

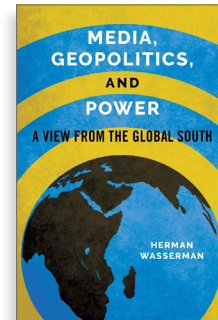
Book Reviews

Editor: Maarit Jaakkola

Herman Wasserman

Media, Geopolitics, and Power: A View from the Global South

Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2018, 217 pp.



From the title of the book, one might conclude that the author portrays only a part of the world. Making this kind of conclusion is hasty and can only be dispelled after a complete and attentive read of the 217 pages of scholarly discussions. Herman Wasserman's *Media, Geopolitics, and Power: A View from the Global South* does not only present over two decades of the South African media trajectory from the apartheid to post-apartheid eras, it also provides a unique and rich connection between the changes in the South African context and the shifts experienced in the global landscape (with focus on geopolitics and discussions in the media).

Most especially, Wasserman makes a genuine case for why what happens in the media landscape within the Global South is of importance to the global media landscape discourse. Specifically, Wasserman notes that the developments in the Global South "can be instructive as to the directions in which global media might be moving" (p. 49). As such, the inclusion of non-Western perspectives in the global discourse must not be "superficial and patronising gestures" (p. 88) as the case has always been.

Media, Geopolitics, and Power: A View from the Global South draws upon a decade of Wasserman's scholarly contributions to the media landscape discourse. The eight-chapter book consists of the transitions witnessed in the South African media landscape from apartheid to democracy, the contestations experienced in the South African media and how it fits in the "global debates about media norms and values and the notion of a global crisis in journalism" (p. 79), and the position of South African media within the shifts in global geopolitics (with special focus on South Africa's membership of the BRICS and its close relationship with China).

In the first chapter of the book, "From Apartheid to a new democracy", Wasserman provides a descriptive overview of four areas of shift witnessed in the South African media: ownership and editorial composition, attempts to diversify the public sphere, normative and regulatory frameworks, and conceptions of the relationship between media and political power. As captured by Wasserman, most of the transitions in media ownership happened in the print media. These transitions aimed at the racial composition of media ownership

in the country. On the need to diversify the public sphere, Wasserman observed that race and language formed the structures of South African media and represented the high levels of inequality in the country. As shifts were witnessed in media ownership, there was a need to move away from oppressive laws that guided the media under the apartheid era for a more professional outlook and institutionalising of regulatory frameworks to check excesses. Also, Wasserman noted that there was a transition from mutual mistrust between the media and the state to different interpretations of the media's roles two decades post-apartheid. Overall, South African media is currently in an "ongoing process of renegotiating its place, role and functions in a democratic society" (p. 46).

The second chapter, "This time for Africa?" provides the intersection that exists between local and global in media studies discipline. Wasserman specifically notes that the areas of shifts witnessed in the South African media is linked to the change in business models, development of new technologies, and the overall shifts witnessed in the global media industry. The chapter makes a valid and relevant case about the continued exclusion of the Global South, including Africa, from media studies scholarship. In a bid to dispel the assumptions on how media studies about and from Africa are perceived, Wasserman argues that there is a need for engagement with African scholarship. The Global North must not portray itself as academic saviours of the South but collaborators and partners with the aim of attaining mutual benefits.

In chapter three, "A changing media culture", Wasserman discusses three themes that emerged from discussions with South African journalists about how the history of apartheid shapes the practice of today's journalism. From these themes, some journalists see journalism as either resistance to apartheid or a cure to the wound caused by apartheid, while others see journalism as the continuation of elite domination witnessed during the apartheid era. Based on these, the professional identities and norms of South African jour-

nals in the post-apartheid era are maintained through the assertion of their "journalistic freedom, independence and social responsibility" (p. 74).

In chapters 4 to 6, Wasserman discusses the local contestations in relation to "Africanisation" of media ethics and global ethical practices. To drive home this point, Wasserman discusses extensively the introduction of tabloids in the print media in 2004 based on the visual presentation and content obtainable in the UK. Wasserman noted this introduction as an off-shoot of globalisation and "glocalisation". The tabloidisation of the media in the country was successful because they catered for the needs of "a readership market once neglected by the post-apartheid commercial process" (p. 98). On the future of journalism, Wasserman notes that there is need for the local and the global to be seen as "mutually independent and provide a perspective from which the notions of the 'future' and 'crisis' of journalism could be considered more holistically" (p. 121).

In chapters 7 and 8, the relationship of South Africa with the BRICS nations – China in particular – as well as the role of new media technologies in South African media landscape, are extensively discussed. Wasserman notes this relationship with China has influenced the ownership structure and content churned out in the South African media. On the role of new media technologies, he draws upon student movement activism in the country, such as #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall, and the role of social media. Wasserman cautiously notes the role social media played in this activism. Drawing comparisons with other examples, such as Arab Spring in the Northern Africa region, #OccupyNigeria in Nigeria, #WalktoWork in Uganda, and the protests against Senegal's former president, Wasserman notes that social media has "proved to be more adaptable and in touch with a movement that is organic in a nature" (p.166).

The book lives up to the expectations it raises in its introduction. Using the transition experienced in the South African media

landscape from the apartheid to post-apartheid eras, Wasserman provides concrete solutions to how the local and global can be viewed with the aim of solving the crisis in journalism globally. In addition, Wasserman's intervention on the relegation of African media scholarship in global media studies scholarship is important and should not be glossed over.

For anyone interested in understanding how the South African media negotiates its

role in a democratic society and the connection between local and global in the media landscape, this book is worth reading.

Kelechi Okechukwu Amakoh
Graduate Student
University of Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

Brigitte Alfter

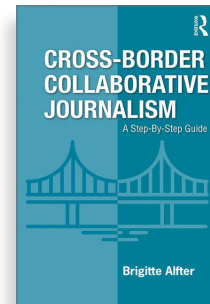
Cross-Border Collaborative Journalism: A Step-By-Step Guide

London: Routledge, 2019, 200 pp.

Is journalistic authority in a state of crisis? What about the future of professional journalism as we know it? German-Danish journalist Brigitte Alfter's book on cross-border collaborative journalism speaks to a certain dimension of current academic debate regarding these questions: the prospects of rethinking journalism beyond the regular newsroom and beyond national and disciplinary borders.

While some aspects of a crisis are evident – such as the loss of a long-practised business model built on advertisement and a decrease in the number of permanently hired journalists – there is less consensus among scholars and commentators concerning journalistic authority and the future. Some seem confident that journalism will endure basically in the form we have today, while others express near relief that a crisis finally has arrived so that journalism can be reinvented in a better form. A metacommunication perspective has gained hold, picturing journalism as discursively constructed and dependent on wider social and cultural contingencies. Recent technological, economic, and social changes are seen as causing troubles for public communication more broadly, not only for journalists. From

this perspective, journalism as an ideology is diagnosed as in need of being brought out of its status as a single institution practised by professional journalists. Newly emerged fields where journalists and non-journalists collaborate across both geographical and disciplinary borders are fruitfully scrutinised in this perspective. This includes data journalism, the global fact-checking movement, and cross-border investigations on transnational phenomena. These are examples where journalists and other actors gather in international networks to share experiences and methodologies, where concrete collaborative work materialises, and where journalistic ideals such as objectivity, accuracy, and fairness are being actualised. Hybridity and boundary-making, as well as boundary-opening, are key words here. As an example, in his analysis of the international fact-checking movement, Graves (2018) calls attention to the need for ethnographic studies of the way journalists team up with other actors and how the construction and reconstruction of autonomy and authority depends on organisational ties across field lines. One of his conclusions is that journalists in this transnational context



are less inclined to police the borders of the journalistic profession towards various categories of non-journalists who are also at work in the verification industry. He documents diversity among the many fact-checking initiatives but suggests there is a “broadly shared concern with promoting democratic discourse and accountable government” along ideals of professional journalism (Graves 2018: 626). He also documents the presence of academia as an institutional base, a source of validation and practical insights, and an essential partner to solicit grants from major foundations.

Many of Grave’s findings from the international fact-checking movement resonates with the cross-border collaborative journalism field as presented by Alfter. Her book is written with students of journalism and practising journalists in mind and is meant as a handbook. Describing herself as a practitioner, Alfter’s background makes her an apt figure to produce a step-by-step guide. She has been working within the genre for many years, for example through the US-based International Consortium for Investigative Journalism. She has also been engaged in setting up transnational support structures for cross-border work – notably through Journalismfund.eu – and has been part of the organising team for the international conference Dataharvest, which offers a densely populated professional and social environment for cross-border activities.

The book is thus not an academic product in a traditional sense, and Alfter does not explore the field with academic issues foremost in mind. However, given the detailed material, the many cases she presents, the historical account based on conversations with pioneers of the genre, and the interviews with leading figures and people currently working in the field, I would like to propose that the book comes out as a piece of informed ethnography, making it relevant for researchers. With a narrative thread driven by curiosity and an apparent effort to reach out to scholars of journalism, the book is a kind of boundary-open call for creative collaborations among knowledge producers not only

across geographical and cultural borders, but of disciplinary ones as well.

The book serves as an introduction to a field many of us are acquainted with through large international investigations such as The Panama Files, which produced breaking news in national media of tax exemption by the rich and powerful. This kind of work, Alfter describes, often starts with a whistleblower offering to leak information to an individual journalist, usually at a renowned newspaper in a Western European or North American country. The journalist realises the breadth of the information – both in workload and publishing power – and with careful consideration of the source’s secrecy and wishes, the journalist contacts colleagues around the world to initiate a joint effort to explore the material. The material is distributed among team members (often millions of documents), expertise is called in (computer engineers, lawyers, etc.), and agreements are made on financing, publication date, encryption of correspondence, and persons to interview. Numerous meetings and discussions follow during months of work on mapping, fact-checking, and journalistic packaging, leading to a joint coordinated disclosure with global magnitude.

Alfter takes the reader behind the breaking news headlines and beyond the media dramas of leaders trying to worm their way out of guilt in front of the cameras. Starting from the presumption that our interconnected world calls for collaboration – simply because no individual journalist or single publishing house can master the number of documents, laws, and languages involved, or build the necessary networks of sources related to global issues – she goes into detail about the context where journalists from different countries team up to carry out cross-border work. Seven steps of the process through which the work unfolds are identified by Alfter: 1) the network necessary to get started, 2) the idea for a project, 3) the research team, 4) the work plan, 5) the research, 6) the publication, and 7) the post-publication work. Each step is given a separate chapter, where it is broken up and expanded.

The issue of culture is central. Composing a team based on several national and cultural belongings is seen as an asset in the sense that team members supplement each other regarding language, experience, ideas about how to do research, access to databases and skills on how to manage them, as well as cultural understandings of the regions where work is carried out. It is also an asset in the sense that differences in journalistic culture can be identified and negotiations pave the way for cross-border agreements of what constitutes “good journalism”. But it is also a challenge to coordinate mutual work in a team involving many different traditions and values, a challenge that often falls on the editor. Alfter goes on and identifies categories of potential cross-border work, all indicating that cross-border journalism is a way of collaborating to produce particular kinds of storylines representing the interconnectedness of contemporary society. In this way, Alfter categorises and structures her material and supplies readers with a picture of how the field is organised. A plethora of examples makes her accounts pedagogic and reader-friendly. Her definition of what cross-border collaborative journalism is speaks of the accessible style: “journalists from different countries decide on a topic of mutual interest, gather and share material and publish the final result to their own domestic audiences” (p. 175).

Alfter continuously refers to academia in her book. She points out that scholars have only begun researching the field and that it would benefit from increased activity and collaboration. Her approach is positive, suggesting that academia can provide a general overview and bird’s-eye picture for which journalists often do not have the time. Entry points to the field are abundant.

The issue of trust is central in the book, in the sense that team members deal with sensitive issues, vulnerable sources, encrypted documentation, and strictly regulated publication; without trust, the work would be difficult. The specific mechanisms of how trust is built, negotiated, and used in particular situations, how it may involve dimensions of

power, produce hierarchy among journalists from different countries, and involve exploitation could be further explored. Whistleblowers is another central topic. In the book, the persons leaking information are depicted as taking immense risks, producing an image of the whistleblower as hero. Research shows that whistleblower can also serve a strategic and self-interested function of smearing opponents (Keeble, 2001). How can this be taken into consideration on a transnational level? Has the whistleblower gained value and particular meaning as a device for accountability in the cross-border context? Furthermore, the networks and consortiums are described positively as facilitators of cross-border work. What about mechanisms of exclusion to the more influential collaborations? Who are invited, who are left out? What about geopolitical tendencies given that the more influential cross-border organisations are US-based?

Another topic is the relationship between the national and the global or the European, in terms of identity, public sphere, and opinion-making. The work process is described as mutual during most of the process, and at a late stage, style changes of the texts are introduced to fit each national context and audience. What about different traditions of journalistic writing? What about the transnational level if in the end it is the national framing that counts? Finally, an interesting aspect of the material is the sociological profile of some of the members, scholars, and pioneers appearing in the book, including Alfter herself – their sentiments and considerations of why they do what they do. Cross-border journalism offers an interesting and attractive job market, although a clear business model is still to be invented (much of the more advanced cross-border work is financed either by legacy media or through donations). Some seem to be attracted to cross-border collaborative journalism in the sense that it offers a kind of refuge, a chance to pursue journalistic investigations in line with journalistic ideals that have been compromised or rationalised away in much of the ordinary and contemporary media industry. Is it in these kinds of

transnational constellations that journalism's central values will endure? How will that affect future journalism "at home"?

As stated, Alfter's objective with the book is not academic. The academic references she does make use of and the theories she speaks of, including cultural studies, network theory, and theories of globalisation, informs her writing but should, in my view, be more fruitfully seen as part of her suggestions for future research and invitation for scholars to enter the scene.

Paul Mihailidis

Civic Media Literacies: Re-Imagining Human Connection in an Age of Digital Abundance

New York: Routledge, 2019, 171 pp.

Platform media and participatory media offer people of different ages and around the world vast opportunities to share their experiences and expressions, to extend their learning, and to set up new forms of communities. From these networked online publics, new opinions can evolve and eventually even change the minds of decisions makers. At the same time, this rich media ecosystem unfortunately is also full of misinformation, disinformation, filter bubbles, spectacle and rumours, conspiracy theories, and tribal ideologies that at times almost seem to outdo true and civilised conversations and block cross-fertilising dialogue. In addition to nurturing hate and aggressive rhetoric rather than empathy, respect, and solidarity, this digital underbelly ignites populism and distrust in and destabilisation of the established institutions of media, science, culture, and education.

One often suggested antidote to this "post-truth condition" is media and information literacy, for example as this is executed in campaigns and interventions meant to enhance children and youth in

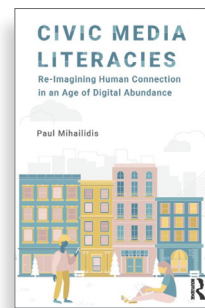
Urban Larssen

Lecturer in Journalism

Södertörn University, Sweden

References

- Graves, L. (2018). Boundaries not drawn: Mapping the institutional roots of the global fact-checking movement. *Journalism Studies*, 19(5), 613–631. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1196602>
- Keeble, R. (2001). *Ethics for journalists*. London: Routledge.



their criticism of sources. These skills and abilities are essential to media literacy, which is often described as the capacity to "access, analyze, evaluate, create by using different kinds of media" and that can be regarded as the outcome of organised media education, for example that conducted within the frameworks of compulsory education. The media literacy movement started in the 1960s among engaged teachers and academics (e.g., Stuart, Hall and Marshall McLuhan) with connection to progressive pedagogics (c.f. John Dewey). Today there is less of Bildung and exploration, and more emphasis on policy and somewhat instrumental ideas for the socialisation of an also employable media citizen for the future. This tendency is manifested, for example, by concepts like media and information literacy (Unesco) and digital competence (EU, OECD). However, despite these efforts, media literacy of today seems to be backfiring. This is at least what American social media researcher danha boyd has suggested. She argues that the training of young people in how to use media to express

themselves and become critically aware and able to deconstruct media messages instead seems to have made generations of (American) youth more individualistic and narcissistic, and also more cynical in their relation to popular media, but less civically engaged.

This dilemma is one of the starting points for Boston-based and internationally renowned media literacy scholar Paul Mihailidis in his new book *Civic Media Literacies: Re-Imagining Human Connection in an Age of Digital Abundance*; but, in contrast to boyd, Mihailidis offers a number of positive and encouraging examples of how young and not-so-young citizens in different contexts perform civic engagement and agency by raising their voices and being persistent in relation to some experienced social injustices or political wrongdoing. Their engagement also inspires others to solve real-life problems by creating and sustaining online-offline networks and communities.

According to Mihailidis, any form of civic training or civic action in our deeply media-tised world will be unavoidably related to the technologies and logics of the media. This ought to make media literacy more popular than ever, but this does not seem to be the case. Mihailidis refers to this as the civic agency gap of media literacy in terms of its policies and practices, and he argues for a need to “re-imagine media literacy” and develop it from a text-based and media-centric policy paradigm more in the direction of what he calls civic media literacy. This orientation is meant both as an alternative and complement to functional media literacy (e.g., Unesco and the EU) as well as Marxian critical media literacy. Instead of focusing on skills or critique on some kind of autopilot, we should focus on *civic intentionality* as the starting point for media literacy training. Civic intentionality refers to the capacity to be together in the world with others and the use of media toward a common good. Thus, media literacy should be more about bringing people together and creating spaces for meaningful engagement, positive dialogue, and community building that can help change society for the better.

To accomplish this, Mihailidis argues for what could be regarded as a more activist-oriented approach. He centres his ideal of civic media literacy around a normative pedagogical model comprising five core values: agency, caring, persistence, critical consciousness, and emancipation. *Agency* refers to the ability to make a difference and create impact through sustainable engagement and partaking in civic life. *Caring* refers to the collective ethics of “caring for” and “caring with” (rather than the more distant “caring about”). *Persistence* can be regarded as a contrast to the speed of much of today’s online life since this is about maintaining efforts that can challenge social injustices. *Critical consciousness* is close to empowerment and used by Mihailidis as a term for learning how to understand social, political, and economic contractions and challenges in a way that makes one aware of one’s capacity to respond and intervene against injustices in collaboration with others. *Emancipation*, in this context, refers to mundane forms of everyday online activism that challenge dominant infrastructure by formulating alternative, experimental, and practice-based designs for “other imaginable futures” than the ones that are officially prescribed by the interests of technology and capital. In order to realise this, Mihailidis connects the five values of civic media literacy to a number of priorities and concrete questions for pedagogues and others to consider when designing their educational practices. He also suggests a model for how to create a sustainable media literacy continuum, and this is centred around voice, agency, and participation.

Dewey and Freire are obvious points of departure for Mihailidis and so are a number of “new media-theorists” like Henry Jenkins (convergence culture, participatory media, spreadable media, civic media, etc.). Mihailidis also offers the reader a somewhat eclectic theoretical and conceptual mixture when he is unpacking concepts like citizenship, agency, and practice to use them as thinking tools in the development of his idea. He aligns with Nick Couldry in using “voice” as a key

metaphor for the understanding of democratic participation, and he turns to German-American philosopher and political theorist Hanna Arendt when developing his take on “agency” as a term for a relational more than subjective positioning.

In the more empirical chapters, Mihailidis acknowledges that platform media and social media also can become almost a contradiction to civic media literacy, to instead mirror what Guy Deboard called “The society of the spectacle”. There are too many examples of this: Pizzagate, Pepe the Frog (right-wing meme figure), the Trump election, Brexit, hoax, hearsay, rumours, and fake news. This plays out well with narcissism, ignorance, and sensationalism, and with the algorithmic order of platform capitalism and click baits and serotine economics. To this, Mihailidis adds his own online survey on how young people find and share information while showing low levels of civic participation. These results indicate political apathy and cynicism and thus also mirror the civic agency gap that civic media literacy is meant to overcome. Mihailidis’s book is, as already mentioned, full of positive examples of how young people raise their voices and agency and empower their capacity, by sharing their personal narratives and social concerns in a persistent, participatory, and creative way – all of this in support of what Mihailidis calls “Team human”. And then, in the final of the books seven chapters, Mihailidis offers us a civic media literacy design guide that various stakeholders can use when facilitating and curating civic media literacy interventions in classrooms, communities, and civic institutions.

This is a book written well before Greta Thunberg, but still it can help us understand the phenomena “Greta Thunberg” also from a media literacy perspective. Her campaign combines traditional offline protests (strikes, sign posts, and demonstrations) with intense social media use (millions of followers and Instagram-, Facebook-, and Twitter-hashtags) and heavy coverage from “the traditional media”. Since this review was written during

the Corona crisis, it is also hard *not* to get the concept civic media literacy on your mind when reflecting on how people around the world gather online to show solidarity and support, community, and creativity by documenting balcony serenades or arranging online events for sharing and caring, especially with the most vulnerable of us, in these times of crisis, social distancing, and lockdowns.

The book is also timely since media education at large, and on different levels, may be at a crossroads and in need of new ways of engaging students that are notoriously immersed in digital media; I agree with Mihailidis that this should be done more on premises of playful, creative, and explorative processes than through instrumental pedagogics with focus on predictable outcomes.

Mihailidis’s book can, in many ways, be read as a continuation of his previous 2014 book, *Media Literacy and the Emerging Media Citizen*. It also reflects his experiences from a long-term engagement as director of the Salzburg Academy’s summer school on Media and Global Change, where students from different countries and disciplines gather around civic engagement and the production of multimedia tools designed to meet the challenges of today. A more negative note is the tendency of Mihailidis to fall into idealism, while convincingly arguing for a renewal of media literacy thinking, in a field marked by its problems with showing evidence-based outcomes. However, idealism and normativity are probably unavoidable in media literacy, since this field is positioned between research, policy, and pedagogics, and thus carries with it expectations of not only presenting research, but also applicable models, concepts, and frameworks. I would also argue that this initial humanistic idea of the informed, engaged, and critically aware “media citizen” is far too precious to abandon as we move further into the order of artificial intelligence.

Michael Forsman
University Lecturer
Södertörn University, Sweden