

# War reporting

## Introduction

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War reporting was not born with the reportage, the invention which created news journalism during the second half of the 19th century. Military campaigns have always been observed by non-neutral bystanders charged with singing the glory of the victorious. Such is the function of the *Tale of the Conquest*, better known as the Bayeux Tapestry, which tells the story of the victory of an 11th century conqueror, who commissioned the work. Still today, it is considered a remarkable testimony on aesthetic and historical levels. «*For as long as there have been wars, there has been war reporting. The only thing humankind seems to value more than the taking of life is the recording of that death in ink.* (Bak, 2016: ix)». And if war reveals the worst side of human beings, it can also produce stories of the best sort: «*(...) war reporting has remained a rich cultural heritage that touches not only those individual cultures or states that have borne the scars of war on its people or its landscapes, but also the collective memory of what it means to be human -- or inhuman*» (Bak, 2016: ix).

However, significant changes occur during the 19th century: the observers, who begin to be called journalists and soon enough reporters, are sent by newspapers that intend to carry out their mission in a more autonomous manner, and position themselves as more independent from the belligerents and the powers at play. As always, the invention is multipolar. The American press begins to publish accounts of the conflict

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with Mexico before 1850, a French newspaper missions an observer during the Italian unification campaign in 1860, the media on both sides of the Atlantic publish the same accounts of the Civil War, military experts send reports and analyses from the Crimean campaign which are published by the press, and proto-war correspondents follow step by step the French defeat in 1870 (Bolz & Charbonneau; see in this issue). The genre emerges in several places and gradually establishes itself. «The British press was one of the first to grasp its relevance, to separate it from other forms of reporting and capitalize on it in a stand-alone manner» (Juneau, 2011: 19). Its development in the French press is conditioned by political factors. It «stems from a tacit arrangement with the imperial power, which has everything to gain from seeing journalists transform into war correspondents» (Thérenty, 2007: 293). War reporting might also have developed thanks to external transformations inherent to technological innovation, creating for instance «changes in the relationship to space and speed with the development of rail transport and the telegraph [now] allowing [the traveling journalist] to focus on news and information» (Thérenty, 2007: 293).

In this context, the coverage of conflicts and wars is of paramount importance in the fields of research in literary journalism and feature reportage. The two genres overlap and sometimes blend together. Writers such as Ernest Hemingway, Martha Gellhorn, John dos Passos or Antoine de Saint-Exupéry were war correspondents in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Hemingway's experience of the Spanish war will inspire one of his greatest works of fiction as an American writer and as a war correspondent: *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Brazil presents a specific case, as war journalism originates in reporting about internal conflicts. The cornerstone of Brazilian literary war journalism, *Os Sertões (Rebellion in the Backlands, 1902)* is based on the coverage of the Canudos War (1896-1897). Written by Euclides da Cunha, an engineer reporting for the newspaper *O Estado de Sao Paulo*, *Os Sertões* avoids the superficial and factual approaches found in other works by war correspondents also sent to the state of Bahia to cover this civil event in Brazil. Years later, José Hamilton Ribeiro covers the Vietnam War for *Realidade* magazine, Brazil's leading magazine of literary journalism at the time and still one of the most studied publications in this field of research. Hamilton regularly provides extensive coverage, before stepping on a landmine and losing part of his left leg the day before his return to Brazil. During his convalescence, he documented his experience in the story «I went to war» (Eu estive na Guerra, 1968), later published in the books *The Taste of War* (O Gosto Da Guerra, 2005) and *The Journalist of the Century* (O Repórter Do Século, 2006).

Brazilian literary and conventional war journalism, throughout its history, appears to have been the business of men only, as confirms academic research on the topic. However, women have also played an important role in the development of war journalism, literary or not, and their trajectories are gradually brought into light (Ruellan, 2018). For instance, Rose Esquenazi, in her book on Brazilian radio during the World War II, mentions the participation of women in the media coverage of the war. She gives the example of Sylvia de Arruda Botelho Bittencourt, who was the only woman to join the group of eleven Brazilian correspondents assigned to the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (Força Expedicionária Brasileira, FEB) and collaborate with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the United Press International (UPI). As pointed out by Leonardo Guedes Henn, the coverage of the war at the time was largely broadcasted over the radio, which was the main and most popular media in Brazil at the time, and women's appearances in audiovisual media were rare (Henn, 2013: 686).

Thus, all attempts to reconstruct a history of female Brazilian literary journalists who covered and still cover wars remains patchy due to the imprecision of the available articles on the subject, most of which are incomplete, suggest contradictory information or appear biased. In this context, the research on Brazilian female correspondents such as Dorrit Harazim (Camargo, 2021), the work of Brazilian women journalists like Patricia Campos Mello on Syria for the largest national newspaper, *Folha de Sao Paulo*, and the book derived from this coverage, *Honeymoon in Kobane (Lua de Mel em Kobane, 2017)*, are exemplary. The increase in women's participation to the journalistic labor market occurs overall in the context of deteriorating work conditions in the field of journalism, also observed in the field of literary journalism (Martinez, 2020: 122).

From the very beginning, the genre of war reporting has created a fascination linked as much to how reporters work than to the accounts of deadly confrontations themselves. It has a particular position within the field of journalism as well as the research conducted in this field. On the level of representations and the collective imaginary, the genre is substantial. It holds a particular position and is highly considered. It is often referred to by students to justify their career aspirations and choices. Bookstores frequently showcase autobiographical or anthological works by reporters. Many fiction films are based on or around the character of a war correspondent. Finally, the violence met on the field (kidnappings, murders, repressions) creates extraordinary media coverage.

Despite the symbolic power it holds, war reporting has been relatively little analyzed by academia.

Important historical work does however exist, such as Knightley's narration (1975, expanded edition in 2004) of the wars from Crimea to Iraq, or more recently Simard-Houde's extensive research (2017) on reporters, including war correspondents. A few works have also been published on the communication strategies of armies and governments. Examples include the fairly recent research on the Propaganda Kompaniens during the Third Reich (Férard, 2014; see the article on this subject in this issue), Hallin's study of the «uncensored» war in Vietnam (1989), Robinet's writings on the management of work relationship between the French army and the media during African conflicts (2016), and works analyzing control mechanisms, so-called the embedding of journalists, used to monitor reporters during the wars of the Middle East (Bizimana, 2014; Allan and Zelizer, 2004), but set up as early as World War I (Maurin, 2009). Research has also focused on political groups engaged in armed struggle that organize units of communication agents and make use of journalistic and media means. This was the case during the Spanish War (Marqués Posty, 2008), the Vietnam War (Tran, 2019), in conflicts in Mexico and Palestine (Ferron, 2012) and more recently in the conflict in Syria (Augé, 2016).

Other academics have examined the coverage of contemporary conflicts by the media (Wolton 1991, Boltanski 1993, Beauregard et al. 2002, Charaudeau 2001), the impact of media messaging on audiences (Eck 1985, Tchakotine 1992), the role of the radio in the Rwandan genocide (Chrétien et al. 1995, Thompson 2006), or the contribution of the media to peace processes in Africa (Baumann et al. 2000; Arrous, 2001; Frère, 2005; 2011). The Rwandan genocide led to reflect on the need to develop a culture of peace through the media. Under the leadership of the NGO Reporters sans Frontières, Radio Agatashya (August 1994 - October 1996) was created in Bukavu, on the Zairean border with Rwanda, to help the victims of the genocide. This gave way to the emergence of «peace journalism» (Galtung, 1998), presented as an alternative concept to hate-sowing media, in the perspective where it plays a role of «involuntary mediator» (Howard, 2005). This journalism is introduced for the first time on the African continent in South Africa in the context of discussions on the role of the media in the reconstruction of a post-apartheid society (Baumann et al. 2000). It is included in the elaboration of a normative approach aimed at highlighting the role of the media in the management and transformation of conflicts or media mechanisms which can promote the escalation or, on the contrary, the mitigation or resolution of a conflict (Crettenand, 2012: 30). Analyzing the uses of the «ethnic war» motif in the written press in relation to two crises in Central Africa (the «selective genocide» of Westernized Hutus in Burundi in 1972, and the genocide of Tutsi Rwandans in 1994), Sophie

Pontzele argues that «the need to work with urgency, the lack of specialization of the journalists assigned to cover the crisis as well as the preeminence of the event and the sensational over analysis combine, encouraging the use of ethnic interpretation patterns» (Pontzele, 2008: 178).

There are still areas of war reporting that remain under-investigated. Its mythical dimension and its uncertainty, embodied by the difficulties of access to the field, to actors, to situations, to archives, as well as to the strategies and modalities of mediation, still remain areas of research of great relevance. Similarly, the constitution of war reporting as a specialized journalistic genre, its evolution based on the changing dynamics of conflict (war, armed conflicts, conflicts related to trafficking and to the slave trade, terrorism, violent extremism...) are objects of investigation which are likely to shed new light on the interrelations between journalism and war. On another level, it would be relevant to develop a sociological analysis of the socio-professional field by focusing on its actors, their itineraries, their professional trajectories, and the statuses and roles they consider having. Studies have been conducted on special envoys (Pedelty, 1994), the rules on interacting with journalists in war zones (Markham, 2013), the place of emotions in the career and practice of reporters (Le Cam and Ruellan, 2017) and on gendered professional practices (Elwood-Akers, 1988, Stur, 2011) based on the experience in Vietnam. Much remains to be done, for instance about the cooperation and rules regulating interactions amongst the actors of the information scene.

Indeed, armies and governments as producers of content, press releases, and full reportages for the media, as well as the collaboration between journalists, the interlocutors of journalists in the field, the soldiers, the media companies, and the senior army officers, could be objects of research which would reveal tension, antagonism, competition, and, perhaps, cooperation. This would allow to develop an in-depth grasp of the dynamics and logics of action in the narratives of war. Tapping into both historic and contemporary periods, these thematic areas are explored in the present issue of the journal *Sur le Journalisme - About Journalism - Sobre Jornalismo*.

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