

# **The Unhealed Wound; Official and Unofficial Journalisms, Misinformation and Tribal Truth.**

**[PROOF TEXT]**

CITE AS PUBLISHED VERSION: Majin, G. (2023). The Unhealed Wound: Official and Unofficial Journalisms, Misinformation and Tribal Truth. In: Fowler-Watt, K., McDougall, J. (eds) The Palgrave Handbook of Media Misinformation. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-11976-7\\_16](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-11976-7_16)

“The division in him was a sorrow and a torment, and he became accustomed to it only as one gets used to an unhealed and frequently reopened wound.”

Borís Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago.

## **Introduction**

We live in a divided world. Looking around, we see two rival tribes confronting each other, each with its own facts and opinions. It is a world of “Official” and “Unofficial” journalisms, in which each tribe dismisses the narratives of the other as misinformation, disinformation and fake news. It is as if we have stumbled into an epistemological maze - a place of darkness. How did we get here? How do we get out?

This chapter argues that the word ‘journalism’ does not refer to a single, unchanging thing. Different journalisms emerge at different times to serve the dominant ideology of the age. For example, during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Victorian Liberal Journalism developed to support the ideology of Victorian Liberal Democracy. Journalism’s role was to help create an informed citizenry. Truth was understood as a process of enquiry in which different views confronted each other in free and open debate. Journalism’s methodology stressed impartiality and objectivity. During the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century an ideological shift took place. The Baby Boomer generation rejected the imperfections inherent in Victorian Liberalism and evolved an alternative, more idealistic ideology. Boomer Journalism saw itself as having ethical-political responsibilities, and truth came to be understood as the consensus of people with shared ethical-political values and goals. Journalism’s methodology shifted to the creation and management of narratives intended to help create a better, more socially-just world.

However, the 2020s is a period of renewed ideological flux as the Boomer consensus unravels and is confronted by alternative ideologies. Boomer Journalism, which has become “Official Journalism”, finds itself challenged by “Unofficial Journalism”. Since they rest on radically different understandings of the nature of truth and knowledge, each considers itself to be genuine and its opponent ‘fake’. Thus, ‘fake news’ and ‘misinformation’ have become tribal labels to stigmatise the journalism, ideology and epistemology of the other. This chapter draws on insights from generational cohort theory, and is offered as a framework which can be used to understand the schism of journalism and public discourse in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It does not provide a quick way out of the maze, but it does, at least, offer a lantern and compass to help us see where we are.

### **A Galaxy of Journalisms.**

In his 1956 classic *Four Theories of the Press*, Frederick Siebert argued that there is no single thing called journalism. Instead, different journalisms evolved to meet the demands of their societies. As Siebert put it (1963, 1-2) “the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates.” However, Siebert’s greatest insight was epistemic, not socio-political. Siebert recognised that journalism always seeks to communicate truth, however, different ideologies understand truth differently. In other words, what counts as legitimate knowledge changes. For example, Siebert explained that for most of human history, people had lived in authoritarian societies in which knowledge of the official narratives (i.e. knowing the correct things to believe, say and do) was more important than knowing whether those things were objectively true. Hence, for most of human history, truth was official truth and legitimate knowledge was official knowledge. Siebert explained that these were produced by (op cit, 2),

“a few wise men who were in a position to guide and direct their fellows. Thus truth was thought to be centered near the center of power. The press therefore functioned from the top down. The rulers of the time used the press to inform the people of what the rulers thought they should know and the policies the rulers thought they should support”.

Siebert’s thesis is well supported by historical evidence. For example, in 1662 the authoritarian government of Charles II introduced a regime of censorship in England requiring all printed material to be licensed. The Act explained that (Charles II, 1662), “many evil disposed persons have been encouraged to print and

sell heretical, schismatical, blasphemous, seditious and treasonable Bookes, Pamphlets and Papers”. Censorship was therefore required to stop the spread of misinformation, or as the Act put it, "any Doctrine or Opinion" contrary to the official doctrine of the "Church or the Government". The Act left England with only one newspaper; *The Intelligencer*, published by the country's official censor Roger L'Estrange. Unofficial narratives were not tolerated.

### **Victorian Liberal Journalism. Making Truth Fashionable and Profitable.**

A radically different type of journalism began to emerge in England during the 1820s to support a new ideology and system of government. Victorian Liberalism grew out of the values of the Anglo-American Enlightenment and stressed the primacy of the individual. Ideological shift brought epistemic change and a new understanding of the nature of truth and knowledge. As Siebert puts it (op cit 3),

“Man is no longer conceived of as a dependent being to be led and directed, but rather as a rational being able to discern between truth and falsehood... Truth is no longer conceived of as the property of power. Rather, the right to search for truth is one of the inalienable natural rights of man. And where does the press fit into the scheme? The press is conceived of as a partner in the search for truth.”

Journalistic truth became a quasi-scientific, quasi-judicial concept – reasonable belief supported by evidence. John Stuart Mill, the most famous theorist of Victorian Liberalism, argued that the new epistemology would contribute to the "mental well-being of mankind" by helping to "put an end to the evils of religious or philosophical sectarianism" which had cursed previous ages. Mill famously explained (2011, 97) that the greatest evil was the old tribal, narrative-led way of knowing that omitted uncomfortable facts and led audiences to pre-determined, partisan conclusions,

“Not the violent conflict between parts of the truth, but the quiet suppression of half of it, is the formidable evil: there is always hope when people are forced to listen to both sides; it is when they attend only to one that errors harden into prejudices, and truth itself ceases to have the effect of truth, by being exaggerated into falsehood.”

The role of Victorian Liberal Journalism should be understood therefore, not as an active process of discovering objective truth (which was viewed as impossible),

but rather as a negative process of restraining the numerous cognitive biases and prejudices to which fallible and frail humans are susceptible. During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a journalistic methodology was developed mimicking that of scientific experiment, or a legal trial. Techniques such as the separation of fact from opinion were designed to train journalists to become impartial enquirers. Another epistemic tool valued by Victorian Liberal Journalism was impartiality – ensuring that the other side of the argument was honestly and fully represented. As the American historian Carl Becker summarised (1958, 38), the epistemology of Victorian Liberalism was based on the belief that,

“the sole method of arriving at the truth in the long run is by the free competition of opinion in the open market... since men will invariably differ in their opinions, each man must be permitted to urge, freely and even strenuously, his own opinion, provided he accords to others the same right... from this mutual toleration and comparison of diverse opinions the one that seems the most rational will emerge and be generally accepted.”

According to this epistemology, misinformation and fake news can be understood as partisan narrative-led reporting that omits opposing views and recklessly mixes fact and opinion.

One of the first newspaper editors to supply accurate, truthful news, was Thomas Barnes who edited the London *Times* between 1817 and 1841. It was Barnes, as one biographer notes who (Britannica, 2021), "established its reputation and founded a tradition of independent journalism." Barnes paved the way for his successor John Thadeus Delane who embraced the latest technology and continued to turn truthful impartial journalism into a profitable business. For example, by 1847 *The Times* possessed the most advanced steam press in Europe, capable of printing six thousand papers per hour (Joslin, 2018). But it was *The Times*' single-minded pursuit of journalistic truth that attracted readers, with the paper's leader writer Robert Lowe famously declaring in 1852 that,

“The duty of the journalist is the same as that of the historian – to seek out truth, above all things, and to present to his readers not such things as statecraft would wish them to know, but the truth as near as he can attain it.” (Hodgins, 1943)

The formula of reporting different points of view fairly and honestly, instead of supplying a single narrative, proved popular with a wide readership among all classes. As the rival *St. James's Chronicle* reported in 1831 (Simkin, 2020),

“For every one copy of *The Times* that is purchased for the usual purposes, nine we venture to say are purchased to be lent to the wretched characters who, being miserable, look to political changes for an amelioration of their condition.”

It was a virtuous circle. *The Times*' growing circulation attracted revenue from advertisers seeking to reach the paper's audience. Thus, the new epistemology helped liberate journalism from its 18<sup>th</sup> Century business model, one heavily dependent on patronage and state subsidy (Horne, 1980).

In the US, it was not until after the trauma of the civil war and reconstruction eras, that a new cultural landscape began to emerge and with it new journalisms. Melville Stone, who launched the *Chicago Daily News* in 1876, was one of the first American editors to embrace the epistemology and methodology of Victorian Liberal Journalism and make it profitable. Stone (2017) described the new approach as being like a “witness in court, bound to ‘tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth’.” Adolph Ochs printed his famous declaration of principles in *The New York Times* in 1896, promising to

“give the news impartially, without fear or favor, regardless of party, sect or interests involved; to make of the columns of *The New York Times* a forum for the consideration of all questions of public importance, and to that end to invite intelligent discussion from all shades of opinion.” (Ochs, 1896),

This was the “New Journalism” – truthful, impartial news which was to become the dominant model in American journalism for the next hundred years. It saw off competition from proto-tabloid “yellow” or “muckraking” journalism which combined sensationalism with moral and political crusading. What was distinctive about Victorian Liberal Journalism was not that it possessed a magical power to know and communicate objective truth, but that its driving *motive* was the search for truth regardless of the consequences. As Och's biographer explains, telling the truth was

“his intent, not always his accomplishment, for who attains his ideal in this frustrated world? But it is a lordly intent, one of the highest goals of human endeavor... It is, flatly, a goal no mere mortal has ever attained; but this man strove for it.” (Johnson 1946, 147)

However, the single-minded pursuit of truth is not the only motive that can be used to guide journalism.

### **The Rise of Boomer Journalism.**

Cohort Theory has become popular as a research methodology in the social sciences (Norval. 2005, 2), but is curiously understudied in the field of journalism. Cohort theory was pioneered by the German sociologist Karl Mannheim who argued that membership of a particular generation,

“endows the individuals sharing in [it] with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experiences, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action.”  
(1952, 291)

The boomer generation is the cohort *par excellence* because its members are widely seen (Phillipson et al. 2007, 3) as having “distinctive experiences that set them apart from previous generations”. For example, the boomers were more idealistic and Utopian-minded than their parents and grandparents. Writing in 1965, the American scholar Allan Bloom noted that the boomers had grown up during an age of extraordinary affluence which led them to see themselves as a new type of “aristocracy”. These young people, he said

“have never experienced the anxieties about simple physical well-being that their parents experienced during the depression. They have been raised in comfort and with the expectation of ever-increasing comfort. Hence they are largely indifferent to it: they are not proud of having acquired it and... because they do not particularly care about it, they are more willing to give it up in the name of grand ideals.” (Bloom, 1988, 49)

Above all, the boomers saw themselves as a unique generation, qualitatively different to any that had previously existed. This sense of boomer exceptionalism is captured by Charles Reich in his 1970 best-seller *The Greening of America*. In it, Reich dismisses Victorian Liberalism as an outmoded philosophy of denial, duty and responsibility which has crushed man’s soul and created a mass of alienated people unable to enjoy life. As Reich put it (1970. 131).

“Imprisoned in masks, they endure an unutterable loneliness. Their lives are stories of disappointed hopes, hopes disintegrating into bitterness and

envy... Death is with them already, in their sullen boredom, their unchanging routines, their minds closed to new ideas and new feelings.”

The baby boomers saw themselves, writes Francis Beckett (2010, ix) “as pioneers of a new world – freer, fresher, fairer and infinitely more fun.” It was a new world that required a new type of journalism and a new epistemology.

Boomer Journalism first appeared as the underground journalism of the counter-culture which flourished during the 1960s. The media scholar Aniko Bodroghkozy summarizes (2001, 11),

“Those who wrote for the underground newspapers saw themselves not as observers of youth activism and lifestyles but as participants... Journalistic notions of objectivity, distance, balance and the like had no place in underground press articles, which were advocacy to the extreme and often not overtly concerned with accuracy of detail.”

This was journalism based on the boomer way of knowing in which truth was understood inter-subjectively as the consensus of the boomer tribe. During the 1980s and 90s, the baby boomers moved into senior editorial positions and imported their more committed, advocacy style of journalism into the mainstream to reflect their own values and assumptions. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it was increasingly taken for granted that journalism should acknowledge its ethical-political responsibilities and play a part in helping to create a more socially-just world. For example, in 1997, Martin Bell the BBC’s Chief Washington correspondent, famously broke with the Victorian Liberal tradition and called for a new “journalism of attachment”

“In place of the dispassionate practices of the past I now believe in what I call the journalism of attachment. By this I mean a journalism that cares as well as knows; that is aware of its responsibilities; and will not stand neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, the victim and the oppressor.”(1997, 8),

The methodology of Boomer Journalism showed little respect for the Victorian Liberal distinction between fact and opinion. Indeed, deliberately ignoring it became increasingly fashionable. The growing colonisation of journalism by opinion was noted by the historian Eric Alterman who coined the word ‘punditocracy’ to describe it,

“The punditocracy is a tiny group of highly visible political pontificators who make their living offering 'inside political opinions and forecasts' in the elite national media. And it is their debate, rather than any semblance of a democratic one, that determines the parameters of political discourse in the nation today.” (1999, 4-5)

Alterman noted that late 20<sup>th</sup> Century journalism was characterised by an explanatory turn, an "explosion of the punditocracy" which was generating a self-sustaining feedback loop in which news organisations created pseudo-facts, or factinions (Majin, 2021), by reporting the fact that a pundit, or other public figure, had stated an opinion. It was, said Alterman, a process that was creating a world of narratives (op cit, 8) “largely divorced from the travails that can make everyday life in the United States such a struggle.”

### **The Boomer Way of Knowing.**

The changing understanding of truth was buttressed by numerous books and papers produced by the boomer generation of academics. For example, in 1972 the American sociologist Gaye Tuchman published the influential, ‘Objectivity as Strategic Ritual’ in which she mocked Victorian Liberal Journalism and its methodology. “Newspapermen,” she wrote (1972, 660), “invoke their objectivity almost the way a Mediterranean peasant might wear a clove of garlic around his neck to ward off evil spirits.” By the late 1970s this truthophobic view had become dominant. For example, a much-read 1978 textbook described Victorian Liberal journalists as (Schudson, 1978, 6) “naïve empiricists” who believed that “facts are not human statements about the world but aspects of the world itself.” To the boomer generation of scholars, this assault on the epistemology of Victorian Liberal Journalism seemed liberating, radical and progressive. However, by unpicking the web of restraint that the Victorians had so carefully woven, the boomers truthophobic turn was also a return to pre-Victorian and pre-Enlightenment ways of knowing. The boomers had rediscovered narrative-led news and replaced their parents’ “naïve empiricism” with an intoxicating cocktail of “naïve relativism” and “naïve intuitionism”.

Alongside boomer epistemology and Boomer Journalism, came a new boomer interpretation of history. From the 1970s onwards, revisionist histories of journalism began to appear in which epistemological considerations were stripped out and replaced by sociological and political perspectives. For example, in 1988



James Curran and Jean Seaton produced an influential textbook in which they stated that their mission was not merely to re-examine the history of journalism, but to “stand it on its head” (1997, 9). Traditional scholarship was labelled the “Whig history of journalism” and described as nothing more than a “political mythology”. Curran and Seaton replaced it with a new political mythology – the boomer history of journalism. The new, revisionist narrative assumed that journalism *ought* to be a force for radical social change, not a tool to assist the search for truth. The concept of truth is barely mentioned by Curran and Seaton. When it does appear, it is dismissed as an “abstract and elevated principle” which “may seem a little incongruous to contemporary ears” (ibid, 24)

The rise of Boomer Journalism and the boomer way of knowing were accompanied however by a disturbing decline in audience trust. Citizens responded to the growing fashion for narrative-led journalism with what the media scholar Yariv Tsfati described as “media skepticism”. It was, said Tsfati (2003, 67), the feeling that, “journalists are not fair or objective in their reports about society and that they do not always tell the whole story.” According to Tsfati, the rise of scepticism correlated with the retreat from impartiality (ibid), “In the past three decades” he wrote, “communication researchers have become preoccupied with the increasingly negative attitudes audiences hold about the news media.” The same worrying trend was noted by the British journalist Andrew Marr the following year when he wrote, "Our problem is less direct lying than slimy misrepresentation" (2004, 379) The modern requirement to make the facts fit the desired narrative was, he said dolefully, creating a journalism of deception (ibid), “How often” he asked, “has the reporter gone through a long interview and stripped out a few words, junking all context and balance, to produce a deliberately misleading effect?” Successive opinion polls during the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century confirm the relentless rise of scepticism. The Edelman Trust Barometer, which carries out annual assessments, finds most people now believe that professional journalists are, “purposely trying to mislead people by saying things they know are false.” Its authors conclude,

“This is the era of information bankruptcy... We’ve been lied to by those in charge, and media sources are seen as politicized and bias. The result is a lack of quality information and increased divisiveness.” (Edelman 2021)

The Guardian newspaper's Stephen Marche writes that the collapse of trust in journalism points to a wider breakdown of the social contract in recent decades, “The United States has never faced an institutional crisis quite like the one it is

facing now. Trust in the institutions was much higher during the 1960s.” Marche adds,

“The Watergate scandal, in hindsight, was evidence of the system working. The press reported presidential crimes; Americans took the press seriously. The political parties felt they needed to respond to the reported corruption. You could not make one of those statements today with any confidence.”  
(Marche, 2022)

### **Official and Unofficial Journalisms.**

The global financial crisis of 2008, it may be argued, signalled the end of the Boomer Era. A complex matrix of changing demographic, economic, social and geo-political factors fuelled demand for a change in ideology to fit the new, harsher reality of life in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. These forces are reflected in the rise of Trumpism and other forms of populism described by the historian Joel Kotkin (2020, 117) as a modern “peasant rebellion” driven by “suspicion among the lower classes that the people who control their lives... do not have their interests at heart.” These forces, combined with the rise of the internet and the availability of new platforms and channels of communication, have led to the establishment of two epistemic universes, each with their own facts and narratives. Boomer Journalism has become Official Journalism which tends to understand truth as official truth – the consensus of experts with the same ethical-political values and goals. Official Journalism sees its role, increasingly, as protecting society from dangerous misinformation and misleading ideas. However, Official Journalism finds itself challenged by Unofficial Journalism which tends to understand truth as a never-ending process in which opposing views confront each in free and open debate. The journalism scholar Kristoffer Holt (2018, 51) writes that there has been a “remarkable surge” in the popularity of Unofficial Journalism outlets during the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Unofficial journalists, says Holt, accuse Official journalists of concealing or distorting information and of teaming up with “political elites”. Holt observes that Unofficial Journalism sees its role as adding back into public discourse the information, facts and opinions that Official Journalism suppresses. Therefore,

“epistemologically, they often pose a challenge to mainstream media, since they implicitly, and often explicitly, challenge mainstream media’s “fake news” these alternative media channels need to be analyzed in the light of

their position as a perceived corrective of traditional media and of constrained public discourse.” (op cit, 52)

This analysis is supported by the writing of many Unofficial Journalists, for example Steve McCann who writes (2021),

“a large and growing share of the American people assumes that virtually all news as presented by the current mainstream media is either a fabrication or an exaggeration to promote an authoritarian agenda.”

Some commentators question the independence of Official Journalism and draw attention to changing patterns of media ownership. For example, the media scholar Merja Myllylahti (2017) points out that Official Journalism is converging “beyond ownership” – i.e., collapsing into a vertical oligopoly. This means that news organisations, social media platforms and global big tech companies are increasingly owned by the same billionaires and private equity firms. The investigative reporter Tim Schwab suggests we may be witnessing a return of pre-Victorian journalistic business models based on patronage. He describes how the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has gifted hundreds of millions of dollars to news organisations including the *BBC*, *The Guardian*, *The Financial Times*, *Medium* and *Le Monde* (Schwab, 2020). Schwab says that the precise extent of Gates’ funding is unknown. However, it touches all aspects of Official Journalism including training and education,

“Gates-backed think tanks turn out media fact sheets and newspaper opinion pieces. Magazines and scientific journals get Gates money to publish research and articles. Experts coached in Gates-funded programs write columns that appear in media outlets from *The New York Times* to *The Huffington Post*, while digital portals blur the line between journalism and spin.”

Journalism’s new subsidized business model also features a prominent role for government funding, especially in Europe. For example, the British journalist and author Laura Dodsworth writes that the Covid lockdowns of the early 2020s triggered a dramatic decline in traditional advertising revenues. In the UK, it was the state that stepped in to make good the shortfall. Did this, she asks (2021), lead to a less than critical acceptance of official government narratives? Others express anxiety over Official Journalism’s independence and point to generous payments made by the Chinese Communist Party to Western news organizations to encourage them to “tell China’s story well”. As the academic Louisa Lim writes,

“China is trying to reshape the global information environment with massive infusions of money – funding paid-for advertorials, sponsored journalistic coverage and heavily massaged positive messages.” (2018)

The radically different narratives offered by Official and Unofficial journalisms during the Covid pandemic vividly illustrate the sundering of society into two rival ideological and epistemic camps each with their own understanding of truth. For example, writing about the efficacy of the new generation of Covid vaccines, the BBC’s Health Correspondent Nick Triggles says,

“As well as reducing the risk of catching the virus, the vaccines also reduce the risk of an infected individual spreading the virus... The ability to stop serious illness has saved countless lives as societies have opened up.” (2021)

Triggles quotes researchers who believe, "vaccines saved 157,000 lives in England alone, and more than 470,000 across the 33 countries in Europe." Triggles concludes that the Covid vaccines are a "marvel of modern science". However, what is absent from his account is any mention that the vaccines sometimes cause harm. To hear this voice, it is necessary to climb over the epistemic fence into the world of Unofficial Journalism. Here we find an entirely different set of facts and opinions. Neville Hodgkinson, a former science correspondent at *The Sunday Times* draws attention to the "high number of vaccine-attributed deaths" and "and adverse reactions" including "the frequency of myocarditis in young adult males." Based on this, he concludes (2021),

“The Covid vaccine should never have been released to the public... Politicians, regulatory bodies, media, individual physicians, so many are culpable of the most terrible crime ever committed on humanity.”

American journalism is similarly divided. MSNBC’s Michael Cohen offers the official narrative (2021), “The progress that has been made on vaccinations is one of the most extraordinary accomplishments in human history”. Cohen continues that, “No major or minor side effects are being reported in any significant numbers. Moreover, the vaccines are extraordinarily successful.” Cohen attacks those who dissent from this narrative warning, “we must not let ourselves be distracted by the know-nothing contingent”. The unofficial narrative is, however, very different. For example, under a headline claiming, “Covid Vaccines Have Killed At Least 140,000 people,” Vasko Kohlmayer (2021) points to the significant number of adverse reactions recorded by the US government's Vaccine Adverse Event

Reporting System (VAERS). Based on the VAERS data, he concludes, “By claiming the lives of so many people in such a short time, the Covid vaccines are the deadliest pharmaceuticals ever released into wide circulation.”

### **Intolerance and Censorship.**

The divided journalistic ecosystem of the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century is characterised by mutual intolerance, simmering hostility and growing calls for censorship. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue, which is funded by a consortium of social media, global tech and government agencies<sup>[1]</sup> argues that dissent from official narratives is part of a growing problem because “the boundaries between disinformation, hate speech and harassment, conspiracy theories, and extremist mobilisation have become increasingly blurred.” The report continues, "hate, extremism and disinformation" should all be seen as part of a “hybrid threat where anti-establishment street protests, established extremist movements and conspiracy theories opportunistically align.” The report calls for "radical new approaches" to combat unofficial narratives and recommends the introduction of censorship in the form of, “robust requirements for algorithmic auditing” to block “extremists” and other “anti-government actors” from posting material online. (ISD 2021, 5-7)

The conflict between Official and Unofficial Journalisms is usually framed as an ethical-political clash. However, this obscures a deeper epistemic clash which rests on how truth is understood. Official Journalism, drawing on the Boomer Epistemology, understands legitimate knowledge as official truth – the consensus of benevolent experts in positions of authority. Unofficial Journalism, seeking inspiration in the tradition of Victorian Liberalism, sees legitimate knowledge as the responsibility of each individual. The wider epistemic problem is that it is impossible to agree what is true, until there is agreement about the nature of truth. However, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, no such epistemic consensus exists. Instead, what we see is a clash of tribal epistemologies and ideologies. As the psychologist Cory Clark shrewdly observes, what we accept as truth is, more than we care to admit, a function of our tribal membership “belief is guided like iron filings around a magnetic field by the forces of tribalism.” (2020, 3) The questions posed by the existence of two rival epistemic universes are ultimately therefore tribal (Miller 2014, 304; Clark et al 2019). What our fractured journalism is really asking is; whose narratives do you believe, ours or theirs? Whose side are you on, ours or theirs?

## **Discussion.**

This chapter argues that early 21<sup>st</sup> Century journalism increasingly resembles pre-Victorian journalism. It is partisan, tribal and more concerned with pursuing ethical-political goals than searching for truth regardless of consequence. The existence of Official and Unofficial journalisms, each with a different understanding of what constitutes legitimate knowledge and truth, is a world in which the labels ‘fake news’ and ‘misinformation’ are used to signal tribal membership and stigmatise the journalism, ideology and epistemology of the other. What we see in the 2020s is, increasingly, the spectacle of one tribe attempting to impose its narratives on the other. It is a situation that raises a number of tough questions, for example, What should people believe? Should citizens be encouraged to listen to both sides of the argument, or prevented from doing so for their own good? What sort of journalism will dominate in the years ahead? and what will this tell us about the nature of our society? Was the era of impartial Victorian Liberal Journalism simply a temporary departure from mankind’s default mode of communication – the official, tribal narrative? This chapter offers a historical and conceptual map to help students of journalism, and the wider public, understand where we are and how we got here.

The sociologist Herbert Spencer (1898, 451) likened a healthy “body politic” to a healthy “living body”. Following Spencer’s metaphor, a divided society can be compared to an injured body – one with a painful, gaping wound. The increasingly rancorous disagreement over whose narratives are true and whose are misinformation, cannot be seen in isolation. It is symptomatic of a wider ideological, epistemic and tribal schism which shows little sign of healing.

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[1] The Institute's funders include; The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Facebook, Google, YouTube, Microsoft, the UK Home Office & the US State Department (ISD 2021 b)