

Understanding the Institutional Precarity of Journalism: A Macro Approach to the Civil Diminishment of Journalism

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This article develops a conceptual framework for understanding risk to journalism, more specifically, risk to the standing of journalism as a civil institution generated by macro-level state and market forces of civil diminishment. While the state and market arguably belong to the most well-studied forms of power influencing journalism, it is argued here that the nature of risk to journalism is not sufficiently understood in terms of how it occasions the diminishment of the quality of civil life by distorting collective inclusive communication and association among members of society. To achieve this, the article builds on civil sphere theory to establish how the civil diminishment of journalism by anti-civil state power can be evaluated through the application of a principle of justification.

Keywords: civil diminishment, civil life, civil sphere, institutional precarity, journalism, risk, principle of justification

Journalistic Precarity as Civil Diminishment

This article develops a distinct rationale for understanding risk to journalism as a form of civil diminishment and establishes how such risk, in the form of the institutional precarity of the civil institution of journalism, can be engendered by anti-civil state and market power. What follows is a textual analysis of aspects of civil sphere theory, which will be used to show how civil life can lose its solidarizing ideals, that is, how it can become civilly diminished when journalism experiences institutional precarity.

Following civil sphere theory, which provides “a new concept of civil society as a civil sphere, a world of values and institutions that generates the capacity for social criticism and democratic integration at the same time” (Alexander, 2006, p. 3), this article is concerned with civil society understood as the social sphere essential to the quality of collective civil and democratic life by enabling public self-determination that holds state and market power accountable. And, correspondingly, how state and market power may threaten a well-functioning civil society through establishing the conditions of civil diminishment, which creates journalistic precarity.

Civil sphere theory emphasizes the important role journalism has as a communicative institution of the civil sphere, and ultimately as an institutional force essential to the democratizing potential of associative and communicative civil life (Alexander, 2006; Alexander & Jacobs, 1998). By focusing on the fundamentally discursive nature of civil life, civil sphere theory views the communicative circumstances and

practical conditions under which the civil sphere sustains public discourse as crucially important for the sustainability and quality of public discourse. In this way, civil sphere theory provides an understanding of the circumstances under which “the idea of self-government by communication” (Calhoun, 2011, p. 313) may be supported. Restrictions on journalism to report freely thwart the formation of a civil society capable of reflection, adaptation, and assimilation of others, limit the capacity of social criticism to be heard, and frustrate democratic integration by perverting feelings of solidarity and hospitality (Harrison, 2019a). Such restrictions also endanger the ability of journalism to hold state and market power accountable and, taken together, occasion the circumstances of civil diminishment. To understand this, two key elements of the civil sphere need to be discussed first: its normative core and its institutional infrastructure.

The Normative Core of the Civil Sphere

For Alexander (2006), a key premise of the civil sphere is “that societies are not governed by power alone” nor “fuelled only by the pursuit of self-interest” (p. 3). Instead, “solidarity is possible because people are oriented [also], to the transcendent, to what they hope will be the everlasting” (Alexander, 2006, p. 3). Organized by the ideal of universalizing solidarity as an ideal of shared and inclusive membership that structures and bounds the societal order, the civil sphere is “empirically differentiated, and morally more universalistic vis-à-vis the [the non-civil spheres of the] state and the market and from other social spheres as well” (Alexander, 2006, p. 31). In this way solidarity is understood as “a condition for both democratic stability and social criticism” at the very heart of democratic public life (Kivisto & Sciortino, 2015, p. 16). By making “a clear and decisive reference to the common good in a democratic way” the civil sphere can be understood as a “regime of justification” (Kivisto & Sciortino, 2015, p. 33) where the moral principle of solidarity binds members of society together and promises to guide their interaction in relation to a standard of universal inclusion. This understanding can be said to correspond to the democratic ideal of self-governance where those affected by decisions are also able to influence them.¹ All of which point to the fundamental idea that the criterion of (universal) inclusion is central to the normative promise of the civil sphere.

The normative ideals that regulate the civil sphere can be contrasted with the moral structures of the non-civil spheres:

The goal of the economic sphere is wealth, not justice in the civil sense; it is organized around efficiency, not solidarity, and depends more upon hierarchy than equality to meet its goals. Politics produce power, not reciprocity; they depend upon authority, not independence; they demand loyalty, not criticism; and they seek to exercise coercive if legitimate forms of social control. (Alexander, 2006, p. 203)

This is not to say that both state and market are not essential for a well-functioning civil sphere “as they produce essential resources, establish necessary degrees of control over a variety of environments, protect and nurture key human values, and . . . make pluralism and freedom possible” (Kivisto & Sciortino, 2015, p. 22). Rather it is when the nonsolidarizing ambitions of the non-civil spheres compromise and distort

¹ See, for instance, Dahl (1970, pp. 49–63); Warren (2011, pp. 378–380); on the “all affected principle.”

the normative ideals and values of the civil sphere that anti-civil outcomes through forms of civil diminishment may occur.

The Institutional Structure of the Civil Sphere

To understand this last point, two things must be clarified. First, that the normative aspirations of the civil sphere are understood as instantiated through institutional structures. Accordingly, the institutions of the civil sphere are “those associations explicitly oriented to participation in public controversies . . . that base their claim on this shared membership and try to develop arguments directed to all members” (Sciortino, 2007, p. 564). Mass media and public opinion and associations belong to the communicative actors that “reflect and diffuse the stances and passions of the most generalized and abstract solidarity” (Sciortino, 2007, p. 564). Meanwhile, regulative and representational associations such as elections, office, and the law not only have a communicatively persuasive force, but also an instrumentalizing capacity since they “can draw upon coercion and even control the bureaucratic state” (Alexander, 2006, p. 6).

Second, the civil sphere is not only institutionally instantiated. It also has a subjective dimension that is characterized by the cultural milieu within which the institutions operate and where collective representations of an imagined community are expressed: “It is also a realm of structured, socially established consciousness, a network of understandings creating structures of feeling that permeate social life” (Alexander, 2006, p. 54). Oriented by the ideal of solidarity, this cultural dimension is symbolically articulated through the discourse of civil society, as a form of generalized language that negotiates between universalism and particularism to constitute “the very sense of society for those who are within and without it” (Alexander, 2006, p. 54). Combined, these two facets of civil life—institutional and cultural—provide the basis for the discursive structure and the extent to which mediated communication in any particular civil sphere is institutionally instantiated and subjectively experienced. In other words, the civil sphere is sustained to the degree to which its own communicative and associative base is free from dominating anti-civil forces. The contestation between civil and anti-civil power is at the root of civil life and no space is more contested than that of the civil institution of journalism.

The Civil Role of Journalism and the Problem of Civil Diminishment

Journalism plays a critical role in the discourse of civil society as it “record[s] . . . select[s] and reconstruct[s] in civil terms what ‘actually goes on’” in society (Alexander, 2006, p. 5). In fact, “the news is the only source of firsthand experience [that most members of society] will ever have about their fellow citizens” (Alexander, 2015, p. 10). As such, “journalistic judgments” are uniquely positioned to influence “the shape-shifting currents of . . . contemporary social life, from people’s movements to legal investigations, foreign policy, public opinion, and affairs of state” (Alexander, 2015, p. 10).

Journalism broadcasts collective representations of social relationships negotiated in relation to “contrasting solidary ties” and “institutionalize(s) civil society by creating messages that translate general codes into situationally specific evaluations and descriptions” (Alexander, 2006, p. 70). This civil role of journalism also needs to be understood in relation to what Alexander refers to as the democratic culture that underpins the professional production of journalism. This democratic culture is effectively captured by the

interrelationship between journalistic professional ethics, including principles such as neutrality, transparency, independence, responsibility, balance, and accuracy (Harrison, 2019a), and “the democratic aspirations of the broader societies in which journalists ply their craft” (Alexander, 2015, p. 10). Developing this notion of the cultural commitment of journalism Alexander (2015) thus acknowledges that journalistic information:

is knowledge filtered through . . . standards of moral judgment—“reporting that is aggressive and reliable enough to instill fear of public embarrassment, loss of employment, economic sanctions, or even criminal prosecution in those with political and economic power” (Downey & Schudson, 2009). News not only observes but judges, stigmatizing violations of civil morality and dramatizing heroic struggles against injustice. (p. 19)

It is this essence of journalism, as being oriented toward the moral concern of civil solidarity as the organizational principle of democratic life that leads Alexander to view journalism as a civil institution. This means that: “When journalists make meaning out of events, transforming randomness into pattern, they do so in terms of the broader discourse of civil society” (Alexander, 2006, p. 19).

And yet journalism is Janus-faced. At times it serves the solidarizing aims of civil discourse, while at other times it manifestly serves “narrow, antidemocratic interests” (Alexander, 2006, p. 19.) By promoting economic or political values over civil values journalism itself can have anti-civil influence. For Harrison (2019a), “the way the news reports . . . civil and anti-civil judgements . . . contribute[s] to the boundaries we place and maintain around civil society with regard to whom and what we regard as civil and anti-civil” (p. 3).

Due to their vital role as interpreters of the social, journalistic accounts generate friction between the idealistic ambitions of civil society and the aims and objectives of non-civil spheres:

apply[ing] polluting categories to an event or actor, news reports create public relations problems for “secretive” or “greedy” corporations . . . and the “partisan” or “manipulative” actors of political life. To broadcast news reports that construct groups and institutions in such profane terms is to problematize their relation to civil society. (Alexander, 2006, p. 82)

Such journalistic judgements can cause reactions from members of the civil sphere that call for perceived injustices to be redressed (Alexander, 2019). As noted by Alexander (2006), “Once reforms are made, factual media often monitor the affected institutions to make sure that their reconstructed relationships remain congruent with the idealized standards of civil society” (p. 82).

Ultimately the civil role of journalism comes down to how it represents civil society in terms of boundary relationships to non-civil spheres and how it meets challenges of anti-civil forces that seek to undermine its contribution to the civil realm of common meaning and intersubjective understanding among members of society that “relate to each other as citizens” (Silverstone, 2004, p. 441) and understand themselves to be “members of a collectivity” (Shils, 1999, p. 16). Following on from this, restrictions placed on the civil role of journalism necessarily minimize the ability of a civil society to achieve such solidarizing

ambitions. In essence, risk posed by anti-civil power to journalism's civil role can be used as an indicator how far civil life itself is diminished.

Framing risk to journalism in this novel way adds to current understandings of journalistic precarity by grounding such risk in the endangering of the quality of collective civil life. From this we can turn to establishing a framework for evaluating macro-level risk to journalism to understand how journalism may be diminished by anti-civil state and market power.

Toward a Framework for Evaluating the Civil Diminishment of Journalism

In addition to understanding the normative core and institutional instantiation of the civil sphere, a third aspect of civil sphere theory, needs to be taken up and developed to understand how civil diminishment occurs. Specifically, how the relationship between the civil sphere (including the civil institution of journalism) and the non-civil spheres of the state and market is shaped through processes of mutual influence and contestation. How these civil/non-civil interactions play out in reality largely determines the extent to which the normative promise of the civil sphere can be actualized. To do this, we need to develop a distinct rationale for evaluating when state and market influence on journalism results in the disfigurement, restraint or subjugation of collective civil life. Achieving this requires that we expand upon conventional ways of understanding the democratic role of journalism (and risk posed to it) to include considerations regarding the quality of civil life.

To show how this distinct rationale for evaluating risk to journalism will be established, it needs to be remembered that the normative core, or civil ideal, of the civil sphere establishes its status as a sphere of justification. As such, examining the independence and robustness of the normative core of the civil sphere can be used to evaluate real societal contexts regarding the extent to which the exercise of power on the civil sphere (and journalism) is undertaken in accordance with the civil ideals that represent the solidarizing character of any particular civil sphere. Essentially, what the civil ideal of solidarizing inclusion aspires to ensure is that power is exercised in a way that is acceptable to the citizens in the civil sphere that entails that the exercise of power can only be justified insofar as the civil ideal is respected, upheld, and applied. If power on the other hand is exercised without such discretion it is deemed anti-civil and potentially harmful to the solidarizing project of the civil sphere.

To better understand this relationship between the civil sphere and the non-civil spheres these can be described as constituting a system within which the civil sphere exposes the other social spheres to public influence for the purpose of serving democratic self-governance. In this way, democracy becomes

a political system and way of life in which civil society and government . . . function as two necessary moments . . . of a system in which the exercise of power, whether in the spheres of civil society or government, is subject to public monitoring, compromise and agreement. (Keane, 2010, p. 2)

This system is characterized by the ongoing "process of apportioning and publicly monitoring the exercise of power by citizens within polities marked by the institutionally distinct—but always mediated—

realms of civil society and government institutions” (Keane, 2010, p. 2). Providing such mediation in the form of checks and balances by subjecting civil and non-civil power to public scrutiny, journalism is in effect part of the civil sphere’s basic institutional infrastructure. Any restrictions on that role can therefore be used as an indicator to assess how fragile and diminished any particular civil sphere is or is becoming.

The conclusion of the above is that the rationale developed here makes it possible first to identify occurrences of civil diminishment of journalism via expressions of anti-civil power, and second to understand these occurrences in terms of their consequences for journalism, and subsequently for the quality of collective civil life. The point now is to showcase how the conceptual groundwork conducted so far comes together for the purpose of establishing a framework for understanding the civil diminishment of journalism occasioned by anti-civil state and market power.

Understanding the Civil Diminishment of Journalism by State and Market Power through a Principle of Justification

State and market are widely accepted as the key forces of pressure on journalism in the literature.² As summarized by Harrison (2019a), state and market power

undermine or limit the civil ideal of journalism . . . by treating their audiences as either belonging to a partisan political group or as consumers (usually both) rather than as citizens. They regard the news as a product rather than as a (public) service and, as such . . . news journalism as an accessory to vested interests. (p. 68)

And yet this acceptance is often superficial in accepting as an axiom that state and market are always negative forces with regard to free and independent journalism. As such, they thereby fail to show how state and market forces can be evaluated in relation to whether these are exercised in ways that respect in general the civil ideals of the civil sphere, and more specifically, the civil role of journalism. Or to put the matter differently, how, as a result of the exercise of state and market power, diminished the civil sphere actually is. For this to happen we need a systematic way of understanding and evaluating state and market influence in relation to the application of a criterion of justification. Such a criterion of justification allows for the differentiation between when state and market power can be viewed as legitimate (when it upholds the civil ideal of the solidarizing inclusion of all citizens as a basic principle of democratic self-determination) and when it represents illegitimate forms of anti-civil domination that gives rise to the civil diminishment of journalism and consequently diminishes civil life by promoting unjust and exclusionary outcomes and practices.

In this way, the criterion of justification can be used as a fundamental principle that allows for the identification of how journalism may be diminished by anti-civil state and market power and a rationale for understanding specifically why this is detrimental to journalism attached to civil ideals as well as the solidarizing aims of the civil sphere.

² See, for instance, Benson (2009), Habermas (1991), and Shoemaker and Reese (2013).

Table 1 provides a summative account capturing how the principle of justification is used to evaluate state and market power in relation to whether they uphold or diminish the civil role of journalism.

Table 1. Using the Principle of Justification to Identify Civil Diminishment.

Adherence to the principle of justification	Nonadherence to the principle of justification
State and market power respect and foster the civil role of journalism and the solidarizing aims of civil sphere.	State and market power disregard, restrict or suppress the civil role of journalism and the solidarizing aims of the civil sphere.
Consequence: State and market power support the civil standing of journalism and the civil sphere.	Consequence: State and market power are anti-civil and generate the civil diminishment of journalism and the civil sphere.

Following Table 1, it can be highlighted that the civil diminishment of journalism, and the degree of its institutional precarity should be understood in relation to the extent to which journalism is able to carry out its civil role. The further journalism is removed from its own civil ethos the more diminished it is. In other words, the civil role of journalism centers on its real capacity to fulfil its civil role through expressing the ideals of solidarity that reside at the heart of the normative core of the civil sphere and to conduct itself independently from external and internal pressures to represent the entirety of the civil sphere. In short, the civil role of journalism and its proximity to the civil ideal is entirely conditional on the context and extent to which it is independent from those anti-civil forces that threaten to diminish it.

Understanding the precarity of journalism as a civil institution requires uncovering different types of anti-civil state and market pressures on journalism in various societal and civil settings for the purpose of identifying various manifestations of civil diminishment. Here the point is to understand when and in what way the state and market do or do not contribute toward fostering the ideal of solidarizing inclusion in the civil sphere. Or, in other words, to systematically explore the ways in which “there is built into politically and commercially inspired anti-civil values a hostility towards the value of accurate and sincere news journalism or a public service ethos in news reporting” (Harrison, 2019a, p. 91). The concern here being to identify how the non-civil spheres of state and market produce circumstances that may have anti-civil outcomes in terms of producing risk to the civil role of journalism and the normative ideal of the civil sphere. Such risk may then indicate the diminishment of the civil standing of journalism as well as the civil sphere.

Ultimately this article aims to facilitate an understanding of journalistic institutional precarity as created by anti-civil state and market forces of civil diminishment. To this end the following section will illustrate how the conceptual framework for evaluating the civil diminishment of journalism via a principle of justification can be applied to state and market power. The aim here is not to provide a complete analysis of the various manifestations of civil diminishment of journalism as generated by anti-civil state and market power. Rather, the aim is to show that the conceptual framework has empirical application when it comes to examining real world settings with regards to understanding how anti-civil state and market power generate forms of journalistic institutional precarity understood here as forms of civil diminishment.

Evaluating the Civil Diminishment of Journalism via Anti-Civil State Power

When evaluating anti-civil outcomes produced by state activities such as the co-ordination, regulation, and administration of society wide plans and policies (Young, 2000) these functions need to be assessed in relation to the ways in which the state acts as a key determinant of the capacity of civil societies to generate solidarizing inclusion.

Producing the resources, forms of social control and the protection of human dignity and freedom upon which civil society depends for its existence on the one hand, the state also has anti-civil features that "reinforce social and economic inequality" (Young, 2000, p. 155). The exercise of anti-civil state power runs contrary to the civil ideal of democratic self-determination that aims to ensure that the state is held accountable through processes of public monitoring and influence. In exercising such anti-civil power, the state thus loses legitimacy since the public cannot ensure that their interests are being cared for. This is where the, the principle of justification provides "the basis of very real differences in the way in which power [is] exercised" (McLean & McMillan, 2009, p. 40).

This is nowhere clearer than in Dewey's (1954) understanding of an inclusive state as facilitating "the organization of the public effected through officials for the protection of the interests shared by its members" (p. 33). This provides a clear link to the principle of justification as a legitimizing rationale and as a means, as expressed by Dewey, to provide a conceptual "criterion for determining how good a particular state is: namely, the degree of organization of the public that is attained, and the degree in which its officers are so constituted as to perform their function of caring for public interests" (Dewey, 1954, p. 33). This understanding of the core normative function of the legitimate state to care for the public interest provides a rationale for understanding the justification of the exercise of state power in relation the solidarizing ideal of the civil sphere, and the civil role of journalism, which aims to facilitate the expression of public interest.

Conditions of anti-civil state power can therefore be described, for instance, through forms of arbitrary and nonaccountable governance that restrict critical input from the civil sphere and journalism. This is captured for instance by forms of unelected and hierarchical governance, including forms of dictatorial, personal, and dynastic power structures.³ Such forms of governance can generically be described as being unresponsive to the will, expectations and needs of its citizens and as placing little value on interaction and critical exchange with civil society. This is illustrated for instance by the closing down of public spaces for contestation and scrutiny (often expressed through the suspension of and assaults on human and civil rights, including freedom of the press) as well as control of the information environment for political purposes.⁴ Other characteristics of such anti-civil state power include the lack of political transparency and use of excessive secrecy resulting in the misuse of national security considerations and

³ For more examples of anti-civil forms of governance see various state fragility indices including the World Bank World Governance Indicators (<https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/>). Forms of anti-civil state power are also captured in media freedom assessments. See, for instance, Freedom House (<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-and-media/2019/media-freedom-downward-spiral>).

⁴ See, for instance, the Civicus monitor for empirical examples of aggressions on civil life (<https://civicus.org/index.php/what-we-do/innovate/civicus-monitor>).

the corruption of public office.⁵ Regimes soliciting such anti-civil forms of governance also tend to rest upon a weak separation of power as illustrated for instance through the disregard of rule of law that leads to lack of state accountability (Levitsky & Zitblatt, 2018). Expressions of anti-civil state power also tend to embrace particularistic rather than universalistic and society-wide concerns and cause various forms of exclusion through the systematic use of disesteem, discrimination, and inequalities to target certain societal groups. These manifestations of societal fragmentation are promoted in societal contexts where sectarian bonds of loyalty, including the domination by populist factions, nativist, or partisan sentiment, are allowed to permeate society (Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018). In addition to such forms of anti-civil power abuse, anti-civil state influence can also be understood to occur when the state does not have the capacity to govern in a way that upholds civil ideals, for instance due to being unable to reduce social conflict and effectively manage organized crime.⁶

These expressions of anti-civil state power are manifest in numerous ways as the civil diminishment of the civil sphere and journalism. With regards to the civil institution of journalism Harrison (2019a) understands,

the exercise of political power [to] range [. . .] from suppression of free and independent news media with impunity to undue editorial influence and agenda setting, to the active collusion of a news organization in their support of the politically powerful. (p. 70)

Ultimately, the consequence of anti-civil state power being exercised upon journalism is that its capacity to uphold civil ideals and support the civil sphere's democratizing ambitions is diminished. Such state influence over journalism is captured by various forms of control and censorship of journalistic practice, production, content, and professional standards (Schiffrin, 2017) and, crucially through various forms of assaults and targeted attacks on journalism and journalists as well as the use of impunity for such crimes to silence journalistic expression.⁷

Evaluating the Civil Diminishment of Journalism via Anti-Civil Market Power

Turning now to market power, it exists as an indispensable sphere that provides societies with essential goods and services through functions of production, exchange and the accumulation and distribution of wealth and income (Young, 2000). In this way, market power exists at the level at which it is regarded as an organized way to conduct social life. It emphasizes individualism and the pursuit of market freedoms. The market arguably also has civilizing qualities that overlap with the requirements of functioning civil societies. Indeed, Keane (2006) argues that

⁵ For examples see the Global Right to Information Rating (<https://www.rti-rating.org/>).

⁶ The body of literature on the fragility of socio-political regimes captures dimensions of anti-civil power when the state is unable to provide citizens with basic life chances and transform citizens' concerns into effective policy (Grävingsholt, Ziaja, & Kreibaum, 2012; Grimm, Lemay-Hébert, & Nay, 2014).

⁷ For examples, see the reports by organizations such as Reporters Without Borders (<https://rsf.org/en>) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (<https://cpj.org/>).

civil societies and . . . market processes functionally require non-violence . . . the self-restraint of actors . . . and a sense of level-headed responsibility for one's actions. . . . neither civil society nor markets can function without the cultivated ability of actors to negotiate with strangers . . . to trust others, and to make sense together. (p. 28)

However, markets also "regularly spoil social interaction . . . stir up social competition and . . . reduce social pluralism; they vandalize the quest for social equality. The much-vaunted civilizing effects of markets are constrained, counter-balanced by uncivil effects" (Keane, 2006, p. 28), including the generation of market failures, "public bads," and "socially destructive storms of technical innovation" (Keane, 2006, p. 30). Market behavior can thus also be described as the antithesis to civil life due to its well-recognized nonsolidarizing effects. Forms of anti-civil market power characterized by nonadherence with the principle of justification can therefore be linked in a general sense to the ways in which the life chances, needs and interests of the public are limited by the way that the market conducts itself by creating circumstances of economic deprivation, inequality, and societal stratification and fragmentation. The rationale and justificatory premises of the market are thus made in terms of personal well being achieved through wealth, success, and property and what anti-civil expressions of market power have in common, then, is essentially their disinterest in, neglect of or inability to provide citizens with essential goods and services and to respond to the needs of the public.

Manifestations of anti-civil outcomes or the diminishment of journalism via the market then are captured by instances of when commercializing values dominate journalistic values, identities, and professional practices. The civil diminishment of journalism via anti-civil market influence is perhaps most concisely summarized through the notion of the commodification of journalism (Kleis-Nielsen, 2017) and the devaluation of the public service mission of journalism (Harrison, 2019b). Here the civil role of journalism is replaced by journalism as an artefact or a mere dissemination technology (see Harrison, 2019a, 2019b). Diminishment of the civil role of journalism also occurs when the pursuit to generate profit overrides (out of necessity to maintain a financially viable business in the wake of disruptive changes related to media market digitization; Kleis-Nielsen, 2017; or through the co-option by market interests) concerns with journalistic integrity (Schiffrin, 2017). Civil diminishment of journalism via the market also arises when uneven economic development generates media infrastructural inequalities and basic public access inequalities and when monopolistic media ownership generates lack of media pluralism.⁸ Reduced investment in journalism combined with the excessive rationalization and cost cutting of media organizations are other manifestations of the civil diminishment of journalism as shown for instance in the reduction of supply of local news content⁹ and investigative journalism (Stiglitz, 2017) as well as conditions of employment insecurity and low wages that may make journalism susceptible to bribes thus threatening the ethics of the profession (Skjerdal, 2018).

⁸ See, for instance, the Media Pluralism Monitor for examples of how economic conditions and media pluralism intersect (<https://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/>).

⁹ See, for instance, "The loss of newspapers and readers" by the Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media (<https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/reports/expanding-news-desert/loss-of-local-news/loss-newspapers-readers/>).

Conclusion

The above is an attempt to establish a conceptual pathway by which we can begin to understand the full scope of journalistic institutional precarity as generated by macro level forces of civil diminishment via state and market power. Doing so allows for the framing of the wider significance of such precarity in relation to the quality of collective civil life. As such, the civil diminishment of journalism endangers the associative and communicative conditions necessary for the maintenance of inclusive civil and democratic life. The introduction of the principle of justification provides a basis that enables the systematic evaluation of state and market power with regards to its influence on associative and communicative civil life, via its direct influence on journalism.

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