

Journalism and risks

Introduction

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he call for papers for this issue titled « *Journalism, Dangers and Risks* » presented journalism as an extension of the freedom to inform, which implies not only the liberty to make known, but also that of freely searching for information in a systematic way and to transform that work into a professional activity. Today, concern for free speech, a preoccupation as old as the one for human rights, seems worrying for at least three reasons:

1. Professional practice of journalism has always involved risks, but today it faces other dangers in an unstable economic and political context which increases, stimulates and provokes, in many parts of the world, socio-political environments affected by corruption, illegal and immoral trafficking, unpunished violence and physical insecurities;
2. The actual figure of journalist is not the extreme “sacerdotal” one, for whom living as a hero and finishing as a martyr would be normal, nor the exceptional citizen one, unique, and Olympic; but it is that one of the specialized worker (employee or freelance) who performs tasks considered as socially and legally legitimate; yet this labor market

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has been shrinking rapidly since the end of the 20th century;

3. The extension of generalized surveillance, thanks to digital technologies, arms some sources, public or private, with more data on journalists and their activities, and makes them capable of hindering their work in new ways.

Evidently, the examination of journalism from this viewpoint in the contemporary context is a very large program. Multiple intellectual paths can be opened and questions arise in abundance. For example, what are the parries that the journalists may deploy in front of the banditry, the decay, or the corruption of the State? How do they build alliances with other social actors anxious to oppose themselves to such problematic political evolutions, so that journalistic activities can be realized without undue risks? Which solutions are initiated to relieve the insecurity of the individual journalist on whom the media enterprise transfers the totality of the burden to realize and defend his work? What uses journalists make of the new electronic monitoring means offered to them, such as drones, geolocations, databases, etc.? On the other hand, how do they protect themselves from the uses of those means against themselves?

The researches on those multiple questions are still scarce, a fact that reflects the unavoidable lag between research on journalism and its daily practice in a context particularly shored by cascading changes. However, we present in this issue seven (7) texts which, each one in his own way, show that the world of research has begun the monitoring and registering of the new risks, and recall as well that journalism, in other dangerous contexts, has proved itself resilient and has been able to develop tactics of avoidance and resistance.

Some of those texts contribute more specifically to the inventory of dangers. It is the case of the study of the armed attacks that occurred in Ottawa and Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Canada, in October 2014, proposed by Marie-Ève Carignan who teaches at the Sherbrooke University in the province of Québec. Her work is emblematic of the ethical interrogations that are challenging medias and journalists in the advanced Western societies, where have been developed over a long period of time detailed ethical guidelines for journalists. More specifically, Marie-Ève Carignan uses jurisprudential judgements of the Press Council of Québec (CPQ) to shed light on the destabilized behavior of the medias in front of those two attacks, and shows this way the limits of their self-regulation.

Chrisanti Giotis, PhD student at the University of Technology in Sydney Australia, highlights the biases that internationalized territories, called « aidlands » or « peacelands », produce for foreigners – including media correspondents – given that those enclaves are carved in countries in crisis, more and more deeply entrenched and separated from the local communities. To Giotis' eyes, those correspondents are somehow « embedded » – in that same sense that we speak of war correspondents being incorporated in the regiments of soldiers on the front – in the domain territorially and intellectually defined by humanitarian action and the actors of the so-called international development. She illustrates her point with interviews with six (6) « fixers » and with observations made in the city of Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The risks driven by those nestings are qualified by her as non-material difficulties and non-physical dangers that challenge the quality and ethics of international reporting, suspected for that reason to be encouraging a limited and mistaken information about countries and conflicts that they cover.

For her part, Silvia Torres, PhD student in communication at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa in Portugal, in a historical work that analyses the media coverage of the portugese war in Angola between 1959 and 1975, shows that a publication can succeed despite everything, within certain limits, to give visibility to a conflict that otherwise could have gone unnoticed. With the classical method of content analysis, applied on the issues published between 1961-1974 of the magazine *Notícia*, a weekly publication based in Luanda, and through interviews with professionals that worked at the time for medias in Angola, Silvia Torres describes how reporters have used professional practices to give salience to that conflict, despite the censorship.

The following text, from Patricia W. Elliott, assistant professor at the School of Journalism of the University of Alberta in Regina (Canada) extends the previous three (3) by discussing how journalism could be possible in such a constraining context as war, but on a much longer period, that is within the frame of a ferocious military dictatorship, specifically the 50 and more years of the military dictatorship in ex-Burma, known today as Myanmar. Her work narrates the perception of risks by journalists themselves and the reasons why they continued to practice journalism in spite of the threats of imprisonment, exile and death. The author describes at the same time the context in which journalists participated to the birth of a democratization phase in 2011. Her research also reveals that, beneath the surface of state control during the dictatorship, can be found an amazing diversity of public expressions,

in ethnic medias, in press agencies in exile, from citizen journalists, from bloggers and even in the medias yet sanctioned by the military State.

The three other texts concern Mexico, a North American country officially characterized as democratic for a long time, but considered more concretely democratic since 2000, when political parties started to alternate at the head of the State, through the election to the presidency. The first two texts deal with non-physical aggressions and structural conditions that insecure the practice of journalism. Diana Denisse Merchant, PhD student in social sciences at the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (Ciesas, Occidente) of Guadalajara, presents the situation in the province of Baja California, the most northern state of the country on the coast of the Pacific Ocean. On the map, that provincial state looks almost detached from Mexico and as a part of the United States, like an extension in the sea of the American California. The author underlines from the beginning the diversity of regional situations for journalism in Mexico. About Baja California, she states that the journalists are submerged in continuous threats of economical, ethical and psychological aggressions, that those pressures are unremitting and that they reflect the general precarity of the journalists in Mexico. She then describes the strategies developed by the journalists of the written press to avoid those aggressions, to circumvent them and to escape them. She observed those maneuvers during 12 months in 2014 from different journalists in five (5) municipalities, observations completed by 25 interviews of journalists and by five (5) interviews with communication officers in State Services. Diana Denisse Merchant analyses her data while considering journalists not as pure victims who suffer the aggression but rather as « agents » who « have to manage with it ».

Victor Hugo Reyna García, PhD student in social sciences at the Colegio of Sonora, in the city of Hermosillo, also focuses on the permanent threats that weigh on Mexican journalists, rather than looking at the « security crisis » that became emblematic of a country that registered dozens of murders of journalists during the last years. He chooses to look in another direction, that of the endemic work insecurity in Mexico. To this end, he refers to German sociologist Ulrich Beck's works "Risk Society", and, particularly, his research cycle on the sociology of work where he states that in that field, as in the others, the contemporary society increases risks and uncertainty. The doctoral student introduces then, in this theoretical frame, three more classical concepts of the sociology of work: job security, qualification and satisfaction. Finally, he feeds that grid of analysis with references to scattered, empirical

works that examined the conditions of practice of journalism in Mexico in the last decades, to which he finally adds his own empirical data that he is collecting in his field of research.

The third text about Mexico, and the last one in this issue, is the work of three (3) authors: Salvador De León Vázquez, researcher at the Department of Communication of the Universidad Autónoma in Aguascalientes, and two (2) research assistants, assistant researcher Alejandra Bravo Ponce, and Master Degree student E. Maritza Duarte Alcántara. Their article presents three (3) self-help organizations set up by journalists who have concluded that it is useless to appeal to the authorities' services to get help, although officially proclaimed help services, given their proven inefficiency. Thus, they have chosen to develop their own networks which enable the experiences of some to inspire others, whether for preventing or avoiding physical violences, coping with threats of sources that hold some authority, facing vexations and reprisals of the hierarchies in newsrooms or dangers coming from police, military and criminal circles.

Those initiatives of self-help organizing emerged in three (3) different zones: the city of México, the city of Juarez in the state of Chihuahua north of the country, and in the city of Tuxtepec, in the state of Oaxaca, in the south. Others are currently being developed, according to the authors. Their birth is closely linked to the climate of extreme insecurity produced by the war against drugs initiated by President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa at the beginning of his mandate in 2006.

The order chosen for the texts in this issue indicates the direction in which the future works on dangers and risks for journalism should probably have to move. Indeed, the first text, on terrorism inside of democratic countries, announces the security constraints that the different national journalisms will have to cope with in the next few years. The three following ones recall, each one in its own way, the limits and biases of the western look on the rest of the world, whose medias and reporters claim to permanently deploy. The article on the work of the international correspondents at Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo evokes both the growing physical confinement of most of the correspondents in the American hotels of the internationalized and secured ghettos of the humanitarian zones, and also their moral confinement in the good intentions of international NGOs. Those situations are multiplying at the same pace than wars and conflicts in the world. Journalism encounters more and more censorship in large parts of the world because of armed conflicts, on top of restrictions that he faces in dicta-

torships or other regimes euphemistically qualified as authoritative.

As for the three (3) articles on Mexico, they appear to discuss of very traditional form of risks encountered by journalists, but in the actual context, they resonate with the first text about terrorism. Mexico has been living for a very long time in a regime of armed security. Therefore, the way journal-

ists survive and work there may foreshadow how the professionals of tomorrow, including those in the advanced democratic countries, will be forced to learn to navigate, to tweak, and to cope with danger. The Mexican example may be exemplary and useful in a context where journalism seems profoundly destabilized, even in the democratized countries.