

The importance of precarity to nineteenth-century journalism and the similarities and differences between journalism in the nineteenth century and today

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The precarity of journalism has a global and historical context. According to Örnebring (2020), more and more professions are becoming precarious, and journalism, in particular, is in this anomaly. In the history of precarity in journalism, writing is a means and a pathway between two phases or ranks rather than a profession, and it is difficult for people to do it for a living. Therefore, most practitioners have an excellent educational background, wealth, and social status. On the contrary, those at the bottom of journalism who are in the opposite situation face many problems and challenges, such as low income, low social status, and high mental stress.

Despite the above difficulties, journalism has yet to choose to solve its problems with unionization, preferring individual action. Professional culture and literary traditions can not only solve the identity problems of journalism's respectability and social status but also explain why journalists feel attracted to the precarity of journalism and reflect the importance of precarity to journalism in the 19th century.

Bohemianism is a crucial part of the news culture system, and Larrikin is a particular image and journalistic identity in the professional culture of Australian journalism (Örnebring, 2020). Both impact journalists' unconventional lifestyles and professional ideals and are why precarity has a vital role and appeal in journalism.

Firstly, in Bohemian culture, the disadvantages of journalism are glorified Örnebring (2020). Accepting lower pay and less security means journalists will give up material

desires and reduce physical needs. Uncertain working hours mean they are willing to travel for the truth, accept potentially harsh working conditions, and even confront evil forces. For example, during America's Gilded Age in the 19th century, journalists worked together to expose the plight of workers, criticize arrogant regimes, and defend the interests of the underprivileged. Even though President Roosevelt ridiculed them as "Muckrakers", their high level of solidarity and solid professional convictions led them to redefine the term. This noble pursuit is compatible with literary romance. Journalists exert more energy and enthusiasm in the news to obtain spiritual satisfaction and maintain a sacred professional identity.

Secondly, this kind of journalistic professional culture emphasizes individual genius and characteristics, and journalists achieve achievements through their efforts and progress, thereby obtaining financial returns and social status promotion, which satisfies the identity of journalists as independent creators and the pursuit of independence and freedom without being tied to an employment relationship as workers. Therefore, the above deeply reflects the importance of precarity to journalists' professional ideals, values, and self-identity. Certainly, precarity also encourages journalists to enhance their professional capabilities and deepen their professionalism.

There are many similarities and differences between journalism in the nineteenth century and today. Undoubtedly, precarity runs through journalism to this day.

In terms of salary, initially, there was and still is a problem of low pay in journalism. Örnebring (2020) mentioned that in the 19th century, British journalists rarely had fixed salaries, and the average annual salary of American journalists was about \$1,100 to \$1,500. Compared with the 19th century, the salary level of journalism in the 21st century has increased slightly. However, it is still low compared with other professions, and freelancers earn less than half the wages of hired journalists (Gollmitzer, 2019). Moreover, journalism payment methods have changed. In the past, the United States paid journalists according to "space and time", but now, for formally employed journalists, it is more used as a fixed salary or royalties (Gollmitzer, 2019). Nevertheless, this still reflects the precarity of journalists' salaries.

Regarding security, Örnebring (2020) mentioned that in the 19th century, journalism had little job security. In current journalism, the security of journalists is still a problem unless some journalists are formally employed or working in state units. For example, in China, permanent staff enjoy five social insurances and one housing fund, wages and benefits, and allowances and subsidies. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no need to worry too much about salary. Nonetheless, this "security" is only for a few people. As in the 19th century, today's journalism industry does not lack talents and applicants. In China, which has a huge population advantage, the supply of journalism jobs is in short supply. Moreover, this "supply" is often not objectively "limited" because some bosses want to maximize the labour force, forcing one person to complete the workload of two people or even a team, thereby saving costs.

Whether in the past or now, journalists' stress and mental health problems cannot be ignored. In the 19th century, low income, insecurity, and irregular working hours were all central reasons for the mental stress of journalists. However, in the digital age, journalists have more sources of stress, and competitive pressures are also increasing. Unlike the 19th century, new technologies undeniably enabled journalists to transcend space and reduce movement (Örnebring, 2010). Network journalism also shows the advantage that "news can be produced and circulated quickly and journalism can be interactive and innovative" (Cohen, 2015, p. 100). These technological advances can indeed reduce some of the workload of journalists and improve the work efficiency of journalists. However, just because the content generated by users continues to increase, the speed of news dissemination continues to accelerate, so journalists need to devote more energy to striving for news and generating and publishing news in a shorter time to gain broader public attention and surpass competitors in the industry. These results, in turn, affect journalists' salaries and security. Therefore, in current journalism, this is not only pressure from money, time, and technology but also journalists' level, industry changes, and social requirements.

Additionally, the situation of women in journalism has not been optimistic. Örnebring (2020) mentioned that in the 19th century, female journalists earned less than men, and they usually considered welfare secondarily, which deeply reflected the extreme insecurity of women in journalism. According to a 2014 study of American journalists,

men still dominate management positions (Gollmitzer, 2019). In other words, women still do not have an equal voice in journalism. Also, due to women's pregnancy and childbirth, women often struggle and are discriminated against in various industries, and it is even more difficult in journalism, which is characterized by precarity. However, female journalists have advantages and play unique roles in the news industry. Nowadays, more and more women are working in journalism.

In conclusion, the romanticization of precariousness by professional culture has important implications for journalism. There are many similarities and differences between the 19th century and current journalism in terms of salary, security, stress, and the situation of female journalists.

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