

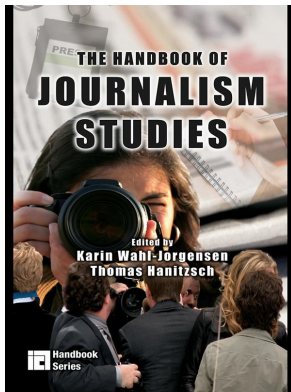
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Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, Thomas Hanitzsch

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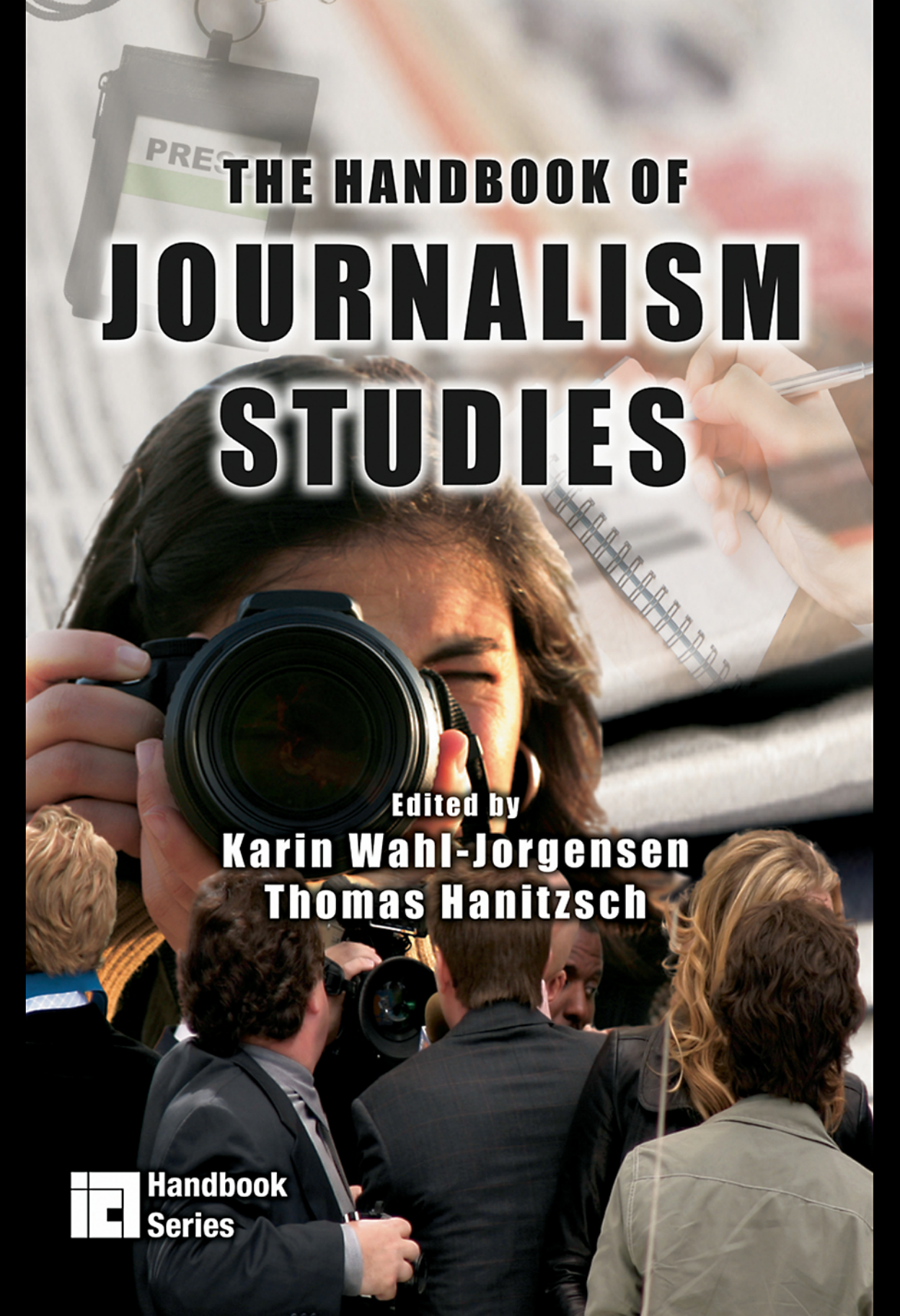
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Towards De-Westernizing Journalism Studies

Herman Wasserman and Arnold S. de Beer

HISTORICAL AND PRESENT CONTEXT

The accelerated globalization of media and its increasingly participatory possibilities in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as a result of technological advances has raised pertinent questions regarding the definition of journalism and journalists. In an era where media have become “environmental” to the extent that the world is becoming a “mediapolis,” (Silverstone, 2007), the task of empirically and normatively defining “who is a journalist”; “what is journalism” (cf. Wyatt, 2007); deciding what is meant by journalism studies education (Fröhlich & Holtz-Bacha, 2003; Murray & Moore, 2003) and how it could be researched (see Löffelholz & Weaver, 2008) has become urgent—even while there is not agreement on evidence pointing to the relative “newness” of the current epoch of media globalization (Sparks, 2007).

Globalization opens the way for the study of journalism and media in their hybrid, regional and global-local manifestations (McMillin, 2007, p. 2), increasing the need to take a global perspective on the study of journalism (which, as a fundamental theoretical point of departure, is something different from incorporating diverse perspectives from around the world). This need springs not only from the momentum of globalization, but also from a global “political realignment” that has resulted in the deconstruction of discourses of global democracy after 9/11 (Joseph, 2005, p. 575). In the field of journalism studies this realignment has led to a questioning of the link between journalism and a particular form of political organization, opening the way for a definition of journalism that is more inclusive of global political differences. As more comparative studies are being done (see Hanitzsch, 2007, for a summary), the dominant Anglo-American view of journalism is being challenged by studies showing up the gap between theory and practice (Joseph, 2005, p. 576). Institutionally, the increased internationalization of the field of journalism is evident, for example, from the constituents of the International Communication Association’s Journalism Studies Division (with more than half of its members coming from outside the United States; ICA, 2007) and international conferences on Journalism Studies being held outside major centers in the North (e.g., in Brazil 2006 and Singapore 2007).

Yet globalization of media and journalism and of the scholarly study thereof, remains a highly uneven and heterogeneous phenomenon. If it has to have analytical usefulness as well as critical potential for de-Westernizing the field, journalism studies has to extend beyond descriptive comparative studies of journalism. A critical journalism studies would also turn the gaze

upon itself and the normative assumptions underlying comparative work, by locating comparative studies within global power relations both epistemologically and politically. Unless comparative analyses lead to a re-examining of the theoretical foundations of journalism studies, such studies will remain an exercise in curiosity rather than result in a far-reaching de-Westernizing of the field.

A related question, and one which we will not attempt to answer here, is whether “Western journalism” in itself exists (cf. Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 368), even if the historical origins of modern mass media are rooted in the West (Couldry, 2007, p. 247). While several studies have found commonalities in the professional ideologies of journalists in countries around the world, significant differences have also been noted (see Hanitzsch, 2007, for an overview of these studies). Attempting to contribute more non-Western perspectives to the field of journalism studies should therefore not rest on the assumption that journalism in “The West” can be homogenized, or that a binary opposition between “West” and “non-West” can (or should) be drawn in any uncomplicated fashion. In this chapter it will be argued that a global approach to journalism studies should start at a fundamentally epistemological level. Theories about how journalism should be defined, what its relationship with society is, how it should be taught and how it should be practiced ought to be constructed within a globally inclusive, dialogic setting. The difference between a dialogic and an inclusive approach is important. Even if diverse journalisms are *included* in a global purview, some of them could still be marginalized or ghettoized as “alternative” journalisms or as belonging to geographically specific areas, and therefore unable to exert pressure on the dominant mainstream to change like they would in a truly *dialogic* approach (see Mowlana, 1996). Inclusive approaches thus far have resulted in the “reluctant” acceptance of models that differ from Anglo-American ones. Normative assumptions like the equation of journalism and liberal democracy, however, remain largely unquestioned (Josephi, 2005).

What is needed, therefore, is a global approach to journalism studies that is “comprehensively and mutually comparative” (Couldry, 2007, p. 247): one which can “disrupt” existing paradigms. Linked to such an approach is an understanding of how the political economy of scholarly production and distribution impacts on the field of journalism studies. Not only the inclusion of “other” perspectives on journalism studies is important—at stake are also the conditions under which these “other” perspectives are allowed to enter the academic discourse.

In other words, a project to de-Westernize journalism studies would have an epistemological as well as a political-economic dimension. While these two aspects are interrelated, they should also be unpacked in terms of their implications for knowledge production in journalism studies. Part of a de-Westernizing approach to journalism studies would entail the realization that all theory is situated somewhere—there is no such thing as a decontextualized theory.

In this chapter, we want to connect the epistemological and political-economic dimensions of a de-Westernizing approach to journalism studies by focusing on one specific area where these two aspects become clearly visible: that of journalism studies knowledge production in sub-Saharan English speaking Africa.

Our position as researchers of African, especially South African, media, also informs the preliminary remarks about “de-Westernizing” journalism studies that we would like to offer here. With our focus on Africa, we cannot presume to speak on behalf of the Global South¹ as a whole, but we anticipate that at least some of what we discuss will have a bearing on journalism studies in other developmental contexts. While the political-economic context of journalism studies in Africa might differ considerably from some non-Western contexts like Asia, it might correspond with, for instance, Latin America, for both historical (such as the history of colonialism) and economic (as developing regions in the global economy) reasons. But just as there is no one Western journalism even if similarities exist (Hanitzsch 2007), the project of de-Westernizing journalism

studies cannot be seen as one-dimensional and should be conducted on multiple levels. With reference to Zelizer's (2004) seminal book on journalism studies and the academy, we would like to argue that for journalism studies to be a truly global project, African journalism studies approaches should be taken seriously as part and parcel of a globalizing world, and not as an "area study," isolated from broader debates.

While the focus on Africa to illustrate some of the key issues in de-Westernizing journalism studies is primarily chosen for practical reasons, such a focus can also be justified in terms of its neglect or relative minor position even in comparative studies (e.g., that of Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Furthermore, a study of African journalism will illustrate the contested nature of the epistemologies, professional ideologies and value systems that mark journalisms worldwide. Journalism in Africa often displays an uneasy relationship between its colonial heritage and post-colonial appropriation, between globalized, Western influence and local resistance. As such, African journalism studies itself is marked by heterogeneity and ambivalence.

KEY ELEMENTS

Key to understanding attempts to de-Westernize journalism studies is the realization that this process has to take place on several levels. Addressing imbalances in journalism scholarship is firstly an epistemological issue, dealing with the origin and nature of knowledge about journalism and assumptions regarding its universality and generalizability. The production, canonization and distribution of knowledge do not take place in a vacuum, however. Epistemologies are produced and attain their validity within social relations, which in turn are embedded in political and economic conditions. These relations often remain hidden but can become visible in a critical analysis of the manifestation of knowledge in the form of scholarly output. To illustrate the above dimensions of journalism studies from a non-Western perspective, they are discussed below with a specific focus on the African context.

Epistemological Issues

An epistemology of global journalism, as a study of knowledge systems and their justification (Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 375), will be invalid if it rests upon evidence gathered from a "tiny handful of countries" made to represent the whole of the world (Curran & Park, 2000, p. 3). While the Western bias of journalism and media studies is increasingly acknowledged and refuted, the question remains how exactly this situation should be rectified. A mere comparative study of how different dimensions of journalism are being understood or implemented around the world may be more inclusive, but would not necessarily de-Westernize the field. This is because the very categories within which such comparisons are made, are often deduced from concepts that have historically been central to Western, liberal-democratic normative notions of journalism, like objectivity, truth-telling and the need for a "free" press. The result is that "other" journalisms, be they African, Asian or Latin American, are then presented in terms of their correspondence with or deviation from established categories, with the normative category itself remaining unchanged even if deviance is not viewed negatively. (Often, however, a negative evaluation of "other" journalisms or the relation between media and state in non-Western countries has more to do with legitimating or repairing the Western paradigm "at home" than with an attempt to get to grips with the situation elsewhere. In this regard, the "othering" of non-Western journalism can serve the construction of the occupational identities of the Western self.) One way around this would

be to work inductively from non-Western contexts, through “thick descriptions,” to re-establish epistemological dimensions for global journalism. Such an approach might lead us to discover that claims to truth and knowledge, as these are understood in Western societies, might be made differently (e.g., through performativity or subjectivity rather than objectivity and rationality), or that such claims might not even be central to journalistic identities in the non-West and the central category would therefore have to be rethought.

De-Westernizing the epistemology of journalism studies would also mean that the research agenda is constructed more inclusively. Instead of constructing research questions in the West and then attempting to answer them in a globally comparative, inclusive manner, the research agenda itself should be conceived of in global terms. Too much theorization about journalism studies is done in ignorance of/or an apparent disinterest in the situation outside Northern academic centers and media institutions. The recent shift towards participatory journalism brought on by technological advancement such as blogging and video-blogging, leading to either celebratory declarations (e.g., *Time* magazine’s awarding of their “Person of the Year” in 2006 to “You,” i.e., everyone using computers to create a new information commons) or to doom-mongering (e.g., about the future of older media like newspapers or television) as if the trajectory of media evolution in the West is universally inevitable, is one example. While journalism theory is being revised and questions raised around the definition of journalism, journalism ethics and audience preferences, scant attention is paid to the situation in parts of the world where these technologies are less pervasive, but where journalism producers and consumers are finding more and more creative ways of dealing with lack of access in order to compete in a globalized media world. The very fact that these specific sets of questions, predicated as they are on the situation in media-saturated societies, dominate the journalism studies research agenda indicates the need to de-Westernize the field of enquiry.

Some critical comments have been sounded against this “self-absorption and parochialism of much Western theory” (Curran & Park, 2000, p. 3). They point to several events and trends (globalization, the end of the Cold War, the rise of the Asian economy, the emergence of alternative centers of media production and the world-wide growth of media studies) that have made the existing “narrowness” of media theory “transparently absurd.”

Similarly, John Downing (1996) has called for more comparative work on a theoretical level. Influential, yet outdated and biased, models for comparative media systems such as that of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) have been revisited (e.g., by Hallin & Mancini, 2004), and global comparative projects undertaken (e.g., Weaver, 1998). Nevertheless, some areas of the world (notably Africa) remain either ignored or occupy a marginal position in these works. African scholars and media practitioners themselves also often uncritically measure their own media institutions and practices against Western-biased frameworks rather than engaging with them critically and creatively.

When the global South enters the dominant Northern scholarship, it is much less often as a critical interlocutor succeeding in bringing about self-reflexivity in the center than as a terrain for “modernization” according to the dominant Western developmental model that remains prevalent even in the era of globalization (Curran & Park, 2000, pp. 4–5, Sparks, 2007, p. 28). The end-result is too often that the Western democratic model of liberal democracy remains the implicit or explicit normative ideal against which journalism in non-Western societies is measured, with media-state relations as a primary determinant of journalistic standards.

If it is then acknowledged that journalism and media theories need to include more non-Western perspectives, what are the impediments in the way of a more inclusive, global approach to journalism studies? To answer this question, the political economy of knowledge production in the field of journalism studies has to be considered.

Political-Economic Issues

Journalism studies is gaining ground as a research field at a time when the globalization paradigm has become the dominant one for the study of media and communication, even if there is disagreement about the evidence to support this paradigm and what it means (Sparks, 2007, p. 149). Critical political economists have tended to see globalization in a negative light, as a “capitalist victory that is dispossessing democracies, imposing policy homogenization, and weakening progressive movements rooted in working-class and popular political organizations” (Curran & Park, 2000, p. 11). The weakening of the nation-state under pressure of globalization has implications for the type of approach to be followed in a de-Westernizing of journalism studies. Nation-states can no longer unproblematically be used as the only or main units for comparison, but media should be seen in terms of the “translocal” (Couldry, 2007, p. 248). That nation-states have not lost all relevance, however, has become especially clear in the post-9/11 era, when journalism has been awash with nationalist and xenophobic discourses (Pludowski, 2007; Berenger, 2004).

Comparative frameworks classifying media according to political and economic systems (e.g., Curran & Park, 2000) or regional media traditions (e.g., Hallin & Mancini, 2004) could both be useful in comparing journalistic ideologies, norms and practices around the world, since they acknowledge respectively the influence of political and economic systems on the practice of journalism as well as the historical development of professional culture in different regions of the world. The acceleration of globalization has meant, however, that even if the conceptual framework of nations or regions might be retained for practical or other reasons (De Beer & Merrill, 2004, p. xv), what is becoming increasingly important is global interdependence between them.

But because of increasing global media flows on these various levels, Couldry (2007, p. 249) has also suggested that comparative media studies should focus more on the difficult and “fuzzy” notion of “media cultures,” rather than the more fixed and clearly delineated media systems. Couldry’s cultural approach suggests a closer look at the appropriation and creative agency exercised by media users outside of the dominant centers. This is a valid point, as long as the attention to “fuzzy” exchanges includes a scrutiny of the structural inequalities (like the so-called Digital Divide) within which these exchanges take place.

Studies of journalism outside of the dominant Western centers (and often taken up in debates among professional journalist elites within non-Western countries themselves) focus mostly on press freedom (or the lack of it) as the central characteristic of journalism. There is a predictability in the regularity with which the state features as the central object of scrutiny in such studies which suggests that liberal democratic assumptions of politics and economy remain the dominant perspective on journalism globally (cf. Nyamnjoh, 2005).

A comparative approach that would focus more on cultural exchanges than structural dimensions like media: state relations would take into account the flow and counter-flow (see Thussu, 2007) of media content globally. Ironically, however, a nuanced and thickly textured picture of the way these “fuzzy” trends of appropriation and redirection are playing out in regions like Africa still eludes journalism studies scholarship exactly because of structural obstacles in the way of wider knowledge about journalism and media in Africa (De Beer, 2007, 2008). One such aspect is the political economy of scholarship, to which we now turn.

Knowledge Capacity Building and Publishing

While there is a clear need for more inclusive and dialogic studies of journalism worldwide, the extent to which this can be done is dependent on more than scholarly interest and openness alone. Knowledge production and theory building takes place within structural constraints, and

these become especially evident when scholarly publication is considered. Nyamnjoh (2005, p. 29) points out how economic considerations impact negatively on the plurality and diversity of content, with the result that scholarship rarely strays beyond the boundaries of the usual:

If he who pays the piper calls the tune, then the cultural capital most likely to inspire investment is that which is familiar to the paymaster's race, place, class, gender or generation; that into which s/he has been schooled to the point of second nature and which, instinctively, s/he expects every piper worth the name to internalize and reproduce. [...] This makes publishing a very conservative industry where despite rhetoric to the contrary, the emphasis is less on creativity than mimicry, and less on production than reproduction.

African scholars (and this could equally apply to scholars from other non-Western regions) are, according to Nyamnjoh (2006), left with an impossible choice: On the one hand, they may write for an African audience in order to remain socially relevant, but sacrifice wider recognition in the scholarly community and miss out on the opportunity to influence global debates. On the other hand, they can choose scholarly recognition in the wider international academic circle but—because their colleagues in the developing world lack the means to access scholarly work produced in costly journals or books elsewhere—forego the opportunity to engage with local audiences that would benefit from the relevance of such scholarly work.

The global political economy of scholarly publication and distribution has a normative effect: The dominance of especially American academic publishing houses and journals has, over the last half-century, become so all-encompassing that generations of journalism students in English-speaking African countries have become inculcated in the American “way of doing things.” American textbooks on journalism have become the major, and often the sole, published source for journalism students in Africa. From Wolseley and Campbell (1959) in the 1950s, Bond (1961) in the 1960s, through Metz (1977), Harriss, Leiter, and Johnson (1992), to the latter authors' updates in the 2000s, American textbooks became the conduit for English speaking African students to learn journalism.

Against the avalanche of available American journalism textbooks, preciously little was produced in Anglophone Africa in terms of journalism textbooks (and exception to the rule was for instance the work done by Francis Kasoma (e.g., 1994) and various authors in South Africa (e.g., Greer, 1999; Nel, 2002), although in some areas of journalism studies like ethics, local authors by and large just took over paradigms developed elsewhere. Journalism training programs conducted by well-meaning NGOs also sometimes assume a certain universality of journalism ideology and practice. These programmes often follow a type of developmental journalism based on a generic understanding of the relation between journalism, society and democracy, rather than a participatory approach where the parameters for training would be set by local journalists and audiences. Murphy and Rodriguez (2006) argue in a special edition of *Global Media and Communication* that questions of globalization and hegemony compel mass communication scholars in the North to rethink the theoretical constructs and praxis of the media industries in Latin America. The same reasoning could apply to Africa, where, as in Latin America,

a cultural landscape [is] increasingly defined by the conspicuous markers of technology and global capitalism (e.g. cybercafés, cell phones, cineplexes, etc.) embedded in social struggles (e.g. democratization, armed conflict, racism, poverty, resource control, immigration) and framed by the thick residues of indigenious, colonial, revolutionary, and pre-capitalist pasts. (p. 268)

For such a rethink to happen within the field of journalism studies, a more inclusive dialogue in the sphere of scholarly publication has to take place. This, in turn, requires that the asymmetry

within the publishing industry and its patterns of distribution be addressed (see Zegeye & Vambe, 2006, pp. 333–334).

JOURNALISM STUDIES IN AFRICA: SCHOLARS AND TEXTS

Given the political economy of scholarly publishing, it is not surprising that journalism studies in sub-Saharan Africa has not produced a strong corpus of home-grown theoretical approaches and key texts.

The exception in this regard is South Africa (others to an extent being Kenya and Nigeria), due to, amongst other elements, its relatively strong economic position that has enabled it to develop a significant publication industry. The academic boycott during the apartheid years isolated the scholarly community in that country, contributing to the establishment of several journals to serve as publication outlets. After the end of apartheid, some of these journals have entered the international arena when they were acquired by international publishing groups (e.g., *Communicatio* and *Critical Arts* now published by Taylor and Francis) or university publishers (e.g., *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, published by University of Wisconsin Press).

Whereas the historical isolation of South Africa has contributed to the development of a domestic academic publishing industry, an extensive body of journalism studies scholarship and publications has been produced by scholars from the rest of the continent residing in the diaspora. The global political economy of publishing has therefore led to the irony that African scholars working at universities in Northern America and Europe have contributed to a relatively stronger position for African journalism studies globally, due in part to their access to publication and dissemination opportunities in the North.

The same Northern influence is found even in the African peer-reviewed journal devoted to journalism studies research in Africa: *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*.² Published since 2008 by University of Wisconsin Press, in association with the Department of Journalism, Stellenbosch University, the research articles published in this journal show a strong influence from American scholars, although contributions from African authors are encouraged. An exception to this trend was *Africa Media Review*, a journal of the now apparently defunct African Council of Communication Education (ACCE) based in Nairobi, Kenya, with recent efforts by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, based in Dakar, Senegal, to resurrect the journal.

However, the strong influence of authors from the North writing on African journalism studies might be changing. For instance, Boafo and George's (1992) book has been published under the auspices of the ACCE in Nairobi. Ansu-Kyeremeh (2005) from Ghana gathered, for his book on *Indigenous communication in Africa*, ten authors of whom seven are from Africa. Francis Nyamnjoh, based at Codesria in Dakar, Senegal, received international acclaim for his book *Africa's Media* (2005).

For a broad overview of the work dealing with African journalism and media, certain recurring topics or trends can be identified. These themes have started to characterize the field of journalism studies in Africa (although they often address journalism as part of a broader discussion of media and communication). To illustrate the kind of work done within these broad rubrics, some recent texts in the respective areas can be noted. This should not be seen as an exhaustive list or a "who's who" of seminal texts, but as a brief attempt to map the field:

- *Journalism, democracy and press freedom* (Berger & Barratt, 2007; Hachten & Giffard, 1984; Hasty, 2005; Hydén et al., 2002; Jackson, 1993; Kasoma, 2000; Tomaselli & Dunn,

2002; Nyamnjoh, 2005; Ocitte, 2005; Olorunnisola, 2006; Switzer, 1997)

- *Media systems and political economy of media* (Bourgault, 1995; Horwitz, 2001; M'Bayo et al., 2000)
- *Journalism ethics* (Kasoma, 1994; Rønning & Kasoma, 2002; Oosthuizen, 2002)
- *Journalism/media and development* (Okigbo & Eribo, 2004)
- *Journalism education and training* (Greer, 1999; Bofo, 2002; Steenveld, 2002)

Caveat and Critique

While the literature from and about African media and journalism provide perspectives that can contribute to what one could call the “de-Westernizing” of journalism studies, such perspectives should not be elided with so-called “Afrocentric” positions (Tomaselli, 2003, cites Ziegler & Asante, 1992, and Kasoma, 1996, as representative of this position). Afro-centric approaches to journalism can be rather problematic, especially when it takes a normative position premised on essentialist African identity and culture. A static notion of “African culture” can legitimize an approach to journalism that rejects Western values wholesale, which is not a helpful analytical position in a globalized era where the dominant mode is that of interdependency and exchange.

Given the struggle for press freedom and democracy in many African countries (to which some of the literature listed above attests), Afro-centric positions that may lead to an uncritical acceptance of authority, undemocratic exclusion of minority voices and the stifling of free speech should be guarded against. Recent work by Tomaselli (2003) and Fourie (2007) has criticized Afro-centered journalistic practices on these grounds. They point to the danger that the very notion of “de-Westernizing” or “indigenization” or “African values” can be oppressive and lead to the stifling of critical debate (Tomaselli, 2003, p. 435; Blankenberg, 1999, p. 61).

The argument advanced in the current chapter is for a dialogic, interdependent approach to global journalism studies. Such an approach to the “de-Westernization” of the field would avoid crude notions of “African values” or “indigenization,” but would be based on an awareness of structural inequalities regarding scholarly production and the concomitant effect it has on epistemology. The emphasis should therefore fall on the contemporary experience of African journalism in a global context (which often is the experience of marginalization, exclusion and ignorance), rather than on a supposed static, pan-African cultural traits, or claims of “authenticity.”

CONCLUSION

The fact that epistemological as well as political economic factors exclude journalism practices, frameworks and ideologies in large parts of the world from scholarly research and debate should not be viewed in deterministic terms. Scholars located outside of dominant centers (in the case of this chapter, in Africa) or working in areas (like African journalism) that are marginalized in global journalism studies have found ways to overcome limitations. While the publication of journals on African journalism or media studies through an established publisher in the North may provide one way of overcoming limitations on publication and distribution, this increases the need for scholars to remain in touch with what is happening “on the ground” in African contexts and incorporate the lived experience of journalists and audiences outside of the metropolitan context.

The inroads made into metropolitan centers are, however, not enough to ensure that journalism studies become a truly global and de-Westernizing project. Attempts should be made to divert funding to scholars working in Africa and other areas outside the dominant centers; to

provide financial support to publications in these areas; to provide scholarships and travel grants to enable scholars in poorer countries to attend conferences. Such economic intervention should complement a willingness and openness by journalism scholars to continually question the assumptions and theoretical foundations upon which they build, in order to develop a truly global study of journalism.

NOTES

1. In keeping with the terminology of “de-Westernizing” as it has gained currency within scholarly debates especially after Curran and Park’s (2000) well-known book, this chapter will refer to the “West” and the “non-West.” However, it is acknowledged that in a post-Cold War geopolitical and geo-economic context, it would make more sense to speak of the Global North or South, or, even more appropriately, the Tri-Continent (Africa, Asia and Latin America) (McMillin, 2007, p. 1, 222).
2. Disclosure: The current authors are respectively editor and managing editor of the journal.

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