

JOURNALISM STUDIES: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Environmental Journalism

Edited by
Henrik Bødker and Irene Neverla



ROUTLEDGE



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Environmental Journalism

Environmental journalism is an increasingly significant area for study within the broader field of journalism studies. It connects the concerns of politics, science, business, culture and the natural world whilst also exploring the boundaries between the local, regional and global. A central and typical focus for its concerns are the global summits convened to share scientific knowledge about global warming and to formulate policies to mitigate its consequences in particular locales. But reporting environmental change creates difficulties for journalists who are often ill equipped to resolve the uncertainties in the disputed scientific accounts of climate change.

This research-based collection focuses on aspects of environmental journalism in Australia, France, Norway, Sweden, the UK and the USA. Contributors present case studies of media reporting of the environment, and explore considerations of objectivity and advocacy in journalistic coverage of the environment and climate change.

This book was originally published as a special issue of *Journalism Studies*.

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Journalism Studies: Theory and Practice

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The journal *Journalism Studies* was established at the turn of the new millennium by Bob Franklin. It was launched in the context of a burgeoning interest in the scholarly study of journalism and an expansive global community of journalism scholars and researchers. The ambition was to provide a forum for the critical discussion and study of journalism as a subject of intellectual inquiry but also an arena of professional practice. Previously, the study of journalism in the UK and much of Europe was a fairly marginal branch of the larger disciplines of media, communication and cultural studies; only a handful of Universities offered degree programmes in the subject. *Journalism Studies* has flourished and succeeded in providing the intended public space for discussion of research on key issues within the field, to the point where in 2007 a sister journal, *Journalism Practice*, was launched to enable an enhanced focus on practice-based issues, as well as foregrounding studies of journalism education, training and professional concerns. Both journals are among the leading ranked journals within the field and publish six issues annually, in electronic and print formats. More recently, 2013 witnessed the launch of a further companion journal *Digital Journalism* to provide a site for scholarly discussion, analysis and responses to the wide ranging implications of digital technologies for the practice and study of journalism. From the outset, the publication of themed issues has been a commitment for all journals. Their purpose is first, to focus on highly significant or neglected areas of the field; second, to facilitate discussion and analysis of important and topical policy issues; and third, to offer readers an especially high quality and closely focused set of essays, analyses and discussions.

The *Journalism Studies: Theory and Practice* book series draws on a wide range of these themed issues from all journals and thereby extends the critical and public forum provided by them. The Editor of the journals works closely with guest editors to ensure that the books achieve relevance for readers and the highest standards of research rigour and academic excellence. The series makes a significant contribution to the field of journalism studies by inviting distinguished scholars, academics and journalism practitioners to discuss and debate the central concerns within the field. It also reaches a wider readership of scholars, students and practitioners across the social sciences, humanities and communication arts, encouraging them to engage critically with, but also to interrogate, the specialist scholarly studies of journalism which this series provides.

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Talking Points Ammo: The use of neoliberal think tank fantasy themes to delegitimise scientific knowledge of climate change in Australian newspapers

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'bottom-up epistemology' lessons", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Modern Physics* 41(3), 2010 and "Climate Change: scientific dynamics, expertise and political challenges" (with A. Dahan) in *Science and Sovereignty* (edited by C. Paradeise, Routledge). She is responsible for a research project gathering social scientists and climatologists on the questions of confidence in global warming.

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PREFACE

Environmental journalism is an increasingly significant area for study within the broader field of journalism studies. Henrik Bødker (Aarhus University, Denmark) and Irene Neverla (University of Hamburg, Germany), who have edited the collection of essays published here, suggest that this significance reflects the fact that environmental journalism connects the concerns of politics, science, business, culture and the natural world, but also explores the boundaries between the local, regional and global. A central and typical focus for its concerns are the global summits convened to share scientific knowledge about global warming and to formulate policies to mitigate its consequences in particular locales. But reporting environmental change creates difficulties for journalists who are often ill equipped to resolve the uncertainties in the disputed scientific accounts of climate change. Further problems emerge from the need to balance the journalistic requirement for objective coverage when confronted with the prospect of famines and flood which might call for a journalistic approach tempered by advocacy.

These research-based studies which focus on aspects of environmental journalism in Australia, France, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, fall into three broad sections. The first three essays present case studies of media reporting of the environment, while the subsequent two contributions explore considerations of objectivity and advocacy in journalistic coverage of the environment and climate change. The final three essays offer intriguing accounts of how substantial, but non-journalistic actors and agencies, (including non-governmental organisations, business and think tanks), help to shape the media and public agenda on climate change but typically in ways which too often elude public notice.

I am very grateful to Henrik Bødker and Irene Neverla for issuing the call for papers and gathering together this distinguished group of scholars whose essays are published here. I am also delighted to have an opportunity to thank Dr Neil Gavin (Liverpool University, UK) and Dr Libby Lestor (University of Tasmania, Australia) for agreeing to read, comment and offer advice on earlier drafts of the papers.

Finally, I hope you will enjoy reading these essays which at times provide rather unsettling as well as enlightening accounts.

BOB FRANKLIN
Editor

INTRODUCTION

Environmental journalism

Henrik Bødker and Irene Neverla

There are many reasons for considering environmental journalism as an academically significant, challenging and valuable focus for a themed issue of *Journalism Studies*. Journalism about the environment and climate change sits at a complex of intersections between politics, business, science, nature and culture, in between, the individual and the common but also in between the local, regional and global levels. While the environment largely appears as local and tangible, the related issues of climate change are global and intangible. This means, that in some locations, associated risks are contemporary and very real, while in others, perhaps most, such risks are remote in both time and space and thus only knowable through various representations. Such differences in perception are, however, not only linked to geographical location but also, at least to some extent, linked to levels of income and technological development (two aspects, which together may allow for more sustained mitigation measures). While there is a broad scientific consensus on the anthropogenic contributions to global warming, scientific knowledge on the regional impacts of global warming is still somewhat uncertain. This, along with the vast differences in perceptions among individuals and in between countries, make global political attempts at mitigation fraught with economical, scientific, developmental, geographical, social and cultural fault lines—as COP 15 in Copenhagen illustrated neatly.

Journalism was an intimate part of establishing and negotiating such fault lines and a focus on conflict is an established journalistic approach to complex issues. Away from global summits, however, climate change is more difficult for journalists to handle since this issue breaches some of journalism's established foci and demarcations. Firstly, the temporal aspect makes climate change difficult to handle journalistically; apart from melting glaciers and extreme weather events, the issue of global warming is difficult to make concrete, and thus the subject of news. This is somewhat linked to the fact that environmental issues, at least in some measure, cut across established editorial boundaries such as politics, business, technology, nature, culture and consumer issues. Finally, since climate change is threatening to inflict great upheaval through famines, and migration waves, the question arises of whether traditional professional dichotomies between "objective" and "balanced" versus "advocacy" journalism are adequate in the face of such social and environmental challenges. This question is exacerbated by the fact that this is an area of reporting that is heavily dependent on journalistic translations of scientific knowledge. Taken together these aspects make environmental journalism an area ripe for clashes of various sorts.

This, as well as a broadly conceived urgency of the issue, has increasingly made journalistic coverage of climate change the focus of media, communication and journalism studies. By studying something that does not quite fit, established practices are made more visible; and emergent practices may be glimpsed. An issue with no clearly defined boundaries may arguably push communication practices to relate to place and space in new ways. Thus, being a window into processes of globalisation it may not only reveal something about new ways of communicating; it may also reveal aspects of a new,

emerging world order. Yet, in relation to journalism, it is still important to point out that this most often is written from and to specific places and therefore inflected by local political, economic, geographical, media-related, professional and cultural factors in various ways.

This has come out of a number of studies focusing on domestication and inflection (see for instance Eide et al., 2010). Whether what may be termed a global journalism is emerging in relation to the issue of climate change is yet to be determined. A number of studies do show, however, that the level of attention is somewhat transnational (see Schäfer et al., 2011; and Shehata and Hopmann in this issue). Studies of attention cycles, however, have also shown that (international or domestic) political differences are somehow needed in order to attract journalistic and thus public attention (see for instance Brossard et al., 2004). Since climate change is often remote in time it somehow needs other concrete events—like extreme weather or summits—to be made the object of journalism.

As a social system with its own specific logic journalism transforms any issue from its starting points to its appearance as an event in the public debate. Such transformations into (political) events partly happen through various framings and cultural domestications; and the transformation from science to politics (and/or economics) through established journalistic norms may distort what is a broad scientific consensus into a “balanced” perspective, and thus contested issue, as Boykoff and Boykoff (2004, 2007) have pointed out, or into a “catastrophic” view, as Weingart et al. (2000) have shown. A related issue here is the lines separating objectivity from advocacy and the notion of communication for social change (see for instance Dilling and Moser, 2007 and Anita Howarth in this collection). Linked to this are studies of how journalism relates to the various vested interests involved in setting the agenda in relation to climate change, e.g. non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and different colours of think tanks, and the wider sociological settings in which this takes place (see for instance Hulme, 2009). The vast majority of empirical studies of the journalism on climate change have, however, focused on media content through various forms of frame-analysis and/or discourse analysis. Seen in relation to the consumption of journalism, there has been a growing interest in the formation of public opinion within the tradition of framing and media effects studies. What has been somewhat missing has been work within a wider audience studies tradition. More of such studies are, however, needed in order to gain a better understanding of some of the consequences of climate change communication, especially how this may or may not relate to social actions.

The proposal for a special issue of *Journalism Studies* on Environmental Journalism grew out of two conferences: “Responsibility Across Borders—Climate Change as Challenge for Intercultural Inquiry on Values” held at Aarhus University in Denmark in November 2009; and “Communicating Climate Change II—Global Goes Regional”, a pre-conference of the ECREA 2010 in Hamburg in October 2010. Participants from these two conferences are among the contributors to this issue along with others who responded to an open call for papers. The complexities of the issue, some of which are touched upon above, and the ensuing interest from a number of divergent communication fields, have made the compiling of this special issue a challenging task. Yet, given that the overall goal was precisely to highlight the complexity of the issue, the aim was to select contributions from different disciplines using different theories, methodologies and, not least, focusing empirically on different parts of the world. In relation to that, a recurrent problem with the

study of global phenomena is that certain parts of the world remain understudied. To some extent this has been the case with respect to the focus of the authors who responded to the paper call for this issue. Consequently, of the eight articles in this issue, only two focus on countries outside the Northern hemisphere (Bangladesh and Argentina), but these articles do provide valuable correctives to issues that are often taken for granted in the journalism studies of the North. Moreover, the research in this themed issue offers an additional and rich range of empirical studies in diverse national settings including Australia, France, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

With regard to focus and methodology, the majority of the articles in this issue are based on various types of content analysis of printed journalism, a leaning that mirrors the research field. Although print is only one element in the broader mediation of climate change, the issues raised in newspapers somehow relate to those of the wider field; also, a focus on print lends itself more easily to a comparison between different cultural contexts. There are also some articles, e.g. Bacon and Nash, which advocate looking beyond texts in order to understand the complexities surrounding the production of journalism on the environment and climate change. This is certainly a call that we hope will be taken up by researchers in the future. That said, however, one may also stress the wide variety of questions and topics that studies of content may bring up and address. The articles of this issue certainly attest to that.

The ordering of the articles in this issue has, however, not been based on geography but on the overall scope of the focus of each article. The first article, Stefan Cihan Aykut, Jean-Baptiste Comby and Hélène Guillemot's "Climate Change Controversies in French Mass Media 1990–2010", aims to understand the processes and actors, which interact in order to establish something as a public problem. Journalists are here seen as one part—the others being scientists, politicians and NGOs—of the shifting social configurations that frame, i.e. define and redefine, problems as (and in) public. Based on a theoretical mixture of the sociology of public problems, media sociology, science and technology studies, this article foregrounds the complex interplay of the processes in which journalism grapples with the issue of climate change. As such, it provides a very relevant background for the remaining articles.

The next two articles also deal with framing. The first of these, Adam Shehata and David Nicolas Hopmann's "Framing Climate Change: a study of US and Swedish press coverage of global warming", addresses the question of whether the framing of climate change is mainly influenced by the global scientific consensus or the discussions of domestic political elites. In order to explore this question, newspaper coverage from two countries in which political attitudes towards climate change differ, namely the United States and Sweden between 1997 and 2007, are analysed in relation to framing and the presence of various types of sources. The article concludes, contrary to other studies, that the coverage in these two countries was very similar in that controversies within the domestic political elites played a relatively minor role in the definition of the issue. The next article, María Teresa Mercado's "Media Representations of Climate Change in the Argentinean Press", deals with similar issues, and draws a somewhat related conclusion. Based on a content analysis focusing on (among other things) section, sources and themes of the coverage of the issue of climate change in two Argentinean elite newspapers in 2009–2010 it is argued that the issue in Argentina is dealt with primarily as a topic of international conflict related to what is described as an environmental debt.