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Female Investigative Journalists: Overcoming Threats, Intimidation, and Violence with Gendered Strategies

Abstract

During the past two decades, numerous investigative journalist networks have emerged globally, through which participants collaborate and share data. This relatively new practice thrives on the opportunities offered by technology and communication while at the same time representing a response to increasingly globalized crises. Confronting global structures of crime and power through their work, the reporters at such networks are also required to manage a host of local conditions on the ground. This article fills an existing scholarly research gap concerning the ways in which female investigative journalists in these collaborative networks navigate the profound challenges of harassment, threats and intimidation, and violence and adapt their practices to stay safe and prosper in their careers. It wonders, as well, whether the cross-cultural environment of these networks is useful or helpful to female journalists from cultures where women otherwise have limited professional leeway. This article finds that women who break free of their gendered roles must deal with the consequences of social and professional slander and physical and verbal attacks on these women are sometimes also directed toward

male family members in their stead. The journalists interviewed for this study brought expertise from Africa, India, Europe, the Middle East, and Australia.

Introduction

The risks and threats to journalists are not unifor but rather differ according to how the journalists work and what they cover in their reporting (Høiby 2019). Investigative journalists face risks and threats that differ from those faced by reporters traveling in a war zone, for example. While scholars are unable to agree on a single definition of investigative journalism (Grøndahl Larsen 2017, Stetka and Örnebring 2013), there are common denominators to the various attempts: investigative journalism seeks to hold power to account (Houston 2009), for one thing; it is linked to public service journalism in the way it is practiced (Gearing 2016, Konieczna 2018); and it is a transferable skill (Aucoin 2005). Such a mode of journalism will naturally provoke responses from its targets, including organized crime, financial criminals, despots, or simply people with power. There are particular risks linked to investigations in one's own city, country, or region that a local reporter must be wary of, and there are other risks linked to working abroad or covering international conflicts. New circumstances or conditions can mean new threats or fewer threats (Dell'Orto 2016, Høiby 2018). Alongside location, practice, and beat, the traits, opportunities, and characteristics of the individual journalist and their news organization also determine threat level. One decisive aspect is gender—female journalists face unique threats and different opportunities to cover certain beats, progress in their projects, and prosper in their careers in comparison to their male counterparts (Craft & Wanta 2020, Høiby 2016). In this article, we discuss the extent to which women journalists are affected by threats to their safety and how they perceive the opportunity to engage in cross-border collaborative investigative projects. To do so, we focus on location, practice, beat, and individual character in relation to issues of safety and professional opportunities in the work of these women.

More and more researchers are looking at how threats and harassment affect women journalists in particular, both online (see Chen et al. 2018, Høiby 2020), in the newsroom (van Zoonen 1996), and in the field (Høiby 2016), but we have yet to see a study addressing this challenge to journalistic practice in the culturally diverse context of global collaborative investigative networks. In addition to the cultural exchange fostered by cross-border projects, the practice of investigative journalism inherently demands the exposure of reporters to potentially dangerous situations as they strive to hold power to account, including both online and offline meetings with sensitive sources and systematic investigations using untraditional methods such as going undercover to infiltrate criminal networks or even investigations in isolated places. A cross-border project might target a particular place but engage journalists (both freelancers and those affiliated with local or national media organizations) from different cultures and countries where their degree of safety is uneven at best. In such a complex work environment, cultural norms complicate the collaboration and negotiation, and this is doubly true for female journalists. In the discussion that follows, we assume that female investigative journalists are as vulnerable to gendered threats, harassment, and discrimination as female journalists involved in other fields of conflict reporting. And we ask questions about how they respond to those challenges.

We begin by presenting some theoretical perspectives on investigative journalism and its evolving global consortiums and investigative collaborations. Then we review existing scholarship on gender in news production and discuss this in context of our research on the challenges and safety concerns of female journalists. Our findings disclose some of the obstacles that female journalists face in their work and the ways in which these are impacted, for better or worse, by work that takes place in a "glocal" and to some extent internet-based context involving multiple cultures that may differ greatly from the individual's local culture. Our interviewees' statements concern the ways in which they negotiate their jobs,the strategies involved in and outcomes of these negotiations. We then discuss the extent to which these statements reflect reactivity and adaptation versus a potentially useful code of practice to be adopted by others.

Cross-border response to global issues: from investigative journalism to cross-border collaboration

Scholars have struggled to define exactly what investigative journalism is, but most agree that it originated in early-twentieth-century muckraking and later developed into a unique set of skills and practices dedicated to holding power to account (Aucoin 2005, Feldstein 2006, Mair & Keeble 2011, Protess et al. 1991). Likewise, this form of journalism, which James Aucoin (2005) has usefully described as a "social practice," has roots in the American style of objective and fact-based reporting (Schudson 1992, pp. 115–16). Aucoin evokes the work of Alasdair MacIntyre to define it further as "sustained and, indeed, [it] progresses through the efforts of practitioners to meet and extend the practice's standards of excellence." Framing investigative journalism as a practice draws useful attention to the fact that it is a skillset as well as a mindset, as is reflected in the definition of it by the Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) association: "the reporting, through one's own initiative and work product, of matters of importance to readers, viewers or listeners. In many cases, the subjects of the reporting wish the matters under scrutiny to remain undisclosed" (Houston 2009). As a consequence of this crucial aspect of the practice, investigative reporters are often subjected to threats and attacks intended to hinder their investigations, as well as retaliation for their published work. Over the last decade, the risks have gone global along with the investigative reporting, and they appear to be expanding along with the technology and the globalized media landscape (Cottle, Sambrook & Mosedell 2016, Høiby 2019, Mair & Keeble 2011).

While local and national investigative efforts based in specific communities and countries hold power to account at those levels, cross-border collaborations in investigative journalism pool information, sources, and content among various actors in the interests of a *global* impact (think, for example, of core journalist- and editor-driven organizations such as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism [ICIJ] and the Global Investigative Journalist Conference [GIJC]). Cross-border collaborations are characterized by four specific features, according to Alfter: "(1) Journalists from different countries, who . . . (2) cooperate on a shared theme or story[;] . . . they . . . (3) compile, mutually cross-check and ultimately merge their findings to . . . (4) individually fact-check and publish these findings adjusted to their national, local or otherwise specialised target groups" (Alfter 2016). As a relatively new phenomenon, cross-border collaborations merit more scholarly attention to the ways in which journalists organize themselves and share their sources and project

responsibilities (see also Alfter 2019, Bebavi 2019, Berglez and Gearing 2018, Carson 2020, Carson and Farhal 2018, Konow-Lund 2019, 2020, Konow-Lund et al. 2019, Sambrook 2018). While today's journalists face new challenges, as mentioned above, they also enjoy new opportunities to transcend physical, psychological, and technological borders in their pursuit of holding power to account.

Below, we will look specifically at how female investigative journalists practice in an international and multicultural work environment while strategizing to overcome gendered threats involving harassment, intimidation, and violence. The existing literature already suggests that female journalists face different risks and threats than their male colleagues (Høiby 2016, Orgeret 2016, Sbrerny 2014, von der Lippe & Ottosen 2016). We would further argue that studies of the challenges to practice of female journalists should also acknowledge the body of scholarship concerned with gender in news production in general (including gendered workplace cultures and discrimination in newsrooms). Safety issues have long buttressed the justifications for why women cannot or should not work in what are perceived to be the more masculine areas of journalism (Høiby 2016, Steiner 2017). Topics like war, conflict, foreign affairs, politics, finance and even sports have been predominantly produced by male reporters (Desmond & Danilewicz 2010, North 2012, Tamir, Galily & Yarchi 2017) as opposed to areas such as entertainment and domestic issues, human interest and health related stories (de Bruin & Ross 2004).We consider female journalist safety and gender representation in news production to be two aspects of the same issue.

Gender and conflict reporting

The field of journalism has long been dominated by masculine inclinations, whether in the liberal Western democracies or the Global South, as has been confirmed by an extensive body of research (see, for example, Chambers, Steiner & Flemming 2004, de Bruin & Ross 2004, Djerf-Pierre 2011, Djerf-Pierre & Löfgren-Nilsson 2004, Holland 2004, Jenkins & Finneman 2017, Melin 2008, Morna 2007, Ross 2004, Zoonen 1998a, 1998b). While research on media content has found that news produced by female reporters is more likely to feature women (Armstrong 2004), scholars of gender in newsroom cultures dispute the idea that the endemic marginalization of women in news production can be abated by increasing their number in the newsroom (e.g., de Bruin & Ross 2004, Shoemaker and Reese 2014). But a recent study that compares issue agendas and story focus at newspapers with mixed-gender participation in their leadership has generated some new ideas (Craft & Wanta, 2004). In this study, it would appear that newsrooms with a greater representation of male editors are more discriminatory when assigning news beats than newsrooms led by female editors—in fact, it would appear that female editors differentiate little between male and female reporters when assigning beats. Nevertheless, the predominant editorial gender had little impact on the content of what was covered. Hence, we can only say that while gender representation above the glass ceiling impacts representation further down the line and across the beats, it does not necessarily impact practice.

Hegemonic masculinity, a term coined by R. W. Connell, refers to a configuration of practice that legitimizes men's dominant position in society and upholds the subordination of women, as well as men who differ from

the script of a certain type of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity as such assumes that there are multiple masculinities and dominates not so much by oppression as by consent. In journalism, it can be realized in what North (2009) refers to as a "blokey" newsroom culture, in which anyone—regardless of sex or gender—who wants to thrive in a system dominated by certain masculine traits will tend not to undermine but to fortify the status quo. In the same fashion, Lobo and colleagues (2017) find the "traditional gender system" to be simultaneously embodied and denied by both female and male journalists through what they describe as a "process of phenomenological 'typification' and adoption of a 'natural attitude' towards the gender system that may prevent the disclosure of new possibilities and understandings of the objective social world and of our gender relations." Given that gender is a social construct and gendering a basic social process, journalism is clearly gendered. Here, we build on Ruoho and Torkkola's claim that gender is "present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies of journalism" (Ruoho and Torkkola 2018, p. 67) and focus on the evolving field of investigative journalism with that condition in mind.

Previous scholarship on gender in war and conflict reporting has been preoccupied with the cultural masculinization of military and power. An example of this scholarship would be the practice of embedding oneself with military forces that became increasingly popular among journalists covering the second Gulf War. Before that, and especially during the U.S. invasions of Grenada and Panama, the "pool practice" was another organized means of entering the field with the military. Both practices, of course, were mainly reserved for men, and very few women were allowed to participate. This masculinized militarization of conflict reporting has in turn impacted the ways in which we think about investigative journalism as well. Machoism and bravado turn up in all of the dangerous forms of journalism, with their attendant expectations regarding who is up to the task. Those expectations even encompass the given journalist's physical and mental health, and especially the ability to deal with trauma (Feinstein 2006). Women in the profession find themselves compelled to "prove" their fitness in these regards before being hired or assigned dangerous assignments (Høiby 2016, Steiner 2016; see also records by women conflict reporters in Storm & Williams 2012).

Although threats faced by conflict reporters can take a variety of forms, criticism (actual or implied) of members of political, financial, and other powerful elites is something that often triggers a reaction (see, for example, Armoudian 2017, Cottle et al. 2016). As online journalism has grown, so has the online harassment and intimidation of journalists. While online harassment can target journalists of any gender or sex, harassment against female journalists is more often directed at their personal characteristics such as appearance or behaviour a strategic choice of the perpetrator to make the attack seem personal which makes it harder to identify as abuse (Megarry 2014). One study of online verbal abuse against women writers showed that these attacks meant to silence them reflected aggression that was categorically built on conservative patriarchal arguments: "[A]ll the women involved were subjected to a particular kind of online abuse which can only be used against the female sex in patriarchal society" (Megarry 2014, p. 50). The range of related sexist hashtags revealed different aspects of the attempted alienation of women but they all targeted their identities as women, first and foremost, and, throughout, "stereotypical ideas of femininity [were] consistently utilized in a derogatory manner" (p. 49).

Of late, female investigative journalists have begun to network and share their stories of discrimination, harassment, and violence (Koch 2019, https://gijn.org/2019/12/03/women-investigative-journalists-on-work-and-life/, accessed 6 February 2020). At a recent GIJC, a major session featured ten professional women sharing their personal experiences and many "survival strategies" concerning their journalistic practice—that is, "practical ways to deal with obstacles they regularly confront," including sexual violence (ibid.).

Method and Empirical Material

This article draws upon the cross-border collaborative investigative journalist organization called Forbidden Stories (https://forbiddenstories.org/) as one of its main cases. This digital platform coordinates networking through which the projects of threatened or killed journalists are furthered via the dedicated efforts of prominent media organizations. At least seven of the informants interviewed for this study had experience in various networks related to Forbidden Stories, all of which concentrated on topical issues through which both journalists and their stories were placed at risk. According to Stake (2005, p. 443), a case study is "not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied." Stake also points out that the utility of the case study "is emphasized by some of us because it draws attention to the question of what especially can be learned about the singular case" (ibid.). Some academics have also underscored the fact that the case study bring about the opportunity to investigate the "hows" and "whys" of present real-life occurrences (Yin 2003, p. 1). Because Forbidden Stories is constantly evolving and developing new projects, it is a particularly useful case for studying the practice of female journalists under threat.

Laurent Richard established Forbidden Stories in 2017 after he and a colleague experienced the *Charlie Hebdo* attack firsthand. The platform is focusing particularly on how to make ´stories´ survive the fact that journalists, including women,are contuosly in danger when producing investigative journalism, and it is not a coincident that their very first story focused the murder of the investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia. Through semi-structured qualitative interviews with informants at Forbidden Stories in 2018 and 2019, we were continually confronted with the question of how female investigative journalists coped with harassment, intimidation, and violence in their professional practice. Initially, few female reporters were involved in the work of Forbidden Stories itself, but several were part of its project networks, and we chose five of these women to interview after our initial round with other platform informants. We found these experienced professionals through the International Consortium for Investigative Journalism (ICIJ), the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), and the Panama Papers network, or through cross-border collaborations of their own initiative. While locating male investigative journalists with relevant experience in cross-border investigative journalism is hard enough, locating female experts in the field is even harder. In one case, the woman we interviewed was the only female investigative journalist in her country.

In all, we conducted thirteen semi-structured qualitative interviews for this article, including nine female investigative journalists and four of their male colleagues based around the world (six in Europe, two in India, three in Africa, one in the Middle East, and one in Australia). We also interviewed three other men twice in

2018 and 2019, for a total of sixteen interviewees, of whom nine were women and seven were men. All informants were offered the option of keeping their identities confidential, which they accepted.

Experiences and Stories of Harassment, Intimidation, and Threats from Investigative Journalists

In the interviews, the gender aspect of being a reporter was not something the interviewees initially wanted to talk about or problematize. As mentioned, researchers have already noted the machoism and bravado in the areas of war and conflict reporting, and the reality is that neither women nor men benefit, either in general or in the specific short term, by appearing "soft," unfit, vulnerable, or victimized, meaning that cases of intimidation and violence tend to be swept under the rug rather than brought out and confronted or analyzed. These cases very much include the gendered violence, discrimination, and prejudice borne by the typical female reporter. Instead of beginning there, then, most of the informants chose to describe their professional journeys. Informants from both the Global North and Global South explained in detail how they worked their way through the newsroom hierarchy to become investigative journalists. Sometimes this progression was more accidental than strategic or planned. A reporter from South East Europe said that she saw a poster advertising a position as an investigative reporter and responded to it, and it ended up becoming her profession. Two Indian investigative journalists began in the news business, found it to be too superficial, and switched over to investigative journalism with the encouragement of more experienced peers. Others again explained how they had happened to come a across data journalism and ended up as trainers for courses at investigative centers, and emphasized how this was their way into watchdog journalism.

Throughout the interviews, our informants emphasized the importance of doing the job well and overcoming rather than dwelling upon obstacles, gendered or otherwise. An African female reporter at first insisted that she had never experienced harassment or intimidation, for the reasons mentioned above, but our ensuing conversation revealed that she had in fact been the target of both sexual harassment and threats. When asked why she did not acknowledge this initially, she said that she considered these things to be stumbling blocks and nothing more: "I don't care. That's it. Nothing can stop me on my way—stop me from investigating. So, I just do my job and close my ears and just go on" (informant, Africa, 26 July 2019).

Many of the interviewees downplayed the severity of the assaults they had experienced, and female investigative reporters from both the Global North and the Global South alike considered it shameful to talk about intimidation and sexual harassment (informant, South East Europe, 29 July 2018; informant, Egypt, 24 August 2019; informant, Africa, 26 July 2019). One prominent and experienced European investigative journalist eventually told a difficult story nevertheless:

> There was this guy who worked for one of the web portals in [South East Europe]—he was the owner of the web portal, and he actually called me on my number, and he told me to go to our back page. He was kind of laughing, and then I saw they did an article which said if you say [her first name] you replace the word "sex" with my name. He called me a "starlet"—he took some of my pictures from the internet and

in a caption said my boss liked me in red, because I was wearing a red dress. He said [. . .], I was stupid and I was a woman. It was a way to discredit you as a journalist. (South East Europe 29 July 2018)

As mentioned above, this story demonstrates that intimidation and harassment are often gendered in nature and built on stereotypes and conservative patriarchal positions that are at once tricky to call out and easy for the perpetrator to dismiss as innocent (or even somehow warranted). What seem to be a recurrent pattern in interviews with informants from various parts of the world, is how such intimidation of female reporters is linked with the capacity to shame them into not publishing a story, in fact distressing them about what they expose in general. People with power may aim for gendered strategies because they work. In the case of the quote above, the informant added how the harasser had implied that the reporter's boss preferred that she dressed in red. She said that ´I was paid by some people to act as their front´. Not only is the harasser using examples from the reporter's journalistic products but also underminding the work process, and trying to make her believe that she is hired for her gender and not as result of qualifications.

An undermined gendered strategy is in others words not to either harass, intimidate or threaten a reporter, but to do all at once. More importantly, the aim may not be to harm the woman per se, but to harm her agency by using her gender against her, reduce her selfconfidence and simply make her stop working as a reporter. The way such gendered harassment, intimidation and threats are shaped and the extent to which they prove effective thus differ with cultural norms and beliefs. It has previously been found that as a reaction to attacks against themselves or their colleagues, women are more likely than men to avoid attacks by limiting their engagement with audiences, adapting their reporting behavior, and considering quitting journalism (Stahel & Schoen, 2020).

Negotiating gender roles in a multicultural (investigative) environment

Over the course of our interviews, we did uncover global cultural discrepancies involving women in this field of journalism. In some countries, female reporters were generally fine with meeting sources alone, while in others, they would consider such an opportunity very carefully. The female reporter quoted above elaborated how the issue of gender mattered stating that gender does ´matter in many coutries, if you're a woman. They would never say to a man he's stupid. They might call him an enemy of the State but they wouldn't say he is stupid and that he is like a starlet. In my case it was like she can't be taken seriously because she's that, and it's really funny´ (Informant, London, 29 July 2019). Female investigative journalists in different countries frequently emphasized how harassment, intimidations and threats were related to the specific culture and environment they are part of. This implies how female watchdog reporters, on one hand are deeply rooted in a spefic culture which will frame possible attacks, and on the other hand embedded into networks were the Westernized- often American-influenced understanding of investigative journalism has different rules of engagement.

In addition, while informants in India, France as well as East South Europe emphasized the importance of solidarity within their networks, an informant in an Africa went much further, describing the international networks as "families" that provided 24/7 professional and even legal advice and general support:

> I am lucky. I have an opportunity to work in a small publication where I'm actually the only woman working with five men but experience no harassment. I am considered a little sister, so everything is fine. They are very proud of me. (Informant, Africa, 26 July 2019)

Several of the informants (India, East South Europe, France) emphasized the imporatence of collaboration with prestigious media houses. This is also part of the safety-strategy to Forbidden Stories in Paris. By collaborating with seminal partners in the media business such as The New York Times, Le Mond, and El Pais, Forbidden Stories signals to criminal persons or organized crime that the stories will be disseminated in a powerful manner around the world. One might say that the media encounter undermining strategies with their own strategies. All of the female interviewees considered cross-border investigative collaborations, particularly between the Global North and the Global South, to be particularly productive and good for their careers. This model of journalism also involves colleagues who have lots of experience and can advise on routines and practices, and it brings with it prestige that can compensate for the lower status that female investigative journalists tend to endure. In this sense informants frequently referred to the importance of transference of skill within the network. The skillset of how to protect oneself was of particular importance. One distinguished African investigative reporter noted that her participation in the Panama Papers project brought prestige to her and her newsroom. A very experienced Indian investigative journalist likewise applauded her Global North collaborative network for its contributions to her daily practice and especially her leverage against various gendered obstacles. She felt as being granted more authority within her own culture and country due to the international collaboration. Within such a model, sources including police, politicians, and even criminals are aware that the individual journalist is not alone in her investigation.

As we learned about the various ways in which our interviewees had been threatened and/or controlled, enabled, and disabled by male colleagues, family members, and community members, we began to gather narratives concerning the ways in which they handled it all through both pushing back and absorbing the blows. One female investigative journalist situated in southeastern Europe, for example, talked about receiving a death threat:

> I was doing a training of journalists and a man just walked into the room as I was packing up, and he gave his name and said you'll be killed. At the time, I was very naïve, I didn't really realized what he was saying. I did not take it seriously and he repeated you will be killed. I felt like this man was really strange. He was asked me how much my life was worth. I felt it was a really weird conversation but I didn't realise how serious it was until I called my boss and said I had this really strange experience.

> My boss immediately said, "you'd better leave the country" and he actually got me a car and I had to leave with that. Only a day later I was like, oh my God, what just happened? I was in shock. (Informant, South East European country, 29 July 2019)

Cultural challenges also imply different views of the authorities. For example, can the police be trusted. One Indian journalists with experience from several international networks suggest that no. (Informant India 22 July

2019). Other stories told by the informants involved intimidation using gendered strategies in a cultural context. At least two informants, one from Egypt and the other from India, said that they had experienced public intimidation, but the focus of their descriptions of these events was their parents rather than themselves. As mentioned above, "family" comes with a different cultural resonance for female reporters depending on their culture and norms, both in the workplace and in society at large. When powerful individuals want to silence female journalists in certain patriarchal cultures, they contact their parents or husbands in order to control the women. Implicit in this strategy are the cultural norms and values that raise girls and women to respect the patriarch of their home. One Egyptian informant told a story about a female journalist who was targeted using defamation and intimidation:

> Slander and smearing reached this female journalist's neighborhood. Those who wanted to slander her went to her family. They would go to your neighborhood and speak to you, or to your family. In the case of another journalist I knew, they even went to this journalist's father. The father was very strict— he came from a very strict family, and so he stopped his daughter, the female journalist, from going to work for a while. So, she was a well-established journalist, but at the end of the day she was a member of the family too. So, they would use the family in two ways: they threatened the family, and they made the family control the woman. (Informant, Egypt, 24 August 2020)

The ability to work as an investigative reporter is, for some women in some cultures or countries, a question of the support and promotion of the surrounding men, whether colleagues, family, or friends. Means of controlling the female journalist arose in several of the interviews with female reporters, including the relatively benign aside of the distinguished African journalist describing herself as her male colleagues' "little sister." Later in the interview, she followed up with further telling observations about those colleagues:

> Some of them think I deserve to be an [mention a prominent cross border collaborarion, authors remark] member, and some of them say, "Oh, for sure she has had sex with one of the members." Oh, it is too much. That's what they think. (Informant, Africa, 26 July 2019)

She continued:

> Sometimes it is not so easy to be treated as if you are just a woman. So sometimes you are just fed up, crying, and after that you wake up in the morning and you still go on. (Informant, Africa, 26 July 2019)

This particular journalist had her family's support to work as a journalist—from her father, mother, and husband. This support made such acts of intimidation a little bit easier to bear. Our informants in India, Africa, and Egypt, in particular, emphasized that this exposure to harassment and threats led to professional isolation and both she and other called out for more solidarity from their professional colleagues. One Indian informant said that her colleagues avoid being seen with her because they do not want to be associated with her work (informant, India, 29 July 2019). Another lamented: " I think the professional isolation needs to end because it takes a big toll. The sense that there is no one around you who is going to help you when you are in trouble . . ." Although men and female investigative journalists can be similarly in danger as pointed out by male members

of The Forbidden Stories (Informant 1, 20 July 2019, Paris, Informant 20 July 2019, Paris), female ones are targeted in a particular manner. Due to discrimination in editorial leadership women journalists more often feel pressured to prove their capacitiy and suitedness and may take extra risks while doing so. Many are underpaid, leaving them with less resources to protect themselves, and being assigned on fixed contracts usually comes with less organizational support. Female journalists also encounter sexual abuse and harassment when dealing with sources (Høiby 2016, Jamil 2019). Consequently, female journalists show different reactions to attacks, and different avoidance behaviour than male journalists in reaction to attacks (Stahel & Schoen 2020).

Global North collaborative journalistic networks serve as an invisible defender of female investigative journalists in the Global South as well, and most of our informants emphasized the importance of solidarity with and support from other journalists. While investigative journalism was traditionally known as a lone-wolf practice, it is now more important than ever to collaborate in order to accomplish anything, particularly given the persistent cultural divides in the field and in the world.

Strategies for overcoming intimidation, threats, and violence

Having elaborated upon the ways in which intimidation, threats, and violence arise in their practice of investigative journalism (and in their own newsrooms), the informants went on to talk about what strategies they used to confront these obstacles. One of the interviewees, who had received a rape threat, said that she reacted with a combination of shock and retreat from society, then decided to try not to stick out:

> You learn your little tricks. So the first trick is to not wear very well-fitting clothes. OK, but you know, not even to wear something that fits you exactly. I wear very, very loose clothes. So I don't even look like a woman. I look like a sack. Secondly, I don't wear makeup at all, and third, I have developed a walking which is a little mannish, if you know what I'm saying. [. . .] There's nothing feminine on, you know, attractive about me—I try to make myself as non-alluring as possible. (Informant, India, 22 July 2019)

The interviewee noted that when she had to move through groups of people, she held her arm out in front of her and pushed people to the side in order to avoid being groped. She also taught this move to her female interns in order to help them protect themselves. Such strategies are gendered strategies. When informants refer to such stragegies they differ distinctly from how they talk specifically about survival strategies in a gender-free reporter sense. Rather these strategies are rooted in the fact that the informants are females. Another example stems from an Indian informant who underscored the virtues of being straightforward. This reporter stresses that if a male colleague or source can be made to understand that the female journalist is not afraid, he might not overstep the boundaries. She also tried to be bold in her journalistic practice, going undercover for long periods to hold power to account and eschewing encrypted forms of digital communication, for example. Still fear in itself is hard to escape after all:

> Yesterday evening, it was horrible traffic, and I was sitting in a car when I was noticing how there were two cars to my left and to my right—it was a terrible traffic jam. I had this fleeting thought in my head:

> What if somebody actually gets out of the car and takes a shot at me? That feeling is there 24/7—as much as I want to, I can't get rid of it. But does that feeling stop me from doing my work? It does not. It only emboldens me to do more, because it's like, I'm going to rebel. (Informant, India, 29 July 2019)

What appear as a pattern in our material is how strategies seem to fall in different categories. Female reporters can for example mix general safety and survival strategies they share with male colleagues with culturally gendered strategies. One such example is when an experienced South East European journalist explains how by discovering that filing a Freedom of Information request might risk authorities track down reporters on their home addresses. One way of avoiding this was to get several people who were not reporters to file requests, and secondly as many as possible in order to get the authorities to overestimate the resources put into the case. (Informant, South East European country, 29 July 2019). This is an example of an organizational strategy more than a gendered one. Then again gendered strategies can be culturally framed due to where the woman is situated. Ultimately if, which is the case for several of the informants in this article, the woman is the only female investigative reporter in her newsroom or even working alone as a freelancer, she will have to develop her own individual gendered strategies.

The individual strategy of this journalist is to cultivate an awareness of the risks, avoid them where possible, and ultimately accept them as part of not only her practice but also her life. Even when on holidays or during weekends.

A female investigative journalist from South Eastern Europe also said that one needs to be aware at any time and everywhere. No one is safe as a journalist anywhere, whether in a Scandinavian, African, or Middle Eastern country:

> I am constantly aware but not aware in a way that disrupts my day. I'm not turning around like crazy—you're just aware of who is around you and what's going on, and it doesn't mean that . . . The brain is an incredible thing. We had training with some people on physical security, and they were saying that that is what we do—we're constantly aware, and you just learn to pay attention, and it doesn't mean you'll act scared and think something will happen, it just means that you understand what's going on around you, and you can quickly make decisions, and it really works. Like one time I was nearly robbed in Tunisia, and I was with two other people, and because I was paying attention to what was going on, not thinking, it was just—I'd noticed a man standing in the middle of the road—I saw a man rushing and I knew what was going to happen. So, I held onto my bag and they tried and they failed and I screamed. So, I knew it was going to happen, and I was able to react, but not because I was like . . . I was just aware, and I think it's like you have to be aware of the risk. (Informant, South East European country, 29 July 2019)

Ultimately, the impact of harassment, intimidation, and violence goes beyond daily vigilance to one's legacy and reputation. The journalist who was slandered in the magazine article lamented the fact that this coverage will never disappear, whereas, to her, being respected as a professional reporter with an immaculate background meant everything:

So I always thought, I have to lead a clean life, not get drunk, not get involved in a scandal, not be dressed like whatever, because I didn't want that to be used to discredit me, and I felt like I was safe in that regard—that you can't really use me to criticize my work. I felt like, this is where I'm safe, and I suddenly realized somebody can just put a whole lot of bullshit in a paper and it stays there, and I was reading comments by the people, and I was shocked because regular people actually believed it. Now it's a funny situation, but the guy who was like the security guy, one time he was going with me to Montenegro, and his girlfriend read this article about me, and she had a fit. Who is this sex woman? Why would you be going with her? That's because if you Google my name, you find this article, and you find it in the first ten results. (Informant, South East European country, 29 July 2019)

When journalists are targeted as people, of course, journalism itself is under attack. The chilling effect of intimidation, harassment and threats against journalists has in theory been closely linked with self-censorship and oppression of information to the public (Høiby 2018, Larsen, Fadnes & Krøvel 2020, Waluya & Nassanga 2020)

Each of our informants had developed individual strategies to cope with gendered obstacles, but several also suggested that media organizations could do the same. This is what networks such as International Consortium for Investigative Journalists and Global Investigative Journalists' Network are beginning to discover. They can leverage their prestige to support female reporters in male-dominated environments both within the organization and out in the world. Some of the informants said that they even chose to leave traditional newsrooms in order to get away from harassment and intimidation, such as, for example, when their bosses would hit on them. Several expressed their preference for a freelance situation or collaborative network outside of a given news organization. In any case, there appears to be lack of awareness in organisations about what female investigative reporters deal with. An initiative responding to this, was the Global Investigative Journalists Network's latest conference of 2019 which gathered female reporters from all over the world to share their experiences and lessons on strategies. But more academic research on investigative reporters, both part of international cross border collaborations as well as local investigative projects, is required.

Conclusion: Beyond denial and embodiment

This article looks at how expert female investigative journalists reflect on and handle incidents of intimidation, threats, and violence in their field of practice. Its findings encompass the ways in which study informants recalled their experiences with gendered obstacles, and the ways in which they coped with them. It appears that cross-cultural collaborations create a space in which women journalists can experience a degree of professional protection and empowerment within the context of their work even as they continue to face the consequences of this work "on the ground." That is, while a female journalist's job may be situated in an intercultural, cross-border context that does not adhere to any particular cultural norm, she must still confront the consequences of her own work and that of her global collaborators when she goes out with friends or has dinner with her family,

for example. Despite the possibility inherent in the investigative journalistic model of cross-border collaboration, female journalists remain prone to social isolation, intimidation, personal threats, and threats to members of family and social circles.

The article's findings also show how powerful actors—individuals, organizations, or a combination of the two—target journalists in order to stop or undermine their efforts to hold power to account. Journalists, in turn, must generate counter-strategies such as cross-border collaboration, which has become much more viable in the digital era. This is particularly important for female investigative journalists, who are respected as equal contributors in a cross-border collaborative professional community but remain part of a cultural context that views them as easy targets for abuse, shame, and even intimidation. There are three types of counter-strategies:

1. Individual survival strategies
2. Organizational survival strategies
3. Survival strategies generated by the profession itself

Individual survival strategies for female investigative journalists encompass analyses of their cultural and local contexts and the challenges they encounter due to gender. They must find specific solutions to specific challenges. For example, if they are not allowed to enter a village to do an interview with a male source because of their gender, they send a male relative instead. If they are targeted due to their gender while having to cover events, they will, as demonstrated, find their own solution to gendered and cultural challenges. Organizations such as cross-border networks can play a valuable role in this strategizing by sharing member skillsets or arranging events to share challenges and solutions (though there is some work to be done here). Lastly, the female investigative journalists indicated that they look to colleagues for solidarity and support, especially when a sense of isolation threatens to overwhelm them.

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