JOURNALISM
IN
TIMES
OF WAR

Introduction by **Hamid Dabashi**

Edited by Awad Joumaa
and Khaled Ramadan

Coordinator
Diana Larrea

ALJAZEERA
MEDIA INSTITUTE

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Cover Image: *Al Jazeera Media Network. Still photograph taken from documentary film "Zero Distance", episode "Among Syrian Fighters". The image shows Al Jazeera correspondent Salam Hindawi in a tunnel in northern Syria, used by Syrian rebels to move underground and fight the Syrian regime.*

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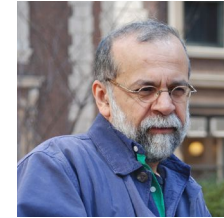
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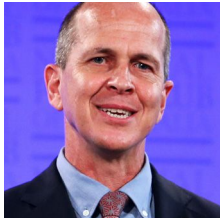
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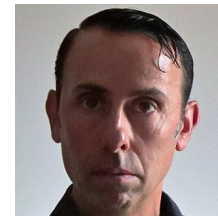
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Message from the Al Jazeera Media Institute

War and conflict have always been part of human history, and as journalists we have to document and tell its stories. This is no easy task. War is surrounded by destruction and human suffering; information is overwhelming, especially today with social media and connectivity; different accounts and narratives emerge and clash. The media and its journalists are one of the groups regularly targeted.

A lot has been written and discussed about war and journalism. With this publication, the Al Jazeera Media Institute aims to provide readers with a different perspective: A 'behind the scenes' of journalistic practices during wartime, told by journalists with a diversity of viewpoints and expertise from the Arab World. This publication opens a window inside the work of Arab journalists, editors and fixers, that have seen war and conflict in the region not only first-hand, but from a quite different standpoint as it is sometimes their own city or neighbourhood suffering from the violence and devastation they have to report on. Their own narratives, combined with ethical discussions and practical advice from their experiences and those of other media experts on the region, are compiled here to provide fellow journalists and media professionals access to this valuable knowledge, and to keep their learned lessons safe from time for the generations to come.

Responsible journalism allows us to hear those suffering in wartime and its aftermath, by making visible what the confronting powers intend to hide, and thus changing the news. Therefore, it is in our best interest to promote high quality journalism by facilitating access to knowledge and to help in building capacities to report from the battlefield safely, ethically, and with human-centred and peace-building perspectives. We sincerely hope you find this publication useful and that the next time you intend to be in the field reporting, or contributing to a news package, you remember or apply at least one piece of advice or tip learned here. That is our greatest aspiration and the motivation of our daily work.

Editors' Note

By Awad Joumaa and Khaled Ramadan

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Reporting on wars and conflicts has always been a precarious venture, especially in a region like the Middle East. The region continues to witness seismic social and political changes in the form of armed conflicts and popular uprisings against entrenched dictatorships.

Telling the human stories from Syria, Yemen, Egypt, Libya and other conflict areas means that a vast number of professional reporters, citizen journalists and media activists find themselves pushed deeper into the ever-shifting frontlines.

In the Middle East, a day does not pass without a journalist being pursued, censored, harassed, kidnapped, imprisoned or killed.

The lack of deep-rooted media institutions in the Arab world and the lack of access to training have left many of our freelance journalists and citizen journalists at high risk. The aim of this book is to contribute to the debate on war reporting in this region and beyond. How can we report ethically and safely? The following chapters provide an insight into the experiences reporters face.

By transferring this accumulated knowledge based on reporting over the last few decades, these experienced professional reporters, citizen journalists and media activists hope their work will be an asset for aspiring war correspondents and those who want to work in the field.

The multiplicity of voices, ranging from award-winning professional war correspondents like Lebanese Zeina Khodr to Zaina Erhaim, a renowned Syrian media activist, provides for a variety of encounters with the wars in Syria, Libya, Iraq and Lebanon.

Khodr has been working with Al Jazeera English since the launch of the channel in 2006. Since the Arab spring, she has mainly been covering the upheavals in the Arab world. Before that, she spent time covering Afghanistan and Pakistan. Khodr's coverage of the uprising in Tripoli and the fall of the Libyan capital was nominated at the Monte Carlo TV and Film Festival as well as at the Emmy Awards.

Zaina Erhaim gives an emotional account of how her people raised their mobile phones and live streamed to the world the unfolding events in Syria. This new form of participatory journalism has come at a cost, she says. But it has also opened up new perspectives.

For us as editors, capturing and documenting these stories by giving voice to reporters in the midst of war has proved challenging. Our participants considered this process a privilege or even a luxury they cannot afford. Many asked: "When do I have the time and energy to tell MY story? I am busy trying to survive and face daily risks." Ameera Ahmad Harouda is the first female fixer in Gaza. Her contribution barely made the deadline of the book. Constant power cuts and family circumstances in the besieged Gaza Strip made it almost impossible.

From Yemen, Bashraheel Hisham Bashraheel was in hiding and keeping a low profile when we interviewed him. He descends from one of the most distinguished families in print journalism in Yemen. Bashraheel speaks about how his children risk being kidnapped. His ordeal is a dramatic account of how you run a newspaper when your country is at war. Getting hold of him was fraught with difficulties as he was constantly on the move. It was only with the help of barely-functioning connections on Viber and WhatsApp, we managed to get you his story.

It was no different when we attempted to speak to the freelance fixer and photographer Muatasm Alhitari. At the time of the interview, he lived in Sanaa in fear of air strikes and armed men roaming the streets. He says every time he picks up his camera it could be his last. Every story continues to be a close encounter with death. As a freelancer in the Arab world, Alhitari speaks of his hardship and survival amid routine arrests and interrogations by many of the armed groups that now control Sanaa.

Some of our contributors were not able to write for this publication due to the extremely risky situations they are operating in. Instead, we conducted lengthy interviews with them over the phone or in person to document their journey. These interviews have been edited and condensed for clarity.

Another challenge was finding the right voices and covering the depth of our region. The high level of polarisation made this an enormously laborious task. To provide a comprehensive overview of the entire region would require several volumes, years of research and access. For that reason, the main countries in North Africa are currently not included in this book. There are also several topics we could not fit in due to time constraints. One important subject we plan to address in later volumes is the ethical dilemma of interviewing people under detention.

Nevertheless, this book is an important first step towards providing a platform for journalists and media professionals that is native to this region and relatable. Its strength lies in the diverse and original content from the rich tapestry of the

people. It is the closest we have to an authentic transfer of experience and knowledge from and by experts in the region. It unearths the humanity buried under the rubble of airstrikes, sifts through the tales under tank shells, and declutters the aftermath of car bombs.

As you go through the book, you will notice how each experience is unique, even if they are referring to the same war or conflict. This is not only because we are hearing from people with different backgrounds but also because the context in which each experience is told has its own nuances and challenges. The authors and interviewees in the book cover a timeline that begins with the 2010 protests in the Arab streets and ends in the present day.

Journalism cannot escape the human imprint of the journalists telling the stories. It is clear for us that there is no single approach or view to impartial reporting on war and conflict. There is not a one-size-fits-all formula that defines war and conflict reporting. From his exile in Turkey, Egyptian Khalid Faheem recounts how Egypt's revolution unfolded. He and his compatriots started their journey by covering the controversial 2010 parliamentary elections. Soon after, they found themselves covering a full-fledged revolution and setting up their own grassroots organisation.

Palestinian journalists, Ameera Harouda and Tamer Al-Meshal, bring to you how different types of wars require different skills. Covering an occupation is for example different to reporting on a civil war. Each war and conflict has its peculiarities, safety risks, logistical requirements, as well as emotional demands.

Al Jazeera's former correspondent Peter Greste highlights the importance of maintaining our integrity as journalists. Greste spent four hundred days in some of Egypt's most notorious prisons. He was falsely accused of defaming Egypt. Greste, who has been freed, has worked with some of the world's most respected news organisations. He began his career in Bosnia and South Africa. He was BBC's Afghanistan correspondent in 1995, where he documented the emergence of the Taliban. Greste also won a Peabody Award for his documentary on Somalia entitled Land of Anarchy in 2011.

The digital age has opened a new era for media professionals. Online journalists Christiaan Triebert and Hadi Al-Khatib take us on a journey to the world of digital trenches. Navigating this new realm requires innovation and a collaborative effort. Audiences are now active participants in this process. Information flows at high speeds and in non-linear ways making it ever more challenging to find the truth amongst the fakes.

Aidan White from the Ethical Journalism Network sums up the core values that underpin journalism, namely accuracy, objectivity and honesty. Ibrahim Saber, a veteran Palestinian cameraman and producer for Reuters, exposes the

dangers of hate speech in the Middle East and how to avoid them. Abou Abass, a senior United Nations human rights officer, defines for us the legal rights and responsibilities we have as journalists. They urge us to commit to best practices and to ensure a safer working environment in this volatile region. The book also explains the personal cost of witnessing human suffering and provides strategies to cope with such trauma.

Our objective is that you will be able to build on the intimate experiences and lessons to hone your skills and survival strategies. To inform the world about the hidden stories in each war and conflict is a crucial task but it needs to be done in an ethical and safe manner. This is the first step towards preserving our humanity.

Introduction

Close Up and Personal

By Hamid Dabashi

Journalism is going through an architectonic change. I remember vividly when the Iranian revolution of 1977-1979 was happening I was a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Listening to local news coverage or reading the New York Times and Washington Post or else watching the three dominant networks of ABC, CBS, and NBS, were all an exercise in mental torture. My mind and my heart were in Tehran, my body trapped in Philadelphia. I finally drove from University of Pennsylvania campus all the way to a vast shopping mall in King of Prussia suburb where I was told there was a Radio Shack outlet that sold short wave radio. I purchased one such radio and tried to tune in to Tehran radio and follow the news of the unfolding dramatic events.

Today almost forty years later I wake up very early in the morning with my iPhone on my bedside-table and start reading the news in Persian in Iran or in Arabic in the larger Arab and Muslim world while my friends, family, and colleagues in these countries are still haggling their roads in their morning rush hour commute to work. I go to sleep in New York catching the news that those very friends in the Arab world will read when they wake up in their following morning. In short in New York I am ahead of their headlines. I am not a news junky, but with a quick scroll down my newsfeed on my iPhone I feel I have my hands on the pulse of the global news. This dramatic shift, predicated on mindboggling technological changes, has happened in the span of one lifetime - from my early twenties when the Iranian revolution happened in the mid 1970s to my early sixties when the Arab revolutions mesmerized the globe.

The focus of this edited volume on journalism in some of the most protracted wartime/conflict zones in the Arab and Muslim world stages the current state of journalism today on a global scale. In the age of "fake news", "alternative facts", and "post-truth" still the question is how do we know what we know about the world? The particular angle of this volume that is "from the Arab world and on the Arab world" gives it its unique political and epistemic twists. Here in this volume you will read how theoretical and conceptual frameworks interface with real-life examples and experiences, a feat that will engage generations of journalists and scholars for generations to come.

When in the course of one of her typically verbose charlatanism, Donald Trump's spin doctor Kellyanne Conway blurted out the bizarre phrase "alternative facts" those of us historically at the receiving end of the Euro-American newspeak were amused that their brand of news actually has a name they did not know before. The New York Times coverage of the propaganda phase of the Iraq war under President Bush, with Judith Miller's fraudulent reporting on the weapons of mass destruction at the disposal of Saddam Hussein, was the epitome of alternative facts and fake news. We did not have these words yet when New York Times was practicing them at the heavy toll of aiding and abetting in the destruction of an entire country.

Who is telling the truth? What is the truth? Why does it matter? The Arab and Muslim world are going through seismic changes. State-controlled outlets are no longer the sole or even the primary source of information about the world. Although that fact does not prevent the intentional blindness that self-interest imposes on what people choose to believe. Social media has altered the landscape of the news industry. If the assumption that the rise of the Arab Spring was something of a Facebook revolution was and remains a technological exaggeration, still the fact of social mobilization through cyberspace networks remains even truer today than ever before. Those of us who have grown up under one form of dictatorship or another have a healthy dose of scepticism about the news in general, from any news media. That does not mean we are suspicious in nature or conspiratorially minded. That means we have a sculpted view of truth, having grown up looking at facts from multiple perspectives.

Can Arabs accurately report their own affairs? Can Muslims be reliable sources of objective information about their daily lives and historic changes? Today the news coming out of the Arab world is not "objective", for it is reported by those who are morally and politically invested in the outcome of what they report. "For the native," Fanon observed in his Wretched of the Earth (1961), "objectivity is always directed against him." Add that to his other precious words: "It so happens that when the native hears a speech about Western culture he pulls out his knife - or at least he makes sure it is within reach." We from the Arab and Muslim world are rethinking the news. We are not offering alternative facts. We are living alternative realities historically distorted by those who have ruled over us - from the colonial condition of the birth of our nations to the postcolonial circumstances of the tyrants who have inherited those states.

What the two editors of this volume, Awad Joumaa and Khaled Ramadan, have brought together is a potpourri of critical reflections on the very volatile conditions of media and reporting. Their concerns with International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights, and Freedom of Expression reflect the dire circumstances in which they and their concerns live today. Journalists are at the forefront of attacks, of accusations, of arrests and incarcerations when what they report does not gel with the state policies they live. There is no free press in much of the Arab world. Israel

specifically targets Al Jazeera as inimical to its colonial domination of Palestine. What we read here is urgent, for the major voices that share their experiences with us in this volume have something significant to say to the world at large.

A quick look at the titles and contents of the essays collected in this volume reveals the major concerns and preoccupations that inform the condition of journalism in the Arab and Muslim world. Paramount in these essays is the safety of journalists. In "Protection of Journalists under Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law," Abou Abass draws our attention to the peril of journalism as a profession. Peter Greste's "Professional Integrity: The Cornerstone of Protection" has similar concerns. Then comes the issue of journalistic responsibilities under dire circumstance. In "Closing the Door on Inciting Violence: How to Avoid Hate Speech," Ibrahim Saber takes us all the way to the thorny issue of how to make a distinction between freedom of the press and hate speech. This is not an easy distinction. But addressing it is a clear indication of the volatile environment in which the question is raised. This volume brings together some seasoned journalists from war zones. A preoccupation with how journalists struggle with the veracity of their reporting while (literally) under fire is evident in the essay "Reporting Under Occupation in Palestine", where Tamer Al-Meshal tests the boundaries of reporting in dire circumstances. The crucial question of gender in journalism is evident in the essay "Despite Barriers and Hazards: A Woman's Experience Working in Gaza" by Ameera Ahmad Harouda, as well as in "War on Your Doorsteps: Journalism and Activism" by Zaina Erhaim. The all too difficult issue of modern technology is tackled by Christiaan Triebert and Hadi Al-Khatib in their essay "Digital Sherlocks: Open Source Investigation and News Verification During Wartime." "War Stories Through Social Media: Audience Engagement and Ethical Hiring Practices," by Sakhr Al-Makhadhi has similar concerns, as does Khalid Faheem's "Beyond Bystanders: Citizen Journalism During the Egyptian Revolution." This, in short, is the state of art, reporters and their editors and their handlers taking time to reflect and meditate on their profession and vocation as competent and caring journalists.

The single most crippling defect of the European and US coverage of events in the Arab and Muslim world is of course their endemic and pathological monolingualism. Their inability to communicate in Arabic or any other regional language is not merely linguistic. It translates into a contorted view of time and space, of culture and circumstance. Imagine an Egyptian or Iranian or Turkish journalist trying to write convincingly about the UK or US without knowing English or France without knowing French, etcetera. Until very recently most US and UK news venues scarcely had foreign correspondents in these countries who could not even grasp a daily conversation in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, or Urdu, and to this day many still do not. The opposite of this malady is of course not an equally flawed nativism, which is equally troubling and blindsided. A crucial fusion of clearheaded thinking and critical intimacy with the languages and cultures of regions is indispensable to have an inroad into the dynamism of an emerging

region of concern. There is still a colonial divide violently separating the modus operandi of journalism as it is practiced by Eurocentric and Indo-European practitioners of the profession.

The global media has neither a centre nor perforce any periphery. In the fortunately decentred world we live, any source of news is just one democratically located click away from the other. The debates and conversations do not happen in the US or Europe - for they are critically pulled and pushed into their global consequences - and as such they happen everywhere and anywhere. From old-fashioned networks like ABC, NBC, and CBS, to cable TV outlets like Fox News and CNN, to corporate printed media like New York Times and Washington Post to bastions of bourgeois liberalism like the New Yorker, to the liberal greasing of Zionist theft of Palestine in Haaretz … we swing sideways to state controlled media like BBC and its counterparts in the Arab and Muslim world. BBC is an extension of the critical intelligence at the service of British foreign policy and by extension a belated Euro-Universalism that no African or South Asian employee of the BBC can conceal. They criticize Al Jazeera for being quiet on the Qatari royal family and disregard their own sycophantic services to the British royalty. I have never read a single word on Al Jazeera so blatantly obsequious to the Qatar royal family as the BBC royal correspondents shower on the royal groins of their ruling family with unabashed adulation. This is not to say much more critical thinking is not required in any and all media, including and perhaps in particular on Al Jazeera. It is simply to say long after Fanon is gone we no longer need to reach for our knife when Europeans or Americans speak of objectivity. We just change the channel or click off to the next website.

New York | *September 2017*

PART 1

WAR JOURNALISM: LESSONS LEARNED AND PRACTICAL ADVICE

Chapter 1

A Struggle Within a Struggle:
Media Coverage and Censorship in Yemen

Interview with Bashraheel Hisham Bashraheel

Yemen has a long history of internal and external struggles and conflict. It is a country marred by civil wars and insurgencies. Dozens of journalists have been jailed since 2001, in direct reprisal for their work.[1] Since 2015, airstrikes and street-by-street fighting have further intensified, endangering both journalists and civilians. Media workers in rebel-held areas risk abduction and censorship. For decades, the rule of law has been absent. The authorities at any given time and place dictate every detail in people's daily reality.

In the following interview, we explore some of the struggles faced by Bashraheel Bashraheel, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of al-Ayyam, Yemen's largest national daily newspaper. His experience is discussed in the context of his experience working in the tenuous political climate Yemen faces.[2] Given the difficulties of the on-going war in the country, it was not possible for Bashraheel to actually write his own words conveying his experience. Living in fear for his life and that of his family, Bashraheel is constantly on the move to avoid those seeking to silence the voice of independently minded media in the country. Yemeni authorities have repeatedly closed al-Ayyam newspaper alongside others.[3] His first reporting job was during the war in the former Yugoslavia. He was an intern at a major western newspaper. "The paper decided to put me there because basically I was expendable", he told us with a laugh. However, Bashraheel descends from a family with a long and proud tradition of running newspapers in Yemen.

Journalism: A Longstanding Family Tradition [4]

Awad Joumaa (AJ): Hisham Bashraheel, your father, was the founder and the first Editor-in-Chief of al-Ayyam, one of Yemen's most influential independent news sources. He passed away on June 16, 2012. Many within and beyond Yemen's borders grieved him. Numerous obituaries described his compassion and commitment to a free and open press. He was a highly respected commentator. Readers, Yemen's corridors of power and journalists alike thought highly of him. As the late editor-in-chief of al-Ayyam, even those who disagreed with his views held him and his work in high regard. Many say your family's life story is inseparable from that of al-Ayyam's and journalism in Yemen. Bashraheel, can you begin by telling us about the story of al-Ayyam and your family's relationship to the newspaper?

Bashraheel Bashraheel (BB): We have for decades tried to run an independent daily newspaper. My family started the newspaper back in 1958, during the British rule of Aden. Back then Aden had a vibrant free-speech movement. However, running a paper in this country had always been a challenge. After Yemen won independence in 1967, all free or opposition press were closed by a government decree. When the socialists came to power in South Yemen, al-Ayyam was closed too. My father moved us all to Sanaa where he ran a paper trading company. He then went to Canada. Yemen's north and south reunited on May 22, 1990. [5] A press law was passed in September of that year, and the newspaper restarted in November 1990. When Yemen's north and south reunited, the Yemeni regime did not quite realize what it was doing when it agreed in the unity agreement to a democratic system that included freedom of expression guaranteed in the constitution. Several journalists said at the time that the regime did not understand the scope or the depth of freedom of expression. Having a free press - guaranteed by the constitution - quickly became an obvious nuisance to the authorities. They were held accountable by journalists, something they hated.

As early as 1998, the regime began a concerted crackdown targeting journalists. In 2005, the District Attorney's Office for Interrogations started to outright target and enlist violence against journalists. This meant that we all had to be more vigilant than ever when it came to our work as independent media.

Above all, I think journalists must always follow to the letter the press law in

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[1] Committee to Protect Journalists. "Yemen." CPJ.org. https://cpj.org/killed/mideast/yemen/ (accessed June 23, 2017).

[2] Al-Ayyam official website: al-Ayyam.info (accessed June 23, 2017).

[3] In 2009, security officials confiscated every copy of the newspaper from newsstands in the capital Sanaa and other cities according to human rights organisations:
https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/yemen-fears-safety-imprisoned-newspaper-editor-and-his-two-sons

[4] Hisham was born on June 19, 1944 in Tawahi, a town also home to the veteran journalist Mohammad Ali Omer Bashraheel, who then worked for the (British) Cable and Wireless Company and also headed Nadi al-Islah al-Arabi (The Arab Reform Club). Mohammad Bashraheel also owned and edited the Arabic newspaper al-Raqeeb (The Observer) and the English weekly The Recorder. Hisham's uncle, Mohammad Ali Luqman, was editor of the al-Qalam al-Adani (Aden Pen). His uncle Abdul Rahman Girgirah was chief editor of the daily al-Yaqdhah (The Awakening) and later of the weekly al-Nahdha (Renaissance). In 1960, his aunt Mahiah Nageeb, published and was chief editor of the monthly Fatat Shamsan one of the first woman's magazine in the Arabian Peninsula.

[5] Corcoran, Marc. "Timeline: A century of conflict in Yemen." Australian Broadcast Cooperation.
http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-15/yemen-a-century-of-conflict/6381720 (accessed January 17, 2017)

their area of operation. The government - whether in Yemen or elsewhere - will take advantage of every opportunity to use the law against you if you are a critical and independently minded journalist. This is why I encourage my colleagues to be aware of the national press law. Journalists should always make it hard for the authorities to use the judicial system against them. Most laws within the Arab world provide for some degree of freedom of expression. If you use the law correctly, you are one step closer to protecting yourself. This was the case of al-Ayyam in Yemen, where in recent years 74 per cent of all cases brought by the government against the press have been brought against journalists and editors working for our newspaper. That said, the government did not win a single case against us. We simply did not give them any legal excuses or made mistakes they could use against us. We worked within the law and knew our rights. When all of their attempts failed to prosecute us legally, the government started using violence against the newspaper, shutting us down by force and not through the courts. This first happened in 2009, and again because of the civil war in 2015.

Censorship and Freedom of Expression in Yemen

Screenshot of front cover of Al-Ayam newspaper 2008

AJ: *If we go one step back, what is it about journalists that make a regime, a government or authority, particularly in hostile environments, so susceptible to criticism from journalists? What is it that makes them so paranoid about our work?*

BB: In Yemen, traditional papers have always been obedient to the government line. Rulers often see freedom of expression as a kind of rebellion against their control. That is one of the biggest problems we are still facing in Yemen today. Freedom of expression is not seen as a right. The public has a right to express their opinion and to criticize the wrong doings of the executive branch of government. As such, the problem we are toiling with is that the politicians do not understand the scope of freedom of expression and the critical role the press plays in monitoring the performance of the government.

AJ: *So in the Arab world practicing journalism is not seen as a right but as a threat, generally speaking?*

BB: Let me give you an example of how the former Yemeni President, Ali Abdallah Saleh, viewed us. He had an interpretation of the free press as something of a 'privilege' that he bestowed on the public. That was his thinking about freedom of expression. That came clear to us journalists in the mid-1990s when he said, "I gave you freedom of expression". But freedom of expression is not given, it is a right, a fundamental human right at that. Everyone has the right to express him or herself.

Apart from the government, another obstacle we face is the lack of critical thinking by the public. We are groomed throughout the Middle East not to think in a critical way. There are very few of us in the Middle East who criticize the work of the government. It is sort of a tradition not to speak out against absolute rulers, but this is slowly changing now. With the advent of the Arab Spring, critical thinking exploded all over the Middle East. This is largely done by young people who were exposed to new forms of media. The advent of satellite television in the 1990s and later social media in the 2000s paved the way for these changes, which led to a very important shift in the way the public thinks and judges the performance of government.

AJ: *You pointed out that there was a lack of critical thinking in Yemen, how did we end up here?*

BB: I believe democracy is something that is learned gradually. In the Middle East, we are not living in democratic societies, with the exception of very few areas and at particular times, Aden in the 1940s being one of them. Back then, people used to criticize the performance of the government, leading to independent voices in the media that were supported by the local population. Other areas in

Yemen were not exposed to this, and so we saw how people became afraid of expressing their criticism of corruption, for example. Things have since changed considerably. It is a matter of education, the environment we live in, and the local traditions that formulate the ability of the public to think critically. Tribal societies can be a harder place for critical thinking to flourish because they are always mindful of criticizing leaders and their own strict internal hierarchy.

AJ: That brings me to a second question, which I will come to in a moment: the personal versus the professional. In your case, and in the case of other journalists, the personal sphere often becomes intertwined with the public thereby blurring the boundaries between them. But let me first go back to what you said about democracy. In Lebanon, for example, the country has been regarded for decades as a beacon of freedom in the Arab world when it comes to freedom of the press. Yet, despite the differences in context and history with Yemen, the idea that a country has some sort of freedom of expression and that its citizens will automatically exercise critical thinking is a problematic one, particularly if one looks at the Lebanese context. As much as there has been press freedom in Lebanon, the ability to question the status quo does not automatically come just because citizens are given that right. Would you agree?

BB: You are not wrong. There are several components to guarantee and promote freedom of expression. For starters, you need solid legal protection and a judicial system that upholds the rule of law and does not cave in to government pressure. Generally speaking, the judiciary and the constitutions in our region are vague and do not go far enough in guaranteeing freedom of expression. This applies to Yemen, too. Journalists are routinely jailed, tortured, and harassed. Freedom of expression is not only a law, written and defined in constitutions, it is also a tradition, a way of education; but the judiciary is needed to protect this right. Free speech is something that is to be wrestled from governments. No one bestows on you these rights, they are hard earned, they require blood and tears.

AJ: You said right at the beginning that journalists must make sure that they know the legislation and environment they are operating in. For many journalists, this may seem like a daunting task because laws are often convoluted and dense. It is costly to engage in any sort of legal battle with governments, not only in Yemen, but anywhere in the world. How do you manage this? What concrete steps can one take to become familiar with these laws?

Tip Box

Key Tips to Help Protect Yourself

- Defend the interests of the public

- Know the laws of the country relevant to freedom of expression

- Pay special attention to those concerning defamation and counter-terrorism. Governments can use these as censoring tools

- Ensure you have the right press credentials

- Always apply for permits where needed even if they are rejected

- Keep record of all your correspondence. Back up your data safely

- Ensure your work is checked by your publishers' legal team. If you are a freelancer, make that part of your agreement

- If you have a lot of information that negatively affects political or economic powers, then assess the legal consequences of publishing it

- Consider other non-legal actions a party might take against you for your reporting

- Consider breaking the story into parts and publishing information gradually

- Build networks with like-minded journalists

- Join your local journalist syndicate or union

BB: For us, in Yemen, our experience taught us early on in the 1990s that a legal team is necessary. A legal team that double-checks everything that goes to print. It is otherwise very easy for the Yemeni government to shut us down if we are in violation of the press law. This has happened repeatedly to other newspapers. The system we used was similar to those in action at the New Yorker and the Times. Both were great friends of ours, and we enjoyed a good relationship with many of the journalists who worked there, and to be perfectly honest we borrowed some of their methods. Above all, it is a learning curve and in the end, you develop your own system in response to your unique environment.

The Cost of Journalism: Personal Sacrifices

AJ: I want to get into the issue of the personal versus the public. During the old al-Ayyam battles, you and your family were in danger, how did you cope?

BB: Before I answer this, let me add another component to the equation. One of the major problems for newspapers is financial independence. The major problem that we face here in Yemen is that a lot of newspapers do not have a functioning financial system in place. The finances of any newspaper are critical to its survival and integrity. The independence of al-Ayyam hinged on that. We did several workshops for newspapers across the country around this issue. The goal was to explain the importance of media independence and how to achieve financial independence. If you are not financially independent as a newspaper or media outlet, you are not independent.

Now, returning back to your question about sacrifices. The sacrifice my family and myself have made has been daunting. We paid a heavy price. As a journalist in Yemen, you face huge emotional stress. It is not just about you, but also your family.

My family, for example, was virtually under house arrest from 2008-2012. As a result, my children had to be home schooled, and there was always a threat someone would kidnap them. Attacks on our property were common. In 2010, the government launched an unprecedented attack on our home and our newspaper offices, in which they used canons, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and heavy weapons against our complex. They surrounded our printing facility and did not allow anything to go in or out. They confiscated our newsprint paper, and any shipments that came to the Aden port, without any legal justification or court approval whatsoever. It was basically a military operation.

AJ: That is quite severe. Many journalists are used to being in-and-out of detention facilities at most. This is something else. What protective steps did you take?

BB: We had legal teams that worked for us on the case. More importantly, we had the support of the public. This helped us a lot. This is a critical point for any journalist: the only way that you can protect yourself is by ensuring the public protects you. This comes as a result of defending the interests of the public. In Yemen, we had wide public support. Many people rallied around us, which I think curtailed the severity of the government crackdown against us.

Poster in support of freedom of speech symbolised by the first Editor-in-Chief of Al Ayyam, Hisham Bashraheel. Photo: Shabwaah Press [6]

Journalism as a Public Service

BB: One of the main roles of independent media is to monitor and report on government performance and contribute substantially to ensure accountability. In sum, the media should protect the interests of the people and expose what is going on within society, the executive branch, the judiciary, and the legislative powers. If you do your best to cover these areas, with honesty and without bias, you will have a good relationship with the public. You will be respected and you will eventually be protected when you need protection.

AJ: That is a crucial point because we often see it the other way around, many journalists in the Arab world, at least those who remain influential, are very close to governments, rather than the other way around.

BB: Yes, but those who are close to the government are not respected publicly. They are well known, sure, but we call them 'government cronies'. On the other hand, I do believe that we have very good journalists who remain independent.

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[6] Shabwaah Press: http://shabwaahpress.com/printpost/34864/

These journalists are well respected by society, and are not criticizing because they simply like to criticize. They are criticizing because they want to see the right things done, not for fame, but rather trying to make something right that is wrong within the society. This is a public service and this is what I think journalism is all about.

AJ: OK. So you are talking about journalism based on civic virtues, duties, and responsibilities. How applicable is this in Yemen and in the Middle East more generally?

BB: You will always find successful journalists who are doing the right thing in every single country in the Arab world. Unfortunately, you will also find them more often than not oppressed by their own governments. This should not dampen the resolve of journalists. To the contrary, this should give motivation to continue pushing to achieve a greater degree of freedom, especially with what is going on in the Arab world today. We are at a precipice of great change in terms of social and government structures, so I predict in the not so distant future we will see quick and deep reforms as a result of what is going on now within the Arab world and the journalists who are calling truth to power.

Covering Civil Wars

AJ: What are the one or two things that you have seen change dramatically, particularly with respect to the role of journalists and the environment in which journalists operate before and after the Arab Spring?

BB: Well, before the Arab revolutions we had tyrannical systems. Even in Yemen, which bragged about democracy and freedom, we had a tyrant. But the Arab Spring pushed us to adopt a civil war mode of covering what was going on in the street. During and after the Arab Spring, we switched from covering reform and corruption, these normal issues for a stable society, to covering war. But a war will always come to an end, and that is where we will start to refocus again on the performance of the government. Of course, during war journalists pay a severe price. For example, in Yemen, all newspapers were closed. My newspaper was nearly destroyed in 2015. We are now slowly rebuilding it. This is the physical price that you pay because of civil war, but war does not last forever and so eventually we must return to some semblance of normal reporting on the everyday activities of government.

AJ: You said something really important that I want to touch on, and which is key to this book. You distinguish between journalism under normal circumstances, which according to you is mainly focused on holding the state power accountable, and what you call 'war coverage'. Explain these different dynamics when it comes to reporting.

BB: In 2015, a coup took place in Yemen resulting in a war between those who were in power before the coup and those who carried out the coup. This meant there was literally no government to criticize. There was no executive, judicial or legislative branch to hold accountable. The whole system was in total disarray and collapsed. Most of the government officials were either in hiding or fled the country. The only story people were interested in was the various battles taking place across the country. People wanted to know, for example, the location of the various advancing forces that were fighting each other and how the opposing forces would impact their lives. This is what people were focused on at the time, so you are forced into delivering this kind of coverage by the dynamics around you. It is not something that is done by choice. This kind of coverage is always extremely dangerous.

In my case, the first thing that the rebels did when they secured the area was to knock on our doors. Of course, we were not at our home, but they were looking for us. The first thing they did after the outbreak of war was to look for journalists. Several were captured and punished. Until now, many journalists remain in detention in Sanaa because of their profession as journalists and their relationship to us in al-Ayyam. We are the first victims, the first causalities, because journalists are always the weakest and easiest to target. In every society, in every country, journalists are the first to be targeted after the outbreak of war.

AJ: There are multiple players in any given conflict, so how does one remain balanced so to speak?

BB: I found it helpful to report on events on the ground as they unfolded. You just report what is going on at that point without adding analysis to it. During a live war, you do not have access to both sides of the equation and opposing forces. As a human being, if for example, your hometown is being invaded, you cannot be totally emotionally disengaged. So I found it helpful to report on what was happening on the ground as honestly as possible.

AJ: Having covered wars myself, you often only get to see half of the equation, you are always behind a defence line of some sort, but even there you face a lot of challenges. Can you tell us about some of these with respect to your experience in Yemen?

BB: Yes, when covering the civil war and the invasion by the Houthi/Saleh forces into Aden, one of the hardest things that I saw were the bodies of children in hospitals. Bodies were littered in the streets. Destroyed homes laid across the city. These are the kind of images that never leave you. They have an enormous emotional impact. You keep thinking about them over and over again. In April and May 2015, the people of Aden did not have any electricity in their homes, including us. We had to venture out for water and food to support our family. We volunteered at hospitals in an attempt to help people. It is hard, really hard to see

the death and devastation around you.

AJ: While operating behind defence lines, I find there are two challenges. First, the perception the other side has of you, and the lack of access to the area under their control. Second, the expectations of the troops whose defence line you are operating behind. You are expected to be a cheerleader, so to speak. How do you deal with these challenges?

BB: [Laughs] That is a good one, a "cheerleader". Going back to Yemen, if you are just reporting on factual events on the ground, as war unfolds, if you do just that, it is a great service to the public. You should focus on what is happening from a human perspective and the people living in that area. The first duty of the journalist is not to the warring factions; you are not trying to be on one side or the other. You should always be on the side of the innocent bystanders and the civilians.

AJ: But when the rebel group or force on the ground on whose territory you are operating tells you, for example, 'why are you not calling our people martyrs?' or 'please do not report on casualty numbers today, they are too high,' both of which I have experienced when reporting from Iraq from behind the lines of the Kurdish forces. How do you reconcile these issues?

A pro-government fighter sits on the back of a military truck during clashes with Houthi fighters in the southwestern city of Taiz, Yemen June 2, 2017. Photo: REUTERS / Anees Mahyoub

BB: As a journalist, you are always a great communicator, always ready with the persuasive skills to talk to people. You can always convince them - either the rebels or the operational forces - of the greater good of what you are doing, even from their own perspective. For example, this was very helpful to me in 2015, when I told the resistance fighters in Yemen that I had to report on what was going on, on the ground. They said, 'no, you are going to expose our operations,' which was their biggest fear, but I convinced them that the world was going to come to their aid if what was happening on the ground was exposed.

However, when one of these factions comes specifically after you, it is time to go into hiding. You cannot take a confrontational or a legal stance during a war scenario. You cannot because there are no laws to protect you. There is nothing to stop them from shooting you on the spot to silence you.

AJ: Can you run us through a scenario you have been in, either recently or one that particularly stands out?

BB: There was a point here in Kraytar, a neighbourhood in Aden, where the resistance fighters were fighting next to the central bank. I was behind the rebel lines, trying to cover the story. They were trying to stop me from doing it, but I told them that if their story did not go out, no one would know that they were fighting. It took approximately two hours of negotiating before they allowed me to do it. I took photographs of the area and the story went out that night.

AJ: There are three or four main warring parties in Yemen; I am struggling to see a concrete example of how one can manage to not anger one of them in any given story.

BB: Our coverage of the National Dialogue events is a good example.[7] We covered the events in a very factual way. Our reporting approach covered these stories without context or analysis. It was just reporting on what was happening in parliament. We stated the positions of each party on the issue and described the fight between the parliamentarians in the debate. It was descriptive reporting done by someone sitting on the balcony of the parliament and listening to what was going on. In this environment, we operated like any other news agency. It is our newspaper's policy not to put any opinion when we are reporting news. Opinions are for columnists. If you want your opinion to appear, then write a column.

AJ: Going back to your point about the National Dialogue coverage, how did you approach it?

BB: I participated in the National Dialogue Conference. It was such a polarizing

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[7] The National Dialogue Conference (NDC) was a transitional dialogue process held at the Mövenpick Hotel in Sanaa, Yemen, from March 18, 2013 to January 24, 2014. This was part of the Yemeni crisis reconciliation efforts. The terms which were agreed upon but failed to be implemented led to Houthi and pro-Saleh groups attacking Sanaa and overthrowing President Hadi and his government.

experience. Most of us who came from southern Yemen, if not all, were against the National Dialogue, because it implied speaking and negotiating with the north. Our newspaper was under immense pressure from the public because of our straightforward news reporting. We did not cheer for the south, but reported the facts. Some of our people in the south perceived us as traitors. There were demonstrations in Aden and all over the south against the National Dialogue. And the northerners kept quiet and did not come to our defence for participating. When we published the proceedings of the National Dialogue and people read the documents that we had presented within it, they saw the need for talking to the other side. Yemen is such a divided society and the divide with the north measures everything in the south. But people started to realise that a dialogue was not bad. The credibility we gained from covering the National Dialogue boosted our confidence to express our views. Covering this event became a watershed moment in my career as a journalist. The dialogue sadly ended up in disaster, as we all know, and Yemen descended into chaos.

Supporters of the separatist southern movement demonstrate against recent decisions by President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi that sacked senior officials supported by the United Arab Emirates, including Aden governor Aidaroos al-Zubaidi, in the southern port city of Aden, Yemen May 4, 2017. Picture taken May 4, 2017. REUTERS / Fawaz Salman / File Photo

On the Run: Your Safety is a Priority

AJ: Back to 2015, after the coup took place, did you leave or seek cover because you had been warned that rebels were looking for you?

BB: Yes. When they came for us in 2015, I was at a neighbour's house because we knew they were coming for us. I was hiding there, so we could see them from the windows when they came into our premises. Later on, it got to a point where I had to leave Aden for two months. I fled to a remote part of the country called Hadramut. This is a place that was under the control of al-Qaeda. So my situation went from bad to worse. [8]

AJ: That leads me to ask about practical tips for journalists who may face similarly dangerous situations. Can you elaborate on what steps you took to escape your immediate danger? How did you reconcile yourself with fleeing to an area controlled by al-Qaeda?

BB: Journalists are always privileged with a lot of information so they have to make smart choices. Self-security is always a priority. You must look after your safety as a priority in any environment. That is one of the first things you are taught when you study journalism or when you practice journalism within a good media establishment. Your safety is number one priority. Fleeing to Hadramut at that time was the lesser of two evils.

AJ: If we look at Yemen and Syria, self-preservation seems to be missing for many journalists, particularly those who do not work for well-established media. So, what message do you have for those who come from outside traditional and well-established media?

BB: As a journalist, I found it always prudent not to be flamboyant within the environment I am operating in. You have to observe as a bystander. We need coverage from war-stricken areas. For example, my media outlet was closed during the civil war in Aden, but I was able to report the daily events to many other media outlets, including Al Jazeera and the BBC. We need the truth to come out but not at the price of our own lives. So always be mindful of your surroundings. Always be discrete and do not be flamboyant within your own environment. Nobody should invite trouble.

AJ: How have you covered the conflict in the past six years on the uprising? How do you report on the siege in Taiz, the situation in Sanaa, the Saudi-Houthi fight on the border? There are so many landmines, metaphorically speaking, in covering a war situation. How have you managed to report on these without becoming a casualty?

BB: From my perspective, what we do from an organisational point of view is very simple. Journalists from Sanaa, for example, work and report from Sanaa. They know their area and they are thus able to deal with the actors on the ground much better than someone who comes from Aden or Taiz. Their contributions,

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[8] Al Batati, Saeed. "Yemeni forces capture al-Qaeda stronghold in Hadramout." aljazeera.com
http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/04/yemeni-forces-capture-al-qaeda-stronghold-hadramout-160426155300044.html (accessed June 23, 2017).

for example, do not appear with their own names on it. We never use journalists' names in a war situation. This especially applies to hot spots. We try to give voice to all sides as best as we can, but this is always next to impossible. Sometimes, we would not publish a story because we feel it will jeopardise our own journalists. But at the same time, we have to try to be as balanced as possible.

Armed followers of the Houthi movement protest against the president's announcement of an extension of the state of emergency and US supporting the Arab alliance led by Saudi Arabia, Yemen May 12, 2017. Photo: REUTERS / Mohamed al-Sayaghi

AJ: Has the issue of censorship or self-censorship come up in your work?

BB: About self-censorship let me say this: I would rather have a story broken into three-parts, published over three days, rather than have one big story appear on a single day. Our coverage of the USS Cole bombing in Aden is an example. [9]It was a daily occurrence and we had a lot of information that was damaging to the government. We decided not to publish all the information at once. You have to be aware of the legal ramifications and what the other side might do to you. It is no good to have the newspaper shut down over a single article. What proved better for us in the long run was to publish the information gradually. Middle Eastern governments are generally less sensitive to those sorts of publications, especially in Yemen. If you publish gradually, they will tend to look the other way. But if you publish all of it at once, it could become a legal and physical battle.

AJ: How does a young journalist with little experience navigate all of this? What

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[9] Cable News Network. "USS Cole Bombing Facts." CNN.
http://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/18/world/meast/uss-cole-bombing-fast-facts (accessed June 23, 2017).

practical advise do you have for young journalists just entering the field?

BB: It is an extremely complex way of operating, especially when you are dealing with people in power who do not believe in freedom of expression. It is dangerous dealing with those who do not believe they are accountable for what they are doing. This becomes the role of the more seasoned journalists. They need to guide the young ones coming into an organization. I think that we have a duty to train and to continuously train new journalists in how to operate within our own societies. It is different in Yemen than in other countries. Every country is unique. Prudence and patience are always two good qualities. Journalism is not just about breaking news and being first. It is about consistency and truth above all else. If you are consistent and truthful, you will build trust with your readers or viewers, and this trust is what differentiates great media from mediocre ones.

Traditional Media and Social Media in Yemen's War Coverage

AJ: Prudence, patience, consistency, and truthfulness sound like very idealistic principles to live up to, especially when you think of the digital age and the fake news we see.

BB: My newspaper al-Ayyam was closed in 2009. It did not reappear again until 2014. A lot changed in the environment in Yemen while we were closed. We had an explosion of social media and mobile devices. Suddenly, every citizen became a journalist; but social media is not journalism. It is often rumours, unsubstantiated rumours. A journalist works hard at verifying sources and at making sure the story is true before publication. It is not just chatting with a friend and publishing whatever you were talking about. That is what social media offers in many instances. People in Yemen over the past two years, in particular, started to distrust social media. They are now hungry for in-depth journalism again.

AJ: Can you give us an example?

BB: Al-Ayyam built its relationship with the public on the basis of trust and truthfulness. We were the largest selling newspaper in Yemen when they closed us down in 2009. We had achieved sales numbers never reached by any other publication. In Aden, we controlled 81 per cent of the market. Across Yemen, we had about 78 per cent of the market. So, when we came back in 2014, the public immediately gravitated towards al-Ayyam. We reached our previous sales numbers within the first two-weeks of republishing. This is a result of the trust I am talking about. When people know you are publishing what is true, then nothing can beat you. Even if you are closed by the government or by the military, nobody can take this trust away from you.

AJ: We are living in very polarized societies across the Middle East and North Africa region. Many people are partisans. When you say they are looking for truth, I find it

difficult to understand. My impression, and maybe I am wrong, and to play the devil's advocate, people do not want the truth. They want to know what is true for them, or what is acceptable to their view of the world. Would you agree?

BB: Yes, but you are talking about a minority within society. Within society the majority are independent. They are not partisans. This is your biggest audience. And this is the audience that all the partisans are fighting over. So, when you are quite popular as a media outlet, everyone will fight to appear on your coverage. They will strive to provide you with their point of view to make sure their opinion is heard. This is what happened with my newspaper. We had all the different political parties trying to make an appearance on every single issue to push their ideas through our pages. This gave me a unique position of being a central point of opinions. My political views, my opinions, do not appear in our news coverage. You have to be very impartial with news. This will make you popular. When covering a political issue, for example, by presenting the views of all political parties, you give the public access to read them. They can then make their own informed opinion. This is what one should strive to do.

AJ: How is the perception right now of al-Ayyam in the different parts of Yemen?

BB: In the south, and a big chunk of north Yemen, it is seen as a national newspaper. In the Houthi held areas, we are seen as the enemy. You will never be able to please everyone in a war scenario, but we try to tell some of their stories. They are not making it easy for us. They do not provide you with information or numbers to report their perspective.

AJ: So, you have to always operate under cover - if at all - in Houthi held areas?

BB: Yes, they are not kind to journalists. Most imprisoned journalists are held in Houthi prisons in Sanaa. We do not have imprisoned journalists right now in government held prisons or in the south.

The Future of Journalism in Yemen

AJ: If we take a wider look at journalism in Yemen, where do you see its role in the coming years as long as the war rages, and then in a post-conflict scenario?

BB: I think that gradually you see the war coverage receding within all newspapers across the country. We will see a return to holding the government and those in power accountable. I do see a lot of newspapers disappearing because they are not able to evolve into investigative reporting. Right now, what you find in most newspapers and websites in Yemen is just news coverage, but you do not find investigative reporting. This has been a tradition for al-Ayyam, but a lot of people steer away from it because it costs a lot of money and time. The newspapers that manage to make the switch to

investigative reporting will survive, and I think the rest will disappear. Unfortunately, with the advent of digital media, it will likely be even be harder to survive.

AJ: We hear lot of people making references to investigative journalism, but how does it actually differ from ordinary news and in-depth coverage reporting?

BB: Investigative journalism is taking an issue and trying to get all the information relevant from multiple sources and points of view. This takes a long time. You have to closely examine the legal and social aspects of the issue that you are investigating. It has to be a well-researched and verified piece, which you can easily defend. In our organization, the largest group we have employed is the investigative reporting department. It is the better funded and equipped department, and the one with the heaviest workload as well, to be honest. It takes a lot of people and a lot of work to produce a single report. It is hard work but you are deeply gratified when you see it published because you see the accomplishment that you have made, and the difference it makes once it is published. Such an example from my newspaper was a story we did on private prisons back in 1996, which had a huge impact and embarrassed the government and virtually led to the closure of private prisons in the country for five years.

AJ: Please can you give some practical tips to fellow journalists based on your experience?

BB: I think there are things all young journalists should know: Safety is number one. Second, be honest. Third, report factually. Fourth, your opinion does not matter; your opinion is not the only correct opinion. At the same time strive to never leave any opinion out; you have to include all opinions that are presented to you. It is the opinion of the affected people that matters. Start your work with interviewing the people that you dread the most when investigating a piece. For me, I always hated going to the government departments, so I always started with them. And do not forget to do the legal work that is needed.

Invest in a decent field recorder, a box of USB sticks, a good camera, and a very small mobile phone. Do not use the big flashy ones. No one will notice the old ones. Always sew a secret pocket in your vest so you can hide the USB sticks!

Make copies of your personal ID and always give those when requested. I always make copies of my ID that look exactly like the originals and I give them away like business cards [laughs]. Especially in Yemen, they hold your ID for everything. Always keep a stash of money somewhere for emergencies, but be very prudent with money.

On an emotional level, you have to develop your own coping mechanisms. We are all human, but you always have to try to remove yourself from the story, especially

when you are embedded within the environment in which it is unfolding. Try to disengage your emotions, at least while you are reporting. Different coping mechanisms are necessary. For me, my children are my coping mechanism.

Finally, learning never stops with a journalist. You have to draw on the experiences of others. I tell all new journalists working in my newspaper, get down from your high pedestal. You are not the best at everything. There is somebody out there in the world better than you. You have to strive to be like that person. This is what learning is all about.

Chapter 2

Despite Barriers and Hazards: A Woman's Experience Working in Gaza

By Ameera Ahmad Harouda

The beginning was like no other. I am a Palestinian born in Libya in 1983. My parents had lived there in exile. Many Palestinians were dispossessed from their homeland after Israel was established. Up to a million people were forced out after the 1947-48 Arab-Israeli war. Then again after the 1967 war between Israel and the neighbouring countries. Hundreds of thousands lost their lands and homes.[10] After years of struggle against the Israeli occupation following a popular uprising, Israel finally agreed to allow some Palestinians to return to their homeland in return for the recognition of the state of Israel.

In 1993, the Oslo Accords created the Palestinian Authority (PA). By the time I turned 13, the first elections of the Palestinian Legislative Council were taking place and, that same year, my family was moving back to Palestine. A totally different chapter of my life started.

Arriving in Gaza, I did not find the freedom that I had enjoyed abroad. To some extent, decades of Israeli occupation had a massive negative impact on our once liberal society. Decades of military occupation had destroyed the social fabric of our nation. It seeped into all walks of life.

As a child, I dreamt of being a pilot and travelling freely from one country to another, but everything I had wished for and dreamt about had vanished into thin air when we came back to Gaza. Gaza was surrounded by Israel from land and sea. Even the airspace was under their control. On a personal level, my own behaviour utterly clashed with social traditions. It seemed girls could not simply be who they wanted to be at that time. I was not willing to settle for that. An uphill struggle challenging local traditions ensued.

In 2000, I started working for the government affiliated Palestine TV as a presenter for a children's program. I also wrote for two university magazines. Throughout all my activities, I tried to change the way people saw girls and women. I wanted to push the internal boundaries imposed on us.

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[10] Palestine Remembered, available online: http://www.palestineremembered.com/ (accessed July 4, 2017).

Later on, in 2004-2005, many international organisations supporting Palestine visited Gaza. I spent most of my time with them, trying to understand how they saw my country and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I learned that most of them needed to be more informed about what was happening in our region. I especially understood that foreign media outlets had to be warned about the hidden stories in Gaza. In 2005, when a German journalist from Der Spiegel needed a fixer, I did not hesitate. Working with her allowed me to step into the world of international correspondents. I started developing a network and meeting several other foreign journalists, becoming the first woman fixer in Gaza.

Covering war is dangerous by all means. Parachuting into war or conflict zones is suicidal for international journalists if they do not know the lay of the land. Where do you fly in or drive into a given country? Where do you stay? Who do you trust? Who will introduce you to the key political figures on the political scene? How will you communicate if you do not speak the language? These and many other questions can either be answered by fellow journalists, friends, or from experience. However, in most cases, the bulk of the news reports published by a foreign correspondent from war-torn places like the Gaza Strip only becomes a reality because of a fixer. That is the person who facilitates the work of journalists covering foreign countries. Sometimes it can be a local journalist, a translator or someone with good contacts and knowledge of the area. The fixer is the eyes and ears of any foreign journalists operating outside of their comfort zone. He or she connects the journalist with the stories, the people and the contacts needed to report the news of that country.

Gender Barriers

Being a fixer in Gaza is not easy, let alone being a woman fixer. In addition to the great responsibility a fixer role generally entails, when you are a woman, gender prejudice is all around you. Working with foreigners was ill-seen. Back then those who did that were considered to be serving Israel's interests. To add to this, I was working with them late at night. This was considered culturally reprehensible behaviour for women. Most of my relatives tried to convince my father to make me quit my job. But my father's reaction was not at all what they expected. He was always encouraging and supportive, and sometimes during working nights he would accompany me or ask my brother to do so.

Journalism is a male profession in my community. Some people from Gaza do not believe we women have the ability to work in this kind of field. Having to work with male journalists exposed me to harassment; although I proved time and time again that I am able to succeed even at times when they were not. Frequently– still way too often—merit and capacity are shadowed by gender biases.

Ameera Ahmad Harouda says that when she first started working as a fixer in 2005, there were no other women doing the job in Gaza. Photo: Edmée van Rijn

However, there are also upsides to being a woman fixer within my cultural environment. Women have better access to certain places and persons than men. For example, I find it easy to reach families and make women and children open their heart to me. This requires empathy and an honest will to listen, but if I were a man, even if I had all the understanding and humanity in the world, some people wouldn't be as available as they are with me for the fact that I am a woman.

My husband has been a great support. He has stood by me at all times, even if at some point, he too was criticized by society for being married to me and allowing me to work as a fixer. For the conservative Gaza society, our family breaks the mould. He has been a stay-at-home dad, watching over our children, while I've been out covering war and conflict. He is my rock. I always give him the contact information of the person that gives me access to the story so if I don't call him every two hours, as per our agreement, he can call the person and find out if something happened to me. Leaving him and my children behind when I go to cover war stories is the hardest part of my job.

Working Under War and Occupation: A Double and Permanent Risk

As a Palestinian living under occupation, my sympathy is first and foremost with my family. I also have responsibility as a fixer towards my country and my people. This means that I cannot always accept to work on sensational stories that could tarnish the reputation of my people. It also means that I have to protect

my sources if I am doing a story. When you work in a conflict zone, your sources can get killed if they talk. I try to never put a life in danger to get a story, and I have to be careful with whom I work with. For example, if Israeli journalists come under disguise of a western passport, I have to be careful. Often people who are against Palestinian people's rights want to give us a bad image internationally. They want to portray us as terrorists. They want to describe a Gaza that is evil and backward. I won't allow myself to be used by journalists with clear political motivations. At the same time, I cannot of course hide some of the ugly truths that this society harbours. The context is crucial. But as a fixer, you do not have editorial control or oversight of what gets published, so one must choose carefully who you work with and on what stories.

I also must document everything that happens and stay honest and neutral. One way of building and keeping that neutrality is to remain unbiased and read between the lines when sourcing information from news pieces, as each local channel, magazine, and radio station has a different point of view and very often a different agenda too.

Ameera at work with Dutch correspondent Monique van Hoogstraten during a visit to the border area.
Photo: Edmée van Rijn

I have covered every war and large-scale Israeli onslaught on Gaza. It has been hard. I have survived airstrikes, targeted assassinations, and explosions that have killed thousands of people. I consider myself lucky. But this brings me to another serious point: Protection.

Tip Box

The Need for Protective Gear

• Information about the war or conflict is crucial, as it will help you determine the appropriate gear for the situation. For example, depending on the threat, you might need to wear a hazardous material suit, such as a gas mask or flak vest.

• Always use some kind of body armour, even if you are covering violent demonstrations.

• A helmet is usually recommended as well.

• Take into account that no protective gear is infallible. Even with protective vest and helmet you might get injured. Think also if the gear you have decided to wear might have you mistaken for a target and increase your risk of being hurt.

The absence of protection–the permanent vulnerability of local journalists in conflict environments—is a difficult part of my job. Most groups I work with come to Gaza on a short mission, but I live here all-the-time. Danger is ever-present in my life and that of my colleagues. We do not get to go back home, take safe shelter, and unwind because to us Gaza is home. During Israeli invasions, we did not even have any basic protective gear, such as body armour or helmets.

Moreover, being a fixer for international correspondents sets the bar a little higher in terms of difficulties. In Gaza, a foreign reporter simply cannot get far without a fixer. The authorities mandate that you have a local, approved sponsor or fixer to help you. The local fixer is often held responsible for the work of visiting journalists, who usually hire them for short periods. This can lead to great implications for the local fixer if things go wrong.

When Israel shells, it can target most areas in Gaza, whether military or civilian. This means that when under attack, violence strikes most of the 360-square kilometre strip, affecting many of its 1.7 million inhabitants. Trying to cope with all that is happening simultaneously, while protecting the journalists that you are directing and guiding, requires a lot of effort and puts a lot of stress on you as a fixer. One must know the terrain and always locate entry and exit points in any place targeted by shelling or any area in which one is covering. If I feel the area is too dangerous for a foreign reporter to join me, I'll explain the situation to them and let them make a decision. If they decide to go with me, I never think about the risk they–we— are taking, or else I would put myself and those with me in danger. I would panic and not be able to think straight or act in a timely manner.

It is important to build a solid network of people in local communities. This is crucial to being a successful fixer. Firstly, for developing a real, human and honest relationship with people that truly transcends your journalistic objectives. If you succeed, people will open up to you and tell you their stories. They will provide you with unprecedented access to information no one else has. This also comes with a responsibility. They are human beings just like me, not casualties, or tragedies, or numbers. We are all Palestinians, living in Gaza. Secondly, having this network provides you with backup. If I face any problem in any place, I can find somebody who can help me, who respects me and I can trust. Needless to say, you should never put any of these people at risk.

Sensitizing correspondents about the dangers in covering certain stories is also part of my job as a fixer. I have to sound the alarm if we are stepping into topics or angles that may simply upset the people in power in Gaza. My job, at the end, is also to reduce the safety risks to which a foreign journalist is exposed to in a foreign land. A good amount of responsibility is on your shoulders as a fixer.

The Whys

There is something that beats all the difficulties of being a woman journalist and fixer in Gaza: I get to tell the world what is happening here, what we are going through, what defines us best and what we suffer from the most.

I have built a large network with the civil society and different Palestinian factions that have allowed me to have a comprehensive perspective and insight of what happens in my own city, to my own people. I see other people suffering– the hardest part of my job— and I must tell their stories. That is my commitment to myself and my community. The stories I hear and the pictures I see with my own eyes are true, and I cannot get them off my mind. I still remember the details of every story and event that has deeply affected me. I cannot even find the words to describe them now.

The Israeli siege imposed on the Gaza Strip hampers all parts of life here. It has an impact on the economy, the culture, our freedom of movement, and the people. Economic hardship is a key motivator for many who take on this job, risking their lives every day. Many have become fixers now. However, we live a new day everyday hoping things will improve.

Although, most of my archives have been destroyed in the conflict, sad and happy memories abound in each corner of Gaza. There is not a place that does not remind me of families or people I have met.

Ameera with her two children, Layan and Adam, at a birthday party at the beach. Photo: Edmée van Rijn

■ # Chapter 3

Lessons from a War Correspondent

Interview with Zeina Khodr

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Zeina Khodr belongs to a unique and hungry breed of Arab Journalists. She worked her way up in the media world one step at a time, starting out as a journalist in local TV stations and wound up at Al Jazeera English (AJE). I was fortunate enough to work with her in the field as a producer, but also as a news editor and executive producer from AJE's headquarter in Qatar.

It becomes clear to anyone who works with Zeina that she is incredibly passionate about her work and beliefs. She is fearless, has courage and holds herself and any team that works with her to the highest ethical standards.

Covering the ongoing conflicts and wars that have inflicted our region has been everything but a coverage of battles and fighting. Putting the human story at the core of our media coverage has been the driving force. Whether it is Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Philippines or Syria, Zeina has been a formidable storyteller. Always striving to make sense of the chaos of the wars engulfing our region. Always providing the much-needed context.

Working together with Zeina on the Syria-Turkey border was for me one of the toughest assignments. For days, we would pour over maps searching for "safe" roads into Syria with one of the many rebel groups in northern Syria. We had a simple objective - to shed light on the horrors of war and the darkness of human-inflicted pain. Operating in Syria had become a nightmare for all journalists, safety-wise. Al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al Nusra operated in Syria and soon after also The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant group (ISIL). Their alliance and later difference complicated matters even more.

Dozens of crackling Skype or Viber calls to activists, besieged doctors, aid workers and fighters were all key to coming up with a plan to enter Syria to cover the ongoing fight between the Syrian government forces and the various armed groups. Dealing with the people on the borders who would help our teams cross into Syria was always a challenge. You could get caught at any moment. Days or weeks of preparations could go up in smoke if our crew was caught by the border guards. Turkey at one point decided to close the official border for any journalist wanting to cross over. If you crossed the border you were on your own. At the height of the fighting in Idlib and Aleppo, it was so dangerous for teams

to be inside Syria that we had to restrict our assignments to a couple of days. Sometimes even a one day run. The tension that grips you when you know your colleagues are now in Syria on their own is immense. Once they cross the border, you are helpless. Zeina, alongside a small team of two or three people, would be on her own. Guided by the extensive research they have done and the contacts made in Syria, their journalistic instinct was all they could rely on. She, and the rest of the teams, made a point of never travelling at night, only in daylight, to minimise their exposure to being kidnapped.

Zeina became one of the first international journalists to be allowed to film with ISIL in Syria before the group split from Al Qaeda. It was not planned but the team had to pass through the ISIL controlled village of Dana close to the Turkey border to leave Syria.

The spread of ISIL in Syria after that made our work ever more dangerous. Airstrikes, kidnappings and killings were real threats. Syria became the most dangerous hotspot in the world. It confined most international journalists to reporting on the war from the Turkey-Syria border. It was during one of these missions on the border in May 2016 that we conducted this interview with Zeina Khodr, Al Jazeera's self-made war correspondent.

Zeina Khodr during Al Jazeera's coverage of the Mosul offensive, November 2016. Photo: Adam Simmonds

Awad Joumaa (AJ): *What made you want to become a journalist?*

Zeina Khodr (ZK): I was studying political science at the American University of Beirut when one of the local stations wanted to start an English language news service. Someone at the university asked if I would like to broadcast the news. I never thought I wanted to work in the news, I was always thinking of the diplomatic corps, or an international organisation like the United Nations (UN).

AJ: *What kept you then in the field of journalism and how do you see your role as a journalist covering conflicts now?*

ZK: It is fascinating. I love to meet and listen to people. So many people would say, 'you keep covering conflicts', but covering war is not just about covering casualties and bombings and destruction. It is about the politics behind the war and I think that is intriguing to try to understand.

You can also make a difference in one way or the other, especially when you work for television. I will give you just one example. There was a girl in Lebanon, in Arsal.[11] She was around 15 years old. Her parents could not pay the rent so they were marrying her off to a 48 or 50-year-old landlord. She was crying and said to me, "I have to do this in order for my family to stay in the house." When the news package went on air, people wanted to donate money. I did not get involved money-wise, it is none of my business, but I kept on linking all these people to the UN office in Beirut. They found a new home for her and she never had to marry this man. There are many other girls like her. It is gratifying when a story like this can help change one person's life.

Sherine Emam (left) and Zeina Khodr (right) while filming a report in northern Syria, 2013. Photo: Zeina Khodr

[11] For more details on battle of Lebaneas-Syrian border town, Arsal. International Crisis Group. Arsal in the https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/lebanon/arsal-crosshairs-predicament-small-lebanese-border-town (accessed July 4, 2017)

Field Journalism: The Human Story

AJ: In covering war, access to areas where the fighting is taking place is always an issue. You have covered Syria's war from day one for instance. How do you tell this story when you are not getting access to the full narrative?

ZK: First of all, I think I am lucky as I have been to Syria many times before the war. On some occasions as a tourist, and others times as a journalist. This meant that I was familiar with the country, its people and its government. Being from Lebanon which borders Syria has also helped me understand Syrian politics. It has always been hard to report from Syria due to the tight restrictions imposed by the government. At the beginning of the uprising, in March 2011, Al Jazeera still had a bureau there. We made our way to the region and with the help of the locals we were the first crew to report from Deraa.[12] Seeing the people there and talking to them really made us understand why they took to the streets. They were hiding us from the security forces, moving us from one room to the other. There was so much fear but there was a lot of courage as well. I saw for myself that it was the people of the village – the teacher, the lawyer, the plumber – who were taking to the street, who were demanding reforms. At the time none of them dared to say, "We want the fall of the regime", or utter the name Bashar Al Assad. They were just saying, "Reforms". But when you pushed them and the camera was off, they would say, "Well, you know, we are fed up with this government and the humiliation we endured over the years".

Weeks later our office in Syria was closed and Al Jazeera was denied visas. We then had no other choice but to only report from rebel-controlled areas. We used to go in and out of Syria from the Turkish side. A lot of people just covered the story from the border, but we saw what was happening first-hand. This gives you an insight. For example, we learned quickly that there is a serious divide within the opposition camp, which you will not really understand unless you see it for yourself. There was a lack of unity which proved to be the opposition's weakness throughout the conflict. We went inside and built relationships with people and activists so we knew which activists to trust and which not to trust. Then again you lack access to the government side, but you can make this up by reading pro-government papers. We know that the media in the Arab world is politicised. Read Akhbar or Safir newspapers and you will know the regime's position. [13]Everyone sends political messages from here and there. My job is to put both sides of the story and it is up to the audience to decide what exactly happened. At the end of the day we are journalists, we are not prosecutors in a court.

Context is Key

AJ: You pointed at two skills journalists must possess in order to cover a story where they lack access. One is reading the various sources and the opposing sides of the story, and the other is the human connections you have with sources inside a conflict zone. You are familiar with the region, but what is your advice to someone who has to cover a civil war somewhere else? Do you believe these skills are transferable? What would be your advice to a trainee journalist or a new young journalist going out for the first time to cover a very polarised conflict without having the background one might have coming from that region?

ZK: You will really have to spend your time listening, talking to people, understanding. It is not only what politicians say. You understand the story much more when you talk to people on the ground. I will give you one example. We do not have access to Damascus, but in Lebanon there are many people who are from Damascus. You can talk to them and understand what is going on. So, people are very important. It also has to do with a lot of reading. A lot of the conflicts today have a past and you need to understand the past in order to understand the present. I mean, Syria did not just happen overnight.

AJ: And…

ZK: And a lot of the time we did not cover the fact that in one way or another, this is a class war. Now everyone talks about the sectarian war, but this started with marginalised people in rural areas rising up. You need to go back to the economic liberalisation program of Bashar Al Assad in 2000 to understand why it was the people of rural Aleppo who stormed the city and not the urban people, who were happy, had jobs and good connections.[14] If you do not understand these little things, then you will not understand the situation. It is not about a rocket that landed here, and the hospital that was destroyed there, and ten people who were killed there. It is much bigger than that. People who had nothing or little to lose were readier to take to the street and risk it all. Those who were living comfortable lives, whose children were able to go to universities and find jobs, thought twice before revolting against the government. For decades, it was only the wealthy and those with connections in government who were able to find jobs and enjoy their lives. The majority of the people felt oppressed and forgotten, and it is this desperation that drives people to rise up and put their fears aside.

AJ: It is the context.

ZK: Exactly, everything is about the context.

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[12] Al Jazeera English. "Anger in Syria over security crackdown." AJE.
http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/03/20113268047311197.html (accessed July 4, 2017)

[13] Akhbar and Safir are two Lebanese newspapers covering Arab politics. See http://www.al-akhbar.com and https://assafir.com

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[14] Hanieh, Adam. Lineages of Revolt. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013

AJ: With that in mind, how does a journalist remain unbiased? Regardless of whether we sometimes misunderstand or understand the story properly, we still get accused of being biased. What are the key skills needed to remain unbiased, if at all possible?

ZK: Being Lebanese, anyone can easily say that I support either side of the Syrian conflict because of how divided Lebanon is. You are either with the government or with the opposition. I really could not and do not identify myself with either of them. I think both of them have made mistakes, and people on both sides of this conflict are paying the price. We all are human, right? Maybe I have certain feelings in my heart about the whole thing but I cannot in any way let it show, because believe me, people will know. My job is to listen to people from both sides. It is a very fine line and you have to be very careful. This is the way to maintain your credibility. But this has been one of the hardest stories to cover because the warring sides expect journalists to support one side and not the other.

AJ: So it is about re-centering the human angle, that is where you see the ability to connect?

ZK: Yes, people are dying on both sides. Maybe people are dying more on one side than the other, but if you tend to only cover one side, then people will judge you. After following certain people on Twitter for the past two or three years, I can now tell where they stand in the conflict. It is not that difficult, it is a giveaway.

The Journalist as Witness: Objectivity and Neutrality

Khaled Ramadan (KR): In 2003, Bosnian journalist Kemal Kurspahic wrote an article entitled "Objectivity without Neutrality"15 . In it he argued that genocide is one of the issues one cannot be neutral about. He had already published an article on neutrality versus objectivity, back in 1995, in which he used the war in Bosnia and reporting on genocide to argue that journalists can be perfectly objective without necessarily being neutral. How do you feel about this whole debate on neutrality versus objectivity based on your experiences?

ZK: I do not relate myself to either side and I think both sides have made mistakes, but remaining neutral? I really cannot. When the rebels committed atrocities, we reported on it. When the government committed atrocities and massacres, we reported on that too. At the end, it is people who are dying.

I saw it with my own eyes in Aleppo, when they picked up more than eighty bodies from a river.[16] The bodies were tied and had gunshot wounds to their heads and

[15] Kurspahic, Kemal. Objectivity Without Neutrality. Boston: Nieman Foundation, 2003.
http://niemanreports.org/articles/objectivity-without-neutrality/ (accessed July 9, 2017)

[16] "Bodies dumped in Syria's 'River of Death'." Al Jazeera. http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2013/03/201331201846902545.html
(accessed July 4, 2017)

people were coming to look at the faces to identify if they were their relatives. The river with the bodies was flowing from government to rebel territory. These people were living in rebel-controlled territory and went to government-controlled territory, either for work or to buy something, and never came back. These are important facts that have to be mentioned, but you have to be careful in your script not to state for a fact that these people were killed by the government. But if one were to put together the information and facts that you provided, they would come up with their own conclusion. Again, we do not work for an international tribunal trying war crimes.

I think there is a way to remain objective. Even if you have certain feelings in yourself, there are journalistic standards you have to maintain, otherwise why are you doing this job? It is your name which will be on the report at the end. Your reputation is at stake.

KR: There is also the shifting role of journalism. You see journalists who simply go under the banner of activists/journalists. They will say they are not only reporting but also witnessing. They are witnesses too, let us say, to war crimes, and they may be invited to the International Court of Justice in The Hague or other places to testify. Some journalists actually did submit material to the Court in the case of Milosevic and felt good about it. They think that activist journalism is not bad journalism. What do you think about this?

ZK: I do not think you are an activist when presenting evidence in court, but a witness. That is a very big difference. If anyone was to call me to court right now and say, "What did you see when they picked up those bodies and people were identifying them?" I would tell exactly what I saw, as a witness. I am not an activist and this is not activism. Activism is when you keep on saying, for example, the other side is doing this and you totally ignore your own mistakes or what you do wrong. You see my point? Activists are those who only want to show one side of a story.

KR: So witnessing is good in your eyes?

ZK: Yes. This is our job. We are supposed to be the "watchdog" for the public. If we are there and we see something, then we must say what we saw, if we have no doubt about what happened.

AJ: Sometimes you have two reporters on the same story, but they come out having two different notions of the truth. Do you think there is one truth out there, or are there different truths depending on who is watching?

ZK: These two reporters are at the scene and they are not reporting from a border, right?

AJ: Yes, let us say they are witnesses.

ZK: There is something called circumstance. Let us say you have somebody from Russia TV and someone from Al Jazeera reporting the same story. Of course, you are going to have very different reports. I will never know the whole truth, but I can give you what I believe are the facts, what I saw, that is my job.

KR: There is also an interesting twist when it comes to the issue of responsibility and guilt. During the Vietnam War, photo journalist Eddie Adams was witnessing a Viet Cong execution in the street and took photographs and videos. At a later stage, he actually apologised to the General who was shooting those prisoners, because he felt guilty for ruining the man's life. To paraphrase him, he said that two people died in that photograph: the recipient of the bullet, killed by the General, and the General himself, killed by Adams' camera. Regardless of that, the journalist did not owe the General anything because he was just doing his job. How do you feel about this guilt that some journalists feel at a later stage?

ZK: Sometimes you feel guilty that you are filming another person's tragedy. You are just standing there and suddenly he or she becomes an object to you. But then you say, "We need to show the suffering". I felt that when we were filming people looking at the bodies from the river and trying to identify them. One man identified his father. He started screaming and ran out. We chased him till he was on the street, where he was hitting the wall and shouting. I lost myself at one point and then tried to ask him a question. He looked at me and someone told him to answer me, and he did. I felt guilty afterwards and said, my god, this guy was going through hell and I went there thinking of a sound bite, you know? But I needed to know the truth, I needed to find out where his father was. Knowing this would help me explain the world who killed these people. I thought if this man wants justice, he needs to tell where his father went missing. He actually told me, "My father went to get his salary from the government side. He never came back. He went missing and now I find his body here." This helps me explain the story. These people crossed into government territory and then their bodies were found in the river.

Verifying Sources

AJ: What are the steps you take to handle and verify sources in a hostile environment, such as the Syrian conflict?

ZK: It really takes time to trust people. You must talk to them a lot, not just about the story but other things as well. You will then start to see whether or not this person is biased. Sometimes you work with producers or fixers on the ground in places where you do not understand the language, and you have to trust them. More often than not, these people have some kind of political leaning. I have

experienced this in many places where I do not understand the language. It takes time and experience to figure out people, but then you figure them out much earlier and you know what you are dealing with. When you know that this person has certain beliefs, you take things with a grain of salt. That is why I think it helped us a lot to go in and see for ourselves in Syria. You meet people, you start to trust people, you try them once and then you try them again. The first time you realise they have lied to you, you know they are not trustworthy. This takes time, it does not happen overnight.

AJ: What other signs or signals should one look for if one is starting out as a new journalist?

ZK: Handling and verifying sources is trial and error. I think I am a very different person today than I was five years ago. Every single day I learn something new, and every single day I make a mistake and I learn from it. This is the important thing. You must always keep an open mind about everything. You cannot trust when somebody tells you to take something for a fact, because everyone has some sort of agenda, even your sources. Sometimes they want to leak a message so they tell it to you, because they have other motives. It is not easy, it takes time.

AJ: Apart from trial and error and time, what other criteria should one have when listening to a source or hiring a local person to work with?

ZK: What I was doing, for example, in Aleppo city. There was one guy I had known for years. I always talk to him on Skype. I really trust him. But he is not the only one I speak with. I have three or four other people from the city I talk and I listen to, to see if they all tell the same story. Then I feel more comfortable about what we are reporting. If one of them says something totally different, I will try to make another phone call and ask again and again. You should not just trust one person.

Journalism as a Tool to Inform and Educate People

KR: As a journalist you provide information, but do you also have some sort of agenda you want to educate the public about, for example?

ZK: Yes. I think the most important issue is that a lot of people are ignoring the context. For example, sometimes we say the Russians are responsible for an airstrike in Syria when we are not sure whether it was a Syrian or Russian plane. Now some may argue what is the difference? Russia and the Syrian government are allies. Yes, they are, but there is a big difference. This includes phases of the conflict during which the Russians grounded their aircraft and refused to support the offensive by the Syrian government and Iran, an ally. Then there have been

differences between Russia and Iran, differences which at times have led the Russians to refrain from air raids to send a message to the West and to its own allies. Every battle, and almost every military act, has a political meaning and it is important to understand this and put things into context.

AJ: This is a particular story, which you know very well, but let us say you went to Greece and had to report on a story. What are the focal points that enable a journalist to bring in this context, what other things should one look for? This brings us head to head with "parachute journalism". To be an honest, contextualising and educating journalist, you cannot be parachuted somewhere if it is to be proper journalism, would you agree?

ZK: Being parachuted somewhere is not ideal and it puts a lot of pressure on the journalist. But most conflicts have the same actors, the government and the opposition, it is only their names that change. Most conflicts are between the people and those who have power. In most conflicts, the role of the army and the security forces are key. There are certain issues that are similar, such as when you need to ask the right questions and familiarise yourself with new actors and their positions concerning important issues.

You also need a very good producer. He or she must know the language and be able to read from different sources, as well as have the contacts to talk to different sides. When I am in a place where I do not speak the language, I make the producer call the opposition and ask them specific questions. Then call the government, see what they have to say. You have to understand the bigger picture. Even migrant stories, no matter how simple and easy they may seem, are not straightforward. Greece has a problem with the European Union and also a long history of conflict with Turkey. When you talk to officials, you have to take that into account and know this background to better understand their answers. You have to crosscheck, talk to different sides, see what the different players are saying. Both producer and journalist need to see the bigger picture.

AJ: Imagine you are a commissioning editor and you are about to send a new, young journalist to cover the war in Syria. You have asked him or her to bring in three, four, five human stories. What would be the criteria for a good human story?

ZK: You should not concentrate on the usual things that people already know, such as going to a refugee camp where you hear stories like, oh there is no food, there is no water. Do not get me wrong, I am not being insensitive here, but I think the pictures speak for themselves and everyone knows what living in a refugee camp means. It means you are not at home and you are living in horrible conditions. What is important is speaking to people from different camps in various areas, and each one of them has a very different story.

Here is an example from Greece. I was doing a refugee story and met a family from the Syrian province of Homs. What is interesting is putting things into context. Some may say that this family should not be eligible for asylum because there is no fighting in their city and the government and the opposition reached what is known as a "reconciliation agreement".

But that agreement, for those in the opposition, amounts to surrender and it does not guarantee their safety. This family told me one of their sons was missing and the other was wanted by the government, so they could never return to their home. Do not just concentrate on the suffering today, put it into a bigger context. From listening to this family alone, you can understand that the solution the Syrian government has come up with, these so-called "reconciliation agreements", is not working for this family. But as them, there are thousands more in the same situation. So, from this human suffering story, you can bring out a much bigger political picture where people can even understand better what is going on in Syria.

This is the easiest way for someone sitting in Sweden or Brazil to relate and understand what has happened in Homs. The guns have fallen silent, but there is no peace.

AJ: When a journalist is told to focus on people in a conflict, most often they bring home stories of suffering. Many do not have the capacity, knowledge or context to explain the wider situation. It takes a totally different skillset to not just focus on suffering but actually tell a human story. We confuse suffering with humanity and human-centred stories, which is not necessarily the same thing. There are nuances, if I understand you correctly.

ZK: This is true. When we talk about internally displaced persons and refugee stories we go in and turn it into a political story. We use the people as characters, tell their story, and let the pictures speak for themselves. The suffering speaks for itself. You will know that no matter the political settlement, or what they are talking about, there is no peace. It is not about, 'Oh, there is a ceasefire, people can go back home!' That is not the case.

Perceptions, Identity and Safety

KR: I am very interested in hearing about your safety, but also about what you represent of nationality, ethnicity and gender. Did these play any role in how people have received you? Did it put you in any discriminating situation, and how did you deal with that if it occurred?

ZK: A journalist's identity and nationality can be a challenge. Being Lebanese, for example, the first question they ask me when I go to rebel-controlled areas is: "Where are you from?" They want to know what is my religion and which

area I come from. Because Lebanon is a divided society, the majority in certain sectarian groups support either the Syrian government or the opposition. I avoid answering. I immediately say: "Listen, I am here, putting my life at risk, I think you have to respect that." Gender plays a role too. This can be a problem in some situations and a blessing in others. Being a woman, yes, sometimes men in some groups will not speak to you, but I think there is a way to handle it. It is in the way you approach people. You have to act differently, assertive, not aggressive. Just because I am a woman it does not mean I am weaker than anybody else. You have to gain people's trust, it is all about trust really and how you present yourself. An experienced female reporter will gain more respect on the ground than an inexperienced male journalist who is unable to show confidence and understanding.

AJ: Can you give us a concrete example of a situation where being of certain nationality or female made you act differently?

ZK: Once we were in Idlib and at that time Ahrar al-Sham and al-Nusra were the main forces on the ground, but al-Nusra was very different from today.[17] It was quite difficult to get access to their leader. They kept telling me: "You are a woman and he will not sit with you." I did not have another Arabic speaker with me who could go and interview him, and just sending in the camera and allow him to say whatever he wanted without challenging him was not an option, so we could not do the story.

Sometimes you cannot do the interview yourself. In other cases, I have gotten away with it, probably because I am from the region. I know the limits and I know how far I can go. At the end of the day, if you make a man feel that he is your brother and he has a responsibility over your safety, it helps. And there is this sense in the Arab world that men should protect women and treat them like their sister. Bottom line is how you approach people, how you act, how you present yourself, but once you gain people's respect then you can expect their assistance.

KR: Is it also part of your protection mechanism?

ZK: Yes.

AJ: One would say that this is adapting to the existing circumstances. One has to be culturally sensitive and sensitive to the local communities one is operating in as a journalist.

ZK: Yes. You have to drink the tea before you put the microphone in someone's face and ask him questions. You have to respect the other person. There are little

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17 "Al Jazeera. Syrians back al-Nusra despite 'terrorist' tag." AJE.
http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2012/12/20121214164411696160.html (accessed July 4, 2017)

things that you must do, regardless if you are a man or a woman.

KR: Maybe being a woman can also give you some advantages for instance in a female environment?

ZK: Yes. There was a group of women who were raped in Syrian government-run jails. We met in an apartment in Turkey and I do not think they would have said what they said if I was not a woman and if the cameraman was not a foreigner, who did not understand the language. They were speaking openly and crying and giving lots of details.

AJ: In terms of covering the Syrian conflict, the human suffering, and the politics behind it, what stands out as the most challenging for you as a reporter?

ZK: The most challenging is getting the truth, because in any war, people are scared. People may say things to you and you know how important this piece of information is, but they are scared to be recorded because it poses a risk to their lives. The most challenging is just getting the truth out, and I think this is because you have a responsibility. One day, history is going to hold you accountable for what you said and what you wrote. I take that seriously. When I look at a child, or somebody in a hospital, or someone who lost his whole family, I say to myself: "I am luckier. I went to school, I went to college, I speak two languages, I can tell the world what he would like to say but he cannot because he was less fortunate." It is a responsibility and that is what gives you strength.

KR: How do you deal with this and all risks involved psychologically and how do you advise young colleagues, who have just graduated and are keen to report on conflict zones?

ZK: I am not suicidal. I do not take unnecessary risks. It is not about proving yourself, I think this is very important, and you have to know when to pull the plug. You should not be embarrassed to say no sometimes. It is not being scared, in fact, it is braver to say no. For example, it was us journalists at Al Jazeera who pulled the plug on entering Syria at one point. We were the ones who decided to stop going into Syria. It was not a decision from the management, it came from me after an incident. Maybe I was just damned lucky and we managed to film without being kidnapped. I went back into Syria once after that, because I did not want the incident to become some sort of phobia. So, I went back in, but I was not comfortable anymore. I thought that every car behind us was following us. Then I realised it was time to stop. Even when we used to go into Syria, we discussed the story a hundred times: is it worth it, or is it just going to be boom-boom, bang-bang, the frontline did not move? I do not want to do that kind of stories. I want to do a story on the frontline and what it means in the wider context. Then you go in, you do it, and you come out. You have to take calculated risks and you have to know when to pull the plug.

We have seen many young journalists cross the border by themselves. They do not speak the language, they trust anyone at the border, ride in their car, drive down to Aleppo, and many of them ended up being kidnapped. We used to make sure who our contacts were, who we were going in with, and whether we could trust them. It takes time. You do not just cross the border and go in. We survived an airstrike a hundred meters away from us. We saw the plane with our own eyes and heard the engines. We had nowhere to hide except for one roof. After that experience, it took me a month to recover. Every time I heard a passenger plane, I used to duck a little. But it did not stop us, we went back in. Anything can go wrong, but that is not what you think about. You think about your story, what you are there to do, and you have very limited time. You have to know that you cannot stay in one place more than ten minutes. The team you work with in any war zone is very important. If you are not comfortable with whoever you are with, do not go in. You must be able to understand each other without speaking, you have to be quick, and you have to know what you are doing. Do not trust anybody who tells you, "Come, come, come, I want to show you something". You have to think a hundred times and you have to be very aware of what is going on around you.

I used to see them (young journalists) go into Syria with nothing, trusting anybody, without understanding the language, just because they wanted that story. They think that they will get their break, you know, because they covered a war in Syria. It is much more complicated than that. If you do not present the story in the right context, you are not doing justice to journalism, you are not doing justice to the people, and first of all, your safety and security is at risk. They had backpacks and were just walking irresponsibly. You really need backup and you need an organisation to be behind you. Covering war is not easy, because it is not "ten people were killed and that house was destroyed". It is a much bigger picture. There is a political crisis that started this, there are politics that is driving this, and there is politics trying to solve this. If you do not understand the whole thing, you do not get the story right.

Dealing with Trauma

AJ: How do journalists protect themselves from getting traumatised in such situations?

ZK: You talk to yourself. You may come to look at ordinary conversations as superficial, but you have to accept that world, because other people are not seeing what you are seeing. It took me a month to not be nervous every time I heard the sound of a plane, but then I got over it. I saw those eighty bodies found by the river, one of them was a twelve-year-old. When we went back to the safe house, my clothes smelled like dead people. I did not sleep that night at all. I kept seeing the faces of those people, but two or three days later, you talk to yourself and you just go on. By that I mean I reconcile with myself and the realities around me. I am not being insensitive here. I am a very sensitive person, but you have to

say to yourself, 'This is my job, I am doing this for a reason'. The first time we were in Aleppo during the clashes, we were at the frontline and the rebels let us move one more street forward. I just sat there and thought about it for a minute. Then I said no, it is the same picture on this street as on that other street, what am I going to get different? So, I said no and they all started laughing and say, "Oh, you are a woman, you are scared". I did not let them intimidate me. I said, it is the same shot in this street as in that street, but in that other street, I can get killed by a sniper. In this street, I will get my story, tell the world, and go back home.

The managers of the channel are in a very difficult position. They are responsible for their employees' safety and security and it is understandable that they would try to hold you back when they feel it is just too dangerous. But my advice is that they need to listen to the team on the ground especially if that team is experienced in such situations. There are some employees who take risks for the wrong reasons, either to prove themselves or to be filmed dodging a bullet, but there are others who do this for the story and I am sure the management is able to distinguish between them. Also, management should allow their employees to choose the team they prefer working with in hostile areas. Team dynamics are important.

I will give you an example. I was in Misrata, Libya, during the uprising and I was not allowed to leave to cover the frontline story near Sirte. The decision was made on the basis that ISIL was present in the area. However, I had covered northern Iraq and reported from Kirkuk where ISIL was also present. So, what made it safe in one place and not in another. Sometimes, bureaucracy gets in the way. Kirkuk is actually in some way a more dangerous place because it is a city that no one controls. Misrata, on the other hand, is a city that one group controlled at that time. And when one group controls a city or an area, you know that infiltration by hostile groups such as ISIL is quite difficult, plus, we have experience going into frontlines. We know how to operate, how long to stay, what is the worst-case scenario. Every single conflict is different; every single frontline is different. Taking into account the experiences of the senior correspondents is crucial when evaluating risks.

AJ: So, knowing where one is going, making sure one is heard. You keep mentioning that you know how long to stay. Can you give a rough idea about what is the maximum one should stay in these kinds of frontlines, although every frontline is different?

ZK: It depends on the country. For example, in northern Iraq we could be there maximum fifteen minutes. If the other side, like ISIL, realises there is a camera crew, you can be hundred percent sure they will want to hit it, and it takes time for them to prepare. So, I would say fifteen minutes at most – get out, move. In Syria, ten minutes, because many people are informers, not just on the frontline but anywhere you are. Even in one certain neighbourhood you have to keep moving, because you cannot give them enough time to prepare, either to kidnap you or to target you.

Apart from your cigarettes and coffee, carry the bare minimum. I would travel light, as light as possible, and in small numbers. The bigger the team the worse and more dangerous it is. We have this bad habit of having four or five people in a team, but the smaller the team, the better. It is easier to evacuate, to watch each other. It is easier if you immediately need to jump in the car and leave. You definitely need communication, this is key, and make sure somebody from your team stays behind in case something goes wrong. For example, in northern Iraq, only three people go through the last kilometre to the place you want to reach: the cameraperson, the reporter, and the security. The fixer and the driver stay back. Being less people allows you to work low profile. You can film what you want, no one sees you, you get out and you pull back. The minute armed actors see you and know there is a camera, they would love to make a show. You also need people in the back in case they need to make a call or try to evacuate. It is much better to keep people a kilometre or two behind.

Zeina Khodr and her crew travelling in the back of a van during a trip in Syria in 2013. Photo: Zeina Khodr

Reporting Responsibly

KR: What about the issue of self-censorship? Like if you feel a story may cause more damage than good, will you choose to not report it?

ZK: The more experience you have, the more you realise that something may seem sensational, but is not representative of what is happening. Sometimes something may happen in front of you, but it is not representative of what is going on, yet it is a great story, a great picture. You need to take a step back and say, "No, this is not a story to be done because it will be taken out of context". If you do those kind of stories, then everyone will think that is what is going on, when probably it was a personal or isolated incident, for example. Do not be afraid to ask what may seem like a stupid question, because sometimes it will get you the real answer. I will give you an example. You are in Idomeni, Greece, you are a young journalist who did not follow the story from the beginning and, let us say, suddenly you are there and people are trying to push through the fence and tear gas and rubber bullets are falling over them. If you are a young journalist, you can easily turn this into an all-out war. You have to ask the question a hundred times, 'Has this happened before?' and 'how many times has this happened?' Questions like this put what you are seeing into context. Otherwise you risk arriving and hearing: "Oh, tomorrow there is going to be a very big protest, people are going to start marching towards the border." You think, 'Oh wow, this is a headline tomorrow', but when you keep asking, you will know that this has happened before. Maybe people are using this as a form of pressure to keep their story in the spotlight. Then you take a step back and realise that it does not become a headline as it is something recurrent. You have to ask the silly question: Has this happened before? What happened the last time? How big is this? Are they trying to do this for a different reason now? Just keep asking and asking, no matter how obvious it is, just ask.

KR: After your input, post-reporting, do you follow how people react to your reports on social media?

ZK: Yes. There are some people who act offensively simply because I work at Al Jazeera. I have also been told that ISIL should capture me as war booty, behead me, and put my head on a pole. At the same time, I have been told that I am an al-Nusra supporter. Others have called me a regime supporter. It makes me very happy that both sides have been criticising me. I do not get bothered and I do not read too much into it because I learn, because I am human and I make mistakes. You have to have thick skin. The first time it happens, you panic. After an hour, you calm down and say, 'Let them say what they want', because there are other people who comment and praise your work or tell you something nice. Just do not get provoked and do not get into discussions. You are not gaining anything by this, nothing at all. And if you made a mistake say, "I made a mistake".

Zeina Khodr and her cameraman Volkan Mustafa (behind) in an alley in northern Syria wearing protective gear, 2014. Photo: Zeina Khodr

Chapter 4

War on Your Doorsteps: Journalism and Activism

By Zaina Erhaim

A man in his fifties is shouting "We are peaceful, we are peaceful!" in a shaky and very low quality mobile video filmed in 2011.[18] He is trying to be louder than the noise of guns. His act does not stop the shooting, nor the advance of the uniformed security officers coming in his direction. They get closer and closer towards him, but he keeps filming. He continues, even when they stand face to face and threaten him with a rifle. He screams: "The world needs to see what is happening in Deraa. Shoot me, shoot me now! I won't stop filming. The world must see."

At the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011, many Syrians thought that showing the world the brutal reality of the war in their homeland would draw the world's attention and lead to a change for the better. They paid a high personal price to reveal how the security forces were shooting down peaceful demonstrators at funerals. They documented with their mobile phones how security forces tortured those who dared to dissent. It was a shout in the dark, a plea to the international community to help them. This faint hope was the main motive for many students, ordinary grocery owners, and carpenters to raise their mobile phones and document the harsh experiences they endured at the hands of the Syrian regime.

But things have changed over the years as war continues to unfold. These noble motivations that pushed political activists to become media activists are not the same they once were. The mediums they initially used to tell these stories of abuse and violation of rights have changed too. Activists are now perceived in a very different way by the public and the hazards they face are much more severe. Even some of the main principles of journalism such as objectiveness have been redefined in the Syrian context. For local journalists, there are far more considerations to be taken and risks to be calculated compared to their foreign colleagues.

[18] Abnhoran, Hariri. Youtube.com. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbxodEgLUHU (accessed January 16, 2017)

The motto, "Telling the world", stopped being the main incentive for these activists. Earlier they would risk their lives to report on a story. There was almost a sense of naivety. I am one of these activists. Little did we know at the beginning of the revolution that the world was capable of ignoring our suffering regardless of how immense it became. Now we have come to understand that. This brutal realisation disappointed us. Our expectations rested on the hope that the global community would help us. This was dashed. This coming of age changed our thinking and our expectations, especially after the chemical massacre committed by the Syrian regime in a Damascus suburb in 2013. Some 1500 persons were brutally killed by the government in one day.[19] This experience led many of us to question the very thing we were doing as media activists. We asked ourselves: "Why are we risking our lives to do journalism?" Frankly speaking, I still don't know the answer.

Documenting and recording current events is a revolutionary duty for many media activists. This is perhaps the only way they know how to do something for their people and motherland. Some of those who initially rose up and documented the revolution are still working as journalists inside Syria. This is what they know. This is the only way they can make a living now. Some are seeking fame, which is dangerous in war zones. Others hope that through journalism, they will help to stop the powerful from manipulating reality and rewriting history. They have refused to accept the regime's narrative of history unfolding.

From Heroes to Greedy Exploiters

The shift in the motivation for becoming media activists resulted from the disillusionment over the last five years, which had a profound change on these young people. It also changed the way their community views them.

In 2011, those reporting from the areas controlled by the Syrian regime as well as the areas revolting were perceived as the only window out of this big prison called Syria. At this stage, fear dominated the relationship between media activists and their sources. Anyone who spoke to the media was the first target of the regime's forces if caught, you could easily end up spending the rest of your life in one of the many secret dungeons run by one of the regime's various security departments.

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[19] British Broadcasting Cooperation. "Syria chemical attack, what we know." BBC News.
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As the revolution got steam and the rebels gained control of some areas, people were more willing to speak. There was a sigh of relief. People were more relaxed when dealing with media outlets. Journalists were seen as leaders in their communities. It was a badge of honour. At the different rebel forces checkpoints, the phrase "we are media activists" was enough to get you through with a big salute from the fighters!

However, the regime started using extreme violence against civilians as well, and as years passed, the attitudes of our people towards citizen journalists changed. They were now subject to violence perpetuated not only by the regime, but sadly also by the very people they sought to help. Media activists were now seen beaten or even shot at by angry crowds during their attempt to film or take photographs of a massacre or the aftermath of an airstrike. Sometimes the crowds would accuse media activists of "using the public misery" to get paid for "blood" images.

Rebel fighters (left) carry their weapons and belongings as they talk to Syrian army soldiers, while rebel fighters and their families evacuate the besieged Waer district in the central Syrian city of Homs, after an agreement was reached between rebels and Syria's arm. Syria, May 21, 2017. Photo: REUTERS / Omar Sanadiki

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United Nations Report. "Report of the United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic on the alleged use of chemical weapons in the Ghouta area of Damascus on 21 August 2013", United Nations General Assembly Security Council, 16 September 2013. http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/997 (accessed January 17, 2017)
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White House Press release. "Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013," The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 30 August 2013.
https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/30/government-assessment-syrian-government-s-use-chemical-weapons-august-21 (accessed January 17, 2017)

The rise of Islamic state group (ISIL) made a bad situation worse. Fear spread like a wildfire. And just like the regime, the first target for ISIL were citizen journalists. Kidnappings, extortions and murder of journalists became a daily occurrence. "Thieves break the surveillance cameras before stealing," this is a lesson we learned the hard way. In other words, anyone who will document the crimes will become a target. Therefore, this criminal group was equally quick to come after us too. Ironically, ISIL's wanted list of journalists was leaked and revealed to be identical to that of the regime.

During these upheavals and dangerous times, new measures had to be taken to protect ourselves. Media activists had to adapt by changing the tools and habits used to report each stage of the revolution. Spy and mobile cameras became widespread. They used fake names and fake accounts to access and post on social media platforms such as Facebook, Skype and Twitter. Content was shared anonymously. Using real names, professional cameras were reserved for those few who became contracted correspondents and credited freelancers with local, Arab and international media outlets.

Many held onto their fake identities and turned to the written press to report on sensitive and controversial matters. We found ourselves between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, there was the rule of extreme groups that imposed censorship and severe restrictions on freedom of movement and access to the people. People were scared. They could not speak freely anymore. On the other hand, we faced the constraints and stranglehold of the regime.

It did not take long before Syria topped the list of the deadliest countries for journalists. In 2015, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)[20] classified Syria as the most dangerous county for journalists to work in, and for a good reason. Syrian media activists had a long list of journalists who were tortured, maimed, shot, arrested or killed. Hasan Azhari was one of those tortured to death by the regime.[21] Bashar al-Assad's government forces have killed media activists and civilians indiscriminately using so-called barrel bombs. Basel Shehada died in such incident while on duty. [22]

Russian missiles fired from a jet killed Wasim Al-Adel.[23] ISIL blew up journalists using car bombs and kidnapped Obaida Batal and Ossama Hassan.[24] Many

were never seen again. Others were slaughtered.[25] Journalists were hunted in Syria and outside of Syria. Some were literally assassinated with a silencer gun in a neighbouring country.[26] Any wrong move or decision could get you killed if you were a media activist or local journalist. You had to think long and hard of where to live, with whom to work, and what to report or not. The number of hazards rocketed. By the end of 2016, CPJ statistics showed that 107 journalists had been killed in Syria since 2011. [27]

Local vs International, Media Activist vs Journalist

Despite all the sacrifices made by what many call Syrian media activists, they are still being treated unequally. They are not considered as actual journalists by most, if not all, international media outlets. We are told this is because they are not "objective" or "neutral." What does "objective" mean in the Syrian context? Does being "objective" when covering Syria mean giving voice to a war criminal and his propaganda, and allowing the regime to justify their bombing of civilian areas, schools and hospitals? I do not believe the BBC, for example, would remain impartial to a latter-day Hitler who laid siege to their homeland or a neighbouring country.

How can you be "neutral" when you live under a regime where telling the truth is considered a crime punishable by any means necessary? You can have your bones broken, get choked, have a cigarette stubbed out on your eyelids or be subjected to any other means of creative torture. Let us imagine what would happen to a western journalist if they try to be neutral when reporting on ISIL. What will happen if they feel obliged to quote from Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISIL's self-style Caliph, to balance the "claims" and "allegations" of his victims?

I believe objectivity and neutrality are applicable terms if and when you report on two political strands, economic changes, social affairs, and so on. These standards cannot be applied in the same way when you have a tyrant proudly boasting about his forces murdering children while they are taking their exams. On the contrary, being biased towards humanity and human rights is nothing to be ashamed of, as far as I am concerned. For me this is what journalism is all about.

Theoretical definitions are not the only dispute between local journalists in war zones and their international counterparts. Foreign journalists have to make little to no effort to gain their credibility in the eyes of international media. They can travel freely. They have the backing of their embassies if they need help. This is

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[20] Committee to Protect Journalists. "Deadliest Countries in 2015." Committee to Protect Journalists. https://cpj.org/killed/2015 (accessed January 17, 2017)

[21] ANSAmed. "Syria: Hasan, death under torture at 24." ANSAmed.
http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/nations/syria/2012/06/12/Syria-Hasan-death-torture-24_7023930.html (accessed January 17, 2017)

[22] McEvers, Kelly. "Slain Syrian Filmmaker Traded Study for 'Revolution'." National Public Radio (NPR).
http://www.npr.org/2012/05/29/153937342/student-helped-the-world-see-inside-a-ravaged-syria (accessed January 17, 2017)

[23] Hammou, Ammar and Nelson, Maria. "Syrian journalists speak out: 'We are working in the most dangerous place in the world'." SYRIA:direct.
http://syriadirect.org/news/syrian-journalists-speak-out-%E2%80%9Cwe-are-working-in-the-most-dangerous-place-in-the-world%E2%80%9D (accessed January 17, 2017)

[24] Jason Stern, "Attacks on Orient News illustrate Syria's many threats", Committee to Protect Journalists, 30 July 2013. Online link accessed 17 January 2017: https://cpj.org/blog/2013/07/attacks-on-orient-news-illustrate-syrias-many-thre.php

[25] "Syrian journalist Khaled al-Essa dies after bomb attack", Al Jazeera News, 25 June 2016.
http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/syrian-journalist-khaled-al-essa-dies-bomb-attack-160625033330015.html (accessed 17 January 2017)

[26] "Syrian journalist Naji Jerf shot dead in Gaziantep, Turkey", Committee to Protect Journalists, 27 December 2015.
https://cpj.org/2015/12/syrian-journalist-naji-jerf-shot-dead-in-gaziantep.php (accessed January 17, 2017)

[27] Committee to Protect Journalists. Journalists killed by country and year. https://cpj.org/killed/ (accessed May 15, 2017)

in sharp contrast to the locals, who are mostly targeted by their own government, because they are journalists.

As a local journalist reporting on war, you are not afforded the luxury of distance from the people you are reporting on. This applies also to your sources. The sources you quote and the numbers of dead reported in the news are not far away and unfamiliar. They are your classmates, relatives, the girls and boys you had a crush on when you were in high school. They are the friends you spent hours with watching silly TV shows. They are people you talked to reminiscing about old memories until the crack of dawn. You are part of the story. It engulfs all aspects of your daily life. At the outset, you feel a deep pain and sorrow every time you report on a story. Despite this, our human instinct and coping mechanisms kick in. In order to be able to carry on with our daily lives, we eventually become numb. When you receive news of your uncle's death, for example, you ask how. Then you are told he died of cancer. Your response is surreal, "Ah ok great, so he was not turned into pieces by a missile." This is common refrain now in our lives. Of course, the circumstances vary, but this reaction pattern is now common.

When it comes to investigative reporting, and unlike foreign journalists, you cannot "burn yourself for a single news scoop," because you do not have any backup "home" to run to when you become a wanted person for the various warring groups. The same situation applies to your sources and people you interview. They cannot not go into hiding. Doing big investigative reports amounts to having a death sentence hanging over you. It is too risky to use secret recordings, for example. As a local journalist, you better have a visa and a travel ticket ready before you even start thinking of writing or publishing a major piece revealing a controversial truth that would put any of the factions in Syria in a bad light.

The move of every media activist is monitored. You have to watch out for what you post on social media. Think twice before uploading any pictures to your Facebook page. Consider who you speak to and what you say. Be particularly considerate about posting things on the people who love you and care about your safety. I urge all to consult with their close family members. I make my husband read every controversial article or Facebook post I intend to publish. This is to ensure it would not put me or him in a difficult situation. For free-minded and independent journalists, this is an excruciating way of working. You constantly have to look over your shoulders. If you want to survive, you definitely cannot publish all the stories you want to. I jokingly advise my colleagues that they need to create a secure folder on their laptop called "not to be published soon." Keep these stories there until it becomes safer to publish them.

When War Hits Your Country: A Practical Guide

For me, journalism is a tool or maybe a skill that provides me with the ability

to give a voice to those whom dictators, religious traditions, prejudices, and discriminatory attitudes want to silence. It is a medium to raise awareness, defend freedom of expression, and bring people close to each other by keeping them informed. It is a passion and commitment to those who trusted you with their information. You gain people's trust when you have the courage to tell the truth, and the compassion to be guided by true feelings of humanity.

Being a journalist in your war-torn homeland comes at a high cost on a professional and emotional level. You are dealing with huge emotional stress. Even though you might be able to separate these challenges on paper, you will not be able to do so in real life. You have to balance all these different things pulling you in different directions at the same time.

Tip Box

I. Personal:

• Be prepared to accept the possibility of you becoming the news.

• Be ready to sacrifice your personal freedom in return for being able to continue to working from inside the country. This includes not saying and wearing what you want.

• You must come to terms with the fact that you will have losses at the personal, social and financial level. Acknowledging that will help you prepare better for what is coming.

• Put savings aside to cover the unexpected.

• Your family, relatives and friends will be targeted when you publish the truth. They will be used to blackmail you.

• During war, socializing can turn out to be a hazard.

   - While on social or family gatherings, for example, watch out what you say and who you speak with.

   - Trust no one and never share personal information. Protect your privacy.

   - Be aware that at any given point you might end up on a wanted list of an armed militia.

   - Do not advertise controversial pieces you publish.

   - Think twice about how you and your family are perceived. If your wife or mother do not wear a veil, for example, this could be used to label you as "secular" and enemy of an extremist group.

• Labels such as "traitor," "government agent," and "western spy" will inevitably be thrown at you.

II. Professional:

• Focus on the human side of the stories. This might not get your story on the front-pages of international media, as they are usually seeking sexy topics about extremists, but it will get you respect, recognition and some awards as well.

• Your files, pictures, emails and mobile phones are a double-edged sword. Learn to protect them. Take at least a basic digital security training online. 28

• Be aware that the boundaries between your work and personal life disappear. Before you know it, your social media is all about news (mostly sad ones). Your "friends" become sources.

• Get insured. This will give and your family some peace of mind. Very few organisations insure their local staff. Make sure you seek alternatives. There are some journalism non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that provide it for free.29

Handling Sources

• Protect your sources by hiding their real identities even if they give you permission to use their names. People do not always think about the consequences of what they tell journalists.

• Be considered when you interview people. Civilians living in a war zone and who lost family members are fragile.

• Phrase your questions thoughtfully to avoid hurting anyone.

• Take time to mingle with them before interviewing them. Drink that cup of tea before you shove a microphone or camera in their face.

• Ask people about their lives. For you, they might just be a story, but they are real people with their own life stories. They want to be heard.

• Locals are your eyes and years. They are like "Google", "Trip Advisor", and "Maps" all in one. Near frontlines, ask them about clean food, shops, safe roads, story ideas, hospitals, and so on.

Dealing with Armed Groups and Checkpoints

• Establish formal relationships with heads of armed groups.

• Ensure you have consent from whoever controls the area you work in. These relationships will be valuable resources for you when in trouble.

• Consult the local population. They can guide if you are unsure about what to say at a checkpoint you want to cross.

- Gather as much information as possible. People will be able to tell you if the checkpoint is controlled by extremists, moderates, thieves, gangs, et cetera. Also, whether they target the media or any other population group.

- Consider if it is safe for you to reveal that you are a journalist.

- Have a sound story if you pretend you are a civilian. For example, I was once at a regime checkpoint. I played dumb blonde to avoid having my camera checked.

- On checkpoints controlled by Islamists, keep calm and let your male colleagues take the lead.

- On ISIL checkpoints, use a different ID. For example, I often used the ID of my colleague's sister and covered my face.

III. Being a Woman in a War Zone

• If you are woman, take even further precautions. We live in a patriarchal society and woman's behaviour is scrutinised more than that of a man.

• People will question your honour and speak ill of you and your family.

• Be prepared to be attacked if you challenge traditional assumptions related to the social meaning and demands of being a woman in the society you live in. As a woman, you are traditionally expected to be "shy." You are encouraged not to speak about daring topics or challenging traditions.

• Protect your personal photos. Do not share these. They can be used against you to tarnish your reputation.

IV. Mental and Emotional Care

• Ensure you have access to psychological help, because you will likely need it. This is a perfectly normal and a healthy need. You will have ups and downs. You will at times question your choice to stay and work in your country when most people have fled. You will feel hopeless and helpless at times.

• Take a break. Switch off your mind for a couple of days.

• Keep hobbies. Music, dance and sports are magical.

• Try to keep some personal space.

• People will count on your help. Get to know your limits. Never make promises you cannot keep.

• Your life is more valuable than any story. It is not worth dying for any story.

• Do not let the desire for fame take over. Most of us work in war zones like Syria because of our passion for this craft. We believe in journalism and its role in making the world a less horrible place.

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28 See for instance: https://twitter.com/Cyberarabs, https://www.facebook.com/cyber.arabs/, and http://www.salamatech.org

29 See for instance: Reporters without Borders: https://rsf.org

Chapter 5

Reporting Under Occupation in Palestine

Interview with Tamer Al-Meshal

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Tamer Al-Meshal has years of experience in covering war zones. He has extensively covered the Palestine-Israel conflict for Al Jazeera. He has also worked for the BBC. Starting out as a trainee, he worked his way up the career to become one of the Arab world's well known faces. For most of his life, he was based in Gaza covering Israel's numerous wars and incursions there, as well as the subsequent siege.[30] He has covered the wars in Libya and Syria. He is now based in Doha where he has dedicated his time to investigative documentaries.

   The Israel-Palestine question, the most central conflict in the Middle East, is one of the most sought after stories. Many journalists have made their names covering it. In the following interview, we chose to highlight the challenges of journalism under duress and occupation because it is very different to other war journalism. As a Palestinian, you live and sometimes die covering the story of your own people. This brings with it a whole set of challenges and opportunities.

Tamer covering Israel's war on Gaza in 2014. Photo: Tamer Almisshal

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[30] Aldabbour, Belal. "Gaza: '100,000 hours of isolation'." Al Jazeera.
http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/01/gaza-100000-hours-isolation-170131070726612.html (accessed July 9, 2017)

Awad Joumaa (AJ): Tamer, let us start with your personal history and experience. What was your first job as a journalist?

Tamer Al-Meshal (TM): I would like to think of my story as a tale based on will, hope and the dream to challenge all the difficulties my Palestinian community faces. I started journalism in 2000, as a trainee at the BBC. At the time, I was a student in Gaza. The year 2000 marks an important change in Palestinian history. This was the year of the Second Uprising against Israel's occupation, also known as the Intifada.[31] I first joined the media world as a trainee and later became a correspondent for The Arabic Service of the BBC World Service in 2006. It took me six years to move from my position as a trainee to that of a translator. Then I became a part-time producer, and eventually a full-time producer. After years of hard work, I was finally appointed as correspondent.

The process of becoming a correspondent is similar to that of building a house. I always say that I graduated twice: once as a journalist student from the university in Gaza, and then as a journalist working with the BBC. During that time, I covered some of the most difficult events in Gaza. There were Israeli invasions, assassinations of Palestinian figures, and airstrikes between 2002-2006. I joined Al Jazeera in March 2008. Just after that, a war broke out in Gaza. This was the first major test for me. I was either going to make it and become a good correspondent, or fail. The war catapulted my career as a war correspondent in the Arab World. I have since gone on to cover not only Gaza but also the conflicts in Syria, Libya and Egypt.

Covering Occupation in Your Own Country

AJ: You became very much involved in Gaza and turned to be one of the most experienced journalists working there. How do you approach a conflict that you are actually living inside?

TM: You are not like a visiting correspondent coming from another country reporting on a foreign country. It is something else. There are many challenges and there are many important angles to focus on. First, you are covering the stories of your people. This means your brothers, sisters, neighbours and friends. Thus, human reality is a very important angle. Second, as a Palestinian, this is your cause. You cannot isolate yourself from your basic values or beliefs. Before you are a journalist, you are Palestinian, a human being. You are a refugee from a refugee family. You are entangled and suffer from Israel's occupation.

Thinking back of my childhood, we always used to hear about Israeli curfews, not being able to go to school, Israeli attacks on our houses, and so on. You are connected to everything around you. They arrested many of my neighbours, my

31 "Al-Aqsa Intifada timeline, BBC, 24 September 2004. Online link accessed 8 July 2017: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3677206.stm

friends, my brothers, and even me. I have been stopped many times by Israeli soldiers. So, you have this background, which forms the basis of your daily thoughts and behaviour. Then there is your professional attitude. You are part of the "cause" because you live here, but you have to balance this out with your professionalism. Working as a journalist, you have to have a higher degree of distance than in other jobs. You are not a politician. You are not a representative of your people, but you are a media professional covering your own cause and the cause of your people. Professional standards are crucial tools along with your integrity. Despite the challenges, you must ensure you hold high on these standards. When you cover a war, your friends, neighbours, and relatives might be amongst those killed in the war.

Tamer on the road in Lebanon during the filming of Abra documentary film. Photo: Al Jazeera

AJ: Can you give an example?

TM: In 2008, there was an attack on the house of a close friend. He was a journalist at a local Palestinian radio station. His name was Alaa Mortajah. He, and his mother were seriously injured in the attack. I went to cover the story, firstly because it was an attack against a journalist, and secondly because he was my friend. I went to the hospital and covered it live. The mother lost a leg. During the live transmission, my friend died. Imagine finding yourself in such a challenging situation. You have to cover the story of your own friend. You are the first to announce his death. At this stage, his family and friends did not know that he had been injured and died.

On another occasion, I received a call informing me that my cousin had been attacked. I was covering another story that day but I ended up not continuing my work. I had to leave everything behind to attend his funeral. This happens to us a

lot and you have to challenge yourself to remain on a professional track because of the pressure, both psychologically and socially. I am Tamer. I am Palestinian. I live here, I have an understanding of the cause, I am part of the cause. You think of your own ambitions and that of your people. You want to live as a free human being and to have independence, just like others do. This does not go against our professional standards. I can say that from my experience in different countries, but especially in Gaza, you have to accept that you are a human being. If you have an understanding of humanity and the needs of the people on the basis of human rights, you can cover human stories. If you isolate yourself, you become a tool. Understanding these human needs takes precedence over everything else.

Keeping Up: Editorial Policies and Ethical Dimensions of Professional Reporting

AJ: How was the response from international media outlets such as the BBC towards a Palestinian in Gaza covering these stories?

TM: You are talking about editorial policies; they are not red lines. You have to understand the needs of the place you work in and their editorial policy. Let me give you an example: While I was at the BBC, we called any Palestinian who blew him/herself up a 'suicide bomber.' The term suicide bomber has an extremely negative connotation in Gaza. The psychological impact of this term on Palestinians who do not agree with it makes it important. People can get angry because they see these people not as 'suicide bombers' but as 'freedom fighters.' You cannot go against the editorial policy of your channel. At the same time, you cannot go to a funeral and say to the people in Arabic 'I am here with the father of the suicide bomber.' You will be attacked. So, what is the solution? You have to be sensitive.

Let me give you another example: Once, I was in the house of the family of a Palestinian who had blown himself up at a military compound. Not wanting to go against the editorial policy of my organisation, I was also aware of the atmosphere I was in. I interviewed the father and described the action by not using any adjectives that would have been negatively perceived by the family. I interviewed him saying, 'I am with the father of the Palestinian who blew himself up.' So, I described the action, not adding adjectives or judging it, distancing myself from the debate. The most important angle and basic rule about being a correspondent in a country is to have the trust of the people. If you build a bridge of trust with people, then you will get credible sources and your work as a journalist will improve step-by-step. If you lose their trust because you do not understand the cultural context, the needs of the people and the atmosphere you work in, you will jeopardize your career.

AJ: Where do you draw the line between the personal and the professional?

TM: It is not a thin line, but there was a time when I was wondering if I should cover a news line so close to me. When my journalist friend was killed in the strike mentioned earlier, I was doing a live transmission from the hospital. When the anchor moved on to my colleague reporter in Jerusalem, the doctor came out and told me that my friend had passed away. I had to make an instant decision on whether to tell headquarters about his death and whether I should report it. I said to myself then, a journalist does not choose which news to cover. You have to cover the story. It is your responsibility to keep people updated and to tell the truth.

AJ: In Western media outlets, there is a tradition of not naming people who die, unless their families have been informed. How have you dealt with this angle in Gaza where you might know before the family? Do you go on air and report it, or do you wait till the family knows?

TM: In the Arab world, unfortunately, we do not have such standards. From a legal point of view, there are no clear laws about this. However, from a human point of view, I can understand why this might be problematic. From my personal perspective, I would prefer the family to know first because it must be shocking to watch the news live. At that time [referring to the case of deceased journalist Alaa Mortajah, mentioned above], unfortunately there was war – no Internet, no phones – you are in a situation where you cannot realistically implement the things you would like to. Many things happen during war.

Tamer during a shoot for his investigative documentary series for Al Jazeera. Photo: Al Jazeera

As journalists, we try as much as we can to implement the highest ethical standards possible, because media, before being a profession, is about human understanding, ethics and law. You cannot be above all of these. During war and under siege, where violations are occurring, and where everyone is silent about them, you want to do your job. During war, journalists are tasked with searching through thousands of events every day, so we have a responsibility to tell the story of the people.

I want to focus on something, which is important. The story and your experience come first. I will give you an example: In the wars in Gaza, we always suffered the consequences of seeing thousands of pictures and videos of people who have been killed. Through experience, you learn to define what meets certain ethical standards and laws of broadcasting. Accumulated knowledge helps you steer through this difficult selection process.

AJ: You mention the terms professional and professional standards a lot. How do you define a professional correspondent in a war zone?

TM: By this I mean, giving the event its right dimension, without exaggerating it and without minimizing it. This is professionalism. You are not a judge. You provide a story. You bring the necessary evidence and elements that can stand up this story. In the last war in Gaza, we made an important decision. We said, we are in a war zone and we understand that many people are questioning the credibility of television news in the Arab world. Questions were being raised about the credibility of the footage aired and whether journalists were reporting credibly on the events in Gaza. Therefore, we decided that most of our coverage on Al Jazeera had to be done as live transmission without any intervention or editing. Simply, let the story unfold.

AJ: We have talked about the case of your journalist friend who died during your live broadcast. How did you deal with the emotions triggered by this event?

TM: I would be lying if I told you I did not cry. At the end of the day, I am human being. I am a husband and a father. I am a Palestinian journalist working for Al Jazeera. Journalists who have a cause always find the willingness and determination to do a good job, because they always feel they have something to achieve. In that case, it affects you personally, but we always try, as much we can, not to become the event. This is another challenge. My mission is not to be the event or the news itself. My mission is to cover it. Because of that we are taking all security measures, not just for our safety. If we were to be the event, the event we want to cover would disappear. The news event is much more important than your personal story.

Protecting Yourself in the Field

AJ: How do you keep yourself safe? What safety measures should one take when covering a war zone? Can you give some examples?

TM: First, experience is very important because when you become an expert in covering a specific place, you will be your own best advisor.

Second is sources. You must always have credible sources. Safety is not simply wearing a flak jacket, a helmet, and other security tools. This is important and there is a great need for that. But your best safety tools are the sources you have and trust. They can give you the right information and let you know whether a place is dangerous or not. Many of the journalists I know and who unfortunately lost their lives relied on bad or weak sources. Wrong information, or bad intel can easily land you in a difficult situation for which you were not prepared for.

Third, basic security measures and tools cannot be underestimated. Many take this lightly. Editors and managers must always ensure their staff wear the needed gear. I cannot imagine someone who covers a war zone, a battle or an exchange of fire without a flak jacket and a helmet. But believe it or not, I see other journalists doing this all the time. When you are in the street wearing only your normal clothes, you might not just lose your life, but you might be the cause or reason for other people to lose theirs. You cannot be in the middle of a battle and not care about safety. You can be brave, but this is not the right place to show that you are brave. That is foolish. You can be brave in the way you do the story, the places you reach and the players you speak to.

Fourth, I do not look at journalism as a single event, which I have to cover and then leave. I am always thinking of future stories. I am looking for continuing the story in a way. When covering an event I am not thinking of the event but about the event in a wider context, therefore, you end up not taking unnecessary risks for a scoop. Also, as a man of faith, I believe in destiny. Our Quran clearly states that one needs to be reasonable and rational. Think before you act. Do not follow blindly. Protect yourself.

The Role of Journalism in Reporting War

AJ: Do you feel that reporting helps shape the environment around you? Does this kind of war journalism help shape the political decisions or the public opinion in and outside Gaza? Or do you feel it is a voice in the dark, or worse, a form of reality TV drama?

TM: I do not think the media is a voice in the dark. If you compare the awareness of people about the Palestinian cause and what is happening in Gaza today,

you will see a difference from a few decades ago. The level of awareness is much higher. You feel the difference when you travel around the world. Do not be mistaken. My goal is not to stir political demonstrations or garner political support. I am simply a messenger. My goal is to convey what is happening. Ultimately, it is up to the people whether they want to listen to it or not.

Palestinians demonstrate in support of Gaza during the 50-day Gaza War. Beirut, August 2014. Photo: DocuLogia

I am happy if my story helps attract humanitarian support for my people, or even aid for one individual. You cannot imagine my great happiness during the 2009 war in Gaza when, in the middle of the night, I received a call from my editors in Doha, Qatar. The previous day, I had covered a story of two children. One was injured when his house was hit by an Israeli tank shell. He lost his eye. Another girl had lost her two legs. My editor told me that the Saudi Health Minister had called into our channel and wanted the two children to be sent to a Saudi hospital. This was in the middle of the war. I did another story about a Palestinian child who was born in Gaza without legs and arms. His case was seen abroad and some people volunteered to take him to Sweden for treatment.

It is moments like these that reminds of me of the value of being a journalist. You are not the one supporting or donating, but you are the mediator. This is not a goal, but it shows how important and successful the media and news reports can be in shaping public discourse.

When I asked my editors to send me to cover other conflicts, I told them that I can do a decent job because the best person, in journalism, to cover suffering, is the one who has suffered the most. It is not about being first and second. It is about understanding and identification. When I went to Libya and Syria, despite

the differences in context, I could make sense of the suffering. Having covered such events for years, it was easy for me to connect with people and their tales of suffering. I know what it means when a mother tells me she lost her son or that her son was imprisoned and tortured. You know the feeling because you have lived through it. This is one of the most important things regarding experience, and experience does not mean just how many stories you have done. It has to do with the environments you have been exposed to. Your experiences shape you.

I will give you an example. I had a formative experience early in my childhood. I had been chosen to be a player for the first Palestinian national sports team going to Norway in 1995. This was one year after the PA had been established. We did not have the PA passport yet. Palestinians at that time simply held travel documents issued by the Israeli occupation forces.

At that time, I tried as much as I could to learn English. I was the best English speaker among the players. So, when I received my new travel document, I was first struck by its orange colour. I read the details and the information. The name was okay. The date of birth was okay, but when it came to nationality, it said undefined. So, what is undefined? I could not make sense of it. I told myself, I am in the Palestinian national team. I am going to play against other national teams. All the other teams have their national documents, but my document says I am undefined. All your life you grow up being told you are Palestinian, but your identification paper says something else. I was in shock. It was my first time to go out of Gaza. I had never travelled before or seen a plane. I was on my way out to see different people, other than Gazans. Everything was new. The other shock came when I started to meet people. I was a child, twelve years old.

I started out, 'Hi, my name is Tamer Al-Meshal, I am the Palestinian team captain.'
'Hi, where are you from?'
'Palestine.'
'What, Pakistan?'
'No, Palestine.'

People did not understand when I said I was from Palestine, no one understood. At that time, my goal started to turn from being the winner of my game, to being the defender of my identity and humanitarian cause. This was my first motivator to be a journalist. Fifteen years later, I started to realise something when I went to Libya and Syria to cover the wars there. They say journalism is an undefined nationality. It is true. I do not need a nationality to cover what is happening in Syria, Libya or any other place. My nationality became my humanity and my professionalism. I think these are the two most important things: humanity and professionalism. You cannot be a journalist if you are not a human. And you cannot do human journalism if you are not professional.

Journalism has no nationality. I believe in my cause, but I am happy when I see

colleagues from other countries come to cover Palestine and Gaza. I do not want to end up saying Syrians should cover Syria, the Gazans cover Gaza, the Danish cover Denmark. If you are human, you can cover any conflict.

The local perspective is very important, but so is coverage from abroad. If I am a Palestinian covering Gaza, that is great, but if you have someone from outside of Gaza who covers from a different perspective even better.

AJ: We have also spoken about the responsibility of war reporters, which is to get the message out, and you said that reporting in a conflict zone is different from any other. If you were living a normal life in Sweden, your perception and coverage would be different.

TM: We live in an uncertain world. Within one hour, the best place can be turned into the worst place. So, the media is the voice of different people. Now the challenge of journalism is not journalism itself, but who is the journalist.

What is the definition of a journalist now? If you look at social media, you ask how many people writing here are actual journalists? For example, most of the Arab Spring events were covered by activists. Are they journalists? Nowadays as a journalist you have to consider Snapchat and all social platforms as other medium for reporting, in addition to traditional media like television and radio. So, anyone who works in that field is he or she a journalist or not? You can no longer talk about one community of journalists that can be defined. Journalism is journalism, but the tools of journalism have improved a lot, even though the journalist and the community of journalists are now more undefined.

I believe our biggest challenge is to keep telling the truth to the best of our ability. It is not simply about being the first to inform people. I am sure people on Twitter and Facebook are always much quicker than traditional journalists. For the Twitter journalist, it is like one-two-three. He does not go to an editor. He does not make calls. He is concerned with always being first. Therefore, the challenge is telling the truth and providing context, rather than being fast.

AJ: What advice would you give to somebody starting out in this field?

TM: There is no start and end for journalists. It is always a continuous process. I do not think that you can ever graduate in journalism. You can never stop and say you are a journalist. You always have to be a student. Second, journalism is a relational and not an isolated process.

Today, journalism is like being on a train. Your ticket to this train is only valid if you keep updating it. You have to constantly be on top of your sources, follow the traffic on social media and engage. You always have to keep learning and listen to the experiences of others. Finally, you cannot be everything and everywhere. You have to focus on something that you can achieve and pursue that.

The problem for some journalists is that they simply want to be famous. If you look at the track record of celebrities, you will see it is to get instant fame following a certain incident or major event you cover. But if you want to be in this world of journalism your goal should always be to maintain your integrity, professional attitude and credibility.

Chapter 6

Tales of a Local: Freelance Journalist in Yemen

By Muatasm Alhitari

After Syria, Yemen has become one of the most dangerous countries for journalists. Following the 2011 protests and the toppling of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the Houthi rebels took over the city of Sanaa on 21 September 2014. Since then, journalists and media have been facing more danger than ever.[32] The armed rebel group has tracked down and detained most journalists who oppose them. Death threats, physical attacks, detention, abduction and kidnapping, as well as restrains on freedom are commonplace.[33] Many local and international TV channels and newspapers were raided. Presently, there are very few, if any, international journalists based in Yemen.

Close ups of protestors in the streets of Sanaa. February, 2011. Photo: Muatasm Alhitari

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[32] Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Since 2010, 19 journalists (17 with confirmed motive and 2 with unconfirmed) and 3 media workers have been killed in Yemen. In 2011, 2015, 2016 and as far as 2017 goes, Yemen appears in CPJ's list of deadliest countries for journalism. CPJ. https://www.cpj.org/killed/mideast/yemen (accessed July 11, 2017)

[33] International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). A report from the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate documented more than 100 attacks on journalists and media organisations during the first half of 2016. "Yemen: YJS reports more than 100 press freedom violations." International Federation of Journalists, 2016.
http://www.ifj.org/nc/news-single-view/backpid/1/article/yemeni-journalists-syndicate-launches-its-6months-report-and-observed-100-cases-of-violation-in-the/ (accessed July 11, 2017)

My story is similar to that of many local journalists, whether Yemenis, Syrians, or Iraqis. We all share the same profession in war-torn countries. As a local freelance journalist and cameraman, I have covered the ongoing Yemeni war in Sanaa, Marib, Taiz and al Hudaydah for several media organisations, such as the BBC and Al Jazeera. The focus of my work has often been on news, especially seen from a humanitarian angle.[34]   Despite persisting challenges, high-risk factors have played a central role and reconfigured the way I do journalism.

Screen grab of a local journalist surrounded by security forces while carrying out his reporting. Photo: Freedom Foundation

Perhaps one of the most challenging situations has been going from one governorate to another. In order to get access to stories you often must expose yourself to danger. Having to pass through checkpoints constantly gives you a visibility that ultimately threatens your safety in more than one sense. In Yemen, most of the checkpoints have been established by militias and are controlled by them. These armed groups systematically capture journalists that disagree with their ideas as a means to censor dissent.

Screen grab of a journalist being dragged away by masked gunmen. The video was shot for the Freedom Foundation report on press freedoms in Yemen in 2013. Video still: Freedom Foundation

Screen grab of the aftermath of a bombing in Sanaa during the war, in 2015. Video still: Muatasm Alhitari

[34] British Broadcasting Corporation. "Desperation on Yemen's streets amid war and poverty." BBC, 27 June 2015.
http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-33297659/desperation-on-yemen-s-streets-amid-war-and-poverty (accessed July 11, 2017)

I remember one morning I went to Sanaa to cover the conditions in which people were living, many of them suffering under the demands of the occupation. Before noon, I was walking back home, carrying my equipment with me, when I came across armed men affiliated to the Houthis. They stopped me and started harassing me with questions that overlapped with occasional shouting from some of the men. "What are you filming? Show us the last picture you took! Turn the camera off and do not touch it!" I did all they asked.

At some point, they ordered me to get in a car, saying they would take me to the police station. The relentless hostility continued: "You traitor! You work for Al Jazeera or al Arabiya. You should better admit it!" For Houthis and rebel groups supporting them, working for such media outlets is practically a crime. This is because they cover the Yemen war critically, especially when it concerns the Houthis. They would naturally accuse such channels for being pro-Saudi since they are part of the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen. I, of course, denied any affiliation with them or having committed any illegal filming. It goes without saying that all my efforts to deter them from holding me were in vain.

Screen grab of the video filmed by Muatasm Alhitari in Sanaa, 2015. Video still: BBC

We arrived to the nearest police station where an official from the same group confiscated my equipment and took my press pass. Threats resumed. The issue at hand, I quickly understood, was whether I was a traitor or not. To establish that, they would check my camera for photos and footage, and in their words "have an expert to review them."

Amidst intimidation tactics and accusations, they finally let me go but kept my equipment. Three days passed by without me being able to recover it or having any news about this alleged reviewing process. Eventually they called and gave me back my camera, saying that I had not done anything wrong as per their discretional criteria. The truth is that they could not turn the camera on to check my footage because they did not know how to use cameras. I was incredibly lucky, which is not something many journalists languishing in prison can say. Their fate remains unknown.

There are too many war stories to tell which reflect the cost of being a journalist in Yemen today. When the Arab Coalition[35] was shelling the presidential residence where the ousted President Ali Abdullah Saleh was staying,[36] I went with a group of journalists and photographers to cover the story. The coalition's operation was still in its early stages. All journalists were allowed into the house after a thorough inspection and the confiscation of their press passes, equipment and mobile phones. We were only left with our cameras and one memory card each.

The destroyed house of former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, 2015. Photo: Muatasm Alhitari

[35] The Arab Coalition refers to the Saudi Arabian-led military coalition that has been carrying out attacks in Yemen against Houthi rebels and in support of the Yemeni government. Supporting states include Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan. Other countries that have been linked to the Saudi-led group, as per a United Nations report, are the United States, Great Britain, France, and Malaysia.

Nichols, Michelle. "U.N. experts warn Saudi-led coalition allies over war crimes in Yemen." Reuters. http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-un-idUSKBN15D0SB (accessed August 11, 2017)

[36] Warplanes from the coalition led by Saudi Arabia bombed the residence of Ali Abdullah Saleh in the capital, Sanaa, but Yemen's former president escaped. Saleh, who stepped down in 2012 following a year of deadly nationwide protests against his three-decade rule, is accused of siding with Houthi fighters who ousted President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi in 2015.

"Coalition bombs ex-Yemen president Saleh's residence." Al Jazeera, 10 May 2015. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/cloneofstrikes-yemen-saada-breach-international--150510035539400.html (accessed July 11, 2017)

We covered the event and walked around the ousted president's residence, which was being targeted. I took all the pictures I needed, but the worry and fear that the bombing would resume never left me. I started speaking with my colleagues to try to make them aware of the dangers of staying any longer in this place, but it was in vain. I decided to leave with one of my friends. Many journalists and photographers remained inside. A few minutes after we got out, airplanes hovered above us and shelled the palace. Many of my fellow journalists were injured in the aftermath.

Nobody is safe in war. However, as a journalist, there are actions that you can take to put yourself in a less vulnerable situation. This is specially so when you are a freelance journalist, as you will face more challenges than colleagues that work as full time staff of well-established media outlets.

Freelance journalists lack access to hostile environment training, for example. Usually they do not have the means to buy protective gear, such as bulletproof vests and ballistic helmets, because they cannot afford it. They also lack insurance. Typically, they cannot rely on any support network, as opposed to journalists who are backed by a media outlet. Some of the consequences of this are, for example, the lack of access to a legal team if detained or arrested and the lack of back-up of a crew if immediate response to a peril situation is needed.

These conditions clearly put freelance journalists at a greater disadvantage when it comes to their safety. But also, they threaten the effective documentation of human rights abuses and war crimes in conflict areas. As happened with Yemen and Syria, there is a point in war zones where the only people capable of telling the world what is happening are local journalists or local media activists, also known as citizen journalists. Many of them work as freelancers. How will the world know if they are being killed and silenced?

Sadly, a common practice of some media networks is to hire local freelance journalists during conflicts only to abandon them right after they have satisfied their information needs. A few years back, I joined a journalist rights advocacy group called Freedom Foundation,[37] an organisation whose mandate is to stop these types of exploitational practices and call on media outlets to effectively protect the rights of freelancers.[38] One of the main things we did was to document cases of human rights abuses against Yemeni journalists.[39] We used to publish an annual report charting these abuses, hoping this would send a message to the

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[37] "Facebook. Freedom Foundation." Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/FreedomFoundationYemen/ (accessed July 11, 2017)

[38] Al-Arashi, Fakhri. "Freedom Foundation Expresses Its Concern on the Safety of Yemeni Journalists after Somers Killing." National Yemen. 2014. https://nationalyemen.com/2014/12/07/freedom-foundation-expresses-its-concern-on-the-safety-of-yemeni-journalists-after-somers-killing/ (accessed July 11, 2017)

[39] The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information. "Freedom Foundation Announces First and Second (Media Observatory) Reports of Violations Committed in Yemen During September and October 2014." The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 2014. http://anhri.net/?p=137548&lang=en (accessed July 11, 2017)

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world encouraging it to act.[40] We would also help journalists find lawyers (legal aid), follow up with individual cases, conduct traditional media skills training, and where possible, workshops for journalists to help them develop their safety awareness. Our work started making progress but came to an abrupt end when the Houthi rebels took over Sanaa.[41]

Tip Box

As freelancer, you should take measures to improve your safety conditions while covering conflict. Here are some tips based on my own experience reporting on the Yemeni civil war:

1. Your personal safety is more important than any news or image

2. When armed groups are in control of a city, always hide your photography equipment

3. Avoid going to targeted areas and wait at least two hours after the shelling stops before going to cover the event

4. When hearing airplanes, you must immediately leave and watch what is happening from distance

5. If the shelling is close to your location, leave the place as fast as possible. Consider that any plane that has just dropped shells cannot do it again immediately. It needs at least 10 minutes before resuming, so this gives you some time to run

6. If the shelling is happening where you are, do not run. Lie on the ground and take cover

7. If arrested by an armed group, always surrender and do as they tell you. Try to calm things down

8. In addition to taking hostile environment training, take first-aid sessions before going to the field

9. Without exception, wear protective head and chest gear when filming armed clashes

10. A golden rule is to try to stay away from direct armed confrontations

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[40] Freedom House. "Yemen." The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/yemen (accessed August 11, 2017)

[41] British Broadcasting Corporation. "How Yemen's capital Sanaa was seized by Houthi rebels." BBC News, 27 September 2014. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-29380668 The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information

A damaged residential house nearby the Republican Guard following an airstrike. Photo: Muatasm Alhitari

Sanaa, Capital of Yemen. Photo taken from the film on press freedom in Yemen in 2013. Photo: Muatasm Alhitari

A civilian plan destroyed by coalition airstrikes in Sanaa's airport. Photo: Muatasm Alhitari

PART 2

From the Digital Trenches: Transforming War Coverage

Chapter 7

Digital Sherlocks: Open Source Investigation and News Verification During Wartime

By Christiaan Triebert and Hadi Al-Khatib[42]

Truth, it has been said, is the first casualty of war. In the digital age, where anyone with a smartphone and internet access can produce and share stories at a fast pace, this thought is perhaps more relevant than ever.

On 16 March, 2017, almost 300 people gathered for the Ishaa night prayers in the Omar ibn al-Khattab mosque south of al-Jinah, in northern Syria. At 6:55 PM local time, an airstrike targeted the religious complex, killing at least 38 individuals – according to claims made by locals. [43]

How can a journalist that seeks to establish what happened that night find out more while not being able to visit the targeted site? Online open source investigation offers an opportunity to discover, verify and validate multimedia information coming out of war zones. These can provide you with more elements to answer the who, what, when, why, where and how, and enable you to tell a story to your audience.

The information ecosystem in a conflict setting includes a great amount of propaganda as part of war strategy. At the same time, activists and citizens start playing relevant roles in reporting what is happening, especially now that they have the tools to do so and are easily able to connect globally. Case in point: There are more hours of online video footage of the Syrian conflict than the actual time elapsed since the war began.[44] The increasing reliance on user-generated content (UCG) is in some cases the only information coming out of denied-access terrains for journalists. But this information may be biased or factually incorrect. Journalists, thus, need to have the skills and tools to go through the overwhelming amount of information produced during wartime, filter inaccurate information – whether published deliberately or not – and get the facts right.

This chapter aims to show how to verify UGC, with a specific focus on war and conflict contexts. The use of digital tools that facilitate reverse image search, checking the weather on a given location at a certain date and time, or geolocating a specific site, along with core journalistic skills, such as cross-checking sources and interviewing relevant stakeholders, will be examined here as key elements of fact-checking.

First, a brief discussion about the importance of verifying photo and video, as a continuation of this introductory conversation is crucial to raise awareness on how easy it is to alter and/or decontextualise images, and how this in our visually-driven world continues to be one of the main strategies used to misinform people.

Second, the best way to illustrate how valuable these verification resources and skills are, and show the diversity of situations they can be applied to in order to fact-check stories, is primarily done by examining four case studies where we have put them into practice. Finally, we describe the results they have rendered. Here the four cases:

1. The United States (US) bombing of a mosque complex in northern Syria
2. Authenticating WhatsApp messages of Turkish coup plotters
3. Fact-checking locations of official videos: Russian airstrikes in Syria
4. Proving the existence of a 7-year-old girl in Aleppo

Photos and Videos: Simple Tools for Verification

There are numerous examples of politicians and officials that use photos that were not related to the topic they were talking about. US Senator James Inhofe, for example, presented photographs to the Senate in February 2015 of what he said were Russian Army tanks in Ukraine the previous year.[45] Two of the three images he showed were in fact taken during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. [46]

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[42] Eliot Higgins, Founder of Bellingcat (www.bellingcat.com), contributed to this chapter

[43] Solvang, Ole. "Week of Carnage in Syria.,Civilians Killed in Attacks by All Sides." Human Rights Watch, March 17, 2017. https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/17/week-carnage-syria and http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/17/airstrike-mosque-near-aleppo-syria-kills-42/ (accessed August 1, 2017)

[44] Justin Kosslyn and Yasmin Green. "Montage -The next generation of war reporting." Jigsaw, April 20, 2016. https://medium.com/jigsaw/montage-the-next-generation-of-war-reporting-a04f4176aff (accessed July 14, 2017)

[45] Mackey, Robert. "Senator Inhofe Shows Fake Photos of Ukraine War." C-SPAN. February 11, 2015. https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4528166/senator-inhofe-shows-fake-photos-ukraine-war. (accessed, July 14, 2017)

[46] That is not to say that there were not Russian Army tanks in Eastern Ukraine: Open source monitoring indeed shows there were. See: Kivimä-ki, Veli-Pekka. "Ukraine Conflict Vehicle Tracking Project: First Week." Bellingcat. February 12, 2015. https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/2015/02/12/ukraine-conflict-vehicle-first-week/ (accessed July 14, 2017)
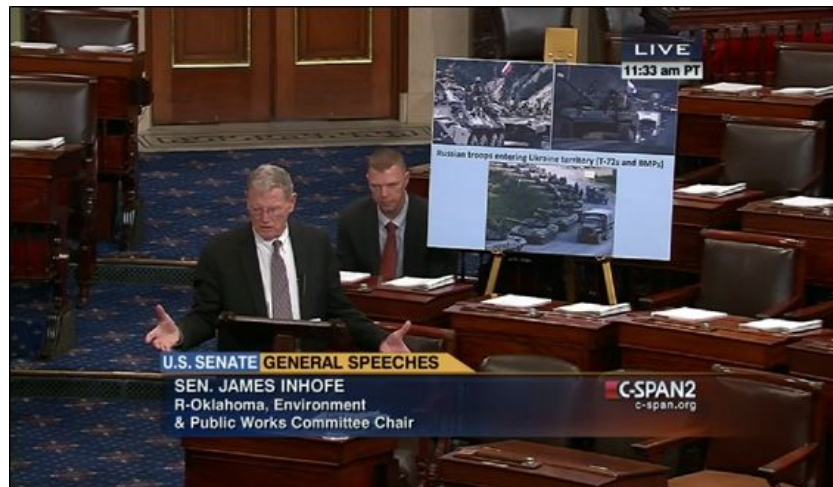
Senator Inhofe presented photographs to the Senate in February 2015 of what he said were Russian Army tanks in Ukraine last year. Two of the three images were in fact taken during the 2008 during the Russo-Georgian War. Photo: C-SPAN

Two photos of Russian tanks during the Russo-Georgian War in 2008. The photos were used by a US Senator to say they depicted Russian tanks entering Ukraine. Photo: (left and right) AP Photo / Mikhail Metzel

More recently, Syria's ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Bashar Jaafari, used an old photo taken in Iraq in an attempt to show the Security Council that Syrian government forces were not mistreating civilians in Aleppo.[47]   The picture he used to corroborate this version of events appears to show a woman being helped down from a vehicle by a soldier, an image originally published in Arabic news websites in June 2016, describing it as a woman being helped by Iraqi soldiers in Fallujah.[48]   Ironically, Jaafari condemned the use of "fake news" around the December 2016 battle for Aleppo.

Syria's ambassador to the UN holding up a photo, which he says shows his government's forces are not mistreating civilians in Aleppo (left). However, the photo was already posted in June 2016 on Arabic-language news websites, saying they show Iraqi soldiers helping a lady in Fallujah, Iraq (right). Photo: (left) UN Web TV[49] , (right) IBN News

For images posted on the web, there is a simple tool to figure out whether it was posted before. This is called reverse image search, and browser extensions or add-ons have been developed by, for example, Google and TinEye, and can be downloaded for free. With two mouse clicks, you can see if an image was posted somewhere before the alleged event took place.

Here is an example of how useful reverse image search is used in verifying digital content. In the context of the increasing media coverage given to the recent flow of refugees seeking entry to the European Union, a photo of a boat loaded with people was being shared on social media, claiming to show refugees arriving in Europe in 2016. Some people reacted stating that they were not refugees in 2016, but European refugees arriving in northern Africa in the 1940s. Neither of the claims was true. A reverse image search shows the photo displays Albanian refugees arriving in Italy in 1991.

[47] United Nations. "The Situation in the Middle East, Syria - Security Council, 7834th Meeting." December 13, 2016. Web TV UN.
http://webtv.un.org/watch/the-situation-in-the-middle-east-syria-security-council-7834th-meeting/5246494281001 (accessed July 14, 2017)

[48] Joe. IBN News. June 9, 2016.
..بالصور... الحشد الشعبي وتعامله الانساني مع الاطفال والنساء والشيوخ من نازحي الفلوجة
http://ibnnews.net/archives/27542 and http://archive.is/T8ynd (accessed December 13, 2016)

[49] United Nations, December 13, 2016, Ibid

Photo: ROPI / Alamy Stock Photo

Screen grab of reverse image search

Even though an event may have happened, sharing photos that are not related to it may cause harm by people simply calling the whole event "fake" or saying it has not happened. This is especially relevant in a war context, where all involved parties and stakeholders will try to influence public opinion. Never forget that information is a crucial and powerful weapon.

Another good example of this is when, in May 2016, the White Helmets posted some photos that allegedly showed the aftermath of Russian airstrikes in a hospital in Idlib, Syria. One of the pictures they showed had appeared in a news piece by Al Jazeera in November 2015, which showed alleged airstrikes in Aleppo that, according to Syria's Civil Defence, targeted residential areas and trucks loaded with humanitarian aid. The Russian Embassy in the United Kingdom exposed the White Helmets through its Twitter handle, demonstrating they were using an image that did not correspond with the event they were referring to, and that it had been published months before.

Screen grab of the Twitter handle of the Russian Embassy in the UK, at the moment it exposed the White Helmets. On the left of the tweet, the decontextualised picture can be seen on the bottom right of the tweet screenshot. On the right, a screenshot of Al Jazeera's news piece, published on November 2015, that shows the same photo

However, a reverse image search only does so much of the job. Searching for videos, for example, is significantly harder. Nevertheless, Amnesty International has developed a tool, the YouTube DataViewer, which allows you to find the exact uploading date and do a reverse image search of stills from the video.[50] The latter may not always be accurate, but it is a good start for verifying videos. You may wonder why it is useful to know the exact uploading time, and why YouTube does not initially provide you with this information. It does tell you the date, but not the local time in which the video was published. An incident in which a suspected US airstrike killed civilians in Syria exemplifies why determining the uploading time of a video – local time – is crucial to having an accurate publishing date, and how both pieces of information are relevant to verifying news.

[50] Link to access the YouTube DataViewer: http://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/custom-scripts/citizenevidence

On a video uploaded to YouTube,[51] a young girl can be seen amidst dust and twisted metal beneath the rubble of a destroyed building in Kafr Deryan, 40 kilometres west of Aleppo city in Syria. These images were among the strongest pieces of evidence pointing towards civilian injuries and casualties as a result of US-led Coalition airstrike in the early hours of September 23, 2014 – the first night of Coalition airstrikes in Syria. [52]

A thorough review of the content by Amnesty International, combined with satellite imagery analysis and reports by Syrian human rights groups, suggests multiple civilian deaths, raising the question as to whether this attack was proportionate and whether precautions to minimise harm to civilians may not have been taken. Yet, the US Central Command's conclusion was unequivocal: "[…] Open source images presented as casualties from the strikes actually came from previous [Government of Syria] strikes."[53] Now, the YouTube video may indeed cause confusion: It says it was uploaded on 22 September, but the uploading date reflects the time difference between Syria and US Pacific Time, where YouTube's headquarters are based and used as the official publishing date. Ignoring this can easily lead to wrong research findings, as happened in the past, and may confuse reporters and journalists seeking to verify critical information. Using Amnesty's YouTube Data Viewer, it is possible to extract the exact time and determine local publishing time: Around 6:00 AM local time on September 23, which fits perfectly with the timeline of the attack. It is worth noting that organisations such as Amnesty International have gathered compelling evidence related to specific attacks by Coalition forces from 2014 to 2016, often using open source material. [54]

So far, we have shown relevant examples of how reverse image search and other tools allow journalists to check visuals within a few seconds. But how do we go about more difficult cases?

News Verification Can Change the News

As a journalist, if you take the information that stakeholders are feeding you without verifying it – or any kind of information for that matter, especially in a war context – you are failing to do your job. Verifying news is pushing for accuracy, a core journalistic value, or at least aiming to do so. When we succeed, when we

[51] Qowjo, Saleh. جثث إنتشال. من تحت الإنقاض المدنين كفرديان قرية ريف إدلب الشمالي
Youtube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkuA3INULmw&feature=youtu.be&t=1m46s Filmed, September 23, 2014 (accessed August 11, 2017)

[52] Koettl, Christoph. "Dissecting a US Airstrike in Syria." Bellingcat. November 29, 2016.
https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2016/11/29/dissecting-us-airstrike-syria/ (accessed July 14, 2017)

[53] Amnesty International, Appendix. "Cases Of Suspected Civilian Casualties In Us-Led Combined Joint Task Force Attacks In Syria Since 23 September 2014." October 26, 2016. https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2450372016ENGLISH.PDF (accessed, July 14, 2017)

[54] Amnesty International, 26 October 2016, Ibid.

get the facts right, news verification can actually change the news: Establishing facts as a means to answer the W's of journalism (who, what, when, why, where) and how events take place, might result in changing the story. Sometimes, despite all of our efforts, we cannot verify a piece of information – in which case it should be relayed to the audience as a means of ensuring utmost transparency.

The following case studies offer good examples of the possibilities and challenges of news verification.

The US Bombing of a Mosque Complex in Northern Syria

To begin with, it is a matter of noticing something has happened. But if you are on the other side of the world, how can you notice a relevant incident, and how can you try to verify it? There are a number of ways for discovering events, and social media is today a relevant public space to access this information. Make social media monitoring a habit. There are a number of digital tools for this. One of them is TweetDeck, where you could start by putting together a list of activists, citizen journalists and any other gateway medium that may potentially be of interest. When looking for a specific geographical area, you could also try to find geotagged photos via services like EchoSec[55] and WarWire. [56]

On March 16, 2017, an airstrike hit a mosque complex in Al-Jinah, Syria. Locals tweeted only two minutes after witnesses stated they heard airstrikes. The first tweet mentioning a strike in al-Jinah, for example, was sent into the worldwide web at 6:57 PM local time – only two minutes later. The tweets published minutes after the incident from local citizens claimed that the village had been targeted by warplanes without specifying what or by whom. At 7:07 PM local time, a tweet mentioned that the airstrike was conducted by the Russian Air Force. Local media agencies echoed that claim. On YouTube, on the other hand, a steady stream of videos coming from the alleged targeted site would become available approximately 1.5 hours later. These videos were later assessed for their noteworthiness. The information came from different platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, in addition to media and other relevant websites. However, it may well be that these sources actually all refer to the same tweet, with or without mentioning it.

[55] For more information: www.echosec.net

[56] For more information: www.warwire.net

A typical homepage from a YouTube account subscribed to many accounts posting videos from the conflict in Syria

When you find your incident of interest, the next step is to collect every video, photograph, and any other relevant piece of information, and post them in one place to begin making sense of the incident. Wherever possible, identifying the original source of that information is key, as it allows journalists to:

1. **Verify whether the content is new**
2. **Discover new information posted by the same source**
3. **Identify any links those sources may have that can take you to other potential sources**

For example, in the mosque attack, we could identify the relevant YouTube channels quickly, and on the main page of those channels were other links to different social media channels. All this content is essential, as it may contain key information for the verification process.

So, how can you track down the original source? If it is a photo, for example, you might want to try a reverse image search. If it is a claim, try searching Twitter on a keyword and list the results chronologically. The aim is to answer who tweeted it first.

The next step is to geolocate as many of the images as possible, so you can begin to get a sense of the location, and start eliminating any videos or photographs that might not be relevant, or flag those that need further investigation. Geolocation is the exact determination of a location where a video

or photograph was taken. One challenge is that it is occasionally very tricky linking interior shots of a structure to its potential exterior, so we can prove the interior belongs to the structure we are examining. In the al-Jinah-case, a video filmed by a local inside the mosque complex and uploaded to YouTube not only allowed us to link the interior with the exterior, but also to confirm details about the building, such as the prayer room being below ground level, and connected to the outside by a staircase to the north side of the building. We compared the interior shown in the video with images showing the exterior, as well as satellite imagery obtained via Google Earth, Microsoft Bing Maps, and TerraServer. While the filmmaker's interpretation of the evidence in the area cannot be verified, the details provided about the physical space are essential in understanding the incident.

Once you have obtained as much information as possible regarding available imagery through tools such as geolocation and reverse image search, you will start having a better understanding of the area, so when you come to review statements from locals gathered through social media you can compare them to what is visible within the geolocated images. Through that, you might also be able to make sense of some of the more unusual things you have noticed.

Back to the al-Jinah case, the first clue that the attack was by US or Coalition forces was the remains of munition reportedly recovered from the scene of the attack.

Remains of munition reportedly found at the scene of the mosque complex attack. Photo: Sakir Khader[57]

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[57] Journalist Sakir Khader obtained the photograph from one of his sources on the ground. Moments after the attack, he asked them to find bomb remnants on the scene and to take photographs and gather information that could lead to determine who had dropped them.

The label was near identical to the labels used on Hellfire missiles, only used by the US and Coalition forces, so despite claims in some of the initial videos and tweets from the attack site that Syria or Russia were responsible, the evidence found in the photo pointed in a different direction.

That same night, the US Central Command claimed responsibility for the attack, wrongly stating its target was a location in Idlib, Syria. The geolocated images clearly showed it was in the Aleppo governorate, though close to the governorate borders. The Pentagon would later state, according to Bellingcat, that this may have been due to differences in internal reporting.

It was clear from the geolocated image that there was a massive crater on the north side of the large building in the complex, far beyond what a Hellfire missile could achieve. Based on witness accounts in videos posted on YouTube and Facebook, and text posts on Twitter, some claims seemed to explain this. Witnesses said that a larger bomb had been dropped, followed by several missiles. While there were small differences in how the witnesses described the events, the larger bomb or bombs and several missiles recurred in each of their accounts. Often, you will find witnesses giving differing versions of the same event, but usually not dramatically different. Nevertheless, those accounts always need to be compared to other evidence to build a clearer picture.

So, after we verified the location, and put together a clearer timeline of the events by cross-checking and comparing eye-witness testimony, there were still crucial questions that needed to be answered:

1. Can we confirm who is responsible?
Interestingly, the US usually publishes reports about the approximate location they are striking. And they happened to have published a report about striking what they said were Al-Qaeda militants in the Idlib province. The building we had geolocated was located in the Aleppo province, but only a few kilometres from the provincial border with Idlib. In combination with the photos of weapon remnants that we obtained through photos and videos uploaded by locals and local media, we decided to email the Pentagon for clarification. Did the Idlib strike refer to the al-Jinah strike? Yes, it did, they would reply.

2. What was the targeted building?
This is especially important in the mosque example as we have the US claiming the target were militants linked to Al-Qaeda, while people on the ground claimed they were civilians and members of a local religious group. With this we had to go back to previously discovered sources, see what information was being posted there, and compare it to images from the attack. Ideally, we would have images from before the attack, or even social media pages used by the victims. Groups like the Violations Documentation Centre and White Helmets will often provide details of the victims, and we can reach out to groups and individuals on the

ground via social media. No evidence of the presence of an armed group could be obtained via open source information. However, this does not necessarily mean there were no Al-Qaeda operatives. A question that would reveal more interesting information will be discussed now.

3. Was the targeted building a mosque?
Revisiting the incident as new information became available, and using that to review, verify, and discredit claims and findings, was crucial to reporting on this particular issue. Often new satellite imagery will become available that shows more details of the area before and after the attack, or, as in the case of the mosque complex attack, the US provided imagery from just after the attack.

An aerial photo from the Pentagon of the targeted area (left) and a still photo taken from a SMART News Agency video (see minute 2:20). Photo: (left) DoD photo and (right) SMART News Agency. Photo: Composition image by Timmi Allen/Bellingcat

The image provided by the Pentagon showed the building after the strike, claiming it was a "partially constructed meeting hall" and that they "deliberately did not target the mosque at the left edge of the photo in order to minimise civilian casualties."

However, open source imagery, videos, satellite photographs, as well as survivor testimonies collected by Forensic Architecture and Human Rights Watch, strongly indicated the targeted building was also a mosque. An adhan speaker, used for the call to prayer, was discovered on pre-strike footage, besides the mosque sign already in place near the mihrab inside the building.

As showed here, news verification enables you to answer basic journalistic questions: What happened? Who is responsible? Where did it happen? When did it happen? How did it happen? In this particular case, as it sometimes occurs, the question as to why it happened remains ambiguous. Were there really individuals linked to Al-Qaeda present? Or do the locals speak the truth? That is something we have not been able to answer satisfactorily, but it is evident that the building hit was a functioning mosque.

The al-Jinah case exemplifies how verifying news and UGC can provide your audience with accurate information about a newsworthy event, a responsibility that might find a more complicated path amidst the information chaos generated by war and conflict. By using geolocation, comparison and cross-check of information coming from different sources (from witnesses to the countries involved, such as the US), we were able to build a solid picture of what happened on March 16, 2017.

Authenticating WhatsApp Messages of Turkish Coup Plotters
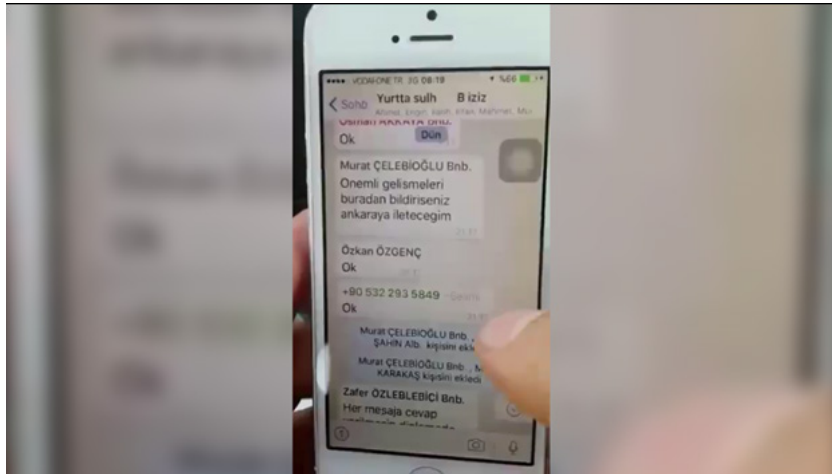
Screen grab of a video that showed a part of the Whatsapp conversation between Turkish coup plotters. The original uploader is unknown[58]

In the morning of the failed coup attempt in July 2016 in Turkey, a WhatsApp chat allegedly displaying a conversation between part of the coup plotters surfaced on social media. While it was being shared thousands of times, the question was: "Is the group conversation authentic?" Based on the transcript, partly provided by Al Jazeera Türk, each and every message was analysed to confirm the authenticity of the conversation.

"66th on its way" or "212 has been passed" – some of the messages included in the chat – may seem cryptic, but with some research '212' appeared to refer to a big shopping mall in Istanbul, and by comparing number plates of military coup vehicles and a database of Turkish vehicle registration plates, it was possible to determine that '66th' referred to the 66th Mechanized Infantry Brigade.

Subsequently, advanced searches on social media can be done, for example,

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[58] Triebert, Christiaan. "We've shot four people. Everything's fine." The Turkish Coup through the Eyes of its Plotters." Bellingcat. July 24, 2016. https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2016/07/24/the-turkey-coup-through-the-eyes-of-its-plotters/ (accessed July 14, 2017)

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to determine if military vehicles with the same number plate were spotted at the locations mentioned in the group app. In that way, each and every message was carefully analysed and triangulated with other open source material, resulting in an extensive reconstruction of the coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016.
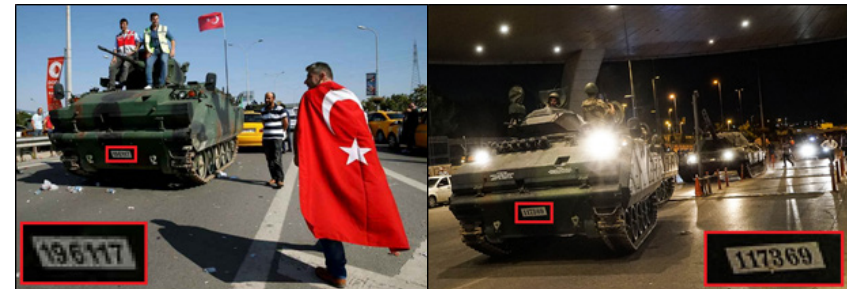
Military vehicles used during the coup attempt revealed more information about the units taking part in the event, as the vehicle registration plates reveal their military unit. These units could be matched with mentions of units in the WhatsApp conversation: '196' refers to the 2nd Armoured Brigade and '117' to the 66th Mechanised Infantry Brigade, both part of the Turkish Land Forces' First Army, 3rd Corps. Photo: (left) Baz Ratner / Reuters; (right) Getty Images

Again, to be sure that the photo indeed showed the location it was said to show, we used geolocation. Always remember to cross-reference visual clues in a given footage or photo with satellite imagery.

Fact-Checking Locations of Official Videos: Russian Airstrikes in Syria

Since the start of their respective air campaigns in Syria, as well as in Iraq, both the US-led Coalition and Russia have published videos purporting to show their bombs targeting military objects. Information-wise, this is one of the peculiarities of war: Content that perhaps in a non-war situation would not be produced and published. Content projected and presented by military forces can be used to deter and threaten adversaries, as well as to gain legitimacy among and support from public opinion. Fact-checking the following official airstrike videos resulted in some interesting findings.

When the Russian military started bombing targets in Syria in September 2015, President Putin claimed that the purpose of the mission was to fight Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL). Initial reports of the Russian Defence Ministry (MoD) claimed that ISIL was the only target of Russian military activity. Yet crowd source analysis of the videos purporting to show those airstrikes, ironically published by the Russian authorities themselves, quickly revealed that specific claims they made were not correct, as illustrated by two examples below.

Triggered by the discovery of two videos of the Russian MoD claimed to be filmed in or near ISIL-controlled Raqqa were geolocated in sites over 100 km west of the city. Bellingcat decided to test these claims by launching a collaborative effort to use the Check[59] platform to geolocate and collect additional information on these official videos. The results were remarkable.

Some videos were verified as being in locations matching the title and description of the videos, but many others gave inaccurate claims as to whose territory was targeted, or even totally wrong location.

A video posted on the Russian MoD's YouTube channel, claims to be showing an airstrike on an ISIL "ammunition depot" in the Raqqa governorate.[60] The Russian MoD implies that the strike occurred near Tabqa, west of Raqqa. However, as has been the case in dozens of other videos, the video was actually geolocated 115 km away near Al-Bab, in the Aleppo governorate. It is unclear why the Russian MoD claimed the wrong location: Both territories were held by ISIL at the time.

Other videos, however, claimed to show airstrikes against ISIL targets but were geolocated to areas where there is no known presence of the group – implying Russia targeted other rebel groups instead. An example is an airstrike said to have taken place in Raqqa according to the MoD, but was geolocated to Al-Lataminah in the Idlib province. While the location was classified by media outlets and activists as "rebel-held", the claim that there was no ISIL presence could even be substantiated with the Russian MoD's own information: Their map of territorial control presented at a press conference. By using this as an overlay in Google Earth with the geolocated airstrike videos mapped, it showed that not only this strike but many others were actually in non-ISIL held territories. Note that this is in 2015; at later stages Russia published more videos showing strikes on actual ISIL-held territory.
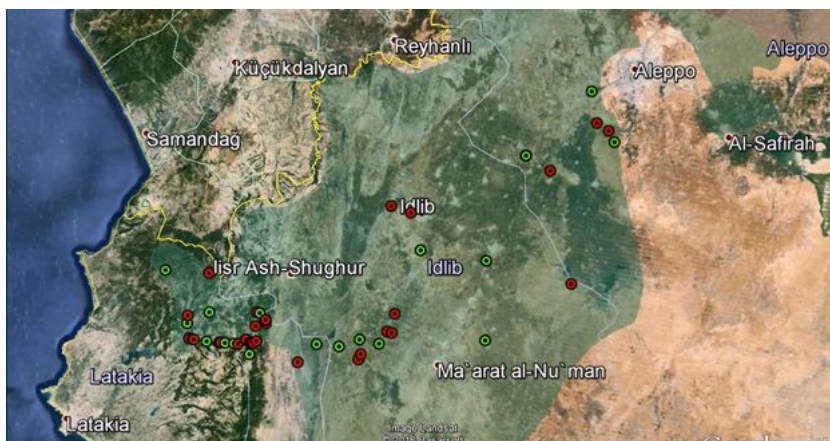
Screen grab of Google Earth, with two added overlays. First, the colors green, black, and non-colored are the areas of territorial control according to a map published by the Russian MoD

59 Check is an online collaborative platform to work together on fact checking multimedia information developed by Meedan, currently in Beta stage.

60 Russian Ministry of Defense."Авиаудар по складу террористов в провинции РАККА."YouTube, November 9, 2015. :
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kW9RqQYGa0Y (accessed July 14, 2017)

Secondly, the circles are geolocated airstrikes, green for a correct location by the Russian MoD and red for not a correct location.

Perhaps the most striking geolocated airstrike video was published in December 2015. The Russian MoD released a video of what it claimed to be an "airstrike against an oil refinery near Khafsa Kabir."[61] However, this "oil refinery" was actually a water treatment facility, "producing an average of 18 million litres of water daily," according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) representative in Syria, Hanaa Singer.[62] The structure shown in the airstrike video appears identical to Google Earth satellite imagery.

Satellite imagery from Google Earth (right) reveals that the supposed oil refinery near Khafsa Kabir, Syria (left), is actually the Al-Khafsa water treatment facility, located at 36.178345, 38.041224. Photo: (left) Russian Ministry of Defense, (right) Google Maps

Further analysis of ground-level photographs of the facility confirmed this was indeed a water treatment facility, and not an oil-refinery as claimed by the Russian MoD. Additionally, using a file type search on Google, we obtained an official document of the German company that renovated the water treatment plant – providing further evidence that this was in fact a water treatment plant, and not an oil-refinery as claimed by the Russian MoD.

These are all examples of how aerial views can be analysed against satellite imagery to establish facts. Now, geolocation is also useful to match a ground perspective to satellite imagery. This method has been used to proof the existence of a 7-year old girl in Syria, as our next and last case study will show.

Proving the Existence of a 7-Year Old in East Aleppo

As the Syrian government forces encircled the city of Aleppo in late 2016, a 7-year old girl named Bana Al-Abed gave a voice to many civilians trapped in the

61 @mod_ Russia, "#SYRIA Airstrike against oil refinery near Khafsa Kabir." Twitter. December 2, 2015
https://twitter.com/modrussia/status/672131862521905153?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw (accessed July 14, 2017)
The embedded YouTube link references the video of the purported oil refinery strike: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKbA_g-4zEE (accessed August 11, 2017)

62 Singer, Hanaa. "UNICEF, #ChildrenofSyria, Statement by Hanaa Singer, UNICEF Representative in Syria on air strikes against the al-Khafsa Water Treatment Facility in Aleppo." Children of Syria. December 1, 2015.
http://childrenofsyria.info/2015/12/01/statement-byhanaa-singer-unicef-representative-in-syria-on-air-strikesagainst-the-al-khafsa-water-treatment-facility-in-aleppo/. (accessed July 14, 2017)

city's opposition-held east. Helped by her social media savvy, English-speaking mother, Fatemah, Bana's Twitter account published pictures of their daily life, amassing over 300,000 followers, including author of the Harry Potter series J.K. Rowling.

Bana's rapid rise to world prominence soon made her a target in the online battle over alleged misinformation about Syria.

In an interview, Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad conflated Bana Al-Abed with "terrorists or their supporters" and suggested her Twitter account was a "game" and "propaganda."[63] Online critics questioned the remarkably well-written English of a 7-year old or why her house still had electricity and internet in besieged east Aleppo. As the speculation about her account became so prevalent, two Bellingcat volunteers decided to examine Bana's Twitter account, effectively fact-checking the life of the 7-year old Syrian girl.

The open source investigation used methods and tools such as social news gathering, context analysis, cross-reference of sources, geolocation, and satellite imagery, among others, to examine Bana's existence and authenticity. For example, they were able to establish that Bana was indeed tweeting from East Aleppo, and not from Turkey, as some of her critics suggested. The Bellingcat team used her videos and photos posted on Periscope and Twitter, including footage in which Bana herself appears, and geolocated them to the area around the same apartment block in East Aleppo where Bana claimed to live, using freely available satellite imagery from Google and Bing Maps. More recent satellite imagery also supported the claim that Bana's family apartment was bombed on November 27, 2016.

Also, the team was able to determine several facts with regard to other claims:

1. By analysing Bana's Periscope videos and reviewing news reports on her (from the BBC and Sept à Huit) they concluded that Bana and her family had access to electricity through solar panels installed on their roof. The panels allowed them to charge some form of car battery, which was then used to charge the phones.

2. As for the internet access, they examined tweets, news pieces, and reports from IT solutions company Dyn, to establish that there were multiple ways in which Bana and Fatemah could have gained access to the Internet.

3. As stated in Bana's Twitter account, it was Fatemah, her English-speaking mother, who wrote a majority of tweets. Fatemah, in fact, had been clear and open about her running the account.

Photos and videos posted by Bana Al-Abed's Periscope and Twitter accounts can be geolocated to a neighbourhood in East Aleppo using openly available satellite images. Online critics had earlier questioned whether the 7-year old girl was really in Syria, but actually tweeting from Turkey or somewhere else instead[64]

The district where Bana's family home is located fell to the Syrian government and allied forces on December 3. Bana and her family were subsequently evacuated to an opposition-held area in the countryside of western Aleppo governorate in late December 2016, along with thousands of others displaced from east Aleppo.

Full details of the open source investigation can be consulted on Bellingcat's website.[65]

You Can Do This!

In today's world, where so much information is being shared, it is easy for inaccurate news to spread, especially on social media. Therefore, fact-checking, verification and validation of information coming out of war zones is more important and essential for the future of journalism than ever.

We have discussed how using open source investigation, supported by digital tools and core journalistic skills, can help you search for stories and tell them accurately to your audience. A simple reverse image search will do when you are just trying to validate if a picture actually corresponds to the story that is being told, but other times, when trying to establish the who, what, where, why, when and how, you will have to approach the story in a more holistic way and this requires using several tools and skills to establish the facts. The discovery process will see you through to the next step, the next claim or UGC that needs to

[63] "'Sir Assad, I'm not a terrorist, I just want to live,' girl, 7, tweets president from Aleppo." ITV. October 6, 2016.

http://www.itv.com/news/2016-10-06/sir-assad-im-not-a-terrorist-i-just-want-to-live-girl-7-tweets-president-from-aleppo/ (accessed August 1, 2017)

[64] Waters, Nick. "Finding Bana – Proving the Existence of a 7-Year-Old Girl in Eastern Aleppo." Bellingcat. December 14, 2016.

https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2016/12/14/bana-alabed-verification-using-open-source-information/ (accessed July 14, 2017)

[65] Waters, 14 December 2016, Ibid.

be verified. In sum, these will point out which combination of tools and methods can be used for determining the authenticity of each specific 'fact'. Always keep your mind open, question everything and be creative in the ways you approach the content to verify it. Your aim is to build a picture as clear as possible. And if you do not figure it out, always be honest to you audience: Say you simply do not know. Before you know it, you will be a true digital Sherlock.

Chapter 8

War Stories Through Social Media: Audience Engagement and Ethical Hiring Practices

By Sakhr Al-Makhadhi

The horror of war is more easily accessible than ever before. Audiences have access to raw footage from activists and uncensored videos as soon as journalists do, sometimes even before. The openness of reporters – even from old-school print and broadcast journalists who engage with their audience on Twitter – has allowed viewers to go behind the scenes. They are with us through the news cycle now, instead of just tuning into a finished package on the evening news bulletin.

Watch AJ+ and you will see something very different about the way we cover conflict. AJ+ is not just reaching new audiences on new platforms, it is changing the way we tell stories. Social news and a more media-literate audience have allowed us – forced us – to reinvent the way we cover war and conflict. Audiences are demanding that we do not sanitise our coverage. Our stories are pushed on to people's news feeds: They come to our audience, not vice versa. Viewers are not making an active choice to sit down and watch the evening news bulletin – they come across us as they scroll on Facebook, or as their Twitter feed updates. This has implications for how we do things.

So, what does this mean? It means we have to be aware that putting shocking footage at the top of a video may not be appropriate. We need to prepare our audience for what they are about to see, either with a warning bumper, or through the language of our storytelling. Our audience does not appreciate a gratuitous video that does not tell the story of a bigger social issue. When we are showing graphic footage, we need to do it for a reason. Sometimes we get it wrong, and our audience is quick to let us know.

The Feedback Loop

Social news has its own unique dimension. This has to do with what we call the feedback loop and the idea of "engagement". At AJ+, the moment we post a story is just the beginning of our news cycle, while many television news journalists

finish their job as soon as their package airs. There is no instant interaction between broadcast reporters and the audience – at least not in the same way.

Often, our audience knows more about the story than we do. As soon as a video goes up, they start fact checking – if there are any errors, they will comment within minutes. That is the scariest moment for producers. It also imposes a much higher burden of fact checking on us than traditional broadcast media. The comments section is directly below our work, and it allows our audience to discuss, critique, and crowdsource the facts. Unlike television news, our coverage does not just flow one-way, our videos are the start of a conversation.

The comments section is also a useful way to source stories, or to move stories forward. For example, we did a story about babies born with heroin addiction (because the mother was addicted) and the moral issues that it raises. In the comments section, victims of this condition joined the conversation. They were able to interact with our audience, answer questions and, in effect, do a follow-up Q&A for people who had just watched our video. We commissioned one of the commenters to write about her experiences.[66]
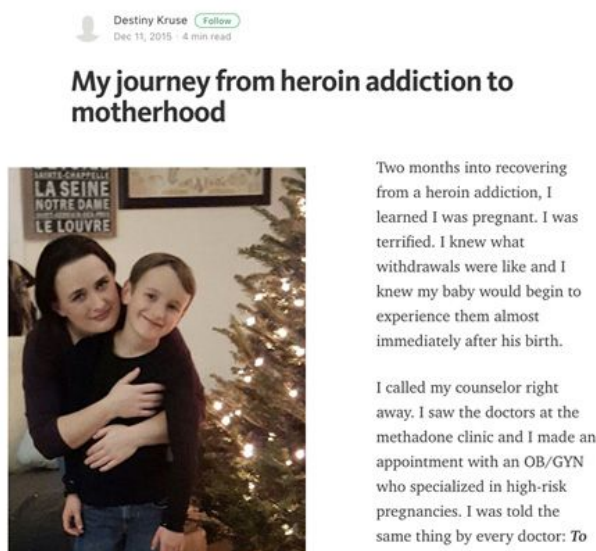

Screen grab of an article written by Destiny Kruse about her drug addiction recovery and motherhood experiences

When we did a story about a Syrian refugee family living illegally in Lebanon with two disabled kids who needed treatment, we had hundreds of offers of help. People were commenting under the video offering cash, medical equipment, even visa sponsorship. These potential donors connected with NGOs in the comments section by email, and succeeded in helping this family.

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[66] Kruse, Destiny. "My journey from heroin addiction to motherhood." Medium, December 11, 2015.
https://medium.com/aj-story-behind-the-story/my-submission-for-aj-1bfc5cb3da1a (accessed July 15, 2017)
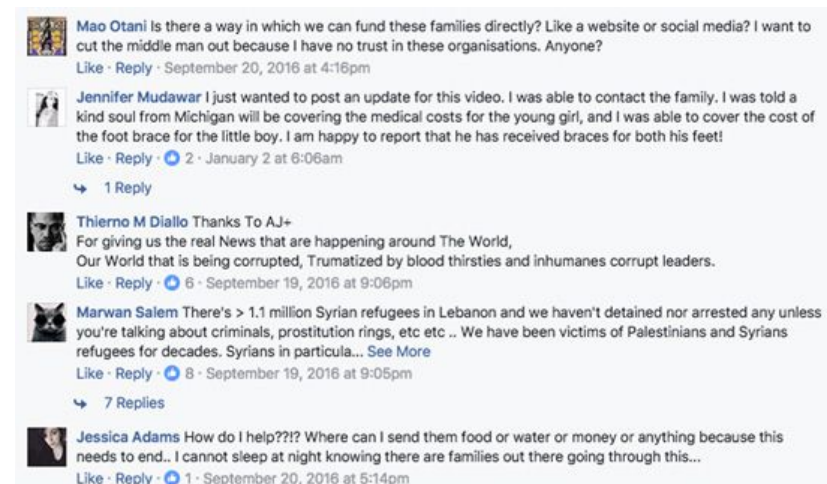
Screen grab of the comment section of the AJ+ video: "Syrian Refugees: Living Illegally"
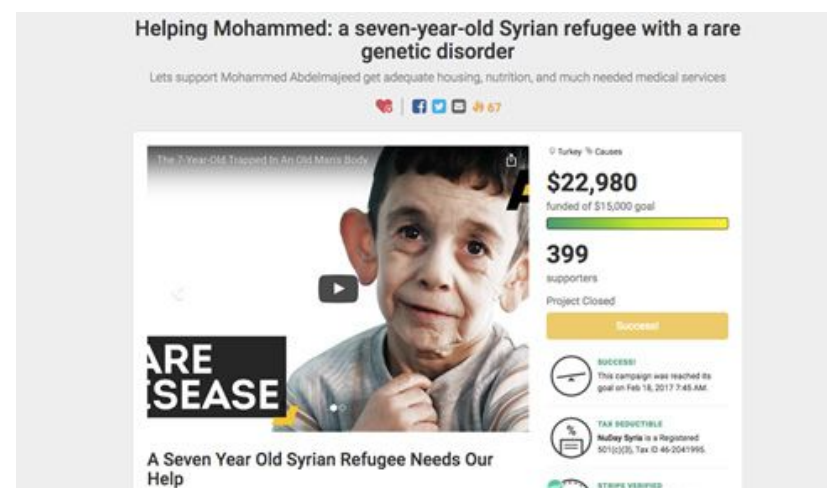
Screen grab of the fundraising campaign started by Team Mohammed surpassed the $15,000 goal

We also covered the story of a Syrian refugee child who has progeria – a condition that makes him age prematurely. He looks like an old man in a child's body. Within two months, the video had been watched by 21 million people. One of those was the man set to be the UK's first Muslim astronaut. He flew to Turkey to meet seven-year-old Mohammed, and we covered the emotional meeting where he handed over gifts and put a smile on the young boy's face. Also, a group of women from the United States were moved to help Mohammed after viewing our video. A 10-person fundraising team grew to more than 100 supporters. They started a campaign to help Mohammed's family to start their asylum process, so

he can live in a country that can provide him with the healthcare and education that he needs. [67]

Safety and Ethics

When covering war and conflict, outsourcing all of the risks and responsibilities saves money. It is less costly to hire a freelancer than sending your own staff to the field. But these kinds of decisions come with great responsibilities. Protecting staff and freelancers should be the top priority for broadcasters and publishers.

The death of a freelance photographer who had taken pictures for Reuters in Aleppo in 2013 was a lesson for us all. It was a reminder that we should not be chasing the story at any cost. [68]

At AJ+, most of our original material comes from freelance journalists. This raises a few issues: When freelance journalists pitch us, they may not have been through hostile environment training or be covered by our insurance.

But there is a bigger issue here – Al Jazeera is one of the world's biggest broadcasters, so even if we could protect ourselves and our freelancers, we could create a dangerous market. We are very careful about where we commission from – we do not hire freelancers in certain regions. The reason? If it becomes known that we are taking freelance material from, for example, Syria, that might encourage inexperienced journalists to try their luck, go in, and then pitch us. Take as an example the case of Sunil Patel, a 25-year-old who went to Syria to learn how to become a journalist and was very lucky to survive.[69] His story shows how certain regions can become a magnet for young journalists. It is also a reminder of how the risks of covering war can be magnified by a lack of preparation, backing from a media organisation, insurance and training.

So, what is the answer? While we cannot go into places like Syria, and while I do not believe we should commission from some places, we can still cover these stories effectively. We should never rely solely on activist networks. We should always develop our own verification and double-sourcing standards to fact-check the content they produce, or use verified UGC footage from news agencies. We have a responsibility not to treat activists as free employees. We should not ask them to shoot footage for us just because they are in the right place at the right time. What we can do is to combine activist footage with Skype interviews that we do from the newsroom. We interview people on the ground

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[67] Team Mohammed. "When social media isn't all bad." Medium, January 31, 2017.
https://medium.com/aj-perspectives/when-social-media-isnt-all-bad-5fd3bc62e0d7 (accessed July 18, 2017)

[68] Reuters. "Syrian photographer killed in Aleppo." Reuters, December 21, 2013.
http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-photographer-idUSBRE9BK09T20131221 (accessed July 15, 2017)

[69] Patel, Sunil. "I Went to Syria to Learn How to Be a Journalist." Vice, November 13, 2013.
https://www.vice.com/sv/article/i-went-to-syria-to-learn-how-to-be-a-journalist (accessed July 15, 2017)

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by Skype and then cut it and edit it into our final video in the same way that traditional media would use a field interview.

Does this cut corners? I do not believe it does. The same fact checking, verification and due diligence that we do with freelance journalists, should also be applied to video material coming from war zones. Of course, activists have an editorial line that they want to push, but we never take any video at face value.

We need to keep our colleagues safe – whether they are staff or freelance – without missing the story. The way that journalism is changing, where journalists are building new relationships with our audiences who are not just viewers but also contributors, means that we do not need to miss the story.

Tip Box

How to Commission Safely

When you are commissioning in a conflict zone, do not let your freelance contributor take any risks that you would not allow a staff member to. There are a few important things to check:

• Has the freelancer got insurance to report from a conflict zone? If not, will your company insurance cover them? Do you need to inform your insurer? Insurance is mandatory for freelancers working for you from war zones.

• Has the freelancer had conflict zone training? If not, can you sponsor them to get training before working with them? The Rory Peck Trust is a great resource for freelance journalists. [70]

• Is the freelancer legally allowed to work in the country? Even if they are not at risk from the belligerent parties, they might get in trouble if they are on a tourist visa – and that may endanger other freelancers, or even your own staff in that country.

• Do you have a bureau in that country, or a country specialist in your newsroom? Are there any country-specific dangers that you or your freelancer need to be aware of? Have you informed your bureau that you are commissioning a freelancer in their country? (If he/she gets in trouble, the first door the authorities knock on will be your bureau's. Also, the freelance journalist will not only feel safer if being backed by your local bureau but can also contact them to ask for help if needed).

• Is the freelancer working with a local fixer? If not, why not? Do you know and trust any fixers in the area?

• Is the deadline and fee that you are paying reasonable and fair? A low fee or an unnecessarily tight deadline could encourage the freelancer to take risks and cut corners.

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[70] Rory Peck Trust: www.rorypecktrust.org

War zones have become the most dangerous places in the world to carry out the act of journalism. But we have a duty to continue telling war stories to our audiences. The tragedy in Syria has become a graveyard for journalists. But it should not become a graveyard for journalism.

Chapter 9

Beyond Bystanders: Citizen Journalism During the Egyptian Revolution

By Khaled Faheem

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"You can say whatever you want, but you will pay for it. "
- Videoblogger Salma el Daly[71]

RASSD photographer Musab Al Shami covering a protest in Egypt. He would be shot dead later on by the Egyptian police. August 14, 2013. Photo: RASSD

Egypt has had three presidents since the founding of the Republic after the Second World War. They have varied in style and legacy, but shared one thing: their disdain for accountability and a free press. During the rule of the last president, Hossni Mubarak, suppression of both political opposition and the media culminated in a popular uprising calling for the fall of the regime.[72] Youth unemployment and police brutality brought to an end three decades of his rule. In the run up to what became known as the Arab Spring, key moments defined the lead up to the mass protests that toppled the Egyptian president in 2011.[73] It is in this context that this chapter on the youth news network RASSD (or RNN) should be read.[74] How was RASSD founded, why, and what lessons can we share from our experience?

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[71] Sistek, Hanna. "Online Journalism Booms in Egypt, But Not Without Restriction," Media Shift, 19 September 2011. http://mediashift.org/2011/09/online-journalism-booms-in-egypt-but-not-without-restriction262 (accessed July 14, 20179)

[72] Knell, Yolande. "Egypt's revolution: 18 days in Tahrir Square," BBC, 25 January 2012. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-16716089 (accessed July 14, 2017)

[73] "Timeline: Egypt's revolution," Al Jazeera, January 2011. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112515334871490.html (accessed July 14, 2017)

[74] RASSD: www.RASSD.com

A New Digital News Platform is Born

RASSD stands for the Arabic words Raqeb (observe), Sawer (record) and Dawen (blog).[75] It was established at the end of 2010 by a group of young Egyptians who had decided to create a Facebook page to provide media coverage of the 2010 elections of the People's Assembly of Egypt. Most national TV channels were at the time controlled by the Egyptian government. Political parties did not have their own channels except for some newspapers and a limited number of broadcasters from the opposition, namely the leftist and Islamist Muslim Brotherhood.

The emergence of social media created a virtual space for young people that wanted to break the chains of government censorship. We were "virtually free" to let the world know our opinion and the Egypt we wanted. Government control of media remained, but a platform that could be ours opened up. The birth of RASSD cannot be properly understood without thinking about the connectivity, proximity, interaction, and mobilisation that social media facilitated.

Demonstrators in Tahrir Square rally against Egypt's Interim Leader Field Marshal Tantawi and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. Cairo, summer 2011. Photo: DocuLogia

Our first goal was simply to tell people the truth about what was going on in our streets and uncover the electoral fraud we all suspected was taking place. The government wanted to win this election to drum up legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Previous elections were rigged.[76] So we believed this time would not be any different. Our group was mostly made up of students. We were not journalists or majoring in communications. We were of all walks of life and backgrounds. We

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[75] Mohammad Ayish and Noha Mellor, Reporting in the MENA Region: Cyber Engagement and Pan-Arab Social Media (Maryland, US: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015).
RASSD is said to have had other initiatives that led its main RASSD initiative.

76 Shenker, Jack. "Egypt's rulers tighten grip amid claims of election fraud and intimidation." The Guardian, 30 November 2010.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/30/egypt-poll-electoral-fraud-claims (accessed July 14, 2017)

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were medicine, architecture, business management and pedagogy students, to mention a few. Some were employed, others unemployed. Some lived in Egypt and some of us worked abroad.

We all met each other on Facebook. To tell you the truth we did not have extensive experience in media work, and we did not know where the road would take us. In typical youth fervour, we had a firm and almost naïve belief that we had to do something to build a brighter future for our country. The main reason why we embarked on this adventure was that we wanted to induce real change in Egypt. We saw the people on the street as our allies. It was with them that a change could be harnessed, we believed, and by telling and exposing the truth we could galvanise the public. Next, we started to teach filming to those who wanted to report on what was happening, and even how to secretly use mobile phone cameras to document the upcoming election as well as how to use live streaming applications.

In the lead up to the election, we mobilised people through the internet.[77] We ended up creating the largest volunteer correspondent network in memory. We named it "The Field Monitoring Unit: Parliamentary Elections 2010." This is how we started our e-news network that relied on what we regarded as citizen journalists transmitting the news of our country. We were the people, belonged to the people, and became a voice of the people. We operated under the mantle "From the people to the people".

Demonstrators commemorating the citizens who died in clashes during the Egyptian uprising at Mohamed Mahmoud Street. Near 6th October Bridge, Cairo, 2012. Photo: DocuLogia

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[77] Cary, Mary Kate. "Egypt Cuts the Internet in the Face of Revolution." U.S.News, 28 January 2011.
https://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/mary-kate-cary/2011/01/28/egypt-cuts-the-internet-in-the-face-of-revolution (accessed July 14, 2017)

RASSD succeeded in exposing the electoral fraud that year, even if the government declared a 99 percent election victory, as expected. Covering the elections gained our page a reputable image for publishing objective facts. This paved the way for a new and an unprecedented type of journalism in Egypt and the Arab world. The events that unfolded in the Arab world during the so-called Arab Spring, starting with Tunisia,[78] became a defining moment in the media landscape and RASSD was well placed to play a leading role.

Online Coverage of the Egyptian Revolution: RASSD's Model

After the coverage of the flawed 2010 parliamentary elections, we started strengthening the volunteer correspondent network we had built. We had to rely on people to take good and accurate shots, and this was a challenge. Our main task was to bring to the public the news that we received as professional and objective as possible, and most of the time this was being produced by citizens with no journalistic background. [79]

One way to improve our media coverage was by enhancing the skills of our correspondents. We started giving free e-training on mobile journalism and the use of relevant applications, especially Bambuser, to live stream events as mentioned before. We also published a series of articles on how to use mobile phones in journalistic ways, and how to communicate in a safer way through Facebook messages and through emails.

A training session for citizen journalists at the RASSD offices. Photo: Khaled Faheem

[78] "The Arab Spring: A Year Of Revolution," NPR, 17 December 2011.

http://www.npr.org/2011/12/17/143897126/the-arab-spring-a-year-of-revolution (accessed July 14, 2017)

[79] For a discussion on the boom of online news platforms in Egypt see:

Sistek, Hanna. "Online Journalism Booms in Egypt, But Not Without Restriction." Media Shift, 19 September 2011.

http://mediashift.org/2011/09/online-journalism-booms-in-egypt-but-not-without-restriction262 (accessed July 14, 2017)

On our platforms, we published videos and pictures taken by volunteers and correspondents. For credibility purposes, we had our own news classification: the news documented with pictures and videos were published under "RASSD/ Confirmed/ News" and any news without a picture or a video sent by one of our many correspondents was published under "RASSD/Almost confirmed/ News."

We established a field newsroom in Tahrir Square during the demonstrations. Events were covered online by other teams of correspondents in different Egyptian cities.

On the first day of coverage of the January 25 revolution in Egypt, we racked up 300,000 followers. In the following days, we received more than 20,000 messages from citizen journalists who wanted to talk about what was happening in their location by publishing news on our network. The speedy success became our biggest challenge. We were compelled to stay as professional and objective as possible when covering events. Our biggest achievement at that time was that people started believing they could change things, and that they had a say in what was happening around them. This came as a result of the RASSD pages becoming not only a news source, but also a space for people to interact by discussing and airing their grievances.

A training session for citizen journalists at the RASSD offices. Photo: Khaled Faheem

Major networks such as BBC, Reuters, Al Jazeera and al Arabiya used some of RASSD's news and photos, and followed the network on Twitter. Within days

of launching our online portal, our live streaming videos became crucial to global media organisations looking to report on what was happening in Egypt.

We also set up pages in different languages and developed networks in English, French and Turkish, to bring the news to Egyptians who speak these languages. Most of these networks are still covering news in the countries in which they were established. Some have stopped working because of a lack of volunteers.

Another task we undertook was conducting opinion polls on political preferences. Views became clearer for people after they had access to information that was not government-controlled. Our transparency and independence gave citizens the feeling that this was their Facebook page as much as that of the people who administrated them.

Tahrir Square at the moment of the announcement of the election of Mohamed Morsi in June 2012. Photo: DocuLogia

Problems multiplied when the government cut off the internet and phone services, which was a typical move from the autocratic regime to silence dissent.[80] Media blackouts could choke the momentum. We had to respond and find a way to keep the information flowing to our audience. We decided to setup a team outside Egypt. Its role was to collect and publish the news by accessing our pages on Facebook and Twitter, so our news production and publishing cycle would not depend on the whims of the Egyptian government and its censorship policy.

After covering the uprisings, we established six similar news networks in many Arab countries, all of them built on the concept of the citizen journalist:

[80] Richtel, Matt. "Egypt Cuts Off Most Internet and Cell Service." New York Times, 28 January 2011.

The Sham News Network in Syria, the Quds News Network in Palestine, the Lightning Network in Libya, the Jordan News Network in Jordan, and RASSD Maroc, in Morocco.

Settling Down

Our volunteers gradually became employees. Our operations grew. During 2011, we had launched various news services including flash news notifications on mobile phones. We also had a small income from the sale of our news pictures and videos. These services gave us more financial stability and helped us develop. We setup an office in downtown Cairo and continued developing our correspondents' skills and capacities, although at a small pace.

We invested in high-tech cameras and equipment to replace our over-used smartphones. Our official website was launched in April 2012. Now a truly competitive and professional media entity, RASSD became a serious player in the Egyptian media landscape.

From 2011 until mid-2013, we expanded and launched our own Radio RASSD. All our efforts culminated in setting up our own media centre, where we managed to train even more citizen journalists. The credibility and reliability we developed helped us launch collaboration schemes with channels like Al Jazeera, and Arab and Global News Agencies like Anadolu Agency, DW News Service, and the Middle East News Agency. Underlining all of this was of course the people's hunger for real uncensored news. Without the support of these people and organisations this would not have been possible.

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/29/technology/internet/29cutoff.html?mcubz=1 (accessed July 14, 2017)

The Egyptian flag with the words "Egypt - I love you" shown at Tahrir Square. Cairo summer 2012. Photo: DocuLogia

RASSD After the 2013 Coup

After the toppling of President Hosni Mubarak, covering the news in the field became easier.[81] We were in a new era. The degree of freedom in Egypt was unprecedented but things started to change after the military coup on July 3, 2013. [82]

Killings, arrests, kidnappings, and the threat of violence threatened all contributors to our network.[83] This was part of a larger campaign to impose a media blackout on the events taking place in Egypt. RASSD continued to challenge the dominant narrative despite intimidation by all means, by remaining committed to a set of core values: "[…] ethics and codes of honour of journalism, adhere[ing] to the journalistic values of accuracy, balance, independence and integrity, and convey[ing] the truth as it is without any bias or distortion". [84]

Our offices in Cairo were closed by the Egyptian authorities in July 2013. Our colleague, photojournalist Musab Al-Shami, was killed during the coverage of events in Rabaa al-Adawiya Square.[85] Many of our colleagues were detained. According to Human Rights Watch, "Egyptian security forces' rapid and massive use of lethal force to disperse sit-ins on August 14, 2013, led to the most serious incident of mass unlawful killings in modern Egyptian history."[86] Hereafter, covering news grew more challenging. The authorities' grip on power strengthened. Anyone carrying a mobile phone or a camera and walking the streets became an instant source of suspicion for the authorities. At this stage, the network of correspondents we had across all Egyptian governorates became ever more important to keep the public informed. However, the government's brutal crackdown inflicted harm and hampered not only the people's revolution but also the safety and well-being of our reporters in the field. An iron-fist rule prevailed. Once again, we had to rely almost completely on citizen journalists who risked their lives with every report they posted.

Truth_Price

Martyrdom

Rassd Photographer "Musab al-Shami" was shot dead by Egyptian police while he was covering the massacre of Rabaa sit-in on 14 \ 8 \ 2013

RNN

A banner designed by RASSD announcing the death of photographer Musab al-Shami, on August 14, 2013. Photo: RASSD

The Future

During the political developments and changes in Egypt, our editorial orientations were clear. We supported the Egyptian Revolution, its youth and the figures emanating from it. "After that, RASSD started serving the revolution. Its foundation was linked to the concept of 'escalating and directive media' given that it was established at a crucial time — just before the revolution's outbreak and its live coverage of the Two Saints Church in Alexandria on New Year's Eve 2011. The people were mobilised to protest against the ruling regime before January 25, 2011, in coordination with the 'We Are All Khaled Said' Facebook page, the most famous page to mobilise people against Mubarak's regime since the killing of young Khaled from Alexandria by the Egyptian police. Khaled became an icon symbolising resistance to the despotism and injustice of the Egyptian police. Thus, RASSD played a major role in covering the revolution's events." [87]

It made us more ambitious and willing to challenge our country for the better. The Mubarak regime, and now the Sisi regime, see us as an oppositional media network. Since the counter revolution, Egypt has descended into a repressive model of governance yet again. Free press and freedom of expression is at its lowest point in years.[88] Human Rights Watch says public criticism in Egypt is practically banned.[89] I now live in Turkey, in exile.

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[81] Wave 3 News. "Report: Mubarak resigns as head of Egypt's ruling party." Wave 3 News, 2011.

http://www.wave3.com/story/13975907/report-mubarak-reisgns-as-head-of-egypts-ruling-party (accessed July 14, 2017)

[82] Azzam, Hatem. "The Egyptian Junta Prefer it in July." The Huffington Post.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/hatem-azzam/the-egyptian-junta-prefer_b_5639590.html (accessed July 14, 2017)

[83] Hauswedell, Charlotte. "Egypt: Military continues detention of critical journalists." DW Akademie, 19 September 2013.

http://www.dw.com/en/egypt-military-continues-detention-of-critical-journalists/a-17097666 (accessed July 17, 2017)

A RASSD photographer named Musaab Al-Shami was killed while on duty by four bullets in the head and chest during the crackdown on the Rabaa sit-in. Egyptian authorities were accused of his death.

See also RASSD press release of August 2013: "Rassd News Network: Brutal Killings and Arrests."

http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO1308/S00486/rassd-news-network-brutal-killings-and-arrests.htm (accessed July 14, 2017)

[84] RASSD Press Release. "RASSD News Network: Brutal Killings and Arrests." RASSD, 27 August 2013.

http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO1308/S00486/RASSD-news-network-brutal-killings-and-arrests.htm (accessed July 14, 2017)

[85] Human Rights Watch. "Egypt: Security Forces Used Excessive Lethal Force." Human Rights Watch, 19 August 2013.

https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/19/egypt-security-forces-used-excessive-lethal-force (accessed July 14, 2017)

[86] Human Rights Watch, 2013, Ibid.

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[87] Awad, Mokhtar. "The role of traditional and new media in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's internal power struggle." Project on the Middle East Political Science, 28 October 2016.

https://pomeps.org/2017/01/23/the-role-of-traditional-and-new-media-in-the-egyptian-muslim-brotherhoods-internal-power-struggle/#_ednref2 (accessed July 14, 2017)

88 Alkarma. "Egypt: RASSD News Network Journalist Arbitrarily Detained Since August 2013." Alkarma, 2 October 2014.

https://www.alkarama.org/en/articles/egypt-RASSD-news-network-journalist-arbitrarily-detained-august-2013 (accessed July 14, 2017)

89 Human Rights Watch. "Egypt Events of 2016." Human Rights Watch. 2016. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/egypt (accessed July 14, 2017)

The Egyptian regime tried to discredit us by labelling us as biased with political orientations.[90] Many have accused us of being members of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is not my intention to dwell on this argument but rather share with you lessons we learned from our experience in covering Egypt and the Arab Spring. Some have described us as pro-democracy activists. Others highlight that we simply did not report news but instead tried to shape it.

Journalists' appeal accepted in Rabaa trial

Abdullah Al-Fakharany, Samy Mostafa and others were sentenced to life imprisonment

✎ Amira El-Fekki   ⏱ December 3, 2015   💬 0 Comments

Newspaper snippet talking about the trial of the RASSD journalists in 2015. Several journalists were charged with "disturbing the peace and spreading chaos" in the coverage of the dispersal of the sit in opposing the military coup. RASSD journalists were also charged with "forming an operations room to direct the Muslim Brotherhood to defy the government." All charges were denied by the journalists. Photo: Getty Images

In my opinion, classifying media outlets is not in itself the problem. You cannot be completely unbiased in a political imbroglio like Egypt.[91] For example, the New York Times declared its support for Hillary Clinton during the American presidential election. But the most important thing is to remain credible, objective

[90] Committee to Protect Journalists. "Egypt sentences three journalists to life in prison." CPJ, 1 December 2014.

https://cpj.org/2015/04/egypt-sentences-three-journalists-to-life-in-priso.php (accessed July 14, 2017)

[91] Alkarma, "Egypt: RASSD News Network Journalist Arbitrarily Detained Since August 2013." Alkarma, 2 October 2014.

https://www.alkarama.org/en/articles/egypt-RASSD-news-network-journalist-arbitrarily-detained-august-2013 (accessed July 14, 2017)

and ethical in observing journalistic standards when covering events.[92] You have to remain committed to the truth and protect the people's right to access information. You have to play a key role by highlighting fake and false news.[93] You have to maintain a role in creating a consciousness by raising awareness among readers of the events unfolding in society. RASSD's experience is an enriching experience for us and our followers. We have learned from our successes, but we have learned even more from our mistakes. We hope our experience can be an inspiration and a springboard for future successes and new experiences in our region and worldwide.

[92] Ahram Online. "Egypt's State Commissioners oppose banning RASSD News Network." Ahram Online, 6 September 2015. Ahram Online. "Egypt's State Commissioners oppose banning RASSD News Network." Ahram Online, 6 September 2015.

http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/139803/Egypt/Politics-/Egypts-State-Commissioners-oppose-banning-RASSD-Ne.aspx (accessed July 14, 2017)

[93] Middle East Monitor. "RASSD challenges newspaper to publish full Al-Sisi interview." Middle East Monitor, 5 February 2014.

https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140205-RASSD-challenges-newspaper-to-publish-full-al-sisi-interview (accessed July 14, 2017)

PART 3

Making Journalism Better and Safer

Chapter 10

Protection of Journalists under Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law: Global Perspective and Arab World Realities

By Abou Abass

Reflecting on the issue of protection of journalists under international human rights law (IHRL) and international humanitarian law (IHL),[94] in times of peace and war, is a task that every journalist covering war or conflict should undertake. Familiarising oneself with relevant legal provisions can be at times tedious and confusing, but it is knowledge that could help you stay safe.

A review of the critical legal framework to be read before going into a war zone will be discussed in these pages. Section one clarifies how IHRL and IHL constitute a framework for the protection of journalists and their rights. It sheds light on the meaning of the notions of journalists, IHRL, IHL and the linkages between them. It also explains the presentation of the legal regime governing the protection of journalists. Section two will show that safety of journalists, notwithstanding the mentioned legal regime, continues to be a major concern and a challenge for the international community, particularly in the Arab world. This region is considered one of the most dangerous theatres of operation for journalists.[95] It acquires some acuity, in view of the context of instability that the region faces.

I. IHRL and IHL as a Framework for the Protection of Journalists

Journalists are "men and women who present information as news to the audiences of newspapers, magazines, radio, television stations and the Internet."[96] Journalists include all media workers and support staff, as well as community media workers and "citizen journalists" when they momentarily play

that role." [97]

Human rights (HRs) are basic rights and freedoms that are inherent to all human beings, whatever their nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, and any other status. They are codified in a set of international rules, established by treaty or custom, namely IHRL, on the basis of which individuals and groups can expect and/or claim certain behaviour or benefits from governments. Numerous non-treaty based principles and guidelines ("soft laws") also belong to the body of international human rights standards.[98] IHL is a set of international rules, established by treaty or custom, which are specifically intended to solve humanitarian problems directly arising from international or non-international armed conflicts. It protects persons and properties that are, or may be, affected by an armed conflict, and limits the rights of the parties to a conflict to use the methods and means of warfare of their choice.[99] While distinguished, the two sets of rules have some common features and objectives. Both IHL and IHRL strive to protect the lives, health and dignity of individuals and groups, albeit from different angles. [100]

Journalists as human beings and by virtue of their profession and role have a strong linkage with HRs and IHL. They are holders of all basic human rights. They have a particular role in ensuring the protection of certain rights, notably the right to freedoms of opinion and expression, which are closely related. They are also considered as indispensable conditions for the full development of the person, essential for any society, and as necessary for the realisation of the principles of transparency and accountability that are, in turn, essential for the promotion and protection of human rights.[101] Journalism is and must be seen as an activity and profession that constitutes a necessary service for any society. It provides individuals and society as a whole with the necessary information to allow them to develop their own thoughts and to freely draw their own conclusions and opinions.[102] Journalists benefit from the protection of IHL, both as civilians not taking part in combat and given the importance of their role.

The Regime of Protection of Journalists Under International Law

All media professionals are entitled to rights to life, to liberty and security of person, fair trial, equality before the law, recognition before the law; rights to

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[94] International Committee of the Red Cross. "What is international humanitarian law?" International Committee of the Red Cross, 31 December 2014. https://www.icrc.org/en/document/what-international-humanitarian-law. (accessed July 14, 2017)
"The Foundation of International Human Rights Law," United Nations.
http://www.un.org/en/sections/universal-declaration/foundation-international-human-rights-law/index.html (accessed July 14, 2017)

[95] Committee to Protect Journalists. "1,246 Journalists Killed since 1992/Motive Confirmed." CPJ. https://cpj.org/killed (accessed July 14, 2017)

[96] "The News Manual: A Professional Resource for Journalists and Media." The News Manual.
http://www.thenewsmanual.net/Manuals%20Volume%201/volume1_02.htm (accessed July 14, 2017)

[97] "Freedom of Expression and Public Order Training manual." (Paris: UNESCO, 2015), p. 13.

[98] International Committee of the Red Cross. "International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law Similarities and differences.". (ICRC, 2003)

[99] ICRC, 2003, Ibid.

[100] ICRC, 2003, Ibid. Thus, IHL rules deal with many issues that are outside the purview of IHRL, such as the conduct of hostilities, combatant and prisoner of war status, and the protection of the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems. Similarly, IHRL deals with aspects of life in peacetime that are not regulated by IHL, such as freedom of the press, the right to assembly, to vote and to strike.

[101] Human Rights Committee, General comment No. 34, Article 19: "Freedoms of opinion and expression." (Geneva, 2011), para. 1.

[102] Report of SR on right to freedom of expression and opinion, 4 June 2012, para. 4.

privacy, family and home; to physical integrity, et cetera. Attacks against journalists violating any of these rights and other prohibitions (for instance prohibition of torture; cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; and enforced disappearance) constitute HRs violations. Some of them, including killing, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and enforced disappearance, may amount to international crimes entailing both State responsibility and individual criminal liability of perpetrators.

Understanding the rights journalists are entitled to in times of war, as well as the limits and restrictions to this protection is crucial. The same goes for the rights and freedoms recognised by national legislation. It gives you a clear view on what is and what is not allowed from a legal perspective when covering war and conflicts. Even if protection can only be guaranteed when conflicting parties respect international treaties that establish rules of warfare and all the instruments directed to protect journalists, having this information strengthens protection practices. Many journalists might not know what to do when arrested in a war zone or may assume that they have special protection, different from that which is provided to civilians. Understanding your rights is critical for every journalist working in the field.

Overview of the United Nations Human Rights Council seen in Geneva, Switzerland. June 6, 2017. Picture taken with a fisheye lens. Photo: REUTERS / Denis Balibouse

a. The Right to Freedom of Expression

Journalists enjoy the right of everyone to "hold opinions without interference," to "freedom of expression" that includes the "freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice." [103]

The right to freedom of expression is not absolute. Its exercise "carries with it special duties and responsibilities" and it may "be subject to certain restrictions". Such restrictions "shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; (b) For the protection of national security or of public order or of public health or morals. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provides in its article 20 that: 1) Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law and, 2) Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law." Journalists have to exercise their right to freedom of expression responsibly.

b. Prisoner of War

Under IHL, journalists are entitled to all the protections afforded to civilians in times of conflict. Article 79 of the AP I to Geneva Conventions (GC)[104] provides that "Journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians" (…) and "be protected as such" under IHL, "provided that they take no action adversely affecting their status as civilians, and without prejudice to the right of war correspondents accredited to the armed forces to the status" provided for in Article 4 A (4) of the Third Geneva Convention.[105] Article 4 (4) relates to prisoners of war, a notion that encompasses a number of categories including war correspondents, provided that they have received authorisation from the armed forces that they accompany. This means that war correspondents are entitled to prisoner-of-war status upon capture[106] In fact, IHL distinguishes "civilian journalists" from "war correspondents" with which they should not be confused. War correspondents are journalists who accompany the armed forces of a State without being members thereof. They are civilians and may not be made the object of attack. However, war correspondents, unlike other

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[103] Article 19 of the IPCPR, para. 1 and 2.

[104] Protocol Addition to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977. For a good review on the protection of journalists under IHL, See: Balguy-Gallois, Alexandre. "Protection des journalistes et des médias en période de conflit armé." International Review of the Red Cross, Vol. 86, No. 853, March 2004, pp. 37-67. Also available in English at: https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/article/review/review-853-p37.htm (accessed August 11, 2017)

[105] "Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War." Geneva, 12 August 1949." https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=77CB9983BE01D004C12563CD002D6B3E (accessed August 11, 2017)

[106] Rule 34 of customary IHL, 2016. https://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1 (accessed July 14, 2017)

journalists, are entitled to prisoner-of-war status upon capture.[107] Closely related to war correspondents are "embedded journalists"[108] referring to journalists who accompany military forces without being a member. In non-international armed conflicts, IHL makes no distinction between war correspondents and other journalists, and journalists have the same protection as other civilians.

Civilians are persons who are not members of the armed forces.[109] Journalists, like other civilians, lose their protection against attack when and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities (Article 79 (2) of Protocol Additional I to the Geneva Convention). Also, journalists, like any other person entering a foreign country, must respect that country's domestic regulations concerning access to its territory. Journalists may lose their right to reside and work in a foreign country if they have entered illegally.[110]

c. War Crimes

An intentional attack against civilians, including journalists, constitutes a war crime. Journalists will only lose this protection if they directly participate in hostilities. Participation does not include such activities as conducting interviews with civilians or combatants, taking still or moving pictures, making audio recordings or any of the other usual tasks involved in journalistic practice. Even dissemination of propaganda by a journalist does not amount to direct participation.

d. Obligations to Promote and Protect Human Rights of Journalists

The obligation to respect and to ensure respect of the human rights of journalists and other media professionals rests on the State as a whole. It encompasses a positive duty of states to ensure that persons are protected from any act that would impair the enjoyment of their rights, including by taking effective measures or exercising due diligence to prevent any harm caused by private persons or entities. This obligation to protect is particularly important in the case of threats

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[107] Rule 34 of customary IHL, 2016, Ibid.

[108] According to Robert Geiss of ICRC, "Embedded journalists" are a modern term. It was apparently first used during the 2003 invasion of Iraq and has since gained widespread currency. It does not occur in any provision of international humanitarian law and, so far as I know, it is not clearly defined. (…) war correspondents are commonly, although not necessarily in all cases, equated with "embedded journalists". In order to become a war correspondent within the meaning of international humanitarian law, official accreditation by the armed forces is mandatory. Thus, if an "embedded journalist" has received the official accreditation then, legally, he is a war correspondent. At: How does international humanitarian law protect journalists in armed-conflict situations? 27-07-2010 Interview.
See also: Farthofer, Mag. Hilde. "Journalists in armed conflicts – Protection measures in the International Humanitarian Law." Paper presented at the SGIR 7th Pan-European International Relations Conference, Stockholm, 9-11 September 2010, p. 1.

[109] International Committee of the Red Cross. "Customary IHL—Chapter 1, Rule 5." 2016.
https://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_cha_chapter1_rule5 (accessed July 14, 2017)

[110] International Committee of the Red Cross. "Customary IHL—Chapter 1, Rule 34." 2016.

and attacks made against journalists by non-State actors[111] who can also be held responsible for attacks against journalists. When violations of IHRL or IHL have been allegedly committed, states have a duty to investigate the allegations effectively and prosecute those responsible.

International law thus offers journalists the protection regime accorded to civilians in the context of armed conflict, of international or non-international character, with some specificity. In view of the threats that journalists have been facing in modern conflicts, some have argued that this protection needs to be enhanced by making it more specific and well-tailored, while others maintain that the existing protection should be enough if well applied. Whatever the best option, it is certain that the application of legal provisions relating to the protection of journalists on the ground has been ineffective in most cases, as is witnessed by the attacks against journalists, just as other civilians. According to the Special Rapporteur (SP) on freedom of opinion and expression the "problem with regard to continued and increasing violence against journalists is not a lack of legal standards, but the lack of implementation of existing norms and standards." [112]

II. Safety of Journalists: A Global Concern and a Challenge in the MENA Region

Safety of Journalists: An Increasing Concern for the International Community

The profession of journalism is not without danger. In fact, many journalists in the world have to struggle to get the information and to keep their freedom, or find themselves facing threats to their HRs, including their right to safety. While this is the case particularly in troubled areas, notably zones experiencing war or other forms of upheaval, it is far from being exclusive to such cases. Local journalists are increasingly facing threats to their life and pay their freedom and their life in the course of duty, in addition to the challenges encountered by journalists in armed conflict situations that frequently draw the attention of the international community. They face daily challenges in situations that have not reached the threshold of an armed conflict, but may be characterised by violence, lawlessness and/or repression.[113] Hence the increasing interest of the international community, notably the United Nations (UN), in taking measures to

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[111] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Report on the Safety of Journalists, 2014.

[112] Report of SR on right to freedom of expression and opinion, 4 June 2012, para. 65; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, 11 August 2008, para. 83.

[113] These challenges range from restrictions to movement, including deportations and denial of access into a country or a particular area; arbitrary arrests and detention, particularly during public crises or demonstrations; torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including sexual violence against female journalists; confiscation of and damages to equipment, information theft, illegal surveillance and office break-ins; intimidation, including summons police stations for questioning, harassment of family members, death threats, stigmatisation and smear campaigns to discredit journalists; abductions or enforced disappearance to killings. See: Report of SR on right to freedom of expression and opinion, 4 June 2012, para. 48.

ensure the protection of journalists in both contexts of peace and war, usually as a response to calls from both journalism and human rights organisations.

The main UN organs dealing with human rights showed an increasing concern for the issue of protection of journalists in peace and war times.[114] In December 2006, the Security Council declared that it is deeply concerned by the frequency of acts of violence in many parts of the world against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in armed conflict, in particular deliberate attacks in violation of IHL. The Council identified the issue of protection of journalists in armed conflict as urgent and important.[115] It insists on the need to observe the applicable law calling upon parties to conflicts to respect their obligations under international law to protect journalists and civilians.[116] The council singled out impunity for crimes committed against journalists in armed conflict as a significant challenge to their protection. The resolution also stressed that ensuring accountability for crimes committed against journalists, media professionals, and associated personnel is a key element in preventing future attacks.[117]

Amongst the UN specialised organisations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been very active in raising awareness on the issue of safety of journalists.[118] UNESCO has spearheaded a group of UN agencies to elaborate a UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.[119]

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[114] See, for instance: Report of SR on right to freedom of expression and opinion, 4 June 2012; The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity Report of the Secretary-General, 6 August 2015; Human Rights Council decision 24/116 on the panel discussion on the safety of journalists; Summary of the Human Rights Council panel discussion on the safety of journalists, 23 July 2014; GA resolution 68/163 on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity (20 November 2013); Report of the OHCHR on the safety of journalists (A/HRC/24/23), 23 July 2014 ["OHCHR report of safety of journalists, 2014"]; and Technical assistance and capacity-building to improve human rights in Libya, HRC Resolution, 22 March 2016.

[115] More recently, the Council, in its resolution 2222 (2015) on 27 May 2015, dedicated to the issue of protection of journalists in armed conflict, reminded the applicable law, reiterated its concern at the frequency of acts of violence in many parts of the world against journalists, media professionals, and associated personnel in armed conflict, reminded the important role they can play in the protection of civilians and conflict prevention.

[116] Security Council Resolution 1738 on 23 December 2016.

[117] Security Council Resolution 2222 on 27 May 2015. In this resolution, the Council also condemned the violations against journalists, reminded that journalists should be regarded as civilians, recognised the role of independent and impartial media for democracy and condemned impunity. It also reminded the responsibility of states to comply with the relevant obligations under international law to end impunity and to prosecute those responsible for serious violations of IHL and urged them to take appropriate steps to ensure accountability for crimes committed against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in situations of armed conflict and through the conduct of impartial, independent and effective investigations within their jurisdiction and to bring perpetrators of such crimes to justice.

[118] In November 2014, UNESCO published a report on the "Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity" which included an analysis of the killings of 593 journalists, media workers or social media producers between 1 January 2006 and 31 December 2013. This generated a significant amount of public interest journalism and resulted in public condemnation of such killings by the Director-General of UNESCO. "Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity." UNESCO. (Paris, 2014)

[119] The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity was endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board on April 12, 2012. The Plan was prepared during the 1st UN Inter-Agency Meeting on this issue, convened by the Director General of UNESCO at the request of the Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). United Nations. "UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity." UN. http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/official_documents/UN-Plan-on-Safety-Journalists_EN_UN-Logo.pdf (accessed August 11, 2017)

Non-governmental human rights organisations – including organisations dedicated to the protection of journalists such as Reporters Without Borders (RWB), Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) – have been actively advocating for the protection of journalists and raising awareness on the issue of impunity of perpetrators of attacks against journalists. In fact, the action of some of these organisations played some role in the placement of the issue of protection of journalists on the agenda of UN organs. Some regional organisations, notably the Organization of American States (OAS), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the African Union (AU), have also put the issue of protection of journalists on their agenda. In September 2014, the UN SR on freedom of opinion and expression and his counterparts from these regional organisations issued a joint statement on the issue of protection of journalists. The four experts called for improved international protection for anyone engaged in journalism, especially during conflict situations, and highlighted that journalists must be ensured the highest degree of protection by states and non-state actors.[120]

Challenges of Protecting Journalists in the Arab world

Violence and threats to journalists are common in many regions of the world, particularly zones experiencing instability. Arab countries are no exception. During and after the Cold War, journalists in the region have been facing many challenges due to both the lack of guarantees of protection of HRs in general and conflict in particular in countries like Syria, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq. North Africa has not been a safe haven for journalists either, for similar reasons. The civil strife in Algeria during the 1990s levelled a significant toll amongst journalists and media professionals, who were targeted by armed groups, further compounding the problem due to the lack of guarantees of freedom of expression that characterised the region for many years.

Since the beginning of the Arab uprisings in 2010 and the subsequent cycle of instability that ensued in countries such as Libya, Yemen and Syria, journalists have been increasingly a target of multiple forms of violence. Even in Tunisia, where important new gains in terms of freedom of expression have been achieved, threats to journalists remain a major issue.[121] Tunis presents cases where security forces have resorted to physical violence and threats of violence to obstruct or try to intimidate journalists.[122]

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[120] Press Statement, 1 September 2014.

[121] See the report, "Sahaafa tahta attahdiid" (Media Under Threat), Annual Report on Violations on Tunisia Media/Journalists, prepared by Tunis centre for freedom of press, in collaboration with Open Society Foundations, Marsed and International Media Support, October-September 2013, pp. 49-61. Tunis Centre for Freedom of Press. "Sahaafa tahta attahdiid" (Media Under Threat), Annual Report on Violations on Tunisia Media/Journalists. (Tunis: 2013), pp. 49-61

[122] Committee to Protect Journalists. "In Tunisia, press freedom erodes amid security fears." CPJ, 27 October 2015. https://cpj.org/reports/2015/10/in-tunisia-press-freedom-erodes-amid-security-fear.php#recommendations (accessed July 14, 2017)

a. Before and After the Arab Spring

Arab countries that have been experiencing instability and conflict, before the Arab Spring, such as Iraq and Palestine, or after it, notably Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt and Syria, have all, at varying degrees, become dangerous places for journalists. Various data, including that of the CPJ, indicate that journalists and media workers have been deliberately targeted by harassment and violent attacks that sometimes led to the injury or killing of men and women journalists. According to CPJ, since 2003, 174 journalists have been killed in Iraq,[123] and 16 journalists were killed in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 1992. In Egypt, 11 journalists have lost their lives since 2011, which has become one of the world's worst detainers of journalists[124] over the last six years. [125]

In 2014, two Tunisian journalists were kidnapped in Libya reportedly by elements of Islamic State group[126] and are still missing. In Libya, journalists and media professionals have since 2011 been subjected to detention, threats and attacks that sometimes led to death and injury. In February 2011, the Libyan government arrested several pro-democracy activists and journalists in the first half of February 2011 in an effort to quell the protests.[127] The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights OHCHR reports featured cases of women journalists being subject to violence and intimidation in relation to their work.[128] A recent report of OHCHR on Libya concluded that the country continues to be one of the most hostile places for journalists.[129] Journalists have faced serious harassment and death threats, and some have been subjected to arbitrary detention, abduction and attempted assassination.[130] Female journalists have been targeted on the basis of their gender,[131] and journalists also routinely face criminal prosecution for defamation and libel for writing on political matters.[132] In Yemen, at least 12 journalists have lost their lives in relation to their work since 2010.

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[123] Committee to Protect Journalists. "182 Journalists Killed in Iraq/Motive Confirmed," CPJ, 2016. https://cpj.org/killed/mideast/iraq (accessed July 14, 2017)

[124] Beiser, Elana. "China, Egypt imprison record numbers of journalists." CPJ, 15 December 2015. https://www.cpj.org/reports/2015/12/china-egypt-imprison-record-numbers-of-journalists-jail.php (accessed Kuly 14, 2017)

[125] Committee to Protect Journalists. "Journalists killed in Egypt since 1992." CPJ, 2017. https://www.cpj.org/mideast/egypt (accessed July 14, 2017)

[126] Committee to Protect Journalists. "17 Journalists Killed in Yemen/Motive Confirmed." CPJ, 2017. https://www.cpj.org/killed/mideast/yemen (accessed July 14, 2017)

[127] Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Libya, 2012, para. 76.

[128] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Human rights defenders under attack." Report of UNSMIL/OHCHR, 25 March 2015, pp. 4-6.

[129] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Investigation by the OHCHR on Libya: detailed findings." 23 February 2016, para. 236.

[130] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Investigation by the OHCHR on Libya." Report of 15 February 2016, para. 50.

[131] OHCHR, 2016, Ibid.

[132] OHCHR, 2016 Ibid.

b. Challenges and Potential Solutions

The described picture shows an increasing threat to journalists in the region, notably during the last six years. This remains a fundamental HRs challenge for Arab countries and the world. In fact, such violence, in addition to jeopardising the respect of HRs such as freedom of expression and the right to safety and security, is also a hard blow with respect to the rules of IHL.

The insufficiency of protection of journalists remains primarily a problem of lack of implementation of relevant norms and standards at the national level.[133] One of the challenges regarding the respect of HRs of journalists is the inadequate legislative framework in various countries that hinders freedom of expression as protected under IHRL, notably article 19 of ICCPR. In addition, there's a lack of ratification of relevant international human rights instruments by states, and constitutional and legislative restrictions that can jeopardise the safety of journalists. While most countries have provided for constitutional guarantees for press freedom and freedom of expression, such guarantees have almost always been vitiated through qualifications in the constitutional text itself, such as caveats 'within the limit of the law,' by penal codes and other laws, as well as in practice. [134]

A study reveals that in most Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries legislation relating to criminal code, media, and cybercrime, limit communication and subjects journalists to a wide array of restrictions that go beyond what ICCPR permits.[135] Such restrictions include the licensing of media outlets and journalists, a ban on criticism against rulers and public officials, prohibitions on contents that harm national economy, and mandates on truth in reporting and other overly broad prohibitions.[136] It has also been argued that there is a fundamental misunderstanding of freedom of expression and its implications in many parts of the globe, particularly the Arab world.[137] These and similar factors constitute a challenge to the above-mentioned rights of journalists in the region,

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[133] Report of SR on right to freedom of expression and opinion, 4 June 2012, para. 65.

[134] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. "World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Regional overview of the Arab Region." UNESCO, 2014, p. 8.

[135] Duffy, Matt. "Arab Media Regulations: Identifying Restraints on Freedom of the Press in the Laws of Six Arabian Peninsula Countries." Berkeley Journal of Middle East & Islamic Levant. 1 (2014), pp. 6. http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1036&context=jmeil (accessed July 14, 2017)

[136] Duffy, 2014, Ibid.

[137] According to Journalist Samar Fatany: "Unfortunately, the universal concept of the freedom of expression is not appreciated or understood in many parts of the world and in the Arab world in particular. Many governments do not conform to its principles and view it with suspicion. They continue to suppress the right of free speech through censorship, restrictive media laws, and the harassment of journalists, bloggers and activists who voice their opinions against human rights violations or major concerns that need to be addressed. Meanwhile, a majority of the public also fails to understand that the universal right of the freedom of speech is not absolute and that it is subject to limitations. The exercise of these rights carries "special duties and responsibilities", and may "therefore be subject to certain restrictions" such as "respect of the rights or reputation of others" or "the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals". Fatany, Samar. "Arab world's misunderstanding on free speech." Saudi Gazette, 2 March 2013. http://english.alarabiya.net/views/2013/03/02/269126.html (accessed July 14, 2017)

subjecting them to arbitrary treatment such as imprisonment or closure of media outlets.[138]

To tackle such situations, all relevant stakeholders have an important role to play. States have a primary responsibility because it is their first duty to ensure and respect the provisions of international law, prevent their violation, and punish the perpetrators of violations. This requires ratification of relevant international instruments and establishment of adequate legislative frameworks that guarantees effective protection in line with applicable human rights standards. In situations of armed conflict, where often armed groups are involved, such groups also have responsibility to observing international law and ensuring the protection of journalists. It is now well established "that all parties to an armed conflict, whether states or non-state actors, are bound by international humanitarian law, even though only states may become parties to international treaties."[139]

At the same time, the international community, represented by the UN and other international organisations, all have to increase their efforts and means to ensure a more effective respect of HR and IHL provisions relating to the protection of journalists. Such actors should work hand-in-hand with states to strengthen the legal regime and more importantly to ensure its effective implementation at domestic level. Journalists, media organisations and civil society also have a role to play. They need to continue fulfilling their role in protecting human rights with responsibility. They must organise to ensure their voices are heard and taken into account by all stakeholders. They need to be involved in the strategies of states and international organisations aiming to ensure a better protection of the rights of freedom of expression and HRs of journalists. Civil society organisations and human rights defenders also need to continue playing a role in advancing the vital cause of protecting journalists.

In order for the efforts of all these stakeholders to yield positive results, coordination and synergistic cooperation are vital. At the same time, a diversity of approaches and measures is needed for tackling the challenges:

1. Prevention through popularisation and diffusion of applicable international standards

2. Criminalisation of HR and IHL violations in domestic laws

3. Development of strategies for the protection of journalists in times of peace and war, at national, regional and global levels

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[138] "Freedom of Expression in Egypt and the Arab World, Annual Report 2015." Arab Network for Human Rights Information, 2015. http://anhri.net/?p=159575&lang=en (accessed July 14, 2017)

[139] Prosecutor v. Sam Hinga Norman (Case No. SCSL-2004-14-AR72(E)), Decision on preliminary Motion (Decision of Special Court for Sierra Leone); See also: Clapham, Andrew. "Human rights obligations of non-state actors in conflict situations." International Review of the Red Cross, Volume 88 Number 863, September 2006, pp. 491-523.

4. Implementation of national and international law at domestic level and globally to fight impunity

All these measures need to be considered seriously to fight and eradicate the HR violations that we are witnessing on a daily basis. A human rights-based approach (HRBA), which takes into consideration the role of the duty bearers and rights holders, and takes into account gender and other relevant dimensions, needs to be used and implemented. At the same time, any developed strategy needs to be inclusive and participatory, involving all concerned stakeholders and including influential actors such as traditional and religious leadership representatives.

While these elements are relevant for all the regions of the world, the stakeholders in the Arab world need to create appropriate forums for resolving such problems, while drawing from the identified measures and approaches. There is a need for focus, concerted and coordinated action amongst the relevant actors in the region. Without a 'home-grown' action approach, all efforts will fall short. At the same time, cooperation with counterparts in other regions of the world can ensure an exchange and cross-fertilisation of experiences, which is also vital. Cooperation with international organisations such as the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) needs to be developed and strengthened. Technical cooperation, dialogue, common approaches, synergy and common values grounded in international HRs standards and applicable international law should constitute the common language and the glue for ensuring positive results. The protection of journalists remains linked to the protection of HRs in general and the protection of civilians during armed conflict. Advancements in democracy, rule of law, HRs promotion and protection within Arab countries, all constitute a crucial and fundamental step, without which the protection of journalists may remain elusive.

Chapter 11

Closing the Door on Inciting Violence: How to Avoid Hate Speech

By Ibrahim Saber

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What is Hate Speech?

There is no standard definition of hate speech. UNESCO defines hate speech as "expressions that advocate incitement to harm (particularly, discrimination, hostility or violence) based upon the target being identified with a certain social or demographic group. It may include, but is not limited to, speech that advocates, threatens, or encourages violent acts." [140]

Some of the most common attributes on which hate speech is built are religion, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, class and disability. It takes forms that can range from written articles, photos and cartoons to video and social media comments.

Subsequently, hate speech can endanger the safety of members of the society including journalists operating in conflict areas and war zones. Those on the frontlines have to deal with very polarised views and narratives.

Hate speech has left many journalists confused, some are scared and do not know how to deal with it, others lack the tools to identify it, while few use hate speech as part of a broader national or partisan agenda.

Taking as a starting point what the UN and other relevant human rights institutions have said in this regard, our primary concern here is to make journalists aware of the pitfalls of hate speech and provide advice to identify and counter it.

Online Hate Speech

A cursory look at contemporary international media outlets including the Arab media reveals that hate speech has become a malady in many newsrooms, and with the rise of social media, online hate speech has also come to the full

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140 UNESCO. "Countering Online Hate Speech." UNESCO Publishing, 2015, p. 10.
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002332/233231e.pdf (accessed July 5, 2017)

attention of rights advocacy groups and organisations. Hate speech in the virtual world, specifically on social media, usually takes form of comments or posts.

Some of the most popular social platforms have their own definition of hate speech, on which they claim to base their content moderation policy and actions.

Facebook defines hate speech and states, "content that attacks people based on their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, disability or disease is not allowed."[141] The platform adds that, "We do, however, allow clear attempts at humour or satire that might otherwise be considered a possible threat or attack. This includes content that many people may find to be in bad taste (ex: jokes, stand-up comedy, popular song lyrics, etc.)."[142]

Meanwhile, YouTube asserts that "hate speech refers to content that promotes violence or hatred against individuals or groups based on certain attributes, such as race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, age, veteran status, and sexual orientation/gender identity."[143] YouTube highlights the platform's respect and active promotion of free speech, and particularly refers to their aim to defend users' right to "express unpopular points of view,"[144] as long as it does not fall into hate speech.

Both definitions are in line with that of UNESCO, and the two of them reflect a conflicting relationship between hate speech and freedom of expression, with a clear objective to protect the latter.

According to UNESCO, online hate speech is no different from offline hatred expressions, but it does have some distinctive characteristics that are worth keeping in mind as journalists:[145]

1. It is visible to larger audiences
2. It can stay online for long time, prolonging its damage
3. It can be itinerant
4. It is low cost
5. It can be done anonymously with no consequence for the perpetrator
6. Its reach is transnational, which raises issues of cross-jurisdictional co-operation

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[141] "What does Facebook consider to be hate speech?" Facebook, 2017

https://www.facebook.com/help/135402139904490?helpref=uf_permalink (accessed July 15, 2017)

[142] Facebook, 2017, Ibid

[143] YouTube. "Policies, Safety and Reporting." YouTube, 2017 https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2801939?hl=en (accessed July 15, 2017)

[144] YouTube, 2017, Ibid

[145] UNESCO Publishing, 2015, Ibid.

Traditional media in the Arab world is mostly either controlled by governments or, if privately owned, often follow a pro-governmental editorial line. This means that dissent voices rarely have access to mainstream media, which "[…] creates frustration within opposition groups and results in these groups resorting to other media such as social media. This can have a destabilizing effect because social media outlets are often untraceable and unaccountable, characteristics which present problems when such media is used to promulgate hate speech and incitement to violence."[146]

Hate Speech in International Law

Hate has of course existed for centuries. Religious texts have in one way or another either encouraged or put prohibitions in place regarding what people can say. However, the systematic attempt to legislate and define hate speech has been a modern phenomenon.

The beginnings of hate speech have been associated with the Nuremberg Tribunal setup after the Second World War. Two people were accused of crimes against humanity (the charges would fall within today's definition of incitement to genocide[147]): Julius Streicher, founder and editor of the anti-Semitic magazine Der Stürmer; and Hans Fritzsche, senior official in the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda. While Streicher was found guilty of producing and disseminating hate propaganda that incited Germans to active persecution, Fritzsche was acquitted at the Nuremberg Trials but later prosecuted and found guilty by a German court on similar charges. [148]

International Human Rights Law and Standards

In articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),[149] the provisions that protect freedom of expression are laid out. They require states to forbid hate speech. The articles provide standards to include such prohibition in their national legislations. Article 19 bestows the right to freedom of expression and details the exceptional cases in which this right shall be restricted. Article 20 complements these limits to freedom of expression – war propaganda and any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred by declaring them illegal – setting the foundations for a definition of hate speech and becoming the threshold for the prohibition of hate incitement.

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[146] Bassiouni, Mahmoud, Cherif, Mahmoud, Rodley, Nigel, Al-Awadhi, Badria, Kirsch, Philippe and Arsanjani, Mahnoush. "Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry." Manama, Bahrain, November 23, 2011. http://www.bici.org.bh/BICIreportEN.pdf in https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/sunni-shia-abdo.pdf (accessed July 15, 2017)

[147] Timmermann, Wibke Kristin. "Incitement in international criminal law." International Review of the Red Cross, Volume 88 Number 864 December 2006, p.832 https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/irrc_864_timmermann.pdf (accessed July 15, 2017)

[148] Timmermann, 2006, pp.827-831, Ibid.

[149] UN. "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1966 (accessed

The balance between promoting and respecting the right to freedom of expression on the one hand, and protecting human dignity of all individuals from discrimination and violence – thereby guaranteeing equality – on the other, is a permanent obligation of states, as per International Human Rights Law (IHRL). [150]

It is the right to equality that principally motivates setting limits to freedom of expression. In this sense, the Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality examine the relationship between these two rights. The document recognises the existing tension between them, but builds a case to show that its foundational characteristic, and the fact that they mutually support and reinforce each other, is preeminent. [151]

Even if IHRL recognises that the principle of anti-discrimination and the right to equality could restrict freedom of expression and enables states to lawfully do so in certain circumstances, there is no consensus on when free speech falls into hate speech.

NGO Article 19 argues that concerns surrounding hate speech legislation stem from fears that governments or other powerful players will use it to clamp down on freedom of expression or stifle citizens from taking part in democratic debates.[152] Following this line of thought, several countries, such as Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and the United States, have entered reservations to Article20.[153]

Incitement to Genocide in Rwanda: The "Media Case"

Since the 1990s, the crime of "direct and public incitement to genocide" constituted a cornerstone in the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, established by the UN in 1994 in response to the genocide of the country's Tutsi ethnic minority.[154] The role played by the media in these horrific events illustrate how media can exacerbate hate speech and the fatal consequences of this ill-marriage.

July 15, 2017) http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx

[150] UN. "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1966 (accessed July 15, 2017)

[151] "The Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality." Global Campaign for Free Expression, April 2009.
https://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/standards/the-camden-principles-on-freedom-of-expression-and-equality.pdf (accessed July 15, 2017)

[152] NGO Article 19. https://www.article19.org/pages/en/contact-us.html (accessed August 11, 2017)

[153] United Nations. "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." 1966.
https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&clang=_en (accessed July 15, 2017)

[154] United Nations Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals. "The ICTR in Brief." December 2015. http://unictr.unmict.org/en/tribunal (accessed July 15, 2017)

Three judges found guilty Ferdinand Nahimana, founder and ideologist of Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, high-ranking board member at Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) and founder of a political party[155] , and Hassan Ngeze, chief editor of Kangura newspaper, for inciting the killing of the Tutsi ethnic minority group.[156] In their ruling, the judges highlighted that these three men "used the institutions they controlled and coordinated their efforts towards a common goal: The destruction of the Tutsi population. They said their broadcasts and publications did not fall under the protection of the right to freedom of expression." [157]

Rwanda was the second time, following Nuremberg, that media figures were condemned under international law for incitement to genocide.

Arab Legislations on Hate Speech

Regional Instruments

The 2004 Arab Charter on Human Rights recognises freedom of expression and establishes restrictions to it, aligned with international standards contained in the ICCPR. Article 32 of the Arab Charter stipulates that:

1. The present Charter shall ensure the right to information, freedom of opinion and freedom of expression, freedom to seek, receive and impart information by all means, regardless of frontiers.

2. Such rights and freedoms are exercised in the framework of society's fundamental principles and shall only be subjected to restrictions necessary for the respect of the rights or reputation of others and for the protection of national security or of public order, health or morals. [158]

Nonetheless, within this regional definition, journalists are often seen rallying around political regimes justifying their abuse of the law when it comes to restraining freedoms of expression, as most media outlets are either sponsored by governments or closely affiliated with them. In many cases, states justify unnecessary interference in freedom of expression to hide endemic corruption and other misbehaviours in government agencies. Most often, obsolete laws are

[155] He was a founding member of the Coalition for the Defense of the Republic (CDR). For full details see:
https://trialinternational.org/latest-post/jean-bosco-barayagwiza/ (accessed August 12, 2017)

[156] British Broadcast Corporation. "Rwanda: How the genocide happened." BBC News, May 17, 2017.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13431486 (accessed July 15, 2017) and http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3257748.stm (accessed August 12, 2017)

[157] UN News Centre. "UN tribunal convicts 3 Rwandan media executives for their role in 1994 genocide." UN. December 2003.
http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=9053&Cr=rwanda&Cr1= (accessed July 15, 2017)

[158] Arab Charter on Human Rights 2004 referenced here: http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=23951 (accessed August 11, 2017)

kept: Rules criminalising defamation and the spread of fake news are used as arguments against government critics, and to censor independent media and citizens who otherwise risk punishment.

A recent study by the Electronic Frontier Foundation analysed how governments of Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia have used the law to silence expression online. According to the study's findings, Jordan and Saudi Arabia use counterterrorism and cybercrime laws to prosecute online activism, while Egypt uses a 2014 anti-protest law as a pretext. Tunisia resorts to defamation and anti-drugs laws. [159]

More relevant to hate speech, this makes media vulnerable to becoming a vehicle for state propaganda, which as recent history shows, may entail reproducing discriminatory stereotypes and incitement to violence towards opposition or other targeted groups. This is potentially even more dangerous in hostile, conflict and war environments, as we will see later on while examining some cases in post-Arab spring Egyptian media.

A second regional instrument that actually contradicts article 32 of the Arab Charter and article 19 of the ICCPR, are the "Principles for Regulating Satellite Broadcasting Transmission in the Arab World" of the Arab League Satellite Broadcasting Charter. This initiative of the Arab League was adopted by Arab ministers of information in February 2008. The document, as outlined in its article 6, sets rules in terms of the broadcast content that is transmitted. Broadcast entities have to guarantee the respect of human rights, dignity and individual privacy, prevent any violations and incitement to hate or discrimination based on ethnic, colour, racial or religious grounds, prohibit incitement to terrorism, amongst other regulations. [160]

This all sounds good in theory. However, the document also presents a set of vague standards open to a wide range of interpretations that can be used to restrict freedom of expression. Here are some of the loose clauses open to different readings:

• Respect Arab societies' religious and moral values

• Refrain from broadcasting anything that offends the notion of God, the monotheistic religions, the prophet's companions, denominations, and religious symbols specific to each confession

• Refrain from broadcasting content with obvious sexual or pornographic discourse or scenes

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• Safeguard the Arab identity

• Stay objective and honest and respect states and peoples' dignity, national sovereignty, and refrain from insulting national and religious symbols

As per this overview of national legislation and regional instruments in the Arab world, the main tasks in the region remain tied to guarantee access to freedom of expression and having more independence and diversity in the media landscape.

As long as this does not happen, political and religious dissent will keep being tagged as hate speech and censored under ambiguous legal and legislative frameworks such as defamation and terrorism. Labelling dissent as hate speech and making them interchangeable concepts diminishes the effectiveness to raise awareness among societies about what constitutes hate speech itself and challenge human rights violations. As journalists, we must not lose sight of this.

Tunisians demonstrate against a bill that would protect those accused of corruption from prosecution, in front of the Assembly of People's Representatives headquarters in Tunis, Tunisia July 28, 2017. REUTERS/Zoubeir Souissi - RTX3DCB8

Arab Domestic Laws

National legislations in Arab countries often include laws that can be used directly or indirectly to prohibit hate speech, mainly based on religion, ethnicity and race.

Recent examples are the Federal Decree Law on combating discrimination and hatred issued in 2015 by the United Arab Emirates. The decree regulates

three main concepts: Blasphemy, discrimination and hate speech. It defines hate speech as "any speech or conduct which may incite sedition, prejudicial action or discrimination among individuals or groups,"[161] and discrimination as "any distinction, restriction, exclusion or preference among individuals or groups based on the ground of religion, creed, doctrine, sect, caste, race, colour or ethnic origin." Note that gender has been left out of this category.

In 2016, the Shura Council in Saudi Arabia took up for discussion a bill that punished discrimination and "hate-mongering" by individuals and groups based on colour, gender, ethnicity and sect, and treated it as crime. Religion plays a fundamental role in the bill: a 10-year prison sentence for anyone found guilty of discrimination or hate-mongering in mosques, specifically saying that places of worship must be protected from discriminatory acts. It also addresses online abuse and aims at controlling the use of social media platforms on national securitygrounds.[162]

When the Jordanian Ministry for Media Affairs was informed that the government was discussing the possibility of a new law to prevent hate speech in social media, social and political activists, as well as the Centre for Defending Freedom of Journalists, warned about the dangers it could pose to freedom of expression.[163]

As much as these efforts may be directed to fight against hate speech and discrimination, the same risk appears yet again: they can also be easily used in practice to silence freedom of expression and repress dissent. National penal codes governing media laws in several Arab countries frequently include vague provisions that criminalise criticism of government, and also lead the way to penalise press reports about religious, social and political topics that are deemed as delicate by governments. [164]

Confronting Hate Speech in the Arab World: A Reality Check

Hate speech and violations to the right to freedom of expression are not an exclusive challenge in the Arab world. However, the conflict environment that followed the Arab Spring upheavals has, according to observers, triggered hate

[161] United Arab Emirates. "Federal Decree Law No. 2 of 2015." President of the United Arab Emirates, July 15, 2015.
http://ejustice.gov.ae/downloads/latest_laws2015/FDL_2_2015_discrimination_hate_en.pdf (accessed 15 July, 2017)

[162] The New Arab. "Riyadh considers tough penalties for inciting hatred in mosques." The New Arab, June 13, 2016.
https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2016/6/13/riyadh-considers-tough-penalties-for-inciting-hatred-in-mosques (accessed July 15, 2017)

[163] The Jordan Times. "Law to combat hate speech could harm freedom of expression, activists warn." The Jordan Times, January 10, 2017.
http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/law-combat-hate-speech-could-harm-freedom-expression-activists-warn (accessed July 10, 2017)

[164] Arabic Network for Human Rights Information. "Freedom of Expression In Egypt and the Arab World Annual Report 2015." Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 2015.
http://anhri.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Freedom-of-Expression-in-Egypt-and-the-Arab-World...-Annual-Report-2015.pdf (accessed July 15, 2017)

speech online and offline, and the post-Arab spring environment is bespoke with intolerance and reinforced sectarianism.

A study on hate speech and sectarianism, entitled "I Hate You", reviews narratives and discourses during the Arab Spring uprisings and concludes that media was not only a relevant vehicle for Arab regimes to crush voices and demonstrations of the opposition, but also at times were "co-conspirators in their practice or their silence to spread hate speech". [165]

MENA Media Monitoring, a media observatory organisation, analysed hate speech in over twenty-five newspapers from four Arab countries starting in 2014, namely Algeria, Jordan, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco and Yemen, over a period of three weeks.[166] The study focused only on newspapers due to financial constraints. They used quantitative as well as qualitative research methods when observing the occurrence of hate speech in the form of content inciting to hatred. The findings were shocking: 3086 hate speech instances during the three weeks of observation. On average, each Arab newspaper published 124 hate speech items during said period of time. This translates to each reader being exposed to around six items of hate speech per day in each newspaper. [167]

The occurrences were highest in Yemen. This lead the researchers to conclude that countries facing war, conflict or tension are at higher risk of being victims of hate speech. Stigmatisation and insults against communities and individuals were amongst the most prevalent forms of hate speech manifested in news pieces from all examined countries. Discrimination and direct incitement were very high, especially in Iraqi papers, for instance. In Tunisia, a major observation was the alarming fact that the articles contained direct incitement to murder other people. In general, opinion-editorials, columns, and opening statements in the analysed newspapers were the worst progenitors of hate speech.

[165] CDFJ. http://www.cdfj.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/العربي-الربيع-إعلام-في-والطائفية-الكراهية-خطاب-أكرهك-إني.pdf (accessed August 11, 2017)

[166] MENA Media Monitoring. http://menamediamonitoring.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03 http://menamediamonitoring.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/والبحرين-واليمن-والعراق-ومصر-وتونس-في-الكراهية-خطابات-رصد-تقرير.pdf (accessed August 11, 2017)

[167] MENA Media Monitoring.
http://menamediamonitoring.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/والبحرين-واليمن-والعراق-في-الكراهية-خطابات-رصد-تقرير.pdf (accessed August 11, 2017)

Case Study: Hate Speech in Egyptian Media

A poster show a placard with the faces of Egypt's ousted President Hosni Mubarak (L) and presidential candidate and former army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is seen by activists during a protest against sisi and a law restricting demonstrations as well as the crackdown on activists, in downtown Cairo May 24, 2014. Egyptians vote this week in an election expected to make former army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi president, marking a revival of strongman rule three years after the downfall of Hosni Mubarak. REUTERS/Amr Abdallah Dalsh (EGYPT - Tags: POLITICS CIVIL UNREST) - RTR3QORM

Post-Arab Spring Egypt remains a polarised and hostile environment. Confrontational narratives that may reach to hate speech levels are not only common in the media, but often instigated and reinforced by the media itself. The below examples were taken precisely from an article that reflects on whether Egypt resembles Rwanda or not. Some media outlets were criticised for inciting violence against the protestors.

"Copts are killing soldiers," said one news presenter, inciting citizens against Christian protestors in the Maspero massacre during which 28 people died, and after which these same citizens attacked Christians in areas surrounding Maspero.[168]

Making generalisations in this case by saying "Copts", which means all Christian Copts and thereby incites individuals to target them, legitimises attacks on an entire identity group, whether verbally or physically.[169] As a journalist one should not judge or declare that a person has killed another person if a legal

procedure has not been held and finalised, finding the individual being accused guilty according to the law. Always attribute your information to an official source such as a governmental agency or medical organisation.

"I wish the police had killed 400 terrorists today," said the journalist Ahmad Mousa during a show on Sada TV on the anniversary of the January 25 Revolution in which more than 17 people died.[170] After elected president Mohamed Morsi was ousted, public, semi-public, as well as private outlets launched a hate and incitement campaign against the opposition, particularly against the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic movement of which he was leader. Members of the group were also described as "sheep" by the known media figure Amro Adeeb on his show "Everyday". [171]

Dehumanising others is one explanation of how some Egyptians citizens could go out on the streets celebrating the killings of a thousand fellow citizens at the hands of the Egyptian police, in what became known as the Rabaa massacre.[172] Media Organisations should have a clear editorial policy to identify terms of potential hate speech in each region, such as never using animal stereotypes to refer to and label identity groups.

"I say it on air, kill police officers," this is what a journalist said on the pro-Muslim Brotherhood channel Egypt Now,[173] calling directly for the killing of people and thus inciting people to actually take to the streets and exercise violence.

Case Study: Sectarian Online Hate Speech

The Carnegie Middle East Program in 2015 analysed in a report sectarian hate speech on Twitter. The study, "Sectarian Twitter Wars: Sunni-Shia Conflict and Cooperation in the Digital Age", examined over 7 million tweets from February to August 2015.

It concluded that social media is one of the main vehicles for the transmission of sectarian and counter-sectarian discourse. It argued that violent events in the offline world fuel online sectarian hate speech. When specific events take place, such as the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen or the offensive in the city of

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[168] Ida2at website: http://ida2at.com/hate-speech-repeat-egypt-experience-ronda (accessed August 11, 2017)

[169] The violence took place at a protest which focused on the state TV and radio building in Cairo's Maspero Square. For details see: http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/10/201210916741376710.html (accessed August 12, 2017)

[170] The journalist is Ahmad Mousa. He has a program on an Egyptian TV Channel called Sada al Balad. See details: http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=25012015&id=9b767115-12ef-4804-a040-990d635d083c (accessed August 12, 2017) and http://www.elbaladtv.net/Program/GetProgram/127 (accessed August 12, 2017)

[171] Arabi 21. https://medium.com/arabi-21/%D8%A5%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%B2-%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%B7%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AF%D8%AF%D8%A7-%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF-c5035ce97d8a and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRRyPZ-nRDY (accessed August 12, 2017)

[172] Human Rights Watch. "All According to Plan the Rab'a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protesters in Egypt." Human Rights Watch, 2013. https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/08/12/all-according-plan/raba-massacre-and-mass-killings-protesters-egypt (accessed July 15, 2017)

[173] Ida2at website: http://ida2at.com/hate-speech-repeat-egypt-experience-ronda (accessed August 11, 2017)

Tikrit in Iraq by Shia militias against ISIL, a sharp increase in hate speech was noted on Twitter. Moreover, Twitter was used to inflame emotions and mobilise communities to act. [174]

Another key finding seems to show that anti-Shia rhetoric was more common than anti-Sunni or countersectarian rhetoric. The report attributes this to mainly demographic reasons. [175]

Anti-Sunni	Translation
ناصبي	Nasabi
نواصب	Nuwasib
الأموى	Umayyad

Anti-Shia	Translation
الرافضة	Rejectionist
الروافض	Rejectionists
حزب الشيطان	Party of the Devil
حزب اللات	Party of Laat
مجوس	Majous
نصيرية	Followers of Nusayr
صفوى	Safavid

Countersectarian	Translation
وحدة وطني	National Unity
انا سني انا شيعي	I'm Sunni, I'm Shia
وحدة اسلامية	Islamic Unity
لا سنية لا شيعية	Not Sunni, Not Shia
لا للطائفية	No to Sectarianism

Figure taken from the report that illustrates some of the key terms used online for either inciting or countering hate speech

Additionally, clerics, group leaders, media outlets, and well-known figures in society play a significant role on how people behave. They seem to drive the online conversation and are key to any rise in hate speech following outbreaks of violence on the ground, or after a certain political event. [176]

Having said that, it is not all gloom. The study also points to examples where social media campaigns play a positive role in stemming sectarian incitement following two attacks on Shia mosques in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

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[174] Siegel, Alexandra. "Sectarian Twitter Wars: Sunni-Shia Conflict and Cooperation in the Digital Age." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 20, 2015.

http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/12/20/sectarian-twitter-wars-sunni-shia-conflict-and-cooperation-in-digital-age-pub-62299 (accessed July 15, 2017)

[175] Siegel, 2015, Ibid.

[176] Siegel, 2015, Ibid.

Countering Hate Speech

The most important question journalists have to ask themselves once again is: Am I falling into or promoting hate speech in any way? Think about this when reporting conflict or war. Is it possible to report war and avoid promoting hate speech when, for example, there are groups making hateful statements against each other? Should we include said statements or should we edit them out? If we edit them out, are we not then reporting the news with bias or incompletely?

These questions will probably never have a definitive answer. That is why it is important to keep asking them time and again, with every news piece we intend to publish.

Tip Box

There are some standards that should always guide your answers to help avoid becoming a vehicle of hate propaganda. They are by no means exhaustive or comprehensive but they can be taken as input to develop protocols or procedures that journalists should always follow:

• Respect human rights stipulated in IHRL and national legislations. Sometimes these will collide, especially in countries of the Arab world. In this case, watch first for your safety and assess the importance of the news versus the potential violent incitement it may generate

• Always incline to create news content from an angle that promotes and protects social peace

• Do not publish any content that glorifies or promotes rape, torture, suffering, death or self-harm

• Stay away from stereotypes when evaluating people, places and events

• Know the context in order to discern agendas and avoid being carried away
by national slogans with ulterior discriminatory objectives

• Do not use controversies and sensationalism just to increase views or readership. Evaluate the news on its merit

• News directors must be aware of the political orientations of their journalists to ensure news is accurate and sound

• When unsure about whether to reveal the truth or hide it – because it might inflame a conflict – ask yourself: Is this news so important that it is worth exposing people to risk?

• Strictly refrain from publishing threats inciting violence

• Never encourage anyone to kill others

• Do not support organizations or individuals who support hatred on any basis

• Media outlets should formulate a code for journalists with specific implementation of mechanisms to prevent hate speech

• Check your news piece against the five-point test for journalists developed by the Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) to assess your content before publishing and avoid hate speech.[177]

Some of this advice may sound obvious, but as we have seen in the examples above, it is very common for journalists in conflict contexts or war situations to violate these essential pointers.

There are many factors behind the spread of hate speech in the media including the political developments in the region and the circumstances surrounding them. But the biggest disappointment is that some media outlets and journalists have drifted blindly behind the tide of such hate mongering. Many media outlets have so far failed to live up to the role of a guarantor of accountability. They have not been able to contribute to protect social peace, and promote values to promote dialogue and more tolerant societies at times where polarisation and the dehumanisation of others is on the rise worldwide.

Journalists should be trained with a methodology and mechanisms to identify, avoid and counter hate speech. Making yourself aware of your speech and actions should be an everyday task – particularly when you are always walking on a thin line between informing and amplifying harmful voices that may undermine peace and threaten integrity and lives of other people.

A Guide to Identifying Types of Hate Speech

With many definitions available, how does a journalist know what falls into hate speech and what does not?

Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Article 19, proposes a typology of hate speech, scaled according to its severity: 1. Hate speech that must be prohibited; 2. Hate speech that may be prohibited; and 3. Lawful hate speech.

The freedom of expression advocacy considers that deeply offensive expressions; blasphemy or "defamation" of religions; glorification of terrorist attacks; denial of historical events; defamation; and speech against the state and public officials, should not be considered hate speech.

Consult the full toolkit here: https://goo.gl/qQGw3H

[177] Ethical Journalism Network, 2015. "Resources to Identify Hate Speech."

http://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/resources/publications/hate-speech (accessed July 17, 2017)

■ # Chapter 12

Professional Integrity: The Cornerstone of Protection

By Peter Greste

Propaganda and censorship are as old as war itself, but that has generally been a struggle to control the story rather than targeting the storyteller. In an ideal world, journalism is not supposed to be a dangerous profession; it has always had its risks of course, but as storytellers, we are supposed to be intermediaries rather than activists, observers rather than participants.

However, a look at the statistics shows some disturbing numbers. The New York-based Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) has been tracking the number of journalists and media workers who have been killed since 1991.[178] Its graphs show a few bad years in the early 90s when many reporters died in two significant conflicts – Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. There, most of the casualties were local journalists who were killed because of their ethnicity rather than their jobs. Later, the numbers tailed off, with between 30 and 40 being killed each year until 2004, when the numbers shot up again, with anywhere between 70 and 110 dying in any given 12-month period. This increase in violence against journalists registered since the mid 2000s can be attributed to different causes. Of course, one of them is war. Numbers show that when there is open conflict, a greater number of journalists are killed.

In Arab world countries in particular, violence against journalists has seen a major upshot after 9/11. Journalists killed in Iraq and Syria represent 20 percent of the total of dead journalists documented by the CPJ since 1992.[179] Both countries are considered among the deadliest countries in the world for journalists. But 9/11 and its subsequent "War on Terror" has affected the safety of journalists in specific regions of the world, such as Arab countries. I have always thought about them as a pivotal point for journalism – specifically the moment when US President George W. Bush declared that, "You are either with us, or you are with the terrorists". That one statement alone made the conflict a binary choice. You could either be on one side of the battle, or the other, but you

[178] The CPJ also documents deaths of media supporters, in recognition of the relevant role they play in the news production cycle. This category includes translators, drivers, guards, fixers, and administrative workers. For a detailed explanation of the terminology used by the CPJ's, please see: https://cpj.org/killed/terminology.php

[179] Committee to Protect Journalists "1246 Journalists Killed since 1992 / Motive Confirmed." 2017. https://cpj.org/killed/ (accessed July 18, 2017)

could not be neutral. For journalists, the implications were profound – the neutral, independent space that our professional standards demanded had suddenly evaporated overnight.[180]

The "War on Terror"

A good friend once rather dryly described the "War on Terror" as a war on an abstract noun. It means whatever anyone wants it to mean. It is both open-ended, with "victory" impossible to define, and indefinable. Throughout history, more than one war or conflict has been articulated around narratives that make it easier for human rights to be violated systematically precisely because the line between citizen or civilian and enemy becomes completely blurred. Cases in point are the military dictatorships in Argentina and Chile, where the "enemy" was purportedly also hard to define. [181]

The difference between these kinds of conflicts and the War on Terror is that the latter has an international dimension and a global reach and impact. We in the West tend to think pretty clearly about what fighting against terrorism is. It is about stopping the slaughter in places like Paris, or the random bombings in Kabul and Baghdad, or home-grown incidents like the Lindt Café attack in Australia, or the nightclub shooting in Orlando. But consider what some of the Islamists I met in prison told me. For them, the "War on Terror" means stopping the drone strikes that hit a hospital in Afghanistan, or wedding parties in Waziristan, the barrel bombs that fall in Aleppo, and yes – the random arrests, the beatings and torture in Cairo's prisons.

In war, the battlefield extends to the place where ideas themselves are prosecuted – and that includes the media. Different parties or factions fight over winning the public's favour. However, in recent conflicts, we have increasingly seen that journalists have no longer simply witnessed and reported on these struggles. We have become, by definition, a means by which war itself is waged. That is not an abstract concept. In one of the very first shots in this battle of ideas, the US Air Force bombed Al Jazeera's bureau in Kabul in November 2001. [182]Officially the US said it was a mistake, but it is hard to escape the conclusion that it attacked the bureau because it wanted to shut down the access that

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[180] The "War on Terror" is of course a game changer but many journalists have been facing safety risks for other reasons worldwide. E.g. in 2009, there were 75 dead journalists, out of which 33 (almost half) were killed in the Philippines. Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries to be a journalist. As far as 2017 goes, it is one of the highest ranking. Here, journalists are being killed as a result of the war on drugs. Violence seems to peak when a country declares an open war, whether an international armed conflict, a civil war or war on a specific issue. We cannot lump the situations in say Egypt, Mexico, Philippines, Somalia, and Pakistan. It will make it harder to diagnose and come up with preventative strategies. Also, we should take into account that technological advances in warfare have contributed to an increased number of killed or wounded journalists. The rise of media activists has meant increased numbers of causalities too.

[181] For example, in Argentina, the enemy was a concept, the "subversives", rather than a tangible, identifiable, and well-defined hostile group. The "fight against subversion" was a term that the government filled in with content at its own discretion. It was used indiscriminately to define anything the government wanted to get rid of.

[182] Wells, Matt. "Al-Jazeera accuses US of bombing its Kabul office." The Guardian, November 17, 2001.

journalists from the Arabic service had to sources in the Taliban and al Qaeda. Whatever you might think about the rights or wrongs of those groups, the US appeared to strike at a media organisation, because it disapproved of the ideas it was presenting. This is one example of how the false dichotomy "either you are with us or with the terrorists" operated.

On the other side of the ledger, the same dynamic can be observed. A few weeks later, the Taliban captured and murdered a group of four journalists on the road from Pakistan to Kabul, simply because of who they were, rather than because of anything they had done.

And then came the execution of Daniel Pearl – the Wall Street Journal reporter who was famously kidnapped and beheaded in Pakistan a few months later. In posting the execution online, al Qaeda used new media to propagate their own message – that anyone who challenges their view of the way society should work will be executed. What al Qaeda began, ISIL has mastered with sickening snuff videos, and their use of social media to both recruit and terrorise. In this war, new media has become as much a weapon of terror as any bomb.

Of course, the first instincts of any government – indeed of any society – that finds itself under attack is to close ranks, to prioritise security over all else, to silence dissent and control public opinion. But now, with the "War on Terror" and "national security" as an excuse, governments the world over are limiting free speech and censoring the press.

Here are just a few examples that CPJ presented to a US Congressional committee:

• In Tunisia, the government proposed a draft legislation in 2015 that would criminalize "denigration" of police or other security forces. The anti-terrorism law allows for prison sentences of up to five years for a person found to have praised a terrorist act or a person connected to it. Such over broad provisions, which echo laws in other countries in the region, infringe on the rights to receive and impart information and to free expression.

• In Cameroon, freelance journalist Simon Ateba was reporting on the condition of Nigerians in refugee camps in Cameroon and Chad, including interviewing those who fled Boko Haram. He was arrested and accused of spying on behalf of Boko Haram.

• The government's counter-extremism strategy provides the United Kingdom's broadcasting regulator, Ofcom, with increased power to take action against radio and television channels for broadcasting "extremist" content. It also requires internet service providers to do more to take down extremist content and to track

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https://www.theguardian.com/media/2001/nov/17/warinafghanistan2001.afghanistan (accessed July 18, 2017)

those who posted it. We have already seen British terrorism legislation used to violate press freedom. In August 2015, British police used special powers under the Terrorism Act of 2000 to seize the laptop of Secunder Kermani, a reporter for BBC Two's flagship news show, "Newsnight". The British Government Communications Headquarters has scooped up emails to and from journalists working for some of the United States' and the United Kingdom's largest media organisations.

• In Russia, the only remaining independent TV news station, Dozhd TV, was subjected to an audit to check for anti-terrorism violations, among other purported legal abuses, in what CPJ and others believe is a politically motivated attack. Attempts to use anti-extremism laws to restrict news and reporting are not new. In 2006, a Russian bill broadened the definition of extremism to include media criticism of public officials.

Reporting Conflict from Egypt: A Personal Account

My personal direct experience stems from covering recent events in Egypt. In the Arab Spring context, my two colleagues and I – producers Mohammed Fahmy and Baher Mohamed – were arrested and charged with being members of a terrorist organisation; of supporting a terrorist organisation; of financing a terrorist organisation; and of broadcasting false news to undermine national security. What we were actually doing was covering the unfolding political struggle with all the professional integrity that our imperfect trade demands – and that included reporting that we believed was both accurate and balanced. In our case, balanced reporting involved interviewing members of the Muslim Brotherhood who, only six months earlier, had been ousted from power after forming the country's first democratically elected government. In other words, we were talking to the opposition.

The Egyptian investigators alleged that we had used our role as reporters as a cover to work as propagandists for them. It is a characterization that a lot of people probably would not have been particularly surprised by. Most people in Egypt would have seen it consistent with the way the present government understands how most journalists operate.

I could not have objected to being imprisoned if we had actually committed some offence; if we had broadcast news that was false, for example; or if we really had been members of a terrorist organisation. But at no stage in the trial did the prosecution present anything to confirm any of the charges. Once again, this was not about what we had actually done, so much as the ideas we were accused of transmitting.

From left to right, Producer Baher Mohamed, Producer Mohamed Fahmy and Correspondent Peter Greste in court, 2013. Photo: Al Jazeera

The trials of the Al Jazeera journalists begin, but are constantly plagued by mistrials, delays and adjournments as the Egyptian prosecutors struggle to bring any condemning evidence or witnesses to the courts. Photo: Al Jazeera

Egypt has gone on to introduce new legislation that makes it a criminal offence to publish anything that contradicts the official version of a terrorist incident. If you check the facts, discover that the government has been trying to cover up some inconvenient truths and publish what you know, you can be hit with a fine equivalent to more than USD 50,000.

But as the facts of the case began to unfold, an extraordinary groundswell of support emerged. It began with our professional colleagues, including some of our fiercest rivals. Hundreds of people from organisations like CNN and the BBC stood with their mouths taped shut, holding signs declaring "Free AJ staff."

Global campaign to free Al Jazeera staff, 2013. Photo: Al Jazeera

After this the public stepped up their support of us, first in the hundreds, then the thousands, then the millions and even the tens of millions. The #FreeAJStaff hashtag eventually got almost three billion impressions on Twitter – a truly extraordinary number by any measure. Next came the politicians. They lined up behind us with an extraordinary unanimity that is genuinely rare these days.[183]

Al Jazeera staff campaigning in Al Jazeera English studio, 2013. Photo: Al Jazeera

183 Lim, Dominica. "#FreeAJStaff: A global day of action." Al Jazeera. February 27, 2014.
http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/2/26/free-aj-staff.html (accessed July 18, 2017)

Professional Integrity as Your Strongest Defence

In this new environment, what should our response be? What is the safest way of protecting ourselves and doing our jobs with integrity and professionalism?

The temptation of course is to give in to pressure from both sides and cede the battleground to the belligerents, relying instead on whatever we are told through official channels. It is easy to simply quote from one side and the other, without trying to get to the truth. We can put politicians on air without challenging their assumptions, arguing that we are "only doing our jobs" by transmitting what they say.

We literally become "the medium" – the means by which others transmit their message, but that makes us no better than social media, acting as megaphones for the lies and distortions of others. It feels safe because nobody gets upset with us, but it is not very good journalism. And our experience in Egypt suggests that it is not as safe as it might seem. In the end, our greatest defence as reporters – indeed our only defence – is our own professional integrity.

The point is that vast support we had while being on trial emerged because everyone came to understand that we had always remained true to the highest ethical standards, not just in our reporting of Egypt, but throughout our careers. If anyone of us had lapsed in the past; if we had somehow given in and published blatantly biased or inaccurate reports, our critics in Egypt would have jumped on them with glee and trumpeted it from the rooftops. Nobody – our colleagues, the public, the politicians, none of them – would have had any confidence in our professional integrity, and they would have started to wonder if perhaps the allegations were true. Our support would have crumbled to dust and we would likely still be in prison.

For all the cynicism about journalism and the media in general, there is still an understanding amongst the public that what we do is, in fact, pretty fundamental to the way our societies work. They know – you know – that for all the criticism that gets levelled at the media, democracy does not work unless there is a free exchange of ideas and information; and a watchdog keeping track of those who make decisions in our name. People backed us partly out of outrage at what we were going through at a personal level. But they also shouted because they recognized and believed in the fundamental importance of the values that we three came to represent – freedom of speech; freedom of the press; and the rule of law in a properly functioning society.

Chapter 13

Good Governance in Media Organisations

By Aidan White

Reporting from the heat of battle or covering the tragedy and desolation of humanitarian disaster can be perilous, but the risks are less if media professionals are prepared for the task. All news media have a duty of care. When things go wrong, media have to take responsibility, particularly when people are hurt or killed. They should ensure that they are well-prepared for the challenges of risk reporting by creating internal systems of good governance, safety-conscious editorial management and respect for ethics by journalists working in the field.

A displaced Iraqi girl who fled her home with her family is seen at Salamiyah camp, near Mosul, Iraq July 26, 2017. REUTERS/Thaier Al-Sudani - RTX3CZY2

It goes without saying that any journalist going on a risky assignment should do their homework. Packing the right equipment, alerting reliable contacts in the field, and being fully briefed on the political and cultural terrain as well as local laws and international humanitarian law are essential.

Journalists should be physically and mentally primed with some first aid knowledge and a session of hostile environment training under their belt. We keep insisting on this, time and again, because unfortunately, many are not. Very often, journalists are recklessly ill-equipped for dangerous missions and they may take unacceptable risks, endangering their own lives and the people around them. Some work without insurance cover or clear working contracts or commissions from responsible media. A few of them travel into dangerous hot-spots without any serious understanding of what they are getting themselves into. Only a minority has safety training.

This practice needs to be discouraged, but at a time when newsroom budgets are under pressure some unscrupulous media may cut corners on the security of their staff to save money. Increasingly, journalists have to look out for themselves.

The situation is not made any easier in the face of media competition. The impulse to be the first with exclusive coverage of violence leads to more risk-taking. Even the best media may sometimes turn a blind-eye to behaviour that breaks the rules if it delivers dramatic footage. Of course, there are no guarantees about safety. Accidents do happen and when bullets fly or crowds are on the rampage anyone can get hurt, but media can minimise the threats to their people.

With this in mind, the following guidelines have been prepared by the Ethical Journalism Network, drawing upon experience and advice from the media industry over the past 30 years and from key organisations such as the International News Safety Institute and the International Federation of Journalists.[184]

These guidelines provide a few suggestions to help media reduce the risks facing their staff. They are not exhaustive, and media should prepare their own purpose-built system, but all safety policies should include:

• Guidance for media managers on the steps they need to take to create working conditions for the safe exercise of journalism

• A checklist for commissioning editors to ensure they are getting the story without sacrificing safety

• Minimum standards for working with fixers and support staff in the field

• Tips for everyone at all levels on ethical behaviour and, in particular, how to deal with propaganda, hate speech and incitement to violence, especially during wartime

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[184] International News Safety Institute. "INSI Safety Code." 2017. http://www.newssafety.org/about-insi/insi-safety-code/ and http://ifj-safety.org/en/contents/international-code-of-practice-for-the-safe-conduct-of-journalism (accessed July 18, 2017)

Getting Started: An Internal Safety Audit

Large media companies have human resources departments to manage their staff, but most media today are small or medium sized operations and all of them are financially stretched.

Very often they employ people on flexible or short-term contracts, but that is no excuse for not ensuring that everyone who is potentially at risk is given the protection they need to work safely.

News media should carry out annual audits of their safety needs that identify the risks their staff face and the need in terms of safety equipment and staff training. This audit should establish baseline standards for their staff in terms of insurance, training and equipment and it is not just for head office – the audit should also examine the capacity and performance of the company's foreign bureaux.

The audit, which should include a review of numbers of staff (and freelance) at potential risk, should examine the company's performance and capacity in the following areas:

• Provision of training and security protection

• Provision of health and life insurance to vulnerable staff members

• Other education, training, counselling, prevention, and risk-control actions covering serious diseases, stress related conditions, and physical attacks

• Special measures to deal with support for women staff

• Health and safety topics covered in formal agreements with trade unions and journalism syndicates

• Engagement with safety activities at national and international level including International News Safety Institute

Media Management

Media managers may not travel into the field, but they should develop internal systems of governance that promote awareness of the potential risks staff face and ways of dealing with a security crisis when it arises.

In particular, they will ensure that the media organisation maintains the professional integrity of its editorial work by not allowing any form of political bias

in reporting or the perception of any undue political influence from any side in a conflict.

Good managers will develop a health and safety regime that protects everyone employed by the company and that recognises that journalists and people who work with them face particular problems that require special attention. They should ensure that they and their commissioning editors, newsroom executives and journalists working in the field are fully briefed on policy and law that affects their safety, including the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists[185] and elements of International Humanitarian Law (IHL)[186] that provide protection for journalists.

Managers must also ensure that specific attention is paid to gender-related issues when it comes to safety. Recent research shows that special consideration of the challenges facing women reporting on risky assignments is urgently required.[187] The threat of harassment, bullying and intimidation of female journalists should be part of a company's safety strategy. [188]

This and other questions should form part of an internal safety information programme that includes detailed guidelines and advice for all staff. This information should draw upon the experience of reporters and editors who have worked in the field. Some companies have created internal handbooks with useful information for their staff.

Such guidelines should emphasize:

• That the company's field operations (branch offices and foreign bureaux) are fit for purpose with the capacity to implement emergency measures in the event of injury, death or other life-threatening crisis

• That all staff or freelance journalists or fixers and assistants in the field have received appropriate safety training and briefings on company policy on safety before they are deployed. It may be useful to prepare a targeted "Fixer's Handbook" which outlines company policy and guidance for employees on short-term contracts

• That staff who are most likely to face high risks (those travelling in conflict areas, for instance) are given medical checks and offered counselling to ensure they are fully fit for the tasks they face

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[185] United Nations. "UN Plan Of Action On The Safety Of Journalists And The Issue Of Impunity." April 12, 2012. http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/official_documents/UN-Plan-on-Safety-Journalists_EN_UN-Logo.pdf (accessed July 18, 2017)

[186] International Committee of the Red Cross. "How does international humanitarian law protect journalists in armed-conflict situations?," July 27, 2010. https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/interview/protection-journalists-interview-270710.htm (accessed July 18, 2017)

[187] International Women's Media Foundation. "Journalist Safety." 2017. https://www.iwmf.org/our-research/journalist-safety (accessd July 18, 2017)

[188] International Women's Media Foundation, 2017, Ibid.

• That all staff and support workers are in possession of appropriate equipment for their assignment including communications support (telephones and where necessary satellite links) as well as flag jackets, helmets and essential documents covering their identity, role and responsibilities

• That life insurance and health cover is a mandatory provision for all staff and freelancers and must be extended also to support staff in the field

• That staff returning from dangerous assignments or events where there has been trauma and distress are systematically and compulsorily subject to a process of debriefing which allows, if necessary, for personal and confidential counselling

Commissioning Editors and Newsroom Leaders

Editors and newsroom executives are primarily responsible for implementing company safety policy. They must ensure that in day-to-day work they balance carefully editorial and professional objectives with the need to protect staff. They should be trained to identify stress and trauma, which may threaten the well-being of staff under their jurisdiction.

In addition, they must ensure:

• That all employees and support staff are informed that taking unjustified risks in pursuit of a story or a picture is unacceptable. Safety must always come before competitive advantage

• That staff or freelancers employed or commissioned to report from dangerous areas should be made fully aware of the potential risks and must be able, without fear of disadvantage, to refuse any assignment on the grounds of potential risk

• That management are responsible for carefully monitoring dangerous assignments and that all staff should report regularly to their superiors on the security situation

• That while respecting the need to be guided by journalists working on the ground who are best able to judge reporting conditions, editorial management should be ready, where appropriate, to instruct their staff and freelancers to withdraw to secure positions if safety is compromised

• That the company only commissions work from people they know or who they have verified in terms of professional capacity for any tasks that involve undertaking potentially dangerous assignments

Ethical Reporting

Journalists who do their job ethically and responsibly are more likely to be safer than those who deliberately bend ethical rules to exaggerate or sensationalise a story.

It is particularly important to ensure that reporting does not cross a line into propaganda and become a vehicle for intolerance or intense hatred that may increase levels of violence.

Journalists will do well to work strictly within the ethical framework of journalism – sticking to the facts and avoiding rumour and speculation; showing humanity and respect for the victims of violence; avoiding bias in favour of one side or another; keeping clear of all forms of hate speech designed to incite more violence; and correcting errors when they are revealed.

Commissioning editors should ensure:

• That all material submitted from conflict zones or from traumatic events should be fully verified and corroborated prior to publication and should not be sensationalised in any way that might put reporters or field staff at risk

• That the pattern of coverage does not give rise to a perception of editorial bias, politically or strategically, particularly if that could lead to the targeting of the company's reporting staff on the ground

Journalists and editors can reduce the impact of intolerance and hate speech by challenging outrageous statements of politicians; putting all factual claims to the test of verification; avoiding use of explicit images of violence and brutality; and ensuring the coverage is inclusive of all legitimate voices in a conflict.

One useful tool developed by the Ethical Journalism Network is the 5-Point Test for Hate Speech, which journalists and editors can use to help them decide how to treat controversial statements and incendiary speech. [189]

Adopting these guidelines and ethical standards will help media develop a culture of safety in their management and newsroom operations, but it may also ensure that media and ethical journalism play a positive role in helping warring communities to step back from violence.

Journalism is not about making peace; that is the job of others, particularly politicians and community leaders, but good journalism will create understanding of the roots of conflict and can provide scope for dialogues that may lead to positive change.

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[189] Ethical Journalism Network. "Hate Speech." 2017.
http://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/en/contents/hate-speech-a-five-point-test-for-journalists (accessed July 18, 2017)

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