

How important are
professional foreign
correspondents
today?



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

From the late Middle Ages and beyond, a network of foreign correspondents has existed across the majority of Europe, spreading news from far-flung places across a chain of set routes (Sambrook, 2010). However, there was news from abroad before there were correspondents, and, similarly, we are now entering another age where these reporters, like many employed in journalism, risk inexistence. Partially responsible are economic cuts that see foreign desks shrink, the accumulating risk to journalists abroad and the appreciation of diversity that is increasing dependence upon foreign nationals instead. Also, the invasion of technology, including social media, mobile phones and new models of low-cost online news, feeds fruitful change as well as faults. In addition to these influences, this essay seeks to deliberate ethical considerations, like the representation of marginalised communities, race and distant suffering, in order to conclude the importance of the foreign correspondents now.

Information about international matters will forever be important. Thus, to appreciate what relevance foreign correspondents still have within its distribution, it is necessary to pinpoint the scope of the competition. In general, this is the Internet and all it prompts. For example, the innovative online resources reporting separately to the skeleton of traditional news; like blog aggregator Global Voices, well-known archive Wikileaks, mapping service Ushahid, or even Facebook's empire to name a few. In spite of this digital revolution though, the way in which the Internet affects the representation of faraway countries remains in its infancy (Berger, 2009). It enables people to obtain additional sources of news, but the average consumer does not bother. To demonstrate, 95% of those who consume

news online do so through domestic newscast websites (Nielsen et al., 2019) and, even in this day and age, just 53.6% of the population is online (Clement, 2020). Plus, for those paying attention to these pioneering applications custom-built for 'citizen journalists', they must tread through infinite clutter because ensuring these moderns newscasts are thoroughly verified is a tough task (Lewis, 2010). Furthermore, the statistics cited are in line with the theory of Imaginary Cosmopolitanism (Zuckerman, 2013), whereby we think we have an extensive viewpoint because of the possibility of worldwide connectivity, but we disregard that the majority of our social network consumption is in fact local. With this in mind, the public remain dependent on traditional media, including foreign correspondents, for that vital international perspective.

However, the other edge to technical innovation, specifically how it can be exploited by traditional news agencies, is also a threat to foreign correspondence, particularly after today's tendency for rooftop journalism. This expression was coined to describe the countless journalists based abroad, habitually amongst conflict, who still hardly get the chance to see what is taking place in that location. This is intended to safeguard foreign correspondents, partly due to facts like the death toll of journalists rising to an alarming total of 80 during 2018 (Reporters Without Borders, 2018). However, this step concerning protection does hamper them in the process. In fact, it is frequently critiqued that though foreign correspondents occasionally break big news, and occasionally deliver detailed breakdowns, for the most part they just compose inconsequential feature after feature within the fortifications of a guesthouse (Sambrook, 2010). Nonetheless,

novel communication technology does not make up for the fact that “ someone stuck next to a dish for hours on end is the last creature on earth to have learned anything,” (Adie, 2003, p. 55). Additionally, even though foreign correspondents are a part of conventional journalism, the established media are increasingly favouring yet another contender: everyday people. For example, Britain’s BBC has its universal UGC Hub that files material sent in by the general public and, in terms of acquiring more remote information, BBC World Service provided mobile phones to Northern Nigerian villages, with a designated attendant per community, to effortlessly learn about potential governmental confrontation concerning land rights with the villages (Sambrook, 2010). Now, considering that it can cost between \$200, 000 and \$300, 000 a year to uphold a foreign bureau (Willmott, 2010), the preference for citizen journalism is fathomable. However, the advantage of a foreign correspondent over a local civilian is that they are competent in first aid, functioning efficiently in hostile environments and equipped should they be taken hostage (Owen, 2001). In theory, this is likely to assure fewer threats and faster dispatches. In addition to safety, which is recognisably a priority, journalists adhere to ethical codes and professional principles that the average person would not contemplate, they are also trained in multimedia, which is cost-effective as agencies are can then employ less people. So, in spite of a digital revolution, along with civilian reporters and their potential to dispense international information, foreign correspondents remain imperative.

Furthermore, and distinctive to local civilians, is another competitor known as the fixer, or rather the local journalist. To contextualise the crucial role in

which they play, the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict will be used as an illustration since Palestinian reporters in particular do produce a great deal of the international news on the Israeli occupation. In many ways, they are the producers of these stories, finding appropriate people with whom to speak, organising tough interviews and navigating the way for the foreign correspondent, together with attending every press appearance of each Palestinian official and therefore compiling fundamental material for everyday news stories (Bishara, 2006). Yet, these fixers and stringers rarely receive any published acknowledgement, and this is the case across the globe. In fact, across 2016 and 2017, the Global Reporting Centre led a survey of over 450 journalists from 70 countries on the connection amongst fixers and correspondents. Interestingly, they depicted it as “ a deep-pocketed foreign reporter hiring a local journalist in an often-poorer country to do his or her bidding,” (Global Reporting Centre, as cited by Borpujari, 2019). Worse yet, the majority of the fixers surveyed admitted to frequently being put in danger.

Everything within the section above alludes to a discriminatory framework that recounts Postcolonial Theory, which has for the most part been overlooked in this area of study on foreign correspondence (Kumar, 2014). This encompasses how those from the West continue to subjugate non-European people, perhaps without even realising. For instance, for a long time the stereotype of a foreign correspondent, and there was one for a reason, has been heroic and brave, reporting from strange places but forever with a familiar face and sent faraway to nobly send back home news. What is so distressing is that this stereotypical foreign correspondent is often

matched with a 'White-Saviour Industrial Complex' (Cole, 2012) that embodies what Postcolonial Theory aims to destabilise. Sean Maguire, Reuters' Editor of Political and General News, is particularly aware of this, noting the organisation's conscious efforts to employ a great deal less British correspondents than before in order to move away from the longstanding colonial and commonwealth archetype of white men effortlessly moving and accomplishing across international news (Maguire, as cited by Bebawi and Evans, 2019). This Critical Race Theory (Gotanda and Peller, 1995) because being free to frame footage in that manner could be an example of white privilege and the discriminating myriad of its social advantages. To another extent, a study, which reviewed 75 books written by foreign correspondents and then later held interviews, used a framing theoretical perspective to assess how culture is utilised in the reportage of the foreign correspondents more widely. They uncovered that 44% referred explicitly to culture and, during the interviews, the researchers picked up on an unconscious awareness of specific cultural influences that were voiced by the correspondents when introduced. In other words, foreign correspondents might be in danger of implanting bias into their coverage whether they realise it or not.

Furthermore, another study found that the American foreign correspondents whom they investigated, propelled by chief news bodies, reported with a consistent lack of gravity and perspective in contrast to their local peers who owned a lot fewer assets and less reputation (Pedelty, 1995). Moreover, additional research relating to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict frequently explains the tendency for foreign correspondents to land and be quite

ignorant to the historical background and incapable of the local language (Bishara, 2006). This is problematic because it guarantees reliance on at least one interpreter and, particularly in rural provinces, you cannot be certain if something has been interpreted accurately or modified to suit what they believe the correspondent would like to hear. (Wyatt, as cited by Laughran, 2018). Consequently, ill-equipped foreign correspondents may well risk the objectivity of their agency. An unfamiliarity with the language and culture of a place can completely hide even the best of a correspondent's capacity to grasp and express well what is happening. Therefore, a comprehensive and pre-existent knowledge of the communities and areas involved, which local professional journalists already have, is vital in order for foreign correspondents to remain important.

Nonetheless, just because this is a trend does not mean to say that the actual position of the foreign correspondent is trivial. Instead, it means that those journalists who take it on need to rework their performance. Besides, in further defence of the foreign correspondent, it is often disputed that they are necessary in order to decipher actions and dealings in a foreign country in a manner that the uninformed audience back home understand best: “ It placed his own society within the context of the continent and the world,” (Smith, 1979, p. 13). This is also rationalised well by Cornelia Fuchs from German magazine Stern, who says that while you can read American papers from Germany, that does not mean to say that you can appreciate what it is about like a German would. This is due to the fact that, correspondingly, the papers in say Washington or perhaps New York write for American audiences and, in that same sense, these American audiences know of many things

that those German audiences are completely unaware of (Fuchs, as cited by Archetti, 2012). Plus, foreign correspondents can report in a fashion that offers their organisation a distinct point of view. Now, it is said that all of this is only really achievable if the commentator goes abroad and personally witnesses the story that they were assigned for themselves. This is reasoned on the attitude that you cannot report on life without going to where it is lived (Gourevitch, as cited by Sambrook, 2010). Besides, correspondents must validate their sources, and the most dependable way to do is indisputably to be on the ground (Massonnet, as cited by Chainon, 2013). So, in other words, they must perform a public service in bearing witness to radical occurrences (Archetti, 2012).

To conclude, it is important to reiterate that although there is a trend of unfortunate foreign correspondent behaviour, this does not mean to say that their role is unimportant. Actually, what is important is the professional correspondents who take into account the arguments mentioned and rework their performance. It seems likely that the old-fashioned job of foreign correspondence will swing from assembling information to guiding, together with local journalists and citizens, the stream of information and online public debate. Also, what we can anticipate is reportage with an array of voices that were formerly unheeded, accompanied by an authentic human characteristic, as well as training and recruiting to provide diversity and local expertise that is very much needed in the twenty-first-century news arena. As a final point, it is worth remarking that extremely few reports have been supported using theoretical frameworks in order to uncover fundamental

ideas and attitudes which control foreign correspondence, like Postcolonial Theory and Critical Race Theory.

Bibliography:

- Adie, K. 2003, *The kindness of strangers: the autobiography*, Headline, London.
- Archetti, C. 2012, " WHICH FUTURE FOR FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE? London foreign correspondents in the age of global media", *Journalism Studies*, vol. 13, no. 5-6, pp. 847-856.
- Bebawi, S. and Evans, M., 2019. *The Future Foreign Correspondent*. Springer.
- Berger, G., 2009. How the Internet Impacts On International News: Exploring Paradoxes of the Most Global Medium in a Time of Hyperlocalism'. *International Communication Gazette*, 71(5), pp. 355-371.
- Bishara, A., 2006. Local hands, international news: Palestinian journalists and the international media. *Ethnography*, 7(1), pp. 19-46.
- Borpujari, P. (2019). The Problem with ' Fixers'. [online] *Columbia Journalism Review*. Available at: https://www.cjr.org/special_report/fixers.php [Accessed 16 Jan. 2020].
- Chainon, J. (2013). Why we (still) need foreign correspondents and reporters on the ground, and how to ensure their safety - *World News Publishing Focus* by WAN-IFRA. [online] *World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers*. Available at: <https://blog.wan-ifra.org/2013/06/05/why-we-still-need-foreign-correspondents-and->

reporters-on-the-ground-and-how-to-ensure-th [Accessed 16 Jan. 2020].

- Clement, J. (2020). Global Internet Access Rate 2005 - 2019. [online] Statista. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/209096/share-of-internet-users-in-the-total-world-population-since-2006/> [Accessed 13 Jan. 2020].
- Gotanda, N. and Peller, G., 1995. Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement. The New Press.
- Kumar, S., 2014. Media, communication, and postcolonial theory. The handbook of media and mass communication theory, pp. 380-399.
- Laughran, S. (2018). BBC's Caroline Wyatt on how language learning has been vital to her career. [online] World of Better Learning | Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2018/03/23/bbc-caroline-wyatt-language-learning/> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2020].
- Lewis, D., 2010. Foreign correspondents in a modern world: The past, present and possible future of global journalism. The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications, 1(1), pp. 119-127.
- Nielsen, R., Newman, N., Fletcher, R. and Kalogeropoulos, A. (2019). Digital News Report 2019. [online] Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Available at: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/DNR_2019_FINAL_0.pdf [Accessed 13 Jan. 2020].
- Owen, J., 2001. Training journalists to report safely in hostile environments. Nieman Reports, 55(4), p. 25.

- Pedelty, M., 1997. The marginal majority: Women war correspondents in the Salvadoran Press Corps Association (SPCA). *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 14(1), pp. 49-76.
- Reporters Without Borders. (2018). Worldwide Round-up Of Journalists Killed, Detained, Held Hostage, Or Missing In 2018. [online]. Available at: https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/worldwilde_round-up.pdf [Accessed 16 Jan. 2020].
- Sambrook, R. & University of Oxford. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism 2010, Are foreign correspondents redundant?: the changing face of international news, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Oxford.
- Seo, S., 2016. Marginal majority at the postcolonial news agency: Foreign journalistic hires at the Associated Press. *Journalism Studies*, 17(1), pp. 39-56.
- Smith, A., 1979. *The newspaper: An international history* (pp. 10-12). London: Thames and Hudson.
- Starck, K. and Villanueva, E., 1992. *Cultural Framing: Foreign Correspondents and Their Work*.
- Willmott, O. (2010). *The Decline Of The Foreign Correspondent*. [online] NewStatesman. Available at: <https://www.newstatesman.com/international-politics/2010/11/foreign-international-british> [Accessed 16 Jan. 2020].
- Zuckerman, E., 2013. *Rewire: Digital cosmopolitans in the age of connection* (pp. 1918-1942). New York, NY: WW Norton.