

BREAKING THE SPELL OF WAR: PEACE JOURNALISM'S DEMOCRATIC PROSPECT

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Abstract

This essay examines and extends peace journalism's critique of mainstream news media in order to articulate a model of an enriched news narrative resistant to war propaganda and consistent with democratic praxis. It discusses the potential of political myth to delimit demagogic projections that otherwise debilitate democratic deliberation and suggests that news media would advance democratic culture by enhancing the public archive on which deliberative practices depend. Critical attention is focused on two factors that reduce the democratic potential of news narratives: (1) the persistent omission of key information and (2) a chronic imbalance in interpretive frames. Whether or not professional conventions and market considerations render corporate media incapable of correcting truncated and unbalanced news narratives, the capacity of the public archive to support democratic deliberation corresponds to the knowledge and perspective it accrues to curtail alienating projections. We must ask, then, if democracy's deliberative prospect can be realised short of correcting the shortcomings of news media.

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How might media strengthen democracy in the foreseeable future? This important but loaded question supposes a democratic prospect, presumes democracy entails a public sphere, and suggests media's untapped potential for enhancing democratic deliberation. A degree of scepticism about any one of these premises is warranted even though the intriguing possibility of media contributing to a healthy democratic discourse might stimulate our imagination.

Democracy requires media to constitute a public, but media do not necessarily construct a deliberating public, even within democratic states and especially on issues of war and peace. News media are inclined instead for a variety of reasons to propagandise war in the service of the state and as an instrument of executive rule. As CBS news anchor Dan Rather put the matter six days after 9/11, "George Bush is the president, he makes the decisions and you know, just as one American wherever he wants me to line up, just tell me where" (History Commons 2001). Such is the default condition of war journalism and, it has been argued, of the journalism enterprise more generally.

Peace journalism's answer to the question of media's latent democratic aptitude is perhaps more revealing than one might initially expect. Especially since peace journalism is considered to be a fringe movement – an incipient project on the periphery of the field of journalism – it is usually ignored outside its own relatively obscure realm of discourse. It attracts only occasional flak from conventional journalists who dismiss it for violating the professional canon of objectivity. At best, it is classified as a type of preventative journalism and a complement to investigative reporting focused on social problems.¹ It is easily dismissed as a journalistic misnomer, a heartfelt complaint that conflates war reporting with peace advocacy. What could a rhetorical enterprise such as this possibly add to a serious discussion of journalism as a medium of democracy?

My answer, in short, is that attending to peace journalism's critique of mainstream news media exposes constitutive properties of war's demonising mythos, a mythos that debilitates democratic deliberation. Simply put, peace journalism's critique identifies missing pieces required to round out the generic war story that stifles democratic praxis. It envisions an enhanced narrative that would break the spell of war by elevating public discourse to a level of complexity and awareness that confounds demonising images. In this way, it points to what John Paul Lederach calls the "exponential potential" of what is made available and out of which, in the present context, something we consider more democratic might emerge (Lederach 2005, 100).

My purpose is to dwell on peace journalism's critique for its democratising insight, that is, as a corrective to present media practices more than a substitute for mainstream journalism's coveted conventions. In this regard, Susan Dente Ross calls for "a dialogue about peace journalism as a reformation of contemporary journalistic practices" (Ross 2007, 77). As a theory and a research perspective (as well as a practice), peace journalism's critique of war journalism invites us to consider how news media might foster democratic deliberation "within the context of globalised communications, politics, and economies" (Ross 2007, 77). By constructing more complete narratives, it is suggested, journalists are more likely to tell the best possible stories and less likely to perpetuate demonising stereotypes that degrade public deliberation. The first question to address, therefore, is what makes for a

more complete or ample news story, especially about war, from the perspective of peace journalism.

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Enhancing the Narrative of War

No news story about war can report everything. Constraints of culture, language, and perspective, limitations of time, space, and other professional resources, the influence of power/knowledge, and additional factors prevent the elimination of all bias and the production of a definitive chronicle of war or of any other topic. Even the *New York Times*, as a self-proclaimed journal of record, purports to print all the news that is fit to print, which is decidedly different than printing all the news. Judgment is endemic to the gate-keeping process of news gathering and news dissemination regardless of how many media outlets are involved. Diverse news media and independent ownership, which could contribute to good journalism, would not supplant editorial judgment or eliminate the influence of narration itself as a discursive form.

If journalism is largely a practice of telling stories and constructing narratives, it follows that the challenge is to compose good stories – stories that are designed to be as honest, accurate, balanced, fair, complete, and critically aware as possible, but also timely, interesting, coherent, and credible within a prevailing socio-political framework of interpretation, including but not limited to cultural expectations, presumptions, value orientations, and assumptions about what counts as fact and appears to be reasonable. Any journalistic claim to objectivity and truth has to be assessed against the rhetorical complexities of composing narratives for specific audiences and adapting them to particular circumstances from a necessarily delimited perspective. Publics and journalists alike are readily desensitised to the constitutive properties of a demonising discourse that too easily becomes literalised and self-sealing.

By this reckoning – that is, by taking into account the filters of language, culture, and circumstance and the rhetorical dynamics of narrative form, all of which influence news production – the measure of a story is not whether it is true or objective in some narrow or isolated sense but instead how much and in what ways it is incomplete. What is overemphasised, underemphasised, missed, and otherwise distorted regardless of how compelling the story might be? What is the bias and limit of its perspective? What is ignored in order to make one party in a conflict appear legitimate and sympathetic and another party appear illegitimate and unsympathetic, one heroic and the other demonic, one present and another absent, one humanised and the other dehumanised? How would shifting the story's focus alter what is seen and how it appears, who is victim and who is victimiser, where interests converge and diverge, etc.? What actual or potential interdependencies and complementarities between the opposed parties are missing from the story as it is spun? By this standard, news stories are assessed according to what is absent more than what is present. Thus, Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick consider peace journalism to be an “analytical model” for identifying “shortcomings in reporting” (Lynch and McGoldrick 2005, 7; see also Galtung 2000a, 14-15).

To determine what is missing from a war story, we need a theory of what it should encompass. Peace journalism offers such a theory by asking what the public needs to know in order to deliberate the possibilities of building peace where war

threatens or prevails. In this way, as Graham Spencer argues, peace journalism resists the “trivialisation of political life” and “seeks to locate politics more firmly in the public sphere” (Spencer 2005, 183-184). This “small but significant body of work” considers how news media might enrich democratic participation by “moving away from exclusive frameworks of interpretation” (Spencer 2005, 165-166). It does not, Ross attests, “seek to distort the facts [or] manipulate the truth” but instead to report “the world more fully, openly, and inclusively” (Ross 2007, 80). This goal varies from present journalistic practices that, according to Gadi Wolfsfeld, too often and too readily “reinforce ethnocentrism and hostility towards adversaries” (Wolfsfeld 2004, 2).

To achieve a less exclusive and more inclusive framework of interpretation in an era of globalisation, peace journalism theorises an articulation of diversity that would expand the perceived parameters of contestation between all parties in a given conflict. Rather than eliminate conflict from the political equation, the news story should broaden the “arena of contestable positions” reported by “allowing more viewpoints to enter debate” than the usual over-simplifying practice of representing only “two dominant oppositional voices” (Spencer 2005, 168). This move toward holding multiple perspectives accountable to one another depolarises and complicates the narratives, providing additional materials from which points of potential convergence might eventually be inferred. In Johan Galtung’s view, this version of “objective” journalism means that journalists “cover all sides of the conflict”; whether or not journalists like one party or another, they should tell the stories in each of the adversary’s own words. Similarly a “truth-oriented” journalism “would expose truths from all sides and uncover all cover-ups” (Galtung 2000b, 163).

Peace journalism proposes a number of ways to compose enriched war stories that expand the arena of contestation. According to Lynch and McGoldrick, these reporting practices include seventeen points, three of which are: (1) disaggregating the stereotypical two-party conflict (and its corresponding zero-sum logic in which one party must lose for the other to win) by asking who else is involved and what are their needs, aspirations, interests, etc.; (2) resisting “stark distinctions between ‘self’ and ‘other’” which tend to degrade into dichotomies of good and evil; and (3) “*treat[ing] as equally newsworthy* the suffering, fears, and grievances of all parties” (Lynch and McGoldrick 2005, 28-29). These three points, together with the other fourteen, represent aspects of an elaborated narrative that, when missing or underdeveloped, diminish the public’s aptitude for deliberation and increase the story’s propaganda quotient. Accordingly, an elaborated narrative, more than its abridged counterpart, will address questions such as:

- Who is affected by and has a stake in a given conflict?
- What are the power relationships among the various parties to the conflict?
- What circumstances and unresolved issues triggered the conflict?
- What is the geographical reach and political jurisdiction of the conflict?
- What are the purposes (rationale, needs, interests, fears) of the conflicted parties?
- What are the potential means, costs, and benefits of resolving the conflict?
- What common ground currently and/or potentially exists between the conflicted parties?²

These are easily recognised as the basic who, what, when, where, why, and how questions of good journalism applied to the subject of war and peace. Each question has heuristic value for uncovering important nuances, such as: (1) finding alternatives to the language of victimisation and demonisation in order to avoid suggesting the impotence of a “devastated,” “defenseless,” and even “pathetic” victim while constructing a stereotypical villain who can only be coerced into submission; (2) covering the full range of harms perpetrated and suffered, including the less visible and longer-term consequences of the conflict; (3) reporting the perspective of everyday people, not just political leaders, caught up in the conflict and the conditions of their everyday life; and (4) increasing coverage of peace initiatives (drawn from Lynch and McGoldrick 2005, 28-31).

Incorporating these added complexities increases the difficulty of imputing malevolence singularly and assigning malfeasance exclusively and decreases the ease with which complicated conflicts are reduced to a crude narrative of good versus evil.³ In complicating the narrative, pressure is increased and resources are added for formulating and deliberating constructive proposals in the public sphere. This, at least, is the theory of peace journalism and its corresponding model of a well rounded news narrative, which articulates criteria for determining how news reporting can strengthen or weaken democratic deliberation.

Projection and Demonisation

These same criteria have informed peace-journalism scholarship and its critique of mainstream journalism’s failure to meet its responsibilities to the public in its coverage of specific conflicts and wars.⁴ Most immediately, news reporting on the nebulous war on terror has been scrutinised in its various manifestations from the perspective of peace journalism and with an eye toward implications for public deliberation. The operative question is whether the news narrative of this open-ended war in its various episodes has been sufficiently elaborated and, if not, what in the narrative has not been adequately developed to support constructive public deliberation. Answering this question should help to gauge journalism’s democratic prospect by the potential of its news narrative to break the spell that war propaganda has cast over public deliberation. Thus, from the perspective of peace journalism, the acid (negative) test of journalism’s democratic aptitude is the degree to which its omissions constitute a demonising narrative.

One particular property of propaganda – projection – is especially pertinent to evaluating journalism’s contribution to democratic praxis. Lynch and McGoldrick (2005, 121) observe that a preferred national identity can be constructed and reinforced by assigning unwanted qualities to a designated enemy. Who a people are becomes a function of what they profess not to be. Thus, for example, American virtue is crafted in the image of evil terrorists (see Ivie 2007). This tendency to project negative traits outward can be exacerbated by perceptions of national peril and sharp distinctions between “us” and “them.” This “fantasy of enmity,” wherein “we seek self-definition through constructing our antithesis,” is so fundamental that Nicholas Jackson O’Shaughnessy (2004, vii) makes it central to the definition of propaganda, just as David Campbell (1998, 3) considers dehumanising representations of the enemy – represented as alien, subversive, dirty, and sick – to be fundamental to the articulation of danger and construction of national identity.

Demonisation – as a function of projection, enemy construction, and the formulation of national identity – marks the boundary between propaganda and journalism, if journalism is to inform democratic deliberation. Thus, peace journalism's corrective speaks directly to war journalism's tendency to demonise (Spencer 2005, 175). To reduce this tendency toward dehumanisation and demonisation, peace journalism cautions against adopting stereotypes, promoting dichotomies, utilising the language of victimisation, and resorting to other over-simplifications and under-representations of conflict situations that create and maintain narrow frames of reference. News coverage of the war on terror is a case in point.

Spencer observes, for example, that in the pre- and post-9/11 Gulf wars, “the demonisation of Saddam Hussein helped to personalise the reasons for war and keep the emotive level of debate away from those who challenged this narrow frame of reference” (Spencer 2005, 144). The mainstream American and British press after 9/11, he argues, made themselves into instruments of propaganda by relying almost exclusively on official sources and largely ignoring voices of opposition and peace, by rendering the war clean and masking civilian casualties with the euphemism of collateral damage, by homogenising Muslims into a singular Islamic threat to the free world and disengaging from the complexities of radical Islam, and, quoting Justin Lewis and Rod Brookes, by a “focus on the progress of war to the exclusion of other issues, the tendency to portray the Iraqi people as liberated rather than invaded, the failure to question the claim that Iraq possessed WMD [weapons of mass destruction], and the focus on the brutality or decadence of the regime without putting this evidence in a broader historical or geopolitical context” (Spencer 2005, 145-59; see Lewis and Brookes 2004, 298). Oil as a reason for the U.S. invasion of Iraq is an example of a major issue that was shunted to the margins of the news, at least within the U.S. (Lynch and McGoldrick 2005, 10-11; see also Hodgson 2009, 171). O’Shaughnessy adds that: “The print media had a vigorous and partisan war. So also did television. Increasingly the mass media seemed to forget their role as self-appointed fearless inquisitor after truth and became instead merely appendices of some vast semi-visible propaganda machine” (O’Shaughnessy 2004, 226).

As appendices of the war machine, news media transformed the so-called war on terror into the propaganda of “militainment,” in which war reporting was intermingled with entertainment formats to create a hyper-reality show (Andersen 2006, xxvi-xxvii, 314). As Robin Andersen argues, an “anesthetised hyperrealism” detached Americans from the consequences of war, sheltered them from its horrors, positioned them as victims, and agitated them through demonisation, thereby removing substance from democratic discourse by the failure to report important facts and check official pronouncements and by the practice of silencing dissenting voices (Andersen 2006, 302, 314-315).

Research on news coverage of other wars confirms that demonising narratives are not a journalistic anomaly of the war on terror. The pattern of war journalism is to omit, or otherwise restrict and seriously bias, information that could invigorate democratic deliberation and impede simplistic projections of evil. Indeed, war reporting consistently takes its cue from political elites and dramatises warfare from their perspective. Conflict is dramatic and therefore newsworthy, but it is also politically savvy for a profit-conscious journalism establishment to operate within

the comfort zone of conventional wisdom and the narrow frame of elite opinion when crafting war dramas, rather than allow itself to be guided by its responsibility to inform public deliberation more broadly and deeply.

This is a point well made by Spencer in his overview of news coverage of wars ranging from Vietnam to Bosnia and Kosovo, the Middle East, Rwanda, Northern Ireland, and Iraq. In the Vietnam War, he observes, reporting did not become more sceptical and critical of official discourse, even given the presence of a strong anti-war movement, until official sources began to reappraise the viability of the war (Spencer 2005, 61; see also Caruthers 2000, 108, 147, 150). Until that time, U.S. news reporting caricatured the domestic anti-war movement within frames and narratives that trivialised its aims, language, and values, emphasised disagreement within the movement, underestimated turnout for its demonstrations, characterised it as subversive, etc. (Spencer 2005, 62-63; see also Gitlin 1980, 27-28). Spencer concludes that this “indicates the political bias of news coverage and its tendency to see opposition to state power in terms of a threat rather than public objection to policy, conducted within the realms of what may be seen as reasonable conflicting differences” (Spencer 2005, 67-68).

The absence of key elements in a news narrative imputes evil all too readily in one direction or another for sufficient public deliberation to occur, whether or not such deliberation ultimately results in a resort to arms. A nonviolent resolution is not the inevitable outcome of an enhanced news narrative, but as the prospect of democratic deliberation is increased by enhancing the news narrative, the potential for creating constructive alternatives is increased. Complicating the story of conflict can provoke a new synthesis of meaning and lead to a fresh perspective on problematic relations, whereas reducing complexities to simplistic sound bites inevitably narrows debate.

Yet, news media default to a narrative of dramatic conflict that constructs politics in antagonistic terms and thereby fails to inform adequately a deliberative public sphere on questions of war and peace. This may seem obvious to all but those who still wish to profess journalism’s faithfulness to objectivity and truth. Perhaps it is too obvious to make a difference, not so much because the field of journalism – in all its occupational conventions and market imperatives – is impervious to change but because as a place of cultural production news narratives operate on a mythic plane beyond the current reach of peace journalism’s incipient critique.⁵ Democracy, understood as a form of agonistic politics, requires a transformation of the mythos of antagonism, not the explosion or abandonment of political myth. Toward that end, demonising narratives cannot be defused by debunking them, for they function as foundational myths that societies rely on to make sense of otherwise disorienting experiences. The remaining challenge for journalists and other cultural workers concerned with enriching democratic practices is to determine what kind of knowledge is required for a deliberating public to recognise and retrieve demonising projections. Here we enter the domain of political myth.

Peace journalism gestures to the need to attend to news narratives as a corrective to projection when, for example, Lynch and McGoldrick exhort journalists to “*seek the ‘other’ in the ‘self’ and vice versa*” by “*asking questions which may reveal areas of common ground, and leading your report with answers which suggest that at least some goals, needs and interests may be compatible, or shared*” (Lynch and McGoldrick

2005, 28-29; emphasis in original). Perhaps the most important information missing from typical war narratives, then, is that which provides the public with a basis for retrieving demonising projections. Without sufficient information to de-literalise dehumanising caricatures, publics cannot recognise themselves in the other and the other in themselves. They cannot turn the outward gaze reflectively inward.

The problem, therefore, becomes one of determining what kind of knowledge resists the demonising projections of war propaganda. Here is where peace journalism's critique has not yet fully engaged the role of political myth. The challenge of articulating common ground consistent with the agonistic character of democratic politics entails a different kind of conjuring than the displacement of difference. Nor is it enough to recognise that images of the self and other are socially constructed and therefore subject to repair and revision, for these are lived images from which the citizenry forges national identities. Conducting a genealogy of this political mythos can expose its troubled origins to critical reflection but not to self destruction. Debunking foundational myths of identity and difference – whether they are myths of national exceptionalism or some other defining vision – produces an agonising void. Acknowledging salient myths instead opens possibilities for, or at least removes obstacles to, transforming perceived incompatibilities and prevailing antagonisms into humanising narratives about complementarities.

Democratic Culture and Political Myth

Peace journalism's call to defuse demonising narratives by reporting on existing or potential common ground between antagonists cannot hope to enrich the democratic public sphere by displacing agonistic political relations. Agonism, as distinguished from antagonism, is a condition of robust democratic culture. Identification that is compensatory to division does not abolish political hierarchies or efface differences of political identity (Ivie "Hierarchies," forthcoming). Nor does democracy, as a politics of contestation, require more than a shared symbolic space to, in Chantal Mouffe's terms, "transform antagonism into agonism" (Mouffe 2005, 20). Democratic discourse respects and negotiates difference and is more or less inclusive, even border spanning in a globalising context, according to its ability to articulate a common symbolic space akin to Lederach's (2005, 35) notion of spinning webs of interconnectivity or Douglas Fry's (2007, 215-216) idea of promoting "cross cutting ties." While both Lederach and Fry envision this kind of convergence in the language of interdependency, an even more apt expression of a democratising and peace-building intersection may be complementariness, wherein contesting parties are constituted as mutually enabling in their differences. Such interdependencies and complementarities can only be articulated through the public's existing framework of interpretation – its mythos. They must express a degree of symmetry or "synchronicity" between the inner and outer worlds to achieve meaningful articulations of complementary relations (Segal 1999, 79).

Constituting a synergic space out of syncretic myth in order to facilitate democratic deliberation is a paradigm of peace-building discourse. Yet, the modern mind resists myth as an unfounded and false notion, a primitive mode of thought that is erroneous and misleading, a persistent and pernicious falsehood that should be exposed and subjected to rational critique. Modernity knows only the dark side of myth and fears the seductive pull of allegorical, parabolic, fictitious storytelling

on the political will of a credulous democratic public. In its modern construction, myth is reduced to fable, to “a widely propagated lie” and thus an expression of false consciousness subject to debunking (Hendy 2002, xii). Accordingly, political mythology in America is relegated by Michael Parenti, for example, to living in a land of idols, where democracy is corrupted without benefit of critical examination (Parenti 1994). Mythos is utterly opposed to logos from a modern standpoint (Flood 2002, 6).

Joseph Mali’s conception of “mythistory,” however, recognises both the necessary presence and constructive force of myth as a modern narrative (Mali 2003, 1-35). Giambattista Vico’s insight was that myth is a story that places human history in the present to construct political identity and constitute a people. It is the foundational narrative that shapes cultural knowledge by explaining the present in terms of a living past. As William Doty observes, myths are “framing stories” that provide the “frameworks for human consciousness” (Doty 2000, 44). A people’s most important meanings and guideposts are embedded in its metaphors and corresponding myths (Daniel 1990). Accordingly, myth can be recognised but not escaped in any narrative construction of reality, whether in historical narratives or news stories. It is poetic logic in which image shapes perception, reason, explanation, and argument and therefore where the potential for human understanding resides. Rather than opposing myth to reason, we might say instead that myth is necessary fiction, that is, fiction in the service of nonfiction for good or ill purposes. It can take the form of a demonising projection or a humanising image of complementarities.

As agents of cultural production, news media necessarily are implicated in the operation of political myth. News narratives either enrich or impoverish public archives of what Bruce Lincoln considers to be culturally credible paradigms or narrative blueprints used to construct and negotiate socio-political boundaries (Lincoln 1989, 21-25). Just as reaching across the boundary line that has been discursively drawn by war propaganda between an “us” and a “them” is rendered improbable by ignorance of how adversaries make sense of their circumstances, discovering culturally viable ways of articulating interdependencies can be facilitated by increasing awareness of political myth.

A mythically inflected news archive about a Western war on Islamic terror, for example, might confound demonising projections with culturally contextualised stories of Iranian, Afghan, Iraqi, and other Middle Eastern peoples, movements, and states. Western publics would know more of how their so-called Islamist adversaries think in various ways and from different standpoints about the Western military, economic, political, and especially cultural presence in the Muslim world. They would understand Islamism better as a religious and political movement, including the differences between radicals and reformers as well as the conditions of poverty and displacement that motivate political Islam, and the place of religious discourse in the popular imagination. Such culturally relevant information might raise public understanding enough to prompt the question of whether and how Western states, given the living legacy of Islamic resentment over its historical struggle with the West, could respectfully (rather than patronisingly) address current grievances and facilitate remedies. Asking such a question could very well elicit additional information about Islamic framing stories relevant to further consideration and deliberation.

This sketchy hypothetical example is meant to serve only as a place marker for the kind of culturally inflected information generally missing from the public archive in circumstances of radical pluralism and political alienation. It gestures to the kind of knowledge of the estranged other that, consistent with the theory of peace journalism, might render demonising projections increasingly problematic, but it also signals the need for acknowledging the estranged self that is the projected shadow, which requires pushing beyond modernist inhibitions to reconsider the mythos of a healthier democratic culture.

Bringing political myth into focus, I am suggesting, is an extension of peace journalism's critique of war journalism and is consistent with a commitment to peace journalism's culturally grounded process of what its guiding theorist Johan Galtung (1996, 81) calls "conflict transformation." "Deep culture," Galtung (1996, 81) argues, conditions conflict through the operation, and as a manifestation, of the "collective subconscious." It is crucial to understand "deep texts," he insists, if we wish to transform conflict formations in which, following Carl Jung's conception of the "shadow" archetype, "the attitudes we do not acknowledge" are projected (Galtung 2004, 145-146). Charting this difficult-to-access cultural substructure of conflict formations is the necessary process of increasing cultural awareness of archetypal myths (Galtung 2004, 148-159). Myths express archetypes obliquely through symbols (Segal 1999, 71-72), the meaning of which can never be fully exhausted but is highly relevant to the potential reframing of public deliberations so that they might become resistant to demonising projections and, by extension, receptive to compensatory images of complementarities between adversaries.

The narrative of people's inner life, their mythic dream world, is the source of public politics (Ellwood 1999, 37). Just as ignorance of the power of archetypal symbolism is a recipe for political disaster, knowledge of a society's "mythological tradition" provides access to "the treasure houses of resources in story and symbol that souls need to complete themselves" (Ellwood 1999, 38). This is the realm where societies, nations, and states must wrestle with their inner angels and demons when seeking to achieve a therapeutic "balanced pattern" that allows for "the gradual withdrawal of projections" (Ellwood 1999, 45, 47). The extreme differentiation between good and evil is moderated mythically with the "recognition and assimilation of the Shadow archetype" (Ellwood 1999, 52, 69). Myth is an interpretive channel, giving access for those who are sufficiently receptive to a level of transformative consciousness, which can bring them into a more "balanced harmony" (Ellwood 1999, 70).

As the cultural vehicle for expressing archetypal forces, myth has spawned hatred and horrendous warfare. It is not necessarily a force for peace, but it can lift to a level of consciousness the projection of an unconscious complex of energy. The flexibility of myth is crucial to the resilience of democratic culture insofar as mythos articulates mandalic images of heroism, nurture, wisdom, fertility, and other forces balancing one another. The balance achieved in framing stories, when it is achieved, weakens the collective impulse to demonising projections. An imbalance produces the opposite effect. This is the significance of attending to the architectonics of news narratives that comprise the public archive.

The underlying mythic design of enriched news narratives is accessible to critical cultural workers, including journalists, through the metaphors embedded

in political and popular discourse. Metaphors can be regarded as “myths in miniature” insofar as “complexes of metaphors . . . constitute myths” and provide the “dynamic tension” that “permits change in the interpretation of the text” (Daniel 1990, 10, 12, 14). Here the journalist as cultural worker encounters the living heritage of political myth.

Engaging these cultural texts invokes the spirit of Vico, Nietzsche, and Foucault in search of foundational narratives as they construct problematic national identities.⁶ Vico understood that we have to grasp these constitutive myths in order to understand the social and political world as it is constructed by humans (Mali 1992, 5, 13, 129, 151). Metaphorical and symbolic language suffuses the commonplaces of politics to form a signifying code that guides interpretation and fuses knowledge with power. Yet, cultural heritage is itself, as Foucault argues, “an unstable assemblage” because it is fraught with discontinuities and full of dynamic interconnections (Foucault 1984, 82).

Genealogy, Foucault famously observed, is “grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary,” requiring “knowledge of details” (Foucault 1984, 76). It looks to dispel the “chimera” of a troubled cultural origin, to exorcise the “shadow” of a pious soul, and thus to relieve a debilitating drag on the present (Foucault 1984, 79-80). In this way, it scrutinises the politics of memory by identifying and de-literalising, in Nietzsche’s famous words, “a movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding.” These troublesome truths, he continues, “are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins” (Nietzsche 1873/1999, 84). Returning these metaphors to life in public discourse brings back into play myth’s capacity to speak to imbalances that produce demonising projections.

The Myth of American Exceptionalism

With this understanding of the contemporary relevance of political myth, journalists might be expected to augment the interpretive capacity of the public archive. Such an expectation expands on peace journalism’s model of the enriched news narrative in a manner that is consistent with Galtung’s guiding conception of conflict transformation. Attending to the living legacy of the myth of American exceptionalism, for example, could release interpretive resources for deliberating anew the nation’s war on terrorism. American exceptionalism is a mythic formation not only of longstanding relevance to U.S. political culture but also with immediate bearing on a transformation of U.S. foreign policy under President Barack Obama’s leadership – that is, the potential transition away from coercive unilateralism and toward an attitude of diplomatic multilateralism (Ivie “Depolarizing,” forthcoming; Ivie and Giner 2009a; Ivie and Giner 2009b). The mythos of American exceptionalism thus bears special attention from news media.

As a complex mythic formation, American exceptionalism is an enduring yet dynamic assemblage of discontinuities within a narrative of national virtue. It both inclines the nation toward an attitude of domination and, Godfrey Hodgson

observes, motivates “wise and courageous conduct” on behalf of noble values such as “the sovereignty of the people, the rule of law, the subordination of political conflict to jurisprudence and the protection of rights” (Hodgson 2009, xvi). The danger of the present moment, as reflected in the continuing fallout of the nation’s enraged martial reaction to the tragedy of 9/11, is that the imbalances of this mythos will “overemphasise the exceptional nature of the American experience and the American destiny” (Hodgson 2009, 9).

Within this mythic formation, Americans tend to equate their richness and power with uncommon virtue – that is, with political and moral superiority – and to minimise their interdependencies with other nations. Thus, they can imagine that their heroic destiny is to expand America’s power and that their duty is to dominate the world. Americans perceive themselves all too readily to be a chosen people with a mission to save the world by spreading freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and capitalism (Hodgson 2009, 10, 27-29). Such national hubris is the product of an imbalance, a disproportionate emphasis on the nation’s distinctive experience and a corresponding exaggeration of its democratic virtue, which impels Americans to project evil in order to preserve their national identity “as redeemers of a sinful world” and inclines the nation toward militarism and war (Hodgson 2009, 22). This was the attitude of George W. Bush and his neoconservative coterie (Hodgson 2009, 171-172), which marks the nadir of the myth of American exceptionalism. As Godfrey Hodgson, historian of American exceptionalism, has observed:

The point at which the principles of American democracy are reduced to mere boasting and bullying, justified by a cynical “realism,” is the point at which the practice of American democracy, at home as well as abroad, is in mortal danger. It is also the point at which the best of the exceptionalism in the American tradition has been corrupted into the worst (Hodgson 2009, 190).

Of course this myth of exceptionalism is a gloss of American experience, which ignores and even represses the blemishes of the nation’s social, economic, and political history. Moreover, the complexity of the myth is such that it has not always been inflected toward hubris. Indeed, it has also spoken in a “gentler and more consensual” voice and served as a myth for motivating national reform (Hodgson 2009, 161). As Richard Hughes attests, the myths that America lives by have a “great potential for good” when expressed in their “highest and noblest form”: as a “chosen nation,” America can be goaded to consider its responsibilities over its privileges; as a “millennial nation,” it can be reminded that it must remain faithful to the principles of liberty and equality, which it purports to extend to all humankind; it can even teach “humility” and “encourage Americans to learn to see the world through someone else’s eyes” (Hughes 2003, 191, 195).

The foundational myth of a divinely chosen nation with a God-given mission, which is the heart of American exceptionalism, is a powerful theme, Hughes observes, that has been put to constructive purposes when it is taken to imply responsibility to other human beings: “But when shorn of the notion of covenant and mutual responsibility, the myth of the Chosen Nation easily becomes a badge of privilege and power, justifying oppression and exploitation of those not included in the circle of the chosen” (Hughes 2003, 41). Thus, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke out in the spiritually laced language of American exceptionalism in

the midst of the Vietnam War, on April 4, 1967, to reconnect the nation to its sense of responsibility to others at home and abroad. Black Americans, he observed ironically, were being sent to Vietnam in disproportionate numbers to fight for liberties they did not enjoy in their own homeland. America would be well served, he insisted, to consider the moral weakness of its position from the enemy's standpoint and with the benefit of Christian compassion and humility (King 1967).⁷

King's metaphorically charged rhetoric reunited American exceptionalism with the sacred covenant of mutual responsibility. He balanced expressions of national virtue and power with culturally resonant images of wisdom and prudence. Speaking as a preacher, citizen, and civil rights advocate at Riverside Church in New York City, "this magnificent house of worship," King was called as if to a "mission." He was "pressed by the demands of inner truth" to oppose his government's policy in a time of war. He summoned "the human spirit" of his fellow citizens to move against the "apathy of conformist thought," to "speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision," and to "break the silence of the night" in order to assume with courage and determination "the high grounds of a firm dissent [from war] based upon the mandates of conscience." His was a "passionate plea" addressed, not to America's enemies, but to his "beloved nation" and "fellow citizens" who carried "the greatest responsibility" to end the war.

America had floundered in the darkness to become like "a society gone mad on war," and the war in Vietnam, "like some demonic destructive suction tube," was destroying the life and soul of the people. When America's soul was "poisoned," the "deepest hopes of men the world over" were lost. King's Christian faith was "brotherhood" beyond the limits of "race or nation or creed." The nation must respond to the "madness of Vietnam" with "compassion" in order to break free of "deadly Western arrogance" and to hear the "broken cries" of Vietnamese who "must see Americans as strange liberators." The "true meaning and value of compassion," King allowed, is that "it helps us to see the enemy's point of view, to hear his questions, to know his assessment of ourselves." Looking back at themselves from the enemy's view, "mature" Americans might be able to perceive the basic weakness of their condition and thus "profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition."

If communism was "a judgment against [America's] failure to make democracy real," King suggested, the nation's only hope was to recapture its revolutionary spirit "and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism." With such a powerful recommitment to its true mission, America would "speed the day when 'every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.'" This, he proclaimed, was "the calling of the sons of God."

By retelling the sacred story of American exceptionalism through metaphorical allusions, King turned the myth on its own terms toward serving a higher sensibility. He walked the fine line between the arrogance of being God's chosen people and the humility of serving a loving God. He invoked the nation's better angels consistent with the sacred mythos of the public's collective identity as an exceptional people. The turn on American exceptionalism, which King took in his speech to the assembled listeners that momentous day in Riverside Church

– exactly one year before he was murdered on April 4, 1968 – was much like the message of the sermon delivered by Reverend Eric Erickson to his Presbyterian congregation in Bloomington, Indiana, on All Saints Sunday, November 1, 2009. All human saints, Pastor Erickson observed, must remember the crucial difference between their own works and God doing His work through them. This is, indeed, a fine line to walk in a land of God’s chosen people between a self-righteous mission – which elevates Americans above, and alienates them from, the rest of the world – and a sacred calling to reach out to all of humankind. This tension is also the dynamic of the mythos of American culture that King drew upon to minister to the nation’s political conscience. He conjured this special sense of mission to call upon his fellow citizens to “make the right choice,” to heed the “creative psalm of peace,” and to “transform the jangling discords of our world into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.” In so doing, he affirmed the nation’s spiritual wisdom and its nurturing strength in order to balance the dark forces of arrogance, fear, and hatred so that the American public might better recognise the shadow they had projected onto their enemies in Vietnam.

Conclusion

My initial answer to the question of how peace journalism’s critique of mainstream news media might advance democratic culture was that by enhancing the public archive it would generate exponential potential for constructive public deliberation. In developing a model of enriched news narratives, peace journalism has identified the omissions of the typical war story that reinforce war propaganda’s demonising projections. Further consideration of peace journalism’s critique, consistent with Galtung’s concern with the deeper texts of culture, reveals the relevance of cultural knowledge to democratic deliberation. Even though myth is barely indicated in the peace-journalism model, the presence of political myth in news narratives and public deliberations is inescapable. Exposing this presence is crucial to understanding the demonising projections that debilitate democratic deliberation. Recognising the imbalances in the mythos of such projections is a step toward withdrawing the shadow that produces them. Thus, if the initial measure of the democratic potential of news narratives was a matter of how much and what kind of information they omit from the public archive, the cultural counterpart to that critical criterion is the degree to which the mythos embedded in news narratives goes unrecognised and remains unbalanced. A persistent omission of key information together with a chronic imbalance in the interpretive frame of a public archive results in demonising distortions that diminish democratic deliberation.

Among the questions this observation raises about political critique of democratic culture is whether journalism is a necessary and/or appropriate medium for addressing the mythic imbalances of demonising projections. Surely myth is accessible to attentive journalists who monitor the metaphors within the political discourse that is subject to their news narratives. Whether running for election to the U.S. presidency, addressing the Muslim world about mutual respect, or speaking to the United Nations about a new attitude of global engagement and partnership, Barack Obama’s interpretive frame of American exceptionalism is manifestly about restoring the American dream (Ivie “Depolarizing,” forthcoming; Obama 2009, June 4; Obama 2009, September 23). His discourse of American mission is laced

with the language of transparency, openness, cooperation, burden sharing, civil society, and human rights as he speaks of a spirit of sacrifice, service, responsibility, cooperation, and global partnership. What, if anything, are journalists to make of this mythos? Is it journalism's responsibility to notice when a Martin Luther King, Jr. or a Barack Obama give voice to the balancing and harmonising themes of their culture's framing stories or when a George W. Bush does not? And what of the mythos of other, less noted parties who are caught up in the violence of nations but too often missing from news narratives and the public archive they construct? Would greater public awareness enhance democratic deliberation? And if the news media are not the proper vehicle for informing the public of missing information and unbalanced interpretive frames, what is journalism's democratic purpose and by what other means is democracy's deliberative prospect to be realised?

Notes:

1. Other names given to peace journalism include post-realist journalism, solutions journalism, empowerment journalism, conflict analysis journalism, change journalism, holistic journalism, big picture journalism, open society journalism, analytical journalism, reflective journalism, constructive journalism, and process journalism. From Lynch and McGoldrick (2005, 240).
2. This is a selected and paraphrased version of the original list by Schmidt (1994), quoted in Lynch and McGoldrick (2005, 53-54).
3. For a brief discussion and example of peace journalism from this perspective related to the war in Afghanistan, see Lynch (2008, January 29).
4. As an example of peace journalism research, see Lynch (2006) for a content analysis of coverage of the Iran nuclear crisis.
5. On the concept of the field of journalism, see Bourdieu (1998).
6. This oblique reference to what might be termed critical genealogy is based on Ivie and Giner (Forthcoming).
7. All quotations of King's words and references to his themes are from King (1967, April 4).

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