

Women Making News

Conflict and Post-Conflict in the Field

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Wardak is a place where schools for girls are bombed, burned down or forced to close, where individuals ... are considered by some as traitors who deserve to die, where nightly letters are distributed to those who teach girls, to women who dare to work. Where foreigners if they are discovered risk abduction and death. To travel there I have to hide under a burqa. From the moment I put it over my head I am transformed from someone everybody sees, to someone no one notices. None of the rebels care about what appears to be an Afghan woman in the backseat of an old, dented Toyota Corolla (Kristin Solberg 2013 [translated by the author]).

Although journalists work in a globally interconnected world where large amounts of information and social contacts are available on a phone which fits into their jacket pockets, being in the field still matters. The reality on the ground is often very different from what the outside world sees. This is experienced – often in the extreme – by women journalists covering the somewhat muddy fields of conflict and post-conflict situations. Conflict zone reporters face a multitude of dangers unique to their particular form of journalism. It is a powerful illustration that only two journalists died covering the First World War whereas today, a hundred years later, the situation is radically different – the number of journalists killed in wars and conflicts increases every year. The role of the war and conflict zone journalist has changed dramatically in recent years, as they are explicitly targeted by dissenters. During WWII, 1,600 reporters were officially accredited as war correspondents, 127 of whom were women (Linda Steiner, Oslo, 6 October 2015). According to Mark Jenkins (2003), these female correspondents fought a “double” war. “They had to fight red tape condescension, disdain, outright hostility and downright lewdness.” en, as now, female correspondents ran the same risks as their male counterparts, as well as others unique to women (Whitehorn 2014).

What challenges and opportunities do women journalists face when covering conflict-related issues, either at home or in a foreign country where gender roles may be very different? How do they experience the differences between covering war or open conflict on one hand and post-conflict on the other? These are the questions with which this chapter engages. Another perspective that has not yet received much academic attention, the role of the body in the journalistic coverage of war and conflict, will also be included in the discussion.

Methods

The chapter draws on findings from interviews with a number of female reporters from Egypt, Norway, Pakistan, South Africa, Tunisia and Uganda who cover wars and conflicts in their home countries and/or internationally. In terms of methods, the chapter presents quotes and excerpts from interviews and dialogue with a selection of reporters. The interviews and talks took place in 2014 and 2015, partly during a conference for female researchers and journalists covering conflict and war in Tunisia in December 2014.

The case study approach has been chosen because it emphasises a detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of phenomena and their relationships. All case study research starts from the same convincing feature: the desire to derive a close or otherwise in-depth understanding of a single or small number of cases, set in their real-world contexts (Bromley 1986: 1). The closeness aims to produce an invaluable and deep understanding – that is, an insightful appreciation of the “cases” – hopefully resulting in new learning about real-world behaviour and its meaning. The distinctiveness of the case study, therefore, also serves as its abbreviated definition:

An empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (for example, a “case”), set within its real-world context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin 2009: 18).

The cases have been selected and studied primarily with an intrinsic interest in each case as such. As they have also been chosen for their diverse natures with differing political, historical and geographical trajectories, they will be studied to find some similarities or differences across different backgrounds or identities.

(How) does gender matter?

That journalistic practices are always *situated* is emphasised in ethnographic studies (Hannerz 2003). Journalists contribute to the larger world’s experiences of conflicts and crises: from shaping global audiences’ perceptions and knowledge about crises and conflicts to affecting our sense of proximity to the distant other (Chouliaraki 2006). The representation of women in media in times of crises is a highly important topic, not least because traditional female roles are, globally, still considered “private”, as opposed to the more public masculine sphere. At classic public sphere theories need to be reworked to include issues of gender politics, representation and identity construction has been repeated for more than 20 years (see, for example, Benahbib 1992; Dahlgren 2005). Does the *situatedness* of journalism in the field result in women covering violence and conflict differently from men? And are the challenges they meet of a different nature? Such questions feed into an overarching interest in how women position themselves in the journalistic field, which is also of interest to this chapter.

Feminist approaches – two central strands and their challenges

Feminism is one of the most powerful struggles for social justice in the world (hooks 2000). The French philosopher Charles Fourier is credited with having coined the word “feminism” in 1837. Today, there are many different variants of feminism associated with a variety of philosophical and political outlooks (Rosser 2005). Many people worldwide practise feminism in the sense of being in favour of equality and professional opportunities for men and women, but without necessarily self-identifying as feminists. Londa Schiebinger (1999) has pointed to the curious fact that feminism is often used to refer to people and policies on the radical cutting edge, whereas when feminist practices or points of view become widely accepted in the culture they are no longer considered feminist but simply “just” or “true”. This chapter will use, as its point of departure, two different main strands central to feminist theories – equality feminism and difference feminism.

Equality feminism (or liberal feminism) focuses on the basic similarities between men and women or, rather, considers the individual differences to be larger within the different gender groups than between them. As early as 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft argued that men and women should have equal access to rights because they are both human beings with the capacity to reason. Simone de Beauvoir’s take was that the ultimate goal is the equality of the sexes in all domains (including economic and political equality) and for a worldview in which the basis of human nature outside culture is androgynous, neutral and equal.

Difference feminism (or cultural feminism) represents a broad spectrum of feminisms that stress the inherent differences between men and women. This approach recognises bias, for instance, in journalism in general and in war coverage in particular, by emphasising what has been omitted from feminine perspectives – sometimes expressed as “women’s ways of knowing”. It focuses on women’s “natural” kindness, tendencies to nurture, pacifism and concern for others, and hence concludes that women are essentially different from men but equal in value. Difference feminism has been criticised as being essentialist, or suffering from “the disease of thinking in essences” to borrow from Roland Barthes (1957/1972: 75). It is described as a belief in the “real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity” (Fuss 1990: xi). Diana Fuss, however, problematises the sharp divide between the essentialist and anti-essentialist camps, as she questions the constructionist assumption that nature and fixity go naturally together, as do sociality and change. However, for the purpose of clarification the discussion here uses the separation between the two traditions as its starting point.

Feminism has been accused of being a mainly Western product with a tendency to forget the need to focus on multiple forms of oppression, race and gender in particular (e.g. Anzaldúa 1990; hooks 1989). Postcolonial feminism has argued that by using the term

“woman” as a universal group, women are only defined by their gender and not by social class, ethnicity or sexual preference (Acker 2006; Hooks 1989, 2000; Narayan 1997). Increasingly, theories of feminism see the need to include a multidimensional approach that also incorporates sexuality and social class. Such an “intersectionality” approach embeds gender processes into specific historical, cultural, and economic/ political contexts, emphasising that power structures based on gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, political orientation, class and so on do not function independently of one another but must be understood together.

The body in the work of a conflict journalist

Because men and women are embodied differently, these differences will express themselves in differing lived situations. As Lilian N. Ndangam (2008: 215) reminds us, feminist-influenced scholarship has extensively applied the concept of the gaze to show how women’s and men’s bodies have been objectified ever since Laura Mulvey had identified the male gaze in sympathy with Jacques Lacan’s statement that “woman is a symptom of man”. Ndangam refers to Stephen M. Whitehead (2002), who describes how the gaze comes with “a set of moral, social and cultural codes or assumptions that ascribe values on the body and different values to different bodies” (2008: 215). Ndangam stresses how the media is a cultural space where the gaze operates.

Joanna Shearer (2007: 20) has shown how French female wartime journalists (in contrast to the overwhelmingly male national media during the First World War), made physical the women’s lives in the detail of their text and also “attempted to offer women their preferred courses of action instead of allowing the government a totalising rule over women’s bodies”. Often, the female journalists’ own bodies became a subject in their process of journalistic writing. The prime minister of Romania repeatedly asked Second World War correspondents “When is Ann Stringer of the United Press coming back? She has the most beautiful legs in Romania” (quoted in Allan 2005: 45). The sexualisation of women is something many female reporters have had to relate to – throughout history and today.

As Haley Potter (2013) puts it, “in addition to various other workplace inequalities, female journalists must deal with their sexualised images in the media, potentially the most damaging of the gendered disparities”. Potter proceeds to show how the sexualisation of female journalists has been substantiated by media reports of the experiences of the female anchors of US Fox News, and argues that “... the sexism which plagues the field of the journalism industry is a complex and systemic problem

... inextricably related to such deeply ingrained issues as racism, ageism, lookism and homophobia” (2013).

The difference feminism’s belief in the “real, true essence of things” is interesting in relation to the discussion of journalists’ bodies. Diana Fuss (1990: 5-6) describes how for

the essentialist, “ the body occupies a pure pre-social, pre-discursive space. The body is real, accessible and transparent; it is always there and directly interpretable through the senses”. For the anti-essentialist, as, for instance, the equality feminist or the constructivist, the body is “never simply there, rather, it is composed of a network of effects continually subject to sociopolitical determination. The body is “always already” culturally mapped; it never exists in a pure or uncoded state” (Fuss 1990 : 6). From this perspective it may be argued that because Norwegian foreign correspondent Kristin Solberg’s body is coded as a “(Western) female body” she has to cover it.

At the same time, the Western reporters covering traditional societies with traditional gender roles described how they are seen as both man and woman: “In the Middle East I am seen as something in-between a man and a woman, and that is clearly a professional advantage” (Wold 2015).

This in-between, or neither-nor position, is described by Elisabeth Eide (2015) in an essay about women reporters who, for several hundred years, have fought conventions and barriers and mediated from-below perspectives on war and conflict:

Through the experience of other places, countries and continents, a travelling woman could sometimes be less of “the other”, but also partly outside because she was neither one of the “local” women nor one of the travelling men.

at this hybrid position may have professional advantages is emphasised by several of the foreign reporters. Kristin Solberg (2014) describes the advantage of being a woman journalist in Afghanistan where the genders live in a particularly segregated way:

I have access to the women in a totally different manner than my male colleagues. It is an enormous possibility and an enormous responsibility as the general representation of Afghan women in Western media is shallow. Women are portrayed as victims or as beneficiaries of Western support, women are never presented as heroes, never presented as someone responsible for their own lives. We are so prone to name these women as victims.

Solberg works to challenge such shallow representation through her own reporting. Several of the other reporters also stress that it is seen as a huge professional benefit to have potential access to 100 per cent of the population. They emphasise the good reasons for having a female voice from the troubled zones, and all agree that this leads to a different way of reporting.

Of course there is a difference between how I as a woman approach conflict and how a man would do it. When I am in the field with my male colleagues, the only things they can think of is when the next battle is going to take place, what military equipment is used, how the war is funded and so on. I’m not saying that as a female I am not looking at these prospects, but I think the most important is the

human part. Those are the stories that touch people and with which they can relate. And as a woman I feel that the emotional parts are the ones I understand the most. I am not going to count the dead, but I will talk to the woman who has been raped or hurt (Among 2015).

All the women reporters voiced here agree that women cover war and conflict differently from men. When it comes to whether this is because of their biological sex (which would be an echo of difference feminism) or because the geopolitics and contextual features provide them with a role different from men's (more in line with equality feminism) it is not obvious that all the reporters voiced here would agree. Some underlined that they have sensitive male colleagues and they also have female colleagues who are "adrenaline junkies". Some argued that they never saw themselves as a "woman journalist", but also thought that there are stories they produce that they could not have done if they had not been a woman.

What is important is that women journalists venture into the field and cover war and conflict. The discussions here are proof of a multitude of good reasons for having female voices covering different phases of conflict and transition, echoing Katharine Whitehorn (2014): "We must be grateful for getting a view on troubled times that is not dictated only by men and the military."

The woman journalist in conflict fields

Conflicts are processes, and it is not always easy to define whether a society is in a state of "conflict" or "post-conflict" as some societies move between conflicts and periods of reconstruction and back again, and both processes may take place simultaneously. Typical, in many conflict/post-conflict situations, is that the security situation may change abruptly and make it difficult for the reporters to anticipate where violence could break out. Several of the interviewees stressed that all conflict situations are different. The Syrian war was referred to as a particularly difficult situation to cover journalistically. Some argued that they would be quite all right in a war zone with clear lines, but that the first post-conflict period – what Armstrong and Shura-Beaver (2010) refer to as the "transition phase" and describe as "inherently complex, and may include multiple, smaller-scale transitions that occur simultaneously or sequentially" – is challenging, as "the lines and rules are dubious" (Among 2015). The transition phase may also be challenging in terms of getting access to female sources, as although women may have played an important role in the real struggle they are often marginalised in the transition phase and within the ultimate political settlement (Azikiwe 2010; Castillejo 2011 and 2013; and the following chapter of this book).

When Norwegian correspondent Sidsel Wold shares her experiences of covering conflict and unstable post-conflict zones as a female reporter, she emphasises that some challenges are the same whether you are a man or a woman, whereas some are different

(Oslo, 2015). Common to all is that you need colleagues you can trust.

In conflict you need good people around you. I believe there is a special place in hell for colleagues who don't help each other in wars, with cables for cameras and computers or other things.

If you are a woman, don't complain! There might be very little food and water, there are no ladies room in a war zone. If you get your period – bad luck. War is war. There is no special treatment of female reporters (Wold, Oslo, 2015).

Experiences from the field show that women reporters are not treated radically differently from men in war and conflict zones, and there are few signs of media houses which discriminate on the basis of gender when deciding to whom assignments covering conflicts will be given. Nevertheless, there are some examples of news institutions expecting women to look “ladylike” and beautiful even when covering conflict zones. The South African public broadcaster SABC's reporter Renée Horne was 28 years old when she left for Baghdad to cover the Iraqi war. She received a lot of attention for her professional and thorough war coverage, but was also told to fix her hair:

... they told me to comb my hair. Yes! My bosses had this whole issue and apparently in the meetings here they had a topic discussion about my hair, that I looked a mess and everything else. And, well, if you see the tapes my hair did look a mess ... They did tell me that I was doing great, but – “Please for God's sake put a comb through your hair.” I was so out of it, so tired – “What do you expect, there is no water in this place. I have bottled water. Do you want me to tell my cameraman that I need all the water for my hair? Really, we do not know how long this war is going to last” (quoted in Orgeret 2006).

In the 2014 publication *No Woman's Land – On the Frontlines with Female Reporters*, the International News Safety Institute (INSI) brings together a selection of suggestions for women reporters covering war and conflict. They highlight that journalists must ensure they are well-prepared to understand and mitigate the risks they may face in the course of their work in conflict and post-conflict situations. INSI safety trainer and consultant Caroline Neil puts it this way: “If you fail to prepare, you prepare to fail” (INSI 2014). Sidsel Wold (Oslo, October 2015) agrees, and describes how she puts considerable effort into how she dresses, and how this includes dressing differently from one country in the Middle East to another. In any case, wherever she is, she does not much like the bulletproof vest:

First of all it looks a bit stupid. It also sends signals to ordinary people who would not have bulletproof vests that this is a very dangerous place to be. It is also difficult to run with a bulletproof vest. I prefer to wear good running shoes and no vest.

Wold's favourite item of clothing when she works in the field covering unstable situations is the scarf:

The scarf is everything! I cover my head with it if I need to go into a mosque or meet some very religious people. It shields against the sun and it may keep me warm in cold evenings. It is a perfect small tent and protects the microphone from wind so I sometimes use it as my radio studio. It protects against sand or tear gas. It is indispensable if you or your cameraman get hurt and you need to stop a bleeding.

Preparing to cover outright conflict or more subtle post-conflict situations includes considering whether reporting a story might compromise the journalist's safety. According to Sidsel Wold, in conflict situations only luck lies between being very brave or being very stupid. At times, the only way to be safe in conflict or post-conflict situations, or in the irresolute field that sometimes separates them, is to decide not to do the story. It may be difficult for an eager and dedicated journalist to turn down the possibility of coverage, but sometimes this is the only solution. Several of the interviewees with considerable experience in conflict zones described the trying situation when you have to turn a story down, and how such a decision may manifest itself as an outright bodily expression. Kristin Solberg describes how her body reacted against going into war-torn Syria in 2014.

I decided to go in with a group of NGO workers from Lebanon where the frontier was still open. However, I had such a bad gut feeling and every night I dreamed that I was being killed. It was a difficult decision to make. I am a Middle East correspondent and I had not been inside Syria for one and a half years. It felt wrong. I felt the need to go into Syria to report with some sort of authority. A correspondent friend from Denmark went and all was fine with her, but there were a lot who went and were not fine at all. I finally decided not to go in with mixed feelings. When I gave in and said no, my body relaxed immediately and I slept for the first night in a long time (roundtable, Tunis, December 2014).

For women journalists, an awareness of cultural norms and practices is particularly important. A current challenge is how the contacts and sources in the field may perceive you as a journalist and as a woman. Reporters who had covered conflict areas in conservative cultures told about the need to develop a situational awareness; some types of conversation would be considered inappropriate and eye contact would be considered to be flirting. The reporters described techniques such as carrying two business cards, one with real details another with a mock e-mail and the phone number to the desk – and the unmarried women wore fake wedding rings.

Kristin Solberg described the experiences of being a woman reporter in Pakistan:

I blame the Hollywood films; around the world there are many men who believe that all Western women are willing. It is difficult to get in touch with male sources

when you cannot give them your number. I changed my reporting style the hard way – nobody told me about it in advance. Lower your eyes, don't smile during interviews. Never give away your phone number (round table conversation, Tunis, 2014).

Chatellier and Fayyaz (2012) studied women's roles in post-conflict reconstruction in Pakistan, a country where the post-conflict label only suits parts of the country. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), including the Swat region, is defined as post-conflict although, as Nyborg et al. (2012) remind us, "not a conventional post war context. The KP has nevertheless experienced a military operation and remains a conflict ridden region, making the challenges of development in this area somewhat similar to areas trying to recover from war". Violence and conflict are also felt in the rest of the country – in 2011 alone more than 7,000 Pakistanis were killed and around 6,700 were injured in terrorist attacks, operations by security forces against militants, ethnopolitical violence, drone strikes, and intertribal and cross-border clashes (Chatellier and Fayyaz 2012). This makes Pakistan a highly challenging area for reporters. Malevolent crowd scenes are often described as an especially difficult feature for female reporters (Wolfe 2011). Staying safe when working in crowds has been a significant challenge for many of the journalists covering the Arab uprisings. Even in her own country (or perhaps especially in her own country) a female journalist is not safe. The first global survey of security risks for women journalists was launched in March 2014 and shows that 95 per cent of all journalists killed are from the country in which they are killed (IWJF and INSI 2014). For women the number is even higher.

The threatened female body

Senior journalist and talk show host Quatrina Hosain, who has worked for a number of Pakistani and international publications, touched everybody at a conference for female researchers and journalists covering conflict and war in Tunisia in December 2014, sharing her strong story of the psychological effects of abuse and harassment, and how she had refused to become a victim. Hosain was brutally attacked when giving a piece to camera at Ghulam Sarwar's election rally in Wah Cantt, Pakistan, in May 2013. The incident can be seen as part of the growing incidence of violence against journalists in Pakistan (see Hussain 2014). A mob of around 30 men surrounded Hosain and got her away from her camera team. The mob violently assaulted her for what she felt was an eternity, but probably lasted ten minutes at the most. Hosain explained how the thought of staying on her feet remained a mantra for her while the male mob surrounding her in a tight circle pushed her, dragged her, insulted her and aggressively groped her everywhere.

One tried without stopping to tear my shirt off. Somehow in all the chaos all I could think of was I must not fall. I said to myself over and over again, I must stay on my feet, I must stay on my feet, if I fall it is the end (Round table conversation, Tunis, December 2014).

Hosain was finally saved by her colleagues and escaped in a car. One of her team members had been hit on the head and a cameraman's camera was confiscated. When she eventually reached her home, Hosain discovered that her body was bruised and discoloured all over. Zahid Hussain emphasises that Quatrina Hosain was targeted for her independent views as part of a growing intolerance towards freedom of expression (Hussain 2014). Quatrina Hosain showed great bravery in the way she stood up after the assault and stated that she would show the footage, unedited, on her show the next night. However, as she told the group of other female journalists in Tunis, the terrible attack had left traces, not only on her body but also psychologically, and for a long time she thought she would never be able to return to journalism (Hosain, round table conversation, Tunis, December 2014).

These violent terrorising forces are so dark and extremely powerful in the way they continue to instil fear and horror, and try to victimise you long after the actual assault took place. Some of that dread I will have to continue to fight for ever.

All the women reporters interviewed in this chapter agreed that there is a need to fight the victimisation of women, in conflict and post-conflict situations, as well as when the journalist herself is attacked while she is at work in the field. Talking about assaults and harassment is not easy. Jenny Nordberg, a New York-based Swedish correspondent, was sexually assaulted by a group of men during a chaotic procession in Karachi, Pakistan when covering the return of Benazir Bhutto in 2007. For several years she did not want to talk about it, until she finally did so when the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) undertook a survey four years later. This is what she explained:

It's embarrassing and you feel like an idiot saying anything, especially when you are reporting on much, much greater horrors ... But it still stays with you. I did not tell the editors for fear of losing assignments. That was definitely part of it. And I just did not want them to think of me as a girl. Especially when I am trying to be equal to, and better than, the boys. I may have told a female editor though, had I had one (CPJ 2011).

As a result of forceful cultural and professional stigmas, very few cases of sexual assault against journalists have ever been recorded. The fear of being considered "a girl" and less capable than male colleagues was a feeling shared by several of the interviewed women reporters in the first phases of their careers. For some, this phase included an awareness of having to prove oneself, and to deliberately avoid topics that might be considered "so", rejecting any allusions to female journalists being more caring or kind by nature such as is proposed by difference feminism.

From my experience, you have to prove yourself as a hard and tough "male" correspondent first. And then you can go from there to broader topics, including "female" perspectives (Reema Abbasi, Pakistan, round table conversation, Tunis, December 2014).

I also had to prove my courage first, and then I could go on covering more “women’s issues” too, such as in the hospital. In Afghanistan I worked a lot with such issues. I remember a conversation with my driver, where he said that after he married his wife’s family would ask him: why do you let your wife work? There is a lot of pressure on men too (Kristin Solberg, Norway, round table conversation, Tunis, December 2014).

The Ugandan award-winning journalist Barbara Among has covered many of the processes, from open conflicts to volatile post-conflict situations, in her own country, as well as in neighbouring South Sudan, and agrees that you have to prove yourself more when you are a woman.

Yes you have to. I have to convince my editors and I have to work extra hard. There is always more danger for a female than for a male in these unstable post-conflict situations, and you have to persuade your editors that you can cope. In Uganda, most of them are men, but I have had some female editors as well. And you have to convince those female editors as hard as you have to convince male editors. The women are often more scared than the male editors to send you out on missions (Barbara Among, interview, Kampala, February 2015).

In all periods of transition there is prevailing tension and a very real possibility that matters could get worse before they improve. The state is often unstable and at high risk of relapse into violence, conflict is imminent and changes may occur quickly, involving particular security threats for women. The IWFM and INSI report interviewed nearly a thousand female media workers from around the world and found that nearly two-thirds of the respondents had experienced some form of intimidation, threats or abuse in relation to work, ranging in severity from name-calling to death threats. An increasing tendency are online threats and abuse.

Online gender harassment

Research on violence and the harassment of women in the news media shows that more than 25 per cent happens in an online environment (IWFM and INSI 2014). Studies also show that female journalists experience approximately three times as many abusive comments on Twitter than their male counterparts. For some female journalists, online threats of rape and sexual violence have become part of everyday life; others experience severe sexual harassment and intimidation (Mijatović 2015). The female journalists attending the round table discussions during the conference in Tunisia in 2014 described increasing pressure from their leaders to be “visible and active” on social media platforms at all times. They saw this as a double-edged sword – on the one hand it represents an effective way of reaching out directly to your audience and promoting your stories, but it is also problematic, as a lot of harassments happen through these channels.

Sidsel Wold covered the Middle East for the Norwegian public service broadcaster NRK

from 2007 to 2011. During the summer of 2014 she covered the Gaza war. She worked at least 14 hours a day and in addition received several hate messages for being too biased and Palestine-friendly. A Facebook page entitled “We demand Sidsel Wold removed!” spread numerous hateful comments.

My male colleagues receive hate mails too, but I am more exposed. Almost all of the very hateful messages are written by men. Men who hate women. is [Israel-Palestine] conflict is very particular. It is a mixture of politics and religion and that makes some people very very angry (Wold, round table conversation, Tunis, 2014).

Wold’s statement echoes the words of the OSCE representative on freedom of the media, who describes how female journalists “mostly report on crime, politics and sensitive – and sometimes painful – issues, including taboos and dogmas in our societies”. She continues to stress how “these online attacks tend to degrade the journalist as a woman, rather than address the content of the articles” (Mijatović 2015). Wold described how the hate attacks are very difficult to receive when you are in the middle of a conflict zone and do not have your usual network around you. “You start to question yourself. What am I doing. Am I insane?” (Wold 2014). She decided to talk openly about the harassment and hatred – and when she was back in Norway she exposed some of the vile messages on social media, even calling some of the people who had insulted her and asking: “Why do you hate me so much?”.

People are afraid to talk about harassment – it’s a stigma. It is like having a very terrible disease. However, I also experienced that being open about it made me stronger. After the newspapers wrote about the harassment people also started to tell me that I’m doing a good job and I received a lot of support (Wold, round table conversation, Tunis, 2014).

This chapter argues that female journalists can safety serve as an indicator of democratic development, freedom of expression, civil rights and media freedom in general. If journalists are threatened and attacked, as were Hosain and Solberg, the broader societal effects are grim – coverage gaps will enlarge as a culture of self-censorship grows within media and society.

The invisible conflicts

Experiences from countries where the security situation is problematic show that some aspects of society tend to be very little covered. For instance, during the war in Afghanistan it was 200 times more likely for an Afghan woman to die of pregnancy or while giving birth, than from a bomb or a bullet, but this received little attention in the journalistic reports from the war. In their acclaimed book *Half the Sky...* (2009), Sheryl WuDunn and Nicholas D. Kristof state that “the paramount moral challenge” of our present era is the oppression of women. The writers’ call to action was a report from China stating that every year 40,000 baby girls die during their first year of life because

they do not receive the same health care as Chinese baby boys. More Chinese baby girls die unnecessarily every week than the total number of victims during the 1989 massacres in Tiananmen Square. The whole world reacted to the latter whereas few people are even aware of the former. The oppression of women and girls throughout the world is one of our time's most pervasive human rights violations, but is very often ignored in mainstream news reports.

The female reporters given voice in this chapter were all highly concerned about such invisible conflicts and questioned how the more immediate disasters often take over for the underlying disasters in conflict reporting. The need to go beyond the immediate was stressed, and also the fact that audiences are more likely to be interested in such stories. The reporters stressed how the victims of conflict are not only those killed: they are also the mothers who could not get to the clinic; they are also the unborn child and the long-term consequences of conflicts – the orphan who will not get education, support or love.

As conflict reporters we have to look beyond the immediate consequences of conflict. Domestic violence is often higher in conflict. There is a need for journalists being sensitive to these issues, to look for those concealed angles (Among 2015).

Summing up

Women are important in the fields of conflict and post-conflict, to ensure that the broadest range of stories and destinies is covered. Gender perspectives are important in order to achieve transparency and a wider image of global conflicts and post-conflict situations, and to provide the information necessary to shape public opinion and government policy. The findings from the interviews and talks included here deal with different meanings and roles and the effects of the individual journalist's individuality, professionalism and security. Gender matters simultaneously across all of them.

Providing hard evidence that women “essentially” act differently as reporters and editors has turned out to be rather difficult (Allan 2005: 47). However – as the experiences from the cases interviewed here indicate – because women's lives in many cultures are different to those of men and in many societies they are more involved with home and family, women tend to approach conflict and post-conflict from other angles, making space for other topics and other voices. In addition, women reporters have a much easier task when it comes to getting close to female sources in traditional societies.

Female reporters are more vulnerable to other kinds of risk in conflict and war zones. Several of the journalists told that there are a lot of “testosterone men” with guns in these situations. When women journalists get older and, perhaps, have a family, they often drop out of reporting from phases of conflict, which means that many of the female reporters are young and rather inexperienced, and need to be cautiously followed up by their organisations. At the same time, the journalists included in this chapter found that security training for journalists is very often highly “masculine” and often organised by former

specialist forces.

There is a need to acknowledge the particular safety challenges female reporters face in conflict zones, some of which have been discussed here, as well as to recognise that female conflict reporters may need to prepare and act differently and get a different kind of support when covering wars and conflicts. In other words, to borrow from Gayatri Spivak (1988), there would seem to be a need for some sort of “strategic essentialism”.

This strategic approach includes the realisation that – although great differences may exist between members of the broad group of “women journalists” and although the profession should be much more defining than the gender – it may sometimes be advantageous for female reporters to temporarily “essentialise” themselves and to bring forward their group identity in a simplified way, the goal being to achieve more awareness of, and support for dealing with, the challenges they face. It is imperative that journalism education and training programmes include gender perspectives in their safety and security training for journalists covering wars and conflicts.

This chapter has shown how female journalists’ conditions of employment, including aspects of safety, can serve as a pointer to democratic development, freedom of expression, civil rights and media freedom in general. Including the role of the body in the journalistic coverage of war and conflict allows for some interesting perspectives and reveals some of the challenges and possibilities women reporters carry with them in the fields of conflicts.

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