**JRP Canada Podcast Transcript — Episode 6 with Cecilia Arregui Olivera**

*[Upbeat intro music begins. It plays into the background of the voiceover]*

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 00:03

Hi everyone, I'm Anna Maria Moubayed from the JRP Canada team. Welcome to another episode of our Meet the Researchers podcast. Joining me today is Cecilia Arregui Olivera. Cecilia will be presenting at the Between Ideals and Practices conference in May. Can you give us a sneak peek of what you'll be talking about?

**Cecilia Arregui Olivera** 00:22

Yes, sure. So what I will be presenting at the conference is actually what I call a little spin-off of my own PhD dissertation. I actually defended my PhD about three weeks ago now and what I will be presenting at the conference is actually a chapter that did not make it into that final monograph, into the dissertation, although it is slightly related to the main topic of my PhD dissertation. But basically, I did research and journalistic practice in Kenya, and especially how Kenyan journalists and foreign correspondents based in Kenya covered electoral - covered elections in the country and the ethnic violence, that it's related to the elections and terrorism. And in -in focusing on that, on how they covered how they practice their profession, in the coverage of those -of those specific issues, I started to get this sort of interest in the sort of interplay between the local journalists that write for Kenyan news media, and the foreign correspondents that are based in Nairobi, Nairobi being like a very big international hub of journalism because a lot of foreign outlets have bureaus or correspondents based there.

**Cecilia Arregui Olivera** 01:41

And even though traditionally, we tend to say, "Oh these people live in separate worlds, and you know, the locals and the foreign correspondents never meet. And in fact, they are interested in different types of stories." And that is, indeed true. But what I am sort of presenting in this conference is the fact that even if they do not collaborate very closely to each other, even if they don't meet each other, very often, that constant awareness of each other, and what each other are publishing, and what each other are doing, really, really shapes how these separate groups of the foreign correspondents and local journalists think about their own journalistic roles and also perform their own journalistic roles. And so this is kind of what I will be talking about in the pre-conference.

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 02:27

Oh, wow, that's very interesting. And in your research, you look at the different kinds of journalists and different groups of journalists. So reporters, editors, media critics, foreign correspondents. I'm interested to know what are some key differences between those groups when it comes to ideals and practices?

**Cecilia Arregui Olivera** 02:46

Oo, okay. So And I guess one thing to say as well is these lines are very much blurred. And the ways that I made this distinctions were, especially for my PhD project was basically on which sort of media outlet they work for, and they publish for and because I sampled them, sort of based on content, they had already published, that was the way I sort of categorize them as foreign or as local. But I also argue that these groups are very, very blurred. And there's, you know, Kenyans writing for foreign outlets, foreigners that have been in Kenya for long enough or have in fact, sort of grown up in the country writing for local media or foreign media or a combination of both. We have fixers that maybe write for local media, but also artists fixers for the foreigners. So you know, I also want to sort- of my next step with this project is to swell to sort of complicate this - the limitations even further.

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 03:48

Now, you've already touched upon this a little bit, but just looking at the interaction between international and local reporters in Nairobi, can you explain a little further how this relationship affects their roles and practices

**Cecilia Arregui Olivera** 04:01

When it comes to the differences in them, well, of course, when I say local journalist, I am talking about national Kenyan journalists that publish for Kenyan mainstream newspapers at a national level. And then when I say foreign correspondents, in my study, I focus mostly on foreign correspondents from mainstream newspapers from the United Kingdom and the United States, those that are based either in Nairobi full time or in South Africa, but came to Nairobi for the coverage of the elections in 2017. And some of these Interplay that I've been talking about, some of these differences is that on the one hand, I think there has been a lot of sort of talk among foreign correspondents in Africa, but also elsewhere of this notion that foreign correspondents usually are sort of depict the regions of the world that they cover in a very like stereotypical negative lens and for that matter, sort of Kenyan journalists, because this is a case I study, try to sort of counter like, because they're aware that there is that narrative that foreign correspondents tend to focus on this what they call Afro-pessimism lens, where it's all about farming, poverty, war, all the negative aspects, right? They try very actively in their own work to sort of counterbalance some of these narratives, while at the same time looking up to those foreign correspondents because at the same time, they do want to sort of also replicate some of the practices of how the New York Times does it, how CNN does it.

**Cecilia Arregui Olivera** 05:34

So it's very, it's this very interesting dichotomy, on the one hand, trying to replicate those sort of powerful media outlets that we all look up to while whilst also sort of trying to counterbalance some of this narratives that only comes to the foreign correspondents. There is there is some research actually by [Toussaint Nothias that talks about this notion of postcolonial reflexivity](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340866616_Postcolonial_Reflexivity_in_the_News_Industry_The_Case_of_Foreign_Correspondents_in_Kenya_and_South_Africa). And it's this notion that foreign correspondents are sort of aware of this traditional sort of critique that they have received that can be in some cases merited and sometimes known, but it's beyond the point, they are aware that there is this discussion going on about the role, and how they do cover, sort of the region of the world that they're based in.

**Cecilia Arregui Olivera** 06:16

And this postcolonial reflexivity also plays a role in their own awareness of what they can do in order to sort of counterbalance some of these narratives and when they can't, as well, because relationships with interests and with the outlets at home, and what they're looking for, et cetera, also come into play in this debate.

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 06:34

That is so incredibly interesting. Now, your research includes 35 interviews with journalists, a few other researchers on this podcast have noted how challenging it can be to get them to talk was that your experience as well?

**Cecilia Arregui Olivera** 06:49

My experience interviewing journalists actually has been quite positive. Maybe I need to say - start by saying that I conducted this 35 interviews as part of my PhD project. However, I was working in the context of Kenya and Nairobi, journalists have come before that since my master's. So I already had some sort of incipient network of journalists in that setting, that sort of, I already had some open doors, before I started interviewing them for this specific project that I'm presenting now.

**Cecilia Arregui Olivera** 07:24

At the same time, I am a journalist, I practiced as a journalist originally before I moved on to being a researcher. And I think I am really sort of aware of that, and how I can use that as a way to sort of get my participants to connect with me and feel comfortable talking to me in terms of getting interviews, I think, actually, my original network really, really helped. And then once I was there in Nairobi, because I also did participant observation, and I spent a lot of time in the newsrooms so a lot of people started seeing me regularly, and that sort of spike their curiosity. And then a lot more people that I actually interviewed sort of came to me wanting to talk to me. So that was a way of like, originally getting them. But then, even then, when you're interviewing them, getting to the point of trust, where they open up, because I was actually asking them a lot about - a lot about their challenges and their practices in their reporting of conflict and that is, you know, very often journalists start talking about what they know people think they should be doing, rather than what they actually did. Because there's this performative aspect of like, okay, we know what journalism is, and what journalism should do. So let's just say we did that rather than sort of open up about all the obstacles and the challenges that we face. And that's when sort of my own background, my own positionality and opening up to them, helped me get to that layer and that level with them as well.

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 08:48

And why do you think it's important to study journalistic roles?

**Cecilia Arregui Olivera** 08:52

I find studying journalistic roles fascinating and when I started in this world of academia, I often had this frustration that a lot of the research tended to focus a lot on the text only without sort of looking at the behind the scenes at the journalists and how they journalists create this text on how they sort of all these challenges and obstacles that they navigate. And I think, sort of journalistic roles, and especially the different dimensions, right, because there's the, you know, the role conceptions and the role and Nachman and the role performance or like, how they - their norms and the values but then what they actually end up doing and then how they talk about what they did. I think all these different layers of journalistic roles really allow me to tap into these different layers of journalism, which all are so so important to understand. From my own personal viewpoint, I am trying to bring the journalists voices at this at the core of the of the discussion

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 09:50

And what's one presentation you're really looking forward to hearing?

**Cecilia Arregui Olivera** 09:55

One of the things I'm actually particularly sort of looking forward to about the Coming pre-conference is the keynote by Claudia Mellado, I have been following her work for a long time, but I've never met her before in person. And as another sort of Latin American researcher in this realm of journalism and journalists, some journalistic roles, more specifically, I look up to her. And for that matter, I am very much looking forward to her talk specifically.

**Cecilia Arregui Olivera** 10:26

And then more generally, something that I really appreciate about this pre-conference is the sort of interest in sort of also bridging this gap between practitioners and researchers and academics. And that is also one of my own personal passions in this world, finding different ways to collaborate to build these bridges. And for that, I'm also quite interested I'm looking forward to it.

**Anna Maria Moubayed** 10:50

*[Outro music fades in]* Thank you once again, Cecilia, for joining us today. And thank you to our listeners for tuning in for this episode of Meet the Researchers

*[End music. End of podcast episode]*.