

# FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE FROM SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: AN EVOLVING COMMUNICATIONAL PARADIGM SHIFT

CORRESPONSALES EXTRANJEROS EN ÁFRICA SUBSAHARIANA:  
UN PARADIGMA COMUNICATIVO EN EVOLUCIÓN

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**Abstract:** A sizable portion of our everyday knowledge about Sub-Saharan Africa comes from the work of international news reporters. Even though these news actors play a critical role in the communication of the distant *Other*, frequently criticized for its representational deficits, scholar empirical research on the work of foreign correspondents has been considerably neglected: it is now decades old, it lacks a systematic examination of the on the ground realities of journalism in Africa and of the evolving work of professionals and Pro-Ams supported by networked digital media. This article analyses the evolving professional cultures and newswork of those individuals (micro). It inspects long-term trajectories in international journalism combined with short-term developments based on transformations on microelectronics and digitization. We conduct the first recorded Pan-African online survey on the work of international news reporters, collecting answers from 124 participants in 41 countries. These findings are complemented by semi-structured interviews with 43 professionals based in Nairobi, Dakar and Johannesburg. Our findings challenge the narrative of international news reporting as a dying breed. Instead, they support a nuanced view towards *localized continuities* and *localized ruptures* in contemporary post-industrial mediascape: its socio-demographics express a considerably precarious new economy of foreign correspondence – particularly, in the case of freelance workers – while the use of network-based digital media is driving the field towards the rising of a multilayered confederacy of distinct correspondences. **Keywords:** Foreign correspondent; international news reporting; multidimensional network of correspondences; networked journalism; pro-am; social media.

**Resumen:** Una parte importante de nuestro conocimiento cotidiano de África al sur del Sahara proviene de la labor de los periodistas internacionales. A pesar

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de que estos actores desempeñan un papel fundamental en la comunicación sobre los Otros distantes, frecuentemente criticados por su déficit de representación, el trabajo académico de investigación empírica sobre la labor de los corresponsales extranjeros se ha descuidado considerablemente. Las investigaciones disponibles carecen de un examen sistemático de las realidades sobre el periodismo en África, así como de la evolución del trabajo de los profesionales y los amateurs con el apoyo de los medios digitales en línea. En este artículo se analiza la evolución de las culturas profesionales de los individuos (micro). Al mismo tiempo, inspecciona trayectorias a largo plazo en el periodismo internacional, combinado con la evolución a corto plazo, basado en las transformaciones en la microelectrónica y la digitalización. Se presenta la primera encuesta en línea panafricana con periodistas internacionales, que recoge respuestas de 124 participantes en 41 países. Estos resultados se complementan con entrevistas semi-estructuradas realizadas a 43 profesionales, con sede en Nairobi, Dakar y Johannesburgo. Los resultados cuestionan la narrativa de la cobertura de eventos internacionales como especie en extinción. En cambio, apuntan una visión matizada hacia continuidades y rupturas localizadas en el medio ambiente mediático post-industrial contemporáneo. El perfil socio demográfico describe una situación bastante precaria en los corresponsales internacionales, en especial en el caso de los profesionales *freelance*; mientras que el uso de los medios digitales está dando lugar a una confederación en diferentes estratos de corresponsalías diferenciadas. **Palabras clave:** Corresponsal extranjero; información internacional; red multidimensional de corresponsales; periodismo en red; amateurs; redes sociales.

## 1. Introduction

This is a study about the socio-demographics, the professional culture and the newswork of international news reporters working across Sub-Saharan Africa. It assesses long-term trajectories in international journalism combined with short-term developments based on transformations on microelectronics and digitization.

This article addresses three general lines of inquiry: who is reporting (demographic and occupational characterization), how is international news reporters' culture defined (values, attitudes and beliefs), and, finally, what constraints impend over their daily work (e.g. access to technology, audiences, competition, cross-cultural communication, deadlines, ethics, sources).

International news “is a major source of our knowledge about foreign Others” that can be conceptualized as being “part of continuing out-of-school lifelong education” (Mody, 2010: 3). The press is therefore an important

knowledge source of international events for opinion leaders, decision makers, and public at large: most never contact directly with overseas events, relying “upon communications media for information about the particular issue and even the more generalized frame of reference within which it is being discussed” (Welch, 1972: 207).

Therefore, “problems with foreign news coverage have special importance because of the impact news has on foreign affairs” (Cordova, 1989: 5). If international journalism knowledge contribution is to be properly recognized, one should also do it by acknowledging and addressing its limitations and constraints.

Previous research has documented its representational deficits (agenda-setting, framing, priming), together with the lack of historical and/or contextual depth and the reporters’ frequent ethnocentric standpoint. Since September 11, 2001 international news – its channels and professionals – gained renewed attention, frequently through new controversies and criticism, becoming even clearer that “everybody has an opinion on global journalism; and after 2001, no one doubts its importance and influence” (Sreberny & Paterson, 2004: 4).

In his seminal social and functional analysis of foreign correspondence, when trying to look for sources of persistent patterns and situate the position of the north-American reporter in the international communication landscape, Maxwell (1956: 6) already states “the tremendous importance of those who gather the news and feed it into the international communication system. And the correspondent has not gone wholly unnoticed”.

The contemporary field of journalism is undergoing destructure-restructure, with new technologies helping to dissolve previous winning formulas. This tension is operating big transformations in the very heart of journalistic information: “News production (newsmaking) remains in the hands of professional journalists while the editorial function (op-ed) is dispersed through so-called ‘citizen journalism’ on the Internet” (Demers, 2007: 29).

Journalistic authoritative point of view –explanation, verification and truth– is being questioned. It is now commonly argued that “camcorders, cell-phones, satellite phones, bloggers and the Internet have been transforming the traditional ways that news has been gathered and reported” (Hachten & Scotton, 2007: 47): normatively and empirically defining who is a journalist and what is journalism has become an urgent enterprise for journalism studies (Ugland & Henderson, 2007).

Assuming that “new digital media connect the world and lower the distinctions between professional and citizen” and that both “can express themselves and be potentially received most anywhere in the world” (Reese, 2010: 350), what transformations can we identify in international news reporting culture when

considering, as has been previously proposed to that “anyone sending information from one country to another is a *de facto* foreign correspondent?” (Utley, 1997: 9).

What implications for journalism societal role are posed by the consideration of a foreign correspondence *de jure* and a foreign correspondence *de facto*? Are we facing the arising of a new type of foreign correspondent or a remediation of the old type supported by different means of communication? And how are new media adopted by professionals and by organized Pro-Ams, “innovative, committed and networked amateurs working to professional standards?” (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004: 9).

This can be better understood by the emerging news culture towards an expectation of a transnational networked accountability, otherwise referred as gate-watching (Bruns, 2005). The fact that audiences are now able to directly and in a more or less self-organized way bring to account international news reporting narrative practices is not a small transformation.

While 20th century journalism was based on the professional management of a relative artificial information scarcity –using *The New York Times*’ motto, “All the news that’s fit to print”– the permeability of contemporary online networks openly questions the modern journalistic authoritative point of view and its monopoly of practice towards more multilayered international flows and counter-flows of communication. Segments of professional journalists perceive this networked journalism as a menace to the specifics of their occupation, posing journalism as a closed profession and trying to convince news consumers that their educational and training qualifications meet the requirements of the service.

One problem with this occupational attitude is that it misses or deliberately denies that networked news consumers –and the implicit gradation and multipolarity of witness and narrative power– are themselves the transformative force behind the ongoing repositioning. Avoiding it does not solve a *de facto* challenge for journalists: that modern professional journalistic interpretive communities, united by their shared discourse and collective interpretations of public events are now mitigated by interpretive multidimensional networks. Indeed, civic media has recently been perceived as a kind of correspondence, with non-professional individuals aggregating, selecting and disseminating information to a large number of people on social media (Monroy-Hernández, Kiciman, De Choudhury, & Counts, 2013).

By addressing the complexities of concurrent disruptive developments affecting the newsworld (Deuze, 2008; Deuze & Marjoribanks, 2009) of international reporters based in Sub-Saharan countries this study proposes to add to the existing literature an updated systematic and stringent focus on the ground realities of contemporary journalism in a world region which for a long time has been neglect-

ted from scholars, through the eyes of its practitioners: professional journalists. We do that by answering to five specific research questions:

- ▶ RQ1: Who is reporting across Sub-Saharan Africa?
- ▶ RQ2: How is international news reporters' culture defined (values and attitudes) in the scope of networked journalism?
- ▶ RQ3: How are international news reporters connected to global online networks?
- ▶ RQ4: Are Internet and digital media imposing specific constraints to the newswork of international news reporters?
- ▶ RQ5: Are these constraints transforming foreign news production legacy?

Within network theory framework (Castells, 1999; 2000; 2007; 2011) and assuming as an operative hypothesis a rupture (Appadurai, 1996) in contemporary international news reporting, the present article analyses the evolving professional cultures and newswork of those individuals (micro level).

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Online Survey

For this study we conducted the first recorded Pan-African online survey on the work of international news reporters, collecting answers from 124 participants in 41 countries<sup>1</sup>. Surveys were administered and collected from 30th November 2011 to 7th February 2013.

Previous studies also used surveys in order to reveal the socio-demographic constitution of foreign press corps (Hess, 1996, 2005; Maxwell, 1956; Nosaka, 1992). Although, these studies have mainly addressed U.S. reporters working overseas and, alternatively, international reporters based in the U.S. They are now outdated and do not take into consideration the emerging and crucial questions

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[01] Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe.

brought by media convergence. Currently, none systematic and updated study is available on the socio-demographics of international news reporters working across Sub-Saharan Africa.

This study is based on a mix of purposive and theoretical nonprobability sample<sup>2</sup>: while not requiring a list of all possible elements in a full population, it requires (1) an effort to create a kind of quasi-random sample and/or (2) a clear idea about what group(s) the sample may reflect (Berg, 2001: 31). At the same time, we purposively sought “respondents who are most likely to aid theoretical development by extending and even confounding emerging hypothesis” (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 1999: 52).

This methodological option was introduced due to four major constraints that shall not be underestimated.

First, if in some world regions and countries “simple or systematic random sampling of journalists is a fairly easy task because there are reasonably up-to-date and complete lists of journalists who are required to belong to a national union or other type of professional organization, or to be licensed or certified in some manner” (Weaver, 2008: 111), this is generally not the case in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although some organizations’ databases exist, the accuracy of available data poses clear challenges with regard to its immediate use.

Second, the task is even more difficult since we are studying not only professional news reporters but also citizen media workers. In this latter category, not all the citizen media workers perceive themselves as journalists. Accordingly, there is no comprehensive/systematic list of their names apart from the one owned by the organizations themselves.

Third, the corporate policy of some news organizations, particularly international news agencies, explicitly prohibits their news workers to participate in surveys. Consequently, these corporations do not immediately facilitate access to their workers’ contacts.

Fourth, in the considerably understudied field of international news reporting from Sub-Saharan Africa it is noticeably difficult to have an accurate, comprehensive and updated register of the freelance media workers (professional or not) moving across the continent. Traditionally they comprise a very large part of the foreign correspondents’ full universe (Hess, 1996; 2005). Their intrinsic mobility and transnational nature are clear constraints when trying to produce a trustworthy database for sampling purposes.

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[02] Due to iteration in research design and operationalization we purposely generated an effect towards snowball sampling. Subjects were asked for the names and contacts of other people with similar attributes. E.g. “Do you know any other foreign correspondent in the region and/or the continent?”

All the collected contacts were tracked and compiled according to five main pre-established criteria: 1) Professionalism (Professional/Pro-Am); 2) Business model (Profit/Non-Profit); 3) Geopolitical historical affiliation (Global North/Global South/Cosmopolitan); 4) Intended audience (International/Domestic and/or Regional); 5) Main publication platform (News agency/Newspaper/Magazine/Radio/TV/Online).

The survey was designed and tested in order to be completed within 8 to 10 minutes, depending on the technical particularities of access to the Internet. Despite this effort, survey statistics show that the median duration of response was 29 minutes. This exceeding time response could be reasonably justified by two important intervening factors.

The first, the multitasking nature of Internet navigation: survey would stay active even if the respondent navigated away from the webpage. This means that respondents could, for instance, check their e-mail or navigate to other web locations while answering to the questions.

Second, we must keep in mind the structural constraints regarding Internet access in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly access to broadband connections. Even if growth in bandwidth has been facilitating broadband uptake in the Developing World –particularly in the case of mobile-broadband networks– profound disparities between World regions are still notorious in terms of available Internet bandwidth per Internet user: almost 90,000 bit/second in Europe, compared with 2000 bit/second in Africa (*The World in 2011: ICT Facts and Figures*, 2011).

Particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, the rate of individuals using the Internet is of 11.2%, compared to a World mean of 30.2% (*The Little Data Book on Information and Communication Technology*, 2012). Power outages must also be considered: official reports consider them as a key factor regarding the slow pace of economic structural transformation (*Sub-Saharan Africa: Maintaining Growth in an Uncertain World*, 2012).

Following the referred pre-established criteria regarding this non-random sample and the specific research design it was possible to collect answers from a total of 124 respondents, with a completion rate of 100 percent.

The survey included questions on demographic and occupational characterization (e.g. date of birth, sex, level of education), on journalistic culture (e.g. Choose one option. New ethical standards are needed in order to adequately adopt user-generated content in newswork), and constraints over production routines (e.g. On a daily basis how frequently do you access Internet? Choose one option. Other journalists' work is used by my supervisors to assess the quality of my work.).

## 2.2. Multi-sited ethnography: semi-structured interviews

The online survey deployment was complemented by semi-structured interviews with 43 professional journalists based in Nairobi, Dakar and Johannesburg. These interviews occurred, respectively, in January, June and December 2012.

Ethnography has been praised in the universe of social sciences research by its ability to permit a careful documentation of situations and self-narratives through thick description (Geertz, 1973). In the scope of this study this careful examination is particularly needed while interpreting the emerging senses of what it actually means for news workers to be a foreign correspondent.

We deploy our study in three key historical geographical hubs in professional foreign correspondence from Sub-Saharan Africa: Nairobi (Kenya), in East Africa, Dakar (Senegal), in West Africa, and Johannesburg (South Africa) in Southern Africa.

In these ethnographies simultaneously in and out the world system the epistemological advantage point of recording data in multiple locals (Nairobi, Dakar, and Johannesburg) may come with the associate shortcoming of a more circumstantial or less intensive presence in field. Despite this unavoidable limitation we argue that to date multi-sited ethnography is one of the most robust and adequate research approaches to the flows of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in the diffuse time-space and local-global nexus of the network society.

Semi-structured interviews “combine the flexibility of the unstructured, open-ended interview with the directionality and agenda of the survey instrument to produce focused, qualitative, textual data at the factor level” (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999: 149). This technique “ensures that the researcher will obtain all information required (without forgetting a question), while at the same time permitting the participant freedom of responses and description to illustrate concepts” (Morse & Field, 2002: 76). The interviews’ script included ten questions:

- ▶ 1. How did you become a foreign correspondent?
- ▶ 2. Can you describe me the main things you do as a foreign correspondent?
- ▶ 3. From the time you started in international news reporting what were the major transformations so far?
- ▶ 4. Right now what would you say are your main concerns and the most important issues regarding your work?



- ▶ 5. What do you think is the most important added value of professional foreign correspondents?
- ▶ 6. How does the Internet affects your work as a correspondent?
- ▶ 7. How do you use online social networks such as Twitter or Facebook?
- ▶ 8. How do you relate with citizen media and citizen journalists?
- ▶ 9. How do you see yourself in this job in the next 10 or 15 years?
- ▶ 10. Is there any other issue or question you think it's important for me to know in order to understand better your work?

Occasionally, the interviews for this study happened while informants and researcher shared a meal. Pragmatically, breakfast, lunch, coffee break and/or dinner time often proved to be the unique opportunities to meet journalists due to their often hectic daily news routines. On the other hand, this approach also allowed informants to see the researcher as “a person who can comfortably participate in ‘normal’ conversations” (Murchison, 2010: 102), and proved to be a discrete setting for those informants who were not formally allowed by their company policies to concede a “on the record” interview.

In order to consistently cover the three key historical hubs in foreign correspondence from Sub-Saharan Africa, we organized professional interviewees in function of four main criteria: 1) Business model (Profit/Non-Profit); 2) Geopolitical historical affiliation (Global North/Global South/Cosmopolitan); 3) Intended audience (International/Domestic and/or Regional); 4) Main publication platform (News agency/Newspaper/Magazine/Radio/TV/Online).

The 43 semi-structured interviews ranged in length from approximately forty minutes to over two hours and were mainly focused on life-histories, news culture, perceptions over newswork and digital media –particularly, Internet and online social media– and career expectations.

Those cover staff journalists to freelancers working for international newspapers (*Daily Telegraph*, *El Pais*, *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *Trouw*, *TAZ*, *de Volkskrant*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *La Vanguardia*, *The Globe and Mail*), magazines (*Time*, *Newsweek*), radio stations (*Capetalk Radio*, *RFI*), television channels (*CNBC Africa*, *France 24*, *N-24 TV*, *NOS*, *Sky News*, *BBC*, *CCTV*), news websites (*BBC News*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Global Post*) and news agencies (*AFP*, *AP*, *IRIN News*, *Reuters*). 29 news media organizations

are covered. Distinct levels of experience in international news reporting are also involved: from veterans (15-20 years of work) to novices (0-5 years).

Interviews were recorded in digital video and digital audio formats. After that they were fully transcribed. Following transcription, each interview was coded with an individual label. The coded interviews were then arranged in a systemic filing system that allowed maintenance and indexation of the coded data into coded classifications. This was a fundamental step in building an analytical system based in typologies.

Since the analysis of ethnographic data through typologies consists in a “systematic method for classifying similar events, actions, objects, people, or places, into discrete grouping” (Berg, 2001: 166), this approach generated the necessary selectivity regarding emergent themes and subthemes from the raw interviews.

### 3. Results

This section presents the results of a survey of international news reporters (n=124) working across 41 Sub-Saharan Africa countries. The results will be articulated with the previous findings from existing studies and systematically expanded through the qualitative insights collected using semi-structured interviews with 43 international news reporters based in Nairobi, Dakar and Johannesburg.

#### ►RQ1: Who is reporting across Sub-Saharan Africa?

The most common contemporary professional correspondent working across Sub-Saharan Africa is a male (68.55%) between 23 and 42 years old (72.51%), with 6 to 17 years of experience in newswork (49.19%), a beginner in international news reporting (52.42%) with a recent experience in the current post (69.35%). He has a higher education degree (77.41%) in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences (68.55%) and works for three or more news organizations (50.81%), frequently for a news agency (30.65%). He is a freelancer (50.81%) often working alone (48.39%) and perceiving himself as a general assignment reporter (75.81%).

This socio-demographic characterization of international news reporters working across Sub-Saharan Africa is consistent with previous research implemented in other geographies of foreign correspondence (Hess, 1996, 2005; Nosaka, 1992), confirming a male-oriented occupational field composed by an educational elite.

This study original contribution to international journalism studies comes partially from an exploratory consideration of the emerging activities developed by non-professionals, particularly citizen media organizations such

as Global Voices Online. The socio-demographics of this sector are relevant, even if in the scope of the present study they were not developed within a comparative research purpose.

The most common contemporary citizen media worker across Sub-Saharan Africa is a male (100%) between 23 and 32 years old (45.45%), with five years of experience or less in newswork (54.55%), a beginner in international news reporting (63.64%) with a recent experience in current post (72.73%). He has a higher education degree (100%), in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences and works for three or more news organizations (45.45%).

► **RQ2: How is international news reporters' culture defined?**

Professional international news reporters working across Sub-Saharan Africa highly value empirical research (92.74%) as a structuring component of their epistemological regime. Objectivity is the guiding principle conforming information collected during fieldwork to professional standards.

This epistemological regime and accountability system are strategic factors in their self-definition of journalism as a professional occupation: they not only delineate the validity of the cultural rules and norms that regulate practitioners who are already within the occupational boundaries, as they critically define those who shall be kept outside the profession. This boundary-work tension defines journalism identity as a professional occupation rather than an informal communication activity, and ultimately delineates its societal role as a task for professionals.

This *professionalism* is articulated with reference to formal education and training as two mandatory factors in the validation of international news reporters' stock of knowledge, and expressed in terms of consistency and disambiguation.

Although, even if assumed as foundational criterion, contemporary international news reporters' epistemological regime suffers now pressures coming from the evolving tension at its material basis, particularly at the socio-economical, financial and technological levels.

The rise of networked journalism (Beckett, 2010), in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa mainly enhanced by the access and use of mobile devices, allows now the nation-based correspondent to receive and transmit information at the pan-African level and beyond. At this level, digital networks mean deterritorialization, virtual global reach and a hypothetical evolving setback for empiricism.

Due to the specificity of the used sample, our study does not allow regard Pro-Ams as immediate and inherent proponents of what could be referred as a

counter-epistemology or an alter-epistemology. Although, it is within this frame that a professional normative repositioning towards boundary-work can be better understood following practitioners' self-narratives in relation to citizen media workers.

This boundary-work operates through an exclusivist attachment to the epistemological regime and accountability system of the modern journalist, i.e. citizen media workers shall be kept outside professional journalism boundaries. A distinct pathway is followed by those practitioners who can be described as news innovators, promoting a more inclusive interpretation of the journalistic field as one that shall be normatively kept *open* to functional reconfigurations.

These two distinct professional sub-cultures within international news reporting from Sub-Saharan Africa coincide in the perception of more balanced and plural contemporary international news flows, through complementarities between professionals and non-professionals. This considerable professional agreement can be regarded as a major finding particularly regarding the debates from the 70s and 80s around a New World Information and Communication Order: it suggests that a representational repositioning is evolving in international communication; one that shall be tested by extensive news content analysis.

In this respect there's now firm ground to declare that international news reporters are aware of their role as translators of otherness and also aware of the historically depicted representational deficits regarding Africa's media image. Our study identified two distinct levels of constraint for this translation work: a cross-cultural level, with correspondents having to frequently cross their cultural comfort zone, and an epistemological level, with reporters managing a tension between context rich information allowed by cultural empirical immersion and the rules of objectivity as cognitive detachment.

This translation work does not occur in a social or occupational vacuum; it is critically molded by very specific constraints to newswork. Criticism on international journalism ethics shall take these in clear consideration, rather than subsuming them in more or less ideological systemic determinants. On the other hand, practitioners themselves shall be aware that international news reporting—its culture and newswork—far from being an aseptic mirror of reality is constructed through objective and subjective constraints; these shall be explicitly communicated in their reports rather than subsumed in ambiguous narrative conventions.

► **RQ3: How are international news reporters connected to global online networks?**

Despite working in a geographical area highly deficient in the access to broadband Internet, contemporary correspondents working across Sub-Saharan Africa are

technically highly connected to global online networks: 99.39 percent of the respondents to our online survey have access to the Internet in their workspace.

Internet is deeply transforming international reporters' newswork. Most (48.39 %) spend now eight or more daily hours online. This is a critical finding explaining why *seated journalism* is currently a deep concern among practitioners, particularly considering that among surveyed newsworkers the Internet is mostly used for newsgathering, news publication and administrative purposes.

Although generally considering that Internet benefits both quality (82.26%) and quantity (86.29%) of news from Africa, international news reporters moderate this substantial technological determinist view with critical concerns over production demands towards continuous speed and flexibility in newswork.

For them, this *seated journalism* limits the ability to fact-check information and to develop expertise from empirical fieldwork practice. These non-empirical and deterritorialized production routines translate in a "wikipediadization of news", according to Drew Hinshaw, correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, based in Dakar. "As if every single article has to have all the single facts that are relevant. And all this information is available online. So, we're losing narrative, because there's so much information you can pour into a report that you forget that's also the information you don't say that also builds the story", he adds.

► **RQ4: Are Internet and digital media imposing specific constraints?**

We can reasonably affirm that more than integrate Internet *in* their newswork, Internet *is* considerably becoming international news reporters' work. This doesn't mean that they perceive the Internet as an indistinct whole: on the contrary, they distrust more information collected from online social networks (29.03%) than the one from online search engines (9.68%).

Citizen participation emerges as a renewed core issue within networked international journalism. Most international news reporters agree that journalists need to give public a more participative role in news work (70.17%). At the same time, they also concur that direct collaboration between journalists and citizens in news production benefits the overall quality of news reporting (69.36%). Critically, a majority supports the need for new ethical standards in order to adopt user-generated content in news work (75.81%).

The implicit recognition of an absence of updated and adapted professional norms and rules directed to deal with user-generated content as a constraint to contemporary newswork is stressed by a further finding: much more than through a personal weblog/website (48.39%), international news reporters are actively networked through online social networks (94.45%).

This means that functional renewed professional rules are now absolutely necessary in the scope of networked journalism and represents a deep transformation for modern journalists' newswork. It is particularly expressed by the current reality of exchange between journalists and the audiences: nowadays, a considerable portion of international news reporters has to manage direct audience feedback in their newswork: 41.13 percent of the respondents to our survey receive it at least once a week.

This unprecedented level of direct and virtually unfiltered interaction represents a profound transformation in professional journalism, clearly demanding for a re-organization of its functions and production routines. This comes as an addition to an already considerably competitive field of work, where most (81.81%) feel competing with other international news reporters.

In this scope, online social networks clearly emerge as important triggers for transformation of newswork. They are already among the most common newsgathering activities among international news reporters, being perceived as a relevant platform (54.84%). They notoriously emerge in practitioners' self-narratives as important monitoring tools for news-uptake and story ideation, platforms for community-building and interaction with the audiences, barometers for competition awareness and as reporting/recording tools.

Regarding practitioners' relations with news sources it's striking to note that the most problematic interaction comes from the so-called aid-industry actors. In itself this finding poses a clear agenda for future research on the realities of "instrumental message transmitters" (Seib, 1997) as it does the revealed sense of uncertainty/insecurity regarding legal protection, both among professional journalists (76.61%) and citizen media workers (72.73%).

This finding is worrisome and shall led to further research and action by intervening institutions, particularly considering that participants in this study often work under repressive political regimes. It becomes evident that intervening institutions need particularly to accommodate the protection worries of citizen media organizations workers. Otherwise these functional equivalents of journalists – even if not in occupational, in Freedom of Information terms – may well be being abandoned to an uncertain fate, as has recently been showed ("Kenya: Unlicensed Foreign Journalists in Kenya to Be Prosecuted," 2013; Rhodes, 2013).

Most international news reporters (95.97%) consider technical skills as important in a convergent media environment, and most (85.48%) also consider themselves technically prepared. Although, from the collected interview accounts, multimedia journalism often translates in an actual degradation of their work, through cost-saving strategies of news media companies, lack of investment in training, equipment, proper production routines and salaries.

In order to fulfill their organizations' needs, international news reporters end up multitasking, compromising the overall quality of news reports. In our view, this finding vividly depicts an apparent evolving negotiation between an organizational professionalism, the media managers' demands and impositions, and an occupational professionalism, taken as the collegial identity of journalists (Ornebring, 2009).

Multimedia journalism practice is in fact a vivid portrait of the emergent *new economy of journalism*, based on a structural reliance on freelancers (50.81%) who perceive their socio-economic work conditions as precarious, mainly due to irregular and low salary levels, payment by news piece, temporary employment contracts, social insecurity and extremely flexible production routines. For these reasons, they not necessarily expect to keep themselves as professional journalists in the near future, but often perceive a future job in Development Communication –frequently in the U.N. and non-governmental organizations– as a pragmatic necessary step towards a more stable labor condition.

► **RQ5: Are these constraints transforming legacy foreign news production?**

As an answer to this question, this study challenges the narrative of international news reporting as a redundant and dying breed (Constable, 2007; Friedman, 2008; Profita, 2007; Sambrook, 2010) by proposing an evolutionary view on the emerging practices within foreign correspondence from Sub-Saharan Africa. Our study supports that contemporary international news reporting from Sub-Saharan Africa is being affected by critical disruptive developments, leading it to a multilayered process of repositioning, taken here as succeeding strategies in the network society. These critical transformations are reworking the meaning of foreign correspondence as defined in the modern era.

Empirical findings from this project underline localized ruptures in the international mediascape: networked digital media propose distinct resources to previous social roles, such as the one of journalism and journalists. Through, rather than due to, developments in network-based microelectronics, international news reporting from Sub-Saharan Africa –its socio-demographics, culture and newswork– is currently traversed by processes leading to a paradigm shift. We are using here Kuhn (1962) terms to describe a profound renovation of the set of practices that previously defined journalism as a discipline during a particular period of time, suggesting a systemic reorganization of international news reporting as a field of knowledge production rather than mere disconnected transformations.

This doesn't mean that previous legacy characteristics are deterministically vanishing or that they will completely disappear. In the consideration of interna-

tional news reporting, as in any social-oriented process, we reject theoretical assessments that artificially separate the concrete material (technological) conditions in place from the actual accommodation practices and uses by human actors.

#### 4. Discussion

Concerning the contemporary socio-demographics of foreign correspondence from Sub-Saharan Africa, empirical findings from this project show how tradition and innovation actually coexist: modern international news agencies maintain a central role within contemporary journalism; it is also noteworthy that no significant transformation has occurred with reference to gender (in)equality, which has been a traditional *tour de force* in research on foreign correspondence.

Likewise, international news reporting is still an occupational field for a cognitive elite with high levels of formal education. Our study actually shows that this may well be truth regarding both professionals and Pro-Ams, suggesting that a higher educational level is indeed necessary for entering and/or keeping in this occupation.

But despite these localized continuities, basic conditions for a perfect storm have been gathering in the last decades towards an occupational paradigm shift: a strong historical criticism over modern professional foreign correspondents' work, the emergence of new players supported by networked digital media technologies and, more recently, an international economic and financial crisis.

Contemporary international news reporting is evolving through and towards multidimensional networks of correspondences, including multiple actors and multiple types of connections between them. The recognition of these multidimensional networks means that not only layers of information but also interpretation frameworks for news stories are multifaceted.

Within networked journalism, syntheses of traditional professional journalism and the evolving forms of direct citizen participation through online digital media, international news reporting can then be adequately considered in itself as a distinct form of knowledge. Traditionally it has been constructed as acquaintance with (Park, 1940) ongoing events, based on empiric research, narrated through objective-to be reports, and a task for modern professionals. Within an evolving confederation of correspondences, how is it changing?

It is no longer an exclusive territory of professionals. The professionalization of foreign correspondence obeyed to the modern industrial precept towards a scientific organization of work, often implemented towards bureaus as delocalized news factories. This previously perceived functional need is currently being challenged by the emergence of more or less organized online networks of Pro-Ams, who may not aspire to be referred as journalists, but for



whom a new communicational regime towards direct access and participation seems to be critical.

These evolving dynamics of participation generate a sense of crisis in relation to journalism verification culture. This negotiation is vividly expressed in our study by the generalized practitioners' perceptions towards online social networks as relevant platforms for international news reporting, despite a considerable immediate distrust the credibility of its information.

On the other hand, contemporary international news reporting it is no longer an exclusive territory of empiricism and modern objectivity. Modern correspondents have been proposed as workers of empirical truths, with their epistemological regime operationalized through an accountability system of which are part media law, code of ethics and the organizationally-framed editor-reporter relations.

A tension towards epistemological repositioning comes now from the articulation between the traditional physicality and empiricism of foreign correspondence and the emerging flows from online networks. This hybridity between physical place and position in the network is clearly transforming international journalism newswork, suggesting the way in which it can actively fulfill the expected societal role of journalism is also evolving.

Internet news reporters spend now a lot of their daily time in front of one or multiple networked digital screens. For a profession traditionally based on the news from the ground this heavy use of the Internet cannot be adequately perceived as a transformation, but again rather as a notorious paradigm shift.

Since among international news reporters the Internet is mostly used for newsgathering, one arising question is then: Are practitioners using it while doing fieldwork (co-presence) or is this a seated newgathering with reporters not leaving their desk and, for instance, rewriting online social networks' feeds? Which interactions are now parts of that process? Is this leading to a less diverse and official-based journalism or rather to a more inclusive and participated journalism? It is fair to say that these are very relevant hypothesis for future research.

Networked digital media are expressed through these disruptive developments that one shall also measure through historical moderation: the cultural trait, professionalism, that can be now often perceived as arrogant occupational boundary-work towards citizen media workers it may also be a fund of intrepidity that has historically allowed professional journalists to pose themselves as authoritative forces of accountability regarding public and private powers.

Surely, unsubstantiated professional intransigence has been a way to preserve questionable practices, with this meaning the historically documented

shortcomings in international journalism. But this also implies asking: What do contemporary communities need a journalist to be? And how to operatively accommodate those localized needs into a globalized, networked journalism? Can organized Pro-Ams effectively fulfill the watchdog role?

Networked journalism signifies today a vast ecosystem and no longer the insulated territory of the past. As an implication, from the point of view of its social relevance and public trust, participation through the media is no longer an option for journalists, but rather a duty, since democratic societies still need –some argue more than never– an adjusted meaning management across distances (Hannerz, 2004).

This is not a new or an exclusive challenge posed by networked digital media. For decades, researchers have portrayed professionals losing sight of communities. Although the need to answer communities' anxieties is not new, its contemporary form of expression is.

Our study shows that international news reporters perceive now a clear need to manage –and to do it in a coherent way– audiences' feedback, from which they derive an expressive need for new ethical standards in order to guide this more direct input from their publics. This implies a considerate resetting of professional journalism procedures and we are led to admit a necessary emergence of new and differentiated journalistic institutions.

Contemporary journalism ecosystem is now composed by multidimensional networks since it meets multiple relations between multiple actors. Future reconfigurations of international journalism will be defined by the ways these multiple networks' nodes are operationalized: the assumed guiding values, rules and norms towards collaboration practices and forms of agency institutionalization.

A focus in these *processes* and *objects* rather than in occupational-centered preservationist concerns may also help to move this debate from the question Are they journalists?, to this other How do they produce journalism? Ultimately, that societal need for accurate, contextualized, verified and plural information is the one guiding the very idea of journalism. In this regard, the evolving modes of journalistic narrative, as method of guiding reporters to locate and express facts, may even be leading to a fuller delivery of the correspondent value (Archetti, 2013).

This project depicts how journalism lives today a clear need for a renewed functional synthesis between tradition and innovation. Contemporary post-industrial journalism stresses the new working methods and processes promoted through networked digital media, expressively “increased openness to partnerships; increased reliance on publicly available data; increased use of individuals, crowds and machines to produce raw material; even increased reliance on machines to produce some of the output” (Anderson, Bell, & Shirky, 2012: 13).

Our study shows how current international news reporting is practiced by men and women trying to fill present uncertainty with the answers that will build the journalism of the near future. This is not only a functional uncertainty, but simultaneously an economical and financial state of insecurity, with news organizations managing the costs and benefits of keeping international news reporters abroad.

This article supports previous studies that have shown why freelancing is often an electronic cage (Ornebring, 2009) manifested by atypical working conditions (Balcytiene, *et al.*, 2011). For instance, it shows that a higher educational degree like a Master's is not an automatic predictor for a more stable financial condition. Are formal educational competencies becoming redundant in international news reporting career path? Are we assisting to the rise of an educational elite of precarious?

Since a very considerable portion of international news reporting from Sub-Saharan Africa is produced by freelancers working in precarious conditions, for three or more news organizations (50.81%), how long and under which life conditions do they manage to keep in the field? What is the dropout rate in this occupation? Answers to these two questions prove to be critical to a better understand of the new economy of foreign correspondence.

As in journalism practice, also in contemporary journalism scholarship it is unethical to pretend that there are still self-evident strategies even if the subject of research is not self-evident anymore. The question is "Foreign correspondence is changing, but are the mindsets of journalism researchers developing in parallel to make sense of its evolution?" (Archetti, 2013: 433).

We add our voice to this argument towards a more robust field of contemporary media anthropology, particularly one able to cross traditional practices that consciously or not end up creating *no research zones*, as has been the case of international news reporting from Sub-Saharan Africa and, more generally, from the Global South: for a repositioning research subject we need repositioning research strategies and approaches.

Global media can be adequately studied through global perspectives deployed in local settings, as in the case of in-depth ethnographies. How do citizen media workers *actually* produce news content? From our own direct experience, this type of intensive and extensive transnational research demands new forms of collaboration between individual scholars and intervening institutions in a challenging environment for independent knowledge production.

Making our own the words of Katherine Houeld, one of the participants in this study, "I'm sure the monks scribes reacted with horror to the printing press. You can't react with fear to innovation. If you react with fear you've lost

the battle, you've made yourself irrelevant", she confessed to the author one afternoon in Nairobi.

In news practice as in scholar research, is not sufficient anymore to *keep up*, but rather to *rework* previous assumptions and methods, the main challenging being to transform and substitute maladjusted practices to the needs and expectations of contemporary societies, rather than imposing occupational interests before societal requisites. This project has been fueled by an effort towards a glimpse of that future.

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