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### Book Review

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# Book Review

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Claudia Mellado

*Beyond Journalistic Norms: Role Performance and News in Comparative Perspective*. New York and London: Routledge, 2020. 320 pp. £96.99 (hardcover). ISBN: 9781138388499.

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It might seem to go without saying, but benefits from saying all the same: it does us all some good to read outside our narrow research niches. For myself, *Beyond Journalistic Norms* provided and rewarded for taking such an opportunity.

*Beyond Journalistic Norms* is the product of Claudia Mellado and seventeen of her colleagues' multi-year Journalism Role Performance (JRP) project. In it, they unfurl their extensive effort to explore journalistic roles and practices around the world, drawing findings from the project's empirical studies into the conversation. The second book from the JRP endeavor (cf. Mellado et al. 2017), *Beyond Journalistic Norms*, moves through twelve chapters, setting out theoretical foundations and methodological design (Part I: Professional Roles and Journalistic Performance), detailing particular comparative studies that encourage us to understand the nuances of their performance (Part II: The Manifestation of Journalistic Role Performance in the News), and showing how these findings confront extant understandings of how roles play out across and within different media and media systems (Part III: Explaining Journalistic Role Performance).

Centering on the performance of journalistic roles, it departs from the interventionist, loyal-facilitator, watchdog, civic, service, and infotainment roles to examine sub-dimensions of these roles with a stated aim of challenging presumptions of any one role “dominating” in one system or another. What results is a rich set of discussions that allow scholars to find their home in studies that might not naturally cross their transom. In that sense, it reflects the best traditions of academic writing, working in two directions. In the first, it directs readers toward the output of the JRP project, pulling from, without rehashing, published studies to detail approaches, methods, and theoretical foundations. This allows for adopting or adapting as needs must.

The second direction is toward those eager to pose alternative questions about journalistic roles, including by reaching beyond the approaches the JRP project employs. It is this latter direction where I found the most purchase, drawn to the provocations brought about in the latter third of this volume. There is inspiration in examining


the tension Mellado and colleagues find that: “Normative roles might be firmly anchored in journalists’ mindsets as guiding ideals and aspirations that give meaning to the profession, but journalistic practice is by no means static and does not depend on individuals’ will alone” (p. 225) and, as alluded to earlier, in pushing us to consider “the extent to which journalists can live up to their ideals in news practice” (p. 17).

It is the novelty of this contribution which the authors promote and from which the wider field of journalism studies can most benefit (p. 15). Or, put differently, this book pushes some of us to drill down into what speaks to this disconnect, and how can we move from identifying it toward plumbing its depths in new ways. As a qualitative researcher focused on the fuzzy edges of digital journalism, large-scale comparative studies are not my bailiwick and we would normally speak past one another. Yet in reading *Beyond Journalistic Norms*, I found myself reflecting on my own research into how normativity shapes even the most iconoclastic journalistic practices, and how ideals of what journalism *should* be have been reimagined by digital actors who interpret them quite differently in practice.

These wider inspirations speak to the importance of this volume for scholars who can learn from a study that extends beyond their immediate focus. In that light, my critiques of what *Beyond Journalistic Norms* offers are minimal. I applaud their de-westernizing approach, yet I found the variety of countries discussed rang familiar, and the lack of examples (or scholars) from Africa seems like a missed opportunity. Further, while highlighting and addressing the changing boundaries around our conceptions of journalism which their study also found, there is a wider body of scholarship developed in the past five years that might have provided some conceptual explanations for unanswered questions (p. 24). Some of these are, undoubtedly, reflections of limitations confronted by any study and, to Mellado’s credit, she foregrounds the challenges with designing and executing such a wide-ranging systematic study, including the difficulty of drawing such a study to a close with limited resources and across institutions.

This book finds its strength in its invitation to move from its findings toward posing new questions about the relationship between journalists’ normative ideals and the practices that result (pp. 227–228). It provides the groundwork for new questions to be asked, which is what we can best hope for in any one volume. What scholars gain from diving into this latest collection is an opportunity to identify the many jumping-off points it provides for the next round of studies, however designed, in order to reflect on and build from the contributions Mellado and colleagues offer here.

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## Reference

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