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Journalism in the age of global media: The evolving practices of foreign correspondents in London

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Abstract
The article challenges the widespread notion that, in the age of global and instantaneous communication, foreign correspondence is becoming 'redundant'. Based on a range of in-depth interviews with foreign correspondents in London, it examines the identity, newsgathering routines, and outputs of journalists working for a range of foreign media organizations. The study suggests that foreign correspondence is indeed evolving, but that the changes are not necessarily for the worse. In fact, not only are foreign journalists not disappearing, but the heavy use of new communication technologies – rather than leading to superficial and low-quality reporting – also supports the pursuit of exclusive news-story angles and a fuller delivery of the correspondent's value.

Keywords
Communication technology, foreign correspondent, foreign journalist, interview, journalism, media, news, newsgathering, sources

Introduction

Current literature on foreign correspondence presents a number of negative claims: foreign journalists are disappearing because domestic publics are not interested in foreign news (Altmeppen, 2010; Robinson, 2007); foreign correspondence is in a state of decline, if not 'crisis' (Cozma, 2010: 667–668; Young, 2010), as much as journalism more broadly (Blumler, 2010; Curran, 2010: 465–466). Such statements contribute to paint, as John Maxwell Hamilton (2009: 463) writes in revisiting the history of foreign

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correspondence, a 'gloomy Darwinian conjecture that "the genre known as 'foreign correspondence' is becoming extinct" and international news "an engendered species"'.

While there are a number of interconnected reasons for these developments – including financial difficulties related to the recent economic crisis – advances in communication technologies and the establishment of global media networks appear to play a very significant role. The need to reduce the number of foreign correspondents in the print medium, for example, might be on a first instance related to the 'death of newspapers' (Alterman, 2008; *The Economist*, 2006) and their turn towards local rather than international coverage as a last source of revenue (Adams and Ovide, 2009). This aspect, however, is largely the consequence of the rise of the internet: as advertisers prefer investing online, newspapers need to find a niche news market that cannot be easily duplicated by material freely available online. In fact, the very possibility for global audiences to access news in foreign countries at a click of a button might lend support to the idea that foreign correspondents are unnecessary 'middle men'. This is the implied logic behind the very title of a recent report by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Sambrook, 2010): *Are Foreign Correspondents Redundant?*

The last systematic study of foreign correspondents in the British capital was conducted by Morrison and Tumber between 1978 and 1981. This article presents the results of a new study to investigate what has changed in the last 30 years by analyzing the identity and background of foreign correspondents, their newsgathering routines – especially their interactions with sources – and the stories they produce. The new study paid particular attention to the way in which advances in communication technologies have affected the practices of foreign correspondents, both in terms of the constraints they impose on, and opportunities they offer to, the reporters, as well as how these technologies are appropriated by foreign journalists for newsgathering purposes in the specific London context.

Although much more contained in scope in comparison to Morrison and Tumber's project (1981), the findings of this investigation still raise significant challenges to the homogenizing nature of the claims that are made about foreign correspondence in a global age. More specifically, the results confirm that foreign correspondence is indeed changing, but that its reality is far more nuanced and variegated than current literature would suggest. The analysis of the correspondents' practice, in fact, suggests that the alleged 'crisis' of journalism might affect some countries more than others, and certain media (like newspapers) more than other kinds of outlets (magazines, for instance). Overall, rather than necessarily leading to 'churnalism' – or the trend to endlessly recycle second-hand unchecked material – the development of global media can also support deeper and higher-quality reporting.

The argument will unfold in four stages. The article opens with a brief review of the literature, which sets the stage for the empirical investigation: it highlights the claims about the impact of new communication technologies on journalism and the outcomes they are expected to have on foreign correspondents' practices. These claims constitute the hypotheses that the empirical study aims to verify. That section is followed by a brief description of the methodology. The third and main part of the article is constituted by the findings. They are extensively illustrated by the contributions of the foreign correspondents in the form of interview excerpts. The fourth and conclusive part points out that, not only are some of those developments that are thought to belong to the future of

journalism already taking place, but that such a future, once one analyzes the actual experience of foreign correspondents, appears brighter than it is currently portrayed. The article ends with a provocative thought related to methodological issues: perhaps there is no crisis of journalism, but a crisis of journalism research.

A new foreign correspondence?

A review of the extensive literature on foreign correspondence far exceeds the scope of this article.[1] The focus here is on those aspects that have the potential to affect the practice of foreign correspondents. Advances in communication technologies, particularly the speed and ease at which it is possible to communicate across distances, appear to have three major and interconnected impacts.

1 *Advances in communication technologies affect the identity and the professional role of foreign correspondents*

The phenomenon of citizen journalism and blogging support the idea that almost anybody with access to a computer can 'report' to worldwide audiences. The proliferation of such non-professional sources, more specifically, challenges the role of the journalist as 'expert' in the dissemination of information and leads to a blurring between the public and professional reporters (Tumber, 2006). In this context some talk about the outright disappearance of foreign correspondents (Hiatt, 2007; Kalb, 1991). Others, instead, point at the 'evolution' of their role and activities (Hamilton and Jenner, 2004). This trend leads to a decline of the traditional figure of the bureau-based foreign correspondent – what Cohen (1963: 17) described as a 'man [sic] in grey flannels who ranks very high in the hierarchy of reporters'. The new environment is the ground for the development of a greater variety of correspondents' identities and respective distinct professional roles: for example, among the rest, the 'foreign foreign correspondent', a hired foreign national who is expected to report from a local angle; or the 'foreign local correspondent', a foreign national who reports about local stories which have international implications (Hamilton and Jenner, 2004: 313). This is also the context where a range of possible contractual arrangements can develop: from staff foreign correspondent (full-time/part-time member of the staff), to more or less regularly contributing freelance correspondents (stringers being at the more occasional end of the spectrum). The study, in this respect, tackles the questions: Who are the foreign correspondents in London? What does their professional role of 'foreign correspondent' consist of? What do they do? What are their living and working conditions like?

2 *Advances in communication technologies affect foreign correspondents' access to sources*

A second major impact of advances in communication technologies on journalism is related to reporters' access to sources. Sources that journalists normally access include not only people such as officials, experts, foreign diplomats, other journalists, or members of the public, but also media sources. Foreign correspondents are no exception to

this. This is nothing new either: Morrison and Tumber, for example, wrote in 1985 that foreign correspondents were dependent 'on the host-country media for information and ideas' (1985: 466). The 'host-country media' was then mainly constituted by national newspapers. The extent of such dependency was already defined as 'enormous' (1985: 466). The time spent on gathering news through media sources was considerably higher than that spent on talking to personal contacts (Morrison and Tumber, 1981: 54). This trend was explained by the fact that foreign journalists tended to operate on tight budgets, often on their own (1981: 23; 1985: 458; see also Wu and Hamilton, 2004: 527). Morrison and Tumber (1985: 466), indeed, concluded that a foreign correspondent was 'as good as the local media will allow'. The present study examines how access to sources has changed since, with the development of a global media network, digital communication technologies, and the advent of the internet. More specifically it addresses the questions: Which media sources do London correspondents currently use? Are foreign journalists even more reliant on media sources, given their ubiquitous availability, at the expense of personal contacts? Or is the greater ease with which information can be gathered from a variety of media sources making it more convenient to pursue personal contacts? Where do London foreign correspondents get their information from in a context characterized by a blurring between the local, the national, and the global?

3 *Advances in communication technologies, by affecting foreign correspondents' newsgathering routines, have an impact on the stories they write*

On the one hand, some argue that the increasing speed of the news cycle, combined with fiercer commercial competition over ratings, leads to lower standards of journalism that favour 'infotainment' over well-researched content (Henry, 2007; Thussu, 2007). Decreasing time for newsgathering also appears to encourage reliance on material from news agencies, with the result that news is becoming increasingly homogeneous on a worldwide scale (Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, 1998; Paterson, 1997). Another possible consequence of busier schedules is the trend to endlessly recycle already existing online material instead of pursuing time-consuming first-hand research – also referred to as 'churnalism' (Atkins, 2011; Davies, 2008).

On the other hand, the possibility of accessing alternative sources through new communication technologies creates the potential for a better contextualization of events within a greater variety of perspectives (Archetti, 2008). This study assesses the effect of the news cycle speed, and the globalization of sources (as either availability of the same sources or multiplication of alternative sources) on foreign correspondents' stories by tackling the questions: What do foreign correspondents report about? Which sources do their stories rely on? It also investigates the 'story behind the story': How does a story come about? Who initiates it? Which decisions by the journalist, editors, and news organizations explain what ultimately the story will look like? The investigation of this aspect helps to place into context the extent to which journalists would reproduce material they might find online: To what extent do they 'recycle' information rather than rewrite it and re-interpret it? What is their leeway for creativity and independence? What is, ultimately, the added value of the foreign correspondent?

Methodology

The interviewees were nine women and 16 men from a range of countries: Australia (1); Brazil (3); Denmark (1); an Eastern European country (1); Germany (4); Greece (6); Finland (1); France (2); Holland (1); Pakistan (1); Spain (2); and Russia (2). The media organizations included:[2] news agencies (Australian Associated Press, Agencia Estado [Brazilian non-state agency], Associated Press of Pakistan; RIA Novosti [Russian]); radio (ARD [German public radio broadcaster]); magazines (two German publications: *Stern* and *Focus*); radio and TV (several Greek stations: ERT3; ANT ENA TV and Flash Radio; Net Radio 105.8; SKAI TV and Radio); newspapers (French *La Tribune, L'Humanité, France Soir*; Swiss *Le Temps*; Dutch *De Telegraaf*; Belgian *Le Soir*); websites (French *MyEurop*); and foreign publications in the UK (*Brazilian News* [in Portuguese]; *Angliya* [in Russian]). The interviews lasted between 18 and 114 minutes, with an average of well over 40 minutes. They were conducted between November and December 2010 and June and July 2011.

Although the number of foreign journalists is not extensive, the interviews provided details of the journalists' working routines and thinking processes that led to story selection, research, and production. The correspondents, at the time of the interviews, had spent between seven months and 31 years in London, and between four and 50 years in journalism. Most of them had been journalists for well over a decade. The majority had been working for media organizations in their respective home countries, often in additional countries other than the UK. They were therefore in the position to compare newsgathering routines across different media and information environments. They were also able to comment about the way the advent of the internet, instantaneous communications, and social media had, over time, affected their working routines. Furthermore, the experience of having covered a variety of roles over the course of their career gave them both greater perspective and a reflective attitude on what affected their activities, especially their journalistic output.

A 'foreign correspondent' in this study was any journalist working for a media outlet producing news (both hard news and features) for a non-British audience, regardless of whether this audience was in the UK or abroad. This definition was adopted to capture the variety of collaboration arrangements between correspondents and foreign offices, which go well beyond the reporting 'full time on a staff basis' of past studies (Morrison and Tumber, 1981: 16).

Findings

Investigating the actual experience of foreign journalists in London reveals an extreme variety of practices. They are now illustrated starting from the identity of foreign correspondents, then moving on to their newsgathering routines, and the content of the stories they produce.

Who are the foreign correspondents?

A new generation?

The profile of foreign correspondents in London appears to be changing. Besides the journalistic veterans, there are also relatively younger people who have become involved

in foreign correspondence. The average age of a correspondent 30 years ago was 41 and he – 85 percent were men – had spent an average of 18 years in journalism (Morrison and Tumber, 1981: 19–20). Today, while a few have extensive experience in journalism (Fawad Hashmey, correspondent for the Associated Press of Pakistan, was assigned to London thanks to his previous 31 years experience as a domestic journalist, for instance), others become correspondents at a much earlier stage in their career. Staff correspondent Arnoud Breitbarth, 30, who previously worked at the economic desk of the biggest Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf*, moved to London as 'the editor in chief wanted someone with an economic background', after eight years of working as a journalist in the Netherlands. When I asked him whether assigning relatively young correspondents to London was the outcome of a deliberate editorial policy he said that in the past it was:

> … usual to be far older to be a correspondent. But being a correspondent nowadays is, I guess, quite hard work, like long hours. You're not only a newspaper correspondent but you do radio, internet and some TV as well. You need to be a bit younger and a bit modern to use all the technologies available.

A Spanish correspondent, also 30, confirmed that in his organization there is a mixture of young and more senior correspondents: 'a city like London is very dynamic and requires maybe people with more energy than experienced analysis'.

As both correspondents wanted to make very clear, 'being young' does not mean 'being inexperienced': 'we have been working before in international news […] we are young, but we are keen' (Spanish correspondent). Overall, however, it appears true that, while the London posting used to be considered almost like the coronation of a journalist's distinguished career due to the prestige associated with the location (Morrison and Tumber, 1981: 19), now journalists who might have had less experience in journalism are able to 'do the job'. Thomas Wald, correspondent for the Australian Associated Press says, for example, that '[now] in journalism people who are not complete experts in a field can gather information much more quickly than in the past and get up to speed […] it probably evens out'. In fact, when another interviewee, Raphael Honigstein, German freelance sport correspondent who also writes for the *Guardian* newspaper, started reporting he did not have a background in journalism at all. He began writing almost by chance while he was studying for a law degree in London.

The interviews suggest that London foreign journalists tend to regard themselves as a 'one man band' (Eric Albert, correspondent for the French *La Tribune* and Swiss *Les Temps*) who tend to work even more in isolation than in previous years. Already in the early 1980s, Morrison and Tumber (1981: 23) found that 30 percent of the London correspondents they surveyed worked alone and 41 percent only had one or two other correspondents alongside them. Out of the 25 interviewees for this study, 22 were the only correspondent in London for their respective organization. The tendency, if any extra help is needed, is to temporarily hire professionals on the ground. Imke Henkel, for example, is the only correspondent for the German magazine *Focus* and often hires photographers locally to take pictures to accompany her pieces. Thanassis Gavos, the only London freelance correspondent for Greek radio and TV station SKAI, would hire a camera crew to 'go out' and shoot his reports. The reduced numbers appear to be related

to advances in communication technology, particularly the fact that recording equipment is portable, easily usable, and editing can be done on the spot. Isaac Karipidis (Greek TV station ANT ENA and Flash Radio), for example, says:

> I do all the camera coverage by myself […] I'm working on my own. I used to have a cameraman, I used to have a sound recorder and everything but now I'm going on with my own. I have my own camera, I have my laptop. I go there, I take my pictures, I do my stand ups, I edit the story and I send it to Greece. That makes my job a little bit more complicated but at the same time, 300 per cent cheaper than before.

Most of the interviewees did not have an office. Nearly all of them worked at home. For example, Cornelia Fuchs, correspondent for the German magazine *Stern* works from home with her laptop. Although the publication still has offices in Paris and New York, this formula has been adopted by her magazine for 10 other locations (including Shanghai, Bangkok, South Africa, Beirut, Kabul, and Istanbul). Sport correspondent Raphael Honigstein mentioned that he tends to work from home, even if he also has a desk in a shared architects' office: 'it's really only a desk and a wireless internet connection. I don't have a phone there. I mean you don't need anything else.'

Are foreign correspondents disappearing?

The data gathered through the interviews questions the argument that foreign correspondents are at risk of vanishing. More specifically, the evidence from the conversations with both the correspondents and the officials at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) makes clear that the number of foreign journalists alone is a terribly inaccurate measure of the health of foreign correspondence. As a start, it is not really possible to compare any hard figures. Morrison and Tumber wrote that 'the exact number of foreign correspondents or even a close approximation was unknown and could not be established from documented sources' (1981: 5). Even 30 years ago, they found it 'impossible to say with certainty if the number of foreign correspondents based in London [had] declined or increased' (1981: 17). Today, the Foreign Press Association (FPA) has about 500 members, but not all foreign journalists register because of the relatively expensive joining fee (Wyld, 2008). According to the estimate of the FCO International Media Officer John Hewitt (2011), the number of foreign correspondents is now 'around the 1500 mark'. The bottom line, however, is that nobody knows exactly how many foreign journalists are in London. While there is a general consensus among interviewees that the number of correspondents is somehow decreasing over time, this does not mean that there are no longer journalists on the ground – so much for the number of closing foreign bureaux routinely cited as the proof that foreign correspondents are soon going to be consigned to the past (Constable, 2007, in Sambrook, 2010: 13). French correspondent Tristan de Bourbon Parme, who works for five different outlets (two French, one Belgian and one Swiss newspaper, and a French website), says that it is true that *staff* correspondents are in decline, but they are being replaced by freelancers: 'there are still correspondents, but they are all freelancers […] They [media organizations] still have somebody everywhere.' This is confirmed again by Hewitt (2011) who, while

reiterating that numbers are decreasing, also points to the fact that there are fluctuations and re-arrangements of journalists' cohorts, related not only to economic circumstances, but also to the evolving interest of foreign countries in the UK:

> I think they are diminishing […] The general pool of foreign media […] around the world will diminish, especially as communications change and improve or get quicker […] since I've been doing this [for the past 10 years] the South American representation has dropped quite dramatically, especially Argentina and Brazil. Brazil is creeping back a bit as its economy grows again, because it's one of BRIC countries [Brazil, Russia, China – organization of emerging market countries]. […] China has increased, because of its economy and increasing influence around the world. I mean, they've obviously got a big group of people here. I think that's more to do with China's ambitions as a super-power than its media interest, but again we have to remember that most Chinese media is state-controlled. But I think that other groups are gradually reducing. Americans have stayed the same here, but Europeans probably are beginning to gradually reduce their numbers; not by much, but gradually. It's a sign of the times.

The last point is also made by a Finnish correspondent:

> Fifteen years ago we were at least 10 very active ones [Finnish correspondents] and probably 20 who contributed. Now I would say that we are maybe five who are active, a maximum of 10 who will write something. The number of correspondents who make a living by this has been halved.

She explains in detail how the cuts have financial reasons related to her home country media industry, but also underlines how the decision to reduce the correspondents in London is ultimately rooted in the fact that 'the UK did not join the Euro and this is an old empire'. To explain the decreasing newsworthiness of the UK she adds: 'I'd say internationally the importance of the UK is diminishing. It's getting smaller and smaller; there's no denying it. It's not the world's power it used to be and from a European point of view.'

The conversations with the journalists also suggest that cuts in foreign correspondence do not appear to affect all media quarters in the same way. Radio and magazines, again according to the experience of the interviewees, are not really witnessing the financial difficulties of the newspaper industry. Cornelia Fuchs of *Stern* explains that her magazine, in fact, has never had so many foreign correspondents. As, as she puts it, 'the only reason why someone would buy a magazine like *Stern* any more is because people know that our journalists are actually there [reporting from a foreign country]'. This trend in the magazine industry is confirmed by Sambrook (2010: 22). He describes how a specialist magazine like *Monocle* has been able to exploit precisely the 'cuts elsewhere in international coverage' to thrive.

Sources and newsgathering routines

The advent of instantaneous communications, the internet, and social media offers a vast range of information sources to journalists. All correspondents mention that the development of communication technologies makes their work easier, even if it is

problematic to sift through the information tide to check its accuracy. A Brazilian news agency correspondent, who wished to remain anonymous, said that:

> … it's much easier now to get information although at the same time you have access to thousands and thousands of different bits of information and it's more difficult to select which one is really relevant or not. I think it's a daily challenge.

All interviewees make extensive use of media sources. This does not mean, however, that they 'recycle' existing news. Consulting media sources is seen as a necessary step towards building an 'information skeleton' to then add 'flesh to the bones' (Eric Albert, correspondent for *La Tribune* and *Les Temps*) through additional conversations with selected and specialized sources – thus bringing out the angle on why the story is relevant to the respective audiences back home. I now illustrate this further by discussing what drives journalists' selection of sources and the way they fit within a very dynamic and non-linear newsgathering process. This will show the extent to which correspondents actively and creatively combine different sources of information to meet constantly changing reporting needs.

Proliferation of sources

Even if an extensive range of sources is available, correspondents select those that better fit with the issue they need to cover, the nature (factual or analytical) of the report they are required to produce, its scope and, connected to the last point, the amount of time they have at their disposal for researching a story. Some spend more time talking to sources rather than online. Here is the example of Sebastian Hesse-Kastein, a correspondent working for ARD, a German public radio broadcaster:

Q: What would you say is the proportion of time that you spend talking to people versus collecting information from other media?

That really depends on what kind of story I'm doing. If it's a news story, like when Rolls-Royce issued a press statement this morning about their engines and how to repair them, of course you don't give Rolls-Royce a call and ask for further information, you use their press statement. But I'm working on a piece right now, a longer one, on the Druid movement in Great Britain, something which fascinates the Germans. Druids were officially recognized as a church in Britain a couple of weeks ago, which was my reason for looking again at the Druid movement. I could find nothing useful on the web, so I have to go there and talk to people, experience it, smell, feel, hear, see for myself. And because everybody in Germany can now log onto the web and look at the BBC website, they don't need me to read back to them what's on the BBC website. What they need me for is to explain things, you know?

Thanassis Gavos's reply to the question of where he gets the material for his radio and TV reports from (Greek station SKAI) shows how sources are cherry-picked depending on the specific needs of the moment:

> The most important sources for me are my contacts. First of all, if it's a big story about the government, then of course the press offices of the particular ministry concerned is my first point of reference. Apart from that, I have quite an extensive list of personal contacts that I collected when I was working for the BBC. Sometimes I go back to them and the list includes politicians, financial analysts, and even, more importantly, academics. Academics always have something interesting to say, or they can just guide you through and maybe introduce you to someone else who knows more about the story. There is of course the internet: you can find almost anything on the internet now. But since the internet is accessible to everyone, if I go on the BBC website then my colleagues in Athens could do that just as well, so I try and find things which I know are not very commonly known or accessible in Athens: articles in particular magazines or newspapers, or official reports, which give my stories something a little bit extra. For me personally, one of the most important sources for a story and for describing the atmosphere or the feeling of the story is the radio. That's why I always listen to the radio. Here in the UK what I love is that people and analysts call in to a programme and express their opinions. You can really get a sense of what the country is feeling about anything from that, I think, and I use that. And of course there is the TV as well, and with all the 24/7 news bulletins it's hard to miss a story.

Other journalists, instead, mainly use other media sources. Jader De Oliveira, for example, works for the Brazilian TV channel Globo News and reports about current affairs and the economy. As he puts it, 'I'm not an analyst, I just report [the facts].' He doesn't travel as much as he used to. He mainly works from home: 'The news agencies and the people in Rio [Brazil] provide me with a lot of information, and also reading newspapers and listening to the news on the television.' Then the office in Rio de Janeiro combines his reports (either recorded over the phone or live) 'with images they get from news agencies'.

News as the outcome of a collective, collaborative, non-linear research process

News is always a constructed product (Archetti, 2010a, 2010b; Schlesinger, 1978), but current reporting by foreign correspondents appears to be so to an extreme extent. Producing news is a highly collaborative process across all of its development stages: selection, research, and production. This, to an extent, has always been the case: Morrison and Tumber (1981: 54), for example, found that, of the correspondents they surveyed, 44 percent spent between one and four hours a week conducting face-to-face interviews, 43 percent spent the same amount of time telephoning sources, 37 percent talking to other foreign correspondents, 28 percent talking to British journalists. The multiplication of opportunities for interaction through the internet and social media, however, leads nowadays to a seamless online/offline constant exchange of information between correspondents and a wide range of other actors and information sources. In the stage of story selection, for example, there could be a negotiation between the correspondent and the editors of the home office, who might make requests about what they would like to see stories about. Public radio German correspondent Sebastian Hesse-Kastein says, for instance, that this happens in roughly a third of the cases, although most interviewees appeared almost entirely free to use their own judgement. This is nothing radically different from what happened in the past: Morrison and Tumber (1981: 25) wrote that 21

percent of stories were 'initiated jointly' (by the correspondent and editor), 64 percent by the correspondents, and 15 percent by the editor. Nowadays, however, due to the higher number of stories produced, the negotiation could take up to six exchanges a day (Spanish foreign correspondent).

A very good illustration of collaborative newsgathering in the research stage of a story is provided by German sport correspondent Raphael Honigstein. The following interview excerpt shows not only a collaboration among journalists, but also a new role for social media in facilitating the sharing and exchanging of information, beyond the sheer speed at which news is assembled:

> Only two days ago there was a story about FIFA [International Football Federation] and it was in a Swiss paper. I read it in the morning, I posted a link about it on Twitter because it was really, really interesting, and a lot of English journalists looked at it and didn't quite know what to do with it but a guy from the Press Association also saw it. He had the contacts and the resources to follow it up, researched it himself, and then he published his own story based on it. We were in contact through Twitter, and these kinds of things happen more and more I find. I see these guys when I'm out in the field, I see the wire guys as well as the other guys, and sometimes it is a collaborative process. I guess I rely less on them, because as soon as there is a wire story *The Guardian* will ask somebody on their staff to write it up, and then you'll read *The Guardian* story the next day, which will be more enhanced and more contextual so I'll rely more on that [to write my analytical piece].

An instance of collaboration in the output stage of news production is offered by Cornelia Fuchs, correspondent for the German magazine *Stern*, contributing to a colleague's piece:

> The other thing I'm working on [at the moment] is that I am just helping a colleague who is doing a big story on the Euro crisis, and I'm researching the situation in Ireland. But I won't write the whole story; I'll just give him some bits and pieces.

Content of the stories

What is 'news' in the eyes of each correspondent?

What ultimately becomes 'news' varies widely. News is not just politics or foreign policy. What is newsworthy depends, among other factors, on the country for which a reporter is writing (particularly, in this case, on its relationship with the UK), and on the editorial needs of the media outlet for which the journalist reports.

Hesse-Kastein (ARD), in describing how a story comes about, explains that there is 'obvious' breaking news (what Honigstein also calls 'self evident'), then there are stories requested by editors, and pieces that are pitched by the journalist. However, while the proportion of these three kinds of news is fairly even in the UK, in the USA, where he had been previously posted, it was different. There 'breaking news' was 'more important' due to the higher interest of German audiences in American politics:

Q: So how would a story come about? You mentioned the differences between an emerging story or breaking news, an editor requesting something, or you pitching a story, but what would you say is the proportion among them?

One third each roughly.

Q: So it's quite balanced?

Yes, it's quite balanced I think here in London. I mean, in the US it was different. The news factor was a lot higher, and in America there are a lot of things going on that you have to cover as a foreign correspondent, and American politics are a lot more important for Germans than British politics is. Here, the election [2010] was a big thing and now there is the whole debate about cutting benefits, which is of course a big story but it's not as dominant in the German news as say what's going on in Washington DC or in Brussels.

As he later expands on this point:

> When I was in America or in Berlin a lot of the stuff we covered was purely political, about policy issues, and obviously there were some issues where you got a lot of angry reactions. For example, writing a pro-George Bush commentary in 2003 was something that definitely generated a huge wave of anger and reaction. British politics is not that interesting to European audiences, so here it's more the sort of entertaining stories that we do. So the Royals, the eccentric British, funny things, and of course the Druid story [mentioned earlier] would be a perfect example.

The interview with the Brazilian correspondent for TV Globo, Jader De Oliveira, shows that the main focus of interest for his home audiences is the economy: 'Well, world economic interdependence is so great that any story on the economy is good.' This is underlined by the fact that the very mention of Brazil as an emergent economy made a good story:

> Anything that has some relation with South America is a good story, and if it has anything to do with Brazil, even better. The other day, for instance, George Osborne [UK Chancellor of the Exchequer] said in Parliament that British exports to Ireland are bigger than exports to Brazil, China, Russia and India put together, the four big emergent economies.

The Greek correspondent Thanassis Gavos, instead, suggests that Greek audiences are particularly interested in financial and society news:

Q: Are there any topics which you feel Greek audiences are typically interested in?

They've been very interested in all things financial for the last couple of years. Even if there is a story about something happening in the City that has nothing to do with Greece they find it interesting, or at least SKAI [his news organization] does. Apart from that they're really interested in the Cyprus problem as well, because the UK is one of the great powers, so there are many stories in that respect. And apart from that, we find things about showbiz and music that are interesting just to keep our younger audience happy as well. And some of the smaller stories, […] about local government or for instance about how the immigration system works here, how foreign communities have been absorbed by the UK. Greece has recently had a huge wave of immigrants, so this comparison is always interesting. And what is interesting is that whatever happens in Greece happens almost a decade after it has happened in the UK. So the example from

a more developed country is really interesting and in some cases provides a lesson on how to react to specific problems.

The correspondent's value

While all journalists need information to feed into their reports, the interviews suggest that there is possibly a high degree of reinterpretation of the material journalists get from their sources. This happens to a greater extent than in domestic journalism and is related to the very nature of the foreign correspondent's assignment.

Several of the correspondents understand their role as explaining what events in a foreign country actually mean. Cornelia Fuchs (*Stern*), for example, says that:

> …you can read American newspapers from Germany but that doesn't mean that you understand what the Tea Party is all about, you know? Because the newspapers in New York or Washington write for American audiences, and American audiences know about a lot of things that German audiences have never heard about.

Australian Thomas Wald (AAP) particularly highlights the need to explain and provide more background than a domestic journalist would otherwise do:

Q: You say that you try to write the stories from an Australian angle – what does that mean in practice?

Well, I guess, number one, if there's an Australian involved, obviously that's the focus. So if there were 25 people involved in a train accident in Yorkshire and two were Australians, then obviously they're going to be the main focus of the story because that's going to have the most interest back in Australia. At another level, I did a story about David and Ed Miliband when they were having their leadership battle [within the Labour party] and obviously there were quite a lot of stories coming out of England, with the English newspapers, and the world agencies as well, but I sort of did my own piece which was more breaking down the intense sort of fibre of their relationship and what it was all about and explaining who they were […] It's just that little bit more of an explanation that you have to give, because the average person in the back of Queensland or Western Australia or New South Wales aren't going to be cognisant with British Labour Party politics, so you have to inform them a little more than you otherwise would here.

For most of the interviewees, foreign correspondence goes beyond reporting what is happening and is related to what Sambrook (2010) calls the 'witness' function of journalism. In the words of Greek correspondent Thanassis Gavos, the role of the correspondent:

> … it's not only having someone there for when the big story breaks – you know, a huge international conference or something and breaking the news. For me, the important thing about my role is being here every day and every day finding something to say that will give a picture about what the UK is all about, and what the UK's role is in Europe or even in relation to Greece.

To an extent, perhaps, this role will never be in crisis because of the need to understand how the politics of one country affects the other. As Gavos continues:

> Because the world has become commonplace for everyone, not only because of the internet but also in politics, whatever happens here [London] usually has some kind of small or large influence on Greece as well. And that's what I try to make people understand by continuing to report on various things.

The bottom line, as Alexander Smotrov, correspondent for the Russian newsagency RIA Novosti, puts it, is that as a foreign journalist you cannot simply translate local press briefings:

> We do feel the pressure of other media [alternative sources of information for publics] and have a general awareness of the fact that audiences can access original sources of information and read the English language media; for example, BBC, *Sky News, The Guardian, The Times*, and other websites. Of course we feel this pressure and that's why we can't simply survive if we continue to work as our colleagues worked 30 years ago, when they picked up stories from the local media and went with that. We can't do this any more, but have to add significant additional value to our stories […] special angles, maybe some opinion, multimedia and good background details.

Finding the alternative 'angle' and news differentiation

This does not mean that the trend of 'copying and pasting' journalism – also referred to as 'churnalism' (Atkins, 2011; Davies, 2008) – does not exist, but that it perhaps affects domestic journalism to a greater extent than foreign correspondence, as this anecdote narrated by Ilja Gonciarov (editor of London weekly newspaper in Russian *Anglyia*) suggests. When asked whether his publication would rely on material provided by other media sources he replied that, rather than being applicable to foreign journalists, 'this [relying on other media sources for newsgathering] is how British papers work now':

> One of my journalists went to *The Times* office […] and he was amused because hardly anyone was coming in or going out, they just worked in the office like office clerks. Because they get everything from news agencies; well, it looked like that to him.

Diametrically opposing the general claim that news is becoming homogenized on a global scale due to the dominance of news agencies (Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, 1998) – particularly the tendency for journalists to endlessly recycle these media outlets' material – the interviews suggested a pressure across the board to *differentiate* news reports. This even applied to the very news agencies that are accused of homogenizing news. Particularly significant is this exchange with Thomas Wald of the Australian Associated Press:

Q: What is your story for today, if you have one?

> … the main story will be Julian Assange, with him being Australian, WikiLeaks and him being arrested. That's […] quite a big story in terms of him denying the

> charges and there are hundreds of documents and there's lots of attention on him, but like anything else it's just finding a way to make it a bit different. Obviously, we have Associated Press and Agence France-Presse so I'll have to a find an angle that's different and interesting for Australian audiences that separates itself from other agencies.
>
> […] another idea that I'm going to try and check up on is the Qatar World Cup [2022] […] the decision [to host the 2022 football World Cup in Qatar] was quite unpopular in Australia, because obviously we didn't win it [the bid] […] So I was going to try and get in contact with some Australian businessmen who might profit from the World Cup going to Qatar and try and get a bit of a different angle in terms of what that means.

Conclusions

This article does not want to deny the challenges foreign correspondents are facing. Just to make an example, few of the interviewees could rely on a stable contract with a single media organization to survive financially. Most of them had to juggle a variety of working arrangements with multiple outlets. The findings of the study, however, do suggest that the future of foreign correspondence is brighter than some of the current pessimistic assessments.

The experience of the foreign journalists in London also reveals that the reality of the correspondents' everyday practice, in the context of a proliferation of sources, audience segmentation, and multiplication of opportunities for collaborative and non-linear newsgathering, is extremely variegated and diverse. From this perspective, the very notion of 'foreign correspondence' as an abstract blanket term disembedded from, to use Pierre Bourdieu's terms, a journalist's unique position in the journalistic field (defined, among the factors that have been discussed, by one's role within a news organization, nature of a reporting assignment, number of organizations one works for, and network of sources) appears increasingly devoid of meaningful content. Worse, it can hinder our understanding of the reality of journalism in the 21st century by bringing with it the danger of overgeneralization, excessive simplification and, ultimately, the promise of describing a reality that does not actually exist.

This underlines the essential role of micro-level and ethnographic research to understand the way in which communication technology advances not only have an impact on a journalist's everyday routine, but are also creatively appropriated by reporters for newsgathering purposes.

Foreign correspondence is changing, but are the mindsets of journalism researchers developing in parallel to make sense of its evolution? The methods of participant observation, surveys, and content analysis that well suited the study of journalistic practices in the past (Morrison and Tumber, 1981) no longer appear to be sufficient to examine the reality of foreign correspondence today – if their application is feasible at all. In fact, how can a researcher observe journalists who mainly work from home or, as the Australian Thomas Wald put it, 'out of a bag'? And, even in that case, what are we supposed to 'observe'? Morrison and Tumber, 30 years ago, conducted a survey of foreign correspondents by posting a questionnaire to the correspondents' addresses, which they had obtained from the FCO and other journalists' associations. Nowadays,

for confidentiality reasons, the contacts of the correspondents would not be disclosed under any circumstance. How can we content analyze the correspondents' output when the stories they produce are circulated across such a variety of channels and platforms – and further edited at every stage of the process – that the correspondents themselves do not even know where their reports end up? As an example, among the interviewees, a Brazilian correspondent who wished to remain anonymous syndicates to '150 or 200 newspapers' in her home country alone.

Statements about the declining state of foreign correspondence are mainly grounded in research coming from the USA and a few other western countries (Franklin, 2010: 445; Sambrook, 2010: 69, 71–95). Conducting labor-intensive, time-consuming, and possibly expensive first-hand research about journalism is increasingly challenging in the context of financial cuts in higher education and limited availability of research funding. Is it possible that we are being misled in our understanding of contemporary journalism by the illegitimate generalization of context-specific research to describe the status of foreign correspondence in its global entirety – a sort of 'academic churnalism'? In fact, having shown that the practices of foreign journalists can widely vary within the boundaries of the same London media environment, is generalization of results – what many researchers would aspire to as the hallmark of a proper scientific study – really desirable and appropriate? The final provocative point I want to raise in this article is that perhaps we are witnessing no real crisis of journalism, but a crisis of journalism research.

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Notes

1. Here are just a few texts the reader might want to consult. In relation to foreign correspondence in general: Hannerz, 2004; the special issue of *Journalism Studies* 11(5) 2010; Sambrook, 2010. About foreign correspondence in the UK: Bober, 1999; Kruglak, 1954; Morrison and Tumber, 1981; Tunstall, 1971. On foreign correspondence in the USA: Ghorpade, 1984; Hamilton, 2009; Hamilton and Jenner, 2004; Hess, 1996, 2005; Lambert, 1956; Mowlana, 1975; Nair, 1991; Suh, 1972; Wilnat and Weaver, 2003.
2. Not all organizations have been named to protect the anonymity of those journalists who preferred not to be identified.

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