

BOOK REVIEW

A Review of Journalism and Gender: Global Perspectives

Margaretha Geertsema-Sligh

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What does it mean to comprehend journalism and gender from a genuinely global standpoint? The question is less straightforward than it first appears. A global approach requires more than extending geographical coverage or adding examples from countries beyond Europe and North America. Journalism scholarship has historically been shaped by theories, professional assumptions, institutional experiences, and research traditions rooted predominantly in the Global North. Feminist scholarship has challenged many of these assumptions, yet it has also been criticized for universalizing experiences associated with relatively privileged Western women. Journalism studies may therefore marginalize knowledge produced beyond the Global North, while gender scholarship may reproduce assumptions about women that do not travel easily across diverse social, cultural, political, and historical contexts.

It is within this intellectual terrain that Margaretha Geertsema-Sligh's *Journalism and Gender: Global Perspectives* makes its intervention. Conceived as a global and intersectional examination of journalism and gender, the book foregrounds women, the Global South, and the structures through which

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gendered inequalities are produced and sustained. Drawing on scholarship and comparative evidence from more than 90 countries, it addresses feminism and intersectionality, media sociology, women's historical and contemporary participation in journalism, media representation, violence and harassment, media development, feminist activism, and journalism education. The book is consequently more ambitious than a conventional study of women in journalism. Beneath its pedagogical organization lies a broader interrogation of how journalism itself is conceptualized: who produces news, who exercises professional authority, whose histories are remembered, and whose scholarship acquires intellectual legitimacy. Gender thereby becomes a productive entry point into debates on de-Westernization, decolonization, intersectionality, and the sociology of journalism.

This review argues that the book's most significant contribution is epistemological rather than merely representational. Its central insight is that gender equality cannot be separated from the politics of knowledge: who defines journalism, whose experiences are treated as authoritative, and whose intellectual traditions shape the field. At the same time, its global ambition raises a productive difficulty. While "the global" can unsettle Western universality, it can itself become homogenizing when the considerable differences within the Global South are compressed into a single category. The book is therefore best understood not as a definitive map of global journalism and gender, but as an invitation to redraw that map.

A major strength of *Journalism and Gender* is its refusal to reduce gender inequality to women's numerical underrepresentation. The author interrogates the dominance of Western research traditions, the privileged position of English in international academic communication, and the related imperatives of de-Westernization, decolonization, and Southernisation. This is important because a purportedly global study can easily become an exercise in geographical accumulation: established theories remain unchanged while cases from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere are added as illustrations. Geertsema-Sligh instead questions the hierarchy through which Western journalism has often been treated as an implicit norm. The argument corresponds with wider critiques of communication scholarship. It is the gender that makes these relations particularly visible because questions of inequality involve authority, recognition, visibility, voice, and legitimacy. The book consequently suggests that the margins of journalism studies are not merely geographical; they are epistemological. It asks readers to reconsider why certain histories have become canonical, why particular professional norms are regarded as universal, and why some scholarship circulates more

easily than knowledge produced in less privileged linguistic and institutional settings.

The integration of feminism and intersectionality is another important strength. The author argued that feminism is not treated as an additional perspective on an otherwise neutral account of journalism; it informs the book's conceptual framework. This matters because "women" cannot be treated as a homogeneous analytical category. The insight is particularly relevant to comparative journalism. The professional experiences of a woman journalist in India, Nigeria, Brazil, South Africa, Sweden, or the United States cannot be reduced to a single experience of womanhood. Caste, race, class, ethnicity, language, religion, political conditions, media ownership, and colonial histories may profoundly shape professional opportunities.

Geertsema-Sligh's engagement with transnational and Global South feminisms is therefore welcome. It recognizes that feminist knowledge has its own geography and that concepts developed within Western feminist scholarship cannot automatically represent women's experiences elsewhere. Earlier arguments produce a tension of their own. If "the Global South" becomes too expansive a category, it may reproduce the homogenization that intersectionality seeks to overcome. The region contains radically different journalism systems, political cultures, linguistic traditions, colonial histories, and gender regimes. Geertsema-Sligh does not completely resolve this difficulty, but importantly, she makes it visible.

The book's treatment of journalism as an institution rather than merely an occupation is particularly persuasive. Drawing upon media sociology and the hierarchy-of-influences perspective, as the author examines journalism across interconnected levels, from wider social structures to organizations, professional routines, and individual journalists. This framework helps explain why increasing women's participation does not automatically produce equality. News organizations may become numerically diverse while retaining gendered cultures and practices. Recruitment, beat allocation, working hours, informal networks, leadership structures, sourcing routines, and assumptions about professional commitment can all influence women's careers. The Shoemaker and Reese's hierarchy-of-influences model is useful here because it locates media production within interacting institutional, organizational, professional, and individual forces. Applied to gender, it shifts the question from whether women are present to whether they possess meaningful professional authority. This distinction between presence and power is among the book's most valuable contributions. Women may enter journalism in substantial numbers yet remain concentrated in less prestigious beats, face

barriers to leadership, or encounter professional expectations that intersect unequally with responsibilities beyond the newsroom. Representation within an organization is therefore not synonymous with equality within it.

The historical dimension further strengthens the book. Conventional histories of journalism have often centred male editors, publishers, political correspondents, war reporters, and media entrepreneurs, with women appearing as exceptional rather than integral participants. Geertsema-Sligh addresses this imbalance through her discussion of women's entry into journalism, women's publications, columns and pages, and the relationship between journalism and the public/private divide. The historical recovery challenges the assumption that women's participation is primarily a recent development. It also reveals an important paradox. Women were frequently channeled into subjects considered less serious—family, fashion, education, culture, and domestic life. Yet these spaces could become sites of agency through which women constructed publics, articulated social concerns, and contested the boundaries of legitimate public discourse.

Women's history in journalism is therefore not simply a story of exclusion followed by inclusion. It is a history of negotiation with institutions whose boundaries were themselves gendered.

The book's engagement with comparative evidence, including the *Global Media Monitoring Project* (GMMP), provides an empirical dimension to its argument. Since 1995, the GMMP has generated longitudinal data on gender representation in news media, making persistent inequalities visible across countries and regions. The continuing underrepresentation of women as news subjects, sources, and authoritative voices demonstrates that increased participation in journalism has not automatically transformed media representation. The crucial question is not simply whether women appear in the news, but how they appear and whether they are positioned as credible actors and sources of expertise. Here, Tuchman's concept of symbolic annihilation remains relevant.

Underrepresentation and stereotypical representation shape not only media images but also assumptions about whose experiences matter and whose voices deserve public attention. Women in politics, for example, may receive considerable coverage while being assessed through gendered frames concerning appearance, family, personality, or emotion. The same problem can arise in reporting violence against women. Journalism may make violence visible while presenting it as an isolated personal tragedy rather than a structural problem. Visibility, therefore, does not necessarily produce

authority. The distinction between visibility and authority is consequently crucial. A meaningful assessment of gender equality must ask who is seen, who is heard, who is regarded as an expert, and who is allowed to interpret public events.

The book's attention to violence and harassment against women journalists is especially timely. Journalism now operates across physical workplaces and digitally networked environments, exposing women journalists to threats, intimidation, sexual harassment, and gendered online abuse. Such attacks extend beyond individual harm. They may influence professional behavior, discourage coverage of contentious subjects, constrain public participation, and ultimately narrow the range of voices contributing to journalism. Safety is therefore not an ancillary concern but a condition of professional equality. Formal inclusion means little if women are discouraged from reporting, speaking, challenging dominant positions, or seeking advancement because of hostile working environments. Geertsema-Sligh is therefore right to connect participation with safety and professional autonomy. Gender equality must encompass not merely access to journalism, but the conditions under which journalists can work with dignity and security.

The most productive critical question raised by the book concerns its central term: *global*. Geertsema-Sligh's geographical reach is considerable, bringing together scholarship and evidence from more than 90 countries, with particular attention to the Global South. Yet geographical breadth does not necessarily produce epistemological plurality. A study may include numerous countries while continuing to rely primarily on concepts developed elsewhere. It may discuss diverse regions while English remains the principal medium through which their scholarship becomes internationally visible. It may incorporate Southern cases while interpreting them largely through Northern theoretical frameworks. Geertsema-Sligh is clearly conscious of this danger. Her discussion of Western scholarly dominance, English-language knowledge, de-Westernization, decolonization, and Southernisation demonstrates substantial epistemic reflexivity. Nevertheless, the tension remains.

A genuinely global approach may require more than adding Southern examples to established frameworks. It may require concepts emerging from different intellectual traditions to reshape the questions themselves. It may also require greater recognition of scholarship published in languages and academic venues that remain peripheral to dominant international citation networks. The Waisbord and Mellado's de-Westernization concerns not simply where research is conducted, but which questions and forms of knowledge

are permitted to acquire generalizing authority. Geertsema-Sligh's global perspective is therefore best regarded as an *unfinished intellectual project* rather than a completed methodological solution.

A critique of Western dominance must also avoid romanticizing the Global South. Decolonization does not mean that knowledge produced outside the West is automatically more authentic or emancipatory. Nor does geographical location itself confer epistemic authority. Journalism institutions within the Global South may reproduce patriarchy, caste and class inequality, racial discrimination, authoritarianism, and exclusion. The objective, therefore, should not be to replace one intellectual centre with another, but to create conditions in which different knowledge traditions can enter into dialogue without one being treated as the universal norm. This is where the book's intersectional foundation is particularly useful. If intersectionality is taken seriously, neither "Western" nor "Southern" can be treated as internally homogeneous categories. Both require continual critical examination.

The book's attention to journalism education gives its argument practical significance. Journalism education is one of the principal sites where professional norms are reproduced. Students learn not only how to gather information and construct stories, but also what counts as news, whose voices carry authority, which histories matter, and which intellectual traditions are considered foundational. A curriculum dominated by Western examples may inadvertently present those examples as universal. Similarly, treating women as a specialized topic rather than as participants in every dimension of journalism can reinforce marginalization.

Decolonizing journalism education therefore requires more than adding a unit on gender or a few readings from the Global South. It calls for reconsideration of curricula, reading lists, examples, professional assumptions, and the hierarchies through which knowledge is organized. In this respect, *Journalism and Gender* is perhaps most valuable when used not as a definitive account of global journalism, but as a catalyst for questioning what "global", "journalism", "gender", and "knowledge" mean.

In conclusion, *Journalism and Gender: Global Perspectives* arrives at an important moment in journalism scholarship. Gender inequality intersects with professional authority, representation, organizational culture, journalist safety, political communication, media accountability, and education. Yet the deeper challenge concerns the intellectual frameworks through which these questions are understood. Geertsema-Sligh's principal achievement is to bring that challenge to the centre of the discussion. The book demonstrates that

journalism and gender must be approached simultaneously as questions of representation, labor, institutional power, professional culture, safety, history, and knowledge production. Its attention to the Global South challenges the tendency to treat Western journalism as the implicit norm, while its feminist and intersectional framework resists treating women as a homogeneous category.

Its limitations arise partly from the scale of its ambition. Geographical breadth inevitably places pressure on contextual depth, while the capacious category of the Global South may obscure significant internal differences. Comparative evidence can reveal structural patterns but cannot, by itself, explain the historical and cultural processes that produce them. These tensions, however, are also part of the book's value. They encourage readers to continue the intellectual work rather than regard the global perspective as settled.

The most productive reading of *Journalism and Gender* is therefore as a challenge to the intellectual architecture through which journalism has traditionally been studied. Its fundamental question extends beyond whether women are adequately represented or equally employed. It asks who has the authority to define journalism, whose experiences are permitted to represent the world, and whose knowledge becomes part of journalism's intellectual inheritance. For students, the book provides an accessible entry into a complex field; for educators, it offers a basis for rethinking journalism curricula through feminist, intersectional, and global lenses; and for scholars, its greatest contribution lies in its epistemological provocation. It reminds us that becoming global is not simply a matter of looking farther afield. It requires learning to look differently. The book's enduring significance, then, lies in its invitation to journalism and media studies to move beyond merely describing the global towards *rethinking, reconfiguring, and re-imagining*.