

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: INVISIBILITIES IN AND OF JOURNALISM

NOTA INTRODUTÓRIA: INVISIBILIDADES NO E DO JORNALISMO

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Journalism is central to society and to the way “we see the world, ourselves and each other” (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009, p. 3), besides being essential to decision-making processes and to the exercise of power. By setting the agenda, journalists influence public and private debate; they determine which issues are (more) important and which ones the public should be thinking about. Hence, journalism plays a key role in democratic societies. Indeed, the intrinsic relationship between journalism and democracy has been extensively documented (e.g., Deuze, 2009; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2003/2004; Singer, 2003; Zelizer, 2012), and it contributes to the importance of studying journalism and journalists, as well as the realities they make visible and, by extension, invisible. At the same time, normative conceptions of journalism are not confined to notions of democracy. For instance, the objectivity ideal and the aligned normative view of journalism call upon journalists not to become news themselves. It is perceived as unprofessional to talk about oneself or the problems of the profession since it may compromise journalists’ detachment and objectivity. Indeed, traditionally, journalists have spared the news industry the scrutiny that other areas are subjected to (Mesquita, 2003). Nonetheless, the current crisis in the news media sector has shed light on a difficult reality that characterizes journalism globally, and issues of precarity, non-standard employment relationships, violence and abuse towards media workers, and so on, are gradually making the news. Therefore, there is a growing body of literature that explores precarity in journalism studies (e.g., Araújo, 2025; Cohen et al., 2019; Ekdale et al., 2015; Gollmitzer, 2014; Örnebring, 2018; Rick, 2025; Ricketson et al., 2020; Sybert, 2023). All of this indicates that precarity has become a characteristic of contemporary journalism practice. Furthermore, what was once limited to online violence is now escalating to offline attacks, often in the form of harassment. The latest report by the Worlds of Journalism project underlines this reality, with psychological threats being the most reported by inquired journalists, followed by digital surveillance and the physical threat

of being exposed to COVID-19 (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2025). These kinds of vicious behaviors target women journalists and minority groups disproportionately when compared to men (see, for instance, Chen et al., 2020; Holton et al., 2023; Miller & Lewis, 2022). Moreover, harassment and other forms of abuse may contribute “to weakening journalism as an institution and ultimately silencing individual journalists” (Miller & Lewis, 2022, p. 80).

While “studying journalism without any sort of ethnocentric bias is an epistemological impossibility” (Hanitzsch, 2019, p. 214), research in journalism studies should account for diversity and pluralism, avoiding imbalances of gender or geographical location, among others. However, that is often not the case. There is a growing body of literature acknowledging long-standing asymmetries in journalism studies’ knowledge production, with the Global North receiving vast attention when compared to the Global South (e.g., Goyanes & Demeter, 2020; Hanusch & Vos, 2020; Jerónimo & Torre, 2025). When it comes to studying precarity within journalism, for instance, there are significant differences between the Global North and Global South. In the latter, conditions of instability are frequent, with precarity being often associated with challenges to professional practice, such as censorship or colonialism effects that are still present in media systems (e.g., Matthews & Onyemaobi, 2020). Notorious differences also emerge when the topic is violence. Even though violence against journalists used to be studied in the Global South, since it was typically associated with war zones and authoritarian regimes, research is increasingly looking into violence within consolidated democracies, such as Western Europe and the United States (e.g., Adams, 2018; Araújo, 2024; Chen et al., 2020; Ivask et al., 2023; Miller, 2023; Miller & Lewis, 2022; Miranda et al., 2023; Waisbord, 2022). Nonetheless, and even though safety is a global problem, journalists in different zones of the globe are subject to different forms of violence and multiple consequences (Waisbord, 2022). Hence, both the forms and intensity of violence and the strategies used to mitigate its effects reflect “persistent structural and systemic disparities in the media environment” (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2025, p. 18).

However, disparities include not only research focused on the Global North/South, but also authorship issues. Hanusch and Vos (2020), who conducted a systematic review of all comparative studies of journalism published in 22 key journals between 2000 and 2015 (N = 441), highlight that, when it comes to authorship, there is still a concentration of power in the Western world. Even though non-Western authors and women are growing in number, “authorship is still considerably more male than female and more Western than non-Western” (Hanusch & Vos, 2020, p. 337). This impacts not only citation rates, which are more male and Western, but also the characteristics of the publications: there are more comparative studies focusing on the Western world, especially on the United States and the United Kingdom contexts (Hanusch & Vos, 2020).

Invisibilities in authorship begin before the publication process, and some authors connect the (lack of) geographic diversity of published research to the geographic diversity of editorial boards. Goyanes and Demeter (2020) conducted a content analysis of journals listed in the Journal Citation Report (N = 84) that shows that diverse editorial

boards are more likely to publish more diverse research articles, based on the country of origin of the first author and on where the data were collected. The same research underlines the power of Western scholarship, with editorial boards being mostly composed by academics from the United States and Western Europe. Hence, their role as “gatekeepers of knowledge” is based on “Western understandings of science” (Goyanes & Demeter, 2020, p. 1140), opposed to the almost invisible peripheral Global South regions that lack the power to “challenge or modify existing theories and research approaches in communication” (Goyanes & Demeter, 2020, p. 1141). Building on the premise that special issues might address the issue of geographic disparities within knowledge production, Ekdale et al. (2022) have also conducted a content analysis of more than 4,000 articles published in five highly ranked journalism studies journals. Their findings indicate that special issues with a geographic focus on the Global South and global perspectives broadly lead to a more geographically diverse group of authors. Nonetheless, they are rare and have fewer citations.

Taking this context into account, in this volume we were interested not only in understanding what journalism research *makes visible*, but mostly what journalism research *keeps invisible*. We received 53 proposals to this theme issue, which speaks to the importance of looking into invisibilities in and of journalism. Of those, 46 submissions were rejected (27 were desk rejected and another 19 were rejected after peer review). This issue is composed of seven original articles contributed by a diverse group of authors, representing several institutions across multiple geographical locations (such as Portugal, Spain, Belgium, Latvia, and Brazil), and focusing on different aspects of invisibility.

The first published article in this volume focuses on the Brazilian context. The author proposes the concept of “regional influence journalism”, grounded in journalistic practices within medium-sized, non-metropolitan Brazilian cities in the interior of states. This term refers to a type of journalism that is different from local journalism, regional journalism, or community journalism. “Regional Influence Journalism: A Proposal for Medium-Sized Brazilian Cities” is authored by Thays Assunção Reis, who employed a mixed-methods approach comprising a mapping of media outlets, semi-structured interviews with journalists, a questionnaire survey with media users, and a news content analysis. Results point to the existence of a form of journalism characterized by the simultaneous production of local and regional news that extends beyond the immediate locality into the wider area of influence. Furthermore, news coverage mediates the demands and concerns of nearby small communities, as it produces local information aimed at regional consumption, while also intermediating information flows originating from other urban centers.

Next, Liliana Carona and Rita Basílio de Simões map the Portuguese centenary regional press as “a resilient expression of proximity journalism” (p. 1). In their text, “Invisible and Vulnerable, yet Resilient: A Portrait of Centenary Regional Press in Portugal”, the authors employ a mixed-methods approach that combines documentary analysis and a quantitative survey. Through the analysis of 40 centenary publications that are still active, Carona and Simões highlight that the centenary regional press has a

strong territorial anchoring that reveals regional asymmetries and other concerning patterns, such as a fragile digital transition, limited gender diversity in leadership positions, and persistent precarity. Results also point to these newspapers' relevant role in preserving collective memory, fostering social cohesion and strengthening local democracy. They add to the body of literature that recognizes journalism as a public value, especially within a challenging national and international context characterized by the increasing precarity of the profession and the growing (and worrisome) news deserts. This is one of two articles focusing on the Portuguese context and exploring proximity and/or community journalism.

In the following study, Miguel Midões looks into "Invisible Communities: Amplifying Minority Voices in Professional Journalism Through Community Radio". The author conducts a qualitative analysis of four Portuguese community radio stations (Rádio Sintoniza-T, Rádio Ophelia, Rádio Freguesia de Belém, and *Rádio Antecâmara*), exclusively online, non-profit, and volunteer-run. Results show that community engagement is still a challenge, and stations lack regular newscasts and news production, which may be explained by their relatively short existence. Still, Midões highlights their potential in offering structured models of alternative, citizen, and community journalism that meet their communities' informational needs.

Next, Anda Rožukalne, Alnis Stakle, and Ilva Skulte explore journalists' safety in Latvia. In their article, "Between Institutional Inertia and Systemic Vulnerability: Understanding Invisible Threats to Journalists' Safety", the authors present their study on Latvian media professionals' perceptions towards work-related safety issues and coping mechanisms. Through a mixed-methods approach that combined literature analysis, a two-round Delphi expert survey, semi-structured interviews, case studies of court decisions, and focus group discussions, this article underlines a worrying reality where a threatening environment coexists with limited support structures. Hence, both *group invisibility* (affecting women, regional reporters, Russian-language journalists, and freelancers) and *concerns of invisibility* (that lead to a normalization or dismissal of threats) emerge. Rožukalne and colleagues' research contributes to a growing body of literature that explores journalists' (lack of) safety in Western countries, following issues such as the rise of populist movements and the spread of dis- and misinformation.

The fifth article presents Elena Louazon's research in Belgium, in which she analyzes "The Invisible Costs of Working on 'Diversity' for Minoritized Journalists". Following the premise that "diverse" journalists would produce more "diversity-related" content, the author conducted semi-structured interviews (N = 61) with LGBT and racialized journalists working in French-speaking Belgium. Results show that minoritized journalists feel they have limited influence on newsroom content due to deeply embedded professional routines (which include systemic barriers like editorial gatekeeping, prioritizing the dominant audience, and dismissing their issues as soft news) and ideological bias (mainly manifested through the presumption of activism and the resulting accusation that they lack neutrality or objectivity). Their efforts to improve representation result in unpaid, unrecognized, and invisible labor; and they face professional risks for engaging in diversity-related work, which reinforces an already existing precarity.

Next, Ana María Zafra Arroyo analyzes the “Evolution of the Photographic Representation of Women on the Front Pages of the Spanish Press (1977–1997): A Comparative Analysis of *ABC* and *El País*”. Following a visual content analysis, results indicate that in terms of their presence on the front pages of those daily newspapers, women remain a minority when compared to men. The author states that *ABC* reinforces traditional gender roles by representing women as “decorative” elements, while *El País* highlights women’s political and labor presence, even though they often place an emphasis on victimization. Zafra Arroyo points to a gendered visual narrative in the press, underlining the persistence of visual stereotypes.

Finally, the last article explores the experiences of Sámi journalists reporting on sexual violence in Sápmi, which is a region shared by four countries (Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia) and inhabited by the Sámi people. In the article titled “‘You Can’t Put It in Cotton, Can’t Pack It in Silk’: Sámi Journalists’ Experiences of Reporting on Sexual Violence”, Svea Vikander identifies journalists’ challenges when reporting on sexual violence based on interviews with Sámi journalists (N = 9) and an analysis of news articles (N = 30), approached through situational analysis. Results show that interviewees experience a hostile work environment and deep discomfort that arises from the prospect of running into the subjects of their reporting. Reporting becomes “too close to home”, which leads to internal tensions that are difficult to name within Western frameworks of fear or trauma. The findings point to a need for scholarly attention to the complex internal and relational lives of Indigenous journalists, shedding light into a sample of journalists that is often invisible in the literature.

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