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# A better future: people power and collective action spaces in global pioneer journalism.

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# ‘A better future’: People power and collective action spaces in global pioneer journalism

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# About the project

- PhD (University of Stirling): ***Meaning-ful Encounters: Relational encoding in pioneer journalism and the reimagining of journalistic epistemology*** (2018-2023)
- Aim: Examine how transformation-focused journalism communities produce knowledge vis-à-vis their audiences, publics and wider world
- Research design and scope: Multiple case study, transnational (global) pioneer communities
- Methodology: Metajournalistic discourse analysis, 30 semi-structured interviews, multimodal discourse analysis of pioneer journalism stories

# The research problem

- Journalism's **epistemic crisis** and loss of epistemic authority (Carlson, 2017, Steensen, 2019)
- Converged media, dislocation to non-proprietary platforms, broken monopoly of legacy media, (inter-)active and fragmented audiences, and public realisations that news is a construct **challenge the validation of news-as-knowledge** (Ekström & Westlund, 2019)
- Callison and Young (2019) locate the epistemic crisis of journalism in **its traditional *view from nowhere*** (the neutral, distanced regime of reporting), rooted in “sedimented power relations”. They see the possible solution in a **“relational” epistemology**: “relating oneself and one’s knowledge in systems and social order within which knowledge is produced, valued and mobilised” (p. 13)
- Soul-searching in newsrooms old and new **to reconnect with audiences/publics**: new styles and strategic rituals emerging (e.g., emotionality), **challenging journalism’s traditional norms** and practices (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, Steinke & Belair-Gagnon, 2020)
- New conceptualisations of journalism: as “a dynamic and dispersed practice” in constant process of **“becoming”** (Deuze & Witschge, 2020, p. 32)

# ‘Pioneer journalism’: A definition

- “Pioneer journalism” (Hepp & Loosen, 2021): transformation-focused actors/collectives who experiment with journalistic practice and who, through their **imaginations and shared visions of journalism’s “possible futures”**, can ultimately effect “the re-figuration of [its] foundations” (p. 15)
- “Peripheral actors” (Deuze & Witschge, 2020, Schapals, 2022) YET they serve as “models or imaginaries of new possibilities”, **gesturing towards what journalism “could be”** (Zelizer, 2017).
- Pioneer communities are “imagined collectives” (Hepp, 2016) in deep mediatization, a **hybrid figuration between a social movement and a think tank**, united by a mission to “bring about **media-related change**” (p. 927)
- Knowledge production: **integral to pioneer communities’ identity and goals**. Studying pioneer journalism epistemic praxis can sensitise us to **shifts in journalistic epistemology** and its possible futures.

# Research Questions

**RQ1:** What is pioneer journalists' vision about the epistemic role of journalism?

**RQ2:** How do pioneer journalism communities enact their epistemic values in their epistemic practice?

**RQ3:** How do pioneer journalists, through their epistemic praxis, reimagine journalistic epistemology?



# Fieldwork and data collection

1. **Field-mapping (2018-2020):** Seven journalism events in Central/Eastern Europe, South America, Southeast Asia (most online) organised by Hacks/Hackers, European Journalism Centre, Splice Media, Association of European Journalists.
2. **Initial sampling (2020):** 20 pioneer journalism organisations, **metajournalistic discourse analysis** as “traces of what matters” to explicate shared “matters of concern” (De Maeyer, 2016) and epistemic values.
3. **Focused sampling (2020-2021):** four cases – *Bureau Local* (UK), *The Current* (Pakistan), *New Naratif* (Malaysia/Southeast Asia), *DoR* (Romania). Interviews with 30 pioneer journalism producers.

## Initial sampling stage: 20 pioneer journalism organisations

Journalism startup/collective	Country
<i>Bureau Local</i>	UK
<i>Coda Story</i>	US, Georgia and Russia
<i>The Correspondent</i>	Netherlands, Global
<i>The Current</i>	Pakistan
<i>Daily Maverick</i>	South Africa
<i>Decât o Revistă (DoR)</i>	Romania
<i>El Surtidor</i>	Paraguay
<i>The Ferret</i>	Scotland
<i>Frontier Magazine</i>	Myanmar
<i>IndigiNews</i>	Canada
<i>Inkyfada</i>	Tunisia
<i>Krautreporter</i>	Germany
<i>New Naratif</i>	Southeast Asia
<i>Outriders</i>	Poland
<i>R.AGE</i>	Malaysia
<i>Rappler</i>	Philippines
<i>Scalawag</i>	US South
<i>Splice Media</i>	South-East Asia
<i>Toest</i>	Bulgaria
<i>Wapatoa</i>	Myanmar

# Data Analysis

*Phronetic* approach to analysing qualitative research data (Tracy, 2018):

- Inductive <-> deductive iterative approach (tagging between theory/literature and emergent themes)
- Open (primary) and focused (secondary) coding cycles
- Codebooks crafted from emergent research data and ‘road-tested’ on rest of data
- 15 first-level codes, synthesised into two higher-level conceptual categories, and iteratively refined at every stage of data analysis

Analytic level	Code Name	Code Description
2 <sup>nd</sup> level codes	Being Meaningful	A <b>vision for reimagining journalism’s epistemology and role in society through the prism of ‘being meaningful’</b> – to make a difference, to create a better future through constructive, impactful storytelling, while embracing the best of old journalism ethics – accuracy, accountability, holding power to account, public interest, democracy and human rights – and the new epistemic values – moral compass, transparency, diversity, human dignity, and relational/situated subjectivity. The vision goes beyond information, towards collective care, advocacy, and action.
	Being Relational	<p>An <b>emerging relational epistemic praxis</b> that is community focused and grounded in lived experience, human dignity and care.</p> <p>The media startups’ epistemic praxis seeks to build closer and deeper relations with their community members, networks, and the wider public and come <b>together</b>. Knowledge production is a collective endeavour that seeks to build an <i>imagined collective</i> around pioneer journalism to create stories and reach communities.</p> <p><i>Being relational</i> goes <b>beyond journalism-audience relations</b>; it extends to the encounters that pioneer journalism enables between journalism and world, generating epistemic capacities with wider social impact potential (akin to a social movement).</p>



# Metajournalistic discourse analysis: Pioneer journalists' shared epistemic values

## Being meaningful:

- Making a difference
- A hybrid vision of journalism ethics: mixing the **old** (accuracy, accountability, public interest, holding power to account, democracy and human rights) and the **new** (moral compass, transparency, diversity, human dignity, and relational/situated subjectivity)

## Some in-vivo codes:

*"A better future" (Rappler manifesto)*

*"Meaningful lives, meaningful knowledge" (Wapatoa manifesto)*

*"Meaningful journalism" (Coda Story manifesto)*

# Metajournalistic discourse analysis: Pioneer journalists' shared epistemic values

## The meaning of 'being meaningful'

- Being useful, simplifying information for audiences (“simple content for a more informed life”, *The Current*)
- Empowering Southeast Asians to take action and build democracy through bridging information and action (*New Naratif*)
- Bettering the lives of citizens, bridging the divide between rural and city communities (*DoR*)
- Empowering underrepresented communities and giving them agency through co-producing “stories that matter” (*Bureau Local*)

# ‘Pioneer journalism’ communities as part of social movements (Hepp, 2016)

*“New Naratif is a **movement for democracy, freedom of information, and freedom of expression** in Southeast Asia. We aim to make Southeast Asians proud of our region, our shared culture, and our shared history. We fight for **the dignity and freedom of the Southeast Asian people** by building a community of people across the region to **imagine and articulate a better Southeast Asia.**”*

# “Relational journalism” (*IndigiNews* manifesto)

*“IndigiNews **cares about people**. We understand the importance of developing **strong relationships** within communities and hearing a **range of perspectives**. We are trained in **anti-oppressive and trauma-informed** reporting, and understand that there are often **historical and political undercurrents** that impact communities today.”*

# ‘Being *relational*’: Pioneer journalism’s epistemic praxis

- **Mutual learning:** Dialogic knowledge production (coming together, building closer relationships, grounding knowledge production in lived experience and community agency, non-extractive, inclusive editorial approaches, soliciting ideas from audiences)

*"It's just so that people can share and often what you can generate through doing that is, I guess, **relationships of trust** between people, people sharing information at a **much deeper, more complex level** than they would normally in a conversation with a journalist... and also creating those conversations between different members of the community."*

*(Bureau Local journalist and community organiser)*

- **Community service and collective care** (people-powered epistemic approach, careful and thoughtful UX design, stories seen as actants-of-change generating capacities for action)

*"We strive to be a source of **balance and compassion...**" (DoR Editor-in-chief)*



# ‘Being *relational*’: Pioneer journalism’s epistemic praxis

- **Together in the *imagined collective*: Mobilising in collective action** (recruiting like-minded people to their cause, using activist discourse, impact-focused reporting - e.g., *Bureau Local*’s “Decolonise the news” and “News you can use” campaigns)
- **Towards knowledge-based advocacy** (moving beyond journalism’s traditional purely informative function, and extending to capacities to spark change - e.g., *New Naratif*’s Baca ‘democracy classrooms’)





*“Politically, we don't have an editorial line. **But morally, we have an editorial line.** For example, we are very pro-women, because we're a woman-led startup, we are pro-minorities, which is difficult in Pakistan to a large extent, because you get a lot of hate if you are pro certain minorities. We are pro-, you know, democracy... **we take the democratic line; that's something we don't draw lines on.**” (The Current Editor-in-chief)*

*“Journalism has a **responsibility to educate and empower**, not just report” (New Naratif CEO)*

*Journalism as a means to an end: the problem should not be simply about about saving journalism but “thinking deeply about **what journalism is for**. What’s the point of journalism and **what it can and should do.**” (Wales-based community organiser, Bureau Local)*

*“For me, **building a more inclusive, understanding, and accepting society** is really the bottom line of journalism.” (New Naratif freelance reporter)*

# Reimagining journalistic epistemology from the ground up

Pioneer journalism producers go beyond their purely epistemic role as facilitators of knowledge and adopt, and indeed embrace, a semi-political role akin to grassroots activism. In so doing, they act as **agents of change**, slowly shifting journalistic epistemology beyond its traditional mission to inform towards social action and collective care, abandoning the *view from nowhere* and **actively embedding themselves in the world**.

Pioneer journalists adopt a more engaged role in society – “towards questioning, negotiating, and even reimagining reality” (Medeiros & Badr, 2022, p. 1356), thus moving beyond information and closer to something akin to ***knowledge-based advocacy***.

Through their epistemic vision and values and their experimental epistemic praxis, pioneer journalists push the boundaries of journalism, **gesturing towards some possible futures** and towards not only “what journalism could be” (Zelizer, 2017), but more importantly, **what it *could do***.

# Five ways pioneer journalists reimagine journalistic epistemology

1. Challenging journalism's traditionally neutral and detached epistemic praxis by ***abandoning journalists' position as disinterested observers*** and openly taking a stand on issues that matter.
2. Engaging in ***knowledge-based advocacy*** – seeking to mobilise, empower, and create impact and democracy-building capacities.
3. ***Creating a circle of collective care*** – connecting and building bridges between people, stories and realities, and offering solutions and constructive approaches to issues.
4. ***Deep engagement and relationality*** – publics and journalists embedded in the knowledge production process, non-extractive approaches, mutual listening and learning.
5. ***Redressing epistemic injustice*** by giving people and communities agency and power to co-produce narratives.