Ontologies of Journalism in the Global South

"My work is the product of my circumstances. It was woven in response to the societal demands that have challenged me in this half a century of intellectual labor" (Marqués de Melo, 2011, p. 302)

Different, But the Same: How the Global South Is Challenging the Hegemonic Epistemologies and Ontologies of Westernized/ Western-Centric Journalism Studies

Bruce Mutsvairo, Eddy Borges-Rey, Saba Bebawi, Mireya Márquez-Ramírez, Claudia Mellado, Hayes Mawindi Mabweazara, Marton Demeter, Michal Głowacki, Hanan Badr, and Daya Thussu

For many years, scholars have accepted the pedagogic, practical, and theoretical universalization of journalism standards. Benchmarks on what journalists, teachers, or researchers should do in their day-to-day activities were set in the West. While a small group of scholars questioned or openly challenged this philosophy, many acquiesced. However, the era of sustained Western discourse dominance seems over if unremitting calls for re-theorization are anything to go by (Glück, 2018; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2021; Mohammed, 2021).

The purpose of this Invited Forum is to add to the growing calls for reconceptualization of the field and to recognize the importance of context in defining, directing, and determining journalism's role in society (Curran & Park, 2000; Mutsvairo et al., 2020; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014; Wasserman & de Beer, 2009). With this in mind, we put together perspectives from established journalism scholars working in various regions of the world seeking to interrogate epistemologies and ontologies of the field from a non-Western perspective. What possible new pathways are emerging in journalism research in the Global South? How can knowledge emerging from the Global South be integrated into central disciplinary debates internationally? What lessons can the Global North and Global South learn from each other?

High-caliber scholars such as James Carey, Cliff Christians, John Nerone, Ed Lambeth, and Ted Glasser issued fervent criticism to the 1956 Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's "The Four Theories of the Press" due to its ethnocentric perspectives (Siebert et al., 1956). However, almost six decades later, scholars from and researching on the Global South are still challenging ethnocentric views in our academic fields, including journalism studies, political communication, and media studies.

Since the professionalization of journalism, and the subsequent proliferation of journalism schools in the 1920s, and despite the efforts of colleagues from the United States and Western Europe who are also interested in decentering the prolonged, systematic homogenization of journalism ontologies and epistemologies, there has been a pervasive and unquestioned imposition of Western views, approaches, and priorities in both scholarship and practice. This special issue focuses on bringing to the fore themes that are often dismissed with paternalistic condescension by colleagues with privileged positions or only considered because of political correctness.

The protracted and tedious cry that journalism is in crisis is an example of such homogenization. The decadent business model, which granted a monopoly of news conglomerates of the Global North a position of privilege and power, is no longer sustainable, but this does not mean that journalism is in crisis in the rest of the world. For example, journalism still fulfills an essential role as the voice of the public and the provider of information for underrepresented rural communities in many parts of the world. The idea of "journalism in crisis" is then uncritically transferred and globally assimilated, further complicating the media ecology of regions in the Global South. In what ways is the community media in India, China, the indigenous media of the Amazon, or Africa in crisis?

Current scholarship continues to provide an incomplete and inaccurate theorization of the many journalisms of our world, and this homogenization drives research agendas that are largely irrelevant for scholars outside of the western context. For example, the research on journalistic objectivity, democratic pluralism, business models, and digital innovation continues to be incomplete.

It can no doubt be argued that the underlying principles of journalism are somewhat unified globally, as is reflected through codes of ethics across the world, which agree on universals such as accuracy, impartiality, truthfulness, and accountability. These common elements of journalism, while universal, can often be challenged in certain contexts that are affected by political, social, ideological, historic, economic, and cultural influences (Deuze, 2002; Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Zelizer, 2005). Yet, the study and practice of journalism have been traditionally conducted through a universal Western lens as a "global standard" that provides status and recognition. In addition, journalists in the Global South are taught to adhere to this universal "right way" of doing journalism. In recent years, the problem with such an assumption has been notable, and documenting the intricacies of journalism practice within the Global South are strongly conditioned by the realities of the local context. The assumption that there is one way of doing journalism is problematic and fails to reflect on what is happening on the ground where regions in the Global South are countering global normative practices of journalism with local news epistemologies.

The importance of history, tradition, and how they shape journalism cultures in the South cannot and should not be ignored. Global perspectives should be intrinsic in every step of journalism practice: the sources chosen, how information is sourced, how the story is framed, and how the language, tone, and rhetorical devices are employed. Every culture of journalism is unique. Even within the Global South, although there are commonalities, every region has its own cultural context that has

shaped how journalism is performed in that space. Journalism studies need to reflect this by analyzing and understanding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for different parts of the Global South. The articles in this issue shed light on these issues.

Papers in this Invited Forum trace the development of journalism studies from a methodological, theoretical, and epistemological perspective. They argue not only for the de-essentialization of the field but also for doubling efforts to recognize the contribution of journalism scholars based in the Global South. It will add further knowledge to this increasingly multifaceted discipline, including the importance of customs, traditions, and cultures in defining and shaping local and regional journalism.

Moving On, but Not So Fast: Old Problems, New Topics, and the Continuing Challenges of Journalism Research in Latin America

Years before the famous McBride report was drafted, Latin American communication scholars actively protested the profound inequalities between the northern and southern hemispheres concerning the production and exchange of information and knowledge in the field of journalism and media. They were first in denouncing their dictatorial regimes and the collusive, complicit media oligarchies of their day (Beltrán, 1970; Dorfman & Mattelart, 1972; Pasquali, 1972; Schmucler, 1972, 1975; Verón, 1971).

Among their concerns were society's right to information in the wake of media concentration and external and internal domination, the uncritical implementation of Western journalism formats, practices, and paradigms, and the need for a new epistemological turn in journalism research and theory beyond the replication of American and European theories of communication (Beltrán Salmón, 2005; Pasquali, 1983; Torrico Villanueva, 2009; Marqués de Melo, 1988). To question their day's dominant research paradigms and epistemologies, this "vigorous intellectual insurgency" (Beltrán Salmón, 2005, p. 31) proposed a critical research agenda for the region and left us with a rich legacy of radical scholarship and an enduring endeavor to challenge the theoretical and methodological ethnocentrism that still tends to prevail in journalism research.

Today, things appear to be improving, albeit modestly, regarding the visibility of Latin American journalism research. While studies on media and journalism can be traced to the early days of the region's field (Mellado, 2012), it is only recently that English-language scientific journals published journalism research *about* Latin America as studies have taken off, increased in volume, and diversified across a vast range of topics and countries. This increase produces a more geographically diverse field than it was five decades ago.

Recent topics addressed in this scholarship *about* Latin America appear to show similar realities and challenges that journalism faces worldwide in the wake of commercialism, digitalization, and industry crisis. Since it appears that we are

finally looking at similar objects, concerns, and research findings that prove themselves true in all corners of the world, is it finally time to move on from national essentialisms? Shall we move past our widely condemned narrow national agendas (Waisbord, 2016, p. 878) or, is this apparently "similar" scholarship revealing new theoretical, conceptual, and methodological approaches that force us to think "local" still?

The answer needs to include a reflection on the contributions of media and journalism researchers *from* and crucially *in and within* Latin America (Ganter & Ortega, 2019). The most visible work tends to be produced by Latin American scholars institutionally located in the Global North or by foreign scholars working in the region, but journalism research *from* and *in* the region is only starting to gain more relevance in the global literature. More Latin America-based scholars engage in comparative, global journalism research endeavors each year, such as the *Journalistic Role Performance Project* (JRP) (Mellado, 2020) or the *Worlds of Journalism Study* (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). Only the JRP study, though, with participating national teams from all corners of the world, has been designed, planned, and coordinated *in* and *from* Latin America. Unfortunately, while the project has opened many doors, this case tends to be the exception rather than the rule. The trend is far from widespread as Latin America-based scholars rarely lead global journalism projects or are first authors in multi-nation scientific papers.

Moreover, these efforts do not fully represent all the rich scholarship produced in the region as publications in Spanish and Portuguese remain unnoticed globally. As a result, most local research goes untranslated, just as English-language scholarship is rarely cited in the region due to language barriers and lack of access to material resources.

Intra-national inequalities in academic production and uneven institutional resources within a single country also affect intellectual production and worldwide visibility. Limited resources for research funding, paper translation, or conference travel can be a setback. Moreover, despite politically correct discourses about more inclusivity in terms of global representation in the academic field, opportunities for conducting and disseminating research are still subjected to the Western logic of scholarly funding, production, and dissemination. Likewise, Latin American scholars are frequently asked to justify the value of their research (Mellado, 2020). Unlike our Western colleagues, who are rarely requested to "contextualize" their findings (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2021), we are expected to convince editors and reviewers that research about Latin America is relevant for academic purposes and should appeal to a global audience (Mellado, 2020; Rojas & Valenzuela, 2019). Research from the Global North is the parameter against which "ours" is compared, measured, and defined (Enghel & Becerra, 2018).

Yet, our single-case national studies have helped to challenge allegedly universal, global phenomena and demystify and refine theoretical constructs and analytical categories through the "local" and the "sub-national." Comparative studies *from* or *about* Latin America have helped identify indicators and variables that challenge theories of universalization of media systems, journalism norms, values, and practices, showing

that heterogeneity is commonplace in journalistic cultures (Mellado, 2020; Mellado et al., 2017). These studies have helped revitalize the importance of context and culture in theorizing global phenomena, contributing significantly to the ongoing debates about universalism and localism.

However, the research agendas favored by global publishers are not always sensitive to our scholarly concerns even though our realities afflict most of the Global South, which constitutes the majority of the global population. Most of us do not get to live in established democracies with a functioning market economy and social welfare system. Our ever-lasting societal problems slowly disappear from global academic conferences and publications. Instead of patterns of continuity, global journalism research, and theory tend to favor more fashionable topics related to fast-paced technological transformations in new digital environments. Research *about* and crucially *from* Latin America catches up with these new topics, but at the same time is forced to continue looking at the unresolved, pervasive issues. We are embroiled in the dynamics of today's academic production and highly specialized field and, at the same time, are locally called to act upon established media/State powers while trying to develop our own "situated" theory and research.

Many countries and sub-national regions face turmoil and experiencing statelessness (Waisbord, 2007) and insecurity (Hughes et al., 2017). Media concentration, media capture, anti-press violence, and political instrumentalization of journalism still curtail society's access to information (Becerra & Mastrini, 2017; Segura & Waisbord, 2016). The liberal narratives of media "change" of the late 1990s and early 2000s, materialized in alleged processes of economic liberalization, political democratization, and journalistic professionalization, appear naïve vis-à-vis the fundamental problems that still afflict journalism in the region. So, a continuing concern is: what should be the role of journalism and journalism researchers?

The answer lies outside the dominant paradigms of theory and practice of journalism. Latin American journalists have been trained in traditional liberal norms like objectivity and factuality, but they primarily support active social change roles (Hanitzsch et al., 2019) that clash with those values. They seem restricted—rather than empowered—by liberal norms and missions that are only functional in established democracies (Lugo-Ocando, 2020). Concepts like press freedom, the watchdog role of the press, or the Fourth Estate fail to capture the needs of societies in constant turmoil and contexts of increased media and/or State power.

Just as the pioneer scholars of the 1970s envisioned a more balanced and inclusive communication order, the quest remains for today's journalism researchers in Latin America. We are attracted to the new research topics that publishers and funders prioritize, but we cannot always afford to follow the fads. Old ailments demand our urgent action and observation to research and theorize, beyond traditional Western paradigms, the role of journalism in Mexico's anti-press crimes, Honduras' gang violence, Venezuela's authoritarianism, Chile's social crisis, Colombia's police repression, Bolivia's ethnic tensions, or Peru's endemic corruption.

Just like 50 years ago, the "local" matters and shapes our research. Our challenging contexts still trigger intellectual curiosity and inform our actions, but is the global academic community willing to listen?

African Journalism Cultures: Dispelling Generalizations and Unmasking One's Locus of Enunciation

The Anglo-American canons of journalism are commonly applied with an underlying assumption of universality that neglects the specificities of the contexts in which they were conceived. While there are undeniable global similarities in professional values and the bureaucratic organization of news organizations, it is equally true that journalism as a social practice is undeniably colored by local factors across the globe (Mabweazara, 2018). These local conditions result in practices that challenge the hegemony of Western professional ideologies, particularly the generic ideals of objectivity and editorial routines that generalize what are, in fact, diverse and complex newsmaking cultures.

This brief intervention reinforces this observation and calls for a transformation in our ways of thinking about the normative identity of a profession that is permanently marked by internal contradictions and instability across the globe. I argue that a more comprehensive theorization of the field of journalism should dispel Euro-American generalizations about the field that are often taken as all-encompassing and that scholars, in *all* contexts, should openly acknowledge the *epistemological limits* of their claims. This approach calls for the "*unmasking of one's locus of enunciation*," which, in the words of Menez de Souza, means "being [. . .] explicit about *the geographical, historical, bodily, and ideological context from which one is speaking*" (cited in De Figuereiredo & Martinez, 2021, p. 356, emphasis added), and, by extension, being sensitive to important *cultural differences* that shape and limit one's conceptual perspectives.

The Journalistic Locus of Enunciation Conceived Through the Prism of Culture

Sensitivity to one's locus of enunciation or the situatedness of one's research and theory acknowledges that journalism as a social practice is both socially constructed and reconstituted in the shared realities (values, beliefs, and general way of life) of the context in which it is practiced. In other words, journalists' actions and decisions (individually or collectively) are inherently connected to the *cultural milieu* that shapes and constrains their actions and decisions. In the African context, this *cultural milieu* relates to entrenched cultural practices that often subconsciously filter into the practice of journalism. Indeed, despite Africa's cultural diversity, "threads of underlying affinity run through the beliefs, customs, value systems, and socio-political institutions and practices of the various African societies" (Sesanti, 2010, p. 347). The notion of

ubuntu, for example, recurrently emerges as an overarching cultural compass for understanding what "Africaness" means. It is seen by many as a "cultural mind-set" that encapsulates what it means to be human in Africa, particularly that "[a] person is a person through other people" (Shaw, 2009, p. 493). One is human because he or she belongs, participates, and shares (Murithi in Obonyo, 2011). As a concept, *ubuntuism* directs our attention to the "defining and patently germane features of African cultural experiences that have implications for the practice of journalism" on the continent (Mabweazara, 2015, p. 107).

Granted, a blind adoption of ubuntuism and its assumptions of "a unitary and binding [African] cultural authenticity" (Banda, 2009, p. 235) runs the risk of essentializing or "[freezing] the continent in time" (Obonyo, 2011, p. 8). It, nonetheless, remains one of the most widely referenced concepts for illuminating the intricacies of African cultural life, which have marked implications for journalism practice, and by extension, for journalism research on the continent. It constitutes the unquestioned background filter navigated by journalists in their newsmaking routines and can be invoked to explain some of the most distinct professional practices and cultures in Africa that relate, *inter alia*, to widespread practices of patronage, clientelism, political parallelism, and partisan reportorial routines. The pervasive cultures of press patronage, for example, can be interpreted as sustained by cultural orientations in which "respect for old age" and the "sanctity of authority" are inherent constituent elements seen as giving "form and stability to the way people communicate" (Faniran, 2014, p. 152) in Africa.

The culturally distinct professional practices are manifest in the way news outlets and their reporters think and act, as well as imitate one another, by often unwittingly sharing "a recognizable style and other identifiable characteristics," including "how the news agenda should be set, and the modes through which it should be presented" (Nadler, 2016, p. 9). Nadler (2016) adds that accounting for cultural factors of news production "shows that news producers are not simply driven by ahistorical or 'noncultural' factors, such as economic imperatives [. . .] or profit maximization" (p. 10). Instead, the entire news ecosystem should be seen as immersed in a whole range of cultural factors that shape newsmaking in complex ways. These factors are adaptive to various structural influences and conditions, especially the structures of ownership and control and the broader ideological climate which shapes the thinking of journalists, editors, and news sources alike.

The default approach to studying and evaluating distinct practices and professional cultures is to apply universal (Western) ethical approaches that out-rightly condemn them as proscribed. However, deploying the prism of *culture* can capture the peculiar realities of African experiences, which Western journalism ethical codes are not in tune with. For example, the very idea of rejecting gifts and incentives is widely seen as incompatible with the communitarian sensibilities underpinning the spirit of *ubuntu* (Skjerdal, 2010). For this reason, scholars like Francis Kasoma (1996) submit that the contexts in which African journalists operate demand a set of ethics that are fundamentally different from Western ethics (Skjerdal, 2010) and advance the contentious concept of "Afriethics"—a

self-regulatory approach that counters Western individualism and strives toward a "journalism with a human face" (p. 93). Of course, this approach has been criticized for its distinctive idealism and underpinning notion of African exceptionalism, which overlooks the globalized nature of the contexts in which African media operate (Banda, 2009).

Against a Blind Homogenization of Journalism in Africa

Although I have pointed to elements of "African journalism cultures," I am not attempting the impossible task of painting all 54 states on the continent with the same socio-cultural brush. The continent is a complex mosaic of cultures with equally varied socio-political, economic, and historical experiences. Thus, while we can point to shared journalistic practices, values, attitudes, and beliefs that are qualitatively generalizable across African countries and can be contrasted with other cultures, especially in the West, the enormity and complexity of the continent make it difficult to paint the entire continent's journalistic cultures with one brush (Mabweazara, 2018). By highlighting the centrality of shared African cultural values that shape journalism, we should not take the important differences between countries for granted. Obonyo (2011) reminds us that "Africa does not provide a clear picture that is easy to diagnose" (p. 5). The continent is culturally, politically, and economically fragmented, and even notions such as "*ubuntuism* exist in various forms" (Mano, 2010, p. 12). For this reason, an assessment of journalism practice and research in Africa, as elsewhere, should be appropriately contextualized in ways that highlight that knowledge is not "neutral or global, but rather localized" (De Figuereiredo & Martinez, 2021, p. 357).

De-Westernizing Journalism Studies in Central and Eastern Europe

Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is one of the most ambiguous regions on the map of communication scholarship. Existing comparative research cannot fully decide which countries shall be labeled as the CEE (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015; Minielli et al., 2021). Moreover, categorizing CEE media is also problematic; studies tend to examine CEE media through the lens of the Western world, also trying to develop the so-called "Fourth Model" of media and politics typical for the post-socialist world (Castro Herrero et al., 2017; Hallin & Mancini, 2012). On the surface, the CEE model(s) are widely based on historical and cultural legacy, reflecting strong media-political relations and media freedom variations (Bajomi-Lázár, 2015). In many ways—as contrasted to Western Europe and other regions of the Global North—CEE is severely underrepresented in the field of communication and media scholarship (Demeter, 2018; Goyanes & Demeter, 2020). Moreover, even if CEE was considered as a research field in communication, it is because Western scholars started to take an interest in CEE media development after the post-communist transition and started to investigate

if CEE media systems and journalistic cultures will develop in line with normative models of Western democracies (Harro-Loit, 2015; Jakubowicz, 1998).

Indeed, there were enormous efforts to export Western journalistic norms to the CEE region in the early days of media and societal transformations (Horváth, 1991; Splichal, 1994). Communication departments with journalism studies programs were established across the region, with primarily Western curricula. Since then, there has been a developmentalist-normative attitude among most Western and many CEE scholars and practitioners. Both Western and CEE researchers tend to consider CEE journalism corrupted or even inferior version of the Western liberal model that is, allegedly, the ideal form of "responsible" and "professional" journalism. It mirrors a developed Western journalist culture as opposed to the "underdeveloped" journalism culture of CEE (Curran & Myung-Jin, 2000). Western journalism is thought to be superior both professionally and ethically. Reuters Institute (2021) states that the crisis of journalism is more acute in the CEE region than in the West since neither Western-like democracies nor appropriate levels of independent and ethical journalism have been developed in the region.

Journalists and academics in the CEE region clearly feel this paternalistic view of many Western scholars. Lauk (2008) cites the opinion of Wojciech Maziarski, a Polish journalist in this context: "Western journalists decided to be good to us, assuming that we are people coming from the bush and it is necessary to enlighten us" ((p. 195). However, the uncritical export of the norms of Western journalism was not successful in CEE. Deeply rooted regional cultural values such as social harmony, unity, respect for central authority, and collectivism were confronted with the Western norms of individualism, rule of formal law, creativity, and the "watchdog" role of journalists (Lauk, 2008). In Russia, Poland, or Hungary, Western journalistic values and styles appeared to be something from outer space (Bajomi-Lázár, 2019; De Smaele, 2010; Donders, 2021).

However, Western scholars are largely unaware that CEE journalism might have legitimate professional values, even if these are different from or even contradict Western journalistic norms. Rather than being *neutral, impartial, and objective*, CEE journalists may be closer to artists, and they want to be active in shaping audiences' opinions and attitudes (Horváth, 1991; Jakubowicz, 1998). According to the findings from early media transformation research, CEE journalists have felt a messianic vocation, a need to become advocates for the people (Goban-Klas, 1997; Gross, 1996). Stemming from decades of state propaganda, CEE journalists might over-estimate the significance of their own judgment, even at the expense of pure facts. Today's journalists might feel personal or civic responsibility regarding the social consequences of their work, which can make them social activists, the guardians, or even opinion leaders of society (Mellado, 2020). They are also politically committed to political populism and practices of self-censorship in the media (Raycheva & Peicheva, 2017; Rožukalne, 2020).

Since the time of the normative press models of Siebert et al. (1956), opinion-driven journalism has been considered an aberration from Western norms. Even today, so-called international, actually Western organizations and agencies such as Reporters

Without Borders (France), International Media Support (Denmark), Transparency International (originally from Germany), or the Freedom House (U.S.) apply Western norms of journalism when ascertaining the operation of the media in different world regions and countries. However, from a CEE point of view, the uncritical adaptation of Western journalistic standards can be both questionable and empirically proven to be inoperable. From a Western point of view, the region's divergence from liberal journalistic norms can be explained by CEE's historical legacies and path dependencies. Notwithstanding, CEE scholars can argue that there are genuine features of their journalistic norms that are no less valuable than the norms of their Western colleagues. Commitment, civic responsibility, activism, and even a messianic role perception are not to be condemned in themselves; they just represent different values that can complete our understanding of how journalism should be done.

Although a shift toward a more CEE-based qualitative and quantitative research has been observed over the last decade (Peruško et al., 2020), the participation of CEE journalism scholars in the global scholarly journals is less than five percent. The number is even lower when it comes to editorial board membership (Goyanes & Demeter, 2020). Similarly, recent studies on CEE media cultures have been edited by scholars working for research centers beyond the CEE (Mihelj & Huxtable, 2018; Minielli et al., 2021; Połońska & Beckett, 2019).

Therefore, we argue that the challenge for de-Westernizing media studies is twofold. First, examination of CEE journalism is a subject for a more in-depth examination of additional cultural criteria, which differ from the ones typical for normative models of democracy. Second, the ongoing challenge is to connect Western scholars with CEE specialists to enable knowledge exchange. The international research communities should give more room for local contributors to present and disseminate their conceptions and ideas regarding journalistic norms, values, and practices as well as journalistic theories and research, while also contesting the exclusiveness and superiority of Western norms and standards.

One Ontology for Arab Journalism and Its Studies?

What is Arab journalism? Should it be any different from other "journalisms" in the world? Professional journalism shares global convergencies: it constructs social reality and is pushed by communication technologies. However, Arab journalism has specifics that are common in other Global South regions: oral cultures, young demographics, and past and present postcolonial asymmetries (Raghunath, 2020). At the same time, we need to avoid cultural essentialism and reductionism in a geo-culturally vast and diverse region. While we must acknowledge the unique global ontologies and epistemic paths leading to different realities for journalism practice and research that transcend Western imaginaries and identities, we should not contribute to a conflation of a holistic essentialist Arab journalism because it underlies nationally defined realities. Arab journalism is an umbrella of "journalisms" that, despite regional cultural similarities, is nationally shaped based on historical trajectories and political, economic, legal, and social compositions (Richter & Kozman, 2021). One driver of

the region's diversity lies in the fact that its inner-regional inequality is the largest in the world. The region includes countries that are among the 10 richest in the world, existing side by side with countries exploited by poverty and proxy wars, such as Yemen and Syria.

Against this background, this essay seeks to reflect on the conceptualization of Arab journalism by retracing its postcolonial predicaments, contrasting its nuanced and invisible struggles with our Westernized discipline, and finally, suggesting ways forward to discover non-Western ontologies beyond mainstream normative knowledge.

Arab Journalism's Postcolonial Predicaments

Contextualizing the birth of Arab journalism helps us understand today's reality. Unlike its bourgeois origins in Western Europe, Arab journalism was initiated by the powerful rulers and/or colonizers, and it did not develop to reflect local market forces. As media-politics parallelism is high, journalism only survives due to political and financial sponsorship by the elite, which tends to enable monopolization, cooptation, and clientelism, as research in Lebanon, Iraq, or Libya has shown (Richani, 2016; Wollenberg & Richter, 2020). Even the few reputable examples of Arab independent journalism initiatives are short-lived or largely depend on (foreign) donors (Badr, 2020). This has led to questions about the role of global development aid and the sustainability of supported journalism models (Myers et al., 2014) and the difference between "looking good" and "doing good" (Noske-Turner, 2014). The asymmetric flows of media assistance into the Global South are a symptom of hegemony, where non-Arab donors select, assess, and fund journalism initiatives. In acknowledging the noble intentions, in the end, Arab journalists are subject to evaluations and grants from outside of their social realities.

Other postcolonial predicaments include internalized Orientalism and the reproduction of hegemonic Western constructions *about* Arab realities. Self-perceptions often guide these as inferior, pre-modern, and living the *Arab malaise* (Alahmed, 2020; Said, 1979). Such perceptions have influenced Arab journalism training that shows a clear Anglo-Americanization and reproduces Western normativity as a yardstick for media (Badr & Elmaghraby, 2021; Moyo, 2020). Examples include the diffusion of the objectivity paradigm and an overfocus on a narrow set of technocratic pragmatic skills echoing Western buzzwords instead of Arab journalists and scholars developing a critical vision (Richter & Badr, 2017). While podcasts or mobile reporting are important hands-on skills, emphasizing technique without critical postcolonial positionality runs the risk of dislocating future journalists from their own realities and of importing irrelevant models of journalism education (Abdelrahman, 2011; Mamdani, 2018). Arab academics also play a role by adopting and adapting to Western concepts—instead of decolonizing them by reducing Arab journalism to mere case studies for emerging buzzwords and reiterating general cultural particularism without drafting a robust theoretical alternative.

Arab Journalism's Different, Nuanced, and Invisible Struggles

Arab journalism typologies, which rely on Western works, highlight a conceptual dilemma (Said, 1979). From a Western normative perspective, Arab journalism can be dismissed as underdeveloped, politicized, and obedient. Yet categorizing Arab journalism through imported typologies tends to overlook nuances in journalism during times of uncertainty (Badr, 2020). Arab journalism has different realities beyond the myth of modernization theory (Amin, 2006), as the following three debates within Arab journalism studies show:

A Different Journalism Crisis

Skepticism about the viability of classical journalism has dominated the discourses in academia and practice for the past two decades due to the structural and digital transformation. While old rules of viability models seem to have been shaken, most research focuses on the journalism crisis as known from Western societies, which presumes a professional consensus and a division in ownership structures, that is, public service versus market-regulated media and mature media markets (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

The Arab journalism crisis is fundamentally different from those crises in Western societies. Exposed by the "Arab uprisings," journalism operates under conditions of dynamism and uncertainty: radical and populist fragmentation, journalists' divisions on the meaning of journalism, cooptation by regimes, and major security threats (Hamada et al., 2019; Harb, 2018). The crisis in Arab journalism is exacerbated by low media credibility and public disengagement: "red lines" and a "low ceiling" are the causes of the crisis (Tawfik, 2017), which refer to limitations on the freedom of expression.

Journalism and the Arab Uprisings

Journalism and politics have predominantly been analyzed from a techno-deterministic transition paradigm, neglecting journalism's role during change (Badr, 2019). Western perspectives also constructed the uprisings as failed when the protests did not establish a democracy. When analyzing Arab journalism, we need to let go of Western-centric linear processes of transitions toward democracy (Carothers, 2002) and address challenging conceptual questions, such as: How can one label loyalist journalists who are not coopted, but who willingly support the current order of power in fear of a state collapse without infantilizing their concerns in an Orientalist way? Should the role of journalists be to report freely and fairly or to support the regime's stability, even if it comes at the cost of their independence? This echoes findings where Arab journalists perceive patriotism as a virtue and not as a breach of journalism, even if they are aware that it stifles criticism (Najjar, 2011).

The Rise of Innovative and Specialized Journalism

New forms of journalistic initiatives, such as data journalism (Bebawi, 2019) and science journalism (Elshahed, 2020), are budding and expanding despite restrictions, which expand the scope of what is possible in constrained regions. Working under conflict, data scarcity, and high media capture indicates strong professional motivation, which qualifies innovative journalism to be viewed as an act of professional resistance enabling cultural change.

Those few examples show how the heterogeneity and uncertainty of Arab journalism create a plethora of nuanced journalisms on which scholars are still theorizing. Arab journalism realities are invisible in Western knowledge production due to perceived language barriers and the academic construction of research. The hindrances include language barriers, as the discourses that occur in Arabic, rendering them invisible, as English is the lingua franca of our discipline (Suzina, 2020). One of the barriers to developing home-grown theories on Arab journalism is the convenience of importing theories from outside. Making Arab journalism comprehensible internationally needs research structures and cultures that build bridges to the region, show genuine interest beyond tokenization and securitization, and accommodate a different type of language that should not be excluded due to a presumed lack of scientific merit.

Ways Forward: Discovering Non-Western Ontologies Through New Epistemologies

Making sense of Arab journalism requires tracing its historical evolution without replicating mainstream "Western" theory, and without essentializing Arab characteristics. A much-needed epistemic transformation in our discipline is "academic humility" which engages with ontologically different styles of knowing that can be perceived as less rational or even as subjective (Echchaibi, 2020). This entails a post-positivist vulnerability to accept being wrong and willing to accept the uncertainty, dynamism, and complexity of Arab journalism. South–South collaborations are another step toward discovering alternate ontologies to mainstream knowledge from the Global South in reputable sites of knowledge production, such as in this forum. Comparative research from the Global South is one possibility to better understand journalism in the Arab world; juxtaposing it with post-communist journalism, for example, is not only feasible but theoretically rewarding, as an unlikely comparison between Poland and Egypt has shown (Richter et al., 2020).

Ontological Debates in Asian Journalism

As the world's largest and most populous continent with some of its fastest growing economies, Asia is host to a wide variety of political systems, socio-cultural histories, and economic approaches. This diversity is also evident in journalism: from state-controlled, one-party journalism in China to a market-driven model in India thriving

along with a vocal and vibrant community-based online journalism, as well as examples of public-service broadcasting, notably Japan's NHK and South Korea's KBS. Thus, to talk about an ontology of pan-Asian journalism presents challenges and contradictions. In this short piece, the focus is on the contrasting contexts of journalism represented by the two Asian giants—China and India.

The rapid liberalization, deregulation, and privatization of the media and telecom industries, combined with the explosion in digital delivery and distribution technologies, have transformed the media landscape in Asia. Although the U.S. imprint on the global communication space—both hardware and software—remains profound, the growth of media in Asia has contributed to the increase in transnational traffic in media products, particularly visible in the digital media space.

In a mobile, globally networked, and digitized communication infrastructure, circulation of journalistic content from many Asian nations has increased (Thussu, 2019). Television news in English and other international languages from China (China Global Television Network—CGTN) is a case in point. As digitization becomes entrenched in everyday life, new constituencies of Asians will connect to the digital world, ensuring that the content from Asian nations is more visible globally. In 2020, a billion Chinese citizens were online, making it home to the world's largest number of internet users (Sharma, 2021).

While discussion outside China about Chinese media and journalism is focused on censorship and control, the globalization of Chinese media has received relatively limited critical scrutiny. A state-run media, advocating "constructive" rather than critical journalism may expand in parts of Asia and the broader global South through China's ambitious 'Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): creating information and communication networks remains an integral part of many of its 900 projects involving more than 100 countries. China also challenges the Western narrative of freedom and democracy with its counter narrative of authoritarian development, claiming in 2020 to have eliminated extreme poverty from the country (please add source).

Its neighboring Asian giant, India, has so far failed to provide decent living conditions to a large proportion of its 1.3 billion people, despite its democratic credentials and media freedoms. Although still a deeply unequal society, with its pronounced caste and class distinctions, India's "argumentative" multi-party democracy is home to the world's most competitive and crowded news market, with more than 400 dedicated news channels and growing online news, thanks to the exceptional expansion in internet take-up. In 2000, only 5.5 million Indians were online; by 2020, that figure had climbed to 700 million.

The transformation has arguably widened the Indian public sphere, as indicated by the increasing role of television and online news in shaping public opinion regarding electoral politics and economic issues as well as social mores and nationalistic majoritarianism. The digital revolution has ensured that these media are now reaching all corners of the globe, largely through the increasingly vocal and visible 25-million strong Indian diaspora—the second largest after the Chinese—and the world's most significant English-speaking diaspora.

Has this growth of media and communication in these two Asian powers impacted Western-dominated epistemological and pedagogical frameworks for the study of journalism and contributed to broadening research agendas of communication studies worldwide? Journalism studies, like other fields broadly within the arena of social sciences, is affected by epistemological essentialism rooted within a Euro-Atlantic intellectual tradition. In addition, the dominance of English as the language of global media and communication has contributed to the primacy of English-language scholarship in this field. The study of journalism as an academic field developed in the Unikted States many decades ago during the Cold War, but the "authoritarian" versus the "liberal" media theory continues to be the dominant paradigm, failing to account for countries as India, which never fitted this bipolar construction of the world.

Comparative models of media systems have ignored the extraordinary expansion and diversity of media systems among the Asian nations, which can provide empirical evidence in the context of digital globalization. Hallin & Mancini, 2012 edited collection *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*, for example, excludes any discussion of India, which may be seen as a gap in communication scholarship.

Asian nations could contribute significantly toward building a more inclusive theory of global journalism that takes on board the extraordinary changes in large countries with long histories and rising economic and cultural power. As in other social sciences, non-European modernities, philosophies, history, and culture are a blindspot in mainstream journalism research. As two leading scholars of international relations recently noted, "I.R. has been largely built on the assumptions that Western history or Western political theory *are* world history and world political theory" (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, p. 3).

Many scholars argue that internationalizing journalism studies is necessitated by the transformation of media and communication in Asia (Chan & Lee, 2017; Gunaratne, 2010; Lee, 2015). Challenging the supposed universalization of Western journalism theories should not lead scholars into the parochialism of the local and methodological nationalism. While a nuanced understanding of historical continuities is important, an engagement with observing global trends is also necessary. However, since most Asian countries depend largely on U.S. or U.K. news media for their international-oriented journalistic content, this imbalance can lead to very limited intercultural communication or media exchange. Sadly, this is also the case with deploying the main theoretical approaches to the study of journalism and communication more broadly. Comparative studies among Asian nations remain few and far between and are often framed in terms of Western norms. Nevertheless, the scale and scope of change among large Asian nations with distinctive cultural and historical attributes have the potential to reframe global journalism research. Will this lead to new ontological engagements to theorize varieties of journalisms in the world's largest continent?

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Author Biographies

Bruce Mutsvairo served as Professor in the School of Communication and Journalism at Auburn University before joining Utrecht University in 2021.

Saba Bebawi is the Professor of Journalism and Head of Discipline for Journalism and Writing in the School of Communication at University of Technology Sydney.

Eddy Borges-Rey is an Associate Professor in Journalism at Northwestern University, Qatar.

Mireya Márquez Ramírez is an Associate Professor of Journalism Studies and Media Theory at Department of Communications, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City.

Claudia Mellado is Full Professor of Journalism at the School of Journalism, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Chile. She is the Principal Investigator of the cross-national Journalistic Role Performance Project.

Hayes Mahwindi Mabweazara a Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Glasgow and Associate Editor of the journal, 'Journalism Studies'.

Hanan Badr is an Associate Professor and media studies researcher at the Gulf University in Science and Technology and Cairo University.

Daya Thussu is Professor of International Communication at the School of Communication, Hong Kong Baptist University. Author or editor of 20 books, he is the founder and Managing Editor of the Sage journal Global Media and Communication.