

# Foreign Correspondents

## Introduction

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This issue of *Sur le journalisme* - *About Journalism* - *Sobre jornalismo* is dedicated to foreign correspondents – those far-off journalists covering news (political, social, cultural, etc.) in a land that is either foreign to them, or foreign to the media for which they work. International correspondence has been part and parcel of the media establishment from the outset and is a fundamental aspect of the institution. For instance, the first European newspapers of the late 16th and early 17th centuries printed news gathered from abroad. In fact, foreign correspondence existed even before the advent of the printing press, and continued afterwards in the form of «*newsletters*,» those special bulletins in letter form produced by observers of political and cultural movements in faraway lands. And journalistic discourse shares the same stylistic heritage as foreign correspondence. Both are firmly rooted in the written letter model; chronicles and editorials have long been written as derivative forms of epistolary conversations between journalists and their readers, and newspapers publish letters sent in by journalists/correspondents. The first reports from war zones, at a time when the genre was not yet clearly established—Italy and Crimea in the 1860s—were in the form of correspondences sent by journalists to their newspapers. But also starting in the same period, the practice began distancing itself in part from the letter genre towards something drier, less personal and standardized: the news agency dispatch. This marks the emergence of a critical phe-

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nomenon in the history of international news production—the emergence of international news agencies in the 19th century, of which the largest still exist. To serve multiple customers and to accelerate the pace of production and circulation of news, the dispatch becomes a telegram and loses its status as a letter—it is depersonalized.

Nevertheless, correspondence survived and evolved. About the time when newspapers tipped their focus towards news (in the early 20th century in most areas of Europe and the U.S.), it found a new status. Correspondents covering foreign countries enabled large newspapers to build reliable networks of local informants to provide original material and remain competitive. «From our correspondent» is a formula newspapers took advantage of to promote their unique qualities and attract readers. From this point on, media created international networks whereby correspondents were sometimes from the same country as their newspaper, and sometimes recruited from local journalists in the country the newspaper wanted to cover. To be an anchor in the covered area was paramount, as correspondents «bathing» in the culture and society covered granted them legitimacy. Two journalistic specialties were established starting in the late 19th century: the reporter, who was sent to the scene of an event in a timely manner, and the correspondent, who was established in a foreign city and/or country. This organization remains in place today in mass media that have foreign or international services; specialized editors monitor a part of the world from the editorial floor (thanks to information provided by the news agencies), a foreign correspondent network is in place, and reporters are on stand-by to be dispatched quickly to cover an event. This division of labor is relevant to more than just the political sphere; media specialized in sports or which give them an important place in their news coverage can also have editors, reporters and foreign correspondents. While specialized editors make their expertise of a country or geographic area their brand and their value on the job market, reporters are usually less specialized, and official correspondents normally remain only a few years in a country; returning home or taking a job in another country (unless of course they are local).

It is clear that the digitization of content and transmission networks is transforming the vocation of correspondents. The editors of mainstream media still attach importance to being able to resort to the pen of a journalist stationed abroad, but it is less certain that the status of this correspondence and its legitimacy remain unchanged in a digital context. The abundance of data

and information available weakens the status of the correspondent, even if she still functions as a guide able to make sense of the mass of swirling digital information. The media are reducing the number of accredited correspondents, closing offices and entrusting a single journalist to cover not only a country but a vast continental area. They also increasingly use freelancers who have no fixed contract, not even part-time, and who work for several media outlets simultaneously. The media today prefer to send a reporter on location when the magnitude of an event calls for it, and in this situation, the freelance correspondent becomes a “fixer” for the special envoy, providing him with contacts and a driver. The media also increasingly use local journalists because of the quality of their contacts and their lower cost than expatriates. Many of these locals are partially trained abroad or have spent enough time there to understand the expectations of the Western media. Having accrued knowledge from their experience as fixers for foreign reporters, these locals occupy a significant segment of the labor market today, especially in photography and TV where the language barrier is not an obstacle to the creation of content. And figures published annually by the Reporters Without Borders corroborate this shift; the deaths of journalists in war zones are overwhelmingly those of local journalists working for foreign media.

And it is also clear that international correspondence is affected by the new modes of communication. Correspondents frequently use social networks to identify sources, verify information and be alerted—an event will very often not have been picked up yet by the media (including local) and it is already the subject of raw posts and comments on the networks. These networking tools greatly facilitate the work of correspondents in overcoming the constraints of time, distance and access (e.g., roadblocks, legal restrictions and dangers); identifying sources before contacting them by phone or internet; and helping find topics or original angles. In fact, they partly abolish geographical distance; an editor can now identify topics and sources, select and contact, all from the central newsroom. This is not new. Experts have always used their address book and telephone to power their long-distance vision, but social networks increase their abilities tenfold; from Paris or London, you can monitor live on Twitter an event that is taking place in Tel Aviv; from New York, Delhi or Brasilia, with Facebook you can reach out to sources who witnessed an event or are close to it and identified themselves as such by publishing content from the Palestinian territories. Account GPS and digital stamps can corroborate the claims. This remote vision also allows central

newsrooms to better formulate requests to local correspondents.

Still, correspondence cannot be reduced to a journalism of the instantaneous. It has always been an important element in how the identity of media is represented, both in diplomatic relationships and in cultural exchange. Its correspondents in the field is how a media presents itself to the public in a serious light, and lets it be known to its political, economic, social and cultural entourage that it is socially respected and trustworthy. And still today the correspondent is a representative of her country; the importance of her role determined by the size of the media conglomerate for which she works. Not so long ago, when international agencies were getting off the ground, the local bureau chief was in some respects the ambassador of his country, he was even sometimes linked to the diplomatic corps, and the line between news-gathering by a journalists for his media and relaying intelligence as a delegate to a government agency was sometimes blurred. Even today, the opening or closing of a large media's foreign bureau is a sensitive issue for both the country of origin and the host country. This because the presence of media has diplomatic import in the broad sense; it contributes to the mutual exposure of each other's cultures, on equal footing with cultural and economic delegations.

International correspondence, then, that venerable elder of journalism, is still relevant. This edition of the journal does not attempt to address all matters pertaining to correspondence, but proposes rather to shed light on some issues based on empirical studies. First of all, going back to the days of the Cold War in West Germany, Thomas Birkner explores the interpenetration of of diplomacy between state and media. His analysis of archives brings to light the importance of foreign correspondents' activities and how their influence extended far beyond mere news coverage. In his study of foreign correspondents in France, Jérémie Nicey observes both a reduction

in foreign bureaus and an expansion of their functions. He discusses the disappearance of one organizational model and its renewal under new forms. By observing the activity of French correspondents in China and analyzing their production, Jiangeng Sun explores the great difficulties facing the media trying to cover this country because of the limitations imposed on their activities by the authorities and the language barrier. The ability of foreigners to perceive political and cultural otherness particularly interests Margarethe Born Steinberger-Elias. She examines how cultural patterns imported by correspondents mesh with local forms of perceptions of reality, and whether the digital flow of discourse is likely to change it. The digital dimension is also at the heart of Antonella Agostino's study. After observing French and Italian correspondents at work in the European Union, she concludes that the Internet has not fundamentally changed the work of foreign journalists who remain closely linked to their sources and opt for the usual means of exchange. Luciane Fassarella Agnez and Dione Oliveira Moura also argue for a certain permanence of the role of the correspondent by analyzing the pervasiveness of the myth of the journalist sent abroad as identifiers of the profession—to be stationed in a distant capital being the hallmark of professional success. The last two articles of this issue analyze the subject from a more socio-historical perspective. Véronique Juneau examines the first war correspondents, at work during the second half of the 19th century, and how sociability was forged between men of the pen and men of the sword; how a specialization forged a collective ethos and carved out legitimacy for itself. Finally, Tania Regina de Luca tells how, in the late 19th century, the activities of Brazilian foreign correspondents contributed to the changing media landscape and how a vocation shaped its roles, practices and labor arrangements.

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