

Place and Inequality in Foreign News Production: The Case for News Media Capitals

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This paper centres on news media capitals as crucibles to investigate inequality in international journalism. Over recent years, foreign news production has continuously evolved due to globalisation, economic decline, and technological disruption (Sambrook, 2010). The traditional role of the foreign correspondent is in crisis (Hannerz, 2004), giving rise to a wider landscape of new actors filling some of the gaps. These include locally hired journalists, freelancers, stringers, parachute journalists, and fixers (e.g., Hamilton & Jenner, 2004). Amidst this diversification of actors, it becomes vital to highlight the often-obscured inequalities of labour that exist in foreign news work, particularly concerning race, gender, and neo-colonial relations (Blacksin & Mitra, 2023).

Because “place, power and social inequality” are deeply interconnected (Usher, 2021, p. 5), I argue for investigating the places in which the interactions between these multiple actors occur: news media capitals. Nairobi, Mexico City, Beirut, London, New York City, etc.: All these and other metropolises host bureaux and headquarters of multiple international news organizations that coexist with (often) vibrant national news media scenes. Accordingly, it is in these cities where the manifold actors of news production gather and interact. Partly inspired by Curtin (2004), this paper aims to theoretically unpack the notion of news media capitals as liminal places in which different journalistic cultures meet and interact, creating opportunities for the empirical research of power dynamics and inequality in foreign news production. In so doing, I draw on Usher’s (2021) framework that defines place as a geographical location, a site for meaning making, and as cultural, economic, and symbolic power. To further illustrate these concepts, I use empirical insight from previous ethnographic fieldwork and interviews conducted in Nairobi.

All these actors of foreign news production are broadly responsible for providing news—often about violence, conflict, and crises—to the entire globe, via news wire agencies and transnational broadcasters that are then used by smaller outlets the world over (Hannerz, 2004). Consequently, understanding these power dynamics is the first step in finding ways of collaborating in news production that are ethical and safe for all actors involved. This, in turn, is paramount to the sustainability of international journalism.

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