

Book Review: The Journalism Manifesto, by Barbie Zelizer, Pablo J. Boczkowski, and C. W. Anderson

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The Journalism Manifesto. Barbie Zelizer, Pablo J. Boczkowski, and C. W. Anderson. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity, 2022. 140 pp. \$45.00 hbk. \$12.95 pbk \$10 ebk.

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Journalism Manifesto offers a brilliant and dense media-sociological reflection on the institution of journalism and how it can revert its irrelevance and heal the deep divide between how journalism operates in imagination and in real-world conditions. The authors criticize a uniform and isolationist view of journalism, resulting in detachment from on-the-ground practice, and seek how to reset journalists' links to societies for whom they work. The authors—Barbie Zelizer, Raymond Williams Professor of Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, Pablo J. Boczkowski, Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Northwestern University, and C. W. Anderson, Professor in the Department of Social and Political Science at the University of Milan—argue that without such change, the future of the journalistic institution is at risk.

The word 'institution' is crucial to the opening criticism. In the first part of the book, the authors deconstruct the theory-driven illusions – put in place by a set of white, male, high-status, Western or Global Northern thinkers – that institutions, including the journalistic institution, are autonomous and independent from other institutions, central to the social fabric, coherent, and permanent. The authors suggest that while journalism in crisis has pinned its hopes on these illusions, they need to be rethought from the core while looking at three 'interfaces' by which journalism links to the outside world: elites, norms, and audiences.

These three interfaces, their recent radical transformation, and the (failed or possible) reactions of journalism to the changes are central to the discussion the book puts forward. The authors argue that 'mainstream journalism about public affairs has been driven largely by elites, written by elites and consumed by elites' (p. 30). But due to the current pressure from anti-liberal and populist political forces, declining trust in elites and expert institutions, and the centrality of social media to political communication, the system of elite governance crumbles. Journalistic norms formulated within Western liberal democracies of late-modernity have proven untenable in other journalistic settings characterized by authoritarianism, violence against journalists, and media concentration. Therefore, the authors argue, journalistic norms currently undermine the institution's ability to function and need to be tailored to the context that the institution inhabits. Finally, journalism has also become disengaged from actual audiences, their preferences and practices: although known and quantifiable, current audiences cannot be taken for granted. They appear to be tribal, emotional, expressive, and skeptical, to which journalism is yet to react.

The argumentation line culminates in the final chapter, where the authors explore two possible ways out: a reformist path and a revolutionary path. Choosing the revolutionary path is based on the assumption that while democracy needs journalism, journalism proliferates in many forms without democracy or liberalism; thus, journalism can and needs forget about its institutional, liberal democratic history. Such revolutionary journalism would be energized by its fight against censorship, corruption, racism, homophobia, sexism, or classism. For journalism to undergo a real revolution, journalists need to get rid of their reliance on elites, throw out norms, and challenge their differentiation from audiences.

The undoubtedly-inspiring revolutionary path inevitably runs into the problem of diverse forms of violence against journalists in non-democratic regimes, tangibly proving that journalism does not flourish everywhere and anywhere, and into countless practical issues. Therefore, the revolutionary proposal can be read as a reminder that journalism requires radical change. Erasing norms is probably the least feasible part, given the need for some version of norms – not banally understood balance and impartiality, but norms such as human rights, truth-seeking, witnessing and verification, and serving the public.

By comparison, the reformist path means moving from tacit to explicit, inclusive, and equitable democratic liberalism that emphasizes transformative action as journalism's guiding *raison d'être*. The reform path builds on the assumption that journalism has a fundamental liberal democratic political orientation, often ignored or forgotten, except in moments of extreme crisis or conflict. Within the reform, elite membership in the journalistic pantheon would be reconsidered, open to historically marginalized and oppressed communities, and subject to higher, value-laden standards. Journalists need to widen and redefine the old norms and embrace new norms such as inclusiveness, social justice, and cosmopolitanism. To meet audiences where they are, journalists need to accept the role of emotions in their work and embrace creativity: 'perhaps journalists ought to start thinking of themselves less like lawyers or doctors and more like jazz musicians, actors, dancers or visual artists' (p. 100). This accurate simile embraces the multi-layered creative side of journalism practice and the vital role of journalists' emotions.

Let's imagine a combination of the two approaches—a revolutionary reform—based on the assumption that crisis or risk has become the new norm, whether we choose to understand it with Beck, Giddens, or others, and whether we substitute 'crisis' with the climate crisis, the illiberalizing tendencies or the renewed threat of nuclear catastrophe. The authors argue that "journalism currently inhabits a space of dislocation, and we are running out of time to repair it" (p. 16). Under the generalized crisis of late modernity, what if the way out of the dislocation leads through its relocation in the diverse heterotopias of mainstream journalism – the Global South and crisis contexts?

Heterotopia has transformative potential. Mainstream Global Northern journalism performed in big media organizations based on rigid norms has much to learn from journalists and journalisms in those contexts that have been used to crises. Many of these actors already have a *modus operandi* integrating some of the reformist elements, such as a grass-roots approach to sources, an anti-paternalistic relationship with audiences, and a focus on empathy and safety. These spaces and actors inhabit the heterotopia and possess the revolutionary power from which the reform of mainstream journalism can draw.