

Learning safety education from journalism educations in the global south. A postscript.

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Abstract

The article recaps the main findings of the investigations presented in this special issue and seeks to answer the question “What can Northern journalism educators do to improve safety during fieldwork in the Global South?” The article builds mainly on qualitative interviews with former journalism students who have done journalism fieldwork in dangerous situations as part of journalism education in Norway. It concludes by recommending the building of networks of mutual aid across countries and continents to research journalism safety and enlist the help of educators around the world in the training of journalism students.

Introduction

When the research group Media, War and Conflict at Oslo and Akershus University College for Applied Sciences (HiOA) with the assistance of The Norwegian National Commission for UNESCO, decided to provide scholarships for educators and scholars from Asia, Africa and Latin America to participate at a conference on teaching conflict, war and peace journalism in Oslo, it was not merely for altruistic reasons. We wanted a variety of voices to be heard at the conference, of course, but more than just seeking diversity, we also knew we needed to learn more about doing journalism in the Global South for the sake of our own journalism students.

In fact, the journalism education at HiOA for more than three decades has encouraged students to travel outside the “West”/Global North to report on issues important for the lives of people in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Some students have had to confront issues of serious concern for their personal safety.

Inspired by the colleagues from the Global South, in this final article of this section, I wanted to end this section by asking former students about their experiences during fieldwork as part of the journalism education in Oslo. What can the journalism educators do better to improve safety during fieldwork in the Global South?

As the discussions unfolded at the event in November 2016, a number of issues related to teaching safety issues to journalism students emerged. The presenters at the conference came from places such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Nigeria, the Palestine, Laos and Costa Rica. While the contexts varied, a number of important issues seemed to be common between the contexts: Many presenters commented on the dominance of international NGOs when it comes to providing safety training. Some have found that foreign trainers too often lacked necessary knowledge of the local context and the realities experienced by local journalists. Some underlined the consequences of the unceasing psychological pressure experienced by journalists as well as journalist educators in challenging environments. All seemed to agree on the need to do more research to understand better the problems experienced by local journalists.

This final article in this special issue seeks to learn from these educators from the Global South. What can journalism educators from a place such as Norway learn about preparing Northern journalism students for working in sometimes challenging environments in Africa, Asia or Latin America?

At HiOA, approximately 500 students have participated in a semester long course called Globalization and International Issues for Journalists over the last 10 years. Nine students that did particularly challenging fieldworks were selected to take part in a small study.

Background – A course in Globalization and International Issues for Journalists

Although the course plan has been updated and adjusted somewhat over the ten years encompassed by this study, the selected students have participated in very similar learning processes. The students are allowed to choose where to do the fieldwork. Some decide to travel alone, while the majority form small groups of two or three friends who travel together. In most cases, the journalism education will, at this stage, not try to dissuade most students from traveling to the places they have selected. However, a few will want to do fieldwork in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria or some other place afflicted by violent conflict and war. A number of processes will be set in motion in these instances. So far, no student has been allowed to travel to places experiencing outright war.¹

The course begins in January with introductory classes to globalization and international issues, including classes on doing fieldwork, the ethics of doing fieldwork and safety issues. At the same time, the students begin to explore local history and society through available literature and interviews with experts, and start to investigate a topic that will be developed further during the fieldwork.

During the first phase of research, the students hand in three assignments. The first assignment is to start exploring and to document key issues related to the history and context of the societies they will be visiting. The second requires more work; the students have to search for relevant sources and interview appropriate experts in order to acquire knowledge of the selected place and topic. The third assignment builds on the first two and asks the students to make a detailed plan for the fieldwork. The plan has to include details on where to stay, local contacts, local organizations, helpers and fixers, and other specifics related to the plan for the fieldwork. The students are asked to evaluate potential safety issues related to the fieldwork.

All three assignments will have to be passed before the student is allowed to travel. The fieldwork will typically last four to eight weeks from mid-March before the students return to have two more weeks of classes and group sessions. Finally, the students hand in a reportage (for newspaper, radio, television or net) and an analytical essay. The course concludes with oral exams sometime in mid-June.

¹ The details are not directly relevant for the topic of this paper. Suffice to say that insurance will be extremely costly. The same with specialized safety courses, safety gear such as bulletproof vests etc.

Perspectives from educators in the Global South

Working on this special issue, the many insights from these researchers resonated with experiences we have had preparing Norwegian students for fieldwork in the Global South.

Dr. Sadia Jamil, for instance, finds a variety of challenges affecting the work of journalists in Pakistan (2017). Most commonly, Pakistani journalists face physical, psychological, financial, topic-specific, emotional and social risks. According to Jamil, 68% of journalists have experienced abusive language and physical attacks during rallies and political events. All surveyed female journalists in addition to some male journalists have experienced gender-specific risks such as harassment, discrimination and blackmailing. There are clearly numerous risks to consider for journalism students wanting to do fieldwork in a challenging environment - not only in Pakistan, but in also quite a few places elsewhere.

Based on research among photojournalists in Afghanistan, Saumava Mitra calls for journalism training to address the socio-cultural, political, economic as well as practice-related constraints faced by journalists in conflict-affected societies (2017). The need for deep knowledge on the socio-cultural, political and economic context should lead to local universities taking a leading role in journalism education and safety training, as well as research.

Umaru A. Pate, Lai Oso and Abubakar Jibril report similar findings from a study of the status of training and research in reporting conflict, peace journalism and safety education in English speaking West Africa. Mostly, the authors explain, the educational systems of the region have been transplanted from Britain in structure, philosophy and curricula. The mass communication/journalism curricula, however, was one of the few exceptions that largely emanated from America rather than Britain. The model focuses strongly on skills empowerment; promoted market based communication and linked the role of the media to general development and regime survival. As the authors demonstrate with their research, countries in West Africa should now rather support institutions in mainstreaming courses on peace journalism, conflict-sensitive reporting and safety education and develop contextually relevant literature in the countries through collaborative engagements

Along the same line of argument, Abit Hoxha and Kenneth Andresen find that safety educators lacking in contextually relevant knowledge tend to compromise quality and outcome of safety education (2017.) According to the research of Hoxha and Andresen, participants at safety training will most likely become less motivated when experiencing lack of attention to the local realities of journalism.

Mariateresa Garrido makes the convincing argument that journalists need to learn about International Humanitarian Law (IHL). According to Garrido, knowing the distinction IHL makes between civilians and combatants, for instance, can make life safer for journalists covering war and conflict. However, surprisingly few know how to dress and behave to avoid being mistaken for something else than a journalist. Perhaps even more surprisingly, Garrido has found it difficult to convince students to study IHL. Based on the experience from teaching IHL, she draws on the pedagogy of Freire to make the argument that educators need to make the subjects relevant for the experiences and realities of the students.

Leire Iturregui Mardaras, María José Cantalapiedra González and Leire Moure Peñín agree that universities need to play a role in safety education. However, subjects concerning international relations now play a less important role than before at Spanish journalism education institutions. The crisis of the media business, meanwhile, means that the media has not taken up the challenge of providing safety education to reporters covering war and conflict. In this situation, most Spanish reporters have reacted positively to the Spanish Army filling the void. The authors reminds us that the army has specialized knowledge of safety issues during hostilities. There are things such as “moving around hostile zones, including health education workshops, information on procedures in minefields, NBC suits, 4x4 driving, and use of maps and GPSs” that university professors would have little or no knowledge of. Similarly, when training needs to include experiences of flying in “helicopters, travel in armoured vehicles, hear hand grenades exploding, machine gun fire, and HK rifle shots” and similar, taking the course designed by the army would be beneficial. The army course gives the participants the possibility to simulate a “night-time hostage rescue operation”. From a peace journalism perspective, training with the army could be seen as potentially problematic, as it might make the journalist less willing to be critical towards the army later. Still, the authors conclude, skills and experiences such as those mentioned here, could potentially be lifesaving in a critical situation.

What were the students supposed to learn before doing fieldwork?

Some of the concerns discussed by the educators represented in this special issue connects with literature on the reading list of the course at HiOA. The study plan describes expected learning outputs. Among other things, the students are expected to develop the skill of “working as a journalist in unknown environments and deal with critical situations that might arise” (HiOA, 2016). A crucial issue is learning to deal responsibly with sources and other “fellow human beings” in unfamiliar contexts. However, cross-cultural experiences can be a challenge for some students. According to some authors, cross cultural learning moves through several phases from “being astonished, enthralled, bedazzled, confused, contradicted, alienated, misunderstood” to being “welcomed, accepted, understood” (Alred, Byram, & Fleming, 2003, p. 27). It is easy to imagine why many students might find it stressful to produce journalism in cross-cultural contexts. When potential dangers and safety issues affect the fieldwork, the level of psychological stress could be further increased.

A few relatively recent titles deal with safety issues during research fieldwork (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995; Richards, 1996; Weissman, 2004). Some of these have been included in the curriculum. According to Bøås et.al., the first rule concerning personal safety is to “know your field” (Boas, Jennings, & Shaw, 2006). Managing unsafe situations involve many types of evaluations. First, the physical surroundings must be mapped to identify potential escape routes, safe havens and so forth. Likewise, places where violence could erupt should be identified. However, mapping physical surroundings is far from enough. It is also necessary to understand what is being said or shouted by the different actors in a potentially dangerous situation. In many instances, a student doing fieldwork will not be able to understand the local languages. He or she will depend on having a translator, a fixer, friend or other contacts to explain what is being said. Additionally, interpreting and understanding body language and movements depend on deep cultural knowledge.

Most authors on the reading list emphasise the importance of knowing who is who. The various groups and organizations must be mapped and analysed. Key questions are “Who are the key players?”, “Who do the various organizations, groups and militias represent?”, “What do they stand for?” and so forth. A thorough knowledge of the social and political field must be developed. Most textbooks on doing fieldwork in potentially dangerous situations discuss whether or not to inform all groups and organizations about plans for a fieldwork. In some contexts, informing all parties would be very dangerous, for instance in districts torn between warring factions (Krøvel, 2012). While seeking to make interviews on both sides of the “frontline” is a fine ideal, crossing the (sometimes only imaginary) frontline would be unsafe or even impossible in many real situations of war and conflict.

A Northern journalist or student doing fieldwork will be in a privileged position. He or she can leave the area after completing the job. The local informants, translators and fixers, however, will have to live on in the local communities in the same context of war or conflict after finishing the task. A foreign journalist or student should therefore be extra careful about putting locals in danger (Hight & Smyth, 2003 ; Schmickle, 2007).

Studies show that dramatic events might cause long-term effects. If traumatic experiences are not dealt with properly, psychologic effects of fear or stress can become serious problems later in life, sometime causing a variety of problems such as “Feeling that you are out of control. Feeling your life is threatened. Blaming others. Shame over your behavior. Problems coping with day-to-day life. Excess use of alcohol or drugs.» (Schmickle, 2007).

Typical issues that now and again appear after returning home are: “Disappointment with attachments that seem cold compared with the terrible intimacy of watching people, even strangers, bleed and die». «Frustration with friends who seem more interested in trivial cultural events than in global matters of war and peace». «Discomfort with material abundance that stands in stark contrast to the desperate need in other parts of the world». «Alienation from a family that had to make do without you» (Schmickle, 2007).

However, these studies also find that long-term effects to stress and fear depend much on motivation and social network. Feeling that the assignment is important seems to make reporters less prone to negative reactions to stress or fear. Similarly, having someone in the newsroom, among the editors, in the family or among friends that are willing to listen and try to understand, appears to reduce negative effect.

A small study of former students, years later

This small study is mainly based on qualitative interviews. From a total of app. 500 students who have taken the course in Global Issues for Journalists from 2007 until 2016, I selected nine for in-depth interviews to probe the issues discussed above.

In the process of selecting the most relevant students, I could benefit from one of a number of sources that inform the journalism educators about each student's fieldwork. For instance, all students have to hand in three assignments where plans for the fieldworks is outlined. After returning home, all students hand in one analytical essay discussing relevant experiences during the fieldworks.

The nine selected have all done fieldwork in particularly challenging situations. However, interviewing former students about possible traumatic experiences and long-term psychological effects is a sensitive issue. For that reason, the research project including the interview guide was submitted to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data for approval. The project was approved on the premise that all information that could identify the informers was to be removed. To further guarantee the anonymity of the respondents, the paper will not describe the places and local issues in full detail, although it would have been beneficial for the understanding of the safety issues to do so.

The (approved) guide for interviews include the following questions, which were followed up with more questions as the interview evolved.

Age and gender.

What was your motivation for doing that particular fieldwork?

In retrospect, did any particular experience during the fieldwork make a strong impression on you?

Could you describe how you reacted to these experiences?

Did you travel and work alone?

Did you have someone to discuss the experiences with during the fieldwork? How did it work?

What do you think in retrospect about those experiences?

Do you feel you were prepared for those experiences?

Have you discussed it with someone later?

Could something have been done differently to prepare you better?

Were the assignments and lectures at school after returning home important or helpful for you in order to deal with the things you had experienced?

What type of knowledge and experiences was important to you in order to deal with the issues?

Looking back on the fieldwork, do you feel that making such experiences during the studies has been mostly positive or negative for your later personal and professional development?

The students and the fieldworks

Most of the selected students did fieldwork either in Latin America or in areas of conflict in or related to the Middle East. Those who travelled to Latin America did work as journalists in areas affected by two different categories of conflict. Some visited districts heavily affected by the so-called war on drugs and had to navigate environments plagued with high levels of violent organized crime. Others reported from districts mostly affected by leftist insurgencies and right wing paramilitaries supported by police or the militaries.

Those who reported from the Middle East worked in areas affected by complex patterns of conflicts. Historically, various leftist and nationalists movements have struggled for "liberation" and for establishing independent states. However, conflicts in these places have become increasingly motivated by demands related to ethnicity. To complicate matters further, numerous religiously based armed groups have emerged as influential players in the conflicts.

The nine selected students were on average two to three years older and therefore a little more experienced than their peers were at the time of doing fieldwork. This small difference in age is perhaps because the teachers would guide younger students in the direction of less demanding projects and fieldworks. Only mature students would be allowed to plan for difficult fieldworks that might involve danger.

Four out of nine selected students are women.

Types of unsafe situations encountered

The students interviewed had all encountered situations they felt were unsafe. Most had felt “real fear” at one time or another during the fieldwork. This is in stark contrast to the vast majority of students taking part in the course over ten years represented here. Less than five percent reported having experienced situations that caused fear. This clearly indicates that certain places are much more prone to danger for journalist students than others. Teachers need to evaluate carefully whether or not a particular student can be allowed to do fieldwork in a locality where the probability of encountering danger is high.

The most common unsafe situation mentioned during the interviews, was being stopped at roadblocks and checkpoints. The students found those situations stressful for several reasons. First, Norwegian students are not used to seeing armed men (and some women) in the streets. Perhaps even worse are being stopped at informal road blocks that sometimes pops up during conflicts, especially when it is difficult to identify the soldier who are manning the check points. As informant number 3 put it: “the shock of realizing that you are powerless”.

“The worst thing I experienced”, said informant number 7 “was being stopped by an armed group. Especially since I was not able to identify which group the soldiers belonged to”. In conflict, you need to think carefully about what you say and how you say it to whom. “I wanted so strongly to frame my answer correctly. Use the “correct” words. But it was impossible to know what to say as long I did not know who I was talking to.”

Informant number 1 and 6 had been present at peaceful demonstrations that suddenly turned violent. “The demonstration was a good place for me to make interviews and take pictures”, said informant number 1. “But I did not understand what was happening. All I caught was that the mood somehow shifted. People began to shout. Others looked worried.” When the chaos broke out, the crowd began to run. This was in itself potentially very dangerous, explained both informants. However, “the main problem was that I did not know who or what I was running from. What is more, I did not know where to run. I was totally disoriented” (informant number 6).

Informant number 5 did experience something similar. For this informant, what happened after escaping from the demonstration was the most unpleasant part. “It became dark and I did not know where I was. At this time, most people had disappeared from the streets. Except from me, very few were out on the streets. The problem was that the army and police set up checkpoints. Everyone was checked. I was afraid that they would believe I was an agent or a in some way was helping the liberation movement. I had heard stories about people disappearing at checkpoints like this.”

In the end, none of the students was physically harmed. All escaped arrest or imprisonment, except for one who was detained for a few hours at a checkpoint. The main problem that the students focused on afterwards was the psychological stress of being overwhelmed by chaos, being deprived of control over the situation. All found not understanding the language particularly difficult. “Knowing that young, armed men were discussing what to do with you without being able to understand what was being said increased the feeling of helplessness. Feeling helpless was the worst part of the experience” (informant number 5).

Many of the informants did mention the added problem of trying to find out what had happened. After returning to the hotels, having escaped the violence and potential danger, the students tried to find trustworthy information online or on television. However, the internet as well as the media were overflowing with rumours. “It was really difficult to find reliable information. I desperately needed to know more. Was it safe to venture out again? Was there any danger in staying put in the same hotel? Was the police looking for foreigners? I had a million questions. But could not find the answers” (informant number 9).

Another issue that many found psychologically disturbing was meeting victims of war and violence. “I was not prepared for the shock. I thought it was just about getting the job done. Just asking the questions. However, I found it very disturbing to have to ask the victims about details. How did it happen? Who were killed?” (Informant number 5). “I felt bad about it for a long time afterwards” (informant number 3). “I could not understand why, but I felt shame and a deep sense of guilt. I was shameful for leaving them behind to return home after having asked them about their most intimate memories of the tragedies”. Years later, many of the students recalled meeting victims of war and conflict as the most difficult experience. Most of them could still feel shame thinking about the experience.

Motivations

Recalling the motivations for doing fieldwork in challenging environments, the students cited a number of reasons. The many reasons mentioned could perhaps best be summarized in five ideal models.

First, informant number 7 and 9 put emphasis on the “social responsibility of journalism” to cover particular issues. “The audience deserves to know about the issue. It is my job to cover it” (informant number 7). The second ideal model could be called “empathy”. Informant number 2, for instance, explained that s/he had seen a reportage on television dealing with this particular issue. “I just had to go. See for myself. I wanted to do something” (Informant number 2). The third category is similar but also slightly different: “These folks are struggling for liberation” (informant number 5). “Almost nobody here have heard about the things that are happening. Norwegian businesses are making things worse by investing in (...)” I have called this category “politics of solidarity”.

A number of statements would fit nicely in category four, “adventurism”. “I wanted to experience something very different from quiet Norway. Wanted to experience something exiting, perhaps dangerous” (informant number 1). Finally, number five is a category I name “personal ambition”. Quite a few saw the fieldwork as a possible step towards the goal of building a career in journalism. “I wanted to do something that would be noticed. Something that stood out from the crowd” (informant number 9).

While I here have defined five categories or ideal models of motivations, all students referred to several motivations. However, the composition of motivations varied much between the students. Some were for instance motivated both by “politics of solidarity” and “adventurism”. While others were motivated by a combination of “empathy”, “social responsibility of journalism” and “building a career”.

In particular, two of the former students reported long-term effects of experiencing dangerous or difficult situations. Both stood out from the rest of the students because they explained having been mostly motivated by “adventurism” and “building a career in journalism”. The problem, both explained, is that they later found it difficult to explain to themselves why they had asked people in very difficult situations about intimate details. “It was hard to live with afterwards. I really felt selfish” (informant number 9). While the number of students is small, it seems like those who reported to have been driven mainly by personal ambition, seemed more likely to report long-term effects such as feelings of guilt.

Feeling unsafe

Among the nine students, none reported to have been in situations of direct physical threat. However, all students told about situations where they did not feel safe. Four of the students believed that the feeling of being in danger of physical threat was so strong that it had a negative impact on the fieldwork and the outcome. Two reported long-term effects, such as nightmares.

Typically, the students found situations such as these difficult to handle: One of the informants covered a popular riot in support of a leftist and nationalist independence movement. A large gathering became surrounded by military and armed police. Besides the danger of being attacked by the police or the military, the student could feel the mood changing and suspicions grow: “I was really concerned that some of the protesters would wrongly identified me as a spy for the police. That would have been very dangerous”.

Another student had had to drive across an area known for being plagued by landmines. “For many years later, I kept waking up in the middle of the night feeling fear, the same feeling I had when driving in (...)”. Yet another told about experiences during fieldwork somewhere ravaged by the drug war. The informant had been dining with a local family when everybody suddenly stood up. “We had to leave, they explained, because a group of youth entered. They looked pretty normal to me, but the locals realized the young med were carrying way too much cash; a sign that something was nor right. They knew from experience that they had to get out of there as quick as possible.”

In most of these cases, what caused later trauma was knowing that things might have gone very wrong.

A different type of distressing experience mentioned by several was being harassed because of travelling with someone from an ethnic minority. “For me it was very traumatic”, explained informant 4, “experiencing that a friend or an acquaintance was subjected to racial abuse. Without being able to do anything. In fact, I could only have made matters worse.” Again, the anger of realizing that they were no more than powerless witnesses was something that stuck with the journalism students for years.

Managing unsafe situations

The students found many ways to deal with danger and stressful situations during the fieldwork. At least one of the students came from a family that many years earlier had migrated from that particular area to Norway. The student was to some extent able to communicate in the local language. For this student, being able to discuss with knowledgeable relatives during and after fieldwork was important in handling psychological stress.

For the others, many mentioned spending as much time as possible and preferably living with local families as fruitful strategies to make the fieldwork safer.

In one particular locality, it had been of great importance to inform all the warring factions about who the journalism students were and what the purpose of the visit was. With the help of international organizations, the information was distributed to the different factions and information was passed on to the different checkpoints in the area. In retrospect, the students saw this as extremely important to be able to travel safely. In other situations, however, the same procedure could have been extremely dangerous. Crossing the border between one armed group to another was seen as impossible (informant 7 and informant 9).

In retrospect, all the students agreed that acquiring deep local knowledge was crucial in order to make the fieldwork as safe as possible. Most students regretted not having read and researched more before traveling.

Three of the students had managed to form some sort of alliance with local journalists that they found very useful. According to these students, getting help and information from locals who understood what it meant to be a journalist, was extremely valuable to avoid unsafe situations. Similarly, two students had been able to enlist the help of local human rights activists. These students also found working with local activists helpful as the activists had much knowledge about what was going on, although working closely with human rights activists could potentially lead to unwanted attention from certain groups.

While it in some of these situations is difficult to assess whether or not working with local journalists or human right activists really made the job safer, the students felt that working with locals made them understand better the local realities. Additionally, building personal relationships to “brave” journalists and human rights activists made the whole experience of covering a conflict more “meaningful” (informant 3).

What is more, all the informants had found it necessary to have someone to discuss with. “I needed to talk to someone to clear my mind. I needed a different perspective on things” (Informant 5). Finding someone to talk with was the most effective way to reduce psychological stress in difficult periods. Those who travelled with fellow students did find it helpful to have a friend to share the experience with. Those who travelled alone did look for others to share with. Most often, this was other journalists in the area or local activists of some kind. Even exchanging emails or talking on Skype with teachers at home was mentioned as something important when experiencing psychological stress.

Post fieldwork at school

The Department of Journalism and Media Studies does have in place a system for post fieldwork follow up including group sessions and plenary discussions. However, none of these informants did find these activities helpful for dealing with traumatic experiences.

What the informants did find helpful, though, was meeting friends and fellow students that had had similar types of experiences. Meeting informally, in spontaneously formed groups of two or three, over a cup of coffee, discussing and sharing freely, was often mentioned as “helpful” or “valuable”. The formally organized debriefs in groups or plenary sessions, however, were mostly seen as “awkward”.

Seven students explicitly mentioned the added stress of having to present a reportage for exams as something that significantly added to the challenges of dealing with stressful situations during the fieldwork. “The stress of producing the reportage for the exam made me push on. I did not take time to stop and reflect. Instead I worked almost day and night to produce something for the exam” (informant 1). According to Schmickle and others, working hard as a strategy to cope with traumatic experiences often lead to long-term problems (Schmickle, 2007). These students had to hand in the reportage and an analytical essay for exams only days after returning home. Additionally, they would have to pass oral exams before completing the semester. It was very hard for them to find time and space to deal properly with what they had experienced.

Long-term effects

The former students did mention minor long-term effects. The fate of victims was the most commonly mentioned theme. Most students have continued to worry about the fate of those they met and interviewed during interviews. In some instances, feelings of guilt was mentioned. Feeling guilty was mostly related to “being privileged” and therefore “able to leave and go home” (informant 3 and informant 4). However, in one of the cases the student worried about the possibility of having “put others in danger” (informant 1). Another worried that pictures and text the students had uploaded to blogs and Facebook during fieldwork could have been a risk to the safety of the sources. It was not primarily the products of journalism this student worried about, but rather communication on social media during the fieldwork. “There was no ways of knowing who might have found the information online” (informant 8).

All the students had encountered problems and had been worried for some reason or another during fieldwork. However, all of the informants, without exception, stated that the experience had been “extremely positive” for personal and professional development. For the students, having to overcome challenges and problems had been turned into something positive, an experience to grow from. This overall positive evaluation is strengthened by the fact that a very large majority of the informants has gone on to become successful journalists. Many of them continue to work on issues related to the so-called Global South.

Improving journalism education in the Global North

Inspired by the insights of journalism educators from the Global South, I wanted to learn from the lived experiences of former students having done fieldworks in challenging and potentially dangerous environments. Two sets of recommendations emerged. One set of experiences and recommendations stemming from the from the journalism educators. The other coming from Norwegian former students.

Much research and planning must be done to avoid dangerous situations, journalism students in addition need to learn how to identify different groups during conflict situations. Students must learn from experts how to recognize different types of arms including firearms. Students should be trained to observe surroundings, plan escape routes and other techniques to get out of difficult situations. From the qualitative interviews, we understand that dangerous situations might arise even if everything possible has been done to prepare for a safe fieldwork. Consequently, it is essential to teach safety issues to journalism students traveling to do fieldwork in challenging environments.

According to Iturregui (et.al.), the many issues in war and conflict requires specialized knowledge, such as being able to identify the sound of firearms, finding good escape routes etc. Spanish journalists value highly the possibility of building experience in controlled circumstances, for example by flying in helicopters and observing live explosions. The journalism students interviewed here, did find it difficult to navigate conflict situations without having such specialized knowledge and experience beforehand.

The findings here seem to connect well with existing literature underlining the correlation between motivation and possible long-term effects of traumatic experiences. The interviews underlines the importance of analysing well the motivation students have for doing a particular fieldwork before the students are allowed to do journalism in potentially dangerous regions. More than anything, building a network of trustworthy contacts before the fieldwork has proved to be the most effective safety measure for these informants. At the same time, the interviews demonstrates that the journalism education needs to pay more attention to the issue of protecting sources and others from harm.

However, there are limits to what educators from Europe can do to prepare students for doing fieldwork in foreign contexts, as the articles in this section demonstrate. Jamil’s work illustrate the numerous ways that the safety of journalists can be compromised (Jamil, 2017). It is difficult to imagine that foreign educators could acquire sufficient knowledge to handle such a multitude of context related challenges. Hoxha (et.al) finds that students tend to become less motivated if educators are lacking in knowledge about the realities of doing journalism in a particular locality (Hoxha, 2017). Still, as Garrido reminds us, it not sufficient for educators to possess the needed knowledge (Garrido, 2017). In addition, the educators need to develop pedagogical skills to connect the knowledge with the lives and realities of the students at home. Mitra and

Pate (et.al) underlines the importance of knowledge-based education (ref). Research is needed to produce knowledge on the specific challenges and dangers faced by journalists around the world.

As the articles in this issue make clear, local universities should have a leading role in producing knowledge and providing education. The best thing Northern scholars could do to enhance safety of Northern journalism students doing fieldwork in the Global South, is to form alliances across borders and continents, building networks of mutual aid to research journalism safety and enlist the help of local educators around the world in the training of journalism students.

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