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Citation: Moon, R., Hellmueller, L. & Wasserman, H. (2025). Introduction: The Future of Global Journalism—Relationships, Tools, and Power. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 30(2), pp. 449-461. doi: 10.1177/19401612241311083

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Introduction: The Future of Global Journalism—Relationships, Tools, and Power

The International Journal of Press/Politics

1–13

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DOI: 10.1177/19401612241311083

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Journalism is increasingly global both in its practice and its occupational ideologies. The current trend toward multipolar world politics—characterized by multiple centers of political power, shifting international affairs away from a single power center or a binary between the West and the “rest”—requires journalism studies to expand how we conceptualize and imagine the future of the occupation (Posen 2009). However, our understanding of global news production is still mostly limited to journalistic ideals and approaches to practices in Western countries and the Global North. This special issue aims to address this gap. We attempt here to push journalism studies in a post-colonial and de-colonial direction by incorporating conceptual, analytical, and epistemological work from and about countries in the Global South that addresses power relationships and asymmetries in global media and scholarly knowledge production (Wasserman 2018). One conceptual challenge we are particularly interested in is the question of what, exactly, it means to be global. For some scholarship, adopting a global outlook means looking beyond national borders to assess transnational geographic encounters and processes—an approach that views globalism as a geographic extension (Berglez 2013). In journalism studies, classic literature discussing “the global” often invokes discussions of globalization and debates about cultural homogenization versus localization or “glocalization” (Hanitzsch et al. 2019). A third group of scholars posit “the global” as introducing a substantively different form of power and pressure into previously geographically bounded processes and structures (Buchholz 2016; Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006). In this view, bringing in the global

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means not just expanding borders but assessing the ways that layers of influence exert pressure on a variety of spaces to result in new forms of capital, new production processes, and new relationships. All these perspectives offer useful interventions to our understanding of the labor of news production, and all are ripe for further application and exploration. We need conceptual, theoretical, and analytical approaches from a broad range of countries and cultures to fully understand the constellation of ways global influence appears in contemporary journalism. This special issue takes a step toward these interventions.

While researchers have begun exploring the implications of journalism's global shift, there is much still to learn—especially regarding the power structures, relationships, and tools of this work. In this special issue introduction, we grapple with the term “global” and the ways these concepts help us better understand contemporary journalism. We suggest that journalism can be usefully conceptualized as a global field and as a global practice.

Bringing in the Global

As we and others have argued elsewhere, global forces and contexts are of growing importance for how we understand journalism practice (Hellmueller 2017; Moon 2023; Wasserman 2018). For one thing, journalists undertake their work in an environment of increasingly complex geographies. The practice of news production entails navigating information environments that often contain local as well as supranational flows of facts and ideas, making journalism a space where “specific structurations of the global” influence work previously seen as local or national (Sassen 2007, p. 22). This work is also increasingly undertaken by people who have moved or are moving across national borders, reporting for a news outlet in a different country than the one where they were born, for audiences in their home country or abroad—contributing to flows of people and ideas that further decentralize global power (Appadurai 1996). The news is often produced with a consideration for spaces, power, and identities that transcend the nearby (Berglez 2008). Global often refers to geography, signaling a transnational phenomenon; as Reese (2010) points out, “for many, ‘global’ means big”—part of a nested hierarchy of levels capturing increasingly larger geographic spaces (p. 346). But the term encompasses more than just geography and more than just “bigness.” It suggests instead a system that incorporates local, national, regional, and global levels of influence (Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006). The concept can apply to different aspects of the phenomenon, including input, affecting norms, regulations, and motivations; output, where behavior has transnational effects; and processes themselves, where the steps involved in a process, such as news production, involve traveling across borders (Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006).

In other words, saying journalism is “global” implies more than just a shift in geographic awareness. It means grappling with the people, processes, and outputs produced at a site of intersection between forces that are hyperlocal, transnational, and everywhere in between. While “global” often signals homogenization (see, e.g., Rodny-Gumede 2013; Waisbord 2013), this special issue highlights the importance of

a more expansive consideration of the term, one that incorporates diverse layers of pressures and incentives to cultivate journalism practices that vary substantially from place to place while still being global. Scholarly work defining global journalism has examined conceptual definitions and practical use during the last decade in journalism studies (Hellmueller and Berglez 2023). These authors define global journalism as a practice or organizational principle, characterized by a drive to cover and understand the complex relations of the world by developing a global outlook in some respect or respects (economic, political, social, ecological, technological, etc.) (p. 2378). The definition focuses on the normative aspiration of a global outlook, where the journalist is motivated to “. . . understand and explain how economic, political, social and ecological practices, processes and problems in different parts of the world affect each other, are interlocked, or share commonalities” (Berglez 2008, p. 847). What this definition captures and we expand on in this issue is the importance of holistically assessing and carefully considering the ways that embeddedness in a network of global, national, local, and other forces influences the context, practices, and content of journalism.

We further argue that the work of understanding contemporary global news production requires not only diverse perspectives but also an intentional upending or decolonization of traditional knowledge hierarchies to prioritize local knowledge, challenges, and solutions. As Simon Cottle points out, “We live in a global age and journalism and processes of globalization are inextricably intertwined” (Cottle 2009, p. 354). And yet, scholarship is still centered around White, Western ways of understanding and doing as normative, to such an extent that different voices and experiences are often excluded and marginalized (Mohammed 2021). One of many harmful outcomes of this reality is that scholarship has overlooked many of the ways that dimensions of power, geography, and practice intersect in local, non-Western contexts. We propose integrating a global focus into two popular ways of understanding journalism as a powerful tool for understanding the forces at work in news contemporary production. First, we propose considering journalism as a global field, bringing a transnational component into field theory. Second, we consider journalism as a global practice, highlighting the ways that the labor of news production draws from influences beyond national borders and likewise shapes coverage that will be influential beyond those borders. These approaches, we believe, allow scholars to situate journalism in a contemporary world where national boundaries are still influential but not the only or even always the most important factor shaping life and work. Global fields and global practices highlight the power and limitations of journalism and offer a grounding perspective for future research. Thinking of journalism as a global field allows us to incorporate influences from a variety of venues, not just national; and thinking of journalism as a global practice provides a way to assess how those influences shape outputs that have far-reaching effects, from tight-knit local communities to far-flung locales. This approach situates journalism in the political communication world within the politics-media-politics approach introduced by Wolfsfeld et al. (2022). A focus on practice highlights the ways that journalists encourage and dissuade political action, for instance in Venezuela where journalists shaped security policy through their coverage of crime (Samet 2019).

Power, Relationships, and Tools

The concept of “power” is complex and contested, but sociologist Steven Lukes offers a useful framework with which to consider its effects on journalism and the ways journalists then affect other areas of life. Lukes proposes three dimensions (or faces) of power: power as the ability to make someone do something; power to set the agenda; and power to shape the boundaries of reasonable discussion or decision-making (Lukes 1986). Another framework in which to consider the labor of journalism comes from Shoemaker and Reese (2013), whose hierarchy of influences outlines the layers of pressures at work on news production—layers that are further complicated by global geography and flows (Appadurai 1996). These dimensions or layers of power influence journalism in well-documented ways. For instance, studies have shown how myths—shared stories about acceptable behavior and the way things are done—contribute to definitions of appropriate journalism practice, exhibiting Lukes’ boundary-setting dimension (Aldridge 1998; Moon 2023). Research on comparative journalism cultures, role conceptions, and role performance examine the interplay of politics, organizations, personal characteristics, and other influences that shape news production (Mellado et al. 2017; Van Dalen et al. 2012). However, there are countless extensions of power into the realm of journalism labor that have yet to be explored, especially in a global context.

The nature of these influences also continues to change, as various actors produce, shape, and undermine journalism, using a wider variety of tools and platforms, drawing on the rapid development of digital technologies. Political actors clearly exert power over journalism in that they have authority to sanction and otherwise limit newsgathering behavior and news production, making the politics–journalism intersection clearly relevant for a discussion of global journalism labor. Moreover, news and information production is no longer limited to traditional journalists; information actors now also come from outside mainstream journalism and could be peripheral to newsrooms (Cheruiyot et al. 2021) or have malicious intent, as in the case of social media actors who amplify inauthentic content to influence geopolitical relations (Wasserman 2024).

Recent political developments, especially in non-democracies and electoral democracies with weak rule of law, have short- and long-term effects on this work. On the one hand, authoritarian governments are increasingly interested in messaging openness to the world through media policy that superficially seems to support freedom of the press; on the other hand, many of these countries are in fact imposing increasing sanctions on information-sharing (Dukalskis 2021; Grasse et al. 2021). When we consider journalists’ working environments, the most-deadly conditions are found in hybrid political regimes where constitutional protections for journalism are not fully enacted or are being actively undermined (Gohdes and Carey 2017). However, other forms of violence journalists endure are not confined to the Global South, as online harassment, targeting in political rhetoric, and job precarity as a form of economic violence are common in the North as well. Indeed, research shows that rhetorical attacks from politicians can lead to physical danger for journalists (Mazzaro 2023). While we know something about the ways that journalists adapt to these changes in ways that help and harm democratic function, many of their strategic and creative coping practices have yet to be documented or analyzed (Ferreira 2024; Ozawa et al. 2024).

Journalist-adjacent actors are also increasingly important in the contemporary world of global information production. Global news is often produced in collaboration between locals and foreigners and between journalists and other actors, who each bring different skill sets to their joint task. Fixers, translators, and citizen journalists contribute to the news ecosystem alongside traditional reporters, photographers, and editors and often receive far fewer protections and less compensation for their work (Arjomand 2022; Ashraf 2021; Mitra et al. 2021; Palmer 2019, 2022). The expanding ecosystem of news production globally, which includes peripheral actors like fact-checkers, bloggers, and social media influencers, as well as non-human actors such as algorithmic-driven news platforms, has disrupted traditional professional boundaries of journalism and necessitates a wider conceptual definition of journalism as a practice and as a normative stance. While this expanding communication ecology, driven by the evolution of digital affordances, transcends nation-state boundaries, local socio-cultural, political, and economic influences remain important to consider (Cheruiyot et al. 2021). These actors' relationships with one another and with the public are crucial to the work of global journalism, as practitioners must often bridge cultural divides in newsgathering routines and expectations between home and host countries (Xiaoxuan Cheng and Lee 2015; Zeng 2018).

Global journalism highlights the power flows that enrich and complicate cultural production around the globe (Appadurai 1996; Sassen 2007). As collaborations among journalists, especially across countries in the Global South, become more common, they point to the increasing centrality of relationships to news production (Cueva Chacón and Saldaña 2021). The newsgathering work that was traditionally conducted by Western reporters is now shared among a variety of diverse staff, including local journalists reporting for distant audiences (Hamilton and Jenner 2004). This collaboration however highlights power disparities, for instance in news bureaus, where the most powerful employees are often Western and their local colleagues bear the responsibility for newsgathering with attendant repercussions in dangerous environments (Bunce 2010; Moon 2019; Palmer 2019). These and other power dynamics of collaborative global journalism are overdue for exploration.

Tools—including the incorporation and adaptation of new technological platforms, programs, and objects—have also shaped the contemporary practice of global journalism. Technology highlights the value of eye-witnessing while also making labor more precarious (Palmer 2018). Local infrastructure, such as roads, communication networks and technologies, and power grids, constrains newsgathering, while new technology makes it easier for citizen journalists to contribute information from otherwise hard-to-reach places (Allagui and Kuebler 2011; Moon 2021; Schiffrin 2009). The proliferation of new technologies tools both burdens and empowers journalists: On the one hand, access to information is, in many cases, easier; on the other hand, increasingly higher expectations of news quality and quantity pressure journalists to produce more content, more quickly. Social media in particular also makes journalists more accessible and visible, which can diversify news sourcing while also opening journalists to cyber-harassment, which is especially vicious for women and minority journalists across

many societies. In Global South countries like the Philippines, India, and South Africa, women journalists express fear that online abuse could translate into offline violence, especially given these countries' political climate, social polarization, inadequate police response, and unresponsive criminal justice system (Posetti and Reid 2024).

Why Labor?

This special issue focuses on journalism labor as a crucial site for research that decenters the Western, democratic perspectives that overwhelmingly guide scholarly understanding. Labor includes the work of producing a material good, or “journalism-as-news gathering,” but also the myriad other aspects of labor, visible and invisible, that journalists do (Örnebring 2010, p. 61). It is a site of practice where real, everyday workers occupying a variety of positions on the labor hierarchy encounter both global knowledge and physical geographic contexts and must sort these things out to perform the routines of news production. In a global news field, this includes the work of translating information from local to international audiences, often accomplished by local fixers who work alongside foreign journalists but receive little recognition and low compensation (Arjomand 2022; Murrell 2013; Palmer 2019, 2022). It includes the physical labor of traveling to conflict zones and the emotional toll of preparing traumatic images for audience consumption, along with myriad other dimensions of emotional labor (Hopper and Huxford 2015; Thomson 2021; Wahl-Jorgensen 2020). For journalists from marginalized communities, it includes additional labor by virtue of simply existing in a newsroom of others (Miller and Lewis 2022; Richardson 2017). Technologies are often inextricably linked with changes in labor, especially in how they push journalists to think of their labor as more contingent—a compounding challenge for journalists working in communities and countries where labor is precarious at best (Matthews and Onyemaobi 2020). Labor is an important lens for understanding power and influence (Sayers 2007). It has long been central to journalism work and has also long been political, with attention to labor issues seen as an inherently Marxist stance—even leading to censorship and surveillance in the World War I-era U.S. (Faue 2020). Understanding global journalism as a practice entails focusing on the ways that people (in this case, journalists) do things and the motivations behind those actions (Schatzki 1997). Journalistic labor is increasingly precarious, a condition that is exacerbated in already marginalized contexts. This work is precarious in the sense that it is often contingent rather than full-time; even full-time journalists are often underpaid and unreliably paid in the Global South (Matthews and Onyemaobi 2020).

While research increasingly acknowledges the importance of a transnational approach to understanding these issues, most studies still focus overwhelmingly on traditional power centers in the north and west (Wasserman 2018). The articles in this issue expand our focus to power in its myriad dimensions as it manifests in journalistic labor around the globe.

Journalism as a Global Field and Practice

Journalism studies scholars have adopted field theory as a useful way to make sense of journalism practice because it highlights the ways that meso-level social pressures coming from interorganizational and professional environments shape production (Benson 2006). While the approach is dominated by Western perspectives, it has global potential, as evidenced by, for instance, Wahutu (2024)'s work on the field of journalism in sub-Saharan Africa. And its global potential extends beyond explanatory capacity for non-Western contexts. As sociologists have demonstrated in several recent applications, when expanded to include a global dimension, field theory offers even greater explanatory potential. One reason may be that Bourdieu's sociological perspective is deeply rooted in his studies of Algeria (Calhoun 2006; Curto 2016). Thinking of journalism as a global field provides a starting point to capture and theorize the myriad novel dimensions of journalism labor in a global world. Expanding the journalism field to a global one is a task that involves, as Larissa Buchholz succinctly points out, "more than upscaling"—rather, it involves rethinking the field as a space with new dimensions of capital and autonomy than those captured in national field theory discourse (Buchholz 2016, p. 34), and of the interrelationship and interdependence of local and global audiences and media networks when it comes to contemporary issues such as climate change, migration and war, and global structures of power (Berglez 2013).

There is already a theoretical starting point for engaging global dimensions within the constraints of field theory. Sociologists have proposed a global dimension to contemporary fields, for instance the field of art dealership, which exists on a nationally bounded plane and on a global or transnational plane (Buchholz 2016). In this framework, we could think of journalists as existing in one of several geographically defined fields, including the transnational or cosmopolitan and the national or local; some scholars have already pursued this idea, for instance Wahutu (2024). We could think of journalists as bridging across these various geographically defined fields (Moon 2019). One could alternatively conceptualize a global field as a "worldwide arena in which states or other actors . . . compete with each other" (Go 2008, p. 207). The global outlook could then serve as a form of cultural capital in a field of competing global powers, in a contest that increasingly draw on mediated strategic narratives, often in online spaces, to wield geopolitical influence (Madrid-Morales et al. 2024). This approach provides space not only to consider the changing geography of influence in contemporary journalism; it also explicitly encompasses and provides language to assess the ways that cultural and political imperialism have shaped and continue to shape journalism practice, even when the practitioners are situated in and speaking to local audiences. At its most useful, field theory leads to an embodied and emplaced study of social struggle, one that considers the socialization, personal trajectories, and careers of various actors and, as such, can illuminate the ways that ideas and practices circulate (Vauchez 2011). Transforming field theory to a global scale provides a way to understand how journalism and journalistic actors are shaped by not only local but also supranational pressures, including the foreign policy efforts of countries encouraging

democratization via media assistance policies and the shared boundaries defining journalism practice around the globe (Cohen 2011; Waisbord 2013; Jones & Waisbord 2010). Layering global and local fields can also highlight patterns of influence not easily seen or explained when looking at one geographic space alone (Vauchez 2008).

This Special Issue

This collection of articles introduces the global field lens to contemporary journalism, capturing dimensions of power and influence that can help us better understand the motivations and pressures shaping the work of news production in the 21st century. Some of the authors in this special issue engage with the transnational aspects of contemporary journalism, showing how some journalists work across national borders and explicitly engage with various geographic spaces. Other authors bring in the global perspective, examining how knowledge hierarchies and production practices are shaped by new incentives and flows that are not the product of any one nation but instead are the result of existing and operating in a world where geographies are layered in local spaces. These conceptions—both global and transnational—of the practice and self-understanding of news workers are evident in various ways in the articles in this special issue.

Yin Luo and Kecheng Fang show how communities of content creators on Instagram are united across geographic distance by their shared values, including the goal of challenging authoritarianism. Sara Shaban and Soheil Kafiliveyjujeh look at the ways Iranian diaspora journalists covering their home country construct their identities, finding that this group of journalists occupies a unique role because of their ability to code-switch between identities as Iranian nationals and international journalists. These pieces highlight the value of a transnational approach to contemporary journalism, examining the effects of collaboration and movement across national borders on news production.

In an examination of African media coverage of crises on the continent, James Wahutu highlights how, even within “local” communities of journalists, global influence and a related “preference for foreignness” permeates decisions about whose voices to highlight and empower in news reports. The author argues that knowledge construction about the journalistic field in Africa has been “outsourced” to non-African actors and, consequently, perspectives and narratives from the Global North have been privileged in knowledge about massive human rights violations. Augusto Santos and Regina Cazzamatta find evidence of power imbalance in their study of the ways BRICS countries cover each other; notably, only in South Africa does coverage of BRICS countries outpace coverage of the U.S.

Meagan Doll examines the characteristics of a community of journalists from Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and South Sudan who attended peace journalism training, thus adding to the literature on how journalism practices spread transnationally. She finds that this group of journalists tend to be highly educated, have personal experience with conflict, and are open to shifting from observer roles to more interventionist stances in their journalism work and shows how a Western model of journalism can

diffuse across diverse communities of practice. Meghan Sobel Cohen and Karen McIntyre provide another example of the “everyday colonization” of journalism that Wahutu notes; they show that while discussions of the relationship between journalists and their publics globally have increasingly focused on issues of trust, most of this work has used the experiences of journalists and audiences in Western democracies as a point of departure and overlooked mediascapes in other parts of the world. Sobel Cohen and McIntyre examine the ways that East African journalists perceive audience trust—a concept complicated by global power imbalance, which leads some audiences to trust international more than local media outlets (Wasserman and Madrid-Morales 2019). Their survey of journalists in Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya shows differences between perceived trust levels in these countries, illustrating that not only do journalists’ relationship with audiences vary globally, but that variations between countries in the Global South also serve as a reminder not to homogenize non-Western contexts. Danford Zirugo also joins this discussion by illustrating how journalists in a single national space—Zimbabwe—are nevertheless divided in their approach to incorporating Western and local values and practices into journalism work. He shows how the Zimbabwean journalism field is fundamentally structured around an ideological collision between, among other things, Western definitions of press freedom and local understanding of communitarian identities, leading to what he terms a “fractured community,” extending Barbie Zelizer’s concept for global use (Zelizer 1993). These pieces illustrate the value of a global approach to journalism, one that extends beyond various geographic spaces to examine how knowledge, power, and politics create new incentives and challenges for journalism work.

While broadening the scope of journalism research to encompass global contexts is undoubtedly an imperative, such research brings ethical and methodological challenges. Saumava Mitra, Lindsay Palmer, and Soomin Seo reflect on these challenges in their article in this issue, in which they examine the power relationships between researchers based in wealthy Western countries and their research subjects in contexts outside the West. The authors argue for a self-reflexive approach to research and model this critical, decolonizing work in their piece.

Conclusion

We hope this special issue inspires new ways of thinking about and studying journalism labor in its many contemporary forms and practices. The value of expanding our approach to this work is evident; in a world that is increasingly fragmented, multipolar, and non-democratic, data and theoretical engagement that explains the ways these fragments and collectivities influence each other is crucial. The articles we have gathered point the way to an engagement with important concepts that can aid our understanding of the new and old dynamics shaping journalism in the contemporary world. Understanding contemporary journalism as a truly global practice and field is an evolving and compelling site of study, and we look forward to work that extends this endeavor even further.

Acknowledgments

The idea for this special issue and many of the articles contained here grew out of a symposium hosted by the Reilly Center at Louisiana State University in spring 2023. We are grateful to LSU's Manship School and especially to Reilly Center director Jenee Slocum for expert guidance and resources to host an in-person conversation that enriched many of the pieces here.

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