Chapter 11

Social movements, contentious politics and media in the Philippines

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This chapter is motivated by a conundrum I faced in researching and writing about the Philippines.[1] Given this country's active civil society, including critical social movements that have challenged the state on many levels, why is it that, when it comes to media, there is no equally strong Philippine movement for communication rights or 'third sector' non-governmental, non-profit community media? And this despite the frustration many Filipinos feel towards their media, and despite their desire for stronger public service responsibility and greater media content diversity. The empirical case study presented in this chapter underscores the importance of de-westernizing theory-building around social movements and processes of mediation. The fieldwork in the Philippines that forms the basis for this study raises significant questions about the country's reputation for having the freest media in Southeast Asia, and assumptions regarding social movement media.

I explore these questions through a critical examination of the concept of 'civil society' in order for it to be more theoretically useful for analysing different groups on the ground. I also focus on the 'threat' as well as the 'opportunity' structures facing social movements in the Philippines that experience substantial political instability and analyse how these play out in social movement media practices, and efforts to achieve media reform. In the context of these efforts, I address some of the limitations of social movement theory, including its lack of relevance to social movements engaged in 'contentious politics' in countries outside the liberal democracies of the global North, particularly those facing significant political violence.

Research on social movements has flourished since the mid-1970s, but remains concentrated largely on movements in the global North, and there is a lack of theoretical attention to the role of communication and media (Downing, 2008, 2011). While recognition of the importance of cultural factors in movement mobilization has increased (Earl, 2004; Williams, 2004), this has not translated into a recognition of media as key sites of cultural development and transmission. Research on alternative or social movement media has increased, but has not been exploited in any meaningful way by researchers in sociology, political science or history; social movement scholars tend also to focus on mainstream media rather than the wide variety of alternative or community media associated with social movements (Downing, 2008; Howley, 2005; Koopmans, 2004). These limitations are especially problematic in the contemporary era of media-saturated cultural environments worldwide.

Much of the work on media and social change, especially cultural studies and political communication research, presumes a relatively stable political and economic environment,

which is a problematic assumption in most areas outside of the United States, Canada and Europe (Downing, 2008). In addition, the effects on media of different cultural norms, such as political clientelism, are rarely analysed, although in countries characterized by high levels of clientelism, such relationships 'tend to undercut the development of horizontally organized mass political parties, particularly those representing the working class' (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002: 176).

This chapter tries to address some of these shortcomings through an analysis of social movement media, and media reform efforts in the Philippines. As a US media scholar with a strong interest in Southeast Asia, I am committed to interrogating the role of the United States in the Philippines, where the discourse of 'terrorism' has exacerbated militarization (a process beyond the scope of this chapter) and negatively affected press freedoms and the realization of a broader set of communication rights. The difficulties facing Philippine media are often framed as a failure on the part of journalists, advocacy movements and the left, according to some Filipinos themselves and expatriate non-governmental organization (NGO) staff. This was also my initial (and problematic) assessment. However, the lived experiences of Philippine media practitioners provide a better understanding of why, in this context, media and media reform efforts are taking shape as they are, and offer insights into the dynamics facing social movements and their media in places other than the global North.

Opportunity and threat: understanding social movement action

The focus on social movements in the global North's relatively stable political and economic environments has resulted in research more attuned to opportunity structures than to threats. Attention to the Philippines demonstrates this rather gaping theoretical hole. Traditionally social movement motivations are seen as being affected by political opportunity in only one direction; as opportunity for action expands, social movement actions mount, but when opportunities contract, action recedes (Goldstone and Tilly, 2001: 180). Goldstone and Tilly (2001) argue that the reality is more complex, however, and that this simple model overlooks the patterns of tactical moves and countermoves between authorities and challengers. They point to several specific cases where the increased repression traditionally thought to reduce action actually increases protest mobilizations.[2] They propose a more complex model for social movement action that explores opportunity and threat in terms of the state's mix of repression and concessions.

While extremely useful, this model is problematic in defining the opposition as a single unified entity when any opposition to political repression is inevitably more complex. We need to recognize that the 'opposition' can itself become the target of a divide and rule strategy of the state and its close relationship with local and, increasingly, global capital. It is here that critical scholarship on civil society is useful, including different types of civil society media.

Deconstructing 'civil society'

There are growing calls for more complexity in our analysis of civil society, networks and social movements, and the distinctions and relationships between them. Political institutions imported from the West, for example, and introduced into societies with 'embedded forms of sociability that are very different from the common individualistic forms of the modern West' (Kaviraj and Khilnani, 2001: 5) often do not function predictably or beneficially. Civil society's distinction from the state is widely conceptualized as one of its fundamental characteristics, but as Khilnani (2001: 31) argues,

> [i]n situations where many states in the South are 'quasi-states', modeling relations between state and civil society in terms of opposition between the two can be misleading, obscuring the ways in which civil society, far from designating a world of spontaneous arrangements, is in fact constitutively intermeshed with the state.

The same arguably is true in the United States and other countries of the global North, where the relationship between state and capital muddies the waters. Influential aid agencies, such as USAID, often ignore the fact that governments are not the sole threat to democracy and good governance, but that it is alliances between state and private sector interests that have produced many of the problems facing developing societies. They have produced many of the 'manifestly illiberal tendencies of many "actual existing democracies", including the United States' (Jenkins, 2001: 266).

The advanced capitalist 'northern' countries identify civil society as the key means of promoting democratization in the global South, yet common understandings of civil society and the relationships between transnational movements, organizations and networks are deeply flawed (Jenkins, 2001; Stammers and Eschle, 2005). Scholars have begun to recognize the problems involved in conflating or subordinating social movements to the organizations associated with them, rather than recognizing these movements as involving a multiplicity of groups and institutions. This conflation makes invisible the existence of radical grassroots groups (Stammers and Eschle, 2005) and neglects the variety of organizational characteristics of international NGOs (INGOs) and transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs). It assumes also that all 'progressive' global movements share similar ideological commitments, strategies and organizational characteristics (Stammers and Eschle, 2005). Scholars critical of this tendency urge us to distinguish analytically between the networks of informal interactions at the heart of social movements, and formal organizations that may or may not be part of movements (della Porta and Diani, 2006; Diani, 2003; Stammers and Eschle, 2005). The conflation of social movements and formal organizations misses the key fact that many NGOs, INGOs and TSMOs are entirely unconnected to social movements and do not attempt to challenge dominant cultural values.

In their narrow conceptualization of civil society, aid agencies often do not allow for hybrid forms of democratic politics 'even when these are instrumental in effecting their preferred

outcomes', especially if they impede efforts to promote 'the type of market-affirming civil society' these agencies seek (Jenkins, 2001: 265). In their promotion of neoliberal policies, aid agencies can end up disempowering subordinate social groups and the redistributive projects and citizen involvement they endorse, in the process helping those in privileged positions to pursue their own self-interests at the expense of the public interest (Jenkins, 2001: 263). In his analysis of civil society in Eastern and Central Europe, for example, Colin Sparks (2005: 41) finds that the 'simple identification of civil society with private capitalism ... motivated the majority of oppositionists' in Eastern and Central Europe once communism had toppled. In this context, the establishment of free and democratic media was seen as requiring institutional changes from state to private control. The more radical interpretation of civil society as being composed of those organizations that can claim to represent the people and give them a real stake in power did not take hold in eastern and central Europe (Sparks, 2005).

Political society

Partha Chatterjee (2001) usefully distinguishes between formal and informal activist groups in post-colonial societies. He argues that 'the domain of civil social institutions ... is still restricted to a fairly small section of "citizens" ... an enlightened elite engaged in a pedagogical mission' (Chatterjee, 2001: 172). 'Civil society [is therefore] best used to describe those institutions of modern associational life set up by nationalist elites in the era of colonial modernity' (Chatterjee, 2001: 174), which

> will long remain an exclusive domain of the elite, [so] that the actual 'public' will not match up to the standards required by civil society and ... the function of civil social institutions in relation to the public at large will be one of pedagogy rather than of free association.
>
> (Chatterjee, 2001: 174)

Chatterjee (2001: 173) calls for 'a notion of political society lying between civil society and the state' that would help us to see how the traditional might cope with the modern in ways that do not conform necessarily to 'Western bourgeois, secularized Christian' principles of modern society. He describes a 'new political society' distinct from the developmental state engaging the population through welfare policies (Chatterjee, 2001: 176). Chatterjee furthermore notes four features of political society: many political society mobilizations that make demands on the state violate the law and, in fact, are collective population groups who 'survive by sidestepping the law'; they demand governmental welfare as their 'rights'; these rights are conceptualized and demanded as the collective rights of a community; and finally, state agencies and NGOs 'deal with these people not as bodies of citizens belonging to a lawfully constituted civil society, but as population groups deserving welfare' (Chatterjee, 2001: 177). These relations, Chatterjee (2001: 178) maintains, are different from 'the well-structured, principled and constitutionally sanctioned relations between the state and individual members of civil society'.

Chatterjee (2001: 178) suggests that the most significant site of transformations during the colonial period was civil society – framed in terms of modernity, and that in the post-colonial period the most significant transformations have occurred within political society – framed in terms of democracy. In other words, colonial period debates on modernity have been replaced by post-colonial debates on the nature of democracy; with the globalization of capital, 'we may well be witnessing an emerging opposition between modernity (development) and democracy, i.e. between civil society and political society' (Chatterjee, 2001: 178).

Chatterjee's (2001) civil society/political society distinction is particularly productive for considering the relationship between contemporary social movements and media, and media reform and democratization processes, especially outside the liberal democracies of the global North. While these relationships and processes are not always framed in terms of divisions within civil society and its media per se, there is growing evidence of these divisions, for instance, in the distinction between 'media reform' and 'media justice' movements in the United States (Cyril, 2005; Dichter, 2004; Snorton, 2009; Themba-Nixon, 2009) and similar phenomena in other parts of the world (dos Santos, 2004; Sen, 2004; Waisbord, 2011). The debates over communication rights that re-emerged with some vigour during the two-part 2003 and 2005 World Summit on the Information Society also make clear the wide variety of objectives and forms of civil society media groups and networks globally (Hadl, 2004; Hintz, 2007, 2009). In this chapter, I explore these divisions within the contemporary media landscape of the Philippines.

The study

This analysis is based on nearly six months of fieldwork conducted in the Philippines, in 2008 and 2010, during which time I engaged in participant observation and conducted in-depth interviews with more than 70 journalists, media academics, policymakers, media advocacy groups, journalism trainers and alternative media staff to enquire about their work. I also participated in several media-related workshops, conferences, reporting field trips, protests, vigils and training sessions.

I employ an inductive form of analysis, in which patterns of discourse and behaviour are allowed to emerge from interviews and observation. This approach allows insights not enabled by more deductive forms of analysis. For example, the in-depth interviews and observations made it obvious quite early in the research that I was mistaken in assuming a desire and demand among Filipinos for grassroots access to media. As a result of not finding the call for independent media I had become familiar with elsewhere, and had expected to find here, my quest became to understand why. Eventually I came to recognize the impacts of both violence and political clientelism, and to accept that I needed to set aside my conceptualizations 'based on universalistic criteria and formal equality before the law' (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002: 185). What follows

is an overview of civil society and political society as they relate to social movement media and media reform efforts within the commercialized, militarized and patronage structures of the Philippines.

Media in the Philippines

Philippine democracy followed the US model (including commercial media with an active and critical journalistic tradition) during the latter's nearly 50-year occupation of the country. All four Philippine constitutions have ensured press freedom and the right to freedom of expression, and the 1987 Constitution also guarantees freedom of information. These constitutional guarantees have led to the widely made, but problematic claim that the Philippines is home to the freest media system in Southeast Asia.

However, the history and importance of 'alternative press' in the Philippines during colonization by the Spanish, the Japanese and the Americans, and also during the period of martial law (1972–1986), led some Filipino journalists to argue that it has become the country's genuine mainstream press. Teodoro (2001) distinguishes between the *Philippine press*, erected during US colonization in the image of the US press tradition, and the *Filipino press*, characterized by revolutionary critique and unabashed advocacy. This distinction parallels Chatterjee's (2001) notions of civil society and political society as they apply to media. Teodoro (2001) argues that it was the 'soft power' of the *Philippine press* that contributed to the success of the US colonial experiment in the Philippines, by buttressing elite and foreign interests and helping to sustain unjust political and social structures.

In the 1960s' lead-up to martial law, the *Philippine press* began to give way to a re-emergence of the critical tradition of the *Filipino press* that was asking serious questions about the political and economic structures that were keeping the country impoverished and the role of the United States in perpetuating them (Teodoro, 2001). During martial law, when the revolutionary *Filipino press* went underground, the *Philippine press* was subservient to Marcos, cloaking its cowardice in concepts such as professionalism and 'objectivity' (Teodoro, 2001). Those who critiqued the imperialism of the Marcos–United States partnership were accused of being part of a 'communist threat'. During this period, writers, journalists and artists operated underground revolutionary newspapers and organized what was described as 'xerox journalism' in the struggle against the dictatorship. These media became known as the 'alternative press', which, despite its long history, was celebrated as a new phenomenon in Philippine journalism (Teodoro, 2001). They played a vital role in the events that led to the ousting of Marcos during the People Power I revolution in 1986.

Alternative media seem to fall into two major categories: one more progressive, corresponding to 'political society', that pushes a radical critique of Philippine society and alternative political, economic and social visions, and the other with more liberal leanings, corresponding to 'civil society', with a view towards reform of the current system. After Marcos was overthrown, the latter, more liberal tendency became incorporated into the

mainstream press alongside more conservative viewpoints (Art. 19 and CMFR, 2005: 26). The situation since the end of martial law has been complicated by the violence perpetrated against both mainstream and alternative media practitioners.

Violence and the culture of impunity

The Philippines is plagued by one of the highest rates of journalist killings in the world. A November 2009 attack, identified by watchdog groups as the world's deadliest on the media, led to the abduction and murder of 32 journalists and their staff. The incident occurred in Manguidanao province where the journalists were covering a local politician's bid to become governor. It increased substantially the already alarming number of Filipino journalists killed in the line of duty. The most recent figures place the total at 112 journalists killed in the line of duty, between 1986 and December 2010.[3]

The situation is perpetuated by a much-cited 'culture of impunity': there have been only a few convictions of assassins or accomplices, and as of early 2011, no mastermind has been successfully prosecuted. Rowena Paraan of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) explained that

> [t]he problem is that people can get away with murder. The justice system doesn't work, and if it does it's so slow. You can have a hearing [that continues] for more than a decade, several decades, even for cases as serious as murder.
>
> (Personal Communication, 8 July 2008)

Since it is cheaper in the Philippines to hire an assassin than a lawyer, and since the consequences of assassinations continue to be few, the killings continue.

The Philippine government's emphasis on anti-terrorism measures was exacerbated by the events of 11 September 2001, and has frequently been used as an excuse for suppressing free expression. Much of the violence since then has been linked by critics to Oplan Bantay Laya (Operation Plan Freedom Watch), a counterinsurgency plan launched in 2002 as part of the US-initiated 'global war on terror', which has been criticized for not distinguishing between armed combatants and civilians. Similar to when Marcos was in power, influential people frequently brand their critics as communists or 'fronts' for the Communist Party (Art. 19 and CMFR, 2005). This endangers journalists, especially when they report on violations by the military, police or rebels (Arguillas, 2000). As University of the Philippines Journalism Professor, Danilo Arao, notes, the situation 'is very, very dangerous … people get killed because of their convictions' (Personal Communication, 8 July 2008). In April 2005, two respected organizations, the NUJP and the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ), revealed that they had been listed by the armed forces of the Philippines as communist sympathizers and 'enemies of the state'. In the face of this evidence, critics argue that the state is a direct threat to social justice activists, not least by allowing extrajudicial killings to go unpunished.

Political economy and Philippine media

While media are often critical of the government and corruption, the Philippine press itself is very corrupt, which is a further complication (Florentino-Hofileña, 2004). Given the political economy of the Philippine media, salaries often do not approach even a living wage, making journalists vulnerable to corrupt officials looking for a bit of good press. Corrupt practices are especially prevalent in the provinces, where the overwhelming majority of the killings of media practitioners have occurred since 1986 (CMFR, 2009).

Critics claim also that media commercialism and competition promote sensationalism, undermine any sense of civic responsibility and ethics, and combine with a centralized content production provincial journalists describe as 'Imperial Manila' to constrain journalists and make adequate coverage of the issues facing the poor an enormous challenge. Homogenous programming and reporting are designed to sell a 'tabloidization of news and public affairs' (Coronel, 2001: 118), which is criticized for not going beyond the typical 'expose-and-oppose type of reportage' and focusing on personalities more than issues (Gloria, 2000: 172). Reporters rarely understand the complexities of the most pressing issues, such as human rights violations or the Muslim insurgency in the southern island of Mindanao (Arguillas, 2000), and overwhelmingly rely on government sources, provide inadequate contextualization and leave out the perspectives of those most affected by the issues (Arguillas, 2000; Art. 19 and CMFR, 2005; CMFR, 2000).

Such commercial media limitations lead to frequent calls for 'community media' or 'alternative media', but the concept of community media in the Philippines is generally understood to mean the provincial commercial press or broadcast stations, which are 'largely, if not nearly exclusively, owned and run by imperial power [i.e. Manila-based] surrogates' (Santos, 2007: 16). While there are local commercial broadcasters in the Philippines, there is no regulatory or legislative provision for non-commercial, non-governmental, community broadcasting. The current licensing system requires a congressional franchise, available only to those with financial means. As in other systems characterized by political clientelism, the regulatory system is weak, there are few public service obligations and where regulations exist they are laxly enforced (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002). There is no tradition of public service broadcasting, and calls for a third sector of non-commercial, non-governmental and largely non-professional media accessible for local communities are virtually absent. There is a need for a reconceptualization of public service broadcasting in the Philippines.

Social movements, 'alternative media' and community communication

Given the financial constraints, threats of violence and the environment of political clientelism in which media are owned by powerful national or regional figures who use them for political rather than economic gain, civil and political society actors clearly have to work hard and creatively in order to communicate. Alternative media is the term most commonly used in

the Philippines to refer to those media associated with 'political society' or critical social movements struggling not just for reform of the current system, but for substantive structural change. Contemporary Philippine alternative media include many small underground publications and websites throughout the country that follow the samizdat tradition, which Colonel (2001) argues remains strong today, sponsored by people's organizations, local progressive political groups and non-profit institutions. There are also alternative radio programmes, online publications such as *Davao Today*, *Bulatlat*, *Mindanews*, and *Pinoy Weekly*, and progressive and militant campus newspapers (Tuazon, 2007).

A loose alliance of progressive production groups, such as Kodao Productions, Southern Tagalog Exposure, May Day Productions, the Amado V. Hernandez Resource Center and CineKatipunan, focus on investigative reporting and critical documentaries that explore poverty, social injustice, political repression, human rights violations and other issues that affect marginalized groups. The Internet and mobile phone networks have become crucial for social movements and alternative media, and blogging provides the public with uncensored information not otherwise available, often in the form of breaking major news stories that later are picked up by the mainstream commercial press. In part, this is because blogging is economical and also offers a degree of anonymity that reduces risk. In addition, many social movement and alternative media groups are based in Manila, where they are largely protected from the violence plaguing the provinces.

When social movements want to publicize their work, their best option often is to use the existing commercial structures and lease out segments of airtime from local commercial stations, a practice known as 'block timing'. However, the practice can be risky, and many murdered media personnel were block timers. However, when it is critical of the status quo, block time programming echoes the country's strong tradition of advocacy journalism, and allows some media and media personalities to emerge and, consistent with the patron-client pattern, come to be seen as 'saviours of the people' (Rorie Fajardo, Personal Communication, 28 July 2010). This helps to explain the violence against provincial radio commentators who individually challenge traditional patronage systems, becoming a new form of modern patron. It helps to explain also how the power of media becomes invested in individual figures rather than a collective right to communication.

Thus, for the most part, media produced by social movement or 'political society' actors in the Philippines exist mainly online, or maintain a low profile through the circulation of independent publications or films through informal networks. Whilst in a number of nations in the global South there is an increasing demand for grassroots access to media, often through emergent community radio movements, there have been only weak calls for this type of grassroots access, especially through broadcast media, in the Philippines. The commercial media environment combined with a system of political clientelism mean that media access is not widely conceptualized as a communication right. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that many local communities struggle with day-to-day survival, especially since the 1997 financial crisis that decimated economies across Asia. Because those most affected are marginalized groups, such as indigenous

peoples and the poor, they are virtually ignored by the mainstream media and are unable to communicate their perspectives on problems, which as a result are not discussed publicly on a regular basis (Batario, 2004).

Attempts to develop non-profit community media in the provinces, independent of university and church networks or local government units, have been difficult at best, often unsuccessful and the target of attacks. The case of Radyo Cagayano, for example, demonstrates the destructive effects of the militarized environment on rural people's communication rights.

Radyo Cagayano

Radyo Cagayano was a small community radio station based in Baggao, Cagayan province, approximately 500 kilometres north of Manila. After four years of saving money to buy the necessary equipment, *Kagimungan*, the farmers' alliance in Cagayan, established the station in a small, collectively constructed building. The station received some assistance from the town mayor and congressional representatives of the leftist Bayan Muna party. From the start, the military claimed that the station had been set up to further the communist interests of the *Kagimungan*, a legally registered organization that had been branded a communist front (Personal Communications, Danilo Arao and Jose Torres, 8 July 2008).

In April 2005, the Manila-based independent production group, Kodao Productions, helped train the volunteers of Radyo Cagayano.[4] However, sometime before dawn on 2 July 2005, after only a few months of broadcasting, eight heavily armed, unidentified men wearing ski masks, combat boots and military fatigues entered the small station (ISIS, 2006). They bound and gagged the six staff members who were sleeping there prior to broadcasting an early morning mass, they poured gasoline on the equipment and set the place on fire. Although Radyo Cagayano was located less than 300 metres from the police station, it took the police more than three hours to respond (ISIS, 2006). The NUJP, on the basis of accounts by the radio station's staff, accused the army of carrying out the attack, since they were the only group known to have a motive (Reporters Without Borders, 2006).

After the attack, Kodao Productions, the NUJP and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) held a press conference condemning the attack, and received some coverage in the mainstream Philippine press. International groups, such as the Committee to Protect Journalists and the International Federation of Journalists, also released statements condemning the attack. However, there was no follow up and no charges were ever filed in the case. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case, but one in a series of attacks on local radio stations including in four other cities earlier the same year.

Radyo Cagayano is an example of media associated with 'political society', but there are also several non-commercial, non-governmental community radio stations that follow the development model and, in the Philippines, are linked into powerful networks such as the Catholic church, or find support by associating with local government units or

universities. These can be usefully conceptualized as development media associated with the pedagogical mission encompassed by Chatterjee's (2001) notion of 'civil society'.

'Civil society' and development-oriented media

The dominant non-profit Philippine community media model, the 'development communication' model and its 'development journalism' component, has a strong history in the Philippines. The College of Development Communication at the University of the Philippines Los Baños is home to one of the few academic programmes worldwide to focus on development communication. However, community media outlets under the development model are no longer as numerous in the Philippines as they once were, and the model itself is tainted by its history under Ferdinand Marcos, who used development communication for his own propaganda purposes (Batario, 2004; Librero, 2004; and Felix Librero, Personal Communication, 25 June 2008). My conversations and interviews with academics and NGO workers made clear that there are significant divisions within the practice of development communication; those aligned with sustainable and organic farming practices and those aligned with and funded by agribusiness ventures and big pesticide and fertilizer interests promoted by the government represent vastly different opinions about how to address rural poverty issues.

According to Felix Librero (2004: 2), a long-time communication development practitioner and faculty member of the University of the Philippines Los Baños, development-oriented community broadcasting involves 'people in the community in the generation, processing, dissemination, utilization and evaluation of information'. It is 'based on the assumption that people are not only the recipients of development efforts but are also the pioneers of development' (Librero, 2004: 2). Librero (2004: 6) argues that: 'the ultimate function of community radio is one of advocacy'. Development journalism is similarly 'purposive' in that it helps 'to bring about desirable change in groups (e.g. a nation) as well as individuals' (Jamias, 2007: 133). Nevertheless, this advocacy orientation can create problems with national broadcasters who fear loss of control, local powerbrokers or anti-government forces who may try to take control of community stations, and national leaders threatened by 'critical voices from some small hot-shot community radio station' (Librero, 2004:10). In addition, many development practitioners studiously avoid politics, arguing that political discussion muddies the practice of development and the ability to find common ground within controversial issues. One example is Felix Librero, who asserts: 'I always make it a point that I don't do politics. Let's talk about education. Let's talk about science and technology. Let's talk about rural development. Don't ask me about politics' (Personal Communication, 25 June 2008).

Despite radio's importance as the most prevalent communication medium in rural areas, many development-oriented community radio stations find it difficult to continue once funding is withdrawn. Writing in 2004, Librero notes that only about 5.9 per cent

of radio stations in the Philippines are non-commercial or government-owned, and that overall community broadcasting 'has not been a successful enterprise' (Librero, 2004: 21). While some development-oriented radio stations are still functioning, such as a few of those in the widely-cited Tambuli network, many have by necessity become affiliated with local government units, universities or churches for support. Librero (2004: 21) recommends that existing commercial broadcasters and institutions, such as universities, NGOs and people's organizations, should develop and promote more locally produced programming, an admittedly difficult task given the competition from the big commercial networks.

In the face of the power of commercial media, some media reformers in recent years have advocated for increases in civic or public journalism, which essentially means more attention to local affairs within the local or national commercial media.

Civic or public journalism

Civic or public journalism is primarily an initiative of the provincial commercial press and funded by foundations and corporations, promoting change while maintaining a commitment to journalistic 'objectivity' and 'detachment' (Santos, 2007: 10). Veteran Philippine journalist, media critic and author, Vergel Santos, has adapted civic journalism for the Philippine context from the United States Pew Center for Civic Journalism. Santos (2007) argues that civic journalism 'turns the news media into a catalyst for community action' by inspiring communities to examine the problems they face, realize their potential to enact change, and 'to take on official power, [and] remind it who the real power is … the people' (Santos, 2007: 15, 17). Rather than focusing on national or capital city events, the media practitioner is 'scaling down his territory to community size and refocusing his perspective on community interest' (Santos, 2007: 18). To do this, journalists must build trust by immersing themselves in communities; conduct community focus groups, informal conversations and citizen polls; widen their network of sources to include NGOs, people's organizations and other community stakeholders; and form alliances with other media to reduce costs and increase impact (Batario, 2004: 7–10). Public journalism must move beyond the frame of conflict and problems to what people are doing and can do to solve these problems, and demonstrate to people that 'they are not powerless … and that their voices matter' (Batario, 2004: 14).

As we have seen, efforts to use media to promote social change vary in the Philippines, clearly shaped by the range of both threats and opportunities available to 'civil society' and 'political society' actors. Social movement or 'alternative' media are most closely aligned with more radical calls for change from 'political society', and remain limited by financial constraints, the threat of violence and the lack of regulatory provisions for grassroots access to media. 'Civil society' efforts, on the other hand, tend to focus on improving the standards of journalism, promoting development-oriented media or pushing for civic or public journalism within the mainstream. This range of approaches is mirrored in the country's media reform efforts.

Media reform in the Philippines

The factors that have resulted in the troubling contemporary media landscape in the Philippines include its hyper-commercialism; the threats posed by militarism and the culture of impunity; a strong tradition of political clientelism; a lack of legal and regulatory provision for grassroots access to media; and the impact of US colonialism and imported notions of media professionalism and journalistic 'objectivity' that have undermined the historical importance of Filipino advocacy journalism. This landscape provides both the opportunities and constraints under which media practitioners and reformers work.

The most visible media reform groups in the Philippines emphasize individual journalists' rights to safety and to freedom of expression in the face of obvious concerns over the killings of journalists.[5] This is consistent with liberal prioritization of press freedom, offers opportunities for support from global press freedom groups and is aligned to Chatterjee's (2001) conception of 'civil society' in its desire to develop modern, professional forms of journalism. The struggle to get out from under the clientelistic system, in which journalism has been constrained as an autonomous institution, includes (in the Philippines as elsewhere) attempts to reduce corruption and promote professional values and the practices and institutions of self-regulation (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002). Reform advocates also have worked to decriminalize libel and prevent its use to intimidate journalists, and to pass a Freedom of Information Act, and a small group of media reform advocates is working to develop a non-governmental, non-profit, public service broadcaster. The role of media in the development of Philippine democracy is the primary concern of these reform groups, all of which conform to Chatterjee's (2001) notion of 'civil society'.

Working within the constraints they face, 'political society' actors call attention to structural problems with both mainstream media and Philippine society generally. While alternative media practitioners make up the bulk of this group, there is some overlap with more moderate, 'civil society' groups. The banner of the NUJP homepage, for example, notes that 'there can be no press freedom if journalists exist in conditions of corruption, poverty or fear', and the site features the violence against journalists as well as labour issues, such as efforts by media corporations to move permanent workers to less secure contract positions and to undermine unions.[6] The NUJP also highlights the issues faced by the country's poor more generally. The PCIJ specializes in the in-depth investigative reporting that is difficult for most news organizations, on issues such as poverty, corruption, the economic and political influence of powerful family clans and other structural issues that are at the root of many problems. These groups push for more mainstream media content that deals with the systemic problems facing the poor, and it is perhaps not surprising that both have been identified as 'enemies of the state'.

The push by a small but active group for a broader range of communication rights for marginalized groups is severely affected by the strength of commercialism, political clientelism and the levels of violence and impunity. This small group, exemplified by Kodao Productions and its efforts to establish Radyo Cagayano, is lobbying for recognition of the need for a third

sector of non-governmental, non-commercial media that would provide grassroots groups with media access and control over content. However, from time to time, these activities are restricted by the efforts of press freedom groups to promote journalistic professionalism. *Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas* (Association of Broadcasters of the Philippines) or KBP, for example, requires that broadcasters are trained and accredited before they are allowed to go on air. The intent is to prevent unethical behaviour by local 'pseudo' broadcasters, but it also prevents non-professionals from legally accessing the airwaves. The promotion of 'alternative' media and grassroots access will be a lengthy, uphill battle, not least because the general public does not conceptualize media access as a communication right.

Social movements, media and media reform in the Philippines

This study advances social movement theory and theories of alternative media in several ways. It contributes to a growing recognition of the distinctions and relationships between different groups seen traditionally as a unified civil society sector, and the media they produce or engage with. It responds to calls for greater attention to the threats as well as the opportunities faced by social movements and their media. It helps to broaden the discussion of social movements beyond the global North, and introduces political clientelism as a significant cultural constraint to the conceptualization of a set of communication rights that moves beyond press freedom and the individual rights of the journalist.

The threats to both safety and livelihoods are significant, especially for more radical or leftist activists who at any time may be branded enemies of the state and become more vulnerable to attack. Violence or repression from military, paramilitary or other local powerbrokers disproportionately affects provincial journalists and activists pushing for systemic level change, such as land reform, labour issues, an end to corruption and other concerns of the poor. There are threats also from the commercial nature of the media system, and a political economy of competition that results in low pay for workers who, in turn, are more vulnerable to the scourge of systemic corruption. The emphasis on media sensationalism and scandal tends to stereotype and scapegoat marginalized groups, such as Muslims living on the southern island of Mindanao. The violence and commercialism are compounded by a history of media conceptualized as the tools of powerful people wielded for their own political ends. All of this results in a set of significant obstacles to strong journalism and the growth of a movement for community communication rights.

Within these constraints, the trend towards civic or public journalism, and the 'dev-comm' tradition work to highlight the perspectives of those rarely heard in mainstream media, but responsibility for these productions remains in the hands of the expert journalist or the development practitioner. The social movement media that struggle for change do so with very little recognition or support. There is no organized movement to re-conceptualize media as a public service or to lobby for a 'third sector' of non-commercial, non-state media. In fact, the push for journalistic professionalism results in a significant

level of anxiety around the concept of 'advocacy journalism' or the use of media as a tool to advocate for marginalized groups.

A more complex conceptualization of 'civil society' and 'political society' helps our understanding of the state's role in exacerbating differences between these groups and resisting the push for systemic change. Threats and opportunities are not shared equally by civil society organizations and political society groups. This is evident in the anxiety expressed by some groups over their potential to be labelled communist front organizations, in the push for professionalism, in the tendency among development practitioners to avoid politics and, despite its historical importance, in the widespread critique among press groups of the notion of advocacy journalism, even by those promoting civic or public journalism. The global prioritization of press freedom and freedom of expression provides a means of networking with influential international press advocacy groups to provoke government action, but keeps the discussion focused on press freedom at the expense of a broader set of communication rights. Those civil society organizations that prioritize press freedom have more opportunity to gain concessions from the state and foreign funding agencies, since the state's response to international pressure is often to acknowledge the problem and at least make a show of responding. For more radical political society groups, however, the threats are often so high as to discourage too forceful a push for structural reforms, and mean that they receive few or no concessions from the state.

The case study in this chapter helps us to understand how social movements and their media are limited by, yet function within, this hyper-commercialized media environment with no public service tradition, which is characterized by a culture of violence, impunity and political clientelism. However, rather than defining the scene by the poverty of its journalism, or the lack of commitment to a broad set of communication rights, I hope this chapter brings to light the vision, tenacity and bravery of those in the Philippines who put to good use the opportunities that do exist, as they work to reform their media system within a significant set of constraints.

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Notes

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2 These include Palestinian protest in the West Bank, Iranian protests in 1977–1979 and Black protest in South Africa.

3 http://www.cmfr-phil.org/map/index_inline.html

4 At one point, Kodao Productions itself was branded a front for the communist movement, a charge it quickly and successfully denied, by pointing out that the man who had testified to 'being part of Kodao Productions since 1989' was unknown to any of its members, and that the production group had not been formed until 2001.

5 The most high profile groups pressing for media reform in the Philippines are the NUJP, the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), the PCIJ, the Philippine Press Institute (PPI) and some smaller groups such as the Center for Community Journalism and Development (CCJD). These groups are allied under the Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ), an umbrella organization that works to support the families of slain journalists and journalists facing legal battles such as libel cases.

6 http://www.nujp.org/