

Towards a conceptualisation of exile journalism

The changing practice, norms, and values of exiled journalists from Eritrea and Burundi

In times of globally deteriorating press freedom and rising numbers of attacks on the press, an increasing number of journalists have to flee and continue reporting from exile. Exile journalism is a modern, global trend - yet, little research has examined the phenomenon. Today, we have a limited understanding of journalism produced in exile as it is mostly compared to normative western theories of journalism, which do not acknowledge the different practical rationale and normative realignment that exile triggers in journalism. Thus, the PhD project this poster is based on proposes a new approach to understanding exile journalism by foregrounding the real-life experiences of marginalised journalists exiled from East Africa and Latin America. This poster presents the preliminary findings of interviews with exiled journalists from Eritrea and Burundi, answering questions of how organisational structures, journalistic norms, practices, and conventions have changed for them since being exiled.



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Objective

This project aims to develop a novel concept of exile journalism drawn from the experiences and practices of exiled journalists from East Africa and Latin America.

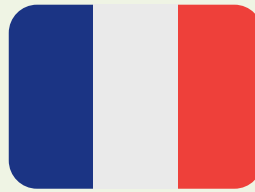
Methodology

At the centre of this project is first-hand information grounded in the experience of exile as a journalist. The mixed-methods qualitative research is designed around the conduct and thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with practising exiled journalists from Eritrea, Burundi, Nicaragua and Venezuela. The study applies multi-layered elements of comparative journalism and engages with decolonial research methods. The generated knowledge is conceptualised through the method of grounded theory.

Case studies (Part I)



Eritrean journalists
exiled in France



Eritrea's former vibrant media landscape after independence was clamped down in 2001, and the country has been in a blackout for the last 20+ years. Many journalists disappeared or fled. Radio Erena in Paris distributes its programmes in Amharic and Arabic via satellite in Eritrea and online for the diaspora.



Burundian journalists
exiled in Belgium



Once a model of professionalism and plurality, journalism in Burundi has gotten increasingly restricted. Following attacks in 2015, 3/4 of Burundi's journalists had to flee. They established successful exile media in Rwanda but had to find new exiles in 2021. Radio Inzamba is mostly run from Belgium now and produces WhatsApp programmes in Kirundi and French.

Theoretical frameworks

Exile is a multifaceted process generally defined as non-voluntary displacement. It has shifting underlying dynamics and a multiplicity of meanings in practice. This project engages with exile as a spectrum, touching upon the political, sociocultural, temporal, personal and collective levels of transnationality and fragmented life experiences through theory and lived experience of the participants.

Journalism is mostly defined along normative lines and analysed according to established elements, conventions, and common identity markers for journalists. But: "journalism studies became about renovations inside the house of news without really addressing how much the neighborhood was changing around it" (Carlson & Peters, 2023: 2). Especially for exile journalism, it has to be considered that "the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever" (Said, 2002: 173). Consequently, this study situates exile journalism within the framework of existing relevant theories, such as peace and conflict journalism, liquid or hybrid journalism, and minority, ethnic, or migrant media. But these are challenged by the accounts of exiled journalists with the methodological, analytical, and conceptual aim of defining exile journalism as a mediated practice within a non-ideal context. The hope is to showcase the conceptual and real value of exile journalism beyond the boundaries of mostly western normative theories.

The challenges of exile

- Access to information
- Verification of information
- Transparency & trust-building
- Information distribution & audiences
- Objectivity & identity questions
- Safety for journalists & sources
- Organisational structures & management
- Lack of funding
- Making a life in exile/ as a refugee
- Recognition of exile journalism



As an exiled journalist, I'm far away from where the events happen. **I cannot witness myself now.** But we have first-hand witnesses who [...] provide us with what we really want to focus on. **If I receive an information, I send it to others.** They may not know each other. It's risky. In case something happens, it's [...] going to fall like a domino.

“

The biggest problem for **most exiled journalists, they are only focused on the production.** But you need the structures, as an institution, management system, financing and administration.

Amanuel Ghirmay Bahta, news editor at Radio Erena

A good journalist is a living one.

Valéry Muco, news reader at Radio Inzamba

I mean, if you are an exile journalist, **you don't really need to say [that] you are already an activist** because you are opposing the situation that sent you to exile. [...] [But] being an independent radio is to just keep a distance from all the political parties. [...] **We oppose through journalism. We do activism through journalism.**

Fathi Osman, journalist at Radio Erena

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“ It's very important to think of a **theorisation of exile journalism.** Because obviously, there's a risk [...] because it can deteriorate if we don't succeed in managing our emotions [...] **What we have lived at ours, it follows us. [...]** **There are norms that we can't follow. [...]** Finally, **another form of journalism** is done, not in the big buildings with the big men and women in impeccable clothes, [...] but [by people] who record a programme in the toilets.

Alexandre Niyungeko, director of Radio Inzamba

The preliminary research findings indicate that exile brings multiple conceptual shifts to journalism theory:

- from an occupational to an existential identity
- from locality to transnationality
- from traditional media organisations & products to hybrid & innovative ones

Key references on exile journalism:
Batist (2010), Burrows (1999), Frère (2014, 2016, 2017), Gebremeskel (2019), Marston (2023), Mugabo (2019, 2020), Nordahl (2009), Odindo / KAS (2021), O'Loughlin and Schafraad (2016), Schöner (2019), Shumow (2014), Skjerdal (2010, 2011)

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Key references on exile: Brinkerhoff (2008, 2009), Cohen (1997, 2009), Hall (2003), Kalra et al. (2005), Roniger et al., (2018), Said (1984/2002), Safran (1991), Sheffer (2006), Shklar (1993), Vertovec (1999), Vasanthakumar (2021)

