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Invisible in This Visual World? Work and Working Conditions of Female Photographers in the Global South

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies have shed light on the masculine nature of the doxa that underpins the field of photography. Other studies have explored the patterns of inequity faced by local-foreign photographers in the Global South who straddle a transnational field of photography within which actors from the Global North and South collaborate but residual economic and symbolic power remain with agents and institutions centred in the Global North. This study draws upon and extends both these lines of inquiry through exploring the professional experiences of 20 female-identifying photographers based in 18 countries across four different geo-cultural regions in the Global South. The article discusses their experiences of marginalisation as marked by three broader themes: *precarity*, *isolation* and *invisibility/partial visibility*. Through this, the article highlights how the gender-based exclusions shown to be inherent in the doxa of national fields of photography may be understood to be additionally intersected by geo-cultural exclusions in what is recognised as cosmopolitan capital within the doxa of local-foreign photographic practice.

Introduction

In the last few years, transnationally comparative data about the photographic profession globally have emerged (Hadland, Campbell, and Lambert 2015; Hadland, Lambert, and Barnett 2016; Hadland and Barnett 2018a), and ethnographic studies have illuminated the key nodes of transnational exchanges within the global image industries (Gürsel 2016; Ilan 2019). However, critical, qualitative studies exploring the work of photographers have largely retained a focus on particular national contexts, rather than adopt transnationally comparative frameworks (e.g., Bourdieu et al. [1965] 1990; Rosenblum 1978; Lindblom 2015; Somerstein 2020a, 2020b; Mollerup and Mortensen 2020; Mitra 2017, 2020). Two recent developments within the latter area are exploration of gender-based marginalisation (Campbell and Critcher 2018; Hadland and Barnett 2018b; Somerstein 2020a, 2020b; Lough 2020) and of inequities facing photographers based in the Global South who work for international media organisations centred in the Global North (Mollerup and Mortensen 2020; Mitra 2017, 2020). Our goal is to extend the

scope of both areas, as well as align the critical perspectives they generate, by exploring the professional experiences of female-identifying photographers from the Global South.

For this purpose, we interviewed 20 professional photographers who identified as female and from, and/or with substantial ties to, 18 countries across sub-Saharan Africa, South and South-East Asia, Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Through thematic analysis, we provide a comparative understanding of the gendered experiences of these female photographers while considering the geo-cultural inequities they experience in their transnational work.

Theoretical Framework

Our interpretative framework is informed by the conceptual distinctions offered by Bourdieu between social, cultural, and economic capitals (1986) as well as his explicatory model of the functions and importance of such capitals within a "field" of cultural production (1993). We also rely on Bourdieu's concept of doxa: the objective and internalised "presuppositions" (Bourdieu 1990, 68) that fundamentally structures the relationships between agents within a field. Doxa encompasses the structures and hierarchies of a field *and* the rules of the game that are unquestioned by the agents within the field. In effect, the "continuity of meaning" (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher 2002, 42) provided by the doxa to a field of cultural production provides relative stability to a field in relation to other fields of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993).

While building on these concepts, we rely on recent extensions by scholars of Bourdieu's fundamental concepts to understand gender-related and geo-cultural patterns within the field of media and journalism. We discuss these below.

Understanding Gender-based Marginalisation of Photographers

Rather than viewing gender as an external factor, we understand photography as a *gendered* field of cultural practice (Ruoho and Torkkola 2018; Hadland and Barnett 2018b, 2013–2014; *Cf*. Campbell and Critcher 2018). As such, our understanding of the masculine doxa in the field of photography closely follows that of De Vuyst and Raeymaeckers (2019, 558) about journalism,

> Because women were traditionally excluded from journalism, male journalists had the opportunity to define the doxa or the taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs about prevalent journalistic practices, important journalistic qualities, and the distribution of status in the field.

Though true for journalism broadly, photojournalism especially is a field where masculinity has hegemonic status (Assaf and Bock 2021, 3–4). Somerstein, through recent investigations of the gendered experiences of female photographers in the United States (2020a, 2020b, 2021), has shown how hegemonic masculinity shapes the doxa of photographic practice and circumscribes women photographers' access to social, cultural, and economic capitals within it, effectively rendering them invisible within the professional field. Crucially, Somerstein's study (2020a, 2020b) shows that gendered exclusions within the field of photojournalism need also be understood through an intersectional lens (Brah and Phoenix 2004). "Invisibility of professional female editorial photographers … is most evident when considering intersections of race, gender, and age", Somerstein

(2020b, 8) found. The race-based exclusions that intersect with the masculine nature of the doxa of the field of photographic practice, show, we argue, the need for a broader exploration of the geo-cultural inequities inherent in their transnational field of local-foreign photographic practice marked by ethnic differences among agents.

Understanding the Marginalisation of "Local-foreign" Photographers

To refer to practice within a transnational media landscape, we use the term "local-foreign" (following Hamilton and Jenner 2004; Mitra and Paterson 2019, 1674) photography. We understand this field as still marked by a North–South divide in its distribution of symbolic and economic power. As described by Gürsel (2016), it is a space where "images and image-brokers of all kinds—photographers, editors, and agents—circulate and influence each other and yet remain geographically, institutionally, and culturally *situated*" (28; emphasis added). Her study, as well as Ilan's (2019), shows how the geospatial distribution of the most powerful "image-brokers" in this transnational field still follows the "old" North–South pattern. When it comes to the institutions, organisations, and actors who hold residual symbolic and economic power within the field continue to be situated in the Global North.

Lough's (2021) recent investigation of the metajournalistic discourse surrounding evaluation of photojournalistic images by judges of prestigious industry awards in the United States demonstrates how this residual symbolic power tends to be *situated* geo-culturally. Lough found that judges were prone to discussing misrepresentations of geo-culturally distant peoples and places when evaluating award entries. Lough (2021) found that such awareness only superficially affected the decision-making process but noted that it might pave the way for industry change in representation of distant peoples and societies. In this context, Lough found that judges' discussions considered "both who the subject is and how the subject was being depicted" (315). It is not recorded whether they considered *who is doing the photographing*, i.e., the positionality of the photographer vis-à-vis the place or people being photographed. This absence captured in Lough's study (2021) shows how the geo-cultural loci of symbolic power within local-foreign photojournalism can remain unquestioned and form part of the doxa.

Studies exploring these power relationships at work within local-foreign photography from the point of view of photographers situated farther from these loci of residual power are scarce. However, local-foreign news-work more broadly has been investigated thoroughly in particular national contexts, as well as through transnationally comparative frameworks, to understand commonalities and differences in this type of journalistic labour (Plaut and Klein 2019; Palmer 2019), including those related to gender (Palmer and Melki 2018; Palmer 2019, 102–4). Studies show that local-foreign news-workers' practices are marked by their position *beyond* nationally bounded professional fields. "They can be thought of as belonging to two fields of journalism: they physically inhabit a journalism field in geographic space, while at the same time producing content that meets the expectations of a field located elsewhere," Moon (2019, 1717) observed. In his ethnographic study, Hannerz (2004) distinguished between two types of foreign correspondents: "spiralists," who stay on the move, and "settlers," who base themselves in one place. Studies exploring commonalities in the labour of local-foreign news-workers globally suggest they do not fit neatly into either type (*cf.* Palmer 2019; Plaut and Klein 2019).

Instead, locally based news-workers catering to distant audiences, we argue, are best described as perpetual *straddlers* of their national fields and a transnational, local-foreign one, with the latter functioning with its own boundaries, its own agents and relationships between them shaping this field's boundaries, as well as its own doxa governing these relationships (Murrell 2015, 1–22).

Studies conducted among local-foreign news-workers (Murrell 2015; Palmer 2019; Moon 2019) show that local-foreign news-workers strive to gain social, cultural, and embodied capitals important within their profession's transnational field to access its economic and symbolic capital. We understand these precursor capitals that local-foreign news-workers must draw upon as *specific* types of "cosmopolitan capital" which, following Lindell and Danielsson, are "defined as those resources that individuals draw upon in order to gain or maintain their social positions as fields become increasingly transnational" (2017, 54; see also Lindell and Karlsson 2016). In the particular case of local-foreign news-work, where the practice is essentially (rather than increasingly) transnational, the most important form such cosmopolitan capital takes is recognition of local-foreign news-workers' competency in intercultural mediation between self; their foreign peers, colleagues, and higher-ups; and the organisations and audiences they serve near and far; as well as the societies where they are based and where they work (Palmer 2019, 139–41; Murrell 2015, 150–1; Mitra 2020, 808–810). In effect, this cosmopolitan capital—embodied and symbolic capitals marking the ability of an individual to transcend geo-cultural boundaries—is both a prerequisite and a product of their work.

Our understanding of these nuances in the field of local-foreign photography is lacking, although photographers from the Global South working transnationally have always been part of the field of local-foreign news-work (Seo 2016). A few recent studies offer glimpses of local-foreign professional photographers' practices in specific national contexts in the Global South (Mollerup and Mortensen 2020; Mitra 2017, 2020). These studies have noted a lack of access to economic capital in the transnational field as a result of geo-cultural inequities. E.g. Mitra (2017) found that the relative lack of access to foreign image-brokers compared with their international counterparts meant that Afghan local-foreign photographers saw their status as that of "fourth-hand photographers" (64). Mollerup and Mortensen (2020) observed in Syria that "Agreements between local photographers and international news organisations made it easier to use the work of local photographers, but they did not render the work of local photographers financially sustainable" (740).

In our view, the recent studies highlighting patterns of gender-based marginalisation in specific national fields, when viewed with that faced by local-foreign photographers based in the Global South, point to the need for a comparative exploration of the work and working conditions of female-identifying local-foreign photographers based in the Global South, in terms of not only access to economic capital but also gender-related and geo-cultural barriers to acquiring the social and cultural capitals that underpin access to economic capital.

Research Goals

In sum, this study is inspired by disparate evidence indicating that gender-related exclusions shape the field of photographic practice, as well as by emerging evidence that, in

the case of the field of transnational photographic practice, geo-cultural exclusions to access to cultural, social, and economic capitals may exist for photographers based in the Global South. Our goal here is to understand how these marginalisations intersect in the experiences of female local-foreign photographers from the Global South.

Methodology

This exploratory study is based on a purposive sample selected for context (Bryman 2016, 420). Between March and May 2020, we conducted semi-structured interviews with participants in mentorship programmes offered by Native Agency and Women Photograph,[1] two transnational, nonprofit initiatives whose stated missions are to empower photographers from traditionally marginalised groups. All interviews were in English except for one conducted in French. They consisted of pre-formulated questions based on research outlined above, as well as follow-up questions guided by responses. We interviewed twenty female-identifying photographers based in or having substantial ties to countries in South and South-East Asia (SSEA), sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Their names are confidential, and the countries they hail from are withheld to protect their identities. Table 1 shows the distribution of the geo-cultural regions represented by the photographers.

Because the mentorship programmes run by Native Agency and Women Photograph are not aimed at specific genres of photography, and because these boundaries are fluid for practitioners (see e.g., Hadland, Campbell, and Lambert 2015, 15), we did not specifically seek photographers working in documentary or editorial photography or photojournalism. However, barring one respondent working primarily as a visual artist using the photographic medium, the overwhelming majority described their work as within the scope of photojournalism, visual journalism, editorial photography or documentary photography. We primarily focus on their accounts. Table 2 presents the photographers' self-described professional roles.

We arrived at our findings through iterative, reflexive transcript analysis to identify emergent themes following Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield (2015, 222–48). We maintained interpretive quality by staying close (Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield 2015, 246) to the interview data at all stages.

Experiences of Marginalisation

While we are primarily invested in understanding the marginalisation these photographers face within the field of local-foreign photography, we found it important to also trace their experiences of access to economic, social, and cultural capital within their

Table 1. x.

Region	Number of participants
Latin America & Caribbean	3
Middle East & North Africa	3
Sub-Saharan Africa	4
South & South-East Asia	10[a]
Total	**20**

[a]One photographer said she also had ties with a country outside this region.

Table 2. x.

Self-chosen professional descriptor	Number of participants
Photojournalist	4[a]
Photographer	5
Documentary photographer	7
Photographer "more into visual arts"	1
Visual storyteller	1
Storyteller	1
Narrative journalist	1
Total	**20**

[a]One identified as both photojournalist and documentary photographer; another as both a journalist and photojournalist.

national fields of photography, as well as in their local-foreign work. This approach serves two purposes. First, while we are unable to provide meaningful analysis of all 18 distinct national contexts, an overall picture emerges regarding commonalities in the gendered experiences of female photographers across four geo-cultural regions in the Global South. Second, their experiences within national fields provide important context for their experiences as local-foreign photographers, and their insights acknowledged an implicit interplay and overlap.

Three overarching themes emerged from the photographers' accounts of their experiences of marginalisation: precarity, isolation, and invisibility/partial visibility.[2]

Precarity

Within an already precarious profession marked by increasing freelancification and casualisation of labour (Thomson 2018; Hadland and Barnett 2018a), fear of political repression and censorship, coupled with gender-based violence, exacerbated the precarity experienced by those interviewed. As a photographer from SSEA described,

> And also as a female photojournalist, safety is a huge thing. Because … there is a lot of censorship in the media, so we have to always be concerned about our own safety … of course the basic safety issues as a female in a male-dominat[ed] country.

Such gendered experiences of precarity were all too common. A photographer from another country in the SSEA region mentioned,

> when you go out on the street to take photos or you go out and show up at an assignment, people will just say "OK, seriously?" And also sexual harassment at work, and the working environment is also very hostile. It's not easy to go out on the street to take photos, especially when it's empty areas. You'll become a really easy target.

Another photographer from the LAC region described a situation echoing that of her peers in Asia, and she noted the lasting psychological effect of such constant precarity,

> And something else is that working here as a woman is particularly hard because we feel unsafe, and people don't understand what this means. It means that your work can be affected by fear … . It gets in the back of your head.

While physical and psychological aspects of precarity transcended the nature of the employers or of work, interviewees often distinguished the national and local-foreign contexts of economic precarity. They often described actual or potential economic

precarity as shaping their professional choices. While the difficulty in making a living affects photographers more widely, most interviewees linked it to the national fields of photography in the countries they were based in and to a much lesser extent to their local-foreign work. A photographer from the SSEA region's response was typical,

> In this occupation, the biggest obstacle is, number one, no certainty of work. We work independently. I mean, if we don't have resource, it is very difficult to work … [in a] a third world country.

The photographers mentioned comparative lack of employment opportunities or regular freelance work within their national fields. One photographer from the LAC region said,

> [A]ll the positions are taken, and most of them are men. So a recent dynamic [is] that people from [one newspaper] or male photographers from [another newspaper] moved to [the former] and vice versa, so there's like already … those spots are compromised while those men continue to work. So, if you want to work as a freelance photographer for publications, you would have to look outside of the [country] because there's just no space.

Many others mentioned limited availability of grants or other funding to support self-led projects in their base countries or regions. For example, a photographer from the SSEA region described having neither "space" nor "platforms" to work on self-directed projects within the national field of photography. In turn, she said that she, and other local documentary photographers,

> who can access and see the international photography scene, they try to have their space in the broader, regional space, because inside the country we have no space.

The economic precarity they experienced and anticipated in their national fields was closely linked, as above, to motivation to seek the economic reward of employment, freelance work, commissions, or grants available within the field of local-foreign photography. For many, the need to work within the transnational field was also fuelled by a hope of transcending gender-based discrimination in access to jobs in their national fields.

The economic precarity the photographers experienced within their national fields could be seen as linked to the lack of opportunities to develop the social and cultural capital necessary to succeed in the field of photography (nationally or transnationally). Many pointed to limited opportunities to gain professional knowledge in their countries or regions. While they most often mentioned the lack of opportunities to learn in non-institutional settings, such as workplaces, some said this lack also included institutional learning. E.g. a photographer from the LAC region said that she received the last internship position offered for photographers in her country and that, since then,

> … there are no schools that offer photojournalism courses; the few newspapers that exist … stopped offering internships; … there is no mentorship programme … . It's very complicated to get into this field … . I don't know how else students interested in photojournalism … will get opportunities … if it's not applying to … programmes [in a country in the Global North].

Transcending limitations of national contexts—and also exclusions based on the masculine doxa underpinning the profession of photography in these contexts—to find transnational opportunities and rewards, however, often came with continued marginalisation in access to economic capital. Linking her experience of lack of opportunities within the national field to the transnational field, one photographer from the SSA region mentioned,

> There're specific gatekeepers, mainly white men in the industry … globally … . I mean, it goes higher than just the photographers on the ground. It's obviously systematic.

The photographers saw it essential to cultivate the social and cultural capital prized within the field of local-foreign photography by these specific gatekeepers, the powerful image-brokers within the transnational field. As a photographer from a different country in the SSA region mentioned,

> And people started giving me a chance after I got a certificate from Berlin, so that's funny. Yeah. So even though I get jobs, I get jobs because I know, "Oh, I have a fancy degree from somewhere or … I got a thumbs up from someone from Europe, so now" … . I could see a steady change. Once I show the paper, they say, "OK, let's talk … ."

These women noted the essential value of their country-specific knowledge—cultural and linguistic—but recognised that the transnational field placed a higher value on credentials from educational institutions or imprimaturs of other sanctioning agents or entities based in the Global North. These were, of course, not within the reach of all. One photographer from the MENA region described starting her own "school," as she could not travel outside her country to study,

> like going through YouTube, articles, studying different journals, magazines from different places around the world. It was really, really hard for me to understand such terms and stuff. I've been studying for maybe two years … .

Most often, photographers said they needed social and cultural capital in the form of knowledge about opportunities, as well as about behavioural expectations, linguistic codes, and access to professional networks necessary to acquire the economic and symbolic capitals they sought within the transnational field. As a photographer from the SSA region said,

> I actually worked full-time for four years as a principal photographer and videographer, and I just quit my full-time job to pursue freelancing so I can have time to work on my personal projects, and I'm finding it difficult to get funding. There's also still like a language around proposals and all of those things. And … if you don't speak like that or you don't sound like that or you're not academic, then there's that limitation.

Another photographer mentioned the importance of social capital, noting its lack among practitioners in the photographic community in her country in the MENA region,

> Some people don't have the access at all to any of those information. And so they are left behind. They don't really know what's going on. They have stories, … they work. But I think partly, with all the system being just flowing, I think the one thing that [they] really might lag someone behind is their education. I mean, in [home country] we have, like if I can tell you, thousands of photographers, thousands. And it's only like small amounts that actually know how to move in their career.

Often, the photographers saw English skills as essential cultural capital for receiving freelance assignments or commercial and philanthropic support for self-led projects within the transnational field. As a photographer from the SSEA region mentioned,

> I didn't know how to pitch stories to … different agencies. And also grant writing, … my first language is not English; it's really tough for me to write grant properly.

But they recognised that the insider knowledge they needed to cultivate to gain access to the economic capital in the transnational field went beyond language and depended on social capital gained from proximity to powerful image-brokers, such as commissioning editors based in the prominent "media capitals" (Curtin 2003) in the Global North. A photographer from the SSEA region said that, while she

> didn't even know how to pitch to international media, I was writing in English even when I was working for the national media in [my country] and … I think I could have saved a lot of time if I already knew or if I had a community, because a network within journalism or photojournalism is super important, because it's also a matter of trust when editors assign photographers to work on an assignment.

In sum, the photographers said that, while they could do little to change their circumstances as far as physical and psychological precarity, they sought to redress the economic precarity they faced. Their experiences with lack of access to economic capital in the profession were also gendered. The increased likelihood of facing such gender-based economic marginalisation in the Global South is borne out by large-scale data as well (Hadland and Barnett 2018b). But the photographers' access to economic and symbolic capitals within the field of local-foreign photography also depended on acquiring specific social and cultural capitals. In this context, geographical mobility allowing proximity to the Global North was important. In their accounts, this geographical isolation from the Global North was linked to a much broader sense of isolation experienced by the photographers.

Isolation

The theme of isolation as described in interviews cut across professional spaces, extending across national fields and the field of local-foreign photography. The photographers described the sense of being segregated when on assignments, within their workplaces, and within their profession and societies because of their gender.

One photographer from the SSA region described how,

> I worked at [name of national media organisation], for the newspaper for like a year when I just graduated in 2014 from my studies. That was like my first professional job as a photographer … . There were like certain things that they would send me on because I was a woman, and not necessarily getting to photograph the things that I wanted to. Even now, it's like, I mean people don't think that I'm capable of going into situations and photographing it. I don't think they take you as seriously.

These experiences of segregation from male colleagues, peers, and seniors were underpinned by wider societal segregation based on the idea that photography was "not a woman's job." As a photographer from a different country in the SSA region described,

> When I am in the field, often people underestimate me and think that I cannot do better. I can't do it like a man … . [You come] with the camera and say you are a photographer? Show us first what you have already done. They don't believe right away. You have to show them things, proofs to believe you. But it's also a problem because, in my region, there are not many female photographers.

The historically and culturally entrenched exclusion of female photographers within the profession was a common theme across regions. A photographer from the SSEA region

described being singled out as a woman both on the streets working as a photographer and within her former workplace,

> They [thought] that it's better to have a male photographer get more work because they have a family to feed, whereas a female photographer doesn't really need to work, you know, because that's the mindset, because most girls are housewives in [my country], and few of them work, so you know like that is another thing that you have to fight for in a work space.

This male doxa of photography in their national fields meant, in turn, few female peers or seniors to turn to for professional mentoring, career advice (or advancement), or psychological support. Such support was considered important because the photographers felt male peers or seniors lacked a full understanding of their gendered experiences. In some cases, this lack of solidarity from male counterparts was exacerbated when the act of working with male seniors could mean humiliation or even sexual harassment. One photographer from the SSEA region mentioned how, as a trainee, she would be made to keep watch over men's kitbags while they were busy shooting:

> I think I was kind of shocked by some people's behaviour in [regional capital city] because some people they really insulted me. "You are not from [the city], you are a woman, you can't do this, you can't do that."

One photographer from the LAC region described an encounter, when starting out as a photographer in her country, with a "guy that hired people [who] wanted … he wanted to work with me, but for the wrong reasons." Both these photographers contextualised these experiences as intensifying their isolation within the professional fields in their regions or countries, as they had very few women peers.

As mentioned before in the local-foreign context, in their efforts to acquire social and cultural capital in the transnational field, several photographers described barriers to mobility to the Global North as contributing factors to their sense of isolation. They felt left out of professional networks, mentorships, educational institutions, and learning opportunities that *mattered* in the local-foreign field. Some typical responses were,

> I mean, if you're talking about access to editors, of course, we don't have many options here in Southeast Asia. You know, if you're talking about all this really big publications mostly located in the States or obviously in Europe. So there's this tendency where we sometimes have to travel to photo festivals like in Perpignan or Arles, for an example … . Just generally, if we have, probably [we] had to put in the money to go down and … meet up with editors.

> Getting work from editors from a distance [is] so [difficult] … . My colleague who has a lot of access in USA, London, European countries, they can go to the editor to meet them, present their work. They are attending portfolio reviews, [and] we don't have that access.

Thus isolation—encompassing segregations based on gender and ethnicity, as well as psychological, physical, and geographical isolation more broadly—cut across the photographers' experiences in both their national and local-foreign fields. The important difference was that they saw the patterns of exclusion in their national contexts as falling on gender lines, while they saw their isolation in the transnational field with an intersectional lens—encompassing geography, gender, and ethnicity.

Invisibility/Partial Visibility

A photographer from SSEA contended that she and others in her country needed to "learn how to be visible in this visual world [of] our profession." The photographers' accounts of invisibility encompassed experiences of *being overlooked* as professionals, as well as being *viewed* not as professionals but instead in terms of gender or ethnicity.

Photographers from all four geo-cultural regions shared the experience of being over-looked for certain types of assignments within their national fields. But they described feeling overlooked even within the field of local-foreign photography. A photographer from the SSEA region,

> [I]t was some travel edition of [prestigious international news organisation based in the US] magazine or something, and the picture that they chose for [my country], … it was of the [name] Hotel, and it was again by some white photographer, and I thought, "My gosh, you really flew somebody all the way out here with a huge carbon footprint to take a photo that any[body here] could have taken." … It is still frustrating and anxiety-inducing as someone who is emerging, who is a woman, and who is a person of colour, and you think, "Gosh, … this is my country, and they are flying people in to photograph it; what chance do I have of getting my foot in the door?"

Several others echoed this view that those based in countries in the Global South, particu-larly women, are routinely overlooked by commissioning editors based in the Global North. Almost all of them linked their invisibility to their ethnicity. As one photographer from the SSEA region said,

> … in a way you know, white reporters, white photographers are still much more visible here [in my country] than locals because of the contacts, and editors look out for [them].

The photographers often spoke in terms of both gender and race and, in particular, described discrimination based on these as part of the doxa of the field of local-foreign photography. As another photographer from the SSEA region said,

> Pretty much when you open the pages of a major international newspaper, and there is a story, … it's become such a habit to me that, when it is based in a non-western commu-nity, I look at the name of the writer, the name of the photographer. It's gotten better over the last decade, but I feel that nine out of ten times there'd be somebody who is not local to the area; it's going to be someone white and, when it comes to photography especially, white male.

Apart from being overlooked, many experienced being looked at specifically as women. One photographer from the SSA region mentioned how she felt her visual presence as a woman was being dictated by a male perspective embedded within the profession,

> I had male [colleagues], and they were offering very gendered [advice]. They were telling me … if you want to do this, I think you have to cut the makeup. I think you have to stop posting pictures of yourself. Less presence of you. More presence of you. Yeah, you don't want to confuse the audience. If you want to be seen professionally, you have to dress this way. And I was like, OK, I feel like the advice comes from a good place, but it's very sexist and very limiting.

Some said their visibilities as women sometimes secured opportunities within the field of local-foreign photography. One photographer from the SSA region said she might be hired for

… many jobs because of my gender. But then again, those are the jobs I will get. It's like, "Oh, we're doing a FGM story, she's a perfect fit, of course; [for] a man [it] would be so hard to do that."

Any favoured access because of a visibly female body, of course, was intertwined with the experiences of gender-based precarity discussed earlier. As a photographer from the SSEA region mentioned,

Everybody leaps onto the idea that, as a female photographer, everybody trusts you more because they think you are a sweet girl with a camera. That may be true, but I feel that, as a woman, the issue of safety really comes into play. Especially when you are young, my age, and you really want to prove yourself, I find myself in situations where I am like, "Is this the sensible thing to do to get the story? Do I really want to travel out there by myself or have somebody, a fixer, come with me?" This safety issue, for a male photojournalist, that barely even touches the consciousness.

Another photographer from a different country in the same region said,

I am better placed because you know certain parts of [country] are very conservative. For example, when we're covering [public health issue], I being the female photographer can enter the homes and meet with the women who … otherwise would not let a man into their house and meet with them, let alone let them photograph them. So that's one way I'm better placed. And this goes for a lot of different stories, how I can enter people's homes and, you know, have a word with them, sit down with the women. So that's like something that if a foreigner, especially being a male, would come into the society and try to do that, they wouldn't get the same response and of course they wouldn't get the same images that I'm able to get. Of course language is another thing, you know. I understand the culture; I know how to dress up when I go into certain communities.

The distinction made by the latter photographer between her gender and ethnicity as forms of embodied capital and her cultural capital stemming from country-specific cultural and linguistic knowledge could be seen in the accounts of others as well. Related to the latter, some photographers also mentioned prolonged ties with the communities of people they photographed as a form of social capital. As one photographer from SSEA said,

And I also think for a very, very, very long time, if you're looking at photography or for news outlets, they were sending in foreign journalists to come and cover stories in Southeast Asia where they don't necessarily get the context of what is going on really in the country and might exoticise the stories which you're covering. So I feel that does not help a lot, but I have seen a lot of changes in the last five years where they do pick up native photographers from their home countries to, you know, to tell it in the way which we experience it. So I'm actually quite positive and happy that I'm a photographer now and not like before.

However, while perhaps more important than before, these forms of social and cultural capitals were far from universally recognised within the field of local-foreign photography. A photographer from the SSEA region mentioned,

So diversity is kind of trendy right now. That's the good and bad thing about it; everybody is talking about, which is great, I mean, finally! But a lot of the talk is a bit totalistic, so I would cross my fingers and hope that eventually it leads to interaction and opportunities. But, for the moment, I am still up against the same, "She is unknown, she is in [country], we don't want to … [hire her]."

Another photographer said she thought a particular international news agency hired her because she was from the country she was based in, but she also noted that this opportunity did not mean she was accorded the same status within the transnational field,

> they tend to hire local photographers because they know the place where you need to go; they have better access into local news. So you will also be expected to be faster. And the thing is … the editors are still foreigners, and they're still making the choice, and I don't know if you know about the situation in [my country], but … all the bureau chiefs have to be foreigners, and all reporters or photographers working for foreign media are called news assistants. Even when we can work as a producer or work as a news photographer, we're still news assistant.

These observations speak to the distinction between the embodied capitals that the photographers recognised they possessed because of their identity, as opposed to their social and cultural capitals. The latter two included cultural and linguistic knowledge of particular places and peoples they drew on in their work within the transnational field of photography but those were not often as valuable in becoming visible within the visual world of their profession.

Discussion

Many of the photographers' experiences were marked by the need to join the field of local-foreign photography to access its relatively less scarce economic capital, compared with their national fields. They said this lack of access to economic capital in their national fields was compounded by the lack of opportunities to gain social and cultural capital (in institutional or non-institutional settings) recognised as essential to success. This motivation to transcend their national fields to seek capital was only further fuelled by gender-based discrimination within their national fields. However, their accounts also show that the social and cultural capital they needed to *become part* of the field of local-foreign photography and to *be visible* within it was not easily available because of the gendered and geo-cultural patterns of exclusions they experienced as continuing to shape the doxa of the transnational field of local-foreign photography.

The experience of some photographers was that their gender or ethnic identity may be seen within the transnational field as an embodied capital. This was, in turn, based on the idea that gender identity can be a tool to negotiate access to specific photographic subjects (*Cf.* Palmer and Melki 2018), but, for the photographers we interviewed, this recognition of embodied capital based on their female gender also came with heightened physical precarity (*Cf.* Campbell and Critcher 2018). What the photographers' accounts add to our awareness about the importance of gender identities of practitioners within the field of photography is an intersectional understanding that the racialized bodies of photographers can also become such an embodied capital when it comes to local-foreign photography.

Apart from this embodied capital of their racialised and gendered bodies, the photographers also viewed their fluency with languages spoken in their countries and regions, cultural competence, and ties with the places and people in their own countries and communities(*Cf.* Palmer 2019, 61–141) as distinct and important cultural and social capitals that they have and can offer; however, they recognised that these forms of capital are yet to become fully recognised as such within the transnational field. For example,

knowing the languages, including the linguistic codes of grant-writing and story pitches, of image-brokers in the Global North offered more reward than knowing local languages.

The motivation, even requirement, to acquire the social and cultural capitals that *are* accepted within the doxa of the transnational field were paramount for the photographers if they were to attain the economic and symbolic capitals they sought. This stress on cultivating the social and cultural capitals based on the existing doxa within the field, despite the economic, gendered, racial, and geographical barriers to acquiring them, underlines the intersectional dimension of the marginalisation experienced by the photographers we spoke to. Their gendered and geo-cultural positionality, as understood through an intersectional lens, made their professional experience substantially different from that of male photographers anywhere, and even from that of women photographers in the Global North.

The forms of cultural capital seen as important to consolidating positions in the transnational field, according to the photographers, were learning at higher-education institutions in the Global North, as well as through seeking out non-institutional professional learning at every opportunity. Those interviewed saw apprenticeships, workshops, professional training sessions, expert review of portfolios, mentorships (formal or informal), and any opportunities for proximity with powerful image-brokers—the established agents and actors at the key nodes of economic and symbolic power within the transnational field of photography based in the Global North—as important ways to secure the necessary social and cultural capitals.

We believe it is important to further delineate which forms of social and cultural capital dictated access to economic capital within the field of local-foreign photography. Cultural capital in the form of fluency in languages spoken in their own countries or regions received less recognition than did knowledge of English. Taking into account the largely Anglophone bias of our study, arguably, it might be reasonable to extend this finding about the importance of English to competency in other languages which are linguae francae in the field of local-foreign photography. This stands in stark contradiction to the assumption made by Seo (2016) that "[p]hoto and video journalists, because the nature of their work requires less perfect English and close access to the locals, are also more likely to be recruited from local fixers and freelancers" (47). Those we spoke to also experienced that their cultural capital in the form of knowledge of the societies they worked in was seen as subservient to that derived from knowledge gained in higher-education settings or through non-institutional learning earned through proximity to image-brokers based in the Global North. Social capital in the form of ties with people of the countries where the photographers were based was similarly lower in the hierarchy than social capital derived from professional ties with individuals and institutions that are powerful image-brokers within the field of local-foreign photography.

In this context, Murrell had observed (2013, 2015) that powerful actors within the field of local-foreign news-work can limit entry to the transnational field to "people like us" (2013, 2015, 150–1), i.e., privileging those local-foreign news-workers whose social and cultural capitals resonate with the editors and journalists possessing economic and symbolic power within the field. A more recent exploration of how culturally situated knowledge comes to be subjugated to "globalised, professional knowledge" in local-foreign news-work by Blacksin (2021) offers further evidence in support of Murrell's observations. Following Lindell and Danielsson (2017), this dynamic may be understood as such: The

types of social and cultural capitals that come to be accepted as cosmopolitan capital within local-foreign news-work are those specifically sanctioned and sanctified by the agents holding higher economic and symbolic power, who act to maintain the stability of the field's doxa. In our study, we found indications that, in the case of local-foreign photography, too, the entrenched patterns of exclusion in the field's doxa are being reproduced by powerful image-brokers, as noted in the case of local-foreign news-work more broadly. Working with the visual medium did not translate to any greater or easier access for local-foreign photographers to the transnational field, compared with other local-foreign news-workers. We argue that understanding these hierarchical delineations that are ultimately based on gender and geo-cultural inequity within the doxa of local-foreign photography is important. As long as the role of powerful image-brokers in the Global North remains vital to recognition of certain social and cultural capitals as cosmopolitan capital necessary for local-foreign photographers to gain access to symbolic and economic capital within the transnational field, a broader debate remains to be had about the exclusions built into their choices which otherwise might go unrecognised.

We found that the female, racialised bodies of women photographers in the Global South could be viewed as an embodied capital in their profession and also perceived and experienced as a vulnerability. Our study also indicated that the field of local-foreign photography may tend to stabilise its boundaries by rewarding certain doxa-sanctioned cultural and social capitals from those local-foreign photographers who are geo-culturally and gender-wise different to the hegemonic male agents who have peopled the field traditionally. These findings seen together raise the question of whether these gendered and geocultural dynamics of the field may dissuade female photographers from the Global South from challenging the existing "regimes of visibility" of peoples and places in the Global South (Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017), especially female bodies in conflict zones (*Cf.* Heck and Schlag 2013; Mitra 2020). But in our interviews we found that the photographers felt that because of their own intersectional positionality, they had a responsibility not to replicate entrenched regimes of (mis)representation and (in)visibility of peoples and places in the Global South. They perceived themselves as resisting the status quo through refusing certain assignments which reify imbalanced narratives and also by creating counter-narratives to them. They also felt reinstating the dignity of marginalised photographic subjects, including women, in and through their work as photographers was important. But this is beyond the remit of the current article and we have discussed these findings in full elsewhere (Mitra, Creta, and McDonald 2021).

Conclusion

Our study is limited in its scope and scale. It is a qualitative study based on a purposive sample of only 20 photographers. Thus we do not claim our findings to be necessarily universal. But given that the themes we identified were common across the female photographers' lived and embodied experiences in different geocultural regions, we believe the current study goes some way towards making visible the gendered and geo-cultural exclusions that may underpin the doxa of contemporary local-foreign photography. We believe our current study to be an argument for exploration of these issues in the future on a larger scale.

Our study suggests that research investigating the gendered and geo-cultural exclusions within the doxa of other forms of cultural practices that are transnational in nature may also prove fruitful. The contemporary debates around cultural hegemony in the global media landscape that recognise shifting ownership patterns, reach, and geographical focus can be enriched by also considering whether the status of certain agents in the Global North—educational institutions, employers, commercial, and philanthropic organisations, powerful actors such as editors and gatekeepers—is also shifting or remaining static.

Additionally, our study highlights how these debates must remain vigilant to the continuing patterns of masculine hegemony reproduced in transnational media landscapes. Engaging in this debate and investigating its nuances will allow us to see not only whether and how power-brokers in cultural industries continue to control access to economic, social, and cultural capitals required of practitioners in the transnational media landscape, but also how these established power-brokers might continue to define the very *nature* of such a media landscape by shaping it *in their own image* in terms of the gender they privilege and the geo-cultural patterns in the social and cultural capitals they accord the status of being cosmopolitan.

Notes

1. See https://www.womenphotograph.com/about and https://www.womenphotograph.com/mentorship-apply and http://www.nativeagency.org/mentorshipprogram and http://www.nativeagency.org/native-foundation
2. In our usage of the term precarity we follow Hadland and Barnett (2018b). In our discovery of the theme of invisibility we are indebted to Somerstein (2020b).

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