Sino-African journalism and journalistic fields: CGTN Africa's workers between worlds

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Abstract

Much academic criticism and public-political opinion has been made of China's "going out" in Africa, and particularly of its media apparatus' role in this project. But there has been little concerted research into the forces that influence production at these news organisations. Why do they produce the news they do? Why do the journalists that work for them choose to do so? Drawing on almost fifty hours of semi-structure interviews and life histories with staff at one of these Sino-African news organisations, CGTN Africa, I will seek to explain and theorise its production of news.

This thesis argues that field theory, as proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, can provide a useful theoretical basis for studying the particular context of news production at CGTN Africa, and can contribute to wider understandings of international news production. Bourdieusian concepts such as habitus, capital, and field, are helpful analytical tools to explain the processes of work at an organisation like CGTN Africa, but also need considerable adaptation to the specificities of the context of this case study.

The analysis is presented in four chapters, the first three of which use the prism of differing vertical layers of field to interrogate the practice of CGTN Africa and its journalists: the global field, where CGTN competes with its international competitors; national fields, where journalists themselves emanate from; and urban fields, where news organisations tend to be based. The final analysis chapter then considers the overlapping of these layers of fields, and the unique patterns of practice this can produce.

In the case of each layer, the context of news production at CGTN Africa is used to reflect back on Bourdieu's "thinking tools," and propose novel theoretical approaches to studying international news production. It first considers how competing heteronomies work to protect unique forms of journalistic practice at CGTN Africa. Second, how journalists interact with forms of capital emanating from competing national fields, developing new dispositions to engage with their work. Third, it considers how social position within journalistic fields relates to physical mobility and geographic positioning within and in relation to urban environments. And finally, it reflects on the role of race and racism in the day-to-day work and career trajectories of journalists working for international news organisations.

Together, these analyses argue that, when used reflexively, field theory provides a fruitful toolkit for researchers investigating journalistic practice in a wider variety of contexts.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

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1. Introduction

On 11 January 2011, China Central Television (CCTV) opened the doors of its new African news production hub in Nairobi, Kenya. This flagship event ostensibly marked the dawn of a new era of Sino-African relations. On the one hand, the new production hub was intended, in the words of Liu Guangyuang, then People's Republic of China's (PRC) ambassador to Kenya (2010-2014), to enable China to present a "correct image" of itself to African audiences (quoted in Wekesa and Zhang 2014, 9). On the other, it was intended to offer African journalists the opportunity, as put by one Kenyan employee at the time, to "change the narrative about Africa" (quoted in Nelson 2013, 26).

Both these objectives were largely driven by a sense, shared by many Chinese and African journalists and publics, of deep imbalances and injustices within the core structure of international journalism, which had long been dominated by Northern news organisations. Centuries of myth-making built on the stories of European explorers, soldiers, colonists, ethnographers, and journalists had constructed Africa as the "dark continent" (Brantlinger 1985) – violent, barbaric, forlorn – and China as the "yellow peril" (Lovell 2011) – inscrutable, unscrupulous, despotic. Both stood as existential counterpoints to a dominant Northern civilisation – refined, morally upstanding, democratic. Despite the end of the imperial era, contemporary critics of international news media argue that little has changed: both China and Africa are still represented in a broadly negative light: Africa as beset by natural disasters and tribal divisions (Franks 2013); China as a devious and ruthless actor, hell-bent on resource accumulation and (eventually) world domination (Mawdsley 2008).

China's entry into the international mediascape, particularly in the case of African news, brought the potential for a radical shift in these dynamics. A decade on from CCTV-Africa's launch – and less heralded expansions undertaken by other Chinese central media organisations, such as the Xinhua News Agency and China Radio International (CRI) across the continent – this shift has attracted significant commentary; much of it alarmist, warning of a massive Chinese "global propaganda campaign," and highlighting the supposed ills of Chinese journalists' "positive reporting" style (Lim and Bergin 2018). Yet there has been little empirical investigation into processes that govern such journalistic practice. Whilst aim is easily taken by casual observers at the top-down control of state media apparatus by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the answer to the question of what influences journalistic practice in

places like China Global Television Network's (CGTN)[1] Nairobi production hub remains largely unknown, particularly in light of the ever-changing nature of China-Africa media relations (outlined in more detail below). This is the first extended study of journalistic practice at CGTN Africa since the Xi Jinping's re-election for both his second (2018) and third (2023) terms as President of the PRC. As Xi's grip on power over the CCP and China has tightened, so has his impact over the PRC's media apparatus and external image, and in particular his emphasis on the importance of building China's soft power (Repnikova 2022). How these changes have trickled down into the practice of China's externally-facing journalists has as yet not been studied.

Those few studies that have engaged with CGTN Africa are theoretically lightweight and have failed to establish a sociologically sound explanation for the particular idiosyncrasies of Sino-African journalistic practice. Explaining and theorising news production at an organisation like CGTN Africa is rendered especially difficult by the complexities of its situation and situatedness. Sino-African journalists sit at the nexus of myriad worlds of journalism, crisscrossed by a dizzying array of potential influences, sources of legitimacy, and professional norms. A Kenyan journalist working for CGTN in Nairobi may report to a white, Western editor, who in turn is overseen by a locally-based Chinese supervisor, subject to a sprawling management structure which arguably ends with the CCP politburo in Beijing. The same Kenyan journalist will be required to pitch and produce stories that are relevant to African, Chinese, *and* international audiences, broadcast worldwide on CGTN's 24-hour rolling-news channel. Thus, the forces of globalisation and localisation bring together various layers of influences at international, (multi-)national, and local levels to create a "liquid" state of affairs (Deuze 2005, 450).

Constructing a robust and reflexive sociological model to explore this complicated situation is no small task. Doing so is the key research aim of this thesis. Asking what theoretical framework can best explain journalistic practice in Sino-African media organisations, it proposes that the "thinking tools" provided by Pierre Bourdieu's field theory are valuable in investigating and explaining the multitude of influences involved in the

[1] CCTV-Africa became CGTN Africa following the structural reorganisation and rebranding of CCTV's international broadcasting divisions in 2016 (see Chapter 5).

production of news at CGTN Africa and how Sino-African journalists experience and negotiate these forces.

Its objectives are simultaneously empirical and theoretical. Empirically, it uses the data created by twenty-nine semi-structured interviews with relevant journalists to build on a small number of studies which have explored production at CGTN Africa, adding important depth and focus to this nascent but underdeveloped field of study. Theoretically, it asks how best we can study and understand the work of journalists operating at the juncture of different worlds of journalism, and those operating from subaltern positions within a global context. The literature on journalism practice has increasingly employed the reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu as a useful set of "thinking tools" with which to theorise on journalists at work. However, the process of integrating this theory has not always been completed particularly reflexively. Often, parts of the theory have been employed in piecemeal fashion, cast adrift from their theoretical moorings, and little academic effort has gone into reinventing field theory to deal with social practice in different contexts from that in which it was developed (Maares and Hanusch 2022). Bourdieu's writings have often been treated as gospel – sacrosanct and infallible – and then, much like scripture, excised and often decontextualised in the process to make seemingly pithy points. My argument throughout this thesis is that field theory *can* satisfactorily explain the journalistic practice of Sino-African journalists, and that, by extension, journalistic practice is best understood as a combination of journalists' habituses and capital as they interact with journalistic fields. However, simultaneously, I argue that field theory *must* be applied reflexively to deal with the particularities of the object of study. Anything less than this fully reflexive approach renders field theory unsuitable in all but a few contexts. Therefore, throughout this thesis, I also develop the tools offered by Bourdieu and his descendants to deal specifically with the complexities and idiosyncrasies of studying Sino-African journalistic practice.

The contribution of this thesis is therefore threefold: first, it consolidates and expands on existing empirical knowledge about journalistic practice at CGTN Africa; second, it contributes to the development of theoretical tools for understanding journalistic practice, particularly within the context of complex globalised-glocalised production, and in subaltern settings; and third, it offers a model of reflexive research practice, demonstrating the way in which future research might more thoroughly develop sociological tools appropriate to their objects of study.

China-Africa media relations

The following sections provide background for the thesis by bringing attention to two key considerations. First, they offer a potted history of Sino-African media relations, highlighting how these media relations are inextricably implicated within the broader context of China-Africa relations, and particularly in the machinations of the Chinese Party-state. Second, they explore the role of soft power in official, public, and academic discourse on Chinese media organisations like CGTN Africa, and question how the concept might be used fruitfully to understand journalistic practice in the context of Sino-African news.

Chinese officials usually date the earliest direct contact between China and Africa to the voyages of the Ming-dynasty admiral Zheng He, who made four journeys to East Africa between 1417 and 1433, carrying ambassadors from cities such as Mogadishu and Malindi to and from the imperial capital in Nanjing. However, following overthrow of the Ming by the Manchu-led Qing in 1644, China entered a long period of international isolation lasting the next three-hundred years. The modern history of China-Africa media relations began with the 1949 triumph of the CCP over the nationalist Kuomintang government in the Chinese Civil War. Ran (2016) and Li (2017b) outline how China-Africa media relations since 1949 have developed through four distinct stages, all of which have been marked by their direct relationship to CCP policy.

Following the end of the civil war, China-Africa media relations developed slowly, but were cemented at the Bandung Conference in 1955, during which Asian and African nations agreed to engage in cultural cooperation and to oppose colonialism. Mao Zedong's commitment to the principle of *permanent revolution* – in which colonised, agrarian, "third-world" societies would form the revolutionary vanguard against colonising, industrialised, "first-world" societies – meant that this initial period of engagement was marked by enthusiastic Chinese support for socialist and independence movements across Africa. By 1966, Xinhua had opened bureaux in 20 of the then 29 independent African countries and were often active in supporting the creation of new national news agencies across the continent, providing training, equipment, and cheap newswire provision.

However, in May 1966, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution with the aim of rooting out supposed reactionary elements within Chinese society and centralising his control over

the CCP. What followed over the next decade was a period of unparalleled social upheaval in China. Media cadres were particularly badly affected, with many journalists branded as reactionaries and forced into re-education programmes. With Chinese society engaged in insular struggle, Chinese journalists in Africa were recalled en masse by the CCP, and three-quarters of Xinhua bureaux across Africa closed down. Sino-African media relations during this period therefore stagnated.

With Mao's death in 1976, China entered an adjustment stage, as a more moderate CCP under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping sought to reinvigorate the Chinese economy and normalise China's international relations. In particular, China's state-media apparatus was broadly commercialised from 1979 onwards, moving away from Maoist facilitation of world revolution towards adopting economic agenda, with little sustained interest in peripheral African markets.

As the CCP cemented its power over a rapidly expanding economy and increased its global presence during the 1990s, media relations with Africa began to accelerate rapidly. The formalisation of Sino-African media relations was a key component of agreements signed at the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, which laid the groundwork for increased systematic cooperation on media development. The CCP also funded massive international expansion of its central media apparatus, with CCTV, Xinhua, CRI, and *People's Daily* all receiving huge financial incentives to open new bureaux and production facilities abroad. This also included extensive use of localised staffing and content, leading to large numbers of African journalists working for Chinese media organisations. As President Xi now enters an unprecedented third term in office, his insistence on the importance of building China's international image and soft power through effective media communication is only likely to accelerate these developmental trends in Sino-African media relations.

Whilst I will discuss the historical trajectory of CGTN Africa in more detail in later chapters, this brief history demonstrates how Sino-African media relations has been broadly subject to the whim of CCP and has generally mirrored changes in China's media ecology and China's wider foreign policy aims.

Soft power in the spotlight

The intense relationship between CCP policy and Sino-African media relations has often provoked discussions about Sino-African media and its role within a wider Chinese soft power strategy. Soft power is a concept that was popularised by the American political scientist Joseph Nye in the 1990s, who explains it as utilising "the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies" in order "to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" (Nye 2004, x). Soft power is thus primarily about the relation of attraction between countries A (the influencer) and B (the influenced).

Soft power has been prominent in the foreign policy and international relations strategies of the CCP since Wang Huning's (1993) influential translation and (re)interpretation of Nye's works, though it arguably has deeper, indigenous roots, particularly in the writings of the thinkers Confucius (551-479 BCE) and Mencius (372-289 BCE), both of whom discussed the limits of coercive power (Ding 2008). Over the past two decades, CCP officials, Chinese academics, and the Chinese media have regularly debated how to increase China's "cultural/civilisational soft power" (*wenhua ruanshili* – 文化软实力) (Wu 2018). As such, the CCP's approach to conceptualising and operationalising soft power has changed over time, and particularly in relation to personnel changes within the Politburo. It first was mentioned official policy during the Hu-Wen administration but was ultimately underdeveloped. Beyond the need to invest in the infrastructure for developing China's international image – particularly its external-facing media operations and Confucius Institutes – there was overall a lack of theoretical maturity or inter-organisational/institutional discipline about what soft power meant, or how it would best be achieved. The Xi-Li administration has promoted a much more coherent and aggressive approach to soft power, inspiring the mass production of policy and theory about the concept, which encourages a "cultural confidence [which] celebrates the distinctiveness of China's cultural and moral values" (Repnikova 2022, 8), and sees soft power as the outer bulwarks of both Chinese culture in general and "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" in particular against cultural encroachment from the West.

Foreign observers – governments, press, and particularly the Western academy – have likewise used soft power as a concept liberally when discussing China's international relations: terms of reference such as "charm offensive" (Kurlantzick 2007) and "charm defensive" (Shi 2015), are ubiquitous in commentaries on almost any aspect of Sino-African

relationships, but not always in direct relation to the changes to its use in China discussed above.

Indeed, the pace and scale of the adoption of this concept has worked to obfuscate its meaning, and, as such, its use as an analytical tool. As Rawnsley (2016) notes, it is, at best, used as an umbrella term for anything that is not "hard power" (that is, coercive power), and, at worst, as a loose synonym for a broad range of communicative strategies. Additionally, as Mattern (2005) has noted, little theoretical or empirical work has attempted to explicate exactly what "attraction" is. As such, I am unconvinced by the utility of the concept, but the ubiquity of its use by official bodies, in the wider literature, and even by many of my respondents, demands consideration.

However, to pivot a study around the concept of soft power is to couch the research in the epistemologies and ontologies of international relations, which tends towards a theory of "media instrumentalism and ignores the incentives and aspirations of the media organizations and journalists" (Li 2017b, 37). Instead, as a "soft power agnostic" (Rawnsley 2016), concentrating only on the aspects of its that are tangible and relevant to the sociology of journalism, I argue that it is imperative to foreground the role of agents, to understand their positionality in relation to global power structures, and theorise on their consequent practice. This study therefore explores how journalists negotiate the diplomatic imperatives of soft power alongside other pressures.

In the case of CGTN Africa, the most pertinent question is whether the station is a soft power instrument or a soft power asset. What distinguishes these two positions? A soft power asset possesses or exerts attractiveness in of itself. A soft power instrument (be it an institution, organisation, individual, etc.) channels and transmits soft power resources to audiences. A soft power instrument is not itself persuasive or attractive, but a conduit for promoting soft power assets. A good example of the prior, arguably, is the BBC. The BBC's relative power of attraction is a result of its accumulated cultural capital, which has made it a respected global news institution, and, thus a powerful asset for representing Britain and British values abroad (Gillow 2020). The BBC is attractive in of itself that, rather than any of its particular contents. On the other hand, let us take the case of RT – previously known as *Russia Today*. RT itself has not established itself as an attractive asset, but focusses instead on carrying and transmitting content about Russia's other (potentially) attractive assets, or

other countries' negative ones (Rawnsley 2015). Its value to Russia's soft power is therefore instrumental rather than symbolic.

A question at the very core of CGTN Africa's existence, then, is whether understands itself to be an instrument or asset (or both) of Chinese soft power. Is its role to transmit Chinese propaganda, to "sell China" to the rest of the world (Wu 2018)? Or is it attempting to become an attractive asset in its own right, either by imitating its Western competitors (Jirik 2016) or by changing the rules of the game, and genuinely "telling Africa's story differently?" Against critiques that the impact of Chinese soft power on international audiences and journalists is extremely limited (Gorfinkel et al. 2014; Maweu 2016; Madrid-Morales and Wasserman 2018), it is pertinent to ask how Chinese soft power actually affects journalistic practice at the station?

Part of objective of this thesis will therefore be to utilise field theory to unravel CGTN's is position in relation to Chinese soft power as an extension of the Chinese party-state. Moreover, it asks how the positions of individual journalists (and groups of journalists) relates to the position of their employer within the global journalistic field, creating unique patterns of journalistic practice that we might label Sino-African journalism. In both of these objectives, field theory can prove to be extremely helpful as an explanatory device.

Thesis scope and definitions

This thesis examines Sino-African journalists at work. Though the term "Sino-African" has not commonly been used in journalism literatures, two definitions of it are useful to delineate the space of this research. A narrow definition describes the specific position of African journalists working for Chinese organisations, regardless of geography. The broad definition considers any journalist, regardless of race or nationality, working to provide Chinese media organisations with African news. I encompass elements of both definitions in this thesis. Whilst many of my research participants are African, I did not intentionally avoid speaking to a wider group of journalists, regardless of race or nationality. On the other hand, I did not consider African journalists working outside of their home continent as relevant to the particular object of study. Hence, the definition I employ is generally broad, but geographically narrowed for relevance.

Thesis outline

This thesis is presented in ten chapters. Chapter 2 comprises a literature review which explores, firstly, the literature on Sino-African journalism. Finding the core literature limited by the number and scale of the studies, and lacking in sociological weight, it then expands its discussion of the literature to include broader descriptions of journalistic practice that might help explain Sino-African journalism, including a wide range of studies and theories from across literatures on Western, Chinese, and African journalisms. However, despite grains of truth in many of these theories, the lack of ontological coherency in this discussion points towards the need for a 'third-way' to break the *structure vs. agent* dichotomy present in debates around journalistic practice. This chapter indicates that field theory may be the best explanation for journalistic practice, particularly in the context of the complexities presented by Sino-African journalism.

Chapter 3 therefore introduces the conceptual framework of field theory as proposed by Bourdieu. It posits that society is differentiated into semi-autonomous spheres of action, or fields, which possess their own internal logic. This logic is shaped by the historical formation of each field and works to drive action by agents located within the field, who occupy hierarchical positions depending on their accumulated capital. These agents struggle to accumulate more capital and valorise their existing forms of capital, embodied within their habitus, or dispositions. This works to produce 'practice,' which Bourdieu simplifies within the equation:

[(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice

The chapter works to unpick this equation, and to understand how it has been applied to studies of journalistic practice within the existing literature. It finds that though much of this research has been fruitful, it has also been fairly limited in scope, covering primarily national-level fields in the West. This has meant that little theoretical work has been undertaken to develop field theory for use in contexts other than those originally proposed by Bourdieu, such as international settings, or within the Global South. The third section of this chapter, therefore, seeks to *reinvent* Bourdieu's "thinking tools," reflexively de-Westernising the concepts of field, habitus, and capital, so that they might be deployed successfully to the particular object of study: Sino-African journalism. In particular, it focuses

on four essential issues within the context of the study. First, it reassesses the dichotomy of autonomous and heteronomous capital, arguing that within the context of authoritarian and emergent-democratic systems, the activities of opposing heteronomous forces can create spaces for journalistic autonomy. Second, it examines the proposed emergence of a global journalistic field, building a framework for understanding how global fields – and fields at a various other levels – might exist in relation to one another. Third, it explores the issue of the relationship between social space and physical space, particularly as it relates to the role of urban fields, interrogating how urban sociology might contribute to the study of journalistic practice. Finally, it explores the role of race and racism within journalistic fields, and asks how specific forms of capital become racialised, delimiting the possibilities for particular fractions of journalists.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology of the thesis, outlining the research methods employed, and introducing the field sites. The central data for this research comes from 22 semi-structured interviews with current and ex-employees of CGTN Africa, supplemented by 7 secondary interviews with other Sino-African and relevant international journalists. Moreover, the methodology details the processes of conducting research throughout the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of doing research "up close from afar." Finally, it also outlines a Bourdieusian understanding of reflexive research practice and presents a reflexive model for utilising field theory successfully when researching subaltern settings.

Chapter 5 presents the case study in question. The chapter provides a historical trajectory of CGTN Africa, broadly outlining its organisational structure.

Chapter 6 to 9 present the analysis of data. Chapter 6 examines CGTN Africa as an organisation operating within the global journalistic field. and utilises the toolkit of field theory to interrogate and explain journalistic practice at the station. This chapter "locates" CGTN Africa in the global journalistic field, examining how the dynamics of the global journalistic field have guided its organisational strategies. It suggests that CGTN Africa has attempted to build layers of similarity and difference from its competitors into its journalism in order to valorise its possessed capital and advance its field position, based on a delicate balance of capital import and export strategies between the global journalistic field and the Chinese journalistic field.

Chapter 7 utilises Bourdieu's core concept of habitus to analyse how a complex, multinational workforce of journalists has been assembled at CGTN Africa, and how they work (or do not work) together to produce African news products that, more often than not, conform strongly to both widely accepted news values and CGTN's organisational objectives and/or limitations. Working within a highly racialised hierarchy, I suggest that some journalists develop schemes of internalised dispositions about news-making that enable them to navigate the complexities of CGTN Africa's position with relative ease – a "China habitus." I explore how and why journalists do or do not develop these dispositions whilst working at CGTN Africa, looking at how a "regime of uncertainty" encourages the learning of new dispositions to successfully improvise the performance of their work on a day-to-day basis, and how these actions relate to an individual's broader social strategies.

Chapter 8 explores the outsized role that Nairobi plays both in the production of African news more generally, and at CGTN Africa specifically. Since the station's main production hub is located in this city, this chapter employs the concept of urban fields and the relationship between social and physical space to understand the ways in which Nairobi itself exerts particular influences on journalistic practice at CGTN Africa. This chapter finds that social hierarchies within the station – and within international media ecology more generally – are reified within the physical space of the city, often negatively impacting the work and lives of Kenyan journalists, who are implicated within racialised forms of social and physical segregation from other cadres of staff.

Chapter 9 builds on the issue of racialised forms of capital explored in chapters 7 and 8 to develop a broader notion of the operation (and operationalisation) of race and racism both at CGTN Africa particularly, and within international journalism in general. Employing the concept of field boundaries as a starting point, it explores how black African journalists are routinely and systematically pushed to the boundaries of the global journalistic field through the operationalisation of racialised forms of capital – embodied as "whiteness" (even at CGTN Africa) – which delimit both their practice and their potential for advancement in the field, and which has broad implications for the provision of international news about Africa. It argues that racism is inherent within the history and current structure of the global journalistic, and that any working understanding of international journalism must integrate a working understanding of race and racism into its analysis.

Finally, the conclusion briefly discusses the implications of the research presented in this thesis, in terms of the study of CGTN Africa and Chinese soft power, as well as for the continued *reinvention* of field theory in further journalism research.

2. Literature Review

How do the journalists working for Chinese central media organisations in Africa negotiate a complex globalised news system? And how have production processes in Sino-African newsrooms been explored and theorised by researchers? The first section of this literature review will briefly summarise research at the interface of Chinese, African, and global journalistic production. However, these studies largely overlook explanations of journalistic production that have been suggested more generally across journalism literature, and these must be taken into account if we are to consider and understand the ways in which Sino-African news is produced. As such, the second section of this synthesises three journalism sub-literatures – namely, "classic" Western studies, as well as studies of Chinese and African journalistic production. This section also seeks to highlight lacunae in the research and suggests that much of this research fails to explain Sino-African journalistic production adequately. Finally, a section discusses the merits of utilising Bourdieu's field theory to overcome these difficulties.

Existing research into Sino-African journalistic production

Journalists have often sought to claim that they are merely "mirrors" reflecting the reality of events to a wider audience. Clearly, news in some way reflects reality – it is not "made up" (the emergence of the "fake news" phenomenon notwithstanding) – and yet, as a finite product, it cannot reflect *all* of the competing events, sources, and interpretations that journalists have to choose from on a daily basis (Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980). Rather, the news is "made" or "constructed" through a creative process of deciding what is "news" in the first place (Schudson 1989). Observing that representations of reality are not *natural*, the social science approach to journalism has therefore focused on this process and the multifarious forces which shape journalistic production.

It is thus vital to consider forces that affect and shape the creative processes of Sino-African journalists. What causes journalists and editors working for China in Africa to choose one story, source, or angle over another? Despite the wide interest in China's media presence in Africa in general, in-depth empirical research into the day-to-day production processes of Chinese media in Africa, or into practices of journalists working for Chinese central media in Africa remains formative.

Five recent studies which have gone some way to filling this empirical gulf. However, interestingly, they come to antithetical conclusions on the central issue of journalistic autonomy. The broadest of these is Pál's *Reporting for China* (2017), which explores how Chinese foreign correspondents' experiences of being posted abroad in America, Europe, and Africa affected their practice and production. In particular, Pál focuses on whether an increasingly young, middle-class, and cosmopolitan workforce engaging in multicultural exchanges and practices are any more or less likely to toe the party line in reporting the news. Interviewing more than seventy Chinese foreign correspondents worldwide, he found a dissonance between the emerging cosmopolitan habitus of these journalists and the work they produce, lamenting that though "being abroad has changed their thinking and values, often in complex ways […] none of this necessarily translates into reporting that transcends national concerns" (Pál 2017, 167). Ultimately, he argues, "systemic constraints […] are the main reason for the rather narrowly national perspective that prevails" in foreign correspondence, with Chinese journalists tending, whether consciously or unconsciously, "to choose and frame stories in a way that conforms to expectations dictated from home" (Pál 2017, 167). In other words, Chinese journalists abroad lack the autonomy to report the world as they see it and are routinely forced to adopt the role of "speaking for China."

One drawback of Pál's study in terms of understanding Sino-African production is that it focuses solely on Chinese journalists, excluding the increasing number of localised staff who report the news for China across the globe, and Africa in particular. Umejei has sought to fill this gap, asking in his studies how African journalists "reconcile tensions arising from their understanding of journalism and the actual practice of journalism" in Chinese central media organisations (Umejei 2018a, 5). After interviewing twenty-seven African and two Chinese journalists working for CGTN, Xinhua, and *China Daily*, Umejei found that these journalists felt they had fairly little autonomy in deciding what was news, noting that a hierarchical "dichotomy of routines" exists between Chinese and African journalists and editors, which serves as a control mechanism over the local-nationals and routinely ends in African journalists' stories being "killed" if they offend Chinese interests or do not meet the threshold for "positive reporting" (Umejei 2020, 66). Both Pál and Umejei therefore suggest that there are sufficient structures in place within Chinese central media organisations to severely delimit the possibilities for journalistic autonomy, and thus ensure that Sino-African news is

reported along the Party line by Sino-African journalists regardless of their backgrounds or values.

Two other studies come to a different conclusion, instead argue that journalists themselves primarily affect the production process. The first, Lefkowitz's (2017) ethnography of CGTN's Nairobi newsroom, comprises a much narrower sample of five content producers: three Kenyan and two British staff. She suggests that the journalists' background, experience, career path, and professional outlook are highly likely to affect their perceived autonomy. The Kenyan journalists were generally much more positive about their journalistic autonomy within CGTN, and stated that they intended to stay with the organisation indefinitely. The British journalists, conversely, were, in the words of one, "pissed off" at the lack of nuance in CGTN reporting arguing that it violated everything they knew about journalism, and both were intending to look for new challenges elsewhere (Lefkowitz 2017, 15). The difference between these two sets of journalists suggests that neither are passive conduits nor necessarily constrained by the organisational structures of CGTN, but rather are individuals who variously *interact with* CGTN's "organisational flaws" to produce Sino-African news.

Marsh's (2018) study of the CGTN Nairobi newsroom came to similar conclusions. She argues that journalistic autonomy at CGTN exists at the level of what Li and Rønning (2013) describe as "half-orchestrated, half freestyle" – that is, that there is still room for journalists to exercise autonomy within a restrictive press system. Whilst the staff she interviewed admitted that there were frustrating red lines not to be crossed, reporters at CGTN generally "revel in the ability to pitch an obscure story and have it accepted" (Marsh 2018, 106). Despite occasional, though rare, interdiction on the part of the station management, "when left to their own devises, on-the-ground reporters for [CGTN] and their counterparts at Western broadcasters" are able to select and produce the news in very similar fashions (Marsh 2018, 116): as one journalist she interviewed explained, "I'd have still been the same me, doing the same work, had I been working for CNN, Al Jazeera, BBC – the same sort of style" (Marsh 2018, 115). As for Lefkowitz's participants, production is presented as a result of individual journalists engaging and interacting with limited organisational constraints, rather than as a result of those constraints per se.

The conflict in the literature between these authors – that of structure versus agency – is one common to social science studies and is most immediately concerned by whether, how, and to what extent journalists possess autonomy and how organisations constrain them.

One study that seeks to break the structure-agent dichotomy is Wright, Scott, and Bunce's (2020) research on state-funded media journalists, which considers the ways in which journalists at CGTN and Xinhua, as well as the BBC, RT, and Al Jazeera, legitimise their practice in light of the external pressures they face from funding governments. Rather than a two-dimensional picture of journalistic autonomy vs. organisational control, their approach highlights a dynamic relationship between journalists both within and across organisations, with state media journalists reinventing and reinterpreting their autonomy based on their broader position within international journalism, legitimising their activity based on how they view their position vis-à-vis their peers at competing organisations. This dynamic approach inspires much of the work of this thesis and will be returned to below. However, first, it is worth considering other ways in which Sino-African journalism has been researched.

Studying Sino-African news production from afar

Aside from the above-mentioned studies which examine Sino-African news production up close – that is, primarily through newsroom ethnography, participant observation, and interviews with journalists – the majority of studies concerning Sino-African news examine it from afar. The methodological approaches of these studies have predominantly taken one of two methodological approaches: content analysis or political-economic analysis. These studies provide useful context, offering researchers practical frameworks for what to look for in situ, and are valuable also for testing the claims made during in situ research.

Content analysis breaks down and analyses media texts to identify the frequency of topics, themes, words, or source that fall into various categories pre-defined by the researcher (Krippendorff 1980). It has proven a very popular method for engaging with Sino-African news and has underpinned the claims of a number of key studies in the field. Li and Rønning (2013) employed content analysis to read their above-mentioned conclusion concerning the "half orchestrated, half freestyle" nature of Sino-African journalistic production, analysing 168 Chinese newspaper reports about Africa to discern how far the journalists produced content that diverged from the party line on Sino-African relations. Zhang and Matingwina (2016b) also employed content analysis to study the employment of "constructive journalism" in Sino-African news content, analysing 221 CCTV-Africa news items to identify whether the coverage was negative or "constructive," and whether, therefore,

Sino-African journalism reported on Africa any differently to Western organisations and journalists. Marsh (2016; 2017; 2018) has consistently utilised content analysis to ask a similar question, whilst also drawing out the boundaries between "positive" and "constructive" journalism. These debates, and a plethora of other studies employing content analysis (Zheng 2010; Wekesa 2014; Wekesa and Zhang 2014; Li 2017a; Madrid-Morales and Gorfinkel 2018), have become cornerstones of the literature on Sino-African journalism. Operating at its best, content analysis can help researchers to identify *correlations* between the content produced and the conditions of its production. Pioneering the use of software and algorithms to code and analyse enormous amounts of Sino-African news items, Madrid-Morales (2016) analysed 3,368 English-language Xinhua news stories published over three decades to illustrate a trend in Xinhua's coverage towards market-oriented news, then, in another study (2019), analysed over 1.1 million items from Xinhua, CGTN, Reuters, and *The Guardian* in order to compare their representations of Africa and establish if and how Chinese coverage differed from that of its Western counterparts.

However, by studying *what* is produced, rather than *how*, content analysis is primarily concerned with the "gatekeepers" of news, as opposed to the producers of news (Tunstall 1971). The gatekeeper model understands news as a one-way flow of information: the gatekeeper "simply decides which pieces of prefabricated news will be allowed through the gate," leaving "information sociologically untouched" (Schudson 1989, 265), which is inadequate if we are to understand why the news is the way it is. This model must be replaced with a theoretical approach that attends to the production of news as an ongoing process in situ (Lang et al. 2004). In short, we must focus on the creation of news information, rather than simply on its selection.

The second key methodology employed from afar is political-economic analysis, which seeks to understand how media ownership, legislation and regulation, and political environment shape media content. This has proven an immensely popular methodology with which to study Chinese media, primarily due to China's highly restrictive press laws and censorship, and enforced state ownership of the entire media apparatus (Schudson 1996). In the decades since China's "opening up" reforms under Deng Xiaoping, various scholars have debated the extent to which the CCP has been able to maintain its grip on media content whilst simultaneously commercialising its media structures. Zhou (2000) and Wu (2000) have argued that the powers of commercialisation have offered new spaces for the diversification

of media content, whilst more recent studies by Zhao (2008) as well as Hadland and Zhang (2012) are less optimistic, highlighting the CCP's strategic use of conglomeration to extend and streamline their control over Chinese media organisations.

Criticism of Chinese media in Africa has frequently been arrived at arrived through political-economic analyses of its ownership. Farah and Mosher (2012), Wu (2012), and Harber (2013), have all raised fears that the arrival of Chinese media and media assistance in Africa endangers representations of Africa and the development of African journalism because of the CCP's perceived single-minded desire to control all aspects of its own image. There is a common thread throughout the literature which supposes an incommensurability between state ownership and journalistic integrity. Many studies of Chinese soft power in Africa, for example, argue that such power is negligible because of the perception that Chinese media amounts to little more than state-sanctioned propaganda – a situation which would only be rectified if Chinese media were independent and commercialised, like their Western counterparts (Zhang 2010; Jirik 2016).

However, there are two key issues with this methodology. In the first instance, it is highly focused on domestic power structures in China, and has little to say on the complex nature of political-economic forces which operate on Chinese correspondents working abroad or local-nationals working for Chinese media in Africa – much the same criticism has been made of Herman and Chomsky's (1994) "propaganda model" assessment of US media. Secondly, political-economic analyses tend homogenise journalists as a group, and obliviate the autonomy of individual journalists (Peterson 2001).

Due to the dearth of comprehensive on-the-ground studies of Sino-African journalism, discussions of Chinese media in Africa tend to be based on rhetorical rather than theoretical agendas (Lee 2013). Knowing so little about how Sino-African journalists go about their day-to-day work, it is easy for commentators to dismiss the content they produce as propaganda, or relegate journalists to the role of soft power agents in China's worldwide "charm offensive" work (Kurlantzick 2007). What is missing from the existing literature is explanation of the connection between the Sino-African journalism context (a well-studied phenomenon) and Sino-African journalism practice (a poorly studied phenomenon). These lacunae can only be filled by observing Sino-African journalists at work.

The hierarchy of influences

The current literature on Sino-African journalism is too scant to encompass the many potential facets of Sino-African journalistic production, so we must look elsewhere for insight. There is a rich literature of production and ethnographic studies exploring the reporting practices of both domestic and foreign correspondents in the West, China, and Africa which may be usefully applied within the Sino-African context. Gans (1979) proposed three key explanations for news production, which Shoemaker and Reese (1996; 2014) employed as the launch pad for their seminal hierarchy of influences model: macro factors, emanating externally from the media; mezzo factors, particularly the organisational structures in which journalists operate; and micro factors, relating to individual journalists themselves. Though this categorisation has been heavily contested, it continues to a valuable structure for understanding competing explanations of journalistic production. The following section seeks to synthesise the literature on Western, Chinese, and African news production within this broad framework, and to draw links between these sub-literatures and Sino-African journalistic production.

Macro level

Gans (1979) identifies a range of theories which attempt to explain media content through "forces outside of the news organisation." Shoemaker and Reese (2014) describe these as "extra-media" or "social-institutional" factors. This cluster of explanations – which are rather inelegantly linked only by their extrinsic relationship to media – include an array of influences, including politics, sources, ideology, and technology.

Politics

Politics affects the work of all journalists but is especially important in considering content produced by both Chinese and African journalists. Chinese journalists work within a highly restrictive political environment in which their ability to create and report the news can be severely limited by the state. The state's methods can range from "hard" measures, which include the imprisonment, censure, or reassignment of journalists and editors, or even the closure of media organisations (H. Lee 2015), to "soft" measures, such as the formation of a "regime of uncertainty" through the creation of ambiguous and often arbitrary red lines of

post-publishing censorship to encourage pre-publishing self-censorship from journalists (Hassid 2008b). Whilst the ability of the CCP to maintain strict control over all of the content created by its own vast media apparatus remains a matter for debate, it is clear that it retains an important role in affecting the media production of Chinese journalists and media organisations.

However, as Hannerz (2004) notes, local government and politics becomes a significant factor for correspondents in the field. Sino-African journalists operate across jurisdictions where local governments have significant proximate control over their day-to-day practices. This can seriously affect the nature of Sino-African journalistic production as compared to domestic Chinese journalistic production, for instance. How these effects take shape is largely dependent on the particular context but, in general, scholars agree that Chinese journalists arriving on rotations in Africa enter a much less restrictive zone for journalism than their domestic colleagues in China, and consequently their freedom to experiment with new journalistic forms is much wider (Zhang 2013; Li and Rønning 2013; Gagliardone and Pál 2017; Marsh 2018). This, it is argued, is mainly as a result of being placed at the periphery of Chinese audience interest, and, as such, out of the direct eyeline of executives (Pan 2000; Jirik 2016), lessening the weight of potential "soft" control mechanisms. Additionally, due to the physical distance of being based outside mainland China, these journalists may feel less threatened by any potential "hard" control measures.

The opposite may be true of local-nationals working for Chinese central media in Africa, many of whom work within relatively repressive press regimes (Rønning 2005): Kenyan journalists, who make up the majority of Sino-African media employees, reported regularly facing intimidation, threats, and attacks in a national survey (Gachie et al. 2013). Moreover, government controls do not affect all journalists equally. Whilst local-nationals may be better shielded from the Chinese government's "hard" control measures than their Chinese colleagues, local-national journalists have significantly less protection in situations where local governments wish to intervene in news production, whereas Chinese journalists have the option to return home at the end of their rotation. As Sambrook (2010) notes, this may affect the level of risk that local-nationals are willing to take in their roles.

Sources

Local politics can also have an important bearing on news sources. Sino-African media content has generally been considered to rely heavily on official governmental sources, favouring incumbent administrations over opposition movements or non-government organisations for its information (Li and Rønning 2013). Li (2017b) argues that Chinese central media organisations' rotational system for foreign correspondents, which usually limit journalists to 2 to 4 year stints in any one posting, severely restricts the opportunity for Chinese journalists to build up a network of reliable sources outside of the local administration. Such an overreliance on local governments allows them to mediate journalists' access to sources, thereby increasing the potential power those outside forces have on the production of news content. Some scholars, however, believe that this overreliance has been overstated: Zhang and Zhang (2018) argue that Chinese foreign correspondents draw on a range of sources including local media, international media, official channels and personal friends. Likewise, several researchers point to Chinese media organisations' wide usage of wire-sharing arrangements with international news agencies such as Reuters and AFP, providing an alternative to official sources (Xie and Boyd-Barrett 2015; Jirik 2016; Xin 2016). Research on journalistic production, though, should remain attentive to the power external sources have over news content (Sigal 1973).

Ideology

Building on Gramsci's (1986) concept of *hegemony* – in which power is maintained through institutions which impress definitions upon and delimit society's ideological space – Gitlin (1980) proposes that news content both produces and reproduces the dominant societal ideology through the alignment of journalistic routines to the systems of power. These routines serve to trivialise, marginalise, and delegitimise opposing views, whilst simultaneously establishing the status quo as the "common-sense" viewpoint. In the case of Sino-African journalism, though, it is far less clear what hegemonic ideology journalists are reproducing. Zhang (2013) has argued that Chinese central media in Africa operates to establish a coherent and consistent "China-style world order" founded around the concept of "harmony," though finds that the results of this effort comprise little more than "push-back" against Western hegemony. Jirik (2016) also notes that Chinese international media organisations are beginning to operate like and create content more like their Western

counterparts, rather than establishing a particularly *Chinese* identity. How ideology operates across national boundaries and within heterogenous workplaces and workforces remains undertheorised.

Technology

Technology is an important factor in journalistic production. Whilst the technological determinism of McLuhan (1964) has been dismissed as oversimplistic, the spread of the internet, in particular, has reignited scholarly debate over the ways in which technology affects news production. Researchers in both China and Africa have sought to understand how the increased connectivity provided by the internet might democratise the process of news making, both in terms of journalistic routines – such as source gathering and publishing via social media – as well through the rise of citizen journalism (Yang 2011; Yu 2011; Wasserman 2010; Moyo 2010). Alternatively, there is concern from other observers that increased connectivity may lead to increased control. China, it is argued, is utilising its media assistance programmes in Africa as a means of reducing press freedoms, providing state broadcasters across the continent with the technological capabilities to improve their content and coverage, whilst simultaneously offering authoritarian governments – such as Zimbabwe – advanced surveillance and jamming technologies in order to exert control over oppositional media (Gagliardone and Geall 2014). Banda (2009b) has noted that African media and journalism is becoming increasingly "infrastructurally aligned" with China, and argues that these technologies do not come "value free," but rather represent a growing African dependency on Chinese capital, personnel, and training programmes, and underline the possibility of a cultural shift from West to East in journalistic practice in Africa.

Mezzo level

Gans (1979) identifies a second group of theories of media production centred around the requirements of news organisations themselves. In organisational theories, journalists' practices and routines of news production are standardised within media institutions so that "it does not matter who [journalists] are or where they come from" (Schudson 1989, 273). Organisational studies of the media began to emerge in the United States during the 1950s and grew exponentially as sociologists began to take an interest in newsrooms (Breed 1955;

Sigelman 1973; Sigal 1973; Epstein 1973; Tuchman 1978; Soloski 1989). These studies tend to start with the observation that there are high levels of homogeneity in the content produced by any given news organisation, which is the result of organisational routines that emerged historically to make the work of reporting more efficient (Gans 1979). Three key organisational features are important in the discussion of Sino-African media: the commercial agenda of the organisation; the division of labour in newsrooms; and the socialisation of journalists into the values of the newsroom.

Commercial agendas

Commercial agendas influence decisions over the staff, time, and resources that can be devoted to reporting. China's central media does not operate under the same commercial pressures as their Western counterparts, who, in a competitive environment, must create news which appeals to wide audiences in the most resource-efficient manner. As state-owned organisations close to the centre of the CCP bureaucracy, Chinese central media organisations can broadly rely on the financial backing of the Chinese state, with their presence in Africa in particular largely bankrolled as part of China's "going out" strategy (Thussu, de Burgh, and Shi 2018). That is not to say, though, that these organisations lack commercial agendas. As part of the CCP's media commercialisation strategy, and to reduce the financial burden on the state, central media were weaned off of state subsidies from the late 1970s onwards and forced to adapt to market conditions by diversifying their structures and content – they had, as a Chinese metaphor puts it, to "try to make money by themselves rather than 'eating from the big pot' (*chi daguo fan*)" (G. Wu 2000, 57). The effects of these changes to the commercial agendas of central media organisations on news production are evident in the content: as Madrid-Morales (2016) notes, Xinhua's African wires have steadily moved from ideological to market-oriented news over the past four decades as the organisation has become less reliant on state subsidies (Xin 2018). However, few central media organisations have become completely financially independent, and, in recent years, subsidies have been on the rise again. Most of these organisations, it appears, continue to exist somewhere "between the Party line and the bottom line" (Zhao 1998), delicately balancing their dual roles of Party mouthpiece and commercial news organisation.

Division of labour

These dual roles have a knock-on effect in terms of the division of labour in central media organisations. Gans (1979) notes that news organisations are, broadly speaking, divided between journalists who primarily judge stories in terms of the source, and those who judge stories from the viewpoint of the audience. In Western commercial media organisations, "it is no accident that audience-related journalists are at the top of the hierarchy," usually holding the positions of senior editors and executives (Gans 1979, 89–90). Under the pressure of the bottom line, commercial news organisations have generally structured their hierarchies to favour the creation of news which appeals to a wide audience. Within Chinese central media organisations, though, the story is more complicated. Having to balance their commercial and Party-apparatus roles, editors not only have to be audience-oriented in a conventional, commercial way, but also have to consider what the Party wants (and does not want) audiences to see. Successful journalists within Chinese media organisations, therefore, make their way up the hierarchy not merely by reaching audiences successfully, but also by building up an intuitive sense of where the "red line" of censorship lies (Pan and Lu 2009).

Newsroom socialisation

This intuitive sense arises from the socialisation of journalists into the values of the newsroom, which encourage journalists to internalise professional and organisation-specific norms. In first instance, this is achieved through the promotion of "good" behaviours: Pan and Lu (2009) have noted the CCP's use of journalism awards to promote their vision of journalistic professional excellence. Awards are named after historical Chinese journalists who represent the Party's journalistic ideals (*Fan Changjian* and *Zou Toufeng*) and are awarded to journalists who best represent an ideal professional in the eyes of the Party. On the other hand, socialisation is also a result of the constraints and controls imposed by organisations (Schudson 1989). A "regime of uncertainty" (Hassid 2008b) plays a major role in this. The process of having stories "killed" (or "spiked") by the censors – and the corollary of not getting paid, or worse – helps journalists to "mature" through the experience of rejection: that is, to learn where the "red line" is (Pan and Lu 2009). Journalists and editors who learn quickly help to maintain the imposed boundaries of coverage within the organisation, and thus improve its efficiency. Hence, "those editors who know what the

[Party] is likely to do are the organizational winners" (Hassid 2008b, 422) gaining prominence and rank.

The processes of socialisation have been of particular interest in the field of Sino-Africa media studies. Several scholars have sought to understand how African journalists who come to work for Chinese central media organisations are socialised into Chinese newsroom values and journalistic norms. Banda (2009b) argues that Sino-African cultural experiences and exchanges, mediated primarily through education and training programmes, play a key role in transferring over Chinese newsroom values to African journalists. Journalists, he noted, who attended the Third Workshop for African Journalists, held during the FOCAC 2006 proceedings, took part in discussions on topics such as "the Taiwan question," and "China's journalistic view and the operation of the Chinese press." Benabdallah (2017) interviewed African journalists who were (re-)training at Chinese academic institutions. They explained that their "training in China exposed them to understanding no-go areas in terms of reporting," and that "[o]pen criticism of the Chinese government, for example, is a 'red line' that the trainees said they are better off respecting and do not gain from actively pursuing" (2017, 502–3).

Additionally, Umejei (2020) argues that an arbitrary censorship system is used to socialise African journalists into "positive reporting." Stories are routinely "killed" without explanation if they fail to meet the threshold. This system is reinforced by an organisational hierarchy, that places Chinese employees above African journalists, giving them the final say on production and gatekeeping issues (Umejei 2020; Lefkowitz 2017). In this way, the Chinese journalists and editors are expected to protect the integrity of the organisation and help to socialise their African colleagues. Even fairly junior Chinese journalists are given sizeable responsibility over African journalists, for example: Annie, a young Xinhua correspondent on her first overseas assignment, was given control over the remuneration of several African journalists, introducing a bonus system "to encourage better writing and cut down on stories that the agency was unable to use" (Pál 2017, 98).

Other scholars have considered how Chinese journalists working in Africa maintain their newsroom values whilst being far from central control and the censor's eyeline. Organisational explanations of news production tend to take for granted the actual physical presence of the organisation in journalists' daily routines. By contrast, journalists in the field may be working away from newsrooms or outside their home countries. In this context it may

be difficult for correspondents not to feel estranged from their normal routines and values (Hannerz 2004). All Chinese foreign correspondents undergo a rigorous socialisation process before serving abroad, usually comprising a six-month tour in one of China's remoter provinces, intended accustom them up to the realities of being "frontline journalists" and, in words of a senior Xinhua editor, to "get rid of the foreign bullshit" they have learned in college (Pál 2017, 106). This does not guarantee that long stints abroad will not affect the maintenance of these values and routines, though Chinese central media's rotational system, perhaps "one of the most distinctive features of [Chinese] foreign correspondence," (Zhang and Zhang 2018, 1813–14), is supposed to help avoid excessive familiarity with the host country by limiting time spent abroad and regularly returning journalists to China.

Micro level

"Social scientists […] speak a language that journalists mistrust and misunderstand. They speak of 'constructing the news,' of 'making news,' or the 'social construction of reality'" (Schudson 1989, 264). The above explanations of news production often strongly contrast against journalists' own perceptions of news making as a chaotic process "experienced as a daily challenge with very little routine work, […] a blackboard wiped blank every morning" (Schultz 2007, 192). In their view, the contributions of individual journalists are the key factor in understanding the news making process. As Peterson notes of American journalists, they "draw from an American cultural meta-narrative of the fiercely independent, intelligent, and brave male, who by virtue of those qualities is able to overcome insurmountable obstacles. […] Flawed but persistent heroes […] on a quest for truth in a landscape of obstructions, illusions and dangers" (2001, 201).

This position is clearly at odds with any explanation of the news process which would seek to constrain the role of journalistic agency. Certainly, most Chinese journalists would not openly ascribe to such a virulent individualism – though some African journalists may – and are more likely to acknowledge constraints on the news making process, but that is not to say that Chinese journalists see their own individuality and agency as having no effect whatsoever. Indeed, Polumbaum and Lei's (2008) in-depth ethnography of the working lives of 20 Chinese journalists noted: "perhaps the most striking aspect of our interviews is the

variety of responses – there is no single way of becoming or 'being' a journalist in China today" (2008, 2).

Several scholars have drawn attention to the roles individuals play in negotiating the processes of journalistic production within the systematic constraints they encounter during their day-to-day work. De Certeau's (1984) concept of "everyday life" has commonly been employed to highlight the way in which these journalists opportunistically resist the influence of the state and censors. Pan and Lu (2009) argue that Chinese journalists localise diverse and sometimes contradictory concepts of professionalism into their day-to-day practices in order to expand the ideological space in which they are able to operate in. Jirik (2010) also observed that journalists working for CCTV-9 ignored or downplayed issues considered important to the Party line, an act of everyday resistance which he refers to as "refusal." This is not to say that these are the acts of the wider journalistic community but, rather, are localised and contextual: that is, the process of news making is affect by the qualities of individual journalists.

Shoemaker and Reese (2014) identify four key characteristics which may influence their work of individual journalists: their background; their personal values, beliefs, and attitudes; their professional role perception and ethics; and their skill level and professional ambition. As Zhang and Zhang argue, "only by knowing who [journalists] are, what drives them[…], and how they perceive their roles can we understand their cultures [and] practices" (2018, 1806).

Background

A journalists' background includes factors such as their ethnicity, gender, class status, and education (Shoemaker and Reese 2014). Both Pál (2017) and Zhang and Zhang (2018) find that the demographics of Chinese foreign correspondents have changed dramatically over the past two decades: most foreign bureaus used to be manned by senior male journalists, occupying well-paid, stress-free postings towards the end of their careers. Today, by comparison, the majority of China's foreign correspondents are young, college graduates, cosmopolitan, and, more often than not, female (Pál 2017). Whilst both studies found that, as yet, these demographic changes have had little impact on content, similar, though less dramatic, demographic changes occurring amongst Chinese war correspondents have been argued to affect the way their particular coverage takes shape (Zhang 2016).

Ethnicity is also an important background factor: Lefkowitz (2017), Umejei (2018a), and Marsh (2018) all note the existence of a dual-track system for Chinese and African journalists working within Sino-African newsrooms. As noted above, this system places even junior Chinese journalists above African journalists within the newsroom hierarchy, leaving African journalists with considerably less agency than their Chinese colleagues (or superiors) in deciding what is news. This suggests that ethnicity matters inasmuch as whether journalists are Chinese or not, and that this factor delimits journalistic agency. Other scholars have also brought attention to the notion that ethnicity may be a major factor within and between African groups. As Nyamnjoh (2005) suggests in his influential work on Cameroonian journalists, the "politics of belonging" can seriously affect news values and judgments, particularly in how these journalists frame political stories. Studies of Kenyan journalists by Wasserman and Maweu (2014) and Ireri (2017a) both argue that tensions between major Kenyan ethnic groups can deeply influence the news production processes of journalists in Kenya, especially during election cycles. This can lead to the emergence and promotion of "hate journalism," which exaggerates and politicises ethnic tensions (Nyamnjoh 2005, 56). Lefkowitz's study of the CCTV-Africa newsroom, however, found little surface evidence of local-national journalists' ethnicities playing a role in their work at the station, despite a wide variety of Kenyan ethnicities being employed (2017); this, though, should not rule out their potential to do so.

Other background features such as gender and religion may also affect journalists' production: Ireri (2017a), for instance, has also noted that Kenyan journalists are predominantly male and Christian. He argues that these factors affect Kenyan coverage of both women – female issues being severely underrepresented in news cycles – and of Muslims – who are the subject of biased reporting due to the ongoing conflict with al-Shabaab militants from neighbouring Somalia.

Personal values

Journalists' personal values, beliefs, and attitudes have also been argued to affect the "angle" of the content they produce (Shoemaker and Reese 2014). For example, Ogongo-Ongong'a and White's (2008) study of Kenyan journalists found that most of their respondents were strongly motivated to become journalists because they believed in the power of journalism to create social change, and that these values had developed before individuals gained any

formal journalism training or experience. Consequently, this desire for social improvement could easily affect the stories which journalists choose to pursue, or the angle they use to frame stories. On the other hand, this desire to "make a difference" can also lead to "burnout" or cynicism when such difference is found to be hard to make. An American journalist, Peter Maas, reported how he suffered a breakdown whilst covering the conflict in Bosnia during the 1990s, stating that he "no longer believed that [his] reporting could make a difference," and suggesting that this led to a more cynical point of view in his reporting (quoted in Seeger 1996, 89). Tom, a Chinese journalist in Pál's (2017) study, appeared to be suffering from burnout which has led to the de-politicisation of his content, caused by the stresses of his "hardship" posting or because of difficulties with the censors. Zhang and Zhang (2018) note that many Chinese journalists accept postings abroad or in war zones as a means to a more adventurous lifestyle, but may often find themselves unable to interact with their localities as they envisaged, being confined to compounds – a little "piece of China," with "Africa" left firmly outside the compound gates (Pál 2017, 118). This situation of being "freer but not free enough" (Gagliardone and Pál 2017) may lead to frustrations, cynicism, and burnout which may affect content.

Professional role-perception

A journalists' professional role perception and ethics helps to determine what information that journalist thinks is worth transmitting to their audience, and how a story should be developed (Shanor 2003). Polumbaum and Lei (2008) argue that Chinese journalists' own professional role perceptions complicate the conventional view that Chinese journalists are either "party hacks," blindly toeing the Party line, or "dissident professionals," boldly seeking to hold power to account. Hassid (2011) contends that such a dichotomy is insufficient to explain journalistic roles in China, instead drawing attention to the complexity and variety in Chinese journalists' role perception. Pan and Lu's (2009) notion that journalists draw on these perceptions of journalism in localised and often opportunistic ways offers a more fluid model for understanding role perception: as compared to adopting static, pre-defined roles, journalists can draw on multiple roles, as well as their understanding of what it is important for journalism to achieve, to adapt to specific contexts. Likewise, Musa and Domatob (2007) argue that African journalists adopt a similarly fluid model in order to balance the globalised "universal" values of journalistic professionalism with their own local histories, lived

experiences, and political imperatives and, as such, interpret and operationalise journalistic values such as "freedom" and "responsibility" in different and sometimes seemingly contradictory ways

Tong's (2011) study of the work of China's "critical/investigative" reporters illustrates how they draw strongly on Western professional notions of "watchdog journalism," and are likely to cover scandalous material and include details intended to shock the public and create a movement for social change. However, such journalists must also know how to "play the edge ball" (*da ca bianqiu* – 打擦边球) – that is, to take coverage right up to the "red line" without crossing it and invoking the ire of the censors (Hassid and Repnikova 2016). An alternative approach is "development journalism," which seeks to cover events and issues so as to contribute to national and economic development (Xu 2005), in contexts where more critical journalism might undermine and destabilise young, developing institutions and incite conflict. Related approaches include: "positive reporting," which "focuses on collective achievements, rather than divisive issues or sensational news" (Gagliardone and Pál 2017, 1054); "constructive journalism," which emphasises a positive, solution-based framework for reporting (Zhang and Matingwina 2016b); "responsible journalism," which "rises above factional interests and commercial imperatives to represent the national interests of unity and development" (Hasty 2006, 75); and "peace journalism" (Galtung 2003). It has been argued that some African journalists, though likely to be heavily influenced by Western journalistic norms (Ngomba 2011), are drawn to these alternative approaches, which are sometimes seen as a direct response to the perceived "negative" imagery of the African continent peddled by the mainstream Western media (Wasserman 2013). Skjerdal (2012) also highlights a range of alternative African-based journalisms from which African journalists may draw, such as those that are centred on *Ubuntu* and *Ujamaa* philosophies, or influenced by indigenous oral traditions (Bourgault 1995; Shaw 2009). These role-perceptions are generally at odds with mainstream Western media practices, which focus on objectively witnessing events.

Skill and ambition

Individuals' skill level and professional ambitions have been argued to influence news content, affecting what resources journalists may draw upon and how hard they may be

willing to work (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1987). Professional ambitions may impact, for example, on how interested an individual may be in career promotions and, consequently, how likely they are to work in an institutionally accepted manner (Bunce 2012). In some cases, this could lead to journalists purposely staying well behind the "red line" so as not to draw the attention of the censors. On the other hand, as Tong (2017) argues, some journalists achieve promotions and "star" status precisely by "playing the edge ball," negotiating potentially sensitive stories through layers of censorship and gatekeeping. There are no guarantees, therefore, of how organisational schemes designed to encourage conformity might pan out when they make contact with individual journalists, who may all react differently depending on their ambitions and skills.

A third way

As Gans (1979) notes, all of the factors above contribute to an understanding of how journalists go about their day-to-day work. However, the majority of these explanations emphasise the macro and mezzo levels, and in particular on the structures that *constrain* journalists. Within this literature, "journalists serve either as channels through which interested institutions speak, or as agents whose actions are over-determined by institutional constraints. […] Analysts taking such views effectively erase the agency of journalists as social actors and interpreters" (Peterson 2001, 201).

Increasingly, this stance is being challenged by cultural studies that emphasise the agency of journalists as agents who contest and negotiate within societal structures (Neier 2008; Hassid 2008a; Pan and Lu 2009; Repnikova 2017). These studies echo the tone of Zelizer who, commenting on the rise of soldier-journalists during the Iraq War, observed that "journalism changed by virtue of who inhabited its culture" (2005, 208). As Polumbaum and Lei remark of the Chinese journalists they interview:

> *[w]e do not deem them paragons, models, or archetypes. Nor do we claim they are representative of Chinese journalists overall […]. Instead, we see these individuals as harbingers of tends and tendencies in Chinese journalism and intellectual life. Their experiences and ideas trace the boundaries that circumscribe what is possible in news*

> *work; their satisfactions and aspirations illuminate achievements attained and prospects yet to be realized.*
>
> (2008, 9)

Though we might agree with Gans that the factors observed in existing theories of production are true in one way or another, the issue here is that these theories themselves cannot account for and include all the competing explanations simultaneously: they are ontologically incongruent. The above macro and mezzo theories emphasise the constraints of institutional and societal structures at the expense of journalistic agency, often reducing them to mere "bearers" (*Träger* in Althusserian terms) of media and extra-media structures. On the other hand, journalist-centred explanations reject the influence of structures over agents, and in doing so ignore the issue of how conformity is established without being the result of a conscious, voluntarist obedience to the rules. The dichotomy of structures versus agency creates a problematic rift between these competing explanations of media content.

Between the two, however, theorists have conceptualised a "third way" of studying news production. Informed by the sociology of both Giddens and Bourdieu, these studies seek to treat objective social structures and journalists' subjective experiences not as competing explanations of the social world, but as intertwined aspects which both contribute to the construction of reality (Benson 1998). These theories are united by a common concern with how social order is created and maintained by social performances.

Giddens' highly influential theory of "structuration" posits that social structures and systems are produced and reproduced through and by the actions, decisions, and behaviours of individual agents who define the shape that societal structures take on in local contexts. These structures both limit and facilitate the actions of agents: they order practice by narrowing the scope of possible avenues agents see as legitimate or possible within their historical context so that they do not act arbitrarily, while maintaining the coherency of the social system in general (Giddens 1995). Whilst agents tend to reproduce existing structures by favouring the familiarity of regularised and repeated social actions, they also have the platform to alter existing structures and produce new ones. This occurs during periods of social upheaval, but also through the unintended consequences of an individual's actions.

Like Giddens, Bourdieu acknowledges the dual importance of both structure and agency and uses field theory to attempt to unpick the complicity of the two. Bourdieu's

suggests that social reality is not dominated by social structures, but neither is individual agency completely free from the constraints of structure. Rather, he suggests, the social world is organised into a series of semi-autonomous fields which are:

> *the site of actions and reactions performed by social agents endowed with permanent dispositions, partly acquired in their experience of these social fields. The agents react to these relations of forces, to these structures; they construct them, perceive them, form an idea of them, represent them to themselves, and so on. And, while being, therefore, constrained by these forces as regards their permanent dispositions, they are able to act upon these fields, in ways that are partially pre-constrained, but with a margin of freedom.*
>
> (Bourdieu 2005, 30)

Both theories highlight that structure and agency feed into one another, whilst understanding and attempting to explain why social continuity is more likely than social change due to the importance of localised context and history. However, Bourdieu's theory is more applicable and useful to studies of journalism for two key reasons: firstly, he developed a wider theory of social practice around his conceptualisation of structure and agency than Giddens; and, in particular, he developed his theory of practice in reference to the producers of culture and cultural products, including focusing specifically on the work of journalists (Bourdieu 1993b; 1998; 2005) – a precedent which has been continued in existing scholarship.

When applied to media and journalism studies, Bourdieu's theory suggests that the social and organisational structures that inform the process of reporting are produced and reproduced by agents acting in their own interests through practical, localised actions, which are delimited by their situated historical contexts. This "practical logic," Bourdieu argues, "understands only in order to act" (Bourdieu 1990b, 91) – that is, journalists choose to play by the rules of the game, or, alternatively, attempt to change the rules, insofar as it practically suits their personal objectives (whether conscious or not) to do so. This presents us with the starting point for field theory as applied to the study of news production. This thesis employs Bourdieu's theory as a framework in its efforts to study and understand the production of media content by Sino-African journalists working for Chinese central media organisations in Africa.

3. Theoretical Framework – Field Theory

> *Bourdieu is just a starting point, not a religion.*
>
> (Guzzini 2006, 21)

What is clear from the literature review above is that the forces which shape news production emerge from diffuse and diverse sites. In this section, I argue that field theory, as proposed by Bourdieu, offers an excellent framework – albeit one that needs adapting – within which to explain these seemingly contradictory forces. Field theory possesses strengths that help overcome the limitations of existing approaches to news production identified in the previous chapter, providing a dynamic, cohesive, and multidimensional framework for understanding power relations within society.

Field theory developed slowly over the entire course of Bourdieu's lengthy intellectual career. Its genesis presents unique challenges to researchers, since field theory presents itself only in the totality of a dizzying range of texts and contexts (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The inherent dynamism of both the theory and its textual manifestation makes a succinct definition a demanding task. At a fundamental level, field theory presents society as divided into multiple relatively autonomous fields, each of which is governed by its own logic (*doxa*). These fields can include, for example, the political field, the academic field, or the journalistic field. Agents (both individuals and organisations) occupy positions within these fields in relation to their possessed capital. These agents negotiate the field in accordance with their individual habitus and compete with other occupants of the field to accumulate more capital and valorise the capital they already possess. The combination of these factors produces practice. Bourdieu (1984) creates a shorthand equation which represents this interaction:

> *[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice*

In order to investigate practice within a particular field, Bourdieu outlines three key elements that require examination: first, how the field in question relates to other fields within society, and whether the field is either autonomous from or dominated by the forces of external fields; second, the habitus of individuals within the field – that is, their dispositions and values;

and finally, the field's internal structure, in terms of the relation of agents to one another, the identities of dominant and dominated agents, the capital at stake in the field, and the "rules of the game" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 104–5). These three steps unify Bourdieu's key "thinking tools" within a coherent theoretical framework for understanding practice. In the case of journalism, in particular, "why a certain story is chosen and written in a certain way, is a process of detailing the convergence of 'disposition' (habitus) and 'position' (structural location within a field)" (Benson 1998, 467).

This precis introduces a number of terms that Bourdieu uses in unique ways. Hence, the first part of this chapter presents an in-depth explanation of Bourdieu's key terms – field, habitus, capital, and *doxa* – and explores their usage in the context of media and journalism studies. The second part of the chapter then considers the feasibility of utilising field theory to understand fields beyond the contexts in which Bourdieu developed it. In particular, this addresses four issues fundamental to the study of Sino-African journalism. Firstly, field theory has been primarily developed in, and continues to be principally utilised by and adapted to, studies focussed on Global Northern liberal-democratic contexts. It is therefore vital to ask how field theory can adapt to Global Southern contexts, such as media-state relations in authoritarian states and emergent democracies. Secondly, it is important to question how field theory helps researchers to understand increasingly unequal, complex, and multi-layered globalised media flows. Does a global journalistic field exist? If so, then how do national and global journalistic fields interact with one another? What are the power relations between different national fields and the global journalistic field? How do these relations affect practice? Thirdly, what other levels of field might be said to exist? How might they affect journalistic practice? In particular, I consider the potential role urban fields might play, and, specifically, the close relationship between social and physical space that manifests within urban environments. Finally, considering the inherent material and symbolic inequalities in social relationships between North and South, I explore how to make sense of the role of race and racism in journalistic practice in the context of field theory.

These considerations show that field theory, as developed by Bourdieu, is not without limitations, which will be discussed in the final section. Yet, it is worth noting that Bourdieu did not envision field theory to represent a grand theory, but rather to serve primarily toward empirical insight: "a set of thinking tools visible through the results they yield, […] a temporary construct which takes shape for and by empirical work" (quoted in Wacquant 1989, 50). As

such, field theory is not employed here as a grand explicatory theory, but as a facilitator towards exploring a particular object of study, to which we can add the contributions of numerous other academics and make alterations to ourselves. As Bourdieu commented, "a good theory […] provides an engine to explore practical questions" (quoted in Neveu 2007, 344). How, then, does field theory help us solve the particular puzzle of Sino-African journalistic production? And how does it need adapting to the contexts of Sino-African journalism? This is not a set of questions that seeks merely to use Sino-African journalism as a "playground to validate and experiment [with] Northern theory" (Nothias 2018, 102), but rather seeks to promote the South as a relevant source of theory and knowledge; not merely taking field theory in its extant form as an explanatory device, but incorporating the contexts and practical lived experiences of Sino-African journalists into a feedback-feedforward process of theoretical creation.

Journalistic Fields

Bourdieu spent a great deal of time exploring the concept of cultural production, with a particular focus on academia (Bourdieu 1990a), literature (Bourdieu 1993b), and art (Bourdieu 1996b). Only late in his career, however, did he turn his academic gaze towards journalism, producing a lecture entitled "The political field, the social science field, and the journalistic field" (Bourdieu 2005) and a short book, *On Television* (1998). Whilst important tracts in their own right, they offer incomplete analyses of the media; the latter work, in particular, has been criticised for its polemic content and homogenisation of journalists (Marlière 1998). Media researchers, however, have since set about adapting field theory, drawing on Bourdieu's wider work in order to create a comprehensive approach to analysing media. Benson (1998; 2005; 2006; 2013; 2015; Benson and Neveu 2005) has been especially influential in this regard, and many other media researchers have developed field theory in relation to their particular objects of study (Couldry 2003; Champagne 2005; Champagne and Marchetti 2005; Marchetti 2005; Duval 2005; Schudson 2005a; Hesmondhalgh 2006; Schultz 2007; Krause 2011; Christin 2016; Zeveleva 2018; Moon 2019). Chalaby's (1998) work charting the "invention of journalism" and the emergence of the first journalistic field in the UK during the 19th century is especially important for understanding how journalistic fields emerge and function, though little work has been done to replicate this process in other contexts. Bielsa's

(2008) theory that a "global journalistic field" has emerged through competition between Western news agencies provides an important step in understanding the spread of Western journalistic *doxa* across the globe, though how the global journalistic field functions, particularly in relation to national journalistic fields, remains severely under-theorised. This chapter aims to begin filling these theoretical gaps, but first explains and explores Bourdieu's "toolbox."

Field

Bourdieu follows Weber (1958) and Durkheim (1984) as seeing modernity as a process of social differentiation into increasingly specialised semi-autonomous spheres of action, which he labels *fields*. These fields are defined, at their most irreducible, by their relative autonomy, such that a field "has its own laws. […] What happens in it cannot be understood by looking only at external factors" (Bourdieu 1998, 36). Any and all external influences to a field are always *refracted* and "retranslated according to the specific logic of the field" (Bourdieu 1993b, 44). Therefore, in order to study journalistic practice it is necessary to analyse the journalistic field in which journalists operate: "what is produced in the world of journalism cannot be understood unless one conceptualizes this microcosm as such and endeavours to understand the effects that the people engaged in the microcosm exert on one another" (Bourdieu 2005, 45).

Fields are structured systems of relative, hierarchical social positions filled by agents who compete and struggle over position, resources, and access to the field: "[a] network, or configuration, of objective relation between positions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97). Fields possess both an external structure, in relation to other fields, and an internal structure, determined by the capital which the field's occupants possess. Fields also possess their own internal logic, which generates field-specific habitus, capital, and *doxa*, which are absorbed by field occupants and reproduced or altered through their practice.

Fields themselves exist in relation to other fields, occupying relative positions within the larger "field of power," generally conceived of as "society" – in Bourdieu's enquiries, this is usually synonymous with the nation-state, though it need not be. Within the "field of power," individual fields react to and refract each other's forces, with powerful fields exerting an Einsteinian force which distorts the space around them, entering into and "colonising"

other fields with their own logics: “the more energy a body has, the more it distorts the space around it, and a very powerful […] field can […] cause the whole space to be organized in relation to itself” (Bourdieu 2005, 43). Fields therefore vary in how they relate to one another, and, in particular, how autonomous or heteronomous their internal logics are (Krause 2018). Media researchers have sought to examine the relative autonomy of journalistic fields, and the extent to which external logics affect the work of journalists. For example, the French journalistic field came to be dominated by market logics emanating from the economic field during the 1990s, radically altering the way in which French journalism was practiced (Bourdieu 1998; Champagne 2005).

Within fields, agents occupy positions in relation to one another, which are determined by the amount of capital they possess. Agents with more capital occupy higher (dominant) positions within the field, whilst those with less capital occupy lower (dominated) positions. These agents compete and struggle to accumulate more capital and valorise their existing capital in order to occupy more dominant positions within the field hierarchy. This struggle over position is the basic, unifying, generative principle of field mechanics (Bourdieu 1993b). Positions within the field are also structured by possession of particular forms (*species*) of capital, which exist in proximity to two poles: the *economic* pole (wealth, income, property, etc.) and *symbolic* pole (knowledge, titles, culture, etc.). In order to maintain and advance their positions in the field, individuals tend to draw disproportionately on either economic or symbolic capital. Bourdieu, for example, notes how in the art world there is a *distinction* between those “pure” artists pursuing “*l’art pour l’art*,” seeking to enhance their reputation through amassing field-specific capital, and “vulgar” (commercial) artists who pursue economic success with popular forms of art, drawing on the logic of the economic field (Bourdieu 1996b). These two poles are therefore homologies of the relations between autonomous field-specific capital and heteronomous external capital. Consequently, fields are “structured on the basis of an opposition between these two poles, between those who are ‘purest,’ most independent of state power, political power, and economic power, and those who are most dependent on these powers” (Bourdieu 2005, 41).

For Bourdieu, journalistic fields occupy a dominant position towards the symbolic pole. Their position of dominance relates to the fact that journalism tends to deal with powerful agents, particularly politicians, and has an important role in the consecration of other fields (Bourdieu 2005). They are sited towards the symbolic pole because of their

position as part of the wider field of cultural production, and journalism's general interest in the production of cultural goods (i.e., the news), though closer to the economic pole than, say, the artistic field, since news tends to be a mass-produced commodity (Bourdieu 1998).

The first task of a researcher analysing journalistic production, then, is to ask to what extent a journalistic field is autonomous or heteronomous. Bourdieu suggests that levels of autonomy and heteronomy can be quantified using context-specific indices, which might include levels of market penetration and government rules and regulations (Bourdieu 1984). So, we might ask where a journalistic organisation's income comes from. State subsidies? Advertisements? Foundations? Or, alternatively, what are the relevant laws on freedom of speech? To what extent are the rules enforced?

Journalistic fields often occupy a fairly ambiguous position. They are often a very powerful field with a particular mandate to enter into and consecrate agents within other fields, exercising a "mediating" role (Bourdieu 2005). On the other hand, as a result of this unusual and unique power, journalistic fields have found themselves a target for external actors, particularly from political and economic fields, who struggle to dominate journalistic logics in their pursuit of power within the wider "field of power" (Champagne 2005). As such, journalism is often considered a "weakly autonomous field," characterised by high levels of heteronomy (Bourdieu 1998) – or, "an impossible autonomy […] that must always be re-won because it is always threatened" (Champagne 2005, 50).

The position of fields is dynamic and ever-changing, as a result of these external influences, and of conflicts within the field. External influences might, for instance, include the actions of an oppressive government cracking down on press freedoms and employing force to intimidate journalists, thereby subjugating the journalistic field to the logics of the fields of politics and bureaucracy. Perhaps less dramatically, though no less importantly, a government might move to stop funding forms of public journalism – as the UK government has threated the BBC in recent years – which may move the field towards greater commercialisation and the logic of the economic field. Internal events may also affect the field's overall position, such when as the privatisation of the French television channel TF1 shifted the entire French journalistic field towards the economic pole (Bourdieu 1998).

Employing field theory to explore the relative autonomy of journalistic fields, Benson (2005; 2013) compares the journalistic fields in France and the USA, focusing on the extent to which these fields are dominated by heteronomous forces, and on how these particular forms

of domination affect journalistic practice in each nation. Similarly, Champagne (2005) investigates how the forces of the economic field have entered into the French journalistic field, imbuing it with a market logic and making its news production more market-oriented. Such findings echo those of traditional political-economic and Marxist analyses of news production (e.g. Herman and Chomsky 1994; Bagdikian 2004), but present a more sophisticated approach. In the first instance, field theory draws links between agents and the society they inhabit (and which inhabits them), restoring the journalist-as-agent into the equation of news production. Perhaps more importantly, though, field theory allows us to consider that media need not always support the existing hegemony, but, in certain conditions, is able to challenge and transform them. Submission to external logics is not "always-already" given, as Althusser (2001) would have it, but is the result of the specific relation of fields to one another.

Habitus

Habitus is the key link between structure and agency – and it is perhaps Bourdieu's most utilised, divisive, and misunderstood concept (Maton 2014). As Bourdieu states, "I said habitus so as *not* to say habit" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 122). Rather, he envisions habitus to be a set of durable and transposable dispositions formed over the course of an agent's lifetime of experience and socialisation, which shape an agent's perception of the world and, by extension, their practice. These dispositions are durable since they last over time and are transposable in being able to be deployed over a wide variety of social spaces and practices (Bourdieu 1993a). Habitus is "a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks" (Bourdieu 1977, 82–83).

This matrix is a "structured and structuring structure" (Bourdieu 1977, 72): it is structured in that it is generated by the fields an agent is active in; structuring in that it shapes an agent's practice; and is a structure since it is systematic and ordered. It can be understood as the conscious and unconscious sum of all of an agent's experiences, but is particularly heavily weighted towards formative experiences, such as school, family, and class backgrounds (Bourdieu 1977). These formative experiences are particularly important and durable. They tend to steer agents towards a particular life trajectory since these dispositions

affect, and reflect, what options an agent sees and their perception of the relative chances of occupying particular positions in response to their current circumstances, with the least likely "excluded […] as *unthinkable*" (Bourdieu 1977, 77). An agent's "vision and division" of the world, seen from a particular position (or viewpoint) within it, guides their actions, enabling them to generate strategies, which are simultaneously systematic *and* ad hoc, in order to cope with infinite, unforeseen, and ever-changing situations in which they might find themselves (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Habitus and field exist in an "obscure and double relation": "On one side it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus […] On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge of cognitive construction. Habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 126–27). Since fields are spaces of action, they are also the site of experiences. By participating in a field, agents assimilate the field's structures and values into their habitus in order to increase their relative chances of accumulating capital and advancing their position. In this way, the field's objective structures become internalised within the structure of the field occupant's habitus, helping to reproduce the logic of field through the dispositions which shape their actions. Thus, the structure of field constitutes the habitus of its occupants, whilst, simultaneously, the habitus of its occupants constitutes, maintains, and operationalises the structure of the field (Bourdieu 1993b).

Despite its propensity towards the reproduction of structures, habitus is dynamic and individual habitus may change and grow over time as agents compete across multiple fields. All journalists have, arguably, at least two aspects to their habitus: a formative habitus, based on family, childhood and educational experiences; and a professional habitus (Bourdieu 1984), reflecting their mastery of a specific game – journalism (Schultz 2007). The process of mastery can take time, and it is therefore common for a process of "habitus transformation" to occur when a journalist enters the field for the first time, or when they change roles within the field (Neveu 2007).

The repetition of this process in multiple fields precipitates the development of habitus of immense complexity, and this process is always ongoing (Leander 2009). As such, a journalist's habitus, like the journalistic field itself, is always in a state of relative flux. The relationship between habitus and field is, therefore, also always ongoing, dynamic, and partial (Hardy 2014). As a result of their respectively diverging and ever-changing histories and logics,

habitus and fields are never perfectly aligned with one another. The relationship is therefore always a question of varying degrees of fit and misfit between an individual's habitus and the logic of the field they inhabit – what Bourdieu refers to as a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu 1994). An agent whose habitus is well matched with a field – that is, when the structure of the field is broadly internalised in the structure of their habitus – may move within it like a "fish in water," displaying practical mastery, and hence dominance, of the field (Hardy 2014).

On the other hand, a field may change more rapidly than the habitus of an individual – whose dispositions are durable, so do not change easily or quickly. This can lead to a "lagging behind," in which practices are informed by a habitus that is out of step with the objective structures in which it now finds itself, marked by actions which might seem anachronistic, stubbornly resistant, or ill-informed (Leander 2009). This effect is known as *hysteresis*, which leaves agents feeling as though they are a "fish out of water." *Hysteresis* almost always occurs when agents enter new fields whose structures are not yet internalised in their habitus. Their behaviour in this situation will reflect the learning process and will necessarily neglect some of the taken-for-granted rules of the field, such as the account Bourdieu gives of Algerian immigrants in Paris who were unable to adapt to their new conditions of existence. But *hysteresis* also happens when fields alter radically, leaving some occupants unable to keep up, as is the case for the older French neighbours of the Algerian immigrants, whose world changes around them – a process of ageing in which their habitus becomes outdated (Bourdieu et al. 1999). In either case, agents' behaviour can appear "Don Quixotean," whose durable dispositions concerning knight-errantry long outlasted their historically-contingent viability as a strategy, resulting in his tragicomic performances (Bourdieu 2000). When fields change in this way, there are always subsequent winners and losers, and *hysteresis* tends to ensure that only those with a highly developed habitus (possessing more transposable dispositions) are equipped to adapt and profit from the opening of new field positions (Bourdieu 1996b).

Habitus provides field theory with an explanatory link between the individual and the social, since it represents "the dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality" (Bourdieu 1977, 72). Since fields both constitute and are constituted by their occupants' habitus, this helps analysts to explore how fields change, both from external effects, and by changes in the habitus of its occupants. In particular, new entrants may radically alter the social morphology of a field. This can help to explain

homeostatic change and generational shifts in fields, as some agents age, whilst new entrants with differently formed habitus enter the field (Bourdieu 2000).

For example, Benson (1998) notes that significant demographic shifts in journalistic fields can create change. A rapid influx of new agents into the field may either challenge or reinforce extant field structures. Particularly at the elite level (i.e., editorial), incoming agents who possess significant capital may seek to distinguish themselves from their competitors and, in doing so, valorise new forms of capital thereby altering the field structure. Alternatively, the arrival of more junior agents may reinforce field structures, as these agents, who possess little transposable capital, conform to the existing "rules of the game" in order to secure their positions; this is particularly pertinent in situations where there is considerable job insecurity and competition for positions (Benson and Neveu 2005).

Capital

Fields are internally structured by their occupants' possessed capital. The space of a field is a "field of struggles" – *un champ de bataille*, "a battlefield" – (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 17–18), in which agents take part in a competitive game, taking strategic actions to valorise their existing capital and appropriate more (Bourdieu 1993b). Agents have a "stake in the game," or *illusio* in Bourdieusian terminology (Grenfell 2014), and are therefore necessarily interest-oriented and practical, not merely following rules or norms, but drawing on the dispositions of their habitus to strategically improvise actions in relation to the opportunities and constraints presented by their present circumstances. In this sense, capital can be understood "as the 'energy' that drives the development of the field through time" (Moore 2014, 102).

Accordingly, the distribution of capital is not static, and the hierarchies of different species of capital may vary between fields and over time: the value of particular forms of capital can change as a result of forces both external and internal to any given field. Significant changes in the wider "field of power" might, for example, influence what forms of capital are valued across a range of fields: Markham (2011) argues that the encroachment of market-logics from the economic field into the journalistic field increased the importance of "celebrity status" within the field, with journalist agents who possessed "celebrity appeal" consequently able to increase their position in the field. Unforeseen external events may also alter the

stakes of the game: the Sichuan earthquake of 2008 is argued to have, at least temporarily, increased the value of investigative reporting in the Chinese journalistic field as both the central government and general public sought answers to the poor local governmental response to the disaster (Zhang 2011; Stern and O'Brien 2012). Alternatively, new entrants to a field may seek to challenge or alter the extant distribution and status of species of capital: the launch of Al Jazeera English in 2006, for example, is argued to have significantly reinvigorated global journalistic competition over international news (Figenschou 2014).

Bourdieu's key contribution to the theory of capital is that he understands capital to be more than just financial. Rather, "assets of different kinds are transformed and exchanged within complex networks or circuits within and across different fields" (Moore 2014, 99). In the broadest sense, Bourdieu distinguishes between economic and symbolic capital, aligned with the heteronomous and autonomous poles of fields respectively. Within the former, the nature of exchange is highly instrumental, self-interested and transparent. Economic capital represents what is "immediately and directly convertible into money" (Bourdieu 1986, 47). Symbolic capital, however, is the "economic world reversed" – that is, the nature of exchange is both hidden and deferred, whilst "actions aimed at material profit are systematically devalued and negatively sanctioned" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 36). Symbolic capital is produced through a misrecognition of cultural products as having an *intrinsic* value evident only to those individuals who possess the "distinction" to recognise them. This sets these individuals apart from "vulgar" producers who, by "going commercial" refuse or fail to recognise the "specific demands of this [particular] universe" – the field – and, as such, deprive themselves of "the means of deriving profits from disinterestedness" (Bourdieu 1980, 262).

Symbolic capital thereby denies its own instrumentalism, and is produced to be converted only at a later stage into economic profit (Bourdieu 1993b). This is because those agents who become dominant by possessing a great deal of capital (and most importantly symbolic capital) come to have a consecratory power – that is, the power to lay the foundational definition of the field. This enables them to define, for example, what journalism is, and therefore to say who is, and who is not, a journalist. As Carlson notes, "this symbolic struggle has tangible consequences […]. Gains in symbolic resources translate into material rewards. Being deemed a 'legitimate' journalist accords prestige and credibility, but also access to news sources, audiences, funding, legal rights, and other institutionalized

perquisites" (2015, 2–3). This secures the position of the dominant agents through the dual effect of valorising their existing capital, establishing their own "vision and division" of the world as "common-sense," whilst simultaneously delimiting the boundary of the field to ostracise potential challengers. The act of consecration is therefore also an act of *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The ultimate stake in the journalistic field is, therefore, the definition – and hence, the boundary – of journalism itself (Bourdieu 1993b).

For news organisations operating in the journalistic field, economic capital can be understood as circulation, advertising revenue, government subsidies, and audience ratings, amongst other indicators (Bourdieu 1998). Organisations' symbolic capital is represented by journalistic prestige: journalism prizes won; their position in the press review; the prevalence of specialised forms of reporting such as investigative, political, or international news (Champagne 2005; Marchetti 2005). There is thus a tension between those news organisations who are symbolically rich and economically poor (e.g., niche journals), who sit towards the autonomous pole of journalism, and those who are symbolically poor by economically rich (e.g., market-oriented commercial television channels, or newspaper tabloids), who gravitate towards the heteronomous pole. Organisations that can accumulate both forms of capital are able to exercise significant symbolic power (and violence) over the whole field by determining the dominant principles of journalism (Benson 2006). Examples of this domination include *The Times* (UK) during the 19th century (Chalaby 1998), or the *New York Times*, with Pedelty arguing that US journalism in the late 1980s became "*Times*-sanctioned truth" (1995, 92–93).

The position of individuals within the field, and within their particular organisations, is also structured by their capital. Their salary, experience, education, and reputation all matter in deciding their position and guiding their actions. Organisations themselves, though agents in their own right, are also spaces of struggle between individuals. Hence, the hierarchy of positions and the interest of individuals are relevant factors in even the most basic interactions between journalists. For example, in an editorial meeting, experienced, senior journalists will carry more weight in deciding whether a story is "newsworthy" – the story that they suggest might not even be questioned by the duty editor – than a cub journalist. The notion of suggesting an idea may not even occur to junior staff members. This is not to say that any particular story has a particular, intrinsic worth, but that senior staff have a better understanding of (and more say over) the "rules of the game." This indicates

that “where you speak from” rather than “what you say” is the most important aspect of action in a field (Schultz 2007, 193).

Further, Örnebring et al. (2018) present an interesting three-dimensional model to understand the position of individual journalists within a field based on a) their material security, b) their possessed journalistic capital, and c) their access to resources. This model helps to explain the wide variety of different positions an individual journalist might hold both within the journalistic field in general, and within their organisation in particular, and how these diverse positions both allow and motivate different working practices.

Doxa

> *There is nothing more certain, for those taking part in it, than the cultural order. Cultivated people are in culture as in the air they breathe.*
>
> (Bourdieu 1996b, 185–86)

Fields possess their own logic or “rules of the game,” which agents tacitly agree to follow when entering into and competing for stakes within a field: the most irreducible principle of a competition is the agreement between competitors that the competition itself exists as a unique game and is worth competing for (Bourdieu 2005). Some logics become so deeply embedded within the habitus of field occupants that they need never be articulated, and this “universe of tacit presuppositions” helps to organise practical action in the field. Bourdieu refers to this as *doxa*: the silent consensus of pre-reflective, shared, and unquestioned preconceptions of appropriate practice within a particular sphere of action. *Doxa* determines what seems “natural” or “common sense” to actors within a field (Bourdieu 1977). This can make *doxa* extremely difficult to analyse: “since it goes without saying because it comes without saying” (Bourdieu 1977, 165) professionals do not tend to speak about it, or often find themselves unable to describe it (Schultz 2007).

Journalistic *doxa* is a crucial element in news production. Objectivity, for example, has become an unquestioned value of news-making around much of the globe (Schudson 2005b). Equally, the idea of “newsworthiness” – that certain events are objectively more worthy of being reported than others – has come to represent a “gut feeling” for many journalists,

experienced “as something very physical, i.e. ‘part of your spinal cord,’ ‘in the back of your head’” (Schultz 2007, 198). Similar is the notion that news events can be objectively divided into “hard” and “soft” news forms, and that that the former is intrinsically more important, despite the fact that this relies upon a value judgement about events (Marchetti 2005).

Field theory introduces a temporal and historical aspect to understanding these values, emphasising their production over time, and framing competing organisations and individuals’ struggles for domination of a field between as a generative exercise (Bourdieu 1993b). Whilst organisational accounts are happy to acknowledge the way that values shape practice, field theory is primarily interested how, and in whose interest, these values emerged in the first place, and how they are maintained (Schultz 2007). *Doxa* is not merely a set of professional values, but as “a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view” (Bourdieu 1998, 57).

Doxa is, therefore, an arbitrary and historically situated tradition presented as “natural” and “timeless,” serving the purposes of the dominant, and which “is silent not least about itself as a tradition” (Bourdieu 1977, 167). In particular circumstances of crisis and criticism, the arbitrariness of *doxa* can be exposed and challenged, leading to a position of orthodoxy or heterodoxy:

> *Orthodoxy refers to a situation where the arbitrariness of doxa is recognized but accepted in practice. The “rules of the game” are known and played accordingly. On the other hand, heterodoxy depends on the recognition of the possibility of competing beliefs and on the emergence of such competing beliefs.*
>
> (Deer 2014, 118–19)

Chalaby (1998) charts how the original journalistic field emerged in the UK during the 19th century, including the foundation of its *doxic* principles. Whilst newspapers existed before the mid-19th century, their content had primarily been a by-product of public and political communications, and the conventions which define journalism were not as yet “invented.” However, as newspapers became more affordable, in tandem with increasing literacy rates, news organisations were able to rapidly increase their readership. This meant that newspapers had an economic stake to compete for, and newspaper owners began to try to differentiate themselves and their products from competitors in order to attract more

readers. This emergence of competition drew businessmen, who were primarily interested in journalism as a money-making exercise, into the field.

This economic competition also led to the emergence of the guiding *doxic* principles of the British journalistic field, including appealing to reader interest, timeliness, and objectivity. By appealing to popular interests, editors could expand their readership further. As such, events came to be reported specifically because journalists had a competitive advantage by publishing them, helping to define a sense of "newsworthiness." Timeliness emerged as newspapers strove to make a "scoop" and present exclusive stories before their competitors. Finally, objectivity emerged, which Chalaby sees as constellation of norms, namely: a fusion of neutrality, impartiality, fairness, and balance; the notion of "retreatism," referring to a journalist's non-involvement in story narratives; and the notions of factuality, truth, accuracy, and completeness. These norms emerged in response to the need for newspapers to appeal to the widest number of audiences in order to maximise their profits, pushing news to appear unbiased. Objectivity also helped journalists to delimit their professional space, distinguishing their work from that of publicity officers and propagandists (Chalaby 1998; Schudson 2005b).

The competitive struggle over readership between these new actors helped to create the journalistic field and define its boundaries. Increased industrialisation, required in order to keep up with demand, led to increased start-up costs. This helped to further delimit the boundaries of journalism, squeezing out producers who did not have significant reserves of economic capital. Industrialisation of the printing presses also meant more papers, which enabled higher circulation, and this helped newspapers to attract advertisers. The income from advertising along with economy of scale enabled the papers to reduce their prices even further and attract even more readers.

This group of *doxic* principles therefore present themselves as the outcome of a lengthy process of rationalisation in which journalists and news organisations "learnt to refrain from expressing their opinions and emotions" (Chalaby 1998, 130). Factors external to the journalistic field, such as technology and changes in the law, clearly had an enabling effect. However, Chalaby sees these as being refracted and mediated by the internal rules and struggles of the developing journalistic field, noting that "the industrialisation of the field would never have progressed at this pace if stiff economic competition did not force newspaper proprietors to keep up with technological progress" (1998, 43).

Thus, to understand the internal structure of a journalistic field, it is necessary to establish exactly *how* its structure came to be, and the particular competitions and competitors who were involved in the process. This process will differ depending on the field, and therefore it is vital for the analyst to explore the particular process of that field's genesis.

State-owned media

Few studies have explored the emergence of journalistic fields in contexts outside of Global Northern liberal-democracies, and most have focussed narrowly on media in the UK, the USA, and France. How might fields outside of these contexts differ? How applicable is field theory to them? What can they add to our understanding of fields? Only a handful of studies have utilised field theory in the study media systems in authoritarian or emergent-democratic contexts, often unreflexively. These studies have been more concerned by how fields of different scales interact with one another: Lei (2016) has explored the relationship between national and local Chinese journalistic fields; Najjar (2007), Zeveleva (2018), and Moon (2019) have studied the relations between journalistic fields in South America, Crimea, and Rwanda and global journalistic fields – an issue to which I will return below. However, I argue that in the Global South the contexts of national media systems present a considerable hurdle to traditional field theory approaches to media and that problematising this can help field theory to take more seriously the way in which differing heteronomies can be productive.

In their studies of the French journalistic field, Bourdieu and Champagne do take seriously the heteronomous effects that the economic and political fields can exert on the journalistic field, and the ways in which journalism's autonomy is established in opposition to these external forces. Champagne (2005), for example, refers to the "double-dependency" of journalism on the state and the market that ensures the always-incomplete autonomy of the journalistic field: "the journalist is an uneasy awkward figure, capable of good as well as bad, who has to come to terms with the political and economic constraints that weigh on him, rendering his position unstable and uncomfortable" (2005, 48). In this account, the journalist is always autonomous against the powers of the state and market combined. However, beyond brief mentions of particular governmental constraints on press freedom, these analyses of news media focus almost exclusively on the power of market logics in the journalistic field, at the expense of investigating the ways in which the political and

bureaucratic fields might affect the process of journalistic production. Even in the context of journalism in liberal-democratic France, this is a significant oversight. As Benson notes astutely, "Bourdieu's conception ignores the possibility of multiple, competing external influences," and "focusing only on the struggle for autonomy draws attention from the ways in which heteronom(ies) can be productive. The particular balance of power between competing heteronomous forces also shapes practice within the field" (2013, 24). State-owned media in authoritarian and emergent-democratic contexts offers the perfect opportunity to illustrate this fact.

Journalistic fields develop not only in relation to an economic pole, or competition over readership, but also in relation to a political-bureaucratic pole. As Wang and Sparks note, in the Chinese journalistic field the relationship between these two heteronomies has varied over time, though "with an authoritarian state always in the dominant position" (2019, 113–14). There have been significant periods of "commercial revolution," such as the flourishing of commercially-oriented newspapers during the post-Maoist era (Zhao 2011). A similar phenomenon occurred in South Africa following the end of apartheid (Hadland 2011). There have also been periods of particularly vicious political-bureaucratic violence against journalistic autonomy, such as those inflicted by the Cultural Revolution in China (Zhao 2011). Sometimes, the swings between these alternate heteronomies are a consequences of one another: the shift towards "hard authoritarianism" under Xi Jinping's presidency, for example, has been argued to be partly a response to the thriving of commercially-supported critical journalism in China after 1992 (Tong 2019). At other times, political-bureaucratic forces have utilised their dominant position in society to enlist the forces of the economic field to cement their own power – an effect that Hadland and Zhang (2012) refer to as the "paradox of commercialisation" – by, for example, consolidating news organisations into media groups formed around the institutions of the party press (Haiyan Wang and Sparks 2019). These variations have had substantial productive impacts on the formation of fields.

It is therefore important to note the high degree of interdependence between the political-bureaucratic and journalistic fields in many Global Southern contexts. As Zhao argues, in many Southern countries "the struggle for the establishment of a modern nation-state is a historical accomplishment" that has invested the state "with the normative expectations of promoting positive freedoms, defending territorial sovereignty, promoting national integration, as well as engendering social economic developments," leading to the

media often being "assigned a major role in the task of national development" (2011, 150–51). These are values which have developed outside of, and arguably in direct opposition to, the liberal philosophical tradition of media in which "state intervention is ignored or lambasted based on the assumption that it will ultimately lead to press censorship" (Benson 2013, 22). But is this necessarily the case?

In her study of the practice of active news-gathering in the United States between 1890 and 2000, Krause (2011) argues that the regulations and protections placed on the journalistic field by a state authority, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), during the 1920s and 1930s protected the journalistic field from conglomeration and a lack of diversity, ensuring the maintenance of a competitive field in which active news-gathering was encouraged. It was only with the repeal of state protections during the 1970s that the pressure of market forces on active news-gathering as common practice was felt. Krause suggests that this indicates that "the journalistic field's autonomy seems to depend not only on freedom from political interference but also on political protection and regulation" (2011, 100).

Illustrating this point further, Tong (2011; 2019) has emphasised the roles of both the party-state and market forces in curtailing *and* protecting the practice of investigative journalism in China. She notes that whilst increased competition between commercial newspapers following the marketisation of the Chinese media system during the 1990s helped spur the diversification of media content and journalistic genres, the blooming of investigative journalism was primarily the result of the CCP's "conventional favour for criticism and self-criticism and later more specifically 'media supervision' (*yulun jiandu*)" – inherited from Confucian concepts of good governance – which "provides official ideological justifications for practicing this type of journalism under the authority of the Communist Party" (Tong 2011, 23–24). Whilst the commercial attractiveness of investigative reporting has waned as the Chinese media market has contracted, Tong contends that the most important factor keeping investigative journalism alive in China is the CCP's desire and support for a limited degree of media supervision. As such, investigative journalism in China is protected by the state from the forces of the market, whilst simultaneously being curtailed; the CCP only accept particular forms and amounts of criticism.

However, the influence of the state in Western journalism – as compared to that of the market – is usually seen as limited and obscure, relegated to specificities like hate-speech

laws, or the provision of cheaper postal rates (Benson 2005). Hallin and Mancini's (2004) discussion of the role of the state in Global Northern media systems is, for example, framed in terms of "interventions" "which presumes a natural state of affairs before and beyond intervention [excluding] a potential role of the state in the initial formation of [these systems]" (Zhao 2011, 150). This is an oversight; the state is still there, even if it is obscure: "it is not a question of state or no state, of repressive policies or no policies at all. It is a question of how the state will choose to act, or not to act, to favor various market or nonmarket logics" (Benson 2013, 33–34).

Turning our attention to state-owned media in an authoritarian or emergent-democratic context merely forces the analyst to take seriously the forces that the political-bureaucratic field(s)[2] can exert on the journalistic field – since authoritarian methods are almost always more obvious and apparent – and, as a corollary, the ways in which this potentially protects journalistic autonomy from other influences. Bourdieu's emphasis on the power of market forces on the journalistic field in his analyses (1998; 2005) is prototypical of Northern investigations of the processes of media commercialisation which are simply not supported by the experiences of media systems in the Global South in which media-state relations can play a decisive role (Hadland 2015). Introducing these experiences into field theory presents a clear opportunity to advance field theory's understanding of the productivity of differing heteronomies.

The values of nation-building journalism, for example, rely on the opposing forces of the political-bureaucratic and economic fields. Such categories of journalism might not be supported by the market. Their very survival frequently relies, instead, on state protection and subsidies. Whilst this makes them highly susceptible to the heteronomous forces of the political-bureaucratic field, in the shape of state censorship and a propaganda role, it simultaneously protects them from the competing heteronomous forces of the market, and the pressure of being "permanently subject to trial by market, whether directly, through advertisers, or indirectly, through audience ratings" (Bourdieu 1998, 71). The autonomy of these journalistic fields therefore exists in a balance between these two competing

[2] Bourdieu separates the political and the state-bureaucracy into separate fields (Bourdieu, Wacquant, and Farage 1994; Bourdieu 2014). However, the precise relation between the political and bureaucratic fields in Bourdieu's writings remains ambiguous (Loyal 2017). The nature of the party-state in contemporary China means it remains particularly unclear where the CCP ends and the state bureaucracy begins (Brown 2019). I therefore refer to the state as the "political-bureaucratic" field throughout this thesis.

heteronomies, and so "it remains important to analytically distinguish political and economic power, and indeed all forms of power" (Benson 2005, 92–93).

As Wright, Scott, and Bunce (2020) found in their study of the boundary work of transnational state-funded media journalists, these individuals often ended up consciously *trading off* different forms of autonomy, compromising one to gain greater advantages in another. An example of this balancing act is illustrated by Figenschou (2014), who notes how Al Jazeera has been able to consistently air highly critical and controversial material specifically because it does not rely on commercial revenue to support its operations, meaning that it does not have to pander to the concerns of advertisers worried about the broadcaster's relationship with foreign governments. This independence from the commercial world, though, makes it subject to a dependency on subsidies provided by the Qatari government which has arguably led to an uncritical editorial line on Qatari affairs.

Relative journalistic autonomy cannot, therefore, be measured along a single axis. Rather, "relatively autonomous fields can be closer to specific kinds of other fields, and further from others" (Krause 2018, 10). Analysing journalistic practice in Sino-African news organisations provides a potentially powerful demonstration of the roles of competing heteronomies on journalism.

The Global Journalistic Field

Bourdieu broadly developed field theory within the context of the nation-state (Wacquant 1989). Most of his studies, and those of his colleagues, focus on purely national-level fields, and are almost invariably set in France and its colonies, leaving field theory open to criticisms of methodological nationalism (Savage and Silva 2013). Even now, many studies employing field theory locate themselves within the bounds of the nation-state (Bourdieu 1998; Chalaby 1998; Champagne 2005; Champagne and Marchetti 2005; Marchetti 2005; Schultz 2007), or engage in cross-comparisons of national media systems (Benson 2005; 2013; Hallin and Mancini 2004; Hallin 2005).

Whilst accounts that focus purely on national fields are useful in understanding the links between media systems and their proximate socio-political contexts, they tend to "flatten asymmetric power relations between [media] systems" (Zhao 2011, 145). National fields are established in structural relationships with competing systems across broad

geographic contexts, and their relative positions need to be explored and explained in order to understand practice within the field. Why have certain journalistic practices and values come to be accepted on a more global scale? Why are some national systems privileged over others? As Zhao notes of Northern journalistic fields, "it is important to acknowledge that the […] acquisition of their distinctive features vis-á-vis those of the rest of the world is an integral part of the story of European imperialism and American hegemony within the history of global media development" (2011, 145).

Journalistic fields in the South also owe at least some of their logic to factors emanating from beyond their own national contexts. Whilst it is important to note that important traditions of communication and journalism in the South pre-date colonialism (Shaw 2009; Mutsvairo 2018), in many of these countries the existence of the modern media system is partially the result of either Northern imposition through the colonial and missionary press (Bourgault 1995; Nyamnjoh 2005; Zhang 2007; Zhao 2011), or as a nationalist reaction to imperialism: the widening of press freedoms and newspaper consumption in late-Qing China, for example, was seen by reformers "as an efficient way to save China from the invasion of the West" and rejuvenate the nation through public enlightenment (Tong 2011, 20–21). It is therefore important to recognise that the existence, shape, and logic of journalistic fields are partially the result of unequal struggles taking place above and beyond the national level. As today's media world becomes increasingly complex, fluid, globalised, and glocalised, it is therefore important to question what role levels of fields outside the national have to play in analyses of journalistic fields.

News organisations and journalists are often engaged in ongoing competition extending beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, and significant players in particular national journalistic fields are often international news organisations. News production often cuts across borders, and is influenced by a range of international, national, and local forces – which Bourdieu's own narrow focus on the nation-state does not account for. To examine the practices of modern journalism, then, it is necessary to account for journalists who are engaged simultaneously in multiple fields across varied geographical scales.

It is worth noting that Bourdieu was open to the possibility that fields of differing scales could, or did already, exist (Bourdieu 1995), though he defined the international as little more than "competition between essentially national approaches" (Bourdieu 1996a, vii).

This definition is narrow and requires scrutiny; rather, the existence and constitution of international fields remains an empirical question (Leander 2009).

Fields emerge as the site of a specific set of struggles, and these struggles do not necessarily favour the national as the basic level of social arrangement *a priori* (Go and Krause 2016). Fields themselves have no pre-determined scale and are always open to redefinition: they may be extended or contracted beyond or below the nation-state if the context of the study demands it (Sapiro 2013). The pre-eminence of the nation-state in Bourdieu's research might instead be put down to the context of those studies. National fields themselves have tended to emerge from the struggles within and between the local fields which predated the emergence of the Westphalian nation-state. Different scales of fields may emerge either from or independently of one another. Casanova (2004) has explored the emergence of the global field of literature which arose primarily out of the competition between national literary fields. Krause (2014), meanwhile, traces the development of the global field of humanitarianism outside of the context of any particular national field. Within these multidimensional contexts, it is pressing to understand how different layers and scales of fields relate to and interact with one another.

Buchholz (2016; 2018) has proposed the clearest framework for understanding the relation between fields on different scales. She notes that envisaging global fields is more than a case of merely upscaling the structure of national fields into larger geographical spaces. A theoretically sound approach to global fields has to unpick how social configurations at the global level are different and distinctive. To properly explain global fields' distinction from national fields, Buchholz (2016) separates two forms of autonomy. First, "functional autonomy," which represents the relationship between fields of differentiated specialised practice which exist at the same level of social organisation (e.g., how autonomous the Chinese journalistic field is from the Chinese political field). Second, "vertical autonomy" represents the autonomy of fields in relation to other fields of the same order but on differing scales (e.g., how autonomous the Chinese journalistic field is from the global journalistic field).

Vertical autonomy holds true for studying the relationship between any fields of the same species at different levels (global, national, urban, etc.). Vertical autonomy highlights the fact that if a global of field is to be of value as an empirical object, it must be demonstratively and relatively different from other scales of field – not merely the sum of all

the independent national fields. This helps explain global fields in two ways, namely: it establishes the nature of the relationship between fields on different levels; and it establishes the global field as the result of a specific set of struggles and stakes.

In the first instance, global and national fields may be established in relative autonomy from one another. This means, as a corollary, that they exert heteronomous forces onto one another: “national and global field levels are only partially independent, we must approach them, by the same token, as still relatively interdependent […], simultaneously distinct and entangled” (Buchholz 2016, 48).

As with functional autonomy, relative levels of vertical autonomy are primarily the result of the exchange of capital by agents operating across fields, affecting fields’ morphology. Previous studies have investigated which national agents develop strategies to internationalise their possessed capital in order to distinguish themselves from other class fractions within national fields. Boltanski (1987) notes how dominant class fractions in France established import strategies of values associated with the “American way of life” in the aftermath of WWII, developing a “cosmopolitan” capital and habitus in order to set themselves apart from other class fractions and assert their dominance. This international capital therefore represents a heteronomous, transformative, force within the national field, turning national fields into the battlefield “between modernists, who take the position of the international, and traditionalists, who play for protectionist closure and the maintenance of national tradition” (Bourdieu 1996a, vii).

However, “vertical autonomy should not be associated with a predefined directionality” or hierarchy between fields at different scales (Buchholz 2016, 43). Rather, national fields may also, depending on their relative power, “colonise” the logic of the global field. Just as national agents import international capital into national fields, so too do these agents export their capital and dispositions into the international fields. This is particularly relevant in terms of agents’ durable, formative dispositions – particularly those related to education and national culture (Curran and Park 2000). They therefore bring these dispositions into play when faced with global competitors. As such, the national is not “soluble” in the global (Cohen 2018, 202).

The competition between actors originating from different national fields at the global level is never equal – there will always be varying levels of match and mismatch between the habitus and capital makeups of national actors and the logic and structures of the global field

which will privilege actors originating in particular national fields. Depending on the historical development of these fields, the structure of certain national fields will be more or less homologous with that of the global field. Actors from those national fields will be better adapted to the global field, and less likely to suffer from the effects of *hysteresis*. As such, the concept of vertical autonomy helps analyse the structure of global inequalities.

Vertical autonomy also brings into relief the exact manner in which a global arena of practice becomes relatively different in its logic and structure from that of national fields. Just as fields within national contexts must become functionally autonomous and differentiated from other fields of specialised practice at the national level, so too must global fields become vertically differentiated from national fields of the same order. A set of particularly global stakes must be formed through the process of particular global struggles, requiring genuine cross-border exchange of capital, the formation of institutions for exchange, and the institutionalized of a field-specific globalised discourse (Buchholz 2016).

The formation of a global journalistic field has been proposed by Bielsa (2008). She argues that competitive struggles between international news agencies – Reuters, Havas (AFP), AP etc. – helped to establish the primary stakes, logics, and boundaries of the global journalistic field. Drawing on Chalaby (1998), she details how the Anglo-American journalistic norms of newswires' home nations came to structure their work in reporting international news. Competing to appeal to the greatest number of wire subscribers and increase their sales, values like objectivity, fact-based journalism, and a focus on reporting "newsworthy" events served the commercially expansionist visions of these organisations. To solidify their position further, these news agencies "made it their task to extend their values of impartiality and objectivity and discursive practices based on factual description worldwide [by] teaching national agencies how to participate in global news markets, as well as creating their own international infrastructures for news production in their respective territories" (Bielsa 2008, 9).

These news agencies gradually began to transform from powerful national agencies into "true supranational entities for the gathering and transmission of news," detached, to the greater extent, from their national contexts (Bielsa 2008, 11). Horvit (2006) finds that the various news agencies' reporting of the 2003 Iraq War was very standardised and denationalised across the board. AFP did not privilege sources from France, nor Reuters from the UK. Neither did these competitors reflect the political positions of the supposed home

nations. This suggests that these organisations had become absorbed into a global field with its own well-established "rules" and logics.

This Anglo-American consensus has remained fairly stable over the subsequent years, despite the rise of significant challengers within the structure of the global journalistic field. Al Jazeera, in particular, has often been heralded as a serious competitor within the global journalistic field, determined to report the news from an alternative, non-Western perspective. However, though it often provides a fresh narrative, Al Jazeera does not challenge the basic *doxic* principles of the global journalistic field. Rather, it was set up "explicitly embracing the media values of objectivity, accuracy and balanced, factual reporting, and modelling itself after the Western media" (Bielsa 2008, 16). Al Jazeera entered a strategic game whose rules had been decided long before it joined, and whose logic was so pervasive as to be a pre-condition for successful participation in the field (2008). That is, in order to expand to the size needed to be competitive in the global journalistic field, Al Jazeera has had to sacrifice key elements of its alterity (Figenschou 2014). The question therefore remains as to whether Sino-African media can genuinely challenge the global journalistic *doxa*, or whether they can even compete in the global journalistic field in the first place.

Bielsa does not deal with the issue of how the global journalistic field and different national journalistic fields interact in any detail. Research into this particular relationship has been generally limited, though two analyses provide a useful starting point. In her study of foreign correspondents working in Sudan during the 2008 Darfur Crisis, Bunce (2011) suggests that journalists working for organisations that operate in the global journalistic field draw on dispositions which strongly correlate with their respective nationality – chiefly their journalism training, newsroom socialisation, and level of integration into local society – in the course of practicing their work. As such, she found that Western journalists posted in Sudan reported very differently to Sudanese reporters working for the same organisations, with Sudanese journalists being more careful about criticising the Sudanese regime and having less sense of their work as "watchdog journalism." However, she notes that some journalists occupied a "hybrid" role, in which they drew on a mix of dispositions from both sets of correspondents.

Likewise, Moon's (2019) study of local-national journalists working for international news organisations in Rwanda suggests that these journalists hold a "bridging" role between the global and national journalistic fields, which is both "precarious and powerful,"

incorporating "lessons and expectations from both fields, resulting in a set of rules that allows the reporter to bridge the two fields and accrue or lose capital in each while not belonging fully to either" (Moon 2019, 1722). In particular, they tend to sacrifice their social capital, losing the status of true "insiders" amongst their national peers, whilst simultaneously gaining symbolic capital by being able to pursue stories and values discouraged by the national *doxa.*

With Sino-African journalism placed at the juncture of multiple fields of different scales, it offers the perfect opportunity to follow on from these studies and investigate further how journalists and news-making organisations negotiate this relationship between fields across and beyond the boundaries of the nation-state.

Urban fields and the appropriation of physical space

The emergence of analogically sound theorising about the existence of global fields (and their relation to other fields) opens up the possibility for further theorising about the existence (and effects) of fields at a variety of levels, including the urban. Writing about the emergence of the global field of literature, Casanova suggests that Paris was able to become the "capital of the literary world," and play an inflated role in establishing the rules and boundaries of the field (2004, 24). As she notes, "cities where literary resources are concentrated, where they accumulate, becomes places where belief is incarnated, centers of credit […]. The existence of a literary center is […] twofold: it exists both in the imaginations of those who inhabit it and in the reality of the measurable effects it produced" (2004, 23–24). What, then, are the peculiarities of urban space?

Urban sociologists have long focused on how the organisation of physical space in cities is produced by and reproduces social space. For Lefebrve, the city represents "a means of control, and hence of domination, of power," and, as such, urban space "serves as a tool of thought and of action" (1991, 26). However, physical space is a concept that has been thoroughly undertheorised and underutilised in field analyses. As Savage (2012) notes, the foundational texts of field theory barely touch on questions of physical space. But physical space was an important factor in his early studies in the Kabyle (Bourdieu 1962) and the Béarn (Bourdieu 2008), and particularly in *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al. 1999), an incredibly rich ethnographic study of marginalised communities in Paris. In this latter study, he lays out his approach to physical space:

> *As bodies (and biological individuals), and in the same way that things are, human beings are situated in a site […] and they occupy a place. The site (*le lieu*) can be defined absolutely as the point in* physical space *where an agent or a thing is situated, "takes place," exists: that is to say either as a* localization *or, from a relational viewpoint, as a* position*, a rank in an order.*
>
> (1999, 123)

The situatedness of the human condition entails that our social position within a field has physical correlates which express and reinforce that position (Wacquant 2018). In this sense, social space *appropriates* physical space, in a process of direct translation, through the distribution of agents and capital across and between different sites. That is, physical space becomes organised in relation to the relative social positions of agents, expressed in forms of spatial metaphors, such the physical positioning of a professor at the front of a lecture hall, or the cultural and economic differences between central and suburban neighbourhoods of a city.

Moreover, as time passes, these inscriptions on physical space become durable and naturalised, acting to valorise the capital of those possessing access to key sites. Being located in a particularly notable site for a given practice – being a doctor on Harley Street, a tailor on Saville Row, or an academic at Oxbridge (it being noted that there is nothing inherent or natural about the status of these physical locations, but, rather, that their good name is purely a social creation) – expresses that individual's eminent position in their field metaphorically and, simultaneously, strengthens and asserts that position of power; it indicates that that individual has "made it," whilst also granting them access to better resources and, hence, more consecratory power in their field. As such, appropriated physical space becomes a stake in the struggles of a field, and one of the sites where symbolic violence is wielded most violently and imperceptibly (Bourdieu 2018).

This indicates that "fields matter concretely, that the relational power struggles they illuminate *cannot but be marked in the urban landscape itself*" (Savage 2012, 515). The inherent inequalities of fields become inscribed in the fabric of the city, acting as a principle of vision and division for its inhabitants by pushing out those without power to the physical and social margins. The process of dominating physical space is cyclical and incremental:

possession of capital "allows one to keep at a distance undesirable persons and things as well as to bring in closer desirable ones, thereby minimizing the expense (especially in time) necessary to appropriate them" (Bourdieu 2018, 110), whilst delimiting the chances of less powerful agents to access these resources. In the simplest terms, it is a question of proximity to scare goods, or what Bourdieu terms the *profits of space*: access to customers, politicians, artists, educational institutions, health facilities, etc. For agents at the centre of things, their possession of capital can engender a "quasi-ubiquity," the ability to travel quickly between important sites of accumulation, whilst for those pushed to the margins, the "lack of capital brings the experience of social finitude to a climax: it chains one, ties one down to a despised locale" (2018, 110).

What, then, are the implications of the role of appropriated physical space for the study of journalism? Already there has been the start of a materialistic shift in journalism studies. Usher argues that existing research "seldom interrogates journalists' relationships with the places of news; these places of news are otherwise understood as unchanging" and argues that "we must understand how where they are—the places where they work and draw meaning from—shapes the news they produce" (2019, 3).

Proximity informs how journalists claim authority, through elements such as events coverage and "live news," establishing what she terms *place trust* through "being there," but also, more generally, sets in motion the rhythm of their routines and practices (Usher 2019). The literal physical locations of newsrooms and offices, for example, has important symbolic and practical effects on journalistic work, both indicating the organisation's symbolic position in relation to the centres of capital, whilst determining journalists access to these centres. As Usher notes, in the USA, many media houses have been traditionally situated close to the loci of power – city halls, police stations, financial districts – allowing journalists to attend events at short notice or socialise with important sources of news. However, geographic relocations of newsrooms to more affordable locations away from city centres over recent decades have often severely interrupted these routines, and have simultaneously sapped at journalistic credibility (2019, 28–29). In short, where news organisations and journalists choose to base themselves and why tells us something meaningful about their relative positions, as well as having tangible impacts on journalistic practice.

The concept of field adds to these notions a dynamic way to "conceive of the conditions of possibility for what journalists do in, through, and in relation to the urban"

(Rodgers 2013, 57). For example, positions within the journalistic field can be inferred, to some extent, by the physical geography of news organisations and journalists. These can indicate both the positions of these organisations and journalists relative to one another, and the position of the entire field vis-à-vis other fields within the urban field of power. That is, powerful news organisations and journalists will likely dominate central spaces, but, simultaneously, may also find their relative autonomy infringed upon by other powerful fields located in a similar space – the relationship between journalists and politicians, for example, will be different for a journalist close to the locus of central government than it will be for one located near an economic centre.

The centrality of Nairobi to the operations of Sino-African media organisations, as well as international news organisations operating in Africa more generally, offers the opportunity to take seriously the role of place and the importance of locality in journalistic practice at these organisations.

Bourdieu and racism

In the above discussions, we have introduced the analysis of global inequalities and physical segregation of space. These concepts draw us towards analysing the role of race in the social relations between agents from different global regions. Bourdieu, and field theory more generally, is not strongly associated with studies of race or post-colonialism. However, both Puwar (2009) and Go (2013) have brought attention to important links between the development of field theory and Bourdieu's personal experiences of colonial Algeria. During the Algerian Revolution (1954-1962), he was conscripted into the French army to fight the *Front de libération nationale* (FLN), serving in administrative roles, whilst also teaching at the University of Algiers, and completing his first formative fieldwork in the Kabyle. Moreover, Bourdieu experienced first-hand the broader effects the Algerian Revolution had on the French intellectual field as part of the Empire-knowledge complex and was highly critical of the symbiotic relationship between the French colonial administration and the social sciences. That is, the conceptual framework of field theory is firmly grounded in the context – and criticism – of the colonial state.

Bourdieu's military service led to him facing off against Frantz Fanon, who was then fighting for the FLN. Whilst the two thinkers most certainly had their differences, Curto (2016)

has argued that their theoretical approaches complement one another well, with Fanon bringing to the fore (post-)colonial elements of race which Bourdieu did not actively consider, facilitatating a Bourdieusian conceptualisation of the function of race and racism in field theory.

For example, Bourdieu's concept of *hysteresis* encapsulates the alienation that occurs when there is mismatch between an actor's habitus and their position in a field, due to the possession of inappropriate or untranslatable capital. Fanon (2021) illustrates how "colonised" cultures position themselves in self-negating, dominated relations to metropolitan culture. Fanon's analysis highlights how those in dominated and liminal positions often struggle to appropriate or deploy symbolic capital, often doing so in misrecognised forms:

> *In Martinique they say "to speak like a white man." The black man entering France reacts against the myth of the Martinican who swallows his r's. He'll go to work on it and enter into open conflict with it. He will make every effort not only to roll his r's, but also to make them stand out.*
>
> (Fanon 2021, 4–5)

This has the effect of splitting the actor's ego, creating, in Fanon's terms, a "white mask" over their "black skin," whereby actors are caught *between* two worlds – the colonial and the metropolitan: the black and white. That is, they inhabit "two mutually alienating universes" (Bourdieu and Sayad 2020, 164). Fanon's account is particularly applicable to Bourdieusian analysis because of the way he describes the *hysteresis* inherent in the embodiment of the (post-)colonial situation, elaborating on the unease, discomfort, and uncertainty that a black person faces in "elaborating his body schema" (Fanon 2021, 90). In his view, "the black man lives an ambiguity that is extraordinarily neurotic" (2021, 169).

Moreover, Fanon illustrates how "whiteness" and "blackness" become associated with particular forms of symbolic capital (and hence, domination) within (post-)colonial situations, particularly through ways of speaking and questions of taste. These help reify principles of vision and division across racial lines. This allows particular black actors to become dominant within colonial societies (*compradors*) by appropriating metropolitan dispositions. However, these same individuals are prevented becoming fully integrated into

metropolitan societies because their grasp of those dispositions is always incomplete: “not yet white, no longer completely black” (Fanon 2021, 117).

Bourdieu noticed this same phenomenon in his early studies of Algerian society, arguing that the colonial system meant that “while each caste has its own system of graded social positions, and each individual is permitted to climb the rungs of the social ladder of his caste, it is practically impossible to cross the abyss that separates the ladders” (Bourdieu 1962, 133). That is, colonial societies segregate races from one another not primarily through Jim Crow-style legislation, but, rather, through the establishment of specific types of capital – that associated with the white settlers and administrators – as the fundamental principle of vision and division of the field. Thus, the field is racialised within its very structure.

In this way, *whiteness* becomes “a location of structural advantage” embodied in “a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (Frankenberg 1993, 1). These practices are “dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on myriad levels” (DiAngelo 2011, 56), undergirding the entire structure of a field. In such a scenario, “there is a disfigured perception of cultural capital that often synchronises and fixes expressions of cultural capital with whiteness” (D. Wallace 2017, 913). In a field such as global journalism, which carries a strong imprint of colonialism into its modern structure, and is dominated with logic emanating from northern journalistic fields, the expression of journalistic aptitude and achievement in this sphere cannot help but be synchronised with a particularly *white* way of practicing journalism.

Objectivity is a good example of a commonly accepted journalistic value that has become imbued with *whiteness*. Objectivity is not a given in journalism, but, rather, is a value that has developed into *doxa* over time, emerging in the late 1900s to protect journalists and organisations from criticism, extend audiences and circulation, and to create standardised formats to help cope with practical and technological limitations of news making (Tuchman 1972; Chalaby 1998; Schudson 2001). Objectivity then spread into international journalism via the competition between foreign correspondents and news agencies providing global news updates to the Euro-American metropole (Bielsa 2008; Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen 1998).

But how does objectivity operate as a function of *whiteness*, and act as a racial barrier to black journalists? As Alamo-Pastrana and Hoynes (2020) argue, objectivity functions as a form of symbolic violence that pushes minorities to the edges of the journalistic field, placed

as, at best, niche interest or, at worst, unprofessional, critical, subjective, and partisan. They observe how the "Black Press" in the USA was consistently marginalised by professional organisations, such as the American Society of News Editors (ASNE), throughout the 1950's and 1960's because it was seen to be concerned with niche issues – i.e., not news for the white majority – or took an overtly critical stance on social justice issues, such as the civil rights movement. As Mellinger (2017) adds, even though these debates were not necessarily racially motivated,

> *it allowed white editors to indulge their fears about what would happen if non-whites, whom they assumed to be less skilled and less prepared for the rigors of the profession, were allowed to report and edit news. Many [ASNE] members rationalized that maintaining the racial status quo in newsrooms was a reasonable and honorable course because it affirmed journalistic standards.*
>
> (2017, 7)

That is, a racialised boundary was set up to prevent the integration of black journalists into the profession because it was deemed necessary by the dominant actors to protect the integrity of the field itself.

The result is that mainstream news – in the global north, at least – has remained essentially stories created by primarily white journalists for primarily white audiences. In this context, objectivity acts a "strategic ritual" (Tuchman 1972) which acts to conceal this inherent (white) subjectivity of both news production and news reception, which is presented as a universal viewpoint, reifying "the perspectives and experiences of white reporters as a form of disembodied, neutral, […] un-raced form of knowledge" (Alamo-Pastrana and Hoynes 2020, 77; Jenkins and Padgett 2012).

In this way, *whiteness* is built into the structure of the field, as Mellinger explains: "Whiteness, […] achieves and maintains its power largely through mechanisms of exclusion and the fraternity that obtains from membership in this club" (2017, 10). This means that journalists form minority backgrounds must generally seek to assimilate into the rules of a game which are rigged against them, adapting to and adopting journalistic norms and values which covertly favour "news for white people" (Nothias 2017, 75). Like Fanon's Antillean who wants to learn French because it will open doors, and shuns speaking pidgin, black journalists

often must "wear the livery the white man has fabricated" (Fanon 2021, 17), eschewing their sense of social (in)justice in order to be *objective*, since this trait defines what or who a journalist *is*.

At least, this is true in journalistic fields in the global north, and, indeed, the global journalistic field itself. As Schudson (2001) has noted, other norms developed in different contexts to provide journalism with much the same insulation from criticism that objectivity does. For example, despite being the supposed antithesis to objectivity, the Confucian-Socialist ideals of Chinese journalism, which normalises the need for journalistic discipline in the service of the nation (Zhao 2011; Repnikova 2017) – as well as similar "development journalism" parallels across the global south – perform the same task, and represent a symbolic *good*. In the case of the global journalistic field, then, it is worth considering "why *this* norm, the objectivity norm, came to dominate" (Schudson 2001, 167), when other norms fulfil the same role. The answer can only be that objectivity remains instrumental to maintaining the position of dominant actors in the global journalistic field, who are made conspicuous by their colonial-imperial historical trajectories, the continuing predominant *whiteness* of their managerial and editorial staff, and their consistent privileging of news about the global north (and its citizens).

Since Sino-African media organisations are extremely diverse workplaces spanning equally diverse socio-geographic spaces, they present an interesting case study of the role of race and racism in international/transnational journalism, and, in particular, to demonstrate the potential of field theory to contribute to the analysis of racial inequality in news flows.

Critiques

Field theory has been subject to significant criticism from a range of sources. Addressing the full gamut of this criticism of Bourdieu's theories is not possible within the scope of this work, but a number of salient issues and challenges are discussed. In particular, this includes: the problems of identifying fields; the lack of empirical research into international fields of power; and analysing habitus. Though this thesis does seek to advance a theoretical agenda, its purpose is to investigate a particular sociological phenomenon. This being so, the main purpose towards which field theory is judged here is primarily practical and empirical: to what extent can it help explain journalistic practice in Sino-African news organisations?

A key challenge for researchers utilising field theory is in the identification of fields *as* fields, and outlining their borders, particularly as they are inherently dynamic and ever-shifting. As such, the researcher is chasing a constantly moving and ephemeral target, leading to Lahire's complaint that there is no "once-and-for-all-answer" to questions like "what is literature?" (quoted in Swartz 1997). Leander (2009), however, argues that the blurry boundaries of fields are a singular strength of field theory: the ambiguity of fields means that field theory is adaptable to almost any context – with the added virtue of forcing the researcher into "a mode of construction that has to be rethought anew every time" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 110). Whilst any single study captures only a "snapshot" of a field which is always in motion, this has "more in common with directing a camera that can zoom in and out, change directions, and make cuts that capture time, space and speed than with drawing maps," reflecting the complexity, fluidity, and instability of contemporary society (Leander 2011, 298).

To try and deal with this ambiguity, several academics have suggested differing strategies to help identify fields. Bourdieu argued that the best way to identify fields was to focus on their effects: "the limits of [a] field […] are simply the point at which these effects are no longer found" (1996c, 132). Berling (2012), on the other hand, argues that analysts should first consider the "capital at stake" and use this as a basis to identify the actors struggling over this capital, thereby detailing the particular shape of the field at that moment.

A related issue is the precise relation of fields at the international (or, alternatively, the local, regional, or urban) level to one another – that is, how does the global journalistic field relate to, for example, the global economic field. In Bourdieu's analyses of fields within nation-states, fields of differentiated practice are always structured in relation to the wider "field of power" (Bourdieu 1996c). The issue here is that the "field of power" either does not exist or has not been adequately conceptualised at different levels of analysis. As Leander notes:

> *Some guidance – in the shape of a better conceptualization of the "field of power" or perhaps more realistically a multiplication of practical research strategies to accommodate the high level of complexity inherent in international relations – is essential to the future development of habitus/field inspired work in international studies.*

(2009, 21–22)

Despite attempts to theorise the existence of global "fields of power" by Lebaron (2008) and Cohen (2018), Guzzini's observation that the existence of larger (or smaller) "fields of power" outside of the bounds of the nation-state "is actually an empirical question which awaits its answering" (2006, 17) still rings true.

Perhaps Bourdieu's most divisive concept has been habitus, which can be difficult to define, and, since it does so much work in field theory is easily misunderstood: "this very appealing conceptual versatility sometimes renders ambiguous just what the concept actually designates empirically" (Swartz 1997, 109). In has drawn particular criticism for appearing to be overly determinist by its insistence of the structuring of agency. Alexander complains that habitus appears "more like a Trojan horse for determinism. Time and time again it is explained not as a site for voluntarism – for improvising within certain limits – but as the reflection and replication of exterior structures" (1995, 136).

Van Hout and Jacobs (2008) take this stance against field theory, particularly in relation to journalism, arguing that its interest in power structures subsumes any attention to agency. They particularly criticise Champagne and Marchetti's (2005) study of the "blood-contamination scandal" in the French press during the 1980s and 1990s, arguing that field theory leads to analysis in which "journalists wander around like faceless and voiceless support actors against the background of a nation-wide drama" (Van Hout and Jacobs 2008, 66). However, the focus on structures by Champagne and Marchetti reflect the aim of their study – that is, the structural, mezzo-level relationship between the journalistic and scientific/medical fields in France. Other studies have very effectively utilised field theory to examine the practices of individual journalists within fields (e.g., Schultz 2007; Bunce 2011; Christin 2016; Zeveleva 2018; Moon 2019). It is possible, perhaps, that habitus does not fully overcome the structure-agency divide. However, it does provide a practical empirical tool, and is a commonly employed across a wide spectrum of sociological study. It is, as Benson and Neveu note, "a reasonable hypothesis: that individuals' predispositions, assumptions, judgments, and behaviours are the result of a long-term socialization […]. Habitus is not unchangeable. In fact, it is constantly being modified […] By incorporating temporality, habitus combats naïve assertions of structural determination" (2005, 3).

A more immediate problem with habitus for empirical researcher is that is can – much like fields – be difficult to locate and analyse. This is particularly so when actors have developed complex and multifaceted habitus: "one does not 'see' a habitus but rather the *effects* of a habitus in the practices and beliefs to which it gives rise" (Maton 2014, 61), and so, in any given situation, how can the analyst determine what particular structure of habitus is in play, and how might changes in habitus be measured? However, these are primarily empirical questions awaiting answer. At its core, the concept of habitus is more useful than it is problematic. As Leander argues, complex habitus is a positive feature of field theory since they help to account for changes in fields:

> *It is precisely because agents are not solely and always following a habitus produced in the [particular] field that enables actors to be reflexive about their own situation, engage in struggles for redefining the rules of the game of the own field, and the boundaries of the field as such.*
>
> (2006, 15)

This becomes doubly so when studying international fields in which a variety of complex actors occupy a complex space. The local-national correspondents studied by Bunce (2011) and Moon (2019) are the perfect example of this: socialised in their national fields and engaging with a wider global journalistic field. Habitus helps us to understand how, in this situation, these actors are able to react to their circumstances, and how they might both absorb and change the structures and values of both levels of fields which they occupy.

Another criticism has been a lack of clear definition of what constitutes journalistic capital (Maares and Hanusch 2022). However, since each journalistic field emerges out of a particular historical context, each will have a different stakes being competed over. That is, what counts as journalistic capital in China, for example, need not (and likely does not) count as journalistic capital in the USA. Since field theory does not pursue universal validity, reaching for a definition of journalistic capital is something of a Sisyphean task – in the case of each field studied, the rock rolls back to the bottom of the slope. Journalistic capital, therefore, is nothing more than the field-specific capital of a particular journalistic field, to be populated anew in each case.

Discussion

Clearly, not all of these challenges are fully resolved. However, field theory remains highly appealing to a wide range of disciplines, including the sociology of media and journalism, in its broad scope and versatility. As demonstrated in this chapter, it is highly adaptable to a wide range of contexts and bridges the divide between macro- and micro-level approaches to journalism (Benson 2006). Crucially, it takes seriously the centrality of power to practice and provides a vehicle for understanding both continuity and change in society. It is, therefore, a particularly promising point for the departure of empirical research.

However, it is not – nor was intended to be – a finished article. Bourdieu viewed field theory primarily as a set of "thinking tools" which has to be reworked to every study and built anew in every context. The purpose of introducing the findings of studies across a variety of contexts in this chapter is not to represent a universal picture of what journalism is or how it functions, to be applied unreflexively on top of Sino-African journalism. Rather, it lays out a framework for how journalistic fields *can* function, given certain historical conditions. Field theory is therefore utilised in this thesis as "a basic structural, relational model of social relations" (Benson 2015, 263–64), but which strictly rejects any claim that there are "transhistorical laws of the relations between fields" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 109). That is, every journalistic field is different in its particulars, and has to be approached as its own particular puzzle.

The advantage and obligation of utilising field theory in this way to study Sino-African journalism is to approach Sino-African journalism itself as a starting place for theorising the work of Sino-African journalists. It is not merely a case of "add Africa and stir" (Abrahamsen 2017, 126–27). Rather, field theory is employed from the bottom up, so as to allow the researcher to recognise the particularities of Sino-African journalism as the result of its own historical pathway, and its specific set of internal and external relations as peculiar only to itself. This study is therefore an ongoing, reflexive, critical, and situated process of theory-making and empirical testing. As I have argued in this chapter, the context of Sino-African journalism presents particular problems to conventional understandings of journalistic fields and offers the opportunity to create theory from out of the lifeworld of Sino-African journalists.

4. Methods

Towards a self-reflexive methodology

Having now brought to the fore the lacunae and theoretical issues apparent in the current literature on Sino-African journalism, this thesis uses the "took kit" of field theory to investigate the work of journalists working for CGTN Africa. These journalists can broadly be split into three groups: Kenyan local-nationals working out of the production hub in Nairobi; expatriate (Western, Chinese, non-Kenyan African) journalists working out of the production hub in Nairobi; and local-national journalists working in country correspondents dotted across the African continent. However, there are a multiplicity of potential cleavages amongst these journalists, such as employment status (full-time employees, agency loanees, stringers etc.), nationalities and race (Black, White, Chinese; or Kenyan, South Africa, Nigerian etc.). These journalists therefore represent a variety of "most different" cases, with participants coming from and working across a plethora of different environments. In this sense, they represent an excellent, diverse test of the appropriateness and potentiality of field theory as a tool for understanding journalistic practice at CGTN Africa.

In terms of what research methods are appropriate to investigate practice, Bourdieu was non-prescriptive. He strongly criticised "methodologism," the academic inclination "to separate reflection on methods from their actual use in scientific work and to cultivate method for its own sake" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 28), warning that "the sophistication of techniques of observation and proof can, if not accompanied by a redoubling of theoretical vigilance, lead us to see better and better fewer and fewer things" (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron 1991, 88). Instead, he espoused a philosophy of "methodological polytheism," whereby the researcher should employ any and all techniques and methods which are relevant and practical; that is, "the array of methods used must fit the problem at hand" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 30). This does not, however, make research an epistemological free-for-all; research must always apply scientific rigor, and the central aspect of scientific rigor for Bourdieu is self-reflexivity. This entails that methods "must constantly be reflected upon […] in the very movement whereby they are deployed to resolve particular questions. […] [O]ne cannot disassociate the construction of the object from the instruments of the object and their critique" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 30).

Bourdieu's concept of self-reflexivity goes far beyond the usual questions posed by academics about their position, requiring them, rather, to "objectify their own activity and submit it to the same kind of analysis one would submit any part of the social world to" (Leander 2009, 7). As researchers, we are not merely our biographical idiosyncrasies (though these remain important), but are inherently implicated in "the game," in the same manner as our participants. We occupy a position in an academic field with its own structures and *doxa*, creating in us a "scholarly gaze" of presuppositions built into the concepts we employ, the instruments of analysis we utilise, and practical operations of research as we proceed. That is what makes "research 'scientific' is less the systematic testing of hypotheses and gathering of facts than it is the adequacy of one's epistemological break with naturalized, common sense categories of knowledge" (Benson 2015, 266). In practice, this means treating with "scepticism the categories offered up by official agencies or previous scholarly research, treating one's own categories as provisional subject to ongoing critical reflection" (Benson 2015, 267). What follows is an attempt to describe and reflect on the research process in this spirit.

Research question(s)

Simply put, this thesis seeks to ask: "what are competing influences on the practices and culture of Sino-African journalism." However, it emerged on a thorough review of the literature that there were significant conflicts over the nature of these influences, about whether Sino-African journalists had autonomy or not, and to what extent an array of micro, mezzo, and macro factors affected their work. Building on an increasing turn in journalism studies towards reflexive sociology, my research also has become concerned with finding a theoretical approach that can unify and transcend these diverse explanations of Sino-African journalistic practice. A second research question, then, emerged: "what theoretical approach can best explain the practices of Sino-African journalists?"

In this regard, field theory showed the most promise, but it had rarely been utilised in the analysis of journalistic practice in the Global South. A key goal of my research therefore emerged, seeking to ask if and how field theory could be adapted to these contexts, and, further, how these adaptations could advance an understanding of the relations between

different fields at differing levels of analysis. Therefore, a supplementary research question was proposed: "is field theory adaptable to journalistic contexts in the Global South?"

Research genesis and development during COVID-19

To answer these questions, I had originally intended to do the bulk – if not the entirety – of my fieldwork in Nairobi, Kenya. Nairobi presented itself as the obvious choice since it provided a focal point for Sino-African journalism, and therefore a prominent case study to see these journalists "up close" at work. I intended to focus on conducting semi-structured interviews with journalists as my primary method, and also hoped to be granted limited access to the newsrooms of these organisations, or to accompany news teams on local newsgathering missions, to triangulate the interviews with newsroom ethnographies and participant observations. The main portion of this fieldwork was planned for early in my second year.

Then, COVID-19 engulfed the world. The limitations this incurred on my research were profound, given the restrictions on life and work during lockdowns, travel bans, and the implementation of social distancing measures. With my research predicated on studying Sino-African journalists "up close," this posed an existential threat to my thesis. Rather than alter my research questions, though, I decided to continue attempting to research "up close" from "afar," and began trying to conduct these interviews virtually.

I built a spreadsheet of every journalist with an active digital presence who currently or previously worked for Chinese central media organisations in Africa, whether in full-time employment or freelance. There are five Chinese central media organisations that operate in Africa: CGTN; Xinhua; CRI; and the two state-run newspapers, *China Daily* and *People's Daily*. This research began with the intention of studying any and all of them. Once the research moved online due to COVID-19 restrictions, the two newspapers were immediately ruled out, since they had virtually no staff with an active online presence. This left the three largest organisations – CGTN, Xinhua, and CRI – as potential case studies.

Since Chinese media organisations do not post or promote the email addresses of their employees anywhere, my primary tools to search for these journalists were the social media platforms LinkedIn and Twitter**.** LinkedIn, in particular, proved a highly effective tool to track down these journalists, mainly because of its advanced search functions, allowing me to specify companies and locations to narrow my search to a manageable amount of hits.

With access to the LinkedIn Premium service, I was able to see members at increased levels of separation from myself and send up to fifteen at-length messages to other members a month. Twitter, on the other hand, relied on journalists putting specific information about their employment in their short biographies in order to show up in the search, which often was not the case. Additionally, I used by-line accreditation in content produced by Chinese central media organisations to give me further names to follow up on digital platforms. In the end, I was able to locate the online profiles of two-hundred-and-twenty-nine journalists who had experience of working for Chinese central media organisations in Africa.

The effect that moving my research online had on this eventual shortlist of potential participants was profound and, in the end, decisive to my research goals. In the first instance, it severely inhibited my ability to contact Chinese journalists working in Africa. Chinese journalists have, in general, little to no presence on Western social media apps – many of these apps, such as Facebook and Twitter, are technically banned in China – and, since I do not speak Mandarin, I was unable to properly navigate appropriate Chinese social media apps, such as Weibo or WeChat, in order to contact them. As such, no Chinese journalists were interviewed during the course of the research. This radically shifted the focus of thesis towards the other categories of staffing at these organisations, namely Africans and Western expatriates.

The move online also distinctly favoured staff from CGTN Africa over the other two organisations, Xinhua and CRI. Of the eventual two-hundred-and-twenty-nine journalists listed, one-hundred-and-forty-nine – two-thirds – worked for CGTN Africa. This number is not necessarily reflective of the relative sizes of these organisations but does reflect that the fact that CGTN Africa staff were, on the whole, far more digitally engaged than their counterparts at either Xinhua or CRI. Combined with difficulties in recruiting participants from this list, this influenced my eventual decision to focus my analysis primarily on CGTN Africa, recruiting Xinhua and CRI staff as secondary respondents only.

Further, of the two-hundred-and-twenty-nine journalists, almost exactly half were based in Nairobi, eighty-nine of which were Kenyan. Studies concerning Sino-African journalism have often focussed on Kenyans for good reason, as they provide the majority of localised recruitment for Sino-Africa media organisations, including CGTN Africa. However, as I continued searching for participants, it became clear that focussing on these Kenyan local-nationals alone would have severely limited the scope of my research, obfuscating important

pieces in jigsaw of journalistic production across the continent. Instead, my shortlist eventually painted a very different picture of the continental infrastructure of these organisations, with potential participants based in thirty-nine locations spread across thirty-five countries. This accurately reflects Cottle's assessment that "news production no longer takes place within any one organisational centre of production but has become increasingly dispersed across multiple sites, different platforms and can be contributed to by journalists based in different locations around the world" (2007, 8–9).

This shortlist became the basis for recruiting participants to my study. Over a nine-month period between June 2020 to March 2021, I contacted every individual on the shortlist requesting a virtual interview. The results of this effort were mixed; since in almost all cases these requests were "cold calls," many were met with steely silence. Other journalists replied but were concerned about my credentials or their security, and some of these chose not to participate. Contact via Twitter had a better "hit rate" than LinkedIn, potentially as respondents were simply more active on that platform – sometimes only replying on LinkedIn months after being sent a message.

Eventually, the central data this produced were twenty-three semi-structured interviews with a range of journalists who had experience working at CGTN Africa. Additionally, secondary interviews were conducted with five journalists who had experience at other Sino-African news organisations (Xinhua and CRI), as well as four journalists who had worked across the African continent for competitor organisations (see Appendix A). To protect their identities, I have chosen to not elaborate on any of the specifics of journalists' biographies – a concern I will cover in more detail below.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, due to the risks to themselves incumbent in participating, a majority of primary interviewees were no longer employed by CGTN Africa. In total nine participants were still working with CGTN Africa at the time of their interview, and fourteen had moved on. However, this leant the study an interesting longitudinal perspective on the field positions of these organisations and journalists. In particular, when, where, and why they moved provided vital data in understanding the distributions of capital and developments in habitus at that particular moment in time (Örnebring et al. 2018).

Of those 23 journalists in the primary sample, 7 were female and 15 were male. The overall level of the career experience was very mixed, with some older long-timers and some younger parvenus, but the women in the sample were more likely to be junior journalists with

no journalistic experience before joining CGTN. In terms of nationality, 12 were Kenyan, 5 were South African, 4 were from other African countries, and 1 was British. Broadly, these figures appear to be representative of the general demographic makeup of staffing at CGTN Africa.

Researching "up close" from "afar"

Qualitative research has generally sought to distinguish between research conducted "up close" or "in the field," and research conducted "from afar" or "back home." These spatial metaphors have suited traditional ethnographical approaches to understanding social phenomena, in which the researcher – usually an "outsider" – physically embeds themselves within whatever society or group they are studying for the duration of their research. This element of "being there" has, in many ways, come to define ethnography as a discipline, enabling the researcher to produce a "thick description" of the particular object of study (Geertz 1973). As Geertz notes, "the ability of anthropologists to get us to take what they say seriously" relies on "their capacity to convince us that what they say is a result of their having actually penetrated (or, if you prefer, been penetrated by) another form of life" (1988, 4–5).

Yet, more researchers are now choosing to conduct their fieldwork online for myriad reason, such as safety, convenience, or ethics (Howlett 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has only brought into sharp relief an already increasing trend in social science research methods: the advent of the Web 2.0 has meant that "being there from afar" was already "becoming an ever more integral part of daily life" (Postill 2017, 67). Post-COVID, it is simply impossible to ignore the integration of components like remote working, e-meetings, and physical isolation into academic routines, practices, and methods, and likewise into the lives of participants. What, then, are the implications for the anthropologist who chooses not to "be there" physically? To what extent does this inhibit their ability to produce "thick description?" Is remote fieldwork "more than a remedial measure, a 'second best' choice for anthropologists unable to reach their fieldsites" (Postill 2017, 67)?

It is self-evident that the researcher working remotely will interact with and experience things differently than if they were on the ground; depending on the specific wormhole they utilise to access their site, they will see different things, hear different sounds, feel different emotions etc., and so the data collected will differ (Howlett 2021). However, as

Gray (2016) argues, these experiences are no less felt "in the body" than had they been experienced in the field; they even allow us access to experience things we would never have been able to in the field, such as when she felt "transported" into the back of a police van when the Russian activist, Alexei Navalny, live-Tweeted about his arrest in December 2011. Instead of a "second best" choice, Postill contends that remote fieldwork in fact represents simply one of "the ever-expanding ways of being there" (2017, 67), and that, further, a reliance on purely non-digital forms of fieldwork no longer makes sense it today's digitally-dominated environment.

We must therefore question whether traditional distinctions between research done "up close" and "from afar" remain appropriate metaphors for different forms of qualitative research today. When our desks or sofas becomes portals to "there," it becomes increasingly difficult to establish exactly where "afar" is in relation. Even the boundaries between media content – analysis of which has long been the preserve of "afar" – and reality seem more blurred in a world where remote sites of study are easily and interactively accessible in real time on our computer and phone screens via Facebook Lives, Twitter threads, and live webcam networks, breaking down a further ontological barrier of "being then" (Postill 2017, 62). The more important task becomes to understand, account for, and report on the different *kinds of being* and knowing that result from engaging with alternative ways of "being there."

Whilst COVID-19 delimited the methodological approach of this thesis in particular ways, it did not make it impossible to access the relevant sites via alternative methods. This research employed virtual semi-structured interviews with journalists from across the African continent in order to explore the context and processes of Sino-African news production. Below, I discuss the suitability and limitations of these methods, and the details of the research process.

Semi-structured interviews

The central data underpinning this thesis' findings comes from twenty-three semi-structured interviews conducted with journalists who had experience working with CGTN Africa. Semi-structured interviewing is a qualitative research method in which the researcher explores the perspective of the informants through a series of partially-planned but flexible questions,

allowing respondents to guide much of the conversation (Bryman 2016). This method has commonly been used in studies by researchers to provide rich insight into the practices of journalists around the world.

Prior to my first interviews, I constructed an interview guide (see Appendix B), covering a range of factors that had been identified in the literature as potentially influencing the practice of journalists, such as their background, news values, interests, inter-personal relationships, access to sources, and autonomy. These questions provided a broad structure to the interviews, but due to the varying differences between the participants discussed above, not all questions were as relevant to some as to others. I also made clear to participants the conversational aspect of our exchange, and that they could talk about their life and career in whatever way they saw fit. Some participants jumped at this invitation, largely leading the conversation themselves, whilst others did not, and preferred to wait for me to ask them specific questions.

The conversational nature of the interviews is most obviously reflected in the duration of the interviews, which fluctuated wildly between participants, but was generally quite lengthy. The longest interview lasted around two-hundred-and-twenty minutes, whilst the shortest lasted just sixty-seven minutes. On average, interviews lasted for around one-hundred-and-eleven minutes.

The interviews were all conducted synchronously via Zoom, a videotelephony software, or WhatsApp, a cross-platform centralized messaging and voice-over-IP service, at the preference of the interviewee. In most cases, interviews took place via videotelephony, with the researcher and participants able to see one another. In some cases, either due to the preference of the interviewee or because of technical issues, video capabilities were not utilised, and the interviews were done over the phone. Interview audio was recorded on an external recorder, transcribed, and the recordings deleted. No video recordings were taken. Follow up questions were either conducted via further videotelephony calls or by asynchronous messaging (either text or voice), depending on the length of the questions, or because of time constraints.

Asynchronous interviews via LinkedIn messenger and email with two participants were also attempted, due to their time constraints and language limitations, but this proved to be unsuccessful due to the severely reduced detail and depth of responses. This approach was abandoned, and the relevant participants data was removed from the study.

Limitations of virtual interviews

The key issue with conducting semi-structured interviews in any environment is the break between practice itself and talking about practice (Bourdieu 1990b). Respondents might forget details and suffer memory lapses (Grele 1998), particularly as some of my respondents had not worked at CGTN Africa for several years at the time of the interview, or might engage – consciously or unconsciously – in *a posteriori* biographical reconstruction (Costa, Burke, and Murphy 2019), with journalists usually, by profession, being very eloquent storytellers, "firmly in control of the messages and cues they are getting across" (Pál 2017, 8). But even if respondents to do give honest answers, we must still consider that that their accounts remain subjective, reflecting their already established sense of self (Bourdieu 1990b).

Conducting the interviews virtually or over the phone also raises a number of important issues about the validity of these interviews as compared to those done face-to-face. A rich literature has amassed over the past two decades debating the differences between virtual and face-to-face interviews, and there is a growing consensus that conducting interviews virtually or over the phone can produce data that is as reliable and rich as face-to-face interviews (Sturges and Hanrahan 2004; Deakin and Wakefield 2014). That is not to say, however, that the data is not in some way different to that gathered face-to-face, or that researchers do not need to be attentive to the particular issues at stake when conducting interviews virtually or by phone.

The most common problem highlighted in research done virtually is technological issues, including poor connection, lag, dropouts, poor sound quality, etc. (Seitz 2016). Several interviews were interrupted by these issues, which affected both the rhythm of the interview and my ability to properly transcribe the interview afterwards. In several cases, myself and respondent had to agree to turn off our videos to help maintain good sound quality. However, considering the total amount of time spent online conducting these interviews, technical issues were relatively few and far between. Frustration from both parties with those technical issues that did occur was minimal: all the participants had a high-level of technological literacy and were used to digital working environments, particularly since COVID-19 had forced many to work from home for the best part of a year. As journalists, they were very comfortable with

the virtual interview format as part and parcel of their own contemporary workflows and took technical issues in their stride.

If anything, in the circumstances, the vast majority were more comfortable conducting the interviews virtually as opposed to face-to-face. Not having to meet in person was much more convenient for the participants as we were able to be much more flexible about scheduling, allowing me to work around the interviews participants' needs. Respondents were generally very happy to schedule an interview at short notice during working hours when their workload was low, and it was also easy to suspend and resume interviews as and when they needed. As Gibson notes, conducting interviews in this way seems "a good fit for a generation used to multi-tasking and flexible social arrangements" (2020, 8).

Several scholars have pointed out that it can often be more difficult to build rapport with your participants online due to the incumbent physical rupture between researcher and participant, and that this can lead to a loss of intimacy which might affect the richness of the account provided (Seitz 2016; Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst 2017). However, I found, much as in Howlett's (2021) study, that this could not be further from the case. Whilst some of the participants did approach the interview cautiously at first, most of these grew into the setting as time went on, and the majority were extremely comfortable from the outset (several even wearing pyjamas during proceedings). Utilising the informal communication patterns of familiar mediums like Twitter and WhatsApp (e.g., textspeak, emoticons, and voice notes) in order to introduce myself and set up interviews leant the whole interview process a relatively casual and conversational tone which seemed to put participants at ease. I also found that the sheer length of many of the interviews indicated that there was little issue with the willingness of participants to contribute meaningfully to the study, and, much like Howlett (2021), I often found *myself* having to initiate an end to the interview.

Relatedly, whilst some researchers have raised concerns that online interviews increase the risk of absenteeism (Deakin and Wakefield 2014), I did not generally find this to be the case. Whilst, occasionally, an interviewee did not turn up for a scheduled interview, this was almost always followed by an apology and explanation – almost always to do with the daily chaos of a journalist's life – with the interview being rescheduled for a later date.

Perhaps the greatest issue with virtual interviews, though, is that it can be difficult – or impossible over the phone – to read the body language of the participant in this setting. Even when using videotelephony, "it is not typical to see more than the person's face or upper

body," and the picture is often not high-quality enough to provide the "rich, nonverbal cues that you feel in a traditional face-to-face interview" (Seitz 2016, 232; Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst 2017). This can severely limit the ability of both the researcher and participant to "read" each other properly, and can lead to "moments of disjuncture" that interrupt the natural rhythm of conversation (Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst 2017). Certainly, there were occasionally uncomfortable moments during the interviews where it was not clear whether the participant had finished speaking or not, an instance of lag leading them to miss a question being asked, or them asking if I was "still there," which might have been avoided in a face-to-face interview.

However, more pressingly in the context of a Bourdieusian analysis, lacking this data delimits the possibilities of understanding *embodied habitus*. Bourdieu argues that *habitus* is the "social made body" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 127), and that *habitus*, as Krais puts it, "expresses itself in gestures, posture, and in the way the body is used" in different spaces (2006, 127). With or without videotelephony, it can be difficult in virtual settings to properly see, understand, and meaningfully record participants' body language, and therefore, to some extent, this data is lost through this method. This seems unavoidable, particularly without video recordings of the interviews – which would raise other ethical issues for the research. Instead, it is necessary for the investigator to be extra diligent of other "verbal clues" during the interview (Sturges and Hanrahan 2004, 115; Seitz 2016). As such, I have attempted to record in my transcriptions the participants' physical movements and non-lexical verbal cues (laughter, pauses, sighs, etc.) as faithfully as possible.

Unsolicited methods

COVID-19 restrictions meant that my originally intended triangulation methods – newsroom ethnography and participant observation – were no longer viable options. However, the scheduling of many of the interviews was very flexible, with the interviewee often engaged in low-level multitasking. This meant that sometimes, either by chance, or through the initiative of the participant, something from outside of the interview space intervened. I refer to these as "unsolicited methods."

One participant was conducting his interview from inside CGTN's Nairobi hub via a WhatsApp call. Walking around the office, the participant took it upon himself to send photos

of the workspaces on WhatsApp messaging whilst simultaneously describing the environment to me in real-time on the call. As they were walking around, they were also engaging with other people in the office, so that I could hear discussions in the newsroom occurring: a newsroom ethnography *in miniature*. In another instance, a Xinhua journalist took a call from his Chinese boss during a Zoom interview and was given an assignment in front of my eyes – we were then able to talk about the assignment when he was off the call. This seemed to be participant observation *in miniature*. Though few and far between, these incidents offered inciteful and valuable vignettes into the lives of these journalists.

Related to the issue of participant initiative, it is also worth noting that several interviewees took it upon themselves to answers certain questions at great length: particularly the opening question concerning their background. Some interviewees used this invitation to cover their life history in considerable breadth and depth; the longest of these monologues lasted over an hour-and-a-half! These life histories proved extremely valuable to the analysis, documenting "the inner experience of individuals, how they interpret, understand, and define the world around them" (Faraday and Plummer 1979, 776), and offering a longitudinal focus to search for repetitions of attitudes and practices over time, which are crucial to the study of habitus development (Costa, Burke, and Murphy 2019; Bourdieu 1987).

From insider/outsider perspective to participant objectivation

A key methodological challenge to research which engages human participants is researcher positionality. In traditional accounts, this has generally been concerned with whether the researcher is an "outsider," having no prior knowledge or understanding of the culture of their participants, or an "insider," who is a member of the same community as their participants, and how these categories affect the ability of the researcher to produce legitimate knowledge. Reflexivity, in this context, means that the researcher has to reflect on their relationship to the research participants, and how this might alter what they see and how they analyse that data.

Bourdieu, however, points out the limitations of this account of positionality, interested, as it is, in reproducing conventional academic norms around legitimate knowledge. Instead, he argues, we must turn our "scholarly gaze" back on ourselves within

our own academic space, dually "playing the game […] whilst observing the game" (Rowe 2018, 106). This is a process that Bourdieu calls *participant objectivation* (2003). It entails that we must take into account our membership of and position within the academic field, and all the categories of unconscious knowledge and assumptions that we strategically draw upon when attempting to make the move towards the "quasi-divine viewpoint" of academically-legitimated "impartial" knowledge (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 254). As Kenway and McLeod note, the viewpoint I eventually construct is "not simply the expression of an individual viewpoint" (2004, 529), but represents the full force(field) of academia and its collective structures and rules, the entire weight of which is then imposed on the research participants. It is therefore insufficient to consider only my position in relation to my participants, but is necessary, rather, to fathom my relation to the total project of my research (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The task, then, is to objectify the entire process of academic objectification (Bourdieu 1990b).

This is no small task, as approaching positionality from this perspective offers no explicit set of mitigating strategies. However, in the context of being a researcher studying the periphery from the centre, it is primarily an ethical question. Considering all the various forms of epistemicide (Santos 2016) that prevail within the theoretical and methodological tool kits of sociology (and the academy in general), I believe participant objectivation can become a key contribution of field theory to the decolonial project.[3] In practical terms, this meant being extremely attentive to the ways in which my position as a Northern PhD Research at a Global Northern university might lead me to employ a range of research factors, including the field theory framework, the interview format, the questions I thought most appropriate, the structure of my analysis, etc., to create "legitimate" research – keeping in mind that the objective of a PhD is, ultimately, to be awarded a doctorate (cultural capital) by the university – and, then, to consider the ways in which that process might obfuscate the lived realities and indigenous knowledges of my participants in the entire process of data gathering and analysis. This required active efforts to decolonise the theory, to broaden the scope of interactions with my participants, and constantly reassess both my interview guide

[3] Go (2013) argues that participant objectivation emerged primarily out of Bourdieu's personal experiences and intense criticisms of the symbiotic relationship between French ethnography and colonialism in Algeria.

and analysis in light of those interactions, in general attending to the "blind spots" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 259) that my methodological choices incurred.

Ethical issues

In some ways, the ethics implicit in interviewing Sino-African journalists are simple in practice, since journalism and academia share fairly similar professional and ethical norms, so all the participants were already very aware of the stakes of their involvement, conventions about anonymity, and whether their accounts were on or off the record. However, the risks incurred by these journalists' participation are very real, particularly in terms of their employment with Chinese media organisations. Employees of these organisations are not supposed to speak to outsiders about their work without express permission from the bureau chief (Lefkowitz 2017), and, unsurprisingly, those that did notify me that they would ask permission all duly informed me that it had been denied, and that they would not take part. Therefore, all participants were taking part *against* the wishes of their respective organisations. As such, all accounts were taken "off the record" as standard and are used in the following analysis under strict conditions of pseudonymity. Academic procedure concerning anonymity would usually entail changing all places, organisations, and names, but to avoid entirely decontextualising the data, the descriptions of participant biographies have been reduced to their lowest useful common denominator (e.g., "a CGTN journalist based in Nairobi").

Informed consent was sought before all interviews, and participants were provided with consent and participant information forms. Consent was, in most cases, provided verbally, as most of the respondents did not want to provide a paper trail of their participation. I took pains to ensure they understood the nature my research, that I was undertaking a post-graduate research project, and that the results could eventually appear in a publicly-available thesis or in academic articles. I have endeavoured to make drafts of outputs available to participants at every turn so that they could ensure they were being represented fairly, and that they were content with the measures taken. They were also made aware that they could withdraw their consent at any time without reason.

Since all research took place digitally, the importance of digital security of the employed mediums and storage of data has been paramount, particularly in relation to the increased risk of data surveillance by the Chinese state in recent years. Whilst the choice of

interview medium was limited by freely available technologies, the riskiest (such as WeChat) were avoided, and participants were offered their own choice of which medium to use. As such, in many cases, participants chose WhatsApp as its end-to-end secure encryption, whilst not fool-proof, offered the greatest level of security. They were also encouraged, in most cases, to take part from their own homes, using a secure connection, rather than public or business networks, to minimise the risk of surveillance. All data was stored securely on an encrypted, password-protected hard drive, and will be securely deleted at the end of the period of study.

5. CGTN Africa: a case study

This chapter provides and introduction to the case study of this thesis: CGTN Africa; its operations; its workforce; and their practices. It begins by providing a history of CGTN Africa, then broadly outlines its position within CCTV today, using the language and toolkit of field theory to untangle the station's historical trajectory. It also describes the internal organisations of its operations today, its array of programming, and staff structure.

CGTN Africa: a brief history

This section draws on secondary literature to provide a brief history of CGTN Africa, partially in order to provide context, but also to illustrate how a news organisation's position in a field can alter over time, and how this alteration affects the type of news it attempts to produce. This demonstrates how CGTN Africa has attempted to negotiate two overarching but seemingly incoherent goals over its short lifetime: first, fulfilling its role as a government mouthpiece; and second, its desire to establish itself as a reputable international news organisation. In the course of this history, we can see CGTN (both as a part of CCTV, and, later, apart from it) swinging away from and back towards the Party-state over time, and how its approach to international journalism – that is, how it has attempted to accumulate symbolic capital in the global journalistic field – is intimately connected to these oscillations. This helps to illuminate the relationship between layers of fields and species of capital. This history plots the general course of CGTN from its origins in local TV, through the development of CCTV as a powerful national broadcaster, to its emergence as a global player today.

From humble beginnings

CGTN Africa can trace its history back to 1 May 1958, when the inaugural broadcast of Beijing TV beamed out to just thirty television sets (Li 1991). This somewhat inauspicious launch was supposedly the result of an abrupt reaction by Mao Zedong to reports that the Kuomintang government in Taiwan was set to establish its own station later that year. Further regional channels were launched in Harbin and Shanghai later that year. As Zhao and Guo argue, this genesis demonstrates from the outset the "inextricable linkages between television [and] the Communist Party's nationalistic ambitions," and that "[f]rom its inception, Chinese television was institutionally and ideologically incorporated into the Party's pre-existing media system

as a propaganda mouthpiece" (2005, 522). This system into which Chinese television emerged was one founded around the interventionist Maoist approach to cultural policy, in which the arts are subservient to politics, with a "greater relative emphasis, compared to Western traditions of art as critical vanguard, on the responsibility of art in the normalization of society" (Zhu 2012, 14). In Bourdieusian terminology, then, CGTN's predecessor began life as a producer of political-bureaucratic, rather than symbolic, products; that is, didactic propaganda, rather than news.

Throughout the Maoist period, radio and newspapers remained the primary media in China. Penetration of television sets in the country was extremely low, and there was also a dearth of both technical expertise and infrastructure, particularly following the suspension of technical support from the Soviet Bloc following the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s. The chaos within Chinese society during the turmoil and disasters of the late 1950s and 1960s further disrupted the development of television broadcasting. During the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962), Beijing TV aired light entertainment variety shows to provide diversion as millions of Chinese citizens starved to death, a decision condemned as "vulgar" by contemporary observers. Then during Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Party cadres attacked TV stations as possible sites of revisionist thought, forcing the closure of many local operators, and shutting Chinese television off from the outside world, including cancelling content-sharing agreements with VISNEWS (Zhao and Guo 2005, 523). By the end of the Cultural Revolution, television remained severely underdeveloped across China, and Beijing TV faced a deeply uncertain future.

New party, new approach

Following the death of Mao in 1976, the Party began to revaluate Chinese television's role as part of its greater project of "Reform and Opening Up." In 1978, Beijing TV was reorganised as a centrally-controlled national channel, China Central Television (CCTV). The following year, advertising was introduced into the Chinese media space for the first time. Though television audiences were initially small, as China's reform programme swiftly brought about widespread improvement in economic conditions, more and more Chinese citizens began tuning in, and the potential profits of advertising increased (Lull 1991). Television also began to replace radio as the most important means of political communication in China, with the CCP's official prime-time daily news programme moving from the Central People's

Broadcasting Station (CPBS – now China National Radio) to CCTV's *Xinwen Lianbo* ("News Simulcast" - 新闻联播) in 1982 (Zhao and Guo 2005). The same year, the CCP created the Ministry of Radio and Television (MRT) – a governing body responsible for the day-to-day administration of media in China, under the direct supervision of the State Council – augmenting its means of controlling content. Simultaneously the CCP began detaching itself from the financial burdens of its vast media apparatus, fixing the levels of subsidies it provided to news organisations in 1984, with CCTV left to cover the rest of its own expenses (Zhu 2012).

CCTV was now simultaneously attempting to increase its audience share against fierce competition from regional TV stations, many of whom were quickly developing popular content and importing foreign programming to satisfy image-hungry consumers, whilst fulfilling its role as a means for communicating party ideology to the masses, reflecting its transition "from a state-subsidized propaganda operation to an entertainment-oriented mass medium with both propaganda and commercial objectives" (Zhao and Guo 2005, 524). Few institutions more fully captured the political, economic, and ideological contradictions of the reform period than CCTV, becoming the primary sites of contestation for the differing socio-political forces in Chinese society at the time (Lull 1991).

The most successful and controversial result of this web of conflicting political and economic forces at CCTV was the 1988 documentary *Heshang* ("River Elegy" - 河殇), a high-brow six-episode assault on authoritarianism and traditional Chinese culture, using the silting-up of the Yellow River as a metaphor for China's need to integrate with the global capitalist order. As Zhao and Guo argue, "[n]o single media text more forcefully expressed the ideological orientations of [the] reformist ethos," and it was met with approval from reformist Party figureheads like Deng Xiaoping – and condemnation from conservatives such as Vice-President Wang Zhen – whilst also being so popular that, following its initial broadcast run in June 1988, CCTV reran the show (albeit a revised version) in August the same year (Zhao and Guo 2005, 525–26). This illustrates that the unique blend of political-bureaucratic and economic capital that CCTV accumulated in the reform period protected its autonomy in equal measure from the forces of market and state, allowing it to produce truly symbolic products like *Heshang*.

As the reform era came to a bloody end during the student protests of 1989, this newfound sense of journalistic autonomy continued to influence decision-making at CCTV. As

Lull has noted, this period was the "most dramatic break from China's generally restrictive journalistic tradition" (1991, 188). The events in Tiananmen Square were played out on live television, featuring the accounts and opinions of the protestors, despite warnings and directives issued by the CCP to prevent such coverage in the media. CCTV briefly occupied a position in the Chinese journalistic field which enabled it to report on a domestic protest movement sympathetically, refusing to give the final word to the Party line.

The come down

The events of early 1989 were the high-water mark for CCTV's journalistic autonomy from the Party-state, and arguably the closest CCTV would ever come to the symbolic pole of the journalistic field. Retribution from the CCP was swift and vicious. The Party declared martial law on 20 May, and CCTV's premises were occupied by soldiers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), with journalists arrested for having made "serious mistakes" in their coverage (Lull 1991, 192). After the bloodshed in Tiananmen Square on 4 June, CCTV's coverage quickly returned to the Party line, producing programmes like *A Record of the June Turbulence in Beijing*, which outlined the supposed restraint of the PLA in dealing with the "turmoil," airing the arrests and trials of the supposed "counter-revolutionaries," and returning the voices and faces of Party leaders to television screens to re-establish a sense of calm and continuity.

Reflecting on the period leading up to the events of 1989, the CCP moved to significantly strengthen its control and oversight over the ideological line of journalistic content at CCTV and other news organisations into the future but simultaneously continued along the path of marketisation of media organisations. As such, during the 1990s, state subsidies for media organisations were slashed, with government contributions to CCTV diminishing from CN¥45 million in 1991 to CN¥34 million in 1996, before being scrapped entirely by 1997, leaving the organisation hurtling towards self-reliance (Zhu 2012). However, CCTV more than coped with this change. Its advertising revenues grew eightfold between 1992 and 1999, from to CN¥560 million to CN¥4.415 billion, and the organisation showed remarkable ingenuity in finding new revenue streams, including branching out into non-media industries (Zhao and Guo 2005).

And yet, this extremely successful transition from state-funded mouthpiece to self-sustaining powerhouse occurred as CCTV "retreated from active engagement with elite political and cultural debates […] and shied away from any attempts to assert relative

autonomy from the Party[-]state" (Zhao and Guo 2005, 526–27). Part of the reason for this is the way that the Party reformed its propaganda apparatus: whilst overall ideological direction of information and media continued to be the purview of the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the CCP (CCPPD), this small body of Party members left the day-to-day implementation of its directives in the hands of the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT).[4] SARFT was given wide ranging powers in order to keep media on a short leash, such as controlling senior appointments in CCTV's management structure, having final say on programming schedules and content, regulating signal coverage, and licencing production companies. Organisations under its mandate – including CCTV – were required to contribute a percentage of their profits over to SARFT in order to fund the costs of their own oversight, removing the financial strain of this bureaucracy away from the Party-state (Zhu 2012).

Moreover, much of the CCPPD's guidance – and, as a result, SARFT's implementation of it – continues to be issued ad hoc through non-legislative administrative statutes, departmental rules, and internal documents (*neican* – 内参). These guidelines have remained fairly consistent since 1989, and can be broadly categorised under the following themes:

1. Think positive.
2. No bad news during holiday periods or on sensitive dates.
3. Don't mention problems that can't be easily solved.
4. Talk up the economy.
5. Demonise the US (and Japan).
6. Don't promote the views of the enemy.
7. Use international news to mould public opinion on issues relating to China.
8. Recycle old propaganda.

[4] SARFT was a 1996 reorganisation of the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television (MRFT) which had replaced the earlier MRT in 1986. SARFT was reorganised as the State Administration of State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) between 2013-2018, and television and radio have been under the purview of the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) since 2018. For the sake of ease and continuity, I will continue to use the acronym SARFT to describe this body.

The issuing of this guidance has consistently re-emphasised the priority of following the Party line over and above concerns about journalistic autonomy, and has led to a general tendency towards conservatism in editorial decision-making at organisations like CCTV (Brady 2006).

However, the relationship between CCTV and the Party-state – as represented by the CCPPD (party) and SARFT (state) – is symbiotic. That is, while it submits to significant political control and regulation of its structure and content, CCTV's dominant position in the Chinese journalistic field – illustrated by its strong performance in accumulating advertising revenue – is partially a result of the protections that the Party-state affords it. CCTV has been able to maintain a virtual monopoly over national television broadcasting in China because SARFT has continually fixed the system to CCTV's benefit. For example, SARFT issued a "must carry" provision for all TV channels in China that they had an "undeniable obligation and responsibility" to broadcast important CCTV programming (including commercials) as part of Chinese media's ideological mission, with the advertising revenues accruing to CCTV. When local stations ignored this policy or complained that it was unfair, SARFT revoked the stations' broadcasting licenses, closed them down, or merged them with more compliant networks (Zhao and Guo 2005; Zhu 2012). The two organisations work together to fulfil their mutual objectives: so long as CCTV continues to produce ideologically appropriate content that SARFT can use to enforce the Party line on Chinese television broadcasting, SARFT ensures CCTV's continued market domination. Whilst its content is no longer didactic in the way that propaganda had been in the Maoist period, CCTV today still broadly conforms to the Party's notion that media must first serve the Party and the people, and it has profited from this approach (Zhu 2012).

This illustrates that the Chinese journalistic field is primarily characterised by its domination by the political-bureaucratic field, demonstrated by the level of influence that the Party-state can exert on journalism in China more broadly, and, as such, the field is not very autonomous. CCTV's domination of the journalistic field is built on its homology with the field's structure: that is, it has accumulated significant political-bureaucratic capital through its symbiotic relationship with the CCP's propaganda apparatus. Put in the simplest terms, it has "played the game," and, in doing so, established itself as *the* prototypical Chinese television broadcaster.

CCTV "going out"

Throughout the Cultural Revolution, China was effectively shut off to the rest of the world, and television had, likewise, looked inwards. Even with the period of "Reform and Opening Up," CCTV continued to focus on its domestic development. It was not until 1986 that the first origins of what would eventually morph into CGTN emerged, with the launch of "English News" on CCTV-1: a single, fifteen-minute daily broadcast, comprising an English translation of the headlines from the Chinese-language national news programme, *Xinwen Lianbo* (Jirik 2008) – humble beginnings. Even into the early 1990s, the sum total of CCTV's efforts to broadcast internationally comprised the mailing of programmes recorded onto VHS tapes to Chinese embassies around the world, with the time-lag involved in transit meaning that the news was often already obsolete when it arrived at its destination (Zhu 2012). That is, at this stage, CCTV was not part of the global journalistic field.

This direction altered dramatically with the appointment of Yang Weiguang as President of CCTV in 1992. Yang was determined to use CCTV's growing financial muscle to create a global television network and was also able to convince the CCPPD that CCTV could play a major role in China's international outreach projects. Within the year, a Chinese-language channel, CCTV-4, had been launched that would serve as the progenitor of CCTV's international project. By the end of 1993, CCTV-4 was supplying eight-hours of programming via satellite to a station in the USA and landed under a similar arrangement in Japan in 1996. Despite being targeted narrowly at diaspora audiences and relying heavily on Western news organisations for its content, this provided a launching-pad for further efforts (Zhu 2012). In 1995, CCTV founded its English news team under the leadership of Jian Heping, producing three daily half-hour English-language programmes to be broadcast on the primarily Chinese-language CCTV-4. This team formed the core of a new, 24-hour English-language international channel, CCTV-9, aimed at a global English-speaking audience, launched in September 2000 by Yang's successor, Zhao Huayong, on a satellite footprint that aimed to cover 98 per cent of the globe (Jirik 2008).

These rapid developments to CCTV's international infrastructure were all set against the backdrop of a renewal of China's "Opening Up" reforms in the aftermath of Deng's 1992 Southern Tour. The exceptionally negative global reaction to the events of 1989 had highlighted the need to improve China's international reputation, many senior Party figures became convinced of the need to invest in a proactive international cultural programme

which could help foster an image of China's benignity to the world, encourage cross-cultural exchanges, and boost trade. CCPPD chief, Liu Yunshan, summarised this notion in 2002, stating that increasing China's soft power was "an urgent strategic task," and that a "more powerful communication capacity [means more] effective global influence" (quoted in Edney 2012, 905).

Also, in light of China's long-awaited entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in December 2001, there was serious concern in the CCP that, if China failed to develop a more robust media which could compete in the global marketplace to which they were about to be exposed, "the party might have no significant media mouthpieces to control" (Zhu 2012, 31). The CCP therefore began to adopt a policy of "media industrialisation" (*chanyehua* – 产业化). Domestic media began to be massed into multimedia conglomerates which were both substantial enough to resist market pressures and easier to control ideologically (Zhao 2000). Meanwhile, China's international media would need investment and a coherent strategy to be able to compete at the global level.

In 2001, SARFT Chairman Xu Guangchun launched an ambitious, long-term plan for CCTV's "going out," with the aims of landing a full range of programming in Western Europe and America within five years and creating a consolidated multi-language global service within fifteen years. CCTV-9 was, in Xu's words, to become "China's CNN" (quoted in Jirik 2008, 84). Part of this process meant refocusing CCTV-9 into a serious rolling-news channel. In 2003, Li Changchun, the Standing Committee's propaganda chief, outlined that the channel's role moving forward would be to present Chinese perspectives on world news issues in a timely fashion. CCTV-9 was relaunched as CCTV-International in May 2004, with a targeted global news schedule of programming, including hourly news bulletins, operating under the slogan: "Your window on China and the world".[5] This indicated CCTV's imminent entry into the global journalistic field as part of a top-down strategy implemented by the CCP to, in the words of Chinese President Jiang Zemin, "let China's voice be broadcast around the world" (quoted in Zhu 2012, 31).

[5] CCTV also began to increase its language platforms during this period, with a joint Spanish- and French-language channel also launched in 2004 (before splitting into separate language-channels in 2007), followed by Arabic- and Russian-language channels in 2009. A planned Portuguese-language service has not yet been delivered.

A global model

One of CCTV-9's first major projects was to provide international coverage of the build-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. However, despite CCTV-International's attempts to focus on improvements to public security and air quality in Beijing, Western media instead directed its attention to riots in Tibet and protests along the route of the torch relay. This failure to control the narrative provided a turning point for CCTV-International by proving to the CCP that, in its current format, it lacked the power to set news agendas on an international level. In 2009, the CCP announced a humungous injection of capital, believed to be in the region of CN¥45 billion, into its central media organisations specifically to fund their overseas expansion, with CCTV-International being the major recipient (Wu and Chen 2009).

This money from the CCP finally enabled CCTV-International to try and live up to its name (altered again to CCTV-News in 2010). By 2009, the channel only employed sixty-three foreign correspondents worldwide (Zhang 2010), but this was about to change. On 11 January 2012, CCTV-Africa opened its production hub in Nairobi – the first Chinese overseas television production centre. CCTV-Africa was operating on a scale beyond anything ever seen at CCTV-News before, initially employing around one-hundred journalists and production staff, the majority of whom were African (Si 2014, 10). A month later, a similar production centre for CCTV-America was launched in Washington D.C. Shortly, CCTV-News had amassed a genuinely international infrastructure, enabling it to produce international news from around world, a move which propelled it into competition with other global networks.

The amount of content CCTV-Africa produced was initially modest, with a single hour-long news bulletin each day, before quickly expanding to include a further hour-long prime-time news bulletin (*Africa Live*), a weekly current-affairs talk show (*Talk Africa*), and a documentary series (*Faces of Africa*). Over time, the size of the station and the amount of programming steadily increased. In 2014, a weekly business show (*Global Business: Africa*) and a weekly sports show (*Match Point*) were added to the station's schedule. These shows are broadcast on a single shared 24/7 global channel, with content from each hub (Beijing, Nairobi, and Washington D.C.) airing throughout the day on a time-zone system. By mid-2015, CCTV-News' content was made up of roughly 117 hours (70%) of programming a week from Beijing, the Washington D.C. hub (CCTV-America) aired 36.5 hours (22%), and Nairobi (CCTV-Africa) contributed around 14.5 hours (9%) (Jirik 2016).

By this point, the functioning of the channel (and the various other language channel run by CCTV) had become complex enough that it was decided to reform CCTV-News as an internal division of CCTV. On 31 December 2016, and almost exactly on schedule with Xu Guangchan's "going out" plan, CCTV-News became the China Global Television Network (CGTN). The change from a "central" to a "global" television channel was more than just semantic and represented a broader shift in how CGTN attempted to differentiate itself from CCTV. CGTN adopted a new slogan along with its new name: "See the difference," a highly ambiguous phrase which suggests, in the words of CGTN-English Controller Liu Cong, that CGTN wished to provide a platform for "a variety of voices, not just the voice of China, but also voices of other Asian countries, of African countries and of Latin American nations" (quoted in Li and Wu 2018, 42).

These sentiments broadly reflect a saying in Chinese media: "treat insiders and outsiders differently. Be strict internally, relaxed to the outside" ("*nei wai you bie, neijin wai song*" – **内外有别, 内紧外松**) (Brady 2000, 943). The rebrand of CGTN was a clear and obvious attempt to internationalise itself, and, in doing so, detach itself to some extent from the Party line. CGTN Africa has adopted a ream of "glocalisation" strategies aimed at "Africanising" its content, staffing, and structure (Hu, Ji, and Gong 2018, 73). In short, CGTN made active efforts to look and sound less belligerently Chinese than CCTV, and to operate more like its competitors. In many ways, it was following the guidance of observers like Jirik – who had himself worked at CCTV-9 for several years – who had argued that CGTN would be best served by attempting to "appeal, attract, and seduce by appearing to be what it is not, namely, by presenting itself as an analogue of other 24/7 news channels like the BBC and CNN" (2016, 3547).

The rebrand therefore illustrated CGTN's apparent willingness to "play the game" in the global journalistic field: it began to shift position towards the symbolic pole of the global journalistic field. Bourdieu argues that producers at the symbolic pole of journalism are influenced primarily by other journalists and news gathering organisations (i.e., journalistic logic), as opposed to by external influences (i.e., governments or advertisers), in how they gather and produce news. This shift is reflected in the content CGTN Africa began to produce, which is discussed in the analysis below.

Never far enough

By the time it was rebranded, CGTN Africa was producing a broad, consistent news-based selection of programmes. At a superficial level, at least, the channel looked and sounded much like its competitors. However its operations continued to be primarily bankrolled by the CCP, with other funding coming from CCTV's domestic revenue – the actual mix of these two funding sources, though, remains unclear (Si 2014). The continued financial support of the CCP meant that CGTN Africa retained its place as one of the richest news organisations operating across the continent, and all without having to sell a single subscription or advertising slot. This immense wealth was a major factor in enabling CGTN Africa to push out the boundaries of its journalism rapidly, hiring highly qualified journalists and giving them the resources to cover the continent in-depth (Gagliardone and Pál 2017). That is, in Bourdieusian terms, the financial capital which CGTN Africa relied upon in its attempt to move towards the symbolic pole originated in the Chinese political-bureaucratic field, pulling it simultaneously towards a heteronomous (national) pole.

The CCP's patronage of CGTN allowed it, through several mechanisms (discussed further in Chapter 5), to continue to influence editorial decision-making at CGTN Africa. That is, despite its attempts to move towards the symbolic pole, CGTN Africa continued to have a role to play as a government mouthpiece and/or Chinese soft power instrument. In 2018, CGTN (as a part of CCTV) was integrated, along with CRI and CNR, into the China Media Group (CMG), a central media conglomerate, referred to as the "Voice of China." This move was prompted, in the words of an editorial published in *People's Daily*, by the need for "'super voice' to drown out the anti-China propaganda" (Stone 2018), helping CGTN to fulfil the mantle laid down for it by Xi Jinping to present a

> *clear Chinese perspective, and an expansive global way of looking at things in order to tell Chinese stories properly, transmitting China's voice, allowing the world to see a colourful and three-dimensional China, and creating a favourable image of China as a builder of peace in the world, as a contributor to global development, and as a protector of the international order.*
>
> (quoted in Bandurski 2021)

As such, news stories related to China – and, specifically, China-Africa relations – have come to form a significant component of CGTN Africa's overall production, despite the channel's supposedly global outlook. Likewise, many elements of the CCPPD guidance discussed above – positive reporting, a focus on business news, a demonisation of the United States, etc. – have continued to influence the editorial agenda at CGTN Africa more generally.

For CGTN, then, "See the difference" not only came to represent its difference from CCTV, but also, paradoxically, its continued alignment with many of CCTV's journalistic values and difference from its (primarily Western) competitors. For example, positive reporting, in particular, has come to form – at least rhetorically – a decisive commitment to report on Africa in a new light that diverges from what was considered the commonplace negative representation of the "Hopeless Continent" in international news cycles (Marsh 2018). That is, CGTN Africa also sought to establish distinction between itself and its competitors by importing heteronomous capital from the Chinese journalistic field – which, as noted above, is dominated by the Chinese political-bureaucratic field – into the global field.

News production at CGTN Africa today, then, is influenced by a complicated position – an organisational schizophrenia, perhaps – split between its desire to be a truly global player *and* fulfilling its role as a mouthpiece for the Party that funds it. This brief overview of its genesis has drawn attention to the dynamism of even an apparently young news organisation over time. It illustrates how from its earliest inception as Beijing TV, through the emergence of CCTV as a national broadcaster, to its own global relaunch, CGTN Africa has moved position between autonomous (symbolic, global capital) and heteronomous (political-bureaucratic, national capital) poles in the global journalistic field.

It has also begun to demonstrate how these shifts in field position relate to shifts in news production at CGTN Africa as the station has adopted strategies of similarity (orthodoxy) and difference (heresy) in relation to the *doxa* of the global journalistic field in order to advance its position in it. The following section now moves from this overview to a richer description of CGTN Africa today, first by assessing its current position in the global journalistic field, before interrogating the relation between this position and current forms of news production at the station.

CGTN Africa today

CGTN Africa forms just one part of a global news organisation, CGTN, which is itself an international news-oriented internal division of CCTV, as part of the wider central media apparatus of the Chinese Party-state. CGTN draws upon a large, multinational staff based in four major hubs – Beijing, Nairobi, Washington D.C., and London[6] – and dozens of smaller satellite bureaus around the globe to produce content for a rolling 24/7 news channel that operates on a time-zone model. Though the central hub in Beijing determines the overall editorial line of the channel, and all broadcasts are channelled to CGTN's satellite network via Beijing, giving it ultimate control over the transmission, each hub operates with a degree of editorial independence over its localised content, programming, and newsgathering (Jirik 2016). It is therefore important to consider CGTN Africa, CGTN America, and CGTN Europe as relatively autonomous from CGTN itself, based in Beijing.

The move towards the production of globally-oriented content has been part of a gradual process of internationalisation of Chinese media which only really took off from the mid-to-late 1990s onwards and which remains a site of contestation on the channel. Today, CGTN has adopted an audience/user-oriented approach to its newsgathering, with CGTN chief Jiang Heping stating that "[o]ur users are fundamental. And our audience is our 'God'" (Jiang 2017). According to its controller, Liu Cong, the English-language channel is targeted towards a global audience (quoted in Li and Wu 2018, 42), and, on its website, states that it aims "to provide global audiences with accurate and timely news coverage" (CGTN n.d.). The internationalisation of CGTN's content, provided by the decentralisation of its newsgathering and production infrastructure into semi-autonomous hubs which aim to deliver localised and diverse perspectives, is a source of significant pride for the organisation, as indicated by its website, which states that:

> *Headquartered in Beijing, CGTN has three production centers, located in Nairobi, Washington D.C. and London, all staffed with international professionals from around the world.*

[6] Whilst the 2021 Ofcom decision to withdraw CGTN's UK broadcasting licence halted the transmission of CGTN content in the UK, the London hub still operates as the production centre for CGTN's European newsgathering activities.

> *Adhering to the principles of objectivity, rationality and balance in reporting, CGTN endeavors to present information from diverse perspectives.*
>
> (CGTN n.d.)

Yet, on the very same page, CGTN also notes its role in "promoting communication and understanding between China and the world, and enhancing cultural exchanges and mutual trust between China and other countries" (CGTN n.d.). Unlike organisations like Reuters, which are commonly accepted to have detached themselves from their original national fields (Bielsa 2008; Bunce 2012), statements like these indicate CGTN's persistent attachment to the Chinese journalistic field, and its role as part of the CCP's soft power machinery, which continue to have significant implications for news production at CGTN and its various hubs, including CGTN Africa.

Importance

Within the global journalistic field, CGTN Africa currently occupies a relatively liminal, dominated position. Management of the station sometimes argue that they are in direct competition with the likes of BBC Africa, AJE, and CNN, and, at least superficially, this appears to be the case. Jiang Heping claimed in 2017 that, overall, CGTN's TV channels were then watched by 387 million people in 170 countries worldwide; that content on CGTN's YouTube channel account had had 300 million views; and that CGTN has the world's most popular English-language Facebook account, with 52.69 million followers (Jiang 2017). As Li and Wu (2018) have noted, these numbers have risen exponentially over recent years, with CGTN's main Facebook page now having over 117 million likes, over double the BBC News' own 53.9 million likes. Whilst its television audiences are almost impossible to judge objectively, CGTN Africa has the following number of social media followers/subscribers:

Facebook – 4,559,853 (likes)
YouTube – 667,000
Twitter – 144,900
Instagram – 35,200[7]

[7] as of 14/10/2021.

On YouTube, its most popular upload, a three-minute *Africa Live* report on rhino poaching in South Africa, has over 51 million views, whilst it has a further 5 videos with between 3-5 million views, and 15 videos with between 1-3 million views, primarily from the documentary series *Faces of Africa* (CGTN Africa n.d.). This indicates that, generally, CGTN Africa is a relatively well-subscribed and followed service, though these numbers are slightly less on every count than BBC Africa's equivalent pages.

However, these numbers are only loosely connected to its position in the global journalistic field, which is never solely a reductive popularity contest. Despite its attempts to internationalise its content and, in many aspects of its conduct, "play the game" by looking and sounding like its competitors, CGTN Africa's news provision – and that of CGTN more broadly – remains poorly regarded by both other journalists and audiences. Whilst audience reception studies about CGTN Africa have been rarely undertaken, an early pilot study conducted in Kenya during 2013 argued that CCTV-Africa, at that point, faced serious problems with a "lack of awareness and sustained interest" in the channel (Gorfinkel et al. 2014, 85).

This lack of awareness also appeared to be the case amongst journalistic communities across Africa as well. Most of my participants – including those who had been on trips to China – admitted that they had had very little to no familiarity with either CGTN or CCTV prior to joining the organisation. After starting work, many continued to have issues explaining who they worked for when chasing sources and stories: "when I go to do a report or an interview and I say I'm the reporter from CGTN, they're like 'who?' They don't even know CGTN like that" (*FSN-22*). Another journalist similarly recalled that: "every time I was requesting an interview, I had to literally explain what CGTN is," adding that, because it was then called CCTV, "they would go, 'whoa, whoa, whoa! Are you news people, or are you putting closed circuit cameras up?" (*CGTN-3*).

Moreover, CGTN Africa appeared hold a low rank in the press review amongst both its international competitors and African news organisations. Staff at other news organisations did not appear to regularly review CGTN's programming to ensure that they were not missing out on important stories, suggesting that, in general, they had a low estimation of CGTN's newsgathering abilities. As a BBC Africa journalist told me,

> *You would never hear […] in the BBC, "oh yeah, I watched that story being done by CGTN and they did a good job." No! But you would hear someone say, "ah, but that Al Jazeera reporter has already done that story," […] or "man, did you see CNN Inside Africa […]," you know? So, the other "Big Two" […] come up, but CGTN rarely comes up in conversation.*
>
> (*CGTN-3*)

Staff at the BBC keep close vigil over news content produced by both AJE and CNN, illustrating the dominance of these "Big Three" in the field. Meanwhile, CGTN has sometimes struggled to even get smaller organisations to pay attention to its agenda. An ex-CGTN journalist, who had gone to work at eNCA, a South Africa-based continental news channel, admitted that: "we pay attention to CNN, we pay attention to the BBC, we pay attention to the other South African channels, and there is a Nigerian channel that we pay attention to, but no, unless there is something China-specific, I don't think anyone is paying attention [to CGTN]" (*CGTN-13*).

These statements paint a rather bleak picture of CGTN Africa's position in the global journalistic field, and one that seems to contradict its overall size, wealth, or social media following. The question therefore presents itself as to why CGTN Africa has apparently made such little impact in the field. Bourdieu suggests that news organisations gain legitimacy through the possession of two different forms of capital: financial capital, represented by circulation, audience-share, and market revenue; and symbolic capital, which is represented by recognition and respect from other journalists and news organisations. In general, most news organisations favour one form or the other, and only a few have possessed large amounts of both. What capital, then, does CGTN Africa possess today?

A tale of two capitals

CGTN Africa possesses a large amount of financial capital; it is an immensely wealthy organisation. At the simplest level, financial capital allows news organisations to operate at both scale (more reporters tend to equal more news content) and depth (higher quality reporters tend to equal higher quality news content). Most news organisations around the world are (or attempt to be) self-sustaining, meaning that they work on a circular economic model in which they invest financial capital into their reporting to reap the direct and

immediate financial benefits of larger audiences and advertising revenues. The financial capital they possess therefore emanates from the economic field, meaning that these organisations are dominated by an economic logic. That is, there tends to be a constant demand for types of journalism that will increase ratings and sell subscriptions.

However, for CGTN Africa, this is not the case. The station continues today to create none of its own income. There are no adverts on the channel, and it is not subject to ratings. Instead, it is funded primarily by the Chinese Party-state. In this sense, it is not unlike some of its competitors: AJE's operations are heavily subsidised by the Qatari state; the BBC also does not advertise, and their income is governed by a licence fee subject to UK government control; however, it is unlike CNN, who do operate on a self-sustaining economic model. For journalists at CGTN, this means they are protected from the influences of economic logic on their practice. As one CGTN journalist put it: "I know what advertising […] can do to journalism: it can be extremely damaging. So, without the pressure for advertising, I'm really not under any particular pressure to push ratings through hyped stories, so I can be really laid back and do a nice, objective story" (*CGTN-17*).

The implicit thinking behind this statement is that objectivity and reliability are journalistic goods *in-of-themselves*. That is, these are *doxic* qualities that provide an organisation with a source of symbolic capital.

Unlike economic capital, which is an immediate end-in-itself, symbolic capital has value as a means to an end. Its profits are deferred and disguised. Building a brand associated with a reputation for quality does not, in of itself, immediately accrue profits, but is likely to result in them over time. As Bunce has noted, today, "Reuters' symbolic capital is a profitable asset for the corporation. Its reputation for accuracy and speed is invaluable to [Thomson Reuters] as it tries to sell financial data services" (2012, 139). However, unlike Reuters, CGTN Africa has not yet developed a reputation on which can trade for profits in the global journalistic field. That is, it possesses low amounts of symbolic capital. Why, if it is free from economic constraints, has it failed to establish its brand?

One potential factor is age. As Casanova notes, "the richest spaces are the oldest" (2004, 52), and the relative youth of CGTN Africa in the global journalistic field compared to, say, the BBC or Reuters (founded in 1922 and 1851 respectively) means that, in the simplest terms, it has had less time to achieve a similar standing. As one journalist put it, people "know the BBC […] because they've been hearing [it] on the radio for years" (*FSN-22*). Yet, this can

only be partially the reason, since, despite being formed in 2006, AJE has rapidly built up a formidable reputation and is now considered one of the "Big Three" players in the global journalistic field.

More damaging has been the perception that CGTN Africa's reporting amounts to little more than CCP propaganda. A Western journalist who had worked at CGTN, told me that, in his view, "we were the marketing arm of China" (*CGTN-8*). This is because, whilst CCP patronage of CGTN Africa means the station doesn't need to chase profits, it makes its susceptible to political-bureaucratic control. The hanging possibility of interference leaves considerable room for doubt amongst CGTN Africa's peers and audiences, regardless of its efficacy.

Despite this, CGTN Africa continues to engage in expensive and time-consuming newsgathering activities for general news. As outlined above, commercial organisations like Reuters and CNN, whose aim is to create financial profits, accumulate symbolic capital by investing in reliable and objective news reportage, and work to transubstantiate that into financial capital over time. CGTN Africa, however, is not motivated by profit, and its incentive to produce general news is less clear. One possible explanation is that CGTN Africa aims to build its brand in order to bolster the CCP's soft power (Jirik 2016). That is, CGTN Africa's may be able to transmute its global symbolic capital into national political-bureaucratic capital – or, in other words, its journalistic reputation into Chinese soft power – over time. Indeed, it has been argued that this is exactly what other state-funded news organisations like the BBC, AJE, and VOA do (Wright, Scott, and Bunce 2020), and this would broadly fit with CGTN Africa's stated objectives.

CGTN Africa continues to pursue the accumulation of symbolic capital. The following sections will outline trends in its reporting and illustrate how the news that CGTN Africa produces is influenced in diverse ways by its existing capital structure: that is, *both* its low overall accumulation of symbolic capital, and its domination by financial capital emanating from the Chinese political-bureaucratic field.

CGTN covering Africa

CGTN Africa's day-to-day production operations are run from its Nairobi hub, which was opened in early 2012. This centre houses all CGTN Africa's administration and production

staff, as well as most of its cadre of journalists, with a smaller number of correspondents, freelancers, and agency reporters spread around the continent. It is a complex workplace containing several departments, teams, and desk with different responsibilities, discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. The consistent daily task of the hub since its launch has been to produce CGTN's flagship African news bulletin, *Africa Live*, which now airs twice daily at 10AM and 6PM (GMT). The hub also coordinates production for a daily African edition of CGTN's business show, *Global Business* (broadcast at 7PM GMT), a weekly African sports show, *Match Point* (broadcast on Saturdays at 6PM GMT), a weekly African current affairs talk show, *Talk Africa* (broadcast on Saturdays at 5.30PM GMT – repeated Sunday 8.30AM and 6.30PM), and a weekly documentary series, *Faces of Africa* (broadcast on Sundays at 9.30AM GMT – repeated Sunday 5.30PM and 11.30PM). There is also a large new media department which operates independently of (but sometimes in conjunction with) the newsroom and is responsible for producing content for the CGTN Africa website (referred to by staff as "the app") and its social media presence.

Today, on paper, CGTN Africa is scheduled to contribute roughly 19 hours of content to the CGTN 24/7 rolling news channel each week, or around 11 per cent of CGTN's total weekly output. The actual amount of content aired which is produced by Nairobi varies greatly week to week, as content produced across the various CGTN hubs is often incorporated into different shows across the channel where relevant. For example, CGTN Africa content is sometimes included on *The World Today*, CGTN's regular on-the-hour global news bulletin. Likewise, content produced in Beijing, Washington D.C., or London is often featured on CGTN Africa's flagship bulletin, *Africa Live*, where it is deemed appropriate. Moreover, there are now more shows on the channel that integrate content from across the four production centres to give a global outlook on the news, such as *Global Business* and *Sports Scene*.

However, despite these marked increases over the past decade and the increasing integration of African content into CGTN's wider programming, the total amount of content produced from CGTN Africa has plateaued in recent years, with its overall contribution to the channel today only marginally more than that recorded by Jirik (2016). Considering this, then, we might ask how CGTN Africa's position in the global journalistic field has affected its overall programming schedule, the stories it has elected to tell, and the way it has chosen to tell them.

Organisation of work at CGTN Africa

CGTN Africa has a continental infrastructure, but most of its staff are based in its Nairobi production hub. Work at the station is divided into three different language-blocks. The largest of these is the English-language division, which produces content for CGTN Africa to be broadcast on CGTN's 24-hour English-language channel. There is also a small but significant cadre of Chinese correspondents based in Nairobi who are responsible for creating Chinese-language content about Africa to be broadcast on CCTV's domestic Mandarin channels. Finally, there are a number of journalists based in parts of Francophone Africa that create content for CGTN's French-language channel, CGTN Français. Whilst there is some degree of organisational cross-over between these divisions, they operate more-or-less independently of one another in fulfilling their respective tasks.

CGTN Africa has a de facto racialised management structure: senior management positions are exclusively filled by Chinese staff. All three language-divisions fall under the purview of the CGTN Africa Bureau Chief, whilst the day-to-day operations of the English-language division are overseen by his deputy, the Managing Editor. Media operations within the English-language division are then managed by Chinese supervisors who – nominally, at least – run the various departments that work to produce CGTN Africa's gamut of programming. Chinese staff filter through the station on a loose rotational system, on average staying in Nairobi for four-to-five-year stints – though some stay much longer. The rotational system for Chinese staff at CGTN Africa is not as formalised as that at Xinhua, where staff serve for strict two-, three-, or four-year deployments depending on pre-defined levels of hardship (Pál 2017). Rather, the length of their stay depends more on the context on the ground in Nairobi, as well as opportunities for career growth and progression, with CGTN Africa often a stepping-stone towards more senior postings at CGTN America, CGTN Europe, or in China.

Below the Chinese supervisors, all positions in CGTN Africa's English-language division are filled by non-Chinese staff – a cosmopolitan mix of Kenyan local-nationals and international expatriate (non-Kenyan African and non-African) journalists. Each department has a non-Chinese deputy supervisor, usually referred to as "team leader," who often handles much of the day-to-day management of the department. Whilst today many of the "team leaders" are Kenyans, historically white international staffers have tended to hold more

senior or prestigious positions or have been paid much more than their Kenyan peers in similar roles.

The daily news routine at CGTN Africa is built around producing content for a variety of shows and platforms, with different departments responsible for different output, though with some degree of staff crossover and content-sharing between departments.

The newsroom

The majority of journalistic staff at the station are employed in the Nairobi newsroom, split between two desks. The News Desk is primarily responsible for producing the twice-daily hour-long weekday news bulletin, *Africa Live*. Work is divided into morning and afternoon shifts, with the morning shift responsible for producing the 10AM GMT (1PM EAT) bulletin, and the afternoon shift producing the 6PM GMT (9PM EAT) "prime-time" bulletin. The delivery of each bulletin is the responsibility of the duty line producer.

Most reporters work directly under the supervision of the News Desk, whilst there are also two semi-autonomous beats with their own non-Chinese editors, Business and Sports, as well as scriptwriters who – amongst other responsibilities – produce stories for the bulletin from news agency wires. The newsroom also includes the Assignments Desk, which works with the News Desk to provide planned coverage of events and supervises the work of the correspondents based around the continent. The Assignments Desk has a Chinese supervisor, but its primary day-to-day functions are administered by the Chief Planner.

The duty planner and duty line producer exert the most *active* influence over the day-to-day production of the newsroom. A morning meeting is held at 9AM EAT led by the duty planner, who runs through the planned coverage for the day. Next, the staff on shift can pitch stories. It is then up to the line producer to decide which stories make it into the rundown for the show and in what order. A Chinese member of staff – sometimes the managing editor, but sometimes a more junior supervisor – is usually present at the meeting to vet stories and report back to the bureau chief. Staff then break out of the meeting, which, on average, runs for forty-five minutes, and set to work on their assigned stories. The rundown then must be completed thirty minutes before it is due to air so that it can be vetted again by a Chinese member of staff. After the bulletin is aired at 1PM EAT, the afternoon shift arrives and there is handover meeting. In general, the prime-time bulletin repeats the content aired earlier, only adding updates to stories or breaking news coverage.

However, it is important to note that most of the journalistic input work at CGTN Africa occurs outside of the daily meetings. Firstly, there is a weekly planning meeting conducted on a Wednesday afternoon, involving only senior non-Chinese and Chinese staff, chaired by the chief planner. This meeting sets the broader agenda for the week ahead, identifying key stories that need to be covered across the continent, including stories that Beijing has instructed CGTN Africa to carry. The weekly plan then forms the basis for the daily plan presented by the duty planner at the daily morning meetings. Secondly, story pitches by reporters are often made outside of meetings. These are often discussed directly (or via email) with the reporter's "team leader," who, depending on the nature of the story, may choose to run it past their Chinese supervisor. This has tended to make editorial meetings at CGTN Africa fairly quiet, top-down affairs, since much of the work of deciding which stories to follow up occurs outside of the meeting room.

Digital news

Despite its humble beginnings (see Chapter 6), CGTN Africa's digital team has grown into an independent department of around fifteen individuals. It has its own dedicated reporters and planners, chases its own stories, and holds its own editorial meetings (though there is some degree of coordinated resources sharing, and the digital team is able to call upon assistance of country correspondents in order to chase stories from across the continent).

Other shows

In addition to *Africa Live*, CGTN Africa also contributes several other daily and weekly shows to CGTN's broadcast schedule. The business team – a semi-autonomous beat of the News Desk – produces a daily hour-long African edition of *Global Business*, which airs on weekdays at 7PM GMT (9PM EAT). The sports team, meanwhile, produces *Match Point*, which airs at 6PM on Saturdays. A weekly current affairs show, *Talk Africa*, is produced by an independent team which includes a Chinese supervisor, as well as an anchor, editor, and executive producer. This team sits in a separate office across the road from the main newsroom and holds its own editorial meetings. Finally, a Chinese supervisor oversees the production of CGTN Africa's documentary series, *Faces of Africa*, which airs at 9.30PM on Sundays, which is outsourced to local production companies.

6. CGTN Africa and the Global Journalistic Field

This chapter analyses journalistic practice at CGTN Africa from the perspective of its entry into the global journalistic field. As part one of the most powerful news-producing organisations in China, CGTN Africa has the potential to be a major player in the global field.

It "locates" CGTN Africa in the global journalistic field, examining how the dynamics of the global journalistic field have guided the organisational strategies of CGTN as it has sought to establish itself as a truly global news organisation. I not only suggest that there is a direct connection between CGTN Africa's position in the global journalistic field and the type of journalism it has tried – sometimes successfully, sometimes less so – to output, but that the CGTN Africa's approach is also reflective of a broader positional relationship between the global journalistic field and the Chinese journalistic field. That is, CGTN Africa has attempted to build layers of similarity and difference from its competitors into its journalism in order to valorise its possessed capital and advance its field position, based on a delicate balance of capital import and export strategies between two layers of fields.

Whilst this chapter draws heavily on the accounts of individual journalists working for CGTN Africa, its focus is squarely on CGTN Africa as an organisational agent – in direct competition with other newsgathering organisations, such as BBC Africa, Al Jazeera English (AJE), and CNN – and its quest to appropriate symbolic capital within the global journalistic field. A fuller account of how individual journalists at CGTN Africa influence (and are influenced by) these larger conflicts will be the subject of the subsequent chapter.

CGTN Africa (and CCTV more widely) is a particularly interesting case study because of its apparently liminal position in the field, despite possession of significant amounts of capital. As a comparatively new entrant to the global field, emanating from a relatively non-homologous national field, CGTN Africa has had to adopt a series of unique strategies in its attempt to establish itself as a global player. It is, therefore, in many ways, a most-different case to other field occupants, and can tell us a great deal about the structure of the global journalistic field. Further, it offers us the opportunity of better understanding the relationship between national and global fields.

Similarity or difference?

This chapter will focus on how the competition between CGTN Africa and its international rivals has affected journalistic practice at CGTN Africa. Global fields must be defined by their relative autonomy from other layers of fields (Buchholz 2016). This being so, global fields must therefore be governed by their own "principles of vision and division" of what is, in this case, journalism or not, or, more precisely, what is *international* journalism or not. As a series of common stakes – audiences and subscribers eager for foreign correspondence – developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the early competitors (Reuters, AP, AFP, etc.) established the prevailing *doxa* of the competition over international news within the global journalistic field, and these are, as Bielsa (2008) has demonstrated, essentially structured around the Western journalistic values (objectivity, timeliness, balance, etc.) of the national journalistic fields from which those early competitors emerged (Chalaby 1998).

Subsequent entrants to the field have had to work to establish their similarity with or difference from their competitors to valorise their possessed capital and advance their position in the field. Bielsa (2008) and Figenschou (2014) have demonstrated, for example, how AJE has sacrificed some of its alterity, integrating mainstream (orthodox) values into its contraflow strategies in order to be competitive in the field. Likewise, CGTN Africa has had to balance its alterity with its desire to be competitive, attempting to push journalistic boundaries whilst also remaining attentive to the Party line.

To do so, I argue, CGTN Africa has utilised a range of heterodox journalistic values in its journalistic production but has been careful to couch them within the existing field *doxa*. That is, the channel has engaged in boundary work (Gieryn 1983; Carlson 2015) to justify importing heteronomous (national, political-bureaucratic) capital into the field, with the aim of transforming the structure of the field and thereby valorising its possessed capital. Put simply, the CGTN Africa has subscribed to the "rules of the game," affirming its commitments to concepts like objectivity, timeliness, and balance which define what international journalism *is* today, but has simultaneously sought to redefine the meanings of these values to better reflect its own approach to journalism. In doing so, CGTN Africa has attempted to accumulate symbolic capital by carefully establishing its *distinction* from its competitors in many areas of its journalistic practice, whilst also balancing its approach by maintaining similarity in others. These strategies have included: the use of positive and constructive

reporting; a soft-touch approach to government relations; a comprehensive approach to African news; and a strong focus on digital news.

Positive reporting and constructive journalism

Amongst the heterodox journalistic practices that CGTN Africa has sought to import into journalistic practice at the station, the most important (and perhaps most contentious) has been the use of positive reporting and constructive journalism, two distinct but associated journalistic styles. Positive reporting encourages the prioritisation of positive, feel-good stories which celebrate collective efforts over negative news. Constructive journalism emphasises a solution-based framework for reporting, aiming to provide pathways to story resolution (Zhang and Matingwina 2016a). Whilst a focus on these values in China has been argued to have lead to heavily institutionalised and uncritical professional practice (Lull 1991; Zhao 2008), their "application to Africa may have different results" (Gagliardone 2013, 26).

There has been an increasing concern about the negativity of international media representations of Africa. As debates concerning a New World Communication Order (NWICO) raged during the 1970s and 1980s, scholars increasingly brought attention to the entanglement of the international news media within the structures of Western (neo-)colonialism and capitalism (Boyd-Barrett 1980). The concentration of journalistic capital in the West has meant the reification of Western ways of seeing in news content, as the news agencies spread Western journalistic models and values across the globe (Bielsa 2008).

International media coverage of Africa has been criticised for being "episodic, simplistic, and relentlessly negative" (Bunce 2015, 42). Built on an Western colonial view of Africa as inherently other and inferior (Mudimbe 1988), international media representation of Africa "can only be understood through a *negative interpretation* […] of all that is incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished, it's history reduced to a series of setbacks" (Mbembe 2001, 1). A Western-dominated media catering primarily to Western audiences has only zoomed in on the continent at its most shocking, violent and helpless (Franks 2013). This has led to the development of a discourse of "Afro-pessimism," epitomised by *The Economist*'s infamous 2000 "Hopeless Continent" cover.

The continuing frustration of many African journalists at this state of affairs was summed up to me by a Nigerian journalist at Xinhua who noted with disgust that stories about Boko Haram were the first thing that came up if you Googled his home country. An

experienced Kenyan journalist described how he felt that Western news values did not accurately reflect the lived realities of Africans: "When looking at the news values about "man bites dog" being what carries the day, and "if it bleeds it leads," it's very easy to just pick up the negatives, which eventually has the unintended consequence of painting an inaccurate picture of what Africa really is" (*CGTN-11*).

When it launched in 2012, CCTV-Africa made positive reporting the centrepiece of its journalistic strategy: as bureau chief Song Jianing maintained, "we hope to strengthen a positive image of Africa in Africa and worldwide" (quoted in Gagliardone 2013, 32). Many of the journalists I interviewed were keen to point out how much the concept of positive reporting on Africa resonated with them, and how this was a major factor in them choosing to work for CGTN Africa. A Kenyan journalist explained how CGTN "appealed to our hearts," adding that

> *I think they were clever in that, if you watch any African story on the BBC or CNN, it's always negative, so I think that is where [CGTN] scored [points], because they brought something new. We hadn't really seen people of a different race report positively about Africa, and that sold.*
>
> (*CGTN-1*)

What is apparent in such statements is that many journalists felt that CGTN Africa's approach to African news was genuinely ground-breaking. There was a sense that CGTN Africa offered opportunities to tell stories that other international news organisations had not provided in the past. A renowned Kenyan film producer explained to me how refreshing it was when they were hired to produce documentaries focusing on African independence leaders for CGTN Africa's *Faces of Africa* series:

> *[W]e'd been battling with channels for the last forty or fifty years […] to tell positive stories about good things that happen in Africa. It's always been a challenge […]. So, for someone to come to us as say, "listen, these all have to be positive," was really good. […] [T]hat was their mandate, which I give them credit for, that they really wanted to tell a different side.*
>
> (*CGTN-29*)

Their relief at finally being able to produce positive stories reveals the potential stories which had been ignored for decades by international media because they did not fit either the Western "Idea of Africa" as a place of violence, suffering, and failure (Mudimbe 1994), or the predominant sense of newsworthiness in the global journalistic field which tend to towards negativity, unexpectedness, and cultural proximity to primary (Western) audiences (Galtung and Ruge 1965). CGTN Africa, however, has been willing to go *out of its way* to tell these stories, regardless of whether they fit a conventional sense of newsworthiness or not, as one Kenyan journalist explained:

> *they felt that [positive stories] could be one of the differentiating aspects of their news. I think it was a good thing, because some of those positive stories will not lend themselves to just being told […]. So, when you have management at an organisation that […] wants to put in that investment, it's good. […] That is something that resonated with me.*
>
> (*CGTN-11*)

Positive reporting forms a key aspect of CGTN Africa's attempts to establish "differentiation" – or *distinction* – from its competitors, and accumulate symbolic capital in the global journalistic field by committing its heteronomous (Chinese/financial) capital seemingly *disinterestedly* – that is, with no apparent purpose other than to "tell Africa's true story."

Part of the reason for the success of this strategy has been morphological changes in the field. A large influx of new agents into a field in a short period can work to transform or conserve the existing field structures (Benson and Neveu 2005). Over the past few decades, the production of international news has shifted radically from Western foreign correspondents to local-national reporters. That is, African news is now much more likely to be produced by African journalists. These local-nationals – like most of my participants – have attempted to bring local perspectives to international reporting, and are far more aware of the dissonances between international news and the reality on the ground (Bunce 2015). By attempting to provide nuance and context to their reporting, these journalists have challenged the conventional sense of newsworthiness. One explained to me what they looked for in their stories:

> *what makes me decide that this is a story […] is "is this telling the true African story?" […] Yes, Africa is disease, poverty, and war, but Africa is also innovative, Africa is also abundant, Africa is also serene […]. I want to show the African story from my lens. You know, we don't just have lions rolling around the streets, right? We have electricity! We have running water! Hey, it's raining outside! The things that affect me, as an African, and as a Kenyan particularly, are the things that I would choose to write about.*
>
> (*CGTN-10*)

CGTN Africa entered a field that was already undergoing significant tectonic shifts in how local-national journalists attempted to go about their work. That is, there were significant homologies between CGTN's and local-national journalists' approaches. However, change within Western-based international news organisations has remained a "difficult synthesis" in which "structural and organisational barriers mean the news continues to be dominated by a Western-centric mode of reporting" (Bunce 2015, 45–46; Nyamnjoh 2005). Within the context of the tensions created by transformations and inertia in the field's structure, journalists and management at CGTN Africa have employed a legitimising narrative for positive reporting directly invoking the *doxa* of the global journalistic. Some of those I spoke to were at pains to point out to me that objectivity and balance – supposed lynchpins of journalistic professionalism – meant presenting both sides of Africa's story. A veteran Kenyan journalist at CGTN Africa mused: "for me, professionalism might be more about […] telling both sides of the story, and emphasising what's good, as opposed to emphasising what's bad and negative" (*CGTN-17*).

Taken out of context, these reflections may seem oxymoronic, but the broader point is that positive news stories produced at CGTN Africa balanced out the negative reporting of its competitors, telling a different side of the same story, and presenting a more objective and accurate picture of Africa overall: "What you are looking for at CGTN, you can't find at the BBC. […] When people look at CGTN, and then look at the BBC or CNN, they wonder if those three channels are covering the same continent" (*CGTN-17*). Likewise, a Kenyan journalist at CRI explained that a positive story wasn't any less the "truth" than a negative one, but that other news organisations wouldn't cover them if CRI didn't: "this story is about the truth, what has happened, and the benefits, and […] the disadvantages. I have to do this story,

because if I don't do this story, nobody else will!" (*CRI-23*). Many participants legitimised CGTN Africa's production by arguing that the stories they were covering were *as* objective as those of their competitors and contributed to a more balanced and accurate representation of Africa. The use of positive journalism was therefore carefully couched in the language of the existing field *doxa*, and exploited alterations in the field structure to allow CGTN Africa to accumulate symbolic capital.

The relative success of this strategy is suggested by the fact that several journalists I spoke to argued that CGTN Africa's positive approach had actively influenced journalistic practice at its competitors. An ex-CGTN journalist who now worked at BBC Africa, told me they felt that "we actually broke ground for positive reporting on the continent [at CGTN], because today I can see quite a lot of it on the BBC, […] there's literally both sides of the coin now getting told" (*CGTN-2*). A CGTN Africa journalist contended proudly that the station's approach had "rattled" its competitors:

> *[CGTN's] journalism has made the BBC come up with a programme similar to what we do. CNN has had some attempts to do a similar thing on Africa, something that brings the positive, Africa-rising narrative about Africa. Because China seems to have been breaking ground in that particular area, […] and it worried the other media, who then followed suit in some way […]. And I'm happy about that, that at least we've done a kind of journalism that has stirred interest in some very traditional, entrenched, and powerful quarters.*
>
> (*CGTN-17*)

Whether this is the case or not remains a matter of debate and an important area of future research. Comparative analyses of African news content produced by BBC Africa, CGTN Africa, and AJE have generally found that the differences in reportage between the competitors is fairly marginal (Marsh 2016; 2017; Li 2017a). Whilst some of this may be down to a shift towards more positive or constructive reporting styles at Western news organisations, Gagliardone and Pál (2017) suggest that the actual implementation of positive reporting at CGTN Africa remains inconsistent. Marsh has noted how news reports produced by CGTN Africa continue to fall onto Western stereotypes and utilise imagery produced by Western news agencies (2017).

It is also important to contextualise any changes in the way African reporting is produced at Western-based news organisations within the broader alterations that have occurred in the field. An ex-BBC Africa bureau chief was happy to give CGTN Africa praise for stimulating the debate around positive reporting but was equally keen to point out that the BBC had been discussing "solutions-focussed journalism" for many years (Kasriel 2016). As they explained: "[m]y mission when I was setting [the BBC's Nairobi production centre] up was to actually create a reservoir or repository of positive African stories that would actually change the Western perceptions in Western media of what Africa really is," though he admitted that this had not necessarily been successful (*BBC-28*). And, as Nothias (2020) has argued, foreign correspondents in South Africa and Kenya have increasingly engaged in what "postcolonial reflexivity," aligning with critiques of international representations of Africa, and acting on this awareness in their journalistic practice to attempt to present a more balanced picture of the continent in their stories. If CGTN Africa has accumulated symbolic capital through its positive approach to African news, this is potentially as much the result of it riding the more general wave of an "Africa Rising" narrative (Nothias 2014) as being the primary cause of this shift.

On the other hand, positive journalism has attracted significant criticism from a range of sources, which potentially undermines its symbolic value. In particular, the fact that positive reporting is essentially subsidised by the Chinese Party-state has led to persistent allegations that it is little more than a euphemism for CCP propaganda. A CGTN Line Producer told me that "it's very weird journalism […], fifty per cent of it is just showing what the Chinese […] are doing for the locals" (*CGTN-15*). Another CGTN journalist argued that it allowed a whitewashing of imbalances in China-Africa relations and attacked the oft-repeated notion from Chinese diplomats that China-Africa cooperation is mutually beneficial: "There is truth, and there is positivity. The truth, here, is that Africa is not such a bad place. It's the truth! But it is another thing to say 'win-win cooperation,' when, really, are we all winning?" (*CGTN-10*).

There was also a concern that, over time, the novelty of positive reporting had worn off, and CGTN Africa's stories had become repetitive or boring, with CGTN being criticised for lacking "a nose for the type of news and the presentation of stories that appeal to international audiences" (Varrall 2020, 9). An ex-CGTN Africa journalist, complained how the search for positive stories and softer news items had led to a lack of inventiveness at the

station, with coverage often falling back into weathered tropes of African reporting like wildlife and tribes:

> *I'd end up in a lot of arguments in the production meeting where […] everyone in the room goes "The Big Five!" "Safari!" "The Tribes of Africa!" And I'm like, "guys! No, no, no! We have the power to do anything we want, and we're just going to do this thing that already exists in the world?" […] Making a documentary about the fucking Masai Mara again! Wildebeest crossing a river with crocodiles!*
>
> (*CGTN-7*)

By importing the principles of positive reporting into the global journalistic field, CGTN Africa has attempted to accumulate symbolic capital in the field by differentiating itself from its competitors, though this approach has not been without its failings and critics.

Government relations

Connected to the issue of positive reporting is the specific way in which political reporting has been produced at CGTN Africa. Despite its international outlook, CGTN remains a part of the CCP's central media apparatus with a direct role to play in serving as a government mouthpiece. The influence on political reporting at CGTN Africa from the CCP was ever-present, but particularly notable during China's "political season" – the period around the yearly sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC), generally held in mid-Spring. During this spell, CGTN Africa generally reports on a lot of Chinese politics regardless of its obvious relevance to African news, and despite CGTN having many China-specific shows on its roster. An ex-CGTN editor recalled how he was once asked to run an uninterrupted fifteen-minute speech by Xi Jinping at the top of the *Africa Live* bulletin, which he described as "overkill" (*CGTN-11*).

More generally, stories that touched on China-Africa relations tended to be given prioritisation over those which did not and would often find themselves higher up on the rundown for the *Africa Live* bulletin. As one CGTN Africa journalist noted: "we have to have two or three things in the bulletin saying about […] 'win-win cooperation,' the Belt and Road Initiative. You can't even question [it]" (*CGTN-10*). Another explained that "to me, what the station was all about was the interests of the Chinese government," adding that "for sure that

we ended up knowing all about the SGR, the standard gauge railway, which they came and built" (*CGTN-12*).

Where African political stories were covered, CGTN Africa's reportage tended to take a soft line on incumbent governments, running against the grain of the conventional, confrontational "fourth estate" media model common to many Western and African journalists. Employing Zhou Enlai's "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence" (*Heping gongchu wu xiang yuanze* – 和平共处五项原则) (United Nations 1958), which broadly expound mutual non-interference in inter-state relations, one ex-CGTN journalist described the station's approach as "'what the government has said' sort of journalism," offering the example of the then ongoing Tigray Crisis: "currently there is some fighting going on in Ethiopia, so you'd report all of the government statements, […] but you couldn't report what the rebels were saying" (*CGTN-2*). As a government mouthpiece, CGTN Africa could not be seen to be taking sides with oppositions, as this might impede the ability of the Chinese government to work with their African counterparts. Hence, political reporting at CGTN Africa tends to be extremely pared back and cautious: "basically, if it makes a government look bad, then it won't fly" (*CGTN-16*). As such, CGTN Africa's political reporting has become "noncombative" (*CGTN-17*).

This is particularly the case when CGTN Africa produces reports about countries and governments with which the Chinese government has close ties, since, as one journalist told me: "you just don't want to be seen like you're attacking their allies" (*CGTN-4*). Several journalists who had worked at the station recounted stories that had been censored for this reason. Interference of this kind was most pronounced in political and current affairs reporting. An editor recalled an instance where the newsroom broke a story but were then abruptly instructed to go into no further detail about it: "a [Kenyan] chief justice was arrested. We broke the story, but the [the bureau chief] ran into the control room [and stopped us]. They didn't want to upset anyone, you know, so you'd report corruption stories, but you had to be very economic with words" (*CGTN-15*).

The intrinsic association between the Chinese Party-state's relationships with other governments and the nature of political reporting at CGTN Africa was illuminated by a CGTN editor, who noted how journalists at the station must keep on top of changes to Chinese foreign policy because of the way it informed what was possible in their work:

> *As the Chinese interests shift across Africa, so does our coverage. Maybe Ethiopia can fall out of favour. […] Then our coverage also changes, so we can focus now more on Ethiopia, more in-depth. […] It covers [Africa] in [a certain] way, as long as the Chinese interests are valid, or are sustained, or still exist. But the moment those interests shift, that coverage also shifts. So, it is difficult to paint a permanent picture of how China covers Africa. Like, we covered Darfur […] and had an analysis that brought out all the gory things [Omar] al-Bashir had done in Darfur, because al-Bashir was no longer in power.*
>
> (*CGTN-17*)

Some journalists argued that CGTN Africa's coverage is held back by its insistence on maintaining good relationships with African governments. Indeed, there have been several notable instances where this approach has not paid off. The most high-profile example is when CGTN Africa's *Talk Africa* programme was offered an exclusive interview with then-opposition candidate in the 2015 Nigerian presidential elections, Muhammadu Buhari, which the station ended up rejecting: "we were not sure whether we should do that interview. The point, really, was should [incumbent President] Goodluck Jonathan retain his seat, how would he view us? How would he view China? Would it be problematic? And, in the end, we were hesitant, so we didn't do that interview" (*CGTN-17*).

The interview would have been a huge scoop for the station, a story with global interest and appeal. The decision not to do it has also had long-lasting implications for CGTN Africa's coverage of Nigeria due to its now-poor relationship with the Buhari government. But the station's management turned down it because it was editorial policy not to speak to opposition leaders, as another member of the *Talk Africa* team clarified: "it was a great opportunity, but we were just not allowed to do it. […] So, it was a pretty big problem on their side, it was their political agenda, because it was made pretty clear that CGTN don't cover opposition movements. They will always cover the government" (*CGTN-13*).

Similar indecision affected CGTN Africa's reporting of the 2017 Zimbabwean coup d'état. Station management hesitated in case Mugabe's government remained in power: "I think the [management] were still very reluctant to run that story, "we need to wait", […] but by the time he was removed […] we couldn't get the story as we wanted" (*CGTN-9*). Likewise,

its coverage of Sudan's 2019 military coup, where reporters "were given explicit orders […] to stop reporting on the coup" whilst its outcome was still unclear, leaving the BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera to cover the issue (*CGTN-19*). In instances like this, CGTN Africa's willingness to act on important stories (a source of symbolic capital) has been stymied by its position and the influence of the CCP on its editorial line.

On the other hand, this relatively unorthodox approach to state-media relations apparently allows CGTN Africa to increase its symbolic capital through the production of other content that could not be seen on its competitor channels. The formal, noncombative manner in which CGTN Africa's management approaches government relations means that the channel has been able to secure interviews with African presidents and senior politicians, including leaders who do not traditionally sit for interviews with international media, such as Omar al-Bashir, President of Sudan between 1993 and 2019, and Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of Equatorial Guinea since 1979. Though these interviews lack conventional journalistic substance, not taking a critical or oppositional line on their subject, they have the potential to be rare commodities that attract professional *and* public interest:

> *We'd have this direct access to Presidents who would not normally go anywhere near journalists, and you'd simply stick a microphone in their faces, and they'd say their thing, and that's what you'd put on air. And the strange thing was that there was quite a bit of viewership at that point, because people had got to see a lot of things they'd never seen before. I was invited to go to Equatorial Guinea, and very few people can say that as journalists.*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

This highlights the difference between conventional journalistic autonomy and what Wright, Scott, and Bunce (2020) refer to as "operational autonomy." Whilst political reporters at CGTN Africa were not able to conduct interviews the way they perhaps thought best, the fact is that they were able to do interviews and produce stories at CGTN Africa that they would otherwise have been unable to do at other stations because of CGTN's approach to government relations. That is, the station traded one form of autonomy off against another to accumulate symbolic capital. One editor discussed the potential profits and pitfalls of this approach:

> *for official organisations, like governments, it helped that the Chinese have a good working relationship with governments, so that would, in many ways, work in our favour when you need to reach out for stories or support, in terms of getting the right kind of people who can answer questions […]. It had its flipside, though, because there were those that felt that […] the Chinese were a friendly entity and so […] you shouldn't be asking any hard questions.*
>
> (*CGTN-11*)

Much as above, this soft approach to government relations is also in danger of creating content that is repetitive or boring:

> *after the first round of interviewing presidents […], if you interview them once again, they don't have anything really much different to say, so that soon loses it shine. So, where do you go from there? […] The presidents are only moving once in ten years, or sometimes once in thirty years, so are you going to wait ten years to do that story again? […] For them, the news has refused to change. So, you can only write so much about the fluff. The wildebeest migration happens every year, so what? Are you going to tell us anything different about it? […] So, after the initial hype, […] you start to have a problem with finding new things to talk about, and the audience starts to notice that.*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

CGTN Africa has attempted to create *distinction* by taking a softer line on political reporting than its competitors. This has meant that journalists at the station have often found it much easier to work with important government sources across the continent and have been able to secure big interviews with African heads of state and officials. However, the flip side of this relationship has been a soft approach to stories, something that goes against the grain of conventional political reporting which has traditionally been defined by its confrontation with the state. Whilst there have undoubtedly been some successes with this format, its overall effectiveness in producing symbolic capital is questionable. As a *Talk Africa* team member conceded: "[African audiences] see the big Western media as good and worthy, because they

have the guts to really bash [African leaders], tell it as it is. […]. The Chinese cannot punch in that weight at the moment" (*CGTN-17*).

Comprehensiveness

Another way in which CGTN Africa has sought to accumulate symbolic capital is by attempting to cover African news more comprehensively than its competitors. Western news coverage of Africa has long been criticised for its focus on a small set of more-elite nations (Egypt, South Africa, Kenya, etc.), and on its homogenisation of the continent in general (Bunce 2015)**.** CGTN Africa, however, has consistently funnelled its significant financial resources into building a continental network of correspondents enabling it to report in timely fashion from all of Africa's fifty-four sovereign nations. This cadre of reporters is vital to CGTN Africa's ambitions: "because a lot of the others don't have correspondents distributed as we have, and that gives us an edge" (*CGTN-9*).

Having correspondents spread across Africa augments CGTN's claims to be telling the "African story" more accurately. The channel aims to air at least one story from every single African nation each year (Marsh 2018), and having permanent correspondents in situ across the continent allows many countries to be covered in more depth than by competitor channels, as one journalist explained:

> *they have incredible reach, much better than the BBC, much better than CNN, Al Jazeera, any of the other big players in the media industry. […] But from places like Ethiopia and Somalia, we were getting stories that other channels weren't necessarily getting […]. The guy would deliver a news story, a business story, and then often something lighter as well. […] So, the reach of the channel was great.*
>
> (*CGTN-6*)

CGTN Africa's extensive correspondent network has potentially allowed it to report on Africa both more broadly (more countries covered more regularly) and with more depth (greater variation in coverage), enabling it to claim to better represent an accurate reportage of the continent's news.

The success of setting up these networks is partially related to CGTN's state-ownership model and its approach to government relations outlined above. Media access to certain

African countries – something which has not always been guaranteed in the past, particularly in the more authoritarian states where media freedoms are poor, such as Zimbabwe, Equatorial Guinea, and Ethiopia – has often been negotiated directly by the Chinese government as part of agreements signed between itself and its African peers, though usually at the expense of any critical edge to its reportage:

> *in a lot of places, the Chinese media starts off on a […] bilateral footing. So, it will come in because the government did a deal with the Chinese government for them to come in. So, it becomes really hard for you to come in and start holding them to account.*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

However, the majority of CGTN Africa's continental reach is facilitated by its relationships with newswires and agencies, foremost amongst them Feature Story News (FSN). Unlike other news agencies such as Xinhua, Reuters, and AFP which provide the raw materials of stories which are reworked by scriptwriters and digital reporters at CGTN Africa's hub in Nairobi, FSN delivers full packages and on-the-ground live presence directly to CGTN (Varrall 2020). FSN is technically based in Washington D.C., but its relationship with CGTN has been described as "symbiotic" (Madrid-Morales 2018, 135), with FSN opening bureaux across Africa primarily to fulfil demand for content from CGTN Africa. Whilst it was difficult to determine definite numbers, one FSN reporter I spoke to estimated that as much as eighty per cent of Africa was covered by FSN journalists on behalf of CGTN Africa.

Whilst FSN reporters also produce work for other FSN clients – including TRT World and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) – they are effectively "loaned" to CGTN Africa whilst working on stories for the Chinese channel. That is, an FSN reporter can appear on CGTN Africa presenting a story or live-cross *as if* they were a CGTN reporter – an anchor might segue to a story saying "CGTN's *Joe Bloggs* reports," yet the reporter is not employed by CGTN. Additionally, preliminary editorial and gatekeeping work is carried out by FSN editors before a story pitch is forwarded to CGTN, as one FSN reporter explained:

> *I'd pitch [a story] to FSN. FSN checks it and ensures that it is something that [it is something CGTN wants] […]. So, once they're okay with it, I'd basically go ahead and pitch it to CGTN. We keep [FSN] copied in on every email. The [FSN] Director for Africa*

> *is copied in on every email, every pitch, every approval of script, every approval of pitch.*
>
> (*FSN-22*)

As such, and as Madrid-Morales (2018) has argued, CGTN Africa's drive to provide a comprehensive reportage of African news through reliance on agency content and staff may be undermining its ability to produce unique, differentiating content – that is, a source of symbolic capital. A CGTN journalist in Nairobi voiced their frustration at the number of stories that were simply rewritten from Western newswires:

> *getting stories from Reuters or AP is lazy. We have the capacity to do the stories ourselves. If CGTN was a serious bureau, like it says it is, it would hire journalists and distribute them everywhere in Africa. […]. It's possible, but for reasons they can best explain, they prefer to outsource correspondents, and have writers interpret other people's stories. So, you find that there is very little original material*.
>
> (*CGTN-10*)

A CGTN Africa correspondent was similarly exasperated by the relationship between FSN and their parent company, describing FSN reporters as "basically guns-for-hire," adding that "they might have a contract with CGTN to deliver a certain amount of content, but, at the end of the day, if Al Jazeera want something, or the BBC, or whatever, they tend to lean towards that first, and then CGTN tends to get the scraps" (*CGTN-18*). Interestingly, then, this relationship which has emerged out of CGTN's attempts to diversify and extend its African news content to be more comprehensive than its competitors simultaneously runs the risk of making its content more similar in style to those organisations.

However, the relatively generous airtime afforded to African news content on CGTN's 24/7 channel also helps to encourage a more comprehensive approach to newsgathering. Beyond the specific restrictions and quotas outlined above, journalists at the station generally find that they had a lot of latitude to decide how to fill the remaining airtime. One described CGTN as "content monsters," whilst a planner agreed that "the content quota was a lot" (*CGTN-12*). A digital journalist explained to me how the sheer amount of content their team was creating offered space to balance their reporting: "if you're supposed to do at least ten

[stories] in a day, you will definitely broaden your search" (*CGTN-4*). Similarly, when I asked a country correspondent whether they felt they had the opportunity to do the sort of reporting that interested them for CGTN, they replied: "very much so," adding "we have freedom, because the rate at which they consume content is just unbelievable" (*CGTN-18*).

This level of demand for content created a lot of space to explore soft news stories, particularly human-interest pieces and development stories which are less likely to be found on competitor channels. As one *Talk Africa* producer explained:

> *between the times when there wasn't China-centric news, you could push the boundaries. […] We did some really interesting shows. […] And, yeah, if you weren't controversial, they let you do it. […] We were often left to our own devices. As long as the show was out and it wasn't controversial, it was good.*
>
> (*CGTN-13*)

For others, though, the pressure to produce enough content to fill CGTN Africa's airtime could lead to superficiality and a lack of depth in reporting. Varrall, for example, notes a general culture across CGTN of "quantity over quality" or "outputs over impact" (Varrall 2020, 11). An ex-CGTN Africa journalist noted how his small team of four journalists would make up to two-hours-and-fifteen minutes of business news a day, and compared this unfavourably to the workflow for business news at BBC Africa:

> *we have a daily show that runs thirteen minutes, and it takes eighteen journalists to put that together. So, you can imagine how many real journalists it would usually need if you were to do serious content [at CGTN]. So, a lot of the time, you'd end up with a lot of fluff, because people have to keep the machine going.*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

A digital journalist at CGTN Africa found similar issues: "we are told to write at least ten stories a day. I'm not saying that's slavery, but it's a little bit difficult to do that many stories when, sometimes, it could be a very dry day in terms of news, so sometimes I just go for something easy" (*CGTN-19*).

CGTN Africa's push to produce a more comprehensive picture of African news presents a mixed bag in terms of producing symbolic capital. Whilst the reach of the channel's reporting is broader than its competitors, this has primarily been achieved through relationships with agencies which undermines CGTN Africa's ability to create unique content. Though its airtime for African content allows for a greater breadth of reporting, particularly including genres not commonly found on competitor channels, some journalists felt that the demands placed on staff meant they ended up producing poor quality news content.

Digital reporting

Many participants felt that CGTN Africa's digital department was a crucial element of the station's success and future potential. This sentiment reflects a systematic shift in Chinese media's international strategy which has come directly from Xi Jinping, who has instructed central media to "get closer" to the audience and adopt an "internet way of thinking," increasing the speed and scope of media convergence (quoted in Li and Wu 2018, 41). At CGTN, this has meant making its audience the channel's "god" (Li and Wu 2018, 42), using new media to disseminate CGTN's content more widely and make it more interactive.

The digital team at CGTN Africa has grown steadily over the past decade. Initially, it only employed two reporters and one intern, and was heavily reliant on the TV department for content: one digital journalist explained "we didn't have enough manpower, so […] we would ask correspondents [to] send us stories, [but] […] for them to even understand how to angle online stories was difficult," adding that station management "didn't see the importance [of digital news]. For them, it was just mainly the TV" (*CGTN-4*).

A major turning point for the department was the Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi on 21 September 2013. Shortly after the beginning of the attack, CCTV-Africa was sent mobile phone footage from the mall, and the decision was made by the Deputy Head of the Newsroom to pass it onto the digital team to post immediately onto the CCTV-Africa's YouTube channel several hours before the scheduled news bulletin. In doing so, CCTV-Africa was able to break news of the terrorist attack, scoring a huge scoop over its competitors – the four-day siege at Westgate turned out to be one the biggest African news story of 2013, alongside the death of Nelson Mandela (Dumor 2013). This incident changed the station's approach to digital news:

> *[the video] had so many views, and […] other media houses were using the same footage. So, they started realising that "oh, this could actually work!" […] And that is when they started putting budget towards the digital team, trying to hire more people, trying to get us more resources […] and, yeah, trying to use the online department to get stories out there.*
>
> (*CGTN-4*)

By 2016, the digital team had expanded to six journalists, and began producing its own unique content, with reporters chasing their own stories across the continent. Today, the digital team comprises around fifteen journalists occupying a variety of roles and operates independently from the TV department, publishing content on the CGTN Africa website as well as across four social media platforms: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram.

Several journalists I spoke to felt that the digital department was increasingly the most important public face of CGTN Africa, and the centre for innovation at the station. A senior broadcast journalist noted how the digital department was now the largest and best funded department at the station. However, the overall level experience and competence of the digital team has, in the view of some, remained quite low:

> *we didn't even have equipment when we started. I was the first actual journalist with digital experience, and filming experience, and editing experience on the team, because before it was basically just copying and pasting stuff onto Facebook. They were like writing some articles on there and being, like, "this is digital!" And I was like, "it's not really, but okay."*
>
> (*CGTN-7*)

The gap between the ambitions of CGTN Africa for its digital content and its actual capacity and competency to provide it have been particularly played out within CGTN Africa's goal of creating comprehensive news content for Africa. As seen above, the digital team creates a plethora of stories, with each reporter expected to contribute around ten stories and/or posts each day. The sheer amount of digital content being created by CGTN Africa's new media team across several platforms offers opportunities to experiment, innovate, and diversify. However, to achieve these numbers of stories every day, the digital department leans

especially heavily on the news agencies – even more so than the broadcast division – and this often meant that original content is sorely lacking. In particular, members of the digital team regularly ended up reposting (usually only with minor copy-editing) stories from Xinhua to fulfil their quotas, as one digital journalist described:

> *sometimes I see time is ticking down; now I resort – and I am not proud of this – to the failsafe. The failsafe is called Xinhua. We're allowed to copy-paste stories from Xinhua […]. So, that is how you'll find, sometimes, I get to ten stories. Like today, I've already done five, but they're all Xinhua.*
>
> (*CGTN-19*)

Additionally, bureaucratic gatekeeping procedures at CGTN Africa meant its digital journalist being outpaced by the nimbler news agencies they compete with:

> *Digital reporting is difficult because you now have to be quick, and you have to be first, […] because that is a premium […]. [E]ven in areas where our correspondents are, you'll find that AFP and Reuters still break that story first. […] [B]y the time the story has been shared on CGTN, […] you'll find we've lost a lot of time, to the point that when you start sharing that story, it sort of looks a bit pointless.*
>
> (*CGTN-19*)

Moreover, digital journalism is generally open to more immediate feedback than broadcast journalism, and management at CGTN Africa seems particularly conscious of the threat to its role as a government mouthpiece when the audience's right to reply is hardwired into platforms it posts on. As one journalist explained, stories could be taken down if there was bad feedback, and this could affect future coverage as well:

> *There was this story about some Chinese tourists […] who got into some trouble in the Masai-Mara, […] so we covered this story, and there was a bad vibe online about [it]. […] So, we were forced to take down the story, and we told not to cover anything related to that. […] Anytime we did a story online and we had negative feedback that seemed to attack China or the Chinese, we would definitely take it down.*

(*CGTN-4*)

A further curiosity that one journalist pointed out is that all of the social media platforms currently utilised by CGTN Africa (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube) are banned in mainland China, whilst important Chinese social media platforms (Sina Weibo and WeChat) are not commonly used across Africa. They wondered what potential infrastructural support CGTN's digital reporting was missing out on because of this. Further, they noted how TikTok, China's largest social media export, was, so far, a missed opportunity for CGTN, as they did not have an active presence on the platform.

Digital reporting and media convergence is set to lead the way into the future of journalism for CGTN in general, and the digital department clearly has forged an enlarged role for itself at CGTN Africa over the last few years. Many at the station see the digital department as the most competitive division of CGTN Africa. However, the reality is that the digital department continues to suffer many of the same problems as the broadcast division at the station in accruing symbolic capital. The overdemand for content from a relatively small team has led to an overreliance on news agencies (particularly Xinhua), and political-bureaucratic control over stories continues to limit its operations. Whilst opportunities for innovation exist, the current iteration of CGTN Africa's digital team seems unable to grasp them fully.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the history of CGTN Africa from its humble beginnings as Beijing TV through to its role within the complex structures of CGTN, CCTV, and China's central media today. In doing so, the chapter has situated CGTN Africa's position within the global journalistic field, illustrating how this position has affected the broader strategies of journalistic production at the station since its creation in 2012. In particular, the analysis has focussed on how the domineering accumulation of political-bureaucratic capital – which props up CGTN's financial muscle – has simultaneously offered opportunities and caused obstructions to journalistic practice at the station, encouraging a distinct set of strategies of establishing similarity and difference between CGTN and its competitors. This has enabled the emergence of heterodox forms of journalism at the station – particularly positive journalism and a focus on softer news – though these have been carefully couched in the

orthodox language of the field's *doxa*. Whilst there have been notable successes to these strategies, such as broader acceptance of the importance of positive reporting in the international coverage, high-profile interviews with senior African politicians, and impressive levels of comprehensiveness in reporting, all these strategies came with pitfalls that often seem to outweigh their relative strengths.

Ten years since it launched, CGTN Africa remains a peripheral actor in the global journalistic field, journalistic autonomy at the station remains in the balance, and journalistic practice continues to be a mix of styles. In the next chapter, we will focus in on the journalists themselves, and ask how the people CGTN Africa employ actually go about their work on a day-to-day basis.

7. "China habitus"

> *The ones who remained are the ones who really gelled with the Chinese. I don't know how.*
>
> (*CGTN-12*)

Journalists are the lifeblood of a news organisation. News production is continuously filtered through the subjectivities of their lifeworld. And yet, news products are often made conspicuous by patterns of uniformity with and conformity to both widely accepted news values and organisational objectives. In this chapter, I will consider how (and to what extent) particular journalistic styles, values, and routines of production are instilled into journalists working at CGTN Africa. Utilising Bourdieu's concept of habitus, I explore how different journalists have come to, worked at, developed within (and left) CGTN Africa, whilst interacting with its internal structures and the structures of wider journalistic fields.

I will focus on the relationship between the habitus of journalists at CGTN Africa and the position of the organisation within the global journalistic field, covered above. I suggest that, while there are varying levels of match and mismatch among staff at CGTN Africa, many individuals develop a "China habitus" – a set of internalised dispositions about news-making that enable them to navigate the complexities of CGTN Africa's position with relative ease. I will then explore how and why journalists do or do not develop these dispositions whilst working at CGTN Africa, looking at how a "regime of uncertainty" (Hassid 2008b) necessitates and encourages the learning of new dispositions to successfully improvise the performance of their work on a day-to-day basis. As such, I argue, the majority of journalists working at CGTN Africa do not regularly experience acutely severe levels of "top-down" interference in their work, but, rather, tend to affect a "bottom-up" approach to ensuring their work falls within the acceptable "ideological boundaries" (*du* – 度); an almost-silent, internalised, and embodied form of self-censorship rooted in the effects of habitus.

Journalists arrive at CGTN Africa with a defined, durable, and transposable set of dispositions which critically affect the way in which they perceive of and undertake their work. How their habitus interacts with and develops in the face of their entry into a new field and/or new position is the main subject of this chapter.

News typification

Despite the fact that many journalists often describe their experience of their work as "a blackboard wiped blank every morning" (Schultz 2007, 192), news production at CGTN Africa – as at most news organisations – is highly structured and routinised, as the above description demonstrates. As a part of the process of routinisation, journalists and managers at the station employ different categories and typifications of news in order to reduce the contingencies in their work. Whilst new stories are dealt with every morning and a new rundown has to be created, these categorisations and typifications help to "routinise the unexpected" (Tuchman 1978) by enabling journalists to quickly decide what stories to cover. The most basic expression of this routinisation is the beat system: sports reporters know to cover sports stories and leave business stories to business journalists. More broadly, however, it is expressed through a wide variety of typifications, such as between "hard news" and "soft news," which become tied up in value judgements about newsworthiness – i.e., which stories are worth reporting or not, and in what order. Building on the discussion of organisational strategy in the previous chapter, this section focuses on how news is typified at CGTN Africa by staff.

News and newsworthiness

Most journalists at CGTN Africa are generalists; that is, they pursue a wide range of news stories without a focus on a particular specialism. Generalists at CGTN Africa cover topics ranging from politics and current affairs, through environment and wildlife features, to development and human-interest stories. Their work is broadly separated into three categories: 1) "spot news," comprising coverage of breaking or developing events; 2) "planned news," comprising pre-planned coverage of upcoming events; and 3) "enterprise news," comprising stories pitched by reporters. CGTN Africa's news provision appears to be split fairly evenly between these three different categories.

As many studies of journalistic work have shown, journalists themselves often have trouble explaining their decision-making processes concerning what constitutes a newsworthy story, and often describe the experience in visceral and physical terms, such as a "gut-feeling," "as if newsworthiness is an integral part of the editor himself" (Schultz 2007, 198). Speaking about themselves, most journalists I interviewed at CGTN Africa "felt" their

experience of news making in this way. As one producer explained, newsworthiness is "quite intuitive, […] very difficult to put into words. […] If you had examples of stories, I could tell you which are news and which are not, but then, to back it up, I would have to think about it a lot harder" (*CGTN-13*). This alludes to *doxic* news values: unspoken, tacit, embodied dispositions about what is or is not news. These values present themselves as common-sense, "a particular point of view […] which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view" (Bourdieu 1998, 57), and, as such, "goes without saying because it comes without saying" (Bourdieu 1977, 165). That is, events themselves come to be seen to have intrinsic values of newsworthiness or not.

However, despite the supposed intuitiveness of news, the same producer conceded that "there were arguments about how we covered things, and what is worth being covered" (*CGTN-13*). Often, individual journalists felt that there was a significant gulf between what stories they thought of as newsworthy and what the station management wanted them to produce, meaning that they often ended up producing content that they had little interest in, or could not see the value of:

> *[t]here was always a bit of a conflict of interests […], so there would always be a bit of a 'why are we doing this?' Say there was a massive coup happening in Mali, or something, and we're being told to talk about how China has sent over twenty boxes of condoms to a slum in Kenya […]. So, there was sometimes quite a lot of conflict […] between those in Beijing […] and the journalists on the ground […] who wanted to actually just cover the proper stories.*
>
> (*CGTN-8*)

Unlike their own "intuitive," unspoken sense of what were "proper stories," journalists working at the station could very clearly identify and name management's criteria for guiding decision-making on stories at CGTN Africa. These criteria, which I will explore below, represent either orthodox (outspoken, recognised, agreed upon, dominant) or heterodox (outspoken, misrecognised, disagreed upon, dominated) news values (Schultz 2007, 195–96), informed by the relative positions of – and hence, levels of match and mismatch between – CGTN Africa (as an organisation) and its journalists within the global journalistic field.

The "China-hook"

In his study of Chinese foreign correspondents, Pál (2017) notes how many of these individuals felt the need to identify a "China peg" in their correspondence. For Pál's participants, the term was ambiguous and all-encompassing, ranging from simply finding stories that would attract Chinese audience's attentions through to "infus[ing] their news reporting with Chinese people's way of thinking" (Pál 2017, 135). For the non-Chinese journalists at CGTN Africa, there was, similarly, almost universal acknowledgement amongst the staff I interviewed of the necessity of identifying a "China-hook"[8] in their work. These journalists had come to realise that what made an event or story newsworthy at CGTN Africa was, primarily, whether it related to China or not, and, moreover, whether it represented China in a *positive* light:

> *almost everything has to have a Chinese angle to it. Like, if we're talking about the health sector […] they prefer to talk about acupuncture. Or if we're talking about infrastructure, it has to have a Chinese angle. If a British, Israeli, or American contractor was building roads in Kenya, that did not make news to them; what makes news to them is what Chinese nationals, businesses, and organisations, and the Chinese government are doing in Africa.*
>
> (*CGTN-1*)

Another concurred that stories "have to have a Chinese angle, […] so, how does it affect the Chinese? Where do the Chinese come in? That's their real question. How will it paint them any better? How will it endear them to anyone? […] That is their priority*"* (*CGTN-5*).

Moreover, the focus on China-related content appears to apply across all beats and categorisations of stories, from politics, to business, through to sports and culture. A *Talk Africa* producer was unequivocal explaining the remit of the show: "anything China-related," adding that "[i]t always came back to China-Africa relations, and how China is helping Africa, and always about 'win-win cooperation'" (*CGTN-13*). This even dictated what guests they would end up having on the show: "it was pretty rare that we did not have a guest on our

[8] I use the term "China-hook" as opposed to "China peg" in order to differentiate between the effects felt by Chinese foreign correspondents and non-Chinese journalists, and as this term was coined by one of my participants.

show in Beijing or in China […] and, a lot of the time, they didn't have anything to add to the conversation, but we just had to have someone from China" (*CGTN-13*). A sports journalist similarly recounted a time they questioned why they were asked to go to Madagascar to cover a story about Chinese martial arts:

> *I told them, "Unless Jackie Chan is coming, is this story really of value to our audience?" […] I didn't want to go because I didn't see how it is not China-centric. […] So, I felt like sometimes, you were pushed to do stories because they felt it made China come out in a good light[.]*
>
> (*CGTN-3*)

Whilst the sheer amount of content produced by CGTN Africa meant that not *everything* it produced could have a "China-hook," ultimately, numerous stories that CGTN Africa journalists thought *did* possess significant newsworthiness for their audiences but were not China-related did not make it to air, as a country correspondent recounted with frustration:

> *we've actually had to interview an athlete and send [management] a WhatsApp video to convince them of what we've done, like, "listen, this is a big story," you know. […] And they sort of just laughed off the story, and I'm like, "I've got an interview with the most sought-after rider in the world right now, and you don't want to take an exclusive?" […] [I]t boggles the mind, some of the decisions.*
>
> (*CGTN-18*)

As these accounts show, this approach to newsworthiness focussing on China-related content represents a heterodox news value, often seemingly at odds with producing what most journalists at the station considered "proper stories."

Hard vs. soft news

A near-universal judgment made by journalists is that "hard news" stories are more newsworthy than "soft news" stories. These typifications are ambiguous and poorly defined, but, broadly speaking, "hard news" has usually referred to "important matters" that lend themselves to analysis, whilst "soft news" concerns "interesting matters" that do not warrant

analysis (Tuchman 1978). As such, politics and current affairs stories have long been considered hard news, and hence more worthy of airtime, whilst sports, culture, and human-interest stories tend to be cast as soft news and end up being relegated towards the middle- or back-pages of newspapers and the end of broadcast news rundowns. No typification of news is, perhaps, as widespread, and supposedly intuitive, as the difference between hard news and "soft news, and the superiority of the prior over the latter.

However, contrary to this accepted journalistic wisdom (that is, *doxa*), staff at CGTN Africa explained that the channel consistently prioritises soft news over hard news: "more than half of [the stories at CGTN] was what you'd call soft news, not hard news" (*CGTN-1*). CGTN Africa's position in the global journalistic field has simultaneously encouraged the channel to pursue positive stories and discouraged confrontational ones, which has not leant itself to the telling of "hard news," an experienced Kenyan journalist explained: "when I came to work for CGTN […] news no longer became that negativity. […] The whole idea of news started to change. […] There isn't such terrible emphasis on that, as was the case in my previous life as a journalist" (*CGTN-17*).

Another Kenyan journalist agreed, spelling out in more specific terms how hard news stories began to get relegated down (or removed from) the *Africa Live* rundown:

> *they wanted [hard] stories to go to the bottom of the run-down. For example, if there was something like the Mali coup, […] that would not have been top story. Yet, if you're doing an African bulletin, that should have been story number one! So, what they wanted to come and correct, in their opinion, was "if it bleeds it leads." In fact, the words used were "no more war, disease, or poverty stories." […] They wanted to have more of the happy things.*
>
> (*CGTN-3*)

Another argued that a coup in Mali would only make in onto the CGTN Africa rundown "if Chinese peacekeepers are dying" (CGTN-10), reinforcing the primacy of the "China-hook" criteria.

Staff explained that politics and current affairs stories – commonly the heartbeat of hard news coverage for most news organisations – usually found themselves positioned lower in the rundown, and often in a very pared-back form: "they didn't like politics; I don't

remember any politics. The only politics that was aired on CCTV was general elections of specific countries, or peace talks, something like that, but they were very careful not to offend" (*CGTN-1*). Content analyses do not fully support the severity of this claim, with both Marsh (2016) and Zhang and Matingwina (2016a) finding that hard news coverage was still relatively prevalent at CGTN Africa. Several journalists at the station noted that "spot news" – coverage of breaking events – tended towards hard stories positioned at the top of the bulletin, a senior planner observing that "those were key stories to put at number one" (*CGTN-12*), though remaining, first-and-foremost, subject to the "China-hook" criteria. However, they conceded that softer stories then followed much higher up the rundown than they would have usually expected.

This was particularly apparent in the relative sense of autonomy that journalists working on the business or sports beats, as well as those pitching cultural and human-interest pieces, expressed feeling compared to those who were primarily interested in politics and current affairs. One sports journalist noted how much freedom they had to pursue stories: "I thought I was given a lot of opportunity, because with sport, it's always feel-good. […] They wanted a lot of feel-good" (*CGTN-3*). Likewise, a business journalist found that his work was easier because the stories he was chasing were less sensitive than his colleagues who covered politics:

> *For business, I knew we had a bit of leeway, because […] it's technical, so they often felt that there was no direct linkage between the sensitive aspects of their lives and what we were doing. But, for the guys around politics, and that sort of thing, there was a real focus on the stories that they were doing, so as to enable [management] to drive the agenda.*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

Overall, the picture CGTN Africa staff painted of the station's news provision was a general preference towards soft news, as was summarised by one producer: "I think they always wanted to go a lot lighter, and in Africa, you've got very serious issues which they kind of just brushed over in favour of other, lighter stories" (CGTN-13), which tended to dominate the rundown, particularly in the *two-to-five positions*; that is, those stories following directly after the day's most important spot news.

Red lines

A further newsworthiness criterion noted by staff at CGTN Africa is the existence of "red lines," that is, subjects or angles that are not deemed acceptable fare by station management. Every news organisation has such lines, and CGTN's "red lines" appear to come in two varieties: those stories which are completely inaccessible; and stories which fall in a grey area (Repnikova 2017).

The inaccessible stories appear consistent across Chinese media both domestically and globally. Marsh (2018) notes that both Dalai Lama and the late-Archbishop Desmond Tutu are both considered *persona non grata*, as one journalist noted bluntly: "we weren't allowed to refer to Desmond Tutu because he was friends with the Dalai Lama" (*CGTN-6*).[9] This reflects longstanding Chinese policy to suppress negative coverage concerning Tibet. However, the rejection of such an important religious, anti-apartheid African figure risks undermining CGTN Africa's promise to help tell "the true African story" (Umejei 2020).

Indeed, this represents a wider rejection of religion as a suitable topic at CGTN Africa which runs counter to the African experience (Umejei 2020). Staff confirmed to me that religious topics were generally considered out of bounds: "anything that involved religion would be killed. China's religious stance is what it is, so they wouldn't have those stories" (CGTN-8). A particularly sore topic for some was Pope Francis's 2015 visit to Nairobi. Even though there are believed to be over 236 million Catholics in Africa, and that one of the world's most important figures was appearing quite literally on the station's doorstep, CGTN Africa did not cover the visit: "the Pope came to Nairobi, and if you had watched CGTN, the Pope didn't exist. They just completely ignored the fact that he was in the city" (*CGTN-13*).

Another key "red line" is negative coverage of China. Whilst content analyses (Marsh 2016; Gagliardone and Pál 2017; Li 2017a) have illustrated how positive reporting has been applied fairly inconsistently at CGTN Africa, negative coverage of China is strictly prohibited; China-related news broadcast on CGTN Africa *must* be positive. Negative coverage of China would be censored:

[9] However, CGTN Africa *did* report on the archbishop's death in December 2021.

> *There was always the idea that some interviews wouldn't be run, or some soundbites wouldn't be able to be played, because they infringed on the Chinese state […]. So, for example, we had an interview with a Cameroonian minister during the Cameroon Elections in 2018, […] and he said something […] [that] was derogatory towards the China-Cameroon relationship, and we had to pull that […]. There was also another time where we went to […] Mauritania, [and] were going to cover the working conditions or people working for a Chinese corporation that were building like an oil plant […] there, […] and [this guy] spoke about his grievances working for them; the long hours, the low pay, always having to be out in the sun, and that sort of stuff. And, I mean, I was just filming it and nodding and realising that we would never be able to run this on CGTN.*
>
> (*CGTN-8*)

More broadly, negative coverage of incumbent African governments is also discouraged. This general rule, however, occupies a grey area, and as discussed in the previous chapter, relies heavily on the changing winds of Chinese foreign policy. It was particularly likely to be enforced if the country in question was an important Chinese partner: "if you want to investigate corruption in football [in Zambia], they start thinking, "oh, well, if its Zambia, well, we are really good friends with Zambia," so you're not really allowed to [do that]" (*CGTN-3*).

On the other end of the spectrum, coverage of opposition movements and leaders tended to be heavily restricted and/or discouraged. As exemplified above, *Talk Africa* passed up on the opportunity to interview Mohammadu Buhari while he was still the leader of the Nigerian opposition, with long-lasting consequences for the channel's relationship with the Nigerian government. Another recent example is the 2021 electoral crisis in Uganda. CGTN Africa did not cover the crisis in detail: as one journalist recalled, "we weren't even allowed to talk about [Ugandan opposition leader] Bobbi Wine. [He was] was a non-existent person" (*CGTN-7*).

Finally, positive reporting on China's rivals, particularly the USA and Japan, is also likely to be censored, as a journalist recalled: "The Japanese Ambassador was handing over a symbolic Taka Tree, wishing South Africa luck [for the Olympics], and I was like, 'this is a great story, it's a good gesture,' but my story was shot down because of the China-Japan relationship. They were like, 'Japan? No'" (*CGTN-18*).

From typification to habitus

An interesting aspect of these criteria that are used to typify and categorise news at CGTN Africa is how they intersect the full gamut of traditional typifications and beats indiscriminately. For instance, a story that paints a negative picture of China would be "spiked" regardless of whether it was a current affairs story or a cultural piece. However, some types of reporting are more or less likely to intersect with these criteria. A sports story at CGTN Africa is simply far less likely to constitute "hard" news or to engage with sensitive issues than, say, political reporting. As such, certain types of news – as traditionally defined – are more likely to air on the channel than others, judged on a unified set of criteria.

This, in of itself, comes as no surprise. News typification at CGTN Africa has been well studied in previous literature. Content analyses by Marsh (2016; 2017; 2018), Wekesa (Wekesa 2014), Wekesa and Zhang, Madrid-Morales (2016; 2018), Li (2017a), Madrid-Morales and Gorfinkel (2018), Umejei (2020), and Xiang and Zhang (2020) have already documented or alluded to many of these typifications. However, these analyses often lack sociological substance, failing to explain how journalists process information in their day-to-day work. *How* and *why* do non-Chinese journalists working at CGTN Africa produce its news to meet these criteria?

To answer this question, it is important to make explicit the symbiotic relationship between these criteria and the position of CGTN Africa in the global journalistic field, which was outlined in the previous chapter. The criteria reflect CGTN's capital arrangement – its liminal position in the field and domination by heterogenous Chinese capital – which brings aspects of journalistic practice at the station more into line with that *doxic* practices in the Chinese journalistic field. These criteria are expressions of relative position, and, as such, of power, actuated through field effects. In this sense, I agree with Marsh (2018) that the majority of staff at CGTN Africa – despite what it might seem – do not regularly experience censorship or interference in their day-to-day work in a particularly active way. Instead, much of what is expressed is a result of differing levels of match and mismatch between journalists' habitus and the relative position of their employer in the global journalistic field. In this way, censorship morphs into a form of self-censorship through the gradual internationalisation and embodiment of dispositions associated with the Chinese journalistic field within non-Chinese

journalists' professional habitus. The question, then, is how do these processes come about? To begin to answer this question, I will explore recruitment at CGTN Africa.

Recruitment

Recruitment (and promotion) is an important way that organisations encourage particular ways of working and being. New recruits do not come into a newsroom "naked," but rather with pre-defined dispositions and experience (Örnebring 2017). As an organisation looks to fill its ranks, it asks a crucial question of both its own and its potential employees' position in the field: what kind of person with what kind of experience and dispositions is valued within the particular circumstances and why? As such, recruitment is an operational expression of and examination in cultural capital, embodied as habitus.

In many media organisations, this debate has focussed the recruitment of either "generalists" or "specialists." As Marchetti notes, "most generalized media seek, first, journalists who are immediately 'operational,' that is, who have training in a certain number of practices and techniques," but others will "recruit specialists for both professional and commercial reasons. 'Knowledge of the issue' is crucial to establishing journalistic credibility both with specialized (source) and generalized (reader) publics" (2005, 66). The type of journalist an organisation values will depend on its own context and position in the field, which is itself dynamic. For example, Reuters used to recruit many generalists to report a wide range of foreign correspondence, but following its acquisition by Thomson, the organisation veered strongly towards the economic pole, and, as such, began to emphasise the need for journalists to have economic specialisms (Bunce 2012).

In CGTN Africa's case, I argue, they have sought to maintain a careful balance of three different types of journalists who all offer different types of broad "specialisms." These groups are loosely defined by nationality, though "not nationality qua nationality, but rather on attributes that are often correlated with nationality" (Bunce 2011, 19): Chinese; local-national (Kenyan); and international. These groups include within them a wide spectrum of journalists, but, I argue, are recruited primarily in relation to dispositions associated with their nationality. Though each individual comprises a unique configuration of embodied capital, they generally coalesce around broadly similar positions within the global journalistic field,

and "engender structurally similar experiences of social relations, processes, and structures" (Maton 2014, 52).

The experience of sharing similar positions in a field produces similar effects even on unique individuals, as Bourdieu argues: "personal style […] is never more than a deviation in relation to the style of a period or class so that it relates back to the common style not only by its conformity […] but also by the difference" (Bourdieu 1977, 86). The effect of these commonalities (and their difference from other groups) mean it is possible to speak of *class habitus*:

> *proximity in social space will tend to generate a degree of interpersonal proximity which, in turn, will encourage certain types of group formation. […] [T]hey are inclined to develop similar lifestyles, outlooks, dispositions, and a tacit sense of their place in the world or "class unconsciousness"; that is, class habitus.*
>
> (Crossley 2014, 90–91)

At the global level, it may be possible to speak (tentatively) of a *national journalistic habitus*. That is, the habitus of journalists from particular nations may share common features and dispositions – particularly when considered in relation to those of journalists from other nations – and, as such, these journalists tend to share relatively common positions in (and, ergo, experiences of) the global journalistic field, forming a distinctive professional milleu (Hanitzsch 2011). The distinct differences in culture between these clusters of journalists from different nations become a focus of symbolic struggles within a field, with each group seeking to deploy its own forms of capital to the greatest strategic effect. This means that each group has some broad form of "speciality" that it offers to its employers. However, as Crossley notes, "the habituation of both cultural differences and criteria for judging them 'higher' or 'lower' […] allows difference and ultimately inequality between clusters of individuals to appear natural and thus both inevitable and just" (2014, 94). As such, nationality becomes a key principle of vision and division in recruitment of journalists.

CGTN Africa employs a strict organisational hierarchy which is formed along more or less nationalised (and racialised – see Chapter 9) lines, with the three different groups of journalists occupying different tiers in the hierarchy. Almost all journalists at the station understood this hierarchy and their position within it. A Kenyan journalist explained:

> *at the top of the pyramid, there is the Chinese. And I don't mean Chinese management. I mean Chinese. Even if it is the person whose job is to manage equipment, they were at the top of the pyramid. At the second tier of pyramid, you have foreigners: your South Africans, your Brits. […] And, at the bottom of the pyramid, you have Kenyans. You have your locals.*
>
> (*CGTN-3*)

I will now explore the recruitment of these three groups, asking how the particular "specialities" of their habitus are operationalised by CGTN Africa's structure and routines.

Chinese staff

The top tiers of CGTN Africa's hierarchy are filled, without exception, by Chinese staff members. Every member of senior management at the station, from the bureau chief through to department heads, is a Chinese national. In total, there are around a dozen Chinese staff that work with the English-language division (Marsh 2018). However, since no Chinese staff agreed to interviews for this research, the assessment made of the position of a *Chinese* journalistic habitus at CGTN Africa is instead formed from the views of non-Chinese staff at the station, as well as secondary literature.

The general profile of Chinese staff at CGTN Africa broadly corroborates the findings of Pál's (2017) general study into Chinese foreign correspondents. He observes an overall shift in Chinese foreign correspondents' makeup from older males at the end of their careers, towards younger, careerist journalists, who tend to come to Africa in order to broaden their experience before moving on to more prestigious postings in Europe, America, or back in China. The most common description given to me of a Chinese departmental head at CGTN Africa was of a young female, more or less straight out of higher education, with little to no journalism experience, and more than likely on their first international placement.

This meant that most non-Chinese staff at CGTN Africa had a fairly dim view of their supervisors' credentials or capabilities as journalists. One said of their superior, the Head of the Newsroom: "to be honest, I don't even think she is a journalist by profession. She seems pretty clueless" (*CGTN-10*). A member of the digital team was similarly scathing of their manager: "[she] was completely ill-equipped and inexperienced. I think […] they just went,

'oh, hey, we'll make you the head of digital,' and she knew nothing about it" (*CGTN-7*). Another summed up that, "whether you are a cleaner, or a soldier, or somebody with some journalistic background, […] and you're Chinese, you're up here [gestures high]" (*CGTN-6*), making clear that the hierarchy is such that *any* Chinese member of staff is senior to a non-Chinese member of staff.

This often meant that young Chinese managers were put in charge of teams of far more experienced non-Chinese journalists. A Kenyan filmmaker who helped produce dozens of episodes of *Faces of Africa* explained about the tension that was caused because the Chinese producer of the show was woefully ill-equipped to lead a team of far more experienced African and Western documentary-makers:

> *She was young – very young – just graduated from film school […] but was [*sarcastically*] an "expert" in Africa […]. We had arguments because, you know, I've been doing this for thirty-five years. […] Between the team […] you were looking at over a hundred years of experience in making documentaries. And then here's someone just out of school telling us how to do our job. So, it was very difficult. […] I don't know how she got the gig, because she wasn't at all qualified for it.*
>
> (*CGTN-29*)

In the eyes of their non-Chinese peers, Chinese staff at CGTN Africa were considered to possess little journalistic capital or credibility. Their potential value to the organisation must therefore emanate from different aspects of their habitus. The Kenyan filmmaker mused: "maybe she had a relative high-up in the party […] [or] knew somebody, […] and she was given this assignment" (*CGTN-29*). Indeed, some of the non-Chinese staff I spoke to felt that the Chinese staff were not journalists at all, but, rather, serve as enforcers to back up a system of party-press parallelism, ensuring maintenance of the Party line:

> *I kept getting the feeling that a lot of our bosses were dual operators. Some of the people who turned up in the newsroom looked like they had never held a microphone in their life. They were terrible reporters. I was offended to work for them. […] [Y]ou'd have bosses who […] couldn't tell a good story from a bad one, [and] were more*

> *concerned about Party lines and what the government wants to say than real journalism.*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

This kind of boundary work – involving casting Chinese staff as something *other* than journalists – was a common mechanism employed by the non-Chinese staff I interviewed. Another journalist was keen to draw a line between the Chinese "staff," who "toed the Communist Party line" and the non-Chinese, who "were trying to be journalists" (*CGTN-13*).

Moreover, interviewees consistently noted how hands-off and quiet the Chinese generally are in their day-to-day work. They apparently contribute staggeringly little to the day-to-day frontline journalistic activities of the station. Rather their role was purely to oversee the work of the non-Chinese staff and ensure content fell within the correct ideological boundaries. A *Talk Africa* journalist explained the limited role of their Chinese supervisor in the production of the show:

> *technically [she is my boss], but not doing much, because the level of journalism is probably not the sort of thing she has been involved with. So, more just keeping an eye for things that might cause problems: "let's just keep an eye so that things don't go horribly wrong, and Beijing gets horribly cross with us." […] But, generally, very hands-off. […] The real work is the rest of the team. From beginning to end, we are in charge of [the programme] […]. Yeah, it's more just like, "A Chinese [person] must be there," […] but in terms of output, overall, what they do, it is insignificant.*
>
> (*CGTN-17*)

Instead, Chinese staff appear to operate more as *lingdao* (领导) – Communist Party parlance for a "leader" with responsibility for strategic oversight – overseeing the enforcement of ideological conformity in the work of subordinates, rather than engaging in either frontline journalistic work or direct line management (Pál 2017; Upton-McLaughlin 2014). Whilst there was little certainty amongst non-Chinese staff as to whether their direct superiors were Party members or not, this did not seem to matter much in assessments of their actions. Indeed, as Pál has noted, despite the increased diversity and cosmopolitanism of Chinese foreign

correspondents, there is "little correlation between such experiences and either journalists' job choices or their reporting" (2017, 77); they continue to toe the Party line regardless. For some, certainly, this might be because of an ideological calling, whilst for others it might be because of their career-mindedness. A producer noted of his supervisor, with whom he endured a fractious relationship: "she wasn't a terrible person; she just toed the China line. I think she was very aspirational […]. I think, for the Chinese staff, working at CGTN Africa is always […] a steppingstone. Now [she] is working at CGTN Europe, pretty much doing the same thing" (*CGTN-13*). Another journalist believed that most Chinese staff were just trying to make it through their placement without ruffling feathers back in Beijing: "[t]hey are covering their own arses at home, [trying] to seem to be running an effective ship" (*CGTN-5*).

What this points to is the "specialist" role that Chinese staff play at CGTN Africa. The majority arrive in Nairobi with little to no international journalism experience, and therefore cannot (and do not) actively contribute to the day-to-day work of frontline international journalism. Their habitus is poorly matched to the *doxa* of the global journalistic field. Instead, their professional habitus has developed primarily within the context of the Chinese journalistic field, and they therefore possess a "naturalised" understanding of the proper criteria of reporting for Chinese state media. They're role is that of gatekeeper, in the most traditional sense, vetting journalistic work as it is produced by subordinates to ensure that it falls within the accepted boundaries outlined by CCPPD and SARFT guidance. Their value comes from this seemingly "intuitive" understanding of what is acceptable to the authorities in Beijing who fund CGTN Africa's operations. This particular set of dispositions is why *any* Chinese member of staff is seen as "superior" to their non-Chinese peers, regardless of substantive rank or position. As one Kenyan journalist put it, the Chinese staff are there "to make us understand what the objective [is]*"* (*CGTN-1*).

Local-national staff – Kenyans

The majority of staff at CGTN Africa are local-nationals; that is, Kenyans. They tend to carry out much of the journalistic legwork at the station, either as "team leaders" or staff journalists (Marsh 2018). Currently, the "team leaders" of virtually every major desk are Kenyans. Kenyan journalists therefore exert a significant influence on the news making processes at CGTN Africa.

The profile of Kenyan journalist that CGTN Africa has recruited has morphed over the years. When CCTV-Africa opened its doors in 2011, it specifically targeted "experienced and often high-profile Kenyan journalists" (Marsh 2018, 105–6). Their star recruit was Beatrice Marshall, then Deputy Managing Editor and Head Anchor at the Kenya Television Network (KTN), and one of the foremost TV-news personalities in the country. Another important recruit was the late Robert Soi, then a senior editor at KTN, who was brought in specifically to oversee the initial set up of the newsroom, production team, and administration staff, and would later go on to be a senior planner at the station.

The team of Kenyan journalists that emerged at CGTN Africa was notable for two reasons. Firstly, it was very tight knit, with most of the staff having worked together at KTN and *The Standard* and being recruited through referrals or headhunting by ex-colleagues. One ex-*Standard Group* journalist note that, when he first walked into the CGTN Africa newsroom, he was greeted by "a huge team of local journalists, many of whom I knew, […] so I felt at home almost immediately" (*CGTN-17*). Secondly, it was extremely experienced. Because of the way it had been recruited, and the relative lack of competition for jobs from other international broadcasters at the time, CGTN had the pick of the litter of Kenyan journalists. As such, most of the journalists had between five to ten years' experience, including in senior editorial positions. The high level of experience and strong interpersonal networks of the Kenyan staff leant the station excellent journalistic credibility, as one editor noted: "the kind of journalists we got […], a lot of them were quite respected in different areas, so […] you're able to build on the credibility of your colleagues […] That was quite helpful, and it made our work a lot easier" (*CGTN-11*).

All of this contributed to the smooth launch of the station, which, one journalist mused, occurred much quicker than the Chinese management had anticipated: "they had not actually expected us to be able to get running for years. So, they were shocked when we did it in under three months and had a show out in January [2012]" (*CGTN-2*). The first intake of journalists at CGTN Africa, then, were recruited partially because of their amassed journalistic capital – that is, they *embodied* (quite literally) what it meant to be "good" and "respected" journalists, particularly in the eyes of their Kenyan peers. That is, these were journalists who were dominant within the Kenyan journalistic field, possessing a well-developed *Kenyan* journalistic habitus.

However, over time recruitment of Kenyan journalists at CGTN Africa has changed. This is partially because of changing dynamics at the station, but also because of increased competition in the local job market, particularly since the BBC opened its new Africa bureau in Nairobi in 2018 (see Chapter 8). Kenyan recruits are now more likely to be younger and have less experience; some have come to the station after a few years working in local media organisations, whilst others have been hired through internship programmes straight out of university. As such, these journalists have much less well-developed professional habitus, as they have had less time to amass journalistic capital. One early recruit summed up the difference between these two intakes:

> *for the new people coming in, I don't feel like they have a really good touch of what a TV is, how it is run. Like in the local media, it was chaotic. […] I learned a lot: […] how the producers think, knowing the camera setup […]. But the new people coming in, I don't feel like they have a really good grasp of what a TV station is all about. […] I don't feel like they've seen that part.*
>
> (*CGTN-14*)

CGTN Africa continues to primarily recruit Kenyan journalists, even though they no longer necessarily lend the organisation the same weight of journalistic credibility or capital as earlier intakes of Kenyan journalists did. Rather, the unifying feature of both earlier and later intakes of Kenyan staff is their grounding within the local-national – that is, Kenyan – journalistic field. It is the dispositions of their professional habitus which are associated with their nationality that continue to make Kenyan journalists valuable assets to CGTN Africa. As Bunce (2015) found in her study of local-national journalists in East Africa, their nationality and background tend to distinguish their work in three important and positive ways: 1) excellent contacts and trusted sources; 2) greater local contextual knowledge; and 3) a high level of emotional investment in and sensitivity towards their own region.

Put simply, the "speciality" of local-national journalists is their "understanding of what journalism is and how journalists should behave, drawn from the local field" (Moon 2019, 1715). If the goals of CGTN Africa are to "tell African stories from an African perspective," then recruiting local-nationals lends significant credibility to its reporting. One journalist summed this feeling up perfectly when I asked him what he brought to CGTN Africa:

"Experience, contacts, [an] understanding of the issues, […] [and] African-ness – African journalists understand African issues – of course[.] […] Being Kenyan means that I have sources here, and being in other countries, being an African I can approach them differently [to the Chinese]" (*CGTN-9*).

Local knowledge and experience – that is, amassed, embodied national journalistic capital – is why, for the most part, Chinese management seem content to leave the day-to-day work of the station up to local-nations journalists: "because most Chinese don't have the benefit of local knowledge, […] they'd be happy to let us […] suggest the stories" (*CGTN-2*).

International staff

Whilst the Kenyan journalists that were initially recruited by CCTV-Africa offered excellent local knowledge and strong journalistic skills, virtually none had experience in international news before. As one recalled: "when it first started, it felt like it was very Kenya-centric[.] […] [M]any people had come from a background of local knowledge and [had] never done anything on a bigger scale*"* (*CGTN-3*). Another agreed, noting that whilst CGTN "were able to get good quality journalists […] we were still not international [which] created a challenge" (*CGTN-2*), remembering how a colleague – an experienced editor from KTN – had not been allowed to voice stories at CGTN because he had a Masai accent and "didn't sound international enough" (*CGTN-2*). Neither was this an isolated incident, another journalist adding that: "to get my voice approved […] took about three years. And do you know what they told me at first? I sound too African!" (*CGTN-10*).

As the station found its feet, there was a growing sense that its local-national staff – as professionally competent as they were – did not offer an *international* product because they did not have the requisite experience in identifying and delivering news stories at an international level, echoing Nyamnjoh's warning that "to be accepted, [African journalists] have to think, see and write as Westerners do" (2005, 87). CGTN Africa looked to remedy this with a recruitment drive aimed at journalists with international experience: "they started off not really wanting to bring in experts from the CNNs, the Al Jazeeras, the BBCs, […] but, eventually, because of the feeling that we were too Africa-heavy, not international enough […] they eventually did bring in a lot of people from other international media organisations" (*CGTN-2*).

These journalists came from a wide range of backgrounds. Some were African, from various countries across the continent. But the majority of these new recruits were British and South African – particularly white South Africans. One South African recalled that, at its height, around fifteen staff members at CGTN Africa had been recruited directly from the South African 24-hour continental rolling-news channel, eNCA, often to fill relatively senior roles.

A particularly notable recruit was Anglo-South African journalist, Andy Duffy, who was employed as Chief Planner from 2013 until he left the station in early 2019 for Al Jazeera. He wielded significant influence in the newsroom as he was responsible for the weekly plan and often led editorial meetings. One journalist recalled of Andy: "he was really tough; he didn't give a fuck about anything. I mean, it was his way or the highway" (*CGTN-1*). Many of the Kenyan staff resented these new recruits, not only because they outranked the Kenyan staff, but were usually paid significantly more: "there were people doing more than Andy, but because he was brought in from South Africa […] his salary was thirty-thousand dollars. Yet, the Africans are getting three-thousand, four-thousand dollars, and they're doing all the work" (*CGTN-1*).

There are many parallels between this period of CGTN Africa's recruitment strategy, and the early years of Al Jazeera English. Despites AJE's attempts at driving an agenda of alterity, the simple organisational and logistical demands of launching a competitive international news channel requires staff who bring with them the mainstream dispositions of a professional habitus developed within the global journalistic field:

> *Although AJE emphasizes that it reports the world through its local correspondents, in its formative years the top and middle management teams have been dominated by white, British, middle-aged men on the rationalization that to operate AJE's ambitious, complex, decentralized production structure, the channel needed senior staff with extended experience from international media.*
>
> (Figenschou 2014, 163)

For their part, the international staff at CGTN Africa that I spoke to – whilst aware of the gaping inequalities in position and pay between themselves and their African peers – did all argue that they had brought value to the channel by instilling and upholding international

standards. One South African showrunner noted how, "when I took over the show, it was pretty weak, and there wasn't really a plan. I implemented systems and structures that they still use today! […] I gave it a lot more focus and more variety. […] So, I think I turned it into something watchable" (*CGTN-13*). Another South African explained that their experience in the high-pressure environment of international reporting meant they were better equipped than their Kenyan peers to deal with changes to the rundown:

> *because I'd come from a twenty-four-hour rolling-news background, [I knew that] an hour is actually a really long time. So, if something breaks […] just before the news hour started, and everybody was like, "we'll have to cover it tonight when we run our bulletin," I was like, "to hell with that! Somebody find me forty-seconds of visuals, get so and so on the phone, and I'll write you some copy."*
>
> (*CGTN-6*)

In their view, they were better able to "routinise the unexpected" of international news cycles because they had dispositions associated with a professional habitus developed within the global journalistic field (or a national field more homologous with the global field). This ability to produce news quickly and "intuitively" to an international standard is their "specialism," and the reason that CGTN Africa decided to increase the number of international journalists employed at the station.

Habitus affinities/disaffinities

Against the common claims that CGTN Africa is interested only in spewing out Chinese propaganda, the majority of its staff – and particularly those who actually do most of its frontline journalism – are *not* Chinese. It is therefore important to question why the entire staff is not Chinese? If the organisation's goal is simply to stick to the Party line, these individuals would possess a more naturalised sense of the criteria for making "ideologically correct" news. Equally, should CGTN Africa simply want to fit in with its international competitors, it has the financial muscle to recruit international journalists who could quickly increase the channel's international profile. Instead, it has chosen to integrate both Chinese and international staff into the organisational infrastructure sparingly.

The insistence on employing Kenyan staff instead points, perhaps, to a genuine attempt to include African perspectives in reporting. The Kenyan staff I interviewed argued firmly that they brought the station a certain credibility through familiarity and similarity with specialised (sources) and generalised (audiences) African publics. That is, through the *Kenyan-ness* or *African-ness* of their habitus – the schemata of dispositions developed within Kenyan and/or other African fields which give them a practical sense of what it *means* to be Kenyan and/or African – they establish what Benson (2013) describes as *habitus affinities* with their audiences. That is, particular journalists and particular audiences share relatively similar positions and experiences, and so readily recognise one another as legitimate members of the same class (or nation, race, etc.), establishing an "elective affinity" with one another:

> *a critic can only 'influence' his readers insofar as they extend him this power because they are structurally attuned to him in their view of the social world, their tastes, and their whole habitus. […] A good* Figaro *editor […] chooses a* Figaro *literary critic […] because, without having deliberately tried, 'he naturally speaks the language of* Le Figaro*' […]. To each position there correspond presuppositions, […] and the homology between the producers' positions and their clients' is the precondition for this complicity[.]*
>
> (Bourdieu 1980, 279)

In theory, then, recruiting Kenyan or African journalists to report the news at CGTN Africa increases its relative chances of resonating with African publics because the two groups (both figuratively and, in some cases, literally) "speak the same language" – that is, they will tell more *authentic* and *relevant* African stories.

However, as Schultz notes, "the game can be played from different positions," giving as an example the fact that an intern saying "that is a good story" does not have the same effect as an experienced editor saying the same phrase, even if said for ostensibly the same reasons about the same story (2007, 193). At CGTN Africa, this situation is complicated by nationalised and racialised hierarchies at the station. Whilst most newsgatherers, content-creators, and anchors at CGTN are Kenyan they are often dominated by and subordinate to editors, managers, and gatekeepers who are either international or Chinese. A Kenyan

journalist explained to me how African journalists could not easily move up the chain of command: "I don't think there is promotion. You get into a role, and you serve in that role. […] I think you can move across departments, but that's a bit rare. But promotion? No" (*CGTN-19*). Moreover, this stance was evidenced in fact: most staff remain in a single position for the entirely of their tenure at the station. One scriptwriter I spoke to had been in the same position for six years. Another senior Kenyan journalist had joined as an editor during the first intake in 2011 and was still in the same position over a decade later! As another Kenyan journalist complained: "the bureau chief is Chinese. The managing editor is Chinese. […] The next level of management […] is Chinese. So, there is nowhere to go up there. […] If those are Chinese positions, then you have glass ceiling right here" (*CGTN-3*).

This follows Wahutu's (2018) argument that reporting on Africa continues to be dominated by journalists who have *habitus disaffinities* with African publics – i.e. non-Africans. In this respect, the situation at CGTN Africa is not dissimilar to other major international news organisations operating in Kenya (and elsewhere). Bunce (2015) found similar hierarchies in place at Reuters' bureau in Nairobi, with white Western managers dominating the newsroom. She notes that, "in normal day-to-day reporting, Kenyan journalists in the Nairobi bureaux have a high level of involvement in decision making about the stories and angles of reporting" but "were absent from the management level of the newswires and outlets." Whilst this was not always an issue with every story, and times of heightened news interest – such as the violence which engulfed the 2007 Kenyan elections – "decisions were made swiftly, often without discussion or consultation; the hierarchies of management became more visible, and the Kenyan voices were side-lined" (Bunce 2015, 54).

Whilst some journalists I interviewed argued that there is space at CGTN Africa to explore lots of stories with a respectable degree of autonomy, ultimately, the final decision as to what runs on the channel (or not) is not in the hands of Kenyan journalists. As one Kenyan put it succinctly: "of course, the last word is with the bureau chief, so you try and convince [him] […]. If he doesn't [agree], too bad!" (*CGTN-9*). The Chinese staff at the station fill their specialist role in interdicting reports which do not fulfil the criteria the organisation applies to its reporting.

However, active censorship of this kind is only part of the story of the news making processes at CGTN Africa. Partially, this is logistical. The bureaucracy needed to parse through every story in this way would simply not be conducive to the time-conscious demands of news

work (Soloski 1989). Moreover, interviews with staff confirm that the majority stories tend to move frictionless through the system. If this is so, it relies, as Wahutu argues, on local-national journalists having "internalized the 'rules of the game' as to the editorial stances and preferences of editors and sub-editors" (2018, 39). How Kenyan journalists come to (or fail to) embody the dispositions within their habitus which make day-to-day work at CGTN Africa practical is the subject of the remainder of this chapter. To begin this discussion, we must first explore in more detail the development of the Kenyan journalistic field, and the subsequent "class habitus" it produces in Kenyan journalists who go on to work for international media organisations.

The Kenyan journalistic field

Journalism in Kenya invites "mixed opinion: some consider it deeply compromised […], but others point to its vibrancy" (Ogola 2011, 80). Building on this view, Lohner et. al have argued that "journalism in Kenya face[s] highly complex and changing structural conditions shaped by the country's colonial and authoritarian legacy, its cultural and ethnic diversity, by hybrid forms of current political governance, and an ambivalent political culture" (2016, 1). This section will briefly explore these complexities through a history of Kenyan's mediascape, and the reflections of Kenyan research participants.

The modern Kenyan journalistic field traces its history back to emergence of the settler press of British East Africa. The first colonial newspaper, the *African Standard*, was founded in 1902 (renamed *The Standard* in 1977), and a competitor, *The Daily Nation*, was formed 1960. Whilst both papers were firmly colonist at their inception, upon Kenya's independence in 1963, they threw their weight behind Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta. Under Kenyatta, Kenya became a highly centralised one-party-state, based on an "ideology of order" (Atieno-Odhiambo 1987), and the media were co-opted into supporting this agenda, engaging primarily in development journalism, and this continued for a period under his successor, Daniel arap Moi. As discontent at Moi's authoritarian rule spread through Kenyan society during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Kenyan media increasingly became sites of ideological contestation, and news became steadily more oppositional (Ogola 2011).

Following the restoration of multi-party politics to Kenya in 1991, the Kenyan economy was broadly liberalised, and media organisations became much less reliant on state

sponsorship, adopting commercial agendas based on increasing advertising revenue. Kenya's media expanded and diversified rapidly during this period, allowing greater space for different forms of journalism to emerge. Despite liberalisation, reforms to media freedoms and relevant legislation dragged behind. As such, the Kenyan government continued to be able to interfere with media organisations through lack of regulation over political ownership, coupled with government control over licensing and advertising. For example, Samuel Macharia was able to secure multiple broadcast licences for his newly formed Royal Media Services (RMS) group in the early 2000's, at a time when the Nation Media Group (NMG) was struggling to do so because of its oppositional line to Moi's government. However, when Macharia began to associate with then-opposition leader Mwai Kibaki, RMS's licences were temporarily revoked, and restored only after Macharia renounced his ties Kibaki (Ogola and Rodny-Gumede 2013).

The 2007 Kenyan elections were a watershed moment for the country's journalists and media. The widespread post-election violence which affected the country was considered to have been fanned by politically partisan media coverage divided along broadly ethnic lines (Makokha 2010). The soul-searching amongst journalists following this has led to an increasing focus on professionalisation, including an growing interest in the values associated with "peace journalism" (Galtung 2003). However, this change in course is what Tettey describes as "self-imposed accountability," based only on "voluntary acceptance of certain standards and codes of behaviour" (2006, 242). Whilst the government instituted legislative media reforms as part of the new 2010 constitution, little has changed in the past decade vis-à-vis media-state relations.

Media in Kenya today then, continues to be influenced by its oscillating relationship to the political-bureaucratic and the economic fields. In general, media organisations are characterised by widespread political and cross-media ownership. The three largest organisations are: RMS, owned by Macharia, who has flitted between different political alignments; NMG, owned by the Aga Khan, whose diverse business interests make him one of the most influential investors in Kenya; and the *Standard Media Group* (SMG), whose largest shareholders are the family of the late President Moi (Nyanjom 2012). These groups all operate across a variety of media, contributing Kenya's largest newspapers (*The Daily Nation* and *The Standard*), radio stations (*Citizen Radio*, as well as a vast array of vernacular stations), and television broadcasters (*Citizen TV*, KTN, and *Nation Television*) (Ireri 2017a).

Despite their size and connections, however, these organisations remain highly exposed to both political and commercial manipulation (Nyanjom 2012). One CGTN Journalist who had worked at one of the country's leading newspapers, recalled how they eventually quit their job because of the amount of interference taking place in his day-to-day work: "the newspaper got very politicised, and the owners were […] were more interested in […] people they could control. […] So, eventually, they pushed me out. […] I felt the pressure, the interrogation, the scrutiny, day-to-day, […] so ultimately […] I resigned" (*CGTN-17*). At the heart of this journalist's discontent with their working situation is a dissonance – in Bourdieusian terminology, *hysteresis* – between the values of most Kenyan journalists and the realities of their working environment.

Broadly speaking, "good journalism" in Kenya today is heavily impacted by Western journalistic values. International broadcasters – particularly the BBC – continue to exert significant influence over readers, listeners, and viewers across Kenya (Lohner, Banjac, and Neverla 2016). Their professional education is also likely to be heavily influenced by Western journalistic values. Almost all of my Kenyan participants, like most Kenyan journalists, hold degrees in journalism (or related subjects), primarily from one of Kenya's top journalism schools at the University of Nairobi or Daystar University, whilst several had attended universities in the United Kingdom. Curriculums at these universities continue to be based primarily on Western texts and sources (Ireri 2017a), as one journalist explained: "I joined Daystar University [which] […] has strong American influence and sponsorship for a lot of the courses, so even the training there, I would say, had an American perspective" (*CGTN-11*). As such, most Kenyan cub journalists enter the field with values which broadly conform to Western models of journalism. Ogongo-Ongong'a and White (2008) found a strong sense of public responsibility amongst young Kenyan journalists, who understood their jobs as fulfilling conventional Western roles such as information-provider, being a "voice for the voiceless," or as watchdogs "holding truth to power."

However, Kenyan journalists operate within a difficult and dominated field in which their held values do not necessarily match up well with the realities of their work. Though many are afforded significant freedoms under Kenya's constitution, and news reporting in Kenya is often considered vibrant, most journalists face consistent (if not daily) constraints on their work. The government continues to take direct and indirect action against media organisations and journalists. Police raids on newsrooms are not uncommon and harassment

of journalists is widespread (Gachie et al. 2013) – one of my participants recalled how he had been arrested by police and held without charge for over twenty-four hours. The organisation which accredits journalists, the Media Council of Kenya (MCK), and that which protects their statutory rights, the Kenyan Union of Journalists (KUJ), are both subject to government funding and oversight (Ogola and Rodny-Gumede 2013). Political ownership of media is commonplace leading to high levels of political and societal parallelism in the press – a common bugbear for many of my respondents. From the economic pole, advertisers also routinely intervene in news work (Lohner, Banjac, and Neverla 2016). In addition, journalists' work is set against a backdrop of poor job security and low levels of pay which tend to encourage conformism, and may lead to questionable professional ethics, such as the pervasive practice of "brown-envelope journalism" (Ireri 2017b).

Kenyan journalists that come to work for CGTN Africa, therefore, often arrive from local media with a professional habitus developed with high ideals but grounded in harsh realities. This shared background, set of mutual experiences, and common dispositions about news making help shape the way that Kenyan journalists interact with CGTN Africa's position in the global journalistic field.

"China habitus"

In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore the extent to which non-Chinese journalists working at CGTN Africa develop a "China habitus." I say "China habitus" so as not to say "Chinese habitus." A "China habitus" is not the same as a the habitus of a Chinese journalist, but, rather, the image or impression of Chinese journalism – whose definition is contested (Lee 2005; Pan and Lu 2009; Zhao 2011; Repnikova 2017) and *not* the subject of this thesis – on non-Chinese journalists working at CGTN Africa. That is, staff develop a set of dispositions which enable them to engage "intuitively" with the criteria that govern newsworthiness at CGTN Africa.

Interviews confirm that, whilst censorship does occur, top-down direction of work at CGTN Africa is limited. More significant, I argue, is a bottom-up approach to a *self-censorship* (both conscious and unconscious) rooted in the effects of habitus. That is, the ideological boundaries of news work are principally learned on the job through (primarily negative) feedback loops, "productive ambiguity" (Repnikova 2017) and a "regime of uncertainty"

(Hassid 2008b). Attempting to work within these parameters, non-Chinese journalists search for homologies with their own durable dispositions, and/or (if they can) develop new dispositions to deal with the uncertainty of the unfamiliar.

Those who struggle to adapt tend to leave the organisation, whilst those who stay might seem to have "sold out to China" (Gagliardone and Pál 2017, 1055). In this account, the scales seem permanently tipped against journalistic autonomy. Instead, by adapting and developing, these journalists sacrifice autonomy in some areas whilst carving out opportunities in others, pushing out new boundaries whilst subverting old ones. That is, the development of a "China habitus" better enables non-Chinese journalists working at CGTN Africa to consistently and successfully engage in "improvisatory performances" (Bourdieu 1990b) in order to work with, around, and through the unfamiliarity of its news criteria.

Uncertainty

Strict top-down censorship is often a messy and time-consuming activity that requires an disciplined cadre following clear instructions as to what is or is not ideologically permissible. Despite popular imagery of Chinese media as a hellscape of stringent control, the reality is that "in light of China's vast territory and population, the media control system relies largely on vague guidelines, changeable instructions, and responses after the fact, rather than on rigid prepublication censorship" (Polumbaum and Lei 2008, 6). Outside of a few forbidden topics, the CCPPD offers only highly ambiguous guidance. Within these grey areas, "it is often impossible for reporters to know ahead of time what will be a safe story" (Hassid 2008b, 423).

Working within this system, "those employees most likely to reduce uncertainty over the proper boundaries of coverage gain prominence" (Hassid 2008b, 422). For journalists in China, "a critical measure of 'professional maturity' is having developed an 'intuitive' sense of the ideological boundaries (*du*) of journalistic work. Job autonomy […] is achieved by being able to act 'naturally' in accordance with the centrally enforced principles of seeing and speaking" (Pan and Lu 2009, 225). These journalists gradually *learn* to discern what to say (and not say), as well how to (or how not to) say it. Ideological boundaries are demarcated in "such a deliberately fuzzy way that news workers self-censor to a critical degree" (Hassid 2008b, 415). It is a form of self-censorship which is naturalised, intuitive, an aspect of their habitus.

For staff at CGTN Africa, a "regime of uncertainty" pervades almost every aspect of their working lives. In the following sections, I will outline how journalists experience this uncertainty through their interactions with CGTN Africa's organisational and bureaucratic structures. Then I will explore how they adapt and develop in relation to these interactions, searching for and building upon homologies within their own habitus, and devising new tactics to successfully improvise their performances. Finally, I will question why some choose to weather these issues whilst others choose to move on in search of greener (or easier) pastures.

Gatekeeping and feedback

An important way that journalists at CGTN Africa experience uncertainty is through the organisation's gatekeeping procedures. Whilst the concept of gatekeeping has been criticised because it "leaves 'information' sociologically untouched" (Schudson 1989, 265), what is interesting is not the actual selection or discarding of particular stories (or types of stories) by editors, but the creative and chilling effects of the feedback loops that result from the routine interactions between journalists and gatekeepers, during which journalists learn to anticipate news criteria. Gatekeeping at CGTN Africa is, as one journalist described, "a tightly controlled ship" (CGTN-2). Moreover, it is a complex system designed to breed uncertainty by engaging multiple – often conflicting – layers of gates. Stories can be vetted by different staff, sat in different locations, at different times during and after production.

Within the newsroom in Nairobi, there are two levels of gatekeepers: non-Chinese and Chinese. The non-Chinese staff are generally editors or team leaders who manage the day-to-day running of a department, with a Chinese supervisor overseeing their work. Story pitches come first to the editor, who may choose to either approve the pitch or push it on to their supervisor for vetting. The majority of stories *are* vetted by a Chinese supervisor before being approved for production – if only because production expenses have to be signed-off by a Chinese staff member. The final decision rests with the Chinese supervisor:

> *the editor has very little power to approve [stories]. It all boils down to what the Chinese person will say. If they like the story, good; if they don't like the story, regardless of how good a story the editor or I think it is, it won't go. Poof. That's it.*
>
> (*CGTN-10*)

If a Chinese supervisor is unsure about a story, they may either reject it outright or send it up the chain-of-command to be vetted by a senior manager. Likewise, meetings are led by non-Chinese staff but are almost always attended by a Chinese staff member who can either choose to veto stories at the meeting or pass information up the chain afterwards. This system ensures that every story is vetted by a Chinese staff member, and executive power is effectively removed from non-Chinese staff:

> *the deputy news editor was not allowed to approve a script […]. As a Kenyan, he was not allowed to do that. But somebody who used to be a receptionist in Beijing, she used to approve scripts; not check them, because her English wasn't good enough, but she would sign off on a script.*
>
> (*CGTN-6*)

It is a valid question as to why CGTN Africa employs a non-Chinese stratum of editors: what is their purpose as gatekeepers? One role they fulfil is as a gap between the non-Chinese and Chinese staff, serving to conduit or stymie information flows through the organisation, as a Kenyan journalist explained: "I'm not allowed to go to my Chinese supervisor. I need to go to the […] team leader, and they'll decide if they need to communicate my issues to the Chinese" (*CGTN-14*). This keeps Chinese supervisors at a remove from the staff under their charge. A common complaint was that staff barely interacted with their line managers. One journalist explained that their relationship with their supervisor is "non-existent; I can't even remember the last time I saw her face" (*CGTN-10*), whilst another claimed that their boss didn't even know their name: "He doesn't give a fuck about that" (*CGTN-5*).

The decision-making processes of Chinese supervisors are essentially a "black-box." Feedback on stories is extremely limited and tends to be purely instructive with little or no justification: "they don't tell you why the story didn't make the cut, so you end up not knowing why something was rejected" (*CGTN-10*). As such, journalists at the station are often left scratching their heads trying to work out why a story had been axed, as two journalists discussed:

> *CGTN-7: They won't tell you why you have to remove a word, or why you can't show something. […] We'd sit down afterwards and be like, "okay, so what's the political situation? How did this person piss off China today?"*
>
> *Interviewer: So, you guys had to figure out amongst yourselves why something would be censored?*
>
> *CGTN-6: Yes! It's just from the top-down, like, "you do," and "you don't."*
>
> *CGTN-7: And it changes from day to day! Like, last week, that person will be fine, and then, this week, something happened, and they are a persona non grata!*
>
> *CGTN-6: So, it's very hard to keep track of that with no official record or style or policy.*
>
> *CGTN-7: They won't send an email about it!*
>
> (*CGTN 6 and CGTN-7*)

A producer concurred: "it's like [the Chinese] have read a book that they're not willing to tell anyone else about. There are just things that they won't explain, and you've just got to deal with it because they're your boss" (*CGTN-13*). This system results in a significant chilling effect on the non-Chinese journalists' sense of professional autonomy, as a team leader explained:

> *it's your job to bring out a story that is right and objective. So, you do not want someone telling you "I don't think this is right." But if you ask them why they think it's not right, they don't give you an explanation. You end up thinking "I will not even attempt it," because every time you feel that the story is not making sense.*
>
> (*CGTN-12*)

This loss of autonomy results from non-Chinese staff being heavily reliant on Chinese supervisors' judgment in order to get stories to air. Instead of the autonomy that comes with a sureness in one's professional capabilities and judgement, staff at CGTN Africa are often faced with uncertainty caused by the application of unfamiliar and seemingly arbitrary news

criteria. There was a general sense that nothing at the station could be done without a Chinese supervisor's say so unless it should come back to bite you. As a producer explained: "when we had meetings without Chinese people, we would go through the day walking on eggshells, because we did not know whether we would have to change our plans or not" (*CGTN-15*).

The purpose of this system is to ensure that those employed to monitor content are "the most cautious" (Hassid 2008b, 423). That Chinese staff occupy the highest positions in the organisational hierarchy is not simply a matter of course, but an expression of their symbolic power to consecrate what is or is not "news" at CGTN Africa. Not only do they possess dispositions associated with the Chinese journalistic field which grant them specialist knowledge that enables them to navigate the uncertainties surrounding CCPPD guidance, they also retain stakes in the "game" of Chinese journalism. That is, because they are answerable to CGTN's executives in Beijing they are deeply invested in ensuring that only ideologically correct content airs on the channel. As a sympathetic international journalist noted, "at the end of the day, the Chinese bosses are the ones that are accountable for what goes out" (*CGTN-18*). As such, the uncertainty that is a feature of the Chinese journalistic field colonises the work of staff at CGTN Africa.

And since many Chinese managers are young, inexperienced, and lacking in practice at "playing the edge ball," this leads to even higher levels of conservatism in their editing (Pál 2017): "they'd be very terrified to make any mistake" one Kenyan journalist told me (*CGTN-1*). Put simply, Chinese staff they know the rules of the game well enough to know not to break them, making the non-Chinese journalists highly reliant on their judgement: "the most politically reliable members of the media receive dramatically enhanced power" (Hassid 2008b, 423).

This leads us to the second differential layer of gatekeeping, that between Nairobi and Beijing. Organisationally speaking, the Nairobi hub answers to executives sitting in Beijing. Infrastructurally, the channel's signal is broadcast via Beijing, so ultimate control over what is aired rests there. However, the actual day-to-day role that Beijing plays in the work of the Nairobi hub is less clear. Marsh notes that station management claim that most decision-making is carried out in Nairobi, and that "very little" editorial control is executed from Beijing, with particular exceptions (2018, 113). Anecdotally, at least, many of my interviewees agreed with this assessment. One explained that "Beijing more or less goes with what Nairobi

has planned [but] sometimes Beijing can directly call us and say, "hey, we want you to work on this story" (*CGTN-17*).

However, an important aspect to note is that communication with Beijing is always mediated by the Chinese supervisors based in Nairobi: "We didn't have any contacts we could call. Any information that we wanted to pass to them had to go through […] the local Chinese medium" (*CGTN-4*). This contributed to a sense of uncertainty and disconnection at the station, as staff were never sure who was actually behind decision-making. A producer described how Beijing's influence, rather than being present or obvious, was felt more like a proverbial Sword of Damocles

> *that was always hanging over your head. [It was] sort of, "Beijing says this, Beijing says that," but that was very much managed by the Chinese staff. All communication with Beijing had to go through them, so I don't know how much of it was Beijing and how much of it was [local]. […] I personally think that […] Beijing was used as a scapegoat a lot of the time.*
>
> (*CGTN-13*)

The gap between Nairobi and Beijing therefore represents another "black-box." It could serve as a convenient excuse – whether real or imagined – for Chinese editors in Nairobi to censor stories, whilst retaining the power to overturn Nairobi's decisions.

Moreover, decisions being overturned or changed could happen both pre- and post-publication. Pre-publication gatekeeping could occur at literally any point of production, from pitching, through editorial meetings, to a story literally being floated minutes before airing. An editor complained how the Chinese would "approve things and let us go as far as we possibly could with something, and then, at the last minute, be like, 'actually, no'" (*CGTN-7*). Though most censorship would occur at an early stage of production, ultimately, the moment of truth was the half an hour before the *Africa Live* bulletin aired. The rundown would be reviewed by two Chinese staffers, and this process sometimes overran, causing huge difficulties for the duty line producer: "they will be watching as the bulletin is on air, and if there is something they see, they will just float it. So, next thing you know, […] it says you have ten minutes under! Where are you going to get ten minutes of content?" (*CGTN-15*).

To add to the confusion, a story that had previously been floated could then be re-reviewed and found to be acceptable: "maybe, they'll come back to you the next day and say, 'play that story, I just checked it again'" (CGTN-15). Indeed, post-publication censorship also occurred. Digital stories that received negative feedback were sometimes removed from CGTN Africa's online platforms. But stories could also be edited after the fact, though not necessarily with any consistency, as a digital journalist explained:

> *I published a story on the website, and five minutes later I got a message, and I was just told "delete all this paragraph immediately." […] So, my article was substantially shortened. But they'll not always censor you. […] I had done another story about [the same thing], and that story was not corrected, it was not censored in any way.*
>
> (*CGTN-19*)

This illustrates that gatekeeping at CGTN African is a complex, multi-layered process, often with seemingly arbitrary, inconsistent, and conflicting application. Getting a story through one gatekeeper by no means guarantees a story will make it to air or remain published in the long-term. Every journalist I spoke to had experiences of having pitches rejected or stories pulled at the last minute – some more than others. In the simplest terms, the purpose of such a system is that, in the words of a former director of CCTV, "journalists mature in this process of rejection" (quoted in Pan and Lu 2009, 225). That is, through having stories "spiked," journalists learn the proper ideological boundaries of news reportage. But the deeper implication is that uncertainty pervades the entire system, with every decision made by each gatekeeper a careful weighing up of "the possible consequences of breaching an unseen, constantly shifting, yet very real line between the permissible and impermissible" (Jirik 2010, 19–20). With such a blurred boundary and so many heads to interpret it, this uncertainty breeds a distinct conservatism into editing.

Training

One important way in which non-Chinese staff at CGTN Africa could potentially learn boundaries is through feedback. However, feedback is usually instructional and specific rather than explained and generalisable. This tended to create negative feedback loops, in which staff learned to avoid the inclusion of context-specific information in news reports – such as

mentions about Desmond Tutu. Another important method most organisations use to inculcate desired dispositions in their staff is through training. The dispositions of a habitus are durable, however, they "can be eroded, countered or even dismantled by exposure to novel external forces, as demonstrated by […] specialized training" (Wacquant 2016, 66). As such, "a significant part of the training of […] journalists can be described as a process of habitus transformation" (Neveu 2007, 339). Training is an opportunity to introduce and/or reinforce ways of being and doing to individuals, representing the accumulation of particular forms of capital, both inscribed (certificated) and embodied.

However, when I asked one Kenyan journalist if he had received any training at CGTN, his answer could not have been more emphatic: "Nope! Nope, nope, nope, nope. None. None, none, none, at all" (*CGTN-5*). Indeed, there was near-unanimous consensus amongst staff that CGTN Africa offered next to no journalistic training, and what was offered was "very rudimentary" (*CGTN-2*). One described the training they received as little more than "a refresher course on how to use a camera" (*CGTN-10*). Whilst some senior non-Chinese staff did occasionally attempt to promote internal training, these were few and far between, and not part of a larger training plan adopted by the organisation, as a senior editor explained:

> *we brought in a few consultants who were good at writing, especially for global audiences, and ran a few courses targeting mainly the writers and reporters. But there were not many of those. I wouldn't say there was a big plan, or that training was among the big priorities for [CGTN].*
>
> (*CGTN-11*)

Those "who do seek avenues for formal professional growth expressed to me that they generally pursued this outside of the workplace" (Lefkowitz 2017, 15). Some staff went out of their way to get training but paid for it out of their own pockets: "the management programme I did, I used my own money. […] CCTV did not pay for any training. […] We only exported our experience to CGTN" (*CGTN-12*).

Others complained that they didn't receive an induction or handover when they started their job: "my first week there was very stressful, because I walked into my office, and my predecessor said 'Hi, this is where I am. I am going to airport now. Bye!' I had to pick it up from there. So, no there was absolutely no induction," forcing him to learn "on the fly" (*CGTN-*

13). Another journalist concurred: "there was no list of 'the twenty commandments of Chinese journalism,' or anything like that. It was when you do stories and some are rejected, […] that is when you learned about it. That was the training, effectively" (*CGTN-8*). As such, many staff found that potentially hazardous interactions with CGTN's gatekeeping was the only way to develop at the station:

> *"Learn-by-do!" […] There was no handbook on house style […] that you could refer to when in doubt. There was nothing. So, you […] knew you had made a mistake when your story is flagged on the run-down. That was it. You cross your fingers that it will be the kind of mistake that won't mean a shouting match.*
>
> (*CGTN-3*)

Later recruits might have people around them to guide them. One producer explained how he received an "informal induction" from two of his colleagues whom he shared a house with (*CGTN-13*). These mentors might not technically be more experienced journalists, but, rather, have had the requisite "training" through their own run-ins with CGTN's gatekeeping to have developed dispositions which they could then pass on to others. A senior producer described how he learned station policy through his interactions with junior staff:

> *sometimes, even junior people would say, "ah, that is not going to go through," because people knew. And they would be surprised when I would assign them to do certain stories, and they would be like, "oh, well I knew that was not gonna fly here." So, that is how you learn.*
>
> (*CGTN-15*)

The only significant training CGTN Africa offers its staff are sponsored trips to China. These form part of a wider strategy of "infrastructural realignment" from West to East, in which journalists from across Africa are increasingly trained by Chinese institutions in the use of Chinese technologies. As Banda notes, this training is "not value-neutral; it also carries with it the cultural and political values associated with those skills" (2009b, 53). Benabdallah has illustrated how these training programmes "are an opportunity for African trainees to be socialised in Chinese values, norms, and expert knowledge" (2017, 495).

However, my participants were less convinced by the efficacy of these trips. One journalist explained to me that the trip he undertook involved some technical training, but mainly involved a cultural tour of China: "we went for about two-weeks training in Beijing, […] learning the systems that we'd be using […]. The other days [of the trip], we would just spend traveling around China, getting exposure to Chinese people [and] culture" (*CGTN-11*). One thought that the trip was simply to "show off how amazing China is" (*CGTN-6*). Another agreed that "you'd do a two-week trip, be taken around the China […] and it was almost as if they were just […] flexing how much progression China had made. […] [I]t was sold as a trip about journalism, but it really wasn't" (*CGTN-8*).

Lefkowitz's interviewees also broadly agreed with this sentiment, telling her that "the point of the trip […] is not to provide media-related training as much as to 'help you gain familiarity and appreciation for Chinese history,'" and that, for some, they "found that learning about what 'informs [Chinese] attitudes' helped them understand management's behaviour within CCTV-Africa" (Lefkowitz 2017, 14). Whilst, on the whole, my interviewees were less convinced, one Kenyan journalist did describe the positive impression a trip to China made on him: "getting to Beijing was a shock! These huge numbers of people, these huge numbers of vehicles, these huge numbers of trains, all this culture! So, it was a real learning curve, and it really opened my mind to this alternative world view" (*CGTN-2*).

Training that is provided for staff at CGTN Africa can be considered threadbare at best. Little onsite training is provided, particularly at the crucial early stages of employment. Where staff have received training, this has usually been on their own initiative. Trips to China happen only infrequently and are of doubtful efficacy in terms of affecting journalistic work – though there is a greater potential for their cumulative effect over time. As such, staff often have little information or expertise with which to navigate CGTN's systems, learning only by doing, or through word of mouth. This lack of training adds to the levels of uncertainty at the station, as a lack of information entails potentially hazardous interactions with the gatekeeping system, which could lead to increased levels of editorial conservatism.

Contracts, pay, and language barriers

Uncertainty also underpinned other practical aspects of journalists' working lives at CGTN Africa. One curious aspect of employment at the station is that each staff member negotiates their own contract. This leads to significant discrepancies in pay: "regardless of the fact that

you have the same [job description], each person is earning differently" (*CGTN-10*). These discrepancies were particularly pronounced between Kenyan and international staff, which "built animosity" (CGTN-10). This animosity was widespread and sowed distrust between Kenyan and international staff, helping to reify these cleavages. Whilst many were willing to work through their differences, it was sometimes done through gritted teeth, as a Kenyan explained:

> *I don't have a thing against the white people in the office, […] because who doesn't want good money? It's not like they're going to be given five-thousand dollars and say, "no, I don't want it because you're not paying the black people enough." But then again, I feel like they can play their part, but they don't want to part of the circus, […] so that's the only problem.*
>
> (*CGTN-14*)

Additionally, most staff are hired on short-term contracts, rather than in pensionable positions, which also works to decrease their personal bargaining power and desire to take collective action: "almost everybody is on a two- or three-year contract, maximum. So, without much security of tenure […] a lot of people would pick their battles carefully" (*CGTN-11*). As Phillips *et al.* argue, short-term contracts are "like keeping a dog a very short leash. Each time they move in the wrong direction they can be restrained so that, in the end, in order to gain a measure of employment protection, journalists are expected to 'internalize'" organisational requirements (2010, 55).

CGTN Africa also employs a generous monthly bonus payment scheme based on a review of staff performance by their line manager. The bonus was variable but could almost double a Kenyan journalists' monthly income. The allocation of the bonus was often a serious point of contention amongst staff, leading to accusations of favouritism: "they improvised these monthly bonuses. […] So, if you're a favourite, you'll get up to eight-hundred dollars bonus [a month]. That is somebody else's gross pay! […] We have categories of how well you can suck up, so it's never about well I can do my job" (*CGTN-14*). Another journalist added that "people would literally stab each other in the back over the bonus" (*CGTN-5*).

All of these issues pertaining to contracts and pay help to drive wedges between staff, making it harder to collectively navigate the systems of uncertainty they face. One

international staffer complained: “there was a bit of mistrust among people there, especially between the Kenyans and foreigners[.] […] So, there were never really honest conversations happening” (CGTN-15). A Kenyan similarly described a “culture of suspicion” at the station, explaining how he felt that “sometimes you don’t even know if you should talk when you’re in the office, […] you really don’t know who you can trust” (*CGTN-19*). This culture appears especially troubling considering that word of mouth represents such an important development method at CGTN Africa.

These issues were further accentuated by linguistic differences between staff. Lefkowitz (2017) found that whilst English is the official language at the station, both Mandarin and Kiswahili are commonly heard. Moreover, language creates exclusionary zones between different groups of staff. An international producer recalled how the Kenyan technical director he worked with “spoke Swahili all the time [and] I don’t speak Swahili, […] [so] that really annoyed me, and I thought it was very unprofessional. (*CGTN-15*). Likewise, Chinese staff often chose to speak to each other in Mandarin. A planner noted how at weekly editorial meetings, after stories had been introduced, the Chinese staff would speak about the stories in Mandarin so that he “didn’t know what they were talking about” (*CGTN-12*).

In sum, then, these factors all worked to sow mistrust, create divisions amongst different classes of staff, inhibit intra-organisational communication, and, as a corollary, increase uncertainty in staff’s day-to-day work.

Hysteresis and the search for homologies

Journalistic work at CGTN Africa is persistently plagued by uncertainty. It is those journalists best able to navigate these systems of ambiguity and doubt that are best placed to survive and thrive within the organisation. The relative chances that a journalist can adapt to and improvise action in such an environment is a product of their habitus, and the levels of match and mismatch between their dispositions and their position in the journalistic field.

In this respect, Chinese journalists at the station have a significant advantage, as their professional habitus reflects the structures of the Chinese journalistic field. Since the uncertainty encountered at CGTN Africa is broadly homologous with (and partially a colonising product of) structures of uncertainty within the Chinese journalistic field, Chinese journalists are better armed with the experience and knowledge with which to navigate these minefields than their non-Chinese colleagues. The overlap of their habitus to these structures

is sufficient that they may act as "fish in water," negotiating uncertainty with a degree of ease. This helps to explain their organisational *and* symbolic domination of the news making processes at CGTN Africa.

The experience of non-Chinese staff is quite different. For most, the "regime of uncertainty" they face is deeply unfamiliar and treacherous. Their habitus has been configured within journalistic fields which share few structural homologies with those encountered at CGTN Africa. This can make it difficult for these journalists to adapt to these conditions. That is, they "do not possess the configurations of capital (*habitus*) needed to claim desirable field positions and […] their struggles to find a sustainable way of living are misrecognized" (Hardy 2014, 134–35). They might experience their work as a "fish out of water," negotiating the uncertainty with a visceral, bodily discomfort and unease, making missteps or adopting unviable strategies.

This is *hysteresis*. It is the result of individuals or groups entering a new field or taking up new positions whose capital structures are not reflected (or embodied) in their habitus. Their existing dispositions are both durable and transposable, meaning that they do not change quickly or easily, but may be deployed across a variety of fields – with differing degrees of match or mismatch. As such, journalists starting work at CGTN Africa attempt to deploy their existing dispositions about news making – developed in relation to their respective national journalistic fields – in their work, whilst adapting only slowly to their new position in the global journalistic field.

The experience of working at CGTN Africa could be extremely jarring, traumatic, or anxiety-inducing for journalists whose habitus was out of step with their position. One journalist, for example, told me: "Sunday nights, often, I lay awake stressing about what is going to happen in the week, and it is just not good for me. Personally, it drives me mad. […] [I]t is stressful, it really is stressful" (*CGTN-18*). Another explained how they felt the stress of coping with uncertainty in their body: "it was very, very stressful, because […] when you're done with your product, you have to go back when you think you may not have been in line with what Chinese. […] It's almost like an amputation, like, now you have to live with […] a prosthetic leg" (*CGTN-15*).

Others, however, were able to adapt with less difficulty, and felt uncertainty was minimal in their day-to-day work: "The Chinese could, at any moment, pull a story, but it didn't feel like that. […] It's like being in a society, where […] you're aware of restrictions

around you, but you still feel you're free" (*CGTN-8*). In doing so, this latter group tend (consciously or not) to search for homologies between the dispositions of own professional habitus and the structure of their current position in the field, disproportionately leaning on particular dispositions, and discarding others as appropriate. These particular dispositions then allow journalists to improvise particular forms of action which allow them to do their jobs in "appropriate" or "natural" ways. I will discuss some of the common homologies journalists drew on, and then explore how these dispositions encouraged particular forms of behaviour.

Normalising interference

A common way in which journalists – especially Africans – at CGTN Africa legitimised their work was by normalising interference in journalistic work, drawing on their experience of interference whilst working for local media in order to cope with similar conditions at CGTN Africa. Indeed, as Umejei notes, "there are some African journalists, who contended that self-censorship in [Chinese] organizations is not any different than in state-owned local media in Kenya" (2020, 73). Several keenly noted that every news organisation has its own agenda or is vulnerable to influence and interference from external forces:

> *I believe every media house has their […] rules and regulations [and] there are times you will have to […] actually do what goes with their house rules. As much as I would want to report a story one this direction, there is of course someone up there who wants a story done in a certain way.*
>
> (*CGTN-4*)

Another Kenyan journalist clarified:

> *absolute autonomy? I can't speak of that. But some autonomy? Yes, I can talk about that. And probably that cuts across [media]. […] It happens at CGTN, that a story you thought should run didn't run. The decision was probably made somewhere where you are not involved. […] [But] even at the BBC, journalists have been horrified to find a story has been spiked for whatever reason.*
>
> (*CGTN-17*)

Some journalists even felt that interference at CGTN Africa was preferable to that which they had experienced elsewhere because it was fairly predictable. A South African producer described to me the bad experiences he had had of receiving flak at several different news organisations in his homeland, and argued that, "at CGTN, I knew what I was dealing with, […] and sometimes it is about the devil you know" (*CGTN-15*). A Kenyan journalist, likewise, compared her experiences at CGTN Africa favourably with those of working for local media in Kenya: "personally, I'd rather hang in there with CGTN than work for local media, because they are a den of liars. The relationship between local media journalists and politicians is too close" (*CGTN-10*).

Drawing on these dispositions associated with national journalistic fields in which interference is more commonplace allowed journalists to accept particular boundaries to their work, enabling them to negotiate CGTN's unfamiliarity more easily by accepting particular topics as out of bounds, reducing contingencies considerably.

Dominated news formats

The majority of participants had been educated in the Western journalistic tradition. Many were interested in "hard news," political reporting, and investigative journalism. These are global *doxic* news values. However, these news values were generally not encouraged at CGTN Africa. Instead, usually dominated news formats, such positive reporting, constructive journalism, and softer news were. For some journalists, this allowed them the opportunity to develop their own personal interest in these dominated forms of news. A digital editor recalled how they relished the chance to have a platform to tell cultural stories that had long been relegated down the news bulletin or banished to documentary format:

> *I had this sort of feeling of coming home and being in a space where I could tell stories that I wanted to. […] [B]ecause China's whole thing is "we're not here to get involved in your politics," and everything is this sort of "soft news" – food, culture, art – which really appealed to me. I'm very interested in having the space to tell a different narrative of what Africa is.*
>
> (*CGTN-7 and CGTN-6*)

Another journalist who enjoyed softer topics found their values "work very well [at CGTN], because anything to do with politics is quite sensitive […] so, these other topics do very well, and there's rarely any opposition to story ideas along those lines" (*CGTN-16*).

Others who engaged with dominated news forms were those journalists who felt strongly about the dominant negative image of Africa in global news flows. These individuals found significant common-ground with their employer on the issue of positive reporting. As one explained: "I'd like to represent the continent, and the country in a positive way, yes: there, we agree" (*CGTN-9*).

Both groups were able to increase the level of overlap between the structure of their habitus and their position in the field by drawing on these usually dominated dispositions which favoured particular news values and formats.

Operational autonomy

Connected to both of the previous themes, many journalists were keen to point out that, in general, CGTN Africa offered them the platform and resources to tell almost any story *within* specified boundaries. Drawing on their experiences of working in often under-resourced and over-stretched local newsrooms, interviewees broadly concurred with Marsh's respondents, who told her that "Chinese managers generally give them what they need technically for their work. Reporters revel in the ability to pitch an obscure story and have it accepted" (2018, 106). In general, during these moves, their ability to allocate organisational resources (allocative autonomy) is decreased, whilst the ease with which they can undertake their day-to-day work (operational autonomy) is increased, as the structure of their habitus becomes more aligned with their relative position in the field (Wright, Scott, and Bunce 2020; Örnebring et al. 2018). In particular, journalists at CGTN Africa stressed that the resources the organisation was able to offer them meant they could do more with their journalism than would otherwise be the case. One senior editor conceded that there were limitations on his work, but concluded that:

> *on the flip side of it, the space you have to tell all these other positive and empowering stories […] was quite significant. […] They would make available to you resources that many other media houses would not be able to. So, if you have a focus and a cause,*

> *and you can find a balance between that and the limitations of where you can go with a story, then you can accomplish a lot.*
>
> (*CGTN-11*)

Another agreed that: "there are resources there. Massive, massive resources. You can tell any story you want; they will make it happen" (*CGTN-15*). Considering the purely financial constraints on their work that most interviewees had described when sharing their experiences of working in local media, in particular, many found that the backing offered to them by CGTN Africa significantly increased their ability to tell the stories they wanted. Others noted how working for a state-funded news organisation protected them from flak from advertisers which they had experienced in previous jobs. In short, many journalists I spoke to were keen to highlight the *enabling* aspects of working at CGTN Africa.

Tactics

By establishing homologies and drawing on specific dispositions or aspects of their experience, journalists at CGTN Africa develop a range of tactics to cope with and adapt to the contingencies of day-to-day work at the station, with its underlying "regime of uncertainty." However, these tactics vary depending on the particular configurations of an individual's habitus and its levels of match or mismatch with their position in the global journalistic field, but broadly fall into four categories: avoidance; disguise; compromise; and retaliation.

Avoidance

One tactic employed by journalists at CGTN Africa is avoidance, involving avoiding involvement with types of stories or forms of journalism that either did not align with their news values or which fall into grey areas of uncertainty that they are not equipped to navigate with confidence. As such, avoidance is most commonly employed by journalists whose habitus was poorly matched to the field, who are most likely to feel compromised by CGTN Africa's editorial line, as it does not match their sense of newsworthiness, and are therefore most likely to provoke censure through the application of outmoded professional dispositions in their work. Avoidance, despite its limited, reactive, and individualised nature, holds great

symbolic importance for these journalists, legitimating their claim to still be "real journalists" by stressing their abilities (or attempts) to evade interference (Wright, Scott, and Bunce 2020).

Broadly speaking, avoidance takes two forms. The first is reactive, avoiding particular stories on a day-to-day or case-by-case basis. This is particularly employed by generalists who have limited opportunities to disengage from particular subjects. For example, a line producer explained how they lay down personal red lines to maintain their professional integrity, but otherwise avoided conflict: "anything that would border on me lying, I would always say 'leave it'. […] But often [the day] would just go smoothly, because I think we learnt, and we hated disappointment, so we stayed away from stories we knew we likely to be canned at the last moment" (*CGTN-15*). A digital journalist, explained that they would simply avoid pitching stories that involved China, only undertaking them if specifically assigned by their supervisor, because they were afraid of making a mistake in their coverage that could provoke censure:

> *I don't really like mentioning China. […] If it's a UN Security Council decision, and China abstained, I will decide not to write about that story […]. I don't know whether [management] will take [the] abstention as something bad. So, altogether, we just tend to leave anything that is China related, unless you've been assigned it. […] In fact, it reached a point where they said, "look, President Xi is doing this, but Beijing will cover it," and we said "hallelujah," because if we see his name anywhere, we just start trembling. Like, this is a lot of unnecessary pressure.*
>
> (*CGTN-19*)

Moreover, this journalist had learned how some types of news were more or less controversial than others and actively sought to fill their quota of stories with softer pieces, particularly as it aligned with their interests: "one good thing about this place is that they don't really look at some things. Like, if it is sports, sports are not controversial for the Chinese, so that is how I choose" (*CGTN-19*). By focussing on sports stories, this journalist found an easy way to satisfy their own journalistic interests, fill their quota, and avoid censure.

Other journalists took even greater steps to avoid particular types of news, actively altering their job roles. This phenomenon has been noted by Wright, Scott, and Bunce, who

argued that "journalists engaged in longer-term strategies, such as opting to work on documentaries, where they could benefit from CGTN's generous resources, but escape what they said was the stricter editorial oversight involved in news output" (2020, 13). One participant had begun life as a generalist at CGTN Africa, but sought a transfer to the business desk to avoid having to write China-related or pro-government stories which did not align with their values:

> *I decided to gravitate towards becoming a business journalist, because I realised that this pro-government stuff, it felt like […] you can't even question the editors if you feel like you don't agree with what they're writing. […] Current affairs, I felt, was a lie. […] It was the best decision I made, especially for sleeping well at night.*
>
> (*CGTN-10*)

Another journalist had also scaled back their involvement with "hard news" formats, arguing that, because those stories would potentially have been heavily censored or rewritten by the editors, they were able to maintain a more authentic journalistic voice by focussing on human-interest pieces that would not be interfered with, even if this meant self-censoring themselves through avoiding particular topics:

> *when you realise that stories will be looked at keenly by a Chinese editor […] and will likely be edited, then you do tend […] naturally – to get your voice properly heard, and to feel like you're fulfilling those journalistic values – scale back to the personal interest stories. […] I did it because, yes, I was interested in it and I loved doing it, but also it was a way that I would get the full values that I believe in journalism heard.*
>
> (*CGTN-8*)

In doing so, these journalists can claim to be avoiding censorship and self-censorship because, as the same journalist argued, they are simply fulfilling his job description: "that is what I was there to do. So, I don't think it was self-censorship" (*CGTN-8*).

Another journalist went so far as to more or less stop creating stories for CGTN altogether and, instead, move into a production role at the station. At the time I spoke to them, this journalist had not done a story for CGTN Africa in two months, and only did so if

specifically requested. Instead, when they did want to continue journalistic work, they would work for another organisation or use online blogging as an outlet: "If I decide to work on anything myself […] I try to avoid doing stories for CGTN at all, unless I have to do something. […] Any other thing, I'll do it out of CGTN. Maybe blogging. Online shows are […] where I can just speak my mind freely" (*CGTN-5*).

Avoidance shares affinities with the tactic of "refusal" observed by Jirik in the operations of CCTV-9. As he notes, "for the most part, the CCPPD has no way of knowing what is actually happening inside media in the PRC. It operates through observing content. What it cannot see is what does not go into content" (Jirik 2010, 22–23). By avoiding or downplaying particular stories, journalists can reduce the amount of risk to themselves, and maintain a semblance of autonomy. This seemingly invisible evasion of political-bureaucratic domination is a perfect example of what de Certeau (1984) refers to as a "weapon of the weak." It is, therefore, no surprise that it tended to be those journalists whose habitus was least well-adapted to their field position who rely on avoidance as survival tactic.

Disguise

A different tactic used by some at the station was to disguise the reports they wanted to do to the extent that they would pass through the various gatekeepers untouched. Marsh notes how journalists at CGTN would "occasionally have to be 'a little clever and a little bit creative […], like if you want to do a story on corruption, you're going to focus on a successful anti-corruption programme'" (2018, 114). Indeed, across Sino-Africa media, Umejei describes how journalists develop "creative strategies to deal with the tensions arising from the conflict between their understanding of journalism and what they practice" (2020, 71), such employing a "reverse-inverted pyramid" style of reporting, or "demotion of lead."

In particular, the poor level of English of many of the Chinese staff at the station presents gaps for journalists to exploit, using a clever phrase or disguise a story to evade detection, as one producer explained: "A lot of the Chinese staff […] could not speak English. And then these are the people who are sub-ing your work and checking your grammar! So, you find ways around them. You can phrase things in ways so that they don't necessarily understand. There are ways around them" (*CGTN-13*). Another journalist agreed that, outside of obvious "China-bashing" or mentions of the Dalai Lama, many of the Chinese staff did not necessarily understand what changes to make in a script: "I mean, they had no idea what

changes I had made, because their level of English wasn't good enough, so I think their primary job was to make sure I didn't include any China-bashing somewhere in there" (*CGTN-6*).

However, despite these opportunities, very few interviewees mentioned specific instances where they had tried to disguise a story that would otherwise have been censored with clever use of language or semantics. This is perhaps unsurprising. This would constitute a high-risk tactic, requiring excellent mastery of red lines, and a well-established understanding of different editors' dispositions and skills.

Compromise

The majority of staff I spoke to – particularly senior, long-timers – explained how compromise with station management was the simplest way to navigate day-to-day news making at CGTN Africa. Whilst compromise meant accepting some forms of self-censorship and forgoing particular topics or stories, it opened up opportunities to explore others and profit from CGTN's significant resources. This was especially the case for journalists who had interests in otherwise dominated types of news that were given space and resources by CGTN. One senior staffer described how, whilst faced with limitations on reporting international relations – particularly when they involved China – they could usually stomach this because they were given opportunities to tell what they considered authentic "African stories":

> *I would say that for the better period of my working for CGTN, the overlap was sufficient to keep me there. Obviously, there were limitations. But I think what I found playing to my interests and my world view was that we had a pretty long leash in being able to tell the African stories, and how Africa is evolving, whether it was African business, whether it is initiatives by governments and non-state players, and what is happening around the world and how is Africa is interacting with the rest of the world.* (*CGTN-11*)

Another senior journalist echoed this sentiment, noting how they were not able to engage in investigative journalism as they would wish, but that this was, for the most part, offset by other factors: "I like investigative reporting. Am I doing a lot of that at CGTN? No, not at the

moment. Am I happy with that? No, I'm not. But I guess it is what it is. […] On most of the other things, I think we are pretty much okay" (*CGTN-9*).

Few operated without the tacit understanding that compromise meant *being compromised* in certain ways – that is, in sacrificing their allocative autonomy to choose stories. One producer explained that they were fully aware that part of the arrangement of doing his job meant agreeing to "manage [the Chinese] project." As they saw it, CGTN Africa purposefully invested in good journalists to produce high quality development journalism:

> *[they] will invest in good people who will produce good journalism, but also get them to do their developmental journalism as well. […] You almost sell your soul when you work there […]. You don't question because you don't care, but you know what they're doing, and that is why you are there. […] They told you exactly where you stand with them, and what they want you to do, and what you can contribute with your journalism there.*
>
> (*CGTN-15*)

Acquiescence with these requirements gave these journalists bargaining power. In order to tempt experienced journalists to join (and remain at) the station, management were often simultaneously willing to entertain and satisfy these individual's professional wants and desires without necessarily including them in organisation's decision-making processes (Soloski 1989), so that

> *there is room for creativity. […] They'll send you to Senegal, and they'll give you objectives of what they want, you know: "do two stories that you must do, and the other three, you can do whatever you want." So, there is always a trade-off and bargaining, especially with talented people that they want to keep. […] So, some people are willing to trade[.]*
>
> (*CGTN-15*)

In Bourdieusian terms, this trade-off is a result of the competition between differing heteronomies. That is, though domination by the Chinese political-bureaucratic field meant that journalists' autonomy at CGTN Africa was compromised, it simultaneously extended it in

other directions by enabling them to receive support from the station for types of journalism or particular stories that might *not* traditionally have been supported by the international news market.

Moreover, as journalists work within this structure, they slowly become better adapted to it, as their habitus adjusts to better reflect their position through a gradual process of development. This does not necessarily mean abandoning their existing professional dispositions about news or newsworthiness, which are extremely durable, but adapting them to be better suit to their current circumstances. Simply put, these journalists develop to "play the game" better from their position in the field as they learned the specificities of their editors' preferences and the news criteria used to judge stories. Rather than disguising their intentions, per se, they tended to reframe them so that they were more palatable to their supervisors:

> *sometimes, when you are writing up your pitch, and you know you want to do, you will also write it in a way that you know they will feel like they are also benefitting it. So, it's not always about your journalism alone, but you think of something with a nice Chinese hook[.]*
>
> (*CGTN-15*)

This practice was widespread, another senior newsroom figure noting how

> *there was a fairly rigorous workflow towards deciding which stories got done, and you'd often find that you'd always have to find a story with a fairly Chinese perspective, besides the others that you wanted to do, for it to move forward. So, that happened a lot.*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

In "playing the game," these journalists often ended up trading off one type of autonomy for another (Wright, Scott, and Bunce 2020). In their view, the security and resources made available to them to engage creatively with African news liberated them from the forces of the international news market, which had long brushed aside such stories. This freedom was paid for with limitations to reporting on international relations and politics – particularly

when it related to China – or by the need to actively search out "positive" and "constructive" stories and angles or include a "China hook." When I asked whether this bargaining affected their personal sense of professionalism, one senior journalist's response was bullish:

> *if I focus more on a certain aspect of a story and less on another aspect of that story, does that make me unethical? I do not think so, because, at the end of the day, I will still have mentioned that African governments are corrupt, which I do in our shows as I work for CGTN. But the emphasis is more of what can be done to stop this corruption.*
>
> (*CGTN-17*)

This journalist's argument was that journalistic autonomy is, one way or another, always a compromise, and is primarily established in finding ways to tell stories and ask questions within the context of one's own position. Indeed, as Schudson (2005a) argues persuasively, journalistic autonomy is never truly a zero-sum game, and that, in practice, the extremely complex, public, and vulnerable nature of journalistic work is what makes it consistently relevant. For journalists at CGTN Africa, it was those who adapted and developed dispositions associated with a "China habitus" who were able to navigate their way more easily through the uncertainties of their day-to-day work, appeared to *feel* most autonomous. This position reflects Örnebring's (2017) concept of "bounded autonomy," within which journalists have considerable autonomy to work on stories whilst simultaneously having an internalised understanding of the limits of these freedoms. As Repnikova notes,

> *[w]hile ambiguity undoubtedly limits […] critical journalism to the narrow grey zones demarcated by the party, it also facilitates its continued existence […]. Uncertainty, therefore, should not only be understood as a mechanism of control via self-censorship, […] but also as an enabling condition for limited forms of activism to coexist with an authoritarian system.*
>
> (2017, 12)

Journalists who were willing to compromise are those best positioned to take advantage of the creative aspects of editorial ambiguity and uncertainty at CGTN Africa, enabling them better access to resources and material security (Örnebring et al. 2018), whilst steadily

accumulating symbolic capital, and often ending up occupying more senior positions within the organisation or elsewhere.

Retaliation

There was also a further, uncommon tactic: retaliation. Whilst "collective resistance to funding states seems rare" (Wright, Scott, and Bunce 2020, 16–17), one high-profile example of active retaliation from staff towards CGTN Africa did occur. On Wednesday 5 September 2018, Kenyan officials raided CGTN Africa's Nairobi offices. Armed police arrested several Chinese journalists, and demanded other staff provide evidence of their right to work in Kenya. The Kenyan government later apologised, but the raid did serious reputational damage to CGTN in Kenya, as one journalist recalled: "it was all over the local media, all over the BBC, etc." (*CGTN-6*).

The raid highlighted two separate instances of retaliation. First, staff at the station reliably informed me that a local employee was the whistle-blower who informed the police about immigration violations at the station as retaliation against working conditions: "that is how bad the Chinese-Kenyan relations had gotten" (*CGTN-5*). This incident highlights the fact that Kenyans could utilise localised forms of capital to subvert power relations in the office:

> *in the formal sense, yes, [the Chinese] hold all the cards. But I would say, also, […] the journalism community here being quite small, they have contacts in the government who can influence decision making, and I imagine such a raid could have been instigated by local journalists working behind the scenes. […] It's not something that will happen so often, but once in a while, when people feel that there are decisions that are being taken and it's getting out of hand, I imagine that those are options that locals with play on to instigate something with the police […] and bring a reprieve.*
>
> (*CGTN-11*)

Secondly, during the raid, as at least one member of CGTN staff present at the time recorded and leaked video footage of the raid to local and international media, adding to the mayhem and causing further reputational damage to the organisation.

Since we do not know who exactly, in either instance, informed the police or leaked the footage, it is not possible to ascertain their exact objectives, and we can only presume

that these employees were sufficiently disgruntled about some aspect of their work to take significant action. However, the result was that the bureau chief and several other senior Chinese staff members were quietly rotated out of the Nairobi office. As one Kenyan staffer put it, "they had to bring in a new Bureau Chief to try and smoothen things up between the Chinese and Kenyan workers here" (*CGTN-5*). This illustrates how Kenyan journalists can, if needs be, deploy localised forms of capital to retaliate and attempt to affect change.

Strategy

The existence of this range of tactics which journalists at CGTN Africa employ to "stay in the game" implies, as a corollary, the simultaneous existence of a shared game (field) and these journalists' investment in it stakes: an effect Bourdieu describes as *illusio*: "players agree, by the mere fact of playing, […] that the game is worth playing, […] and this *collusion* is the very basis of their competition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 98). It is this investment in the competition which drives individuals into action, utilising (and developing) the dispositions of their habitus to advance their position in the field: "individuals have an interest which is defined by their circumstances and which allows them to act in a particular way within the context in which they find themselves in order to define and improve their position" (Grenfell 2014, 153). Simply put, if individuals did not have an interest in the game, they would not play. However, since they do, they deploy their embodied capital within the agreed regulations of the game (*nomos*), and attempt to accumulate more capital, all to take up better relative positions in the field which will give them consecratory power to redefine the field *doxa* to better suit the structure of their habitus. As Grenfell notes, "disinterestedness can never exist since […] the most basic act of phenomenological engagement occurs in a context where interests are the defining *raison d'être*. Such desires, ends and interests might therefore be tacit, implicit, or unconscious, but they are no less (in fact more) powerful for that" (2014, 158).

Each individual approaches the game from a specific position – though one which shares relative uniformity amongst journalists of similar classes/nationalities – and, as such, has a specific interest based on their dispositions and how they perceive their relative chances of advancing that position. Hence, relative field position informs relative interest, leading (consciously or unconsciously) to the adoption of differing strategic positions. To pose these issues succinctly: why do journalists come to work for CGTN Africa? Why do they stay in their

job (or not)? And why do they develop new dispositions related to a "China habitus?" I argue that the answers to these questions lay in two separate stratagems which broadly conform to the accumulation and embodiment of two different species of capital: symbolic and financial.

Symbolic capital – long-term strategizing

Many participants were keen to point out that working for CGTN Africa offered significant opportunities for growth and career development. This was particularly, though not exclusively, the case with Kenyan journalists. These journalists took a long-term view of their employment at CGTN Africa, looking to use it as an opportunity to increase their skills and experience, which could then be used to secure better positions in the field later down the line. In Bourdieusian terminology, these journalists were focussed on amassing symbolic capital. The effects of symbolic capital are deferred and disguised: instead of focussing on immediate financial gain, individuals set themselves to accruing journalistic renown through the possession and embodiment of the qualities – misrecognised as *intrinsic* to the profession (that is, *doxa*) – of a "good journalist," which can then be *exchanged* (or transmuted) for financial gain in the future through advancement up the hierarchy of the field (i.e., a more senior, better paid job) (Bourdieu 1993b).

At first, the idea that employment at CGTN Africa might offer the opportunity to build a journalists' renown might seem quizzical, particularly considering its liminal and dominated position in the global journalistic field. However, CGTN Africa was at the very forefront of the process of staff localisation when it opened its offices in 2011. And, though it faces more competition today than it did back then, it remains one of the largest employers of Kenyan journalists in the global journalistic field: for Kenyan journalists who wish to take their careers further, "local media could not provide the types of opportunities […] offered at CCTV" (Lefkowitz 2017, 15). Put simply, for journalists such as this, employment at CGTN Africa can offer them experience and development that they would otherwise not be able to gain, even if the same would not necessarily be true of, say, a Western journalist. A Kenyan journalist now employed by the BBC explained this dilemma well, noting how they had profited in long term by working at CGTN Africa:

> *If I wasn't African, […] it would be a real blot […] because, for a lot of [Western journalists], they go to Al Jazeera and CGTN to die; so, you haven't been good enough to hold your own in CNN or the BBC […]. But for an African journalist it's really a leg up. […] The fact that I worked for CGTN only came up [at the BBC] when I mentioned my experience working across Africa; so, the fact that I could work in many different countries and had real experience of reporting on the ground without much support, which was a plus, because the opportunity had been given to me by CGTN.*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

This is particularly so for younger journalists that come to CGTN Africa with limited experience. For these individuals, CGTN Africa taught them much of what they knew about journalism and offered them a starting point for their journey into (and up) the global journalistic field. One Kenyan journalist, despite having many complaints about working for CGTN, admitted: "I've grown up here. I've grown in terms of being in a newsroom. I've learned a lot, to be able to produce stories, edit them, […] which is pretty cool. The experience of being in the field is unparalleled; I can't replace that with anything in the world" (*CGTN-10*).

Another journalist who had also had negative experiences agreed with these sentiments, further highlighting how the international aspects of work at CGTN Africa had helped their professional growth:

> *It was my first home, so the experience I got there is incredible. […] I mean, travelling around Africa and leaving your comfort [zone] is an extraordinary experience, because it also helps you grow […]. So, despite all of the shortcomings of CGTN, they really moulded me into a person, in terms of career and in terms of [being] an individual.*
>
> (*CGTN-4*)

Indeed, it was the chance to report at an international level that most journalists I spoke to referred to as the key aspect of their work which has helped them grow their skills and move on to better jobs. A producer who left CGTN Africa to move back to their homeland noted that working there had given them "international exposure," and developed their leadership and organisational skills:

> *I got to come back to South Africa with a very good niche skill of [covering] the African continent, and there aren't many people in South Africa [who can do that]. […] I learned how to manage a team across an entire continent […]. So, I definitely gained a lot of professional experience from that, and I don't think that I would be in the position I am now if it wasn't for working for CGTN.*
>
> (*CGTN-13*)

A Kenyan journalist, who had moved on to a senior position at the BBC, was similarly keen to highlight both the continental story-telling and leadership aspects of his experience at CGTN Africa:

> *I think it offered me a lot of growth, in terms […] of the opportunity to operate at a good international level. […] I was able to really be fully immersed in telling African and international stories on a fulltime basis, which has helped me build my profile as an expert on African affairs. I think it was a big stride for me. […] And also, as part of my own growth, it offered a leadership opportunity in a multicultural, multinational environment, which basically gave me the foundation which I am building on here at the BBC.*
>
> (*CGTN-11*)

The platform that CGTN Africa offers to journalists such as these helps to explain why so many are keen to work at the station, and willing to accept the restrictions on their working practice there. In particular, it is those staff most adept at compromising with station management that appear to profit most from their employment at CGTN Africa, acquiring impressive portfolios because of their ability to work relatively seamlessly within the system. These journalists then tend to be able to move on to "better" jobs because of the skills and experience they amass whilst at CGTN: "I think that is how they bargain with the Africans that they employ, you know; while you are assisting them with their project, you also get to get a lot of exposure and experience in the work that you do for them" (*CGTN-15*).

However, because of CGTN Africa's liminal position, the opportunities for growth eventually appeared to peter out. Indeed, as Lefkowitz notes, staff often found that, given time, "job growth within the organization did not meet expectations" and eventually many

came to the conclusion that "it was time for a new experience and challenge" (2017, 15). Many participants indicated that they felt that their careers were beginning to stagnate. This was particularly the case with the more experienced Kenyan journalists who had joined the station early on. Whilst the first few years at CCTV-Africa had been challenging and exciting, as the channel became more settled, opportunities for innovation began to wither up:

> *I'd been working for CGTN for a little over six years by the time I left, and I felt that I had exhausted my growth options within CGTN. They were kind of at a plateau in terms of their growth as an organisation. At the very beginning, it was exciting: we were building programmes and setting up a new office, […] and I was raring to go on to do bigger things, to achieve more, but you get the sense that they were contented with what they had achieved and were happy to just stay there for a while. And I guess I was a little more ambitious than that.*
>
> (*CGTN-11*)

Another described this growing sense of stagnation, and how the compromises they were making no longer offered the same potential for personal growth, and thus became less attractive: "five years [after joining], I had fallen into the cycle of "been there, done that, what more can I do?" […] [So I thought] I might as well go to place that will allow me to put in more work, something investigative, or just a bit more feature-y" (*CGTN-3*).

What this indicates is that Kenyan journalists were willing to develop news dispositions associated with a "China habitus" *only* insofar as it served their *interest* and was consistent with their strategic approach to career advancement. One journalist explained how they saw CGTN Africa as a "platform to grow," but that they quit once its potential profits no longer outweighed the costs to their journalistic autonomy (*CGTN-12*).

It is important here to reiterate that while hindsight might allow this to appear as or sound like an overtly conscious act of strategizing, it is more so the result of improvised reactions to a *practical sense* or gut-feeling rooted in relationship between habitus and position. That is, it is the *sense* or *feeling* of stagnation that was a cue to an improvised exit. One journalist captured well this sense of improvisation, arguing they "adopted a 'wait-and-see' approach. I stayed because I was growing, and when I felt the growth had stopped, I essentially started to work towards leaving" (*CGTN-2*).

Some journalists took an even longer-term view of the potential benefits of accumulating capital and dispositions associated with a "China habitus," observing wider trends in the global field of power in which Chinese capital would play an increasingly dominant role, particularly across Africa:

> *being a member of the editorial staff for the Chinese state broadcaster is a huge thing, because […] I'll have an institutional memory that not many people will have had the privilege to have, in the way the Chinese actually work. […] So, I think it is valuable, because […] it might be of use, because one way or another, they are going to influence how we do things, especially in here in Africa.*
>
> (*CGTN-15*)

This represents a heretical form of symbolic capital. These individuals were willing to bank on future alterations to global power structures, and were also, in some cases, willing to *do their bit* to hasten these transformations through their own work in order to profit from them further down the line: "I believe that the world will change its perception of China […], and when that happens, some of us […] might be benefitting from that. And maybe we will have made our own small contribution to changing that perception, which is then a good truth for me" (*CGTN-9*).

Whether they chose to take this heretical view, or a more conventional careerist pathway, the majority of journalists at CGTN Africa engage in some kind of long-term strategizing which guided their decisions to join, stay at, and leave the organisation at different points. Most did so in order to become "better journalists," gaining (international) experience and building skills, accumulating capital, embodied in the dispositions of their habitus, which have allowed them to advance their position in the field, accepting compromises with station management in order to gain a platform and amass journalistic renown. The benefits of this approach have been acted out considering that six (27% of the total) of those I interviewed have since moved on from CGTN Africa to the BBC.

Financial capital – short-term strategizing

Most participants alluded to the financial benefits of working for CGTN Africa. Indeed, as Umejei notes, Chinese media organisations often can offer "remuneration that the Western

and local media are not able to provide for African journalists," and, in his view, this "may account for why African journalists […] modify their journalistic orientation to suit an authoritarian Chinese media organization" (Umejei 2020, 1–2). However, despite the fact that most individuals ultimately understood their careers in terms of its potential financial benefits, we should be careful to parse out the differences between those taking a long-term and short-term strategic view of financial empowerment.

Whilst those taking the long-term view often had an eye on future career advancement, they tended to play down the immediate importance of pay, often mentioning the financial incentives of working for CGTN Africa only in passing or with a degree of flippancy – when listing the benefits of his role at the station, one senior journalist noted as an afterthought (and a wry smile) that "they don't pay me too badly" (*CGTN-17*). To individuals like this, better pay was merely a knock-on effect of career growth – that is, by "playing the game" and being a "better journalist," these individuals could benefit financially later on through the deferred transubstantiation of their journalistic renown (symbolic capital) into better-paid roles (financial capital).

This is not necessarily the case for everyone at the station. Many staff I spoke to take a much shorter-term strategic view: it is the immediate financial capital they can amass whilst working for the CGTN Africa that matters most to them. The reasons for taking this approach are varied but essentially all borne of necessity. As Lefkowitz puts it: "CCTV-Africa is not the dream choice for media workers aspiring to work in international markets. Rather, it is a stable choice for media professionals in Kenya. […] Media workers tolerate CCTV-Africa's organizational flaws and interpersonal obstacles in order to pursue their careers as media professionals" (2017, 16).

For some, CGTN's relatively generous pay-packet simply presented a chance to pay off debts, as was the case for one young Kenyan, who was considering whether to stay in the media or move into entrepreneurship: "I've thought of maybe sticking at CGTN a little bit longer, maybe as I try to complete my student loan. Maybe after that, […] I'm looking for an opportunity" (*CGTN-19*).

For others, they had joined hoping to advance their careers, but had reached their stagnation point without finding a better opportunity for progression. This was the case for one Kenyan staffer, who told me how their attitude towards their work had changed over the eight years they had worked at the station:

> *coming here, there was a different way of doing things, so I was still interested, and I was still having fun learning. […] It really excited me […]. So, I did enjoy it at the beginning. But […] if I am to answer right now, it is totally different. I don't feel like I am enjoying it, because I don't feel like I am learning anything at this point. […] Basically, I'm doing it [now] because I have to pay bills.*
>
> (*CGTN-14*)

Another Kenyan journalist echoed these sentiments, stating matter-of-factly that "from a personal point of view, definitely, I am economically empowered. Professionally, it has done nothing" (*CGTN-1*).

A lack of opportunity appeared to be the core concern for this group, who often felt they had little option but to continue working at CGTN because of the financial security it provided them, even if they didn't enjoy the work. The precarity of journalistic work in Kenya meant that, as Wright, Scott, and Bunce found, "these journalists argued that they had little alternative, as work for domestic media in Kenya involved working much longer hours for less money, and frequently involved greater government intimidation and censorship" (2020, 15). Re-entering the local field did not appear as a viable choice to most: all by two of my Kenyan participants either stayed in their position at CGTN Africa or moved to the BBC. Of those two, one is now unemployed. Moving back into local media brought with it the danger of losing one's job, and the risk of leaving the journalism entirely.

One Kenyan staffer was in the throes of these such calculations, weighing up the financial benefits of staying versus leaving, though had as yet remained in their job, a process that was evidently causing intense distress and confusion:

> *You know, at times, you begin to question yourself, because, at this point, I feel like I took the wrong course, and I feel like I shouldn't have worked in media. If I'd get the same pay in a different company, I'd move in a jiffy. I wouldn't even give it a second thought. […] Actually, yesterday, there was a job, and […] I actually considered it. […] I was like, "should I apply for it?" But then again, it's an internship position, with no surety of employment. But then again, they were like 'after the internship you could*

> *get employment.' But then again, I was like, I'm going to lose all my medical cover. So, I feel like, at some point, I'll have to pay cut so that I can move somewhere else.*
>
> (*CGTN-14*)

The significant financial incentives to keep a job at CGTN Africa can lead to conformism, as, coupled with clear directives, journalists can fall back on "what would make their bosses happy" (Varrall 2020, 10). This was particularly evident when participants discussed CGTN's unique monthly bonus system, which offers the opportunity for staff to almost double monthly income. This provided a huge incentive to work hard and toe the party line, as one journalist illustrated:

> *CGTN has a very unique bonus scheme. […] The maximum bonus you can get is equivalent to your salary. So, if your salary is one-thousand dollars, and you do very well, you can get two-thousand dollars. So, that really motivated us. I can tell, for a fact, that I really worked hard, and I got that bonus consistently for as long as I was there, since it was introduced.*
>
> (*CGTN-1*)

The bonus was issued at the discretion of a journalist's direct Chinese supervisor, so, they continued: "You had to be a pet, yeah. When they say 'sit,' you sit. When they say, 'wag your tail,' you wag your tail" (*CGTN-1*). And they were not alone in voicing their willingness to play the pied piper in order to pick up a healthy bonus. Another echoed these sentiments:

> *Loyalty gets rewarded. […] I'll be honest, most of us are mercenaries, who pledge allegiance to the highest bidder. Currently, CGTN is the highest bidder. […] So, when I joined, there was this particular supervisor; she was rather an arse, she literally would want you to kneel at her feet […] to get any bonus. Sometimes your bonus would come as low as three dollars! […] Then, say you were a good child that month, you'd get up to a hundred, two hundred dollars this time. So, it depended on where you were on the "kiss your arse" level with that particular person.*
>
> (*CGTN-5*)

There is clear motivation here to toe the line, since those "who fall out of favour with their superiors, or whose work is frequently censored, find themselves quickly out of the money" (Esarey 2006, 57–58). Individuals become dominated by particular forms of capital emanating from particular sources, and so internalise the dispositions associated with that particular position in order to appropriate it. If a journalist prioritises amassing financial capital that ultimately emanates from the Chinese political-bureaucratic field, they will eventually become dominated and colonised by the logic of that field. One producer, for example, told me how they attempted, to be a "good journalist," but also often chose to avoid confrontation in their work at CGTN Africa because of the financial benefits of keeping their job:

> *to be completely honest, there is some self-censorship. You eventually know what they are looking for, so you give it to them. And, to be honest, in my role, what they were looking for was very easy to give them. So, I pushed the boundary whenever I could, but, at the end of the day, they were paying me a lot of money to do quite a simple job. Toeing the line is easy. So, yeah, you eventually get tired of running into brick walls. […] You suggest things and they get shot down. So, eventually, you stop doing it, and you toe the line. You do as your told because it is profitable for you.*
>
> (*CGTN-13*)

A South African journalist explained how they often had to grit their teeth when asked to do stories they didn't enjoy, but that the fact they got paid well in US dollars, which generally has a very favourable exchange rate with South African Rand, made the work bearable: "there are trade-offs. […] One of my colleagues described it as, "we've signed a pact with the devil." […] Some days […] you're like, if it wasn't for the exchange rate, I probably wouldn't be sticking around*"* (*CGTN-18*).

One Kenyan journalist gave off the impression that they hated their job and disliked the Chinese agenda intensely, but, on the other hand, were content to remain working at CGTN Africa because it paid them well enough to let him do his own journalism (and other ventures) on the side. They avoided any distasteful work they could but did it when it was asked of them, claiming many colleagues took a similarly apathetic, workaday attitude: "people [are] caring less […] about the politics of China-Africa, and just being here to do their

damn jobs. That's it. So, […] we're here just to do our job, cash your pay cheque at the end of the month, and just fuck off" (*CGTN-5*).

This illustrates the short-term strategizing undertaken by some journalists at CGTN Africa whose primary concern is the immediate financial benefits of their job, rather than the deferred symbolic rewards of potential career advancement. Whilst some had started out with the hope of progressing, the realities of facing a dearth of potential opportunities meant some stayed with CGTN Africa much longer than they intended or desired.

Conclusion

This chapter has focussed on the different classes or groups of journalists that work at CGTN Africa, and considered how the structures of their habitus, formed by the logics of diverse national journalistic fields, relate to CGTN Africa's position within the structures of the global journalistic field. It is CGTN Africa's liminal position in the field, dominated, as it is, by political-bureaucratic capital emanating from the Chinese journalistic field, which helps to define its unique and heterodox news criteria and the general sense of newsworthiness at the station. This position and its related criteria also help to define the internal hierarchical structures of CGTN Africa itself. Within this structure, different groups of journalists are recruited to occupy different roles in relation to the structure of their habitus, with Chinese journalists occupying the most senior editorial positions because of their symbolic domination of the station through the homology between the structure of their capital and the position of the organisation. Kenyan journalists occupy lower positions in the hierarchy but are essential to the day-to-day operations of the news organisation because of their mastery of African news. Similarly, international journalists bring their own "speciality" to the table by ensuring content is suitable for international audiences. This helps us to explain how and why local-national journalists, in particular, adapt to their employer's needs and demands. They engage with a "regime of uncertainty," and adopt new dispositions associated with a "China habitus" through a series of tactical manoeuvres, in order to secure and advance their position within the organisation (and the field). These tactics relate to wider strategies deployed by these journalists which focus on the accumulation of specific forms of capital, either symbolic or financial capital. This illustrates how "self-censorship" is enacted "bottom-up" by the learning

an internalisation (embodiment) of new dispositions about news making, as journalists adapt to the taking up of a particular dominated position within the global journalistic field.

8. Nairobi as an Urban Field

Throughout the previous analyses, there is a single pivot – or chokepoint, perhaps – around which all Sino-African journalism gravitates: the city of Nairobi. CGTN Africa is administered from its Nairobi offices, and every piece of news passes through these systems before being aired. This chapter will focus on the specific and unique effects that Nairobi, in its position of privilege, has on the process of CGTN Africa's journalistic production. It is an extremely important site for journalism – a regional capital, perhaps – that exerts a significant gravitational force on journalism in Africa, and on Sino-African journalism in particular. This chapter will firstly explore why Nairobi was chosen by CGTN – and others – as a hub for their African operations, and then go on to establish the tangible effects that the geography of journalism in Nairobi has on journalistic positions and practice.

When conceptualising different layers of field analysis, it is important to take an analogical approach. Fields are defined by their relative autonomy, and so it is vital to establish the ways in which differing levels of fields relate to, and are established in relative autonomy from, one another (Buchholz 2016). In practical terms, this means establishing the unique patterns and structures of macro-capital within an urban space. This would entail that the journalistic field in Nairobi possesses a particular structure and relation to other fields in Nairobi. It therefore follows that, if journalistic practice is primarily the result of position within a journalistic field, that being "a journalist in Nairobi" has specific effects on that individual's practice. Therefore, in order to understand how journalistic practice in Nairobi might differ from that practiced elsewhere it is fundamental to consider the relationship between physical and social space within the city.

Choosing Nairobi

When CCTV was considering setting up a new headquarters in Africa in 2010, an important decision was where to locate it. Senior African staff members at CGTN Africa explained that CCTV's initial plan was to set up in Johannesburg, South Africa. However, after holding preliminary discussions with key stakeholders, the decision was taken to set up shop in Nairobi. Wekesa and Zhang suggest that this decision "followed logic" (2014, 8). But what elements commended Nairobi as a city from which to run CCTV's coverage of Africa? The data

indicates three important factors: it's location as an entrepôt; an extensive pool of experienced journalists; and political considerations.

Nairobi: the gateway to Africa

Had this decision been made a decade or so earlier, the result might have been quite different. During the 1990s, Nairobi was a different city, only just beginning to emerge from the authoritarian single-party rule of Daniel arap Moi. Whilst there had been a significant community of foreign correspondents based in Kenya since independence, these bureaux played second-fiddle to those located in South Africa, which at the time possessed a more developed communications network, and had long offered the leading continuous news story in Africa: apartheid and, later, the Rainbow Nation transition under Nelson Mandela (Hannerz 2004, 56). An ex-BBC Africa bureau chief explained: "I mean, people forget, but anti-Apartheid was the cause celebre of my university generation; South Africa was a global news story, and it was getting on mainstream TV news every night. And so, that was compelling me to operate out of Johannesburg" (*BBC-28*). Nairobi was, they continued, "always there as the second bureau," producing big stories like the 1979 overthrow of Idi Amin in Uganda and 1984 Ethiopian Famine (*BBC-28*). However, at the time it was generally considered as a "mediocre" place for journalism, "not regarded as a very pleasant place to live or go about one's business" (Hannerz 2004, 55).

However, Nairobi has gradually emerged as a regional hub for journalism, primarily because of its positioning as an entrepôt for international news about Africa. Entrepôts developed during the colonial period as shipping nodes, in which merchants from the metropole would congregate to compete to export goods imported from the colonial interior region (Yeung 1967). This colonialised one-way flow of goods from periphery to metropole is arguably still the case for information and news stories across Africa today, with Nairobi serving as a node through which international news correspondents flow into Africa, and African news stories flow out.

Scholars have long argued that access to news sources presents one of the most important form of journalistic capital, arguing that being able to quickly and reliably report the news by having easy access to authoritative sources gives a journalist or news organisation a significant competitive edge, as it improves journalistic efficiency and credibility (Gans 1979). The reason most often cited by my participants for a news

organisation wanting to be based in Nairobi was its central geographic location, which greatly improved the ease with which the rest of continent could be reached and reported on. A senior ex-CGTN Kenyan journalist noted, "if you have a pan-African outlook, from Nairobi you are basically four hours away from anywhere in Africa" (*CGTN-11*). This provided a significant advantage over South Africa which "was a little bit disconnected," a BBC journalist recalling that "all the stories I remember doing, you'd always pass-through Nairobi on your way there or your way back, just because it was a good transport link" (*BBC-28*).

Once the focus of African news reportage broadened as apartheid ended, Nairobi's geographic qualities began to shine. From the mid-1990's onwards, a large number of stories that attracted international attention began emanating from the East African region, such as the Darfur Crisis, the independence of South Sudan, the Somali Civil War, Al-Shabaab, piracy in the Horn of Africa, the Rwandan Genocide, and the ongoing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Nairobi's proximity and connectivity to these places of news quickly made it a safe and comfortable hub from which to cover the dangerous but newsworthy areas within its orbit. As a senior Kenyan journalist at CGTN noted, journalists "tend to migrate to Nairobi, because Nairobi […] offers a bit of a safe haven for journalists working in the region" (CGTN-17). Or as Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina satirised: "Nairobi is a good place to be an international correspondent. There are regular flights to the nearest genocide, and there are green lawns, tennis courts, good fawning service" (2012).

This connectivity was assisted by the rapid development of Nairobi's infrastructure across the board, intensively developing its transport infrastructure, greatly strengthening Nairobi's role as a regional hub (Ombara 2013). Nairobi also established itself as a tech hub, and the emergence of companies such as internet-providers Safaricom and Zuku or mobile money-transfer service M-Pesa have ensured that Nairobi boasts by far the most comprehensive, fastest, and cheapest internet connectivity on the continent (Akamai 2017). These qualities are particularly well encapsulated by the way in which journalists from South Africa – where average internet speeds are about half that of Kenya – waxed lyrical about them: "Internet connectivity, Wi-Fi, is everywhere in Nairobi. Walk into a restaurant, free Wi-Fi. […] Wherever you went you'd be connected" (*CGTN-6*).

If a journalist wants to connect with a story or source anywhere across the African continent, whether in-person or in cyberspace, the costs – in terms of money, time, and effort – are all significantly reduced by being in Nairobi. It might be tempting, therefore, to see

Nairobi less a *place of news* in of itself than a *place from which to access news sites*, but this description does not quite capture the full picture. Rather, entrepôts tend to encourage a centralisation of important and powerful agents across a whole range of fields. Indeed, many of the same reasons that made Nairobi attractive to media organisations like CGTN made it similarly attractive to a range of important and authoritative news sources. For the United Nations, Nairobi has often been considered it's "third capital," and the city houses continental headquarters for virtually all UN Agencies. Swathes of international non-governmental organisations have important offices in the city, a fact again pincered by Wainaina's wit: "To make your work easier, you need, in your phone, the numbers of the country directors of every European aid agency: Oxfam, Save the Children. To find these numbers is not difficult: chances are these guys are your neighbours, your tennis partners" (2012). As a CGTN journalist explained, Nairobi was "a very good place to be a journalist, because there are a lot of international organisations based here, so, if you do have a story that […] needs some heavy authority as a source, then it's quite easy to get" (*CGTN-16*). Another concurred that "if you worked elsewhere, you'd really be struggling with issues of access" (*CGTN-11*).

Overall, the presence of these organisations, wedded with its emergence as a financial and transport hub, contributed to a healthy flow through the city of high-profile figures from across the continent. Because of this, a senior journalist mused, it was sometimes "easier to find a Somalian or South Sudanese politician in Nairobi" than in their home country (*CGTN-17*). In this sense, news sources often *come to* media organisations based in Nairobi, rather than needing to be *travelled to*, further reducing the costs of covering the continent. As Bourdieu notes, "within the field of journalism, there is permanent competition […] to appropriate what is thought to secure readership, in other words, the earliest access to news, the 'scoop,' exclusive information, and also distinctive rarity, 'big names,' and so on" (2005, 44). A key part of the battle between news organisations and journalists to appropriate news sources and information in this way, then, is expressed geographically, that is, by very literally "bringing desirable people closer, thereby minimising the expense of appropriating them" (Bourdieu 2018, 110). Positioning themselves in Nairobi offered CGTN the best opportunity to do so, bringing the rest of the continent closer to them in a variety of ways.

Nairobi's journalistic pool

Sources are not the only "desirable people" essential to the processes of news-making. Journalists themselves accumulate capital, via their education, experience, network-building, etc., and news gathering organisations compete to attract and recruit the most desirable, most adept, and most adaptable journalists for their station. News organisations are therefore always likely to congregate around locations that possess a large, experienced population of journalists. As Casanova notes, particular fields located within particular cities only begin to develop "prestige" – that is, consecratory power – dependent "on the existence of a more or less extensive professional 'milieu'" (2004, 15). Simply put, the prior existence in Nairobi of a large pool of well-trained, highly-experienced, English-speaking journalists and production staff made it an alluring place for CGTN to set up shop, as being based in Nairobi improved the opportunities and reduced the costs of being able to recruit – that is, appropriate – a high performance news-making team. This point was well made by one senior Kenyan journalist, who argued that

> *in their considerations would have been the ease of getting people who can do the job. […] They wouldn't struggle in Nairobi to fill those positions and have the right manpower to get the job done. […] And also, the language: they needed people who speak English, […] so that would be a big advantage compared to a place like Addis Ababa, or elsewhere in region.*
>
> (*CGTN-11*)

Demographic data supports this argument: a national survey of Kenyan journalists shows that the vast majority of degree-holding, accredited Kenyan journalists are concentrated in Nairobi County (Owilla et al. 2020). With a vibrant media, multiple high-quality universities offering media-related courses (University of Nairobi, Daystar University, Aga Khan University, and the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication), as well as a number of leading production houses such as Kenya Television Network, Citizen TV, and Nation Television Network, Nairobi possesses a large pool of skilled journalists and the education-experience infrastructure to maintain it (Lohner, Banjac, and Neverla 2016). Additionally, it attracts a sizeable population of international journalists which contributes considerably to its journalistic community.

This pool is vital to the success of CGTN's operations in Africa. Launching in an unfamiliar mediascape with no name to trade on, it needed to quickly assemble an experienced, well-known set of journalists to build its credibility:

> *they needed people getting to know CGTN, because it was an unknown entity, […] [so] they needed more experienced journalists, people with networks. Because of my experience, […] my face was known, so if I picked [up] a phone to call somebody to come to the studio or to sit on a telephone to give us a phone interview, […] they would remember me. […] And because of us, the channel quickly got known in Nairobi, because of the local base of experienced journalists they put together.*
>
> (*CGTN-17*)

Basing itself in Nairobi gave CGTN the best chance to quickly achieve the results it desired and build on the amassed symbolic capital of an experience and highly-qualified workforce.

Political connections

Nairobi offers much more stability and freedom for journalists than other cities in the region. As one Kenyan journalist put it, "there is quite a lot of room for media freedom that has been inbuilt here over the years, since the 1990s, […] so, it is a good environment to work as a journalist here" (*CGTN-11*). This good environment was doubled in effect by the already-established connections the Chinese government had with the Kenyan government since Kenya's "Look East" policy was launched in 2003. As another Kenyan argued, "I think in Kenya, [China] saw a friend, a safe haven, you know" (*CGTN-17*).

Having already worked together for the best part of a decade, the infrastructure for bilateral cooperation between the Chinese and Kenyan governments was already well-established. CGTN has used its physical proximity to and social familiarity with the Kenyan government to enmesh itself within the administration, recruiting a relative of the Vice-President of Kenya, a relative of the head of the Communications Authority of Kenya, and a relative of the head of Media Council of Kenya. These backdoor channels between the organisation and the Kenyan government helped reduce issues associated with licensing the channel – which have been at the centre of CGTN Europe's run-in with UK regulator (*Ofcom* 2021) – and the issuing of work permits to Chinese and international staff at CGTN Africa. This

significantly improved the ease, mobility, and efficiency of work for CGTN in Nairobi, illustrating the significant *profits of space* the city provided to CGTN.

Choosing Kilimani

A mile or so west of Central Business District (CBD) of Nairobi is the district of Kilimani. On Wood Avenue is a large, box-like building – the K-Rep Centre – which is home to CGTN Africa. It is worth asking why CGTN chose this place *in particular* as a base of operations. Literature on the role of place in journalism indicates that prominence and proximity, as well as cost, play a key role in the choosing of newsroom space (Usher 2019). My participants suggested this was the case with CGTN as well, though its location separate from other news organisations in the city – which have a tendency, like all alike businesses, to group closely together due to the naturalisation of their shared interests – indicates slightly unorthodox priorities.

Prominence has always been an important factor in where news organisations choose to house themselves. As Usher argues, "research on newspaper buildings suggests that the location of the news organization in a city centre has been a physical reminder of a newspaper's importance to the public and its influence on the city's power structures" (2019, 27; Wallace 2005). This urge to be seen to be at the centre of city life, which grants a news organisation significant consecratory power within the urban environment, necessitates that the organisation be literally physically located at the centre of the city (Mair 2013). This is what Bourdieu refers to as the *profits of rank*: the "symbolic profits of distinction attached to monopolistic possession of a distinctive property" (2018, 111). Simply put, being located somewhere of established significance impresses competitors, contributors, and customers alike, which derives symbolic (and hence, deferred) profits.

To some extent, Kilimani fits this description. It is a relatively affluent area, brimming with commercial activity, and home to the State House – the official residence of the President of Kenya. One journalist characterised it as an "exclusive area," whilst another explained: "[Kilimani is] a very bourgie place, and by bourgie, I just mean a very different class live there. Either you're extremely rich, or you have a nice business around that area. Everything around there is expensive" (*CGTN-5*). CGTN's choice therefore made sense, as the location would match the intended product: "the relative cost was something they wanted,

because they would say that they wanted something that was a bit upmarket, which they would consider premier, because they also wanted to have a premium product to put out" (*CGTN-2*). The *profits of rank* that the Kilimani office provided was summed up by another Kenyan journalist who recalled his thought process when he arrived for his interview: "I got there, and I immediately thought that 'I need to stay here,' because they had these really fancy offices, so […] maybe this job will pay me enough" (*CGTN-1*).

Kilimani is also relatively close to important news sources in the city, most of which are located within or around the CBD. Many news organisations and journalists have long prioritized close proximity to the city's centres of power, such as city halls or police headquarters (Usher 2019). Local media houses, such as KTN and Nation TV, therefore, have offices in buildings directly within the CBD, as have CNN, whilst BBC Africa are located just a few streets away on Riverside. When asked why CGTN opened their offices in Kilimani, proximity to the CBD was often the first and most vehemently-made point. One journalist answered unequivocally, "[w]ell, because it's central. It is central to everything" (*CGTN-10*).

However, whilst Kilimani is close to the CBD, it is not in the CBD. In good traffic it is little more than a ten-minute drive from the CGTN offices to the CBD, but good traffic is a rarity in Nairobi, as a producer pointed out: "Nairobi is very well known for its terrible traffic, so yeah, that wasn't great. It was difficult to schedule things, like shoots and stuff, because you'd never have any idea whether you'd get there on time" (*CGTN-13*). If the idea was to be close to news sources in the CBD, then CGTN was at a disadvantage compared to other news organisations. What, then, was drawing them further west than their competitors, away from the centre? Take a drive around Kilimani, and the answer soon becomes obvious, as on almost every street you'll find billboards and shop fronts bearing Chinese symbols: Kilimani is home to Nairobi's Chinatown.

CGTN is in close proximity to a host of official and private Chinese organisations (Kabale 2019). The Chinese embassy is a five-minute drive, whilst Xinhua's headquarters is only 850 metres away. As one Kenyan journalist put it, Kilimani "is literally a whole joint of Chinese shops. We call it 'Little China.'" (*CGTN-10*). Another argued that "I think that [CGTN's] choice was partly because it is a popular area with the Chinese" (*CGTN-13*). Interestingly, CGTN had originally set up in offices further away from this tight-knit Chinese community, down Ngong Road in a building called Morningside Centre, but decided to move to its current location before officially starting its operations.

The proximity to Chinese communities and organisations, whilst simultaneously being near enough to the CBD, provide a balance of what Bourdieu refers to as *rents of situation*, that is, being "de facto situated close to things or institutions (goods and services such as educational, recreational or health facilities) and to agents (certain neighbourhoods provide profits of safety, tranquility, etc.) deemed rare and desirable or distant from undesirable agents and things" (Bourdieu 2018, 111). Notably, multiple CGTN journalists mentioned how they felt the proximity of other Chinese people and businesses gave a sense of safety and security to the Chinese staff at the station.

Effects of place on journalism at CGTN

Urban landscapes are rife with boundaries. These divisions – which in cities often take the metaphorical form of seemingly distinct districts – reflect issues of class and race present in the construction of habitus amongst various fractions of journalists working at CGTN Africa: mental maps of the social positions laid out on the physical world which guide action in relation to those spaces, a particular way of "seeing" the city. Both social stability within and mobility across these boundaries becomes a way in which symbolic violence is enacted, with agents possessing low capital unable to maintain their positions within boundaries or comfortably cross them, and those possessing high levels of capital able to establish a quasi-ubiquity. The interviews with journalists at CGTN Africa indicate a number of ways in which the physical space of Nairobi served as a metaphor for their social position whilst also working to naturalise and solidify those positions through symbolic violence, thereby affecting the performance of their work. These included: difficult material conditions for Kenyan journalists; excessive localised travel for Kenyan journalists; limited international travel for Kenyan journalists; the bi-directional effects of digitised workflows; and localised competition provided by the opening of the BBC Africa bureau.

Surviving the city

Living costs in Nairobi have spiralled over the last two decades. Average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in the centre of Nairobi in 2020 was around $434 per month (Statista 2020). As one journalist put it: "Nairobi is expensive […]. Damn expensive!" (*CGTN-14*). Meanwhile, the average pay for local-national journalists has not kept pace, a national survey

indicating that "Kenyan journalists are poorly paid – with a significant 17 percent earning less than $375 per month, and around a quarter taking home a monthly income of between $375 and $625" (Ireri 2017a, 255). Swathes of retrenchments in local media have meant – in the simplest terms of supply and demand – too many journalists to too few jobs, driving wages down. Participants recounted stories from their careers in Nairobi that illustrate this imbalance. One recalled how, as a cub journalist, he would literally live from press conference to press conference, surviving on "facilitation" by his news sources:

> *as a young journalist, […] nobody is willing to go out of their way to help you much. […] At that point, the editors would keep reminding you to be resourceful in terms of how you get out there and get the news, so you'd rely a lot on facilitation by your news sources. […] So you'd go to an event, they'd serve you breakfast, then maybe hold the press conference, and then, maybe, after that they'd tell you, "by the way, as you leave, we have some goodies at the door," and they'd call it "facilitation," or "bus fare." Because people used to struggle. So, they'd give you a thousand shillings, or something like that[.]*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

When CGTN arrived in Nairobi they employed the local market as a framework for pay. Each CGTN employee negotiates their own contract and pay with the company on an individual basis. Many recruits had no experience of working in international media, and, as such, did not know their own worth, but did know that there was plenty of competition for employment:

> *on signing the contract, I realised I didn't have good bargaining power, but, on the other side, I feel like somebody was advising them that Kenyan journalists don't really get good pay, so that whatever you give us, we'll take: it was much better than what I was earning, so I was like, "oh, this is a plus[.]"*
>
> (*CGTN-14*)

Moving from local media to CGTN meant these journalists being able, in some cases, to double their income, often making it a simple decision to join, as one argued: "of course, the

money played a factor. When you're moving and your salary is being more than doubled, at that point, you're like, 'why not?'" (*CGTN-3*).

However, as CGTN began to recruit international journalist, wild discrepancies in pay began to develop. Judging by accounts of both Kenyan and international staff, an international journalist could be earning anywhere between three to ten times as much as a Kenyan staff member with comparable responsibilities, with the added advantage of being paid in American Dollars rather than Kenyan Shillings:

> *I was shocked when I first found out the disparity between salaries [between] a writer from South Africa, who has the same experience and qualifications to the Kenyan they are sitting next to in the newsroom, doing the same amount of work, given the same responsibilities. […] [W]hat [the Kenyan] was earning in a month […] a South African would draw from the ATM two, three, four times a week.*
>
> (*CGTN-6*)

This helps illustrate that, despite the improvement in their pay as compared to working in local media, the conditions of existence for Kenyan staff at CGTN was not actually all that far removed, and most still faced more or less the same issues of making ends meet in an expensive city as they had done before. Their statements demonstrate the sheer level of precarity faced by many Kenyan staff at CGTN in Nairobi. A cub journalist at the station recalled being paid Ksh30,000 (~US$300) a month exemplified this:

> *I don't think I can call it a good salary. […] You're living pay cheque to pay cheque, and it only keeps you alive. Yeah, at least you can have two or three meals a day. […] I would buy thirty envelopes at the end of every month and put in each envelope three-hundred Shillings – that's like three dollars – and I had to live with these three dollars every day. So, it helped me to at least ensure that I didn't sleep hungry, and I make it to work.*
>
> (*CGTN-1*)

Indeed, just the act of keeping oneself fed could prove a daily challenge. Several participants noted how important the free in-house cafeteria was to them, as getting lunch in Kilimani

would otherwise be a huge financial drain: "For you to have a decent lunch, you'd have to spend like five-hundred, a thousand shillings. […] So, for us to get free lunch and free dinner, that was a plus" (*CGTN-14*). However, with costs of running the cafeteria apparently skyrocketing, these privileges were eventually removed:

> *they used to go overboard; they'd serve shrimp, lobster […]. It was ridiculous, so it's no wonder costs went through the roof. So, […] they created […] a pay-as-you-go thing, and then the prices were out of reach for most of the locals, because […] spending five dollars a day is ridiculous.*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

The cafeteria later proved enough of a privilege to be used as a bartering chip by the station management: "when people asked for a pay rise, what did they do? They decided to introduce back the free lunches and free dinners" (*CGTN-14*).

Despite these difficulties in making ends meet, many journalists in Nairobi felt under pressure to "live large":

> *the people the journalists want to hobnob with, they go to certain exclusive clubs, they live in certain expensive areas. So, a culture of "living large," of driving a Landcruiser or living in a very expensive house, is to give them access, to make them look like those people, make them part of the club, part of the elite.*
>
> (*CGTN-17*)

This is what Bourdieu describes as the *effect of club*:

> *[e]ntry in certain spaces, and particularly the most 'select' of them, requires not only economic and cultural capital but social capital as well. Such selective locales can grant social capital and symbolic capital, […] resulting from the lasting and regular congregation, within the same space […] of people and things that are alike in that they are different from the mass of people who have in common the fact of not being 'common[.]'"*
>
> (2018, 112)

Simply put, entry into such locations requires a significant amount of *distinction*, but also can provide significant symbolic rewards. For journalists, this could be, for example, access to highly exclusive sources or networks that help land big stories. As such, journalists in Nairobi would sometimes insist on living in expensive parts of city, as well as having an active (and expensive) social life, despite their poor salaries, meaning that "the better part of [the media fraternity] is living in debt, because you have to keep up appearances. How can you be an anchor, a reporter, a journalist, and you're living in some slum? So, you have to live in the fancier, better parts of Nairobi" (*CGTN-14*).

As such, journalists in Nairobi often search out ways to supplement their income (Ireri 2015). This included some journalists at CGTN Africa, who engaged in "side hustles" (*CGTN-5*), using their free time to run their own businesses or engage in freelance work. As one argued, "[t]he only autonomy I can say I had was that I was a bit more flexible with time, when I would show up to work, or something; […] and that's probably why I stayed […] for so long, because it helped me to do other businesses on the side" (*CGTN-1*). Whilst all of the "side hustles" described to me appeared to be legitimate activities, this illustrates the kinds of financial pressures the city placed of these journalists, which could also potentially encourage the pursuit of less ethical opportunities for income supplementation, such as *brown-envelope journalism*, a practice of cash-for-stories that is reportedly common practice in Kenyan journalism:

> *poor pay leaves the Kenyan journalists open to manipulation by powerful elites who offer them a wide range of favors – including cash, paid trips, free meals, and job opportunities, to mention a few. […] [I]t means that the poorly paid Kenyan journalists produce stories that favor news sources who offer them extra income or other favors.*
>
> (Ireri 2017a, 225)

It is important to state here, categorically, that I have found no evidence of brown-envelope journalism at CGTN Africa, and yet the conditions for it to exist were evident. It is noteworthy that one of the favours mentioned by Ireri – free meals – *was* used as leverage over staff by station management. Another is cash, represented by CGTN's bonus system (discussed

above). Low salaried pay meant that the monthly and annual bonuses offered to Kenyan staff at CGTN Africa were of vital importance to their survival.

It is therefore clear the serious material ramifications choosing to conform or not could have on the livelihoods of journalists at CGTN Africa. The general sense I got from many of CGTN Africa's Nairobi-based employees was of entrapment in a cycle of low capital possession and low social mobility. One noted that they simply had too many expenses to risk their job:

> *As time went by, I was like, "I need to get out," but I had so many debts that I had to pay, I had my dad to take care of, I had medical insurance cover for the first time, so, while I wanted to leave, it wasn't really up to me. I needed to stay there as long as possible, until I got a better opportunity.*
>
> (*CGTN-1*)

Another shared similar emotions:

> *I do feel trapped. […] I feel like I'm giving so much of myself to them, but then again, I feel like they're like, "you're desperate, you need it, so do it." […] And, you see, the thing about it is, when I leave, they'll get somebody else, as in, they wouldn't even struggle. […] I just cough like this, and they replace [me] like that.*
>
> (*CGTN-14*)

In an oversaturated and competitive journalistic pool, the threat of replacement is very real, and staff turnover, particularly at junior levels, is very high. Combined with the low pay and high living costs of Nairobi, this can lead to a cautious and conformist approach to work, a subdued relationship with their Chinese supervisors, and a tendency to toe the party line when necessary, in order to maintain their employment status and earn additional financial benefits (Benson and Neveu 2005, 5–6). As such, I argue that station management were able to exploit the conditions of the city in order to encourage conformism amongst Kenyan staff, helping to cement CGTN's editorial agenda.

Working harder, travelling further

Pay disparities between fractions of staff at CGTN were also reified in space, with serious practical implications, effectively working to segregate Chinese, international, and Kenyan staff into living in separate parts of the city – a segregation that was also reproduced in the social interactions between these different fractions of staff. As one Kenyan journalist put it, "the office has a divide […] due to this whole pay discrepancy […]. You'll find the internationals […] will stick together more, and Kenyans together more so, because of that gap" (*CGTN-10*), whilst the another noted that the Chinese "tend to keep to themselves […]. Do we interact outside of the office with them? Rarely" (*CGTN-9*). On the issue of places of residence, Bourdieu notes that,

> *[e]ach agent may be characterized by the place where he or she is situated more or less permanently, that is, by her place of residence […] and by the relative position that her localizations […] occupy in relation to the localizations of other agents. […] It follows that the locus and the place occupied by an agent in appropriated social space are excellent indicators of his or her position in social space.*
>
> (Bourdieu 2018, 108)

Kenyan journalists at CGTN were generally priced out of living close to the main offices in Kilimani. As one reasoned "the media house maybe pays them forty-thousand [shillings] and a house in Kilimani is seventy-thousand [shillings]," (*CGTN-17*), so, for most, it was simply not an option without supplementary income. This was not the case for Chinese or international staff. Chinese staff were provided by the station with accommodation in flats directly opposite the office, as another Kenyan vented, "the funny bit is that the Chinese, their rent is paid by the company, and […] [it's] like two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand [shillings]" (*CGTN-14*). International staff, meanwhile, were generally paid enough to be able to afford to live in Kilimani, within walking-distance of the office, often sharing with compatriots:

> *When I moved to Kenya, there was […] another South African who was looking for a roommate, and he also worked at CGTN, and so it all kind of fell together. […] [It] was about a two-minute walk to work […] [in] quite an up-and-coming area of Nairobi. […]*

> *That was the great part about CGTN; I was earning enough that I didn't have to worry about the prices. […] [I]t was expensive, but I just didn't really notice that.*
>
> (*CGTN-13*)

Chinese and international staff, therefore, both had easy access to their work environment. Kenyan staff, however, were faced with the choice of spending most of their salary on living close to the office or living further away and having an unenviable daily commute, which entailed either needing to leave exceptionally early in the morning or battling extremely bad traffic to get in on time. One of those who chose the latter option, living in the much more affordable districts of Eastern Nairobi, explained that:

> *for a person like me, […] I couldn't afford [Kilimani]. […] So, I used to have to battle maybe ten kilometres of traffic coming into town […] [and] sometimes those sorts of decisions do make it difficult. But I'd say it's sort of normalised, […] because workplaces tended to be in the city centre, and you'd live out in some of the suburbs and then come to work. But Kilimani was tough, yeah. […] If you are on public transport, it is stressful. Eventually, most people found that they either had to buy a car, or find some other way, by leaving really early, which I think is what many people do. […] They leave at five-thirty in the morning, or at six o'clock. […] Most people in Nairobi can't really afford cars, […] so the key thing was that […] you could just snooze [on the bus] so you'd still arrive at work sort of fresh and ready to go. If you got one of the loud buses, the matatus, it would be a real challenge.*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

The longest daily commute amongst my participants was two hours each way.

Instead, a few journalists chose to pay exorbitant rents in order to be closer to work. One who chose this option to reduce their commute lamented how little she got for her money:

> *I live in a one-bedroom, but the rent I pay here, if I was in [the countryside], I would probably get a four-bedroom house. […] But for me, personally, I just felt like I needed*

> *to be closer to work because of the traffic issues. For me, it doesn't make sense for me to on the road for one hour to get to work and another hour in the evening.*
>
> (*CGTN-14*)

However, this individual was part of a small minority. In most cases, Kenyan staff at CGTN didn't consider that living in Kilimani was even a remote possibility for them. When I asked one journalist, who had an hour commute each way to work, whether they would like to live in Kilimani, they simply replied "I wish" (*CGTN-5*), whilst another argued that "Kilimani is usually […] for expatiates. […] Kilimani is reserved for rich people" (*CGTN-10*). These journalists displayed a naturalised vision of the division of their urban world, a disposition of their habitus that lead them to believe that Kilimani was a district for other, richer, foreign people, and not for them, and hence, did not seek to live there. As Marom argues, choice of place of residence "is not just a 'matter of taste' but an element in the 'struggle over classifications', a set of strategies of distinction with an organizing and unified logic that establish and maintain social divisions," (2014, 1347), and hence, a system of symbolic violence. The class-ified and racialised segregation of Kenyans, as a relatively homogenous social group possessing a similarly-organised low-level capital, to the peripheries of their own city seemed natural to the journalists that I interviewed, encapsulated by one, who argued that it was simply "the way Nairobi works," further adding that, "you would rarely find that any of them would want to live in Kilimani when you can pay much less in another neighbourhood where you fit in and is more friendly to your pocket" (*CGTN-11*). There was, therefore, a tacit (and distinctly colonial) expectation – that is, *doxa* – that Kenyan journalists working in Nairobi would travel further and longer in order to get to and from work.

In addition to this, Kenyan staff at CGTN also received less help from the station than their Chinese counterparts on their journey to and from work, whilst, unlike their international colleagues, they were not paid well enough to hire taxis every day:

> *There were these huge, big black vehicles, […] and the drivers had to be available at any point to take any of the Chinese staff anywhere. […] They'd be dropped off and brought back. And the transport for the Kenyans was like a minibus thing, […] [which] would go from this area to that area to that area. So, if you finished work at nine and were the last person on the list, you would likely get home at eleven. It was easier to*

> *club together and get a taxi, which is what the South Africans used to do, but we were paid in dollars so could afford a taxi. A taxi for the Kenyan staff was a luxury.*
>
> (*CGTN-6*)

Kenyan staff, instead, often chose to use public transport (*matatus*) or motorcycle taxis (*boda bodas*) as they were more affordable and direct.

Despite the lack of assistance, the station had stringent controls on clocking-in, including a biometric entry system:

> *They had this thing about getting to work at nine, which pissed the life out of me, […] some of us said that "this is not a factory in China!" […] So, you have to clock-in at nine AM, […] [and] your performance review would be tied into that clocking-in and out of work.*
>
> (*CGTN-3*)

For many staff, then, this combination of factors meant extremely long days: "I consistently left the house before 6AM. You remember that I said we work seventeen-hour days? […] You'd get back into your house just at about 11PM, and you'd do that consistently throughout the year, because that was the only way to get ahead" (*CGTN-2*). The practical effects of this on journalists' work are simple but important to consider, since, as Usher suggests, "longer, costlier commutes wear on workers" (2019, 28). Similar to *LA Times* workers affected by the relocation of their newsroom in a study by Walker (2018), some journalists at CGTN Africa showed serious concerns about having the energy to do their work after having to battle distance and traffic day after day, year after year – though many also accepted it as par for the course in Nairobi.

One indication of the strain commuting put on journalists at CGTN was when I asked them about changes to their lives and work since the COVID-19 pandemic. For journalistic staff, the pandemic had meant they had been working from home for the best part of a year. For the production staff, who were still required in the offices, they continued working the same number of hours, but were limited to being on shift only half the number of days a week. This meant elongated working days, but no travel or work at all for half the week. Every interviewee I spoke to about this issue felt the changes had been positive for their mental and

physical wellbeing, and had improved their productivity by reducing their commute, freeing up more time for relaxation. One journalist with a very long commute felt that working from home had "been better for me in terms of time. […] There's much less distraction. […] It's been quite convenient for me" (*CGTN-16*). Despite having one of the shortest commutes of any of the Kenyan staff at CGTN Africa, another also agreed: "I've tended to be more efficient. I've done much more work much more quickly than I used to do at the office. And I've even joked with my bosses and employers and said, 'why do you want me to come back to that office?'" (*CGTN-17*). They argued that things were much better now than before, and staff should be able to do as much as their work as possible from home in the future:

> *I think some things should change […] for good, you know. Like, what's the use of an office meeting at nine o'clock in the morning? […] Five people battling traffic since six AM to get to some place so that they're in a meeting at nine. Is that really necessary? […] I could as well be in my hometown […] and therefore I do not even need to be in Nairobi to do an office meeting.*
>
> (*CGTN-17*)

They were also not the only member of staff at CGTN who felt the urge to return to his hometown as a result of the pandemic. Because of the changes to the shift patterns for production staff, one staffer actually had time every week to visit their family in rural Kenya: "it's better, because for three days, I could actually go to [my hometown] and come back on the third day, […] so, I prefer the three days" (*CGTN-14*).

In general, though, local journalists – and particularly junior-level employees – at CGTN have to travel further and work longer hours in order to get their jobs done, since they live further from the station and receive less help getting to and from their work. On the other hand, Chinese and international journalists have to travel less far and work less hard in order to get their stories to air. Not only is this a vicious form of class-ified and racialised symbolic violence, naturalising the segregation Kenyan journalists into urban peripheries, far removed from the locus of capital appropriation – i.e., the office and news sites – but also, in a practical way, can lead quickly towards burnout. One journalist explained how they stopped pitching as many stories because they were exhausted by the constant travelling:

> *I was in the field almost every other day, going as far as the Masai Mara, doing three stories, going to another town, doing four stories, going to another town, another three stories, come back to Nairobi, rest for two days, go back… ehh! I was really all over the place, and I realised that, "oh gosh, I'm becoming a bit of a workaholic, and I can't even remember what my mum looks like." […] That's why I haven't gone to the field the whole of last year.*
>
> (*CGTN-10*)

The literature on burnout in journalism suggests that junior and female journalists – i.e., those generally possessing the least total capital – are the section of the profession affected most commonly and most acutely by burnout (Jung and Kim 2012; MacDonald et al. 2016). In the context of CGTN Africa, this can therefore have serious knock-on effects on the ability of Kenyan journalists to accumulate capital, as their physical removal, far from centres of capital, complicates and potentially inhibits their ability to do their job, causing them to have to work harder and travel further in order to advance their career. Eventually, this might even lead to a critical undermining of a journalist's career commitment, to the point where they leave the field altogether (Reinardy 2011). It might also affect representation in news content. If Kenyans are more likely to suffer from burnout, this may colour the stories they pitch or the angles they take due to an increase in cynicism or reduce the number of pitches they are making compared to their colleagues due to fatigue.

Stuck in the city

Whilst Kenyan journalists often suffered from difficulties in navigating around and within Nairobi, their low capital also meant that they very rarely got to escape the city by exploiting one of the key benefits and opportunities available to CGTN employees: travel abroad. In the first few years of CGTN Africa's existence, travel abroad was a common feature for almost all employees. During this period, oversized teams of reporters would be sent out from Nairobi to cover events:

> *these guys used to do things in a big way, so like, where […] the BBC had two correspondents […] the Chinese team had eleven people! One guy to carry the bags, one to hold your microphone, one guy to produce, one guy to… I mean all sorts of*

> *things. And the Chinese would have a duplicate role for someone from the Chinese-language division for everything we did.*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

Large budgets for producing international stories would be approved with little pushback or questioning from management:

> *initially, it was literally almost like a free-for-all kind of situation. A free buffet! You would say, "oh, I'm going to South Africa, and I need two-hundred dollars per day, and I need to hire a car for three-hundred dollars, and I need to stay in a hotel for this much," and you submit a budget and "approved!" Go!*
>
> (*CGTN-3*)

This liberal system of budgeting was a boon for the senior reporters at the station who could take advantage of it. By travelling widely, they were able to vastly broaden their portfolio, and better establish their credentials as international journalists, in a way that had simply not been possible when they worked in local media:

> *CGTN gave me opportunities that I would never find […] [in] local media. […] I went to the Africa Cup of Nations, […] and I remember going to every city that hosted a match. […] I told them, "Ivory Coast are now in the quarter-finals, Didier Drogba is playing, the quarter-final is in Rustenburg," and I was like, "you guys need to get me a ticket," and nobody questions you […]. So, the support that you get to get the job done was really good. […] So, for me, career-wise, it did work.*
>
> (*CGTN-3*)

This journalist was able to use this experience to later move on to work at BBC Africa, noting that: "I was able to use the opportunities I got there […] to be able to show my level of journalism to help me get the job" (*CGTN-3*).

However, the free buffet did continue unabated. As expenses spiralled, control of the budget was tightened, particularly when a new rotation of Chinese management was brought in. Budgets became vetted much more diligently, and, as a result, pitches for stories outside

of Kenya became harder to push through Chinese gatekeepers: "they even became a bit strict about which assignments they would allow people to do, […] and you'd find that pitches to spend time in a country to do features, those were becoming fewer" (*CGTN-3*). This meant that those travel opportunities which had been so important for the career-development of some of the journalists at CGTN Africa began losing their shine. For one senior journalist, the increasing difficulties in travelling for work proved to the be the straw that broke the camel's back:

> *eventually the appeal sort of peeled off. I got tired of doing that sort of thing, so I eventually decided to move on. Yeah, one day, we had this fight over money with one of my bosses, and I thought, "it's not what I want to keep doing."*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

For the junior crop of journalists that have joined the station more recently, opportunities to expand their portfolios and advance their career through covering continental stories have therefore been significantly reduced. One Kenyan journalist had had so many pitches for international stories turned down that, eventually, they decided to give up and only pitch stories in Kenya:

> *they'll give you a funny excuse, like "you need to pitch six stories for one place, you can't just go for one story," which I did, and you just find "denied," for no reason […]. I was wondering what else I would need to do to qualify to travel, to the point where I just got tired. I thought, I might as well just pitch stuff in Kenya[.]*
>
> (*CGTN-10*)

One obvious and immediate impact of this on CGTN Africa's news provision is a general favour towards stories from Nairobi and Kenya, observed in content analyses (Wekesa 2014; Wekesa and Zhang 2014).

Moreover, when I asked this individual why they thought their international pitches were being turned down, they responded, with a fair degree of venom, that favouritism was to blame. Since the budgets were controlled by the Chinese management, having the ear of your supervisor could, apparently, make all the difference: "There's never a particular reason,

to tell you the truth. Honestly, if I could boil it down, I'd say it's favouritism. […] [But] you'll find that someone else has been told "yes, you go." So, it really depends on how much ass you can kiss" (*CGTN-10*). It is notable that Ireri's (2017a) list of favours that are used to win over the loyalties of poorly paid Kenyan journalists includes paid-for trips. Another staffer suggested strongly that this was the case at CGTN:

> *The Chinese thrive on rewards and punishment. So, for the African team leaders, the kinds of rewards they get is that if there is a trip coming up […] they'll just be roped into the trip, they'll just find a role for them. […] Yet, whatever they are going to do, it is my job! […] Logically, I'd be the one to travel if they have to do some [of that work]. […] But because they don't like my way of doing things, […] I'll be punished.*
>
> (*CGTN-14*)

For junior Kenyan staffers, their lack of capital meant that they suffered from a lack of physical mobility *and* social mobility, unable to escape the confines of the city in order to advance their careers by working on international stories. One perfectly summed up the feeling of "social finitude" (Bourdieu 2018, 110) which is the result of a lack of capital, stating that her lack of mobility meant that

> *I am doing the same thing over and over, and it's like it's nauseating, it's choking me. […] I feel trapped just thinking about how I feel right now, because there is […] no professional growth, […] [and] there is no financial growth, because I feel like those two should go hand-in-hand. So, yeah, I feel stagnant. I feel like I need to learn new things, but then again, where am I going to learn new things?*
>
> (*CGTN-14*)

This account is in stark contrast to those more senior journalists who found that "you just do the pitch, and the bosses are like, 'yeah, we like that, we like the idea, we see what you're doing with this,' and then, that's it," enabling them to "move around freely" (*CGTN-3*), and displaying a clear sense of "quasi-ubiquity" – an ability to easily be close to sources of capital accumulation, that is, places of news (Bourdieu 2018). A European journalist at CGTN, for example, was often selected to travel for stories because of his possession of a European

passport, an extremely valuable source of inscribed capital that reduced the costs for visa applications. Other indications of this pattern of physical movement being tied to capital possession were that international staff were provided by the organisation with a return airfare home each year, and Chinese staff had the option of rotating out of Nairobi, either to other foreign stations or back home to China.

What is clear from these accounts is how the city limits marked a boundary that some junior Kenyan journalists simply could not cross due to their lack of capital. This severely held back their careers, as they could not get experience of reporting on international stories. Meanwhile, senior journalists at the station – and particularly international staff – were able to accumulate capital by covering those stories. Nairobi's boundaries therefore served as a physical metaphor for the distinction between these fractions – one marked by upward mobility, the other by social finitude.

"Will you be my Facebook news source?"

Clearly, access to news sources and site is a vital source of journalistic capital. Despite the difficulties most Kenyan staff encountered accessing important sites in their day-to-day work, others, and particularly those based on the planning desk or in the digital department, were able to use their location close to the centre of the news operations of CGTN Africa – that is, based in the central office – in tandem with the excellent digital infrastructure in Nairobi to position themselves as "nodes" through which vital news information from across the continent could pass to CGTN, and, as a result, accumulate significant symbolic and financial capital by landing big stories and getting paid good bonuses. As Massey (1994) has argued, those who hold influential positions in social flows can use time-space compression to their advantage – that is, significantly reduce the costs required to appropriate capital. Gutsche and Hess add that "to be a news 'node' in which information relevant to a particular social context is expected to pass represents a type of power worth protecting" (2019, 24).

This set of journalists at the headquarters in Nairobi became particularly adept at using the internet to build significant international news source networks in order to access stories across the African continent. As one journalist recollected: "I didn't travel […] so, what I did was that I had a network of fixers all over Africa, so if anything happened […] I was the first to know" (*CGTN-1*). When asked how they went about building this network, they noted with some degree of pride that, "I built it up myself, from the ground up. I used Facebook […].

I would just go to media houses in Egypt, or Morocco, or Nigeria, check their Facebook pages, check who their reporters are, and then just type them in, send them a friend request" (*CGTN-1*). Instead of travelling physically, they were instead able to effectively "travel" through cyberspace, building symbolic capital by landing stories through digital networks. Another journalist argued that:

> *the difference today is with the advance of technology. […] The constraints of time and space no longer exist in the same way. So, I think investing in that sort of thing has made life for journalists in cities easier. […] You can even spend upwards of a month without having left the office, […] but reporting the news every day, and reliably so[.]*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

A veteran reporter, who had seen Nairobi changed over thirty-years of journalism experience, explained that "being a journalist in Nairobi these days is just sitting in the office and Googling, surfing, and making mobile phone calls […] because the technology is there, […] which means that journalists don't move around too much," though they clearly felt that this was a change for the better, adding that "when people talk about proximity and news, for me it's a terribly good thing, because some people just do not know what it meant to bring a news story and put it out there for people" in the pre-digital era (*CGTN-17*).

A common claim amongst staff at CGTN was that a key source of journalistic capital for the station was the comprehensiveness of its coverage of Africa (see Chapter 6). Whilst CGTN's network of correspondents – augmented by agents from FSN – went some way to achieving this, the work of these digital "nodes" in Nairobi also significantly aided CGTN in "laying claim" to the African continent as a legitimate media territory by reporting news from across the continent in timely fashion (Gutsche Jr. and Hess 2019).

However, overreliance on digital journalism can sap at journalists' ability to establish *place trust*, one noting that "you really start to lose touch if you don't move around much" (*CGTN-2*). *Place trust* is an essential way journalists set themselves apart as "professional knowers," and the inability of the digital reporters to travel in order to *be there* could damage their epistemic authority to report the news (Usher 2019). A lack of familiarity with place coupled with the demands placed on reporters can be problematic and constrain news-gathering efforts, increasing dependence on official sources, as these are often the most

accessible and reliable sources to journalists lacking localised news source networks (Molotch and Lester 1974). This was particularly evident in the account of one digital reporter about how they went about fulfilling their daily quota of ten articles a day, reporting on government-issued figures for COVID infections, checking for announcements from AFRICOM (US Africa Command), the UN, and the African Union, "because they are the easiest to write about" (*CGTN-19*). And, as we saw in Chapter 6, if time was running short, digital reporters could always copy and paste stories from Xinhua as a failsafe to fulfil their quote. This account illustrates just how a sedentary working routine, in which proximity to news sources is not taken seriously, can lead to a lack of balanced, innovative, and varied reporting of the news, and an overreliance on official sources.

Yet the picture of reporting patterns at CGTN Africa indicate that news from across the continent is increasingly being told from behind desks in the Nairobi newsroom, rather than by correspondents in the field – particularly as the station continues to increase its focus on reporting via digital platforms. This has led to what Gutsche and Hess refer to as a "metropolitan domination" of the journalistic field, noting "a journalist's level of prestige and/or credibility can ultimately depend on where they are located in physical space" (2019, 41), and, in CGTN Africa's case, journalists located in the newsroom in Nairobi carried more weight in the news-making processes than their colleagues in the field. This creates a new centre-periphery dynamic in which journalists in Nairobi occupy a dominant position, whilst country correspondents occupy a liminal, dominated position.

Some country correspondents expressed a general detachment from the news making agenda in Nairobi, often being the last to be told of editorial decisions, and a powerlessness to affect them. One explained: "you feel very disconnected, and at times, […] you feel like you're throwing darts at a dartboard that you can't see and hoping that it lands. […] A lot of the time the communication is tricky, and it adds to the frustration" (*CGTN-18*). They were routinely not informed by the editors in Nairobi about the plans for the relevant weekly show, and so were often unable to prepare and pitch stories which met the brief: "it leaves us in the dark. We do have our own agendas that we want to push through, but it is a guessing game. […] So, it is incredibly frustrating, and I would kind of appreciate it if they trusted us more" (*CGTN-18*).

This experience was quite apart from that of foreign correspondents of old who often argued they had much more autonomy because of their physical distance and

disconnectedness from their editors (Hannerz 2004). Instead, CGTN country correspondents' physical distance left them ignored and out of the loop: "I think I drive them crazy, because I email them every day. […] I'm very passionate and proud about the work that I do […]. It bugs me that [CGTN] don't want more content" (*CGTN-18*). As Usher notes about journalists in the US, they often felt that if they weren't in the main office, they would be overlooked by the station management, since it was a case of "out of sight – out of mind," and, as a result they might be considered "dispensable" (2019, 29). For one journalist, it meant that they were seriously having to consider the future of their career: "I don't see myself staying in this current position going forward. […]. I rely mainly on CGTN for my income, and, if the trend continues as it is, I am going to be forced to shift them to side […] purely because of the uncertainty that comes with it" (*CGTN-18*).

The expansion of digital infrastructure in CGTN's working routines, then, meant that the distances between centre and periphery were simultaneously diminished (physically, connections could be made further afield) and extended (socially, these connections were less meaningful). That is, there is occurring a "geographical stretching of social relation" (Gutsche and Hess 2019, 29), but, for some journalists at CGTN, this is literally a stretching (and straining) to breaking point, where they are risking being pushed to the very margins of their profession.

The BBC comes to town

One factor that changed the dynamics of career mobility in Nairobi was when the BBC opened its new African headquarters there in 2018. I have already spoken about the effects of competition between CGTN and the BBC at a global level in previous chapters, but it is a very different thing, on the other hand, to talk about the actual potential of staff at CGTN Africa being able to work at the BBC. I propose that the physical proximity of competing employers, and the formation of localised journalistic networks between those employed by competing organisations, helps to engender a social dynamism within the journalistic field in Nairobi.

When CGTN Africa set up their station in 2011, there was not a great deal of opportunity for Kenyan journalists to advance their careers beyond the local-national level, and, as such, many Nairobian journalists jumped at the chance to work at the international level, despite their own unfamiliarity with and misgivings about CGTN as an organisation. As another journalist recalled:

> *I actually had to Google it when I made the application, I had to read about CCTV, I had to read about "who are they?" […] [But] I told myself that, "this could be a stepping-stone to an Al Jazeera, or something[.]*
>
> (*CGTN-3*)

Over the next few years, CGTN continued to maintain a virtual monopoly on international exposure for Nairobian journalists, and, as such, continued to offer the best opportunities for experience and pay in the city. However, the opening of the BBC Africa headquarters at 9 Riverside, Nairobi, just a few kilometres from the CGTN offices, in 2018, altered these dynamics. This office is the largest BBC bureau outside of the UK, housing half of the BBC's six-hundred Africa-based staff (*BBC News* 2018), significantly larger than CGTN Africa's hub. Recruiting for such a large station created a huge demand for experienced journalists, and since CGTN employed a large number of journalists with international experience in the city, many key positions at the BBC were filled by staff from CGTN. One of those who remained at CGTN noted that "the BBC rolled out big and was recruiting, and it haemorrhaged us. […] It took almost the bulk of its news staff [from CGTN]" (*CGTN-17*).

For some staff at CGTN, this opportunity was an escape route from an employer that had given them a big break but had plateaued without serious competition to drive it forward. One recalled the serendipity: "just when I was getting bored with CGTN, BBC Africa goes on a massive recruitment to expand its African operations, and I got the job" (*CGTN-3*).

Many of the staff at CGTN saw the BBC as the pinnacle of journalistic achievement: "for me, as a journalist, having been able to get the BBC onto my CV, it rubber stamps everything that you do" (*CGTN-2*). Some who remained at CGTN retained ambitions of joining the BBC now they had set up in the city: "I'd tried before to join the BBC, because they're very successful, […] but they set up when I was at CGTN […]. I would be tempted [now]" (*CGTN-9*). For journalists like this, the realistic possibility of working for the BBC in Nairobi caused a shift in mindset – that is, it introduced different stakes into the game, and hence, encouraged different strategies from agents in the field.

Many of the remaining staff at CGTN Africa are close friends and ex-colleagues of staff at BBC Africa. Socialising between staff from the two stations is frequent, and practically all CGTN staff I spoke to were keenly aware of conditions at BBC Africa. One journalist who was

good friends with several staff members at the BBC noted that "journalism is an interactive space. We go to the same bars, we talk, we exchange ideas and stuff. […] Yeah, you talk about what's happening, you also vent" (*CGTN-10*). Complaining about one of their friends and ex-colleagues having to deal with bureaucracy in reporting on the 2013 Westgate shopping mall attack at CGTN, they exclaimed that "in fact, I'm glad [they] left, and their thriving in the BBC, because CGTN was not serving them well" (*CGTN-10*). They were not the only person to use this language, another agreeing that "we talk with them, and let me tell you, they are thriving. […] They have been given chances" (*CGTN-14*).

Overall, the sense from staff at CGTN was that their counterparts at the BBC were better paid, got better benefits, had better working conditions, and better prospects for career progression, and so, all of a sudden, journalists at CGTN felt they were getting the short end of the stick. A Kenyan summed up the change in mindset:

> *we came in[to] [CGTN] as desperate people. We didn't want to step on [the Chinese's] toes. We felt like they were doing us a favour, giving us better pay than what we were earning. […] Some of our guys went [to the BBC] three years ago, and […] the other day we were just laughing that in three years, they've had a pay increase of up to a thousand dollars […]. They are totally protected; they're well taken care of. […] I went to one of my former colleagues who works at the BBC, and he was just telling me that this was an environment you can thrive in.*
>
> (*CGTN-14*)

In particular, Larry Madowo, who was Business Editor at BBC Africa, then breaking-news anchor for BBC America, and now recently appointed CNN's Nairobi-based correspondent, was name-checked by several staff as an exemplar of potential career-development at the BBC, being given opportunities to work outside of Africa.[10]

For staff at CGTN then, and particularly those who had been locked into positions for several years, the entry of the BBC into the Nairobi mediascape reinvigorated their sense of the possibilities of upward mobility. There was now the real chance of moving on to a more

[10] Though he had not worked at CGTN, many staff at the station worked with Larry whilst employed in local media.

prestigious, better paid role at the BBC. For these staff, this meant an active effort towards bringing their portfolio and CV into line with the BBC's requirements. When I asked one staff member if it was their ambition to work there, they replied emphatically, "Oh yeah! Actually, just the other day I revamped my CV. I had better get a job" (*CGTN-14*).

Whether this has had a tangible impact on practice at CGTN is hard to measure. A senior producer at CGTN argued that very little changed in the way the management ran the station in the aftermath of the BBC opening:

> *CGTN lost a lot of people to the BBC, but it still didn't deter them. […] They didn't care. Because there would be days where there would be a huge story, […] and everybody had it live, and we didn't. We didn't, and it was normal. You'd ask twice or so to say, "are we not taking that live?" And like, "no, we carry on as normal[.]"*
>
> (*CGTN-15*)

However, at the very least, it meant that there was a large turnover of staff at CGTN around 2018. Literature on staff turnover suggests that large numbers of new entrants tend to encourage conformity, as these parvenus compete amongst themselves for scarce resources (Benson and Neveu 2005), so it is possible that the mass exodus of staff from CGTN to the BBC might have had a chilling effect on innovation at CGTN, as suggested above.

What is important to note here, though, is the importance of physical proximity to these changes: had the BBC chosen, say, Johannesburg for their Africa headquarters, rather than Nairobi, then journalists at CGTN Africa would not have gained such a clear sense of the possibilities for upward social mobility in the field. The BBC enriched competition in the urban field, creating new positions to be filled by Nairobian journalists, and, ultimately, altered the relative positions of agents within the field, valorising different forms of journalistic capital.

Conclusion

This chapter has utilised the concept of urban fields to explore the role of place in journalistic production at CGTN Africa, and in particular, the unique effects that Nairobi exerts on this phenomenon. It has illustrated how the material conditions of the city affect the distribution, valorisation, and accumulation of capital for different fractions of staff at the station. What is

evident from the data is how the organisation of the physical space of the city, and how agents are able to travel across its boundaries, correlate with and reify urban agents' social position and mobility. That is, occupying particularly valuable urban spaces both indicates a dominant social position and allows the occupant easier access to sites of accumulation.

In the case of CGTN Africa, Kenyan journalists often found themselves pushed to the boundaries of the city, indicating their dominated position relative to their international and Chinese colleagues, often leaving them open to symbolic violence, as many found a conformist approach to their work was the only way to ensure making ends meet due to the expenses of living in Nairobi. Many also found it more difficult than other fractions to access important sources and sites of news, whether in the city itself or beyond, delimiting their potential for career advancement. Though some were able to upend this lack of mobility by using the internet, this sometimes comes at the cost of credibility by undermining *place trust* and causing an overreliance on official sources. Correspondents based outside of Nairobi, on the other hand, often found themselves out of sight and out of mind, unable to affect the agendas at the station. However, one factor that was effective in altering the dynamics of social mobility within the city was the opening of BBC Africa's bureau, introducing new stakes into the game. The opening of new field positions and the formation of localised networks of journalists working for competing organisations appeared to reinvigorate the practice of many CGTN employees, even if the organisation itself seemed unperturbed. These findings suggest that the role urban fields and physical space in the study of journalism is an important new frontier for studies journalistic practice.

9. CGTN Africa and the limits of fields

The previous three chapters have all analysed journalistic practice at CGTN Africa through the prisms of differing layers of fields, illustrating how all of these fields have unique ramifications for work at CGTN Africa. In this chapter, I will extend the discussion to an exploration of the relations between fields at different levels. They do not operate in complete independence from the others at different levels; they overlap, intersect, and relate to one another in diverse ways, and these relations between fields are a key factor in shaping journalistic practice. An important part of any study employing field theory must therefore be to disentangle the web of relations between fields, whether they exist at the same (functional) or different (vertical) levels (Buchholz 2016). In order to achieve this disentanglement, it is necessary to establish where the boundary of a field is – that is, to understand the outer limits of its effects – so that it is possible to decipher the points of contact between one field and the next, where relations might exist between them.

Plotting the boundary of a field is not a simple task – they are by definition dynamic and often highly porous. This becomes even more complicated when considering fields at differing levels, particularly as a field's correspondence to definite geographic space begins to break down. In her work on trans-Atlantic journalism, Christin (2016) delineates three important criteria for judging the existence of transnational fields, and I argue that these criteria can be equally useful to establishing the overlapping relations of differing layers of fields: an active struggle over legitimate definition of field-specific cultural capital (i.e., in our case, what represents "good journalism"); the presence of reciprocal field effects; and the existence of common stakes (e.g., jobs, audiences, awards). This chapter will use these criteria to judge the overlapping and dynamic effects on journalistic practice at CGTN Africa through building an understanding of where the limits of these fields lie, and how this affects and, in many cases, delimits the practice of particular castes of journalists at CGTN Africa

I find that the global journalistic field, in particular, is characterised by its "weakness" – that is, it holds an interstitial position between more firmly established journalistic fields. These "settled" fields, which, in this particular case, are national fields, strongly influence practice within the global journalistic field, though to differing degrees depending on their level of overlap. The relationship of overlap between fields, moreover, is a direct result of their historical trajectory, with the global journalistic field formed primarily through imperial,

colonial, and neo-colonial structures emanating from particular national fields. Finally, I argue, this trajectory has imprinted a *doxic* "Whiteness" – reified particularly through the objectivity norm – onto the global journalistic field that delimits the possibilities for African journalists in international settings, tantamount to the racial segregation of international journalistic production.

In doing so, this chapter, illustrates that understanding international journalism (or the global journalistic field) requires intense scrutiny of the relationships between the global field and fields at other levels. Further, it shows that racism is inherent to the systems of global journalism as currently constructed. Therefore, a field theory approach to (global) journalism must build a working Bourdieusian understanding of the functions of race and racism within fields.

To present these arguments, the chapter will first introduce the concept of "weak" fields, before demonstrating how the case study of CGTN Africa illustrates that the global journalistic field is defined by its weakness, utilising the criteria suggested by Christin (2016). It will then delve into the genealogy of the global journalistic field to explain why it has developed into a weak field, before exploring how race and racism play a role in delimiting the practice and possibilities for African journalists both at CGTN Africa and beyond. Focussing on how the global journalistic field continues to be dominated by racialised forms of capital – "whiteness" – upheld particularly through the objectivity norm, it analyses how journalists at CGTN Africa interpret and implement journalistic objectivity in their work and career. Finally, it will discuss the theoretical ramifications of considering the nature of race and racism in multi-level field systems on notions of hybridity in international journalism.

Weak fields

The concept of a "weak" field was advanced by Vauchez in his studies of the structure of the transnational field of European law (2008; 2011). He found that this particular arena comprised a relatively autonomous sphere of action, but that it lacked some of the defining features of more established fields. Extrapolating these findings to the notion of transnational fields in general, he argues that they possess a hybrid structure which entail elements of both *settled* and *emerging* fields (Steinmetz 2008), in particular focusing on the "extensive interdependence and overlap of transnational settings with neighbouring fields" and their

"interstitial position as they are merged into 'other fields that are mapped out and constituted more firmly' (Topalov 1994, 464; Vauchez 2008), as well as to the related *blurriness* and indifferentiation of their internal boundaries" (Vauchez 2011, 342). Building on this argument, then, we might ask to what extent is the global journalistic field a "weak" field? I postulate that, based on the analysis of practice at CGTN Africa, the global journalistic field is defined by the *blurriness* of its boundaries, and its extensive interdependence with and low autonomisation from national journalistic fields.

More generally, literature concerning international journalism, foreign correspondence, and global news also appears to point towards this conclusion. As in Vauchez's study, the global journalistic field

> *does not hold by itself through a sort of endogenous and self-referential logics; rather, it is deeply embedded in highly institutionalized and differentiated national fields of power that exert a differential hold through a variety of social processes (socialization, valued credentials, career paths, established models of professional excellency, and so on).*
>
> (2011, 342)

Indeed, there appears to be little evidence of consistent global journalistic education, qualifications, career path or awards, and individual journalists seem to be overwhelmingly impacted by their institutional and organisational settings (Hamilton and Jenner 2004; Sambrook 2010; Vicente 2013). Moreover, there continues to be poor professional definition of the role of a journalist in the global field, with poor separation between what constitutes "global news" and "foreign correspondence." This might easily be batted away as a mere semantic issue, yet where "global news" refers to genuinely cosmopolitan storytelling (Berglez 2008), "foreign correspondence" necessarily refers to spatial difference between the "foreign" and the "domestic" which sites a news organisation or individual journalist within a distinctly national context, writing for "back home" (Nothias 2017, 75). In such a context, capital acquired (and embodied) within national fields tends to exert significant influence on position and practice in the global journalistic field – and this also explains the dominance of particular (Western) national fields (and journalists emanating from those fields) in global journalism. This is the result of socio-historic struggles, which have consecrated

"white/western" values into the field, requiring "translational work" for others (Schmidt-Wellenburg and Bernhard 2020, 15). To what extent does an analysis of practice at CGTN Africa support these claims?

CGTN Africa in a weak field

Journalistic practice at CGTN Africa is influenced by the presence of multiple layers of fields: global, national, and urban. Utilising Christin's (2016) criteria, I will now build upon these findings to analyse whether journalism at CGTN Africa is indicative of a weakly fielded system. I argue that such practice is characterised by: first, the presence of multi-layered and asymmetrical field effects; second, an active but limited struggle over the definition of good journalism – invoked primarily through import-export strategies between global and national layers; and third, a distinct lack of common stakes between different fractions of staff.

Reciprocal fields effects

A field can be said to end where its effects are no longer felt. Positing the existence of field effects is, therefore, essentially to pose a question about the boundaries of fields. To be *in* a field is to be *subject to* its effects, to be enmeshed and implicated within its structures and logics, to be *taken up* (viscerally) by the game being played. Within the context of a field, then, dynamic exchanges of capital take place as dominant actors seek to defend their position in the field, whilst peripheral actors seek to advance their own. Field effects are the result of these symbolic and economic exchanges taking place, as actors seek to draw their legitimacy from one or another source of capital.

In the case of trans/multi-national capital exchanges (including journalism), such exchanges tend to be both highly asymmetrical and non-reciprocal: "peripheral actors pay attention to and draw legitimacy from the dominant actor, but the dominant actor does not reciprocate" (Christin 2016, 228). This is due to the overlapping of fields at different levels, giving diverse sources of capital from which actors can seek to draw legitimacy. And, since not all fields are created equal, but, rather, are established in dynamic relational hierarchies with one another, it follows that not all field effects are felt equally either. Working backwards, then, establishing to what extent capital exchanges are actually taking place and in what direction reveals the structure of fields effects, and this, in turn, maps out the borders

of (and overlap between) differing fields. In the case of CGTN Africa then, it is important to consider how different cleavages of staff felt the effects of different fields in unique ways, drawing particularly on one or more fields (at multiple levels) in order to establish their legitimacy.

Chinese journalists, for example, appeared to be well-insulated from the effects of the global journalistic field. That is, despite operating within the boundaries of the global journalistic field, Chinese staff at CGTN Africa did not appear to draw at all upon capital from the global field for legitimacy, instead always referring back to the Chinese journalistic field as a locus for their work. One African journalist noted how much more interest the managerial staff took in content produced for CGTN Africa's Mandarin-language division, because it would be seen by their countrymen back in China: "because their families are back home, their bosses are back home, and everybody is watching them back home, they were very serious about the Mandarin side" (*CGTN-1*). Likewise, another told me how Chinese staff took CGTN's stated soft power mission to heart: "CGTN Africa was started primarily as a political arm, and it is there to gain influence, […] [a]nd I think that the Chinese staff took that […] seriously" (*CGTN-13*). Indeed, Chinese staff seem to operate more as foreign correspondents than international journalists, in that their practice seems explicitly pitched towards a metropole – in this case, China – rather than a species of genuinely cosmopolitan *global* journalism (Pál 2017).

What this orientation of effects tells us is how few transnational capital exchanges appear to be taking place between the Chinese and global journalistic fields, particularly in terms of global-to-Chinese directionality. The Chinese state's monopoly over journalistic production within its national borders creates a strong boundary for its journalistic field. That is, the Chinese state's domination of the Chinese journalistic field allows it to resist the introduction of vertically heteronomous (globalising, cosmopolitan) capital – or, at the very least, allows careful control over the processes of integrating such capital into its structures (Zhao 2011; Shi 2018; Benabdallah 2019). Indeed, as Pál (2017) argues, Chinese foreign correspondents are still much more likely to be influenced in their work by the editorial agenda of *Global Times* than the BBC or CNN. Several of my interviewees appeared to agree with such a sentiment when asked about their managers. One told me that:

> *What I found odd was how in most newsrooms you have screens showing you what other media houses are doing, so if I'm working I am watching the BBC […] just to know how people are treating a story. With CGTN, all of the screens were on CGTN. […] So, I don't really think they thought of themselves as having competitors.*
>
> (*CGTN-3*)

Moreover, the opportunities for genuinely cosmopolitan interactions between Chinese and non-Chinese staff appear to be extremely limited. Pál (2017) has noted how organisational rules sometimes forbid socialising with non-Chinese staff, whilst interviewees agreed that Chinese staff generally kept to themselves and did not interact with non-Chinese staff except when necessary for work, living predominantly in neighbourhoods with other Chinese expats, eating Chinese food, and so on. So, whilst Chinese foreign correspondents might apparently have more opportunities than their domestic colleagues to accumulate cosmopolitan capital, in reality, the actual rate of transnational capital exchange appears to be very low. This suggests that reciprocal field effects for Chinese journalists are limited, and, particularly, that whilst the Chinese journalistic field has caused an intrusion into the global journalistic field, the effects of the global field are not reciprocated within the Chinese journalistic field. This, in turn, would indicate that whilst the Chinese field has a well-established and fairly impermeable boundary, that of the global journalistic field is much blurrier and prone to heterogenous intrusions.

The situation for African journalists, and particularly Kenyans, is very different. Kenyan journalists appeared to draw from a diverse array of positions held in different fields operating at different levels – that is, simultaneous position-holding in number of fields appeared to affect their practice. Moreover, the positions held within these fields varied greatly: dominant in the Kenyan journalistic field, but peripheral and dominated in the global and Chinese journalistic fields. As we saw in Chapter 7, when discussing their skills, many were keen to point out their local knowledge and dominance of local-national field that set them apart as suitable recruits for CGTN. Yet, when it came to producing *international news* participants appeared to draw on a (sometimes confused and/or inconsistent) mix of influences.

African staff tended to feel the influence and symbolic domination of their Chinese superiors within their organisational setting. That is, most staff had keen sense of their

dominated position relative to Chinese staff at the station, and, again, as we saw in Chapter 7, altered their practice in a range of ways to maintain and advance their position within CGTN, embodying aspects of a China habitus in order to make their working routines more seamless and less stressful. These changes imply that African journalists at CGTN draw on positions (however liminal) within the Chinese journalistic to legitimise their practice of international journalism (that is, within the global journalistic field), particularly those who employed narratives of compromise to argue that utilising CGTN's resources enabled them to do better journalism. This suggests, again, that the field effects of the Chinese journalistic field are felt far outside of China's sovereign territory, and beyond what might be conceived of the field's "natural" boundaries. In short, therefore, CGTN Africa represents a heteronomous national-level intrusion into the global journalistic field.

On the other hand, African journalists at CGTN continuously lionised Western media organisations (and particularly the BBC) within the global field. They felt the symbolic domination of the global field by these organisations and, as peripheral actors, sought to draw on resources of dominant ones in order to legitimise their work. One argued that "if CGTN Africa was to try and take notes from what BBC Africa is doing, it would have a greater chance" of success (*CGTN-10*). Many cited CNN's veteran broadcaster Christiane Amanpour as an important influence on their career and made sure to tell me that they religiously followed BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera coverage of international news. This indicates that some staff at CGTN were keen to highlight their understanding of – and hence, position in – the global journalistic field in order to legitimise their career choices.

However, the attention paid to international journalists by African staff was not necessarily returned in kind. Indeed, the international staffers I spoke to – whilst often sympathetic to the plight of their African peers – tended to distance themselves from the Chinese journalistic field whilst simultaneously placing themselves above the African staff, drawing heavily on their dominant position in the global journalistic field for their legitimacy. This meant being keen to point out how they did not kowtow to their Chinese supervisors as they felt many of their African peers did – even if they understood that Kenyan staff lived a different reality. One South African journalist told me that they were "pretty disliked by my superiors because I cannot keep my mouth shut, and I know that comes with a lot of privilege because I'm not like the Kenyan staff where this was like the only opportunity I'd have, so I kind of spoke up a lot about stuff" (*CGTN-7*). Likewise, a European journalist felt that only

"twenty-five per cent" of his African colleagues were "good journalists," sharing similar values to himself, whilst the others had compromised themselves by "dancing for twenty pounds" because they "believe that's their best chance of being a journalist" (*CGTN-8*). These statements illustrate the way international journalists tended to simultaneously reject the influence of both the Kenyan and Chinese journalistic fields on their practice, centring their legitimacy on their position in the global field.

What the positioning of these three groups indicate is that, in the case of journalism at CGTN Africa, the effects of transnational exchanges of capital are strongly asymmetrical. Kenyan journalists, in particular, seem caught in a vice of overlapping and seemingly conflicting field effects emanating from different fields at different levels, which are not reciprocated by their Chinese and international co-workers. They compromise to appease their Chinese bosses whilst simultaneously venerating dominant global actors, drawing legitimacy from these two sets of dominant actors, and yet neither Chinese nor international journalists reciprocate, instead distancing themselves from local-national and/or global practice. This suggests that there is a strong hierarchy of journalistic fields, which places the Kenyan journalistic field at the bottom of the pile. It also suggests that that field effects are strongly refracted through institutionalised and organisational structures and settings which originate from national-level fields. This would indicate that the global journalistic field is, at best, "weakly" fielded.

Struggle over definition

What disputes over what constitutes "good journalism" take place in these exchanges between cleavages of staff at CGTN Africa? In Chapter 6, we saw how CGTN Africa as an organisation sought to navigate conversations about "good journalism" by carefully introducing heterodox ideas into the global journalistic field, whilst in Chapter 7 we saw how staff at the station interpreted these conversations.

Indeed, many African and the majority of international staff often disparaged CGTN Africa's journalism as mere "propaganda," contrasted against "proper journalism." In particular, the station's policy of prioritising China-centric positive news was often presented as the opposite of how journalists understood their work. One Kenyan journalist firmly stated that "we have to be happy to tell the good and the bad. That is what journalism is. Full stop" (*CGTN-3*). An international journalist agreed that positive reporting "undercuts quite a lot of

what journalism is supposed to be. […] I'd say that it's not journalism" (*CGTN-8*). Some staff chose not to use the term "propaganda," but instead focussed their criticism of CGTN's journalism on it being suffused with "fluff": uninteresting, unnewsworthy, "soft" content. In doing so, they were drawing heavily on Western journalistic norms about objectivity and hard news. Moreover, there was a common thread of establishing distinction between themselves as "good journalists," Chinese staff who were "not journalists," and also those they saw as "sell-outs" to the Chinese, embodied in the often-repeated idea of CGTN Africa as a "retirement home" where unambitious journalists can earn good money by doing "bad journalism."

However, other groups of staff were willing to argue that positive and constructive reporting, and a focus on softer news, had its virtues, particularly in the context of African news. This was particularly the case for those who felt that African news had been poorly treated by dominant global actors and saw CGTN Africa as a potential opportunity to reshape African storytelling:

> *you have white people coming to talk about Africa from their lens, so Africa, to me, felt underrepresented[.] […] CGTN, to me, seemed like a company that was trying to steer away from the narrative that Africa is poor, corrupt, disease-ridden, and genocide, and hunger. So, at the time, I thought that this was a good company that matched my way of being a journalist and telling stories.*
>
> (*CGTN-10*)

Whilst adapting their approaches was sometimes a challenge initially, many staff found ways to compromise with station management. Yet, the limits of their patience for compromise only stretched so far. Many were willing to engage with alternative definitions of journalism insofar as they saw it as credible within their particular context and potentially profitable (either in the long- or short-term) for their careers.

However, in practical terms, these struggles appear to be both fairly limited and predominantly retrospective in nature. That is, within the context of the CGTN Africa newsroom itself, there didn't appear to be clear evidence of widespread dynamic debates about journalism taking place. It is notable that many interviewees were at pains to recount how editorial meetings at CGTN Africa were quiet, top-down affairs without much active

discussion about stories, and how the newsroom was unusual for being so silent. This silence was reflective of the wider lack of overt discussion about the constituents of journalism in day-to-day work at CGTN Africa:

> *[Editorial meetings were] always very serious. It was always very quiet. A lot of people sitting around the table. […] The managing editor would […] go around the table asking what people were doing, and "yes"-ing or "no"-ing the stories. […] Newsrooms are noisy places; people shouting across desks. At CGTN, everything is quiet, dead quiet. […] Sometimes journalists had differing opinions, but […] the Chinese always won.*
>
> (*CGTN-13*)

Where such debate did take place, it tended to do so outside of the workplace, and, more often than not, after an individual had already left CGTN.

These debates are interesting for several reasons. Firstly, discussions about journalism seemed to have little effect on CGTN Africa's broader editorial line over the years, illustrating that organisations and institutions firmly established within a particular field (i.e., CGTN within the Chinese journalistic field) *can* remain fairly impervious to the effects of other fields, even when entering them – and that this is primarily dependent on the inter-relations between the two fields. Further this also suggests the lack of clear hierarchical function between national and global journalistic fields. Secondly, it indicates that agents can be affected by diverse position-holding in several fields simultaneously. That is, African journalists working at CGTN Africa interpreted the clash between Western and Chinese journalistic norms within their own local-national context to create unique patterns of practice.

Common stakes

Fields are held together by the glue of common stakes. Bourdieu argues that the most basic principle of a cohesive social field is that those playing the game are all equally invested in the idea that the game is worth playing. So, it is important to ask whether all staff at CGTN Africa are, in fact, playing the *same* game, or, rather, are engaged in different games, as this indicates which field they are *actually* playing in.

The evidence suggests that, contrary to the concept of shared common stakes, each cleavage of staff at CGTN Africa appears to have radically different trajectories and delimited possibilities for career advancement, particularly when focussing on jobs and pay. The trajectories of these different cadres conform strongly to Hannerz's (2007) typification of "spiralist" and "long-timer" foreign correspondents. "Spiralists" are mobile actors who "spiral" between positions in different locations and fields, whilst "long-timers" are marked by their "commitment to single regions" or particular beats (Hannerz 2007, 303). Such differences in geographic mobility also relate to differences in social mobility, as we saw in Chapter 8, since they generate different forms of experience and knowledge (capital). In this case, each actor within a particular class tended to accumulate similar capital, and each class accumulated different species of capital from one another. International experience gained in the global journalistic field often serves to secure more dominant positions within national journalistic fields – "multi-level circulation" (Vauchez 2008, 138) – or even into positions outside journalism – "inter-professional mobility" (Vauchez 2008, 139) – rather than necessarily or predominantly serving to increase an actor's position within the global journalistic field, depending primarily on which class (or nationality) that actor comes from, and hence, the fields in which they are implicated.

The average career trajectories of Kenyan journalists at CGTN Africa, but also of African journalists more generally, was characterised by a very low degree of multi-level circulation. That is, although some individuals were able to move up the chain by degrees, most Kenyans who wanted to remain as journalists chose to stay at CGTN Africa in dominated positions in the global journalistic field. This is despite, as we saw in Chapter 7 particularly, there being extremely limited opportunities for meaningful pay increases or promotions for African staff at the station. One was very abrupt when I asked how promotion worked at CGTN Africa: "What promotion? Does that answer your question?" (*CGTN-3*). Another, who had been with the station since 2011, explained that "movement is not high. Their system is very rigid. They bring you in as Security Editor and they make you stay there for a very long time" but added that, without viable alternatives presenting themselves as greener pastures, "we have to accept it at the moment" (*CGTN-9*). Many of these individuals did not necessarily see CGTN Africa as their long-term future, but often had difficulty securing more dominant positions, and so often ended up "hanging on" at CGTN much longer than they had anticipated or wanted.

This low degree of multi-level circulation suggests local-nationals are prototypical "long-timers," wedded to a particular location and specialisation: Africa and African news. This dynamic between position and knowledge (capital) is cyclical and self-perpetuating. These journalists become valuable to international organisations specifically because of their specialist knowledge, which makes these organisations generally unwilling to redeploy such journalists elsewhere. One journalist noted how their expertise likely contributed to them being turned down for a job at CGTN America:

> *I'm very grateful for a lot of things that CGTN has done, but I also feel that there are certain limits within that, and […] because of the way we've delivered stories, the access that I've got to [sources] through the years of my experience, the Chinese are genuinely not keen to move me on[.]*
>
> (*CGTN-18*)

Another noted: "they're like, 'yeah, yeah, yeah, we'll let you try that,' and then suddenly it's like, 'oh, wait, you're too valuable in the newsroom, so we can't let you leave,' so that's a bit frustrating for me" (*CGTN-6*).

Moreover, this dynamic is exacerbated by the fact that the majority of Chinese and international staff are "spiralists." Chinese staff, in particular, operate on a rotational system which meant a constantly shifting managerial structure operating above local-nationals. This often made it difficult for Kenyans to build long-term relationships with line managers who could then recommend or assist Kenyans in moves, promotions, or pay rises.[11] Since Chinese managers had full authority to arbitrate on such matters within their departments, the lack of lasting or meaningful relationships between Kenyan journalists and their Chinese managers – which, as was illustrated in Chapter 7, could extend to not even knowing one-another's names – often stymied Kenyans' career prospects and income. Additionally, Chinese and international journalists' lack of specialised knowledge about African news meant that they often ended up leaning heavily on Kenyan staff to provide sources and stories. A Kenyan ex-journalist explained to me that at Xinhua, where the rotational system is much more rigid,

[11] An unusually vicious iteration of this phenomenon befell one journalist, who had been head-hunted by the managerial team at CGTN America and had handed in their notice at CGTN Africa. However, the team in Washington D.C. was then rotated and the move fell apart. The journalist was left jobless.

the impermanence of Chinese staffing meant that the Xinhua relied on a more permanent and settled local-national staffing in order to keep the organisation running. Combined with the lack of mutual trust and understanding that comes with this arrangement, this leads to a general lack of growth for local-national staff, despite the fact that they are "the people who actually do the work" (*Xinhua-24*).

Moreover, few Kenyan journalists ever decided to return to the local-national journalistic field once they had a job at CGTN. There was almost unanimous acceptance that working for an international media organisation was superior to local media in terms of exposure, pay, job security, and job conditions, regardless of CGTN's particular organisational flaws. As one journalist explained: "if I go to KTN, they can decide tomorrow "you're fired," and there is nothing that anyone can do about that. […] So, now I'm stuck at CGTN, […] unless I go to somewhere like the BBC" (*CGTN-10*). So, multi-level circulation did not tend to occur in this direction either. If an African CGTN employee did end up leaving in order to pursue a local-national career, it was almost always part of a change of profession. These career changes ranged from working in Nollywood, through NGO work, teaching, writing, professional video gaming, to politics. Leaving journalism entirely was the most common consequence of leaving CGTN Africa amongst my participants.

The careers of CGTN Africa's international staff, on the contrary, were marked by high levels of both intra-field and multi-level circulation, indicating high social and geographic mobility – that is, they were generally classic "spiralists." Despite often arriving at CGTN with less journalism experience than their Kenyan peers, they almost always held more senior positions, and received significantly better pay. Most stayed at the station for between two to four years. However, many still found glass ceilings at CGTN Africa, with difficulty in moving beyond the specific job they were recruited to do. However, their better sense of mobility meant they were often less willing to toe the line their Chinese managers set out, particularly as most were confident that they would be able to get a new, potentially better job. One explained that they were content with the idea of losing their job at CGTN because they were "a big believer in the universes sorting stuff out." When I asked how they got their new job at another international broadcaster, they answered nonchalantly that they "just walked in the door" (*CGTN-7*). This carefree sense of mobility was summed up by another international journalist who told me about how they came to work for CGTN:

> *I was just coming to two years in Singapore, and I was like, "I've done that now" […] and I just wanted to go, "you know what, fuck it, let's do Africa," as stereotypically white as that is. But, you know, it was like "let's just go and see it, let's just have two years there […], and embark on learning a new culture, and a new way of living." So, yeah, it was just that that opportunity came up, so I was like, "you know what, let's go for it."*
>
> (*CGTN-8*)

Moreover, this blasé attitude seemed to be broadly justified. All of the international journalists I spoke to had been able to use their experience at CGTN Africa to secure "better" jobs elsewhere, regardless of the level of field. Some had moved on to more dominant positions in the global field, taking up positions at the BBC, TRT, and Al Jazeera. Others had secured prestigious domestic roles, such as one who had returned to the UK to work with the BBC, and South Africans who had taken up senior positions at eNCA and SABC. One, for example, noted how working for CGTN Africa had given them "the platform I needed to get the leverage I needed to work for a Western news organisation" (*CGTN-8*).

The career trajectories of CGTN Africa's international journalists are therefore notable for two reasons. Firstly, they are distinct from those of their Kenyan peers because of the greater sense and practice of upward mobility – both geographic and social. Secondly, the global journalistic capital accumulated whilst working abroad can be redeployed and transmuted by international journalists back into their own national journalistic fields, allowing them to secure jobs back at home.

This second point is also particularly pertinent when looking at the career trajectories of Chinese staff at CGTN Africa, which were also characterised by multi-level circulation, specifically between the global and Chinese journalistic fields, institutionalised through CGTN's rotational system. Moreover, they circulate through jobs, whether at the managerial echelon in Nairobi or as journalists back in China, that, as we have discussed above, are simply not open to international and local-national journalists. And, conversely, whilst some Chinese journalists might seek to extend their stays in Africa beyond their standard rotation, or to rotate to other "global" positions at CGTN's international hubs in Washington D.C. and London, they do not show interest in or apply for other jobs in the global journalistic field at

competitor organisations. The differing limits of career trajectories between these classes are well recognised by Pál, who notes:

> *Career tracks for Chinese and African colleagues are distinct. The former generally responds to more or less implicit rules and incentives that govern career advancement within and potentially across central media organizations, while the latter is framed in financial and professional terms and rarely points beyond Africa.*
>
> (2017, 117)

The degree of specific multi-level circulation between the global and Chinese journalistic fields is so extreme and delimited by nationality that it seems that Chinese staff at CGTN Africa are playing an entirely different game, as if they "inhabit a different world" (Pál 2017, 117). Rather than genuinely engaging in the global journalistic field, they reflect the position of "China as the world" (Shi 2022). Their attention is firmly fixed on the stakes of the Chinese journalistic field as a self-sufficient marketplace. One journalist summed up the general sentiment of Kenyan staff in Nairobi about their Chinese colleagues that they "were just there to do their time" (*CGTN-1*) before heading back to China. This may help explain why increased cosmopolitan interactions in global and international settings do not necessarily translate into more cosmopolitan conduct in Chinese journalists' practice (Pál 2017).

It is clear that the three classes of journalists at CGTN Africa are not necessarily playing the same game. Local-national and international staff share some of these stakes, but face quite different prospective trajectories, and, as such, display very different levels of social and geographic mobility. Chinese staff, meanwhile, appear to be uninterested in the stakes of the global field, and, instead, are solely focussed on jobs and advancement in the Chinese journalistic field. These lack of common stakes, added to the findings above that there is only a limited and predominantly retrospective struggle over the definition of good journalism, as well as limited reciprocal field effects, suggest that global journalism is strongly intersected by national fields which strongly influence journalistic practice at the global level, implying that it is "weakly" fielded at best.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore how the global journalistic field came to be so weakly fielded, and how this weakness continues to delimit the possibilities for

African journalists in international journalism, like those working at CGTN Africa, and, as such, the potential for genuinely inclusive and decolonised African news making.

Stuck in the middle with news

In his study of global journalism, Reese argued that "elite journalists will likely have more in common with each other, across national boundaries, than with many of their more localized compatriots" (Reese 2001, 178). His reasoning was that, increasingly, these elite journalists have a more cosmopolitan habitus that unites them as a distinct class of "global journalist," and distinguishes them from their less cosmopolitan local peers. Contrary to this utopian view of global journalism, the evidence from CGTN Africa suggests the complete opposite: different classes of journalists are "not all equal partners in the flat world" (Go and Krause 2016, 13), but, rather, are very much unequal partners in a world riven by boundaries and hierarchies, and characterised by high levels of symbolic violence. These findings echo those of Seo's (2016) study of practice at Associated Press international bureaux, where what the organisation self-described as a "family" is in fact

> *a caste system, with different roles and compensations expected according to nationality and/or ethnicity. […]* Spiralists—*who are usually white, American, and male—constitute the top, supported by an underclass of local journalistic hires, many of whom are elites from English-speaking families with college degrees.*
>
> (2016, 44)

In Chapter 7, it was shown how particular roles, and particularly managerial appointments, are strictly segregated by race and nationality at the station, whilst Chapter 8 illustrated the material and symbolic segregation of fractions of staff in urban space. We must therefore ask the question as to why African local-national staff occupy this dominated position in the global journalistic field.

These hierarchies are the result of the historical processes of formation of the global journalistic field, which emerged as the result of competition over the supply of foreign correspondence between organisations based in the Global North – particularly Reuters (UK), Havas/AFP (France), and AP (USA) (Bielsa 2008; Boyd-Barrett 1980; Boyd-Barrett and

Rantanen 1998). Foreign correspondence is deeply rooted in, and conceptually implicated by, the Western nation-state, its boundaries, and relations to other localities.

Moreover, this competition was inextricably connected to the colonial-imperial projects of these nation-states. For example, Read (1994) refers to Reuters as the "News Agency of the British Empire," and illustrates how Reuters geographic expansion and the direction of its news provision were governed, at times directly, by the demands of the imperial administration. Both Spurr (1993) and Riffenburgh (1993) have also demonstrated how the norms of foreign correspondence were heavily influenced by its intersection with empire and exploration, highlighting the successful career of Welsh-American journalist-cum-explorer Henry Morton Stanley, who, after a decade working on assignments across Africa for the *New York Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*, was hired by Leopold II of Belgium to become the chief agent of murderous regime of the Congo Free State. As imperial projects worked to universalise Europe and Euro-American norms whilst establishing subaltern cultures, foreign correspondence was an important vehicle in establishing the legitimacy of the imperial vision of the world, whilst also being implicated in and affected by these manoeuvres (Chakrabarty 2008; Mbembe 2001; Mamdani 1996). Despite the end of the imperial era, today's international journalism continues to carry the weight of this history, with established metropolitan (Euro-American) journalists dominating peripheral, subaltern classes of local-national journalists.

This is further complicated by the continued (neo-)colonial overdetermination of national journalistic fields across the Global South, which were often founded in direct relation to the colonial state or settler community, meaning that African journalists often continue to be influenced by (neo-)colonial structuration of the fields in which they operate (Kumar and Parameswaran 2018). For example, many of my Kenyan respondents noted how their journalism education in Kenya's university system was heavily influenced by Northern norms and Northern instructors, as well as several respondents choosing to study further in the West, particularly in the UK. In these circumstances "African world-views and cultural values are hence doubly excluded" (Nyamnjoh 2005, 3) through the overlapping of fields at different levels – local-national and global – which both derive their historical structure from the national journalistic fields of the old imperial powers.

African journalists therefore exist within professional fields in which any indigenous cultural values are excluded and devalued in favour of a Northern (Anglo-American)

journalistic culture which presents itself as universal. Much of the literature concerning African journalism highlights the continuing influence of Northern journalistic values across the continent's journalism practice (Kupe 2013; Nyamnjoh 2005; Wasserman 2018). Yet, despite the enduring legacy of northern journalism on African journalists' practice, this does not seem to have any meaningful positive impact on their ability to operate within the global journalistic field. Instead, there appears to be significant symbolic and material inequalities that prevent African journalists from successfully manoeuvring up the hierarchy of the global journalistic field, whether at CGTN Africa or more widely.

Studying this phenomena in the context of CGTN Africa lets us focus more clearly on the homologies and heresies inherent in the relationship between international and African journalists, since within China's "most dissimilar system" of media (Zhao 2011, 143) neither caste is dominant. As compared to their Chinese colleagues, African and international journalists share much in their working practice. But the most resonant aspect of difference between these castes was their divergent career trajectories and levels of socio-geographic mobility. Moreover, this is not merely a matter of fact, but, rather, is embodied in the habitus of African journalists. That is, African journalists held a much more circumspect view of the possibilities for a career in international journalism than their international peers. Whilst a few Kenyan journalists I spoke to were keen to mention the successful, globe-spanning career of their compatriot, Larry Madowo, the majority simply didn't see this pathway as a viable possibility for themselves – and in many cases, didn't want it either. When I asked one if they thought they could one day be a bureau chief, they explained that "in all honesty, […] it's not a thing that appeals to me, not at least in this organisation" (*CGTN-9*). That is, they *rule it out* in their own minds as *impossible*. When asked about career ambitions, most local-nationals' goals were fairly limited, either focussing on getting to do different types of journalism, or, more commonly, on earning more money in order to better support their extended families – what several referred to as "black tax"– even if that meant leaving the journalistic profession.

This seeming lack of career ambition mystified many of the international staffers, who seemed horrified that "some of them have no intention or desire to be anywhere different" (*CGTN-7*). One white South African explained that "there's some of my colleagues that have been here for eleven years, and they seem to be happy to stay here, but I'm like, 'don't you want to go and experience something different?'" (*CGTN-18*). This was deeply contrasted to

their own ambitions: "I definitely see myself working overseas. I would like to […] go try something new […] and experience a new way of living" (*CGTN-18*). Other South Africans also saw working at CGTN as a stepping-stone to further moves abroad: "It's not like I am passionate about the project there, but it is my way out of South Africa, and eventually maybe to Europe" (*CGTN-15*).

The gap between these two perspectives is a question of differences in positionality, and the consequent variances in the two castes' different vision and division of the field. Whilst the international staffers saw themselves as truly *international*, Kenyan staff's sense of self was generally far more circumspect, even parochial, limited to being *African* specialists within the global field. Contrary to optimistic views of global journalism as the "natural consequence of increasing connectedness, boundarylessness and mobility in the world" (Berglez 2008, 855), the social inequalities prevalent between castes of journalists at CGTN Africa indicate that the global journalistic field is riven with boundaries which delimit mobility between different fields at other scales in vastly uneven and non-reciprocal ways. In particular, African local-national journalists seem stuck in a niche of *African journalism*, a niche reflected in the relative peripherality of African news in global news cycles, embodied in their journalistic habitus, and enacted through their limited vision of the field.

Racial boundaries in the global journalistic field

An important aspect of the positional relations between different classes of journalists at CGTN Africa extends beyond nationality. I argue that race and racism play a key role in delimiting the possibilities and positions of local-national journalists, predominantly black phenotypes, in contrast to the relative dominance and socio-geographic mobility of international staff, predominantly white phenotypes, with some exceptions.[12] That is, there are racial boundaries which help to restrict the definition of a global journalist and help to exclude local-nationals from breaking out of their *African* niche.

Racism is a fact of life at CGTN Africa. It comes in two forms: first, a direct, abusive form, or what one interviewee described as "hot" racism (*CGTN-1*), entirely directed at black

[12] The majority of those I class as *international journalists* in my sample are white South Africans, but include some Europeans, and also several black South Africans. However, the black South Africans appeared to have a separate experience to either their white compatriots or their Kenyan peers.

staff; and second, structural racism, which tends to favour white journalists over black staff, whilst keeping both subservient to Chinese management.

Reports of "hot" racism incidents, where Chinese staff were outwardly racist to African staff, were quite common in interviews. One Kenyan journalist explained how the Chinese came across as superior to black staff: "With the Chinese, at CGTN, you felt the racism in your face, because '[…] I am talking to you as an African, and I think you are beneath me'" (*CGTN-3*). Relations between these two castes was clearly tense, as another recalled: "The Chinese, […] they're not friendly people. […] You'd be in the lift with them […] and they'll be talking about you and just pulling their mouth, and then they'll laugh, clearly looking at you, gossiping about you, and there is nothing you can do about it" (*CGTN-14*). A further journalist mentioned two separate incidents: first, a Chinese manager wiping down seats that had been sat on by African staff members before sitting down herself; and another where "a Chinese staff member called this guy a monkey. […] You know, […] no matter how pissed off you are, you just don't call black people monkeys" (*CGTN-10*).

As for structurally racist practices at CGTN Africa, many of these have been covered in previous chapters. I have already explored the de facto racial segregation of the managerial structure at the station, with a clear hierarchy of Chinese managers, predominantly white internationals in senior roles, and predominantly black local-nationals at the bottom of the pyramid. This racial hierarchy was evident in pay discrepancies between different castes of journalists, with local-nationals earning much less than their international colleagues. And further, that these socio-economic inequalities were reified through the racial segregation of workplace and urban space in Nairobi.

This hierarchy reflected a broader structural symbolic violence effected on black journalists at the station. As a Kenyan journalist explained: "there was sort of an unwritten rule that you couldn't be the real leader in the newsroom if you weren't either white or Chinese. And […] the Chinese had this huge […] fascination with white people, so that the white people could not do wrong" (*CGTN-2*). There was also broad acknowledgment amongst the white international journalists that their skin-colour affected their position at the station, as one agreed, "there definitely was this idea that we had different treatment because of the colour of our skin" (*CGTN-8*). Moreover, this was not merely a distinction based on nationality, since, as another white journalist confirmed, black international journalists ranked lower in the station hierarchy than their white international peers: "even amongst the international

staff, white was valued above black" (*CGTN-13*). The overall preferential treatment of white staff was summed up best by one Kenyan staffer, who took me as an example:

> *you're white, so you can never make a mistake […]. I mean, [the Chinese] adore the white colour. You could come in right now, do an interview with them, and probably you'll be earning eight-thousand dollars. And they never question you. I come in with an idea, and they'll be like, "okay, we'll think about your idea." If, in the subsequent meeting, you come up with the same idea, they'll be like, "oh, that's a really nice idea," just because you're white. […] If you have a British accent, an American accent, […] you'll get good treatment, good pay, they'll hear your ideas […], and whatever you say matters.*
>
> (*CGTN-14*)

This account has an obvious resemblance to Schultz's (2007) argument that an experienced editor saying "now, that's a good story," would have a completely different effect to an brand-new intern saying "now, that's a good story," about the same story. As Schultz continues, "the argument might be exactly the same, […] but the position from where the argument is uttered is very different – the dispositions of the editor and of the intern are not the same" (Schultz 2007, 193). Likewise, the position of a black journalist and a white journalist at CGTN Africa, and within the global journalistic field more generally, are evidently not the same. This is not merely to do with formalised organisational hierarchies, job titles, and ranks but about relative positions in the field – although formalised roles are *sometimes* reflective of these positions. In short, then, black journalists, in general, hold more dominated positions in the global journalistic field than white journalists.

But why is this the case? Certainly, the circumstances at CGTN Africa seems merely a microcosm of a wider set of limitations placed on black journalists both across the African continent and worldwide. When I asked an ex-BBC Africa bureau chief how he saw the prospects of young African journalists, whom he now helps train, his simple assessment was that the situation "is difficult" (*BBC-28*). Indeed, research from both the UK and the USA suggests that recruitment of journalists from minority backgrounds still lags far behind that of majority (i.e., white, middle-class) groups (van Dijk 2016; Jenkins 2012; Mellinger 2017).

What, then, are the racialised boundaries which delimit the definition of black journalists as *global* journalists?

The successful crossing or spanning of the boundaries between fields is necessarily a case of an actor having a well-developed habitus: an accumulation of relevant, translatable capital. In particular, black journalists (particularly Kenyans) struggle to successfully cross the boundary between African local-national journalistic fields and the global journalistic field. This would suggest that failure to claim a more than a liminal position in the global journalistic field is to do with a lack of access to appropriate, translatable capital. Further, that it is black journalists in particular who seem to struggle with this manoeuvre would suggest that the problem is, specifically, lack of access to *racialised* forms of symbolic journalistic capital.

Racism, then, is at the heart of the issue. For Bourdieu, "the function of racism is none other than to provide a rationalization of the existing state of affairs so as to make it appear to be a lawfully instituted order" (1962, 132–33), facilitated by and grounded in physical and symbolic coercion, rather than through formal legislation. That is, there are no codified rules, strictly speaking, that *should* limit the successful entry of black journalists into the global journalistic field. Even CGTN's strict racialised managerial hierarchy is *de facto*, not *de jure*. Rather, racism functions to limit acceptable forms of capital, to ensure the continuity of the extant field structure, and maintain the positions of dominant actors against the moves of dominated ones.

African journalists, objectivity, and Black cultural capital

As discussed in Chapter 3, objectivity is identified in the literature on journalism and racism as one of the key forms of journalistic capital imbued with *whiteness*, serving to reify racial divisions within the journalistic fields and delimit the practice of black journalists. As dominated actors within the global journalistic field, drawing on diverse positions across multiple layers of fields for their legitimacy, what were the main stances to objectivity taken up by black staff at CGTN Africa? And, moreover, what can this position-taking tell us about the racialised boundaries of journalistic fields?

The doxic fraction

Broadly speaking, views on objectivity were split into two (and, in theory, three) separate stances. The first group were those journalists who argued that objectivity was a cardinal good in journalism; that is, they took a *doxic*, unquestioning stance, arguing that to be a journalist meant also to be objective. Displaying anything less than objectivity meant, consequently, being something *other* than a journalist: a "propagandist," a "sell-out." These were individuals who tended to feel "that the Chinese were up to no good, would compromise their values" (*CGTN-2*). They often also saw alternative forms of journalism, such as positive reporting, constructive journalism, and development journalism, as an existential threat to the profession itself. One journalist explained how they often disagreed with their Chinese bosses about the stories they wanted to run, because they didn't like the focus on positive news:

> *I think news should be objective. […] [T]here are issues in Africa that we need to highlight, but some of it is sensitive to [the Chinese], and they don't want to show so much of it. […] So, you know, there was an issue there, which was that we were always supposed to show positivity […] [and] I thought that positivity could limit the journalistic skills we had.*
>
> (*CGTN-12*)

Another felt that while positive reporting was not inherently problematic, the emphasis placed on it by the station management blurred the lines of objectivity and truth-telling, and could adversely affect professional standards: "it's good to tell positive stories, but are we telling the truth? Because, then again, even if it is positive, it could be a lie, and then that also destroys the credibility of what journalism is about" (*CGTN-10*).

Even if journalists recognised that a focus on objectivity in international media organisations had resulted in broadly negative coverage of Africa, which they tended to feel created an unfair image of the continent, journalists in this group felt strongly that objectivity remains the key principle in their work and is the answer to correcting inaccurate representations of Africa. One Kenyan journalist, for example, accepted that Western-based international media organisations had not always done a great job of accurately reporting African stories, but argued that CGTN's approach was no better, and that being objective

remained *the most* important facet of being a journalist: "[The Chinese] ended up doing the same thing that they were accusing the Western media of, […] of doing propaganda and showing that Africa is a 'shithole'. They came in and still had their own propaganda" (*CGTN-3*).

The orthodox fraction

The other group of journalists – a decidedly larger proportion of my interviewees – felt that while objectivity remained important in ideal terms, it was difficult to implement in practice. That is, they took an *orthodox* – rather than *doxic* – view of objectivity, accepting its general importance to the journalistic profession, but making its tenets outspoken, and, in doing so, problematising them. For these journalists, objectivity was seen primarily as a "starting point" from which to negotiate one's position in relation to the context of one's work: "you must always be as objective as possible. I think that must be a thing that must be taught to all journalists. But you have to look at both sides of the story" (*CGTN-2*). These journalists were, in general, willing to accept that, despite its importance, objectivity was not a given in every and any context, and that alternative approaches to news, such as positive reporting, could be *as* objective as conventional "negative" or watchdog journalism:

> *the situation a lot of Africans find themselves in is that, while you do want to talk about issues of governance, […] you have more pressing issues at hand. So, trying to find ways of tackling this then becomes the most important thing. […] Because, while it's all well and proper to say we'll stick with the values, […] sometimes, the only way to move the conversation forward then becomes to look at things in a different way.*
>
> (*CGTN-2*)

In tune with this assessment, other journalists were often keen to point out how poorly Africa had been represented in international news, arguing that positive journalism offered a level of balance to news reporting, particularly when used in conjunction with conventional journalistic forms. As one Kenyan journalist explained, ignoring positive stories simply because they are positive is "not journalism to the extent that it's not representing a true picture" (*CGTN-11*), and complained that Western journalists' first inclination when doing a story from Nairobi would often be to do a piece-to-camera in front of the Kibera slum,

whether the story related to Kibera or not, simply because it fit with the global perception of Africa. They argued that inflexible approaches to objectivity meant that "it's very easy to […] just cement old perspectives that have been built up by years of reporting that is focussed just in one aspect […] while the truth is the picture of what Africa is much more dynamic and different," and that, to be objective, "you can't ignore what else is happening" (*CGTN-11*). Another echoed the arguments about information contraflows made in the NWICO debates of the 1970s, that "there is a different side to the Third World. […] There are good things, but not many people know," musing that "a bit of good stuff […], maybe that is also news, without necessarily having to be put at the bottom of the news chain," and asserting that whilst objectivity was still important to journalism, "there is also the positive side that can also be news" whilst improving the accuracy and credibility of African news provision (*CGTN-9*).

Other journalists took a similarly circumspect – but still broadly orthodox – view of objectivity, continuing to defend it in idealistic terms, but also having a realistic approach in terms of their understanding that working for *any* organisation meant compromising their personal objectivity to some (greater or lesser) degree (see Chapter 7). A Kenyan summed up this dilemma for journalists, noting the specific issues at CGTN Africa, but also broadening his argument to journalism in Kenya more generally:

> *I cannot guarantee you objectivity, because […] I cannot say anything that damages the Chinese reputation while I work for a Chinese government-owned station. There are certain Kenyan media that are owned by certain politicians that you cannot say something bad about. So, objectivity depends on who you are working for.*
>
> (*CGTN-5*)

An international journalist generalised this experience even further, arguing that working for CGTN opened their eyes to a more widespread crisis of objectivity in journalism, one which was making them reconsider their place in the profession:

> *Call it a mid-life crisis, but I must say that working for CGTN […], as much as I can criticise them, I did realise that everyone else is the same; CNN has their own biases, the BBC has their own biases. They're doing the exact same thing, just for profit rather than soft power, so that all becomes a little bit frustrating.*

(*CGTN-13*)

For these journalists, then, objectivity is "still a goal […], but it all depends on who makes the decisions, and who pays the salaries" (*CGTN-18*). Justifying their work when faced with this realisation meant sometimes engaging in semantic hoop-jumping. Some employed euphemisms such as the importance of "getting the facts right" (*CGTN-5*), "accuracy" (C*GTN-1*), or "truth-telling" (*CGTN-16*) in journalism to avoid conflicts over the nature of objectivity.

In theory, there would also be a third group who took a *heterodox* view of objectivity, rejecting it as either impossible or highly problematic. However, none of the journalists I spoke to were willing to abandon the idea entirely, illustrating its continuing importance within the global journalistic field. Some journalists came close, however, including one who, whilst reiterating that objectivity is "good goal," told me that felt that it wasn't "always practical to be objective" (*CGTN-15*). In their view, journalists needed to take a more active role in challenging the powers-that-be, stating that "I believe on being on the side of the truth, and not necessarily being objective," and highlighting the importance of social justice to journalism: "so, sometimes […] you take a strong stance against corrupt people, and it is your agenda, and you can't be objective, because you'd be complicit in the corruption if you are trying to protect the people who have been looting to the detriment of poor people" (*CGTN-15*).

These three different stances – and their various iterations – reflect the habitus of the journalists holding them in relation to their positions held across a variety of overlapping fields. Particular positions imply a particular viewpoint of the field, and so these journalists see and divide the field up in diverse ways. In the context of CGTN Africa, objectivity is a salient pivot around which African journalists at the station divide up the global journalistic field, fathoming what being a "good international journalist" is, and how their relative chances are best served.

What is most interesting about this phenomenon is that journalists sharing broadly similar positions in the global journalistic field adopt such different stances to objectivity – and the gap between the *doxic* and *orthodox* positions above should not be understated. What seems at stake here in the thoughts of African journalists is the particular relevance of the concept of objectivity in the context of African news. Whilst those holding the *doxic* position argued that objectivity was a pancea to the issues affecting African journalism (such

as negative representation), those holding *orthodox* positions felt that objectivity was important but potentially problematic and, at the very least, needed rethinking and balancing with alternative journalistic approaches. These two groups represent different fractions of journalists at CGTN Africa (and in the global journalistic field more broadly) adopting different strategies based on the translation and appropriation of different types of cultural capital.

The *doxic* fraction work to "play down" their "Africanness," presenting themselves, instead, as "globalists." They reject the peculiarities of African journalism in favour of the objectivity as the universal viewpoint: *journalism is objectivity*. They accept this *sine qua non*. In doing so, they align themselves with the interests of post-imperial international news organisations, adopting "approved" embodied scripts concerning objectivity in order to win renown from the dominant white actors within the field (usually their editors and/or line managers) and advance their position. Since, in their view, "being a good journalist" is broadly equatable with "being objective," they attempt to reject any heterogenous interests in their work – social justice activism, political influence, or financial incentive – in the (unconscious) hope that, by doing so, there will be no limit to their professional advancement. Like particular fractions of black schoolchildren in Wallace's study of racialised capital in British schools, these journalists "modify their expressions and endure symbolic violence," disregarding their accumulated stock of Black-African cultural capital (from their position in the local-national field) in favour of accumulating White-Global cultural capital, so as not to "risk socio-political exclusion and suffer structural violence" in the global journalistic field (2017, 916; Rollock et al. 2015). Their autonomy, such as it is, is crushed under the weight of conformity to "rules of the game" which do not necessarily overlap with their actual experience of reality (Schudson 2005a).

It is, perhaps, unsurprising that the journalists most likely to adopt this approach to objectivity were those who employed avoidance tactics whilst working at CGTN Africa, so as not to damage their perceived journalistic integrity, and also were most likely to take a long-term strategic view on growth in the global field, aiming to accumulate global journalistic capital (see Chapter 7).

On the other hand, the *orthodox* fraction work to "play up" their "Africanness," presenting themselves as unambiguously *African* international journalists. They engage actively with the peculiarities of African journalism, and question (without rejecting) the relevance of objectivity to the African context. Like other fractions of Wallace's

schoolchildren, they "showcase an awareness of the dominant symbolic economy that governs" the global field, and a "willingness to partake in the conversion and exchange of its currency" (2017, 916), adopting professional dispositions concerning the centrality of objectivity to journalistic practice, whilst simultaneously translating their existing capital reserves – accumulated from positions in their local-national fields – to develop a critique of objectivity. That is, they deploy a specifically *non-dominant Black-African cultural capital* (Carter 2003) to interpret the structures of the global journalistic field. These journalists do not simply seek to overthrow objectivity as a journalistic norm, but de-code the dominant cultural capital of the field through their particular vision and division of the field and attempt to re-code it to better reflect their existing capital reserves *as Black Africans*. Members of this fraction often took time in interviews to assert their racial identity, discussing the importance of balancing negative representations of Africa, introducing the context of colonialism and imperialism to African reporting, or considering the global impact of the Black Lives Matter movement. This represents a process Huggan describes as "strategic exoticism" (2016, 48), involving the commodification and domestication of marginality as a cultural asset able to destabilise dominant forms of capital and the field structures they undergird – "inhabiting them to criticize them" (Spivak 1990).

Moreover, the *orthodox* fraction tended to see the Chinese managers at CGTN Africa as useful – albeit, provisional – strategic allies worth compromising with, committing social and cultural resources into fostering a good working relationships within the organisation in order to secure advantages in the field (see Chapter 7) – opportunities not made available by Western international news organisations, particularly before the opening of the BBC's Nairobi hub in 2018.

In either case, black journalists suffer racialised forms of violence of one kind or another. The *doxic* fraction suffer symbolic violence at the hands of dominant actors – Western international news organisations and their (primarily) white editorial, managerial, and executive classes. By submitting to the commonly accepted rules of the global journalistic field, including the centrality of objectivity to journalism, they effectively amputate (or lobotomise, perhaps) dispositions of their habitus they deem untranslatable between the local-national (where their early career experience formed their dispositions) and global journalistic fields (in which they wish to advance). This reduces their opportunities to express their distinction from other (white) international journalists, who are also more likely to have

better-developed habitus due to the homologies between Western national journalistic fields and the global journalistic field.

The *orthodox* fraction, meanwhile, suffers structural violence. Because they refuse to play by the rules of global journalism *sine qua non*, their practice is sometimes misrecognised. Their insistence on integrating their (heterogenous) Black-African cultural capital into their journalistic practice, critiquing objectivity in the African context, ensures that dominant actors (including CGTN managers) do not see them as "international journalists" so much as "African journalists," or the rather derisory allocation of "local staff." Whilst this does not necessarily stop these individuals being employed by dominant organisations like the BBC or Al Jazeera per se, it delimits the possibilities of them gaining renown and breaking out of their African niche into the wider global field. They are marginalised and seek alliances with liminal organisations like CGTN Africa who offer limited opportunities to accumulate capital (both symbolic and financial).

In both cases, then, race and racism work – often beneath the surface of things – to delimit the possibilities for advancement of black African journalists, both at CGTN Africa, and within the global field more broadly.

Multi-level position-taking and hybridity

We can conclude, then, that racism in international journalism operates as the result of the racialisation of particular forms of capital within the global journalistic field, and, moreover, the restriction of access to those particular forms of capital to particular castes or caste fractions. Instead, these castes must continue to rely primarily on their existing reserves of capital – the aggregate of their experience within more localised fields – which may not be easily transposable to the global context, whilst simultaneously attempting to accumulate appropriate forms of capital from a liminal position within the global field. The result is an always-incomplete process of transformation, similar to that described by Fanon above, where an actor is now not quite what they were, but not yet the next thing. The actor appears to hold, instead, an interstitial position between two fields. Several studies have drawn upon the work of subaltern studies, and particularly of Bhabha (1994), to describe African journalists working for international news organisations as "hybrids" (Bunce 2015; Umejei 2018b) or holding "bridging roles" (Moon 2019) between fields. In this literature, and, indeed,

in this thesis, such hybrid agents are often described as "trading off" (Wright, Scott, and Bunce 2020) or "sacrificing" (Moon 2019) capital in one field whilst acquiring it in another. This account of the process, in of itself, is not untrue – but there is a danger of overstating the level of strategic insight involved.

Bourdieu and Sayad (2020) describe such individuals as "cultural *sabirs*,"[13] enmeshed in two incongruent worlds, "unable to speak the two cultural languages well enough to hold them clearly separate" (2020, 121), often leading to misrecognised practice and alienation. This account speaks more clearly to the confusion, discomfort, and weakness of the dominated position that the majority of my interviewees often seemed to find themselves in, and which has punctuated the analysis throughout this thesis. African journalists at CGTN Africa did not seem to get to pick and choose at which level a particular practice was intended. Rather, "practices are not designed to work at a certain level, either local or national or international; their effects as practices come from the relations they are embedded into" (Bigo 2020, 61). That is, *all* of the positions held by an actor in *all* levels of fields are implicated *all at once* in both guiding a particular practice and in feeling its effects: there must be "a strong understanding that all actors play in a series of multiple games by doing one act only" (2020, 70).

This is an important point, since it draws attention to the inherent precarity of hybrid positionality amongst African journalists working for international media organisations. They are simultaneously local-national journalists *and* international journalists, holding positions in both fields, and yet cannot simultaneously act as both, since each position infers a different sets of accepted practice (*doxa*) in a different level of field. Moreover, unlike journalists emanating from local-national fields with a greater level of homology with the global field, they lack the appropriate resources to successfully act in either field. And, since their practice is always imperfectly matched to a particular arena, this problem is cyclical.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the relations and boundaries between the various levels of fields discussed in the previous chapters. In particular, it has sought to illustrate how the weakness

[13] "*Sabir*" refers to a French-based pidgin language commonly used by Algerian peasant communities during the French occupation.

of the global journalistic field and its porous, blurry boundaries with national-level fields work to the advantage or disadvantage of particular castes of journalists at CGTN Africa. I have illustrated how field effects, journalistic definitions, and stakes differ greatly for Chinese, international, and African staff at the station, and how African journalists, in particular, have extremely limited prospects within the global journalistic field, and appear, generally, to be stuck within a niche of "African news," as opposed to "international news."

To understand this phenomenon, I constructed a framework for understanding the role of race and racism in field theory and used this to break down the way that particular forms of capital within the global journalistic field are inscribed with *Whiteness*, which works to limit African journalists' access to positions within the field. Despite different fractions of African staff holding different views about objectivity, for example, all suffered forms of symbolic or structural violence which worked to delimit their practice as international journalists.

10. Conclusion

This thesis has had two interlocking aims: one empirical; the other, theoretical. It has, in the first place, sought to consolidate and expand knowledge about the journalistic operations of the CGTN Africa. In doing so, it has also sought to build a robust sociological model, based on Bourdieu's field theory, that explain journalistic practice at CGTN Africa, and, further, may serve as a model for reflexive and ethical practice in researching social phenomena in the Global South moving forward. This conclusion will first summarize the empirical findings of the thesis. Then, it will move to a discussion about the theoretical model proposed by the thesis, presenting an argument for why field theory is an effective tool in this context. It will then discuss the theoretical and methodological limitations of the study. And finally, it will suggest directions for future research based on the findings of this study.

Empirical findings

The empirical findings of this thesis, in general, support and consolidate the existing knowledge of journalistic practice at CGTN Africa, building upon empirical work done by, amongst others, Marsh (2016; 2017; 2018), Lefkowitz (2017), Umejei (2020), Pál (2017), and Madrid-Morales (2018), whilst also expanding it into both a new decade of operations for the organisation and into new frontiers of analysis.

Chapter 6 investigated CGTN Africa's wider position within the global journalistic field. Whilst it concurred with existing studies that CGTN Africa's position was liminal within the global journalistic field as compared to its more dominant competitors such as the BBC, CNN, or Al Jazeera, its overall domination by political-bureaucratic capital emanating from the Chinese Party-state – which offered it much of its significant financial heft – had broadly ambivalent effects in regard to the general strategic direction of the station and its journalism. Despite the potential for an overbearing role for the Chinese Party-state in day-to-day journalistic decision-making at CGTN Africa, the station's journalistic approach was mostly ad hoc, characterised by often unpredictable strategies of constructing similarity and difference from its competitors in its quest to accumulate symbolic capital and valorise its own sources of capital, based on a broad – and inconsistent – range of influences emanating from different fields. This helps to explain the similarly ambivalent findings of analyses of CGTN Africa content, few of which have found consistent patterns of content production at the station,

particularly in relation to "positive reporting." As such, CGTN Africa's general position within the field should be seen as inherently hybrid and volatile, dominated by a range of influences emanating from multiple fields, rather than singular and purely propagandist. Therefore, the impact of changes to China's soft power strategies into Xi's third term on journalists at CGTN Africa is extremely unclear.

Building on this premise, Chapter 7 investigated in detail the internal functioning of the station's day-to-day operations. It found that work at the station was affected by a pervasive "regime of uncertainty" that impacted almost every aspect of journalists' jobs: pitching and producing stories through a complex and inconsistent gatekeeping system, often without the help of formal training or induction, and negotiating an office riven with divisions over pay, contracts, and language. These divisions reified the existence of different castes of managers and journalists at the station, broadly characterised (and influenced) by their nationality: Chinese managers; senior (better paid) international journalists; and junior local-national Kenyan staff. Within this environment, different caste fractions developed dispositions associated with a "China habitus" to varying degrees by seeking homologies with their own existing dispositions (based on their experience of journalism in their particular national settings) and by adopting a range of tactics for avoiding censure, disguising their agenda, compromising with dominant actors, or retaliating against them – though avoidance and compromise were by far the most common approaches. Moreover, an actor's choice of tactics was underpinned by their position within – and hence by their vision and division of – the journalistic worlds they take part in; their sense of their relative chances of success and upward mobility within those worlds based on their viewpoint; and their overall (conscious or unconscious) strategic approach to navigating those worlds and their chances. Broadly, two strategic approaches were observed, undergirded by the appropriation of two different forms of capital: symbolic and financial. Individuals in more dominant positions (particularly international staff and senior Kenyans) tended to have a more optimistic, long-term view of their relative chances for upward mobility in the global journalistic field, and hence prioritised the appropriation of symbolic capital (journalistic renown). Whilst they sought to avoid the worst excesses of propagandistic work at the station, they were generally willing to compromise with Chinese management in order to make the most of the opportunities to increase their profile and portfolio presented to them by CGTN's significant resources. Alternatively, individuals in less dominant positions tended to take a much more pessimistic

view of their relative chances for upward mobility, and instead prioritised short-term financial benefits of working at CGTN Africa. Whilst apathetic to the station's goals, they were willing to toe the line so as not to provoke censure from management, at least until a better (financial) opportunity presented itself. This helps explain how CGTN Africa maintains a relatively consistent editorial line – particularly on issues that matter to station management – without the need for intensive top-down censorship, instead relying on inculcating "correct" dispositions towards work amongst staff so that they would effectively "self-censor," whilst simultaneously accommodating divergent reporting styles – particularly concerning more concretely "African" issues – as "trade-offs" with staff for their symbolic benefit.

Chapter 8 then moved on to discuss the effects of urban space of journalistic practice at CGTN Africa, focussing on the role Nairobi has to play in these processes. I initially outlined the primarily reasons that CGTN Africa set up its production hub in Nairobi: its central location and connectivity with the African continent and proximity to important sites and sources of news; its large pool of qualified, experienced, English-speaking journalists; and China's political connections within Kenya. I also discussed how proximity to important Chinese institutions and expatriate publics, as well its relative affluence, influenced the siting of the CGTN Africa offices. I then explored the broader implications of this situation (and situatedness) for staff at the station. I found that many local-national staff had problems with basic issues relating to subsistence because their pay was pegged to local rates, and, by itself, did not often account for an urban lifestyle. This left many staff relying on receiving favourable bonuses from Chinese management, which often led to a conservative approach to their work, or on "side hustles," which had the potential to damage their journalistic focus and/or integrity. Moreover, economic differences between different castes of journalists meant that there was a de facto racialised segregation of urban space in Nairobi, with local-national staff often cast to the margins of the city. As such, the most dominated actors often had to work longer days and engage in arduous daily commutes or pay over-the-odds for property closer to the office. These dominated actors also generally found it more difficult to take advantage of the considerable opportunities CGTN Africa offered for international travel, which could have significantly increased their profile and potential for career advancement, demonstrating the interconnectedness of limits placed on physical and social mobility. I also found that localised, city-wide social networks of journalists working for competing stations added particular dynamism to the work of those journalists – deeply affecting some of their

approach to their work. This was particularly the case after BBC opened its Nairobi bureau in 2018, offering new avenues for employment for journalists who felt their experience at CGTN Africa had gone stale, and contributing to the sense of social inertia for those who remained at the station.

In the final analysis chapter, I explored a theme that undergirded many of my other findings: the role of race and racism in the working lives of journalists at CGTN Africa. Indeed, I observed consistently throughout my analysis how nationality (and, by extension, race) formed the key cleavages amongst staff at CGTN Africa, and, more broadly, how the global journalistic field is characterised by "weakness" – that is, its colonisation by particular national journalistic *doxa* emanating primarily from the Global North. At CGTN Africa, I found that Chinese, African, and international staff did not operate under reciprocal field effects, participated in only very limited struggles over the definition of journalism, and, most importantly, shared very few common stakes in their day-to-day work or career trajectories. Indeed, the relative chances for upward social mobility were starkly different for each group: in particular, black African journalists had significantly weaker prospects for advancement in the global journalistic field than their white peers, whilst Chinese staff appeared to circulate within a completely separate, China-centric job market. This is the result, I argue, of the conflict between the (embodied) capital of black African journalists and the dominance of values imbued with *whiteness* – particularly objectivity – within the global journalistic field. Black African journalists must either endure symbolic violence in submitting to the field *doxa*, refusing the idiosyncrasies of their habitus, or structural violence by fighting against it (even if only in part), employing their reserves of embodied Black cultural capital to secure their position in the field (from both upward and downward social mobility). Either way, they find their practice and possibilities delimited by their race, and in inherent racism within the structures of the global journalistic field.

With these findings, this thesis adds much needed depth – and, as such, contributes significant original insight into – the existing knowledge of journalistic practice at CGTN Africa.

A reflexive agenda for field theory framework

Beyond its empirical findings, this thesis offers originality in its theoretical approach: field theory as a theoretical framework contributes to the study of journalistic practice both in

general and at CGTN Africa specifically whilst this thesis simultaneously advances the use of field theory through reflexive research practices.

In the literature review, I explained the process by which I came to employ field theory in this research. Whilst there are many possible explanations for the particular ways in which journalists work, their general ontological incoherency lead toward a "third-way" to explore journalistic practice at CGTN Africa. Despite settling on field theory as an approach, in the theoretical framework, I explored several limitations that existing field theory approaches had in the context of my study and suggested possible approaches to overcome these. And herein lies field theory's primary appeal: if employed to its fullest extent, it serves as a model of genuinely reflexive and ethical practice in research. Bourdieu himself intended his "thinking tools" to be malleable rather than prescriptive, to be reinvented for each and every new object of study. Moreover, his belief was that the entire process of the creation of an object of study should be subjected to the rigours of this process: that the researcher (as a member of the academic field, subject to its *doxa*) must attempt epistemological rupture with the "common-sense" of doing research. This approach to reflexivity – *participant objectivation* – is radical and complicated, but also effective and important. It inherently encourages innovation and compassion in the construction and execution of the entire research project, which leads to both stauncher application of ethics and more scientific results.

I have attempted to apply this approach to its fullest extent throughout this research, and part of this thesis' originality is its claim to serve as a model and exemplar for such reflexive practices. In the case of each of Bourdieu's "thinking tools" this thesis has sought innovative solutions in their application to the idiosyncrasies of Sino-African journalism. Below, I will describe how these "tools" – in particular, field, habitus, and capital – have simultaneously contributed to the particular study of journalistic practice at CGTN Africa and more widely to the field of journalistic practice research in the process of being "reinvented."

Fields

Fields are the building blocks of their eponymous theory. But, most crucially, Bourdieu conceived of them as empirical constructs brought into being to analyse particular social phenomena. A major challenge for this project was how to construct a coherent universe of distinct but related (and often overlapping) fields operating at different geographic levels of society presented to it by the complex lifeworld of Sino-African journalists, meeting at the

nexus so many different layers of influence. This thesis has, in turn, analysed journalistic practice at CGTN Africa through the prism of three relatively distinct levels of journalistic fields – global, national, and urban. Moreover, and more radically, it has sought to build a framework for examining the relations between these distinct layers of fields – that is, where fields end, and how they intersect – and how these relations reify the roles, practices, and position of (and, hence, inequalities between) different fractions of journalists at CGTN Africa and beyond. In particular, the relationship between the global journalistic field and various national journalistic fields has been explored in detail, demonstrating how global journalistic practice remains primarily dominated by the logics of northern journalistic fields, and how this delimits the practice of African journalists in this field. And, at the other end of the scale, it has demonstrated how insulated the Chinese journalistic field remains from external pressures.

This thesis has illustrated on a theoretical level that fields (and their boundaries) can serve as an extremely fruitful analytical concept for understanding the differences and similarities between various logics and cultures (*doxa*) of journalism, and how these competing cultures develop, become organised hierarchically across space (i.e., at different levels, and in different locales), and alter (or not) over time.

Habitus

Habitus represents the embodiment of field position into durable dispositions which guide practice, constituting an agent's vision and division of that world. It is therefore intimately related to the conceptualisation of fields. As such, a study's approach to utilising habitus as a concept must be as innovative as its approach to fields. A significant challenge in the case of this thesis was to demonstrate the opposing processes of habitus durability and development that occurs when agents enter new fields and are subjected to new influences. What became evident through the analyses was that many dispositions about journalism remain fairly durable even when deployed across different layers of related fields; that is, most journalists maintained a relatively consistent view of what constituted "proper journalism" and "correct" ways of working, based primarily on their formative experiences in their national field of origin, regardless of which field they entered, even if they did not always get to practice it. When and where development of new dispositions – such as those associated with a "China habitus" – occurred, this arose first and foremost through homologies with existing

dispositions, and then further as strategic necessities (either long- or short-term) in order to "stay in the game."

Moreover, journalists' vision and division of journalistic worlds also remained fairly consistent regardless of which field they were currently active in. That is, their sense of their position within a field, and, as such, their relative chances of advancement remained closely attached to the overall hierarchical arrangement of fields relative to one another. For example, because of the dominated position of Kenyan journalism relative to international competitors, many Kenyan journalists simply "could not see" themselves advancing far up the hierarchy of the global journalistic field, in the same way that some implicitly understood that living in particular, affluent parts of Nairobi was "not for the likes of me." Local-national journalists are employed – not only at CGTN – as (regional) "specialists" and come to see this as their natural position, and very rarely advance beyond it, since they (literally) do not see advancement as a genuine possibility.

Habitus provides a unifying concept of generative practice across different layers of field. Whilst change does occur (when necessary), habitus helps explain how and why there are durable differences (and limitations) in the ways in which different castes of journalists at CGTN Africa work. They are not merely subject to material and symbolic inequalities, but literally embody them; see them laid out onto and across physical and social space; feel them in their mind, bones, and guts.

Capital

Capital is the engine which drives the dynamics of field theory, as agents compete to appropriate additional capital and valorise their existing stocks. As CGTN Africa journalists moved between and competed across a variety of fields at different levels, it was essential to identify what resources (at what levels) they were deploying when, and which types of capital (and where) they were trying to accumulate by doing so. What became clear in the analysis was that different groupings of journalists at CGTN Africa had very different strategic outlooks – that is, literally, their position in the field based on their possessed resources – and different aims from one another. As such, depending on their starting position, and the protections afforded by competing heteronomies, these different groupings often took divergent pathways through their careers, the more experienced Kenyans seeking career advancement (amassing symbolic capital), whilst many of the neophytes who joined later simply sought to

get by (amassing financial capital). This helped to explain their tactical approach to their day-to-day work at the station, and particularly their willingness to compromise or not with their Chinese bosses.

Moreover, as agents moved between fields, it also became clear that particular forms of resources were becoming racialised. African journalists at CGTN Africa were delimited in their actions and potentialities by the domination of their specific forms of possessed Black cultural capital by White forms of capital that predominated in the global journalistic field. And, additionally, that *access* to particular forms of relevant capital was de facto segregated along racial lines, particularly in the case physical proximity to important sites of work.

Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the different species capital offers a unifying notion for theorising the relative position and relative chances of actors across fields. When adapted to include the competing roles of different heteronomies, which provide protection for different types of journalistic autonomy, it is an immensely flexible tool to use in analysing the work of journalists across a variety of spaces.

Limitations

There remain some limitations, both methodological and theoretical, to this study. Methodologically, the primary limitations to the study were the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic had on the eventual sample of the study, and also in the methods that the study was able to employ. I have already discussed many of these limitations in the methodology and have argued there against the idea that online research inherently produces weaker data than in-person research – only different data. Whilst I stand by those arguments, there is also no doubting that a wider range of available methods would produce interesting and potentially augmentative data. In particular, in-situ ethnographic methods, and particularly participant observation whilst in the office and in the field, as well as first-hand insight into editorial meetings, etc., could provide further understanding into the findings discussed here. Likewise, and particularly in the case of a Bourdieu-inspired research programme, greater levels of physical data about participants would help to produce potentially interesting findings related to the embodiment of dispositions within individual's habitus. And further, online research probably contributed to the lack of Chinese participants in this study. Whilst

I got a good idea of their working habits from the international and Kenyan staff, nothing substitutes for their own voice or right-to-reply in this research.

At a theoretical level, whilst I have attempted as much of a reflexive and complete "re-invention" of field theory as practicable, there are issues raised by critics of field theory that I have not touched on. In particular, I have not attempted to conceptualise a global "field of power," or how this would relate more widely to activity in global fields. Whether such a field exists or not is subject to debate, and would require significant, focussed empirical enquiry to unpick (Guzzini 2006). I adjudged this debate to be peripheral to the subject at hand, and beyond the scope of this thesis to cover in detail. I argue that the lack of an answer to the wider position of the global journalistic field within global power relations does not undermine the insights provided by a field analysis of the interaction of the global journalistic field with other levels of fields.

Future research

Beyond its own findings, this study opens up interesting questions for further research. It has illustrated that field theory provides an incredibly fruitful platform for research into journalism practice in general, in the case of international journalism, and the particular case study of Chinese media involvement in Africa. Further research applying field theory as a theoretical framework to study these wider phenomena would help expand on the findings of this research. In particular, further research applying this framework to the study of other Chinese media organisations operating in Africa – such as Xinhua or CRI – would be profitable not only in the case of understanding the operations of these organisations, but would offer a clearer picture of the idiosyncrasies of practice at CGTN Africa, as well as of the organisation of the global journalistic field in relation to the Chinese journalistic field. In terms of the study of African journalists and journalisms, the points raised in this thesis concerning the adaption of the habitus of African journalists working in international media, as well as their relative struggles to break into and up the global journalism field, offer interesting questions for further research. For example, further longitudinal research to assess the long-term durability of newly adopted dispositions – such as those associated with a "China habitus" – would provide interesting insight into the possible futures of journalisms in Africa. Similarly, further

research applying the concepts of racialised capital within other contexts would help to understand the operations of and possible development of international journalism.

Appendix A: Full Interview Log

Interviewees are listed in two tables: Table 1 lists primary interviewees who worked or had worked at (or with) CGTN Africa; Table 2 lists secondary interviewees who worked for other Sino-African news organisations or non-Sino-African news organisations (the relevant organisation is indicated by the pseudonym signifier).

Where an interviewee was an active employee of CGTN Africa (or, in the case of secondary interviews, other relevant organisations) at the time of the interview, this is indicated by an asterisk (*).

Provided are pseudonymised signifiers. A sealed list of real identities is provided to examiners only.

Table 1 - Primary Interviews

Pseudonymised signifier	**Date of Interview**
CGTN-1	07/01/2021
CGTN-2	11/11/2020
CGTN-3	28/09/2020
CGTN-4	14/12/2020
CGTN-5*	01/12/2020
CGTN-6	31/03/2021
CGTN-7	03/05/2021
CGTN-8	17/11/2020
CGTN-9*	28/07/2020
CGTN-10*	23/02/2021
CGTN-11	12/03/2021
CGTN-12	22/12/2020
CGTN-13	14/10/2020
CGTN-14*	09/03/2021
CGTN-15	30/09/2020

CGTN-16*	13/03/2021
CGTN-17*	02/12/2020
CGTN-18*	22/10/2020
CGTN19*	14/01/2021
FSN-20*	28/02/2021
FSN-21	09/01/2021
FSN-22	20/11/2020
CGTN-29	12/04/2021

Table 2 - Secondary Interviews

Pseudonymised signifier	**Date of Interview**
BBC-28	18/03/2021
CRI-23*	02/11/2020
Xinhua-24	08/12/2020
Xinhua-25	10/12/2020
Xinhua-26*	20/10/2020
Xinhua-27*	06/10/2020
AFP-30*	30/10/2020
Bloomberg-31*	30/10/2020
AFP-32*	05/11/2020

Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Below is an indicative list of questions which were asked to participants.

1. Face-sheet:
    a. Age
    b. Organisation
    c. Position/Job Description
    d. Location
2. On themselves:
    a. What is your background? Education? Upbringing?
    b. What inspired you to become a journalist?
    c. What has been your career trajectory?
    d. How were you recruited by your organisation?
    e. How familiar were you with China's media before joining it?
    f. *(If Appropriate) How did you come to leave the organisation?*
3. On journalism:
    a. How do you define "the news"?
    b. What makes a story "newsworthy"?
    c. What values do you apply to, or think inform, your work? What about ethics?
    d. What types of reporting most interest you?
    e. How much do think your values overlap with those of your organisation?
    f. Can you recall any conflict in the newsroom over how a story was covered?
    g. Have you heard of "positive reporting" or "constructive journalism"? What are your thoughts about these ideas? Do you apply them in your stories?
    h. What makes you a good journalist? What do you bring to your organisation?
    i. What is it like being a journalist at your organisation?
4. On day-to-day work:
    a. What is your day-to-day working routine?
    b. How much news do you produce?
    c. What sort of stories do you tend to produce for your organization?

   d. Do you attend editorial meetings? What is your contribution in these meetings? Whose agendas are most prominent?
   e. How much autonomy do you think you have in your day-to-day work?
   f. What constraints do you feel upon your day-to-day work?
   g. What is the office like?
   h. Did you receive any training or education since joining?
   i. How is the presence of Beijing felt in your day-to-day work?

5. On the organisation:
   a. What is good about your organization?
   b. What differentiates your organisation from others?
   c. Who is your main competition?
   d. Who is your audience?
   e. Do you think your organisation is motivated by profit?
   f. How does promotion happen in your organization?
6. On relationships in and out of the newsroom
   a. Who oversees your work?
   b. How are your interpersonal relationships in the newsroom?
   c. Do you discuss professional issues among yourselves?
   d. Is ethnicity an issue in the newsroom?
   e. Do you find it easy to access information and/or sources?
7. On the future
   a. What are your ambitions? Do you see yourself remaining in your current position?
   b. What do you think that working for your organisation has done for your career/yourself?
   c. What will your organization look like ten years from now?
   d. Do you think Chinese media is changing the way media works in your country?

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