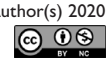
Article

Journalism
2021, Vol. 22(8) 1912–1928



DOI: 10.1177/1464884920913383
journals.sagepub.com/home/jou
SAGE

'A journalism of fear'

Chris W Anderson
University of Leeds, UK

Abstract

What should journalism do, and for what reasons should it do it? The starting point of this article is that two distinct but converging factors have made this question increasingly hard to answer. On one hand, the seemingly perpetual crisis in newsroom capacity has made it hard to sustain a maximalist normative conception of what journalism should accomplish. On the other hand, the globalization of journalism studies research has problematized the assumed link between journalism and democracy. In response, this article outlines a new normative journalistic ideal, grounded in the political theory of the late Judith Shklar – a 'journalism of fear'. Under this model, the link between journalism and liberalism is asserted over and above the link between journalism and democracy. Drawing on Shklar, the journalism of fear contends that the worst of all evils is cruelty, and the purpose of journalism is to minimize that cruelty. The article elaborates Shklar's thinking by comparing her perspective on a number of issues to those of a far more familiar political philosopher, John Dewey. It concludes by looking at what a journalism of fear would look like in practice by briefly discussing newsroom responses to the Windrush scandal in the United Kingdom.

Keywords

Comparative journalism research, democracy, Dewey liberalism, normative theory, Shklar

Introduction

What expectations should we have from 21st-century journalism, and from 21st-century journalists? What should journalism do, and for what reasons should it do it? For a profession invested with so much normative, theoretical, political, epistemological, and democratic baggage, we scholars ask these questions less often than we might. Or rather,

Corresponding author:
Chris W Anderson, School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK.
Email: c.w.anderson@leeds.ac.uk

it seems that our answers are implicitly embedded in the research questions we ask and the specific cases we choose to examine. As Chris Peters and Matt Carlson (2019) put in the introduction to a recent special issue of this journal,

> A virtue of being a journalism scholar is that we rarely need to defend – or even explain – our topic of inquiry. When new acquaintances ask what we do, and we respond that we study news and journalism, our inquisitors are usually happy to engage in conversation about it. (p. 637)

Inherent in this unquestioned acceptance is an implicit understanding that journalism matters, and that it matters in particularly normative ways which are largely self – evident to all. It is an acceptance that has been facilitated, in part, by the growth of journalism studies as an academic field, as well as by the largely Western orientation of much of the empirical work within that field, at least to date. It seems like a more explicit re-evaluation of the normative theories of the press might be useful at this moment, not just for academics, but for professional journalists as well.

Recently, a few scholars have begun to push back on this assumed normative importance of journalism, often for the purposes of taking a contrarian position: that journalism is less important than we think it is, that the link between journalism and public life is not particularly clear, or that there are only a few things (or maybe even one thing) that journalism can do for democracy. This essay takes up the challenge mounted by these minimalist arguments. If we do not take the importance of journalism for granted, and if the economic and political times in which we live make holding up grand expectations for the news profession increasingly problematic, what reasonable hopes can we have for journalism? To repeat the question asked above: what ought journalists do, and why should they do it?

To answer these questions, I draw on the political theory of the late Judith Shklar (1989), particularly the line of thought advanced in her essay *The Liberalism of Fear*. For Shklar, famously, the worst of all evils is cruelty, and the purpose of a liberal political regime is to minimize cruelty. What would a journalism governed by Shklar's normative understanding of politics, liberalism, and cruelty look like? How could we articulate the normative purpose of a 'journalism of fear', and what would its guiding principles be? I contrast this understanding of journalism with both 'maximalist' conceptions of the relationship between journalism and political life (a conception found, for instance, in arguments by communitarian inclined public journalism scholars; Christians et al., 2009) as well as a more 'minimalist' paradigm advanced by Michael Schudson (2008), Barbie Zelizer (2013), Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (2017), and others. This understanding of a journalism of fear, I argue, is not only normatively powerful but is also very much in line with the guiding perceptions of a great number of everyday working reporters – a perspective I outline in my discussion of journalism's coverage of the Windrush scandal in the United Kingdom. In this, I also think that my perspective complies with Kleis Nielsen's stringent three-part test for any good normative theory: that it is possible, it is occupationally distinct, and that it is based on something that journalists themselves actually want to do. But we will see.

Normative journalism theory and the 'maximalist perspective'

Americans, in particular, have always had high hopes for communicative processes in general and journalism in particular. John Dewey's (1916) maxim that 'of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful . . . society exists not only by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication' (p. 5) has inspired numerous scholars to wax rhapsodically on the democratic power of the press, most eloquently among them the late James Carey. Alexis de Tocqeuville's (1840) comment that 'nothing but a newspaper can drop the same thought into a thousand minds at the same moment' has been pointed to as one of the central takeaways from one of the few pieces of quasi-indigenous American political theory. A sociological variation of this point was later picked up by Robert Park in his early research work on the solidarity and community building capacities of the urban ethnic press (Park, 1923).

Echoes of these visions can be found in one of the most comprehensive collection of normative journalism theory, *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies* (Christians et al., 2009). In this book, the authors lay out four potential roles which can be played by the news media in a democracy – monitorial, facilitative, radical, and collaborative roles – as well as the manner in which these roles draw on larger philosophies of democratic political governance. Three of the four roles (facilitative, radical, and collaborative) can be rightly said to embrace a *maximalist* understanding of what journalism ought to do in society, each of them pushing beyond a simple understanding of journalism as the social institution that uncovers and publishes facts to facilitate the political education of the public. The facilitative role emphasizes fostering public conversation and deliberation, the radical role sees journalism as getting to the root of pernicious social problems, and the collaborative role even involves supporting the actions of the state in times of natural disaster or emergency.

Although not the only focus of the book, *Normative Theories of the Media* makes numerous references to a dialogical understanding of the media's role in a democracy, tying this philosophy into the facilitative, deliberative potential of journalism. There are two aspects of this dialogical role, each of which differs subtly about the ultimate *purpose* of journalism-fostered deliberation, but each of which can also be said to be a part of this 'maximalist'. The first is a communitarian approach to conversation. The second might be understood as a Habermasian, or 'public sphere' approach. Emphasizing the fact that any deliberative understanding of journalism must posit an engaged public, whose conception of a common good goes beyond the rights-based, individualistic, liberal approach of monitorial news reporting. Clifford Christians and his collaborators take liberal, monitorial journalism as the baseline understanding of what journalism ought to do, and then push this minimal understanding in more demanding directions. Indeed, it was the debate in the 1990s between liberal and communitarian understandings of what journalism ought to do for democracy that marked, perhaps, the most explicit attempt to formulate a more fleshed out normative perspective on what journalism ought to 'be for' (Rosen, 1999).

The specific object of controversy in the 1990s was the press reform movement known as 'public journalism'. It is not my purpose to fully probe the complexities and

nuances of this important movement here. Nevertheless, these early arguments about public journalism (and the larger debates between liberalism and communitarianism in which they were embedded) were, I would suggest, one the last times a substantive vision of journalistic norms was offered in the academic realm. There have been many debates about journalism since the 1990s, of course, but most of them have to do with the relationship between news and technology, the economics of news, the value of objectivity, or the meaning of journalistic professionalism. On a normative level, 21st-century arguments about the impact of technology in journalism remain indebted to arguments from the 1990s, even while, on a practical level, current journalistic work has traveled a long way from communitarian concepts of an informed and deliberative public. The minimalist conception of journalistic norms required an earlier, maximalist normative conception of public journalism to have existed as an ideological predecessor.[1]

What was the public journalism movement? In its most straightforward sense, the idea of public (or civic) journalism was that reporters ought to move past simply providing information to citizens about the actions of politicians and public figures, and actively work to facilitate the public's ability to exist in the first place, by journalists working in collaboration with community leaders, to bring citizens together, to debate public issues (which would then be featured in the press). Alternately, journalists could go beyond the usual elite suspects as news sources and work more actively to incorporate the 'public's voice' in news coverage (Glasser, 1999; Rosen, 1999). In practice, this led to news organizations sponsoring community forums in which ordinary citizens could help set the agenda for news coverage.

We can abstract from these very practical practices and solutions to the more ethereal realms of democratic theory, and the relationship between public journalism and dialogical communitarianism, by substituting the word 'journalism' for 'politics' in Daniel Bell's overview of the communitarian challenge to liberalism. For Bell (2016),

> ~~[politics]~~ journalism should not be concerned solely with securing the conditions for individuals to exercise their powers of autonomous choice, as [it] *also needs to sustain and promote the social attachments crucial to our sense of well-being and respect*, many of which have been involuntarily picked up during the course of our upbringing. (Bell 2016, p. 13, emphasis added)

This emphasis can be seen mostly clearly in Christians' later writings on public journalism, who, true to his communitarian focus in *Normative Theories of the Press*, argues that 'public journalism depends on a notion of the common good. [Christians] takes community formation as public journalism's overriding mission, with news and other forms of discourse serving as agents of community formation' (Haas and Steiner, 2003: 35). Even if we discount the truly maximalist need to achieve a communitarian 'common good' through conversation, public journalism theorists (at the very least) emphasize the fact that journalism can help create a non-communitarian public sphere though deliberation and conversation. In this, nearly all public journalism theorists draw most explicitly on James Carey (1989), whose writing can be seen, retrospectively, as the taproot of the entire maximalist conception of normative journalism theory, whether deliberative or communitarian.

An additional range of normative theories on the purpose of journalism also exist, above and beyond those outlined in the communitarian versus liberal debate in the 1990s about journalism's role in democratic life. Some of these (Strömbäck, 2005) link journalistic purposes with multiple variations of democracy, broadening and expanding the perspective of Christians et al.[2] Blumler and Cushion (2014) discuss six normative approaches to journalistic practice, relating all six to different ways 'democracy is to be served by journalism' (Blumler and Cushion, 2014) while admitting that these varied academic approaches have had little impact on the actual practice of news.[3] A critical discourse analysis of the various embedded normative principles of *digital journalism*, conducted by Kreiss and Brennen (2016), point to an even greater expansion of the normative hopes for 21st-century news, pointing to demands that digital news be *participatory, de-institutionalized, innovative, entrepreneurial*, and so on. In all of these cases, we see both a link between journalism and democracy (usually explicit) as well as a fairly broad set of expectations for the role journalism might play in making democracy work well.

However, recent years have seen the start of a pushback against these expansive notions and normative hopes within the scholarship surrounding journalism studies itself. It is an academic pushback that begins by opposing either journalism as primarily focused on fostering conversation (the anti-deliberative point of view) or as responsible for creating the sense of a common good and coherent public community (the anti-communitarian view). As a philosophical liberal (Graves, 2017; Schudson, 1998: 367), Michael Schudson led the way in opposing both of these perspectives; first by arguing that 'conversation (and conversationally-enabled journalism) is not the soul of democracy', and second, by highlighting the fact that expansive notions of what journalism is for only represent one possible journalistic future. There are other things journalism can do, Schudson (1997), contends, which are less demanding and perhaps more compatible with a liberal normative framework. It is this set of minimal philosophical expectations, combined with a resurgent liberal focus on the importance of information and the role of 'facts' in democratic life, that has led the way to a minimalist turn in journalism theory in the early decades of the 21st century.

The minimalist turn

The minimalist direction indicated in the debate over public journalism, or at least the attempt of some of public journalism's critics to separate the practice of journalism of some of its more expansive democratic claims, has picked up speed in recent years. In part, this move toward a skepticism of maximalist journalistic theory was borne out of the increasingly global nature of journalism studies. The encounter with a global and comparative research agenda, along with the end of the Cold War, forced the mostly Americanist scholars who had been active up until that point to reckon with the non-universality of Western journalistic claims and practices. At the same time, the crisis in media production wrought by the growth of the Internet and the rise in platforms (Anderson, 2019) forced other critics to concede that even if larger normative hope were ideally possible, they were practically *impossible* due to shrunken journalistic capacities.

Barbie Zelizer's (2013) essay On the Shelf Life of Democracy in Journalism Scholarship argues against the narrowness of normative visions of the news that see journalism and democracy as inextricably linked. Building on the metaphor contained in the title of her piece, Zelizer contends that the 'shelf life' of the democracy concept for journalism studies may have passed its expiration date, and she hopes to decouple the relationship between journalism and democracy. For largely historical and path-dependent reasons, Zelizer acknowledges, this is not an easy separation. 'Journalism is thought to possess the most value when it is used to enhance democracy', she acknowledges. And yet,

> The theoretical shortcomings of the journalism/nexus link drew first from the certain version of modernity to which early political philosophers repaired in pushing it forward. Simply put, their version of modernity was Western in geographical orientation, narrow in its applicability. The mindset they invoked was modern only from a certain geographical and cultural perspective, and it assumed conditions that were not part of the default settings elsewhere in the world. Thus, the nexus between journalism and democracy was often unreflective of circumstances beyond the West, where, as Garcia-Canclini (1995) argued nearly 20 years ago, different modes of entering and leaving modernity had become widely prevalent. (Zelizer, 2013: 465).

This normative and theoretical flaw has empirical consequences, Zelizer argues. Journalism scholarship's slender normative justification means it operates from a narrow intellectual base, one that is incapable of understanding how and why journalism matters for democracy in different places around the world. In post-Soviet nations, for instance, journalism may have a great deal of normative value, but it is not always because journalism enhances democracy. It may help build public solidarity, construct the nation state, and so on. Zelizer wishes to maintain a thick, robust dimension to journalistic purpose, but to do so, argues in favor of dropping democracy from the equation. Journalism 'does' and is 'for' many things, but to fully understand what they are, scholars need to adopt a broader normative understanding that democracy currently allows.

Nielsen, for his part, maintains the link between democratic ideals and journalism (see also George, 2012, for a related argument) but he whittles it down to its very foundations. More so than Zelizer, Nielsen embraces Schudson's notion of 'monitorial democracy', or the idea that citizens, most of the time, delegate their democratic accountability mechanisms to a variety of external bodies and agencies, including journalism. Nielsen, in modification of Schudson's 'six or seven things journalism might do for democracy', argues that any valid normative theory of journalism must meet a stringent three-part test: it must be an actual possibility (i.e. not fanciful or overly abstract); it must be something journalists actually want to do (i.e. compatible with journalism's own self-image), and it must be distinct (something unique to journalism). For Nielsen (2017), then, 'the one thing . . . journalism just might do for democracy is . . . provide people with relatively accurate, accessible, diverse, relevant, and timely independently produced information about public affairs' (p. 1252). This is a radical departure from earlier notions of journalism as establishing or representing community ideals (in the communitarian framework) or facilitating democratic deliberation (in the deliberative framework). It even cuts deeply into the monitorial notion of citizenship, acknowledging that Schudson's notion of democratic citizenship is the correct one, but that the political accountability

outsourced to the journalism profession must be extremely narrow and tailored specifically to the things that journalism does best. The economic precarity of the journalism profession, the rising political attacks mounted by populist politicians and authoritarian leaders, the fragility of journalism when confronted with the power of platforms – all this demands a retreat to first principles and a consolidation of journalistic core functions. For Nielsen, it is essential to keep journalism coupled with democracy, but to do so it must focus on providing information to others.

In these arguments against traditional journalistic maximalism, Zelizer and Nielsen advance different goals. Zelizer opts for a politically thin, but normatively robust, conception of what journalism is for; to understand its actual role in countries that are not Western, thus, a democratic conception of journalism's relationship to politics must be jettisoned (Zelizer, 2013). Nielsen, for his part, maintains the link between journalism and democracy but does so by whittling away what journalism actually might provide for democratic states. It can give citizen timely and professionally verified facts about current affairs, and little more. In both cases, the idea that journalism can build a democratic public sphere by enhancing community deliberation, that it should be participatory, innovative, and anti-institutional, or even that it should help formulate an understanding of the common good (which is antecedent to individual rational preferences) seems a long way off.

Judith Shklar, liberalism, and a journalism of fear

Given all this, we return to our original question: What expectations should we have from 21st-century journalism, and from 21st-century journalists? Given the increasingly cross-national nature of journalism scholarship, the growing repression and political pressure faced by members of the press (Freedom House, 2017), and the decline of journalism's economic base, what are legitimate expectations of what journalism should do, and why? In the words of Nielsen (2017) from the article quoted earlier, what can we expect from a 'few thousand over-worked and increasingly underpaid and inexperienced white-collar professionals . . . working for sometimes existentially threatened media organizations, faced with well-organized and non-transparent vested interests?' (p. 1252).

In the second half of this article, I want to argue that our confusion over the proper normative role of journalism stems not simply from economic decline or the de-Westernizing of journalism studies, but can also be attributed to theoretical confusion – fundamentally, a conceptual confusion between *democracy* and *liberalism*. In discussions of the role of the press, the two terms are almost always conflated, as if journalism's support for democracy inherently implied an embrace of liberal values, or, if the liberalism at the heart of so much Western journalism inevitably made democracy better. It does not. Whatever the ultimate relationship between journalism and democracy, there may yet be a few things that journalism can do to support liberal political ideas, particularly liberalism as defined in minimal terms, as it is in the work of the late political philosopher Judith Shklar. In the pages that follow I want to provide an overview of Shklar's work and how we might use it to think harder about the purposes of journalism in an austerity ridden, anti-liberal, democratic-authoritarian age. Specifically, I want to discuss how her

work disaggregates notions of liberalism and democracy – though the two are, in her words, engaged in a 'monogamous marriage of convenience' (Shklar, 1989: 198) – and how notions of fear and political cruelty are at the root of her skeptical commitment to liberal justice. Integrating Shklar's work on cruelty with the question of the normative role of journalism, finally, leads us back to the title of this essay. What remains when we sort through dashed democratic hopes and minimalist conceptions of journalism? A journalism of fear.

Shklar's life and thought

Of the great generation of post-war European intellectuals who made their home in the United States (Shklar was born in Riga, Latvia, in 1928 to Jewish parents), Judith Shklar is one the least well known. In part this may be attributed to her relative youth at the time of her emigration, in part it may be reducible to the fact that she never commented extensively on current political issues in the manner of Hannah Arendt or deeply influenced an entire school of political thought in the manner of Leo Strauss (Levy, 2018). Nevertheless, as the first woman to receive tenure in Harvard's Department of Government in 1971, she ought to be better remembered. Active in the American Political Science Association (APSA) and known to her friend as 'Dita', Shklar is, perhaps, best remembered in the more than 25 years after her death (in 1992) as a great teacher of future political scientists, with students ranging from Amy Guttmann to Nancy Rosenblum and Patrick T. Riley.

Because the remaining space in this essay is limited, and because her thought is so multifaceted, complex, and relatively unknown to journalism scholars, I want to introduce Shklar's notion by comparing her to a much more familiar political thinker, indeed, one who is our disciplinary touchstone whether we use him for purposes of opprobrium or celebration: John Dewey. We have briefly encountered Dewey in my discussion of public journalism, above, and I want to extend the discussion of his political thought by using him as a contrast with the much different normative philosophy of Shklar. The two liberal thinkers differ along a number of fronts, but for this essay we will focus on three: their conception of the purposes of political life, their ideas about the nature of the political citizen, and their notion of the role and meaning of political communication (including journalism) in modern society. Each of these comparative axes can shed light on what is unique about Shklar's thought, and, in turn, what this thought can add to our understanding of normative journalism theory.

As prelude, I want to mention one aspect of Shklar's work that does not directly intersect with Dewey's, but which is essential for understanding the kind of thinker Shklar was, and the way that her thought, after only 25 years, has accumulated a helpful antiquity. Although she certainly came of intellectual age in the midst of the various 'cultural and critical turns' in the academy, her work is refreshingly free of the kind of relativistic doubt that dominates so much normative writing on politics and democracy. 'The liberal prescription for citizenship', she admits in her most famous essay, *The Liberalism of Fear*, 'is [to many critics] both a very unhistorical and ethnocentric view that makes *quite unwarranted claims for universality*. The relativist', she goes on,

> Now argues that the liberalism of fear would not be welcomed by most of those who live under traditional customs . . . To judge inherited habits by standards that purport to be general, even though they are alien to a people, is said to be an arrogant imposition of false as well as partial principles. (Shklar, 1989: 34)

Shklar will have none of this. In response to these relativistic claims, she responds that

> Unless we can offer the injured and insulted victims of most of the world's traditional as well as revolutionary governments a genuine and practicable alternative to their present condition, we have no way of knowing whether they really enjoy their chains. There is very little evidence that they do. The Chinese did not really like Mao's reign any more than we would, in spite of their political and cultural distance from us. The absolute relativism, not merely cultural but psychological, that rejects the liberalism of fear as too 'Western' and too abstract is itself too complacent and too ready to forget the horrors of our world to be credible. It is deeply illiberal, not only in its submission to tradition as an ideal, but in its dogmatic identification of every local practice with deeply shared local human aspirations. (Shklar, 1989: 34)

To 21st-century ears, this is a surprisingly bold and unapologetic defense of a certain form of chastened universality. In its strangeness, we may find food for thought and a challenge, whether we agree with Shklar on these issues or not. It also provides an initial insight into the kind of thinker and writer Shklar was, as well as a gateway into understanding particular form of pessimistic liberalism. How this line of thought differs from other political conceptions of the normatively valuable 'good life' is clearer when we compare Shklar's thinking with Dewey's. Each of them is, in the broadest possible sense of the term, a liberal, but both disagree fundamentally about a variety of key intellectual concepts, starting with the basic purposes of political life. From these different perspectives, they then disagree further about the nature of the ideal of polity and the political citizen, as well as about the role that could be conceivably played by journalism and communication in helping to shape politics.

Shklar and Dewey

Did Dewey possess a coherent account of the *summum bonum* of political life, a highest good that could be used to order political values in a democratic system? There is much controversy about this question; as a pragmatist, Dewey explicitly denied the existence of a 'highest political good', an ultimate political value which could be used to order the purposes of political life. Such an ordering of virtues denied human beings and political institutions the flexibility they needed to respond to changing circumstances, and also denied the very basic fact that modern democratic society was inevitably made up of different values (Dewey, 1893). But in some ways, we can also see that this tendency toward open-ended experiment is itself a political good. Arguably, for Dewey, the purpose of political institutions is to facilitate the ability for human beings to solve public problems. In this, politics ought to be communicative, open-ended, rational, and most importantly, *experimental*. The state is an 'experimental problem', writes Dewey (1916: 32) in The

Public and Its Problems. 'Men have got used to an experimental method in physical and technical matters. They are still afraid of it in human concerns', he adds (Dewey, 1916: 169). The highest purpose of political life, paradoxically for Dewey, is to not have a highest purpose insofar as such a hierarchy of values blocks the true point of politics – to allow citizens to collectively and open-mindedly work together to address the practical, moral, and value driven problems they face in a democracy.[4]

While there might be some conceptual confusion about whether or not Dewey seems to think political life possesses a highest good, there can be no doubt that Shklar turns this notion on its head. Politics, for Shklar, is actually capable of enabling a *summum malum*, a greatest evil. This is defined in perhaps her most widely quotes and famous passage from *Liberalism of Fear*:

> The liberalism of fear in fact does not rest on a theory of moral pluralism. It does not, to be sure, offer a *summum bonum* toward which all political agents should strive, but it certainly does begin with a *summum malum*, which all of us know and would avoid if only we could. That evil is cruelty and the fear it inspires, arid the very fear of fear itself. To that extent the liberalism of fear makes a universal and especially a cosmopolitan claim, as it historically always has done. (Shklar, 1989)

For Shklar, the starting point of liberalism (which is, we will note and return to later, distinct from democracy) should be located in the aftermath of Europe's religious wars of Reformation, where a stunning amount of blood was spilled and treasure was exhausted in order to reconcile men and women's inner thoughts with the needs and beliefs of political rulers. The liberalism of fear begins with 'the conviction of the earliest defenders of toleration, born in horror, that cruelty is an absolute evil, an offense against God or humanity' (reference). If liberalism has a political purpose, for Shklar, it is to ground itself in the historically informed understanding that cruelty is the natural tendency of all political rulers and that the state (while certainly capable of coordinating the activity of diverse subjects in order to solve public problems pragmatically) has – as its' permanent dark side – the sublimated urge toward cruelty. Dewey and Shklar are both skeptical about absolutes and are critical of ideological concepts that act as a block toward the practical necessity of getting political work done; but the difference between them is one of optimistic versus pessimistic temperament. Democracy, for Dewey, is the enabler of truly experimental state. But for Shklar, democracy too has the possibility of embracing cruelty when yoked to the state form, and it is liberalism's job to check that drive toward the ultimate evil.

Given these deep divisions between this optimistic versus pessimistic conception of politics, it should not surprise us that Dewey and Shklar also possess strongly differing accounts of the nature of the political citizen. While Dewey's political subject cannot be subsumed under the broader notion of Habermas' deliberating public, it does seem clear that for Dewey, political citizens are ultimately self-reflexive, experimental, discursive persons. Shklar sees such concepts of what the subjects of a democracy actually do, as appropriate to a more utopian political age. Rather,

> For [the] liberalism of [fear] the basic units of political life are not discursive and reflecting persons, nor friends and enemies, nor patriotic soldier-citizens, nor energetic litigants, but the

> weak and the powerful. And the freedom it wishes to secure is freedom from the abuse of power and intimidation of the defenseless that this difference invites. (Shklar, 1989)

As Dewey sees it, modern subjects encounter a range of political problems which require the assemblage of a diverse range of actors, engaged in both free communication and experimental self-reflexivity, who can work with the institutions of the state in order to achieve a meaningful (if always provisional) solution to public problems. The state, for Dewey, is an experiment, and the public is always a temporary though meaningful manifestation of experimental procedure. Shklar's conceptions are more modest. The state is not only a problem-solving mechanism – it is always, though the institutions of government, a power that stands over and above those that it rules. Nor does such a notion require a concept like Hannah Arendt's totalitarianism. 'This is a shorthand for only the extremity of institutionalized violence and almost implies that anything less radically destructive need not concern us', Shklar writes,

> The liberalism of fear, [in contrast to theories of totalitarianism] regards abuse of public powers in all regimes with equal trepidation. It worries about the excesses of official agents at every level of government, and it assumes that these are apt to burden the poor and weak most heavily. The history of the poor compared to that of the various elites makes that obvious enough. The assumption, amply justified by every page of political history, is that some agents of government will behave lawlessly and brutally in small or big ways most of the time unless they are prevented from doing so.

Shklar's political theory, then, possess a notion of the weak and the strong, the elite and the subaltern, the rulers and the ruled. As Daniel Kreiss (2017) has made clear, Dewey's political theory arguably does not. 'Our doctrine of plural forms is a statement of fact there exists a plurality of social groupings, good, bad, and indifferent', Dewey (1927) writes. 'It is not a doctrine that prescribes inherent limits to state action . . . our hypothesis is neutral as to any general, sweeping implications of how far state activity may extend' (p. 72). How can we imagine that the weak and the strong citizens can ever approach the experimental processes of public problem solving on equal footing, as Dewey seems to demand? For Shklar, such an option seems like an absurdity – at least without also possessing a normative liberalism that operates as an undercurrent to the experimental, nominally democratic state.

Does adopting Shklar's more justice-oriented, pessimistic understanding of the political citizen mean that we need to abandon Dewey's truly insightful notion that the state is not a force exterior to society but pragmatically imbricated in the processes of public life itself? After all, the political theory that fears the 'excesses of official agents at every level of government, and it assumes that these are apt to burden the poor and weak most heavily' (Shklar, 1989: 10) would seem to imply that the state is a permanent fixture that stands outside the political realm for the potential purpose of repression. It is here that we encounter journalism and communication more broadly, and the different ways Dewey and Shklar understand the point and purpose of communication within a democracy.

For Dewey, communication and democracy are virtually so closely conjoined that they often appear conceptually indistinguishable, a point made most clearly and eloquently by

James Carey (1989). As he notes, for Dewey, democracy is 'more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint **communicated** experience' (Carey, 1989: 93). It is this understanding of communication that has rendered Dewey so familiar to communication and journalism scholars. To quote Carey quoting Dewey once again, 'of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful'. The importance of communication for Dewey lies essentially in his broad understanding of what democracy is and how it relates to his conception of the experimental nature of public and political life. Democracy is not simply an opportunity for individuals and groupings to mechanically assert their own self-interest, rather it is a process through which the public understand its own interests in the first place, as well as by which it engages in a process of assessing the outcomes of its provisional, experimental approach to state action. Both this articulation of interest and this pragmatic assessment of results occur through a communication process.

We thus circle back to Carey's understanding of the relationship between journalism and democracy as well as the normative conception of journalism contained within the public journalism movement. If communication and democracy are coterminous, and if democracy really means the ability of a communicative public to come to an understanding of its own interests, then journalism (insofar as it is the primary means of conveying political information to citizens) would seem to be one of the more important communicative forms and formats. Given what we have learned about Shklar's own political thought and her radically different understandings of the purposes and limits of state power, as opposed to Dewey, we must quickly realize that such a conception of journalism and communication would be impossible for her to maintain. While 'Shklar's thought prescribes an open-ended democratic process to identify people who are subject to fear and cruelty, listen to their accounts of it, and think creatively about how to respond' (Levy, 2018), this concept of communication certainly cannot be linked to any grand notion of democracy as Dewey understands it. Instead, we can reconstruct which might be a 'Shklarian' theory of communication by looking at the two central aspects of her political philosophy. First, cruelty is the worst possible thing that can occur in a state. The purpose of communication, then, would be to limit cruelty as much as it is possible. Second, the fundamental division in the polis is between the strong and the weak. For Shklar, then, any normatively oriented institution of democratic communication should look to support the weak in their struggles against the strong as much as possible, all for the purpose of reducing political cruelty. This conception, insofar as it understands communication and journalism as part of a larger process, through which the state is implicated and enacted through the very critique of that state, does not entail us to entirely discard Dewey's truly admirable notion of the nature of the state itself. It simply adds normative value to that notion.

The journalism of fear in practice

What would a journalism – indebted to liberalism more than democracy, opposing cruelty in all its forms, and roundly 'de-Westernized' – look like in practice? One way to answer this question would be to think hard about how journalism might cover one of the major political crises affecting representative democracies today – the fate of immigrants and

refugees, living unsettled and often marginal existences, within nominally tolerant Western states. A refugee herself, Shklar's own liberalism of fear was particularly applicable to grappling with migration, toleration, and immigration. 'The self-destructive tendencies in Western democracies that have come to the surface in recent times Shklar would have found abhorrent', write Samantha Ashenden and Andreas Hess in *OpenDemocracy*:

> Two arguments that form important threads in her political obligation lectures come to mind: first, her suggestion that we focus more on the condition of exile as a barometer for obligation; and secondly that we take proper political notice of the vulnerable status of refugees worldwide. (Ashenden and Hess, 2019)

In a political theory primarily concerned with citizens and the sanctity of democracy, refugees and migrants are an anomaly; they have no official status in the political or public realm other than as a token gesture. Likewise, a normative notion of journalism centered on democracy deals with those existing outside the polity with difficulty; how ought non-citizens be treated by a journalism that attempts to help discursive citizens realize their true preferences through reflexive, experimental, and deliberative formulae? This is true even in the case of the most minimal notions of journalistic purpose. If the point of journalism is to provide citizens with the basic, timely, and factual information they need to govern themselves, then refugees and migrants are treated as an 'object' of political concern that must be dealt with or managed by citizens themselves, rather than as human subjects in their own right.

Furthermore, the purposeful deployment of cruelty usually lies at the heart of 21st-century refugee policy. While we could pick a number of contemporary examples to illustrate this deliberate infliction of fear on the vulnerable – from Donald Trump's periodically announced immigration crackdown raids, to the treatment of Mediterranean sailing vessels by the coalition government led by Matteo Salvini currently ruling Italy – I want to focus on the Windrush scandal in the United Kingdom, as it lays bare the combination of bureaucracy, surveillance, and cruelty which are perennially at the disposal of the modern state. The 'Windrush Generation' was the name given to a large group of post-World War II arrivals to the United Kingdom from the Caribbean, the first group of whom arrived on the *HMS Empire Windrush* in 1948. In a bid to recover from the devastation of World War II, immigration from these countries was strongly encouraged by the British government. When immigration controls were tightened by the United Kingdom in 1971, the Windrush migrants were granted permanent residency status in the United Kingdom. What is more, as citizens of colonies who had not achieved independence in the 1940s and early 1950s, many of these migrants assumed they were naturally British citizens.

When immigration became a controversial issue in the United Kingdom (along with the rest of the West) in the early 2010s, the Orwellian intricacies of earlier Windrush policies were laid bare. No paperwork was ever processed for those Caribbean migrants granted permanent residency status, and no documents were ever granted confirming the decision for them to stay. Even worse, the landing cards of Windrush arrivals were destroyed in 2010. They were thus uniquely vulnerable to deportation. In essence, a group of travelers belonging to former colonial lands, deliberately encouraged to travel

to the United Kingdom for economic reasons, and who often faced a great deal of discrimination and alienation after they arrived, were suddenly rendered 'problematic' or even potentially 'stateless' following changes in the laws and bureaucratic procedures. An unknown number were deported. Others faced discrimination in their attempts to continue working or even when accessing medical care.

The numerous tragedies, large and small, endured by the Windrush Generation were the result of democratically legitimate procedures and valid bureaucratic processes. They were also, unspeakably and undeniably, cruel. And the point is simply this: even the most expansive normative journalistic framework has difficulty in justifying exactly why and how reporters ought to convey the cruelty of Windrush. At the same time, journalists by and large reacted to the cruelty of Windrush in a profound and professionally meaningful way. The BBC, *The Guardian*, and dozens of other British newspapers (including some of the most scurrilous tabloids) reported on Windrush with depth, gravitas, and an underlying anger about the unfairness and callousness of the policy. That journalism would respond this way shouldn't surprise us – but it does point to a gap in our theory. The inability of normative journalism theory to articulate exactly why and on what grounds journalists ought to convey the cruelty and fear of Windrush is an academic failure, not a journalistic one. It calls for a normative understanding of journalism as a liberal activity, not necessarily a democratic one.

Conclusion

I have, in the preceding pages, tried to lay out a new normative theory of journalism. It would not see the primary purpose of journalism as the provision of basic factual information for the monitorial public. Nor would it think of journalism as the lifeblood of democracy, insofar as it allows the public to formulate its true interests and even engage in democracy as a form of life. Instead, it would seek to expose cruelty, take the side of the weak versus the strong, and contribute to a distinctly liberal form of political solidarity, one that saw the deliberate infliction of pain as the worst thing any powerful authority could do. To mount this argument, I have turned to the political theory of Judith Shklar, particularly her notions of putting cruelty first. Other aspects of Shklar's thought might also be brought to bear on journalism in future extensions normative of this work, including her writings on injustice (Shklar, 1990), her conceptions of citizenship (Shklar, 1995), and her notions of political obligation (Shklar, 2018).

Of course, no normative vision is anything more than a general guide, and this one certainly does not exclude other forms of professional journalistic activity. Clearly, the daily reporting of factual information for the purposes of self-governance will always remain a core journalistic activity. Journalism may even, occasionally, rise to the heights of allowing democratic publics to better articulate and understand their political beliefs and interests and participate in communication as a form of life. But in the spirit of Neilsen's earlier arguments about 'counterfactual idealism', I would conclude that the exposure of deliberate cruelty is something that a great many journalists actually *want* to do. The residual liberalism at the heart of modern journalistic practice – grounded in Shklar's defense of toleration and her argument that cruelty must be put first – is a final, powerful incentive for today's news organizations to adopt a 'journalism of fear'.

Acknowledgements

This article is a modified version of my Inaugural Lecture, delivered at the University of Leeds on 24 October 2018. I would like to thank Giorgia Aiello, Stephen Coleman, Jay Blumler, Sherine Conyers, and my parents for their kind comments and feedback. This article is dedicated to Michael Schudson, who taught me to take liberalism seriously.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD


Chris W Anderson https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3893-8411

Notes

1. The relationship between the public journalism movement of the 1990s and today's forms of 'engaged', 'audience-driven', or 'conversational' journalism is complex. Some scholars (such as Rosen, 2008) have intimated that public journalism was simply a 'pre-digital' version of the Internet-based communication that now includes audience perspectives. In this article, on the other hand, I follow Anderson's (2011) argument that public journalism and audience-driven journalism represent distinct categories of journalistic theory and practice.
2. 'Neither the proposed news standards nor the criticism levelled against them', Strömbäck writes, 'specify with sufficient clarity the model of democracy to be used as a normative departure. This article argues that the question of proper news standards cannot be addressed in isolation from the question of different normative models of democracy'.
3. What kind of democracy is to be served by journalism? We propose for consideration a certain view of communication-for-democracy: beyond freedom of expression and the press (though inclusive of that); beyond the dissemination of information about events (though inclusive of that too); beyond even holding power to account (via interrogative interviewing and investigative journalism); but incorporating the norm of meaningful choice over those issues and decisions that may ultimately determine much of how we live with each other.
4. In this critical overview of Dewey, I generally follow Schudson's (2008, 2016) multiple revisionist accounts of the relationship between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey.

References

Anderson CW (2011) Deliberative, agonistic, and algorithmic audiences: Journalism's vision of its public in an age of audience transparency. *International Journal of Communication* 5: 529–547.

Anderson CW (2019) Journalism online and offline. In: Hesmondhalgh D and Curran J (eds) *Media and Society*, 5th edn. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 100–115.

Ashenden S and Hess A (2019) Political obligation today: In honor of Judith Shklar. *Open Democracy*, 21 June. Available at. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/political-obligation-today-honour-judith-shklar/ (accessed 24 February 2020).

Blumler JG and Cushion S (2014) Normative perspectives on journalism studies: Stock-taking and future directions. *Journalism* 15(3): 259–272.

Bell D (2016) Communitarianism. In: Zalta EN (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition). Available at: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/communitarianism/
Carey J (1989) *Communication as Culture*. New York: Routledge.
Christians CG, Glasser TL, McQuail D, et al. (2009) *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
de Tocqeuville A (1840) *Democracy in America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Dewey J (1893) Self realization as the moral ideal. *The Philosophical Review* 2(6): 652–664.
Dewey J (1916) *The Public and Its Problems*. Athens, OH: Swallow Press.
Freedom House (2017) Freedom of the press 2017: Press freedom's dark horizon. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/press-freedoms-dark-horizon (accessed 13 March 2020).
García Canclini N (1995) *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
George C (2012) Diversity around a democratic core: The universal and the particular in journalism. *Journalism* 14(4): 490–503.
Glasser TL (1999) *The Idea of Public Journalism*. New York: Guilford Press.
Graves L (2017) The monitorial citizen in the 'democratic recession'. *Journalism Studies* 18(10): 1239–1250.
Haas T and Steiner L (2003) A public philosophy for public journalism. In: Harper J and Yantek T (eds) *Media, Profit, and Politics: Competing Priorities in an Open Society*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, p. 33–52.
Kreiss D (2017) Reinhold Niebuhr's critiques of John Dewey and comm research. Available at: https://medium.com/@dkreiss/reinhold-niebuhrs-critiques-of-john-dewey-and-comm-research-66a0e792e9cf (accessed 24 February 2020).
Kreiss D and Brennen J (2016) Normative theories of digital journalism. In: Anderson CW, Domingo D, Hermida A, et al. (eds) *SAGE Handbook of Digital Journalism Studies*. New York: SAGE.
Levy J (2018) Who's afraid of Judith Shklar? *Foreign Policy*, 16 July. Available at: https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/16/whos-afraid-of-judith-shklar-liberalism/ (accessed 25 July 2019).
Nielsen RK (2017) The one thing journalism just might do for democracy. *Journalism Studies* 18: 1251–1262.
Park R (1923) The natural history of the newspaper. *American Journal of Sociology* 29(3): 273–289.
Peters C and Carlson M (2019) Conceptualizing change in journalism studies: Why change at all? *Journalism: Theory, Practice, Criticism* 20(5): 637–641.
Rosen J (1999) The action of the idea: Public journalism in built form. In: Glasser TL (ed.) *The Idea of Public Journalism*. New York: Guilford Press, pp. 21–48.
Schudson M (2008) *Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Schudson M (1997) *The Good Citizen: A History of American Public Life*. New York, NY: Free Press.
Schudson M (1998) Delectable materialism: Second thoughts on consumer culture. *Ethics of Consumption: The Good Life, Justice, and Global Stewardship*, pp. 249–286.
Shklar J (1989) The liberalism of fear. In: Rosenblum NL (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 21–38.
Shklar J (1990) *Faces of Injustice*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Shklar J (1995) *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Shklar J (2018) *On Political Obligation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Strömbäck J (2005) In search of a standard: Four models of democracy and their normative implications for journalism. *Journalism Studies* 6(3): 331–345.
Zelizer B (2013) On the shelf life of democracy in journalism scholarship. *Journalism* 14(4): 459–473.

Author biography

Chris W Anderson is a Professor of Media and Communication at the University of Leeds, and the author or co-editor of five books: "Rebuilding the News" (Temple), "Remaking the News" (MIT), "The SAGE Handbook of Digital Journalism" (SAGE) and "Journalism: What Everyone Needs to Know" (Oxford) and "Apostles of Certainty: Data Joutnalism and the Politics of Doubt" (Oxford).