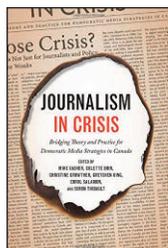


Review



Journalism in Crisis: Bridging Theory and Practice for Democratic Media Strategies in Canada. Edited by Mike Gasher, Colette Brin, Christine Crowther, Gretchen King, Errol Salamon, & Simon Thibault. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2016. 360 pp. ISBN: 9781442628885.

We live in exciting and challenging times for democratic media reform. Converging technological, institutional, socio-political, and economic developments threaten the field of journalism—but also provide opportunities for engaged actors to look to theory, policy, and practice for historic lessons as well as emerging solutions. Such is the premise of this excellent collection of essays, *Journalism in Crisis: Bridging Theory and Practice for Democratic Media Strategies in Canada*, on the present “critical juncture” (McChesney, 2007) faced by democratic media in Canada and beyond.

Activist and reform-oriented approaches to media policy and practice are enjoying renewed focus in communication scholarship, as illustrated in recent issues of *International Journal of Communication* (IJOC) and *Journal of Information Policy* (JIP). JIP published a series of articles re-examining the debate between “administrative” and “critical” approaches to communication policy research, with the aim of exploring how these traditions might be integrated in contemporary work (Katz & Katz, 2016; Napoli & Friedland, 2016). In a related discussion in IJOC, Carragee and Frey (2016) outlined the need for engaged communication scholarship:

“[This approach] involves communication researchers (and, in the case of teaching, communication educators and students) using their theories, methods, and applied practices to work with and for oppressed, marginalized, and under-resourced groups and communities ... as well as with activist groups and organizations ... to intervene into unjust discourses and material conditions to make them more just, and documenting and reporting their practices, processes, and effects to multiple publics” (p. 3975).

In his response to this piece, McChesney (2016) agrees with their assessment and stresses its importance at the current historical moment, emphasizing both policy struggles and efforts to establish independent media organizations and systems. *Journalism in Crisis* contributes a Canadian perspective on these issues. Covering different facets of journalism practice and policy in a theoretically grounded and accessible manner, the authors take a tone of cautious optimism that highlights contemporary challenges while encouraging action. As Christine Crowther, Simon Thibault, Errol Salamon, and Gretchen King write in the Introduction: “This book is meant for readers who believe

journalism has a role to play in democratic life, and who are willing to engage in those arguments on a theoretical and on a practical level” (p. 4). Inspired by the work of media activists and reformers from around the world, chapter authors take a global view, featuring studies of media policy and practice from Australia, Iceland, and the UK, as well as from North America. Their discussions are both diverse and intersectional, highlighting the voices of distinct communities while noting points of similarity.

Drawing on the analytical concept of a media ecosystem and the normative aims articulated in critical public sphere theory, the authors trace the historical roots of the issues discussed in each chapter while highlighting how they have “taken on the hues of the times we live in” (p. 7). Contemporary networked digital technologies, shifting audiences, evolving policy frameworks, and emerging business models are situated in wide-ranging case studies that tease out how policy and practice interact in various media. By adopting a process-oriented view to these issues, authors illustrate not only what has happened, but also what might happen in years to come.

The book is well-structured for this purpose. Part 1 features chapters by Pinar Gurleyen and Robert A. Hackett, and by Greg Nielsen, who respectively frame the subsequent discussion with reference to journalism studies and critical theory. Chapters in Parts 2 and 3 may foreground elements of media policy/practice, but they do so in ways that recognize and reflect their complex interactions. This reviewer particularly appreciated the skill of the authors in presenting these relations in ways that demystify technical concepts sometimes employed in media policy, while also motivating practical change through concrete proposals.

Each chapter explores the interventions of people working in media systems—as policy advocates, citizen journalists, community media managers, and in other roles. For example, David Skinner, Kathleen Cross, and Robert A. Hackett show how policy activists have consistently struggled to democratize media structures against powerful opposition, outlining proposals for institutional reform and highlight several promising “made in Canada” initiatives. An international example comes from Arne Hintz, who illustrates how the collapse of Iceland’s economy led to the emergence of a civil society-driven campaign for media reform based on the free circulation of information, including through digital intermediaries such as the Icelandic Modern Media Initiative.

Local media and community journalism are another theme running throughout the book. Pointing to the economic challenges faced by community journalists, Karen Wirsig and Catherine Edwards provide a concise overview of the policy and regulatory frameworks that such groups operate in, before offering proposals for public-community media collaboration. Their chapter ends with several case studies that provide evidence of such partnerships.

This analytical approach of blending policy and practice is also used in chapters about emerging journalism practices. Importantly, authors point to innovations taking place in so-called margins as drivers of change. In their discussion of Groundwire, Gretchen King, Chris Albinati, Anabel Khoo, Candace Mooers, and Jacky Tuinstra Harrison describe how community radio remains a core medium for local journalism, but also reflects national efforts to syndicate content and share governance practices among regional affiliates. The authors discuss their efforts to “build a national com-

munity news network among community radio stations and volunteers in Canada, prioritizing public engagement, training and localism” (p. 209). This work includes policies developed by the collective and implemented by a range of participants from diverse, but interconnected, communities of marginalized or under-represented voices. The chapter also provides important background to the upcoming CRTC hearings on Native Broadcasting, including the reform efforts of the Community Media Advocacy Centre in this space (see: <http://www.cmacentre.ca>).

In his chapter on Aboriginal media, Michael Meadows provides a comparison of Indigenous public spheres in Australia and Canada. He notes that, despite their diversity, these spaces support common acts of Indigenous representation and self-determination, while also contributing information and innovative practices to “mainstream” media—an area that might be further explored with reference to the important work of Indigenous scholars of resurgence (Corntassel, 2012).

In their concluding chapter, Errol Salamon, Gretchen King, Christine Crowther, and Simon Thibault re-iterate the book’s goal to help “initiate participatory and deliberative policy-making to ... redress a democratic deficit in Canadian journalism” (p. 266). In this reviewer’s opinion, the work succeeds. It provides a strong contribution to both journalism studies and communication policy studies, while providing a handbook for researchers, policy activists, and journalism practitioners. Well-suited to both graduate and undergraduate readers, this volume provides an excellent overview of the history and future of democratic journalism in Canada.

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