

Book Review

The Palgrave Handbook of Cross-Border Journalism

Rothenberger, Liane, Löffelholz, Martin & Weaver, David H. (Eds.). (2023). *The Palgrave Handbook of Cross-Border Journalism*. Palgrave Macmillan. 618 pages. ISBN: 978-3-031-23022-6 (Hardcover), ISBN: 978-3-031-23023-3 (eBook)

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In recent years, various cross-border journalistic projects have made headlines: The Panama Papers, the Pegasus Project and Forbidden Stories are just three famous examples. These projects involve groups of journalists from different countries working together, collecting data in various locations and languages, and publishing their findings in a coordinated manner for their respective audiences.

In response to a world that is ever more connected by technology and globalization, it seems that journalists must join forces across borders to address complex issues like intersecting humanitarian, security and environmental crises, migration or economic entanglements. However, upon closer examination, the term “cross border journalism” (CBJ) raises several questions: Which borders are being crossed? By whom? What does it mean to cross them, and what practical chances and challenges are hiding behind this concept?

The *Palgrave Handbook of Cross-Border Journalism* steps in to offer a comprehensive critical analysis of the concept, its theoretical and conceptual foundations, its practical challenges, and its manifestation in various contexts. It reviews existing research and adds points and perspectives that have not been analysed in such detail before. The book compiles chapters by scholars from various countries, structured in six sections: (1) conceptualizing and analysing cross-border journalism, (2) actors and production of cross-border journalism, (3) content of cross-border journalism, (4) audiences of cross-border journalism, (5) cross-border journalism around the world and (6) the future of cross-border journalism.

One of its biggest achievements is to broaden the view of what “cross-border journalism” is (and what it can be), thereby dismantling some simplified or stereotypical understandings. To begin with, CBJ is neither a new phenomenon nor limited to the examples cited in the beginning; rather, a transgressive nature is inherent to the journalistic profession: “Journalism has been crossing borders since news media and nation states co-emerged in the seventeenth century” (p. 1), even if the term was not used by then. Institutions such as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), founded in 1997, have contributed to formalizing and professionalizing the practice of CBJ, building important infrastructure, networks and advocacy. The transgressive, cooperative nature of CBJ stands in contrast to foreign reporting, where the emphasis lies on reporting about ‘other’ countries, rather than on joint reporting.

Yet is the assumption that CBJ is on the rise actually true? Explaining the global, cosmopolitan and parochial as underlying concepts, Tanikawa stresses that two contrasting tendencies coexist: on one hand, a global or cosmopolitan perspective seems to become more important. Cosmopolitanism and globalization appear to be enabled through media and vice versa. However, research also shows that parochialism and what might be called ‘navel gazing’ remain, and in some cases are increasingly prevalent in much of media reporting. This is evidenced by a focus on national topics and the misrepresentation or othering of international topics.

Various chapters discuss one of the best-known models of CBJ – the four elements developed by Alfter (2017): different countries (1), one topic (2), sharing information and work (3), and distributing to different audiences (4). Through these elements, a network develops that can lead to new joint CBJ projects in a circular motion. Rothenberger et al. pose the question of whether there can be other forms of CBJ that do not necessarily rely on this circle of collaboration but can instead be determined by common platforms, joint crowdfunding, or methods.

This aligns with what Estella notes in her chapter on de-Westernizing: the dominant definitions of CBJ may not fit all contexts and can thus stand in the way of truly border-crossing journalism. She points out that the dominant understanding of CBJ derives from Anglo-American journalism, with 81% of journal articles on this topic published by West-based scholars. Consequently, it may seem that there is no CBJ in some regions of the Global South, which is obviously incorrect, or that journalists from these countries are limited to roles such as fixers or “local experts”. To overcome this bias, she advocates sensitivity towards different media systems, journalism cultures, and working conditions, emphasizing intercultural competencies as a crucial skill for CBJ. In contexts where media freedom is more restricted, CBJ projects and the backing of larger international networks can provide a sense of protection, something that is backed by Ireri in the chapter on Sub-Saharan Africa.

One of the strengths of this book is to follow this idea by exploring cross-border journalism in different regions of the world. Chapters on all world regions dive deeper into the contextualized specificities of CBJ within different media systems and journalism cultures. While most continents are divided into various chapters (for example, Asia is covered in sections on the Arab World, Greater China, South Asia, Southeast Asia and South Korea/Japan), Sub-Saharan Africa is represented in just one general chapter. This reflects the tendency of Africa being a “weak spot” in many major comparative studies in the field.

However, CBJ does not have to be limited to crossing the borders of nation-states. In combination with transnationalization, it might also involve crossing the borders of the profession – for example, connecting with citizen journalists and media users through participative or grassroots journalism, and responding to the new realities shaped by big tech platforms and social media. The book aims to combine its theoretical elaboration with such practical aspects. Info boxes provided by practitioners bring in knowledge and experiences from newsrooms and beyond. Could CBJ be a solution to some of the crises that traditional newsrooms have been facing in the last decade? “It is one of this generation’s tasks to adapt the journalism profession to the present era, the era of increasingly networked societies”, stresses Alfter (p. 116), discussing which structures and work processes enable fruitful collaborations. She also mentions the importance of including CBJ training into journalism education – a topic deepened in a chapter by Bettels-Schwabbauer et al., who examine how journalism education can work across borders and evaluate four examples of teaching in international groups as preparation for future collaborative work.

A perspective on cross-border journalism research is also included, reflecting on the experiences in the World of Journalism Study and sharing insights about international cooperation across university systems embedded in geopolitical power structures and varying levels of cooperation (the centralized model, the correspondent model or the coordinated cooperation model). As CBJ gains attention and importance, research on it must keep pace – this book serves as an example of such an effort.

Much of international journalism research has focused on comparing research units differentiated by nation states (a category also debated in Lamour's chapter), such as comparative research on media systems, journalism cultures or role understanding and role performance. This book emphasizes where those boundaries are being transgressed. With this unique perspective, *The Palgrave Handbook of Cross-Border Journalism* offers extensive resources for researchers and practitioners of CBJ, and students. It also provides rich material for further research, whether through specific case studies or analyses of the effects and opportunities of CBJ. Additionally, it also opens up a view into the future, exploring the potentials of AI for CBJ and the importance of audiences.

One finding of the book seems to be increasing complexity: both cosmopolitanism and parochialism are on the rise. While technological and societal advances enable more transgressiveness, new borders are also being constructed. In times when nationalism seems to be on the rise globally – whether through right-wing extremists gaining in national and EU elections in Europe, or through more authoritarian and strongman regimes around the world - having a counterweight seems essential. Putting the emphasis on connection and cooperation through joint journalistic work that brings cosmopolitan views and border-crossing investigations to diverse audiences has the potential to be a defying practice that could help to break down complicated transnational news. By assembling up-to-date research on how to make this possible, this book hits the *zeitgeist*.