

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

FORGOTTEN JOURNALISTS:

Lived experiences and professional identities in the past

Ghent (Belgium), 6-7 June 2025
Deadline for abstracts: 30 August 2024

Organized by: CAMille (Centre d'archives sur les médias et l'information, ULB-KBR), LaPIJ (Laboratoire des Pratiques et Identités Journalistiques-ULB), Liberas (Heritage Centre for the History of the Freedom Ideal, Ghent), Ghent University (UGent), Royal Library of Belgium (KBR), Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

Confirmed keynote speakers: Noah Amir Arjomand (University of California), Will Mary (Louisiana State University), Marie-Eve Thérenty (Université de Montpellier III)

The history of journalism has often focused on a limited number of famous individuals (Juergens, 2015; Lutes, 2002; Mousset, 2004). The heroes of wartime journalism (Martin, 2005b; Hallin, 1993), foreign correspondence (Bourdon, 2013) and investigative (Aucoin, 2007) or literary journalism (Sims, 1984) are well known. Behind these big names hide many journalists whose names and works have not made it into the canon. Yet to grasp the full diversity of the journalistic field, these careers and lives need to be recovered. This conference aims to do just that: to reconstruct the careers and lived experiences of a mass of anonymous news workers. Three groups of forgotten media professionals stand out (amongst others): war correspondents and foreign correspondents, female journalists, and those who founded and shaped professional journalists' associations and trade unions behind the scenes. Thanks to the ever-increasing amount of digitised historical news media, the digitisation of genealogical sources and the growing access to the archives of professional journalists, the lives and works of forgotten journalists have become easier to trace. This allows us to re-evaluate identities and practices and to develop new methodological perspectives. Looking beyond the journalistic pantheon will not only lead us to uncover fascinating lives and experiences in historical journalism, but also to reconsider the importance that has been ascribed to the small circle of household names.

By focusing on lived experiences and professional identities from a historical and decentered perspective, we want to make visible those whose work has been underestimated, or whose journalistic (or partly journalistic) careers have been neglected. A few studies have adopted such a perspective on forgotten journalists (Mythen, 2006; Stevenson, 1997; Sundaram, 2017). We think the time is ripe for a more systematic approach which takes into account journalistic cultures from around the globe.



We propose two different ways to decenter the history of journalism:

A. Finding forgotten or invisible journalists

We invite contributors to present cases of journalists who have been forgotten or have remained invisible in the studies about their field of expertise and form of journalism. Many war journalists, foreign correspondents, photojournalists, investigative journalists, founders and leaders of journalists' unions, cartoonists etc, have remained anonymous or have not been studied despite a prolific career in the media. This is certainly the case for women journalists, and for non-Western reporters and investigative journalists who left an important mark in the media landscape of their colonial and postcolonial societies. Journalists active in sectors and areas of journalism that are often considered less prestigious are also an important group of forgotten media professionals. Press agency journalists spring to mind, as well as journalists writing for the fashion, lifestyle, theatre, and cinema columns. Moreover, there is the possibility of investigating those who hide behind pseudonyms, bringing to life certain ghosts lurking in the history of the press.

*E.g. publications on the Belgian social reformer Alice Bron (1850-1904) were for a long period of time limited to short biographical entries. A recent analysis of digitised Belgian newspapers has reconstructed Bron's prolific career as a feminist and socialist journalist with a strong commitment to social issues (Vidalenche et al, 2024). Norbert Zongo (1949-1998), to give another example, was an outstanding investigative journalist in Burkina Faso, whose professional commitment cost him his life. His career, writings and positions have been partly analysed in their local context (Bianchini, 2007), but he remains a largely unknown figure in international academic circles. This is also the case, for example, for the war reporters from North Vietnam: 'half soldiers, half journalists', who have received very little attention except from a French photojournalist, Patrick Chauvel. He gathered their photographs to tell a different story of the Vietnam War in the book *Ceux du nord* (Ed. Arènes, 2014).*

B. Rediscovering the forgotten journalistic activities of public figures

Many authors, politicians, activists and other public figures pursued prolific careers as journalists. The journalistic activities in their careers are often forgotten. Despite being overshadowed by their later (or earlier) fame, their journalistic oeuvres are well worth studying in their own right. This is true on national, international as well as regional and local levels. The journalistic careers of plenty of prominent individuals remain to be re-evaluated. Studying these figures as journalists may both result in a more complete understanding of their careers and help to re-evaluate the role of journalism as an outlet of political and social activism.

*Numerous trailblazing women politicians in France and Belgium started out as activists and journalists who published widely in magazines and news media. This is the case for Lucie Desjardin (1875-1945), the first woman to be directly elected to the Belgian Parliament (in 1929). Her important journalistic career has fallen into oblivion. Belgian poet and teacher Marie Closset (1873-1952), who published under the pseudonym Jean Dominique, remains well-known for her literary career, while her widely read columns in *Le Soir* (« le Spectacle des jours ») are all but forgotten today (Gemis, 2010). Edith Cavell, a British nurse who helped hundreds of allied soldiers escape from occupied Belgium in WWI, acquired worldwide fame as a resistance hero after being executed for espionage in 1915. The fact that she also founded a medical magazine named *L'Infirmière* has gone almost unnoticed.*

These are just two possible perspectives, and they **can obviously be combined and addressed in different ways**; in the form of career reconstructions or detailed analyses of journalistic output (using digital approaches to large press corpora or through close reading of a more restricted corpus). The approach can be individual/biographical or collective/prosopographical. It can be based on an analysis of professional networks and organisations, or be more focused on informal networks.

The general goal of this conference is to produce an open-access edited volume in the series *New Perspectives on the History of Liberalism and Freethought* (De Gruyter Brill).

The conference will be held at Liberas in Ghent (Kramersplein 23).

Both senior and junior scholars are encouraged to apply. We intend to provide travel grants for two non-European, early career researchers. If you want to be considered for a travel grant, please state so when submitting your abstract.

Please send your abstract for a 20 min presentation and a short biography to christoph.despiegeleer@liberas.eu **before 30 August 2024**.

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