Research Notes…

Confronting Challenges in Journalism Education

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There is an underlying challenge in journalism education that exists in many countries, including Seychelles. This obstacle is connected to two intertwined premises. First, journalism is shaped by 'the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates' (Siebert et al., 1956). By this I mean that journalism in Seychelles is influenced by the nation's unique history, political traditions, social networks, geography, and cultural heritage. Because journalism reflects society, and societies around the globe are distinct from one another, journalism also varies depending on the particular time and place (See Hanitzsch et al., 2019).[1]

Saying journalism is affected by politics, culture, and other historical and structural influences may sound obvious, but what it actually means is highly complex and raises numerous questions that need deep interrogation. For instance, in Seychelles, how does the legacy of the one-party state shape journalism today? What spoken and unspoken 'rules' of journalism from this period continue to infuse the spirit of journalism in Seychelles? How does the past influence what Seychellois journalists feel they can—and should—do as a journalist? Or, how does the distinct blend of cultures that have intermingled in Seychelles impact the news values that have become prominent in the country? What assumptions about the world and strategies for navigating society are imbedded within Seychellois journalism? Ideally, journalism education would not only teach reporting, editing, storytelling, and technical skills

[1] In conjunction with Dr. Olga Klymenko of the University of Seychelles Education and Socio-Economic Research Institute, and Tessa Henderson of the Seychelles Media Council, we conducted a representative survey of journalists in Seychelles. This will be the first time that Seychellois journalists will be included in the Worlds of Journalism Study, which surveys over 30,000 journalists from around the world and allows researchers to understand how journalism varies from country to country. Since the study is ongoing, repeating every few years, researchers are also able to see how journalism changes over time. The results will be released in late 2023 or 2024.

(videography, audio production, photography, layout design, etc.), but would also help students reflect on deeper social questions and bring the hidden influences that shape journalism in Seychelles to the foreground.

The second premise is that the texts used to educate journalists in many countries around the world are largely written about journalism in America and Europe. This is a big issue because, at a basic level, journalism education is built around prominent books and articles. Readings are often used to structure a course and provide students with the sources for their own research. As professors, we rely on readings to frame classroom discussions and lessons. We use texts to give students background to the main controversies and varying arguments within a field that students should be aware of.

It is of course possible for a thoughtful teacher to overcome the lack of localized journalism readings, but it is not easy. Teachers can adapt their lessons and assignments to address the issues that students will encounter within their own society, but this requires both teachers and students to swim against the current. This is because it is far easier to design a course around existing texts, and when this happens, the likely result is that students end up spending a disproportionate time reflecting on the challenges facing journalism in the US and Europe. The danger of this is that the journalistic challenges students will face in their own countries will becomes secondary—at least in the classroom. This can create a disconnect between journalism education and the practice of being a journalist.

This is not to say that there is no benefit for students to learn about how journalism works in another country. There is merit to learning about the Watergate reporting that brought down U.S. President Richard Nixon, and the reporting on the Pentagon Papers and the Mai Lai massacre that helped end the US-Vietnam War. Just as there is a benefit to learning about the combative political partisanship inflicting American journalism or the corrosive rise of 'fake news' and propaganda that is spread, through social media, around the world. Linking journalists through awareness of a common set of examples, shared professional norms, and a familiar range of philosophical debates, allows communication across the profession to flow with more ease than if we all myopically focused on local issues.

Nonetheless, the problem with studying journalism using texts that emphasize American journalism is that the issues facing journalists in Seychelles, as well as other countries in Africa and beyond, are often of a different variety than the issues facing American journalists. The economic realities of journalism differ. As do the legal protections and established precedents. In many lower- and middle-income countries, journalism is a relatively recent development and news organizations tend to be young and in constant struggle to survive their early years. In comparison, American journalism rests upon institutionalized norms that are carried on by legacy news organizations that are more than a century old, such as *The New York Times*

(est. 1851), *The Washington Post* (est. 1877), *The Atlantic* (est. 1857), not to mention *The Hartford Courant*, which has been in continuous publication since 1764. In addition, America's hyper-commercial and libertarian journalistic traditions often have little likeness to journalism in the rest of the world (See Siebert, et al., 1956; Hanitzsch, et al., 2019). Even though American journalism is a powerful force that continues to promote its brand of journalism across the globe, because of the reasons outlined above, among others, American journalism is not particularly reflective of journalism in Seychelles or in many other countries (see Tunstall, 1977; Tunstall, 2007).

For decades, scholars have recognized the shortcoming of teaching journalism in Africa based on Western journalism models and texts. In the 1980s, David Barry, the former Director of the Inter-African Center of Studies on Rural Radio at Ougadougou in Burkina Faso, argued that American educational models for training African journalists were often ineffective since they 'too often merely reproduced the schemes of schools in Western countries which are designed for different needs' (Murphy and Scotton, 1987, p. 26-27).

Another scholar, Seth Adagai, who was the first coordinator for the African Council on Communication Education (ACCE) in 1975, sought to 'collect and disseminate information on [African] media development, research, communication training, [and] curriculum design' (African Council on Communication Education, 1975, 'African Council for Journalism Training'). At one point there was a project by ACCE and UNESCO to produce 22 educational books that would advance journalism education in Africa. The proposed books included 'Rural Newspapers in Africa' and 'Media and Environment in Africa: Challenges for the Future'. I've been unable to find these books—or to find out if they were ever published. While using texts that focus on journalism in Africa is more beneficial to students than learning about journalism education in America or Europe, there are still distinct differences in journalism between African countries. For instance, the similarities between journalism in Ethiopia and Seychelles may be as remote as journalism between America and Seychelles.

This problem in higher education was also recognized by some of the anti-colonial leaders who fought for independence. Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Leopold Sedar Senghorin Senegal were highly critical of Westernized 'de-Africanized' education (N'Daw, 1973). This was echoed in the 1980s by Alamin M. Mazrui of Kenyatta University, who called for 'decolonizing' the curriculum in African universities, stating that 'the business of a university is a commitment to understanding some of the most profound problems affecting the societies which the university is supposed to serve'. Because of this, adopting Western curriculums and readings was counterproductive. 'African students are literally ripped from their culture', stated Mazrui, 'with their higher education entirely dependent on Western ideas and even Western examples' (Murphy and Scotton, 1987, p. 18-22; Kasoma, 1985). The situation in

Seychelles may be slightly different, as the colonial past and the uniquely international creole culture is distinct from Kenya and other African countries in many ways, but the underlying criticism likely still holds up.[2]

To be clear, the problem isn't that students around the globe have access to books about American and European journalism – the challenge that exists in journalism education is that the readings, textbooks, case studies, and the broader curriculum often have too little to say about journalism that is specific to that given nation. This obstacle is *likely* to be particularly acute in lower- and middle-income countries with relatively new journalism education programs, where research and instructional texts about local conditions have yet to be created.[3] At the end of this article I'll outline what the Education and Socio-Economic Research Institute at the University of Seychelles is doing to address this, and how it *could* be a model for journalism education in other countries that lack localized journalism texts.

The problem goes deeper than simply not have readings about local journalism. By reading in-depth analysis of journalism in other countries, without doing the same in one's own country, this can inadvertently aim one's critical and reflective lens outward, as opposed to examining one's own society. This makes journalism education more of an intellectual exercise as opposed to practical and useful problem solving, and can lead to neglecting the local issues surrounding journalism which truly require sustained analysis and attention.

Additionally, without learning about influential journalism from within their own country, students may develop a mistaken impression that important and historical journalism comes from elsewhere. This can become a deeply limiting belief about the role journalism can play in their own country.

Of course, not all texts need to be localized. There is common technical side to journalism education that is understandably *inter*-cultural – it requires a similar set of skills that are largely independent of culture to effectively shoot and edit video and audio, take quality photographs, and so on. What 'quality' means can differ between cultures, but there are still many common elements that make using an American or British text about news writing or videography perfectly useful, even if it is not localized. But, there is also an *intra*-cultural side to journalism

[2] Overcoming the legacy of colonialism in journalism education was part of a project that used to be referred to under the cryptic name of the 'New World Information Order', which basically sought to free developing nations in the Global South from dependency on American/Western journalism values, models, language, and education.

[3] I'm stating this as a working premise that needs to be investigated.

that also has to be nourished by giving students and instructors texts and case studies that focus on journalism from within their own society.

Pointing out the need in journalism education for a strong local connection is not to discount the benefit that students gain from learning about how journalism works in other countries. Studying other cultures can help students recognize that what often feels 'natural' or 'common sense' in their own culture is actually based on a unique cultural tradition that isn't shared elsewhere. Learning about other societies casts one's own society in a new light. For instance, to learn about the news values in Seychelles, it is helpful to contrast them with news values elsewhere. By looking at American news values[4], for instance, students can learn how the commercial media in America tends to prize controversy, conflict, and sensationalism because gaining a huge audience is often the most cherished news value. Even a quick glance at the headlines from some of the major Seychellois news organizations reveals a slightly different set of news values that isn't as hyper-commercialized, sensational, or as combative as American news. Nonetheless, it is a lot to ask undergraduate students, who typically don't have research backgrounds, to make that leap from reading about American news values to doing their own research into uncovering the news values within their own country. It can be done, but it is helpful to build on the sustained thoughts and experiences of others.

This is where the journalism case-studies project, that is part of the Education and Socio-Economic Research Institute at the University of Seychelles, comes in. We are working to create a volume of case-studies that focuses on journalism in Seychelles. Each chapter will be written by a different Seychellois writer who has a unique understanding of and history with journalism in Seychelles. There will also be chapters written by foreign correspondents who have covered Seychelles over the years. Each chapter author will focus on a different aspect of journalism in Seychelles, and can be used to facilitate debate among journalism students, as well as practicing journalists, in order to identify some of the main challenges facing journalists in Seychelles.

While this is only a first step, this project seeks to orient journalism education towards the significant issues facing journalists in Seychelles. Part of the purpose of journalism education is to recognize and understand the traditions that shape journalism in one's own culture. Sometimes these traditions are only stated quietly, or in coded language, or remain unspoken, but they nonetheless impose themselves on young journalists until the lessons are internalized. A thorough journalism education should bring these submerged rules to the surface, so students can engage with them – and eventually shape them in a way that aligns with their values.

[4] By news values I'm referring to what news gets selected and promoted, and which aspects of a story are emphasized as being important – and which stories and details get ignored or downplayed.

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