Reporting from the Wars 1850 – 2015

The origins and evolution of the war correspondent

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Introduction

War has preoccupied human civilisation for at least 4000 years from the foundations of the worlds first great empires to the empires of today. Mankind has been for as long as recorded history fascinated, horrified, thrilled, proud, confused, inspired and disgusted by war. With such a huge range of emotions and reactions to work with it is hardly surprising that it makes 'good' news in the sense that it fulfils all the elements of newsworthiness. The world's first 'war correspondent' is sometimes said to be Pheidippides at the battle of Marathon 490 BC.

Legend has it he ran 150 miles in two days to announce the victory of the Greeks over the Persians inventing war reporting and impossible deadlines simultaneously. He reportedly collapsed and died after imparting the news.

The war reporting we are familiar with today began at around the beginning of the 17th century with the advent of the modern newspaper. War interfered with commerce and the early newspapers were concerned with disseminating information to merchants. War reporting, it was stated, was the "subject of news" most printed.

War reporting served a number of purposes from its very beginnings. As mentioned above, war raises contradictory emotions in those called to take part in it. This includes of course not only those who actually fight but those who are expected to pay for it. The costs of war, born by the taxpayers, have broken the economies of even the wealthiest of combattants.

War costs lives and vast amounts of money so the war needs to be popular. An army needs recruits and they must be convinced the war is just. A war chest needs filling and those who pay must also feel they are contributing to a just cause. War weariness must be avoided and the press plays a large part in that. From the earliest records of war to the modern conflict it has been observed that wars cannot be fought without morale. Writing about the results of the first day of the Somme in 1916, an unknown Reuters correspondent informed the worlds readers of the morale of the British troops who had just launched the offensive, "the troops are in excellent spirits", they stated. That day is known to us today as the blackest day in the history of the British Army. It is highly unlikely that those at the front were in anything like "excellent spirits".

Today we take a less jingoistic view of war and our press brings us bad news more often than good. It was probably Vietnam that consolidated our view of war as seen in the press of today. Marshall McLuhan a media academic said in 1975, "Television brought the brutality of war into the comfort of the living room. “Vietnam was lost in the living rooms of America--not on the battlefields of Vietnam". The Vietnam war did more to change war reporting than any other. Reporters became ever more sceptical and refused to accept official press releases. Investigative reporting, looking beyond the story, grew in importance. It was no longer simply the good guys versus the bad guys, no more *Casus Belli*.

Today we are all too familiar with the face of war. We know the language of war and the cost of it. War reporting today is the world of the embedded and the unilateral reporter. People who often risk their own lives to show us the risks taken by others. Even after more than four millennia war is still very much part of our lives. Not only the lives of the soldiers, the politicians and the tragic civilians caught up in it but thanks to the war correspondent and war reporting it touches all of us. The purpose of this book is to tell that story.

The coverage of war helps the public to understand the dimensions of conflicts, which in many cases are caused by distrust and ignorance. In that sense, war journalism should always be accompanied by peace journalism, through which the values of coexistence are promoted in order to achieve greater knowledge (and recognition) of the other. In this book, we present 12 chapters, drawn from the study of a complicated profession: the war correspondent. The book is structured around two main sections: Ancient times, which spans between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and Modern times and general approaches, in which we present chapters that present issues related to the 21st century or, in turn, related to issues of war reporting, public opinion in countries in conflict, to name a few.

The book, which is in chronological order, begins with Elizabeth Rechniewski´s chapter, who analyses the intervention of a correspondent of the Sydney Morning Herald - known as The Vagabond - in the revolts of 1878 in New Caledonia. According to the author, the Special Commissioner played a leading role, pointing out the errors that had caused the situation, as well as being a precursor of literary journalism and immersion. In an interesting chapter on the journalistic culture and self-perception of correspondent in the Victorian war of the late nineteenth century, Devin Dattan describes the professional roles and attitudes that these professionals incarnated in the aforementioned conflict. For her part, Patricia Clarke introduces a relatively unexplored subject: the participation of Edith Dickenson in the Boer War. Dickenson, considered Australia's first war correspondent, was affected by

censorship and the problems of sending content, but she represented an example of fearlessness and courage.

Luigi Petrella presents an analysis on the propaganda war in the Spanish Civil War. The author specifically describes the arrival of the almost 1000 Italian correspondents who participated in the war, especially to cover the routines of the rebel army led by Francisco Franco. After the defeat of fascist Italy, according to Petrella, only journalists who collaborated with the Nazis were charged in various cases with prison sentences; the others, however, continued working in the same places.

In the chapter entitled Correspondent Techniques and Tools, a global description of the necessary techniques and tools commonly used in World War II is presented. From the telegrams, to the reports through the radio, going through the conflicts with the authorities, the author presents a description of great help to understand the informative management of this historical confrontation. For his part, Brian Hannon focuses on reflecting on the processes of censorship and self-censorship, particularly among British correspondents in World War II.

The next section of the book looks towards modern times and presents five chapters which describe some episodes occurring at the end of the XX Century and the beginning of the XXI. In the first chapter, Ángeles Durán brings us an enlightening analysis of the difference between peace and war journalism, with a case study of the Australian aboriginal people, and the need for their representation within the mainstream media. Mohammed Wesam Amer then studies the journalistic practices in the American and British press during the Gaza War. The next chapter by Aleksandar Mitić analyses the coverage of the war in Kosovo (1999), in which a group led by the US and NATO deployed its troops against Serbia and Montenegro, countries which were divided by the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The author delves into what were the dilemmas faced by journalists during this conflict. Daniel Barredo, Steven Grattan and Karen Pinto conduct a comparative exercise between the perceptions of two groups of journalists from Colombia and Northern Ireland. Through in-depth interviews, the authors perceive the existence of taboos in terms of the proximity of the armed conflict -especially in the Colombian case-, in addition to proposing the creation of some kind of mediating agency in that country, with the purpose of arbitrating the relationships between professionals and the organizations that shelter them. Finally, the chapter "Reporting the Human Cost of War", explores the human costs of conflicts and how, through coverage, it is possible to deepen the imaginary and, with it, achieve a greater responsibility when impacting on the context. From the review of the specific literature, therefore, an evaluation of the key aspects in the war correspondent is made, such as "truth seeking"

or "capturing history under construction". In later modern times, Julian Matthews and Alan Fisher conducted eight interviews with war reporters, with the aim of exploring the vision of these professionals on important issues such as mediation between the societies they target and the victims; the negotiations with their information organizations and the other professionals; and, in general, the professional roles assumed by journalists during armed conflicts, among other issues.

From our point of view, this book will be of interest to journalists, academics and students.

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Ancient Times

Chapter 1

The Vagabond: The Sydney Morning Herald's Special Commissioner on the 1878 Revolts in New Caledonia

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In mid-July 1878 reports began to reach Australia of the outbreak of native revolts on the French colony of New Caledonia. This rebellion in the nearest European colony to Australia was covered extensively in the Australian press which had, however, to rely on reports sent by British residents living in Noumea. In view of the interest in these events, the *Sydney Morning Herald* immediately dispatched its own reporter to New Caledonia, a certain Julian Thomas, pen name "The Vagabond," as its "Special Commissioner". It was under this byline that a series of eleven lengthy articles, each of several thousand words,[1] appeared in the paper in September and October.

Australia and New Caledonia in 1878

The interest displayed in these events by the Australian readership can be explained by the close if strained relations that existed between the French and British colonies. In September 1774 Captain Cook had named and taken possession of New Caledonia "in his Majesty's name," but in the following decades, the British had displayed no interest in establishing an official presence there. In September 1853 two ships of the French navy landed at Balade on the north-east coast of the *grande île* and claimed the territory in the name of Emperor Napoleon III. In the Australian colonies, the annexation provoked outrage that was directed as much against the British colonial office for its laxity and lack of foresight as it was against the French for their audacity. With a new appreciation of what had been lost, the Australian newspapers lamented the capture of this "valuable prize", making frequent reference to its economic and strategic significance. It became almost an

[1] The length of the articles ranged from 2357 to 4154 words.

article of faith in the Australian press that New Caledonia under French control would become a failed colony, that the French did not possess the British talent for colonisation and even that they treated the Indigenous peoples worse than did the British. Moreover, editorials and letters to the editor periodically claimed that the French colonists themselves would prefer to have the superior management that British control would bring to the territory, opinions that were strongly expressed in 1878 during the period of the Canaque[2] revolts in New Caledonia (Sydney Morning Herald 1879; Australian Town and Country Journal 1878).[3]

In the decades that followed the seizure in 1853, relations between the French and British colonies fluctuated according to the state of relations between the imperial powers and changing geopolitical realities in the region. The profoundly ambiguous and tension-filled relationship between Britain and France cannot be underestimated – the two countries had been at war for much of the past five hundred years, they vied for power and influence in Europe, strategic control of international waters and colonial possessions. The alliance between France and Britain forged to fight the Crimean war in 1853 – the year of the French takeover of New Caledonia – did not fundamentally alter the suspicion that many Australians felt towards the French. Moreover, they feared that the British would be all the more likely to abandon the interests of their colonial dependents in Australia if those interests conflicted with the needs of the alliance.

The "tyranny of distance" had a special impact on the mindset of Australians who feared that the relative proximity of New Caledonia and their own isolation from possible British intervention made them vulnerable to any threats that might come from that quarter (Rechniewski 2015). These fears can be better understood in the context of the lack of rapid communication between the two colonies: the electric telegraph was established between Brisbane and Noumea only in 1891. As a consequence the Australian newspapers, in their periodic bursts of apprehension concerning French intentions in the Pacific, warned that New Caledonia was only "four or five days sail away" and that the first that Australians would know of an invasion

[2] I have used the spelling "Canaque/s" rather than the more contemporary Kanak (sing. and pl.) because the former is the one Thomas uses.

[3] References abound in the papers of this period to the defects of French colonial rule, whether in the colony of Bourbon (present-day Réunion) where "chaos" prevails (English and Foreign Affairs 1879, 7), in Cochin-China or Tahiti. The "unfortunate state of affairs in New Caledonia", brought about by mining failures and financial disasters, is "but a type of the wretched state of French colonies generally" (Australian Town and Country Journal 1878, 9).

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