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Why Study African Media?

This book is motivated by two factors. The first is rooted in my first year as an undergraduate student in the United States. In 2007, my home country, Kenya, had a highly contested election that led to post-electoral violence. While the violence was primarily limited to a few parts of the country, watching and reading coverage from Western media outlets, one would have been forgiven for thinking that the whole country had convulsed into an inexplicable, bloody, and vengeful conflict. There was little to no mention of the intricate political, economic, and historical injustices that had led Kenya to this point. In the eyes of the Global North's press, Kenya was proving to be a typical African country, beset by ethnic hatred and the potential to be "another Rwanda." For many, images of political protests, burning tires in the middle of roads, and machete-wielding men represented all that was wrong with African politics. These images linked the country to past and ongoing atrocities in other African countries. The crisis had a primeval inevitability, with a constant stream of people running away from the violence of "burning houses […] and even people hacked to death" (Ogola, 2008). Images were accompanied with little to no contextualization, subliminally suggesting that the whole country was doggedly marching into the abyss.

The second motive is grounded in an intellectual interest born of and nurtured by frustration. Frustrations best capture in December 2017, at the start of a two-year postdoctoral fellowship, I attended a symposium in Canada with several scholars working on media and atrocity in Africa. During my presentation, a well-regarded scholar asked a question of which I had heard numerous variations during my graduate career. Prefacing his question with the tried and tested "I don't mean to be disrespectful," he

asked why I would focus on African newspapers and not those from the Global North, since no one reads African newspapers. Leaving aside the annoyance that African audiences were being labeled as "no one," what took me aback was the fact that for this scholar, the fact that we were both at this symposium and we were fellows at Harvard University was not enough to convince them that African journalism was worth studying. My work, the voices I was giving space to, and the intellectual exercise I was engaged in were all for naught, since "no one" read African newspapers.

This book represents an effort at allowing people who look like me, and live where I have lived, to tell their stories. It is about giving African journalists a platform to discuss how they construct knowledge about Africa. It is about pushing back against the tendency to talk *about* and *for* Africa without speaking *to* and *with* Africans. This is not to suggest that I seek to tell an "African story," since, with fifty-four countries, what counts as an "African story" is in itself contested (see Jacobs, 2015). Moreover, the data presented in Chapters 3–5 offer a strong rebuttal to the notion of an "African story."

Both motivations are anchored on the fact that scholars and laypeople often assume that they know the nuances of how Africa is represented in the media. As a result, a set of beliefs about media representations of Africa have become truisms both within and outside academia: (1) journalists from the Global North often represent Africa through stereotypical frames and often ethnicize African conflicts; (2) journalists from the Global North lionize international rescue/intervention; and (3) Global North journalists typically represent Africa with paternalistic, negative, neoliberal narratives. Yet, despite a long and deep fascination with Africa, there is a dearth of scholarship on how African journalists represent the continent and its peoples. This void is extant in studies on how conflicts in Africa are represented in the media.

Journalism scholarship has been epistemologically ethnocentric with regard to how Africa and Africans are represented, almost as though African journalists do not engage in knowledge production. The continent's media organizations are treated as transient compared to their counterparts in the Global North, resulting in a scholarship with an "imperialistic unconscious" through its "European metrocentrism and analytic bifurcation" (Go, 2013b, p. 49). They can only be understood as flawed and incomplete copies of those in colonial metropoles. This has meant that scholarship on African journalism has had the tendency not just to "reproduce and mirror the wider culture of northern dominance" but to approach Africa's press more to make comments "about

something else, some other place, some other people," with the continent being the "mediation that enables the West to accede to its own subconscious" (Go, 2013b, p. 49; Tageldin, 2014 p. 302–3). As Nyabola (2018, p. xix) and Mbembe (2001, p. 3) eloquently put it, Africa is often the background to someone else's story rather than a unit of analysis in its own right.

With all of this in mind, *In the Shadow* tells the story of how African journalists contend with being journalists that are African, covering an international event unfolding next door. It examines the social conditioning of African journalists' knowledge while paying attention to existential factors like professional pressures, norms, and the nation-specific constraints placed on journalists and the news organizations they work in. As a result, *In the Shadow* is invariably interested in news narratives and the social context within which journalists construct these narratives. As will become apparent, these narratives are neither naïvely constructed nor innocently relied upon. They embody multiple discursive struggles over what it means to be an African journalist, what it means to be an African news organization, and what it means to be an African in light of a politics of identity and belonging. This third struggle is key to understanding journalism narratives in Africa when we consider that within the African political scene there still exists what Nyamnjoh (2005, p. 17) calls "an obsession with belonging," which becomes evident in this book as well.

In the Shadow achieves the aforementioned by focusing on how African journalists constructed knowledge about the atrocities in Darfur between January 1, 2003 and December 31, 2008. The choice of Darfur as a site for studying African journalism fields and how they cover international events unfolding on the continent is based on two key attributes. First, Darfur was the first conflict that garnered intense attention from the Global North after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi as well as unfolding in a post-9/11 world. Second, Darfur provides a site through which to analyze journalists from several African countries covering a singular event to understand the narratives and norms they rely on to make sense of an event for diverse national audiences. Also, because of its history of Arabization by Khartoum, continental tensions about what it means to be African and what it means to be an "African journalist" clearly come to the fore. As such, Darfur is a perfect site to investigate the tension between journalistic norms and roles (*doxa*) on the one hand and an embracing of an African postcolonial identity (*habitu*) on the other.

STRANDS OF JOURNALISM SCHOLARSHIP

Scholarship on the representation of Africa, particularly by the Global North, has developed along three primary trajectories. The first argues that Western organizations rely on colonial tropes that focus on ethnicizing every conflict in Africa while also relying on stereotypical representations of Africans (Ebo, 1992; Kogen, 2015). This reportage on Africa is reductive, and its engagement with the continent begins from the premise that the continent is incomplete and needs to be "saved" (Bunce, Franks, & Paterson, 2016; Mamdani, 2010). This trajectory holds that this type of representation hovers between, on the one hand, homogenized knowledge leading to a normalization (and eventual disregarding) of conflict in Africa and, on the other hand, trying to convince the audience that this is newsworthy and *new*. Thus, phrases such as "another Rwanda" appear regularly whenever a conflict is covered in Africa (see Brown, 2013). The implication is that African journalists are likely to better contextualize Africa. *In the Shadow* engages and pushes back on this strand by showing that African journalists also ethnicize conflict on the continent but argues that this is part of a long historical debate over who belongs and who does not (Chapters 6 and 7).

The second strand's approach has led to analyses moving away from questions focusing on the rigid *bias* versus *objectivity* paradigm to studies of how newsroom routines play a role in shaping news content (Tuchman, 1978). This shift has also informed our understanding of the news as an organizational product – that is constructed, rather than a "true" transcription or representation of events. Taking cues from the literature on knowledge production, this strand argues that representations, like the knowledge anchoring them, depend highly on the social context journalists, news organizations, and audiences are in. This trajectory has led to a careful analysis of how atrocities – such as Darfur – are framed by media organizations from the Global North and how wire agencies inform how news organizations from the Global North cover Africa (Bunce, 2010, 2011; Savelsberg & Nyseth Nzitarira, 2015). For example, Savelsberg and Nyseth Nzitarira (2015) find that a nation's collective memory of traumatic events, such as Ireland's famine and poverty, or Germany's memory of the Holocaust, will manifest in how the media frame atrocity. Traces of this strand can be found in *In the Shadow's* discussion of frames in Chapter 5, in which Rwanda's memory of its own Genocide and the memory of colonization across Kenya, Rwanda, and South Africa influenced how Darfur was framed. It builds on this strand by arguing

for the importance of nonjournalistic actors – like the colonial and postcolonial states – in affecting how journalists operate (Chapters 2 and 3). The strength of social context is accentuated in Chapters 2 and 3, which discuss the political and educational contexts as an avenue to understand the struggles over what it means to be an African journalist working in an African news organization.

In the Shadow's focus on discursive struggles builds on a third and very nascent strand of scholarship that has shown promise. This trajectory argues that scholars have inadvertently found themselves perpetuating a myth regarding how Africa is represented, due to focusing primarily on newspapers, magazines, and a small number of countries (Scott, 2017). This narrow focus has meant that scholars have made sweeping statements about "media representations" when they mean "press representations." This is further compounded by the narrow range of topics related to crises, likely determining research design (Nothias, 2016). In this strand, we find work by Guy Berger (2010), Daniel Hammett (2011), and Jacqueline Maingard (1997), who focus on how major international competitions hosted in South Africa were represented in the press. By focusing on the representation of South Africa in contexts not imbued with violence, these and other scholars avoid the concerns Nothias (2016) raises over predispositions towards specific research designs. This trajectory, in conjunction with the second strand, urges scholars to take a more nuanced approach to studying Africa's representations by the media and to include more diversity in questions and topics analyzed. Using Darfur as a case study, it shows how an analysis of conflict representation can yield insights that allow for new avenues for scholarly engagement and broaden our understanding of journalism(s) in the Global South. Furthermore, *In the Shadow* also shows that conflicts are ripe for capturing discursive struggles over identity and professional norms and expectations and how these lead to tensions over what it means to be a journalist.

Although these three trajectories offer a rich and vibrant debate about how Africa and Africans are represented, none actively engages with how African journalism represents Africa and Africans. All three treat largely Africa as merely existing in the shadows, a prop in the discourse about journalism fields from the Global North. A decade and a half after Hallin and Mancini (2004) argued for a case study approach to understanding media interactions with other social actors – and articulating which actors and institutions play a crucial role in shaping the narrative –very little has been done on media in Africa. *In the Shadow* takes up this challenge

by focusing on the roles of the political field (Chapter 2), academic field (Chapter 3), journalistic cultures (Chapter 4), and sources (Chapter 5) in shaping narratives. With this in mind, I make two claims in this book: (1) discourse about the silencing of African voices by Western journalists has itself silenced African voices by not including them in analyses; (2) as a result of this silencing, we know very little about journalists in Africa and the types of narratives they employ to represent Africa and Africans.

At heart, *In the Shadow* is about the construction of knowledge about Africa by journalism fields in Africa. It is anchored in Max Weber's (1976) call to study the press, the contextual nature of knowledge, and the narrative limits and opportunities this contextual nature presents (P. Berger & Luckmann, 1966). It does this by paying attention to the structures and strictures of the journalism profession as understood through Pierre Bourdieu's field theory (1984, 1991, 1999, 2013). This situates *In the Shadow* at the intersection of two strands of knowledge production scholarship: one preoccupied with the influence of global scripts on local knowledge production (Haller & Hadler, 2008) and the other with the impact of nation-specific contextual and institutional realities (Savelsberg & Nyseth Nzitarira, 2015). It is at this intersection that I empirically illustrate and explain how: (1) News organizations in Africa are critical players in the silencing of African voices; (2) African journalists are themselves part of the marginalization of African voices; (3) narratives employed by African journalists do not differ that significantly from those employed by journalists from the Global North; and (4) African journalists use the ethnic conflict frame with relative frequency when narrating a conflict. *In the Shadow* achieves this by analyzing the social space in which journalists exist as Africans and the structure of the professional space within which they pursue "their different trajectories" (Bourdieu, 1996c, p. 27). Ergo, it purposefully centers African narratives and experiences while pushing the Global North to the margins.

THEORIZING AFRICAN JOURNALISM

When thinking about the trajectory of the journalism profession on the continent, it is impossible to overstate the effects colonization had on the formation of the profession and how it developed in the postcolony. For example, it would be imprudent to talk about media freedoms in post-colonial Africa without taking into account the role of colonial control in shaping how actors within and outside the profession understand these freedoms. Moreover, colonial era moves to control

Indigenous presses highlighted the importance of retaining power over the field within the new political class. It is not a stretch to argue that political elites inherited fields that colonialists had designed and deployed as tools of oppression (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2010, 2012). Many were all too willing to put the profession, just like economic and political institutions, to the service of a ruling minority (Mamdani, 1996; Nyabola, 2018). As Martinique political philosopher Frantz Fanon (1968) had warned, politicians succumbed to the seduction of colonialist thought and, as a result, journalism found itself the subject of enduring coloniality (Quijano, 2000).

I rely on field theory to capture these disparate forces seeking to influence how journalists operate to varying levels of success (Benson, 1999; Bourdieu, 1993; Usher, 2017). As an explanatory mechanism, it is not a "static model with a priori determined confines," allowing me to simultaneously use it in a transnational, national, and subnational manner (Buchholz, 2016, p. 34). I construct a profession whose boundaries and characteristics "transgress, principally, those of the nation-state" (Buchholz, 2016, p. 34), leveraging this quality to design transnational, national, and subnational units of analysis that work in concert to produce and shape the narrative on Africa. It allows me to articulate experiences that go a long way in explaining individual and institutional decisions that may seem irrational to those outside the profession (Chapters 4 and 5).

Discussing Bourdieu's conceptualization of a "field," Julian Go and Monika Krause (2016, p. 8) remind us that a field is "a social space of relations or social configuration defined by struggle over […] valued resources." In *In the Shadow*, the critical resource being contested is the right to construct the continent's narrative. This idea of struggling over "valued resources" has a lot of purchase for anyone thinking about how to argue for a transnational African field (as I will do) while also being sensitive to the idea that within this overarching field, there are smaller subfields also struggling over resources. Additionally, field theory allows *In the Shadow* to expand its focus "beyond the newsroom and towards a larger news ecology" (Usher, 2017, p. 1119), which allows for the contextualization of the realities journalists have to deal with – such as an ever-present state in how Rwanda covered Darfur (Chapters 5 and 6) – without resorting to assumptions about state censorship and authoritarianism that tend to surround discussions of relationships between journalism and political fields on the continent. This expansion of focus to include interactions with nonjournalistic actors places *In the Shadow* within Hallin and Mancini's (2004) milieu.

For *In the Shadow*, the task of field theory is to examine the role of institutional logics while simultaneously highlighting and being mindful of the complex interplay between social structures and cultural forms within a society.[1] Members of the field share certain dispositions and have specific beliefs that they take for granted about how the field operates and the particularities that structure the field. Specifically, I lean more towards Rodney Benson's model of "journalistic field position, logic and structure" (2013, p. 17) than I do the version discussed by Pierre Bourdieu (1993). Bourdieu discussed fields as sites of struggles for and between two forms of power: an external heteronomous pole and an autonomous pole internal to the field. For Bourdieu, the heteronomous poles contain both economic and political power, whereas the autonomous poles are more cultural. On the other hand, Benson argues that focusing on merely economic and cultural forms of power is "inadequate to explain the complex dynamics of the ongoing journalistic mediation of public discourse" (2013, p. 13). Instead, Benson's model provides a way to analyze the "complex interplay of market, civic, class, and organizational ecological dynamics" (2013, p. 25). By taking this approach, I seek to complicate understandings of how and why "news is produced as it is" (Benson, 2013, p, 25). This should provide a fuller understanding of the influences at work in shaping narratives produced by journalists situated in African contextual realities.

Understanding Journalistic Fields

Fields contain an internal logic by which those within them have shared understandings of the fields' rules and operate within their frameworks. This does not mean that the field is impervious to exogenous pressures. Instead, these pressures are not always translated to the field's internal logic. We can understand this internal logic as part of the field's "rules of the game," the embodiment of which forms actors' *doxa*. For example, journalists are generally mindful of their editors' framing preferences and adjust their narratives to suit this mold to get their stories published. They will adapt their behaviors to gain recognition and resources within the field. A Kenyan subeditor explained this dynamic in their newsroom:

[1] To quote sociologist Gaye Tuchman (1978, p. 183), "Social structure produces norms, including attitudes that define aspects of social life which are of interest or importance to citizens."

> For example, our managing editor is very conservative. So she will say, "No, I do not want that," or a story will come in, and she will say, "No, that is not good for our readers." […] So when the story comes in, it is likely to be less harsh because of her. So when she is on leave and her deputy [steps in], you can almost tell that there is a different kind of mindset. (Subeditor interview, Kenya).[2]

Additionally, journalists have experiences they garner before entering the field by being socialized into their respective communities. Bourdieu (1958, p. 144) states that these experiences are part of one's *habitus*, which can be thought of as the unconscious patterns tailored to one's society that structure one's day-to-day (Go, 2013a, pp. 62–63; Hammoudi, 2009, p. 210). The relation between habitus and the field presently occupied by an individual facilitates incorporating the relationship between the individual's past and present, accounting for how it influences them. For *In the Shadow*, habitus elucidates the role of a politics of belonging in shaping the actions of journalists (Chapters 2, 6 and 7). Both doxa and habitus provide individuals with the tacitly accepted presuppositions within groups and professional fields. Neither of these are fixed, and are dynamic and susceptible to ongoing experiences. To achieve this level of nuance in explanation, I leverage Benson's (2013) analytical levels of field *position* (distance from the market and nonmarket power as mediated by the state); field *logic* (news practices and formats that are dominant); and field *structure* (distinctions inside the field, related to habitus of journalists and audiences, and the organizational ecology of competition).

Field Position

Benson informs us that field *position* situates journalistic fields within a field of power in which journalism fields operate in "relation to the nonmarket or civic field and the capitalist market field" (2013, p. 25). In this field of power, the state can extend its tentacles onto both market and nonmarket actors through its power to make laws and empower regulatory bodies to effectuate these laws. As such, Benson reminds us that it would be a misnomer to suggest any "necessary dichotomy between state and market," since the state "enables and constrains both market and nonmarket activity" (2013, p. 25). This complication is especially poignant when studying journalism in countries such as Kenya, where, while the journalism field may appear vibrant, this should not be conflated with its independence. New organizations in the field are either owned

[2] This interview is quoted in Wahutu (2018b).

or controlled by allies of the state, and because the state constrains and enables both market and nonmarket activity, its presence is never wholly avoidable. Analyzing the field's *position* highlights that the nonmarket and market poles sometimes work in equilibrium towards "unstable hybrid formations" (Benson, 2013, p. 25).

On the market side of this field of power, these hybrid formations are epitomized by the fact that in 2010, when data was first publicly available, the Kenyan government spent $45 million on advertising – despite a ministerial directive to reduce spending on advertising purchases (Nyabuga & Booker, 2013, p. 71; Wahutu, 2018b). South Africa spent $4 million in the same year (Maseko, 2010). This suggests that the state can still meaningfully constrain the level of autonomy journalists have through the market levers of power. On the nonmarket side, the effect of this hybridity was evidenced during Kenya's post-electoral violence in 2007–2008, when the state ordered the shutting down of live broadcasts. Although editors complained bitterly about this illegal action in op-eds, one of the worst-kept secrets was that government officials had previously met with media owners, and both parties agreed to the shutdown of broadcasts (Obonyo, 2011, p. 12). This articulation of *position* envisages political and economic forces as not always being at opposite poles of the spectrum (Chapter 2).

Field Logic

While focusing on dominant practices and format, field *logic* traces the field's historical trajectory, paying particular attention to how the field's rules of the game are established and how and why they persist over time. Benson informs us that the dominant logic in the field is likely to endure even "after conditions external to the field change" (2013, pp. 25–26). Building on prior research and theorizing on journalism education, Chapter 3 demonstrates how – because those training African journalists in the early years of independence were from colonial metropoles – one of the *logics* that has endured is the seeming disconnect between journalists and the everyday realities of Africans (Nyamnjoh, 2013, 2015). The first generation of post-colonial journalists gained skills viewed as necessary by external agencies, such as the Ford Foundation, the International Press Institute (IPI), and UNESCO, but which were qualitatively unhelpful to fellow Africans (Jenks, 2019). Consequently, the profession is viewed as "deaf and dumb to the particularities of journalism in and on Africa" (Nyamnjoh, 2015, p. 37).