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Making Caribbean News Relevant, Comprehensive and Independent
Juliette Storr

JOURNALISM IN A SMALL PLACE: Making Caribbean News Relevant, Comprehensive, and Independent by Juliette Storr

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Caribbean Journalism: Relevant and Engaging

> Crick, crack…
> Once upon a time, was a very good time, the monkey chew tobacco and spit white lime.[1]
>
> —traditional Caribbean folk sayings

Storytelling plays a significant role in Caribbean societies. How you tell the story matters; whether you leave an impression on the audience matters, too. But it also matters that you tell the audience the right story at the right time, since the right story can change people's lives if told in the right way—if it is relevant and engaging. Such stories have changed people's minds, inspired them, or compelled them to act. These two principles are also important to Caribbean storytelling tradition, which is reflected in all aspects of Caribbean cultural life. "Journalism is storytelling with a purpose:"[2] It influences our lives through the stories it tells about the world around us. As such, journalism plays a significant role in Caribbean storytelling and social construction because it influences and helps society to cultivate a particular worldview, language, and understanding. According to Kovach and Rosenstiel, "we need news to live our lives, protect ourselves, bond with each other, and identify friends and enemies. That is why we care about the character of news and journalism we get: they influence the quality of our lives, our thoughts and our culture."[3] They believe that writer Thomas Cahill said it best: "You can tell the worldview of a people … the invisible fears and desires … in a culture's stories."[4] Journalism provides us with stories that are essential to our sense of self. Unfortunately, for the last twenty years Caribbean journalism has been providing a debased sense of self, one defined by commercialism, violence, and political scandal.

Journalists have a responsibility to explain what is at stake—the larger picture, the long-term effects of issues or topics or events. They have a responsibility to engage with society about what they are learning. The role of journalism is to make both the significant and the small interesting and relevant. This responsibility may seem counterintuitive in a region where storytelling emphasizes the everyday, the small things, but it should not. Kincaid's critique of the region's inability to attend to significant matters, to bring them to light in a deliberative public forum and resolve them in a way that advances these societies, is key. Journalists are responsible for bringing these issues to light; they are responsible for explaining the "so what." Journalists should attend to how, where, and when they engage to produce a richer, more robust discourse on matters that are important. Caribbean people use the art of storytelling to convey important life lessons. Many of these stories are allegorical or analogical in nature and provide moral guidance for life. Perhaps the most popular are the *Anancy* stories.[5] These stories have their roots in traditional African oral storytelling. Journalists should use this form to engage their audience on relevant issues and topics. So often missing from journalists' stories are the connections between the story or event and its impact on Caribbean people's lives.

Journalism should be made up of stories that identify the significant aspects of the social order, where political and economic development is balanced with personal triumphs or tragedies, interesting stories about human beings in various communities throughout a country or region, and the world. This is what Kovach and Rosenstiel refer to as "engagement and relevance, not engagement versus relevance as the two are sides of the same coin."[6] News stories about Caribbean societies should be fun and fascinating, captivating and important. Journalism should not only give people what they want but also what they need: relevant and engaging stories and their connections and consequences on the personal, local, national, regional, and global levels. Most people want both information and storytelling. They want the business section and the cartoons, the front page and sports.

This balancing act, making news both relevant and engaging, is especially important in contemporary Caribbean societies. The commitment to both will provide journalism with the best opportunity to serve democratic ideals in an era in which information is easily accessible, since democracy works best when citizens receive relevant and engaging information. When journalists provide great reports with connections to social, economic, and political injustices or great reports on human triumphs and tragedies, or compelling accounts of human character and dignity, and they do so with a mixture of great narrative, exceptional analysis, and literary flair, they have moved the needle to the middle of this continuum between relevant and engaging to reflect a combination of both good storytelling and good information. They are also doing it to uphold their commitment to citizens to provide them with information they need to understand their world.

Providing information is not journalism's only task. It must provide information that people will engage with—that they will read, watch, listen and respond to. This is an important challenge in a world of twenty-four-seven news cycles, internet blogs, and citizen journalists. If democratic societies are to function for the good of the polity, Caribbean news organizations must present important matters in a way that captures the eyes, ears, and hearts of the citizenry. Otherwise, the truth—the first moral principle for journalism—will become suspect, and citizens will be persuaded to believe whoever can get the fastest and most compelling information to an audience and persuade them that their version is true. In the age of the internet and mobile telephones, this could quickly descend into a race to the bottom, where the most salacious and inaccurate coverage gets our attention and truth and the moral principle behind the democratic values of equality, justice, and liberty gets trashed in the new wasteland of the plentiful. Then, misinformation, disinformation, inaccuracy, distortion, and fallacy would dominate the marketplace of ideas and democratic principles would be undermined. This prospective future—of an Orwellian world of manipulation, inequality, injustice, and plutocracy—would not bode well for journalism and its role in democratic societies.

Challenges to Relevant and Engaging Journalism in the Caribbean

What are the challenges that prohibit journalists from fulfilling this responsibility? According to American and European media scholars Robert Picard, Howard Tumber and Barbie Zelizer, and Henrik Örnebring and Epp Lauk,[7] the long list of constraints that prohibit good journalism includes such things as inexperience, marketplace logic, haste, ignorance, laziness, bias, lack of training, news traditions, cronyism and self-aggrandizement, censorship, fear and intimidation, and low remuneration.

Around the world, there is growing frustration with journalism, and Caribbean practitioners are not exempt. Public criticism has increased over the last ten years as the public service role of journalism has been subsumed by commercial incentives.

On 21 August 2013, Gary Spaulding, a senior writer for the *Jamaica Gleaner*, wrote a story about a Jet Ski accident that caused the death of a six-year-old girl. The heading was "6-Y-O Dies, Sisters Injured After Freak Accident At Beach."[8] The first four paragraphs of the story read:

> What started out as a pleasant holiday trip to a beach in St. Ann over the weekend was suddenly transformed into a nightmare for a 28-year-old father of two when a jet ski raced out of the water on to land and into his children, killing one and leaving another battling for life.
>
> Richard Hyman's six-year-old daughter, Tonoya, was killed by a deadly blow from the jet ski, while yesterday, it remained touch and go for her four-year-old sister, Remonique.
>
> "Jah know, mi feel it! I don't know that there is any word in the dictionary to express my feelings right now," mumbled Hyman as he spoke with *The Gleaner*. "I don't know anything. I am keeping my fingers crossed. … I have to put God in the midst at this time."
>
> Bryanna, a sibling of the two girls and Hyman's step-daughter, was also hit but sustained minor injuries, including a broken tooth. She was treated and released.[9]

Jamaican writer and media critic Annie Paul criticized the story on her blog under the heading "Demonic Jet Ski Kills 6-Year Old Girl in Jamaica!"[10] According to Paul, the story focused completely on the victims, and not the perpetrator. It did not tell the reader who was driving the Jet Ski, how it ended up on the beach striking the six-year old and her sisters, or even on which beach the incident happened. In other words, the story did not answer basic journalistic questions of who, what, where, when, why, or how. It is neither balanced nor comprehensive. It leaves out relevant information and does not move the reader to feel a sense of "outrage for the loss of life."[11] This story is typical of the type of journalism currently practiced in the Caribbean.

According to media critics, one of the prevailing reasons for this type of coverage is the quality of practicing journalists and the market logic of media owners. The low salaries do not attract or retain high quality, skilled persons. Therefore, the demand for comprehensive, proportional, relevant, and engaging coverage often goes unfulfilled.

A former general manager of CANA described his frustration with this situation:

> You have, a journalist, somebody [who] says she's going to do an assignment, and she gets there late because [of] shortness of staff and she just manages to get a sound bite or something and she's got to run off to go to another one [assignment] and then comes back in to write something up and she gets paid for that. But I know she's actually short-changing the public. … All you're putting in is these little sound bites, it's never a complete story it's just a little gist of something which is accurate but it is not the whole truth, it's just part of the truth that comes out. … I think that the main thing that bothers me … is the charade that the new journalist has to go through and the mere fact that the public doesn't get the true story.[12]

Journalists interviewed for this book believe there are many constraints that limit their ability to function effectively in the public interest. News organizations throughout the region operate in highly competitive media markets with a media logic that focuses on market-driven ideals; to be successful they must sell news as a commodity. In these competitive markets there is a high turnover of journalists as practitioners move from one media house to another in an attempt to find better opportunities. This often leaves newsrooms with inexperienced staff. Understaffed newsrooms place more demands on journalists, and they in turn submit a harried, hastily assembled product that is neither relevant nor engaging.

Harold Hoyte, one of the owners of the *Barbados Nation*, believes that current labor conditions and the type of people who are entering the field do not advance journalism or democracy:

> The biggest challenge that we face is a lack of interest by young people in the profession. I think the cadre of people that we used to have who were attracted to the profession has disappeared. We used to be able to replenish the supply of people interested in the profession, people with a social conscience, people who were prepared to do the necessary training at university or college to equip themselves. … Now what we have are people who are in it as a stepping stone to move on to more lucrative opportunities. So the biggest gap that has developed over the last several years would be finding people with the commitment [who are] prepared to make the sacrifices, to do the reading, to do the research, to check the record, to check the facts before they commit to writing.
>
> So the quality of journalism has slipped over the last several years, I would say 10 or more years. … We have seen … a definite change in the quality of people that we have as a pool from which to draw for human resources. That is, I think, the biggest challenge that we face.[13]

Hoyte concludes that because of current practices, the fundamentals of journalism have been lost. "The question of ensuring that the less fortunate in the society are protected, that the leaders in society are kept honest at all times and so on—there is no passion for that kind of journalism anymore, so that what we have right through the Caribbean almost without exception are people who would just report what they are told in an unquestioning manner."[14] For Hoyte, journalists are simply recipients of press releases who "regurgitate them for presentation and [do] not discern any hidden messages or innuendo from which a more substantial story could emerge. They don't have that keen interest in those things."[15]

Hoyte also notes that while journalists used to strive very hard to practice the best international standards of journalism, there has since been an erosion of standards, partly because of the journalists and partly because of the media owners. Previously, standards were based on the "best newspapers, particularly in the United Kingdom and to a lesser extent, the United States. And those are the standards by which we operated and so we measured our success against those standards."[16] He believes older journalists upheld these standards despite the fact that they were severely hampered by lack of technology, training, and exposure:

> We sought to be able to do things in the finest tradition of journalism. And that meant always checking our facts. We used to be ashamed by errors and by corrections. Our pride stood or fell based on the accuracy of what we wrote. So when I see wrong names in the newspaper and wrong dates and wrong ages and wrong addresses I squirm because it was something we would just not do. And if you did not know you would ask until you were sure or you would double check.[17]

Hoyte's newspaper and media group merged with Caribbean Communications Network in Trinidad in 2005 to form One Caribbean Media, the largest media conglomerate in the region. As a media owner, Hoyte therefore accepts part of the blame for the reduction in journalistic standards:

> I believe that the record will show that in thirty-five or so years that we have at this newspaper … been able to aggregate profits that are nothing to be ashamed of. [But] I think we could have done with a lower aggregate and preserve the profession … that is critical to the success of our operation. So I think as owners we have some responsibility to bear.[18]

To restore the necessary professional standards, Hoyte recommends placing more emphasis on training and mentoring.

Barbadian journalist Reudon Eversley provides a similar description of the changes and challenges facing Caribbean journalism. He too believes the quality has changed over the last ten or fifteen years. "When I joined," Eversley remembers, "most people didn't have degrees, didn't have any formal training. But you had good mentoring because there were a lot of senior people in the newsroom."[19] According to Eversley, the new labor conditions came about because a lot of senior journalists left the profession, which means that "today, you have newsrooms that are essentially green. And even though the reporters are supposedly better trained because most of them are graduates of the community college, with associate's in mass communications programs, that has its deficiencies because they do not come to us newsroom ready. We still have to initiate them."[20] For Eversley, there has been a decline in standards in spite of the increase in college degrees.

Eversley provides a similar assessment of the low knowledge level of current journalists and their lack of interest in reading: "You find many young journalists today, they don't read as much as people from my generation. I mean I still read a hell of a lot. A lot of journalists today, they're not … sufficiently curious." As a result, he believes, "the perspective of many journalists today is very narrow, essentially local, domestic, and they do not have that broader perspective that is so necessary when it comes to analyzing and interpreting events and putting them in their true context, especially where economic issues are concerned."[21] Eversley describes the current generation of journalists as "docile, press-release writers" who regurgitate everything: "They don't go out in the field and dig." He points out that the other major shortcoming "has to do with the whole culture of journalism, because you find that media managers tend to focus more on the quantity of stories produced by journalists than the quality."[22] Eversley believes media managers and owners have placed more demands on journalists for quantity instead of quality to feed a twenty-four-seven news cycle and converged platforms. In other words, journalists work for media organizations that expected them to produce content for all of their media platforms—newspaper, radio, television, online, and social media. They are also required to have multiple skills.

Byron Buckley, of the *Gleaner*, explains that, "once the reporters leave journalism school … and get into the media house [they don't continue training]. … Our sense is that continuing education and deliberation is minimal."[23] He believes the Jamaica Press Institute should establish partnerships with other civil organizations to develop the training and research needed to build a professional identity.

Senior practitioners believe that though students are graduating with degrees in journalism and communication, they are coming to the workplace with too many deficiencies. “We don’t want to pick on CARIMAC,” says Buckley, “but when the kids come from the journalism school, let me put it this way: We find that they are deficient in some rudiments of language, they don’t have the capabilities to take down the language, and sometimes just simply [can’t do] the writing”[24]

Peter Ames, a radio broadcaster in Trinidad, attributes this problem to society. He describes the poor quality of the voices on the new radio stations and the associated problems of poor grammar and syntax as “a reflection of society. If you don’t like society, I suspect you don’t like media. And if you like the media, you probably like society. You know, it’s a reflection. I cannot see how media can be one thing and society another.”[25] This perspective is contrary to the thesis of this book: In hybrid societies, there must be an acceptance of what has been created in these spaces—in other words, there must be room for the use of both dialect and standard English. After all, the Trinbagonian, Jamaican, Bahamian, Belizean, Barbadian, Grenadian, or any other Caribbean dialect, is the lingua franca of these societies.

Throughout the region, many leaders, whether political, economic, and civic, have complained about the quality of the elementary and secondary educational systems. Some journalists in the region are instructed by their employers to write at a fifth-grade level because the region has a high level of functional illiteracy. Some journalists believe this societal problem also appeals to the lowest common denominator. However, Bahamian journalist Rupert Missick, wary of this type of criticism, points out that journalism walks a fine line between what is useful and what sells: “At the end of the day, if nobody picks up your newspaper, nobody is going to read about changes in the judiciary or trade agreements or things like that. A trade agreement headline will not sell your newspaper in the Bahamas. It will not.”[26] Further, Missick bemoans the fact that

> when we get our numbers back … a lot of times we will see that when there was a murder we will sell 25,000 papers or sell out. When we have, for example, “Marvin Pinder elected deputy

> leader of the PLP," it drops to like 15,000. "Prime minister says no to CSME," it drops to 10,000. That's just the reality. … Things that are useful will end up on page 2 and 3 because they have to. Nobody will buy the newspaper [if these are placed on the front page].[27]

Buckley and other editors argue that training must be the focus of media development in the Caribbean. They acknowledge that the landscape has changed because of technological and economic forces. Consequently, they believe journalists will have to be trained from a broad perspective as information brokers. Buckley believes that, despite global fears for the future of journalism, the profession will remain relevant. However, he insists, journalists will have "to learn more and they [will] have to become knowledge experts because all that's being challenged now with communications technologies. New media will have a place but old-type media [will] still have a place—they just need to refine or define [it] a bit better."[28] Journalists in this new environment will have to be multitalented. A photographer will have to shoot still images and broadcast video and in some markets also write, edit, and report the story.

Media's Filtering System

In his article "Contra the Journalism of Complicity," British media scholar Oliver Boyd-Barrett cites Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model, as proposed in their 1988 book *Manufacturing Consent*, as "one of the most challenging, relevant, and profound—if also frequently misunderstood, underestimated, and flawed—critiques of modern journalism."[29] Despite its drawbacks, this model is a useful framework for critical analysis of media systems. Herman and Chomsky propose "that the collection and dissemination of "news" in mainstream media comprises a five-layered filtering process" including: "the corporate interests of news media, the salience of advertising revenue, overweening dependence on "authoritative" voices, the press's fear of retribution from powerful sources, and shared ideological paradigms—that of 'anti-communism' in 1988 now best reinterpreted as unquestioning presumption of the inevitability and virtue of unregulated monopoly capital."[30] This framework is a good model for analyzing journalism in the Caribbean, as well as the filters used to determine what becomes “news” in the region. However, there is an added filter in today’s rapidly changing environment: new technology. This raises concerns about the necessity for journalism as a public service. I will address these issues throughout the remainder of this book, but first, I want to apply Herman and Chomsky’s framework to the Caribbean. Because of its history of media development, I want to begin with censorship and the press’s fear of retribution from powerful sources.

In 2015 the *Columbia Journalism Review* warned that censorship of the press was growing globally as governments applied a number of stealthy strategies to disrupt independent media and shape the type of information that reaches society. Its verdict: “Censorship is flourishing in the information age.”[31] This warning is relevant to the Caribbean. In a region with a history of state-controlled broadcasting, censorship has influenced the practice and profession of journalism. Further, the smallness of these countries has increased the overall impact of censorship—so much so that a form of unconscious self-censorship has emerged. Add to this the litigious societies that emerged from the deregulation, liberalization, and privatization of the 1980s, and current warnings of increasing global censorship do not bode well for press freedom in the Caribbean. In a 2011 report on Caribbean press freedom, the International Press Institute noted that the growing number of criminal lawsuits against journalists and media organizations has threatened Caribbean press freedom by contributing to a climate of self-censorship.[32] The following year, 2012, in an effort to change Caribbean media laws, the IPI and the Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM) implemented a public campaign to end criminal defamation in the region and advocate for access to information. The IPI and the ACM published a report on the results of the campaign in which they noted the Caribbean was going against global trends, with increased libel prosecutions.[33] The two organizations urged Caribbean leaders to repeal outdated laws that criminally punished defamation. The two-week campaign was held in Barbados, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Trinidad and Tobago. The IPI and the ACM conducted a follow-up campaign in 2013 to advance the goals of the 2012 campaign.

The English-speaking countries of the Caribbean had criminal defamation laws in place that dated back to the mid-nineteenth century, with penalties of at least one year in prison. The IPI noted in its 2013 report that Caribbean countries were still subjected to “a panoply of repressive measures, from jailing and persecution to the widespread scourge of 'insult laws' and criminal defamation, which are sometimes used by the powerful to prevent critical appraisal of their actions and to deprive the public of information about misdeeds."[34]

The IPI/ACM campaigns aimed to abolish criminal laws in the Caribbean that concern defamation, slander, libel, or insult. The campaign encouraged the use of civil laws, bringing the Caribbean in line with international press-freedom standards and the recommendations advanced by regional and international human-rights bodies.[35] The IPI/ACM campaign was ambitious, as it targeted politicians specifically and did not address the underlying dynamics of Caribbean culture. So far, the campaign has had limited success, with three of the six countries featured in this book decriminalizing defamation in 2013.

Caribbean countries emerged from a history of extermination, abduction, and abortion, a violent cutting off from original African and indigenous cultures. This four-hundred-year history has left the region with sociological and psychological effects that are visible today.[36] It has produced complex issues of identity and a set of cultural practices that emerged through force and resistance. Kincaid examined postcolonial Antiguan society and found it lacking in many areas because the people seemed to be willing partners in their own subjugation. Their deference and subservience to the tourist dollar, political and economic elites, and a British past still causes a lot of indignation. Hilary Beckles discusses these issues in his book *Britain's Black Debt*.

Perhaps one of the most debilitating aspects of Caribbean culture is the need for secrecy and silence. This aspect of the culture, discussed in the previous chapter, was inherited from the colonizers and has been compounded with the reverence for authority and the cult of the leader. Secrecy and silence are the norm. Thus, in effect the people of the Caribbean collude with political and economic elites in their own exploitation. Their silence gives consent and allows outdated laws to remain in effect.

Any campaign to effectively change these laws must include the education of the people about the impact of these laws on their democratic and human rights. This should be a central part of Caribbean media literacy programs. Politicians throughout the region are moved by the votes of the people and the power of external agents, and they will only act to make significant changes to institutions and structures in their countries when their power is threatened. As such, it is important for the IPI and the ACM to get input from the people and external stakeholders to affect the kind of change that will produce new laws. Media was only one of the institutions governed by colonial policies and practices. All state agencies and institutions in these countries need to change to create efficiency and effectiveness at all levels of decision- and policymaking. However, to institute this kind of macro-level change is a tall order for these small societies. This would require media and journalism to play a more active role through the production of engaging and relevant stories that make connections and explain consequences. To practice this type of journalism would require better training and mentoring.

While Caribbean journalists believe a free press exists throughout the region, they also believe press freedom is constrained by a lack of freedom of information laws and the presence of archaic defamation laws. As Byron Buckley explains, "[Jamaican] libel laws are antiquated and they are punitive, because you can still arrest a man … [and] put him in jail for libeling somebody. It's still a criminal offence. We find that … the bar for libel for public officials is too high. It needs to be lowered."[37] At the time of this interview, Jamaica had not yet changed its defamation laws. These laws prohibited journalists from questioning the reports of public officials who were very sensitive to criticisms raised by the media. Buckley advocated strongly that the requirements for libel and defamation be lowered and believed judges should determine the damages in libel cases rather than a jury. "Right now … you can earn more [from] libel … than the six figures in your life earning. We are victims now … so we feel that it should be rationalized. We feel that it [libel] should be decriminalized. It is not a criminal offence, but a civil one."[38] In November 2013, Jamaica changed its defamation laws and decriminalized libel.

Caribbean journalists concede that a lack of freedom of information laws and restrictive defamation legislation have reinforced self-censorship. David Ellis notes that factors such as smallness, secrecy, and victimization have exacerbated the problem. The size of these markets makes it difficult for journalists to find people who are willing to speak out against anyone prominent or powerful. Ellis questions the impact of these constraints on journalism. "The absence of freedom of information legislation, to what extent does that limit [journalism]?" asks Ellis. "And even if you had freedom of information legislation, as is proposed for Barbados, what is the cultural norm? Will public servants and other people who have information feel that they are in a position … to give [it] up?"[39]

Caribbean journalists believe the smallness of their societies, coupled with the nature of local political culture, has stopped a more rigorous press from emerging. According to Reudon Eversley, these factors have played a significant role in creating an environment that limits journalism, especially investigative journalism, in Barbados. "There is a lot of self-censorship," Eversley explains, "because you have some of [the] politicians who are so thin-skinned they threaten you, they threaten to sue you for the slightest thing. … I mean the defamation laws here are not like in the United States, where once you are a public official it is expected that you would be subjected to the most rigorous scrutiny. Here that's not the case; people talk about their good name."[40]

This type of environment creates a culture of fear and intimidation as potential sources fear repercussions such as job loss or other forms of victimization. As Harold Hoyte puts it, "there are lots of people who are not prepared any longer to express their points of view for fear that it may affect their mortgage or their family. I do not know what has happened to this society because I don't think that it is a problem that is peculiar to journalism."[41] Hoyte believes journalists have not addressed these issues because "we have become a little too materialistic and people are in it to see what they can get out of it, not what they can contribute to this society."[42] Eversley was more pointed in his description:

> So you hear on one hand that we're free in Barbados, but free to what extent? People are very restrained because Barbados is a country that has been historically ruled by fear from slavery days. People will come to you and will readily provide you with information but they do not want to be quoted. And the responses, when you ask why, they say, "Well I don't want anybody to burn down my house, I don't want anybody to attack me when I'm going home. I don't want to lose my job. I have my children to send to school, I have my mortgage to pay." You hear all of these reasons and underlying all that is fear.[43]

Journalists throughout the region have a difficult time covering sensitive topics related to politics, religion, and societal issues like homosexuality, incest, and marital rape. Journalists are wary of politicians, civil servants, and other elites suing them and are constrained by cultural expectations to conform. Self-censorship has become a more effective means of control than state-sanctioned laws. Ironically, these restraints have coincided with an increased demand from citizens for more investigative journalism. This demand has been exacerbated by citizen journalism and people's ability to access and disseminate information using new digital technologies, and it has created tensions between journalists and citizens. The dialectical tension between the public's right to know and its need to know has placed journalism in a precarious position. Rupert Missick summed it up this way:

> Now we have a sort of emergence of this desire … to know more, but at the same time we have government institutions that don't feel that that is the public's business to know. They feel the public should not know, and for no good reason other than the fact that they feel they are a government institution and their business is their business. It is not seen as the public's business.[44]

Journalists in the Caribbean work in small political systems that are centrally controlled, mostly by the prime minister or president. This makes it challenging for journalists to obtain information or provide criticism of a government's performance. Many journalists describe the relationship between government and the press as hostile. Here, Hoyte reveals the kind of political pressure journalists in Barbados face:

> We had from time to time occasional efforts by successive governments to haul us in, but we never had any overt or persistent attempts to control the media. I have had some prime ministers say some awful things about me and my family, about journalists and so on, and make threats.[45]

David Ellis's and Reudon Eversley's comments are even more evocative. For Ellis, the fear of victimization "is a reality in this environment."[46] He describes the fear journalists had for a former prime minister as "palpable." As for Eversley,

> I mean, this is a small society and people who take a stand run the risk of being deprived of opportunities. We have a history of this. The best example is probably a guy called Kendal Wickham, who is easily the best journalist this country has produced. He lived in the early part of the last century. His newspaper was a crusading newspaper advocating improved conditions for the working class. He was sued and he had to leave Barbados and go to Grenada to live, where he died. … I mean, lots of journalists have had to leave. Once you decided to take on the establishment they pursue this policy where you have to starve. I was almost a victim of that in 1999. After I left the *Advocate* I could not find work in Barbados. I applied for jobs and you would have thought … someone with my seniority, having served as director of news and current affairs at CANA and then editor of the *Advocate*, you would think corporate Barbados would be happy to snap me up to work in corporate communications. People kept me at a distance, as though I had leprosy … my solution was to leave Barbados.[47]

Gathering information remains a challenge. Karen Herig, editor of the *Nassau Tribune*, believes a freedom of information act would not address the cultural issue of obtaining reliable information because "getting information is a bit of a problem, and the attitude towards journalists in this country … is secretive, in things that shouldn't have to be."[48] With or without freedom of information laws, journalists throughout the region believe the constraints of culture would continue to impact journalism. Hoyte believes freedom of information acts would not become law, or, if they did, Caribbean governments would not enforce them. "In small societies," he claims, "[freedom of information] is a dangerous piece of legislation, very dangerous. So I understand from government's perspective their reticence to invoke this legislation. But at the same time, society deserves to have access to public information because it is on their behalf that the decisions are being undertaken."[49]

The culture of secrecy creates a problem for journalists because they are dependent on their sources. With no freedom of information laws, the only way to get reliable information on a consistent basis is to use personal contacts, meaning journalists are walking a tightrope: On the one hand, they are trying to present unbiased, objective information, while on the other, they are trying not to alienate their limited number of valuable sources. With politicians and civil servants being so secretive and wary of journalists, gathering information is incredibly challenging.

The lack of access to information and the hostile attitude of political leaders make any type of investigative reporting difficult. Because getting information in these controlled, small environments is difficult, critical information often goes missing in Caribbean reporting. This inhibits the democratic function of media in society.[50] Further, lawsuits are used as a scare tactic to frighten publishers, media owners, and journalists into not publishing or broadcasting news stories. This discourages reporters from digging too deep; even if they find something and are justified in reporting it, the financial cost of a legal battle could be staggering.

Relevance and engagement cannot emerge in an environment where the predominant mode of information gathering is an overdependence on official sources or "authoritative" voices. Caribbean journalists have been criticized for reproducing official press releases or statements, without asking probing questions or following up with additional investigation that might provide in-depth coverage of the story. David Ellis believes journalists prefer these official sources, since they are an easy way to obtain a story. Some journalists defend this practice; they claim their editors do not give them the time to delve deeper or get another angle.

To understand the reasons for the lack of investigative journalism in the region, Ellis and other journalists believe, one has to understand the Caribbean context, as there are several forces within these environments that have to be factored into any analysis of investigative journalism. One of the forces that limits reporters' investigative work is the size of these countries. "What needs to be done is … to look more closely at all the factors and forces that are at work in a country like Barbados that limits people in this way," says Ellis. "For instance, in a small-sized [country] the function [of investigative journalism may be limited]. … So, does that influence the failure to develop stories in the way that we are talking about? It does."[51]

Journalists are also constrained by economic censorship, which has emerged under the pressure of advertisers who often pull or threaten to pull their advertisements as a means of controlling what stories are published in the news. Juan McCartney provides the following example of the influence exerted by advertisers over journalists' work:

> I did a story on how there were rats in a big food store, and a judge tried to close the food store down. This [case] was in the court; this is what people eat! … I did the story for radio, and when I went to do it for print, they told me to drop it! Drop it because we are working on a big ad campaign with them. Drop it! So I did what I was told.[52]

In the Caribbean, advertisers exert a form of control. In these small societies, it is dangerous to offend any advertiser because they would react by pulling their advertising. This is particularly evident in government advertising. Eddie Carter, host of a popular morning radio show in the Bahamas, recalled an incident when an advertiser reacted this way. According to Carter, the advertiser misinterpreted what he said about one of the company's products, a meatless burger that had failed in the market. The advertiser called the station and threatened to pull all of the company's advertisements. Unlike in New York City, where there are millions of advertisers and a more mature marketplace, the small markets of the Caribbean are limited:

> They are still willing to say, "Forget those listeners. I will yank my ads if you don't treat me right." So, we don't have corporate maturity I don't think, and we don't have general listenership maturity. I don't think we're ready to have the honest conversations on air yet about serious issues.[53]

The influence of advertisers works against journalists seeking the truth, as their efforts to publish are often squashed by advertisers. Journalists are in turn discouraged to pursue stories that they know will likely be pulled.

The sum effect is that the journalist is forced to drop the story, but the underlying problem is that the advertiser never directly tells the news agencies to drop these stories in the first place. Editors often tell their reporters to drop stories because they are working on major advertising campaigns, which indicates an indirect level of censorship. Company representatives then contact journalists directly. Essentially, the pressures of advertisers are so great that editors, publishers, talk show hosts and producers, and other decision-makers have developed their own form of self-censorship in order to avoid a loss of revenue.

Government also exerts advertising pressure. For example, in 2008 the Guyanese government withdrew state advertising from one of the country's independent newspapers, the *Stabroek News*. State advertising was restored to the paper after seventeen months, and then withdrawn again in 2010. State advertisements accounted for 15 percent of the paper's advertising revenue. According to IPI 2013 report, the editor, Anand Persaud, believed the government sought to drive the paper out of business.[54]

Related to the economic influence of advertisers is the growing trend of media conglomerates throughout the region. Each of the countries in this book have one or two dominant media conglomerates. Regional conglomerates are also growing. Media scholars like Herbert Schiller, Ben Bagdikian, and Robert McChesney have written extensively on the effects of conglomeration on journalism and democracy.[55] The trend of mergers and acquisitions in the Caribbean may be a good marketing strategy for media owners, but it portends a negative outcome for democratic rule. The recent merger of the Gleaner Company and RJR in Jamaica should set off more warning bells.

The role of corporate interests in news media is particularly troubling in these small societies, where political and economic forces have already silenced a lot of dissent. Yet there is no discourse on the effect of media conglomeration on the small markets of the Caribbean. Further, issues of anti-trust have not been addressed in these markets and may become a challenge as the trend of mergers and acquisitions continues.

The major criticism of corporate ownership is its concern for the bottom line. Corporate owners push news media organizations to make profits. The profit-making approach often results in more concern for what sells. Media scholars in the United States and Western Europe have been concerned with the power of advertisers to influence news content since the rise of mass media. Their arguments are centered on issues such as the rise in sensationalism, homogenization, and immediacy.[56] Caribbean journalists and media scholars echo these concerns. They believe more checks and balances must be created to contain the growth of media conglomerates in the region. Charles Carter, owner of Carter Marketing, believes there should be oversight committees and regulation that "ensures that the democracy you cherish and that you deregulate the old system for, isn't being harmed by what you created in a new system. That has to be a part of it as well—that somebody would say, 'No, we believe in free enterprise but now you are creating monopolies and this should not happen.' "[57]Hopeton Dunn has issued a similar warning. He believes that lack of regulation has been one of the problems in Caribbean countries since these markets opened up. "These private-sector players come in and we do not have a sufficiently developed regulatory structure. And then the consequences of that runaway activity by private interests become a source of complaint."[58] According to Dunn, "regulation has to be part of what the public sector holds on to. Because that is the fountainhead from which public policy is going to flow."[59]

Being relevant and engaging is challenging in a marketplace that is inundated with foreign information and entertainment, especially from the United States, where the effect of so-called "infotainment" on the public interest has grown quite pronounced. The outsized influence of major American television news networks—CNN, Fox, ABC, NBC, CBS, and MSNBC—and wireless companies such as the Associated Press and Reuters makes it extremely difficult for local news programs in the Caribbean to compete. Local and regional television news production has to compete with the production quality of foreign news outlets. Local newspapers are compared to international newspapers. The internet has increased access to foreign content and increased the pressure for local media products to be more like their larger multinational counterparts. As Rupert Missick has noted, "the demands of the public have changed as well too. We are not compared to the *Tribune* of the 1970s or '80s or even the '90s; we are compared to the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*."[60] But Missick believes this comparison is not fair: "As you can see, we are not seen as an improvement of what was in the past. We are judged on how much of a shortage we are, compared to the big newspapers of the US or the UK, who have far more resources, time, money, and people."[61]

The latest filter, new digital technology, was discussed in previous chapters. It has imposed another level of influence on journalism. In 2000, John Pavlik identified four major areas of influence: how journalists do their work; the content of news; the structure or organization of the newsroom; and the relationships between or among news organizations, journalists and their many publics.[62] These areas of influence are still prevalent today in news organizations around the world. Many scholars and practitioners believe the internet is the most influential technology to come along, as it continues to raise questions about the survival of journalism and its relevance today.

Although overall internet penetration in the Caribbean is moderate to low, there are some countries in the region with high internet penetration (see chapter 3). Despite these variations, journalists in all of the countries discussed in this book have described the rapid changes taking place in the practice of journalism. These changes align with Pavlik's description of the impact of digital technologies on journalism. Journalists and media owners interviewed for this book described both positive and negative impact of new technologies. As David Ellis explains,

> [the internet] has allowed us to be able to multitask, it has put us in a position where we can do research faster, better. It allows us to be able to get our material out [quickly]. The whole question of convergence is a reality and we have to do more. For me, this is the most significant revolution that I have seen in [my] years … in the profession. It's the biggest thing everywhere. … But, there is the question of privacy; everybody's privacy is now being intruded upon by the technology that we have—that is the downside.[63]

Ellis's comments sum up the current reactions to the new media environment. The potential for good and harm are present in our ability to send and receive information anywhere, anytime. We celebrate the impact these technologies are having on the common good, but as more people use technology to invade our privacy, our concerns have increased. These issues affect journalists on both the personal and professional level. They face a difficult task; they must respect privacy, but also protect the public interest. Using user-generated content and information in the public domain has taken on new meaning and journalists must weigh carefully the public's right to know against the public's need to know. They must consider the harm and injury this information will cause if they publish it.

Making the News Relevant and Engaging

Media's filtering system influences news content. Corporate interest, advertising revenue, a dependence on "authoritative" voices, and fear of retribution from economic and political elites influences the type of journalism practiced in the Caribbean. Consequently, this filtering process makes it difficult to provide news that is relevant and engaging. Today, the most significant media filter is the marketplace ideals that drive the decision-making process of owners, editors, and journalists. This filtering process has created a number of trends.

First, media organizations' current hiring practices play a key role in the type of news content that is produced. The hiring of very young and inexperienced people negatively impacts the production of relevant and engaging stories. Many of these young journalists do not stay in the field very long. The high turnover of employees means news organizations are constantly training new staff. One constant refrain from senior journalists in the Caribbean is their concern for the inexperience of young journalists. But this is not confined to the Caribbean; it is a global trend as well. As P. Anthony White, a journalist and media owner in the Bahamas, explains:

> I really think that too many of the young journalists are not given enough training before they are sent out. They should have more on-the-job training. They are doing a lot of things wrong. You've got to be able to interpret what is going on. … Present the facts themselves in a more definitive manner. The biggest thing is that you need to train the young people more intensely.[64]

As White's comments point out, Caribbean journalists need to be trained how to ask the types of questions that would uncover information that citizens need and want, the kind of information that makes connections and identifies consequences. White points out that, though many young journalists are now university educated, they have not developed what Roxanne Gibbs calls "a nose for news." White's critique suggests the need to implement new training approaches that fit both the market and the culture.

Peter Christopher described the Trinbagonian marketplace as a "merry-go-round" in which journalists constantly move from one organization to another in search of higher salaries and better opportunities.

This has created a cadre of young and inexperienced journalists, which has in turn led to increased training costs for employers.

According to the editors and media owners interviewed for this book, this now constitutes one of the biggest challenges to the industry. Many believe that the number of people who used to be attracted to the profession has decreased significantly. Older, more seasoned journalists are characterized as socially conscientious, trained people with on-the-job experience who are prepared to work hard. Younger journalists, on the other hand, are described as inexperienced, untrained, technically skilled people who are using journalism as the stepping stone for their next big career opportunity. Editors and media owners believe that one of the biggest problems to develop over the last ten years has been finding qualified, well-trained individuals who are committed to the profession and prepared to make the necessary sacrifices. Well-read researchers who check the facts before they commit anything to writing are in especially high demand.

Nicki Kelly, a journalist with more than fifty years of experience, surmised that "the main problem is that the young people who are going into the profession don't seem to be interested in what they are doing. They don't even read their own paper. They don't read generally; they're not curious. They don't want to find out things."[65] While the youthful cadets are credited with mastery of new technology, they are criticized for lacking the fundamentals of good journalism.

Media owners and editors believe that the quality of journalism will continue to decrease unless steps are taken to train and mentor young, inexperienced journalists. The challenge of youth and inexperience is intimately connected with education and training. Some journalists received their education at institutions outside of the Caribbean; others were trained within the region, attending the University of the West Indies, at either the Mona or St. Augustine campus (in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, respectively), or one of the other tertiary institutions or trade schools throughout the region. Some of the editors in this study believe there is still a wide gap between academia and industry as graduates often leave school unprepared for the practice of journalism. Others believe alternative models should be created to train journalists to practice their profession more effectively.

Some of the younger journalists interviewed agreed with this assessment of their performance. Others thought the criticism was unfair; they believe that, like many of their senior colleagues, they would also learn on the job and improve their performance through experience. Thea Rutherford, a younger journalist, believes that "in time, perhaps because of our educational background and technological skills, we might become better journalists than previous generations."[66]

But whether they agree or disagree with the criticism of more experienced practitioners, younger journalists believe one area they could improve immediately is self-regulation. They acknowledge the need to raise the level of professionalism in the practice of journalism throughout the region, which in turn, they admit, would improve the level of respect journalists receive in Caribbean societies. They believe the profession and practice of journalism could be advanced throughout the Caribbean with the development or reestablishment of press associations, the creation of press councils or ombudsmen (and women), and the revision and implementation of professional code of ethics. This is the model I advocate. I believe Caribbean countries should invest in this model and create better training programs to ensure the relevance of journalism in the region. The following section provides a framework for a new training model to advance the role of journalism and communication in the region.

A New Training Model

As Stuart Surlin and Walter Soderlund concluded, the region has implemented a "multifaceted" response to the persistent problem of journalistic training. And yet none of these approaches have resolved the problem. The current model of training is ineffective. The region imports foreign consultants to train journalists through workshops and seminars, sends journalists abroad to foreign media organizations and institutes in exchange programs, conducts in-house workshops or enrolls them in local or regional academic programs. But this model is a quick fix to a complex problem. I propose an alternative approach, a hybrid model that involves the creation of journalism institutes in each country to work collaboratively with press or media associations and regional academic programs. This approach would provide a theoretical framework for understanding the role of media and journalism in the Caribbean and improve the standards of the practice through training and mentoring. This model could eliminate the high employee turnover. One of the major outcomes of this model would be the creation of a stand-alone regional media institute, similar to the Poynter Institute in the United States, to advance media research and training throughout the region.

Caribbean journalists, as Byron Buckley suggested, must take ownership of their own profession and create the kinds of programs that would produce journalism that is essential to their cultures and their markets. This hybrid model would begin by developing partnerships among the current entities—professional associations, academic programs, and media institutes. At the time of this writing, some of the countries in the region have begun implementing new training programs run by academic institutes. In Jamaica, CARIMAC began restructuring its programs in 2015 to address some of the deficiencies in the market and develop a new training program for journalists. Jamaica also re-engineered its professional body, the Professional Association of Journalists, to foster professional growth.

The problem of high employee turnover could be addressed through labor unions and professional associations working with media owners to increase wages and improve working conditions. However, associations and institutes should develop professionalism through their mentoring programs, training workshops, and certification programs. Advancing journalism as a profession could increase longevity within the field as more journalists opt for longer careers. Associations and institutes would encourage innovative approaches to the practice of journalism throughout the region. Through these institutes and associations, journalists could learn how to connect more with their audiences.

This approach embraces the theories of hybridity and participatory communication. Journalism institutes could develop media literacy programs throughout the region to help journalists and their audiences understand all aspects of news production and the impact of that production on people's lives. They could develop new models of the five *W*s and the *H* (who, what, when where, why, and how) in response to the coverage of news in their cultural environment. New forms of narrative writing and storytelling could emerge from the collaborations of professional associations and media institutes. They could produce engaging approaches to visual, verbal, and written forms of storytelling that also embrace and integrate citizen and community journalism. All traditional news formats would be open to the creative process as journalists reinvent traditions like the hourglass, Q&A, experiential storytelling, photography, videography, and captioning. The possibilities are endless and journalism in the region has an opportunity to reposition itself in a fast-paced digital world.

Journalists could connect their stories with the people in their communities through the inclusion of people-oriented stories, using the region's oral history and love of storytelling to connect to the allegories and analogies that play an integral role in Caribbean people's lives. The internet could be used to enhance storytelling, using the interactive elements of the internet to engage the audience through participation in storytelling. This model of journalism could advance "narrative in the service for truth."[67]

At the time of this writing, professional journalism associations, if they exist at all, are ineffective throughout much of the region. Professional associations will only flourish if practitioners value them. In these small countries where media conglomerates are growing, professional journalism will be subsumed by the logic of the market unless professional associations, media institutions, and academic programs become strong advocates of civic or public journalism. Civic or public journalism could be advanced through new partnerships among these entities. Since the interviews for this book were conducted, Barbados has revived its professional association, Trinidad and Tobago has started a journalism institute, and, with my assistance, the Bahamas reestablished its professional association. Belize and Grenada also have associations; Belize's is ineffective and Grenada's suffers from political pressures.

Since it began in 2001, the ACM has done a lot to grow the profession but could do more to advance an indigenous training model and improve professional standards. Caribbean journalists should align their professional associations with international media watchdog associations like the International Press Institute, Freedom House, and Reporters Without Borders. They could strengthen these international relationships by building stronger regional ones and educating members of the public about their rights and responsibilities. The effective implementation of media literacy programs could gain the encouragement of citizens, whose support and understanding may lead them to champion their cause all the way to the ballot box. In addition, Caribbean journalists should continue their campaign to get defamation laws decriminalized and freedom of information laws implemented.

This advice is not given lightly. Political, economic, and social controls are deeply embedded in these societies. However, if journalists are to serve the interest of the people and advance democracy, they will have to collaborate not only with external actors like international watchdog groups; they will also have to partner with citizens to improve the practice and the profession. There are many recent examples throughout the region of bloggers and citizen journalists being sued and arrested. In the Bahamas in April 2013, a political activist, Rodney Moncur, was arrested for posting what was deemed by the police "indecent and obscene" images on his Facebook page. He was later released and fined $10,000.[68] Moncur protested his arrest and claimed this was a violation of his right to free speech as a citizen journalist. The response of local journalists to this incident was divided. Some supported Moncur's position, while others believed Moncur's Facebook posts were an attempt to sensationalize the incident and gain public support. The images in question purportedly presented evidence of police brutality. As they become more active disseminators of information, citizen journalists should be included in media-training programs.

Two of the major components of this training model must be media ethics and law. Increased concerns over privacy raise new ethical dilemmas for journalists in the present media environment. Privacy concerns are particularly important in the small communities of the Caribbean because the impact can be profound. For example, in 2015 there were a number of cases where female journalists' privacy was invaded using the phenomenon known as "slut shaming"—currently one of the prime means used to silence female journalists.[69] Other ethical concerns, such as the influence of political and economic elites, fair and accurate reporting in small environments, discrimination, and covering minors, should also be addressed. Caribbean journalists should also know the local, regional, and global laws that guide the gathering and dissemination of information. And it is very important in today's information environment for journalists to understand the legal issues of hacking, data mining, and national security. These issues are important for the practice of all types of journalism, but they are particularly salient for investigative journalism.

This new model for training journalists and advancing communication programs in the region also requires the participation of media owners. Though many owners know the value of training, the competitive nature of the small Caribbean market is dissuasive. Media owner Ken

Gordon and broadcast journalist Peter Ames believe the development of institutes and professional associations would improve the practice of journalism in the region. However, they both acknowledge the reluctance of media owners to participate in the development of training institutes because the phenomenon of "poaching" trained employees is a harsh reality in these small competitive markets. As Ames explains: "One of the difficulties … is that you will train and I will hire away from you."[70]

In 2011, Trinidad opened its first journalism institute, the Ken Gordon School of Journalism and Communication, though the school, housed in the College of Science, Technology, and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago, is not a stand-alone institution. In 2013, the Bahamas was in the initial stages of discussing the development of a journalism institute. To that end, I presented a proposal to the College of the Bahamas, though the college had not advanced the proposal by the time of this publication. Jamaica has the oldest journalism institute, CARIMAC, but this institute is not a stand-alone institution, and it operates like a school in a university program. Further, according to some Caribbean media scholars, practitioners, and owners, it has not met the needs of the regional, or even local, marketplace. Some of the interviewees complained that its focus is too theoretical and parochial. Hopefully, the region will continue to develop journalism institutes to work in collaboration with professional associations and academic programs as I believe this model is the best one for the region to create the type of journalism that fulfills the needs and wants of its citizens.

This hybrid approach should result in the professionalization of the field and the fulfillment of its members' training needs. This approach should also develop more research and theory on the role of journalism and communication in the region; there is still very little published research in the discipline. Also, research that has been published is not shared across the region. If regional institutes are developed using this hybrid model, this could produce more research as institutes develop partnerships and share resources. As a result, knowledge will be extended beyond the parochial concerns of each country. Partnerships should also be created with the Caribbean diaspora. Creating interconnected institutes, academic programs, and professional associations could begin the process of developing more scholarly work.

The Bahamas began its bachelor of arts program in journalism and communication in 2011. It is in the initial stages of development. At Barbados Community College there is a two-year program that provides associate of arts degrees in journalism and communication. Belize has a similar program and Grenada has an associate degree program at St. George's University. There are also other programs in Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana, and the US Virgin Islands. But these are all run parochially; there is limited institutional integration and no regional partnerships.

Finally, the region is too dependent on external actors for solutions to its complex problems. If it is to develop its own model of journalism, one that will fit these environments, it will require the development of the discipline of communication to which journalism belongs. This means more emphasis will have to be placed on understanding the role of communication and journalism in the development of these societies. This includes journalists' understanding of their role in the development of democracy in these microstates. The lack of research and scholarship in the Caribbean in general, and in the field of communication and journalism in particular, leaves the region and its practitioners vulnerable to the continued reliance on models and theories that were designed for larger countries like the United Kingdom and the United States.