

## Professional and Personal Identity, Precarity and Discrimination in Global Arts Journalism

### Abstract

Arts journalism, journalism on the arts and entertainment industries, has been primarily defined in a Western European context within Journalism Studies. Yet this neglects the globalised nature of arts and entertainment production and consumption and the mobile reporters who cover it, and the nationally contingent challenges and opportunities they face. In a world grappling with the Covid-19 pandemic, arts reporters face a triple threat: the precarity of what is often a freelance career, the financial disruption of the global media and entertainment industries, and the exclusionary biases of a global media ecosystem which favours reporters who are transnationally visible and mobile. Drawing on a data corpus of 24 interviews with arts journalists from 12 different countries in four continents in 2020-2021, we explore how such journalists are increasingly subsidising their work with employment beyond the media sector. Arts journalists from Europe grapple with complex challenges relating to their professional and personal identities, in contrast to journalists from the Global South, where questions relate primarily to economic and structural challenges. Journalists from West Africa interviewed face increasing if sporadic interest from media organisations in global economic centres, and the emerging content possibilities of internationally funded digital and streaming platforms, mirroring broader economic flows of capital and labour.

Keywords: arts journalism, identity, precarity, agency, globalisation, gender, race

### Introduction

Arts journalism has played a central role in the history of media and information, yet has often been branded on the spectrum of ‘soft’ news (Reinmann *et al.*, 2012). Such journalism is defined here as editorial coverage of arts, culture and entertainment events and issues, including news reports, broadcasts, previews, reviews, interviews, opinion related to issues of artistic publication, production, reproduction and/or performance (Botma, 2008; Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007; Hellman and Jaakola, 2012). Arts writers have been discussed as “cultural intermediaries” (Bourdieu, 1984; Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2014), as they work and exist in an overlap of both the journalistic and artistic fields. Unlike conventional journalism, many writers in the arts realm remain totally external to roles within news organizations, and as such, distance themselves from the profession and institutions of journalists (Freidson, 2001), while others perform more traditional roles. These are some of the reasons why the field has been traditionally considered as difficult to demarcate (Kristensen and From, 2015).

Journalists in the arts-specialised sub-field often make claims to elite specialised knowledge bound up with elite educational, media, cultural and artistic institutions in the Global North. Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen (2007) suggest that whilst many arts journalists describe themselves as occupational journalists, there is also a vocational element to arts writing separate to news journalism. The authors state that journalists in this field “also lay claim to an arts exceptionalism... and present their work as infused by a passion which is otherwise frowned upon within journalism” (Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007: 620).

Needless to say, arts journalism has been principally conceived of and empirically considered within a European context, as part of the wider issue of Western bias in Journalism Studies at large (Hanitzsch, 2019) and even in conceptions of journalistic practices outside the Global North that inherit values and norms from the Enlightenment at the expense of local and situated

knowledge (Araya, 2014). As part of the pledge to deWesternise the field (Wasserman and de Beer, 2009) and given its own claim to eliteness and expertise within newsrooms in western Europe, this article contributes to the understanding of this distinct subfield of journalism by exploring how arts journalists view their shifting professional and personal identities in different global contexts.

The most prominent strand of research on arts journalism is through the related field of cultural journalism, defined in Nordic contexts as engaging “with a wide range of cultural issues, from the arts to everyday life, or from culture understood narrowly as aesthetic expressions to culture viewed more broadly as ‘a whole way of life’” (Kristensen, 2019: 2). Although the terms “cultural journalism” and “arts journalism” are sometimes used interchangeably, cultural journalism encompasses coverage of culture broadly, beyond the arts, including lifestyle, taste, and literacy, albeit in culturally contingent ways (Kristensen and From, 2015). Kristensen (2019) describes cultural journalism as having “a tradition of being performed not only by professionally trained journalists but also public intellectuals, critical thinkers, academics, and cultural columnists”. In this study, we will take care to delineate between the two, focusing only on journalism pertaining to institutional creativity including music, visual art, literature, theatre and cinema, and how these are manifested in different global contexts.

The paper will firstly centralise how the arts journalists’ view their professional identities in their own terms. It will seek to inquire how these identities reflect the increasing professional fluidity and financial challenges within both the arts journalism field and institutional journalism more broadly, as observed in the 12 different countries from which interviewees were sourced (Cohen, 2016; Matthews and Onyemaobi, 2020). Secondly, it will focus on how these arts journalists’ view their personal identities in relation to their work, evaluating the extent to which these interact with newsroom and journalistic biases, for instance discrimination, in different national media systems, while acknowledging the transnational nature of both the consumption and production of arts coverage.

We argue in this paper that the extent to which a shift from permanent employment to casual labour is particularly acute in arts journalism (Franklin, 2014; Hanitzsch *et al.*, 2019). We also argue that the fact this intersects with particular identity categories disadvantaged by such precarity is worthy of elucidation (Thurman *et al.*, 2015). Given that creative practitioners frequently seek to communicate personal emotion and expression, questions of personal identity are mentioned more often in arts stories than in other kind of story (Riegert and Hovden, 2019). This, we argue, necessitates the specific consideration of personal identity within this sub-field, especially beyond existing scholarship. In doing so, we seek to explore the factors that the sample of arts journalists interviewed feel regulate the expression of their professional and personal identity through their own work, and how these impact on inclusion and exclusion from the arts journalism sub-field as normatively considered within Western academia.

The article draws from a data set of 24 interviews with arts journalists working in four different continents. Participants’ views are considered contextually based on their national and cultural circumstances, employing interviewees’ self-identification around dimensions including gender and sexuality, ethnicity and nationality – for ethical reasons, where participants did not offer this information, they were not pressed on it. Our study expands the findings of previous empirical studies in this context, which have tended to focus on journalists from a single country (e.g. Golin and Cardoso, 2003; Botma, 2008; 2013; 2017; Nnadozie, 2013; Greeley, 2005; Nicodemus and Romare, 1997).

Theoretically this paper sees arts journalistic identity and journalists' views on this identity as particular articulations comprising a repertoire of discursive positions activated in specific institutional contexts (Hanitzsch *et al*, 2019: 48). These are flexible repertoires deployed as journalists reflect on their profession to render it meaningful to themselves and external stakeholders. We argue that these repertoires set the boundaries of what is considered acceptable in particular sub-fields in particular contexts. Repertoires might be rearticulated in different ways in national contexts, to reflect local values and practices, not to mention the particularities of media economies, governments and regulatory systems (Hanitzsch *et al*, 2019: 50).

## Literature Review

### Global Arts Journalism and Professional Identity

Scholarship on arts journalism is almost entirely limited to a Western European context, with the definition of arts journalism changing in different media systems (Janssen *et al*, 2008; Kristensen, 2010; Kammer, 2015; Jaakkola, 2015). This replicates biases in Journalism Studies at large, mostly a history of white, often male journalists in Europe (Hanitzsch, 2019). As Hanitzsch has pointed out, “much of what we know and take for granted in the Western world, but also elsewhere about ‘journalism’ rests on concepts and evidence generated from within Western concepts and experience” (2019: 214). Beyond a few salient exceptions (Golin and Cardoso, 2003; Botma, 2008; 2013; 2017; Nnadozie, 2013; Greeley, 2005; Nicodemus and Romare, 1997) there is almost no scholarship on the arts journalism sub-field beyond Western Europe and North America, and barely any scholarship which spans national borders.

One of the few exceptions, a major study of this beat in Brazil, was by Golin and Cardoso (2003), who define arts journalism as institutional journalistic content relating to literature, cinema, visual art or music, among other artistic foci (2003: 1). That research identified a shift from criticism to news and celebrity in São Paulo in the 1980s and 1990s due to journalistic institutions downsizing, though does not include original empirical data from interviews with arts journalists themselves. More recently, arts journalism in Nigeria, another of the countries featured in this article, largely emerged in the 1960s, becoming less information-based and more critical after Nigerian independence in 1960 (Nnadozie, 2013). “The Nigerian *Guardian*’s arts section is a largely middle class-oriented but still intellectual paper” (Nnadozie, 2013: 8). Such reportage suffers from poor pay and loss to other, related fields, according to Nnadozie. Botma’s recent study of journalists’ cultural and economic power in post-apartheid South Africa (2008; 2013; 2017) focuses on how arts journalists’ cultural capital was expressed through the editorial presentation and content of their writing, but also does not include interviews with the journalists in different global contexts.

Writing specifically on visual art criticism includes Greeley’s *Modernism: What the North Can Learn from Latin America* (2005) about a group of Latin American and chicano art critics or Nicodemus and Romare’s (1997) research on Africa’s art criticism. The focus of these texts is on avant garde art practices and how inherited ideas and aesthetic movements like Modernism are translated or not to local contexts. Some researchers, like Valdes (2006) and Vodanovic (2015) discussing the Chilean art writing scene, have mentioned that texts are intentionally hermetic, very often with concealed or ambiguous meanings. This makes them difficult to access by a wider audience and therefore substantially different to journalistic writing. Equally, such literature fails to account for the increasingly globalised nature of arts journalism in a world of digital mediation, and the views of its practitioners in relationship to this, and the cultural and economic power of global cosmopolitan centres.

Arts journalists' identities in Europe have traditionally been framed around 'exceptionalism' or as 'crusaders' for the appreciation of institutionally realised art, specialists sometimes believing themselves to have greater qualifications for their role than their newsroom peers, believing arts journalism is qualitatively more important than other forms of news journalism (Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen 2007). However, as newsrooms have faced greater economic pressure and roles have converged, the hegemony of an elite group of cultural tastemakers has been eroded. There is strong evidence to suggest that such changes are contextually and nationally contingent (Hanitzsch *et al.*, 2019). In their survey of journalists in 67 countries as part of their *Worlds of Journalism* project, Hanitzsch *et al* found that those specialised in so-called "soft news" faced more precarious job situations, with 76 per cent in full time employment compared to their "hard news" equivalents (2019: 86). Such "soft news" is more likely to be practiced in advanced economies with less than four per cent of journalists in countries such as Bhutan, Tanzania, Japan, Mexico and Bangladesh engaged in such kinds of practice (Hanitzsch *et al.*, 2019: 86).

While precarity has been felt largely across journalism, the result of a "decline in traditional jobs following a collapse in advertising funding" (Matthews and Onyemaobi, 2020: 1837) the extent to which this might be felt particularly acutely within arts journalism globally remains unevaluated. With any such evaluation, we must be mindful of not mapping Western views of precarity into different national contexts, where locally contingent factors including control by media owners, might be felt more acutely, and interrelate differently with working conditions in different places (Matthews and Onyemaobi, 2020).

### Global Arts Journalism and Personal Identity

As with professional identity, considerations of personal identity, with some notable exceptions relating to representation (e.g. Thurman *et al.*, 2015; ASNE, 2018; Media Diversity Australia, 2020; Granger, 2020) are limited in geographic scope. Within Western Europe, studies relate to journalistic masculinity, the marginalisation of women and nascent research into the experiences of LGBTQi+ journalists, but none of these is specific to the sub-field (Djerf-Pierre, 2007; Mitra *et al.*, 2022; De Vuyst and Raeymaeckers, 2017; Enriquez, 2021; Åkerlund, 2019; Wallace 2019; Magrath, 2020; Şahin, 2021; Barnhurst, 2003).

Much of the research concerning personal identity relates to a lack of representation within Western publics, where there is an absence of voices from normatively marginalised identity categories (Kammer, 2015). For example, drawing on a representative sample of 700 UK journalists, a 2016 study by the Reuters Institute for Journalism and City University, London, found that 94 per cent of journalists identified as white compared to 87 per cent of the UK population (Thurman *et al.*, 2015). US newsrooms skew male and do not reflect the racial diversity of their home cities (ASNE, 2018). Australian news reporters are overwhelmingly white, with just six per cent from an indigenous or non-European background (Media Diversity Australia, 2020). Gender, sexuality, disability and racial diversity dissatisfaction have also been raised in Chinese, Canadian and Indian newsrooms (Granger, 2020).

**Regarding gender,** journalism practice historically emerged as a male-dominated field.

Scholarship in Sweden has found newsroom culture to be gendered around normative tropes of masculinity with this embedded into the beliefs that underpin the field about topics and practices with greater symbolic and journalistic status (Djerf-Pierre, 2007: 81). Women have been historically tokenized, experiencing gendered, subordinate roles, and excluded from positions of power in the newsroom hierarchy in Belgium, for example (De Vuyst and Raeymaeckers, 2017). Moving beyond normative gender binaries, the study of trans journalistic identities is nascent, with journalistic pieces focusing on trans journalist representation in Mexico City, Lagos and

Detroit (Enriquez, 2021) or scholarship on representation in Swedish newspapers, for example (Åkerlund, 2019). There is some exploration of journalists' sexuality, including interviewing openly gay male sports journalists in the UK and US about their experiences in the media workplace (Magrath, 2020; Şahin, 2021; Barnhusrt, 2003). However, these articles do not consider the arts journalism sub-field specifically.

There is an increasing literature on transnational or global journalism, practices that exceed national and geographic boundaries (Lindell and Karlsson, 2016; Reese, 2015; Hellmueller, 2017) but surprisingly little on the personal identities of cosmopolitan and transnationally mobile journalist covering arts including cinema e.g. film festivals, visual art including biennales, music, architecture or literature in different countries. Such events, working as they do with internationally mobile artists looking to reach transnational audiences through streaming platforms (Zhang and Su, 2021; Skovmand, 2016; Goldschmitt 2019; Ghosh *et al*, 2022), inevitably attract journalists working across multiple territories; indeed, this international mobility on behalf of arts journalists might seek to offset the financial precarity of working for financially destabilised outlets in single countries. However, this international mobility might come with associated risks, including the marginalisation of specific actors: those with particular passports (e.g. those from the Global South or beyond the European Union), childcare responsibilities, languages, or financial precarity. Assembling evidence as relating to these journalists will be another contribution of this paper.

## Research questions

Following our review of the relevant literature, this research study aims to address the following research questions:

**RQ1: What do arts journalists in the different global contexts studied feel are the biggest challenges they face relating to their professional identities?**

**RQ2: How do these journalists feel questions of personal identity are relevant to their work and what are the dimensions of concern to them?**

## Methods

Due to almost complete absence of scholarship beyond a narrow geographic area, the purpose of the study was to ascertain the questions of importance—as relating to their professional and personal identities—to a diverse group of arts journalists working in a range of different countries. To select the participants, the paper's authors first identified a sample universe of established arts journalists working in capital cities, who had worked in their fields for over five years. Such participants were in regular employment within arts journalism, so were able to supply a concise, informed overview of relevant concerns in a broad variety of contexts.

As such, our priority was to select participants who were diverse with respect to nationality, gender, sexuality, job role, medium of journalism (e.g. print, digital, broadcast) genre of arts journalism (e.g. specialising in music, theatre, cinema, literature, visual art) and ethnicity. The researchers used a mixture of purposive and snowball sampling, where they approached participants with the questions of professional and personal identity in mind, with participants suggesting other participants of relevance (Bryman, 2016: 408).

Of the 24 participants interviewed, six participants had contracts with major media organisations with the remainder freelance. Ten of these journalists were female and 14 male. Table 1 presents



the interviewees' self-described professional roles. Almost none of these journalists solely pursued one job, with most working also as novelists, curators, lecturers, publicists, news reporters or in entirely unrelated fields. Participants did not volunteer their ages. Interviewees included 12 from Europe—with five from Central or Eastern Europe— three from Latin or Central America, three from sub-Saharan Africa, four from Central Asia, one from North America and one from South East Asia. The breadth of participants was useful in giving an overview of differences and similarities in arts journalism practices in different continents and countries, and many of the participants were transnationally mobile and engaged in transnational journalistic practice, but we must be cautious about claims of generalisability. Given that many participants spoke openly about current and former employers, interview data was anonymised, and data that might identify participants is purposefully omitted.

Regarding positionality, this paper's authors are a white heterosexual British man and a white heterosexual Chilean woman resident in the UK; as such we must be mindful of the potential effects of this on research participants, particularly when discussing questions around personal identity. While many participants were open about their experiences, and care was taken to phrase open questions relating to identity, participants were not pressed on their identity if they did not supply this information voluntarily, in their own terms.

**Table 1**

Self-identified professional role	Number of participants
Theatre critic/journalist	2
Visual arts journalist	4
Freelance arts journalist	7
Film critic/reporter	4
Games journalist and writer	2
Music blogger/journalist	4
Architecture journalist	1

The researchers' semi-structured interviews allowed them to follow up particular questions in greater depth. An interview guide was employed but when greater detail on responses was required further questions were asked, accordingly (Olsen, 2014). Because the interviews took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, and because of the international interview pool, interviews were all conducted synchronously online via Zoom. Interviews lasted up to 60 minutes and took place between January 2020 and May 2021. Because of our interest in reportage within different national boundaries, interviews were conducted in English, though some of the participants worked in multiple languages. Where relevant these languages are indicated in our findings.

Our interview guide required participants being asked how they would describe their current work, their job and role, their background and how they would self-identify professionally and personally, if they chose to. They were asked how their own work within the field had changed, both positively and negatively, since they had begun their careers. They were asked how about current challenges and opportunities within arts journalism, how this affected how they viewed their professional and personal identities, and were asked about the organisations for which they worked, and how this had changed since the start of their professional career.

The interview audio was transcribed using an external transcription software company. A thematic analysis was undertaken, with a central index of themes and sub-themes assembled through reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, paying particular attention to repetition

and replication in light of the paper's interest in participants' professional and personal identities, their relationship to other themes and the existing literature (Bazeley, 2013; Green *et al.*, 2012).

We took a hybrid inductive/deductive approach to analysis, mindful of themes that might emerge in relation to the overarching questions of professional and personal identity in arts journalism (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Within these major questions, subthemes emerged from the data, were factored into our literature review and informed the organisation of our material. As such, though our primary interest was in professional and personal identity, as led by the data, the most salient sub themes relating to arts journalists emerged as their 'precarity,' 'multiplicity of jobs', 'hybrid or in-between identities', 'exclusionary biases of commission across continents', 'sexuality,' 'tokenism' and 'gender discrimination'. Quotes indicative of the prominent sub-themes are included below.

## Findings

### **RQ1: What do arts journalists in the different global contexts studied feel are the biggest challenges relating to their professional identities?**

#### Multiple jobs

Our first finding was that a decline in regular employment caused precarity among arts journalists in numerous national contexts. A retreating sector drove journalists to moonlight in different professions, move between them fluidly, and in certain situations write sponsored content. Interviewees raised this as substantially impacting on how they view their professional identity.

In the following quotations, we see how journalists from Chile, Brazil, and Iran respectively all noted that the general precarisation of arts journalism had accompanied broader economic decline within the industry—but that arts journalism was more acutely hit. Interviewees all indicated this was a long-term development exacerbated by the pandemic. The journalists quoted here included a male Chilean national newspaper editor, arts journalist and novelist writing in Spanish; a male Brazilian journalist working in Portuguese on literature and music journalism, and a male film journalist working for a national news agency in Iran, writing in Farsi.

We must also think that the written press— and particularly arts journalism - is going through a very brutal crisis. In Chile there are practically no newspapers or magazines left, and in the newspapers and magazines that still exist, the pages dedicated to culture are really a minority –Journalist working in Chile

I would say that the opportunities are getting smaller if you intend to live in arts journalism. As in any part of the world, the major journalism companies in Brazil are breaking down and their newsrooms are getting smaller. And arts journalism, which was never exactly valued by companies, is the first to suffer casualties – Journalist working in Brazil

The most significant problem in the profession of journalism and film criticism is the instability of job. On the other hand, the safety of journalism in Iran is very low and the expenses are so high, conflicting with the low income. Many of the critics in Iran have other jobs to support the living –Journalist working in Iran

As we can see, these financial challenges interrelated with geographically specific challenges which were unique to the media systems in which they occurred. Economic troubles with Chilean and Brazilian journalism have been documented during the pandemic, but not in relation to arts journalism (Newman *et al.*, 2021). Iran is known to be one of the most unsafe countries for journalists, so it is noteworthy that this extends to film critics (Reporters without Borders, 2021).

A male, Costa Rican visual arts writer, editor and curator working in Spanish and English interviewed for the study highlighted a lack of arts journalism jobs in Costa Rica meant journalists might fluidly shift employment between arts journalism and other culturally related fields. “It might happen that you develop a career as a journalist and spend 20 years and so on as a writer and so on and then you become a curator or a programmer or whatever,” he added. “I am aware that that doesn’t happen that often in the UK, for instance, but in Costa Rica, given that the field is so small and that the people who do this, we do it because we love it, because there isn’t that much money, that probably means that we are involved in some other way”. The interviewee described how the local arts and media economies’ relatively small size also encouraged a precariously employed, highly educated workforce in which practitioners worked across multiple fields simultaneously.

As with other media economies, Costa Rican journalism has suffered financial erosion exacerbated by the pandemic, with arts journalism being acutely hit. Longstanding cultural supplement *Áncora* for national newspaper *La Nación* closed in 2020, said the journalist: “It used to be very different maybe five, six, 10 years ago,” said the journalist. “There were a lot of outlets and there was a lot of writing and it was a very active field, but in the past few years, it’s really gone downhill because of the economic crisis in the country and then because of the pandemic. I’m not sure how we can recover right now”.

The way arts journalists responded to financial challenges were highly nationally contingent. A male lecturer and arts journalist based in Ghana, who works both as a music blogger in Ghana and a journalist for UK national newspapers, writing in English, said that arts journalism in Ghana was compromised within mainstream outlets because of the practice of journalists writing sponsored content. A third of the country’s media outlets are owned by politicians or people associated with dominant political parties; its top-five most read newspapers are all affiliated in some way with prominent politicians (Asante, 2020).

There's a type of arts commentary that you'll find in the newspapers here, which is the sponsored kind. So, I pay you money, you say good things about my event or my record, etc. And that had problems because obviously, he who pays the piper calls the tune. It meant that there is no culture of criticism. –Journalist working in UK and Ghana

Previous, recent explorations of Ghanaian journalism have evidenced the erosion of salaries and stable work by rapidly expanding digital platforms, increasing the temptation for journalists to take “soli” or bribes (Endert, 2018). In this interview, the arts journalist indicated that some journalists are likely to take money either from companies or individuals—he did not specify which—to write positive arts coverage, and this undermined their credibility.

In this section we have therefore seen similarities between practitioners’ precarity relating to long-term economic decline in arts journalism in multiple countries: Chile, Brazil, Iran, Costa Rica and Ghana. Journalists responded to this through moonlighting, moving between fields, producing sponsored content, or as we will see in our next section, by pitching to international journalistic outlets. These commissioning routes emerged along specific national and cultural dimensions.

### Dimensions of transnational arts journalism



Our second key finding was that journalists saw a clear gradient of transnational commissioning power between countries in the Global South and global economic centres in arts journalism. Journalists felt the precarities raised above interrelated with their relationship with a transnational journalistic marketplace. A variety of different approaches to pitching domestically and internationally were observed—leading to the perception that some arts journalists were favoured over others. This thematic finding was clearly delineated along routes which mirrored flows of global capital.

Reflections on these cultural biases were found with the lecturer, arts journalist and blogger working in London and Accra, Ghana mentioned in the previous section. He commented on how there was a dual economy between local blogging subsidised by a workforce employed outside journalism and a global shift in interest in Black music culture driven from the West, which was relatively lucrative, if infrequent.

There's a global interest in African arts and culture at the moment from Afrobeat to Beyoncé. That creates opportunities for local writers to be on international platforms. Let's say *Vogue* wants to do an interview with someone here. They might employ someone locally through contacts or through their work. That's happening with greater frequency. When it happens, that translates well locally because the local currency is weak. In reality it should be possible for an arts writer to sustain themselves well. The problem is demand. I can't think of many people who are [full-time] culture correspondents for this region –  
Journalist working in UK and Ghana

Here he describes here a sense of a local arts journalism economy beholden to a Western drive towards questions of identity and race, with major international publishing companies such as Condé Nast, which publishes US and UK *Vogue*, among other titles, increasingly contacting local journalists and paying them in dollars or pounds sterling. For those who can access these commissioning networks, the spoils are lucrative. However, this infrequent interest isn't enough to sustain a local arts journalist full-time, said the interviewee.

Indeed, a female British-Nigerian arts journalist interviewed—a broadcast journalist, working in English—agreed with this “global interest in African culture,” noting not only a lack of Black writers within the international sub-field, but also entrenched networks of privilege which led to commissioning particular individuals. She highlighted “passport privilege” as an ongoing issue. “I hold dual nationality – British and Nigerian – so I know the ease of jumping on a plane if invited to a biennale to cover it,” she said. “While someone else would need at least a month or two in advance to gather all the documentation, there is still no guarantee that they would get a visa. That affects your ability to expand your storytelling”. Thus those arts journalists in Nigeria who might seek to work internationally, for instance within the European Union, might be clearly disadvantaged by the paperwork around visa applications—bureaucracy unlikely to help with tight journalistic deadlines.

In the interviews here with the Ghanaian and Nigerian journalists, there is a strong emphasis on the structural, racial and global economic power disparities that might regulate arts journalistic expression in a globalised context, suggesting that alongside local, regional, and continental arts journalism – the Ghanaian interviewee highlighted a range of local platforms, blogs, magazines and newspapers, from *OkayAfrica* to South Africa's *Drum* magazine – the international market was of increasing influence in these contexts. However, there were clearly ways that those who had easier access to these economic flows of cash – due to trade links between countries, or personal access to passport privilege which aided international travel – benefited over others.

One silver lining was highlighted by a second male Ghanaian music journalist interviewed, a blogger writing in English, who said the expansion of digital platforms in Ghana is slowly

creating opportunities for more stable work for arts journalists locally. However, global streaming platforms are often reliant on globally mobile capital:

So, with some blogs for example, I know that [Ghanaian music blogger] Swayye Kid now partners, he's the Ghana representative for Boomplay. And Boomplay are one of the biggest music distributors on the African continent. So, think of them as an Africa-based iTunes. And so, he's become their Ghana rep, simply through being a blogger. But he's always had a day job. I think he's an accountant somewhere, this young guy –  
Journalist working in Ghana

This interviewee specifically cites the music streaming service Boomplay, launched in Nigeria in 2015 before expanding internationally, including to Ghana in 2020, and now boasting 75 million users across countries including Cameroon and Kenya. Boomplay's principal funders are Chinese investors Maison Capital and Seas Capital. There is increasing evidence of Chinese state influence in media operations in West Africa, with the Chinese government's Digital Silk Road Initiative pledging to invest \$8.43bn for telecom and digital infrastructure across Nigeria, Zambia, Angola, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe (Chaudhury, 2021) So it is noteworthy that arts reporters in Ghana, though suffering from financial precarity, are beholden to opportunities stemming from Chinese investment in international streaming services, further blurring the boundaries between independent journalism and sponsored content.

For our final example in this section on the dimensions of transnational arts journalism, we will return to the Costa Rican journalist, who reflected that the international arts freelancing market in Costa Rica was delineated by a communications infrastructure that favoured Spanish and American outlets over Latin or Central American alternatives. "It's very important to understand that it's easier for me to get a book that was just published in New York last week than it is for me to get a book, even a bestseller, from Nicaragua or from Panama or from Guatemala because the communication infrastructure, especially in terms of culture, in our nations is very weak," he said, referring to the kinds of books he might read or review as part of his work as a visual art journalist and editor. "And so a lot of the books don't actually circulate, and it's sometimes harder to know a writer from Guatemala than it is to know a writer from Spain, for instance". The journalist emphasised that particular subject matters of interest to the US and European journalistic markets—for instance books in English and Spanish—were easily privileged. Thus the Global North had an economic sway both in terms of the commissioning power of international outlets, and the kinds of subject matter available to the journalists to respond to.

## **RQ2: How do these journalists feel questions of personal identity are relevant to their work and what are the dimensions of concern to them?**

### **Sexuality, gender and ethnicity in arts journalism**

In reference to our second research question, pertaining to questions of personal identity among arts journalists, we will consider quotes from interviewees based in Kosovo, the UK, and Poland. The interviewees from the Global South interviewed for this study almost without exception did not discuss their gender, sexuality or race. In this section our principal finding is that arts journalists from the range of contexts studied felt that there was a tension between their desire to challenge discrimination against particular groups—whether it was lesbian artists, artists of colour, or women—versus a need to downplay questions of identity in their work, whether to normalise minority voices, avoid 'tokenism' or embrace personal confidence. This is demonstrated through the work of an LGBTQi+ arts journalist in Kosovo, the work of two female arts journalists in the UK of South and Western Asian heritage, and a female Polish film

critic. Though these are different kinds of identity in very different contexts, this tension clearly emerged as a common theme in our data.

While some of these observations might be relevant beyond arts journalism, Gripsrud (2017: 184) argues that the concern with identity within the sub-field is because arts journalism, by reporting on artistic production, functions in the public sphere to build a set of shared experiences (in relation to, for instance, sub-cultures or national identities). This promotes empathy by nourishing an understanding of different human experiences, and provide a space for debate with different views in public life.

Turning to our first example, an LGBTQi+ Kosovan theatre journalist working across public relations, television, print and digital, in Albanian and English said there was a tendency for arts journalists who wrote about LGBTQi+ issues to be labelled by their sexuality, leading to a reluctance to engage with LGBTQi+ stories. This partly emerged because of his fears of discrimination. In Kosovo, the majority of the population are Muslim ethnic Albanians, with few openly LGBTQi+ people (Agence France-Presse, 2018).

“In 2013 I got an award from here and the article was about lesbian women in Kosovo, but I do remember at that time I was working for a newspaper and they were hesitating to publish the story,” he said. The journalist made clear that he had experienced difficulties in placing LGBTQi+ stories within a national newspaper at which he was formerly employed; editors’ gatekeeping in relation to heteronormativity extended broadly across the spectrum of journalistic specialisms. The journalist interviewed felt strongly that his own knowledge of the local LGBTQi+ community gave him an advantage over others in telling such stories, and that telling such stories was of personal importance to him. “I think that a journalist can be an activist, [that] somehow you will expose your own beliefs or you cannot be that much detached from your writing,” he added.

However, despite this lack of representation of LGBTQi+ stories in particular contexts, the journalist also described how he saw it as his role to normalise and not fetishise stories of “success” from within the LGBTQi+ community. The journalist explained his desire to provide platforms for representation of LGBTQi+ arts and creativity by including it in this specialist sub-field, as opposed to a subject of journalism within its own right, separate to artistic questions. “For example, I belong to the LGBTQi+ community and I have always tried to cover this community within the culture and art world in Kosovo. I treated successful stories from the members of the community as something very normal and not very extraordinary, that was part of my identity being told via someone else”. Thus we see a tension between challenging questions of representation, while also normalising the work of particular minority groups within the sub-field.

Moving to our second example, two female arts journalists working in the UK described experiences of their work interrelating with their ethnicity. Both interviewees, employed on contract by international or national titles, expressed fears that they might be commissioned to write about topics because of their cultural backgrounds, as opposed to their expertise. In the UK, where questions of diversity within the press have come under increasing scrutiny (Douglas, 2021), journalists have questioned whether superficial attempts to increase diversity within newsrooms lead to journalists having restricted opportunities to write beyond their own identities – in this case reporting on art or theatre produced by particular communities (Wilks-Harper, 2016).

The first female arts journalist based in the UK expressed concern that her background might be used as a reason for commissioning her. “It’s actually almost insulting, that because I’m from [a particular country] that I’m necessarily going to be an expert on all things [from that country] and therefore I would be the right person to write this article,” she said. “I got quite upset about that. And this is the kind of lack of sophistication that gets on my nerves. Just because I’m from [this country] doesn’t mean that I should be the one who’s going to have all the expertise on [that country’s] art. In fact, I don’t”.

The second female journalist based in the UK said that she might have particular expertise writing about a particular community but “would resent being sent to works only by [artists] of colour because I’d feel I was being siloed. I don’t feel I own that territory, or can write about it in a better way. But I can certainly not tread on eggshells and write honestly, and bring a bit more complexity at times”. Again, we see the journalist expressing an ambivalence between providing expertise through her own personal knowledge of a particular topic relating to her identity, versus being defined by her identity over her interests. We argue that there is a clear ethical need to broaden representation within arts journalism, one which challenges a lack of structural diversity at a commissioning and senior editorial level to pay heed to such concerns.

Turning to our final example, the last interviewee which we cite in this study, we saw how a female Polish film journalist working across broadcast and print, in English and Polish, reflected on how her gender might be viewed negatively within the sub-field, citing examples of sexism, and prejudice against motherhood. Sadly these examples match universal studies around gender discrimination, which manifests itself globally with women less likely to occupy senior journalistic managerial roles, and more likely to be freelance (Hanitzsch *et al.*, 2019: 94). The journalist’s interview evidenced a tension between her need to challenge such examples of discrimination, versus a need to minimise its importance and rely on her own confidence as a journalist, independent of any particular identity category.

The journalist said that the #MeToo movement had helped her reconsider how her gender was viewed by the male directors she would regularly interview. It is worth noting that Poland’s ruling Law and Justice Party has long criticised the promotion of gender equality as “gender ideology” (Human Rights Watch, 2019), with film scholars noting discriminatory treatment of women on-screen in Poland and resistance to gender equality within the film community (Gober, 2020). While this arts journalist framed herself as more than capable of standing up to aggressive peers, she also highlighted examples of sexism and abuses of power by interviewees. The journalist did not specify whether the interview(s) in question happened in Poland or elsewhere.

I think one thing you need to know about me is that it’s not that I am very self-confident, but I am very self-assured. I don’t know how to say that. Like, for example, when #MeToo started and all my friends started posting #MeToo, I was like, whoa, not me, never happened to me. And then I realised that I did have situations like that. Not very hard core, but just some, like, an overtly sexual comment from a director you’re interviewing—Polish arts journalist –Journalist working in Poland

Such minimisation of everyday sexism constructs this abuse of power within reporting as harmless, with the reporter rearticulating the need to “rise above” such abuses (Worth *et al.*, 2016). Equally, the reporter is maximising the need to prioritise her own self-assurance over tackling structural discrimination (Orgad and Gill, 2022).

The same journalist also said that motherhood had affected how those commissioning stories might view her work, again ambivalently articulating her fears that she might be seen as less

reliable than her younger female or male peers. “I’m fine, but I am pretty sure some people think that I’m unreliable without even checking if I am. Because they think if I have a kid now, I don’t have a life.” This illustrates previous research about a masculine doxa (De Vuyst and Raeymaeckers, 2019), expressed in journalistic qualities, practices and, most obviously in this comment, status within a news organisation. It also reiterates the findings of older research about the effects on motherhood on the career of female journalists (Elmore, 2007), particularly in regard to career progression and promotion (North, 2016).

In sum, within this section we have seen examples of arts journalists speaking out against discrimination, but also employing different strategies in order to tackle it. In these examples arts journalists have either sought to normalise minority voices through representation within the sub-field, spoken out against tokenisation of their own identity, or sought to normalise unequal treatment and embrace personal expressions of self-assurance.

## Discussion

Despite the breadth of the interviewees covered in this exploratory paper, and the amount of material to cover in a relatively short piece of text, we have seen a number of new questions emerging around arts journalism considered in a global context, and how arts journalists perceived themselves. The journalists interviewed defined themselves and their work in relation to financial instability, national gradients relating to commissioning power across continents, and how that intersected with the financial downturn and the pandemic, forming a perfect storm for such precariously employed practitioners. We saw questions of personal identity and discrimination around sexuality, ethnicity and gender underlined across different countries in Europe.

Even though the values that define professional identity appear to be fluid and in flux, flexible multiple, and culturally contingent – as the work of Fredriksson and Johansson has described (2014) – interviewees from a range of backgrounds expressed commonalities about the precarity of their work, and that they see themselves as existing on the margins or outside traditional newsrooms. This might be a peculiarity of the contemporary arts and cultural sector, particularly in a pandemic setting, where there are large numbers of freelancers (Hanitzsch *et al.*, 2019).

The participants from Ghana, Nigeria and Costa Rica all suggested that commissioning took place along particular networks of economic power. These might include a bias towards funding and gatekeepers stemming from either Europe, China or the Spanish-speaking world, which extend the relevance of theories of global journalism to the sub-field in question (Hellmueller *et al.*, 2016; Lindell and Karlsson, 2016). As Tanikawa writes, such global journalism identifies shared perspectives “of those implicated in common worldwide occurrences such as global warming, natural disasters and wars” (2019: 1422). While on the one hand, we might argue that arts journalism in 2022 could conceivably be conceived of as global, given the transnational production, distribution and consumption of cinema, music and literature, our study extends this conception of global journalism to journalists themselves within the sub-field. However, rather than discursively constructing ideas of ‘the global’ within their work, the journalists interviewed employ working practices that are internationally mobile, fluidly switching their focus between different employers, sometimes in different countries. Some of the participants found such mobility easier than others, describing those without the right passports excluded from particular, privileged journalistic markets.

In relation to personal identity, comments expressed by interviewees related to sexuality, ethnicity and gender, included here because of arts journalism’s perceived relevance to questions

of social and cultural identity (Riegert and Hovden, 2019). It is of concern that, despite the small sample size, some arts journalists still feel marginalised or tokenised due to their sexuality, gender or cultural background, and these experiences are clearly locally contingent to the freedoms of particular cultural and media systems. We saw a journalist in Kosovo describe a fear of “being labelled” as an LGBTQi+ journalist in a country where hate speech against LGBTQi+ people and activists have been accused by Human Rights Watch of being inadequately investigated (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The journalists based in the UK described a fear of being tokenised over and above being valued for their expertise, in a media environment where there is an underrepresentation of journalists from minority groups (Oteka, 2022). In Poland, a female journalist described sexism from those she has interviewed, in a country with a pronounced history of gender inequality (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019).

We should be wary of extrapolating these contingent findings more broadly in such an exploratory paper, but they clearly speak to questions of local and transnational cultural publics, who is allowed to have a voice in them, who is gatekeeping these voices, and the kinds of voices which are permitted to comment on the globally influential arts and entertainment industries.

## Conclusion

This study has made visible a sense of precarity and crisis in the sub-field across different contexts, modulated by the specificity of those lived experiences and the particularities of local realities, along with some of the dynamics of gender, nationality, sexuality and ethnicity of journalists working in the subfield of arts. It has also established how notions of professional and personal identity intersect in those lived experiences, with consequences for various journalistic practices such as commissioning, pitching, access to material, and others.

Given the importance of social and cultural questions to Journalism Studies, the lack of consideration of reporters concerned with questions of cultural production, within arts journalism, or beyond the Global North, especially Western Europe, is something of an anomaly. We hope this exploratory paper raises questions relating to the professional and personal identities of arts journalists in relation to global media industries. It also identifies emergent and present questions around the effects of the pandemic on freelance working practices, the transnational economic gradients of power financing journalists in this context, the social realities of journalists facing discrimination, along with the culturally contingent circumstances of these prejudices within and beyond the sub-field. As such, we suggest this demonstrates further a need to shift research into the arts journalism sub-field beyond local questions, and ask how such a sub-field might manifest in both locally contingent and transnationally dependent ways within the public sphere. Beyond these theoretical questions, these findings might serve as a useful case study for professional and person identity in journalism practice more broadly.

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to the reviewers for their helpful and constructive comments.

## Disclosures statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.



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