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ABSTRACT
This paper presents a theoretical reframing of journalism as a fundamentally mobile practice and outlines a research agenda for studying the politics of mobility in journalism that is centered on the everyday work of journalists. Our reframing draws on geographer Tim Cresswell’s work on the six components of a politics of mobility, which are motive force, speed, rhythm, route, experience, and friction (Cresswell, T. 2010. “Towards a Politics of Mobility.” Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 28 (1): 17–31). Cresswell poses six key questions about mobility, and rephrasing them to fit journalists, we get why do journalists move?; how fast do journalists move?; according to what rhythm do journalists move?; what route(s) do journalists take?; how do journalists feel when they move?; and what stops/impedes the movement of journalists? These questions entail a research framework concerned with the different conditions of movement for different bodies, thus drawing attention to previously understudied areas of journalism studies.

KEYWORDS
Mobility; politics of mobility; constellations of mobility; reporting; mobile news; mobile journalism

Introduction
In this article, we present a framework for addressing the persistent taken-for-grantedness of physical movement in journalistic work. Our framework, based on the notion of a politics of mobility from geographer Tim Cresswell (Cresswell 2006, 2010), makes mobility (as in the physical movement of bodies in/through space) central to the study of journalistic practice—with particular focus on the unequal distribution of mobility, and the consequences this inequality of mobility has for journalism as a democratic endeavor.

Journalism as Mobile Practice
The mobility of journalists has always been crucial to the construction of journalism as a necessary component of modern Western representative democracies. The justification of journalistic authority and privilege rests on the mobility of journalists; that they can go where the audience cannot (or do not). In complex societies, a division of “witnessing labor” has occurred where journalists go to key places on our behalf: the halls of
Parliament, the courthouse, the Stock Exchange, the police precinct, faraway countries, war zones, or on a smaller scale, remote parts of one’s own nation, or even certain neighborhoods of one’s own city. Yet the fundamental importance of mobility to journalistic work is subject to a curious paradox: celebrated yet little studied. The expectation that journalists could and should move around freely in local as well as global contexts is often taken for granted, even more so in our digital and mobile world. The whole idea of a “correspondent” rests on an assumption that reporters can and will travel freely within and between nations. The practice of the beat round, a foundational part of news-gathering (Magin and Maurer 2020), takes for granted that the reporter can move unhindered between news locations. The beat routine is a mobility routine: “[I]t consists of a series of locations that the reporter moves through in an orderly, scheduled sequence” (Fishman 1980, 43).

Such assumptions of unhindered mobility are untenable. Access restrictions and forcible removal are common occurrences when reporting in authoritarian regimes or from conflict zones (e.g., Gonen and Hoxha 2019)—and increasingly in (nominally) democratic regimes as well (US Press Freedom Tracker 2020). Assuming unrestricted mobility of journalists also ignores that women and members of different minoritized communities have historically found it difficult to move into and between key news sites—or may have even been forbidden to enter them. Journalistic mobility is thus unequally distributed along familiar lines—among nations, between genders, among ethnicities, etc.

Despite these fundamental links between reporting and mobility, when the terms “mobility” and “mobile journalism” appear in journalism scholarship they are almost always exclusively linked to a particular technology—mobile devices. The research on mobile devices and journalism contains relatively little in-depth theoretical concern with the term “mobility” itself and its implications—with some exceptions. For example, Duffy et al.’s (2020) recent special issue of Digital Journalism aimed at incorporating the “mobilities turn” from geography and sociology into the study of mobile devices and journalism (Duffy et al. 2020, 3, 5). Yet as a rule, questions of whether the use of mobile devices actually makes journalists more physically mobile (rather than more sedentary) are conspicuously absent in research on mobile devices and journalistic practice.

Recent events have made the mobility (or lack of it) of journalists a more visible issue. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected journalists’ ability to move freely in myriad ways, both directly and indirectly. Lockdowns, closures of key news sites or indeed whole sectors of society (e.g., organized sports), and cross-border travel restrictions have made many forms of reporting more difficult or even impossible—making it obvious how much journalists under normal circumstances rely on being able to move unhindered within and between all kinds of spaces, from local to transnational. The 2020 George Floyd protests across the US saw journalists specifically targeted by police—precisely because the journalists were moving around, attempting to report the story “from the ground” (Douglas 2020). These events—among others—have sharply demonstrated how vulnerable journalism is to restrictions of mobility, even in our digital, networked world.

In light of this, it is high time to further develop the growing strand of research on the role of place and space in journalistic practice (notably Schmitz Weiss 2013, 2015, 2020; Hess 2013; Gutsche and Hess 2018a; Usher 2015, 2019) to also incorporate an analysis of mobility. We see a pressing scholarly need to acknowledge that there is a politics of mobility in journalism, i.e., a regulation of mobility built on an unequal distribution of
risks and opportunities and a privileging of certain mobilities and bodies over others. This politics of mobility extends well beyond the relationship between journalism and technology. The goals of our framework are to revisit largely taken-for-granted aspects of journalistic mobility with a critical eye, and to reframe key elements in journalism studies and journalism history in terms of their mobility implications. We focus on the reporting/news-gathering aspects of journalism, as they are most closely linked to mobility.

Towards a Politics of Mobility for Journalism

At its most basic level, mobility refers to the act of moving between locations, “getting from point A to point B” (Cresswell 2006, 2). Stephen Greenblatt notes in his manifesto for mobility studies that “[F]irst, mobility must be taken in a highly literal sense” (Greenblatt 2010, 249; italics in the original). Geography and sociology, the two social science disciplines that have been most concerned with mobility, generally start their analyses of mobility from the physical movement of human bodies through space (see for example Cresswell 2006, 1; Kellerman 2006, 1; Sheller and Urry 2006, 207). Yet the physical movement through material space is just one part of the mobility equation, or, as Cresswell notes, “[P]hysical movement is, if you like, the raw material for the production of mobility” (Cresswell 2010, 19). Understanding mobility also requires attention to how physical movement relates to the cultural and social representations of movement, and the lived, embodied experience of movement (Cresswell 2006, 2, 2010, 18–20).

Representations give mobility its meaning(s). Representations link mobility to ideology and social hierarchies. Some forms of mobility are desirable and a privilege, other forms are enforced and stressful. The reporter (i.e., the kind of journalist who is most actively engaged in moving around and gathering news) has considerably higher representational status than economic status. Reporters may not be the best paid journalists or have the best working conditions, yet enjoy high symbolic value (see Örnebring et al. 2018). The reporter is a key representational figure in journalism precisely because he or she is the most mobile kind of journalist. Furthermore, mobility is linked not only to representations of journalism but also to the representations created by journalism. Scholars researching journalism’s “protest paradigm”—the way journalism systematically misrepresents political protest—have long pointed to how sensationalist imperatives and implicit racism tend to dictate journalists’ movements on the ground covering protest (e.g., Chan and Lee 1984; Kilgo and Harlow 2019). For example, in a study of the 2014/2015 Ferguson protests in St Louis, MO (using interview data alongside geographical information analysis), Cristina Mislán and Amalia Dache-Gerbino found that activists strategically moved their protests to an affluent majority-white part of St Louis both in order to be safer and in order to create a different type of coverage (Mislán and Dache-Gerbino 2018, 692–693). The mobility patterns of journalists affect the representations they create, another important link between the politics of mobility and democracy.

Physical movement is also an experienced, embodied practice. One person’s tedious journey might be another person’s exciting adventure. There is a strong contrast between on the one hand the routine character of much movement—walking or driving to work, doing household chores—and the ways in which many mobility routines actually require or assume a particular kind of body: male, white, able. The experience of mobility also varies depending on the space where movement occurs. Geographer David
Seamon uses the metaphors “body and place choreographies” and “place ballet” (Seamon 1979, 54–57) to describe the integration of embodied habits of movement with the locations we move through. Mark Fishman’s detailed ethnographic analysis of a crime reporter’s daily movements as part of his beat (Fishman 1980, 37–44) can easily be seen as such a “place ballet”—one where the (male) reporter’s experience of movement becomes inextricably linked to experiencing information almost solely coming to him from bureaucratic sources, organized for his or her benefit (ibid., 44–53). Another use of the notion of “place ballet” could be applied to the way in which women reporters often find their daily movements restricted by men’s harassment—inside and outside the newsroom (Flatow 1994; North 2016; Steiner 2019).

An analysis of journalism’s politics of mobility must also take into account the complex interplay between mobility and sedentarity. Johan Jarlbrink analyzed changes in the norms and roles of journalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in terms of mobile and sedentary practices. After describing a scene from an 1893 editorial office where the world came to the editor’s desk (through other newspapers, clippings, telegrams, etc.), Jarlbrink noted that just a few years later, “[T]he physical presence of the reporter had become essential” (Jarlbrink 2015, 281) and newswork had become mobile rather than sedentary. Now, it has potentially shifted back to sedentary/desk-based again. French scholars Olivier Baisnée and Dominique Marchetti noted in their ethnographic study of the Euronews 24/7 news channel that “[A]lmost the entire staff only physically leave the editorial offices situated in the outskirts of a major French city (Lyon) to have something to eat or to drink coffee or smoke” (Baisnée and Marchetti 2006, 114).

The fixed-location newsroom has long been the center of the news production process, the sun that reporters orbit. The mobility of the reporter frequently relies on the coordination and support of more sedentary colleagues in the newsroom: editors, fact-checkers, and administrative support staff. One journalist’s mobility requires another staff member’s immobility. Journalism historian Will Mari studied precisely this kind of mobility interplay in his historical analysis of the telephone and radio car as journalistic tools, noting that “[A]s disruptive objects of news-gathering technology, the telephone and radio car were two-way, negotiated tools, freeing and tethering, empowering and disempowering, reporters vis-à-vis their supervisors” (Mari 2018, 1385). Both tools allowed journalists more freedom and flexibility but also made it easier for newsroom managers to surveil reporters and increase their workloads (ibid). In a more recent example, Mary Lynn Young and Alfred Hermida analyzed the Los Angeles Times Homicide Report (a data journalism project that aimed to cover all of the around 1000 annual homicides in Los Angeles County) and found that this sedentary, desk-based initiative actually provided more comprehensive and systematic coverage of murders in LA than any previous “mobile” reporting initiative (Young and Hermida 2015).

The examples all show that any new technology put at reporters’ disposal will affect mobility in potentially contradictory ways. In light of this, questions of who are advantaged and disadvantaged by new mobility routines become even more relevant. Furthermore, there is also a need to categorize mobility issues, in order to be able to give a more detailed account of power dynamics and potential inequalities.
Six Components of a Politics of Mobility

The starting point of our politics of mobility is that journalists have bodies affected by power asymmetries when moving through space. Different aspects of movement entail different asymmetries. Geographer Tim Cresswell breaks down mobility into six “constituent parts”: motive force, speed, rhythm, route, experience, and friction (Cresswell 2010, 17, 21–26). These components are in turn related to six “key questions” about mobility: (1) why does something/someone move (motive force)?; (2) how fast does something/someone move (speed)?; (3) in what rhythm does something/someone move?; (4) what route does something/someone take?; (5) how does it feel to move (experience)?; and finally (6) when does movement stop/what impedes movement (friction)? In the following, we apply Cresswell’s questions to reporting and its practitioners (focusing on concrete embodied practitioners rather than journalism in the more abstract, institutional sense) in order to create a politics of mobility for journalism, and to identify what Cresswell terms constellations of mobility, i.e., “… historically and geographically specific formations of movements, narratives about mobility and mobile practices” (ibid., 17). This way of approaching mobility is simultaneously more general (as it is not tied to a specific technology, i.e., mobile devices) and more specific (as it breaks mobility down into analytically distinct parts) than previous uses of mobility as an organizing concept in journalism studies.

Rephrasing Cresswell’s key questions about mobility to fit journalists, we get (1) why do journalists move?; (2) how fast do journalists move?; (3) according to what rhythm do journalists move?; (4) what route(s) do journalists take?; (5) how do journalists feel when they move?; and (6) what stops/impedes the movement of journalists? These may at first sight seem like “stupid questions” or trivial concerns, but as we hope to show, they present a way of viewing journalism as embodied by definition, and concerned with the different conditions of movement for different bodies—that is to say, with power and (in)equality.

Motive Force: Why Do Journalists Move?

From a contemporary journalist’s point of view, the question of why he or she moves has a straightforward answer: because events dictate it. If there is a murder, the crime reporter needs to go to the crime scene, and so on. Journalists tend to see the impulse to move as external: something happens, and the journalist has to cover it. Yet established newsroom heuristics control the impulse to move: “news values” determine whether it is worth following a story or not (the very phrase “following a story” implies mobility). The first newsroom decision when faced with a new event is thus to decide whether to apply motive force or not. Behind this seemingly straightforward process for applying motive force lie many complexities. Sometimes reporters can choose where they go, other times they might be ordered to go somewhere. Some journalists do the assigning and some journalists take the assignments. “Star” journalists can choose what they want to do, cub reporters cannot. Some assignments are rewards, others a form of punishment. Sometimes news organizations restrict the movements of their own reporters, if that movement does not fit with the extant politics of mobility (e.g., Black journalists banned from covering BLM protests because they are not “objective”, see IFJ 2020).
Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought home the unequal organization of journalistic work, especially in developing countries. Freelance journalists, often relying on legacy media organizations to apply motive force (and thus payment), have seen assignments dry up or being virtually forced into taking unsafe assignments where they are not provided with the same protective equipment and insurance coverage as staff journalists (Oliver 2021)—motive force applied without safety considerations.

The idea that outside forces should determine journalists’ movements (movements therefore outside the control of the individual journalist) is a powerful professional myth that came into being as part of the “rise of the reporter” and the professionalization process of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Jarlbrink 2015; Nerone 2015). The myth that journalists should not control the impulses of their own movement lives on in the representational figure of “shoe-leather reporting”. Jay Rosen calls shoe-leather reporting “the one god an American journalist can officially pray to” (Rosen 2015). “Shoe-leather reporting” combines some voluntary aspects (as it is linked to individual traits of agency like initiative, curiosity, and tenacity) with involuntary ones (as the journalist would not necessary have any control over where the story takes him/her or how long it will take to research it) and assigns a high representational status to those that otherwise may have a low formal status (i.e., rank-and-file reporters) in the newsroom hierarchy. The fetishization of “shoe-leather reporting” thus functions to the advantage of the employer: once a story is assigned, the expectation is that the reporter will simply put in the movement-work necessary to complete it, no matter how long it will take or how arduous it might be.

The realities and representations of the application of motive force in journalism also look very different in global contexts of conflict, colonialism and authoritarian heritage. For example, Marie-Soleil Frère noted that following the military coup in Burundi in 2015, the regime deported or otherwise forced into exile more than 80 journalists (Frère 2017, 5–6). In this case, the motive force took journalists away from news events rather than toward them. Omar Al-Ghazzi’s study of media practitioners covering the Syrian uprising in 2011 found that these practitioners (including both journalists working for legacy media and citizen journalists) often identified the force moving them to cover the uprising as not coming from a newsroom nor from themselves as individuals. Rather, the motive force was provided by the revolution itself and a sense that history demanded they take action (Al-Ghazzi 2021, 6–7). Distributing motive force based on “news values” very much implies a societal context where freedom of mobility is the norm rather than the exception. The examples provided by Frère and Al-Ghazzi, as well as the case of selectively not applying motive force for Black reporters covering BLM protests instead point to the important role of violence—physical and symbolic—in the politics of mobility of journalism.

**Speed: How Fast Do Journalists Move?**

With the rise of the reporter as the dominant journalistic ideal, and the concomitant rise of news as the representationally most important form of journalistic content, came an increased focus on the speedy movement of reporters. When William Howard Russell, famed correspondent of the *Times* of London, covered a trial in Dublin in 1844, the newspaper had already cemented its “get it first” reputation and expended considerable
resources to get Russell to London with news of the verdict before *The Times*’ competitors could do so. “Now a special train was kept in readiness at Westland Row in Dublin; a steamship, the Iron Duke, lay in Kingstown Harbour with her steam up; and there was another special train at Holyhead for the run to London”, wrote one of Russell’s biographers (Hankinson 1982, 25). Russell had to travel this way because the telegraph did not connect England and Ireland until 1853. In other words, the news moved as fast (or as slow) as Russell did—the telegraph network (which was expanding rapidly in the mid-1800s) was in fact the first invention that freed news transmission from the constraints of technologies based on conveying the human body (e.g., carriages, ships).

In the mid-to-late Victorian era, speed became a constitutive trait of journalism. Historian Mark Hampton describes it as an “epistemology of speed and sensationalism” (Hampton 2004, 92), replacing an “epistemology founded upon deliberation and discussion” (as expressed in the opinion- and commentary-focused pre-industrial press). Early producers of illustrated (photographic) news were clear that being first with a distorted or even misleading picture was more competitive than being late with an ever-so-accurate one (Hampton 2004, 92): speed was more important than accuracy. In fact most research on verification and source checking still shows that despite the high value most journalists assign to verification, they frequently do not verify facts at all or only perform very limited verification practices—speed reigns supreme (e.g., Barnoy and Reich 2019; Diekerhof and Bakker 2012). Like the involuntary impulse to apply motive force, speedy movement has become embedded into the mythological ideal of journalism: a necessary, unquestioned marker of professionalism. Yet for all the problems associated with journalism’s excessive focus on speed, speed is also a big part of what makes journalism threatening to power holders. Those under scrutiny by journalists frequently employ “roadblocks” in order to reduce the speed of journalism—e.g., denying or slowing down FOIA requests (Wasike 2020), or refusing access to government experts without the presence of a communication/PR officer (SPJ, SEJ & ASNE 2015). Thus, speed is also part of what gives journalism its power.

If you ask a contemporary journalist how fast they move, a likely response is simply “too fast”. Study after study of twenty-first century journalism have found that journalists perceive a near-constant, very rapid speeding-up of their work—even the speeding-up is speeding-up. Even if journalists no longer have to personally travel “with the news” in the way William Howard Russell did, the speed of news production is still keenly felt. The politics of mobility perspective directs us to ask questions of the effect of this persistent internalization of speed as a core value on the health and mental well-being of practitioners (as in Burke and Matthiesen 2009; Reinardy 2009, 2013, 2016), and how the stress this causes is unequally distributed. For example, research indicates that women journalists feel more stress-induced negative affect and exhaustion than men do (Burke and Matthiesen 2009; Reinardy 2009).

**Rhythm: According to What Rhythm(s) Do Journalists Move?**

Rhythm refers to the repeated pattern by which bodies start and stop their movement. Rhythm, to paraphrase Henri Lefebvre, is repetition with a particular measure. Yet rhythm is not only mechanical repetition, it also contains reactions to the unpredictable: “…there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the...
repetitive: difference” (Lefebvre 2004, 6). This characterization of rhythm as a repeated pattern occasionally interrupted by the unforeseen probably resonates with most journalists as a description of how mobility works in their everyday working lives.

The daily rhythms of journalism are well-studied: there are deadlines, morning meetings, post-mortems, “putting the paper to bed”, and of course beat rounds (we keep returning to Mark Fishman’s work since his ethnography of local news production is one of the most detailed accounts of journalistic mobility available). The beat round as a rhythm is built around the daily deadline. Fishman describes the journalistic beat round as a rhythm of starting, stopping, and moving: the justice reporter beginning his work day at the county sheriff’s office at 7.30 am, checking in with the editor around 7.50, arriving at city police headquarters at 8.00, to the newsroom at 8.30, and so on (Fishman 1980, 38–40). Beat rhythms have changed very rapidly in recent decades. Email lists, phone contacts and online archives have replaced or complemented the physical beat round, sedentarism encouraged by the very networked technologies assumed to enhance mobility. Fishman described a world where key source institutions tried to make journalists’ rhythms smoother (e.g., creating press rooms, having people available for briefings, allowing journalists physical access to buildings). Today, government and PR sources increasingly try to control journalistic rhythms or impose their own rhythms on journalism, for example by closing press rooms (Jouhki and Baek 2008), or interacting with journalists only in strictly managed ways (e.g., Koch, Obermaier, and Riesmeyer 2020). Yet studies of the changes to the everyday working rhythm of the beat round are virtually non-existent, though there are anecdotal observations (e.g., LaFrance 2013).

The deadline looms large in journalistic rhythms. Historian C. John Sommerville noted that the shift to a day-to-day periodicity for news may have been as revolutionary as the invention of the printing press, because it created the audience expectation that news should arrive daily (Sommerville 1996, 4–5). Temporality and temporal rhythms and affordances have thus shaped journalism over the centuries. The temporal affordances of different platforms (print, broadcast, digital) create different temporal contours for the rhythm of newswork (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2015; Usher 2018; Zelizer 2018). In broadcast journalism, for example, the deadline has long been set to the news show cycle—with only a few news segments a day in the past to where now there is more than five hours of news programing a day (Reinardy 2013). More news programing means more news to produce and the rhythm of the broadcast reporter ebbs and flows with that news cycle (ibid). The digital era of 24/7 news was in turn greatly influenced by the news deadline cycle of broadcast; “rolling” news coverage was easily transported to new digital platforms. (Usher 2018).

Yet this 24/7 rhythm, where news production does not “start” or “stop” but just consists of a fluid, never-ending movement through the present, is paradoxically what ties journalists even more to the newsroom and to their desks. Usher’s analysis of breaking news routines in US metropolitan newsrooms revealed this: a boat fire was discovered by listening to the police scanner (and possibly watching TV) in the newsroom, and pictures from the field were sent in to the central production desk by witnesses rather than by journalists (Usher 2018, 7). A story about pit bulls on the loose could to a large extent be covered without leaving the newsroom (ibid., 7–8).

Applying a politics of mobility perspective, we can view sequenced phenomena in journalism besides the beat round and the daily production routines as rhythms as well.
In long-form journalism, slow journalism and/or investigative journalism, the deadlines come in cycles of weeks, months or even years. This shows that rhythms over a longer continuum are also possible in journalism (Zelizer 2018). Another example would be the practice of so-called parachute journalism: “...they [i.e., parachute journalists, authors’ note] work there a few days, then leave for the next conflict zone. Stories may be filed over a few hours or days with little research to support them”, as Hoxha and Andresen (2019, 1735) describe this rhythm.

Route: Which Way Do Journalists Take?

Journalistic routes are connected to the notion of news flows: where does the news come from and where does it go, and how does the journalist position him- or herself in order to capture the flow of events? The editor and the reporter determine the news value of an event; decide whether it is worth covering, which in turn determines the route the journalist takes. Elements of the route—for example whether the journalist has to visit more than one site to cover the event, or whether the journalist will return to those sites over a period of time (i.e., when covering an ongoing or developing story)—will be determined by the informal classification of the event (Tuchman 1978, 48–49). The routes or flows are also affected by the mobility affordances of the organizational framework of the newsroom operation, which dictates how much and how far news coverage will go (Ali 2017). News flows and routes can also be dictated by government entities (democratic and authoritarian alike) seeking to control the news agenda.

Route also includes the movement of a reporter covering his/her local community. The route of the beat is often consistent over time, linking routes to rhythm as in the case of Fishman’s police reporter. “Route” has the same etymological root as “routine” and “rote”, which emphasizes the routine, naturalized nature of many aspects of journalistic mobility. The beat is a combination of route and rhythm, organizing mobility for the efficient gathering of news from bureaucratic sources. The route of the beat is also influenced by the distribution framework of the news organization, creating a news net (Fishman 1980; Tuchman 1978) around a given area or boundary that determines the geographic area of news coverage for a given community (Gutsche and Hess 2018b). This can create geographic bias and power differentials between and within news flow routes (Hess and Waller 2016; Mersey 2009), for example, when certain neighborhoods or communities are covered repeatedly whereas others may be completely neglected—they are not part of journalists’ routes (Wiard and Henrique Pereira 2019). This kind of geographic bias has come under major scrutiny recently in light of the racial justice protests happening throughout the U.S, for example. The power dynamics related to who gets a voice in representing a given community affects the news flow and the pathways of how news is received or not in a community (Usher 2019). The routes used by journalists may not be the most representative of the community they cover. The Covid-19 pandemic has further disrupted journalistic routes: in a recent study of hyperlocal/community journalists in the UK during the pandemic, Karin Wahl-Jörgensen found journalists struggling to cover their communities under lockdown conditions restricting their physical mobility, and in some cases having personally to take over distribution routes in order to get their printed papers to readers (Wahl-Jörgensen 2021).
Furthermore, these forms of geographic bias underpin the greater issue of racialized and gendered politics in journalism (Clark 2014; Gutsche and Estrada 2017; Gutsche and Hess 2018b; Richardson 2017). Scholars have identified the biases embedded in urban planning through racist and classist zoning; practices that continue to this day and have become part of the way news flows occur as well (Mislán and Dache-Gerbino 2018; Sharp 2009; Wacquant 2001). As noted previously, the protests linked to the killing of George Floyd and the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson have brought the impact of these racist structures on journalistic routes to light (Mislán and Dache-Gerbino 2018; Richardson 2017). “Parachute journalism”—covering a story mostly from a distance, just traveling in for a few days to cover an area the journalists usually do not cover—does not apply only to foreign reporting but also to a domestic urban reporting increasingly criticized for making its narratives fit dominant hegemonic and racist ideologies (Gutsche and Hess 2018b). Journalists’ use of this kind of route can have lasting effects on the communities they ostensibly serve.

However, there are examples of journalists taking different routes in their journalistic work. In San Antonio, Texas, a small independent news publisher, NOWCastSA, uses a local library as the newsroom instead of an actual office building (Beard 2017). Community members can thus be a part of the news process: they often interact with the publisher and the staff in the library, and the publisher often hosts news events at the library for the community. Instead of organizing a route to fit the needs of bureaucratic newsgathering, the newsroom has been placed in order to intersect with audience routes (i.e., visiting the library), unequivocally placing journalists as part of the community they cover. The route of the news flow is not necessarily dictated by the reporter or publisher, but by continuous interactions within the public space of a local library—thus potentially changing and challenging embedded power dynamics.

Or in Liberia, where lone journalist Alfred J. Sirleaf (who has been bringing news to his community since 2000 with his initiative Daily Talk), doesn’t have the community come to him for the news, but he goes to the community with his chalk and chalkboard to make sure everyone has the news they need daily (Internews 2018). The alternative routes taken by journalists at both legacy and new hyperlocal outlets in order to come to grips with issues of representation is another increasingly important research area—one directly impacted by the politics of mobility.

**Experience: How Do Journalists Feel When They Move?**

Many journalists report a nostalgic longing for times when they got to move around more—around their local community, around the world, doing “old-fashioned shoe-leather reporting” (as noted, this term evokes intense, laborious movement). At the same time, recent decades have brought a number of mobility-enhancing technologies—mobile phones, tablets, laptops, drones—that may help movement. Several studies report that this “enhancement” in fact leads to a lot of stress and that mobility technologies often are used to fill previously “dead time” with work—using laptops or mobile phones while in transit, for example, linking mobility to work (Sheller 2015). The experiences of mobility many journalists share (nostalgia being one of them) are partly rooted in the affordances of the newsgathering enterprise. The fact that the whole world in some sense “comes to the newsroom” and is collected in the daily paper or news broadcast
likely contributes to a feeling of newswork being infused with mobility, even as that feeling in some sense is an illusion. The array of technologies available to a journalist can contribute to an increased experience of autonomy and control but may also create an experience of disconnection both from the newsroom and from the communities journalists cover.

These contradictions can create an experience of what we call a \textit{tethered mobility}, where mobility is free but also always tied to the center of production (the newsroom). The phenomenon of tethered mobility is not new—the telephone and radio car also created this tethered experience for reporters: in constant contact with the editor, communicating the story back to the newsroom (Mari 2018). And of course, the Covid-19 pandemic has tethered many journalists to their homes rather than their newsrooms, with attendant effects on their ability to do their jobs (again, see Wahl-Jörgensen 2021).

We also noted briefly earlier that harassment and discrimination are all too often inextricably linked to the experience of movement inside and outside the newsroom. For women journalists, experience of sexual harassment risks having perhaps the ultimate mobility effect: making them leave the newsroom and the profession (e.g., Brown and Flatow 1997, 173–174). Harassment and discrimination along racial lines are also a salient experiential dimension for many journalists of color—including the experience of not being employed/let into the newsroom in the first place, as news organizations have long had a big diversity problem (Mellinger 2013). Black journalists in the US have had to engage in a long struggle in order both to get credentials to cover major news sites and to get into legacy newsrooms as employees (see for example Pride and Wilson 1997, 163 on how Harry McAlpin became the first credentialed Black Washington correspondent in 1944). These experiences of harassment and discrimination from within the newsroom demonstrate that symbolic violence is also part of journalism’s politics of mobility.

Finally, we need to point out that the most common journalistic experience of mobility is probably not to reflect on it at all. As we mentioned before, much of journalistic work is entirely routinized, including movement. Rhythms, routes and other patterns of movement become naturalized and embedded in everyday practice, leading journalists not to reflect on them much—like the journalists studied by Fishman who did not think very much about how much their beat rounds were centered around a limited set of bureaucratic source organizations. Returning to our earlier discussion of protest coverage, that research provides another example of movement patterns and their consequences becoming invisible to practitioners. The journalists surveyed by Harlow and Kilgo (2020) did not think it at all controversial or problematic that their decisions to cover or not cover protests were more based on whether protests caused inconvenience to local residents rather than on the importance of the issue of the protest, for example (Harlow and Kilgo 2020, 8). Journalists frequently do not experience that there even is a politics of mobility.

\textbf{Friction: What Hinders or Stops Journalists’ Movement?}

Many of the problematic aspects of journalism’s politics of mobility we have discussed so far can be collected under the header of friction—how mobility is constrained. Problems of access to news sites and travel restrictions have created friction for reporters since long before the Covid-19 pandemic (see Sherer 1985 for a discussion of photojournalists being
accused of trespassing, for example)—even if the pandemic has made that type of friction more of a general issue. As noted, this type of friction is generally more salient in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian countries, as well as in conflict zones (e.g., Mexico, see Alves 2005; Israel/Palestine and Kosovo/Serbia, see Gonen and Hoxha 2019).

In the wake of the “news crisis”, newsrooms are often closed or relocated in an effort to save costs, and this mobility of the newsroom itself also is a form of friction. When a newsroom is moved out of the city center and into a suburban location, many journalists visceraally experience losing a connection to the “hub of activity” they saw as central to their work (Císařová and Metykova 2020; Usher 2015). And of course, newsroom moves and newsroom closures create friction beyond the subjective experience of journalists, i.e., the friction that comes from more and more communities having no journalistic rhythms/routes at all. Yet this can happen even without newsroom closures, if a community experiences that news organizations never “come to them” and thus display a lack of attention to inclusivity, diversity and equality in the news coverage of the community (i.e., the lack of journalistic mobility in/through particular areas affecting the representations of that area, as mentioned earlier). This has in fact been an area of much recent concern and criticism in the United States (Flynn 2020; Williams 2015), even as the lack of diversity in newsrooms and in journalistic coverage have been known for years. These kinds of friction are not abstract issues but directly related to the (lack of) movement of certain journalistic bodies within newsrooms and the communities they cover.

Linking back to our initial discussion of mobility and mobile devices, technology can both add mobility friction and reduce it. Journalists can use digital services and mobile devices to literally navigate a path to a news event via maps, and use locative tools for data scraping, data visualization, and alerts. Drones and sensor technologies may also reduce friction in the journalistic process to help journalists map environmental data from specific locations in a community, or to gather information without putting one’s own body in danger (Gynnild 2014).

Friction is not a given— if journalists are aware and care enough, they can adapt and find innovative solutions to reduce friction, and/or make newsrooms more sensitive to the links between diversity, movement and representations. Obstacles to movement can have an eye-opening quality—like the Covid-19 pandemic and other recent events rendering mobility issues more visible. Yet in a global perspective, the “dark side” of friction is likely more prevalent: authoritarian regimes, criminals and armed groups hinder journalists’ access and threaten their bodily safety. This kind of friction can lead to life-and-death situations for journalists.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The contemporary digital and mobile media landscape has made some aspects of mobility more prominent and visible, while also hiding many mobility-related intricacies and mobility aspects of journalistic work. The politics of mobility in journalism are guided not only by new technologies but also by historical and representational patterns that have roots going back centuries. The politics of mobility is also closely related to the politics of space, place, and location. Just as location is a “meaning-maker” in journalism (Schmitz Weiss 2020), so too is movement between and within locations. A lot of the work on spatial, place-based aspects of news and journalism already tackle mobility
issues implicitly and link physical movement to its representational and experiential dimensions, as for example in a recent study of how journalists perceive and think about “location” as a category: “[T]he subjects interviewed show that the wayfinding process is not just about navigating to or away from a news event but it lies in the construction of the experiences made in the spaces and places the community interacts with” (Schmitz Weiss 2020, 361). Paying more attention to mobility deepens and strengthens this “spatial turn” in journalism studies—a turn that has already generated important insights into place-based patterns and power dynamics relevant to news and journalism.

Our specific insights generated by this framework take the form of two observations regarding the constellations of mobility in journalism. First, we see an editor-centric constellation built around the world “coming to” a stationary desk and a sedentary editor historically replaced by a reporter-centric constellation built around sending reporters out into the world and then having them return “home” (to the newsroom). This latter constellation engendered a number of mobility patterns that over time have acquired a weighty representational—even mythical—baggage: the centrality of “shoe-leather reporting”, frequently expressed via a physical beat round; the tethering of reporters to the newsroom as a physical as well as representational “center”; and the institutionalization of speedy movement as a core characteristic of reporting. These mobility myths frame the common interpretation of a perceived contemporary change back to more sedentary journalistic practice as something wholly negative—despite the fact that new technologies can imbue sedentary journalism initiatives with a radical potential that many mobile practices de facto have lacked (as in the data journalism project studied by Young and Hermida, for example). Furthermore, many technologies can also add mobility potential without physical movement by the journalist (e.g., drones), thereby potentially reducing risks. A troubling aspect of these mobility myths is the extent to which they valorize risk and danger as part of journalistic practice.

Second, in contrast to the strong normative link between mobility and democracy, it is clear that violence—physical and symbolic—has also always been a key part of the politics of journalistic mobility. Regulation of journalistic mobility through violence has two aspects: one external, the other internal. The external regulation-through-violence comes from governments, regimes and other types of non-media actors (e.g., organized crime), which limited and restrict the mobility of journalists in order to preserve their own power. This type of regulation is not limited to authoritarian regimes but also becoming common practice in ostensibly democratic regimes. A constellation of mobility based on limiting access for journalists, removing press rooms and similar spaces, and police harassment of journalists, is becoming increasingly the norm across the whole world—including Western democracies. The internal aspect of regulation-through-violence refers to how news organizations historically have policed the presence of women and minoritized communities in newsrooms and at news sites, using both symbolic and physical (e.g., sexual harassment) violence and the threat of violence to control the mobility of bodies long seen as “not belonging” to journalism. This has furthermore had the consequence that journalism has subjected parts of its audience to symbolic (i.e., representational) violence (as documented by “protest paradigm” scholars, for example). In order to further democracy, it is important to resist both authoritarian control over journalistic mobility, and journalism’s own regulation of who gets to practice journalism unhindered: journalism can be both the subject and the agent of mobility restrictions.
Thus despite the necessity of mobility to democratic practice, mobility in journalism has often not been regulated with the primary aim to support democracy (in the sense of full and equal participation of all), leading us to ask what a regulation of mobility that does place the democratic role of journalism front and center would look like. So-called “alternative” journalism genres (e.g., community journalism, indigenous journalism, journalism practiced by minoritized communities, peace journalism) can teach legacy news organizations a lot about the politics of mobility in service of democracy, diversity, and participation.

Cresswell’s mobility questions point to a multi-faceted future research agenda combining an array of methods. In order to study the issues raised here comprehensively, we would need (among other things) quantitative surveys of journalists’ mobility practices (How often do journalists leave the newsroom? Where do they go and what do they do there? How do gender, race and class influence journalists’ mobility practices?); ethnographies of newswork not necessarily tied to specific places but focused on the nomadic practices of journalists; qualitative and quantitative analyses of both general news content and specific cases of “locative journalism” in order to see how mobility is both utilized and represented in the news; and not least the integration of various “mobility technologies” into the research process (e.g., making ethical use of mobile data and locative data; using drones to gather visual and/or environmental data about communities that can then be compared and contrasted with news representations and journalistic work patterns). Only through understanding how journalists negotiate mobility through motive force, speed, rhythm, route, experience and friction can we understand journalism’s future as a part of our democracy—for if equality of mobility is at the heart of democracy, it must be at the heart of journalism, too.

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