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Book Review

Responsible Journalism in Conflicted Societies. Trust and Public Service Across New and Old Divides

Lynch, Jake & Rice, Charis (Eds.) (2022). Responsible Journalism in Conflicted Societies. Trust and Public Service Across New and Old Divides. London and New York: Routledge, 228 pages. ISBN 9781032013305.

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Jake Lynch and Charis Rice have edited an anthology, *Responsible Journalism in Conflicted Societies. Trust and Public Service Across New and Old Divides*, that addresses the issues of responsibility, public service, trust and public interest in journalism. From this perspective, the collection analyses in 13 diverse and mostly empirical contributions how contemporary technological, political, social, and economic conditions affect the relationships between journalists, their sources, audiences, and the wider publics in nowadays journalism.

Three features characterize this anthology: First, it is based on a broad concept of “conflicted societies” that not only focuses on societies affected by violent conflicts but also includes political and social contestation in consolidated but increasingly polarised democracies, such as the USA or Great Britain. Second, as a consequence of this broad understanding of societies affected by conflict, the contributions to this anthology are broadly distributed globally and also address countries that are otherwise less in the focus of media and journalism research, such as Cyprus, Pakistan or the Central African Republic. Third, some current case studies, e.g., studies of the COVID-19 pandemic, are included to better convey essential aspects of these issues, such as disinformation in relation to the overarching theme of responsible journalism in conflicted societies.

After an introduction by the two editors, the anthology is divided into three parts dedicated to (1) journalism at the local level (“Responsibility and Visibility in Journalism – The Turn to Local News”), (2) journalism in conflict situations, and in particular, the concept of peace journalism (“Reform Agendas in the Study of News About Conflict and Peace”) and (3) relationships with audiences (“The People Formerly Known as Audiences – New Roles and Relationships with Publics”), always with references to responsible journalism.

The first section, which discusses local journalism, comprises three contributions ranging from discussions of ethics in local journalism (Julie Firmstone et al.) and the role of community journalism during the COVID-19 pandemic (Karin Wahl-Jorgensen) to disinformation in hyperlocal media (Jerome Turner and David Harte). It is already apparent here that the contributions are diverse but at the same time interrelated and complementary, which also applies to other parts of the anthology. For example, Karin Wahl-Jorgensen shows that journalists in hyperlocal media orient themselves towards traditional values, on the one hand, but on the other hand also serve as community advocates and thus want to strengthen solidarity, trust, and loyalty of the audience. Afterwards, Turner and Harte discuss in their contribution on “fake news” on hyperlocal Facebook Pages that exactly this trust and bond between citizen journalists and the audience can lead to problems in dealing with mis- and disinformation.

With five contributions, the second section on journalism in conflict situations and especially the concept of peace journalism is somewhat more comprehensive than the first and focuses on ideas of reform. In the opening contribution, Cecilia Arregui

Olivera argues for a re-shaping of the concept of peace journalism, which she criticises as too dualistic and a one-size-fits all approach. Instead, she suggests to focus more on production practices, in-depth studies of diverse contexts and to take advances in technology into account. Against this background, she also addresses the paradox that, on the one hand, a de-Westernisation of journalism theory is called for, but on the other hand, peace journalism is often difficult to practice in Western societies because their divisions are not a consequence of armed conflict. Later, Shabir Hussain argues in his contribution that the concept of peace journalism needs to be adapted for non-Western countries, where other challenges need to be considered, such as a lack of freedom of the press, security risks and threats to journalists' lives, or a lack of resources. Concerning theory, he consequently suggests a critical pragmatic approach taking the varying contexts and outcomes into account. Jake Lynch and Giuliana Tiripelli show that peace journalism is a concept not only discussed in academia but also applied in journalism training. In their contribution, they discuss how training should encourage journalists and other public communication professionals to report constructively, particularly with a view to social change. Overall, they argue that the discussion on impact of constructive information practices should not be limited to audience effects but also include the production stage of mediated communication processes. Other contributions address the socio-psychological processes of journalists, using the example of the Cyprus conflict (Huri Yontucu and Metin Ersoy) and the question of journalistic responsibility in reporting in societies in transition in exceptional cases, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Ortiz dos Santos), e.g., not to contribute to tensions or stigmatisation in society.

In the third section comprising of five contributions, the audience perspective and new roles and relationships with the public are the primary focus. The (lack of) trust in the media in divided societies is the focus of the first contribution, where Northern Ireland is used as an example. To account for the complexity of analysing trust in journalism in such divided societies, the authors, Charis Rice and Maureen Taylor, propose combining philosophical and communication theories. Burton St. John III's and Kirsten Johnson's contribution on what they call "personalized news communication" (p. 156) does not deal, as it first might suggest, with the personalisation of news by means of algorithms but they interpret it more broadly. Through the lenses of public-, participatory-, citizen-, service-, solutions- and transparent journalism, they outline the potential of individual connections with community members. The goal in this regard is to foster trust and a better relationship with the audience. Çiğdem Bozdağ and Suncem Koçer investigate how polarisation affects false news and trust. They show that the strategies used by the audience to identify sources as trustworthy go beyond the mere matching of political views. In addition, recipients use cues including the metrics of different platforms (e.g., follower numbers, likes) or the reputation of a specific news source as indicators of trust or distrust. Robin Blom's contribution ties in with the topic of polarisation and discusses how the notion of objectivity is used to legitimise polarised debates and at the same time can lead to the spread of mis- and disinformation, as he illustrates with the

examples of the COVID-19 pandemic and the storming of the US capital. Finally, a chapter is also dedicated to media literacy (Judith Roberts) to better deal with the challenges elaborated above, such as disinformation.

What distinguishes the anthology is that it allows for a diversity of thematic aspects, national contexts and theoretical and methodological approaches all linked to the overarching theme of responsible journalism in conflicted societies. Taken together, the contributions show that journalism must understand its public service mission and that the audience must be able to trust journalism if old and new divisions are to be overcome. To this end, they present inspiring food for thought – both theoretically, with a view to research, e.g., on the further development of the concept of peace journalism, and practically, with suggestions, e.g., on local journalism or audience participation.

The downside of this broad approach is that no unified theoretical picture emerges and the individual studies of different quality do not always advance what is already known. Central terms and concepts of the anthology, especially conflict, trust and public service, could have been discussed more comprehensively, and several contributions use the term misinformation when actually disinformation seems to be meant. At the same time, the anthology obviously has a clear normative positioning. The reporting patterns on which many of the contributions are based, such as peace journalism, participatory journalism or constructive journalism, clearly deviate from a journalism that is purely based on the neutral communication of 'facts' but imply that journalists should be aware of the consequences of their reporting or even actively contribute to the solution of conflicts, which is not an uncontroversial position in both academia and journalism. In this respect, this normative stance could have been reflected more explicitly and comprehensively.

This anthology can be helpful for journalists who deal with conflict reporting, be it on the local, national or international level. It can encourage them to reflect on their own roles and inspire new practices, e.g., to strengthen the relationship with the audience through a greater transparency of journalistic processes and decisions or constructive reporting. Due to its focus on responsible journalism in conflicted societies, it is also worth reading for academics working in media, journalism, communication, peace, conflict and security studies, especially those doing research at the intersection of these fields.