Journalism Researchers' Engagement and Reflexivity

ROSELYNE RINGOOT

Gresec
Université Grenoble Alpes
roselyne.ringoot@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr

CATHERINE QUIROGA CORTÉS

Lerass & LaPIJ
Université de Toulouse
catherine.quiroga-cortes@univ-tlse3.fr
0009-0000-3191-8875

LISE MÉNALQUE

ReSIC & LaPIJ
Université libre de Bruxelles
Lise.Menalque@ulb.be

MARIANA FAGUNDES-AUSANI

Arènes
Université de Rennes & Universidade de Brasília
fagundez.mariana@gmail.com
0000-0003-3361-3607

his special issue focuses on the engagement of researchers working on journalistic subjects and fields, who question the standards, practices and research methods used in their studies, which are underpinned by - or confronted with - their engagement. Going beyond the general issues surrounding the place of the social sciences in society, and the political role and social responsibility of academics, the aim is to highlight and question what is special (or not) about the engagement of journalism researchers.

This issue stems from the observation that many young researchers[1] have questions about their specific, even emotional, relationship with their journalistic and/or media research field. Because they are former journalists, or because they work on the coverage of events and territories that are very close to them, the need to include (or distance themselves from) these 'personal' dimensions in their scientific work is essential. The other related observation is that there is already a great deal of work on the engagement of researchers and scientific reflexivity, but little of it is rooted in the field of journalism and media research.

Proposing reflection on the positions of researchers (scholarly, expert, engaged, militant, observation from a neutral or involved standpoint, etc.) allows us to explore the forms and methods of the reflexive exercise relating to the commitment to research and

to the journalistic object. Just as the tools of the social sciences are both resources and instruments for constructing and understanding the object of study, the engagement of researchers can be perceived - by the researchers themselves - as both an asset (it enables them to get as close as possible to the social world being studied) and a disadvantage for research (they need to be able to distance themselves from their own experience of reality). There are several theories and works that question the postures of researchers: the constructivist approach, with the classic works of Bourdieu (1987), Neveu (2003), Delforce (2004) and Frère and Jacquemain (2008), works on engagement in the social sciences, and more particularly in journalism, by Stengers and Schlanger (1989), and work on the links between journalism and the social sciences (Bastin, 2016). The objectifying dimension of the interactionist concept of career can also enable us to implement the 'thread' of objectification as a practice of unveiling (Becker, 2002), and to focus on the successive positions occupied within a world from a dynamic and processual perspective.

Whatever the phase or stage of the research concerned (emerging, intermediate, consolidated), researchers are likely to problematise the relationship between engagement and journalism research, and to put their work into perspective from the angle of reflexivity and their engagement. This question raises another underlying issue, namely that of the potential cooperation, demarcation or tensions between journalism researchers and journalists in the context of shared or unshared commitments and struggles. How do they commit themselves to a common cause, such as carrying out academic work studying the journalistic coverage of a social mobilisation (Ruffio, 2024; Thiong-Kay, 2021), while at the same time develop boundaries that construct distinctive legitimacies. Or, *a contrario*, in the case of antagonistic engagement.

The aim here is to shed light on what engaged scientific reflexivity might look like, depending on one's own situation and on the various stages around which the research is structured: the construction of the object of study, the choice of, access to and relationship with the field, the methodological approach, the research story and narrative, and the work of mediating and mediatising scientific production. Examining the reflexivity at work from the angle of engagement means exposing oneself to a potentially atypical approach, as it involves highlighting case studies that may focus on different specific and circumstantial traits that characterise journalism researchers. Furthermore, considering various factors, such as the research trajectory, personal experience, the construction of the journalistic empirical object, the management of the political stakes of the subject of study and its possible politicisation, may even turn

out to be a bit risky, as restoring reflexive questioning in its committed dimension is an unusual professional exercise in our fields of research. The correlated enunciative system also represents a challenge, and when necessary, the choice may be made to use an assumed 'I' adapted to the narrative of a scientific self, but which does not typically conform to the norms of scientific writing.

The scholarly collaboration between the editors of this issue has primarily been shaped around two key concepts - that of the 'specific intellectual' (Foucault, 1976) and that of 'situated knowledge' (Harraway, 1988) - which reflect diversified but nonetheless complementary roots in the perspective of elucidating the articulation between commitment and reflexivity. Michel Foucault's reflection on the 'specific intellectual' relates to his positioning and modes of political intervention. It takes place in the context of the militant and protest movements of the 1970s in France, and more specifically in the project to create the *Groupe d'information sur les prisons* (Information group on prisons), to which he contributed. The notion of 'situated knowledge' emerged in the 1980s in the United States thanks to feminist studies which, by considering power relationships (class, race, gender, etc.), challenged the epistemology of an 'objective' vision of the human sciences (Bereni, et al., 2020). Up to that point, the individuals studied appeared disembodied, proof of the predominance of a 'classical' epistemology of 'male universalism' (Nelson, 2003), which would have us believe that respondents are 'naturally' perceived as male, white, able-bodied and heterosexual. The same is true of researchers, who are expected to be 'objective', detached and 'neutral' in relation to their research subjects.

The first focus, to help us approach the question here, is anchored in the period of the protest movements of the late 60s and early 70s in France. Michel Foucault developed the notion of the 'specific intellectual' in a reflexive impulse that consisted of clarifying his role and his involvement in the emergence of several 'information groups', on prisons, health facilities and asylums (Artières, 2002). At the same time, he had to distance himself from the figure of the omniscient writer supporting political causes, that of the 'universal intellectual' embodied by Jean-Paul Sartre. This distinction, formulated by Foucault, emphasises knowledge linked to a specific, defined object of research: "Intellectuals have got used to working, not in the modality of the 'universal', the 'exemplary', the 'just-and-true-for-all', but within specific sectors." (Foucault, 1976, p. 109)[2]. He positions himself as a 'specific intellectual' operating in specific fields of research (prison, madness, sexuality), which are also questioned by different categories of social actors involved.

Preferring the term 'intellectual', Foucault nevertheless refers to research operations to define the specificity that qualifies them. The 'specific intellectual' is part of the search for truth, defined as "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true" (ibid, p.113)[3]. The Foucauldian 'specific intellectual' does not have the vocation of expressing themself in the place of the social groups they study (such as prisoners) and their positioning is based on their expertise in the related field of knowledge. However, "the work of the 'specific intellectual' consists above all in rethinking the categories for analysing the social world and redefining the relevant issues, against received ideas and routine patterns of perception" (Sapiro, 2009, p.28). According to Michel Foucault, the search for truth links problematisation and politicisation in the sense that problematisation opens up the possibility of new politicisations emerging. It is not so much a commitment to a cause, but rather a commitment as a researcher.

The second focus used here is borrowed from Anglo-Saxon feminist researchers (Hartsock, 1983; Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1992) who initiated an epistemological process to 'sexify knowledge'. Gender as a social construction of sex differences and identities "(...) forces us to rethink our categories and analytical schemes" (Laufer et al., 2010, p.11), as well as the very position of researchers in relation to their research objects. Haraway (1988) describes 'situated knowledge' as a re-reading of the criteria of scientificity from feminist positions (taking gender variables into account), in other words a necessary reflexivity on what goes into the choice of knowledge production, what the researchers choose to exclude and why, and what goes into the construction of the research subject (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2003). Beyond the epistemological renewal in the field of feminist knowledge, this way of thinking about the 'researcher/research object' relationship and reflections on 'scientific objectivity' affect all areas of the human sciences.

For several years now, researchers in journalism have been asserting their adherence to the epistemology of 'situated knowledge', seeking, in particular, to shed light on obscure points that are often neglected in the literature. Cathy Marston (1999) characterises the training of young journalists at the end of the 1990s as ableist, because this training emphasises overworking, which able-bodied people are better able to handle. More recently, Kristin S. Orgeret (2020) drew on this epistemological posture to call on journalism researchers to give greater prominence to emotion in their research. The aim being to offer more inclusive insights into the journalistic profession. Situating oneself in relation to the research object and/or the respondents leads to reflection on the power relations induced by research postures, in what Patrick Charaudeau calls the "tug-of-war between a posture that would require [the researcher] to denounce what the dominant discourses conceal, and another that, on the contrary, expects axiological neutrality" (2013, p.2). It is a question of making the link between the material conditions of researchers' existence, the production of knowledge through their research objects, and their particular commitments (Clair, 2016) in what Harding describes as standpoint theory (1987).

These two approaches invite us to undertake a reflective exercise on the conditions of knowledge production, the postures adopted and the effects of power involved in all research. In this sense, they seem to us to be fertile resources for thinking about the forms of engagement of researchers in journalism. However, they alone cannot exhaust the diversity of positions adopted by these researchers. Both Gabrielle Ramain and Clémence Petit's essays are rooted in feminist epistemology and situated knowledge, and share a reflection on the articulation of a recent past as a journalist and a present as a young researcher working in journalistic fields. The emotional work of research described by Gabrielle Ramain provides an insight into the transition between the two professional worlds, while the delimitation of the field and the interview procedures described by Clémence Petit reveal the reflexive layering at work. Two other authors also have one point in common, that of the *Gilets jaunes* social movement (and more particularly their media and communication productions) as the founding terrain giving rise to two very different reflexive exercises. Mélanie Lecha's paper explains how she was able to reconcile (or not) her activism as a former '*Gilet jaune*' with her posture as a researcher, while Brigitte Sebbah's paper sets out how the simultaneity between the mediatised event and the performed research induces, at the same time, the deconstruction of dominant media narratives. Emmanuel Marty's paper focuses on the concept of axiological neutrality and the empirie of interviews and journalistic corpora, and puts into perspective the reflexivity and engagement of the researcher in the study of discursive materials.

These works are complemented by three interviews with French, American and Brazilian colleagues on their relationship to engagement. It is to this plurality of forms of scientific engagement in journalism that this issue aims to contribute.

Notes

1.   The idea for this issue of the journal arose at the end of the second edition of the young researchers' day (known as the methodology day) of the Rencontres internationales des recherches sur le journalisme held in Bordeaux in December 2022. The theme of the panel, 'The struggles of researchers in journalism', echoed the previous day's conference, which focused on journalism as a profession of struggle. As the lexicon of combat had been at the heart of the previous two issues (Sur le journalisme, About journalism, Sobre jornalismo, Volume 13, n° 1 & 2), we decided to shift the focus of the editorial project, focusing more precisely on scientific engagement and reflexivity.

2. Translated by Colin Gordon in Gordon, C. (ed.) (1980), Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977, New York: Pantheon Books, p.126.

3. Ibid, p.132

Bibliography

Alamo-Pastrana, C., & Hoynes, W. (2020). Racialization of news: Constructing and challenging professional journalism as "White Media". *Humanity & Society, 44*(1), 67-91. doi:10.1177/0160597618820071

Alemán, S. M. (2017). A critical race counterstory: Chicana/o subjectivities vs. journalism objectivity. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education, 16*(1), 8.

Berkowitz, D. A. (1997). *The social meanings of news: A text-reader*. Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.

Boczkowski, P. J., & Papacharissi, Z. (2017). *Trump and the media*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical reason: On the theory of action*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Carlson, M., Robinson, S., & Lewis, S. C. (2021). *News after Trump: Journalism's crisis of relevance in a changed media culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Carlson, M., Robinson, S., Lewis, S. C., & Berkowitz, D. A. (2018). Journalism Studies and its core commitments: The making of a communication field. *Journal of Communication, 68*(1), 6-25. doi:10.1093/joc/jqx006

Chambers, D., Steiner, L., & Fleming, C. (2004). *Women and journalism*. New York: Routledge.

Christians, C. G., & Carey, J. W. (1989). The logic and aims of qualitative research. In G. H. Stempel & B. H. Westley (Eds.), *Research methods in mass communication* (2nd ed., pp. 354-374). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Dierickx, L., & Lindén, C.-G. (2024). From bytes to bylines: A history of AI in journalism practices. In T. s. Tófalvy & I. Vobic (Eds.), *Histories of digital journalism: The interplay of technology, society and culture* (pp. 69-81). London; New York: Routledge.

Elsheikh, D., Jackson, D., & Jebril, N. (2024). Revisiting the hierarchy of influences on journalism in a transitional context: When the social system level prevails. *International Journal of Communication, 18*, 1-19.

Ferrucci, P., & Kuhn, T. (2022). Remodeling the hierarchy: An organization-centric model of influence for media sociology research. *Journalism Studies, 23*(4), 525-543. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2022.2032805

Firestein, S. (2012). *Ignorance: How it drives science*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hall, S. (1980). *Culture, media, language: Working papers in cultural studies, 1972-79*. London: Hutchinson.

Hall, S. (1989). Ideology. In E. Barnouw (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Communication* (Vol. 2, pp. 307-311). New York: Oxford Press.

Hall, S. (1992). The West and the rest: Discourse and power. In S. Hall & B. Gieben (Eds.), *Formations of modernity* (pp. 275-332). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (pp. 13-74). London: Sage.

Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Ramaprasad, J., & De Beer, A. S. (Eds.). (2019). *Worlds of journalism: Journalistic cultures around the globe*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hanitzsch, T., & Vos, T. P. (2017). Journalistic roles and the struggle over institutional identity: The discursive constitution of journalism. *Communication Theory, 27*(2), 115-135. doi:10.1111/comt.12112

Hanitzsch, T., & Vos, T. P. (2018). Journalism beyond democracy: A new look into journalistic roles in political and everyday life. *Journalism, 19*(2), 146-164. doi:10.1177/1464884916673386

Hanitzsch, T., Vos, T. P., Standaert, O., Hanusch, F., Hovden, J. F., Hermans, L., & Ramaprasad, J. (2019). Role orientations: Journalists' views on their place in society. In T. Hanitzsch, F. Hanusch, J. Ramaprasad, & A. S. De Beer (Eds.), *Worlds of journalism: Journalistic cultures around the globe* (pp. 161-197). New York: Columbia University Press.

Hanusch, F., & Vos, T. P. (2020). Charting the development of a field: A systematic review of comparative studies of journalism. *International Communication Gazette, 82*(4), 319-341. doi:10.1177/1748048518822606

Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (2002). *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Lewin, K. (1951). *Field theory in social science: Selected theoretical papers*. New York: Harper.

Mitchelstein, E., & Boczkowski, P. J. (Eds.). (2023). *Digital journalism in Latin America*. New York; London: Taylor & Francis.

Ornebring, H. (2018). Journalism and change. In T. P. Vos (Ed.), *Journalism* (Vol. 19, pp. 555-574). Berlin, Boston: Walter De Gruyter.

Parks, P. (2019). Covering Trump's 'carnival': A rhetorical alternative to 'objective' reporting. *Journalism Practice, 13*(10), 1164-1184. doi:10.1080/17512786.2019.1577696

Parsons, C. (2007). *How to map arguments in political science*. New York: Oxford Press.

Robinson, S., & Culver, K. B. (2019). When White reporters cover race: News media, objectivity and community (dis)trust. *Journalism, 20*(3), 375-391. doi:10.1177/1464884916663599

Schudson, M. (1978). *Discovering the news: A social history of American newspapers*. New York: Basic Books.

Schudson, M. (2001). The objectivity norm in American journalism. *Journalism, 2*(2), 149-170.

Shoemaker, P. J. (1991). *Gatekeeping*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Shoemaker, P. J., & Cohen, A. A. (2006). *News around the world: Content, practitioners, and the public*. New York: Routledge.

Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (2014). *Mediating the message in the 21st century: A media sociology perspective* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Shoemaker, P. J., Tankard, J. W., & Lasorsa, D. L. (2004). *How to build social science theories*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Shoemaker, P. J., & Vos, T. P. (2009). *Gatekeeping theory*. New York: Routledge.

Steiner, L. (1988). Oppositional decoding as an act of resistance. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 5*(1), 1-15. doi:10.1080/15295038809366682

Tandoc, E. C., Hellmueller, L., & Vos, T. P. (2013). Mind the gap: Between journalistic role conception and role enactment. *Journalism Practice, 7*(5), 539-554. doi:10.1080/17512786.2012.726503

Vos, T. P. (2002). Newswriting structure and style. In W. D. Sloan & L. M. Parcell (Eds.), *American journalism: History, principles, practices* (pp. 296-305). Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co.

Vos, T. P. (2010). A cultural explanation for early broadcast policy: Professionalism, voluntarism, and U.S. Broadcast Networks. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 54*(2), 179-193.

Vos, T. P. (2011). A mirror of the times: A history of the mirror metaphor in journalism. *Journalism Studies, 12*(5), 575-589.

Vos, T. P. (2012). 'Homo Journalisticus:' Journalism education's role in articulating the objectivity norm. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism, 13*(4), 435-449. doi:10.1177/1464884911431374

Vos, T. P. (2013). Explaining the origins of the advertising agency. *American Journalism, 30*(4), 450-472. doi:10.1080/08821127.2013.846714

Vos, T. P. (2016). Historical perspectives on journalistic roles. In C. Mellado, L. Hellmueller, & W. Donsbach (Eds.), *Journalistic role performance: Concepts, models, and measures* (pp. 41-59). New York: Routledge.

Vos, T. P. (2019). Journalism as institution. In H. Ornebring (Ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Vos, T. P. (2023a). The social roles of journalism. In S. Allan (Ed.), *The Routledge companion to news and journalism* (2nd ed., pp. 73-81). Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge.

Vos, T. P. (2023b). Theory, concepts, and historiography: An overview. In M. M. Garza, M. Fuhlhage, & T. Lucht (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to American Journalism History* (pp. 401-410). New York; London: Routledge.

Vos, T. P., & Finneman, T. (2017). The early historical construction of journalism's gatekeeping role. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism, 18*(3), 265-280. doi:10.1177/1464884916636126

Vos, T. P., & Li, Y. (2013). Justifying commercialization: Legitimating discourses and the rise of American advertising. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 90*(3), 559-580. doi:10.1177/1077699013493787

Vos, T. P., & Moore, J. (2018). Building the journalistic paradigm: Beyond paradigm repair. *Journalism*, 1464884918767586. doi:10.1177/1464884918767586

Vos, T. P., & Perreault, G. P. (2020). The discursive construction of the gamification of journalism. *Convergence, 26*(3), 470-485. doi:10.1177/1354856520909542

Vos, T. P., & Russell, F. M. (2019). Theorizing journalism's institutional relationships: An elaboration of Gatekeeping Theory. *Journalism Studies, 20*(16), 2331-2348. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2019.1593882

Vos, T. P., & Thomas, R. J. (2018). The discursive construction of journalistic authority in a post-truth age. *Journalism Studies, 19*(13), 2001-2010. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2018.1492879

Vos, T. P., & Thomas, R. J. (2019). The discursive (re)construction of journalism's gatekeeping role. *Journalism Practice, 13*(4), 396-412. doi:10.1080/17512786.2018.1478746

Waisbord, S., & Mellado, C. (2014). De-westernizing Communication Studies: A reassessment. *Communication Theory, 24*(4), 361-372. doi:10.1111/comt.12044

White, D. M. (1950). The 'gate keeper:' A case study in the selection of news. *Journalism Quarterly, 27*(4), 383-390.

Wolfgang, J. D., Vos, T. P., Kelling, K., & Shin, S. (2021). Political journalism and democracy: How journalists reflect political viewpoint diversity in their reporting. *Journalism Studies, 22*(10), 1339-1357. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2021.1952473

Zelizer, B. (2019). Why journalism is about more than digital technology. *Digital Journalism, 7*(3), 343-350. doi:10.1080/21670811.2019.1571932