

Kate Wright, **Who's Reporting Africa Now? Non-Governmental Organizations, Journalists, and Multimedia**, New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2018, 280 pp., \$41.99 (paperback).

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News coverage of sub-Saharan Africa increasingly draws upon images, videos, and words that were constructed with the support and guidance of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). This is one important point made by Kate Wright in her book **Who's Reporting Africa Now? Non-Governmental Organizations, Journalists, and Multimedia**. But this is far from the only point that Wright is interested in making. Instead, she goes several steps further and asks: Why do mainstream journalists use NGO-curated material? On the flipside, why do NGOs produce or commission this material at all? Finally, how does this material reach news organizations, how do they use it, and "what are the effects of these exchanges on journalism, NGO-work, and the mediated representations of 'Africa' made available to UK audiences?" (p. 17).



In asking these questions, Wright is addressing a number of complex issues that are relevant not only to communications scholars but also to international journalists and news editors. Early in her book, Wright outlines the economic challenges that have plagued the international journalism industries. These challenges include plummeting advertising revenue in the digital age, slashed news budgets, and staff cuts—all of which have made it difficult for foreign desk editors to send journalists and photographers to cover events in sub-Saharan Africa. One of the arrangements that has intensified in this context is the interaction between news organizations and aid NGOs.

Crucially, though, Wright does not only discuss the political economy of this growing interaction; instead, she approaches her research questions through the lens of moral economy theory. According to Wright, this approach "highlights the complex mixtures of compliance and resistance, altruism and self-interest, autonomy and responsibility, protection and dominance—this, in terms of media producers' being situated both inside the market but also working against it" (p. 79). Because moral economy theory is focused on analyzing "the interaction of political economies with normative values" (p. 3), this theory is a productive tool for attending to the complexity of the journalist–NGO relationship, which cannot simply be understood in economic terms. The journalist–NGO relationship must also be understood in terms of the complicated reworking of normative journalistic values at a time when the profession of journalism is often argued to be in a financial and professional predicament (Meikle & Redden, 2010; Picard, 2017; Reinardy, 2011; Russial, Laufer, & Wasko, 2015).

To take this more nuanced approach, Wright deploys a holistic method, which involves the analysis of five separate cases in which a U.K. news organization published material about Africa that had originally

been commissioned by an NGO. Not only does Wright conduct rich textual analyses of the NGO-curated news reports, investigating the semiotic representations of the people the stories feature, she has also conducted 57 semistructured interviews with NGO workers, freelancers, U.K.-based journalists, and—importantly—people based in the countries to which the largely North American or Western European NGO workers and journalists traveled. The fact that Wright brings in the voices of the locally based interpreters and guides hired by the NGO staff is telling. It shows that she has an intellectual (and ethical) commitment to bringing a plurality of cultural perspectives into her own research, alongside highlighting this plurality (or lack thereof) in news coverage about sub-Saharan Africa.

Each of Wright's case studies also reveals this commitment. As she teases out the complicated interactions between NGO officers, freelance journalists, and foreign news editors—interactions that result in major mainstream news outlets publishing photos, videos, and feature stories or blogs that were originally commissioned by aid groups with their own particular agendas—Wright constantly seeks out the testimonies of the local interpreters and guides hired to help the foreign media workers do their job. And though she expertly strikes at the heart of the unique ways in which journalists are reworking their notions of trust, transparency, and accuracy as they engage in this ambivalent dance with NGO workers, Wright also highlights the fact that far too often, the perspectives of sub-Saharan actors still get misrepresented or ignored.

This is part of the reason why the use of moral economy theory is quite effective in each of Wright's case studies. Moral economy theory assists Wright in showing that there are multiple layers to the exchange that is increasingly happening between news editors, freelance journalists, and NGOs. Indeed, the freelance journalist looms large in this book as a figure who simultaneously inhabits both the world of mainstream news reporting and the world of NGO-work. On the one hand, the freelance journalist is able to inspire trust in the desk editors who do not have time to scrutinize the NGO material for bias or inaccuracies. On the other hand, the freelance journalist is able to do projects that "matter" on a normative and even an ethical level when working with NGOs. Not to mention, the NGOs can provide the freelance journalist with safety equipment and risk assessment, something that mainstream news outlets have long struggled to offer their freelance hires (Armoudian, 2016; Cottle, Sambrook, & Mosdell, 2015; Palmer, 2018).

If there are any weaknesses to be found in this book, perhaps one could critique the fact that it is still too soon to answer one of the author's aforementioned research questions: "What are the effects of these exchanges on journalism, NGO-work, and the mediated representations of 'Africa' made available to UK audiences?" (p. 17). While Wright does a phenomenal job of illuminating the effects of the journalist-NGO relationship on the specific representations she is analyzing, more (longitudinal) research is likely necessary to look at the effects these exchanges have on journalism and NGO-work as a whole.

"Nitpicking" aside, Wright's book ultimately offers a revealing look at a complicated relationship between news organizations and NGOs, especially in the context of covering sub-Saharan Africa. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in human rights media, African studies, or international journalism in the digital age.

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