Violence against Indigenous Journalists in Colombia and Latin America

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores mechanisms and causes that put indigenous journalists at risk in Latin America. It seeks to explain the nature of "indigenous journalism" as well as the differences and similarities between "indigenous journalism" and the journalisms found in mainstream media in Latin America. It analyses measures taken by indigenous journalists and indigenous communities to improve the safety of those who work in the indigenous media. Indigenous journalists are particularly likely to be engaged in struggles involving local communities resisting outside dominance. Therefore, indigenous journalists continue to be vulnerable to many types of threats and violence. The international community has so far paid little attention to the safety of indigenous journalists.

Keywords: Indigenous peoples, journalism, communities, Colombia, violence

1. Introduction

Indigenous journalists in Latin America play an increasingly vital role in uncovering the vast scale of legal and illegal exploitation of natural resources, forests and land in the region. At the same time, they have informed national and international audiences about abuse and exploitation of indigenous peoples. However, for these and other reasons, indigenous journalists have made powerful enemies.

In recent years, individuals and groups wanting to silence journalism in Latin America have exposed numerous indigenous journalists to threats and violence. Violence against indigenous journalists is intimately connected to the general problem of violence against indigenous activists and leaders. These leaders and activists were often deeply engaged in production and dissemination of information through channels such as radio, blogs, online news media and other forms of media in order to defend and protect indigenous autonomy. Nonetheless, this type of journalism and thus the safety of these indigenous journalists have received little attention from international bodies that strive to improve the safety of journalists.

This chapter intends to analyse indigenous journalism and the mechanisms and causes that put indigenous journalists at risk. The chapter will introduce the problem by discussing a selection of prominent cases where indigenous media have been targeted. Further, the analysis draws on 76 short structured interviews with indigenous or community journalists from Colombia, Ecuador and Nicaragua in addition to focus group sessions with indigenous journalists working with the Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) in Colombia.

The term "indigenous journalism", however, is disputed. Most "indigenous journalists" would themselves prefer to be referred to as "communicators" instead of "journalists". Similarly, outside observers do not always agree on the use of the term "journalism" to describe this particular type of information production. Therefore, the paper also seeks to shed light on the nature of "indigenous journalism" as well as the differences and similarities between "indigenous journalism" and the journalisms found in the mainstream media. A deeper understanding of "indigenous journalism" is necessary in order to enhance the safety of indigenous journalists in Latin America.

2. Existing literature on indigenous journalism and safety issues

Gema Tabares has introduced the concept of "indigenous journalism" to encompass the relatively new form of journalism that is developing mostly around radio stations and online news sites connected to indigenous organizations and communities in Latin America. According to Tabares, Indigenous journalism is a "collective work" of "thinking and action" for indigenous communication (Tabares, 2012b). The use of the "collective work" concept seems particularly appropriate, as the imaginary of an "indigenous journalism" has grown out of communitarian action at the local level mediated at meetings, discussions and networks at national and continental levels, for example the two Cumbres Continentales de Comunicación Indígena del Abya Yala (Continental Summits of Indigenous Communicators of Abya Yala[i]). "Indigenous journalism" bears many of the hallmarks of "traditional journalism": it is connected to a community of journalists continuously engaged in discussions about issues such as norms, values and ethics. It is disseminated through media channels and is imagined as existing for the benefit of the audience.

Tabares and others have discussed the possibility of using the better-known concept of "alternative journalism" or "community journalism" instead of "indigenous journalism" (Darío Buitrón, 1996; Lamuedra Graván, 2011; Tabares, 2012a). Using "alternative" would underline the similarities with journalisms elsewhere that offer alternative perspectives to those of the mainstream media. Often, alternative journalism would also seek to foster greater popular participation in the production of journalism. Employing the term "community journalism," meanwhile, would underline the intimate relationship between those producing information and the communities they belong to. While the indigenous journalists participating at the continental summits certainly belong to a community of communicators, it would be mistaken to see them as belonging to an autonomous sphere within indigenous communities in the way we might do in the case, for instance, of European journalism.

Nevertheless, the phenomenon Tabares seeks to capture with the term "indigenous journalism" is different from the types of journalism commonly labelled "alternative journalism" or "community journalism." The difference is most salient in the many traditions, rituals, institutions and procedures that integrate individual journalists into indigenous communities and organizations. From an indigenous perspective, "occidental" journalism is seen and criticized as a phenomenon that has emerged from a process of increasing individualization in the "occidental" world. "Occidental" media are similarly understood by indigenous activists as having contributed to accelerating individualization (Mancilla Maldonado, 2010; Muñoz, 2015; Suárez Quiroga, 2014).

The emerging norms and values of indigenous journalism explicitly oppose individualization and call for journalism and media to not only serve indigenous communities but also be a part of these communities. Tabares, for example, finds three aspects of indigenous journalism to be crucial (Tabares, 2012a). First, indigenous journalism must respond to the needs of indigenous peoples. Second, the communication must highlight the crisis of the "Occident" and revalue the knowledge and life forms of indigenous peoples as a viable alternative. Three, the technologies underpinning the media must be placed at the service of indigenous life and culture. This understanding of journalism is not obviously reconcilable with norms of "objectivity" and "balance" held by many in the mainstream media.

Several instances of violence, threats and hate speech related to indigenous issues and peoples are discussed in the literature dealing with freedom of the press and safety of journalists. The UNESCO report *World trends in freedom of expression and media development. Special digital focus 2015* (Gagliardone, 2015) does mention one case of hate speech online related to indigenous peoples in Australia (p. 48). However, there are no

instances of journalists identified as indigenous being mentioned in the main report. Nonetheless, diversity in media and journalism is underlined as a key value several places in the report. The "UN Secretary-General's Global Education First Initiative (…) aims to equip learners of all ages with those values, knowledge and skills that are based on, and instil respect for, human rights, social justice, diversity (…)" (Gagliardone, 2015 p. 51). The report also underlines the importance of diversity in media audiences (p. 51) which depends on linguistic diversity (p. 67).

Reporters Without Borders (RWB), meanwhile, has published information on a substantial number of cases involving indigenous journalists and indigenous issues over the last ten years. The online database contains more than 80 news items and background articles related to indigenous issues.

In "Officials prevent indigenous radio station from reopening", RWB is "alarmed by the continuing persecution of community radio stations in Guatemala" (Reporters Without Borders, 2015d). RWB connects the murder of a community radio station director on 14 April in the south of Mexico to indigenous struggles in the region (Reporters Without Borders, 2015b). In 2015, RWB reported ten cases of missing journalists to the United Nations, among them the case of Borja Lázaro from Colombia who had been missing since 2014 when he was producing reports on indigenous cultures (Reporters Without Borders, 2015a).

In 2012, RWB found that a newly adopted law discriminated against indigenous community media in Guatemala (Reporters Without Borders, 2012). In 2010, RWB welcomed the acquittal of a Chilean filmmaker who had been working with Mapuche indigenous activists (Reporters Without Borders, 2010b). The majority of cases, however, are related to indigenous struggles in Colombia. The Cauca region seems to be a particularly unsafe region for indigenous journalists. Titles such as "Journalism in Valle del Cauca – terror, economic pressure and self-censorship" (Reporters Without Borders, 2015c), "Airwaves against bullets – indigenous radios stations in Cauca" (Reporters Without Borders, 2012 -a), "Cauca's indigenous community radios appeal for help" (Reporters Without Borders, 2012 - b), "Paramilitaries threaten 11 journalists and 11 indigenous radio stations – vice-president asked to intercede" (Reporters Without Borders, 2011) and "'ChuzaDAS : Media targeted by intelligence services'" (Reporters Without Borders, 2010a) make it clear that violence and threats against indigenous journalists in Cauca cannot be seen as isolated episodes. They should instead be understood as structured assaults that over time serve to limit indigenous people's freedom of speech.

Freedom House has reported on restrictions on freedom of speech for indigenous peoples, for instance the Mapuche in Chile (Freedom House, 2006). The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) provides valuable research on the intimate relationship between indigenous struggles for autonomy and violence against indigenous journalists as well as non-indigenous journalists covering indigenous issues.

Although the struggle for indigenous rights is an underlying issue that needs to be interpreted in the context of Latin America as a whole, this paper will gradually zoom in on the safety of indigenous journalists in Cauca, Colombia.

The safety of indigenous journalists in Colombia is connected to the overall dynamics of violence, power struggles, conflict and war in Colombia. Colombia presents a number of contradictions. The country has a long tradition of civilian-led stability that stands out in Latin America. Colombia also has a tradition of respect for the independence of the judiciary. The constitution of 1991 strengthened judicial protection of human rights, promoted non-discrimination and diversity, and reinforced the democratic mechanisms of citizen

participation. Indigenous organizations participated in the production of the new constitution, which established a number of formal measures to protect indigenous culture and autonomy. Thus, in some respects, Colombia appears to be a well-established and advanced democracy. In other areas, however, "severe shortcomings" seriously undermine the extent of democratic rule in the country (Freedom House, 2011). The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) in 2014 stated that Colombia, "embodies hope, but also shows the long road that must be travelled to reach justice." (Witchel et al., 2014). Since 1992, the CPJ has documented 45 journalists killed because of their work in Colombia, in addition to 33 killings in which the motive is not clear. Impunity prevails in 88 per cent of the cases. However, the situation has improved significantly since 2008.

The improvement seems to have little to do with justice as most of the murders still go unpunished. While Colombia does have a programme in place for protection of journalists that provides security details or helps relocate threatened journalists, CPJ believes the improvement is mostly due to the general abatement of the war since 2008. There is probably a causal relationship between the advancing peace process and improved safety for Colombian journalists.

In the case of indigenous journalists, however, this causal relationship appears debatable. The violence against all types of indigenous leaders has continued at a very high level despite the ongoing peace process. According to the indigenous organizations, the armed parties and others are trying to create "facts on the ground," positioning themselves for future control over and exploitation of the abundant natural resources found on indigenous territories. Attacks against indigenous leaders and journalists seem to be coming from all sides, including paramilitaries controlled by elite groups, the state security apparatus and Marxist guerrilla organizations.

3. Methodology

This research has been undertaken as part of the Norhed-funded master and research project NORHED RUIICAY[ii]. Twenty master students contributed to this investigation by conducting 76 semi-structured interviews with indigenous and community journalists in communities in Ecuador, Colombia and Nicaragua. For reasons of comparison, the interviewers asked questions used by the investigators connected to the Worlds of Journalism project. Henry Caballero Fula of UAIIN (Colombia) organized focus group interviews with indigenous journalists in Cauca. Vicente Otero contributed with his extensive experience as the organizer of several national and continent-wide summits of indigenous communicators. Gerardo Simbaña of Pluriversidad Amawtay Wasi (Ecuador) has systematized resources on indigenous media in South America, while Gema Tabares has provided input on the most relevant cases in Mexico and Central America. Finally, the paper builds on research done in connection with the project *Journalism under Pressure: A mapping of editorial policies and practices for journalists covering conflict* (Høiby & Ottosen, 2015). Nonetheless, I bear the full responsibility for everything in this paper.

The first step of the investigation was to systematize existing literature on the safety of journalists related to indigenous issues in order to better understand mechanisms and causes. Second, the paper builds on the 76 semi-structured interviews with indigenous and communitarian journalists with the aim of contributing to the understanding of norms and values of indigenous journalism compared to mainstream journalism. With the help of Caballero and Otero, the investigation employed focus groups consisting of experienced

indigenous journalists in Cauca, Colombia to discuss the safety of indigenous journalists and the measures undertaken to protect the safety of indigenous journalists.

The research should be seen as a small first, albeit necessary, step in the process of producing reliable knowledge about safety for indigenous journalists in Latin America.

4. Why are indigenous journalists exposed to threats and violence?

With researchers from the RUIICAY[iii], we have searched for literature and attempted to systematize some of the information on the safety of indigenous journalists that has been published. Too little has been published on the patterns of causes and mechanisms behind violence against indigenous journalists. In the following, I will use a few selected cases to begin a more systematic examination of possible causes and mechanisms behind the violence. While some aspects of these cases, such as the identity of the intellectual authors of reports on violent crimes, are still contested, the underlying conflicts are well documented.

The murder of Honduran indigenous environmentalist Berta Caceres illustrates the problems of demarcating the border between journalists and non-journalists. Caceres succeeded in rallying the indigenous Lenca people behind a grassroots campaign to pressure the largest dam builder in the world to pull out of the Agua Zarca. While Caceres is usually described as an "indigenous leader" and "environmentalist", the organization she co-founded, the National Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) founded and ran three radio stations. Independent media and indigenous journalism played a pivotal part in the struggle for indigenous rights. In fact, a photo published by the Goldman Prize after Caceres won the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2015 pictures her in a studio working on a report for Radio Guarajambala.

The case illustrates several phenomena commonly found in cases of violence against indigenous leaders and journalists: Indigenous activists engaged in struggles against corporations seeking to exploit natural resources are also founders of media channels (for instance radio stations), and use the media to produce and disseminate information to audiences both inside and outside the indigenous communities. There is no clear line of distinction between activism and journalism, which is why scholars of indigenous journalism often compare indigenous journalism with "alternative journalism" and "community journalism." In the case of Berta Caceres, the Honduran state was obliged to provide protection to Caceres after the United Nations special rapporteur for indigenous rights, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, raised the issue with the Honduran president. In other cases, conflicts arise precisely because states decline to give indigenous communicators and journalists the same type of judicial protection as other forms of journalism.

Whether or not journalists are recognized as such is not of purely academic interest. In many Latin American countries, recognition as journalists is crucial for the right to protection, for gaining access to the airwaves as well as numerous other issues related to freedom of expression. In Mexico, for instance, the Second National Congress of Indigenous Communication (CNCI) consequently demanded a share of "the radio electronic spectrum" to be reserved for "broadcasting indigenous radio" in such a way that "the migration of commercial stations from AM to FM does not impede the rights of indigenous peoples to information." At the same time, the congress denounced the Federal Telecommunications Commission for discriminating against indigenous media (Segundo Congreso Nacional de Comunicación Indígena (CNCI), 2008).

The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal has investigated numerous cases related to "free trade, violence, impunity and the rights of the peoples of Mexico" (Tribunal permanente de los pueblos, 2014). The tribunal documented 11 assassinations of journalists during a period of 20 months in the southeast and northeast of Mexico. Additionally, the tribunal found 180 cases of violence against female journalists. Public officials or the police were responsible for more than 60 per cent of the cases. The tribunal calls on international institutions to "denounce the systematic abuses of rights" and "demand that the state guarantee the work of the communicators of the communitarian radios" (Tribunal permanente de los pueblos, 2014).

Similarly, in Colombia, indigenous organizations and communicators "reject threats and demand access to freedom of expression" (Minga Social Indígena y Popular, Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia ONIC, Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca-CRIC, & Asociación de Medios de Comunicación Indígena de Colombia-AMCIC, 2013). After presenting a long list of crimes against indigenous communicators, the signatories demand that the state should investigate the crimes and punish the perpetrators. Despite several calls from Colombian indigenous organizations and international bodies, the government has so far "failed to take action" to protect the communicators.

In Argentina, the Argentine Forum for Journalism (FOPEA) examined the arrest of three indigenous radio journalists at a protest against rally Dakar in 2014 (El Foro de Periodismo Argentino (FOPEA), 2014). The investigation once more highlighted some key issues found in all the cases analysed here: first, local authorities and police failed to recognize the radio journalists as "real" journalists deserving protection; second, the radio journalists were engaged as leaders and activists in their respective indigenous communities; third, the indigenous activists protested against the use of their land for commercial purposes without prior consultation. According to Myrna Cunningham, member of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the social gains of indigenous peoples in Latin America have unleashed "a violent reaction against" indigenous communities (Cunningham, 2013).

In many ways, indigenous peoples have won important concessions from governments over the last 25–30 years. New constitutions recognize countries as being "multinational" or "multicultural" and provide indigenous peoples with particular rights to education, language and so forth. International conventions, such as the International Labour Organization's (ILO) "Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention" (No. 169) from 1989, grant indigenous peoples permanent rights to territories. An increasingly vocal and strong indigenous movement is standing up against states, corporations and armed groups wanting to exploit indigenous territories without the consent of indigenous peoples. However, the conflicts arising from these struggles are claiming countless victims all over Latin America.

5. How is indigenous journalism different from other journalisms?

The cases quoted above indicate that the communicators that I refer to here as "indigenous journalists" do not necessarily adhere to commonly held norms of journalism, such as the norm of objectivity. Objectivity is generally understood as "balance", "independence", "detachment", or "disinterest". In the cases cited here, the indigenous journalists are not detached or independent from the communities. Instead, they see production and dissemination of information as integral parts of the struggle for indigenous autonomy. To understand better the norms and values of indigenous journalism, we have interviewed

indigenous journalists and some non-indigenous journalists working in communities with a high proportion of indigenous peoples.

First, following the Worlds of Journalism Study[iv] template, we asked, "how important is it" to be an "absolutely detached observer".[v] On a scale from 1 to 5 (5 meaning extremely important), the mean value of all answers was 3.95 with almost no difference found between indigenous and non-indigenous journalists. This places indigenous journalists well within the range of typical values found among professional journalists in countries as diverse as Australia, the USA, Uganda and China. A question about "providing citizens with the information they need to make political decisions" as a goal for journalism, revealed a slightly greater divergence between indigenous journalists and most professional journalists (WJS). The mean result for the group of indigenous journalists was 3.88 while WJS found 4.38 to be the mean among all journalists interviewed. Conversely, indigenous journalists are much more likely to be willing to "advocate for social change" than journalists in the USA, Europe and Australia (mean of 3.81 among indigenous journalists versus 2.50 in the USA). Although the responses vary within the group of indigenous journalists interviewed, the typical respondent is much less likely to agree with the statement "I think that facts speak for themselves" than journalists from any country included in the Worlds of Journalism Study (mean value of 3.19 among indigenous journalists versus 3.91 for the USA).

The results from the semi-structured interviews help us understand the norms and values of the emerging indigenous journalism. Contrary to our expectations, many indigenous journalists do see themselves as "independent". In focus groups, many expressed a need to continue working for a greater autonomy for journalists as a group in the struggle for indigenous autonomy. Some indigenous journalists clearly wish to develop a journalism that is more critical towards indigenous authorities. As one of the indigenous journalists stated: "Independent journalism is needed to criticize leaders of communities and organizations. People need independent information." Nonetheless, the group of indigenous journalists is resistant to defining "providing citizens with information" as a goal. The focus group sessions indicate that one reason lies in the histories of racism and exclusion in Latin America. Indigenous journalists do not believe that majority rule will necessarily end racism in Latin America. In the group sessions, the journalists would question the meaning of "citizens" and engage in debates on the notion of "information" that can be simply "provided". According to many participants, the information provided by journalists in the mainstream media is far from being simply out there, ready to be "provided". Instead, they see it as socially constructed based on, for instance, existing social structures. That is perhaps why indigenous journalists are more willing to identify with the goal "to advocate for social change".

6. Colombia and the safety of indigenous journalists

According to the interviews, most indigenous journalists have experienced serious threats or some sort of violence related to their work. The group interviews, meanwhile, shed light on the many measures indigenous journalists as well as indigenous communities and organizations take to protect themselves.

The indigenous journalists' movement in the region of Cauca, Colombia was moulded in a context of constant danger and violence. The threats come from all parties in the long civil war. The attacks have sometimes been aimed directly at indigenous journalists, while the indigenous media have sometimes been affected indirectly. At all times, however, indigenous journalists have had to rely on organized communities for protection. The growth of indigenous media has consequently been inseparable from the growth of the indigenous

movement since the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) began to use silkscreened posters systematically to distribute information at meetings and other events in the 1970s. Later, the CRIC founded a newspaper "indigenous unit" and circulated the newspaper to all communities. The network Association of Indigenous Media in Colombia (AMCIC) was founded in 2004 and is currently composed of 24 communication collectives in the Department of Cauca.

A long list of attacks on the indigenous media has been documented by the indigenous communicators and activists. On 9 July 2011, for example, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) exploded a bomb placed on board a bus outside the police station in Toribio, causing severe problems for the civilian population. Radio Nasa was damaged and a journalist was seriously injured when the equipment fell on him. Likewise, the radio mast of Nasa Estéreo was installed on a hill belonging to the community, but it has not been possible to repair damage to the antenna because the army has installed a military base on the hill against the will of the community (La Otra Cara 2015). Rodolfo Maya Aricape, an indigenous community journalist of the Network School of Communication, was killed in the northern district López Adentro de Caloto in 2010 (Monroy Gomez 2011). The crime remains unsolved. Vicente Otero has repeatedly been threatened in times of social mobilization. He was imprisoned on charges the state could not support and had to leave the country for more than six months (Sulé 2013). Several radio stations have been damaged in guerrilla attacks on police stations. Radio Libertad de Totoro, for example, was damaged because the Colombian army had entered the station during an attack. Radio Nasa in the Paez municipality was damaged when the police directed "shots at the station, damaging some of the equipment" during a confrontation with the guerrillas (Caballero Fula 2015). The journalists fear losing the support of the communities more than threats or attacks.

The violence against indigenous journalists in Cauca is typically related to the coverage of protests against exploitation of natural resources on indigenous territories. Covering such issues tends to expose indigenous journalists to the risk of making powerful enemies among international businesses and local elites. The risks to indigenous journalists' safety is sometime directly linked to conflicts between indigenous peoples and the Colombian state.

While Colombia faces a number of challenges related to the safety of journalists, the challenges facing indigenous journalists do not necessarily follow the same pattern or have the same causes as threats to mainstream journalists. Instead, they need to be assessed and tackled in the context of indigenous struggles for territories and autonomy.

7. Indigenous journalism needs to be recognized

Indigenous journalism poses some serious questions related to the professionalization of journalism in Latin America. According to Silvio Waisbord, professionalization is "about the specialization of labor and control of occupational practice. These issues are important, particularly amidst the combination of political, technological and economic trends that have profoundly unsettled the foundations of modern journalism" (Waisbord, 2013).

This notion of professionalization as specialization is in conflict with indigenous imaginaries of a good life and a good community (Buen Vivir). According to indigenous holism, a good community can come into being when the members know the different roles and functions of the community. Broad experience is highly valued. Therefore, members of a community will normally learn by circulating between different roles. Division of labour and consequently greater specialization is not seen as a good thing.

The indigenous journalists do not themselves understand "journalism" as a social activity that ought to be performed by specialists belonging to a clearly demarcated profession. Indigenous journalists will typically have served as community leaders or have held various roles in indigenous organizations before becoming "journalists" for a limited period of time.

My hypothesis is that academics and journalist organizations sometimes have problems recognizing indigenous journalists as being "real journalists" because of this aversion to professionalization and specialization. This is further complicated because indigenous journalists as a group have somewhat negative attitudes towards mainstream journalists and the journalism they observe around them. Many indigenous journalists claim that mainstream media are "owned by small elite groups" and consequently reflect existing social and economic hierarchies. Most argue that mainstream journalism tends to exclude and devalue minorities. Mainstream media are thus accused of "representing hegemonic ideologies, norms and values" (all quotes taken from group sessions and interviews).

Nevertheless, many aspects of indigenous journalism are familiar to the student of the history of journalism. The Norwegian journalism that emerged in the late 1800s, for instance, was created by organizations deeply embedded in local and national communities, such as political parties, trade unions, the small peasant movement, and important in the case of Norway, the movement to construct a Norwegian language. Norwegian journalism in the late1800s was not seen at the time as being independent from organizations and communities, but rather as embedded within them, much like the indigenous journalism in Latin America today.

8. Measures to protect the safety of indigenous journalists

Many of the qualities of indigenous journalism described above serve to protect indigenous journalists. The circulation between roles and responsibilities, for instance, ensures that individuals will not remain in an exposed and vulnerable position for extended periods of time.

Many of the indigenous leaders will have a background from indigenous journalism and thus intimate knowledge of the potential dangers to the safety of journalists. Organizations and communities have therefore established a number of mechanisms to protect the journalists. CRIC, for instance, has developed a communication policy and provides support to the network of communication collectives and radio stations. The networks and collectives effectively disseminate information about threats, dangers and violence through established channels within and outside the indigenous movement. The movement is highly effective when it comes to organizing public protests involving tens of thousands of well-organized participants.

Perhaps the most astounding feature for an outside observer is the unarmed but well-trained and highly organized indigenous guard that will confront any aggressors in order to protect indigenous journalists and indigenous leaders (Dudouet, 2014; Piñeros, 2006). The indigenous guard represents a daunting opponent for any aggressor, even if heavily armed, as seen during the confrontation between FARC and indigenous guards in Toribio in November 2014. Even though the FARC soldiers killed two unarmed guards, they eventually had to surrender to the local authorities.

If needed, indigenous organizations have the ability to remove indigenous journalists from dangerous localities and place them in more secure environments until it is possible to return

home. This was the case when Vicente Otero had to leave Colombia because of continuous threats and persecution based on false information (Cultural Survivor, Undated).

The very aspects of indigenous journalism that sometimes make it difficult for outside observers to identify this type of journalism as "real journalism" are the same aspects that help guarantee the safety of indigenous journalists in times of extreme violence.

9. Conclusions

This has been a first step towards a systematic analysis of the safety of indigenous journalists in Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America. I have argued that threats and violence against indigenous journalists constitute a real and widespread problem that has so far received inadequate consideration from the international community. This is most likely because "indigenous journalism" is not easily recognizable as "journalism" to "Northern" observers.

While many journalists in places that are hostile towards critical journalism prefer to see themselves as "objective" and without personal interests in the issues they cover, indigenous journalists explicitly put the tools of journalism to work to serve communities struggling for indigenous autonomy. This has put indigenous journalists in a particularly precarious position. The problems of indigenous journalists have been compounded by the fact that Latin American justice systems in general have been influenced in so many ways to support the powerful over the poor and excluded. Additionally, mainstream journalists in Latin America have been slow to recognize the importance of the work indigenous journalists do, probably because so many indigenous journalists do not adhere to the norms and values that many Latin American journalists consider important to protect journalists and build acceptance for the profession of journalism.

However, the close integration of indigenous journalists within indigenous communities and organizations serves to protect their safety. As a result, the norms and values of indigenous journalism have emerged and continue to be socially constructed as integral to the struggles of the indigenous communities.

It is essential to recognize the invaluable contribution of indigenous journalism to society. Indigenous journalists deserve to be fully recognized as journalists and consequently considered when measures to protect the safety of journalists is being discussed.

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[i] Many indigenous organizations use the term Abya Yala to refer to the American continent.

[ii] More information on the programme: https://www.norad.no/en/front/funding/norhed/projects/ruiicay-hioa-intercultural-communication-linkage-programme-/

[iii] Red de Universidades Indígenas Interculturales y Comunitarias de Abya Yala (The Network of Indigenous Intercultural and Community Universities of Abya Yala). Many indigenous leaders and activists prefer to use «Abya Yala» instead of «America».

[iv] For more details see http://www.worldsofjournalism.org/

[v] «5 means you find it extremely important, 4 means very important, 3 means somewhat important, 2 means little important, and 1 means not important at all.»