

Book Review

An Introduction to Journalism: Thinking Globally

Silvio Waisbord (2025). An Introduction to Journalism: Thinking Globally. Polity.

298 pages.

ISBN: 978-1509562718 (Hardcover)

ISBN: 978-1509562725 (Softcover)

ISBN: 978-1509562732 (eBook)

Mira Keßler

Author information:

Mira Keßler serves as a research associate and lecturer in the master's program "International Media Studies" (IMS) at DW Akademie in Bonn. She teaches practical media courses, intercultural communication and competence, journalism in international comparison as well as media and communication theories. Her research focuses on international journalism trainings as part of media development and includes postcolonialism, de-westernization and qualitative methods.

E-Mail: mira.kessler@dw.com

To cite this article: Keßler, Mira (2025). Book review of Silvio Waisbord (2025). An Introduction to Journalism: Thinking Globally. *Global Media Journal – German Edition*, 15(2), DOI: [10.60678/gmj-de.v15i2.358](https://doi.org/10.60678/gmj-de.v15i2.358)

As journalism navigates increasing globalization through accelerated digitization, and political, cultural and economic interrelations, Silvio Waisbord's *An Introduction to Journalism: Thinking Globally* arrives at a timely moment. As the book links basic questions of the role and necessity of journalism to complex dynamics since the rise of the internet and struggles for press freedom Waisbord presents a comprehensive overview of the fundamentals of journalistic work. The book opens with an introduction chapter in which Waisbord makes his pedagogical and conceptual objectives explicit: it "is not meant to be a comprehensive primer of academic research" (p. 6), it aims to provide critical summaries of themes (p. 7), and to equip readers with a global lens for understanding journalism's role today especially in the backlight of digital, economic and political transformations, troubling work conditions, and the intensification of connections between societies from all over the world (p. 6). Therefore, "[t]he purpose is more modest and realistic. It is an "Introduction to" rather than "The Complete Guide to Journalism" – as announced by the author himself (<https://www.politybooks.com/blog-detail/introduction-to-journalism-thinking-globally>, 16.11.2025).

As a distinguished scholar in media and public affairs at George Washington University, he offers a carefully structured introduction to journalism studies through a global lens for "undergraduate students" (p. 1) by dividing the book into four overarching sections— Purpose, Structures, Practices, and Changes & Continuities of journalism. Each of it is composed of several sub-chapters titled with questions, thus supporting the self-reflection and learning experience of the readers. "A question-and-answer format is the closest one can get to what I find a productive way of learning: figure out what a topic is about and why it matters, identify interesting questions, and produce plausible answers [...]." (p. 7). All chapters are clearly and didactically well structured: each begins with a short summary and a presentation of the keywords, is enriched with spotlighted questions and cases from different parts of the world, important terms are defined in info boxes, and each chapter ends with a conclusion, review questions and few tips for further reading.

In the first section on *Purpose* (chapters 1–3), Waisbord starts with the central questions how news and journalism are defined, and their relation to democracy and press freedom. From the beginning, Waisbord addresses the complexity of the answers presented and how journalism needs to be viewed from multiple perspectives depending on the context and region of the world. In the *Structures* section (chapters 4–6), he discusses the manifold roles of the influence of political, economic, and ideological power on journalism. It is these forces that need to be considered when analysing the state of news industries and journalistic norms and practices globally. With the third and most extensive section on *Practices* (chapters 7–12) he turns to the daily life of journalism: production routines, working conditions, anti-press violence, news diversity, and professional ethics. Here, Waisbord shows how news values could lead to blind spots, how precarity, anti-press violence as well as technological innovations define the possibilities and limitations for journalistic work and news diversity, and when we look through a global lens, how diverse journalistic

ethics and self-conceptions are. Particularly relevant in this section are the sub-chapters concerning public trust in the press and news audiences in times of increased polarization, news avoidance and political divisions worldwide. Finally, in the last section *Changes & Continuities* (chapters 13–15), Waisbord reflects on global journalism's evolution, its future trajectories, and why journalism remains relevant despite all upheavals. In particular, he argues that global journalism is not only in flux but also in many respects persistent.

One of the most significant contributions of Waisbord's book is its global and manifold perspective. While many introductory textbooks on journalism remain rooted in Western (especially U.S.-centric) paradigms, Waisbord deliberately expands the frame to include multi-regional cases, perspectives and studies about news and journalism across the world – even with a tendency towards regions he knows better (p. 7). In doing so, he addresses the way journalism systems in different parts of the world interact with, resist, or adapt to different local power structures.

Although older publications have already tried to address the range of structural questions for journalism as well as those concerning objectivity and the audience, Waisbord's *An Introduction to Journalism: Thinking Globally* is a novel attempt at providing an introductory overview. In this canon of books Waisbord attempts the almost impossible – to comprehensively, critically, and globally outline the most important topics of journalism, especially with regard to the required De-Westernization, internationalization, and cosmopolitan perspective of journalism research. Moreover, by systematically linking power, structures and practices, the author offers more than a descriptive account: he provides food for thought for understanding how economic imperatives, political pressures, and ideological commitments shape journalistic routines, values, and institutions. From a pedagogical standpoint, this book has clear value. Its logical organization and accessible style make it suitable for undergraduate and graduate courses. Instructors could adopt its chapters as modules, since each one stands somewhat independently yet also fits into the larger conceptual architecture. For researchers, particularly those working on global media systems or comparative journalism, Waisbord's work offers both theoretical points of reference and different case studies.

While *An Introduction to Journalism: Thinking Globally* boasts many strengths, a few limitations warrant attention – as Waisbord recognized them partly himself (another strength of the book). First, as with many introductory texts, the chapters remain necessarily broad in scope. Many times, and throughout the book, the author refers to examples and studies without giving references – which is not only significant for the transparency of his knowledge, but also for further literature research and reading. As Waisbord states in his *Acknowledgements*, his book is inspired by other scholars and referencing their work represents appreciation. This introduction certainly represents a major conceptual effort and is based on intellectual and interdisciplinary engagement with various thinkers from philosophy, literature, and sociology, among others. In this sense, names like Michel Foucault, Gabriel García

Márquez or Immanuel Kant are occasionally mentioned. It is regrettable that these persons are not presented in more detail or at least reflected upon, especially for an introductory work the book presents. As a result, it is not always clear to what extent they support the statements and lines of thought in this book, which is undoubtedly based on a wide variety of inspirations. Moreover, as the author states himself, the book presents examples from regions he knows better (p. 7). More than once these thinkers presented could be associated with a Euro-American context. This is not inherently problematic, but it is also a pity given the book's overall global perspective. For another instance, if readers seeking nuanced, country-level analyses of journalism, especially in under-researched regions, they may not find them, even the author gives a variety of spotlighted cases from mostly Europe, Southern America, Canada and the U.S. (in addition, one each from Taiwan (p. 137), South Korea (p. 158), South Africa (p. 166), Pakistan (p. 184), and Syria (p. 220). Some cases are even not specific, when writing about “[c]ertain examples of news coverage” and broadly that “research shows” (p. 98), or generally mentioned “studies in several countries” (p. 120) or what happens in “some societies” (p. 252), without giving references or specific examples. This is also true for the graphically clearly highlighted and concise definitions of terms, since they are not linked to relevant theorists and academic literature in the field of journalism studies. Especially for an introduction for undergraduates it would have been relevant to facilitate further academic engagement. The recommendations for further reading are also somewhat brief, although perhaps helpful in avoiding feeling overwhelmed. At the same time, however, they do not showcase the diversity of academic literature – not only thematically but also globally, which of course is a challenging endeavour.

Second, though Waisbord includes various examples and case studies and furthermore does not intend to give “a comprehensive primer of academic research on journalism” (p. 6), there could be greater empirical depth in some areas—especially in regions and from thinkers of the Global South. Given his global framing, more in-depth empirical engagement with non-Western contexts (for example, detailed data on newsroom economics in emerging markets, or studies of local news practices) would have further strengthened his arguments. Especially since Waisbord himself addresses De-Westernization of research and Decolonization (p. 197), power dynamics and inequalities within the research landscape and journalistic field could have been discussed more extensively. This could seem particularly relevant given the desire to adopt a global perspective. The author does address this occasionally, but in the introduction, he still seems to define De-Westernization partly in a Western-centric way by stating that De-Westernization knowledge aims to explore “the global relevance and applicability of knowledge produced in the West” (p. 8). Furthermore, questions about seemingly universal values are not sufficiently discussed by linking them to Western democracies and Western parts of the world, especially with regard to similar values that are equally and independently rooted in the Global South. Wiredu (1999) for example describes a form of a consensus democracy in traditional African politics, where decisions are based on general consensus, in contrast to majority-based decisions in majoritarian democracies, which do not strive

for consensus and therefore do not include everyone equally. Furthermore, Schirilla (1999) also points out that values such as equality, individuality and other emancipatory “development” concepts are not solely based on “Western” intellectual traditions and are therefore not only associated with a “Western” model of democracy. Here, too, a more in-depth examination of democratic research and theories – or at least corresponding references – could have enriched the book.

Nevertheless, these critiques stem largely from the ambition of writing a globally oriented introductory book with a broad comparative grid, rather than a micro-study of every context. Having said that, this book as a comprehensive overview of relevant aspects of journalism viewed globally is in any case a stimulating and introductory read. It is particularly well-suited for students of journalism, communication and media studies. Whether at bachelor or master level, its structure and clarity make it a stimulating textbook. Educators who teach international or comparative media courses could use the framework (purpose, structures, practices, changes) as a syllabus backbone. And it could also stimulate media practitioners, who might draw from Waisbord’s reflections on press freedom, professional ethics, and the challenges of news diversity in a global era.

In summary, Silvio Waisbord’s *An Introduction to Journalism: Thinking Globally* is a highly accessible and thoughtfully structured overview of journalism. Its global orientation, structured pedagogy, and linking of structural and practical aspects make it a valuable resource for students and practitioners alike. The question-and-answer layout, spotlighted cases, and concise definitions make the book particularly useful for readers new to journalism studies. Perspectives from the Global South—though acknowledged as vital—are not always explored as fully as the global framing might suggest. Some theoretical inspirations are mentioned only briefly, which limits their value for beginners seeking deeper academic grounding. While the book occasionally remains broad, lacks some references, and could engage more deeply with non-Western contexts, these limitations do not overshadow its conceptual clarity and intellectual ambition. Ultimately, Waisbord provides an accessible and stimulating entry point into global journalism—one that invites readers to reflect critically on what journalism is, and what it might become. As such, the book is a recommended read for anyone seeking to understand journalism’s roles, challenges, and transformations in an interconnected world.

References

Schirilla, N. (1999). Vielfalt, Universalismus und kulturelle Differenz. In V. Aithal, N. Schirilla, H. Schürings & S. Weber (Hrsg.), *Wissen - Macht - Transformation: Interkulturelle und internationale Perspektiven. Festschrift für Patrick V. Dias* (S. 58–75). IKO - Verl. für Interkulturelle Kommunikation.

Wiredu, K. (1999). Demokratie und Konsensus in traditioneller afrikanischer Politik: Ein Plädoyer für parteilose Politik. In V. Aithal, N. Schirilla, H. Schürings & S. Weber (Hrsg.), *Wissen - Macht - Transformation: Interkulturelle und internationale Perspektiven. Festschrift für Patrick V. Dias* (S. 76–88). IKO - Verl. für Interkulturelle Kommunikation.