



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

ISBN 978-1-55238-850-1

**THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK.** It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at [ucpress@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ucpress@ucalgary.ca)

**Cover Art:** The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

**COPYRIGHT NOTICE:** This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

**UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY:**

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

**UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY NOT:**

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.



**Acknowledgement:** We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher, **re.press**, and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy <http://www.re-press.org>

## Caribbean Journalism: Maintaining Independence

Being impartial or neutral is not a core principle of journalism. ... [I]mpartiality was never what was meant by objectivity. But if neutrality is not a cornerstone of journalism, what then makes something journalism? ... [T]he critical step in pursuing truthfulness and informing citizens is not neutrality but independence.

—Kovach and Rosenstiel,  
*The Elements of Journalism*

To advance the key concepts of democracy—liberty, equality, community, communication, public opinion, popular consent—media must be free from state- and self-censorship, physical and moral pressure, and political prejudice. In *The Elements of Journalism*, Kovach and Rosenstiel insist that “journalists must maintain an independence from those they cover.”<sup>1</sup> They believe this applies to all types of journalism, from hard news and opinion, to commentary and criticism, to talk shows, vernacular blogs, and citizen journalism. Nowhere is this more relevant than in the English-speaking Caribbean.

In these small societies, everyone knows everyone else and degrees of separation are difficult to maintain. The concentric circles of influence are more tightly woven, as politicians can sometimes be family members, friends, neighbors, or former colleagues. These politically centralized social systems also make it difficult for journalists to maintain their

independence when covering powerful elites; it is hard for them to criticize those they are related to, those with whom they have worked or maintained friendships. However, Caribbean journalists' lack of independence has engendered much public criticism, as public doubts over their professionalism continue to surface.

On 2 May 2013, Wesley Gibbings, the president of the Association of Caribbean Media Workers, wrote on his blog that, while it was important to celebrate the recent decision by the government of Trinidad and Tobago to repeal some aspects of the country's libel and defamation laws, there is still a long way to go in terms of removing the high levels of self-censorship and lack of professionalism among journalists in the region. Gibbings noted that "journalists are rarely kidnapped, injured or killed in the Caribbean, but many of their stories die. Stories are 'killed' by the chilling effect of draconian legal sanction and by small, closed communities, advertisers, and publishers who either do not wish to offend or are concerned about the protection of people and interests with which they are associated."<sup>2</sup>

In a region where journalists blur the lines between journalism and public relations, it is important to make independence an important standard. Journalists admit that some of their colleagues have moonlighted as public relations practitioners; others have left the profession altogether in order to pursue more lucrative jobs in public relations, drawing on their former relationships in the media. In one case, a Bahamian talk show host had a program on the state broadcaster—a nine-to-five job with a government agency—while simultaneously maintaining a marketing and public relations company. Journalism, as practiced in the Caribbean, is fraught with similar issues. On his blog, Gibbings cites the following areas of concern: "media colleagues badly compromised either by an inability to contain their political enthusiasm or resist the lure of supplementary personal incomes. The Caribbean media is no exception to the growing emboldening of such partisan elements in the press. This does not, at any time, diminish their own claims to freedom but weakens the professional base from which they operate."<sup>3</sup>

Independence is an essential requirement of journalism; it is a key component of the profession's reliability and validity. "It is this independence of spirit and mind, rather than neutrality, that journalists must keep in focus," argue Kovach and Rosenstiel. "Editorialists and opinion journalists ... are not neutral. Their credibility is rooted instead in the

same dedication to accuracy, verification, the larger public interest, and a desire to inform that all other journalists subscribe to.<sup>74</sup> Journalists' loyalty should lie with citizens and the truth, not with special interests, politicians, or political parties. Maintaining independence also requires journalists to avoid arrogance, elitism, isolationism, and nihilism. This is the mandate that journalists must follow as they advance concepts such as truth, fairness, balance, accuracy, and transparency.

In his opening address at the 2001 Caribbean Media Conference in Grenada, Keith Mitchell, the country's prime minister, pointed out that some of the difficulty of maintaining a free press comes from journalists themselves, many of whom are influenced by their personal agendas rather than the development of their societies. "Too often," claimed Mitchell, "personal vendettas, coupled with journalistic pride and the tendency of media people to set themselves aside—or above as the case may be—from the general public, result in judgmental journalism."<sup>75</sup> Not only is this approach regrettable, Mitchell told the assembled journalists—it is also "dangerous, as it undermines the trust and interest the community has in your newspaper, magazine or broadcast station. This can impact on your advertising base, as well as your credibility."<sup>76</sup> While Mitchell may have been referring to the media's coverage of politicians, his comments apply to the broader practice of responsible news coverage.

Bahamian journalist Nicki Kelly's critique of journalistic practices echoes Mitchell's perspective on the diminished capacity for independence among journalists in the region:

I think if they [journalists] united as a body and if they perhaps got some journalists from the rest of the Caribbean to come and talk to them ... they can understand what is going on elsewhere and get over this isolationist idea that they have. ... They also have to learn to function in a way independently of their publishers. They have an obligation to the company that they work for to produce the work, but they don't have to bind their minds; their minds are not enslaved to these people. They ... should free their minds and realize that there is a whole other world out there and, if they want to improve as people and as journalists, they have to understand what is going on out there and they

have to get rid of the ego bit and join together in a mutual effort to improve themselves.<sup>7</sup>

Kelly's comments point to perhaps the most salient issues facing Caribbean journalism: the need for professional organizations to help journalists. Along with other veteran journalists in the region, Kelly hopes professionalism becomes one of the core areas addressed in the immediate future.

According to Omatie Lyder, the purpose of journalism is "to provide citizens with information so that they [can] make important decisions in their lives."<sup>8</sup> In order to achieve this, journalists throughout the region must maintain independence from both their subjects as well as their sources. Here, Harold Hoyte explains the challenges of maintaining independence from the powerful elites in Barbados:

We have had our challenges. We have no censorship per se. We have had challenges with the previous government in particular because the then prime minister was pretty aggressive—combative is the word—and as a result, journalists came under his heel from time to time. I think that may have scared some people because of the awesome power of the prime minister in a small society like this. If he says you cannot get a job here, you cannot get a job here and ... nobody will dare touch you because they are afraid of that. ... I don't think there is censorship but I think they [politicians] are overly sensitive to the role of independent media.<sup>9</sup>

Roxanne Gibbs's description of the constraints faced by investigative journalists aligns with Hoyte's perspective:

Really it's not that easy [doing investigative journalism]. ... It is not that easy simply because in our culture you unearth something, and trust me, the person involved is connected to this body and that body and is president of this body ... and because of this it doesn't get very far because of the smallness of our community and our society. ... So for people to say, "Oh we don't do enough investigative [journalism]," it is not as easy as it looks; even from where I sit here, it is not as easy as it appears in

terms of us getting the information to make the story solid and that kind of thing.<sup>10</sup>

Bahamian journalist Juan McCartney agrees that the smallness of Caribbean societies plays a significant role in the types of stories chosen and how they are covered. But the problem also extends to access of information, which he believes permeates the private sector as well. According to McCartney, the only way to get information is “to cultivate sources [and] basically pry it out of people.”<sup>11</sup> As a result, journalists are often forced to use unconfirmed reports because they cannot verify the available data. McCartney believes that if there was a freedom of information act, it would allow journalists access to personnel records, civil servants would be able to speak on the record, and, when someone runs for public office, journalists would be able to question their record on certain things without fear. In the current environment, McCartney explains, accessing this type of information is extremely difficult, and is often only possible through the influence of powerful individuals:

If you want records on things like cabinet papers or things that happened in the government, say, thirty years ago, you still can’t get that information. There is no way to get it unless someone like the prime minister says “Hey, give them the cabinet paper.”<sup>12</sup>

Caribbean journalists believe this kind of dependency makes it difficult for journalists to maintain their independence. They have become so reliant on political elites and civil servants for information that they have created an asymmetrical relationship between the press and the government, which in turn erodes their independence.

Journalists’ lack of independence from political elites is particularly noticeable among public broadcasters. In 2008, Larry Smith, formerly on the board of directors of the Broadcasting Corporation of the Bahamas, as well as a media owner and former journalist, wrote on his blog *Bahamas Pundit* that the state broadcasting institution, Zephyr Nassau Sunshine, “has no respect for either advertisers or its audiences. It indulges in a culture of complacency and entitlement that protects a top-heavy management structure and allows employees to wear their politics on

their sleeve. And it is governed by laws that let politicians cherry pick the public interest.”<sup>13</sup>

In addition to remaining independent from their sources, it is important that journalists and media organizations control their biases if they want the public to believe they are telling the truth. When journalists lack independence, special interests control what the public perceives as the truth, and when special interests groups control public information, democracy is threatened. Examples of this type of control are prevalent throughout the English-speaking Caribbean.

Hoyte believes this lack of independence created one of the major problems with journalism in the contemporary Caribbean: its inability to uphold its responsibilities to democracy. When journalists neglect this responsibility, the public interest is supplanted by the special interests of political and economic elites. The public is thereby manipulated by the official version of the “truth” instead of a more comprehensive and independent understanding of the issues facing society. This is journalism with an agenda—political propaganda disguised as journalism.

In his 2001 address, Keith Mitchell acknowledged that there was too much partisan political coverage; he advised journalists to change this practice. According to Mitchell, media houses and news services throughout the region concentrated primarily on political matters and neglected other vital areas of society. “Indeed,” he pointed out, “attention is often focused on politicians more than anyone else in the society. I believe the media has a responsibility to educate and inform—with the same degree of eagerness—on other issues of national and regional importance such as health care, educational reform, financial matters and all other areas of development in the society.”<sup>14</sup> Yet while Mitchell’s critique of the emphasis placed on political matters in the region is a valid one, journalists should not lose focus of the fact that monitoring politics is a necessary part of ensuring effective governance.

David Ellis believes that as a result of partisan political coverage, neither the individual journalist nor the profession as a whole is respected in the region. He says many people view journalists as tools to be used and manipulated. Ellis cited the 2010 case of the United States of America versus Michael Christopher “Dudus” Coke, and the ensuing extradition incident in Jamaica to point out media manipulation:

I have spent a considerable amount of the past week monitoring Jamaica's media and the situation there and I must say that it appears that a number of the journalists went out and braved all of the bullets and everything to get their material out. But there is still ... manipulation and ... disinformation, not only coming from those who are powerful, but those who consider themselves to be powerless. ... When it comes to using the media to manipulate, to say this thing happened and that thing happened, they [both politicians and citizens] do that.<sup>15</sup>

The extradition of Dudas, a Jamaican drug lord, to the United States in 2010 caused civil unrest in Tivoli Gardens, a neighborhood in Kingston, Jamaica. Dudas was indicted in the United States for the transshipment of cocaine and marijuana. Many of his supporters in Jamaica fought with local authorities to prevent his extradition. According to international reports, seventy people died. Ellis believes the manipulation of the media in the wake of this incident was evident in every sphere of society; everyone did it, not just the powerful elites. For example, Ellis was particularly upset when a colleague tried to influence his own independence:

We are vulnerable to manipulation by all types of people, but there is this notion that we are only vulnerable to misuse by people who have power, and that's not true. At every level people try to use us and what they don't want is for us to say so ... to ask them why. ... I have just received a [legal] letter from a colleague in the newspaper [industry] because I said that his story, his interview with the commissioner of the police, smacked of a public relations story. ... My colleague, who is supposed to be in the vanguard of the fight for freedom of expression ... goes to a lawyer to get a letter sent to me on those grounds.<sup>16</sup>

In such a climate, both independence and transparency are affected by the intersection of media regulations and politics.



## Media Regulations and Politics

As print and broadcast media have evolved in the English-speaking Caribbean, two separate paths to regulation have come about. While print media has had minimal state intervention and more self-regulation through independent codes of practice, broadcast media has had more state intervention and is regulated through broadcasting acts, commissions, and authorities. In addition, broadcast media is subject to content rules, which do not include quotas for local content, and are subject to laws that govern defamation, obscenity, and violence. At the time of this writing, there were no press complaint commissions or councils, though the creation of such complaint commissions to deal with press complaints had been discussed in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, with stronger advocacy in Jamaica for implementation. Journalists throughout the region are not required to register with professional bodies or state institutions.

Beyond freedom of expression mandates, there are no statutory rules that govern print media. Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Grenada have established professional associations that have developed their own codes of ethics to measure professional standards. These codes generally provide guidelines for professional conduct with no clear identification of prohibitions for specific content or penalties for infractions. These guidelines are not binding and depend on journalists remaining vigilant of public interest and community standards. This puts the onus for being fair, accurate, and truthful on journalists rather than citizens. Consequently, over the past five years there has been increased public pressure for the creation of press councils or commissions to adjudicate complaints. Press associations in Barbados, the Bahamas, and Belize fluctuate between periods of activation and dysfunction. Their codes of conduct are either outdated or have gone unimplemented.

Until the recent changes in defamation laws in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Grenada, journalists there practiced under restrictive media laws governing libel and defamation. These laws threatened the independent practice of journalism in these countries. Journalists complain that these laws, inherited from the British, restrain them from criticizing elected officials and other public figures. Byron Buckley, associate editor of special projects at the *Jamaica Gleaner*, and president of the Press Association of Jamaica (PAJ), believes the libel laws are both antiquated and punitive.

When he was interviewed, in 2009, libel was still a criminal offence in Jamaica. The libel and defamation laws were reformed in Grenada, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago in 2013 to make libel a civil offence. “We were saying, the MAJ [the Media Association of Jamaica] and the PAJ [the Press Association of Jamaica], we’re saying that the only thing you should be able to sue for is malice. Anytime you are a public official, we should have some latitude to question your reports and even hint at some things, once we’re not set out to maliciously damage you.”<sup>17</sup> Both the PAJ and MAJ recommended that public officials adopt a servant approach toward the public. Jamaica’s Defamation Act of 2013 replaced the Libel and Slander Act of 1851 and the Defamation Act of 1961.

Unlike the Bill of Rights in the United States, the constitutions of these countries, except for Trinidad and Tobago, do not guarantee freedom of the press. Instead, the constitutions in five of these countries—the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, and Jamaica—enshrine freedom of expression. Trinidad and Tobago’s constitution specifically identifies the rights of a free press but has done very little to encourage its freedom of the press; it was thus downgraded by Freedom House for the government’s abusive treatment of journalists in 2012.<sup>18</sup> Journalists believe freedom of expression does not provide the constitutional protection they need to challenge restrictive media laws.<sup>19</sup> Media laws criminally punish defamation, which includes libel, seditious libel, contempt of authority, and insult, both of individuals and of the state itself.

Caribbean journalists, print and broadcast, have to prove the information they report is both accurate and true. According to Chantal Raymond, defamation laws in these countries require minimal proof of defamation and legally start from the position that the information is false: “Politicians and civilians have thus taken advantage of the laws by bringing libel suits against journalists and media organizations that are required to defend their statements as truth.”<sup>20</sup> Journalists are therefore very cautious about what they write or say. Consequently, a culture of self-censorship has emerged among Caribbean journalists.

Broadcast media has a long history of state control. It began with public service broadcasting modeled on the BBC, and morphed into state-control broadcasting by the 1950s. This created state-controlled information, which favored the governing party, particularly after these countries became independent states. The majority of state-control broadcasting,

associated with propaganda, censorship, and control of information, was dismantled by the first decade of the twenty-first century.<sup>21</sup> All of the countries covered in this book, except Barbados, had restructured their state broadcasting systems into public service broadcasting or sold the majority shares in state broadcasting entities to private broadcasters. Broadcasting commissions, authorities, and other regulatory bodies were formed to regulate the new liberal media environments that emerged in these countries in the 1980s. It is in these new media environments that politicians became more vigilant and filed defamation lawsuits for the slightest offence.

Gary Allen, managing director of Radio Jamaica Rediffusion, points out that the regulatory structure in Jamaica, and by extension the greater Caribbean, evolved out of the turbulent 1990s, when the liberalization of markets emerged without careful evaluation of the marketplace:

I think that the early stages of the regulatory framework that was put in place could probably be described as inadequate at the time and probably not fully thought out. By the time we got to the late 1990s, and even into the turn of the century, we started the discussion about production quality and standards. ... I think one of the disappointments is that those discussions took place around the regulator, and so we did not have the regulators actually being so engaged as to direct even discussion, direct thinking, trying to guide policy.<sup>22</sup>

Of the six countries in this book, Jamaica has the most regulated market, followed by Trinidad and Tobago, and Grenada. The Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica (BCJ), established in 1986, monitors and regulates electronic media, broadcast radio, and television. The BCJ implements public policy and law to balance the interests of consumers, the industries, and the creative community. Prior to the creation of the BCJ, the Jamaican Broadcasting Authority monitored broadcast media. It was eventually integrated into the BCJ, which now also receives and investigates complaints and conducts research.

In the mid-2000s, the BCJ forcibly imposed its regulations. During that period, broadcasting companies, particularly television stations, were producing music videos that promoted a cultural phenomenon called

“dagging”—an explicit reenactment of sexual acts through dub or reggae dance that predated Miley Cyrus. According to Hopeton Dunn, chairman of the BCJ, there was a major public outcry against this type of content.<sup>23</sup> The commission forced broadcasters to remove this content, and it implemented new standards for broadcasting, which were incorporated into the broadcast license fee agreement. Not everyone agreed with the BCJ’s response and some critics accused it of censorship. While the other five countries of the English-speaking Caribbean did not have a stand-alone broadcasting commission at the time of this research, they had created regulatory bodies, either in the form of a telecommunications or utilities authority, to regulate the electronic media and establish standards for content. However, they should follow Jamaica’s lead and create stand-alone broadcasting commissions to monitor and regulate their electronic industries more effectively.

The license fee agreements, in all of these countries, now require both public and private broadcasters to maintain standards of decency, protect vulnerable groups, advance cultural diversity, present accuracy and fairness in news and current affairs programs, maintain public service obligations, avoid harmful and incendiary material, and protect national security interests. Some critics have accused Caribbean governments of using the license fee to coerce the media. In 2014, international watchdog organizations Freedom House, the International Press Institute, and Reporters Without Borders reported government influence in granting broadcast licenses. These practices were especially evident in Grenada and Guyana. According to the report, “editors of several newspapers [in Guyana] alleged government discrimination in the awarding of radio and television licenses to friends and relatives of former president Bharrat Jagdeo.”<sup>24</sup>

Complaints against libel and defamation laws continued. A 2007 Freedom House report accused the government of Grenada of using the threat of libel laws to pressure the media. The report recounted a 2006 incident involving George Worme, editor of *Grenada Today*. According to Freedom House, “Worme—who has clashed with the authorities over libel issues in the past—was detained by police for several hours on March 14 in relation to a possibly libelous article published the previous month. No charges were made against him, but media freedom advocates claimed it was another indication of the ruling New National Party’s efforts to limit media criticism.”<sup>25</sup> The US State Department reported in June 2006 that

Grenada's prime minister had won the libel case he had brought against the editor of the newspaper; the editor was ordered to pay approximately US\$37,000. Freedom House later reported that there were several occasions when members of the government publicly reprimanded the print media for running critical articles. Indeed, the 2014 report from Freedom House, the International Press Institute, and Reporters Without Borders highlighted the increased number of complaints from Caribbean politicians against media for critical articles or broadcasts.

International and regional organizations have voiced their objections to political influence in the media. In the 1990s, in an effort to reduce political interference, encourage openness and transparency in governance, and advance human rights throughout the region, the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Press Institute urged Caribbean governments to pass freedom of information legislation to close the gap between government and civil society.<sup>26</sup> The IPI's 2013 report on Trinidad and Tobago noted criminal defamation laws were an "insult to democracy." The report quoted a 2005 joint declaration by the special rapporteurs of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR): "In democratic societies, the activities of public officials must be open to public scrutiny. Criminal defamation laws intimidate individuals from exposing wrongdoing by public officials and such laws are therefore incompatible with freedom of expression."<sup>27</sup>

Belize began its progress towards transparency with the creation of a freedom of information law in 1994. However, the law was not implemented until 2000; by then, it was considered "too broad in its definition of private and public information."<sup>28</sup> Though it was revised in 2000, it was never implemented. Media scholars, practitioners, and analysts still criticize the Belizean government and its agencies for not implementing the law. Jamaica passed an access to information law in 2002; it became effective in 2004. Jamaica's law allows greater access to public information, but journalists do not receive information efficiently. The Gleaner Company recorded its continued battle with lawsuits and access to information in its 2013 and 2014 annual reports. While it believed the new laws improved the practice, it also claimed that "they do not go far enough in better enabling media to tackle the corruption prevalent in our society."<sup>29</sup>

The passage of the new laws represented a step in the right direction, but it took almost ten years for politicians and civil servants to implement their requirements. The Bahamas passed its freedom of information law in 2012 but it did not formally enact it. Barbados and Grenada have not passed similar laws. Trinidad and Tobago, too, passed a freedom of information act in 2001 but did not enact it. The implementation, scope, and types of exemptions in these acts leave critics like Venkat Iyer and Toby Mendel questioning their effectiveness in advancing openness, accountability, and transparency among Caribbean governments.<sup>30</sup> Most troubling for these societies is the fact that the Official Secrets Act remains law. A holdover from colonization, this law makes it an offence to disclose official information or breach official trust. This means people working in the civil service who disclose information could be prosecuted. Many Caribbean journalists feel the Official Secrets Act negates any freedom of information law.

Barbadian journalist Reudon Eversley points out that the Barbadian government had promised to bring freedom of information legislation but were still drafting the legal framework of the bill in 2010. Eversley did not believe the act would be passed; at the time of the publication of this book, Barbados still had not implemented it. Even with the passage of a freedom of information act, some journalists believed they would still be constrained. As Eversley points out, “we have a lot of old laws, too, like the Official Secrets Act, a lot of old colonial laws that are still on the statute books that can be used effectively against you. But libel is the biggest challenge because people will sue you for anything. ... People sue for the slightest thing, especially, politicians.”<sup>31</sup>

Senior journalists believe politicians have taken advantage of the inexperience of young journalists to instill a new level of fear and intimidation. For example, in March 2012 the prime minister of Grenada was blamed for the dismissal of Rawle Titus, a news reporter for the *Grenada Advocate*. An article published in the *Grenada Advocate* on March 9, 2012, prompted Titus’s dismissal. In that article “Titus reported that the prime minister had selected the ruling National Democratic Congress’s candidates for the next general election without consulting with the party’s leaders.”<sup>32</sup> Later, other media also carried reports that supported this claim. The prime minister’s press secretary, Richard Simon, requested a retraction and an apology from the *Grenada Advocate*. Shortly thereafter

Titus received notice that his contract with the *Advocate* would be terminated.<sup>33</sup> At that time, Reporters Without Borders called on the government of Grenada “to provide a frank explanation of a matter liable to endanger media independence.”<sup>34</sup> This incident is not the only example of threat and intimidation. The prime minister or president, and the ruling party in these small states, wields a lot of power. In 2013, a young reporter in Grenada recounted the threats made towards her by the prime minister. The owner of her media company, a close friend of the prime minister, conveyed the threats.<sup>35</sup> Her name is omitted here because of concerns of repercussions.

According to Reporters Without Borders, Jamaica was ranked thirteenth on the list of global press freedom in 2012—the highest of any Caribbean country. The same year, Freedom House described Trinidad and Tobago’s democracy as “flawed.” Freedom House also described the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, and Grenada as having a “moderately” free press.<sup>36</sup>

In 2011, Wesley Gibbings, president of the ACM, claimed restrictive laws prohibited journalists from protecting and advancing democracy throughout the region. He identified the challenges to press freedom and freedom of expression in Caribbean countries as “a complex mix of direct and insidious phenomena that include overt state hostility towards media organizations, a heritage of restrictive legislative environments, control of media content by commercial and special interest groups, corrosive effects of systemic self-censorship, and general public apathy.”<sup>37</sup> Two years later, Gibbings acknowledged that the current blend of media regulations and commercial interests did not bode well for the future of democracy in these countries.<sup>38</sup>

Caribbean journalism continues to operate under the influence of archaic British laws. Journalists in the Caribbean strongly believe these laws must be changed and new ones implemented if they are to function more independently. Although they believe freedom of speech and a free press are not absent from the region, they admit scarcity of freedom of information laws and a culture of secrecy prohibits journalists from performing their duties independently. While it appears some governments are changing their laws, others are reacting to the digital environment with the application of restrictive new laws. Grenada’s enactment of new electronic media laws in 2013 seemed counterintuitive to its recent announcement to decriminalize defamation. Despite protest from Caribbean journalists, the

IPI, and private citizens, Grenada did not repeal its new electronic media law and the fear remains that other governments throughout the region may adopt similar legislation.

## Maintaining Independence in Small Caribbean Societies

Despite the enactment of freedom of information laws in eight of the English-speaking Caribbean countries—Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago—and the recent decriminalization of defamation in Grenada, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago, the secretive practices inherited from British colonial administrators continue to permeate all aspects of Caribbean life. Thus, Caribbean journalists find it difficult to obtain information that is in the public interest. Some journalists have had to resort to cultivating a small network of reliable sources, but in small societies these sources often do not have the same level of anonymity as they do in large countries, and this impedes free expression.

In these small, secretive societies, media systems are plagued by partisan politics, which presents itself in a variety of ways and influences the performance of journalists. This concept has been referred to in the literature as political clientelism. In their article “Political Clientelism and the Media: Southern Europe and Latin America in Comparative Perspective,” Daniel Hallin and Stylianos Papathanassopoulos argue that political clientelism plays a significant role in media performance. They define clientelism as “a pattern of social organization in which access to social resources is controlled by patrons and delivered to clients in exchange for deference and various kinds of support.”<sup>39</sup> They examine how this concept presents itself in the media systems of four southern European countries—Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal—and three Latin American countries—Brazil, Columbia, and Mexico. The concept of political clientelism is not new; it is present throughout all political systems. However, Hallin and Papathanassopoulos argue that it is particularly useful in the case of the news media because “the ideals of neutral professionalism based on Anglo-American media history are widely accepted by journalists around the world, even where the actual practice of journalism



departs radically from them. The concept of clientelism is useful in media analysis, in part precisely because it illuminates normative issues of media performance in a democratic system.<sup>340</sup>

The challenge of maintaining neutrality and independence, or in journalistic parlance, objectivity, is much more difficult in small states, where there is a heightened awareness or need to maintain unity and a collaborative atmosphere; in such an environment, managing boundaries is challenging. Many of the journalists interviewed for this book spoke of the realities of practicing in small communities and the challenge of responding to relational expectations, including the expectation of covering family and friends. Social cohesion is valued. Bahamian journalist Thea Rutherford alluded to this in her description of the working conditions in her country. “I think it is really difficult to practice in a small country,” she explains, “because everybody knows everybody, and it’s probably the same problems that the police have [with regard to crime].” Rutherford believes “that is the biggest challenge to our responsibilities, because our responsibility is to be reasonably objective. The responsibility is, ideally, that nobody should be out of bounds to cover. The reality is, however, when you look at a small community, there are going to be limits.”<sup>341</sup>

How should journalists cover their relatives and friends in small countries? How do they maintain credibility while covering public officials or prominent members of society when they are related to them? Journalists in small towns in the United States and Great Britain have also raised these questions. Their professional associations, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) in the United States and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Britain do not address these questions directly. The SPJ admonishes journalists to “act independently. Journalists should be free of obligation to any interests other than the public’s right to know.”<sup>342</sup> The SPJ’s code of ethics details how journalists should do this, but it fails to address the question of close relationships. The NUJ is less detailed in its code of conduct but implies that journalists should avoid conflicts of interest. The current codes of ethics of professional associations in the Caribbean do not address these issues. Like the SPJ, they provide guidance on conflict of interests and disclosure but do not specifically address the issue of covering close relationships, especially in small communities.

Caribbean journalists have been criticized for lack of independence from those whom they cover. The perception that journalists are biased

in their coverage of political elites was most prevalent among broadcast journalists, many of whom had been accused of being government propagandists. This perception persists. In terms of professionalism, ethics, and independence, journalists struggle to maintain a professional distance from those they cover.

As Claude Robinson explained, “the major role of these broadcasting systems in the 1960s and 1970s was public education, cultural enrichment, national identity, or a sense of ‘nation-ness.’”<sup>43</sup> But these systems lacked independence, editorial autonomy, and financial stability, and they were not accountable to the public. In her 2007 study, Cinzia Padovani noted most of these systems were starved of public funds and relied heavily on commercial advertising. Most were in debt by the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>44</sup>

Many scholars, like Monroe Price and Marc Raboy,<sup>45</sup> and Indrajit Banerjee and Kalinga Seneviratne,<sup>46</sup> believe these systems were operated as state-run institutions with direct dominance or interference from ruling political elites. As a result of political and economic constraints, these systems were not able to effectively promote public service values, editorial independence, quality programs, and democratic and accountable systems of administration.<sup>47</sup> However, having dominated their markets for decades, they did make important contributions, providing some of the region’s rich cultural heritage in terms of music, drama, and the arts.

Government influence in broadcasting remains a concern throughout the region. Broadcast journalists who work for state-owned radio and television stations are often accused of political clientelism. Further, because of the size of these markets, private broadcasters also favor one political party over another. Broadcast licensing is controlled by the state and favoritism is sometimes evident in the provision of licenses. Partisan relations are also evident in newspaper ownership and, historically, favoritism in print journalism’s coverage of political parties was perceived as highly partisan. In Belize, Grenada, and Guyana, with their history of party ownership of major newspapers, partisan political coverage is highly visible.

Hallin and Papathanassopoulos focus on five major characteristics of political clientelism evident in the performance of media systems included in their study: “low levels of newspaper circulation, a tradition of advocacy reporting, instrumentalization of privately-owned media, politicization of public broadcasting and broadcast regulation, and limited development

of journalism as an autonomous profession.<sup>248</sup> These characteristics are also present in Caribbean media systems—except, whereas the European and Latin American examples show low levels of newspaper circulation, the Caribbean varied, from high circulation in Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, to medium circulation in the Bahamas and Barbados, to low in Belize and Grenada.

Throughout the Caribbean, particularly in wake of the liberalization of the 1990s, “there was a strong tendency for media to be controlled by private interests with political alliances and ambitions who sought to use media properties for political ends.”<sup>249</sup> In some countries, these relationships were very visible as media companies with known political affiliations openly supported their party, often times the governing party. Some media houses have an adversarial relationship with political parties. These partisan relationships were strongest in Antigua, Belize, Grenada, and Guyana, but they were also present in the others. Caribbean countries have a history of politicizing public broadcasting. As such, journalistic autonomy was limited throughout the region.

Political pressure can take the form of commercial action. For example, the withdrawal of state advertising from *CaymanNet News*, in the Cayman Islands in 2004, was in response to politically unfavorable journalism, as was the withholding of state advertising from the *Stabroek News* in 2009. The concentration of media ownership, particularly by conglomerates, could also diminish independence. Wesley Gibbings laments the fact that “low professional standards, defective media institutions, adverse political circumstances, and uncompromising commercial interests conspire severally and collectively to create conditions that militate against the free press in the Caribbean.”<sup>250</sup>

The conclusions of Hallin and Papathanassopoulos’s study, when applied to the Caribbean context, are amplified by the size of these markets. Hallin and Papathanassopoulos believe journalism in the Caribbean is “not strongly developed as an autonomous institution, differentiated from other institutions—the family business, the political clique, the party—with a distinctive set of professional values and practices.”<sup>251</sup> Although Jamaica is a stand-alone example for advancing professionalization, I concur with Hallin and Papathanassopoulos. There is limited professionalization, evident in the limited development of institutions of journalistic self-regulation. Professional associations are important in a region where

authoritarianism, clientelism, and secrecy are strongly embedded in local cultures. Professionalization could lift the integrity of journalism and bring about more media autonomy throughout the region.

According to Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, the region emerged from an early form of clientelism, “a dyadic one based on relations of dependence,”<sup>52</sup> which was replaced with the “complex pyramidal clientelism”<sup>53</sup> evident today. The latter form emerged as “national political institutions developed, including political parties and centralized administration, and combined with clientelistic relations to create a more complex form of clientelism.”<sup>54</sup>

The new form of clientelism has led many people to criticize the structure and quality of journalism. The main concerns are the lack of professionalism, media bias, poor quality reporting, lack of autonomy, and journalists’ lack of knowledge of their environments and social histories. These deficiencies are noticeable in these small societies and have led to a diminished respect for journalists. However, during the independence movement and immediately after independence, journalists were praised for their contributions to the development of these countries. This was the period when developmental journalism was the dominant model.

In interviews conducted for this book, journalists described the emergence of a hostile relationship between the media and politicians; many recounted incidents of direct intimidation. In particular, Guyana provides one of the most notorious examples of press intimidation. According to the IPI’s 2013 country report, the relationship between the government and the press, although somewhat improved since the replacement of former president Bharrat Jagdeo, remains hostile. During his tenure, President Jagdeo referred to journalists as “carrion crows” and “vultures,” and he compared certain Guyanese media professionals to their Rwandan counterparts, some of which were accused of instigating the 1994 genocide.<sup>55</sup> President Jagdeo also banned Gordon Moseley, a reporter for *Capitol News* and the president of the Guyana Press Association, from the office of the president. Verbal assaults on the press are common throughout the region and many politicians use the term “opposition press” to describe media who oppose the government. Incidents of physical violence have been reported as well. In 2012, for example, the IPI condemned the beating of *Kaieteur News* reporter Freddie Kissoon. In an earlier incident in 2010, according to the IPI’s 2013 report, a bucket of human waste was thrown in Kissoon’s face. Kissoon is a well-known critic of the People’s Progressive Party.<sup>56</sup> In

2012 in Antigua and Barbuda, the investigative news website *Caribarena* reported serious allegations of intimidation. According to the IPI, “*Caribarena*’s editors reported incidents of violence, and fear for their safety led the editors to remove bylines.”<sup>57</sup> The editors also reported that their homes had been broken into, that stones were frequently thrown at their cars, and they claimed that “the government has pressured private advertisers not to cooperate with *Caribarena*.”<sup>58</sup> They believed they had been targeted with this harassment campaign because of their reporting on sensitive issues.

According to other reports, Caribbean politicians have employed intimidation tactics, such as sending security officers to press conferences, having ghostwriters send letters to the editors of local newspapers containing vicious verbal attacks to editors of local newspapers, selective advertising, enforcing national security laws, controlling attendance at press conferences, and ignoring, obfuscating, or delaying information requests.<sup>59</sup> The relationship between government and the press in the Caribbean has become hostile and mistrustful. To diffuse the growing tension, in 2014 the IPI recommended increased dialogue between public officials and journalists to enhance the government’s understanding of the media’s role in democracy.

In conjunction with the negative climate, there is a high level of bias and clientelism among media owners and politicians. Several journalists claimed that they were pressured to report from a particular political standpoint, and some editors altered copy “to supply a particular bent.”<sup>60</sup>

The dominant sentiment among journalists interviewed for this book is that they are not respected. Anthony Forbes, a former journalist who was employed at the time of research with the Bahamas Information Services, noted that while there were more journalists with university degrees, “we haven’t had the same level of the quality of news reporters. They aren’t as aggressive in going after the real good stories as opposed to just sensational stuff.”<sup>61</sup> Harold Hoyte recalled his encounters with ministers of government and prime ministers at press conferences, “where they dare not slip because we were onto them. Now you watch a press conference, and the questions are very patronizing and people are very polite and so on. There are no follow-up questions they are just token questions, a token question here and a token question there.”<sup>62</sup> Hoyte believes that to some extent there is also manipulation of the media—for example, when

“governments try to handpick people [at press conferences]. ... So people who may ask unsettling questions are unwelcomed.”<sup>63</sup>

That the public and other key stakeholders do not care about the work they do or understand the many challenges and constraints within which they work has a demoralizing effect on journalists. This lack of empathy and support does not inspire them to produce the kind of work that many of their critics demand. The Barbadian journalist Reudon Eversley and the Bahamian journalist Ava Turnquest both believe that public criticism and public apathy towards journalism has had a negative effect on their performance. As Turnquest explains, “we need the public’s feedback. When I do a story on a significant issue I want that feedback from the public. That’s what motivates me to do what I do. When the public doesn’t provide that feedback it seems to me that they don’t really care about these issues.”<sup>64</sup> Likewise, Eversley complains that people do not understand how news is produced, the conditions journalists work under, or other constraints that impact journalism. “You have a lot of self-appointed experts on journalism who call for investigative journalism but they are not sufficiently appreciative of the underlying factors that hinder it. Nor will they be bold enough to mount a lobby. They expect you to go out there and fight for them but they don’t want to fight for you.”<sup>65</sup>

Some Caribbean journalists also believe that independence is culturally specific. For instance, Omatie Lyder, editor of the *Trinidad Express*, provides an example of gift-giving in the Caribbean context:

We also have to keep in mind that our culture is different and there are things that you would [not do]. I’ll give you an example. The banks would send us carnival T-shirts. The banks would never do that in the US so you’d never be put in that position. But do you make a big deal out of it and send them back? You know five credit union T-shirts? When they are not expecting [or] they are not perceiving it as a gift. It is just something they do for their customers anyway. They don’t expect that a journalist is going to end up on their side. They don’t expect it and to actually send a T-shirt back would just insult someone you have forged a decent relationship with, a decent working repertoire. So there are those things we have to keep in mind.<sup>66</sup>

Although Lyder believed these types of activities were not interpreted as opportunities to influence or manipulate journalists, these gifts could influence journalists indirectly and an unconscious bias toward the gift-giving individual or organization could emerge.

Another cultural practice is “envelope journalism,” which happens when journalists receive payment for attending press conferences and other events. In the Caribbean, media scholars and professional associations are aware of these forms of influence, but they have not taken a hardline against them.

So, the questions arise, How do journalists practice independence in such an environment? How do they develop a professional identity while balancing overlapping relationships? Journalists’ observations underscore the difficulties of accomplishing this goal under the current working conditions. Reudon Eversley believes these small, authoritarian societies make it extremely challenging to practice effective journalism. He provides an example of how difficult it is to investigate or cover sensitive topics like race relations in the Caribbean. When he worked as an editor for the *Barbados Advocate*, he created a special assignments desk to explore some of the issues that plague Barbadian society. Eversley noted they were forced to drop a story on race relations because of economic and political pressures:

I mean, we always knew in Barbados ... [that] we have our own unofficial system of apartheid. Whites, it’s only now that you’re seeing a bit of integration. But when I was a boy growing up there was no mixing. I went to an old grammar school where white boys sat in my class and we would talk during the week but on Friday afternoon that relationship came to an end.

So we wanted to look at what it meant to be white in Barbados. Because there are a number of issues—like, for example, unemployment. Unemployment is not a white issue in Barbados; unemployment is a black issue. Most white guys who are at school will tell you they don’t have to study; education is not that important to them because they control the economy and when they come out they will get a job. They find it easier to get access to bank loans to start businesses that people like myself [blacks] the banks will give us hell.

So we wanted to look at what it meant because ... for example, in St. John's, a parish here, we have a community of what we call "ecky-beckies," they're poor whites. They came here as ... virtual slaves from Ireland, indentured servants. They were expelled by Oliver Cromwell, but they have retained their identity and they're among some of the most racist people you could come across because they refer to people like myself as niggers.

So we wanted to explore some of these issues and my manager called me one day and told me we had to end it because certain powerful elements in this country were accusing me of trying to stir up racial strife, when basically it was my view that the black community was entitled to know what was the experience of whites. They know what our experience is, they see us on the front page with crime and what not, they know of our struggles. Why we don't know about their privileged living? So you're not going to have any real investigative journalism in this country. It would be for someone from the United States or from England to come in and dig it up, where they don't give a hell about what happens here. But if you have to live in this community, this community has a way of getting back at you and punishing you in the area where it hurts most—in your pocket.<sup>67</sup>

Eversley's description of race relations clearly speaks to the continued issues of race in these postcolonial societies. But it also points to society's need to maintain a sense of group cohesion. As collectivist societies, Caribbean countries value group harmony, which sometimes was maintained through submission to the social order. There are few public discussions of race, sexism, ethnic relations, or same-sex relations as they exist in these countries, and when they are discussed it is either in the context of a response to incidents like the accusation of radio stations inciting racial discrimination in the 2002 Trinidad elections, the work of international and local NGOs, or the academic discourse on race and sexual orientation within the Caribbean intellectual community. Race relations in the Caribbean are anchored in the past—both the recent past, just prior to independence, and the colonial past under the mercantile system of slavery



and exploitation. Caribbean journalists are prohibited from frank discussions of race and sexual orientation. Homophobia is also deeply embedded in these societies. Senior journalists, those who have lived and worked before, during, and after independence, discuss the continued challenges of covering black-white relations. Many can provide examples of the racism they experienced when they were first hired. For example, as Ken Gordon noted, in the 1940s a radio station ran an advertisement for an announcer which read, "Announcer needed. Only white need apply."<sup>68</sup>

These political, economic, social, and cultural constraints undermine the principle of independence, but more importantly, they cheat the public and betray the truth. When the biases of political, social, and economic elites and media owners align on questions of censorship and social cohesion, important issues like ethnic identity, race relations, gender bias, and sexual orientation remain hidden from public scrutiny. This represents an egregious breach of the public's trust and a compromise of Caribbean journalists' ability to report fairly and accurately. Worst of all, there are no mechanisms of oversight to police these types of biases.

"Independence of mind" is further eroded by the increase in radio punditry. The initial impact of these shows on political elites was tremendous. But, the initial euphoria and increase in power was subverted. Many talk show hosts embrace their celebrity status and try to maintain audience share by trafficking in opinion, speculation, and misinformation. Like their American counterparts, they see themselves as the new information elites. Many exuded the star syndrome.

Critics accuse journalists and talk show hosts of paying more attention to their stardom than their role as newsgatherers. Some of the journalists interviewed agree that the issues of arrogance, egoism, and elitism are affecting the quality of journalism. This phenomenon has led to accusations of bias and unfair coverage as journalists are accused of spending more time advancing their status in society than upholding the principles that guide the practice and profession of journalism. Rupert Missick, a young Bahamian journalist, believed that instead of fueling their egos, journalists should be more concerned about understanding complex and complicated issues like the CSME and EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement). He admitted that journalists, during the time of the debates over the CSME and EPA, did not have the background to understand them and so they did not know how to explain how these issues would impact their audience on an

individual and collective level. He acknowledged his own lack of training and described how a senior journalist explained to him how he had to write so that the audience understood the CSME or EPA. Missick confessed he did not know how to write that way. “How do you write that?” he queried. “I can barely understand it, and I can’t listen to it for more than two minutes without losing interest. How does a reporter who is not an economic expert, how does he dumb it down or make it simpler to educate somebody fully about what it is?”<sup>69</sup> Missick believes that citizens only want to know how to stop these agreements because the journalists only provided them with one side of the story. They do not understand the benefits, nor, according to Missick, do they care to understand them. The coverage of these agreements has not been comprehensive, proportionate, relevant, or engaging. As a result, a lot of misinformation, disinformation, and fear has been circulated. Missick acknowledges that during these debates some journalists took an elitist approach to their audience, believing the audience was not smart enough to understand these agreements. He believes journalists’ weak coverage of these two agreements was related to elitism, a lack of resources to meet the expectations of the population, a lack of access to information, and a lack of knowledge, time, and training.

Elitist attitudes and the phenomenon of the celebrity journalist do not engender independent journalism. Although journalists are troubled by the emerging phenomenon of the “star,” they are equally relieved that the impact of this phenomenon has not reached the same levels as the United States or Britain. Journalists in the region, unlike their American and European counterparts, do not yet command significant remuneration for speaking engagements, lectures, or book deals, but some have obtained significant rewards from political and economic elites in exchange for favorable coverage. Some journalists have moonlighted in public relations, while others have created their own private media or communication firm while working as a journalist for other media. These conflicts of interest are important and are the purview of professional associations.

While independence is a valuable principle to uphold, it should not preclude journalists from presenting a voice in their stories, which is not the same as being biased. They should use a voice that excites the reader, listener, or viewer, but they should remain balanced, accurate, and fair. They should not confuse fact with opinion. Speculation and bias should not replace facts. While there are journalists and journalism scholars

who would argue fiercely for objectivity as the holy grail of journalism, no journalist can truly be objective as the human condition has inherent biases based on background, personality, values, and beliefs. Despite the acknowledgement that true objectivity is impossible to practice in the field, some journalists still strive to achieve this. Dan Gillmor, author of *We the Media*, rejects the notion of objectivity, and in his essay “The End of Objectivity (Version 0.91),” he advocates that journalists drop the word objectivity and replace it with thoroughness, accuracy, fairness, and transparency. “We are human,” he writes. “We have biases and backgrounds and a variety of conflicts that we bring to our jobs every day.”<sup>70</sup>

The majority of the journalists interviewed agreed that there is a need for independence and the application of objectivity through the verification of facts in the pursuit of truth. However, journalists also acknowledged the challenges of upholding this principle.

## Professional Associations

Professional associations are synergistic groups of people who come together to further their career and enhance their profession. They setup guidelines for ethical conduct and best practices. It is unfortunate in a region that has such rich intersecting histories and cultures that journalism has not developed as a professional, lifelong career. Further, the size of the markets, political and economic control of the market, media organizations, and educational institutions do not facilitate the development of a journalistic culture that is vital to the growth and development of democracy. As a result, it is difficult for young people entering the field to see themselves in lifelong careers.

In order to build a professional culture, media owners, policymakers, media scholars, and journalists will have to decide on the role journalism plays in the development of these societies and provide the training and opportunities for journalists to develop lifelong careers and a professional identity. Caribbean journalists believe that throughout the region journalism has not yet developed into a professional career. Creating a professional culture would advance this goal. Professionalism would also benefit the reputations, morale, and success of journalists. To have the greatest impact the goals of professional associations should be specific, measurable,

attainable, relevant, and timely. A clear plan of action should be created to achieve these goals.

This call to action is extremely important at a time when journalists will be expected to make sense of the overwhelming amount of information citizens receive every day. If they are not held accountable to citizens for what they write and present, how are they any different from the propagandist? The level of criticism regarding the quality of Caribbean journalism should motivate journalists to improve the quality of their work. To this end, the most important contributions of professional associations are a code of ethics that clearly articulates how journalists should practice, as well as the mechanisms of accountability.

Brent Dean and Peter Christopher, two younger journalists, viewed the lack of professional careers in journalism as a multifaceted problem with media owners, political leaders, educational institutions, and journalists themselves sharing the responsibility for the haphazard development of journalism throughout the region. Journalism is perceived as a short-term employment opportunity that can propel journalists into better careers in public relations, law, or politics. In Dean's opinion, journalists do not join professional associations because they do not have a stake in journalism. Rather, "for there to [even] be an association, you have to have people who have something at stake. If people are just passing through, they are not going to risk anything ... [to] create a very active association or union. They are just going to keep their jobs, not get in any trouble, and go home on time."<sup>71</sup> He believes that treating journalism as career or profession, along with the resources that go with such status, could improve the value of professional organizations, "but media owners will have to play a big role in this. Once people are making very little and they don't think they can stay they will go. I think that's ... the main reason why we don't have associations, unions or such."<sup>72</sup>

Christopher also believes journalists are not being very responsible or accountable. "There should be some kind of accountability. You also have to be mindful of what danger you can put the public in, what effects your writing has on the public because there are a lot of stories that are written that end up putting members of the public in danger, they cause innocent people their jobs."<sup>73</sup>

Christopher is perturbed because many journalists do not check their facts; others use unattributed sources and rumors with very little

substantiation. In Trinidad and Tobago, he explains, “newspapers are full of errors. We like to sensationalize stories. We like to fabricate stories. We don’t get all the facts. We overlook many things. *X* newspaper is supporting this party, this political side. There is no objectivity in the media. That’s the common criticism.”<sup>74</sup> He cites the example of journalists reporting the rumors of a human trafficking story as fact instead of investigating the rumors to get to the truth:

What happened last week or two weeks ago with the whole fiasco with the multi containers on the port where these young journalists were so thirsty to break this media story [that they] went out and reported [that] this container full of children was found in the port and this is something that is continuously happening. Everywhere I go ... I will always encounter somebody who says that the media in Trinidad never gets the story right. It’s because a lot of the reporters ... don’t double check what they’re hearing or they just take the first thing they hear and say, “hey, this is the story. I’m gonna write it as this.” And as such, the credibility of the media in Trinidad has suffered a lot.<sup>75</sup>

For Christopher, this incident underscores how far the standards have fallen. He believes a lot of these weaknesses could be attributed to youth, inexperience, and lack of training: “Because a lot of journalists who are currently in the media are very young, they don’t have the full approach to journalism and the quality [that is needed].”<sup>76</sup> As such, Christopher noted, the quality is not very high. “Some of these senior journalists who are still around would try to tell us ‘hey you could look at what the BBC does or read ... one of the English newspapers and see how they approach different stories.’”<sup>77</sup> However, the younger journalists did not follow through. The problem was also exacerbated because “some of the editors who are in place now are these same young journalists who came up without guidance, and they are just doing what they heard from before and not really getting it right. So there is a lack of guidance.”<sup>78</sup>

Christopher is disheartened by the ineffectiveness of the professional association in Trinidad and Tobago. “I don’t consider it very effective,” he explains. “I was nagged into joining. They’re going to have a meeting on Saturday, which I probably will not attend because I have been very

disheartened by how they have approached previous media affairs. They normally adopt a wait-and-see policy on most things, so I've not been impressed by their operations."<sup>79</sup>

Professional organization is one of the key elements for the advancement of journalism throughout the Caribbean. Jamaica provides a good case study for the region. Jamaica's professional organizations, the Press Association of Jamaica and the Media Association of Jamaica, have attempted to professionalize journalism and standardize its practice. Both organizations have articulated the principles and guidelines for the practice and profession. The annual distribution of professional awards has helped to standardize and enhance the value of the profession as well.

To actualize their role as independent monitors of power, journalists in the Caribbean should first define what independence means to them and identify the standards of independence they want to uphold. They should also determine how they would implement these standards. Improving the profession would also require the creation of codes of conduct for national, regional and international practices as the emphasis of coverage shifts to the need for glocal perspectives; this means understanding the local and the global. Professional associations should also work with academic programs and institutes throughout the region to improve the quality of education and training. Further, as a result of increased criticism, press councils or a formal oversight structure should be established to create a system that handles media complaints.

