

# GENDERING WAR AND PEACE REPORTING

SOME INSIGHTS – SOME MISSING LINKS



Berit von der Lippe and Rune Ottosen (eds.)

NORDICOM



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*Some Insights – Some Missing Links*

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*Berit von der Lippe and Rune Ottosen*

Oslo, September 2016



## Introduction

# Approaches and Insights on Gendering War- and Peace Reporting

Berit von der Lippe & Rune Ottosen

The stories told of history, war, defeat, victory and glory spring mainly – and more manifestly than other discourses – from masculinised memory, ambitions, humiliation and hope, told mainly by males in power positions and male reporters (Yuval-Davis 1997; Tickner 2001). It is obvious that things have changed nowadays – in societies, in politics and in media. Today, women are present and visible (though in the minority) as generals, officers or soldiers, and as high-ranking politicians dealing with security issues; and in many countries women's presence as journalists and war reporters seems to be taken for granted. Women are now prominent among war reporters.

Will the presence of women in the frontline be indicative of a change in war storylines? Will women's perspectives allow for greater engagement with the lives of the victims of war rather than its technical and strategic aspects? There are no clear-cut answers to these questions as there is no deterministic link between sex/gender and more peaceful news (or a more peaceful world). The forces shaping our collective perspectives are, however, still dominated by men's voices, and traditional masculinist war narratives are still the rules of the (war) game.

War reporting has traditionally been dominated by male war reporters and war reporting has been overrepresented by elite sources like politicians, high ranking military officers and state officials. These elite sources are collectively dominated by men and it will take more than more women journalists to change this male hegemony (Ottosen 2010).

War reporting is of stories about life and death, about the motivation for going to war, about public opinion and 'hearts and minds'. These stories are indicative of the culture of the countries at war, the personalities of those leading the wars, television images, books, movies and photographs.

Gender matters in war reporting, as it does in the real world – and especially during war and conflict (Enloe 1999), but gendering war reporting is still marginalised. Violence against women tends to increase during times of war and conflict, and owing to the continuation of various forms of violence left unaddressed by so-called peace

settlements (still negotiated primarily by men and for men) new forms of violence such as domestic violence and human trafficking become acute in the aftermath of war (Pankhurst 2008, see also Reeves 2011). The need for gendered lenses on war and conflict reporting is indeed urgent. Constructions of masculinities and femininities matter. Visibility matters, as do voices heard and voices listened to. Roland Barthes's understanding of myth may illuminate the taken-for-granted aspect of 'gender neutrality' and iconic images in war reporting – dynamic or not – because media tend to give the impression of simply seeing the world and the surroundings as they really are. In reality, media images are highly contingent and ideologically framed (Barthes 1959). Visual representation through images in photojournalism, computer games and fiction movies about wars are essential for hegemonic masculinity (Andersen 2014).

When watching a dozen male ministers, admirals, soldiers or officers on a television screen, most people only see ministers, admirals, soldiers or officers. It is often overlooked that the members of the group are exclusively males, but had the group been of exclusively women – ministers, admirals, soldiers or officers – they would probably be perceived first as females. Would they have been seen or perceived as ministers, admirals, soldiers or officers at all? Or would some people even have laughed, seeing the women as ridiculous? One way the myth functions is to naturalise men in power positions to such an extent that some kinds of hegemonic masculinity still seem to be an integral part of what may be called hegemonic discourse. The masculinity encouraging and sustaining the desire to fight in war is dependent on maintaining a privileged position. Resistance and transformation are indeed possible, and capable, of challenging the existence of war itself; if challenged, men might not be pressured into mobilisation by such notions of masculinity (Repo 2006: 123).

These issues are complex, of course, and only some of them will be discussed in this compilation. They will be approached from various theoretical perspectives. Scholars, cultural critics and media workers have scrutinised coverage and highlighted 'missing links' and partiality in war-reporting practices; gendered analysis of war reporting has been poorly presented. The missing link in the articles presented here is war reporting in social media. Several women and young girls have been – and are – active and actively using these media, thus contributing as war reporters in multiple fascinating and informative ways.

In fictional war stories the characters are given specifically gendered roles – but not so in war stories as news. The essays in this compilation aim to reduce the scholarly missing links by bringing forth aspects of war reporting through various gendered lenses. Some individuals are anonymous or invisible. Some bodies are valuable and worth protecting; some are unworthy of protection; some are constructed as dangerous and even evil, thus necessary to destroy (some are dangerous and need at least to be restrained). To some extent we are dealing with dichotomies of self/other, autonomy/dependence, agency/passivity, rational/emotional, civilised/primitive, as well as dimensions of visibility/invisibility, foregrounded/backgrounded or marginalised and

silenced. One aim of this compilation is to demonstrate how genders are manipulated and used as vehicles to support and legitimise violence and militarism.

### A third gender or post-colonial flashback?

Given women's historical marginalisation from war reporting, this appears to be a progressive development for women in journalism. Many see themselves as 'third gender' when reporting from Muslim countries because, they claim, in the eyes of local men they are distinguished from local women and less threatening than male reporters. What kind of 'feminism' is created by this 'third gender' discourse, and who is excluded within this narrative of 'women's progress'? The third gender category may be seen as constructed upon diverse gendered and ethnic/racial characteristics; based on racial/ethnic assumptions it can be exploited by white women reporters in order to improve their access to information. This is posited as a 'unique advantage' over male journalists in conflict zones but, according to Evgenia Perez (2002), also over local women specifically in Muslim-majority Arab countries (see Edney-Browne 2015).

The problems many see in reporters' 'third gender' identity, is that Arab women's experiences will easily become segregated from white women's experiences and, implicitly at least, they will see an 'average third-world woman' in opposition to idealised images of the Western women – "educated, modern, having control over their bodies and sexualities, and the 'freedom' to make their own decisions", as Chandra Talpate Mohanty expresses it (Mohanty 2003: 53). Although some women reporters find that they are perceived as breaking with traditional values, they might be categorised as 'third-gender'. Western women war reporters might easily see themselves as distinct from the 'native women'. In conservative Muslim-majority countries, women may be perceived as harmless, and this is especially advantageous in military or political contexts where men journalists are more readily conflated with 'the enemy'.

Women's visibility and invisibility in the mass media's war stories reflect the contradictory attitudes suggested above. The well-known expression of the feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), "white men protecting brown women from brown men", may today be paraphrased as "Western women protecting brown women from brown men". Warning that we cannot usefully respond to the silencing of the 'subaltern' woman by 'representing' that figure, or by constructing her as a speaking subject, Spivak reminds us of a colonial past. Even when undertaken with 'good intentions', no perspective can turn this other into a self. Lila Abu-Lughod takes us further and focuses on how imperial logic genders and separates subjects so that men are the 'other' and the women need to be protected – through a Western rescue mission (Abu-Lughod 2002). This modern 'feminist' protection scenario became particularly noticeable as part of the (so-called) war on terror after 11 September 2001. It refers to the protection of both the enemy's and 'our' women – female soldiers included. The protected is often rendered voiceless, and only occasionally seen or

listened to, thus rarely foregrounded as soldiers fighting and acting in the same way as male combatants.

A glimpse into feminist perspectives on war, peace and security may be relevant; as these issues belong to the most gendered field on earth. The metaphorical rape of a country is, for most women – and for some men – seldom experienced metaphorically. Security easily merges into insecurity and becomes physical and material, gendered insecurity. Cynthia Cockburn (2001: 16) argues that gender is being used as a structural principle, often idealised, in international relations, as a symbol. According to Cockburn, this contributes to transferring specific meaning to the objects of international politics, thereby justifying certain policy actions. Hierarchies placing gendered objects in contrast to each other are established, creating an image of international politics as nonpolitical activities.

War, peace and security are surely notions with multiple dimensions and meanings, as are gender equality and gender sensitivity. They can be extended, narrowed and broadened, but also emptied of content. The mutual meanings of security issues are largely shared by people in power positions (mostly men), and express the perspective(s) of the power elite(s). When alternative war stories are silenced, an injection of new voices and new ideas alongside new perspectives are all the more important (Ross & Moorty 2005; Lippe 2012b).

Images of a ‘post-feminist achievement’ in NATO’s member states can easily be equated with the full realisation of gender equality as a norm – as opposed to Islamic practice in general – and, at least to some extent, “thoughts are already thought through” (Keskinen et al. 2009: 12-13). The investments in a universal emancipatory politics may work to constrain critical feminist questions of both government policies and global political environments, which creates fertile arenas for this kind of feminist war/security rhetoric to succeed (Eisenstein 2002; Cloud 2004; Lippe 2012a).

Despite some differences among Western countries and within Western cultures, there is a substantial risk of liberal feminist ideas of gender equality and gender balance becoming “a nasty little weapon” of imperialism (to borrow an expression used by Spivak (2001: 17)). When we put ourselves in the position of the other, the rhetoric of benevolent philanthropy often fails to exhibit the patience and respect necessary to weave disparate perspectives together. In her essay *Terror: A speech after 9-11* (2004), Spivak describes the ‘war on terror’ as synonymous with global civil war and emphasises its coercive rhetoric of cultural incommensurability. She argues that the war on terror is part of an alibi that every imperialism has given itself, a civilising mission carried to the extreme. Security states do not justify their wars by appealing to sentiments of greed or desire for conquest; they appeal to their role as protectors (see also Young 2003).

What postcolonial readings of global civil war have in common, according to Spivak, is their desire to respond to war in a moral fashion. To swim against this current without drowning is a difficult discipline – a discipline and an activity ‘the white woman’ does not have to learn. The silencing of most women’s voices – and agency – seems sufficiently hidden in the doxic room, and powerful women would rather let

the current hegemonic stream do the work. Western liberal feminist rhetoric remains lost in tradition, although dressed in postmodern ‘post-feminist achievement’ clothing – fulfilling the logic of present absence. Postcolonial feminists often accuse Western feminists of essentialising and victimising non-Western women as being in need of the emancipatory assistance of their ‘liberated’ Western sisters, and this allegation is constantly repeated in the case of the veil.

## Gendering peace journalism

Although there is no deterministic link between sex/gender and more peaceful news (or a more peaceful world), bringing women reporters’ voices into war coverage war might have some impact on traditional masculinist war and conflict narratives. The gendered lenses in what follows are first and foremost perspectives critical to the depoliticising tendencies of liberal feminism. Representation in power politics, according to this feminist school – among whom Nancy Fraser is a leading voice (see Fraser 2013) – seems to be more important than redistribution and opposition to existing power structures, focusing mainly on women’s exclusion from politics. Pursuing strategies for women’s inclusion in power positions may of course be important, but the question is what happens if some few females these days take their place alongside the males. The neoliberal project seeks, according to Fraser, to undo past collective gains which limited labour exploitation and maintained public goods, instead fragmenting people into individuals pursuing their individual goals. Within the dominant (neo) liberal project in a globalised world, feminism tends to be expressed in individualistic terms rather than focusing on social solidarity. As several postcolonial feminists have argued, a historical weakness of liberal/imperialist feminism in the West has been its racist, patronising attitude towards women of color who have been seen less as allies or agents and more as victims in need of rescue (Narayan 1997, 2000; Mohanty 2003; Spivak 2004). These are all perspectives present in the anthology. Added to the feminist perspectives indicated here are aspects of sexuality, ethnicity, culture, geography and social class; thus an intersectional approach, against a background of identity or power.

Johan Galtung’s model for war and peace reporting has been introduced as a criticism of the present conflict reporting in mainstream media (war journalism). Galtung argues that criticism is not enough, and offers peace journalism as a constructive alternative. After presenting the model, we will look critically at its relevance for the main topic of this book, the gender issues. He takes the feminist position that women will be better prepared to be peace journalists, as most of the violence in the world is perpetrated by men (he suggests 90 per cent). He then draws the assumption that the “vested interest for women to change the situation is obvious; just as there is vested interest for males in preserving the *status quo*”. Galtung forgets the main problem in his own model, seeing the war itself as the biggest problem, and putting the women reporters on a pedestal, better equipped than men to be peace journalists.

But there are also other reasons why men may be better at peace journalism though this is in no way meant to suggest that the burden of this civilizing mission should fall on women alone. Peace is more holistic than war; women may be more sensitive to a broader range of variables than men (op. cit.: 268).

Galtung's model of peace journalism builds on the dichotomy between what he calls "war journalism" and "peace journalism" (Ottosen 2010). The model includes four main points which contrast the two approaches: war journalism is violence-oriented, propaganda-oriented, elite-oriented and victory-oriented. This approach is often linked to a dualistic approach, a zero-sum game where the winner takes all (as in sports journalism). A potential consequence is that war journalism contributes to escalating conflicts by reproducing propaganda and promoting war. His theory is also relevant for the propaganda warfare mentioned above, since an essential part of the peace journalism model is to expose propaganda lies on all sides (Galtung 2002).

Peace journalism is people-oriented in the sense that it focuses on the victims (often civilian casualties) and thus gives a voice to the voiceless. It is also truth-oriented in the sense that it reveals untruth on all sides and focuses on propaganda as a means of continuing the war (Galtung 2002: 261-270). In this context, the peace journalism quest to identify atrocities on all sides in a conflict is of par'worthy' and 'unworthy' (Herman & Chomsky 1988). In this context the model is gender neutral since the explicit issue of gender and different masculinities and femininities is not dealt with. Galtung, addressing gender, focuses mainly on the role of women as victims, supplemented by a general acceptance that women are more open to peace ideas than are men. When listing unreported issues, for instance, he refers to the Balkan war (taking place) at the same time as the article was written as: "The mediation of numerous Yugoslav peace groups, consisting mainly of women" (Galtung 1992: 261). He also implies that women are more open to positive news (such as peace ideas) than men, who apparently tend to be more interested in negative news, "violence, where the male hunter-warrior has to be on guard" (op. cit.: 267). Here,

... that women should be more interested in peace news than in war news tallies well with the assumption of women as better peace workers/peace carriers. If women believe more than men in horizontal networking for the care of other humans ...

Nohrstedt and Ottosen have also addressed the weakness of Galtung's model as too static as an analytical tool, and they suggest the supplement of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2014: 100). They particularly point in the direction of Ruth Wodak's notion of historically-oriented CDA. Wodak's suggestion is to use historical analogies and examples in the discursive approach to war and peace issues (Wodak 1996, 2001) We think a historically-oriented gender analysis could very well be added to this list of critical supplements to Galtung's model as it lacks the ability to include aspects of multiple femininities and masculinities in the analysis of media representation of war and conflicts.

We need here to look critically at Galtung's model has a moral and ethical point of departure, acknowledging that media themselves play a role in the propaganda war, presenting a conscious choice: to identify other options for the readers/viewers by offering a solution-oriented, people-oriented and truth-oriented approach; and this in turn implies a focus on possible suggestions for peace that the parties to the conflict might have an interest in hiding. But, as Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick 2005: 5) have pointed out, it's not the job of the journalists to come up with specific peace suggestions in their reporting: "Peace Journalism is when editors and reporters make choices, about what to report and how to report it, which create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value nonviolent, developmental responses to conflict."

Security states hardly justify their wars by appealing to sentiments of greed or desire for conquest: their appeal is their role as protectors. Assumptions, categorisations and conceptualisations on gendered security issues need to be analysed as part of the wider globalisation phenomenon. This 'wider phenomenon' is a global polity that is taken for granted according to the dominant ideology of liberalism, both economic and political, a background assumption that Shepherd calls an "absent presence" (Shepherd 2008). The presence of women and the increased gender awareness in war, peace, and security issues, on the other hand, may be seen as 'present absences' – women in power positions are present and visible, but few among these women are representing any counter-discourse to the hegemonic discourse, and are thus a presence of women and absence of feminist opposition. This may be seen as one aspect of the feminist co-option phenomenon.

### The shortcomings of lip service to equality

Co-option is a fertile means of containing and maintaining large areas of silence, a practice that both absorbs and neutralises the meanings of the original concepts to fit into the prevailing political priorities or the 'taken-for-given'. Because concepts such as gender equality allow for multiple conflicting interpretations, spaces are created for empty declarations. Gendered concepts can easily be co-opted and mixed with hegemonic discourses (including hegemonic war rhetoric), whereby they are used in ways not corresponding to the original goals of those who formulated them (Lippe 2012b). Today, most people pay lip service to gender equality as a fundamental principle of democracy and social justice. Co-option therefore becomes all too likely and gender can easily be shrunk to the use and juxtaposition of 'he' and 'she' in official acts.

Gender concepts are not just neutralised or absorbed; they might in fact also work against mobilisation for real changes. It is difficult, as Maria Stratigaki has written, to mobilise for something already 'being there' (Stratigaki 2005: 36). The danger of co-option is greater in large organisations, and particularly if there is a high level of normative legitimacy for the general principle underlying the original policy goal. Co-option works against mobilisation and pressure by interested parties and indi-

viduals by using the original as well as the transformed concept as an alibi. Ann J. Tickner (2001: 49) exposes the 'myth of protection' thus: "... despite a widespread myth that wars are fought, mostly by men, to protect 'vulnerable' people – a category to which women and children are generally assigned – women and children constitute a significant proportion of casualties in recent wars."

Has mainstream feminism today been co-opted and cheapened into the narrow struggle to fill men's shoes while preserving capitalist, racist, imperialist and even patriarchal inequalities?

In the context of the ethical turn in foreign policy, NATO will for example no longer appear solely as a military alliance but as an organisation in which civilian and military relations are interconnected – to the benefit of the overall agenda of peace/avoiding war between major powers. In NATO's most recent action plan, the integration of gender is, for example, particularly stressed: "... key action areas include the further integration of a gender perspective in the areas of arms control, building integrity, children in armed conflict, counter-terrorism and human trafficking" (NATO 2014, see also Lippe & Stuvøy 2013).

Vital for promoting NATO's political project are psychological operations (PSY-OPS), also known as perception management (Ottosen 2013). One PSYOPS operation was to publish propaganda through television, radio and written publications. These products looked like journalism, but were constructed to promote the interests of their partner, the former president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, who was (with little justification) framed as the defender of democratic values. By the use of NATO/ISAF propaganda through a lookalike newspaper, *Sada-e Azadi*, the civilian population of Afghanistan is promised a future democracy, including the liberation of women (op. cit.: 87). This fits well into the pattern described by Jemima Repo:

The parallel is made between the American-backed officials as enlightened and progressive in support of women's rights and Westernisation, and the Islamists as Islamic fundamentalist ex-warriors still bloodthirsty and insistent on a backward society that oppresses women. The division between good/bad men divides Afghan masculinities into two opposing groups that sustains the US self-image of democratic liberator used in the humanitarian discourse for additional justification for the war. The US and its Afghani supporters are still characterised as woman-friendly, and any association with the Taliban as woman-repressive (Repo 2006: 66).

A gender sensitive approach will pay attention to the differences among men and among women, rather than exaggerating them. What is implied, though, are, first and foremost, representations as intertwined with identity categories such as state, nation, ethnicity and others. Security discourses and media discourses on war do more than construct problems, dangers and fears, underlining what and whom to be afraid of – media discourses also construct 'good citizens'. In an era of globalisation and increasing interdependence between nation states, no less than during the Cold War rhetoric of containment, war rhetoric is informed by specifically masculine values. Attempts to

connect violence structures with attributes or behavioural propensities that men or women supposedly share rely on stereotypical generalisations about men and women and will, as Iris Young underlines, “often leap too quickly from an account of the traits of persons to institutional structures and collective action” (Young 2003: 2). Good citizenship still seems to consist of cooperative obedience to authorities claiming that ‘we’ support democracy ‘out-of-area’ in the ongoing wars on terror.

Although many researchers in international relations claim that the discipline of international politics is gender neutral, others argue that the very definition of security and violence is in many ways gendered, affecting the overall nature and functioning of the international system. According to Tickner (2001), nowhere are the gender binaries more apparent than in the field of international politics (see also Enloe 1999, 2004). The international environment continues to be defined in terms of hegemonic masculinities, establishing the boundaries and power relations between the feminine, the private and masculine, the public and international. Gender, international relations and the notions of security are tightly connected, tending to form rather fixed discourses and practices that are further utilised in international politics. Does this hold? Or, somewhat more modestly, how do such views correspond with the media’s war reporting?

Like most mediated wars, these stories are still stories about how liberators and oppressors, heroes and villains, protagonists and antagonists are constructed. With only a few exceptions, the stories are male, representing so-called masculine values, whether honourable or disastrous – revealing simultaneously how some kinds of hegemonic masculinity are embedded in this discourse and regarded as universal. There is, however, no unequivocal position of women – or men – in war. There are constructs and perceptions of masculinities and femininities. If the reciprocal relationship between masculinity and militarism is in some sense weakening, so too perhaps is the power of the state to manipulate public support for its right to use violence in pursuing its policies abroad and in encouraging men and – in the name of gender equality policy – women to join the armed forces. Thus the state has a vested interest in maintaining strong ideological links between militarism and specific kinds of masculinity – while at the same time needing females to enter the forces, an integral part of liberal feminism.

Many women war reporters are probably tougher and even more fearless than their male colleagues when faced with dangers, and therefore perceive their gender as irrelevant and themselves as equal to their male colleagues. Molly Moore, a rare women reporter at the frontline during the Gulf War in 1991, was embarrassed when offered more comforts because she was a woman: “I’d always insisted I be treated the same as the troops” (Moore 1993: 11). The question is, have they simply been ‘leaning in’? This may perhaps be illustrated by women reporters’ reactions to the French branch of Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF). In 2011, this branch was forced to withdraw a statement saying that the international news media should not send women reporters to Cairo following cases of sexual assault. RSF had announced: “For the time being [media should] stop sending female journalists to cover the situation in Egypt. It is

unfortunate that we have come to this but, given the violence of these assaults, there is no other solution". (*Guardian* 2011)

Lindsey Hilsum, Channel 4's highly regarded international editor, wrote to RSF demanding it withdraw its initial advice, saying: "We have fought for decades as female journalists to get our editors to treat us equally. I do not understand how an organisation devoted to press freedom can recommend discrimination like this."

She asked the rhetorical question: "If more female journalists are assaulted, are you going to say it's our fault for being there?" She did not stop there and told the *Guardian*:

Sexual harassment and assault is undeniably a problem and absolutely horrific, but that does not mean women should be intimidated into not reporting in difficult situations. Male journalists have been assaulted and killed in this year's uprisings, but I haven't heard calls for them to leave.

Those who take the greatest risk, are, however, more often the local/native translators, freelancers or journalists. All reporters in conflict zones have to make judgments on the ground about safety, and the risk of sexual assault is one factor in that judgement. An Egyptian-American reporter who spent years – and a pregnancy – as Baghdad bureau chief for her agency and is now based in Cairo, tweeted the following response: "Well intentioned, but we have a job to do ... Nobody ever tells female doctors and nurses to go home and let the boys handle it."

Like their male colleagues, women reporters have come under sniper and artillery fire as well as aerial bombardment; have been teargassed at protests; and have been interrogated by security services and militias in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia. Women and men reporters tend to evaluate journalism, journalism ethics and journalistic identities in similar ways, having similar epistemologies. Women reporters don't share some gender-specific style of reporting or journalistic philosophy – and neither do men. And just as women in general do not share the same perspectives on feminism, the same goes for women war reporters. Power is not produced alone, and neither is gender. As Judith Butler sees it, gender is an act that requires repetitive performance "of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualised form of their legitimation" (Butler 1999: 178). It is a process without beginning or end, "an ongoing discursive practice ... open to intervention and resignification" (Butler 1999: 43).

Although there are no clear-cut demarcation lines (rather, there are blurred lines) between the topics and perspectives in the chapters in this volume, they are presented along the following structural line: first we ask to what extent or in what ways the gender of the reporter matters; secondly the focus is on articles focusing on the media's construction of women as 'the other', and within a postcolonial approach. Then, masculinities and feminities are discussed as the context of articles, and last – but not least – it is argued that gender has an impact when it comes to peace journalism.

In the following we will present the four parts of the book, including short presentations of the chapters.

## Part I. Gendering Professional Agencies

In *Bodies at War: The Dangers Facing Women War Reporters* Linda Steiner draws interesting historical lines among women war correspondents. Much has changed since 1846, when Margaret Fuller, the *New York Tribune's* literary critic and already known for a major treatise on women's rights, went to Italy to cover the revolution, making her the first woman foreign correspondent. Nonetheless, sexism remains. Mark Jenkins (2003) explains why Second World War 'gal correspondents' had to hustle harder than their male colleagues. They had to fight red tape, condescension, disdain, outright hostility and downright lewdness. They were assigned as a stunt, excluded on false pretenses, isolated by patronising protectionist policies and limited to certain topics and angles.

Steiner also focuses on women war reporters' accomplishments and how they have been ignored while their sex lives have been privileged and their sexuality exploited. The chapter provides an abbreviated history of the forms of sexism that women have faced in trying to report on war and the sex/gender structure that can distort war coverage. Even more problematically, Steiner contends, they have been exposed to sexual assault/sexual violence, sometimes in order to get a story – but then discouraged from reporting such assaults.

In her essay *Gendered Narratives: On Peace, Security and News Media Accountability to Women*, Sarah Macharia makes an argument for gender-aware journalistic professionalism which springs from three intersecting concerns: women's right to freedom of expression, gender-responsive media professional ethics, and gender-responsive peace journalism. Her point of departure are the 876 stories relevant to peace and security published in 83 major newspapers over a three-day period in April 2015. One important finding is that unfair representation and misrepresentation of women legitimise a culture of inequality and injustice. The alternative – to construct counter-narratives that empower subordinated groups – has little likelihood of succeeding in a news culture of hegemonic masculinity. Women are barely present in peace and security print news produced in transitional and conflict countries. There is evidence that the sex of the reporter makes a difference in the gender dimensions of a story. First, peace and security stories by female reporters are more likely to contain women as subjects or sources than those by their male colleagues; while men dominate as news subjects and sources in stories by all reporters. Macharia discusses whether peace journalism can be a platform for more gender-aware reporting.

Looking at another case from the African continent, Lilian Ngusuur Unaegbu raises the question: *Conflict Reporting in Nigeria: How Gender Balanced?* Through interviews with women journalists in two national newspapers in Nigeria, she reveals a pattern of discrimination against women at several levels in the daily reporting of news. Boko Haram's violent behaviour has promoted a specific pattern of hegemonic masculinity. Her argument is that through stereotypically violence-oriented war journalism, the coverage of the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls created an atmosphere of pas-

sivity and hopelessness. Gender-sensitive reporting of conflicts in Nigeria has been poor, and an additional problem is that most often women are portrayed as helpless victims. The feminist theoretician Jemima Repo has suggested that by sensationalising the rare examples of female suicide bombers, the newspapers fall into the trap of gender-cultural explanation, reducing women's participation to a generalised continuation of masculine action that does not exist beyond their connection to their male relatives. '... [W]omen are yet again victimised as sufferers of the brutality of their male counterparts, which they escape by their own death' (Repo 2006: 87).

In her chapter *Sexual Violence against Journalists in Conflict Zones, and Gendered Practices and Cultures in the Newsroom*, Marte Høiby challenges assumptions that violence against male reporters is essentially different (by motive) from that against female; that female staff require extra protection, and that these assumptions will be alleviated by hiring women for leading positions. While violence against men sometimes differs from that against women, the questions she brings forth are: how does it differ, and which similarities and which differences are significant? Women probably need extra protection, but why is extra protection reserved for women only? Høiby approaches these issues within a context of rape theory and literature on masculine hegemony and conflict-related sexual violence – offering a critical analysis of gendered issues (including victimisation and agency) and further contextualising the noncompliance with a specific kind of masculinity. Any dichotomic demarcation line is impossible to draw between men as such, and women are thus challenged – without, though, opposing that gendered differences do exist for women and men as war reporters.

Choosing to shed some light on the violence suffered by men, Høiby contributes to a more nuanced and complex discussion of the reality for both women and men reporters who are risking their lives in the job of covering war and conflict. The empirical data presented is retrieved from twenty in-depth interviews with journalists and editors in the Philippines and Norway that were carried out for a larger study on journalist safety and adaptation strategies in seven countries (see Høiby & Ottosen 2014). It considers the potential problematics of gendering risk and sexual violence against journalists, and intends to serve as a contribution to dialogue on a topic to which there are few definitive answers or solutions.

## Part II. Women and Lack of Agency

In her contribution “*There are No Women*” – *The War in Libya in TV News*, Eva Boller shows, through content analysis, that women are absent from TV news. Analysing the coverage of the war in Libya in 2011 in three TV newscasts in Germany, France and the UK, Boller examines the presence of women in the news, both in front of and behind the camera, to find that women were not visible in nearly 60 per cent of reports. German TV had no female correspondent in the country, French TV only one and only

the BBC had as many as seven female reporters at one point in Libya. Boller refuses to accept that the lack of women simply mirrors the ‘facts on the ground’ but, rather, reflects the overly strong focus of reporting on the battlefield instead of reporting about the situation for the civilian population – including women. Boller’s suggestion is to raise awareness of this absence of women, to change the focus of reporting and to improve the quality of war reporting through more female war correspondents.

In Elisabeth Eide’s chapter, *War and Women’s Voices: The Gender Approach of Afghanistan’s Largest News Agency*, the focus is on the Afghan media and their coverage of women. This chapter maps how one of the mainstream media outlets itself covers and evaluates the situation of women after fourteen years of US-led foreign military presence. It is an explorative study of Pajhwok, the dominant Afghan news agency. The main question is how Pajhwok prioritises women in their daily news coverage, and to what extent they are allowed a voice. Eide maintains that in simplified political discourses it seems as if the Taliban represents the sole responsible force behind extreme interpretations of the treatment of women in Islam. History proves otherwise, Eide tells us, as extreme oppression is a deeply-rooted phenomenon in Afghanistan. An underlying assumption here is that Afghan journalists may be able to provide a wider range of perspectives and narratives about Afghan women. Knowledge of the country’s history and culture enables them to communicate in the languages of the majority of Afghan people, who do not speak English. In general, women seem not to be prioritised in Pajhwok news stories, and prominent men often speak on women’s behalf, but most voices cited in the stories under the (small) ‘Women’ umbrella are those of women. Many belong to the elite, but there are also grassroots women, mostly victims or blaming the authorities for lack of attention to their plight. Eide thus gives voice to some few Afghan women, and simultaneously underlines that favouring elite sources is a universal journalistic convention, and not specifically Afghan. Could the peace journalism discourse be relevant here?

Desy Pirmasari’s chapter, *Being a Female Journalist at the Frontline*, shares her unique experience of being a Muslim woman reporter in a male dominated news environment during the war in Libya – in some way another dimension of so-called ‘third women’. She provides evidence of the problems women reporters face in a culture where strong and independent female voices are not welcome. Women reporters have to negotiate their identities and ‘go native’ in order to build proximity and eliminate barriers during their coverage in the field and thereby also give voices to strong and independent Muslim women’s voices. No women, however, were reported joining the armed struggle with men during the uprising in Libya. The question is whether female rebels might be a way forward for women’s liberation in Libya. The NATO intervention proved to be a misuse of UN Resolution 1973, which called for a no-fly zone but ended up with regime change. In all practical terms, the intervention strengthened the aggressive masculinity in the region.

In her chapter *Good or Bad Agents? Western Fascination with Women and the Construction of Female Objects during the ISIS/ISIL Crisis*, Marta Kollárová chal-

lenges the traditional way of seeing women as vulnerable objects in need of protection, turning her gaze on the ways women (first and foremost Muslim women) in combat are often perceived as even more dangerous than men. Although Kollárová does not explicitly focus on femininities as such, her text demonstrates Western media's ambivalence towards the agency of women and young girls as soldiers. Alongside the images of Yazidi women who have been sexually harassed, enslaved and victimised by ISIS terrorists, the Western media frequently report on Muslim (Kurdish) women as heroes who, according to many reports, had no choice but to take up weapons. Stories of beautiful, strong and (as some journalists call them) 'badass' women apparently killing more ISIS fighters than their male counterparts, only later to be killed themselves, have been a significant feature of Western reports on the conflict in Iraq and Syria.

While Kurdish women are frequently perceived as beautiful and even stylish agents, the women joining ISIS are presented as ghostly creatures (in black, full-body burqas) without any sense of agency, and being manipulated by ISIS propaganda. The political motivation and agency of the 'jihadi brides', as they are often called, are usually hidden behind simplified and universalised media images of ISIS propaganda and women's irrationality. The images of Kurdish and ISIS women result in binary representations, creating strict divisions between the 'good' fighters and the 'bad' women, 'whores' with no (or wrong) notions of agency. More specifically, Kollárová asks what the representation of women in Syria and Iraq mean to our understanding of women's agency, and what important insights this case study can bring to our perception of female violence and women's involvement in political conflicts.

As Edward Said (1995: 227-288) argues, the racial difference created by European colonialism enabled the idea of the White Man, an idea and a reality involving a particularly "reasoned position towards both the white and the non-white worlds". There can be no equivalent hegemonic femininity because although there are hierarchies among femininities, all femininities are subordinate to the hegemonic masculinity. This masculinity relies on a self-identification with heterosexuality, and defines itself in opposition to homosexuality, which is at the bottom of the gender hierarchy among men alongside 'subordinate' non-white masculinities (see Hooper 2001: 55).

This will be important in looking at the dehumanisation and demonisation of terrorists, mainly Muslim men. At present, many are attempting to reassert their masculinity after a long period of extreme violence and oppression, practices impinging on the human rights of women in the Middle East. When the traditional means by which masculinity is asserted have almost been devastated by long episodes of civil war and conflict, men will attempt to reclaim their masculinity through the use of violence. A re-masculinisation has occurred through the use of violence in the private sphere as well, where women will often become the most accessible targets (Gilliani 2008).

### Part III. Postcolonial Perspectives Forever?

Sadia Jamil's contribution, *Journalism and Freedom of Expression: Challenges and Constraints in Pakistan*, is written in the light of postcolonial feminist theory. She emphasises that the notions of 'freedom' and 'equality' stem from Western privilege, underlining that these two notions have different meanings and practices in postcolonial third-world countries, reflecting the differences in women's nationalities, race, ethnicity, religion and class. Pakistan shares a colonial past with India and Bangladesh. While these countries have inherited many Western ways and ideas, Jamil underlines that the practice of those ideas is not without problems. Despite emancipation from colonial oppression, she brings forth the lack of respect for women's right and how this disrespect has impact on Pakistani journalists, as well as media content. Using sub-themes, of which the journalist's safety was the most common, fifty-one men and women journalists were interviewed. The problem revealed was that women reporters are confronted with physical attacks and gender harassment while covering political events – and the environmental constraints in Pakistan were not confined to the coercive attitudes of government, military, political parties and pressure groups.

Most reporters – and most women reporters, in particular – claim that storylines in war reporting are not a matter of gender differences.

Berit von der Lippe's chapter, *Philanthropic War Narratives and Dangerous Protection Scenario(s)* relates to war reporting embedded in postcolonial perspectives and to the war reporter's gender. Highlighting a 2009 visit by the Norwegian defence minister, Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, to Faryab, a province in north-west Afghanistan (where Norway should be responsible for protecting the inhabitants from the Taliban), she presents the contradictions and paradoxes in embedded war reporting dressed in 'feminist philanthropy'. The focus is the minister's visit, together with some embedded journalists, to women prisoners and their children. Strøm-Erichsen permitted the journalists to photograph the prisoners unveiled, thus identified, and to listen to their most intimate testimonies – to be published some days later. The reports may reveal what is at stake when 'female victimisation' is represented – and published – in protected scenarios, endangering the lives of those 'we' claim to protect and empower. Lippe suggests that gender awareness may be related first and foremost to gender-responsive professionalism and an epistemic standpoint, rather than related to the gender of the war reporter – a reflection of internalised ideological assumptions.

The insecurity and oppression of 'the other women', as most Afghan women experienced, may serve as only one example of gendered violence through extremely patriarchal power structures – and how the international community addressed and communicated their 'plight' to Afghan women and children. The 'war on terror' in Afghanistan began one year after the birth of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, a resolution seen by many feminists as a watershed for women and a challenge to the women-and-children-as-helpless-victims construct (Enloe 1999, 2004), recognising

women's right to participate as decision makers at all levels in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peace-building processes (see Cohn 2004). Women should now, following this resolution, be seen as active agents in the public arena.

The resolution and the women-as-agents rhetoric, had the potential to become something more; in her article *Key Factors and Challenges to Understanding Women's Role in the Peace Process in Afghanistan*, Quhramaana Kakar discusses how and why the universalist strategy adopted by UNSCR 1325 is problematic in its application to concrete contexts. International frameworks and policies fail, Kakar tells, because of their inflexibility and lack of understanding of the context, including media, which have largely perceived Afghan women as victims of violence and submissive beneficiaries of international aid. Her focus is on how women in Afghanistan have, despite their reflection in the international media, been effective agents of social and political change. The author's first-hand familiarity (as a native of Kandahar, the most dynamic region of the country), and her empiricism, come from her personal experience (including interviews with women peace builders) as the gender advisor to the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme under the High Peace Council. She raises critical questions as to how international lawyers force choices on disempowered local constituencies in which they must choose between local culture or international rights – leading, according to the author, to essentialist identity politics.

*Is Peace a Smiling Woman?* is the telling title Kristin Skare Orgeret has chosen for her chapter. Using examples from a selection of four Norwegian newspapers in their print versions (*Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende*, *Dagsavisen* and *Klassekampen*), she looks at how gender is portrayed in peace-building efforts in relation to wars around the world. She discusses how traditional structures of binary oppositions, such as imperialist feminism versus postcolonial feminism, or equality feminism versus difference feminism, may be used to analyse the framing and constructions of 'the other', be they men or women. A central argument is that it is possible to connect perspectives from the postcolonial feminism school to the theoretical field of peace journalism, as both are concerned with getting more voices and perspectives heard.

Orgeret looks for alternative routes to a hegemonic universalism and to an essentialist particularism, challenging (as also does Kakar) the universal 'white feminism' as the norm constructed in three Norwegian newspapers. Linking her critical perspectives to peace journalism – as an alternative journalistic programme where the idea is to escape from the war propaganda trap of symbolically constructing armed conflicts – she opens up more multifaceted representations of femininities and masculinities in conflict and peace building. It is crucial to counteract conceptions reinforcing gender stereotypes. According to this author, more complex gender representations may also help to counter social hierarchies based on associations with male and female traits, which often tend to block female participation in post-conflict societies, and deny men the right to be victims.

## Part IV. Masculinities, Heroes and Victims

Femininities are not only as important as masculinities for understanding the war system as such, and it is equally important to be aware of how these constructions are played out in the media's war reportage. Both femininities and masculinities may be seen as located in hierarchies according to cross-cutting factors such as nationality, race or religion, and – more broadly – global power structures (Jaggar 2005). Gender hierarchies between and also within these identities, and hierarchies and power relations are also manifest between *different* masculinities and different femininities. These issues are inseparable from gender identities and are crucial to media and war reporting. Hegemonic security discourse and the discourse of victory are based upon suppositions about human nature and suppositions of war as (often) the only means of stability. The hegemonic assumptions used in analysing states and their behaviour in the international system depend, as we have brought forth above, on characteristics that we in the West tend to associate with masculinities: autonomy, sovereignty, independence, power, strength and honour. The fear of the other, the fear of dependence (implicitly, lack of autonomy) is seen by many feminists as a male construct. The fear of admitting that women's agency is as potent as men's might be another aspect of hegemonic masculinities.

In her discussion of R.W. Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity, Mimi Schippers argues that:

As Connell suggests, any conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity must be first defined in its difference from femininity. I would add, however, that any conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity must also be defined by the way in which it articulates a complementary and hierarchical relationship to femininity. Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity, with a few key changes (in italics) and the explicit addition of femininity, serves us quite well. Hegemonic masculinity is the qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Schippers 2007).

Hegemonic masculinity is a concept – popularised by the sociologist R.W. Connell – of proposed practices that promote the dominant social position of men.

In his article, *Masculinity, Iconisation and Ficcional War Heroes in the GWT*, Rune Ottosen focuses on how (through gendered images of alleged heroes) the media distort the male experiences in the battlefield. As his point of departure he takes two case studies from the US, and explores the hypothesis that historically the traditional 'American hero' has been a cornerstone in American war propaganda, discussing what relevance this might have for Norwegian media. Referring to the influence of American popular culture in Norway, and taking into consideration that Norway is a small NATO country, Ottosen compares the US and Norwegian media representation of masculine culture. He also discusses whether hegemonic masculinity can be an analytical tool for analysing the media images of IS/ISIS fighters.

In Toby Miller's chapter in this book: *Why War – Still? Albert Meets Sigmund in the Ultimate Match-Up*, he introduces a conversation between Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud in which they debate issues of war and peace, offering a different peace-oriented approach as a challenge to hegemonic masculinity. Miller asks how this account of masculinist scientific and technological rationality affects contemporary reportage. We know that reactionary commentators, male and female alike, valorised the hyper-masculinity that was unleashed even beyond its normal limits in the US after 2001. It is clear that columnists – who continue to command column inches and video clips – used the opportunity of war to push a domestic agenda in favour of male power. Their use of international relations to attack queerness and feminism is one area that needs serious engagement, through content and textual analysis, that can point to the trends in their work and check their facts.

Anette Bringedal Houge's contribution in this book, *Subversive Victims*, is a challenge to the orthodoxy that only women are subject to sexual abuse, and to rape on a mass scale, during wars. Men who are subject to sexual violence are traumatised, as are all who suffer sexual abuse, but they are nearly non-existing in the media. Male rape victims are marginalised by the media, because the very idea of male rape challenges the stereotypes in hegemonic masculinity. Based on a feminist approach, focusing on *all* the victims of sexual violence during the Bosnian war, including men, may provide valuable insights into the understanding of masculinities and patriarchy. Taking male victims of sexual violence seriously may be a righteous execution of the aphorism that what is personal – to women *and* to men – is also political.

Because defeat is the ultimate humiliation, hegemonic masculinity is valorised in its role as the 'protector'. It links military masculinity with values such as honour, loyalty and righteousness and it is this type of masculinity that belongs to heroes and myth making. (Tickner 2001: 57) Such war narratives are often effective vehicles for mobilising public support for war, and rely to a great extent on the celebration of heroic masculinity. The myth of the just warrior fighting to 'protect' vulnerable women and children continues to prevail, no matter (so it seems) (see Gilliani 2008).

Referring to the sexual torture conducted by female personnel at Guantanamo Bay, Jemima Repo (2006: 73) makes the point that the bodies of female soldiers also function to heterosexualise American male soldiers and desexualise or homosexualise the prisoners:

The male-directed sexual attention of US female soldiers eroticises bodies for male consumption, and automatically assumes the heterosexuality of their American male counterparts. In turn, the refusal of Muslim men to respond to this female sexual provocation strengthens the implications of their sexual impotence and lack of heterosexual prowess. Their homosexuality is strengthened even further by US male soldiers who have on several occasions threatened them with homosexual rape. As discussed, homosexual rape serves to homosexualise the rape victim, and inflate the heterosexual masculinity of the rapist.

Seen in the context of Johan Galtung's model for peace journalism, the lack of a clear gender perspective offers no real solution to explain how a peace journalism position should deal with systematic use of sexualised violence as a weapon in war propaganda.

In the name of universality, realists and liberals (as well as neoconservatives) have constructed a worldview based largely on the experiences of some men – a worldview offering only a partial vista of reality, and from a specific perspective. That this might be a kind of particularist perspective is seldom considered. Theorists, and most politicians and journalists, come short in their critique – not only of hegemonic discourse but also of similar international relations theories. Thus, in making manifest the gendered fantasies of autonomy, one also makes manifest the limited perspective on which hegemonic realist thinking still seems to depend.

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## Part I. Gendering Professional Agencies



## Bodies at War

### *The Dangers Facing Women War Reporters*

Linda Steiner

#### Abstract

War reporting is widely regarded as men's domain, literally requiring masculinity. Female war reporters have faced – and understood that they must face – sexism and specifically gendered constraints and hostility from the military, the public and news organisations. Inspired by feminist critiques of sexism, this chapter provides a history of the constraints on women trying to report on war and of false gender scripts that distort war coverage.

Keywords: war reporting, sexism, gender scripts, lookism, post-traumatic stress disorder.

War reporting is journalism's most honoured domain, although perhaps no longer the most desirable, since it is also the most dangerous. This is especially true when many parties no longer respect international humanitarian law, which has generally considered journalists covering armed conflict as civilians to be respected and protected as such. The new risks were forcefully acknowledged by the *Sunday Times* American-born reporter Marie Colvin, who covered conflicts in Chechnya, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka (where she lost an eye when an attacker threw a grenade at her, knowing, she said, that she was a journalist), and East Timor, where she stayed with women and children at a UN compound in order to force their rescue. In a speech honouring journalists killed while reporting from war zones, Colvin (2010) had declared: "It has never been more dangerous to be a war correspondent, because the journalist in the combat zone has become a prime target." Two years later, evidence that women and men were equally targeted, Colvin was killed while covering the war in Syria.

War reporting is widely regarded as men's domain, requiring masculinity. Christina Lamb (2008) explained her dream of becoming a war reporter: "They were all men and to me they were all gods." So the women attracted to war reporting have faced – and understood that they needed to face – sexism and double binds as well as hostility from the military, their own news organisation's bosses, men and women rivals, and the public. Women do not of course seek physical injury or sexual harassment. None-

theless, they have long been willing to undertake the risks of injury and harassment. Indeed, women are now prominent among war reporters. Their numbers increased especially after 2011 when, having cut back on foreign bureaux, many news organisations needed journalists in Afghanistan and Pakistan. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, of 235 journalists killed in crossfire or combat since 1992, 6 per cent were women and 29 per cent were freelancers; 5 per cent of the 83 journalists killed in Syria since 1992 were women; and 46 per cent were freelancers.<sup>1</sup>

Much has changed since 1846, when Margaret Fuller, the *New York Tribune*'s literary critic and already known for a major treatise on women's rights, went to Italy to cover the revolution, making her the first woman foreign correspondent. Nonetheless, sexism remains. Mark Jenkins (2003) explains why Second World War 'gal correspondents' had to hustle harder than their male colleagues: "For theirs was a double war: the war against the enemy, and the war against the system. They had to fight red tape, condescension, disdain, outright hostility, and downright lewdness." To that list one could add being assigned as a stunt, excluded on false pretenses, isolated by patronising protectionist policies, and limited to certain topics and angles. The accomplishments of women war reporters have been ignored while their sex lives have been featured and their sexuality exploited. Even more problematically, they have been exposed to sexual assault/sexual violence, sometimes in order to get a story, but then discouraged from reporting such assaults. The idealists among them have especially suffered victim blaming.

This chapter will provide a very much abbreviated history of the forms of sexism that women have faced in trying to report on war, and the sex/gender structure that can distort war coverage.

To understand how sexism works, to ask why sexism remains stubbornly persistent in shaping worlds, determining possibilities, deciding futures, despite decades of feminist activism, is to work out and to work through the very mechanics of power ... . The critique of sexism is a form of intellectual and political labour that teaches us how worlds are built; how histories become concrete (Ahmed 2015: 5, 8).

Marilyn Frye (1983) notes that refusal to recognise sexism as such itself reproduces sexism. Sexism was seemingly erased from feminist theoretical vocabularies, perhaps because complaints seemed unduly negative and/or uncreative (Ahmed 2015). Fear of being labelled a feminist killjoy, or a humourless prude, has long been a powerful disincentive – to journalists no less than academics – to criticism. Pointing this out, much less theorising it, is dreary and exhausting. But feminist scholars are again insisting that theories of sexism are not only explanatory (if sexism is a means of reproduction, then institutionalised sexism helps explain what reproduction is) but also interventionist, throwing a "wench in the works," as Sarah Franklin (2015) cleverly punned.

In this chapter I also offer recommendations for designing gender-sensitive policies for hiring and protecting journalists. Producing full, rich, truthful accounts of wars and warfare requires a full complement of talented professionals who are not constrained by, or forced to re-enact, false gender scripts.

## History

The pattern of editors sending women to cover war as a publicity-generating stunt dates back to 1890-1891, with two women sent to cover the Sioux uprisings in South Dakota, USA. Reportage by Suzette La Fleshe, an Omaha tribe member, contradicted the sensationalised news that exaggerated or even fabricated stories about blood-thirsty Indians, stirring up anti-Indian sentiment, serving the interests of both the US government and circulation-hungry newspapers (Reilly 2010). But La Fleshe was probably sent to the Dakotas by her husband, editor of the *Omaha World-Herald*, to exploit the novelty of an Indian woman covering an Indian war. *The (Chicago) Herald* almost certainly sent Teresa Dean as a stunt. Ironically, Dean drew resentment when she arrived, in part because her very presence undermined the air of dangerousness. In excluding Dean from a group photograph of reporters, one man asked how it would look, after weeks of hair-raising accounts of the Wounded Knee Massacre, to be photographed in the company of a fashionably dressed woman (Jones 1972). The hawkish Dean went on to cover the Spanish-American War, the Boxer Revolt, and the Philippine Insurrection.

A kind of double bind for women, covering conflict also has a long history: although an interest in war is apparently perfectly normal for men, in women it is unnatural and dangerous for troops. This found harsh but not unique expression in attacks on Anna Benjamin by rivals. In 1898-99 Benjamin photographed and wrote about the Spanish-American War for *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, having reached Cuba on a ship transporting coal. Referring to Benjamin, the *New York Journal's* James Creelman wrote:

But with the advent of woman came sorrow. The swish of the journalistic petticoat on the edge of the military camp meant the hidden leaking of news ... [A] woman, when she cannot drag forth the secrets of an army by strength, will make a sly hole in some man's discretions (Creelman 1901: 336).

Creelman described women reporters as surprisingly eager to see slaughter: "Curiously enough, women seldom show any signs of timidity or shockability on the battlefield" (op. cit.: 337).

The physical danger of war reporting was already evident for women during the Spanish Civil War. The German-born Gerda Taro (her real name was Gerta Pohorylle), the first woman war photographer covering the Republican army retreat, died when a tank crashed into a car carrying Taro and some wounded soldiers. Frances Davis Cohen, an American reporting for the London *Daily Mail*, was struck by shrapnel while watching an attack on Franco's army; the resulting septicaemia ended her career as a foreign correspondent. A much more consistent risk was sexism, as seen in the experience of Martha Gellhorn, who dropped out of college to pursue journalism, first as a crime writer in the late 1920s but much more importantly as war reporter; she covered the Spanish Civil War for *Collier's Weekly* and later covered the Second World

War, Vietnam (which she found supremely disturbing and horrific), El Salvador and Nicaragua and the US invasion of Panama. But for all the powerful reporting about the impact of war on civilians and soldiers, she often remains known for her five-year marriage to Ernest Hemingway – biographical accounts of Gellhorn often lead with her marriage to Hemingway, even as they acknowledge how much she detested being defined this way. His fourth wife was the Second World War correspondent Mary Welsh, whose 1986 obituary in the *LA Times* was similarly headlined, “Hemingway’s 4th Wife, Mary, Dies in N.Y.”

The US Army severely limited the number of American women able to cover the First and Second World Wars, sometimes casting its refusal as a concern about women’s safety. *Life* magazine photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White (1944), for example, was accredited to the Army Air Force and witnessed combat, *inter alia*, in Russia, North Africa and Italy. Although she eventually flew on bombing raids, she was initially refused air transport to Europe by authorities who claimed that flying was too dangerous for women. But military brass typically gave an even more spurious reason for excluding women from war reporting: ‘lack of facilities’. May Craig once joked that she would be always remembered with the word *facilities*, so often it had been used to prevent her from doing what men reporters could do, although she was eventually accredited by the US Navy to cover the Second World War and later Korea (Twomey 2001). One of many women to mention this, Charlotte Ebener even titled her 1955 memoir *No Facilities for Women*.

Having persevered and won the assignment, women sometimes took more risks and worked harder than men to prove themselves. Mary Boyle O’Reilly, who had written for *Harper’s Magazine* and several newspapers, and exposed so-called ‘baby farms’, went to Mexico, Russia, and England for a newspaper syndicate. Covering the First World War, she entered Belgium disguised as a peasant. The Germans imprisoned O’Reilly along with the Richard Harding Davis, Will Irwin and Gerald Morgan, three correspondents enjoying celebrity status. After their release the men went back to London. O’Reilly, however, chose to return, in disguise, to Belgium.

Even more women covered the Second World War, although the military’s continuing hostility led to newspapers largely relegating them to the women’s angle – civilian impacts and collateral damage. Of 1,600 reporters officially accredited as war correspondents during the Second World War, 127 were American women (Jenkins 2003).

Marguerite Higgins is arguably the canonical case of the tensions over gender roles confronting women war reporters. Despite an air and appearance of fragility, Higgins worked her way into foreign reporting for the *New York Herald Tribune*. As a result of her prize-winning reporting on the end of the Second World War, Higgins was appointed *Tribune* Berlin bureau chief at the age of twenty-six – but she was initially banned by the US military from covering Korea on the grounds that the front lacked facilities for ladies. General Douglas MacArthur reversed that order and she went on to share a Pulitzer Prize for Korean War reporting. MacArthur also advised Higgins to ignore what jealous men said about her (Higgins 1955). But men and women rivals

alike suggested that Higgins furthered her career by offering sexual favours to military sources. As Higgins herself acknowledged, many men associated “the combination of femininity and blonde hair with either dumbness or slyness, or both” (Higgins 1955: 56). Meanwhile, Higgins was neither the first nor the last woman to regard maleness as the standard – the unmarked category – for war reporters. Male colleagues respected her, albeit as an exception, famously saying: “The front line is no place for a woman, but it’s all right for Maggie Higgins” (Higgins 1955: 40).

## Reporting the Vietnam War

By the 1960s, military resistance to the presence of women war reporters remained stiff. Although US soldiers may have been eager to see a friendly American woman, military brass tried to prevent women reporters from getting near combat. Women correspondents in Vietnam were demeaned as “donut dollies and do-gooders ... husband hunters, war groupies or thrill seekers who created difficulty for ‘real’ (male) journalists who had a job to do” (Hoffman 2008: 9). Having left the women’s pages to follow her reporter boyfriend to Vietnam, Denby Fawcett recalled: “Military commanders did not like the idea of male reporters getting killed, and they were even more horrified at the thought of a woman reporter getting shot” (Bartimus et al. 2002: 7).

When General William Westmoreland happened to see Fawcett, a family friend, at an army base, he tried to ban woman from combat zone, apparently fearing that women correspondents would either endanger soldiers (who would rush to protect them during an attack), or “collapse emotionally when faced with the horrors of combat” (op. cit.: 13). Westmoreland’s proposed ban occasioned the only time women reporters in Vietnam united in solidarity: they successfully lobbied the Pentagon to retain their battlefield access. And for the 23 days UPI’s Kate Webb was held as a North Vietnamese prisoner, the UPI wrongly thought she had been killed, so denied combat assignments to other women.

As it turns out, women *were* wounded or killed. Dickey Chapelle (1919-1965) was the first war correspondent killed in Vietnam. An award-winning photojournalist who had previously covered wars in Korea, Taiwan, Algeria, Hungary, the Middle East and Cuba, Chapelle was hit by shrapnel while on patrol with marines. Marguerite Higgins, by then a mother of two, contracted a fatal tropical disease while in Vietnam. Philippa Duke Schuyler died in 1967 in Vietnam, when the military helicopter carrying her crashed, perhaps because the pilot was showing off.

But women managed to make inroads in Vietnam, partly because guerrilla combat and the absence of distinct front lines meant fewer military restrictions on war correspondents. Special permission to travel to Vietnam was not required, and freelancers could obtain press passes merely by showing that three news organisations were interested in their work. Women reporters could book and pay for commercial flights. For example, when *Look* magazine refused to send Jurate Kazickas, she used money

won in a television game show to get to Vietnam, where she was wounded during a mortar attack (Bartimus et al.: 2002).<sup>2</sup> What women needed in Vietnam was the ability to improvise and transition quickly from covering dangerous jungle warfare to dressing up for embassy events in order to network with politicians – and figuring out how to switch from talking to brass, who were opposed to women's presence, to ground troops, who generally welcomed women, precisely because their presence made commanding officers uncomfortable, and who would give them rides (Hofmann 2008). Ultimately some 467 women covered Vietnam (267 were American; most of the others were Vietnamese) (Edwards 1988). By the mid-1980s, women accounted for 20 per cent of foreign correspondents.

### New dangers in the twenty-first century

A few conditions seem unchanged in the twenty-first century. One is the requirement that women, at least those on television, be attractive. Women describe needing to carry make-up into combat zones so that they can look good. In 2001, the veteran war correspondent Kate Adie criticised BBC management for softening news by hiring women without journalism experience but with “cute faces, cute bottoms and nothing else in between” (Cohen 2001). Adie was undoubtedly being overly cynical here. Nonetheless, market-driven television executives apparently believe that pretty faces make the sight of body bags on the evening newscast more bearable.<sup>3</sup>

A number of these problems, including how ‘lookism’ constitutes a double bind, came into focus when CBS chief foreign correspondent Lara Logan was sexually assaulted in Tahrir Square while covering the uprising in Egypt in 2011. Logan, appearing on CBS's *60 Minutes* a few months later, said: “It's not one person and it stops – it's one person and another person and another person ... The more I screamed, the more it turned them into a frenzy.” She recalled seeing cell phone camera flashes as the frenzied crowd photographed her naked body. “I didn't even know they were beating me with flags and sticks because the sexual assault was all I could feel,” Logan said. She thought she would be killed. Logan, who has covered conflicts in Africa, Europe and Asia, and who continues to require hospitalisation four years later for the injuries sustained, was criticised for going to a dangerous place, demonised as an absent mother, labelled a war junkie – but also mocked as a naive, pearl-necklaced former swimsuit model, even as others posted comments online wondering why she didn't look better.

Female war reporters run a high risk of sexual harassment and rape. A 2005 survey of twenty-nine women war reporters conducted by the International News Safety Institute found that more than half reported sexual harassment while on assignment. Many have been raped. But correspondents who have been sexually attacked – often in combat zones – rarely tell anyone, whether as a matter of shame, compulsion to be part of the macho club or (most likely) fear of being pulled off an assignment. The *Chicago Tribune* South Asia bureau chief Kim Barker never admitted that she had been

molested in Pakistan, lest she got grounded (Barker 2011). Judith Matloff (2007), who covered civil wars across Africa for Reuters and *The Christian Science Monitor*, never told her editors about how a mob in India had started tearing at her clothes while policemen silently watched. She later explained:

I put myself out there equal to the boys. I didn't want to be seen in any way as weaker. Groping hands and lewd come-ons are stoically accepted as part of the job, especially in places where Western women are viewed as promiscuous. War zones in particular seem to invite unwanted advances, and sometimes the creeps can be the drivers, guards, and even the sources that one depends on to do the job ... But female journalists tend to grit their teeth and keep on working, unless it gets worse. (Matloff 2007)

Lynsey Addario described being sexually groped when she and three other *New York Times* staffers were kidnapped in Libya in 2011: "Every man who came in contact with us basically felt every inch of my body short of what was under my clothes" (Shadid et al. 2011). Tahrir Square does appear to be particularly dangerous. Mona Eltahawy, an Egyptian-American journalist, was beaten and sexually assaulted by Egyptian police as she covered Tahrir Square protests, and a year later Sonia Dridi, a French television journalist, was attacked by some fifty protestors before being pulled to safety by a male colleague. The British journalist Natasha Smith (2012) described being sexually assaulted by group of angry men in Tahrir Square while filming a documentary: "All I could see was leering faces, more and more faces sneering and jeering as I was tossed around like fresh meat among starving lions." She also described thinking she would die. On a single day in 2013, mobs assaulted forty-six women protesting in Cairo; and a twenty-two-year-old Dutch intern covering protest for an Egyptian news outlet required surgery after being gang-raped. Referring to these cases, Logan commented: "Sexual violence is a way of denying women journalists access to the story in Egypt. It's not accidental. It's by design" (Chapman & Zahriyeh 2012). Rape is a crime of power, not sex, and now Cairo shows rape committed as a war strategy, perhaps relying on group dynamics and ideologies that encourage men to act violently (Wolfe 2013).

A second kind of double-bind involves victim blaming, especially for war correspondents who are mothers. Women covering war long term have essentially been required to remain childless. In 2001, the Taliban arrested the *Sunday Express* reporter Yvonne Ridley, who had disguised herself in a *burqa* in order to reach Afghanistan. Ridley spent her daughter's ninth birthday in jail. Critics accused her of pandering to the values of tabloid journalism merely to glorify her career, endangering her interpreter and driver and, especially as a single mother, immorally and recklessly leaving her child. Ridley (2001) retorted, "I thought this was an argument that was long, dead and buried and forgotten about. And here we are in the new millennium questioning my right to go out and do my job as a journalist because I'm a single mother." Other women, especially single mothers, continue to report but stop volunteering for hot-spots. Facing her own 'excruciating' dilemma, Judith Matloff (2004) ultimately decided

not to risk leaving her son motherless, although she quoted a few war reporters who claim that mothering kept them sane or made them better reporters, with sharpened insights into suffering. Fathers are not accused of damaging their children by pursuing their journalism careers. Perhaps men might similarly describe how families – or lack thereof – entered into their decision making but they are not asked.

It is more likely that the pressure is on women to prove themselves and to take risks to advance their careers. Many journalists argued that the success of BBC world affairs editor John Simpson, who had entered Afghanistan wrapped in a *burqa*, put pressure on other journalists, especially women such as Ridley, to follow suit as a way of crossing the border. Meanwhile, although some reporters would wear an *abaya* to blend in (or fit in), others wear only a head scarf, worried that *abayas* will hinder their ability to work efficiently.

But it is not only mothers who are subject to victim blaming. Amanda Lindhout was reporting in Somalia in 2008 when teenagers kidnapped her and Nigel Brennan, her Australian photographer. The captors freed their Somali translator and driver after 150 days. After 460 days, she and Brennan were released in exchange for over \$600,000. Lindhout had worked for a new Iranian startup but was a wholly unprepared novice – although formal training is hardly a prerequisite. She went to Somalia because she “really, truly cared about the human suffering in those places” (Wolfe 2013). The kidnappers beat Brennan but did not verbally abuse him. They raped Lindhout and called her dirty and evil. Readers attacked Lindhout’s ‘stupid decision’ with crudely misogynistic language. Two woman reporters asked her whether she thought she was raped because she was ‘pretty’ – whether she ‘tempted’ the kidnappers. After emphasizing Lindhout’s photogenic looks, the *Guardian and Mail* conservative columnist and sister Canadian Margaret Wentz (2013) conceded that Lindhout had endured dreadful and undeserved gang rape, starvation and disease. Yet, she declared:

[M]y sympathy is tempered by the fact that narcissistic, recklessly naive people like Ms Lindhout are often their own worst enemies. They bring trouble not only on themselves, but on their families, their helpers and fixers and the governments that get involved in rescuing them.

Post 9/11 conflicts are different, and riskier. In twentieth-century wars, reporters – at least those from the US – wore US military uniforms and travelled with troops. Nowadays, reporters travel alone, often with rebels. A second change is in the long-standing taboo on intentionally harming women journalists. One former war reporter says attacking Western women journalists represents a ‘war zone trifecta’ (Hampton 2009: 145). In 2001, Taliban leaders promised to reward the murder of Western journalists; two women were among the eight killed in the next seventeen days. In 2014, an Afghan police commander shot at two Associated Press women who were good friends.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the shifts in war reporting, including the increased use of women, reflects economics. News executives have long sought ways to boost audience numbers, and one way is by hiring women. War reporting is expensive – as is providing security:

in 2007, major security companies charged approximately \$1,500 a day per member of a security detail; armored vehicles cost \$100,000 or more (Ricchiardi 2007). Nonetheless, using women as stringers and freelancers points to a profit-driven shift to cheaper workers that has increasingly problematic implications: freelancers, who are typically young, inexperienced, and disproportionately idealistic, take risks that reflect not careerism, but idealism. Women war reporters have come from across the political spectrum – doves, hawks and down the middle. But freelancers experience additional and exceptional dangers: no news outlet is responsible for paying ransom if they are kidnapped; they lack medical benefits or support if injured; they don't get the training, services and back-up support of an employing news organisation; they can't afford the best fixers. And historically, women have been disproportionately represented among freelancers – including in conflict work.<sup>5</sup>

All contemporary reporters covering conflicts are increasingly vulnerable. Twentieth-century wars were primarily waged by national armies with well-defined battle zones; even during Vietnam, US reporters often wore military-issued uniforms and travelled with their troops. Now, in contrast, many reporters go solo on the rebel side. The first Western journalist to die while covering conflict in the Central African Republic was a French photojournalist who was killed – the French president called it 'murder' – in 2014. Camille Lepage had gone to South Sudan in 2012. Her work was used by French, British, and German newspapers, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal*, Al Jazeera and especially BBC, and several major several nongovernmental organisations. Lepage told an interviewer (Jones 2013) that she was shocked by the paucity of coverage devoted to South Sudan and the Central African Republic, and annoyed by the pessimism about it:

I *had* to go and report from there ... I became very keen on the duty of a journalist to tell stories and make them accessible to a broad audience. I also realised what the media agenda was, and how so many serious stories were missing from the headlines simply because they don't fit within that agenda, or the advertising company's interests. I can't accept that people's tragedies are silenced simply because no one can make money out of them. I decided to do it myself, and bring some light to them no matter what.

The dangers, pressures and strains of modern war reporting affect both men and women: war reporters apparently develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) at a rate five times higher than the general population (Feinstein 2003). Moreover, if journalism's so-called macho code discourages journalists from seeking treatment for PTSD, women are probably equally unlikely to admit weaknesses and thus equally unwilling, or more so. A study of frontline journalists who worked in conflict zones, of whom 25 per cent were women, found that women drink just as much, if not more, than the men – although men are generally much more likely than women to drink to excess (Feinstein & Sinyor 2009). Journalists who cover death and destruction think of themselves as unusually tough, impervious or immune to the reverberating

impact of the human suffering they witness. Until recently, journalists felt that if they publicly acknowledged that reporting experiences might affect them in the long term, the journalist would be thought of as weak and less capable.

The *Washington Post* reporter Jackie Spinner (2006) described intense PTSD upon her return from Iraq. The freelance journalist Nadine Marroushi (2014) said her own debilitating experience of PTSD began when she went to Sinai – because no foreign news outlet would send staff – to cover the use of ‘scorched earth tactics’ to root out militants: “I just wanted to do my job: bear witness and report.” But she had no hostile environment training, and her problems were compounded by the exhausting and daily sexual harassment that, like most Egyptian women, she said she confronted. She suffered panic attacks, depression and suicidal thoughts, and was particularly shaken when, reporting from Tahrir Square in 2014, she was attacked by a citizens mob that falsely accused her of working for Al-Jazeera. Finding that there was little discussion about journalists’ experiences of PTSD, she said, “It was as though it was a taboo subject, and I felt embarrassed that I was experiencing this.”

Anecdotal and formal studies of combat journalists suggest that most men are married, while the majority of women are single (Feinstein & Sinyor 2009). The *Chicago Tribune*’s Liz Sly warned women about considering war assignments, which are always nomadic and unpredictable: “If you have a boyfriend, you will lose him. If you don’t have one, you won’t find one” (Hampton 2009: 148). Kristen Hampton argues that, unlike men, women “tend to view international reporting as a zero-sum career, one that can be successful only if they give up any hope of family or personal life” (op. cit.: 143). Hampton left the *Chicago Tribune* after becoming romantically involved with an army officer she met in Iraq. In any case, the majority of the husbands of war reporters are either other reporters or are involved in the military. This is unsurprising: who better understand the demands of this intense and potentially life-altering arena of conflict, terror and loneliness?

Meanwhile, women often feel selfish and guilty about the worry they inflict on loved ones. Some women took on war assignments only after getting divorced.<sup>6</sup> Katherine Skiba asked her husband, a *USA Today* reporter, for forgiveness for risking danger while reporting in Iraq; she advised him to marry someone nice if she were to be killed (Skiba 2005). Elizabeth Neuffer once observed that “being a war correspondent is an act of violence against the people you love the most because they end up having to stay behind worrying about you” (Lee 2002). In covering conflicts in Bosnia, Albania, Kosovo, Rwanda and Afghanistan for the *Boston Globe*, Neuffer had been menaced by armed rebels, subjected to death threats, abducted by soldiers and threatened with rape; in 2003, she was killed in a car accident in Iraq. Christiane Amanpour, CNN’s chief international correspondent until 2010, reported on Rwanda, Bosnia, two Gulf wars and Afghanistan. Amanpour described the challenge of always living in “fear of being shot ... of being kidnapped, of being raped by some lunatic who hates your stories or blames you for bringing NATO bombs down around them. We manage the fear, but the strain takes its toll” (Amanpour 2000).

## Conclusion

Regardless of journalistic beat, women and men tend to evaluate journalism, journalism ethics, and journalistic identities in similar ways, and to have similar epistemologies. This may be attributed to socialisation into a shared, dominant ideology and journalistic culture, including shared experiences of journalism education. Women reporters do not share some gender-specific style of reporting or journalistic philosophy. Their politics range from the pro-military, pro-war position of Higgins and Logan, to the passionate opposition to war of Vietnam reporter Gloria Emerson and Martha Gellhorn, who covered virtually every major world conflict that occurred during her sixty years in journalism. Their motives for war reporting differ greatly: some simply needed to earn a living, others wanted adventure. Many felt 'called' to report. Seeking to bear witness to the injustice, tragedy and horror of war, Gellhorn repudiated what she dismissively called "the objectivity shit." Others committed themselves to 'balance' and to the impartiality demanded by professionalism.

In some sense, this supports contemporary feminists such as Judith Butler who treat the social construction of gender not as a matter of 'natural' behaviour but, rather, involving repeated and rewarded performances of gendered ideas – which themselves can and do change over time as well as vary across culture. Notions about gender roles and about masculinity and femininity have changed greatly, albeit unevenly by news organisation and especially by country.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, while this account is regrettably US-centric, increasingly women from around the world are reporting on war – and are being killed, imprisoned, banned or threatened for doing so. Meanwhile, sexism (if not misogyny) and sexual abuses of women reporters continue, and also globally.

So this leaves two questions, which may be related. One is why women in journalism, including war reporters, have been hostile to feminism. Edith Lederer, who was the first woman assigned full-time to cover Vietnam for the AP wire service and then went on to cover many more conflicts (including the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, the 1991 Gulf War and Bosnia) credits the women's movement with encouraging women to believe they could do anything. But, historically and in the present, most women credit their success to their individual hard work and express little or no interest in feminism or in sisterhood. They assume that they will face a certain amount of sexism but also that feminism is not necessary or even helpful in addressing it.

Second, what has enabled so many women to battle through – or to ignore the Catch-22s, double standards, and anti-women or anti-feminist backlash? Miranda Fricker (2007) observes that women's testimony can be relegated and dismissed through 'epistemic marginalisation' or 'epistemic injustice' because of the prejudices of an individual hearer or structural identity prejudice. Two researchers draw on Fricker to analyse how students are marginalised when experiencing and discussing sexual harassment (Whitley & Page 2015). Their point is that when women insist that sexual harassment exists – by complaining or refusing to go along with unwelcome advances – the problem is often reconstructed as involving complaining women; the

problem sticks not to the harasser but to those who expose the problem, relocating the problem in ways that cause its disappearance.

This would easily apply to the newsroom, with its insistence that journalists transcend their bodies in the interests of objectivity, and to the decidedly hyper-masculinised culture of conflict zones, in which women attempt to outmacho the men. Women trained to be tough and professional, and to ignore their bodies as journalists – but then in a war zone, frightened that their bodies will give them away – are simply not going to complain about sexism. Women's secrecy about rape means not only that they often suffer in lonely silence but also that their editors (usually men) remain unaware of the dangers and therefore do not try to strengthen their security abroad or provide them with support when they return. In this context, and given the stigma of being called a killjoy and the danger of having complaints attached to the complainers, they are not going to report harassment.

Meanwhile, the increased use of women foreign correspondents as stringers and freelancers perhaps simply shows a profit-driven shift to cheaper workers and away from expensive ones. But it is a major problem, especially for women, intent on proving themselves even while they have a harder time getting full-time work.<sup>8</sup> Storyhunter provides publishing tools, editorial support, and distribution opportunities for freelancers, handling the sales and distribution of freelancers' work and providing safety training and insurance coverage. But this is a Band-Aid – a stop-gap solution.<sup>9</sup> News organisations could also form consortiums to manage the freelance work, provide support and assist reporters who come into harm's way.

News organisations will probably continue to have trouble finding highly experienced staffers willing to risk their lives. Yet, given the continued career-making status of conflict reporting, volunteers will come from the ranks of those who are ambitious, young, single – and female. Organisations (news outlets, foundations, platforms like Storyhunter and ProPublica) need to be very clear and explicit about the risks and should not pressure reporters to undertake risky efforts. News organisations should not sexualise women reporters by coercing them to look sexy, even when reporting from combat zones, which arguably undermines their professionalism.

News organisations need to provide clear training and preparation, not merely not to minimise risk and abuse but also so that reporters know to recognise – in themselves or others – the signs of PTSD, to ensure that reporters feel free to say when they have been sexually molested or assaulted, or if they are suffering PTSD. A representative of a private security company said her corporation had included rape and assault in its safety training but dropped it because men were uncomfortable with it (Dart Center 2005). Hostile environment courses should acknowledge gender-sensitive issues, and women should offer the training.<sup>10</sup> Reporters need to know about resources and news organisations should pay for therapy.

Finally, news organisations must take responsibility and back up journalists whose work they have used, including if they are held hostage. In 2011, after killing a photo-journalist, Libyan soldiers captured three freelancers. Because one of the three, Clare

Gillis, had written for *The Atlantic's* website, the publisher David Bradley worked hard to arrange for their release. Later, Bradley, with Gillis's help, worked hard on behalf of several hostages kidnapped by ISIS and held in Syria. This time the efforts failed. But Bradley's attempt offers a model. News organisations must step up to the plate. As with the issue of sexism specifically, the solution – vague as it is – can only be institutional change, a transformation of the culture.

## Notes

1. <https://cpj.org/killed/in-combat.php>
2. The 1982 Falklands War between Britain and Argentina was fought over islands 400 miles from the nearest land mass. UK authorities selected no women reporters to travel on the troop ships. The sole woman travelling with the British was its war artist.
3. Even this might be insufficient. Lara Logan complained when one of her reports was not aired but merely posted on the Web; a spokesperson explained, "The executive director of the *Evening News* thought some of the images in it were a bit strong plus on that day the programme was already packed with other Iraq news" (Ricchiardi 2007).
4. Friendships are highly unusual among women reporters.
5. The romanticisation of freelance journalism for its supposed autonomy and freedom from bureaucracy and office politics is belied by declining incomes, layoffs, and competition, partly, McKercher (2009) says, because freelance journalism is 'women's work'.
6. Representing the opposite problem was Mary Marvin Breckinridge, the first woman to work for CBS Radio Network in Europe; one of Edward Murrow's 'boys', she reported from seven countries during the Second World War. Her career ended when she married a US diplomat; the State Department claimed that her journalism would compromise her husband's work.
7. Presumably in the US, women's increasing visibility and authority as soldiers and military officers, public information officers and government leaders helped women war reporters.
8. Foreign bureaux and even entire news organisations are closing, and in 2015 the McClatchy chain discontinued its foreign bureaux.
9. Moreover, six of Storyhunter's eight leaders, and all the top executives, are men. (<https://storyhunter.tv/>)
10. For example, the Egyptian journalist Abeer Saady offers such training. <http://asahnetwork.org/en/abeer-saady/>

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# Gendered Narratives

## *On Peace, Security and News Media Accountability to Women*

Sarah Macharia

### Abstract

That peace and security are gender issues necessitates gender-responsive journalism particularly in conflict contexts. Media monitoring results from 15 nations are assessed through women's freedom of expression, gender-responsive media ethics and peace journalism lenses. The similarity of findings suggests the transnationality of patriarchal capitalist norms at the base of news media systems.

Keywords: gender, news, media sexism, peace journalism, accountability, ethics

This article discusses findings from media monitoring research carried out in fifteen transitional and conflict countries on news related to peace and security. The analysis is approached from a feminist perspective in which the monitoring results are assessed against the standards of journalistic professionalism adopted by the news media industry and understood through a gender lens, locating the critique centrally within the profession. The study finds that news reporting falls considerably short on the measures of respect for the right to freedom of expression for all, particularly women, (gender-responsive) media professional ethics, and (gender-responsive) peace journalism. The cross-country and cross-regional findings are instructive on the transnationality of patriarchal capitalist norms beginning at the foundational, structural level of news media systems.

### Conceptual framework

Fifteen years ago, Annabelle Sreberny (2001) called for an approach to feminist media studies that is global in purview, that problematises the political and more clearly articulates concerns around political and mediated representation. While the body of feminist work on globalisation, media policy, technology development and political economy perspectives has grown during this period (Gallagher 2014), the challenge

of media sexism has not only persisted but also morphed in unexpected and hitherto unimagined ways.

A transnational approach to a feminist study of news on issues related to conflict, peace and security is necessary to uncover empirically how media sexism plays out across nation-state boundaries, to understand the openings for gender-responsive media reporting and the opportunities such an orientation to journalism would present for subjugated groups. The precariousness engendered by war and displacement complicates the layers of oppression for groups already disadvantaged by their subordinate gender, ethnic, religious and other identities. To what extent may news produced in these contexts be said to align with the hopes and struggles for freedom from these oppressions? Alternatively, in language that speaks to media industry professionals, to what extent does media output meet the benchmarks of (gender-aware) journalistic professionalism in keeping with industry standards? Broader, non-thematic but nonetheless gender-focussed studies such as the Global Media Monitoring Project 1995-2015 have revealed the gravity of gender bias, misrepresentation and underrepresentation of women in the news across time and space (Macharia 2015). Do the patterns hold in news produced in transitional or conflict countries on topics relevant to peace and security?

Global industry bodies such as the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) evoke the concept of media accountability, which refers to the process by which news organisations or journalists are obliged to render an account of their activities to their publics, including women who comprise at least 50 per cent of this constituency. “Underlying the notion of accountability is the assumption that journalists and news organisations are more likely to behave in a manner that society would define as responsible if they know that they may be required to explain their behaviour” (IFJ 1954). Media accountability to women, or professionalism from a gender perspective more broadly, becomes even more important in transitional and conflict situations in view of peace and security as gender issues, and the disproportionate impact of conflict on girls and women.

The imperative for gender-aware journalistic professionalism springs from three intersecting concerns: women’s right to freedom of expression, gender-responsive media professional ethics and gender-responsive peace journalism.

According to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN in 1948, the first concept ‘freedom of expression’ (FOE) includes the right to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. Feminist media theorists have increasingly pegged their challenges to media sexism on the right to (critical, gender-aware) FOE arguments – (compare Gallagher 2014) – as a perhaps more productive approach to engaging with the media industry, recalling this right as a dimension of the same text prescribing the much-defended right to press freedom. A gender-responsive conceptualisation of freedom of expression brings into view marginalised groups, calling attention to their particular needs stemming from the struggles that

accompany their gender, class, ethnicity and other identities. In 2010 the four UN Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression included discrimination of historically disadvantaged groups among the ten key challenges to freedom of expression in the next decade (La Rue et al. 2010). They underscored the continuing struggle of women, minorities, refugees, indigenous peoples and sexual minorities to have their voices heard and to access information of relevance to them, making reference to underrepresentation in mainstream media workers, inadequate media coverage and the prevalence of stereotypical or derogatory information.

The second concept, media professional ethics, pertains to core standards central to the practice of journalism; tenets such as balance, fairness and accuracy in reporting. Understanding and applying media professional ethics through the prism of gender results in 'gender-ethical journalism' that realistically, accurately and fairly represents women and other marginalised groups (Macharia & Morinière 2012). Gender-ethical journalism aligns with

news media's key role in democratic societies: creating the 'public sphere' where information essential to citizens' participation in national and community life is presented and where issues of importance to the public are discussed and debated. Democracy critically depends upon an informed populace making political choices. For this to happen, it is clearly important that a wide range of experiences and viewpoints, and the interests and concerns of all sections of society be represented in the media (ibid.).

The final concept is peace journalism, first advanced by Johan Galtung, that has gained traction (Lynch 2003; Hackett 2006; McGoldrick & Lynch 2005) at the same time as it has attracted controversies (Hanitzch 2007; Loyn 2007) on the journalist's and media's rightful place in peace processes. Peace journalism "uses conflict analysis and transformation to update the concept of balance, fairness and accuracy in reporting ... provides a new road map tracing the connections between journalists, their sources, the stories they cover and the consequences of their reporting [and] opens up a literacy of nonviolence and creativity as applied to the practical job of everyday reporting" (McGoldrick & Lynch 2000). Peace journalism is "a departure from the traditional way of covering news stories, particularly conflict and violence, not only in nuances and emphases but in substance" (Peleg 2007).

Mainstream peace journalism theory is not inconsistent with feminist principles:

... the genuine peace journalism model, of course, has an inherent gender perspective, which understands how gender relations play out. It is, therefore, better equipped to uncover the underlying roots of armed conflict and helps find solutions for lasting and sustainable peace (Yiping 2012).

Critical peace journalism is guided by a human rights perspective and is unrelenting in seeking out and bringing into conversations taking place in the public sphere the voices of women and other marginalised groups. A critical approach understands

that gender justice concerns should permeate *all* phases of peace processes, from participation in negotiations to conflict prevention and protection.

An orientation towards gender-responsive professionalism hurtles against constraints at two levels, beginning with the general structural, economic and political pressures facing mainstream news media practice. Economics and politics within the media outlet and in the broader political landscape have been underlined as ‘the most crucial’ in peace-oriented practice (see Search for Common Ground, *undated*). “But if journalism is stripped of all other values except economic ones, then reporters need not be bothered with ‘non-financially viable’ issues such as truth, honesty and fairness” (Peleg 2007). This counter-argument points to a need to temper economic arguments with recall of the ethical imperatives inherent to professional practice. Issues of media inhouse politics, interference by owners and coercion by external political actors are perhaps more restrictive. At the same time, theorists have demonstrated the existence of journalistic agency and the possibilities practitioners and media have to reshape and reconstitute power relations in ways that counteract structural determinism (see Hackett 2006).

At the second level are the broader media problems of persistent sexism and problematic gender discourse, whose roots may be traced to the patriarchal capitalist norms underpinning society and its institutions, including the media. Media tendencies to objectify women and to glorify macho masculinities – particularly in conflict and war reporting – legitimise oppressive gender relations of feminine subordination and masculine dominance. Following Fraser (1990), media achieve informally what the political economy accomplishes structurally, in this case consolidating worldviews of gender power inequalities as natural and normal. Two decades of transnational media monitoring through the Global Media Monitoring Project reveal a stubborn resistance to significant change across space and time, and also a reproduction of sexism across all platforms in which content is produced and/or shared (Macharia 2015). In her review of feminist communication research, theory and activism, Margaret Gallagher (2014) concludes: “The struggle for visibility, voice and influence is still a formidable one. The issues involved remain marginal not only to the agendas of most political and social movements, but also within academia.”

## Methodology

Civil society groups have engaged in collaborative transnational gender-focussed news media monitoring for two decades now as a strategy to gather empirical evidence on the gender dimensions of news content, among other objectives (see the Global Media Monitoring Project 1995-2015).<sup>1</sup> Adopting a similar approach, the current study was carried out in the context of the fifteen-year review of the United Nations Security Council Resolution UNSCR 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

The resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.<sup>2</sup>

While the resolution has sometimes been problematically applied by governments to justify the recruitment of women into the military (contrary to its original intentions),<sup>3</sup> it remains an important rallying point for civil society organisations and others seeking redress on the marginalisation of women in peace processes. The study thematic focus boundaries were drawn around ‘peace and security’, and stories on conflict were defined into the sampling criteria in view of the paucity of a ‘peace’ orientation in media narratives on issues and events regarding conflict.

A call for participation was circulated to potential civil society research partners in eighteen transitional and conflict countries identified by the United Nations agency for gender equality (UN Women) as focus countries for the special review. Volunteer teams in fifteen countries responded to the call and were supplied with a methodology kit containing guidelines for news media selection, sampling, coding and qualitative analysis. The media monitors were required to identify and code stories published over a three-day period in their major local newspapers. Only stories on topics related to peace and security issues could be coded, further organised under the broad themes ‘politics and government’, ‘crime and violence’ and ‘social and legal’ news. The ‘politics and government’ category covers stories on peace agreements, peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction and disarmament. ‘Social and legal’ news includes stories on protection, safety and physical security, humanitarian response, human rights, peace activism and employment. The ‘crime and violence’ theme assembles stories on sexual violence, socioeconomic violence, war and terrorism. The data was weighted using the square root method, with calculations based on country newspaper densities and population size.

The countries in the sample are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Nepal, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Togo and Uganda.

## Scope

A total of 876 stories relevant to peace and security published in eighty-three major newspapers over a three-day period in April 2015 were coded. The stories are reported by 347 identifiable journalists and contain 1,865 news subjects – or sources and people whom the news are about. The dominant stories included reconciliation after the Second World War on the occasion of the war’s 70th anniversary (Bosnia and Herzegovina); Australian-Iranian partnership to counter terrorism (Papua New Guinea); Jerusalem occupation violations against prisoners (Palestine); Balikatan joint American-Philippines military exercises (Philippines); the planned ratification of the

Algiers peace accord between the Malian government and Tuareg-led rebels (Mali); and President Salva Kiir's pledges to end the conflict by peaceful means (South Sudan).

The newspapers monitored represent a spectrum of political orientations. The sample includes stories published in the right-wing *Simerini* newspaper in Cyprus, pro-government *New Vision* in Uganda and *The Juba Telegraph* of South Sudan, pro-opposition *Le Phare* in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the leftist *Haravgi* Cypriot daily. The papers target a range of audiences, from populist *Abante* in the Philippines, *Kantipur* in Nepal and *elPeriodico* in Guatemala, and languages such as the Arabic *Al Ayyam* in Palestine, the French *Togo Presse* and *L'Essor* in Mali. Most of the newspapers monitored are privately owned, reflecting the reality of private capital dominance in the media industry. One newspaper – *Daily Monitor* in Uganda – is owned by the cross-border media conglomerate Nation Media Group operating in the East and Central African sub-region.

National news is covered in 40 per cent of the stories, followed closely by foreign and international news at 36 per cent. Interestingly, only 12 per cent of peace and security stories published in the most important, highest-circulation newspapers in transitional and conflict countries cover local news. Eleven per cent of the news items cover sub-regional and regional stories.

More than one half of news on peace and security cover political sub-themes (56 per cent) (Table 1). Social and legal stories, and stories on crime and violence take up 24 per cent and 21 per cent of the news items respectively.

**Table 1.** Distribution of peace and security stories, sub-themes, by country (per cent)

	Politics and Government per cent	Social and Legal per cent	Crime and Violence per cent	Sum per cent*	Number of stories
Bosnia and Herzegovina	30	27	42	99	165
Cyprus	48	41	11	100	108
Dem Rep of Congo	47	30	23	100	30
Guatemala	0	100	0	100	6
Guinea	100	0	0	100	5
Liberia	13	13	75	101	8
Mali	67	26	7	100	42
Nepal	62	13	26	101	104
Palestine	18	58	24	100	62
Papua Guinea	21	44	36	101	132
Philippines	81	3	16	100	69
Sierra Leone	39	28	33	100	23
South Sudan	48	33	19	100	27
Togo	68	29	2	99	41
Uganda	11	49	40	100	53
Average	56	24	21		

*Comment:* Average calculated using square root weighting. The discussion throughout this chapter is based on weighted statistics.

\* Totals may be slightly above or below 100% due to rounding.

## Findings

### *Subjects and sources*

Women are barely present in peace and security print news produced in transitional and conflict countries. They constitute only 13 per cent (N=1865) of the persons interviewed or spoken about, a statistic that is considerably lower than the already unrepresentative 24 per cent (Macharia 2015) on women's overall presence across all news topics. The percentage of women in Cypriot peace and security print news falls squarely on the 13 per cent average. In Palestinian news, women make up only 15 per cent of the people in the news: "Palestinian local media have only one story worth covering; the Palestinian-Israeli conflict represents nearly 90 per cent of all news coverage in the occupied territories" (Douglas & Issa 2014).

The gender gap is most evident in politics-themed peace and security print news and narrowest in social and legal stories: women make up only 7 per cent of persons in political news and 22 per cent in social/legal news. Political stories form the bulk of the news agenda – at 56 per cent – of the total set of stories, and pertain to questions of power and decision making. While it is accurate that women are severely under-represented in mainstream politics and government,<sup>4</sup> the mediated world exaggerates the underrepresentation to the extent that news media deny visibility to women in power, downplay women's participation or trivialise their engagement in politics. The South Sudanese media monitoring team observed a consistent denial of women to front-page coverage even when women hold key ministerial and top government positions; at times women are silenced in stories purportedly about their political events and attention is diverted to the few men present – as in the case of a story monitored for the study. This illustrates news media's tendencies, through coverage, to push back against women's insertion into politics and public life – the arena in which power plays out – consistently reverting to stereotypical gender representation and generally accepted gender roles even when such depictions do not bear out in the lived experience. The problematic portrayal and its influence on public perception makes even rockier the already uneven playing field for women in politics, and complicates further their struggles for equality in power and decision making.

The monitoring methodology identifies six types of roles in which people appear in the news: as the subject of the story, as a spokesperson for a group, as an expert or commentator, as an eyewitness account giver, or as a person providing popular opinion. The findings on this indicator shed light on media's methodical attribution of 'interview-worthiness' to people on the basis of gender. The study found the narrowest gender gaps to be in the 'personal experience provider' (women 24 per cent, men 76 per cent) and in the 'popular opinion provider' role types (women 18 per cent, men 82 per cent). The largest gender gap is in the 'eyewitness account giver' (women 6 per cent, men 94 per cent) role type; the narrowest gender gap is below the halfway to numerical parity mark.

Only 39 per cent of the already meagre number of women are directly quoted, compared to 60 per cent of men. This statistic is concerning when the insignificant

presence of women in the totality of stories is taken into account. The striking gender difference raises the question of whether women's views, in their own words, are considered worth citing.

The indicators above bear directly on the concept of freedom of expression, and in particular that of women. The acute gender gaps and clear androcentric bias evidence a trampling on women's right to voice, the right to make their opinions known and to be heard equally with men. Underrepresentation, misrepresentation, inadequate media coverage and gender stereotyping confirm blurriness in or non-existence of a gender lens in understanding and/or applying journalistic professional ethics.

### *Perpetrator, victim and survivor narratives*

The study considered gender difference in the portrayal of people as perpetrators of one form or another of violence. Interestingly, 11 per cent of women coded under this variable are described as perpetrators, close to the 16 per cent statistic for men. Even more intriguing is that women were portrayed most (38 per cent of times) as perpetrators of non-intimate violence from stories in five countries – Liberia, Uganda, Nepal, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Papua New Guinea. These surprising findings could possibly be a sign of media backlash against the gender equality and women's empowerment discourses now emblematic of societies the world over.

Closer scrutiny of the stories points to the media's patriarchal capitalist underpinnings, manifested through framing or fixation with events that transgress gender norms, and are perhaps deemed likely to increase newspaper sales. The finding is illustrative of media tendencies to magnify or sensationalise incidents of violence in which women are suspected to be perpetrators, as in the 2004 case of American army private Lynndie England who gained notoriety after photographs were published in the media depicting her complicity in the sexual torture and humiliation of male prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Explanations for the media attention in England's and similar cases have ranged from the media practice of gendering, to its subordination of women and its promotion of patriarchal militarism (Caldwell 2012; Howard & Privera 2008).

Next, we consider two indicators simultaneously: portrayal as victims and portrayal as survivors. These indicators are informed by feminist concerns about the links between language and empowerment. Portrayal as 'survivor' discursively attributes agency to an individual, a recognition of will and determination to overcome adversity. Portrayal as 'victim', on the other hand, implies passivity, a resignation to circumstance and lack of ability or will to take control in order to redirect the unchecked eventual outcome of the situation. These concepts are certainly not mutually exclusive, and a person may be portrayed as a victim as well as a survivor in the same story. The coding instrument took this possibility into account. Sometimes a person can only be described as a victim, as in the case of someone whose destiny has been determined through a fatality. The feminist mission through these indicators is to draw out a more

intentional journalism that is aware of and responsive to nuance and the influence of language.

Twenty per cent of the women are portrayed as victims in contrast to 7 per cent of men. The count of persons portrayed as survivors falls dramatically relative to the number of persons portrayed as victims, by three times for women and two times for men. At the same time, the percentage of women portrayed as survivors is almost three times that of men, at 8 per cent and 3 per cent respectively.

The most common victim category for women and men is that of 'victim of war, terrorism, vigilantism and state-based violence': 43 per cent of women and 49 per cent of men portrayed as victims fall under this category. As in the preceding indicator, women (48 per cent) and men (43 per cent) depicted as survivors are both most likely to be presented as survivors of war, terrorism, vigilantism and state-based violence than any other type of survivor.

The gender patterns of portrayal as victims and portrayal as survivors change outside the 'war, violence, vigilantism' victim/survivor type. Almost one-third of women portrayed as victims are depicted as victims of intimate partner violence (15 per cent) and non-domestic sexual violence (13 per cent). Men are next most likely to be depicted as 'other' type of victim (17 per cent) and victims of non-domestic crime such as robbery (11 per cent) (clarifications provided for 'other' here include boys portrayed as victims of neglect). Women are next most likely to be portrayed as survivors of non-domestic sexual violence (22 per cent) while men are equally likely to be portrayed as 'other' type of survivor and survivors of accidents and natural disasters (both 16 per cent).

To a large extent these findings reflect a dimension of gender disparities in everyday life for people living in conflict and transitional environments. While all, women and men alike, are affected, the suffering brought about by conflict is compounded for women by the forms of violence that accompany their gender-based vulnerabilities. These include sexualised violence within and outside the domestic space, economic, health-related and other struggles. Men's suffering is aggravated by general problems such as other forms of crime and economic hardships resulting from insecurity.

The much reduced news media depictions of people as survivors betray, perhaps, an orientation in reporting that falls short of the peace journalism model. Are journalists missing opportunities to construct more empowering narratives that will support efforts to prevent fresh outbreaks of violence or protect vulnerable groups? Is the literacy of nonviolence and creativity discussed by McGoldrick and Lynch (2000) in short supply? Is there scant attention to a rights approach that would bring into focus the perspectives of women and vulnerable groups and would challenge a doom and gloom narrative? The findings on the perpetrator, survivor and victim indicators trigger questions on the framing choices journalists make, whether intentional or unconscious, and the impact of these choices on vulnerable groups' experiences of peace and security.

## News production

Cross-tabulating the 'sex of reporter' variable with other variables yields information on differences in reporting between female and male reporters; 41 per cent of the stories are reported by women. The gender gap in bylines is widest in stories on crime and violence (50 per cent) and narrowest in political news (8 per cent). Only 25 per cent of crime stories are reported by women, in contrast to political news stories where the ratio of female to male reporters is closer to parity. A closer look at the distribution of stories reveals that three-quarters (75 per cent) of the stories by female journalists are on political/government news, compared to almost two-thirds (62 per cent) of the stories by men. Only one in ten of the stories by women is on crime and violence compared to two in ten of stories by their male counterparts.

Analysis of the data by story scope shows the largest gender gap to be in local news reporting (36 per cent) and narrowest in foreign/international stories (6 per cent). Closer scrutiny of the distribution of stories by sex of the reporter reveals that over a half of bylines by women are on national stories (55 per cent) and lowest in sub-regional/regional stories (7 per cent). Bylines by men are highest in national level stories (43 per cent) as well.

There is evidence that the sex of the reporter makes a difference in the gender dimensions of a story. First, peace and security stories by female reporters are more likely to contain women as subjects or sources than those by their male colleagues; while men dominate as news subjects and sources in stories by all reporters, 23 per cent of the people in stories by women reporters are female, compared to 16 per cent in stories by men. Second, stories by women reporters are five times more likely than those by male reporters to highlight gender (in)equality issues. Third, despite only 6 per cent of the stories focussing centrally on women, the proportion of stories by women that do so remains somewhat higher than those by men: 6 per cent of stories by women compared to 4 per cent of stories by men. Fourth, 5 per cent of stories by women clearly challenge gender stereotypes in contrast to 3 per cent of stories by men. Fifth, 4 per cent of stories by men clearly portray women as leaders compared to almost double (7 per cent) of stories by female reporters. Finally, a women's and/or general human rights angle is present in 77 per cent of stories by female reporters, compared to 58 per cent of stories reported by men. While the differences in several of the indicators discussed here are slight, they are nevertheless present and merit further consideration to uncover why they exist and what intervention possibilities are offered.

A standpoint epistemology perspective suggests that the differences may to some extent be traced to the reporters' gendered subject positions and the lived experiences they bring, as a consequence, that bear on their journalistic choices. This implies that some gains may be made in the struggle for visibility and voice if there is greater representation of marginalised populations among reporters and other newsroom staff, of course within a broader strategy that brings together multiple drivers of change.

Androcentric bias and patriarchal interests prevail in the outputs of male *and* female journalists, which is particularly troubling when stories bear on peace and security issues. “Gender-awareness and conflict sensitivity are the building blocks of reliable, professional journalism – not optional extras” (Lloyd & Howard 2004). The three-pronged yardstick foregrounding gender-responsive professional ethics, peace orientation and women’s right to freedom of expression reveals the news media’s normative requirements in peace and security reporting to be significantly unfulfilled.

## Conclusion

The similarity of findings across countries and regions further suggests the transnationality of patriarchal capitalist norms in news media systems, shaping newsroom practices, approaches to news production and the content delivered. The findings on the wide array of indicators reveal the intricate workings of this normative foundation as manifested through content. The findings evidence not only the exclusionary character of the local mainstream media public sphere in matters of peace and security, but also the severity of marginalisation on the basis of gender difference. Equality in participation in discourse in this space is foreclosed for women and feminised others, while unfair representation and misrepresentation legitimise the culture of inequality and injustice. Struggles to construct counter-narratives that empower subordinated groups have little room to succeed against an onslaught of media reports that are skewed in favour of the dominant ideology. These struggles may have limited means to create other discursive spaces capable of posing sufficient challenge to the wide-reaching mainstream media. Where the spaces, in the form of alternative media, are present, the conversations remain at the margins with slim possibility of permeating into public discourse, of shaping/re-directing popular response or of influencing policy agendas. The media’s critical function of holding power bearers accountable to their weaker publics – an imperative for a democratic and egalitarian society – (following Fraser 1990), is compromised.

Some monitoring teams remarked on the free-for-all nature of their local news media industries where anyone with financial means and – at times – political motivation could establish a newspaper. Poor remuneration of workers drives down the quality of journalistic output as experienced staff exit for better-paying jobs. As well, ill-paid journalists tend to cover the events of those convenors who pay them, implying that events by the poor or powerless have little chance of securing media space. While money and politics largely dictate whose events get coverage or how the narrative is framed, journalistic agency exists, as Hackett (2006) argues, and journalists’ personal values and interests imbue the production process. Further, shaping power relations within everyday journalistic routines “implies the productivity and power of journalism, and the potential agency of journalists as social actors” (Hackett 2006).

These insights and the research findings point to several actions. At the level of media workers is a need for introspection to understand how patriarchal capitalist norms manifest themselves in the values and interests the practitioners bring into their work. This action should be a prerogative for concerned media professionals led by industry associations and unions. Also at the same level are media professionals applying the new or sharpened awareness of spaces for agency to inject intentionality in the production process, for a more inclusive and peace-oriented journalism. At the policy level, the insights point to a need for adoption and/or enforcement of gender responsive ethics and practice codes in media houses and at national regulatory levels, with the necessary enforcement measures. Finally is an approach to media assistance that makes mandatory a requirement for gender-responsive journalistic professionalism. This final action calls for policy and programming responses at national and international levels by media development agencies, particularly in transitional and conflict environments.

## Notes

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## Newspapers monitored

- Bosnia and Herzegovina: *Dnevni Avaz*, *Dnevni List*, *Glas Srpske*, *Oslobodjenje*
- Cyprus: *Alithia*, *Haravgi*, *Phileftheros*, *Politis*, *Simerini*
- Democratic Republic of Congo: *Forum de AS*, *La prospérité*, *La référence plus*, *Le Phare*, *L'observateur*, *Tempete des tropiques*
- Guatemala: *Al Día*, *Diario de Centro América*, *elPeriódico*, *Prensa Libre*, *Siglo XXI*

Guinea: *Le Diplomate, Le Standard, L'observateur*

Liberia: *Daily Observer, Front Page, In Profile Daily, Pabbat Newspaper, Public Agenda, The Inquirer, The People, Women Voices*

Mali: *Info Matin, L'Essor, L'Indépendant, L'indicateur de Renouveau, Le Combat, Le Républicain, Nouvel Horizon*

Nepal: *Annapurna Post, Gorkhapatra, Himalayan Times, Kantipur, Kathmandu Post, Nagarik Daily, Naya Patrika, Nepal Samachar Patra, Rajdhani Daily, Republica Daily, The Rising Nepal*

Palestine: *Al-Ayyam, Al-Quids, Felesteen*

Papua New Guinea: *Post-Courier, The National*

Philippines: *Abante, Bulgar, Business Mirror, Cebu Daily News, Manila Bulletin, Mindanao Times, Pampanga Sunstar Daily, Philippine Daily Inquirer, Philippine Star*

Sierra Leone: *Africa Young Voices, Awoko, Concord Times, New Citizen, Newswatch, Politico, Premier News, Standard Times, The Satellite*

South Sudan: *The Citizen, The Juba Monitor, The Juba Telegraph*

Togo: *Forum de la Semaine, L'Alternative, Liberté, Togo Presse, Triangle des enjeux*

Uganda: *New Vision, The Daily Monitor, The Red Pepper*

# Conflict Reporting in Nigeria

## *How Gender Balanced?*

Lilian Ngusuur Unaegbu

### Abstract

This is a study of how gender discrimination affects gender sensitive reporting of the Northeast Boko Haram conflict. Women from the northern part of Nigeria for cultural and religious reasons would speak more freely to a fellow woman, however, due to gender constraints, female journalists are not allowed to report on a sensitive beat like the conflict in Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigeria, media, women, gender, journalists, Boko Haram conflict

The society we live in plays a pivotal role in shaping our attitudes and behaviour. As social beings, we are constantly bombarded with information emanating from the environment which influences the way we perceive the world. This information also tends to shape our attitudes and beliefs, gradually moulding each and every one of us into accepted members of society. In the past, these influences which defined our behaviour in society emanated from sources such as the community, family and school; however, nowadays these institutions seems to be declining as society now adapts to the dynamics of technological age, the media. According to Stella Okunna (2000: 4), the growth of the mass media has a significant impact on the lives of everyone. Through glamorous or subtle messages, the media shape the opinion of audiences. Other scholars (Daniel & Akanji 2011: 227) describe it as a vehicle for social change. Even in conflict situations, fair and balanced reporting is expected from the media.

Gender sensitive reporting is an integral part of conflict reporting, and essential in presenting a balanced view to the public (El-Bushra 2012: 20) and finding lasting peace in conflict situations (Bell 2013). But this has not been the case in the reportage of the Boko Haram insurgency which has engulfed Nigeria since 2009. Media reports emanating from the conflict are largely centred on the havoc, carnage and threats by the terrorists. In essence, what makes headlines is the killing and destruction by the insurgents or the offensive launched by the Nigerian military and sub-regional task

force; with casualty counts of the fatalities and injuries making beautiful infographics in newspapers.

Until 14 April 2014, when the world was awash with stories of the kidnapping of 276 girls from a government-owned girls' secondary school in Chibok, Borno State, the impacts of the conflict on women and girls were largely missing in the media.

Local media coverage of the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls was largely driven by international media coverage, with frames reinforcing a hopeless situation. Many Nigerians received the news of the abduction on international media channels before any local news channel reported it. Local reports were mostly culled from reports by international media. It was this coverage that led to the #BringBackOurGirls movement here at home, calling on the government to act quickly. Although it is appreciated that local coverage has improved over the months, the Nigerian media's framing can be described as unfair. Nigerian newspapers largely frame reports of the Boko Haram incident as one of hopelessness (Ngwu et al. 2015) – also lacking contextualising gender perspectives.

This could be tagged an eye-opener, but the portrayal of women is still as helpless victims. Such stories re-shame women. The pattern of news reports reveals a gender stereotyping – the masculinity of men and the pitiful situation of women. Images in newspapers and on television show men as spokespersons, with women seated or squatting in the background. These portrayals confirm that while women are seen in the media, their voices are not heard (Anyanwu 2001).

Although the function of the press as an observer is necessary for the enforcement of political, cultural, economic and moral stability in society (Mu'azu 2002: 47), in principle journalism practice requires media reportage to be fair. Unfortunately, journalistic reports have failed to present important dimensions of the conflict – from the involuntary yet sudden displacement of women to the issues of rape, change of household structure, forced marriage, slavery, and the lack of follow-up stories to monitor how survivors are coping (Dunu 2015: 2). This gender orientation is not unconnected with the male dominance of the Nigerian media born out of age-old societal constraints.

It is estimated that women make up almost 50 per cent of Nigeria's population (World Bank 2014); but only seven of the 109 currently serving senators are women. This reveals the unseen nature of women in Nigerian political and social life. In perspective, the 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project indicates a huge imbalance in gender disparity in the Nigerian media; 81 per cent of reporters are male whereas 19 per cent are female. Even wider is the gap evident in a six-month review of two national newspapers in Nigeria conducted for this chapter, which revealed that 94 per cent of reports on the Boko Haram crisis were written by male journalists. This reinforces Valentina Bau's (2015: 16-19) assertion that while data on the social and political situation of women is already weak, it becomes even scarcer in conflict analysis.

A school of thought argues that the absence of gender sensitive reporting in the Nigerian media can be linked to few female journalists in the media and even fewer female journalists reporting conflicts. The argument rests on the Hausa adage "only

a woman truly understands a woman's problems". In relation to media reportage, it means that a female journalist is more likely to understand the plight of female victims and to report it appropriately. The argument goes further by suggesting that a woman affected by conflict is more likely to speak frankly and freely with a female journalist. This suggestion, or school of thought, has a cultural background. In the northern part of Nigeria (where the Boko Haram conflict originates), most women are left indoors to bring up children and to not do any formal work or be seen talking to men other than their husbands or immediate relatives. When they go out, they are expected to wear a long flowing *hijab* and face cover. Such cultural conditioning means that when a male journalist conducts the interview with a female victim, she is most likely not to speak freely. This means that in the absence of female journalists, as usually is the case in conflict reporting, the views of women necessary for gender sensitive reporting (essential for peacebuilding) is poorly presented. While this argument holds, it raises the question: to what extent will the involvement of female journalists induce more gender sensitive reporting?

This chapter looks into the subject by providing an overview of the nature of local journalism coverage in Nigeria. It then dives into media coverage of the Boko Haram conflict. To understand the lack of gender sensitive reporting, it provides an in-depth review of the challenges faced by female journalists, and it goes further – to examine and discuss the realities of women directly affected by the conflict.

## Methodology

The article was birthed out of findings from a Nigerian country report for a research project to map the experiences of journalists and editors in seven countries. During the interview process, most of the informants with experience in conflict reporting were male, which leads to questions of: Where are the women reporters? Are female journalists not reporting on conflict? And if there are no female journalists reporting conflict, then how gender sensitive is the coverage?

A full report of the findings has been published by Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Science. The paper made use of unstructured interviews and reviews of newspaper articles. Eight female journalists were targeted for the unstructured interviews. Owing to time constraints, and their locations, five of the informants were interviewed by phone; the other three interviews were face-to-face. Each of the informants selected has over ten years' experience in journalism practice and has covered conflict, human rights or crime related stories. To comply with ethical considerations, the names of the informants are kept confidential.

Two national newspapers – *ThisDay* and *Daily Trust* – were analysed for a six-month period from January to June 2015. In the newspaper analyses, emphases were on the quality of coverage and tone. The study particularly tried to analyse how journalists reported the Boko Haram insurgency with questions like: Were there gender

perspectives in the news articles? How were women reported, as helpless victims or survivors? Did the tone of articles re-shame victims? Or were articles just focused on the carnage, the number of bomb blasts and people killed? The choice of the two newspapers was based on their experience of Boko Haram. *ThisDay* newspaper offices in Abuja and Kaduna was simultaneously bombed on 27 April 2012 by the insurgent group which has also issued messages of threat to staff on grounds of unfair reportage. On the other hand, the *Daily Trust* newspaper has a strong presence and wide coverage in the northern part of Nigeria where the insurgents have their stronghold. The two papers were also selected for their wide readership, access to old stories or issues for this study.

## Theoretical framework

This research is based on two theories: agenda-setting and feminist media studies. The agenda-setting theory of the mass media implies that the mass media predetermines which issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society. The theory does not ascribe to the media the power to determine what we actually think but it does ascribe to them the power to determine what we should think about (Folarin 1998). “The press may not be successful most of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers/viewers what to think about” (Schulte 1983: 133).

Research into the agenda-setting function of the mass media has shown in many cases that the nature of coverage given to certain issues influences the way in which members of the public perceives these issues as important. Just as the mass media set the agenda in political campaigns, they also influence the public’s perception and seek to re-orient thinking and, to some extent, affect behavioural traits – what the Nigerian media focus on in the Boko Haram conflict will become what society thinks and believes the conflict is. According to Babatunde Folarin (1998) two elements are involved in agenda-setting theory. One is the quantity or frequency of reporting – how often the print or electronic media report an event or an issue. The emphasis placed on what is being reported is also significant. An example is the number of times women are showed as victims of rape, in distress and in need of help or news sources and experts vis-à-vis the number of times men who appear in the articles as experts, opinion leaders or news sources.

The other is the prominence given to the report through headlines, displays, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, graphics or timing on radio, television and films. This is clearly seen in the photographs of the reviewed articles as most women are portrayed as helpless while men are rendering help – or displaying the unrealistic masculinity of ‘strongman’, even in the wake of violent conflict. The importance of this theory to the study lies in its ability to explain the fact that the media can emphasis or present issues concerning women positively and confer on them status that will

be appreciated by society better than what society already has as presented by other researchers.

In *Feminist Media studies – Media Production and the Encoding of Gender*, Liesbet van Zoonen (1994) highlights several factors that could determine the portrayal of women in the media. One is the number of women working in the media industries. This is true for Nigeria, as it is understood from the study that although the number of women entering academic training in communication has increased, women are still a minority in the media industry – which suggests that they are moving into areas of communication studies other than journalism. Women are invisible, as either journalists or news subjects, and the few working in the field are rarely given the opportunity to cover conflict or hard news. For any system to be transformed, the actors must be actively present, which makes it important for women to advance to executive positions in order to influence decisions in the industry. They can also influence society economically and politically with their kind of reporting if given opportunities beyond entertainment news.

Van Zoonen (1998: 37) also argues that “if data tell something about differences between women and men in journalism, they actually tell something about self-perception and self-images”. In Nigerian media, however, this is not a case of self-perception or self-image but, rather, socioeconomic and cultural factors related to gender. The Nigerian woman is culturally considered a second-class citizen and this affects her opinions. Nor does she have the same economic power as a man.

This implies that in a country like Nigeria, where there is high level of poverty and gender inequality, fewer women will be seen in the media industries and fewer still in decision-making positions. This could have a significant impact on the kind of coverage women receive and on their experiences in the work environment.

### Media coverage of the Boko Haram conflict – what gender perspective?

In writing this chapter I conducted a quick content analyses of two popular daily newspapers – *ThisDay* and *Daily Trust* to evaluate the participation of female journalists in the Boko Haram conflict. Of the 105 reports analysed that featured the Boko Haram conflict, only five (representing 4.8 per cent) of the reports were partly or wholly written by female journalists. What was observed in the reports was sheer lack of a gender perspective. The question is whether the lack of female journalists in conflict reporting is responsible for the poor gender-sensitive coverage.

Despite the low participation of women in media, the 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) reports revealed that women reported nearly half of the stories raising issues of inequality in the media globally, which suggests that women’s participation in media is likely to increase gender-sensitive reporting. While this is subject to interpretation, a veteran female journalist from northern Nigeria, with

experience across the country, interviewed during this study, used the Hausa adage “only a woman can truly understand a woman’s issues” and said that most women would be more confident speaking with a female than a male journalist, especially considering the social norms in the northern part of Nigeria where many women are not allowed to speak to unrelated men.

Unfortunately, Nigerian media appears to be preserving existing trends, excluding women in news stories, giving them little opportunity to be heard, and demeaning them through stereotypes that increase their vulnerability (Daniel & Akanji 2011: 231). GMMP (2010) has reported that women journalists are excluded from serious debates on conflicts, politics and economics in Africa but are often given ‘soft’ sections that dwell on family, lifestyle and arts.

While gender-sensitive reporting of conflicts in Nigeria has been poor, analysis of images in the newspapers suggest that even when gender issues are reported, women are mostly portrayed as victims. In images, women are seated in the background, looking dejected, while their husbands take to the microphone to address audiences. The situation is made worse by the sensational coverage when women are the perpetrators. This is exemplified by “Female suicide bomber kills 8 in Potiskum” (*Daily Trust* 12 January 2015) and “Mob kills suspected female suicide bomber in Bauchi” (*ThisDay* 2 March 2015). Analysis of news reports reveals that when a female is the suicide bomber, the caption is “female suicide bomber” whereas a male suicide bomber is captioned “suicide bomber. Fair treatment of gender in the media needs to be a professional and ethical aspiration, and given same degree of importance as accuracy of information, fairness and honesty (IFJ 2009: 16). But what is common in the Boko Haram news coverage is that women make headlines when they are involved in a situation society sees as a ‘should not’ for a woman, and they appear in news mainly as impoverished and helpless victims of conflicts – rarely as decision-makers or agents of change.

With such use of stereotypes, the ability of women to unleash their inherent potential is limited. It reflects a mental block not only in terms of what society may expect from women, but also, more seriously, in terms of what women may expect of themselves (IFJ 2009: 14).

The position of this article is that while the media may not be party to the conflict, they can contribute to the process of its resolution or otherwise through the nature of their coverage and framing of reports. This is based on the assertion that media act as a filter that shapes the public notion of what is important (Daniel & Akanji 2011: 228); thus media presentation of a fair gender perspective cannot be over-emphasised. As Christine Bell (2013: 1) recommends, women should be part of all the stages of peace-building negotiations (which includes women in conflict reporting) and the situation of women should be considered when designing conflicts agreements (gender sensitive reporting has to be a responsibility and an aspiration). Unfortunately, what is obtainable in the media is shallow coverage that clearly omits a balanced gender perspective.

News reportage of the Boko Haram insurgency hardly deepens the Nigerian audience’s understanding of the situation – aside from the casualty figures, the location

of the attack, who is saying what, military responses and government comments and treatment of victims. These are exemplified by the headlines of national dailies: “Again, suicide bomber wreaks havoc in Yobe”; “Another bomb explosion rocks Jos as hundreds of people lose their lives”; “Boko Haram on rampage, hundreds killed, village overrun”; “Many feared killed as blasts rock Yola, Maiduguri”; “Bloodbath in Borno”, “Boko Haram kills 296 in 3 weeks under Buhari”: “Bauchi blast toll rises as government picks medical bills”; “NAF hits Boko Haram targets in Sambisa”; “Jonathan: We will rout Boko Haram and bring them to justice”; “Buhari, Deby strike deal on Boko Haram” and so on. While these headlines seem to attract more readers, in truth they create an atmosphere of panic and confusion.

Analysis of the 105 articles showed that 50.5 per cent came from military press releases after incidents, 13.3 per cent came from government officials highlighting the defeat of Boko Haram or giving casualty numbers, and 8.6 per cent were from opinion leaders – mostly politicians using the porous security situation to their advantage to solicit for votes, ensuring them of safety (typical trade by barter – ensure your safety with your vote) during their campaign rallies. Only 26.6 per cent of statements came from the affected communities, mostly from eyewitness. Analysis also reveals a glaringly obvious gender disparity. Of the 105 articles, 72.4 per cent were from male sources, from the government, military or affected communities. Only one female rescued from Boko Haram appeared as a source, with interview questions focusing on her experience as a victim. Not even the championing of the “Bring back our girls” campaign that attracted an international audience qualified women as credible sources of opinion.

Ifeoma Dunu (2015: 2) described the Nigerian media coverage as intense, issues-based and gender-blind. Although Dunu did not directly link ‘gender-blindness’ to the absence of female journalists, one could argue that the dominance of men in the Nigerian media – and existing societal norms – encourage lopsided coverage. While the number of women in mainstream media has improved over the years, male dominance is very much evident; they select the news and set the agenda for media establishments. Analysis of national newspaper management reveals that the top three positions are held by men. Thus the increase in women’s participation suggests the practice of ‘add women and stir’ without any notable contribution to media reportage diversity and establishment ownership.

Analysis also reveals that most of the reports about the Boko Haram insurgency were written by correspondents in Abuja, hundreds of miles away from the conflict area and indicative of a lack of field-based coverage. Of the 105 reports analysed, eighty-four were either incidence reports or public relations articles, while fifteen are situational reports. In other words, investigative journalism, essential for balanced reporting, is absent, as is gender reporting of the conflict. Where strong gender perspective is presented in the news articles the stories are usually taken from an international news agency such as Reuters or AFP. But if reports about the Boko Haram conflicts are written by reporters in Abuja (which is relatively peaceful) or taken from international news agencies, why then are women not involved in reporting them?

## Situational constraints of women journalists: journalism with tears

Female journalists face a number of constraints that affect their ability to stay afloat in a male-dominated industry. The greatest challenge constraining women in the media industry is their responsibility to family. There is a general assumption that women should be confined to traditional roles as household caretakers and child-bearers, and that the additional rigours of news reporting, late working hours, numerous travels and meeting deadlines may be too much for them to handle. According to Van Zonon (1994: 53), news happens in twenty-four hours and reporters are expected to be mobile and to travel anywhere at short notice. Female journalists often consider it impossible to combine work and family, since many media organisations do not yet provide childcare facilities. On the other hand, these factors pose no hindrance or inconvenience for men as they can be away from their families for days at a time. Nearly all the informants reported family concern. One shared her experiences:

It is difficult doing this job as a nursing mother. I remember I had to carry my three-month-old baby with me to work, and source for news just to keep myself employed. The office did not have childcare facilities, my family felt I could leave the job and concentrate on taking care of the child but I needed the job for financial security and I considered the baby too young to be taken to day care so I had to work like that ...

Parents and family systems in Nigeria contribute immensely to women's inability to break the proverbial glass ceiling in the media industry. Most parents believe that educating girls (especially where there are limited funds) would amount to nothing since they would eventually get married, leave home and become wives and mothers. Poor girl-child education plays itself out in the media.

Another factor that inhibits female journalists in conflict reporting in Nigeria is sexism. Women are often looked at as less intelligent and less confident to be in the media, especially in issues of conflict and politics. It is worse when the woman is small in size. One journalist said she is often referred to as a girl instead of a woman, and some awards she has received were addressed to as 'Mr' instead of 'Ms'. Women themselves have not helped matters, possibly because of societal conditioning. Many women feel uncomfortable when they are given positions society considers unusual. In addition, men see women and their aspirations as unquestionably subordinate and feel comfortable when women act as their appendages. Generally, Nigerian society denigrates women in power. The trivialisation, marginalisation and stereotyping of women are incontrovertible aspects of Nigerian life.

Financial capacity is another challenge inhibiting Nigerian women's participation in media – in this case media establishment ownership. For example, the Nigerian print media establishment, of about forty-four national newspapers and fifteen magazines, is overwhelmingly owned and managed by men. Similarly, the national television – which is the oldest and longest existing television outfit – has never been headed by a

woman. According to one of the female journalists interviewed, journalism in Nigeria is a masculine profession. Women's survival depends on their ability to know their worth and stand firm.

The remuneration package for journalists is poor – and even poorer for female journalists. Financial reward is undeniably a motivating factor in the choice of a career. Sadly, journalists are often not motivated financially. Some media establishments owe their staff salaries for long periods. It is only in Nigeria that a media house can say “our identity card is your meal ticket”. Journalists have asked how they can be expected to work and to deliver when they are not paid, as they need to get themselves to sources for their stories. Journalists are rarely paid compensation when they suffer hardship in the line of duty, and if compensation is paid it does not go beyond medical bills (IPC 2015).

Another challenge to gender-sensitive reporting is the nature of conflict. The emergency of the Boko Haram insurgency in northern Nigeria presented the media with a different kind of conflict than they have been used to reporting. In other conflicts, the media could identify the opposing parties and obtain interviews from them, but this is not so in the Boko Haram insurgency. It is understood that members of the sect are extreme ideologists who do not reason with journalists – or with any person, for that matter. There are records of the killing of Islamic clerics who dare to condemn their actions. Invariably, there are no ‘rules of engagement’. The question here is how one can report effectively without having the story from both sides. No journalist has ever been invited by the sect to present their perspective. This is significantly different from the Niger Delta crisis where the militants fought for resource control and the repair of their degraded environment caused by the exploration for oil, and often invited journalists to present their story. In an interview, an award-winning journalist, reporting on issues of human rights and corruption, said, “How can I risk my life to seek out someone who does not value life? That would be deliberately putting my life at risk.” This statement is in line with one obtained in previous research, where a male journalist said that even though he was a Muslim from Borno State he was not interested in seeking to interview any member of Boko Haram, even on invitation. He said, “I cannot trust people who are out to kill and destroy with no definite reason.” If a male journalist can make such statement, then – considering the stereotyping of women – no female journalist can go there.

Aside from the usual daily editorial briefings, most journalists covering conflicts do not undergo any form of conflict zone reportage training such as security tips for emergency response and coping strategies in difficult situations. In my 2014 report, it was revealed that poor training is prominent among journalists working in privately owned media establishments and it makes them unwilling to report on the Boko Haram conflict. Another concern related to training is that the journalism profession in Nigeria does not have strong regulations demanding appropriate academic training that qualifies one to practise as a professional. Most Nigerian journalists have trained in a different discipline, such as engineering. In the words of an award-winning female

journalist and renowned gender activist interviewed during the study, “journalism in Nigeria is more of public relations ... and an all-comers affair” (Interviewee, name withheld).

Regular beat switch is another challenge. Beat switch is practised by many media houses: a reporter is switched from one beat she/he has been covering for a few years to a different beat. For example a reporter covering health is switched to cover sports after only three years. This practice impedes journalistic expertise in the areas of assignment and also obstructs the full life-cycle coverage of stories which is essential for fair gender reporting. What we have noticed is that reports begin and end on the day of the havoc with almost no follow up stories on the event – it is intense news. The study reveals that the few mentions of a past event are instances where a new incident happens and the casualty figures of a previous event are quoted to connect the events. This lack of life-cycle news coverage means that stories of survivors are rarely told.

Lastly, there is the journalist’s safety. Although this chapter is concerned with outlining the nature of conflict reporting in Nigeria as it relates to gender perspective, it is important to also look at the safety of journalists covering conflicts and political violence. Issues of safety affect both male and female journalists but the situation for female journalists is made worse by the marginalisation of women. From threats and abduction to assault and murder, journalists in Nigeria have seen it all. Interviews reveal, sadly, that some perpetrators of such acts are law enforcement agents – the military and the police. Sexual assault and harassment of women are often trivialised by society and even by colleagues, making it difficult for female journalists to report sexual violence. One of the informants said that trivialising the experience is as good as re-shaming the affected person, which usually makes the trauma and the entire healing process very difficult.

At the time of writing this chapter, Donu Kogbara (a British-Nigerian female journalist) was held by kidnappers for over a week in Rivers State, Nigeria. She has since been released, but only a day after her release the wife of the *Sun* newspaper’s deputy managing director was abducted and released (after 102 hours). One of the informants in this study has also been kidnapped and is still recovering from the trauma. The continuous impunity of the attackers can best be described in the words of the International Press Institute (2012): “The truth that brings change has many enemies.” And in their pursuit of the truth journalists are exposed to violence. What this suggests is the erosion of press freedom in Nigeria. Even more disturbing is that those who harass, unlawfully arrest, maim, and kill journalists are hardly ever brought to book. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) (2014) report ranked Nigeria twelfth globally and second in Africa (behind Somalia) for unpunished murders of journalists. This poor record may be connected to Bilkisu Yusuf’s (2013:7) assertion about untouchables and their networks. While Nigeria’s rating on the world freedom of press index has improved considerably over the years, there is still much to be desired. According to the International Press Centre’s baseline report on the safety of journalists in Nigeria, reporters prefer to report on the Boko Haram crisis from

the situation room of security agencies in Abuja – hundreds of miles away from the active conflict zone.

## Conclusions

News coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency depicts a ‘single story’ analysis of women victims. What this suggests is that women’s issues are not marketable news. Sensational and controversial news is what sells. The dominance of men in the media has not helped. It has made women even more distant from the ‘hot’ news spot of politics, conflicts and economics to focus on lifestyle, entertainment and public relations news reportage. Although the media industry in Nigeria continues to grow, the notable growth has been in the increase of media establishments and practitioners rather than in diverse opinion. Women’s participation in media may not automatically reverse pre-existing discrimination, but it can foster generational mentorship. An effective media agenda must include gender equality and gender-sensitive reporting. The justification for gender equality is that women continue to contribute significantly to the economic, educational, political and cultural development of Nigeria.

## Recommendations

As the chapter has looked at the challenges faced by female journalists in Nigeria, and how they affect gender-sensitive reporting, the following recommendations are made:

- It is imperative that media practitioners step up to the demands of the twenty-first century by encouraging female journalists to report on the ‘hot’ topic of conflicts, as well as holistic gender-sensitive reporting. Editors do not have to expect the good story from male journalists alone, but must give women the opportunity to do the same.
- Journalists should always put themselves in the shoes of women affected by conflict – that is, they must understand the situation. Who better to understand a woman than a woman?
- While the increased use of female journalists in conflict reporting can be argued to be essential for providing a balanced gender perspective, the issues of insecurity, impunity, insurance and other challenges must be tackled effectively and urgently.
- Society must stop making being a woman in Nigeria a “crime”. It must stop the war of gender stereotyping and inequality which is a hindrance to the achievement of the fifth goal of the global goals for sustainable development.

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## Sexual Violence against Journalists in Conflict Zones

### *Gendered Practices and Cultures in the Newsroom*

Marte Høiby

#### Abstract

While sexual violence is a threat to both men and women in war and conflict, cases concerning male victims are largely absent from public discussion and women's vulnerability regularly assumed. This paper suggests that procedures for journalist safety are influenced by a male-aggressor/female-victim paradigm, underestimating the vulnerability of male colleagues and discriminating against women.

Keywords: conflict reporting, journalist safety, gender, women, sexual violence, male-aggressor female-victim paradigm

While sexual violence is a threat to both men and women in war and conflict, cases concerning male victims are largely absent in the public discussion, and women's vulnerability is regularly assumed. This chapter suggests that gendered policies and practices for journalists' safety in the field of conflict reporting are influenced by a male aggressor/female victim paradigm, underestimating the vulnerability of male colleagues and discriminating against women. The result is limited professional leeway for female staff and underreporting of assaults for both men and women. Dominant masculinities in editorial leadership exist and influence decision making and routines, regardless of gender participation.

Sexualised violence or threats against women journalists have in several cases led to sexist deployment to work in areas where female reporters have endured sexual assaults. The women journalists interviewed or otherwise considered for this study express a need to reclaim their professional freedom with respect to safety and sexual violence. Their concern is for the discrimination (misjudgement and distrust) they suffer when it comes to decision making for their own safety, and the gendered prejudice which occurs among editors and fellow journalists of both genders. At the same time, male journalists have said they are pressured (by the same dominant culture) by unrealistic expectations of their manhood.

I shall discuss in theory and challenge empirically some assumptions influencing practices in the newsroom (and in the field): that violence against men is essentially different (by motive) from that against women; that women staff require extra protection; and that these assumed situations will be alleviated by hiring women in leading positions. While violence against men sometimes *appears* different from that against women, my questions are about *how* it differs, and which differences – and similarities – are significant. That women need extra protection will not be opposed – but why is extra protection reserved for women? I approach these issues in the context of rape theory and literature on masculine hegemony and conflict-related sexual violence, scholarly fields offering critical analysis of gendered issues including victimisation and agency and further contextualise the disjuncture between men and the masculine. It has long been known that there are multiple masculinities within any one culture and across cultures, and that it is impossible to draw a dichotomic demarcation line between men and women. It is this binary perspective that I aim to challenge – without, though, opposing the notion that gendered differences do exist for women and men as war reporters. Choosing to shed some light on the violence suffered by men, I may, hopefully, contribute to a more nuanced and complex discussion of the reality for both women and men reporters who are risking their lives in the job of covering war and conflict.

The empirical data presented is retrieved from twenty in-depth interviews with journalists and editors in the Philippines and Norway that were carried out for a larger study on journalists' safety and adaptation strategies in seven countries (see Høiby & Ottosen 2014). It is augmented with secondary data from public interviews and reports by international bodies, and takes an explorative approach in discussing gendered attitudes and adaptation strategies among journalists and editors working in the field of conflict coverage. It considers the potential problems of gendering risk and sexual violence against journalists, and intends to serve as a contribution to dialogue on a topic to which there are few definitive answers or solutions.

## Method and structural considerations

The following is based on findings from a research project which set out to map journalists' and editors' experiences with threats, and their responses to a potentially more dangerous security situation for journalists at work in conflict zones. The project interviewed a hundred journalists and editors in seven countries. Gender was not the original aim of the research project, and because of methodological inconsistency among project participants in the different countries it was discussed in only some of the interviews. This chapter is based on eighteen of the interviews; all the informants are from Norway and the Philippines.

Six of the informants are editors and twelve are journalists. Ten are women and eight are men. Most of the journalists are staff reporters, and only a few are freelancers

or contracted on short-term agreements. The Norwegian journalists work as foreign affairs or international reporters, and the Filipino work locally and/or are connected to international bureaux. Many of them have lifelong experience of conflict coverage, and all have covered conflict frequently in the past five years. Most of the interviews are recorded, but some are not, for safety concerns, and the identities of interviewees are protected. Additionally, this chapter will use information and statistics from international institutions working to promote journalists' safety, and from public interviews of journalists who shared the stories of their attacks.

The definition of conflict reporting decided upon was outlined in the study:

reporting on armed or violent social conflict ... both armed conflict and organised crime; any type of reporting in which the journalist is putting her or his life at risk for the job, based on potential threat from actors involved in the conflict.

### Violence and gender in theory

The assumption that violence against women is different from violence against men has been challenged on several premises by scholars. Richard Felson (2002), who has studied broadly the social psychology of violence, concludes that the same motives – to gain control or retribution and to promote or defend self-image – play a role in almost all violence, regardless of gender. Carine Mardorossian holds that all violence is sexualised, and describes it as “an inherently sexualised phenomenon of which rape is the extreme form” (Mardorossian 2014: 8). She advocates for greater focus on the representativeness of rape in society and culture, and warns against the treatment of sexual violence as a ‘woman’s issue’.

In war and conflict, violence may be used strategically to subjugate the enemy and demonstrate sovereignty, at an individual level or more systematically. In the book *The Landscape of Silence* Amalendu Misra (2015) gives a record of the very prevalent issue of sexual violence against men in war, which he describes as a most effective means to “humiliate, de-masculinise and strategically weaken the male enemy for good”. He argues that through this form of violence the rapist or violator appropriates the victim’s body and mind for a longer period of time owing to the fear, shame and ruined self-image that often follow the attack. The victim is likely to reduce social and political activity (forcibly or by will) and let the perpetrator succeed in minimising his influence in society, but “discipline and punishment are often its core objectives” (op. cit.: 73). The lack of spaces for the male victim to turn to after the attack makes it even more difficult for him to restore his position in society. Misra stresses the absence of methods to redress male victims’ conditions in “social, political, legal, medical and post-conflict contexts” and that society perpetuates ‘false’ norms that ignores men and boys as victims of sexual violence (op. cit.: 225). It imposes unhealthy expectations about masculinity onto men whereby they are expected to keep quiet about their victimhood – and the silence may reinforce the assumption of their invulnerability.

Although Misra's research focuses on men (combatants and non-combatants), many women (combatants or not) are victims of the same masculine hegemony of war and conflict. In their case, however, their struggles are commonly reduced to a 'woman's issue'.

While men do not receive recognition for their vulnerability and need of protection, women are perhaps restrained by excessive focus on these very issues. As Todd W. Reeser puts it: "the most basic assumption about masculinity ... [is] that it belongs to men (Reeser 2010, in Mardorossian 2014: 12), and I suppose the same presupposition exists for women and the feminine. One example is the combat culture and strategy towards military efficiency in the US army. Barkawi (1999) argues that the 'soldierising' of recruits demands transformation by a set of values that he labels 'warrior masculinity' which ensures their readiness and effectiveness in combat. Such masculinity is the furthest point of the masculine and both men and women (with a heterosexual orientation) can undergo the transformation of adopting these values. (Thus, they argue, the recruitment of soldiers with other than heterosexual orientation will be at risk of de-masculinising, for example through stimulating social cohesion, combat groups and reduce military effectiveness) (Barkawi op. cit.: 184).

For example, in the male-only basic training of US army combat arms recruits, group norms, derived from civilian society but also fostered (tactically or otherwise) by staff (for example, in marching songs), regularly figure women as either "saints" or "whores". Such constructions of the feminine foster warrior masculinity and group solidarity. Women are to be protected from the realities of war because, while virtuous, they are weak, or they are to be used for sexual gratification. The widespread prostitution around military bases and other forms of subordination of women are consequences of this construction of femininity. In these and other ways, a specifically masculine and heterosexist soldierly identity is produced, an identity crucial to the competitiveness, the aggressiveness, and the willingness to kill and die required of effective combat formations (ibid.).

The protection scenario of the masculine, or the warrior masculine, protecting the feminine, is further manifest in society through the absence of bodies and resolutions protecting boys and men in war (see Misra 2015). Similarly, civilian males and combatants are also excluded from 'protection' in human security discourse in international institutions (Carpenter 2006). This social construction – the overpowering position of the masculine and the subordinate position of the feminine in the combat setting (or conflict zone) – is likely to also influence conflict reporting from the field. Recent feminist scholarship contends that any individual – regardless of gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation – can act either as superior masculine or subordinate feminine. This chapter discusses the extent to which such pre-judgements and pre-suppositions are still entrenched in society and in newsroom cultures.

## (Sexual) violence against journalists – women’s issue?

In war and conflict, journalists are in a particular situation; protected as civilians (by UN Resolution 1738), but increasingly targeted as combatants, and they may hold substantial political influence through the dissemination of information. Violence against journalists is on the rise (see Reporters Without Borders 2014; UNESCO 2011; CPJ 2012) and both journalists and editors are increasingly reluctant to enter and engage staff in work at the conflict hotspots (Høiby & Ottosen 2015). Although journalist safety is receiving growing attention and strengthening international standards (UNESCO 2014), the critical and extensively underreported issue of sexual violence against journalists has not until recently been on the radar of international bodies and support organisations.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) report *The silencing crime: Sexual violence and journalists* (Wolfe 2011) lays out the findings from interviews with more than fifty local and international journalists, both men and women. It states that sexual assaults can typically be placed in the following categories: “targeted sexual violation of specific journalists, often in reprisal for their work; mob-related sexual violence against journalists covering public events; and sexual abuse of journalists in detention or captivity”. Women are more likely to be targeted, while there are also registered attacks on male journalists, “most often while in captivity or detention” (op. cit.) More than a dozen of those interviewed said they had endured rape or other severely violent sexual assault, and the majority of international correspondents reported having been repeatedly groped while working.

A study by the International News Safety Institute (INSI) of 1,000 women journalists supports the claim that sexual violence is frequently used to silence and intimidate women journalists, and adds that women are additionally exposed to attacks because their work challenges gender stereotypes (Barton a& Storm 2014). However, the majority of threats and assaults disclosed in the study occurred in the workplace and were perpetrated by bosses, supervisors and co-workers. In general, targeted attacks on women journalists are lower than their proportion in newsrooms (UNESCO 2014), and according to CPJs figures women account for only between 5 and 10 per cent of journalists killed in a year.<sup>1</sup>

There is little focus on such atrocities against men, and there has been no major systematic research among male journalists. There are cases of organised rape in prisons where journalists are being held and where such violence is known to be used against male reporters (Wolfe 2012). Another example is the assault against Umar Cheema, reporter for the English-language Pakistani newspaper, *The News*, who was tortured and raped in 2010. His openness about the attack contributed to breaking the stigma and focusing the spotlight on sexual violence against male journalists as well. But, still, it is assumed that there are many such unrecorded cases.

Most of the threats to women (according to male and female informants) consist of sexual harassment and verbal threats, abduction, rape and capture into forced ‘mar-

riage', which happens especially when covering local conflict in provincial areas. In the interviews, several women mentioned the risk of not being let out again if entering a camp or an area under the control of insurgency groups.

... you have a feeling that there's already a threat against you because you're a woman. When I went up to the camp, I saw women and I learned that they were really not from the mountains; one is a teller, the other a nurse, a teacher – I met all of them. One of them even asked me to send a letter to her parents that she was already made to be a wife [to one of the group members]. The threat against you is not by bullet. You feel that there's a threat against you for being a woman.

But the threat of rape or capture into marriage can be mitigated by pretending to be married already. Another woman journalist recalls an experience from covering insurgency in a provincial area:

At the ... camp in ... in 2007, there were people asking about you, asking whether you already have a husband. They were told that I already have one so I had to borrow a ring because we needed to go back ... this is an added risk for women in those areas. You could be easily taken in as wife or married to someone there under duress ... you may get raped or forced to marry someone. The fear is real and the threat is real.

This was also used as a strategy by a Norwegian journalist when taken hostage by the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines fifteen years ago. In a recent account of her kidnapping, she recalls that she asked a French co-captive if he would pretend to be her husband, thinking that the kidnappers would have more respect for a woman who is married (NRK 2015). Stories told by women journalists in the book *No Woman's Land* (Storm & Williams 2012) echo this strategy among their many tips to women reporters on how to stay safe. Inventing stories about the classical nuclear family of husband and two or three children is often on the list of safeguarding remedies.

So, why do they believe that by claiming their dignity in advance they can prevent an attack? And why is it that sometimes an attack *can* be prevented (as in the case of the informant who borrowed a ring and was let out of the camp)? It may be explained by cultural or religious norm: if one is married, one cannot be married again. At the same time, this underscores the essence of shame in sexual violence. "I would rather you shoot me than get raped," was a statement from one of the female journalist informants. Why would she give her life to her assailant? The stigma of rape is substantial. While the violence may appear as sexual, it is political in essence – rape and sexual violence against journalists in war and conflict zones is used strategically to control information (as pinpointed by Amalendu Misra (2015), for discipline and for punishment.

## Gendered restrictions in risk assessment

Although violence regularly takes a sexual form regardless of gender, women journalists face particular restraints that do not apply to their male colleagues. An example that set a precedent in the Philippines was the kidnapping in 2008 of ABS-CBN anchor and broadcast reporter Cecilia Victoria Oreña-Drilon (famously known as Ces Drilon) and cameramen Jimmy Encarnacion and Angelo Valderrama. They were held for nine days by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), and the ordeal triggered a significant shift in the security focus of national media houses towards extra protection of women journalists – even though two of the kidnapped were men. Whereas Drilon and the cameramen were released claiming to be physically unharmed, whether or not she had been raped in capture took significant space in the media coverage and the online discussions following the ordeal.

One of the editors interviewed for this study says that after the kidnapping of Ces Drilon they strengthened safety routines in general with briefings and routines that were rapidly institutionalised.

It also affected sending female journalists [to the area]. Not just the women but also those who are not senior or experienced in those kinds of situations. We don't just send the 'younger' ones. We no longer deploy the 'newbie' into those types of coverages.

While this statement signals a leader's commitment to protect employees' safety and wellbeing, it also discloses an assumed relationship between vulnerability and age, experience – and gender. It is also worth noting that the statement was given by a female leader. The following came from one of the female journalist interviewees:

You need to be able to convince the bosses that it's not dangerous for women ... the kidnapping of women made an impact on the desk. There's some word going around that female kidnap victims were raped in the past including the foreign hostages. It sends a signal that if you're a woman, you will be raped ... [after] Ces was kidnapped, we noticed that they're more careful in deploying women.

There seems to be a trend to take decisions about risk assessment away from the women journalists more often than for the male, and regardless of their age and experience. The term 'hegemonic masculinity', coined by Raewyn W. Connell (2006), refers to a set of practices promoting the dominant position of men in society. Women in leadership positions may adopt such dominant masculine cultures (which succumb to the power of men and vulnerability of women) along with their male colleagues.

It is not only editorial management that sets restrictions for female journalists; during the political unrest in Cairo in 2011, where several women reporters and activists endured attacks by organised mobs, RSF (2011) declared:

It is more dangerous for a woman than a man to cover the demonstrations in Tahrir Square. That is the reality and the media must face it. It is the first time that there

have been repeated sexual assaults against women reporters in the same place. The media must keep this in mind when sending staff there and must take special safety measures.

While RSF did not directly call for media houses to deny access to their women staff, during this time many media administrations experienced internal disputes on whether to send women and many (including editors interviewed for this chapter) decided to take their women staff reporters off the story. When asked about their response to the international warning, one of the editors replied that “gender consideration is naturally part of our risk assessment [and] if women in particular are attacked at a site, we will be reluctant to send them”. None of the editors expressed concern about gendered risks to their male employees and there are no known cases in which men have been denied tenure because of their gender. One editor said that women reporters could have advantages in conflict zones, seemingly posing a lesser threat to their surroundings and appearing more sensitive in matters that demand a sensitive approach. Although the answer is in accordance with traditional stereotyping, the informant could possibly be right to assume that a woman who has just survived a rape by a male assailant is more likely to be speaking to a female than a male journalist about it, but the categorisation of assignments into those suited to women and those suited to men continues to reinforce the stereotypes of women as ‘kind’ and men as ‘insensitive’ which is a concern for both the freedom and participation of the female reporters and for the safety of the male. At the core of this issue may lie the fact that the adaptation strategies rely on stereotyped gender roles. It also poses a line of questioning about gender identities and gender categorising of individuals.

Gendered restrictions by editorial leadership often result in the women’s limited power over their own professional practice, downplaying their ability to make good decisions and strategise for own safety. Altogether, it limits their opportunities for work in the field of conflict coverage. According to the aforementioned INSI study, most incidents of harassment and violence were never reported, even though a majority of women who experienced them said they were psychologically affected. Those who did report sexual harassment were asked “what was the outcome?” and their responses mostly indicated negative effects, from being disregarded to losing assignments or, in a few cases, being fired (INSI 2015).

The alternative, to take on freelance assignments, would potentially and counter-effectively reduce their safety standards even further owing to less training, equipment and resources for safe transport and accommodation. Most of the women consulted for this study felt capable of assessing the risk themselves. “Primarily because of the [insurgency] group, we shouldn’t be sending female journalists because there’s a possibility we may be raped. But sometimes I am opposed to that because it limits us when in fact I can handle the situation.”

Regulations to protect women from sexual violence further invite an assumption that the woman did not strategise prior to her attack and that she could have done

something to prevent it from happening (such as not entering the area of risk). Such regulations also signal to male staff that they are not at risk of sexual violence and that there is no willingness to protect them – or space to deal with this form of violence should it occur. The focus for response ought to lie in the social system, as it does with most other crimes. It is questionable why this has to be emphasised so particularly in the case of sexual violence against women – and why we resort so easily to solutions where freedom is taken away from them.

### Macho culture and sexist deployment

At the journalist and academic research conference *Women, democracy and the media: Political participation and freedom of expression* held in Tunisia in 2014, female reporters discussed how they had established themselves in the occupation – which, for many, had been an experience of swimming against the current. Women war and conflict reporters say that they have to ‘prove themselves’ before being contracted. What has to be *proven* does not refer to building journalistic experience or networks but, rather, to demonstrate that she, as a woman, can navigate foreign landscapes and cultures ‘on her own’ and has the physical and mental capacity to endure work in especially demanding conditions. Several women say that (more than their male counterparts) they have to prove they are willing to take risks and know what such risks may entail.

Both men and women reporters interviewed for the study said that deployment to conflict zones often depends on physical strength and masculine traits. As an editor put it: “Men are usually deployed in conflict/violence coverage. We only have one woman reporter. She covers politics. It is also a dangerous beat, but not as risky as war coverage where there’s action and violence.” A male reporter said, “Here in [conflicted province area] you don’t regularly see women covering actual war. I think the fear comes more from the desk. Will the desk approve of deploying women? I don’t think so.” A woman journalist said she believed she was allowed to cover the defence beat because she looked ‘macho and not fragile’ – only one example of how women in the business of covering war and conflict also respond to the same masculine hegemony as men.

Women’s ‘particular needs’ and the lack of facilities to meet them, has been an issue for military and editorial leaders throughout history when it comes to sending women into the battle zones (Steiner 2015). Arguments against deployment are based on their physical requirements and assumed necessities, and that they are more vulnerable to sexual assaults. One example is this statement by one of the (male) journalists interviewed:

If I were to assign, I wouldn’t assign a woman in jungle warfare. What about her needs? I can take a bath in the river ... It’s like what they say; twelve soldiers and journalists can pee all at the same time in one toilet. For women, they have to take cover.

A female reporter also gives an account of experience (in this case related to the coverage of natural disasters) which is potentially dangerous and often traumatising:

Sexist deployment exists. The guys are always considered first. I confronted an editor before the ... earthquake because I noticed that they sent people who you know are lazy. Just because the 'Top five' were tired you would send a crappy reporter to do the job just because he's a man. There was one editor who refused to accept my observation that they're sexist when deploying reporters. I asked the editor to list down the last ten typhoons and count how many women were deployed to cover them. She still denied this by saying I was just hallucinating. I think this was the reason I was deployed to cover the [next] earthquake. I felt everyone was waiting for me to fail because I challenged their decision-making process on who to send ... Some female reporters thanked me because I was able to break the mode. Now they also get deployed. Why do we even have to fight this hard? Eventually the editor admitted that it's because we, women, take so long to pack our clothes, we easily get scared, we get our monthly periods and "then, before you know it, I need to pull you out" ... I overheard a male reporter once, that men always get deployed to dangerous places not because of sexism but as a matter of convenience. He echoed the statements that it's just faster and more efficient operationally to send a guy. [But] the younger male reporters also stand up for women in the newsroom. We regard each other through skill, merits, strengths ... beyond gender.

Some journalists and editors said that they believe gender is not an issue. One of the male editors-in-chief expressed clear confidence in his female reporters: "I believe there is no issue. We can have initial reservations but this doesn't prevent us from deploying female reporters to conflict areas."

The propensity to take risks has been documented in a large number of questionnaires and experimental studies. For example, a meta-analysis by Byrnes, Miller and Schafer (1999) reviewed over 150 papers on gender differences in risk perception. They concluded that the literature "clearly" indicated that "male participants are more likely to take risks than female participants" (op. cit.: 377). Given the amount of documentation of gendered differences in risk taking, one might consider this a significant element for reporters' safety in the field. Men and women calculate risk differently and women in general take more precautions in potentially dangerous situations (Harris et al. 2006).

## Underreporting of incidents

That some journalists are denied tenured work in conflict zones with concerns about safety discourages journalists of both genders from reporting incidents of threats and violence. The CPJ report (2012) states:

[M]ost of the journalists told CPJ that they had chosen not to tell their editors or go public about the sexual assaults, and of the few who did speak up, all but one said they had been met with censure, such as being pulled from an assignment or being told to remain quiet.

In the report, *ProPublica* reporter Kim Barker told the CPJ: “I think it’s difficult for us to talk about this stuff because we don’t want to look like we’re weak, or whiners ... The tendency of bosses is to want someone who knows what to do and doesn’t need hand-holding.” One of the interviewed editors expressed it explicitly: “The culture plays a role. If you admit that you need psychological help, your reputation will suffer ... you’re considered lucky if the editor even asks about what you’re going through internally after a coverage.”

Reluctance to report incidents is not limited to women but becomes a restraint on all reporters, and male journalists are also exposed to the pressure of being able to ‘handle it’. Several male reporters indicated that they did not want to show weakness by reporting after-effects and injuries, as this could lead to exclusion from new assignments. This way of thinking is expressed in a statement by one of the editors: “We also don’t force [the assignment] even on our senior reporters. If you don’t feel comfortable [with it], it will not be taken against you or you will not be seen as unreliable.” Even though in this instance the journalists’ own limits are indeed being respected, fear of being considered ‘unreliable’ if refraining from accepting an assignment is evidently an issue that exists and of which the editor is aware.

## Conclusions

Statements from informants to this chapter indicate that female and male reporters experience threats and violence motivated by social and political control. Although reported threats towards women are often sexualised, there is reason to believe that dark figures for this form of violence against men are significant. Sexual violence against women journalists is among the main concerns for journalists and editors of both sexes. The interviews in this study, as well as research from interested organisations, indicate that women journalists face risks for challenging gender stereotypes *and* for doing the work of a journalist, and that assailants aiming to silence them more often resort to a sexualised form when they attack. On the other hand, little if any research has been done to find whether male journalists run additional risks for being men, despite men having been victims of more than 90 per cent of journalist killings annually, as recorded by the CPJ since 1992 (CPJ 2016).

Sexual assaults happen directly or through harassment; in personal attacks and in phone calls, e-mails and SMSs. Many also suffer the after-effects of such attacks, and some are reluctant to report these reactions for fear of appearing fragile or vulnerable to colleagues and management. The competition for assignments related to war and conflict is tough, and journalists may wish to appear strong and well suited to

the physical and psychological challenges. This emphasis on traditional masculine (stereotypical) traits has the potential to further obscure the true objective of quality journalism.

Editors' responses to protecting their employees often depend on whether the employee is a man or a woman; many editors have said that they are reluctant to send women staff to a site where there is a specific risk of rape. However, while statistics show that the proportion of male journalists killed is significantly larger than that of female (UNESCO 2014 p 93), neither editors nor journalists in this study mention that a situation could be more dangerous for men than women. These are indications that adaptation strategies may rely upon constructed ideas of stereotypical gender roles. The purpose of this chapter is thus not to encourage journalists and editors to stop taking preventive measures to stay safe from rape or any other form of violence, but merely to warn against seeing it as a women's issue instead of a societal problem constituting a threat to democracy and free speech.

It seems like sexual violence is considered an issue that pertains only (or mostly) to women journalists although we know that it also affects men. The idea that men are slightly better suited to work in conflict zones and require less protection than women appears mainstream at times. Men may strive to comply with a heroic ideal of the masculine, for which they are often admired. It would be interesting to examine whether those men who cannot or will not comply with the script of heroic manliness become marginalised, or to what extent their alternative form of masculinity is recognised. Whereas women are more likely to face sexual violence than murder, this is not a risk they are admired for taking because of the considerable stigma around this form of violence. In some cases, women reporters may strive to comply with the same masculine heroic ideal as the men and, if successful, contribute to the same dominant masculine culture. In that case, reporting incidents would be an ultimate setback for compliance with the macho ideal for both men and women. Men are reluctant to report sexual violence, but under the same masculine regime it seems be difficult for the women too, as they may lose the competition for future work.

## Note

1. See annual statistics at [www.cpj.org](http://www.cpj.org)

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## Part II. Women and Lack of Agency



# “There Are No Women”

## *The War in Libya in TV News*

Eva Boller

### Abstract

The study focusses on the representation of women in TV news regarding the war in Libya in 2011. A quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the newscasts of Tagesthemen, News at Ten and Le Journal de 20 heures was combined with correspondent interviews. The results show a striking lack of female presence in all newscasts.

Keywords: war reporting, gender, visual framing, TV news, war in Libya in 2011, war correspondents

War is often considered a male topic. It deals predominantly with male politicians and male soldiers – and male correspondents report about it. In war, military and masculinity also traditionally share the same stereotypical concepts, such as strength, aggression and physical stamina (cf. Klaus & Kassel 2008; Schiesser 2002: 48). Men are – according to this image of stereotypical masculinity – usually portrayed in the media as defenders and protectors of their ‘home’ (country) and their family. In this bipolar logic, women in the context of war are usually portrayed in the media as the ‘prototypical victim’, like the passively suffering, mourning mother of soldiers (the Pietà), a refugee mother with baby/child in her arms and generally the ultimate victim of violence and persecution (Klaus & Kassel 2008: 266; Pater 1993).

Research has shown that the legitimization of war is often linked to the reporting about women and violations of women’s rights (Ahmed 1992; Cooke 2002; Klaus & Kassel 2008). As an example, Elisabeth Klaus, Kerstin Goldbeck and Susanne Kassel (2002) analysed the way in which women were presented reporting from the Kosovo war. They explain that the involvement of Germany in this war was highly controversial because there was no UN mandate and it was the first time since the Second World War that Germany was involved in a military intervention. They found the German media reports they analysed to be dominated by stories and images of women and children who had been victims of mass rape. By focusing on

these crimes, Klaus and Kassel (2008) argue that media have helped to convince reluctant groups (such as women's and peace groups) of the need to act by starting a military intervention. In addition to justifying war, the presentation of violations of women's rights would add to the construction of a concept of the enemy. While their own culture would be presented as progressive, and respectful towards women's rights, the 'other' culture would violate them, and therefore military intervention would also help these foreign women to a better life (cf. Stabile & Kumar 2005; Lippe 2012). Klaus and Kassel conclude that rape is without question a terrible crime and an expression of patriarchy, and that it should of course be reported – as should all other violations of women's rights or rather "human rights" violations, no matter on what side of the conflict they occur. They should not merely be exploited to justify war as the ultimate solution. Other possibilities of conflict resolution strategies should not be excluded in the media discourse.

Shahira Fahmy (2004) had examined how Afghan women were presented in photographs during and after the fall of the Taliban regime. In her analysis she came to the conclusion that despite of signs of visual subordination and framing stereotypes, after the fall of the Taliban regime women were portrayed as more involved, interactive, socially intimate and symbolically equal to the viewer. So the visual presentation of the Afghan women could give the viewer the impression that the war in Afghanistan had helped to liberate Afghan women. In his 2003 study, Eric Louw concluded that the Afghan women not wearing *burqa* were supposed to represent the success of the war in Afghanistan.

While former studies found that, in war reporting, women are often presented as the victims (cf. Schmerl 1989) a new study (Fröhlich (2015: 134) came to the conclusion that women are so marginalised in war reporting, that they are not even in the majority in the representations of victims. In this longitudinal study of war coverage in two German national newspapers there were so few cases of women that it was almost difficult to analyse them in a quantitative way.

Most research about war reporting focuses on newspapers and images in print. Few studies so far have focused on war reporting in videos. TV news, however, is of huge importance to the legitimization of wars. Audiences of newscasts have the impression that they themselves could form an opinion based on what they have seen in the news, as one could believe one has witnessed it with one's own eyes. It is easy to forget, that whatever – or whoever – you see is always just one aspect or one frame of the story, since reality cannot be broadcast. Most readers are more critical of textual framing, but viewers are less, aware of visual framing, the selection and combination of images with a text that guides the perception of the viewer. So, how are women presented in TV war reporting?

## The conflict and war in Libya in 2011

The 2011 war in Libya was selected as an example of a more recent war. In a comparative content analysis the most popular TV newscasts in Germany, France and the UK were examined. The newscasts selected were the ‘News at Ten’ from the BBC, ‘Le Journal de 20 heures’ from TF1 and the ‘Tagesthemen’ from the German ARD. These countries were chosen because of their differing politics during the military intervention. It was expected that their newscasts would be diverse in their reporting. The method applied was a multilevel content analysis. First, the whole period of the war, from February until the end of October 2011, was examined in the three newscasts in a quantitative content analysis. The element of analysis was the report. If there was any report about Libya each day it was coded, and what kind of report it was, was noted down – how long (in seconds), who was reporting, if this person was in the country (Libya) and if the reporter was male or female.

### *Female war correspondents*

In general, female war correspondents are still the exception rather than the rule (cf. Fröhlich 2015: 119). Sybille Hamann points out that female war correspondents do not write differently, but that they potentially write different stories (Hamann 2010: 315). It is a lot easier for a female correspondent to make contact with the ‘male sphere’ and the ‘female sphere’. She explains that the female correspondent would more likely be regarded by men as a foreign person (with all the privileges attached) rather than as a woman – a male correspondent could easily get into trouble, if he tried to interview females, but by choosing as a topic only the publicly accessible parts of life, reports could be limited to the world of men. Usually, the male story would be regarded as ‘the story’ and the male narrative would dominate the reports, with female stories as only a theme for special interest groups. Hamann points out that by excluding stories about females in reports about Afghanistan, the reporting would follow the rules of the Taliban, who do not want women to be included in their story. Whoever thinks the male part of society is the whole, without noticing that there is something missing, is using Taliban logic by excluding half of the population from the world that is being reported about. Hamann argues that war correspondents are often gender blind and would easily assume common stereotypes about the genders: the gender perspective, she argues, is not a feminist distortion of reality or a special angle but the perception as a whole. Since men would often not be able to report with this gender perspective, it is essential that women also report about war and that they report about different topics and aspects.

Liesbeth van Zoonen maintains that female journalists would often be more interested than men in human interest stories. Male reporters would focus on facts, but women would report the background story and report about the effects, while keeping in mind the needs of the audience (van Zoonen 1998). More female reporters

in war zones could also lead to more reflection about the consequences of war, and less on the battlefield and violence – which might promote more peace journalism (Galtung 1997: 82).

In the Libya study it soon became clear that there is already a difference in feminine representation in the newscasts by the number of female war reporters. At some point, seven correspondents reported from Libya for the German *Tagesthemen*, and there was not one woman among them. The French *Journal de 20 heures* had nine correspondents, but only one of them was a woman. *News at Ten*, on the other hand, had twenty-nine correspondents in the country during these nine months, seven of whom were women. In each newscast there were also reports about the conflict in Libya by reporters who were not in Libya. The mere number of female correspondents already gives some reason to believe that more male stories were told in the newscasts.

### *The visibility of women*

In order to find out more, a visual content analysis was conducted. The most important months of the conflict were selected: February, with the beginning of the demonstrations; March, with the recognition of the rebels by France as the only legitimate representatives of Libya, the UN resolution 1973 and the start of the military intervention and finally October, the month of Gaddafi's death and the end of the intervention. Apart from the majority of the reports, this is also the most interesting time with regard to the legitimization of the military intervention.

One observation was noticeable from the start: the lack of women in the video material. The visual theme most prevalent in all three newscasts was “male rebels on cars with weapons, shooting”. These men were often presented from below in heroic poses. They filmed themselves while they were standing or sitting on cars, and the foreign media also showed them standing on jeeps, tanks or ruined buildings. Women were not shown standing on top of anything, and the camera angle was at ground level. The rebels were in a uniform of a sort, often camouflage clothing, sometimes with fake medals attached, and were usually shown holding guns. Female rebels were hardly ever visible. In a few exceptions, Libyan women in *hijabs* (headscarves) were shown in the news with machine guns. In general the support for the rebel side from Libyan women was only recognisable because of the rebel flags some women were holding or wearing.

The lack of visible females was quite striking. In the majority of the 517 analysed reports with video material (59 per cent) not a single woman was visible – but this is by no means an indication that in the other 41 per cent (where at least one woman was clearly visible) women were the protagonists. Newscasts were similar. The best chance of seeing a woman in the Libya reports with video was in the French newscasts, where 42 per cent of the videos showed one or more women (in 40 per cent of the *News at Ten* reports a woman was to be seen). The worst chance was in German TV, with only 39 per cent of videos showing a woman.

## Female voices

People allowed to speak on television in a report are important. They have something to say, they should be heard and the viewers should listen to them. So how many women were among them?

In the deepened content analysis of the three months, the first three soundbites of each news report were coded with information of the person’s sex, to show how many women were allowed to speak. Assuming that the attention of the viewer decreases with the length of the report, only the first three soundbites were considered in the analysis, regardless of the total number in a report. Out of 646 soundbites, only 67 (10 per cent) are of women. This is a strong underrepresentation, especially if one considers that among these female voices are the German chancellor Angela Merkel, the former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton and Catherine Ashton, the former first vice-president of the European Commission. If you look at the different newscasts you get the following image:

**Table 1.** Newscasts and their proportion of male and female soundbites (per cent)

	Female	Male	Sum per cent	Total
Tagesthemen	12	88	100	168
Journal de 20 heures	12	88	100	221
News at Ten	8	92	100	257
<i>Total number of female and male soundbites</i>	67	579		646

Most soundbites (258) appeared on the BBC, but only 8 per cent of them came from women. With 26, France had the most female voices, but this was still only 11.7 per cent of their overall soundbites. German TV had 21 soundbites from women and 2.5 per cent female voices.

## The female voices in the reports

In 102 reports, all three soundbites were by men and there was no report with three female soundbites. In 80 per cent of the reports only male voices appeared. In 18 per cent there was a mix of men and women. And in only 2 per cent one or two females (but no man) gave a soundbite.

## Influence of female correspondents

It was also tested whether the sex of the correspondent had any influence over the choice of the interview partner and the visibility of women. Sometimes a report was produced by a team of female and male reporters but it was unclear whether the correspondent had worked with female or male fixers, so these results can only be seen as a trend.

**Table 2.** Journalist teams and soundbites related to sexes (per cent)

	Female reporters	Male reporters	Mixed journalist team
Reports with soundbites by women only	5	2	0
Reports with soundbites by men only	74	82	71
Reports with mixed soundbites	21	16	29
Sum per cent	100	100	100
<i>Total</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>204</i>	<i>24</i>

Of all-male teams, 82 per cent were only of men's voices. If women were the correspondents, the percentage of male voices only is 74 per cent. Mixed teams of men and women seem to be the most balanced, with 29 per cent of mixed soundbites; whereas for all-female teams it is 21 per cent, and for all-male teams it is 16 per cent.

At the BBC, eight (38 per cent) out of the twenty which included female soundbites came from female journalists. In Tagesthemen only two soundbites (10 per cent) of the twenty-one came from a female journalist, who was not in Libya. In Le Journal, twenty out of the twenty-six soundbites (77 per cent) by women came from the female correspondent and from female reporters who were not in Libya. Even though Le Journal had only one woman in the country, during this time she was responsible for a good number of reports (forty-one reports out of 102), but the majority of the reports from Libya still came from male reporters, even though this one female reporter made quite an impact, alone being responsible for sixteen out of the twenty-six female soundbites, and in 77 per cent of her reports she included women in the visuals.

The News at Ten had seven women reporting from Libya, but between them they were only responsible for forty-one reports out of 276 (approximately 15 per cent). The female reporter responsible for most of the reports (thirty) at the News at Ten worked in Libya during April and August – months not included in the visual content analysis and soundbite analysis.

## Does the sex of the correspondent affect the visibility of women?

While the female correspondents included more female soundbites, they did not (contrary to expectations) show more women than did the male teams.

**Table 3.** Journalist teams and visibility of women related to sexes (per cent)

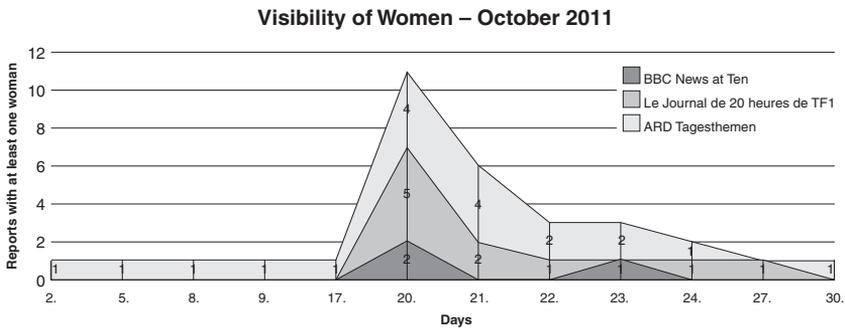
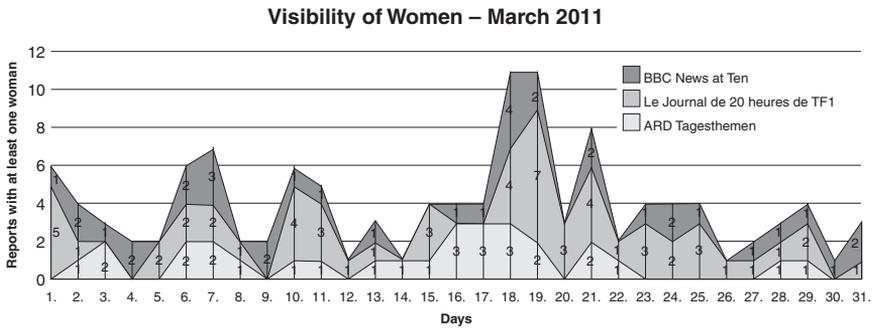
	Female reporters	Male reporters	Mixed journalist team
No women visible in video material	67	55	37
Woman or women visible in video material	33	45	63
Sum per cent	100	100	100
<i>Total</i>	<i>195</i>	<i>298</i>	<i>24</i>

In 45 per cent of their reports, male teams showed women, whereas female teams only showed women in 32 per cent of their reports (in two-thirds of their reports no woman was visible). The highest percentage (63 per cent) again came from mixed teams.

Female reporters more often speak to women. Male reporters more often show women. Mixed teams seem to be the best for female visibility and for the inclusion of female soundbites.

## When are women present in the TV news?

Were women portrayed in a way that justified the military intervention? To answer this question, the exact dates when women were more visible in the newscasts were examined, and the result shows that there is a strong connection between the overall amount of reporting on a particular day (24 February, 18 and 19 March and 20 October) and the likelihood that women would be visible.



Women were visually present at particularly relevant days. After the UN resolution (17 March 2011) that had allowed all necessary measures to protect Libyan civilians, several reports in the newscasts dealt with the conflict and in these reports women were often present. The same applies to 19 March, the day the military intervention started. French television had peaks on these days. On 10 March, when France accepted

the rebels as the only legitimate representation of Libya, there is a peak in female visibility – and also on the day Gaddafi was killed, 20 October 2011. This is also because there were more reports about Libya on these important days but there might also be a connection between the visibility of women and the legitimization of the resolution, the military intervention and Gaddafi's death.

### Qualitative content analysis: Silent rebel supporters and screaming Gaddafi fanatics

To find out more, in detail, about how Libyan women were presented in the newscasts on the important dates of 10, 17, 18 and 19 March and 20 October, a qualitative visual content analysis was conducted. In the reports about the Libya conflict only few Libyan women were presented in the three newscasts overall. If they appeared, they were either the female rebel supporter or the female Gaddafi supporter. The latter are presented as active and outspoken, accusing the rebels of being Islamists and demonstrating for Gaddafi and against the NATO intervention.

On the day of the resolution, News at Ten showed a soundbite – twice – of a female Gaddafi supporter in Tripoli screaming: "I hate UN, British, French and Arab! I only love Libya and Muammar al-Gaddafi." Even though she is given the chance to speak, her soundbite does not contain any argument for or against military intervention. She appears fanatical about the resolution, and her outburst of hatred seems irrational – exemplifying the unreasonable position of Gaddafi supporters in respect of the military intervention. In *Le Journal*, the female Gaddafi supporters are shown risking their own lives by sitting in front of Gaddafi's compound as a human shield: "We are staying here to protect Gaddafi and if France bombards us we will die here." The only female correspondent from France is responsible for most of the few existing soundbites from the female Gaddafi supporters.

On the other hand there are the female rebel supporters. Most of them are presented in demonstrations outside Libya (in Brussels, London and Paris) rather than within the country. They are rarely interviewed. Their support for the rebel side is expressed by showing them holding the new Libyan flag or having it painted on their faces. On the day before the resolution, one Libyan woman gave a soundbite to a BBC correspondent on the phone: "We don't have anywhere to go. We just stay at home waiting. Waiting to die. We are so scared." The correspondent asks: "If you were able to speak to the international community right now, what would you say?" And she replies, heard by the viewers: "Please, please help us! We need help! We are so scared! Children so scared. Please help us, please!" The report ends with these words. The exact identity of this woman and the circumstances of the phone call remain unclear but the soundbite of a pleading Libyan woman might evoke sympathy for the rebel side and support of the resolution for a no-fly-zone. "Women and children" are mentioned several times by male rebels as the victims of Gaddafi's actions. Even

the British policewoman Yvonne Fletcher, who was shot in the 1980s in front of the Libyan embassy in London, features prominently as a female Gaddafi victim.

On the day of Gaddafi's death the newscasts only presented joyful female Libyans. A Libyan girl in Tripoli gives a soundbite to a female BBC correspondent: “I feel so happy. It's amazing. I have never felt as happy as today!” The female Gaddafi supporters no longer appear.

This portrayal of happy women and children could be seen as a way of legitimising the killing of Gaddafi, which was not the result of a legal process. If all these “innocent women and children” are cheerful about it, the circumstances surrounding Gaddafi's defeat cannot be completely wrong (cf. Boller 2015).

### Libya and the role of women

The topic ‘women in Libya’ is interesting enough to fill a whole book (cf. Buding 2008). This study, however, is about the way women were represented in German, French and British TV reports about the conflict in 2011. That said, it is interesting to get some idea of the situation for women before, during and after the Gaddafi regime.

Libya was a tribal society with patriarchal structures (Hüsken 2011: 58). Today, five years after the military intervention in 2011, the country is still in chaos. Bombing and the fighting on both sides have destroyed infrastructure (for example the man-made river project),<sup>2</sup> the country has more than one government, and Islamic State is now active in Libya. The effects of these living conditions for women in Libya cannot be thoroughly examined here.

Traditionally, public life was dominated by men and private life was the realm of women. While some claim that in Gaddafi's socialist state, the ‘Jamahiriya’ women had equal rights, others stress that he was by no means a feminist. In Gaddafi's *Green Book* he wrote that men and women were equal, but that they were biologically designed for different roles in life and thus not equal (cf. Lobban & Dalton 2014: 88). Gaddafi encouraged women to enter traditionally male-only sectors of Libyan society by allowing them into the armed forces (as one of the first in the Arab world) and his all-female bodyguards were often regarded with astonishment by the foreign media (St John 2011: 66). Because of his policies on women, Gaddafi clashed with more traditional sectors of Libyan society and with conservative Islam clerics (cf. Buding 2008: 255).

Some argue that by promoting a more open, expansive and intrusive role for women, Gaddafi wanted to boost the legitimacy of his regime (St John 2011: 256). Education for females was improved and the adult female illiteracy rate dropped under Gaddafi to 29 per cent, an impressive result compared to that of neighbouring states (Dris-Ait-Hamadouche and Zoubir 2007: 274-248). Gaddafi restricted polygamy and raised the minimum age for the marriage of girls. He established the Department of Women's Affairs and set up a centre for women's studies.

While these facts about Gaddafi's Libya point to a more modern society that promoted equality between men and women, others believe that this was merely a pretence and that women in Libya were not equal: "... even though men and women in principle were guaranteed equality under Libyan law, a lack of application and control resulted in a notable level of inequality in practice" (St John 2011: 66-67). The practice, under Gaddafi's rule, of detaining women and girls suspected of 'violating moral codes' into 'social rehabilitation' facilities is sexist and a major obstacle to female empowerment. As Human Rights Watch stated in 2010:

The Libyan government continues to detain women and girls indefinitely without due process in "social rehabilitation" facilities for suspected transgression of moral codes. Many women and girls detained in these facilities have committed no crime, or have already served a sentence. Some are there only because they were raped, and are now ostracized for staining their family's "honour".<sup>3</sup>

The Arab Spring of 2011 was supposed to bring freedom and democracy to the whole population. Salwa Bugaighis, a lawyer from Benghazi and one of the founding members of the NTC, was a prominent woman during the uprising. She was outspoken in support of the rebels, not wearing a *hijab*, and giving interviews to foreign TV teams. Sometimes called the 'voice of the revolution', Bugaighis resigned her position in the NTC after three months, to protest against the lack of women in the new government. She also opposed moves to make the wearing of the headscarf compulsory. In 2014 she was shot in the head – supposedly by Islamist extremists.<sup>4</sup>

The question of feminine participation in the revolution and subsequent war cannot be answered that easily. There were women like Salwa Bugaighis, but the majority of women were less prominent in the political and rebel organisations.

In a BBC Newsnight report about the future for Libyan women in August 2011 – six months after the start of the uprising – the reporter Madeleine Morris condemns the lack of women in the new Libyan government and remarks:

The irony is, before the revolution, Libya was one of the more equal countries in the Arab world. Women were better educated than in neighbouring countries, had maternity benefits and held high-ranking government positions ... Women were always a visible, vital part of the colonel's Libya. Could that be about to change?<sup>5</sup>

In the same programme, however, the BBC Middle East commentator Mona Eltahawy concludes: "Nothing could be worse than how people had lived under Gaddafi ... There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that men and women in Libya will live much better lives without Gaddafi."<sup>6</sup>

After Gaddafi's death on 23 October 2011, the NTC announced that Sharia law would be the main source of legislation.

## The circumstances behind the reports

Jörg Armbruster, the German correspondent who most frequently reported from Libya in *Tagesthemen*, has written a book about his experiences. In it he writes about the extreme separation between men and women among the Libyan rebels that did not exist under Gaddafi. He even uses the expression ‘caging’ of women by the rebels (Armbruster 2011: 134).

For a better understanding of the circumstances of the reporting in Libya and the results of the analysis, interviews with correspondents from each newscast were conducted. The journalists were asked whether they had tried to show both men and women in their reports. One German correspondent simply answered: “No. If there are no women I cannot show women.” Asked if he had reported this, he replied: “We had so much to do, you can’t also report about these issues.” To the question whether being a man had been an advantage or disadvantage he said:

There were many women among the reporters. Therefore I don’t believe it was an advantage [to be a man]. Maybe, rather, a disadvantage, because the press officer and later the information minister was a big womaniser. Maybe women had an advantage because of this.

Another German reporter explained the lack of females in the visuals as: “It was war, and in war women don’t play such a big role.” When he was confronted with the fact that war affects the entire population, and women make up 50 per cent of the population, he replied: “It was a very conservative society. The role of women is a special topic in Libya. They are not present in the streets and the public sphere.” Asked if being a man had been an advantage or disadvantage he said:

Perhaps it is easier to get into certain circles as a woman, but in other circles you won’t be taken seriously. There are advantages and disadvantages, but I suppose in this situation there are a few more advantages to being a man. It was physically very stressful. Well, there are tough women, but in a 5000 or 10 000 metre run men are obviously faster than women.

The final German correspondent said that it was difficult to film the average woman in Libya. He had met some exceptional female activists, but apart from that he did not have “much to do with women there”. Asked whether being a man, has been an advantage or disadvantage, he said: “In this male circle of rebels and journalists it was probably easier to be a male reporter.” Men would have had an advantage, with the whole ‘macho nonsense’ as he called it. On the other hand, he didn’t think that female reporters were at a real disadvantage because Western women were regarded as ‘somehow extra-terrestrial’ by the Libyan men. Women’s advantage was that they were able to speak to the average women in Libya, so female reporters had been able to report in a more complete way about Libyan society, because they had been able to report about the other 50 per cent of the population. Asked why he had not mentioned the circumstances, he answered:

That is their culture. The more you get used to living in this culture as a foreign correspondent, the more you stop noticing it. That the women are, so to speak, locked away ... that sounds so negative ... that women have a different role in these societies. So eventually the correspondent does not notice it any more ... then he does not address it anymore and every German viewer is alienated and surprised at what he sees – but the correspondent is no longer aware.

A reporter from the BBC remarked:

There was a really conservative element in Misrata and women certainly did not take part in any of the fighting or in the running of the revolution. They had been involved in feeding and clothing etcetera. But because of the conservative nature of society there I as a male reporter had less access to interview women than perhaps I would have liked.

He was asked whether he had dared to speak to Libyan women. “You would have had fewer opportunities to do that ... you would not meet them in the general course of life, unless you made an effort to do so, because men and women were generally kept separate.”

Another BBC correspondent answered the question about whether he had tried to show both men and women:

It's a very traditional religious country. And we did show quite a lot of women. But women tend not to want to speak. Some would, these very powerful strong Gaddafi supporter females. But there is no gender equality of the kind we would expect in Europe so it's very hard for a man even to talk to women.

When asked if he had made an attempt to speak to women he replied: “Sure, always. And you can find them, because there were better-educated secular women, who it was very easy to speak to. I mean, I would always try to speak to a range of people.”

Asked how being a man affected his reporting, he became quite thoughtful and replied:

As a man you are more likely to be threatened. You are more likely to be beaten. I think women reporters sometimes have the advantage that they are treated like honorary men, when they are with men. But they can also go and speak to women with much more ease. You know, they can go into the women's room at the back of the house. They can go into the kitchens. I mean, I would not be able to do that except by permission of the husband or the father, who would then go in and ask the woman to come out.

When asked why he had not reported the circumstances he answered:

Maybe we should have done a bit more explaining about that. It depends on the piece. If it's a short news piece there is no space to go into that sort of thing. But if you are doing a longer more discursive report then I think it would be possible to talk about things like that. But in general I assume maybe we assume too much. ...

The final BBC correspondent answered the question of whether he had tried to show both men and women:

I just want to report on what's in front of me, what is to hand ... women played a rather more important part on the rebel side than they did on the government side, and I hope I reflected that a little bit. It didn't seem to me to be kind of central to what was going on. When there were women I would interview them and film them as best I could but it's not always easy ...

He was asked how being a man affected his reporting:

I don't know how differently I would report. When I think about my women colleagues I don't think we report about different things. I am extremely interested in women's rights ... If you are reporting in a country like Libya the chances are that you will be mostly concentrating on men because men are the people you tend to see most of.

A French correspondent explained the situation: “But in Libya, one problem was the wife. Because if you look at the pictures of Libya, there is no woman!” On trying to show men and women in his reports:

It was very difficult. We asked ... but we didn't see any women. I mean, maybe one or two, but ... it was very strange. So I asked the fixer and he was saying yes, the women are helping because they are doing the food and doing that and that. They are with the revolution. So I asked the fixer, OK, but could we see them? So he replied: ‘No, because they are in the background.’

He was asked if it was more difficult for him to speak to women because he was a man and said that if he found an activist woman it was not difficult. “But the difficulty was to have the simple woman, because in the Muslim or Arabic culture, you don't show your woman to a stranger.” His reason for not mentioning these facts in his reports:

But at the time I was in Libya it wasn't important. It is the kind of story if you have time. Not if you are running about what is happening, if the revolution is winning or losing, or Gaddafi is winning or losing.

The only female correspondent included in the interviews was the French woman responsible for the forty-one reports out of Libya.<sup>7</sup> When asked if she had tried to show both men and women in her reports she replied without hesitation. “Of course!” Nonetheless, she also added: “But there weren't many women. It was problematic. That's how it's like in Arab countries.” To the question of whether being a woman had influenced her reporting she said: “No. It is the same. I am a woman, but I am a journalist. That does not cause any problems.” In reply to the claim (by the German correspondent) that women might be at a disadvantage because the job was physically so stressful she said it was not a problem for her: “Maybe it was physically stressful for him, but not for me. I have also worked in Syria and Tunisia and there was no

problem.” To the question whether war reporting was more dangerous for her as a woman she replied contemplatively:

Maybe. But I don't want to think about it. When I work I should not think 'oh, it is more difficult for me because I am a woman.' If I do that, then I will do nothing. So I only do my job.

## Conclusion

The results show that in all three newscasts hardly any women were seen or heard. Women were not visible in nearly 60 per cent of the reports. German TV had no female correspondent in the country and French TV only one. Only the BBC had as many as seven female reporters in Libya at one point. One could argue that foreign correspondents focus too heavily on the male perspective and the battlefield. War affects the whole population – and that means including women. By not showing their situation and giving them a voice one denies them the power to be heard. In addition, in television news women are sometimes presented (or excluded) in a way that might justify military intervention – but more common than the use of female visuals as justification is the exclusion of females in general. In the interviews, the following four reasons were most often given in explanation:

### *Blaming culture: It is like that in Libya!*

One explanation is that media only mirror social reality. The answer “If there are no women, I can't show women” is typical, but it is an over-simplified way of describing the work of correspondents. It is not possible to film reality. The job of reporter requires finding the story, finding interviewees and creating the report, which is a constructed combination of various aspects of what the reporter finds and what he or she is looking for. Often, the reporters were aware that they were not including women into their reports (that they were excluding half the population) but they attributed it to Libyan culture – if some Libyan men (and also some women) think women should not play a role in the public sphere, foreign television news should not question it.

The Libyan tradition was often given as an explanation for the lack of female voices. This stands in contrast to the statements from Armbruster and the BBC Newsnight team who had claimed that under Gaddafi women were visible in public life. One BBC correspondent had said: “... women tend not to want to speak. Some would, these very powerful strong Gaddafi supporter females.” This willingness of some Libyan women to speak to the TV journalists also becomes clear if one has a closer look at the women who gave soundbites. The “female Gaddafi supporters” make up the highest number of all the female voices included (eight out of twenty-six) in “Le Journal”. All these soundbites were given to the one female reporter. All these soundbites were given to

the one female reporter. It seems that the female Gaddafi supporters were quite willing to speak to foreign media – if they were asked (especially by a female correspondent). Similarly, there were also women on the anti-Gaddafi side, who were quite ‘modern’ and willing to speak with the media – like Salwa Bugaighis from the NTC. Two correspondents also agreed that ‘activist women’ would speak to them. The lack of female voices is therefore not necessarily only due to the culture in Libya.

### *No time/secondary topic*

War correspondents nowadays face huge time pressures. They are often expected to report for several TV newscasts, and they are reporting under difficult and dangerous circumstances. Finding female interview partners in a culture where women are not so accessible in public life undoubtedly takes longer. One could argue, however, that omitting women is not a minor detail, since it excludes literally half of the population from the conflict picture. (In a hypothetical case of a report only including women, the editor-in-chief would probably immediately ask for an explanation.)

Günther Pallaver and Günther Lengauer (2008: 119-120) argue that the male perspective would overlie other news values. There would still be a stereotypical (or sexist?) separation of topics into soft news (women) and hard news (men). By focusing more on the situation for Libyan women, the focus of the reports would also shift from the battlefield to the causes and consequences of the war. The quality of the war reporting would improve and peace journalism would be supported.

The military intervention in Libya was supposed to protect the civilians – therefore one would expect to see and hear more about female civilians in the reporting. If this is not the case, the reporters could explain the circumstances to the viewers. Lack of time and lesser importance were often cited as justifications for ignoring this in newscasts of the Libyan revolution. Women were not considered important enough to be reported about, not seen as ‘part of the story’.

### *Lack of awareness*

One German correspondent said that he had stopped noticing the absence of women in his reports. Nevertheless, the Libya conflict was not only about shooting male rebels in the desert. It is as important to report on the after-effects of the war and its impact on people – including women.

The correspondent normally tries to fulfil the expectations of the home office. The final version of the report that is broadcast is the result of a collaboration between the correspondent and the editor-in-chief. It is therefore also the responsibility of the chief editor to notice and encourage a more gender-balanced conflict coverage that covers the situation for the civilians, and not only the daily shooting on the battlefield.

### *Difficult task for a man/has to 'make an effort'*

The results of the qualitative content analysis and the interviews show that the role of female war correspondents is extremely important for the representation of femininity in the reports. Several of the male correspondents stressed that female journalists had the advantage of being able to speak to women with more ease and were therefore able to present a more complete picture of society. Since the exclusion of the female perspective weakens the quality of war reporting, the presence of more female war correspondents is therefore absolutely necessary to improve the quality of war reporting and the possibility of peace journalism.

### Notes

1. *Tagesthemen* instead of *Tagesschau* was selected, because the newscasts share the same net of correspondents, but *Tagesthemen* is better suited for comparison with the other two newscasts, because of its length and the presence of an anchor.
2. The man-made-river project was a network of pipes that provided the population with fossil water from the desert. It is the world's largest irrigation project. It was hit and partly destroyed by NATO airstrikes.
3. Human Rights Watch. World Report 2011: Libya Events of 2010
4. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/26/salwa-bugaighis-libyan-shot-dead-benghazi> (18.2.2016)
5. BBC Newsnight 25.8.2011 What will the future hold for Libyan women? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kN1GV0yn-A> (Timecode: 01:28-2:15) (18.2.2016)
6. Timecode (5:40- 6:00)
7. Other female correspondents from the BBC who were asked to participate declined the offer.

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## War and Women's Voices

### *The Gender Approach of Afghanistan's Largest News Agency*

Elisabeth Eide

#### Abstract

This is a study of how Pajhwok, one of the largest Afghan news agencies, represents Afghan women. Women's issues do not have a high priority, but when focused upon, women are often invited to speak for themselves, elite women most prominently. Violence against women is a dominant theme, and attributed much to tribal traditions rather than to the war itself.

Keywords: women, violence, tribal culture, marginalisation

The latest invasion of Afghanistan (7 October 2001) led by the US, sought legitimisation for the need to 'hunt down' Al Qaeda, which had orchestrated the 9/11 attacks, and its allies in the Afghan Taliban. As years went by, it became increasingly clear that the war efforts had not led to the breakdown of those two extremist movements. Fourteen years later, the Taliban have regained much of their pre-9/11 strength, threatening stability in a majority of the Afghan provinces.

Invaders also gradually sought legitimisation of the war effort by referring to gender equality. The US leadership inferred that the invasion after the fall of the Taliban led to the rapid emancipation of women. In his State of the Union address (29 January 2002), the US president George W. Bush declared: "The last time we met in this chamber, the mothers and daughters of Afghanistan were captives in their own homes, forbidden from working or going to school. Today women are free, and are part of Afghanistan's new government."<sup>1</sup> His rhetoric demonstrated what has become increasingly clear: a very limited knowledge of the society in which the US military-industrial complex intervened (Eide & Skaufjord 2014). The first lady, Laura Bush, also made her voice heard in the early days through a radio speech, in which she declared that the war on terror was "a fight for the rights and dignity of women",<sup>2</sup> thus confirming the critical postcolonial statement of Gayatri Spivak (1988) about white men saving brown women from brown men.

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Eide, Elisabeth (2016). War and Women's Voices. The Gender Approach of Afghanistan's Largest News Agency in Berit von der Lippe & Rune Ottosen (eds.) *Gendering War & Peace Reporting. Some Insights - Some Missing Links*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

The dominant Western political discourses seemed to toe this line, as has been demonstrated by Lippe and Väyrynen (2011), Jabbara (2006) and several other scholars. Lippe and Väyrynen (2011: 25) analyse how female politicians in Finland and Norway rhetorically adhere to “benevolent philanthropy” in which they find it easier to “identify with oppressed women than with strong and potent women ... based ... on solidarity as equals”. In other words, a focus on the suffering women, not the most vocal ones, becomes politically mainstream. As Lippe sees it:

The Afghan war came, so to speak, as a package containing a celebration of neo-liberalism, modernity and democracy – juxtaposed with the liberation of Muslim women from “brown men” as part of ongoing civilising missions elsewhere in the world (Lippe 2012: 32).

When important Afghan female voices ran counter to the dominant narrative, they were listened to less. Such was the case with RAWA, a feminist Afghan network, which dared, during the Taliban regime (1996-2001) to film the execution of a woman at Kabul stadium,<sup>3</sup> a film shown repeatedly in many countries post-9/11. When RAWA started their critique of the US-led war efforts and their alliance with prominent warlords, their voices were almost totally ignored (Abu-Lughod 2002; Eide 2002).

Afghanistan is still in a situation of war. The Taliban’s influence is on the rise, ISIS has established itself in the country, and civil casualties are on the increase, both by way of Taliban/ISIS attacks and attacks by international forces still in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> Alarming reports on the situation for Afghan women are available (AIHRC 2013;<sup>5</sup> HRW 2013;<sup>6</sup> 2015<sup>7</sup>).

The abovementioned studies of Western media, representing this superficial political rhetoric and tending to legitimise it for Afghan women, need to be supplemented by studies focusing on Afghan media and their coverage of women in the country. This chapter attempts to map how one of the mainstream media outlets in the country itself covers and evaluates the situation of women after fourteen years of US-led foreign military presence. The following is an explorative study of Pajhwok, the predominant Afghan news agency, and its coverage of women. The main question raised is this: How does Pajhwok prioritise women in its daily news coverage, and to what extent are they allowed a voice in this coverage?

## Contextualisation and critique

What may be a joint failure of dominant media and political discourses is *contextualisation*, involving in-depth knowledge of the history of Afghanistan in general and the history of women throughout the last century in particular. Media have often highlighted women’s situation in Kabul in the 1960s and 1970s in contrast to what came later, particularly during the reign of the Taliban (1996-2001). I have myself, during fieldwork in the country, listened to tales from women who were young in the

pre-war decades, who have confirmed the relatively liberal atmosphere of the capital in that period (Eide & Skaufjord 2014). However, they also confirmed that Kabul was a special and liberal part of the country, populated perhaps by 100 000 people (today, five million), while strongly patriarchal tribal traditions were dominant in the rural areas where the vast majority of the population lived. An earlier attempt at modernising society and giving women some rights took place in the 1920s, when young King Amanullah Khan (1919-1929), after having won the third Afghan-Anglo war, opened the first schools for girls and allowed some urban women to create the first women's organisations. Khan sent a group of young women to Turkey to be trained as nurses. The reforms triggered protests from conservative tribal leaders, and forced Khan into exile in 1929. In the aftermath, his reforms were reversed.

Simplified political discourses demonstrate a view in which it seems as if the Taliban represents the sole responsible force behind extreme interpretations of the treatment of women in Islam. History proves otherwise: extreme oppression is deeply rooted in Afghanistan. "Afghanistan has always had elite and middle-class women who asserted their rights and marched towards modernisation. Despite these examples, the experiences of Afghan women in rural areas have been about oppression through tribal customs and dictates" (Ahmed-Ghosh 2003: 11).

The anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (2002: 784) experienced being called by the media to speak in the aftermath of the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. She consistently opposed the ways in which she was asked to speak of "Muslim women" as a simple entity, and criticised the ideas for news programmes:

... there was a consistent resort to the cultural, as if knowing something about women and Islam or the meaning of a religious ritual [for example, Ramadan] would help one understand the tragic attack on New York's World Trade Center and the US Pentagon, or how Afghanistan had come to be ruled by the Taliban, or what interests might have fuelled US, and other interventions in the region over the past twenty-five years, or what the history of American support for conservative groups funded to undermine the Soviets might have been ...

Abu-Lughod underlines the recent past, where the US was famous – through connections with Pakistani secret services – for supporting extremist Afghan groups in their military resistance to the Soviet occupation as part of the Cold War. She regrets the omission of questions that might have explored "global interconnections" instead of questions "that worked to artificially divide the world into separate spheres – re-creating an imaginative geography of West versus East, us versus Muslims, cultures in which First Ladies give speeches versus others where women shuffle around silently in burqas" (ibid.).

That rigid patriarchal views and practices are still widespread (in urban settings as well) may be illustrated by two recent events. One is the way in which, at the end of 2013, the conservative Afghan parliament refused by a majority to accept the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) decreed into law through an executive

order by the former Afghan president, Hamid Karzai. This defeat has, according to supporters of ERAW (see Koofi 2015) made it more difficult to support women who are subject to mistreatment. Among the reasons for the defeat are that the conservatives opposed a ban on child marriage and showed firm resistance to women's shelters. A recent illustration is the way in which a large group of men lynched a young woman outside a mosque in central Kabul (see below).

## Methodology and research questions

A longitudinal study of Afghan media and their coverage of women in Afghanistan during the last war (2001 – ) or previous wars, is not the aim of this study. Rather, it will look at how Pajhwok treats women's issues, through a sample of stories collected from their digital English news site. The motivation is to study the extent to which this powerful institution highlights the plight of women in the country, and to which degree women – whether well-known and institutionally positioned or at the grassroots – may represent themselves in news stories and reportage. The research sub-questions were:

- What priority does Pajhwok give to the coverage of Afghan women?
- Which topics are dominant in this coverage and which are backgrounded or missing?
- To what extent are Afghan women invited to speak or quoted in the stories (explicitly about women) analysed, and what do they speak *about*?
- What presence does the international community (military forces, transnational and other representatives, NGOs) have in the coverage of Afghan women?

The questions are driven by an urge to find out how journalism by one of the most prominent media institutions in the country sets out to cover a question treated in both journalism and literature across the world (Doubleday 1988; Ellis 2000; Latifa 2002; Seierstad 2002; Shakib 2002; Joya 2009; Koofi 2012; Solberg 2013). An underlying assumption is that Afghan journalists, rooted in the country itself, may be able to provide a wider range of perspectives and narratives on the situation of Afghan women. They are bound to have a deeper knowledge of the history and culture of their country and are able to communicate in the languages (Dari, Pashto) of the vast majority of Afghan people, who do not speak English.

## Pajhwok News Agency

Pajhwok (a Pashto word meaning reflection or echo) is Afghanistan's largest independent news agency. Its headquarters are in Kabul, with eight regional bureaux, plus a network of reporters and correspondents. They serve the national newspapers, but

also “provide photographs, video footage and audio clips to international wire agencies, televisions and radio stations.”<sup>8</sup> The agency is owned by Afghans, claims to have no political affiliations and employs more than 120 reporters.

Starting as a small project to report on the Constitutional Loya Jirga<sup>9</sup> in 2003, the agency has grown rapidly and presents itself as the “main provider of daily news to the country’s media and the most trusted source of news about Afghanistan from an Afghan perspective”. Its aim is to “help build a diverse Afghan media that keeps Afghan citizens informed, promotes transparency and accountability in governance, broadens participation in national life and fosters respect for human rights.”<sup>10</sup>

The agency received the Committee to Protect Journalists’ (CPJ) Freedom of the Press award in 2008.<sup>11</sup> It has also been threatened and attacked, as an institution and via its individual reporters. On 10 June 2015, there was a bomb blast at the Jalalabad office in the east of the country, and the Pajhwok director told the CPJ that he thought there were more “threats than in the past”.<sup>12</sup> Four people were injured on this occasion, but none were Pajhwok staff. The news agency is modern and provides a diversity of formats and apps, a Twitter account and a Facebook profile with more than 200 000 likes.

## Content analysis

The methodology applied is a combination of quantitative content analysis of the webpage distribution of stories (as topicalised) as well as of a particular sample of stories from one year from the ‘women’s section’ of the Pajhwok webpage. The analysis of the latter monitors reporters, voices (sources) by gender and topics as well as genre and key-words. Key-words are selected according to a thorough reading of the women’s stories, as words heavy in content, and in this context associated with the treatment of women.

This overview will be supplemented by a discourse analysis of a smaller number of stories. Theoretically, the study is inspired by postcolonial gender studies (Abu-Lughod 2002; Narayan 1997; Spivak 1988). It is also, more practically, inspired by my own background, including extensive fieldwork/journalism during thirteen visits to Afghanistan from 1997 to 2016, and almost two years’ work among Afghan refugees in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1987-1988. I am fully aware that postcolonialism is a disputed term, since it may be interpreted as denying the existence of neocolonialism, but find Françoise Lionnet’s definition useful: “a condition that exists within, and thus contests and resists, the colonial moment itself with its ideology of domination” (Lionnet 1995: 4), supplemented by Stuart Hall (1996: 243 e.a.):

Postcolonial meant as a term to “describe or characterise the shift in global relations which marks the (necessarily uneven) transition from the age of Empires to the post-independence or post-decolonisation moment” – and identify what are the new relations and dispositions of power emerging in the new conjuncture.

A new relation is – I believe in the case of Pajhwok – that in a time when international reporters have largely abandoned Afghanistan, that another flow occurs, different from the one-way-flow of the large news agencies identified by the NWICO actors (Carlsson 1998). The sample of items originates from Pajhwok’s English website, while the main languages in Afghanistan are Dari and Pashto.<sup>13</sup> “Pajhwok delivers an average daily output of three dozen stories in Pashto, Dari and English.”<sup>14</sup> But are the stories the same? An e-mail exchange with the agency confirms that they first produce the daily news in “local languages (Pashto and Dari) and then ... translated to English”. Mr Javed Hamim from Pajhwok furthermore writes that they do not translate all the local language items, but at least “the most important ones”. In addition, they add some stories from their reporter in the US, and at times they monitor Intel Media and include English stories related to Afghanistan. Thus, at least the most important stories reported from inside Afghanistan are likely to be the same in all three languages.<sup>15</sup>

### A small category

The English language home page offers fifteen thematic categories of stories, one of them named Women. The others provide a wide variety, and are listed below with their number of ‘pages’ on the Pajhwok website (one ‘page’ contains, on average, twenty stories), to indicate which categories receive the most journalistic attention. The categories are Government and Politics (422), Security and Crime (519), Business and Economy (61), Education (30), Health (21), Agriculture (11), Reconstruction (34), Migration (8), Accidents and Disasters (42), Religion and Culture (27), Society (21), Innovation and Technology (2), Environment (1) and, finally, Sports (29).<sup>16</sup> The Women section, by comparison, features seven pages. The webpage collection dates back to the end of 2011, and the date of registration was 1 October 2015.

These simple statistics clearly demonstrate that politics and security issues, much related to the ongoing war, are the main Pajhwok priorities, by far exceeding any other topic on the list. Having a separate category for Women (number twelve on their list, with a small number of items), may be interpreted as relegating women’s affairs to the margins of the news flow, and thus preliminarily indicating that women’s issues are a low priority for the agency.

On a more positive note, it may demonstrate a willingness to take care of women’s issues by making readers especially aware of their problems in a vastly patriarchal society. The categorisation does not of course imply that this is the only editorial space where Afghan women are present. The Women category is part of a universal phenomenon. In many countries, including Norway, separate “Women’s pages” constituted an important trend in the twentieth century (Roalsø 2004), precisely to make women’s issues more visible, while risking that these pages would become an editorial alibi. Underlying this, are the contours of a philosophy of difference (and subordina-

tion), which views women as (radically) different from men, while men maintain the universal human standards.<sup>17</sup> Taking into consideration that the agency publishes approximately thirty-six stories every day, and that there have been a little more than six pages of Women stories since the end of 2011, this coverage is clearly limited.

### Women's stories – inside and outside of the niche

One sample (fifty-two stories), was generated by the search string 'Women' and 'War' from 2015.<sup>18</sup> In this sample, women are the main topic in only a few stories – in most they are mentioned as victims of a war incident, or as a group receiving aid, a 'women as vulnerable' discourse. Women's situation is also mentioned in articles commenting on the peace negotiations with the Taliban, and then also as potential victims of compromises with the Taliban. A few stories, in which women's issues are highlighted and associated with the ongoing war, are analysed further below.

The other sample contains thirty-nine stories, all featuring in the Women section during the twelve months October 2014 to October 2015. News about women is also present under other umbrellas such as health and education; thus the total output incorporating women's voices is larger. The brutal street lynching in Kabul of a young woman, Farkhunda, was filed under the Crime and Security section, with more than twenty news stories, many of which were accompanied by (or were mainly) video stories lasting a few minutes, and accessible on the site, although not with English subtitles.

Two examples may illustrate the ways in which news about women is integrated into other sections. A story from the Education section, "400 more schoolgirls poisoned in Injil district" (7 September 2015), does not immediately indicate whether only girls were victimised, but the photo is mainly of girls. The poisoning happened in districts in Herat province, and according to the text more than 500 female students and teachers were affected, while two male spokespersons (and no women) commented on the poisoning. Nobody died, and the attack was blamed on 'foreigners'.

Under the Health category we find "Dozens of nurses graduate in Maidan Wardak" (20 September 2015), illustrated by photos of the new nurses clad in black gowns and hats like those worn at some Anglo-Saxon institutions of higher learning. This is a positively angled story, since the graduation is "aimed at reducing maternal-child mortality rates". However, only male spokespersons are quoted in the article. It is an example of male officials speaking on women's behalf – a symbol of 'proxy power' (Tvedt 2003). Exceptions to this 'tradition' exist, such as a story placed under the Society section, headlined "Govt urged to criminalise street harassment" (5 August 2015), where civil society members in Bamyan province present a study on the street harassment of women and urge the authorities to take action. The story cites three women activists.

## Women's voices, violence and rights

What happens when women are the main topic, such as in the second sample? Here, I look first at the gender of the reporters, and next at voices – that is, who is quoted in this sample of the thirty-nine stories, all featured in the Women section.

### *Reporters*

The analysis reveals that sixteen of them had no other byline than the name of the agency, while fifteen stories were signed by male reporters, and eight by female. In a male-dominated society, this is not a bad proportion, although one would expect a higher number in this particular field of journalism. The agency may have left out bylines for security reasons. The institution NAI (Supporting Independent Media in Afghanistan) has reported an increase of harassment of and violence against journalists in the past few years<sup>19</sup>.

One of the security-related news stories states in its headline: “Violence against female journalists affecting media work” (20 August 2015), and mentions a report showing that more than a hundred cases of violence against female journalists had been registered. The report, based on research in Kabul and Balkh provinces, concluded: “their [women’s] weak presence is affecting the quality of media work”. Cases occurred in the field or at the workplace, but also ‘outside the field’. The NAI’s director, Abdul Mujeeb Khalvatgar, observes more young women than men in journalism schools, which may be promising for the future, provided the security situation improves<sup>20</sup>. In a thoroughly gender segregated society such as Afghanistan, female journalists are required simply to have access to grassroots women and their experiences. Most schools are segregated, and in traditional Afghan homes, men and women sit in separate rooms, especially when receiving visitors.

### *Voices*

An overview of sources quoted directly or indirectly in the sample of thirty-nine stories reveals that of 124 voices, eighty-four (68 per cent) are women, and forty (32 per cent) are men. Some articles are one-sourced, while some of the longer stories quote as many as fifteen different voices. In this particular sample we cannot identify any strong and powerful male “representation by proxy” discourse (Eide 2002) as seems to be a tendency in the stories outside the Women umbrella. Women officials in high positions, civil society organisers, activists and grassroots women are all visible/quoted in the text sample, with a majority of women holding formal positions – parliamentarians, human rights organisations and representatives of Afghan Women Network (AWN), an umbrella network for a number of women’s associations<sup>21</sup>. If this had been Western media representation, an analyst might be tempted to conclude that this was a case of a necessary “stratification of the colonial subject-constitution” (Spivak 1988: 294).

In this context, however, the conclusion is rather that of a universal elite orientation in journalism: experts and leading figures feature more prominently than grassroots women in mainstream press coverage.

### *Themes*

As seen from the above, women speak, but what do they speak *about*? Table 1 is an overview of the themes covered by the thirty-nine stories in the sample. (Some items feature more than one theme, thus the total number exceeds thirty-nine). Violence is a dominant theme, occurring explicitly in half the stories, and an underlying topic in some others. Strongly related to violence is rights, focusing on the legal rights of Afghan women. Part of the context is the non-implementation of EAW because of resistance to this law by a majority in the Afghan parliament. That violence is a dominant topic comes as no surprise, and a report from the AIHRC shows that family violence (husband or other relatives against women) is the prevalent form of violence, as elsewhere in the world but certainly more widespread than in many other countries.

**Table 1.** Topics women speak about in a sample of thirty-nine stories, Pajhwok News Agency (number)

Themes	Number of occurrences
Rights, access, justice, awareness	8
Culture, society	5
Politics	4
Violence, harassment	20
Marriage traditions, dowry, etc	4
War	1
Work, economy	1

The high occurrence of violence is worthy of some attention, since violence in Afghanistan has been seen as special, as something that we (with our superior culture) are perhaps able to root out by intervening. In her reflections on “death by culture” Uma Narayan asks why violence against women (often linked to dowry) is almost never seen as comparable to domestic violence in the US: “Domestic violence against Indian women thus becomes the most widely known in Western contexts in its most extreme incarnation, underlining its ‘Otherness’” (Narayan 1997: 86 ff.). She adds: “transnational cooperation and solidarity among feminists depends on all of us better understanding such issues of ‘context’ and ‘comparative understanding’ that contribute to problematic pictures of ‘our similarities and differences’”.

Although it is established that violence towards women in Afghanistan is more severe than in most other countries,<sup>22</sup> politicians assuming the uprooting of violence by military intervention might have used a less self-assured rhetoric if they had seen violence against women as a universal and hard-to-uproot-phenomenon in its variety of patriarchal traditions and brutality. An analysis is urgently needed of the context

of such severe cases of violence, and here people with the power of representation abroad would benefit from listening to their Afghan colleagues.

### *Key-words*

In which discursive ways is violence articulated in the sample? Another search is based on key-words that occurred frequently in the texts about women. It further confirms the journalists' top ranking of violence; but also indicates that reporters link women's rights to reduced violence. Concepts used to characterise the (historical) background of violent deeds against women are: tribal, conservative, local, primitive or cultural traditions. Two phenomena mentioned specifically are *mahr* and *baad*. *Mahr* is equivalent to bride price, an amount paid by the groom's family before he is married, a tradition that, in hard times, has encouraged child marriages. *Baad* (in the text also called a 'negative custom') entails settling disputes between families: the culprit family can solve the dispute by giving away a daughter or sister to the victim family. In "Forced marriage trend on decline in Paktia" (22 December 2015), the reporter cites a tribal elder who says that "a large number of people in the province were against this trend to give one's sister or daughter in dispute settlement", and that people could now instead give cash or land to solve a dispute between two families. A father speaks of his experience when, after shooting a man in a land dispute, he was ordered by the local Jirga (council) to give his two daughters to the victim's family. One of them committed suicide when she learned of the "solution", while the other "was living a miserable life".

**Table 2.** Key-words content of thirty-nine stories, Pajhwok News Agency (number)

Key words	Number of cases
Security	33
Violence	138
Suicide	25
Education	26
Health	13
Rights <sup>23</sup>	101
Islam	10
Taliban <sup>24</sup>	13
Tradition	12
Awareness	21

*Note:* In addition, words such as rape (6), elopement (5), and warlords (5) are mentioned.

The reason for the decline in these practices, according to the journalist, was "public awareness campaigns". Two (male) religious scholars interviewed denounced *baad* as against Islam. None of the reports highlighted emotions, although the cases mentioned clearly had the potential. Several stories contain statistics accompanied by claims of the deterioration or improvement of women's situation. Among the reasons given for

the statistical increase of violence is women being more aware of their rights and more often reporting incidents. Thus, we observe a strong presence of a rights discourse connected to violence against women in Afghanistan.

In “Women’s rights violations on the rise in Faryab” (12 January 2015), the main source appears to be the AIHRC (Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission), which expressed “grave concern over a dramatic increase in violations of human rights” in the province where Norwegian troops were stationed until 2013. Perpetrators are said to be “mainly husbands and other family members”. Cases of “suicide and self-immolation issues were also on the rise among women”. Among the several women quoted is an anonymous thirty-eight-year-old, whose husband beats the children. She was worried that she “will face serious threats if I share my problems with the women’s affairs department. Most of the women are killed by unidentified gunmen after lodging their complaints”, which may partly explain why local government representatives sometimes claim improvement whereas rights organisations speak of deterioration. A critical source evaluation may also reveal that government representatives exaggerate progress out of self-interest – or they may simply hear less about cases of violence if reporting entails a risk of being killed.

In “EVAW law’s parliamentary approval to check violence” (16 August 2015), filed by a female reporter, civil society groups blame the decision by the Afghan Parliament for the increasing crimes against women. She quotes the AIHRC: “more than 2,000 cases of violence against women were registered during the first three months of the ongoing solar year, compared to 2,500 cases during the entire last year”. Although most statistics in Afghanistan are in need of critical scrutiny, this indicates a deterioration. The AIHRC consistently focuses on women’s rights, so it is not surprising that the commission is quoted here.

### *The ‘Not-Theres’ and ‘the International’*

In the articles, the (history of the) international military presence is not mentioned. But as an underlying presupposition one may discover some critique of the international presence, since, after fourteen years the situation of women is still more than fragile, and the (partly ongoing, partly stranded) negotiations with Taliban are feared because they might sacrifice the rights gained by women since 2001. On the other hand, it is clear that when violence against women is explained it is rarely blamed on the ongoing war, but on deep-rooted traditions in Afghan society that have been allowed to continue.

Six stories in the sample contain references to “the international”. One comments on the secret encounters between Taliban and government representatives in Oslo in June 2015, when a group of female MPs participated (“Female MPs in talks with Taliban Reps in Oslo” 3 June 2015). Another story advocates for peace on Valentine’s Day (“Valentine’s Day: Activists seek end to crimes against women” 14 February 2015), and refers to the “One billion rising revolution”, an international campaign to end vio-

lence against women. This campaign, launched in 2012, is based on statistics showing that one in three women in this world will be beaten or raped in her lifetime, which means more than one billion female citizens (thus, the name).<sup>25</sup> Related is an article stating that the existing legal framework in Afghanistan provides limited options for women facing violence (“Reforms needed to ensure justice for women: UN report” 19 April 2015). Yet another article reveals how women’s rights defenders face threats according to a report by Amnesty International, and comments on the international situation which has allowed Afghanistan to be swept “under the carpet” (“Women’s rights defenders facing threats: AI” 7 April 2015). Finally, an Indian reporter in Delhi tells how the highly-respected NGO SEWA (Self Employed Women’s Association) will work for the benefit of Afghan women (“India’s SEWA to train 3,000 Afghan women” 10 May 2015). This sample demonstrates that the international references in the sample are few, but *when* international issues occur, references are to international grassroots campaigns rather than ‘benevolent’ Western politicians.

## Women’s day celebration and a street lynching

Two stories are analysed, picked carefully for their importance and their use of sources. One is on International Women’s Day, which has been officially celebrated for the past decade, and is interesting for an analysis of voices and attitudes; while the other case is about a street crime, which gained significant international media attention.

### *8th of March celebration*

The story ‘Many provinces celebrate Women’s Day’ (8 March 2015) seems to be a result of Pajhwok teamwork. Among all the texts analysed, the International Women’s Day report represents the largest multitude of voices, a majority of them female. The acting governor of Nangarhar province, Maulavi Ataullah Lodin, addressed the event with the following remarks: “The international community wants women’s rights in line with their laws, but the laws in Afghanistan are based on Islamic principles under which our women have been given their rights.”

The Lodin quote, with its binary ‘their laws’ vs. ‘our women’, may be interpreted as integral to a traditional patriarchal discourse which refers to Islam as the way in which to solve (or having solved) women’s rights. The context is the prevailing parallel judicial system in Afghanistan. The Constitution (Article 32) guarantees women and men equal rights.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Article 3 states: “No law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan.” This part of the Constitution may – subject to conservative interpretations – undermine measures taken to secure women’s rights.

An underlying presupposition in Maulawi Lodin’s speech, may be associated with an occidentalist attitude towards “the international community” (here: an essentialised

“West”). This entails harbouring undesirable gender practices, thus the need for distance between the treatment of women in Afghanistan, where Islam is the dominant religion, and that in the West, which leads to promiscuity and uncontrolled behaviour (Buruma & Margalit 2002; Carrier 1995). Uma Narayan (1997: 6) addresses related attitudes:

Many feminists from Third World contexts confront voices that are eager to convert any feminist criticism they make of their culture into a mere symptom of their ‘lack of respect for their culture’, rooted in the ‘Westernisation’ that they seem to have caught like a disease ... This tendency to cast feminism as an aping of ‘Westernised’ political agendas seem commonplace in a number of Third-World contexts.

A deputy governor in Paktika province, Attaullah Fazli, told the agency that, “women in Paktika remained deprived of the rights they had been given by Islam”, mentioning education, health facilities and inheritance, and blaming successive governments for not having ‘paid attention to them’. The two men, prominently quoted, demonstrate how senior officials get the opportunity to speak on women’s behalf.

Fazli’s views partly contradict Lodin’s, since Fazli underlines Islamic rights not having ameliorated the situation of women. In the sample stories, there is not a single example of female sources referring to Islam when interviewed; nor do the ten women quoted in this particular story do so. For example, the director of women’s affairs in Nangarhar province, Anisa Imrani, said, “... the aim of celebrating the Women’s Day was to help women know their rights and avail them”. Another woman, presented as a “resident of Behsud district, Zakira”, said: “They celebrated the day every year, but it had no benefit for women, who remained deprived of their rights.” Several voices of women from Herat province mentioned rampant violence against women.

The story indicates a will by Pajhwok to represent many voices (the majority of them women’s) on the subject of women’s rights, without concealing serious problems.

### *The murder of Farkhunda*

A young woman, Farkhunda Malikzada, criticised a mullah for selling amulets in a central Kabul mosque. This happened on 18 March 2015. The mullah responded by baselessly accusing her of having burned the Qur’an. After this accusation she was attacked by a mob of male passers-by, severely beaten, pushed onto the Kabul riverbank and set on fire. After the killing, the first such seen on the streets of Kabul, a group of women carried her coffin to the cemetery, surrounded by supportive men. The murder caused national and international outrage, and forty-six men were arrested. Four of them were sentenced to death, a sentence that was later repealed and changed to life imprisonment – among severe protests from women’s organisations.

What astonished many observers in Afghanistan, was that the culprits were not extremists or terrorists. Videos of the murder demonstrate how several young men, in Western-style clothes; either took part in the violence or tried to capture the “event” on

their mobile phone cameras. In the aftermath, the police were accused of remaining passive during the lynching. Pajhwok published a video showing women carrying the coffin. Protests took place in several parts of the country, before the reporting turned to the judicial trials of the accused and the policemen who did nothing to prevent the murder.

A longer article describing court deliberations (“Farkhunda case: Rahimi admits to police negligence” 3 May 2015) starts with “an Arab-speaking man”<sup>27</sup> who allegedly disrupted communication with the police, even though the hearing was meant to question a number of police officials. As to why such a street lynching could happen, the judge is quoted:

The judge observed charm and amulet selling was the main reason behind Farkhunda’s killing. He asked the director of mosques at the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs to appear before the court on Monday to provide details of the ministry’s initiatives against amulet sellers.

If this is a correct and representative quote from the presiding judge, the only “explanation” for the murder is the irregular (un-Islamic) activity performed by the mullah in the mosque. No other explanations – for example, the raw patriarchy let loose on this particular day in March 2015 – are offered in the article, which also quotes several policemen who claim they were not there in time to prevent the crime. The only (living) woman mentioned in the article was an MP: “Fawzia Koofi, a lawmaker and member of the fact-finding commission, [who] criticised the court head for not allowing everyone to express their views in court”<sup>28</sup>

## Women to stop men going to war

From the sample generated by the search string ‘Women’ and ‘War’, most articles just *mention* women. They are backgrounded (Fairclough 1995), if not symbolically annihilated (Tuchman 1978). Many of the stories are short; some just present a photo with a brief text. “A women from war-affected family” (17 March 2015), actually focuses on a woman. It shows a *burkha*-clad woman sitting idly on barren land, with some food parcels. Only her hands are visible. One of them is supporting her head, as if she is tired of waiting for donations or for some means of transport to take her and the parcels away. This news item could be typical of a presumably universal trend to represent Afghan women as passive recipients of (our) aid – the vulnerable victim discourse.<sup>29</sup>

There are several other items in this sample about ‘families’ or ‘women’ receiving aid, referring to the war situation in the country, and underlining the victimhood of civilians in general and women in particular (“War-displaced families in Badakhshan without shelter” 10 March 2015; “Civilian casualties rise in the Northern zone: AIHRC” 15 August 2015). In a story entitled “Women have borne the brunt of conflict” (10

March 2015), Afghanistan's ambassador to the UN, Zahir Tanin, is quoted as claiming that women have borne the brunt of the conflict for over thirty years:

This past year in Afghanistan was particularly deadly for women, with 12 per cent more women killed and injured than the previous year. Women in Afghanistan, including women in public roles and girls seeking education, are often targeted.

The article is one more example of women being spoken *about*, without being quoted. The ambassador spoke of livelihoods as threatened by the "consequences of the violent conflict", and women having to support families when husbands, parents, siblings or guardians died or were wounded. Women's responsibilities as heads of families were also highlighted, together with their lack of access to financial resources and their vulnerability to exploitation. On the whole, this story contrasts victimhood with a more active role ("women in public roles and girls seeking education"), and their potential function as providers – only, however, if the group of *traditional* heads of households is exhausted. The article communicates an ambiguous combination of 'gender complementarity' often emphasised in Islam, with emerging female responsibility and independence.

One story stands out as promoting women as peace generators: "Women should stop their men from going to the war" (13 May 2015). The main source, Jamila Yousafi, a provincial peace committee secretary, addresses a forum in the war-torn province of Kandahar. According to the reporter, she said that "women in villages should stop their brothers, sons and husbands from going to the war and invite them to lead a normal peaceful life" and that "women influenced many matters pertaining to their male family members and a wise woman could effectively play a positive role in shaping destiny of her family." Furthermore:

She called for creating awareness among women through an organised mechanism about the devastating effects of war in order to encourage them to stop their men from joining the conflict and raising their children in a proper way to make their future secure.

Another woman confirms Jamila Yousafi's view, but also endorses the new president, Ashraf Ghani, referring to "the recent direct talks between the government and Taliban representatives in Pakistan". Unlike many of the voices quoted (not least in Western media), that are highly critical of the negotiations with the Taliban, this woman toes the line of the country leadership in a strongly disputed issue. The story may be seen as related to 'peace journalism' (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005), while simultaneously associating women with huge responsibilities – thus again subtly referring to women's particular qualities.

The (historic or current) Western military presence is not mentioned much in either sample. But in an article entitled "Working on goal of sovereign, stable partner in Afghanistan: Obama" (7 February 2015), Pajhwok's Washington correspondent presents Obama's now more limited "counterterrorism approach" in the US National Security

Strategy, a document praising the counterterrorism approach in several states, claiming to have contributed to the “goal of a sovereign and stable partner in Afghanistan”. The document cited is thirty-five pages long, but the reporter only highlights one aspect to do with women in the text. While stating that Afghanistan is “not a safe haven for international terrorists” the National Security Strategy document praises the sacrifice of US military, civilians and international partners, in weakening al Qaeda and helping to “increase life expectancy, access to education, and opportunities for women and girls”. A *Time* magazine cover signalling the crucial importance of foreign military presence for the improvement of Afghan women’s situation is illustrated by a woman whose nose and ears had been cut off in a dispute with her husband, who was helped by the Taliban (“What Happens if We Leave Afghanistan” 9 August 2010)<sup>30</sup>. While many women would agree that women’s situation improved after the fall of Taliban, there are also voices who refuse to support the one (Western forces) against the other (Taliban and its allies), since the situation of women in Afghanistan still remains one of the worst on this planet.

## Conclusion

A larger study is required to establish in full how Pajhwok covers women – and comparative studies of other media (for instance, the very popular Tolo TV) would widen the perspective. In this chapter, the aim has been to map a selection of stories on women in what is sometimes misguidedly called the post-conflict Afghanistan, since the country still suffers from war (Eide 2016). In relation to the initial questions raised, we can draw the following conclusions:

### *Priority, voices and themes*

In general, the priority of women seems to be low in most Pajhwok news stories, and prominent men often speak on women’s behalf. However, most voices cited in the stories under the (small) Women umbrella are those of women. Many belong to the elite, but grassroots women are also included, usually as victims or blaming the authorities for lack of attention to their plight. This findings confirms that to favour elite sources is a universal journalistic convention.

Violence is a dominant theme, and an analysis of themes and key words confirms a strong link between violence and the lack of rights – and also, at times, the lack of women in judicial bodies. When causes are mentioned, the violence in most stories is related to traditions and national politics rather than to the ongoing war, although in some cases armed groups are mentioned as culprits. Thus, a combination of (male) political majority and family/tribe members and traditions are to blame.

Many stories emerge as ‘conference news’ – they seem to originate from conferences or press conferences launching reports and featuring prominent people. This may also

explain why so many are quoted in certain items, since at conferences they are readily at hand. Pajhwok is a news agency; thus on its (English language) website one does not find opinion pieces or editorials with analyses of current events, and the elements of analysis found in the texts are predominantly from the cited sources who in many ways represent traditional Afghan society – but also including critical women's voices.

The international community does not have a significant presence in the sample of 'women's stories' – the analysis demonstrates that the role of the international community vis-à-vis women carries little significance in the agency stories which are predominantly local.

### *Global solidarity*

Is there, then, a part to be played by people located elsewhere (in the global North), when it comes to women in Afghanistan? Can they, as Abu-Lughod asks (2002: 789), seek to be active “in the affairs of distant places ... in the spirit of support for those within those communities whose goal are to make women's (and men's) lives better ... Can we use a more egalitarian language of alliances, coalitions, and solidarity, instead of salvation?”

Discourses on vulnerable victims are more prominent than those on resourceful, reform-friendly women. Representation of women from the global South by proxy, whether western politicians or national male (and sometimes female) elite officials, is nothing new. For the resourceful women to gain prominence in the news there is a need for recognition of unheard voices, those for whom an imagined 'we' was supposed to fight, without knowing who she was.

### Notes

1. <http://www.ssa.gov/history/gwbushstmts2.html#1> [Accessed 2 October 2015]. At that time there was one woman in the government, the minister of women's affairs, Dr Sima Samar.
2. *LA Times* 18 November 2001; <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/nov/18/news/mn-5602> [Accessed 28 February 2016].
3. <http://www.rawa.org/murder-w.htm>
4. See for example this UN report: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50553#.Vkj-F5r8YOzE>
5. <http://www.refworld.org/publisher,AIHRC,,,529744454,0.html> and *The Guardian* 17 April 2016, stating that more civilian casualties are caused by government: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/17/rise-in-afghan-civilian-casualties-caused-by-pro-government-forces-taliban>
6. [http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2014/01/23/22417746-womens-rights-in-afghanistan-worsen-in-2013-report?lite](http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2014/01/23/22417746-womens-rights-in-afghanistan-worsen-in-2013-report?lite)
7. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/afghanistan?page=2>
8. <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/about-us> [Accessed 30 September 2015].
9. Loya Jirga is a traditional Afghan national assembly, literally “grand assembly”.
10. <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/about-us> [Accessed 30 September 2015].
11. <https://cpj.org/awards/2008/awards-release-08.php> [Accessed 25 November 2015].
12. <https://cpj.org/2015/06/pajhwok-afghan-news-agency-targeted-in-bomb-blast.php> [Accessed 30 September 2015].

13. Dari is basically the same language as Persian (Farsi), and thus the native website is available to Iranians, while approximately 20 million Pakistanis (in the Khyber-Pakhtunwa province) understand Pashto.
14. <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/about-us> [Accessed 1 October 2015].
15. E-mail exchange with Javed Hamim, Pajhwok, 19 April 2016.
16. The Women category ranks twelfth among the fifteen categories. <http://www.pajhwok.com/> [Accessed 1 October 2015].
17. In addition to the fifteen categories, Pajhwok's home page features "special pages" on topics such as the Peace Process, Elections and Mining. Maybe typically, the emblem of the Peace Process page is an illustration of a small girl clad in pink, plus a white pigeon, the latter a universally recognised symbol of peace (see below).
18. This sample is only from 2015, as the search string would not generate findings from before that year. The stories are limited to the first nine months of the year.
19. <http://nai.org.af/media-watch-reports/> [Accessed 30 September 2015].
20. <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2015/03/how-afghanistans-female-journalists-are-covering-the-stories-no-one-else-can/> [Accessed 3 October 2015].
21. See <http://www.wluml.org/contact/wrrc/content/afghan-women%E2%80%99s-network-awn> [Accessed 25 November 2015].
22. Afghanistan is ranked as the worst country to live in for women: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/15/worst-place-women-afghanistan-india> [Accessed 4 October 2015].
23. Some include organisations using "rights" as part of their names.
24. Some of these have to do with peace negotiations between the government and the Taliban.
25. <http://www.onebillionrising.org/> [Accessed 2 October 2015].
26. Article 22 reads: Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law.
27. "Arab" or "Arabic" is mentioned seven times in the text, although the man has Afghan citizenship.
28. Fawzia Koofi is more than an MP; she is the deputy speaker in the Afghan Parliament. During the last presidential elections, she wanted to launch her candidacy, but was refused for being too young (age above forty required – at the time she was thirty-nine).
29. From the image it is clear that the food comes from abroad.
30. <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20100809,00.html> Accessed 05.07.2016

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# Being a Female Journalist at the Frontline

## *An Autoethnography*

Desy Ayu Pirmasari<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This is an autoethnography paper about being a female journalist, reporting amid the civil war and political unrest in Libya. It highlights my own experiences and how my gender affected the coverage. My findings also demonstrate that volatility in gender roles is a common phenomenon in times of civil unrest.

Keywords: female, journalist, autoethnography, gender, volatility

This chapter implements autoethnography, also known as a form of ethnography, which uses personal experience or self-narrative research to understand culture. Carolyn Ellis (2004) argued that autoethnography brings the connection of personal experience to cultural, social and political matters. The researcher is positioned as both the subject and object of the research. In this chapter, therefore, I will reflect on my own experiences as a female journalist working amid the civil unrest during the Arab Spring in Libya. I recognised myself as a subject of my own research, in which my experiences are used as the primary data source. Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997) has emphasised that autoethnography brought about the voice of the insider, which is believed to be truer. Her claim, with which I agree, is grounded on the fact that autoethnography is written in the first person, as the researcher is also the insider or part of the culture studied.

My interest in autoethnography began with my awareness of subjectivity as well as Sandra Harding's feminist standpoint on epistemology and its concept of strong objectivity. Harding (1991) argued that our beliefs and thoughts are influenced by our backgrounds, which could affect our research. She also emphasised that some backgrounds can yield more knowledge of certain phenomena than others, which means that research conducted by a person from a different cultural or personal background can result in a different viewpoint. This can be linked to arguments that knowledge is situated, socially constructed, shaped and influenced by many elements, such as

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gender, race, religion and other experiences or personal backgrounds (See Fook & Gardner 2007; Harding 1993; Jørgensen 2003). As Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011: 2) discuss, autoethnography is an approach “that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, and the researcher’s influence on research”.

In this chapter I intend to explore the subjective side of news coverage, how the story is actually affected by some aspects, including the concept of news values, the journalist’s background, and the editorial policies of the media. Specifically, it highlights my experiences as a female journalist assigned to report on the Libya uprising during the Arab Spring of 2011. Data for this chapter was gathered through the reflexivity process, writing notes, reviewing photographs, news scripts, videos and interviews during the coverage.

On the other hand, in term of news, similar concepts of subjectivity to those mentioned above are also applied. Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard (2003) argued that news is culturally constructed and the contents depend on the people chosen as sources, while Susan Moeller (1999) underlined the power of the words or languages and images used in the story, as well as those who choose to comment. Jennifer Saul, for example, explained how the media distorted the meaning of ‘immigrant’ which basically means people who migrate. Saul (2015) argued that words or language constructed our thoughts and deliberations. She criticised the way the media used the term ‘migrant’ (to describe people who tried to leave their country because of war and political instability and travelled to Europe) which distorts the real meaning and associates it with certain people or communities.

Having said that news is constructed, this chapter will emphasise my perspective as a practitioner (journalist) on how the news we produce is affected by many elements, including editorial policy and social ideology, as well as our own personal interests and backgrounds – what I call ‘inevitable basics’. The journalist has the power to pick whose voice is written in the news, and which quote to use for the story.

In this chapter I want to highlight the insider perspective of a female war journalist. The chapter also explores how, as journalists, we have to negotiate our identities and “go native” in order to build proximity and eliminate barriers during the coverage in the field. By exploring my experiences as a female journalist making a report in a highly male dominated conflict zone, I want to add my voice to the various bodies of literature on gender and conflict reporting. I believe that bringing the voice of an insider to the forefront could not only help to develop the perspective of research in this field, but also help to build an awareness of how our background has in fact influenced the stories we make.

### **As an Indonesian female journalist**

I am a journalist from Indonesia, which has the largest Muslim population in the world. I was working with a national TV news station when assigned to cover the Libya uprising in 2011. I had never had any training on how to cover from the conflict zone, and I

was a relatively new professional in the media industry at that time, having just started working as TV reporter in September 2008. Libya was my first assignment to report in a conflict zone outside of Indonesia, although prior to this assignment I managed to do some investigative reporting and cover stories related to terrorism issues in the country. The assignment to Libya is part of one of the station's programmes to make an hour-long documentary from conflict zones around the world. The programme was broadcast in Indonesian languages and mainly targeted male audiences, as political and conflict stories are still strongly associated with male interests, particularly in Indonesia, a country with a strong patriarchal culture.

Journalism is known as a highly male-dominated field in which the newsroom culture is mainly shaped by patriarchal values. Data provided by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), which surveyed 522 media companies around the world between 2008 and 2011, highlight that the number of women working as full-time journalists in the surveyed companies is around one-third or 33 per cent of the total (Byerly 2011). The TWMF report revealed that men occupy the majority of the top-level management posts (72 per cent) or dominate the decision-making positions – which potentially preserves what Chambers et al. (2004: 92) called the “masculine newsroom culture that masquerades as neutral professionalism”.

In the media industry, male journalists are also generally associated with so-called ‘hard news’, the serious and important stories such as politics and economics, while female reporters are linked with ‘soft news’ and less important stories such as fashion, lifestyle or human interest (Allan 2004: 119; Chambers et al. 2004). This is still true today. The number of female journalists reporting on serious subjects such as politics, business, and sport still lags behind. Female journalists in this field have tried to challenge the masculine hegemony that has been deep-rooted and seen as normal (see Chambers et al. 2004).

The rise of women's involvement in the media industry began during the First and Second World Wars, in order to fill the jobs left by the men who entered the military (Chambers et al. 2004). Although their numbers are still lower than men's, recent developments in the media business have opened up more opportunities to women who want to be journalists. In Indonesia, there is no specific data gathering about the number of female journalists, but according to Eko Maryadi, the chairman of the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) Indonesia, they are estimated to be only around 20 to 30 per cent of the total number of journalists in the country (Luviana 2012). Maryadi has said that in the TV industry women are generally associated with “beauty and make-up products” rather than recorders, microphones or camera equipment needed for coverage in the field. A report published by AJI Indonesia mentioned that in the TV industry many women are recruited as journalists based on their physical appearance, to better enable the station to approach male sources (Luviana 2012: 18). Many female reporters face discrimination, as they have responsibilities in the office and also at home as mothers. Additionally, according to the report, many female journalists are judged not by their ability but by their gender identity as women. They earn

lower salaries and sometimes are not given health insurance, as they are not taken to be the head of the family, whereas male journalists are usually given health insurance for themselves and their family members including their wives and children. On the other hand, in many media companies in Indonesia, female journalists are typically only given health insurance for themselves, despite having husbands or children as well.

The strong patriarchal culture in Indonesia is inseparable from the gender ideology of the thirty-two years' administration of the New Order era. Under his presidency, Soeharto promoted Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga (PKK), which literally means 'Family Welfare Guidance', and aimed to train women to be good housewives at home. According to Julia Suryakusuma (2011) the New Order gender ideology implemented what she called 'state ibuism', an ideology in which women are expected to follow their '*kodrat*' or natural destiny as a housewife and mother for their children, while men are considered as the heads and protectors of the family. The ideology promoted the idea that a woman should be loyal and obedient to her husband, while also responsible for nurturing their children in the family (Noerdin 2005). The implementation of gender ideology in Indonesia is inseparable from the fact that more than 85 per cent of the population is Muslim. In order to maintain his political interest and power in the country, President Soeharto often politicised Islam to gain support for his regime, and asked women to follow their *kodrat* in the domestic space, which is associated with Islamic values.

Many have argued that Islamic values privilege men over women; however as Anne Sofie Roald (2001) says, religious texts in general are often interpreted from male perspectives or what she calls "androcentric interpretations", underlining that interpretations of Islamic texts come from male-dominated societies and contain patriarchal values. Roald also argued that "texts are present in their entirety in the body of religious literature, but one tends to choose and interpret texts, intentionally or unintentionally, according to what is compatible with one's own attitude" (2001: 119).

So far, I have emphasised the role of gender ideology and Islam in Indonesia in order to build the connection to Libya, an Islamic country in which more than 97 per cent of the population are Muslim and Sharia law is implemented as the state's legal system.

### Making coverage amid the civil unrest in Libya

That Indonesia and Libya are both dominated by Muslim followers, and the proximity between people in these two nations, makes the Libyan uprising a story that matters for Indonesians. For me, as a journalist, the basics that I have to understand are the news values, which consist of some elements to judge and evaluate the newsworthiness of an issue. Although many have argued that news values might vary in relation to different cultures and news organisations, in fact some elements, such as proximity and conflict, are consistently included, or acknowledged universally.

Proximity is one of the most important points I have to keep in mind during my

coverage in a country geographically situated far away from our office headquarters and our audience in Indonesia. Although the Libyan uprising is part of the Arab Spring and has attracted much international attention or appeared in many news headlines in 2011, we still have to emphasise the significance of the story to our local audience. In the same way as ethnographers who have to mingle with local communities being researched, as a journalist I also have to have the same attitude – “go native and be local” – in order to be accepted. ‘Going native’ is a common practice in the media; Alex Crawford, Sky News special correspondent, explained that she wore a headscarf like local people during the coverage in Libya in order to respect their culture (Crawford 2012). It brings closeness to the people. In addition to how I dress and the headscarf I always bring to wear in coverage, I always emphasise that Indonesia contains the largest Muslim population in the world, in order to bring a connection and proximity to Libyans.

I was often asked which media outlet I came from. Having realised that our TV station is broadcast locally for an Indonesian audience and is not internationally known, I usually said “I am from a national TV station in Indonesia, the country with the biggest Muslim population in the world.” Every time I used this answer, they would respond with a big smile and welcome me very warmly. I also often faced further questions (as I do not wear a veil and sometimes covered my hair with only a scarf). “Why do you not wear a veil?” I would usually smile and explain, “Yes, in our country we are not obliged to wear it, many people do but I do not.” The smile usually succeeded in defusing their confusion in which I asked, in return, “Have you been to Indonesia?”, a question which then gave me opportunities to explain further about Indonesia and explore the connections between our cultures. I sometimes also spoke about the 1998 reformation in Indonesia, which succeeded in ousting Soeharto, the dictator of thirty-two years. Most of local people responded to the story by saying that they would also succeed in eliminating Colonel Gaddafi’s regime.

As an Indonesian, once ruled by an authoritarian regime, I felt that I shared similar experiences as people in Libya. Although I was just eleven years old during the 1998 reformation in Indonesia, as a journalist I know how my profession changed after the regime ended. During the New Order era, the media industry was strictly restricted and overseen by the government; thus only after Soeharto stepped down did the new government, under President BJ Habibie, pass Press Law No. 40/1999 that accommodated freedom of speech. The bill also opened the gate for press freedom, not only to make the local media more outspoken in reporting news but also to push the growth of the media industries. During my coverage of the Libyan uprising, I was continually being informed by the locals that under the Gaddafi regime they could not speak freely. This made me reflect upon my country, Indonesia, during the New Order era, when those who were considered outspoken faced threats or even abduction by the government. Thus, I was sympathetic to the Libyan people’s struggle to eliminate the regime controlling their freedom.

Exploring the similarities between our cultures (religion, in this context,) as well as our experiences seeking for liberation from an authoritarian regime, brought a fur-

ther connection between me and the local people in Libya. Seen as ‘the other’ at first, I became more accepted because of this connection, which helped me to gain more information for my report. In addition, the similarities brought a further connection to our audience in Indonesia, which could attract more viewers to the programme when it was broadcast.

### The volatility of gender roles and the Libyan uprising

I was in Libya in April 2011, during the early stage of the revolution that had begun in mid-February. I stayed in Benghazi, Libya’s second largest city, the *de facto* capital of the opposition and also the stronghold of the anti-Gaddafi movement. As a foreign journalist at the time, assigned to an Arab country, I stereotyped Libya as a country with a strong patriarchal culture. I had read and watched stories about the male-dominated culture of the Arab world, which constructed my knowledge and beliefs about Libya, so the first time I was asked to go to there I thought that reporting on women’s activities during the revolution would be an interesting story for the documentary. Although stories from the frontline were my main goal, covering what we call a ‘sidebar’ is also a must in making documentaries, in order to bring the whole picture to the audience.

I found only men when I went to the frontline in Ajdabiya or the road between Ajdabiya and Brega. I never saw Libyan women in those battlefields (except a few journalists), but women did support the revolution in public spaces by joining demonstrations on the main road in Benghazi. During the uprising, demonstration become a daily activity in Benghazi; people, including women, called for international intervention to support their struggle to overthrow the dictator of forty-two years, Muammar Gaddafi.

I interviewed one woman who joined the demonstration with her daughter, and she told me that all the women in Libya want to be free. She said, “We did not feel we are free, we did not feel we are like any women in the world,” and she also emphasised that neither men nor women are free under the Gaddafi administration. I also interviewed her husband, who supported her and said that everyone has one main goal – to overthrow the dictatorship. I was surprised by the situation I witnessed, where women appeared and spoke freely in a public space alongside the men. It brought me a new perspective, as before heading to Libya I believed women there were subjugated and had no freedom in public spaces. I was wrong, as in Libya I saw women at every protest held in Benghazi, although they did not go to fight on the frontline.

In fact, this is common in many places experiencing civil unrest. For example, many women were actively involved in the war for independence from French colonialism in Algeria, another North African country with a strongly patriarchal culture, although after the war ended they were sent back to the domestic space and further restrictions were imposed on their bodies and appearance (Kutschera, 1996; Meintjes, 2002; Turshen, 2002). Similarly to Algeria, women in Aceh (Indonesia) and Tamil

(Sri Lanka), both similarly patriarchal societies, joined their male counterparts in the struggle against state oppression (Balasingham, 1993; McCall, 2000; Pirmasari, 2013; Samarasinghe, 1996; Schalk, 1994). This indicates that in times of war – and particular during unrest leading to war – it might happen that gender barriers suddenly vanish (usually, though, only to be re-established, partly during the war and partly after the war has ended).

Although no women were reported joining the armed struggle during the revolution in Libya, their appearance and participation in the public area shattered the patriarchal culture that associated women with the domestic space. Women raised their voices in the public space to claim agency like their male counterparts, and asked for change and democracy. This also affected my coverage; my appearance as a female journalist reporting on the political unrest in Libya, who went to the battlefield, was warmly accepted and welcomed by the opposition forces at the frontline and helped me to get some sources for interview and filming. Women's active involvement in the revolution also helped me, as a foreign female journalist, to be accepted in communities. I would argue that in time of civil unrest, even in a country with a strong patriarchal culture, volatility in gender roles is a common phenomenon, in which throughout the revolution men and women raise their voices together to call for international support.

Owing to my background and identity, the involvement of women in the 2011 Libyan uprising captured my attention and curiosity. Women tend to write the majority of stories relating to women's issues (Chambers et al, 2004). My perspective of Colonel Gaddafi's regime was also influenced by the position of various international organisations such as the United Nations. As a result, I saw Gaddafi's as a despotic government, while the revolution was a form of people's response to the regime after being oppressed for decades. My personal situation is likely to have influenced my reporting and may also have affected the audience. During the civil unrest in Libya, Gaddafi's government restricted media access, which made it difficult for journalists such as myself to obtain the government's perspective, so it was difficult to present both sides of the story – a vital principle in journalism. This lack of access meant that we could only report what we saw, while endeavouring to gather information about the government's perspective from some limited sources.

In this position, we as journalists actually put our lives in danger, as we were seen as the voice of the rebellious group (particularly as those who entered Libya through Benghazi) and therefore a potential threat to the government. Our reports, broadcast to an audience, could not only shape opinions but also mobilise international reactions to the crisis. In times of violent conflict, journalists are often targeted by the warring sides, and as José Gonzalez (2014) notes, many journalists who are killed during war coverage were deliberately targeted for killing or kidnapping as a way of silencing them. According to data from the Committee to Protect Journalists (2016) 1,180 journalists have been killed since 1992 and 247 were killed in the crossfire of combat. The organisation also claimed that the suspected source of fire included military and government officials, political groups and the paramilitary. Although there

are international laws on the protection of journalists in armed conflict, there are no guarantees that journalists will not be attacked.

During the uprising in Libya, many weapons were in the hands of civilians, most of whom had not been trained in their use, and so we were also afraid of being hit by mistake. I even witnessed a man being shown by other fighters how to operate anti-aircraft weapons before heading to the frontline. During my coverage on the frontline, I witnessed opposition groups attacking sporadically without commands being issued – which significantly increased the danger. It was similar to the situation of journalists in Nepal as mentioned by Rune Ottosen and Marte Høiby (2015) in their report *Journalism under pressure: A mapping of editorial policies and practices for journalists covering conflict* – we are also responsible for our own security and safety.

However, as that was my first time reporting from the war zone, I was excited to keep going with the coverage, even when the situation seemed to get worse. I felt a mixture of fear and curiosity, but as a TV journalist I am aware that the story will be less significant without pictures as I have been trained in the concept of ‘writing to picture’, which means that the pictures lead the way to the news script. This affects our decision to stay at the frontline, as we can gather further stories and pictures from within the uncertain situation, although we are aware of the danger.

One critical situation I experienced during my coverage was when NATO misdirected air strikes on 7 April 2011 and hit the opposition tanks between Ajdabiya and Brega, killing at least five rebel fighters. The rebel fighters I met in Ajdabiya at that time kept telling me that NATO had turned its back on them and was supporting Gaddafi. They started to attack NATO sporadically with multiple rocket launchers from the city of Ajdabiya. The next day NATO admitted the incident and regretted it, but refused to apologise. It was not the first time that a NATO air raid had mistakenly hit the rebels, but I would still argue that the opposition groups depended heavily on them. NATO involvement in Libya began after the UN Security Council agreed to adopt Resolution 1973 on 17 March 2011, which included a request for an immediate ceasefire and an end to violence against civilians.

There were many disputes following NATO intervention in Libya, which also conducted aerial attacks as part of its mission to use ‘all possible means’ to protect civilians. However, at that time my coverage focused mainly on how far NATO air strikes helped the rebel forces, rather than the legal basis of their operations. It has been highlighted by Rune Ottosen et al. (2013), in investigating Norwegian news coverage of NATO intervention in Libya, that the “... media, lacked the will to look critically at the legal basis for NATO’s ‘out of area’ policy”. During the uprising, many media and journalists, including myself, were seduced by NATO propaganda and the dominant narrative regarding their mission in Libya. NATO claimed that the airstrikes and bombing were to protect the people from their despotic leader. The dominant narrative regarding Gaddafi concerned atrocities carried out by his regime and the lack of freedom citizens possessed, and that the uprising was a response to his oppressive leadership. Although there is no justification for Gaddafi’s dictatorship, which used

military confrontation in response to the people's call for democracy, NATO's subsequent military campaign in Libya must also be questioned. Even though the military alliance claimed that their targets were military and that their campaign was to protect civilians, the air strikes caused many civilian casualties and destroyed their houses, as reported by Human Rights Watch (HRW). According to HRW, NATO operations in Libya killed at least seventy-two civilians, of whom a third were children under the age of eighteen (Abrahams & Kwiram, 2012). During the seven-month campaign, NATO carried out more than 26,500 sorties and over 9,700 air strikes (NATO, 2011). The dominant narrative at that time did not allude to civilian damage. All attacks conducted by the alliance were seen as justified, and the intervention perceived as an effort to save Libyan people from an autocratic regime.

Alan Kuperman (2013b) criticised NATO and its allies for providing support to the rebels who aimed to overthrow the regime, and rejected the ceasefire proposals which are actually part of the Resolution 1973 message. Kuperman revealed that the support included training for the rebel fighters by British military and intelligence, weaponry supply such as light arms and ammunition by France, and anti-tank missiles by Qatar (which later also admitted to sending ground troops). NATO intervention is claimed (ibid.) to have extended the conflict's duration and casualties, worsening human rights abuses, Islamic radicalism and weapons proliferation in Libya and its neighbouring countries. I agree with Kuperman that the intervention of NATO and its allies has perpetuated the existence of militant Islamist groups, which have now become a threat. After Gaddafi's regime ended, the rebel fighters refused to disarm and are now separated into about 1,700 different armed groups with differing ideologies, including militant Islamist (BBC, 2015).

On the other hand, Libya's revolution to overthrow Gaddafi was predominantly a male war. Men dominated leadership and strategic positions during the revolution, although women strongly participated, calling for changes and democracy. For example the National Transitional Council (NTC), the *de facto* government of Libya for ten months between 2011 and 2012, has four main council members who were all men. The political body mentioned only one woman out of nine key figures who, they claim, shaped the NTC. The aftermath of the Libyan uprising could pose further challenges for women, particularly considering that five years later the country still does not have a legitimate government. Hanan Salah (2014) notes that in the absence of law and order in Libya, some militia groups, including those with a militant Islamist ideology, are imposing 'self-justice' based on their own standards and beliefs. Some have asked for gender segregation in public spaces or even rules over how, specifically, women should be dressed in public (Salah 2014).

Libyan women could, however, help to improve this situation, as they constitute approximately half of the total population, and have an opportunity to raise their voices, as they did during the revolution, when they made significant contributions in diverse roles. Nicola Pratt (2013) slated the perception that women were not significantly involved in emerging political institutions during the uprising, arguing that this

opinion was rooted in a Eurocentric framework based on the idealistic development of the women's movement in Europe, and a neo-orientalist framework that saw Arab women as passive victims of eternal Arab Islamic patriarchy. This perception leads on to the generalisation of women's experiences all over the world, the victimisation of Arab women and the demonisation of Arab men – which will then position the West as rescuer of the Arab world by bringing it into civilisation (ibid.). In the same manner, Berit von der Lippe (2012), who studied the Afghanistan war, highlighted that in the Western view this war brought neoliberalism, modernity, democracy – and the liberation of Muslim women from 'brown men' – as part of the West's worldwide civilisation campaign. Therefore, witnessing the Libyan uprising merely through male struggle at the frontline, while neglecting women's involvement in the revolution, not only silences their voices and agencies, but also perpetuates Western hegemony by homogenising women's experiences in all areas. The growth of women's agency groups in Libya since the uprising – such as the Women for Democratic Transformation platform (WDT) and the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace (LWPP) offers some optimism for the involvement of women in economic activities on the political stage, and their access to policy-making bodies.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown how my background as a journalist, coming from a Muslim majority country, Indonesia, affected how I negotiated my identities with people in Libya, also a Muslim-dominated country. My gender influenced my decision to choose a specific topic for the coverage; I decided to see how women in particular got involved in the revolution to ask for international support in order to eliminate the regime. This represents my preference and power as reporter to choose whose voice was to be quoted in the news I made.

The media has its own agenda, which is reflected in the sources selected to comment on an issue and the language used for a story (Moeller 1999). However, in my case, it is me as the journalist who has the power to choose sources in the field and the words written for the script. My situation and constructed knowledge played important roles as I considered the culture and historical context of our Indonesian audience in those decisions. As a matter of fact, this has been a common practice in the world of journalism: "the media typically cover war from the point of view of the country in which they and their major owners and readers are based, reflecting the point of view of that country's government and its foreign policy elites" (Boyd-Barrett 2004: 29). Oliver Boyd-Barrett underscored how Western media reports on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were based on Western perspectives or interests. This chapter shows that the stories I broadcast on the Libyan uprising were influenced by many aspects, including the media itself, my identity and background as the journalist who conducted the coverage, and our audience.

In telling of my experiences using autoethnography, I have been able to relate my experiences with common practice in the media industries. This autoethnography also confirms Caldas-Coulthard's (2003) argument that news is culturally constructed. This is a crucial point, as the media has the power to spread the word and lead public opinion, particularly in the context of war coverage. "News, therefore, has a social, a political and an educational role" (Caldas-Coulthard 2003: 273), and with its power media play an important part in the construction of reality. Through its subjectivity, the media could potentially perpetuate more conflict that might lead to further casualties and catastrophes.

For me as a journalist, reporting from the conflict zone and being able to report directly from the field not only gave me an opportunity to witness the situation directly, but also to tell the world and speak for those who have been voiceless or silenced. In addition, as a female journalist working in a male-dominated industry it was also a way to prove that women have the same capacity and ability as men to cover the so called 'serious news'. I believe this is one thing I could do to eliminate hegemony in this field, that usually associates women with 'soft' news or less important stories and men with the so-called 'hard' news.

Writing this autoethnography, which required me to do undergo a self-reflexive process, has helped to build my awareness as a journalist about the power of words in constructing audience thought and the rationality of judgment on certain issues. At the beginning, there was a conflict in my head when writing this chapter, as I came to admit that our work as journalists could be biased by our interests and backgrounds. However, as Peter McIlveen (2008: 7) says, through autoethnography scientist-practitioners could bring themselves "... into critical view and to reveal a phenomenon with the intellectual objective of a shared disciplinary understanding and empathy". I believe that by opening our potential subjectivity as journalists up for public scrutiny, it will help us to be more careful when writing stories, so that the news reported could provide an insight instead of escalating a situation or silencing any one voice.

## Note

1. Desy Ayu Pirmasari is a PhD student in the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion, Lancaster University, UK. Prior to her PhD, she worked as a war journalist and has been covering stories amid civil unrest and conflict zones including Libya, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Mindanao (Philippine) and North Korea.

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## Good or Bad Agents?

### *Western Fascination with Women and the Construction of Female Objects during the ISIS/ISIL Crisis*

Marta Kollárová

#### Abstract

Female fighters are frequently seen as something unnatural and extraordinary. Recent media coverage of the crisis in Syria has also been defined through orientalist images of women, objectifying Kurdish women as 'beautiful souls,' while ISIS 'jihadi brides' are labelled as victims or mad women, not fitting the Western image.

Keywords: orientalism, feminism, Muslim women, the West, ISIS/ISIL

After the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent US intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, women from the Middle East were again given increased attention in the Western media. Whereas the US first lady, Laura Bush, argued that US military action was a "*mission civilizatrice*" to rescue veiled women from patriarchal oppression (*Washington Post* 2001) according to Kevin Ayotte and Mary Husain (2005: 113) the Western invasion was, rather, an expression of Orientalist policies far removed from humanitarian intervention. For them, the presentation of Muslim women as victims in need of saving, standing in contrast to emancipated and strong women (such as the US first lady), was closely connected to Western notions of power politics, highlighting the relations between women and Orientalism. Women in Middle Eastern countries were soon influenced not only by local gender relations but also by Orientalist divisions between the West and the Muslim 'other'.

Women are often at the very centre of Orientalism. The Orientalist notions of differences, where positive images of the developed Western 'self' are constructed and presented in contrast to negative images of the traditional 'other' – further creating a specific, imaginary space of Orient (Said 2003) – have thus to be further translated into our understanding of female representation in Western media and policy making. Usually, when the situation of Muslim women is analysed in the media they are presented as veiled and passive 'ghosts' (Ozemoy 2001), universally and a historically categorised as oppressed – and sometimes even brainwashed – by strong, dominant

men and Islam. As a reporter claimed, describing the “liberation day” in Afghanistan after the US intervention, the only possible explanation for the missing ‘*burqa*-burning revolution’ (automatically expected by the Western liberators), could be that the years of patriarchal oppression left a mark and a stigma on Afghan women (ibid.). Muslim women are thus described as not being able to fully understand their humiliation due to ahistorical traditions and long-lasting patriarchy and manipulation. In contrast, Western women are seen as free, smiling agents, eager to offer assistance to their helpless sisters (Dubriwny 2005: 84–85). Women from Western societies are therefore often labelled in media and politics as superior to Muslim women, creating idealised narratives of femininity and freedom.

The recent conflict in Syria, Iraq and in Libya and the subsequent emergence of Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) has been defined through similar images of women. However, what is interesting in this case is that alongside images of Yazidi women who have been sexually harassed, enslaved and victimised by ISIS terrorists, the Western media frequently report on Muslim, Kurdish female heroes from the region who, according to numerous reports, had no other choice than to take up weapons and fight against ISIS barbarity (Eager 2010: 278). Stories of beautiful, strong and ‘badass’ women, apparently killing more ISIS fighters than their male counterparts (*Foreign Policy* 12 September 2014), only, later, to be killed themselves, have been a significant feature in the Western reports. Observers frequently claimed that ISIS men are terrified of Kurdish women (*International Business Times* 7 October 2014), emphasising the extraordinary agency and strength of these female fighters.

In contrast to Kurdish Muslim women who are willing to fight for their freedom and emancipation, Western female migrants joining ISIS, have been described as surrendering their liberties and betraying their democratic communities for the oppression of Islamic State. Where Kurdish women are perceived as beautiful and even stylish agents (*Huffington Post*, 10 August 2014), the women joining ISIS are presented as ghost-like creatures in black, full-body *burqas* (*Guardian* 17 February 2015), without any sense of agency, manipulated by ISIS propaganda. The political motivation and agency of the ‘jihadi brides’, as the Western women joining ISIS are frequently referred to, are often hidden behind simplified and universalised media images of ISIS propaganda and women’s irrationality. The images of Kurdish and ISIS women result in binary representations, creating strict divisions between the ‘good’ fighters and the ‘bad’ women, ‘whores’ with no notion of agency (Sjoberg & Gentry 2008: 10).

Examining the way images of women from different social backgrounds are being created and re-created in juxtaposition can uncover a lot about the current dominant political discourse and the structure of power relations between ‘us’ and ‘the other’. Looking at women, their agency and female violence through the Orientalist lens can bring in many new perspectives about Western policy making as well as media reporting. To get a better understanding of such practices, a more detailed deconstruction of images of Muslim and Western women engaging in violence is important.

## Kurdish women battling ISIS

News stories about beautiful young women fighting their cultural oppression have quickly secured the interest of the Western public. Numerous articles stating that the ISIS fighters fear being killed by Kurdish women (and “losing seventy-two virgins for martyrdom”) started emphasising the extraordinary strength of these female fighters (*Christian Post* 15 October 2014) while at the same time demasculinising ISIS terrorists and their actions in the region. In addition, journalists have often published interviews with individual female fighters, highlighting the numbers of Islamic terrorists killed by each one of them (*International Business Times* 14 October 2014) later updating the articles with information about their tragic but heroic deaths during the struggle against ISIS violence (*Foreign Policy* 12 September 2014). Nevertheless (as many of the analysts notice), the media tend to paint a rather rosy picture of these Kurdish heroines (*Ruwaydah Mustafa* 11 March 2015). In order better to understand the objectification of women’s bodies during the ISIS crisis it is therefore important to examine the case of the Kurdish female fighters in greater depth, accounting for the construction of various images as well as for the Orientalist politics of representation in Western media.

## Kurdish female fighters

Since the very beginning of Syrian civil war and the ISIS crisis, Kurdish women have fought alongside their male counterparts, joining the People’s Defence Forces and, later, even establishing their own independent and autonomous female organisation, the Women’s Defence Unit. It is estimated that currently 35 per cent of the Kurdish forces are women, accounting for almost 15,000 fighters operating in Syria and Iraqi Kurdistan what many Western observers perceive as a rather significant number for such traditional Middle Eastern societies. With the emergence of ISIS, reporters increasingly started reporting the extraordinary female military leadership. The reports about women serving as co-commanders, cooperating and even giving orders to their male comrades (such as brave Colonel Nahida Ahmed Rashid leading the Peshmerga female as well as male fighters against ISIS), have often been picked out by Western media when referring to the Kurdish units (*PRI* 7 August 2014). The idea that Kurdish women are not only affected by, but also govern and further influence the overall developments of the war, have quickly become a central feature of the reports about the struggles of Kurdish populations and cruel ISIS practices against the people of the region.

The media often describe these women as “incredibly brave” and “inspirational” heroines willing to fight not only for their women’s rights and for their families but also for women from other ethnic groups (*Daily Mail* 23 October 2014). According to such claims, Kurdish women have “more to lose than anyone else” (*CNN* 30 October 2014) because of the threat of sexual enslavement and oppression. They are even sacrificing

their lives, either in suicide attacks (*The Times* 7 October 2014) or when captured by ISIS fighters (*International Business Times* 3 October 2014). Such exceptional images of female agency have further demonised Islamic State, suggesting that its practices are more horrific than ever, making even women take up arms in order to resist. As the media reports frequently stress, Kurdish women never wanted to kill, but ISIS are “vile human beings”, killing children and raping women, and therefore they have no other choice but to exchange their peacefulness and purity for violence (*International Business Times* 23 October 2014).

In this case Kurdish women are seen as ideal women, “beautiful souls” for Western communities, fighting the radical Islamic group which kills and oppresses in the name of religion. In 2014, the Kurdish female fighters were even chosen by CNN as the most inspiring women of the year, for their “courageous role in the war against the Islamic state” (*CNN* 27 January 2015) and increasingly more and more journalists have enthusiastically claimed that the extraordinary strength of these women represents a slap in the face of ISIS “on behalf of progressives everywhere” (*International Business Times* 28 October 2014). They depict Kurdish bravery and determination as a perfect example to all women in the broader Middle East whose freedoms are being violated by oppressive, cultural and religious traditions (*International Business Times* 15 October 2014). In analysing the Western reports and articles it becomes clear that in many ways the media construct idealised images of women’s motivation and their female agency while overshadowing their male counterparts, who are only rarely mentioned in reports and usually in connection to the recruits from the West (*Daily Mail* 21 April 2015). However, while some commentators celebrate such images of emancipated Kurdish women as successful in transcending the typical Orientalist pictures of Muslim women as victims, and backward (*International Business Times* 30 October 2014), it could be claimed that the images of Kurds and the reports about women’s emancipation are often very romanticised, misrepresenting the political agency of these women and leaving important features out of the picture.

### Kurdish women as terrorists?

Before the Syrian conflict and the emergence of the Islamic State, the female fighting units of the PKK Kurdish organisation enjoyed little publicity in the international media. Reports about brutal honour killings and female genital mutilation in Iraqi Kurdistan (*Radio Free Europe*, 10 March 2009) and the victimisation of female Kurdish suicide terrorists were more widespread. The Kurdish organisations with their female combatants were included in the international list of terrorist organisations and partially deleted from the database only after their battles against Islamic State and their cooperation with Western communities were recognised (*Aljazeera* 29 October 2014).

In contrast to more recent claims that Kurdish women are the “most emancipated women of the Middle East” (*International Business Times* 15 October 2014), Western

observers and media often argued in their pre-ISIS reports that almost 76 per cent of Kurdish attacks were committed by women and hence they were posing a serious threat to international security (Center for American Progress 5 January 2012 and Stratfor Global Intelligence 19 September 2009). Through their armed struggles against Turkey and other states with Kurdish minorities, Kurdish female terrorists – diverging from their traditional roles as mothers and peaceful individuals – used to be looked on with horror, aversion and sometimes even pity. After one of the unsuccessful suicide attacks in Turkey, the media started labelling these women “murderers with highlights” (Altinay 2013: 85), describing them as inhuman and as attempting to invade and destroy modern societies.

The victimisation of Kurdish female members of the terrorist organisation also played a crucial role in the media. Although journalists have rarely acknowledged that Kurdish women were important members of the PKK’s struggles for Kurdish independence, enjoying the same training and conditions as males (International Institute for Counter Terrorism 12 February 2003), there were also reports about the cruelty, such as kidnapping women to force them into joining the organisation (Jamestown Foundation 11 September 2007). Frequently-described cases of unfortunate family situations, the deaths of relatives (*BBC* 15 February 2013) and the cultural oppression of women, as well as sexual harassment and humiliation by Turks and by their own male comrades (Rajan 2011: 104). Kurdish societies were presented to the Western public through a mixed image of violent terrorist acts and of women’s oppression as well as their consequent radicalisation. However, as one of the female Kurdish activists, Dilar Dirik, notices, after the emergence of ISIS and its significant threat to the West, the earlier images of female terrorists were quickly overlooked by Western media and policy makers, replaced by new and sensational images of brave Kurdish female fighters (*Aljazeera* 29 October 2014). It can indeed be observed, that whereas previously the female suicide bombers were seen as brutal women or victims of male oppression, the more recent female suicide mission against ISIS was described as “martyrdom” and a heroic act (*Daily Mail* 6 October 2014). The more complex picture of Kurdish female political agency thus remains to be overlooked and even ignored in Western media, simplifying the struggle of Kurdish women by connecting their agency purely to battle against the Islamic State and overshadowing their calls for Kurdish independence and broader equality. By taking into account different images of Kurdish female fighters and the notions of their agency presented in Western media one can uncover important insights into the practices of Western objectification.

### Western Orientalism and the politics of representation

In the Kurdish case it is important to acknowledge how images of female fighters are created, re-created and utilised at different times and in different situations. Although many of the commentators saw the current coverage of Kurdish female fighters as a

crucial step away from Western Orientalism (*International Business Times* 30 October 2014) after more detailed examination it becomes clear that female bodies still play an important role in Western policy making and mass media.

As Chandra Mohanty (1998: 61) claims, women and gender are crucial parts of Orientalism that further need to be defined as the construction of knowledge about the Third World and Muslim women by Western feminists and observers. The very fact that Kurdish female fighters immediately gained such extensive attention in Western media reports about the Islamic State and the Middle East can be seen as an Orientalist act (Daniels 2013: 13). The fascination with women from Muslim communities and the media presentation of certain types of female agency are examples of long-lasting political objectification and the Orientalisation of non-Western communities. The current shift in media descriptions of Kurdish women – from the oppressed or mad terrorists to emancipated and brave women – cannot be perceived as challenging Orientalist power politics. As Judith Butler (2011: 9) claims, the representation and political aspects go hand in hand, as representation is an “operative term within a political process” which seeks to gain visibility and legitimacy, creating new political narratives and discourses. In this case, the media and policy makers are able to shape and establish new attitudes by emphasising certain issues and traits about the objects they are using for their policy purposes. It could be argued that Western Orientalism and the objectification of female bodies is quite influential when dealing with the issue of Kurdish female fighters. Although Western policy makers frequently ignored Kurdish pro-Western sentiments by overlooking their calls for independence (*CNN* 13 March 2015), with the rise of ISIS terrorism new pictures have been presented. However, as many Kurdish female activists argue, the recent “whitewashing of the Kurdish women’s resistance”, still remains to suit the perceptions of Western audiences, extending political agency to Kurdish populations only when it relates to Western interests – in this case the onslaught of ISIS (*Huffington Post* 2 December 2014). The real agency and political goals of Kurdish female fighters are hidden, shaped according to Western standards and ideas about female emancipation.

The overall simplification, reductionism and even standardisation of Kurdish women and their political agency can also, in many ways, be connected with the Orientalist politics of representation (Zine 2006: 9), where the general complexity of the issue is reduced to the single image fitting the dominant Western discourse. As many of Kurdish female activists argued, the West constructs rather idealised picture of Kurdish female fighters and the Kurdish communities, failing to account for the broader issues and the problems Kurds have to face in countries such as Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. In fact, as has recently been observed, whereas Western media are fascinated by the fights of Kurdish women against ISIS in Iraq, Turkey and Syria, the struggles of their Iranian female counterparts against domestic oppression go largely unnoticed (*Al-Monitor* 11 May 2015). It is also important to acknowledge that although Kurds in Turkey and Syria can be seen as more liberal, the Iraqi Kurds still remain quite traditional and patriarchal (*Aljazeera* 11 March 2015) – which does not fully reflect

the pictures of Kurdish women painted by media. The Orientalism of Western media frequently simplifies the situation of these women, leaving out important features of their lives while over-emphasising their fight against Islamic State. By highlighting the struggles against ISIS oppression and reducing the complexity of the issues, the media further demonises Islamic terrorism and also, in a way, justifies the Western position and strategies.

## Women of the Islamic State

In analysing the current war in Syria and Iraq it quickly becomes apparent that images of women have a much more central role than during previous conflicts in the Middle East. The Western fascination with Kurdish “badass” women has, in many ways, been accompanied by reports about Western female migrants to ISIS. The widespread news of young women from Western countries joining in the cruelties in Syria and Iraq have been a great shock to liberal societies, which immediately labelled these women as monsters who enjoy violence (*Telegraph* 28 January 2015) or as vulnerable teenage girls influenced by ISIS propaganda (*Guardian* 21 February 2015). Compared to heroic Kurdish female fighters, the “jihadi brides” seem inexplicable. To better understand the nature of the current Syrian and Iraqi conflict and the objectification of female bodies, gender violence and female agency, it is important to examine how also ISIS women are presented to the Western public.

## Female migrants to ISIS

The issue of foreign females migrating to join terrorist organisations is more serious today than ever before. Although there have been previous cases, like Malika El-Aroud from Belgium, who moved with her husband to Afghanistan and even actively assisted with Al Qaeda attacks against the European countries (Bloom 2011: 200-201), Western women have never joined Islamic terrorists groups in such large numbers (*Economist* 30 August 2014). It is estimated that there have been over 550 women from Europe, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand who have willingly joined ISIS fighters in Syria (Hoyle: 9) and the number might still be rising. To the surprise of many analysts and scholars, these female recruits are mostly young and well-educated second or third generation Muslims who grew up and lived most of their lives in democratic societies, showing no previous signs of radicalisation or Islamisation (*Telegraph* 22 January 2015). It therefore often remains unclear to the Western media why these women leave their lives in exchange for a foreign, conflict-driven country and the ISIS restrictive rules on female clothing and behaviour. The media reports often make the point that the strict Islamic traditions re-established by the Islamic State do not allow women to engage in fighting. As jihadi brides they are expected to participate in the indirect

state-building process or in creating the female brigades that control the behaviour of women in the broader community (*Daily Mail* 5 February 2015). According to Mia Bloom, rather than becoming “Mulan” as many of the jihadi brides talk about on their Internet accounts, these women are in fact expected to “get pregnant soon” and have many children in order to create a growing Islamic State (*Huffington Post* 3 February 2015). Several reports state that women migrating to ISIS are expected to live like “1950s housewives in the West” (*Telegraph* 28 January 2015) passively obeying their husbands. Although it is quite difficult to get objective data about the lives of these Western women under ISIS, the Western media constantly highlight the “misery” the new jihadi brides endure, such as the black *burqas* covering every part of their bodies, the complete submission to their husbands, and hunger and poor healthcare (*Daily Mail* 5 February 2015). Stories (and theories) of women’s radicalisation have thus become crucial to most of the reports, trying to find an acceptable explanation as to why Western women enjoying freedom and liberties decide to join an organisation that treats women like “cattle” (*Independent* 10 December 2014). By engaging in such interpretations and assumptions Western media thus create images of women, their female agency and the nature of female violence.

### Romantic love and ISIS propaganda

As Karla Cunningham (2003: 186) notes, there are various reasons why women join radical terrorist organisations. However, in contrast to male recruits who are perceived as political agents resisting the politics and Western strategies in the region, women’s personal problems, family and the idea of romantic love remain the most frequently-cited motives. Reports of women’s problematic pasts, unexpected pregnancies and the subsequent search for honour and love have often been mentioned. As Mia Bloom (2011: 198-199) claims in her analysis of Malika El-Aroud, Western women usually join their newly-found husbands or partners, who introduced them to religious and honourable lives. Female recruits are often seen as emotionally vulnerable and easily manipulated by men.

Similarly, in the case of female migrants to ISIS, most Western media and opinion articles quickly focused on women’s long-lasting attraction to “mad, bad men”, claiming that young girls with a more “sheltered upbringing” are often attracted to abusive partners and dangerous criminals (*Independent* 22 February 2015). According to these analysts, “the pull factors have never been stronger” (*Guardian* 21 February 2015) and the highly romanticised, influential and impressive ISIS social media campaign leaves young Western women unaware of the “massacres, genocidal campaigns, sexual slavery and horrific crimes” committed by ISIS (*Huffington Post* 24 February 2015). Such media reports about women’s attraction to strong, masculine, fighting men thus turn women into sexual deviants who are betraying their Western freedoms and liberties, through their obsession with men and their psychological inability to resist

(Sjoberg & Gentry 2008: 13). Many of the observers go on to claim that in order to prevent the radicalisation of young Western women there is a need for better education and information about the horrors in the Middle East and that schools and parents should teach their children from an early age about oppressive Islamic practices and the freedoms they can enjoy in the West, to dissuade them from rebellious behaviour (*Guardian* 3 October 2014). Although many jihadi brides are educated women, media reports keep describing them as easily manipulated, in need of saving and greater liberal emancipation in order to comprehend the dangers of Islamic radicalisation.

In contrast, other journalists state that many of these young women know about the cruelties of ISIS terrorists and that their migration to Syria is not simply teenage rebellion. They are not vulnerable “princesses” confused by ISIS romantic propaganda, but should be seen as cool-headed and determined “horror-movie ghouls” enjoying violence and suffering (*Independent* 23 February 2015). Analysts assessing the women’s posts on social networks after the ISIS beheadings claim that “it’s a bizarre mix of western teenage speak with a massive amount of brutality” (*Telegraph* 28 January 2015). In this case, jihadi brides are presented as crazy and unnatural, in need of “therapy or rehabilitation programmes” (*Huffington Post* 24 February 2015). Female migrants to ISIS are once again deprived of their agency. The media’s attention to ISIS propaganda, the claims of female vulnerability and mental problems thus seem even more to demonise the monstrous terrorist organisation – without considering any other potential motives of these women.

### ISIS women as political agents?

Whereas many feminists and journalists believe that women join radical organisations because of their personal problems and romantic desires, there are also scholars who claim that women join terrorist groups for the same reasons as men, and it is therefore misleading to simply describe women as vulnerable or even insane when men remain defined by their political activities (Cunningham 2003: 186). In order to account for the complexity of female violence and its representation in Western media it is therefore important to focus on the multiple factors affecting women’s motivation for joining radical organisations and to examine how they are presented throughout the media in comparison to their male counterparts.

In reports and articles dealing with foreign migrants to ISIS, men are described as political actors motivated by their desire to protect “Muslim lands and blood of Muslims” in their fights against infidels, America and other foreign interventionists (Barrett 2014: 20). Many analysts state that these men joining ISIS are often resisting the discrimination of the Sunni population and the oppressive Western strategies in the region (*RT* 20 May 2015). Even though there have recently been some references in the media to personal and family stories, male political activities and determination are more frequently discussed. In the case of “Jihadi John”, the Kuwaiti-born British

man who became known for beheading Western hostages in Syria, the personal stories of his being bullied at school and his failed engagements to women (*Daily Mail* 27 February 2015) were overshadowed by stories of his political activities, religious determination and disillusionment with Western society (*Business Insider* 26 February 2015). In the mass media the motivation of male migrants to ISIS are significantly different from the images of women escaping to Iraq and Syria, who are still presented as manipulated by the idea of romantic relationships.

However, as the Institute for Strategic Dialogue found after detailed analyses of the Twitter and Facebook accounts of the Western female migrants to ISIS, the reasons why these women travel to Syria are very similar to those of men (Hoyle: 38). According to the research, there are three main motives influencing the ISIS female migrant: the security threat to Muslim “Ummah” caused by Western attacks and invasions; the construction of the Islamic caliphate; and especially the search for identity (op. cit.: 11-14) which are almost identical to the motivations of the men. The alienation and the identity challenges these women have to face are often noticeable in their posts on social media. As one Muslim woman from Britain admitted, “feeling marginalised does not of course justify acts of terrorism”, but she fully understood the desire of the young women to search for a place where they belong and are not restricted in their religious and cultural practices (*Telegraph* 22 January 2015). Many of the jihadi brides claim that they are harassed “in the street in the West” and that they finally feel free under ISIS, where they can cover themselves without restriction (*Radio Free Europe* 17 March 2015). Hayate Boumeddiene, who escaped to Syria, also claimed that after losing her job as a cashier in France for wearing the *niqab* she finally felt free in the country “governed by the laws of God” (*Huffington Post* 2 February 2015).

Such statements by women are only rarely mentioned in the Western media, or are accompanied by stories of romantic love and male influence – as was also the case of Boumeddiene, who was described as more religious and radicalised after meeting her husband (*France* 24 12 January 2015). The media thus often create differences between male and female terrorists, objectifying female bodies and simplifying their actions into stories of their vulnerability and naivety, without acknowledging their political consciousness and determination.

### ISIS women and the notions of agency

It is often very difficult to say what exactly motivates Western women to join the ranks of ISIS. Different women can be driven by different motives (Sutten 2009: 27). This chapter has shown how the motivation of female migrants is often reduced to specific images of vulnerability, taking away women’s agency and the possibility of political action.

As Jessica Auchter (2012: 125) states, the recognition of “political subjects as agents” always depends on our ability to rationalise their action. If a certain person, or a group, does not fulfil the criteria of liberal democracies, their agency cannot be recognised

or has to be reduced to conform to Western standards. Western women migrating to ISIS, challenging the liberal ideals of women's emancipation and liberties by claiming that, in fact, they felt much more oppressed within democratic societies than under the rule of Islamic terrorists (*Radio Free Europe* 17 March 2015), have been therefore seen by media as irrational and "possibly under pressure from a group's leadership" who want them to attract new women to marry male fighters (*Daily Mail* 5 February 2015). Similarly, as Laura Sjoberg (2007: 98) observes in the case of US female soldiers torturing Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib, the Western public cannot hear stories of European or American women challenging liberal ideals and strategies, engaging in violent and oppressive action in contrast to Western emancipatory principles. The very nature of their actions thus has to be controlled and shaped in a way that can be further used as a weapon against the narratives of "enemy masculinities". The agency of these Western women is hence often taken away and replaced by stories which demonise the enemy "others" by stating that ISIS propaganda and brainwashing are the most threatening forces for young women. According to such claims, the ISIS campaign on social media has to be stopped in order to prevent more girls from joining ISIS, as well as to preclude more serious consequences, such as female suicide attacks, where girls are especially picked and pushed into such actions by their male counterparts (*International Business Times* 30 January 2015).

The simplification of motives has significant implications for our understanding of the conflict in Iraq and Syria, further constructing certain images and characteristics of the Islamic State in comparison to Western societies. While these women's disillusion and dissatisfaction with their political rights in Western countries are only very rarely described by the media, strong pull factors and dangers of ISIS propaganda are emphasised much more frequently.

## Conclusions

The difference, in the images, between Kurdish and ISIS women make it immediately apparent that visual images play a crucial role in the overall representation by Western media of ISIS. Photographs of attractive "badass" Kurdish women, with uncovered heads and broad smiles, who in many ways resemble Western women despite their Muslim cultural backgrounds, have been broadly presented on the websites of the mainstream newspapers and even Western fashion magazines (*RT* 7 October 2014 and *Marie Claire* 30 September 2014). On the other hand, pictures of black full-body *burqas* are negative. Western analysts referred with horror to ISIS cruelties aimed at hiding women away from the public and reducing them to ghostly creatures with no voice or agency (*News Everyday* 19 February 2015). Muslim veiling again becomes the Orientalist symbol of female oppression, ignoring the claims of ISIS women who perceive *burqa* as part of their religious rights as well as the other significant problems they have to face in their communities (Shepherd 2006: 26).

Closely connected to the visual representation of women in Western media, the simplification of images, and of female activities, is another important motive in both cases. Kurdish women have been described as active fighters against oppression, without being recognised as members of the terrorist groups fighting for Kurdish independence. The female migrants to ISIS have been also reduced to the single image, without taking into account the alienation and oppression they have to face in Western communities (Women Under Siege 5 March 2015). As Ilija Trivundza (2004: 481-482) observes, journalists and policy makers often rely on Orientalist notions of framing, highlighting and selecting some features while omitting others, thus reducing the complexity of social relations to sets of simplified images of “us” and “them”, creating “imaginative geography” based on the articulation of differences and inequality. The Kurdish female fighters have been placed above the Western female migrants to ISIS, contributing towards the hierarchical divisions between “good” agents and “bad” women or victims, in need of liberal intervention. Women affected by the ISIS crisis are not only presented through contrasting visual images – their motivations, actions and especially their agency are further politicised and defined through established binary relations.

Through such processes of binary divisions, the presence and activities of the Islamic State have been even more demonised and its political strategies hidden behind the stories of female victims or monstrous women enjoying violence – further justifying Western strategies and measures within the Middle East. Therefore, as Caron Gentry (2009: 247) rightly points out, it is important to realise that the media images of female violence and political agency tell us much more about the “storyteller” producing such perceptions than about the women’s agency and the reality of the conflict. In order to understand female agency and female violence in greater depth, it is important to ask who and whose agency gets represented, at what time, as well as in connection to what situations. When looking at cases of female violence and female fighters – not only in connection to ISIS but also more generally – one has to account for the Orientalist power politics shaping the seemingly naturalised and universalised images of women. Only through deconstructing Orientalist representation and transcending the categorisation and objectification of women as victims, “whores” or “beautiful souls” one can one fully understand their motives and deal with radicalisation and women in combat.

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### Part III. Postcolonial Perspectives Forever?



# Journalism Practice and Freedom of Expression

## *Challenges and Constraints in Pakistan*

Sadia Jamil

### Abstract

Chapter 9 addresses the gender-based differences of journalistic practices and limitations in Pakistan. Drawing on new institutionalism theory, the chapter addresses the ways in which environmental constraints affect the work of male and female journalists in the country. The chapter especially discusses the specific challenges faced by female Pakistani journalists from the perspective of postcolonial feminist theory.

Keywords: gendered journalistic practice, environmental constraints, new institutionalism, postcolonial feminism

Freedom of expression is widely acknowledged as a fundamental human right that should be available to everyone; the bedrock of democratic structure, which thrives on free public debate. In many societies across the world, however, journalists are unable to practise their right to freedom of expression owing to diverse constraints that render them less empowered to perform their roles. Female journalists, especially in the Third World countries, are unable to practise their right to freedom of expression because they experience gender disparity and conservatism (IFJ 2015).

The case of Pakistan is noteworthy in the analysis of freedom of expression, gendered journalistic practice and constraints. Pakistan's expanding media is quite free and vocal in the Southeast Asian region. However, journalists work in an environment where recurrent political tensions, terrorism, religious extremism, a lack of safety, government restrictions, censorship, intimidation, military intervention and economic constraints all affect their free expression.

The Pakistani female journalists confront additional constraints of gender disparity, male dominance in society and the journalism profession, conservatism and social norms. Notwithstanding that a noticeable proportion of Pakistani women pursue their careers in the journalism field, they are still underrepresented and only a few have achieved positions at the decision-making level or in areas that influence media policy (IFJ 2015). This indicates the overall status of women in other areas of public

and private life in Pakistan. Gender violence and harassment are common and directly or indirectly silence the voice of female journalists. Pakistan's media cannot be ranked as completely free and representative without the equal voice of women.

Considering the aforementioned, this study investigated a research question: what are the environmental constraints that affect journalists' work and their right of freedom of expression in Pakistan? Drawing on the new institutionalism theory, the study highlighted how differently Pakistan's context (environment) affected the work of male and female journalists, thereby to underline the gender-based differences of journalism practice and constraints. Data were collected using qualitative methods of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

The thematic analysis of qualitative data suggested the dominant impact of Pakistan's context on journalists' work, and revealed different types of contextual influences. Data analysis suggested a lack of safety and social, institutional and legal influences as the prime reasons for the gender-based differences in journalism practice and constraints.

To explain the abovementioned findings, the chapter's first section briefly explains the new institutionalism theory as the main framework of this study. The theoretical framework section further expounds postcolonial feminist theory in order to offer some more insights into gender-based issues in Pakistan. The chapter's second section reviews past studies into journalists' work and press freedom in relation to environmental constraints and the prior studies of journalism practice and gender disparity. The chapter's third and fourth sections address, respectively, the methodology and the findings of this study. The fifth section discusses the implications of the findings in terms of the gender-based variations of journalism practice and constraints in Pakistan, and finally the paper proposes recommendations for the empowerment of male and female journalists in the country.

## Theoretical framework

### *New institutionalism theory*

The new institutionalism theory has been used with certain distinctions in domains such as sociology, political science, organisational studies, journalism and economics. The theory primarily builds itself in relation to three core aspects: standardisation (of concepts, practices, routines, rules and values); the influence of environment on actors' agencies (actions), and the role of actors' agencies in any institutional setting (Jaasaari and Olsson 2010: 76; Powell and DiMaggio 1991). While this chapter focuses on the impact of broader environmental constraints on journalists' work using the new institutionalism theory, it attempts to address gender disparity in Pakistan, and constraints faced by the local female journalists, through the perspective of postcolonial feminist theory.

### *Postcolonial feminist theory*

This theory has emerged as a response to 'Western feminism'. It attempts to underline the typicality of women's issues in postcolonial third world countries, condemning Western feminism, which tends to emphasise homogenisation and asserts that all women have the same needs and similar experiences (Mohanty 2004).

The theory emphasises that the notions of 'freedom' and 'equality' stem from Western privilege; however, these two notions have different meanings and practices in postcolonial third-world countries, reflecting the differences in women's nationalities, race, ethnicity, religion and class. Postcolonial feminists insist on recognising the lives and experiences of women in contexts completely different from those of women in the West. For instance, Pakistan shares a colonial past with India and Bangladesh. While these countries have inherited many Western ways and ideas, the practice of those ideas is not without problems (Jayawardena 1994). The Western concepts of 'freedom' and 'equality' are contested in postcolonial countries such as Pakistan, especially when it comes to women's rights. Notwithstanding emancipation from colonial oppression, Pakistan's society is still conservative and does not respect women's right to make their own choices within and outside the home. Though a small number of women are represented in politics and in education, they are not involved in mainstream businesses or decision-making areas.

The main reason for women's oppression in the country is patriarchy. Women also suffer because of religious and cultural limitations, financial dependence on men and a lack of recognition and representation. Postcolonial feminist theory helps to re-evaluate the Western concepts of 'freedom' and 'equality' in order for a better understanding of women's lives, constraints and experiences in conservative and patriarchal third-world contexts like Pakistan.

## Literature review

### *Journalists' work and press freedom: constraints and challenges*

In many quarters, journalism (or the press) is especially seen as the watchdog of public and private institutions. However, some studies have critically scrutinised the role of journalists as watchdogs, suggesting it is only a symbolic role when political and market pressures constrain journalists' freedom. For instance, Bartholomew Sparrow (1999: 4) stated that "only rarely and to limited extent are the news media able to act as a significant checks on national government or as advocates of public interests". In authoritarian countries, the watchdog role of journalists becomes a cliché when ruling authorities wield their power to restrain journalists' work and press freedom.

A number of international scholars have analysed press freedom in relation to government restrictions (Nixon 1960, 1965; Stein 1966; Lowenstein 1970; Weaver 1977, 1985; Price 2002; Rozumilowicz 2002). These past studies suggested that an absence

of government's control of media resulted in improved levels of press freedom and journalists' abilities to criticise and to work freely.

Some other prior studies of press freedom suggested that journalists' practices and freedom of expression were not affected only by government's restrictions, and that there were many other restraining factors such as political influence, safety risks, legal influence, professional challenges, economic constraints and journalists' self-censorship (Hussein 2010; Popescu 2010). Female journalists not only face the common professional and environmental constraints of their male colleagues, but they also confront some gender-based challenges such as harassment, gender disparity and discrimination.

### *Journalism practice and gender disparity*

In recent years, journalism practice has evolved with new challenges. Despite the recognition of environmental constraints associated with the news media, journalism scholars have widely paid attention to gender inequality in the profession. A number of past studies analysed the participation and influence of women in the news media and revealed the increasing numbers of female journalists globally but indicated male dominance in the profession, especially at management level (positions such as producers, executives, chief editors and publishers) (Myer 2009; Byerly 2010).

The proponents of feminism generally assert that in most cultures men have more opportunities to progress socially and professionally than do women (Bell 1984). This feminist assumption of gender inequality is quite evident in the journalism profession these days. For example, the Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF 2010: 24) revealed that "73 per cent of the top management jobs are occupied by men compared to 27 per cent occupied by women". The gender disparity in journalism is also evident in terms of duties – for instance, a report of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) highlighted that "women are more often found reporting on 'soft' subjects, such as social issues, the family, or arts and living" (White 2009: 2).

One possible reason for assigning female journalists soft beats might be their better awareness of these areas and their ability to cover them more effectively than male journalists. The trend of assigning soft beats to female journalists is common in societies that have been structured on the "assumption of sex-biased roles" (White: 14). However, Hanitzsch and Hanusch's (2012) comparative research in eighteen different countries of the world found no significant difference in the attitudes of male and female journalists towards their jobs and roles. This implies that female journalists do not practise journalism differently. Nevertheless, there might be differences in challenges and experiences, depending on the context within which journalists perform their work. This study, therefore, investigated the constraints faced by male and female journalists in order to highlight gender-based differences in journalism practice and limitations in the context of Pakistan.

## Methodology

This study used two qualitative methods of data collection including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Fifty-one male and female journalists participated. Journalists were chosen from the most influential newspapers and television news channels in Karachi (twenty-two media organisations). Thirty-four male and six female journalists were interviewed individually. Eleven journalists participated in two focus group discussions (six journalists in female focus group and five in male focus group). For the confidentiality of journalists, interviewees and focus groups participants were quoted using numbers (1-40) and alphabets (A-F for the female focus group and G-K for the male focus group).

The data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were analysed thematically using ten inductive sub-themes (ranked in the order of prevalence): (i) journalists' safety, (ii) organisational influence, (iii) religious influence, (iv) social influence, (v) political influence, (vi) institutional influence, (vii) economic influence, (viii) professionalism, (ix) pressure groups' influence and (x) legal influence. These sub-themes were classified on the basis of key-words in the journalists' responses to research questions. The prevalence of sub-themes was decided on the basis of the number of journalists' responses in each sub-theme.

## Findings

The data from in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions suggested that male and female journalists talked about ten sub-themes, which highlighted different environmental constraints on their routine work. Journalists' safety was the most common and emphasised sub-theme. Almost all male and female journalists highlighted safety issues that affected their routine work. Male journalists mainly talked about their physical and psychological safeties and underlined the killing of journalists while engaging in investigative journalism due to non-state actors (including ethnic armed groups, sectarian groups, land grabbers and local hostile groups). Journalists also pointed out the risks of political killings, physical torture, kidnapping, imprisonment and harassment. Noticeably, male journalists from the private television news channels highlighted physical (killing, kidnapping and injury) and psychological (pressure and surveillance) threats by Pakistan's law enforcement agencies, religious militant organisations, ethnic groups and political parties. Female journalists highlighted gender harassment and safety risks through political parties, religious militant organisations and the local public. Some female journalists also highlighted the incidents of physical threats to male journalists in Karachi and in the conflict areas of Pakistan (discussed later in this chapter).

Organisational influence appeared as the second most common sub-theme in the journalists' responses to research question (see table, sub-theme 2). A majority of

male and female journalists (forty-two out of fifty-one), from either Urdu-language or English-language media, mentioned different types of organisational influences including organisational policy, owner's business interests, owner's ideology, organisational control over news content and the control of marketing and advertising departments over media content. Findings suggested that both male and female journalists (especially from the private television news channels) viewed the policies of their media organisations as a major intervention in their routine work.

Reports by international organisations do not provide detailed accounts of the different social and religious constraints on freedom of expression and press freedom in Pakistan, but the country's journalists highlighted several such constraints. The table below explains the findings of this study numerically.

**Table 1.** Findings of in-depth interviews and focus groups discussions (number)

Sub-themes	In depth-interviews		Focus group discussions	
	Male journalists	Female journalist	Male focus group discussions	Female focus group discussions
Journalists' safety (P=48)	34	6	5	3
Organisational influence (P=42)	33	3	4	2
Religious influence	28	2	4	1
Social influence (P=34)	23	6	3	2
Political influence (P=34)	27	1	4	2
Institutional influence (P=34)	32	0	2	0
Economic influence (P=32)	23	3	4	2
Profession(P=32)alism	27	1	2	2
Pressure groups' influence (P=25)	23	0	1	1
Legal influence (P=21)	19	0	2	0
Total number of participants	34	6	5	6

*Comment:* The total number of journalists who participated in the study: 51. P = participants.

The study suggested that many male and female journalists (thirty-five out of fifty-one) experienced religious constraints owing to sectarian polarity, religious extremism, militant religious organisations, Islamic values, Pakistan's religious ideology and blasphemy laws, sectarian prejudice, social sensitivity towards religious issues, a lack of tolerance and the religious mindset of the public. Noticeably, the majority of journalists who talked about the sub-theme of religious influence were from the Urdu-language media.

Male journalists also underlined diverse social constraints: a lack of tolerance, the violent attitudes of people, a lack of education and awareness, ethnic prejudice and clashes, cultural taboos, feudalism or tribalism, conservatism and the dominance of an elite class in society. On the other hand, female journalists highlighted gender-based limitations including male dominance in Pakistan's journalism profession and society, the social mindset for female journalists, social pressure, family and cultural

restrictions. Journalists from the English-language media emphasised cultural taboos and conservatism as the social constraints they faced at work.

Pakistan's unstable political situation and recurrent ethnic tension has also come under scrutiny by international organisations monitoring press freedom. Findings validated that male journalists experienced the political influence mainly because of controlled democracy, the pressures of political parties, tension between political parties and the political affiliations of media organisations. Female journalists talked much less about the sub-theme of political influence, which might be due to their work in the less risky beats of social issues, education, business and health (see table, sub-theme 5).

Many male journalists highlighted the sub-theme of institutional influence as a constraint on their freedom of expression. For example, thirty-four out of fifty-one male journalists mentioned the institutional influence of government and the military. A number of male journalists, from newspapers and private television news channels, highlighted suppression by General Zia and General Pervez Musharraf during their regimes. Several other male journalists (twenty-four out of the thirty-four who responded in this sub-theme) mentioned the following government restrictions: the selective allocation of advertisements, suppression of or less access to information, government pressure, the banning of certain private television news channels and the use of regulatory bodies against media.

Male journalists from the print media talked more about government control of advertisements, whereas those from the private television news channels emphasised information suppression and a lack of access to information. Interestingly, female journalists did not experience institutional influence while performing their jobs (see table, sub-theme 6). Findings suggested that, overall, there was no restriction by the government on interviewing anyone. However, one of the male interviewees mentioned government's restrictions on interviewing Taliban leaders and the members of banned religious organisations.

The study revealed that both male and female journalists confronted economic constraints at work (see table, sub-theme 7). For example, thirty-two out of the fifty-one journalists spoke about job insecurity, joblessness, contractual jobs, low and unequal pay-scales, corruption in journalism, the issue of implementing on Wage Board Award (the award explains the pay-scale of newspaper employees set by the government of Pakistan), a lack of resources, the poor economic condition of media organisations, cross-media ownership and government's control of advertisements.

Data suggested that male and female journalists faced numerous professional challenges too. Several male journalists (twenty-nine out of the fifty-one) talked about envelop journalism, sensationalism, yellow journalism, a lack of professionalism, journalism ethics and education. In particular, male and female journalists from private television news channels expressed their concerns about sensationalism and the lack of ethics, responsibility and training.

One of the important constraints mentioned by Pakistan's journalists was the influence of pressure groups. Twenty-four out of fifty-one male journalists, and only one

female interviewee, identified the different types of pressure groups they confronted while doing their routine work and which included ethnic groups, linguistic groups, government, feudal lords, intelligence agencies, religious and sectarian groups, political parties, land grabbers, media owners and cable operators. Interestingly, no journalist from the state-owned television news channel talked about pressure groups in Pakistan.

Constitutional protection for the right of free speech is subject to certain restrictions in Pakistan. Journalists face legal pressure from the many suppressive media laws (such as Pakistan Panel Code 1860, Blasphemy laws, Official Secrecy Act 1923 and Defamation Ordinance 2002). However, as compared to other influences, fewer male journalists talked about the sub-theme of legal influence. For example, twenty-one male journalists identified some legal challenges and constraints due to the laws of Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority, Defamation law, Press and Publication Ordinance of 1960, Contempt of Court law and Access to Information law. Surprisingly, none of the female journalists in this study talked about any sort of legal influence on their work and right of freedom of expression.

Overall, the data from in-depth interviews and focus groups discussions validated each other, especially across the sub-themes of journalists' safety and organisational influence. The data from in-depth interviews strongly validated the data of male focus group discussions on the sub-themes of religious influence, social influence, political influence and economic influence (see table, sub-themes 3, 4, 5 and 7). Unlike the individual interviewees, the participants in both focus group discussions did not talk much about the sub-themes of pressure group influence and legal influence. Therefore, these sub-themes appeared as the least common in the data-set of both focus group discussions.

## Discussion

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, which is acknowledged by international declarations and national constitutions worldwide. Notwithstanding the constitutional guarantees, the reality on the ground differs in many countries of the world. Pakistan is faced with multi-dimensional and severe issues such as rampant terrorism, growing religious extremism, sectarian violence, conservatism, internal political tensions, a declining economy, and a lack of rule of law and human rights. Despite these pressing issues, gender disparity in society and the profession of journalism is one of the critical problems. This section discusses how environmental constraints affect the work of male and female journalists in Pakistan, thereby to underline gender-based differences in journalism practice.

The study revealed a lack of safety as one of the major problems affecting journalists' work and their freedom of expression. Almost all male and female journalists who participated in this study underlined the fearful environment of Pakistan. Journalists suggested that their physical and psychological safeties were most at risk. In particular,

they faced threats while doing investigative stories and reporting on religious, political and defence issues. Although both male and female journalists emphasised safety issues, male journalists were more prone to safety risks in Pakistan. According to a female interviewee:

Male journalists do face severe safety threats because they work mostly in political and crime beats. There is a high ratio of male journalists' killings and kidnappings because most of them are working in the conflict areas of Pakistan such as Baluchistan and North Waziristan. While female journalists do report political events, normally they are not sent to the conflict areas of the country. (Interviewee 37)

Recent international studies have suggested that war reporting is not confined to male correspondents, and female journalists are also entering the "war correspondents club" (White 2009: 6). From a feminist perspective, women's conflict reporting can be seen as a positive step towards gender equality in journalistic roles and duties. Nevertheless, in the case of Pakistan, and perhaps in many similar contexts, the notion of gender equality in the profession of journalism is somehow complex because the nature of safety risks is not merely gender-specific. This study found that female journalists confronted physical attacks and gender harassment (through unnecessary touching and sexual comments) while covering political events. In the recent past, there were a number of incidents when female journalists were beaten and verbally abused while covering political events in Pakistan. For example, in December 2014, Maria Memon (Geo News anchor), was attacked as she covered the political rally of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the party of former cricketer Imran Khan. In the same year, another two reporters of Geo News, Farhat Jawad and Amna Amir, faced physical attacks by the PTI's workers while covering the political party's rally (IFJ 2014, 11 December).

This study also revealed that a very few female journalists could work in the country's war zones, which indicated the underrepresentation of female war reporters in the conflict areas. A recent report by the International Federation of Journalists (2015) also confirmed the underrepresentation of female war and conflict reporters in Khyber Pakhtunistan and Baluchistan provinces, which are undoubtedly marked as the conflict areas of Pakistan. The report suggested:

According to the clubs and unions in Pakistan's conflict areas, the only women journalists represented in Khyber Pakhtunistan area and Peshawar were twenty compared to 380 of their male counterparts; and in Baluchistan, there were two journalists in Quetta compared to 133 male journalists. There were no women journalists in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas including Kurram Agency, Khyber Agency (Landikotal, Jamrud and Bara), Mohmand Agency, North Waziristan, Chinar, Parachinaar, South Waziristan, Bajour, Kurram Agency and Sadda. In Khyber Pakhtunistan, there were no women journalists in Bannu, Swat, Hangu and Dera Ismail Khan. And in Baluchistan, there were no women journalists in Khuzdar, Punjgoor and Gawader.

The statistics above suggest that Pakistan's media organisations recognise the country's unsafe environment for female journalists and prioritise their safety more than male journalists especially in the war zones. Apparently, the scope of female conflict reporting is limited in Pakistan not only because of the severity of threats and media owners' preventive approach, but also by virtue of the country's social environment that is conservative and restricted for women.

This study also revealed that one of the major implications of safety threats in Pakistan's conflict areas was journalists' reliance on second-hand information. According to interviewee 34:

Let's take the example of Baluchistan. My reporters cannot go there. They have fear of their safety because they can be kidnapped and shot either by militants or government ... We have to rely on second-hand information in Pakistan's conflict areas.

This implies that safety risks do affect the quality of journalism in Pakistan and to some extent the public does not receive accurate information. Despite safety threats, "organisational influence" appeared as the second major constraint for both male and female journalists. The study found that journalists' work was largely affected because of their organisational policies and owners' vested interests. According to a male focus group participant:

Chances of my job termination can increase, if I do any story that hurts the vested interests and policies of my owner and editor. I am forbidden to give the telecom industry's news because of my organisation and editor interests. Organisation tries to present the information after moulding it in a way that reality is contradictory to the given information. (Participant J)

Journalists' feedbacks in the sub-theme of 'organisational influence' did not reveal any gender-based difference of journalism practice and constraints because both male and female journalists were bound to work according to their media organisations policies.

Pakistan's religious context emerged as the third most dominant aspect in influencing the journalists' work and their right of freedom of expression. Data suggested that both male and female journalists had to employ self-censorship while reporting on religious issues such as blasphemy, religious extremism and sectarian violence. Journalists revealed that they were compelled to self-censor because of the public's reaction and safety threats. According to interviewee number 22, "blasphemy is a very sensitive issue here. In Pakistan, it becomes a collective issue. We are very sensitive towards religious symbols and icons." Considering the religious sensitivity of Pakistan's society, some media organisations have language's policies for the reporting of religious stories. For instance, as a female interviewee unveiled:

*Express Tribune* has a policy of not using the word 'Islamic' to report about extremists. Sub-editors are asked to use words such as 'religious extremists' or 'militants' while reporting about terrorism incidents. So, this is a religious constraint. (Interviewee number 33)

This study suggested that male and female journalists both faced common religious constraints and their practices were shaped by media organisations' policies, the level of safety risks and social attitudes when reporting on religious issues. Apart from religious constraints, this study revealed that Pakistan's socio-cultural system had substantial influence on journalists' work and their freedom of expression. Therefore, the sub-theme of 'social influence' indicated a major gender-based difference of journalism practice and constraints among journalists.

Pakistan is a patriarchal and conservative society where men are the primary authority and women are subordinate, resulting in gender disparity. The study confirmed that female journalists experienced gender discrimination and inequalities at societal and professional levels, which indicated an explicit gender-based gap of journalism practice. The female journalists were usually assigned soft beats, which indicated that the practice of journalism was not uniform as far as the work of reporting was concerned. In addition, they faced difficulties in information gathering by virtue of their gender. According to a female television news producer:

Health and education beats were used to be labelled as 'female beats' in Pakistan's media ... Previously, female journalists had not so many working opportunities. If I talk about myself, I used to have only health and educational assignments. Although, male journalists can also cover health beat very well ... Recently I had an opportunity to cover crime beat and public's demonstrations ... Male dominance in the society and profession does not give progressing space to female journalists. Sometimes, I face problems in *information gathering* because of my gender ... Gender harassment is a common issue in Pakistan's society. Nevertheless, I think many media organisations try to keep the organisational environment conducive for women staffs. (Interviewee number 38)

Gender inequality is a global phenomenon, which is deeply rooted in many third world countries. In Pakistan, it arises through patriarchy or male dominance entrenched in society as a system of power, and results in the suppression of women. Advocates of radical feminism assert the equality of men and women in political, social and domestic domains (Thompson 2001). Postcolonial feminist theory, however, questions the assumption that patriarchy is the prime source of women's oppression and considers cultural and religious limitations; the financial dependence of women on men; a lack of freedom, recognition and representation. Women's issues especially related to their freedom and equality call upon a more contextual feminist analysis.

When analysing gender injustice and the issue of women's liberation, one must remember contextual differences that distinguish women's lives and experiences in different parts of the world (Lila 2002: 788). The notions of freedom and equality tend to redefine themselves in postcolonial Muslim countries, reflecting a clear cultural divide between Islam and the West. The case of Pakistan is complex because the country's social structure is underpinned by Islamic and feudal customs that shape cultural practices at micro (individual and the family) and macro (professional and societal) levels.

At a micro-level, the idea of ‘family’ is largely contentious in Pakistan because it emerges as an institution where men have the decision-making authority (as is usual in Islamic and feudal systems) and women are mostly dependent and subordinate, especially in financial matters). In Nancy Fraser’s words (2013), the notion of family can be understood as the “site of labour-exchanges” (unpaid in the case of household work that women normally perform) and “economic distributions” (usually controlled by male heads of households). This implies that gender inequality breeds from the notion of family that renders a woman less empowered to strive for her economic, political and cultural recognitions at macro level (the societal and professional levels) in Pakistan.

Some people might contend this analysis, saying that society in Pakistan is progressing when it comes to the recognition of women in politics, education and journalism. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of Pakistani women are still deprived of the basic rights of freedom of expression, education, voting and decision-making. The process of social change is slow – however, Pakistan’s media and women’s rights activists need to become more effective change agents in terms of employment and the promotion of female staff at all levels.

Male journalists viewed the affect of ‘social influence’ on their work and right of freedom of expression differently. They specifically talked about cultural taboos and social conservatism, which were the prime reasons for their self-censorship. According to a male interviewee: “Pakistan is a traditional society. Therefore, journalists should not criticise anyone directly in their writings and speech because people are conservative here” (Interviewee number 20). Pakistan’s recurrent ethnic disputes were also an important reason for self-censorship. For instance, a male interviewee stated:

Let’s suppose, four people die in a firing incident and they belong to a particular ethnic group. When information will come to me, I would not report who was Urdu-speaking or Pathan or Baluchi. I would only report the number of casualties, the incident’s location and the targeted victims’ political affiliation. The reason for this precaution is that my story might cause ethnic unrest or reaction that can increase the number of casualties. Therefore, we have to self-censor many facts. (Interviewee number 2)

Journalists’ self-censorship is part of trending peace journalism in Pakistan. Despite constant ethnic disputes and safety threats, the Pakistani journalists strive to enhance peace prospects within the politically volatile and risky situation of the country.

The concern is that political parties are not the only ones exercising power in Pakistan. This study suggested that many male journalists faced “institutional influence” in the form of government restrictions and military interventions. Articles 19 and 19 (A) of the Constitution of Pakistan (1973) guarantee the rights of freedom of expression and freedom of information. Notwithstanding these constitutional guarantees, journalists revealed the government’s restrictions in forms such as suppressive media laws; the government’s suspension of newspapers’ licences; the banning of television news channel; restrictive allocation of government advertisements; restrictions on

interviewing Taliban leaders and the member of banned religious organisations and physical attacks on journalists who have been critical of government performance and of the army.

Interestingly, none of the female journalists viewed ‘institutional influence’ and ‘legal influence’ as controlling their work, which indicated a gender-based difference in the type of constraint faced by the Pakistani journalists. Again, this might be because male journalists are assigned to hard beats more than their female colleagues.

Feedback suggested that the army and the government controlled the right to freedom of information through information manipulation and news-feeding. According to a male interviewee: “... intelligence agencies have a big role in news-feeding and information manipulation ... Media is fed by them” (Interviewee number 14). Another male journalist suggested: “information is not given to us when we try to contact the respective authorities in the government’s departments”. (Interviewee number 32). Male journalists’ feedbacks substantiated the level of information suppression due to safety threats and “institutional influence”. Journalists also revealed the part played in information suppression by the corporate interests of media organisations. One participant in the female focus group discussion revealed: “One cannot give even the breaking level news because of advertisements. Advertisers are our real client and our entire revenue comes from them.”

The study exposed media owners as not only responsible for information suppression, but also as part of the existing pressure groups in Pakistan. It was found that male journalists had experienced pressure from government, ethnic groups, political parties, religious organisations and, intelligence agencies while doing their jobs (see statistics, table, section IV). However, the biggest challenge for them was to confront the internal pressure of their organisational policies and the corporate interests of the owners. For example, interviewee number 15 said: “We are asked to leave the organisation if we do not agree with any policy.”

Data suggested that both male and female journalists viewed “economic influence” as a constraint on their work and right of freedom of expression. Journalists of both genders highlighted the Wage Board Award issue, the government’s control of advertisements, trend of forced job termination, envelop journalism, low or unequal pay-scales and the delayed payment of salaries. Male and female journalists faced the challenge of professionalism, suggesting that they agreed about the practice of the professional norms that underpin journalism. Journalists from private television news channels commented especially on the trends of sensationalism, a lack of journalism ethics and journalistic training. They considered that the commercial interests of media owners undermined their professional norms and practices; this was not surprising, given that media operate as a corporate entity worldwide and that professional journalism is usually incompatible with the business interests of media owners (McChesney 1999).

Feedbacks from the journalists confirmed the impact of “institutional environment” on their work and their right to freedom of expression. Male journalists had to

negotiate with pervasive external socio-political influences and internal organisational constraints whereas female journalists had experienced social influence. Both appeared as “passive actors” with a low level of empowerment, suggesting a constant tension between journalists and their institutional environment in Pakistan.

## Conclusion

This chapter discussed the impact of environmental constraints on the work of male and female journalists in Pakistan, thereby to highlight gender-based differences and constraints on journalism practice. Data suggested that nearly all male and female journalists had concerns about safety risks, although the females were more concerned than the males even though the males were assigned the riskier beats of defence, crime and politics. The study revealed other common areas of constraint including organisational influence, religious influence, political influence, economic influence and professionalism. Male journalists highlighted the impact of environmental constraints on their work more explicitly. They underlined self-censorship; reliance on second-hand information; news-feeding by intelligence agencies and information suppression at government, military and organisational levels. Four sub-themes suggested gender-based differences: safety, social influence, institutional influence and legal influence. Female journalists stressed gender-specific risks such as harassment, and work-related threats to their male colleagues. They suggested that male journalists were more likely to be subjected to physical threats because of the beats they covered. This indicated the difference of practice as far as the nature of job was concerned.

The sub-theme of “social influence” highlighted most sharply the differences difference between genders, female journalists expressing concern about gender disparity in Pakistan’s society and the profession of journalism. Male journalists did not emphasise gender disparity. Rather, they viewed cultural taboos, conservatism and ethnic tension as major social constraints on their work and freedom of expression. Interestingly, none of the female journalists had experienced constraint by institutional and legal influences.

The study revealed that Pakistani journalists did not routinely work under an enabling institutional environment. Findings showed that the environmental constraints in Pakistan were not merely confined to the coercive attitudes of government, military, political parties and pressure groups, but religious extremism and a lack of tolerance also affected journalists’ ability to work freely.

The main concern is how to reduce these gender-based differences and how to empower male and female journalists equally so that they can promote democracy in Pakistan. Social influence was one the most prominent sub-themes that indicated the impact of social limitations on journalism practice. Therefore, it is imperative to promote the principles of participatory parity at macro level, which requires social policies and action by the Pakistani government and media organisations that acknowl-

edges the legitimacy of claims to recognition without gender bias; economic parity; and equal political and social representation of male and female journalists (Fraser 2013). Media organisations and journalists' unions need to ensure the empowerment of journalists through improved safety, regular professional and safety training, better pay and legal protection.

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# Philanthropic War

## *Narratives and Dangerous Protection Scenario(s)*

Berit von der Lippe

### Abstract

Critical rhetoric is linked to postcolonial perspectives and will serve as the context of the protection scenario(s) in focus. The aim is to shed some light on contradictions and paradoxes in embedded war reporting, in this case from Afghanistan, dressed in 'feminist' philanthropy, thereby challenging liberal perspectives concerning war reporting and gender-awareness.

Keywords: rhetoric, postcolonialism, feminism, ethics, embedded journalism

The protection-of-women-and-children scenario is a common part of war rhetoric and has always been so (Enloe 1990, 2004; Yuval-Davis 1997; Tickner 2001). Nation states today have added a specific feminist rhetoric to this scenario in order to mobilise support for war (Abu-Lughod 2002; Ferguson 2005). Today, women are present and visible (although in the minority) as generals, officers or soldiers, and as high ranking politicians dealing with security issues (Lippe & Stuvøy 2013), and women's presence as journalists and war reporters seems to be taken for granted in many countries. A paraphrasing of Gayatri Spivak's well-known expression "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1988) into "Western men and some Western women protecting brown women from brown men" may indicate my approach to gender in war and conflict reporting in this article.

When the war on terror began in 2001, representatives of Western power elites – males and females – added the use of gender equality rhetoric, or a specific "feminist" rhetoric, to the protection scenario (Lippe 2012). The staging of mass media images of Afghan women in Kabul unveiling themselves immediately after the US bombing of Afghanistan post-9/11 were laden with rhetorical power (Shepherd 2006). The invasion seemed already, after a few days, to have liberated at least some Afghan women – and at least in the capital, Kabul. For the liberators and protectors to wield this public superiority, there must be accepted hierarchical subject positions – one group

as protectors and thus agents, the other group protected and helpless but liberated or saved by the former. The concept of “liberating” and/or “protecting” women has always been – and still is – an important myth that helps to create sustained support for war and its legitimisation (Ahmed 1992; Cooke 2002). The liberator/liberated or protector/protected relationship is by definition unequal, and unequal relations rest ultimately on the threat or act of violence.

As the silence imposed on most Afghan women today does not differ much from the silence imposed on them fourteen years ago (Amnesty International 2012; Joya 2014), it is all the more important to be mindful of the plight once offered these women (and children). This does not mean that Afghan women did not speak yesterday and do not speak today, but their voices seldom reach out to the Western public (see Chapter 11 in this volume).

As the war became increasingly burdensome, hard to win and diminishing in credibility, the coalition players in Afghanistan realised that a more convincing communications strategy was needed (Kotilainen 2011). In this chapter I offer a spectacular example of such strategic communication, including building democracy and protecting and/or liberating Afghan women (and children). In 2009, the Norwegian secretary of defence, Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, travelled to Faryab, a province in north-west Afghanistan, where Norway is responsible for the protection of the inhabitants from the Taliban. The minister’s programme included a visit to Afghan female prisoners (and their children), together with some embedded journalists. Strøm-Erichsen permitted the journalists to photograph the prisoners unveiled (thus identified), and their most intimate stories or testimonies were listened to. The main question is about how the prisoners were represented and their traumas retold and published by the journalists – who, thanks to Strøm-Erichsen, were allowed to pass barriers and enter rooms which would otherwise be closed to them.

With a comparison of the differing – even opposing – aspects of gender awareness manifested in the reportages from the minister’s visit, the aim here is also to discuss these with reference to ethical issues. The reportages in focus are exemplary; one because it represents total blindness of gender awareness and disrespect of ethical codes, the other because of an extraordinary awareness and respect of ethical codes. By refusing to participate in an already rehearsed protection scenario, the second of these shows that embedded war reporters, males or females – in this case a male – are free to choose which rules of ethics to follow. Some reportages might, better than others, reveal what is at stake when “female victimisation” is represented in protection scenarios endangering the lives of those “we” claim to protect and empower. And by comparing two reportages (both made by male reporters), I also suggest that women and men tend to evaluate journalism ethics and journalistic identities in similar ways, and to have similar epistemologies, sharing dominant ideology and journalistic culture (see Chapter 1 in this volume). Gender awareness may be related first and foremost to gender-responsive professionalism and epistemic standpoint, rather than to gender as such.

Limiting the material of analysis to these reportages only, I risk insinuating that something subordinate represents something common. This is a risk I choose to take. I do not aim to present any proof or to make a general statement believable. I do, though, suggest some potential links between particularities and generalities; in this case not only a general or common tendency to domesticate war reporting, but primarily the tendency in many Western countries to dress war, conflict and military activities in philanthropic and gendered clothing – leaving this clothing on the battleground, together with the plight of women (and children) so eagerly announced. A deep dive into even limited material might indicate war reporting as a minefield – not least in times when gender is used as supplementary vehicle to legitimate NATO's various military operations.

First, I will outline a critical approach to liberal “feminist” war/security rhetoric by referring to Michaele Ferguson's (2005) analysis of US war/security rhetoric and the reframing of liberal feminist concepts, linking her perspective to Norwegian rhetoric and the postcolonial perspectives used in the analysis of the two reportages. These perspectives, supplemented with Wendy Hesford's approaches to cultural representations of women's and children's “distant suffering” (Hesford 2011), will also be useful when ethical aspects, complying with the Norwegian Code of Ethics, are discussed. Finally, I question whether war reporting within protection scenarios of women-and-children is a reflection of internalised ideological assumptions rather than the reporter's gender, simultaneously challenging essentialist and liberal perspectives concerning gender awareness and feminism. Because all discourse serves a certain ideological function in seeking to persuade us of the commonsensical, natural, necessary meaning of the world, feminist rhetorical criticism represents a political intervention – as opposed to any military intervention. This article may, I hope, represent a feminist political intervention (albeit a limited one) into war narratives published as protection and/or liberation scenarios of women and children.

## Theoretical perspectives

A feminist war/security rhetoric is based on a rhetorical and representational model of framing, where frames are conceptual structures that enable us to make sense of information by selectively presenting it from a particular viewpoint. Relying on a morally-based idea of gender equality, rather than a political or historical one, may “motivate and justify intervention abroad in the name of women's rights” (Ferguson 2005: 20; see also Shepherd 2006). In transporting pre-existing feminist ideas into new contexts, feminist rhetoric is introduced into a discursive context in which other frames are already operative.

The US-led military intervention against Afghanistan in October 2001 was couched in opposing perspectives, national interests, retaliation, ‘war on terror’ as well as a language of caring for others, and thus not merely the narrow pursuit of the interests of state. Similar opposing and contradictory perspectives were present in the political

rhetoric of most Western countries (Stabile & Kumar 2005; Lippe & Väyrynen 2011). While the rhetoric in the US had to balance between a neoconservative and a liberal 'feminised rhetoric' (Flanders 2004), Norwegian representatives of the power elite were dancing on a different tightrope. They had to reach a public characterised by 'liberal feminism' – that is, a feminism incorporating women into existing male-dominated power structures and (market) liberalist ideology (Lippe 2010, 2011).

There is, though, a substantial risk of the rhetorical use of liberal feminist ideas becoming "a nasty little weapon" of imperialism (to borrow one more expression used by Spivak (2001: 17)). When we put ourselves in the position of the other and speak on behalf of the other, the rhetoric of philanthropy often fails to exhibit the patience and respect necessary to weave disparate perspectives together. Lila Abu-Lughod takes us a few steps further and focuses on how imperial logic genders and separates subject peoples so that men are the other and the women are able to be civilised:

To defend our universal civilisation we must rescue the women. To rescue these women we must attack these men. These women are to be rescued not because they are more 'ours' than 'theirs' but rather because they will have become more 'ours' through rescue missions (Abu-Lughod 2002: 469)

In such a system of logic, 'compassionate warfare', 'benevolence and philanthropy' as well as 'protection scenarios' are, also according to Abu-Lughod, preferred parts of Western rhetoric – that is, Western feminised security rhetoric (see also Cooke 2002; Enloe 2004). A liberal feminist liberation narrative and scenario may of course be dressed differently, but shares a common logic, justifying and legitimising military intervention and in the long run beneficial to its subject populations – women and children in particular.

Who has the privilege of speaking "when veils seem more like walls" (as Jacqueline Jones Royster (1996: 36) puts it) is an issue more important than the veiling of bodies. The interest in and the foregrounding of *burqa*-clad, apparently voiceless Afghan women was applied as part of a rationale for once again waging a just war and securing Afghan women (Stabile & Kumar 2005). Anne Orford warns that we cannot usefully respond to the silencing of the 'subaltern' woman by "representing" that figure, or by constructing her as a speaking subject (Orford 2002). Even when undertaken with 'good intentions,' the attempt to rewrite the Third World as the subject of a reconfigured, decolonised law cannot succeed. No perspective critical of imperialism can turn the other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been an incommensurable, discontinuous other into a domesticated other that consolidates the imperialist self.

The Norwegian war narrative cherishes the idea that Norway has a long-standing tradition of participation in UN-led peace-keeping activities, conflict prevention through political dialogue, mediation and overseas development aid on a large scale (on tradition, see Leira 2005). Solidarity, internationalism and peace-keeping operations have been the main rhetorical vehicles around which the Norwegian foreign policy

rhetoric has been established and in whose name actions are performed. According to this policy rhetoric, Norway never takes part in war or warfare; it happens, though, that the country takes part in military operations.

The defence minister in the periods 2005-2009 and 2011-2013), Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, has been the most energetic spokesperson about activity within the feminised agential/protection scenario. She continuously reminds us, that "... we take part, not in war, but in military engagement", because "we want to contribute to peace and conflict resolution" (*Aftenposten* 8 March 2006). This is sometimes linked to "a natural part of our tradition of peace building and stabilisation in the world" (Strøm-Erichsen 2007). The humanitarian rhetoric – of peace and gender equality, of democracy and freedom – is the dominant thread in Norwegian war (that is, peace) rhetoric.

Members of the media witnessing distant suffering (including emotional appeals based on empathy and/or an ethic of care) are themselves conditioned by hierarchies of power and inequality. An ideogram such as "women-and-children" functions in much the same way as abstractions such as 'equality', 'democracy', 'modernity' and 'liberty', despite the materiality of women and children. This indicates the importance of recognising the ability of material concepts to act as ideology in certain types of discourse (Dubriwny 2005: 89-100; Sontag 1977, 2003). Although these ideograms are culture bound, meaning different things in different cultures, some, like "women-and-children", do appeal to common values all over the world – at least to some extent. This also indicates an acknowledgement of the blurred lines between words referring to the material world and to abstractions (see Kotilainen 2011).

War narratives tend to employ an inherent power dynamic between the spectator and the 'spectacle' (or subject) of suffering. Often, the visibility of distant suffering may inadvertently perpetuate the most powerful rhetoric in the violent production of gender identities. Wendy Hesford (2011) offers a critique of some 'spectacular rhetorics' in the human rights imaginary, creating a possibility for theorising identities, recognitions and feminisms – in my view not merely restricted to human rights discourses. Scenarios of female victimisation may, according to Hesford, easily resubordinate "the subject, women and girls as sympathetic victims in need of rescue, historically subjugated to that identity according to rhetorical and journalistic conventions" (Hesford 2011: 96).

### The protection scenario

The rhetorical situation is one indicating when silence and invisibility is preferable – and, similarly, when silence should be broken and visibility is useful. In 2009, the rhetorical situation demanded evidence of the benefits of Norwegian 'engagement' in Afghanistan. Some journalists and some Norwegians began asking pointed questions, such as why "we" still had armed forces there. The period 2008-2009 was called the 'problem phase' (Lurås 2009). This phase was also the time when embedded journalism increased. It was now important to remind the Norwegian people of the country's

philanthropic and peaceful activities – the right time for the visibility of ‘our’ plight and benevolent ‘engagement’, particularly for Afghan women (and children).

In the autumn of 2009 Strøm-Erichsen visits Afghan female prisoners in a small town in the north of Afghanistan. The minister is photographed weeping in the prison yard.<sup>1</sup> Next to this photo is one of unveiled female prisoners together with their small children. Without these pictures, the reportage would have lost much of the rhetorical force – and appeal. Why is the minister weeping? And what has her sorrow to do with the women and children? The headline (“Streams of tears”) is not informative (a pun – Strøm means stream in Norwegian). The lead tells the following: “Thanks to Norwegian economic support, the living standards for the imprisoned women in Meimaneh are ameliorated. The verdict, though, makes even a defence minister weep.” Some other clues add more information as to why the minister is weeping: “The verdicts are shocking” and “No human being in Norway would have accepted the fate of these women”. The caption says “Defence minister, Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, wiping her tears in the prison yard after meeting female Afghan prisoners and their children.” The minister’s face can hardly be seen, sufficiently only to see her weeping. The faces of the prisoners and their children are unveiled and staring at the camera (thus directly at us as spectators). The prisoners’ fear – or surprise – is striking and shows up some of the paradoxes in the protection scenario. Unveiled, and now taken care of in a modernised prison, thanks to Norway’s engagement. Some readers may ask why the prisoners look frightened.

As spectators, we are invited to identify with the prisoners as those in need and those whose protection they depend upon (an exemplary illustration of a protector/protected scenario), even before we read their tragic stories. Unveiled Afghan women are often perceived as icons of freedom. The unveiling of these women prisoners hardly denotes empowerment or freedom and may, rather, be seen as an indication of paradoxes in protection scenarios. Although neither icons nor war reportages have any dictatorial power over readers, spectators or voyeurs, the hierarchical positions of mediated suffering subjects and spectators will more often than not be present in cultural representations of ‘distant suffering’ – particularly distant-women-and-children-suffering in war reporting. The political aspects easily become invisible. It is the politics of philanthropy – a position of identification many spectators are used to, perceived as part of the nation’s identity and to some extent as part of one’s own identity (seldom, though, taken into consideration). This is how this particular reportage is constructed.

Images of small children with their mothers may allow those who photograph them to stake and claim the moral high ground. When the substantiation of an assertion is literally visualised (as, for instance, “Norway is needed in Afghanistan and protects women and children”, the proof of the assertion becomes concrete to some extent. The ideogram, ‘women-and-children’, is placed before our eyes, complying with western fantasies of rescuing brown women. As icons of innocence, the mother-and-child(ren) are metaphors for a country’s future, for the political and social well-being of a culture.

The non-ideological questions around which the public can rally, such as the protection of women and children, are ancillary to the main concern of why they need aid in the first place (see Moeller 2002). The domestication and self-consolidation manifestly expressed in this kind of spectacular witnessing has nearly all possible commonalities with a postcolonial perspective (Spivak 2004) – even before we are invited to enter the prisoners’ strictly private and intimate spheres.

### Traumatic and intimate stories

There are many testimonies – or traumatic stories – in the reportage. Only two of them will be retold here. The first is that of a young Afghan woman pictured somewhat helplessly caressing her three daughters. Nahla is the name in my narrative. She is twenty years old, the text tells us. We, the spectators, also learn that they, the mother and her children, are all dressed up, prepared for the visit of the minister. Nothing is said about the prisoners’ reactions to also meeting foreign men taking photos. We read that “... her three small daughters are struggling to find a place on the mother’s lap”. The text only underlines – or explains – what is seen in the photographs. “Now they are too small to understand why mum is not living at home,” the text tells us (spectators, probably, more than readers). She has to be prepared for twelve years behind bars in Meymana.

The intimate tone is seen in the following: “They accused me of having assisted my cousin to secretly meet a lover.” The voice is the prisoner’s own, translated for the journalist. Then the reporter adds: “In Afghanistan, one calls this kidnapping. Women are deemed guilty if their girlfriends or relatives fall in love with the wrong man. They are also guilty if friends and relatives escape from their husbands. The law is ruthless.” After eight years of struggle for women’s liberation, it is tempting to ask why it is still like this. The reporter doesn’t ask. We are also informed that the first verdict was six months, but it was taken on appeal to the Supreme Court in Kabul and became twelve years. Because her cousin met a man in secret. “The shock can still be seen in the face of the young woman,” we are told. Might the shock also be due to a sudden and surprising visit of Norwegian journalists, eagerly photographing her and her daughter? Whether as readers, onlookers or voyeurs, we are appealed to as protectors of a helpless Afghan woman and her children. The information about injustice is probably true, and the empathy in the reportage is manifestly present.

Another young woman, about eighteen years old, has been convicted for adultery after being raped by her relative – in the absence of her husband who worked in Iran. “The small child Samir is the result.” What is a direct quotation and what the reporter has chosen to include is unclear. But what is certain is that this is very sad – most of all for the mother and the little boy. “The brother-in-law is neither prosecuted nor punished. In Afghanistan women are often found guilty when men lose control.” This, too, is written with empathy. The protection scenario is strengthened when we learn that “the actual prison is probably the best prison in Afghanistan. Earlier, and before

the Norwegians came to the rescue, the prisoners were crammed into a cellar.” The reporter’s praise of Norwegian philanthropy is reminiscent of public relations rhetoric, and undermines his role as a journalist. To readers, the appellation of protector and helper is undermined as well.

Hesford’s call to refuse “conventional icons of victimisation, thereby countering Western images that mobilise ideals of domesticity to construe or invite the reader/listener as rescuers” is difficult to imagine in the reportage. Her invitation to “prompt viewers to contemplate how they are positioned by the media to see themselves” is hardly complied with (Hesford 2011: 110). It is difficult to discover any glimpse of critical self-reflection and equally difficult to spot anything which might enable readers to turn their eyes inwardly (see Mral 2014). The rhetorical potency of the ideography ‘woman-and-children’ might have been too strongly underlined.

Similar terrible stories are told, stories similar to these testimonies, by Afghan women who have broken Afghan tribal moral codes, retold by the reporter and published for Norwegian readers. In another material context these testimonies could have been witnesses to human rights violations. The women might then have chosen anonymity and preferred to be veiled. The publication, or public relations stunt, is a story explaining why ‘our’ presence in Afghanistan is needed. “The politics of pity conflates language of the ‘other’s’ trauma, by positioning the other as the recipient of the gift of rights distributed by the powerful,” Hesford tells us (2011:47). In this narrative, enemy men are portrayed as barbaric and oppressive towards local women, who are constructed as a homogeneous “powerless group” (see Mohanty 2003: 54). In this case and in this reportage, the prisoners, as ‘others’, are literally positioned as recipients of gifts distributed by the powerful potential rescuers. Marginal knowledge, selective memory and selective representation of the ‘other’ are vital to the ‘saving-brown-women-and-children’ mentality – and scenario. Unable to see how ‘the other’ women use rhetoric to negotiate with men within patriarchal – even misogynist – tribal structures, the ‘protectors’ and ‘liberators’ must have been listening mainly to their own conviction of benevolence, their internal echo.

Being agents and storytellers in their own right, the prisoners’ identities would have been represented as more complex than being victims rather than survivors – concepts, though, which are not mutually exclusive. Having dared to break the moral codes of their tribal community, these prisoners had manifested bravery more impressive than most of the readers and spectators are able to imagine (see Giliani 2008; Joya 2014). A reportage taking this as point of departure, might have great appeal – perhaps greater than the rhetorical appeal of the actual protection scenario. As readers and spectators, our own identities as philanthropic protectors might also have been challenged, and the lines between the ‘self’ and ‘the other’ blurred. It could have been a manifestation of female heroines ‘out there’ – rather than ‘in here’. Hierarchy in this kind of communicative practice is certainly a question of power.

I now turn to codes of press ethics, and discuss the extent to which the reportage is allied with abusive power.

## Broken codes of ethics – blind gender awareness

'Bearing witness' refers to media practices of producing testimony. To bear witness describes the act of appealing to an audience to share responsibility for the suffering of others, and conjures up an explicitly moral practice. This is central to the legitimization of journalism (Zelizer 2002). The reportage is an intrusion into the suffering of others. Making demands on powerless subjects who are, perhaps, not in a position to consent to being represented, the reportage can be seen a perversion as well as a parody of moral or ethical journalistic practice.

The publishing and the public relations effect of Norwegian benevolence in Afghanistan in general, and philanthropy towards Afghan women (and children) in particular, seemed more important than an awareness of the prisoners' and their children's security. Still, though, the minister's and the journalist's intentions might have been 'good'. The 'criminals' were 'better off' in the newly-built prison. Ignoring – or being ignorant of – prevailing cultural or symbolic systems (not least when it comes to gender relations and how Afghan men and women interact), Strøm-Erichsen permitted her empathy to be made public. Any awareness or consideration of her position as allied to NATO (and therefore a potential enemy of Afghans) must have been absent. The reporter and his editor, choosing to publish the story as a protection scenario, manifest a similar kind of 'gender awareness'.

The prisoners' stories retold may, as suggested above, have certain features in common with testimonies told by those who agree to be witnesses in war tribunals as part of the reconciliation processes. Those who are witnessing can always choose anonymity to avoid potential stigma and life-threatening retaliation. Hesford (2011: 113) also reminds us of "whether to stay silent or to speak". This should be an awareness taken for granted. For these imprisoned women, the stigma could hardly have been worse. Most of them are not allowed to communicate with foreigners at all. Only on a few exceptional occasions are they permitted to communicate in public with Afghan men – veiled and accompanied by a male relative. Photographed and identified by foreigners, they have broken one more important code of moral behavior: communicating unveiled with and permitting foreigners to witness their 'crime stories'. Photos and reportages move and are transnational, but only some selected people may move. The prisoners are probably not among the selected movable people.

The question of violations of the Code of Ethics in the Norwegian press is of greater importance than discussing the motives of the reporter and minister. Article 3.4. reads:

Protect the sources of the press. The protection of sources is a basic principle in a free society and is a prerequisite for the ability of the press to fulfil its duties towards society and ensure the access to essential information.

The information in the reportage can hardly be called essential for fulfilling duties towards Norwegian society. Article 3.5 is more precise: "Do not divulge the name of a person who has provided information on a confidential basis, unless consent has been

explicitly given by the person concerned.” It is more than doubtful that such consent was given by the women concerned.

More relevant and to the point here is Article 3.9:

Proceed tactfully in journalistic research. In particular show consideration for people who cannot be expected to be aware of the effect that their statements may have. Never abuse the emotions or feeling of other people, their ignorance or their lack of judgment. Remember that people in shock or grief are more vulnerable than others.

The women’s emotions or feelings, although complex and difficult for foreigners to imagine, should of course have been taken into consideration. The photos shot and the identification of the prisoners published, their stories retold for a foreign public, cannot have been based on confidentiality. Given the freedom to discuss whether to stay silent or to speak, the prisoners might have preferred silence – veiled in the *burqa*.

“The self disclosure of one is the power of the other. One has something of the other in one’s hand – something big or something small,” writes Svein Brurås, the Norwegian expert on ethics, including press ethics (Brurås 2003: 122; see also Eide 2003). It is not, though, a question of ‘exchange ratio’ between informants and journalists. Cultural practices within asymmetrical relations of power often slip, as in this case, into nationalist rhetoric on the one hand and uncritical cosmopolitanism on the other hand – inattentive also, it seems, to the information continuously spread around the world, and inattentive to the importance of material contexts where news is seen, the women are now ‘shot in bed with the enemy’. The freedom to choose to stand up or to remain silent, to be visible and identified or invisible and unidentified, is the alpha and omega of certain critical situations. The condition for the imprisoned women was critical before the visit and became no less critical after the visit and the publication of the visit – a display of Norwegian philanthropic war practices. The gendered representational politics of pity, as in the actual reportage, comply well with the feminisation of suffering and hope brought forth in current liberal internationalist or transnational imaginaries.

The three intersecting concerns for gender-aware journalistic professionalism springs, as underlined by Sarah Macharia (Chapter 2 in this volume), from women’s right to freedom of expression, gender-responsive media professional ethics and, gender-responsive peace journalism. In the actual reportage all these concerns are broken and/or overturned. Gender-responsive professional ethics are absent, thus broken. Gender-responsive peace journalism (the philanthropic protection scenario) overturns all aspects entrenched in peace journalism. In a similar vein, the freedom of expression is a freedom the journalist has given himself – as will be discussed below.

### Alternative scenarios – gender awareness

However restricted, embedded journalists have some freedom. None among the Norwegian visitors was forced to identify the prisoners or to raise critical comments,

and no one forced any editor to accept publication. The other example of reportage may illustrate aspects of alternative options – because the reporter has chosen a version differing radically from any associated with the protection scenario. We see the minister, respectfully smiling to a high-ranking Afghan man in the military. Friendly, it seems. The heading reads: “Strøm-Erichsen sees good progress.” The caption reads: “Defence minister, Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, visited Faryab yesterday. She sees much progress compared to the situation three years earlier. Here, she thanks the Afghan major, Talib Jan Yosifi, after a meeting.”

The identification of the male major is evidently of another kind to that of the prisoners. The report is introduced: “Despite the development in Afghanistan, the minister says that Norwegian soldiers contribute to peace and democratisation in the country.” This is in fact an indication of what is told in the reportage. The ‘despite’ is indicative both of the reporter’s critical perspective and the paradoxes embedded in Norwegian nonmilitaristic benevolence and the way these paradoxes are suggested throughout.

Readers and spectators are invited in on the day after the minister’s visit to the prison. No female prisoners are seen, no small children are present. The visit is only referred to: “Yesterday the minister shed tears when she met with eighteen imprisoned women and six children.” And instead of praising Norwegian philanthropy, the reporter lets praise be presented by quotations in the minister’s own voice or by manifestly giving distance to the minister’s euphemisms. “She tells us that Norwegian prison consultants ensure better prison conditions, thus preventing abuses. Norwegian soldiers are responsible for the security in Faryab on behalf of NATO.” Juxtaposing these two sentences, one about prevention of abuse to imprisoned women and children, the other the explicitly military objective, the reporter signals a potential paradox – philanthropic security and military means.

The reporter lets the minister comment on what she has seen during her visit, including her critiques about restrictions on women’s freedom: “We’ll have to set rigid standards for Afghan authorities.” Here, hers is the voice of a forceful minister. Her setting of standards, and the ‘we’, represent the minister’s will to show strength – in troubled terrain – and the reporter’s intention to make this visible. The standards broken are serious, and explicitly avoid representing any offending oppositional voice. It seems as if the reporter is inviting readers to consider these broken standards as a return to the standards before ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ began.

The linguistic balancing act of the reporter may also be illustrated by the following: “Despite the deteriorating condition and increased violence, Strøm-Erichsen is assured about the success of the Norwegian participation in the war. She means, on the contrary, that the soldiers make progress by entering new terrain.” This ‘despite’ is, as already suggested, a subtle way of telling the readers that the Norwegian presence has failed. The reporter’s choice of the word ‘war’ instead of operation or engagement, is another sign of the embedded journalist’s independent position. Finally, giving the voice explicitly to the minister and simultaneously choosing the ‘despite-increased-violence’ trope, the reportage may also be seen as gender-responsive peace journalism.

A year later, the same reporter reflects on the visit to the women's prison (Sømme-Hammer 2010). We learn that the prisoners had received gifts from the minister, whose visit they had expected. They certainly didn't know that the visit was part of an information strategy of Norwegian philanthropy – a strategy wherein the prisoners, the women and children, played the main role. We even learn that some of the women tried to hide their hair when, all of a sudden, they were to be photographed. “Now the women were forced by the prison director to contribute to this PR – together with their children,” the text also says. Misuse of the subjects' feelings and lack of knowledge (particularly when they are in shock or sorrow) makes such considerations very important. “They had to do as they were told,” Sømme-Hammer comments.

“Media accountability to women, or professionalism from a gender perspective more broadly, become even more important in transitional and conflict situations in view of peace and security as gender issues, and the disproportionate impact of conflict on girls and women,” Sarah Macharia reminds the reader in her text (Chapter 2 in this volume). She also underlines the imperative for gender-aware journalistic professionalism springing “from three intersecting concerns: women's right to freedom of expression, gender-responsive media professional ethics and gender-responsive peace journalism.” For me, Sømme Hammer has complied with all these imperatives: the female prisoners were not free to choose silence – not even free to hide their hair. The reporter thus manifested gender-responsive media professional ethics by listening to an inner echo of a quality other than that expected. He broke with conventional codes of embedded war reporting, unlike his colleague who complied perfectly with the conventions expected by the minister of defence.

### Protection scenarios – whose protection?

In the real world, the prisoners are now victimised three times over: first by their relatives, then condemned as criminals and finally as potential traitors – photographed, identified and packaged to enable spectators to look at them and listen to their stories. Transforming some victims' testimonies into narratives fit for the Norwegian public has fashioned a protection scenario of testimony witnessing. This kind of protection scenario may illustrate some (un-)expected rhetorical complexities, re-affirming the self of the Western, neoliberal spectator rather than enabling a true and materially-based response to human rights from a perspective challenging dominant global power structures (see Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2014).

Among the rhetorical complexities of race, gender and power, it is not just a question of our refusal to recognise differences and thus a refusal of openness. Royster's question: “... when veils seem more like walls, who has the privilege of speaking?” ought indeed to be considered – over and over. The protection scenario is described by Lina Abirafeh (2009) and others as a crucial mistake and a symptom of Western 'othering'. The failure to recognise that many Afghan women's identities stem from

their relationships with family and community may be seen as symptomatic of the Western domestication (whether philanthropic, aggressive or both) of 'the other'. Because of the misogynistic and oppressive Afghan culture, the protection scenario was enabled. Because of the publication, the women are less protected.

Without a female minister, the doors to the female prisoners and their children would probably have been closed and the protection scenario would not have been published. Strøm-Erichsen was the hostess. She accepted being photographed weeping, the caring mother – perhaps with good intentions but, it seems, ignorant of her ignorance about Afghan tribal culture (see Duprée 2002) and simultaneously unable to consider herself as representing the world's most powerful military alliance, NATO. Media accountability to women, or professionalism from a gender perspective more broadly, also demands a professionalism among political power elites – in this case a liberal feminist Norwegian defence minister. The internalisation of good intentions may have rendered the minister and the reporter incapable of seeing possible tragic consequences for the prisoners and their children. Gender awareness is laden with paradoxes – in war reporting and on the ground in war zones.

To see cultures as "self-contained or autonomous without also noting the ways in which their traditions have been and continue to be shaped by Western interventions" is, according to Alison Jaggar, to omit important aspects of Western global dominance (Jaggar 2005: 50). Jaggar's use of the term cultural Western 'essentialism', the tendency to characterise whole cultures as internally homogeneous and cut off, is an essentialism present in the mindset of many, male and female, living in liberal democracies. The reporter's mindset is perhaps more important than the gender of the war reporter.

Injustice against poor women in poor countries may be attributed to traditional – and even misogynist – local culture, but to do so in order to obscure (thus implicitly legitimate) military occupation is more often than not representative of liberal democracies 'marketing' their philanthropy towards women-and-children. Representing a liberal feminism focused on incorporating women into existing male-dominated power structures and (market) liberalist ideology, most women belonging to the power elite facilitated the metamorphosis of the militaristic and masculine US-led NATO into a collective peacekeeper that can "save brown women from brown men". Sometimes, even embedded male journalists might be more trustworthy partners than women in power positions.

Today, 2016, the protection, security and liberation of Afghan women is out of sight – and so are the protection scenarios of Afghan women. The war has officially ended, and the mission (almost) accomplished. The Afghan women's anonymity seems to be secure and secured. Farayb, among the most secure provinces in Afghanistan before the Norwegians entered the territory, soon turned into a battlefield as the Taliban saw their interests threatened. My rhetorical question: Today, who is protected – and by whom?

Representatives of relevant institutions (ministries of defence and foreign affairs) and Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen have been contacted. So have the embedded journal-

ists. I have asked for informations about the prisoners and their children. No one was able to answer. More exactly, they didn't know what has happened to the prisoners. The officials claim that Norwegian 'engagement' in the Afghan province is over. The embedded journalist who produced the protection scenario has agreed (in multiple e-mails) to meet me, but we have not yet met. On one website I found some information: a new prison director has reinstalled 'traditional' rules – that is, stricter or more oppressive rules. Four of the eighteen women have been released, have returned to their families and are now living in an area more violent than before the Norwegian 'engagement' took place. To what extent the 'free' women are prisoners within their own families, is invisible – and of little or no interest, it seems.

The Western 'improving eye' perspective rarely leaves discursive room for the agency of 'the other' women. In the real world, the relation between protector and protected is often experienced as a relation between oppressors and nobody – no body – who is really protected. The colonising project, as being in the interests of (for the good of, promoting the welfare of) the colonised, reflects – as Uma Narayan (1997: 57) expressed it a few years before Operation Enduring Freedom began – the position which supposes that "only Westerners are capable of naming and challenging patriarchal atrocities committed against Third-World women". Today, most Afghan women are no better of than before Operation Enduring Freedom began. As no one seems to know anything about the Afghan women prisoners and their children, the particularity of this article may serve as an illustration – or a metaphor – of some generalities about contradictions in Western liberation scenarios. It may also illustrate that professional ethical practices and gender awareness depend on more than the gender of the reporter.

## Note

1. In one of Norway's most influential newspapers the minister was photographed by one of the embedded journalists. To avoid repeating any identification of the prisoners, I prefer not to identify the newspaper and the exact date of the report.

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## Key Factors and Challenges to Understanding Women's Roles in the Peace Process

Quhramaana Kakar

### Abstract

This article focuses on the socio-political participation of women in Afghanistan. It briefly sheds light on the victimisation of women by the media, while attempting to explain how the role of women has been perceived and evolved over time in different contexts given the misogynistic nature of the society. The study also involves the case study of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme.

Keywords: women, peace-building, participation, culture, misogyny

The international community, including the media, has largely perceived Afghan women as victims of violence and submissive beneficiaries of international aid. In reality, women in Afghanistan have been effective agents of change – both social and political – although most of this has not been reflected by the international media for various reasons. Women play a vital role in shaping the social and political context of Afghanistan, crucial for attaining a lasting peace. Whether in politics, the security sector, civil society or as human rights activists, Afghan women help pacify violence, often in a highly effective, sustainable way. Yet there is very little evidence in the media of the ongoing local and regional engagement of women in the peace process, including their formal roles as peace-builders (such as on provincial and central peace councils).

The UN Security Council Resolution for Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) adopts a universalist strategy: often problematic in application to concrete contexts. International frameworks and policies frequently fail owing to inflexibility and failure to understand the particular context. Mark A. Drumbl (2004: 105), discussing the rule of law for Afghan women, argues: “International lawyers should not force choices on disempowered local constituencies in which they must elect between local culture or international rights. This leads to essentialist identity politics.”

In the Afghan context, gender mainstreaming is particularly at odds with the interests and perspectives of many conservative rural women. This is especially trou-

blesome for the implementation of the peace process, because women at the local level are given little opportunity to shape the strategy. The international community often fails to reflect on the impact of the liberal, universal instruments aimed at supporting women's rights.

This chapter draws attention to the gender dynamics and changing roles of women in Afghan society. In order to understand women's position in society as whole, it sheds light on major socio-cultural structures. Finally, it explains the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP), a case study that highlights some of the challenges which women have faced, from representation to negotiations.

As a native of the most dynamic region in the country, Kandahar, my first-hand experience allows me a particular perspective on what it takes for most women in a war-torn, conservative society to contribute to social pacification. Empirical evidence is drawn from my work as gender advisor to the APRP under the High Peace Council; interviews with women peace builders; and my experience of the development, women's empowerment and leadership development sectors.

Given the tendency of Western politicians to use the mass media in underlining the necessity of 'liberating' Afghan women as part of the War on Terror, the focus on Afghan women's multiple identities, their strength and the means they use to survive in a misogynist culture may, it is hoped, bring forth what has, to a large extent, been invisible to most reporters – male or female.

## Victimisation of Afghan women by the media

Although the literature and broader media have noted a clear improvement in the lives of Afghan women over recent times, this only covers the progress made in the last fifteen years. Not much has been said about the situation which has faced Afghan women for much of the conflict-ridden last half-century. Moreover, Afghan women have tended to be portrayed merely in terms of victimisation; as a report by the Middle East Institute puts it, "there are plentiful accounts of oppressed women in Afghanistan in the international media, development reports, and academic literature" (Murray 2009).

The more adverse an incident involving a woman, the more media attention it receives. Chris Greer discusses the idea of a 'hierarchy of victimisation': "At one extreme, those who acquire the status of 'ideal victim' may attract massive levels of media attention, generate collective mourning on a near global scale, and generate significant change to social and criminal justice policy and practice" (Greer 2008). Yet has the media's portrayal of Afghan women as victims had any positive impact on them? Such is the sensationalised manner in which such stories are highlighted that whether this can help bring about any real change is highly debatable.

The famous story of Zakia and Ali, the two lovers who escaped death to live together, is not all that uncommon in Afghanistan. Certainly, publishing their story has brought it to the attention of Western human rights groups, but the consequences for Zakia,

Ali and their communities may well be adverse. In a conservative society, where the average man and woman do not even have the opportunity to fulfil their most basic needs, social change will take a very considerable time. Instead of covering their story in a simplistic way which suits Western audiences, it would surely be more beneficial in the long run for the media, human rights groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide more context and understanding of a deeply traditional society, in which culture and religion play a pivotal role in all aspects of everyday life.

Accordingly, this chapter seeks to begin the long process of remedying the problem by focusing on the *strengths* of Afghan women, rather than treating them as victims. Many Afghan women display huge strength and courage on a regular basis in challenging or even confronting outright hostile scenarios; such 'victims' can help bring about fundamental change. Yet the media generally ignores their potential for real agency. The recent case of Farkhunda, a girl who was beaten and burned to death in central Kabul, is one such example: Farkhunda wanted to help teach Afghans about various evils, raising awareness about sham mullahs who mislead the people in the name of God and religion. Yet very little is known to international audiences about the real causes behind her murder: media coverage simply sensationalised, simplified, and quickly moved on, ignoring any more detailed explanation. To put it another way: Afghan women have found themselves labelled as 'victims', but there has been no attempt to explain what causes this victimisation.

## Women and peace-building: theory and practice

The dominant understanding of conflict and peace-building depicts men as the central agents of violence and its cessation. In contrast, women are viewed as passive victims. These perspectives ignore how their living conditions worsen as a consequence of war and the ways in which they are able to harness creative strategies to change gender dynamics and the cycle of violence in Afghanistan. It is therefore important to question essentialist definitions of women.

More positive portrayals, which emphasise their nurturing maternal capacities associated with peace, are also problematic.

Certainly, some extraordinary men have changed the course of history with their peace making; likewise, a few belligerent women have made it to the top of the political ladder or, at the grassroots level, have taken the roles of suicide bombers or soldiers (Hunt & Posa 2001: 38).

There is a need to avoid conceptions of men that link masculinity to a predisposition towards warmongering. "These kinds of essentialist assumptions have been strongly criticised as limiting not only the agency of women, but also the possibilities for peace and the potential more generally for feminist theory and practice" (Elshtain 1987; Sylvester 1987; Tickner 1992: 59).

Cynthia Enloe (2014: 12) explains how men and women react to situations in ‘opposite’ but ‘complementary’ ways. Recognising only the role and actions of either men or women in addressing social and political problems is not reasonable unless done so critically in terms of the ultimate implications for individuals and communities.

Gender cannot be conceptualised separately from other identities. Anne McClintock (1995: 5), for example, notes that “gender comes into existence in and through the relation to race, class and sexuality – if in contradictory and conflictual ways”. In the case of Afghanistan, tribal and ethnic identities are also significant and may reinforce or undermine gender identity.

In line with the argument of Chandra Mohanty et al. (1991: 56) that “for too long women in developing countries have not been conceptualised as agents of their own destiny but as victims”, this chapter instead focuses on post-structuralist influenced feminist scholarship, especially that of Lene Hansen and Laura J. Shepherd, which emphasises the discursive construction of gendered subjects.

To conceive of gendered selfhood as discursively constructed is to view it as “existing only insofar as it is continually rearticulated and uncontested by competing discourses” (Hansen 2006: 6). In this way, gender is defined as systems of meaning and representation. Discourses are claimed to ‘fix’ self-understandings and interpretations of the world, and thus reproduce power relations (Shepherd 2008: 20-30), albeit always temporarily, and in incomplete ways. “This means we have to enquire into multiple and competing discourses about gender and security which articulate specific subjects, ascribe identities to these subjects and position them in relation to each other” (Shepherd 2008: 76).

In Afghanistan, ‘gender’ and associated strategies of gender mainstreaming are largely considered a Western imposition, often understood in combative terms of seeking to empower women *against* their male counterparts. Some feminist groups and experts have shaped the idea of gender in ways that generally mean only women are addressed. This may well be the trend in most developed countries too:

A series of contributions by feminists in the field of politics and political theory has focused on the ways in which women’s issues, concerns, and participation are excluded from the public political arena because of the division between the private and public spheres, on the one hand, and the language and politics of universal political rights, on the other (Oxford Index).

Afghan women have generally been perceived by Western scholarship as victims of violence and submissive beneficiaries of international aid. It is invariably forgotten that they play a vital role in shaping the social and political context of Afghanistan. That said, the majority simply strive to obtain basic services and to avoid and survive violence. Their experiences during long periods of continuous turmoil are more intricate and their roles more subtle than elaborated by the international community and national institutions. Rita Manchanda contends that:

Empirical evidence shows that women will not receive their fair share without deliberate planning of gender-sensitive relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. However, multi-donor frameworks for building peace in war-torn societies, at best, insert gender-sensitive language and ignore it at the field level (2005: 47).

## Women, peace and the problem of women as peace builders

Lack of awareness of life conditions at field level is also illustrated by the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the discrepancy between words and reality therein. UNSCR 1325 is often considered a landmark resolution: the first time the Security Council directly addressed the subject of women and armed conflict beyond a few passing references to them as victims or a 'vulnerable group' (Cohn 2004: 2). Carol Cohn defines UNSCR 1325 as "the product of a sophisticated feminist initiative – launched by NGOs and later picked up by women's advocates within the UN". A critical question here, though, is whether NGOs actually represent the grassroots, vulnerable locals and civil society.

UNSCR 1325 adopts a universalist strategy. This is often problematic in application to specific contexts. In Afghanistan, gender mainstreaming is particularly at odds with the interests and perspectives of many rural women. This is especially troublesome in the implementation of the APRP, because women at grassroots level are given little opportunity to shape strategy. In addition, women who do not embrace Western feminist perspectives on the integral connection between recognition of their rights and peace are essentially silenced. In consequence, local approaches to peace may contradict the principles of UNSCR 1325. Women who adopt local solutions find the Resolution highly naive regarding their perspective.

Nicola Pratt and Sophie Richter-Devroe (2011: 493) question the type of feminism which UNSCR 1325 represents, and its implications. They utilise Shepherd's argument concerning the marginalisation of issues (such as poverty) that undermine women's capacity for agency. This applies in many underdeveloped, war-torn societies, where women neither own nor control significant national resources. They further develop Shepherd's critique of the 'women, peace and security agenda' which equates women's agency with their capacity to act: warning that "this agency is both a rupture in the familiar representation of women-as-victim and an additional burden for (some) women to bear" (Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011: 494). This critique is extremely pertinent in the case of Afghanistan, where women lack the economic and social capacity to act on their own.

Women play a crucial role in bridging the social divide, by connecting communities and individuals. Swanee Hunt and Cristina Posa argue that bridging divides, even if unsuccessful, has value – in lessons learned and links to be built on later. "Local actors with crucial experience resolving conflicts, organising political movements, managing relief efforts, or working with military forces bring that experience into

ongoing peace processes” (Hunt and Posa 2001: 39). By bridging these divides, women change the narrative of peace building in Afghan society – where violence has long been considered a means of realising interests – instead turning the focus towards the attainment of peace and human rights.

Women apply particular methods in such circumstances; but international frameworks often do not reflect on these. Women who prioritise the cessation of conflict over the achievement of equality are silenced by UNSCR 1325. Sheri Lynn Gibbings (2011: 531) notes that the “re-gendering of gender is dependent upon women activists’ compliance with the universal and liberal principles upon which resolutions like UNSCR 1325 are based”.

However, the media provides little or no focus on the core issues of women as peace builders. Moreover, there is very little knowledge among Western audiences of local level engagement in the programme. The practices of women in their ordinary lives – often crucial to determining whether family members continue to fight alongside the insurgency or to choose peace – are ignored. This effectively edits out a central dimension of peace building, and the roles women play in it.

### The changing roles of women in Afghan society and peace building

The largely subordinate position of women in Afghan society is often explained as a consequence of religion, culture and tradition. However, a close examination of Afghan history shows that prior to the ascendancy of the Taliban, and indeed before the international intervention of 2001, women had rights, access to the public arena and higher levels of mobility than they currently possess – at least in urban areas (Hasan 2012).

The history of women in Afghanistan has not been presented systematically to the world. Seventy-five-year-old Sara Surkhabi, senator and member of the HPC, told me that:

Not recording or presenting the history of women’s roles in society, especially on issues of political and social change like war and peace building in Afghanistan is a deliberate act, and it proves the negative gender politics in this country, promoted by Afghans and foreigners throughout time.

Tribal practices have often targeted women as victims. For example, using women as bait for peace deals was widespread in the past; some tribes, particularly Pashtoons, still use women as tools for such deals in order to save their young men from being victimised in retribution. The custom of *baad* has been extremely cruel to women: young girls/women, irrespective of their age, are exchanged for the lives of their men. A large number of women are negatively affected by such practices.

Nevertheless, there are instances in which some women experience positive outcomes from their tribal identity and affiliation. In these cases, most accumulate power

from their tribal identities only when their husbands, fathers or other close male relatives, who hold power, die or are killed. A member of the HPC, whose husband had been a tribal elder and led *jihad* against the Soviets in Kunar province, replaced her late husband as the tribal leader. She has immense respect in her community owing to her association with her husband.

Discussing the impact of *pashtoonwali* (tribal codes of conduct widely practised in Afghanistan), Palwasha Kakar notes that “the segregation of genders does not necessarily result in the total disempowerment of women. In *pashtunwali*, women still have influence and access to specific power structures specifically within segregated, homo-socially ordered Pashtun communities” (2003: 12).

Although Afghanistan is an Islamic society, historically, religion has not dominated or replaced its cultural traditions: especially when it came to the positions, rights and roles of women. In order to strengthen cultural values and reduce the conflict between religion and culture, clerics interpret religion according to their need, maintaining control over their communities by shaping religious views in accordance with cultural practices, not defining them from a religious perspective. Clerics play a vital role in shaping the attitudes of Afghan people. They acquire their legitimacy from politicians, tribal leaders and ordinary people.

As a result of this tangled mix of religion and culture, women have been victims not only in peacetime but also at times of war and conflict. Huma Ahmed-Ghosh (2003: 3), commenting on the impact of local approaches on women in Afghanistan, notes that:

It has been especially harsh, since women's lives have often been used as the raw material with which to establish ethnic prominence. Tribal laws and sanctions have routinely taken precedence over Islamic and constitutional laws in deciding gender roles, especially through kinship hierarchies in the rural regions.

Culture and religion are vital in defining the roles of women in places such as Afghanistan. Lila Abu-Lughod (2002: 785) cites Hanna Papanek (1982), who described the *burqa* as a form of ‘portable seclusion’. Many regarded it as a liberating invention, because it enabled women to move out of segregated living spaces while still observing the basic moral requirements of separating and protecting them from unrelated men. Women's roles in such contexts frequently remain unrecognised.

Similarly, women's treatment and perceptions of their role depend on a range of religious understandings. Religious education is not available to everyone. Islam itself is subject to diverse interpretations, to the point whereby it is surprisingly difficult to accurately assert the extent of its impact upon the life and role of all Afghan women. There is very limited knowledge among international audiences regarding the difference of religious and cultural implications on women in Afghanistan.

## The misogynistic approach of Afghan society

Violence and discrimination against women has been part of Afghan society at different levels in different styles at different times. Discriminatory thinking from men regarding women and their roles has not changed much over time. Women are still objectified and their physical and social rights owned by fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. Hayat Alvi (2012) illustrated this as follows: “Jaleb Mubin Zarifi, a Northern Alliance member, is quoted on a National Public Radio (NPR) broadcast as saying, ‘Democracy is un-Islamic’, and immoral behaviour by women causes cancer and AIDS.” Attitudes like these increase pressure on women; as well as on ordinary Afghan men who may not necessarily be bigoted, but find it difficult to argue amid societal norms where the majority is conservative and resistant to change.

Women are still treated as objects in most of Afghan society. National laws discriminate against women on many issues. Only women are punished for moral crimes (for example, fleeing home in fear of abuse or being killed or compromised in family and tribal disputes); or find themselves forced to marry. Despite the Constitution supposedly granting equal rights to men and women, society is deeply misogynistic: even in terms of the formal system supported by a highly educated class and the international community.

The negative attitudes of Afghan men towards women also shape the role of women in various social and political aspects; in some cases including women against other women.

This is illustrated at both grassroots and institutional levels. Abuse of women and girls persists in villages and cities, from households to the workplace, keeping Afghan women from exercising choice at every level. The whole environment discourages many women from leaving the home and makes them servile – but at the same time, helps some to become stronger and more prominent (albeit via a level of sacrifice which men are not forced to make).

## The urban and rural divide and peace building

Broad, generalised references to ‘Afghan women’ in the media have led to the misconception that they somehow constitute a single homogeneous group. In reality, there are significant differences between urban/rural, educated/uneducated, rich/poor and different tribal/ethnic groups (Barakat & Wardel 2002: 910). The country is divided along socioeconomic lines and across rural and urban contexts. Maliha Zulfacar (2006: 28) notes that “the reality of a nomad woman differs from that of a village woman and both are different from an urban university graduate”.

In urban settings, women are not essentially bound by tribal identities; however, their families and political association shape their roles. Ahmed-Ghosh (2003: 1) contends: “For women in rural Afghanistan, control over their lives and gender roles

is determined by patriarchal kinship arrangements". A stark economic gap among people in general and women in particular has divided their interests and needs.

At least to some extent, the media have looked at rural and urban women, highlighting their specific problems and the assistance they receive. However, this does not amount to anything like a balanced analysis, particularly when it comes to the contributions of rural women. Such an analysis would involve understanding how women's roles have been influenced by security and changing social norms.

Case study: Women in the formation and structure of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP).

Initiated in 2010, the APRP is a central vehicle of the peace process, intended as a five-year strategy through which to achieve peace and stability in lieu of the withdrawal of international troops. The APRP is essentially a twin-track effort, aimed at reconciling the political elite of the Taliban and reintegrating foot soldiers. It attempts to forge a durable peace process between diverse actors, divided by tribal, ideological, regional and ethnic loyalties, under the pretext of democracy; but amid a scenario of ongoing conflict. Indeed, since 2007, the Taliban – thrown out of power by the US-led coalition in 2001 – have been gaining strength in their fight against the Afghan government and international community.

It is especially important to examine international interventions over gender mainstreaming policy which have emphasised numerical representation, to ask whether these have been effective, and to grasp the ways in which women's roles are understood by key actors in the process, and how this affects their agency.

The APRP presupposes the 'reintegration' of those Taliban who have renounced violence and agreed to accept the 2004 Constitution. Its language rejects enmity; instead, it invokes the 'common suffering' experienced by *all* Afghans as a consequence of war. Yet women generally conceptualise the social and political return of the Taliban in ways that differ from both the black-and-white distinctions of the international community and the holistic ethos of the peace process. Their perspectives are marginalised by the rhetoric and practice of the Programme.

After substantial lobbying, and as a consequence of pressure from international donors, women were allowed to participate in the consultative forerunner to the peace process: the National Consultative Peace Jirga (NCPJ), convened by President Karzai in June 2010. From the start, female representatives to the NCPJ were clear in expressing their sense of exclusion (Quie 2012) and wish for the recognition of women's rights as an integral component of the process. These representatives drafted detailed proposals for applying UNSCR 1325 (and subsequent resolutions), the Constitution, and elements of the Afghanistan New Beginnings Programme, in order to incorporate women.

International donors insisted on recorded consultations with women and human rights groups. In practice, the Joint Secretariat, which designed and implements the APRP, avoided this. Although meetings with the women were eventually convened, their recommendations were not disseminated, nor were they incorporated into the design (Quie 2012). International (and some domestic) actors pushed for seats for

women on the HPC. Nine women now sit on the seventy-member council: yet this does not automatically translate into support for the differing lived experiences of war which women in very different segments of society have had; nor recognition of their concerns regarding the accommodation of particularly hardline factions of the Taliban.

Women at the forefront of the peace process have experienced the repercussions of gender mainstreaming and consequences of their initial embrace of Western visions of feminism and women's rights most intensely. Anecdotal information gathered in my work as gender advisor to the APRP revealed an escalation in domestic violence experienced by women involved. My own records of discussions with HPC members between 2010 and 2011 indicate that female representatives engaged in under the radar negotiations with the Taliban consistently found that their efforts remained unrecognised or that credit for their achievements was taken by men. In this way, the numerical representation lobbied for by the international community lacked the intended impact.

There has been some token representation of women in the government and civil society. Women representatives are predominantly chosen by leading civil society networks, such as the Afghan Women's Network, and international development organisations; as well as by international embassies. Women participants in government are mainly chosen by the president, and recommended by ministers.

With the help of international actors, civil society representatives have been able to advocate for the protection of women's rights; but they are given little opportunity to speak at key conferences laying the groundwork for the APRP. The London Conference on Afghanistan in 2010, for example, focused on reconciliation with insurgent groups, but only one Afghan woman participated:

While the only official woman delegate in the Afghan mission to the London Conference pleaded that women's rights must not be sacrificed on the altar of security concerns, women's rights activists who had also travelled to London brought their own message (Kandiyoti 2010).

Women were initially ignored in the consultative dimension of the peace process. However, following heavy lobbying by Afghan civil society groups and their international allies (such as donor organisations and sections of embassies responsible for women's rights), women did manage to obtain 20 per cent representation in the National Consultative Peace Jirga announced by President Karzai following the London Conference.

Some male HPC and PPC members are also largely excluded from decision making: as a consequence of political affiliations with opposition groups, or differences based on ethnic, tribal or regional identities. A member of the HPC says: "We are trying to be involved in the peace process but in my opinion, most of the time we're not included in major discussions" (Arghandiwal 2012). Complicating matters still further, some members do not genuinely believe in a peace deal with the Taliban, and often create conflict with members who want it to succeed, as part of their aim of jeopardising the process. Again though, media often ignore the exclusion of men from the formal peace process, treating all women as victims instead.

Women on the HPC also find themselves under continual criticism from their fellow women in civil society and the international community. They are characterised as passive representatives of various political factions introduced by powerful members of the government. These critiques often surface during women's conferences and in research on the peace process and women's involvement (APRP archives, Women's Committee 2011, 2012); and official meetings between female members of the HPC and civil society organisations (APRP archives 2011-2). Criticisms are based on personal issues or accusations of lack of capacity for the major political challenges ahead, and are invariably made by those who simply do not appreciate how difficult it is to achieve even minimal levels of progress. A number of women on the HPC and PPCs are also criticised for lack of educational qualifications; but in most cases, these have not been a hindrance to the work they do at grassroots level.

The challenges that women face are often connected to specific phases of the programme. The APRP has three main stages: Social Outreach and Confidence Building, Demobilisation, and Consolidation of Peace (APRP Strategy 2010). The gender policy sections of APRP strategy on the mainstreaming of women emphasise their participation at *every* stage. The confidence building and reintegration stages involve transitional justice, where women and men at local level should be given an opportunity to decide who to make peace with. However, there has been no evidence of local women's inclusion in the critical process of transitional justice, despite it supposedly being "Afghan owned and Afghan led". In any case, a key difficulty for women who embrace Western perspectives is the lack of follow through on the part of international actors.

Legitimacy, then, rests on Afghan articulation of Afghan women's needs, but the generic term 'Afghans' clouds multiple differences in how peace is understood, how it should be pursued, and what role women should play in the process.

Gulhar Jalal, a female member of the HPC, believes women's roles in peace councils with traditional linkages to their community should be as significant and recognised as those of men. However, they are different because of the complex heterogeneity of Afghan society and the multiplicity of tribal, socioeconomic and cultural identities. Jalal therefore sees a need to avoid the generic homogenisation of women. Women who express the very different and often traditional needs of their communities "should not be criticised for being different to women in Kabul" (Interview with Jalal 2011).

Jalal's story is instructive. Kunar province is one of the most conservative parts of the country in terms of women's participation in the public sphere. Despite this, she is regarded as a 'living legend' for her courage and activism. Her comments highlight conflicts between Afghan women on how peace should be pursued and, more fundamentally, the intrinsic meaning of 'peace' for women in different segments of society.

The efforts of women such as Hawa Alam Nooristani, another HPC member and key negotiator with groups of insurgents, who uses her tribal affiliation and links in order to engage them, also remain unrecognised. These included the Women's Committee meeting with female members of an armed opposition group in the APRP office in Kabul, during which women on both sides requested that it was not publicised for

security reasons. Female opposition members expressed similar concerns, and agreed to act as mediators between their male members and the APRP (meeting notes: APRP archives 2011). Very little is known about the efforts and suffering of women in the insurgent families and their role in the insurgency.

Some level of women's participation and their formal engagement in the peace process at grassroots and national level is recognised, but very little is done to address specific constraints and limitations to their participation. Highlighting their success stories will help people learn from them and rightly direct support to them. Some observers have also begun to recognise women's roles in formal and informal peace efforts. Female HPC members working with local NGOs to facilitate the peace process say they engage in discreet dialogue or 'silent advocacy' (Safi 2012) with women in insurgent households: to encourage their support for the APRP.

Confirming and recognising the number of women negotiators in countries like Afghanistan has been a challenge for national and international institutions. For instance, a report by UN Women (2012: 2) states: "Our review of a sample of thirty-one major peace processes since 1992 shows that women represent a strikingly low number of negotiators, and that there has been little appreciable increase since the passage of Resolution 1325." In the case of Afghanistan, none of the major monitors of the peace processes mentions women's success stories in negotiations with insurgent groups at local level or in national negotiations. Their invisibility is connected to personal security and entrenched patriarchal practices, whereby men seek to take credit for the achievements of women.

Instead, most of the media reports we read concern the *absence* of women from peace negotiations. One such report, for example, states: "Afghan women are excluded from efforts to negotiate peace with the Taliban, and hard-won rights could be bargained away unless more is done to include them in the process" (Donati 2014).

Sari Kouvo's (2008) reference to international approaches towards women's rights in Afghanistan as a "quick and dirty approach" fits extremely well here. According to Najia Ziware, HPC member, "much work remains for society to accept and create the necessary space to engage women's participation in the peace process" (Safi 2012).

## Conclusion

The limited focus on women's contributions as peace builders and change agents at the local level has resulted in the widespread generalisation and belief that women are passive in peace building. There is an absolute need to identify the strengths of women at the grassroots level, and their stories of heroism in leading their communities to contribute to conflict resolution and peace making. The media can and do play a vital role in bridging the knowledge gap among the general public and policymakers.

Patriarchy remains one of the most important reasons why women with lives full of accomplishments go unrecognised; with men stealing the credit for female peace-

building successes at the local level: such as through making contacts with armed insurgents in their communities and families.

We have also identified how neo-colonial webs of power have overshadowed the existing role of women in Afghanistan. Future research should reflect on the dominant patterns outlined here, as well as explore how flawed international agendas obsessed with Western, liberal approaches have ended up dragging women in directions not conducive to their aspirations or even more basic goals.

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## Is Peace a Smiling Woman?

### *Femininities and Masculinities in Conflict and Peace Coverage*

Kristin Skare Orgeret

#### Abstract

The chapter studies how concepts of gender, war and peace are understood and applied in the coverage of international strategies for conflict and peace in examples from Norwegian newspapers. The theoretical backdrop is found in discussions on traditional and more recent forms of feminism and in some of their inherent contradictions.

Keywords: gender roles, conflict and peace reporting, feminism studies, Norwegian newspapers

This chapter aspires to contribute to the growing body of academic work in the field of gender perspectives within international relations and conflict studies. Using examples from a selection of four Norwegian newspapers in their paper versions – *Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende*, *Dagsavisen* and *Klassekampen* – it looks at how gender is portrayed in peace-building efforts in relation to wars around the world. Crucial questions are connected to how concepts of gender, war and peace are understood and applied in the coverage of international strategies for conflict and for peace. The theoretical backdrop is found in discussions on feminism and in some of their inherent contradictions. The chapter sets out to combine different perspectives to engage with questions of how to conceptualise the multiple and simultaneous roles of gender – femininities and masculinities – in reporting conflict and peace initiatives; of the challenges and opportunities in the press's equations between gender roles and war and peace; and of which journalistic approaches have the potential for developing encompassing representations of gender and transformation towards sustainable peaceful solutions to conflict.

The methodology is based on a content analysis of a selection of the four above-mentioned newspapers from 1 January 2013 to 30 September 2015. A quantitative analysis will be carried out in order to find some trends related to gender and journalistic coverage of war and peace building, looking into how much coverage is given to male and to female participation. Using the findings from the quantitative analysis

as a backdrop, a qualitative analysis of the news stories will be undertaken, to situate some of the articles within a combination of some key feminism perspectives. The approach is explorative and the articles serve primarily as illustrations and examples of different approaches to gender, war and peace. To provide a broader context for the discussion, the chapter also includes input from an interview with the Ugandan award-winning journalist Barbara Among, who has covered war and conflicts extensively in her own country. These quotes are considered important as contextual information to supplement and extend the knowledge from the analysis of the newspapers, as both a way of including the voice of an experienced reporter and of getting perspectives on reporting conflict and gender which don't necessarily originate from the northern hemisphere. A leading hypothesis for the chapter is that different perspectives on gender and peace processes find resonance within different scholarly traditions of feminism. The chapter therefore starts with an introductory presentation of some predominant understandings of feminism.

### Feminism approaches

Feminism has been described as one of the most powerful struggles for social justice in the world (hooks 2000). There are, today, many different variants of feminism associated with a variety of philosophical and political outlooks (see, for example, Rosser 2005). This chapter discusses some important approaches and their inherent dilemmas. It is inspired by intersectionality and by exploring the intersections between gender and geographic/cultural belonging, and by conflict and peace. The starting point for the discussions is the distinction between sex and gender (the former to a large degree a 'natural' categorisation, the latter primarily social) as, for instance, proposed by Zillah Eisenstein (1999: 36-41), so that although the biological specificities of male and female bodies may be asserted in all their multiple forms, it is the notions of gender and gender differences that will be discussed here.

Historically, equality feminism focused on the basic similarities between men and women, or, rather that individual differences are larger *within* the different gender groups than between them. Inspired by thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir (1949-2002), equality feminists argued that whereas women and men have basic biological differences of anatomy and frame, on a psychological level the use of rationality and reason is androgynous. For 'equality feminists', men and women are equal in terms of their ability to reason, achieve goals and prosper in both work and domestic life. 'Difference feminism', on the other hand stressed the inherent differences between men and women, and rejected the more androgynous view of human nature as emphasised in equality feminism. Difference feminists would argue that there are fundamental, biological differences between men and women, and that women have particular nurturing virtues such as empathy, patience and concern and are inherently more kind, gentle and peaceful (see, for example, Gilligan 1982).

More recently, scholars such as Nancy Fraser (2014) and Andi Zeisler (2016) have shown how gender equality may also allow for multiple conflicting interpretations. In particular, Fraser's critical approach to liberal feminism shows how the movement for women's rights and liberation has increasingly become closely intertwined with what she sees as neoliberal strategies for reshaping society in the image of the marketplace (2014). The neoliberal project seeks to undo past collective gains, which limited labour exploitation and maintained public goods, instead dividing people into vendors and consumers. In such a project, feminism would be expressed individualistically, and the focus on social solidarity is distorted. In the words of Zeisler (2016), "the revolution has become privatised" and feminists today are all about the right to make individual choices – and are totally estranged from the original objectives of feminism, which meant collective action to change entire systems. Several scholars agree that feminists' objectives have been 'co-opted' by other agendas, as gender is used as a technocratic tool and is thus stripped of its original critical content (Squires 2005; Whitworth 2004). Fraser (2014) and Zeisler (2016) show how gender concepts can easily be co-opted and combined with hegemonic discourses (including hegemonic war rhetoric) and used in ways not envisaged by those who first expressed them. Berit von der Lippe and Kirsti Stuvøy (2013) clarify, for instance, how the demand for female representation in international peace negotiations often lacks reflection on global power structures and how good intentions for gender equality can easily be co-opted into justification for war.

The liberal feminism approach is criticised by the postcolonial feminists as well, as they show how what they label 'imperialist feminism' was born in the nineteenth century in the context of European colonialism. It was based on the appropriation of women's rights in the service of empire, and has taken new forms and presented new agents of imperialist feminism in the last years (Kumar 2014). Deepa Kumar shows how the immediate context for a renaissance of imperialist feminism in the US is the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan. Borrowing a trope from Britain in India and Egypt, and France in Algeria, the US argued that it was going to 'liberate Afghan women.' Imperialism became even more interconnected with empire in the Obama era, Kumar argues and shows how Amnesty, through the voices of powerful women, such as Madeline Albright, provided imperialist feminist justifications for war (2014). From this perspective, feminism has been accused of being a largely Western product with a tendency to forget the need to focus on multiple forms of oppression, race and gender in particular (Anzaldúa 1990; hooks 2000). Postcolonial feminism has argued that by using the term 'woman' as a universal group, women are defined only by their gender and not by social class, ethnicity or sexual preference (hooks 2000; Narayan 1997). As several postcolonial feminists have argued, a historical weakness of liberal/imperialist feminism in the West has been its racist, patronising attitude towards women of colour who have been seen less as allies and agents and more as victims in need of rescue.

## Peace journalism

Peace journalism stems from the work of Johan Galtung (2002) and seeks to counter the established journalistic practices of war journalism. Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick describe peace journalism as the process in which journalists make choices about what to report and how to report it, which “create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value the non-violent, developmental responses to conflict” (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005: 5). Peace journalism is supposed to be an alternative journalistic programme where the idea is “to escape from the war propaganda trap of symbolically constructing armed conflicts as polarised, black and white, zero-sum games” (Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2008: 13). Peace journalism, as opposed to the established practices of war journalism, demands the contextualisation of a conflict. It suggests that the reporter should refrain from mere event coverage of violence and should delve deep into the root causes to find possible peaceful long-term resolutions. An important task within the peace journalism model is to report in relation to the context and historical issues in the conflict area, identifying “its history, recent causes and internal composition” (Francis, in Lynch 2007: 8). This indeed echoes much of the postcolonial feminist writing, which asks us to be aware of the tension between the universality of rights and the need not to erase the socioeconomic and political context of the living realities of women and men around the world.

A central argument in this chapter is that it is possible to connect perspectives from the school of postcolonial feminism to the theoretical field of ‘peace journalism’, as both perspectives are concerned with getting more voices and perspectives heard. As power structures based on gender, race, ethnicity, political orientation, empire, class and the like do not function independently of each another but must be understood together, there is a need – on one hand – to embed gender processes into specific historical, cultural and economic/political contexts, without – on the other hand – exaggerating the emphasis on ‘voice’, ‘agency’ or ‘location’ in such a manner that it reduces patriarchy merely to questions of culture and tradition. This chapter, hence, proposes to bring some of the differences and paradoxes of feminist epistemologies into the reading of the newspaper texts, in order, hopefully, to further develop the discussions about gender, peace and conflict. Before taking that on, however, we will have a closer look into the journalistic material that we are to discuss.

## Journalism a cultural prerequisite for social change – selecting Norwegian newspapers

Journalism may influence the way a society thinks about the world, the way each culture perceives itself and its surroundings, and the way people relate to one another and to society at large. Journalism plays a part in shaping the way in which core societal concepts such as ‘men’ and ‘women’ are understood and used. Journalism therefore

functions as a cultural prerequisite for societal change at large, and for the dissemination and communication of ideas of gender as well as of conflict and peace. Studies show how the representation of gender in news is often associated with relations of domination and subordination: news reports of violence of gender tend to represent women as victims – associated with their lack of power – or, on the contrary, as those responsible for the violence of which they are victims. Often, aggressors are not part of news reports at all. However, journalism and the professional orientations of journalists, the conditions and limitations under which they operate, may vary from one part of the world to another as the Worlds of Journalism study indicates (<http://www.worldsofjournalism.org/>).

In Daniel Hallin's and Paolo Mancini's (2004) study of European media systems, Norway is labelled 'democratic corporatist', characterised by "a high level of political parallelism" and "journalistic professionalisation" (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 145). The four newspapers analysed here have been selected on the basis of their geographical location and readership profile – not so much for a comparative perspective as for a broad selection of articles to study in light of the present focus of research. *Aftenposten* is Norway's largest newspaper, based in Oslo and owned by Media Norge and Schibsted, and so is *Bergens Tidende*, Norway's largest newspaper outside Oslo. *Klassekampen*, published in Oslo, styles itself as "the daily left-wing newspaper" and is published in Oslo, *Dagsavisen* is also published in Oslo: it was the former organ of the Norwegian Labour Party and is now fully independent although the relationship between the political parties and the media remains interesting in Norway (see Ottosen et al. 2013).

### Selecting relevant articles

As Roy Krøvel (2016) shows, over the last twenty-five years Norway has been engaged in various peace processes around the world, normally in the role of a 'facilitator' or 'neutral mediator'. As a result, Norwegian foreign diplomacy has been credited with a number of international successes and Norwegian media have not remained unaffected by these activities. The role of the Norwegian "regime of goodness" (Tvedt 2006) and the disputes around the concept, is not in particular the focus of this chapter, but nevertheless constitutes part of a broader context for the selected articles. An interesting aspect when selecting key words for choosing relevant articles in the newspapers, is the use of the concepts 'war' and 'peace' in Norwegian political discourse.

Norwegian politicians have been reluctant to label Norway's participation, for instance in NATO's military operation in Libya, a war, even though Norway participated actively in the bombing, and preferred to present 'humanitarian' arguments as justifications for the intervention (see Ottosen et al. 2013). Hence, the differences between 'peace actions' and 'war actions' may be difficult to grasp when based on key words for selecting newspaper articles. As a result, a list of similar key words covering

both war and peace discourses was used as a basis for selecting the articles. The aim of the study is not to present an overview of all such articles published during the selected period, but, rather, to provide a sound basis for reflection on how gender is portrayed in Norwegian newspapers in relation to war and in peace-building efforts around the world.

### A few quantitative findings

For the coverage of war and peace building, it turns out that adding the keyword “man” or ‘men’ results in significantly more articles than adding ‘woman’ or ‘women’. For example, during the period in focus, ‘peace process’ plus ‘woman/women’ received twelve hits in the selected four newspapers, whereas ‘peace process’ plus ‘man/men’ received eighteen hits. ‘Bombing’ plus ‘man/men’ received 103 hits and ‘bombing’ plus ‘woman/women’ received 74 hits. ‘Peace’ plus ‘man/men’ received 1483 hits and ‘peace’ plus ‘woman/women’ received 992. When a broad keyword such as ‘peace’ or ‘war’ is used, there are, of course, an important number of articles which are not directly relevant for the focus of this research project (for instance, articles about sport and so on). Some 150 articles, explicitly relating to processes of war and peace, were selected, and from this material some articles and opinion pieces will be further discussed below.

The fact that ‘man’ and ‘men’ were explicitly mentioned in more articles than ‘woman’ and ‘women’ in combination with the entire list of keywords, echoes the findings of Eide and Orgeret (GMMP 2010 and 2015 ) that women appear in approximately one-third of the news stories in Norwegian media and men in two-thirds. Internationally, women’s visibility in the news media is even smaller – only around one-quarter of those heard, spoken of or read about in the news are women (GMMP 2010 and 2015). For expert sources, the gap is even more prominent: around 80 per cent are men and 20 per cent women, globally and in Norway.

When looking more closely into the articles it becomes clear that when the physical sex of the actors of the stories is not explicitly stated, the implied norm is that ‘people’ are male. Examples are: ‘insurgents’, ‘militarists’, ‘commandants’, ‘commanders’, ‘attackers’, ‘warriors’ and so on. The norm is male, if women are involved, the prefix ‘female’ or ‘women’ seems necessary. Another distinct finding is that gender is not (or is rarely) discussed as an issue in the majority of news stories on conflict, war and peace processes, where men are dominant actors. When the focus is on women, however, the articles are, in general, much more gender aware. Most of the articles focused on women will also be explicitly concerned about gender roles, or on what is considered typically or untypically feminine.

The article ‘Rather war than peace’ (*Bergens Tidende* 10 April 2013) is a typical example of an article which presents a totally male focus in a ‘normalised’ way. Accompanying the lengthy article (with numerous male sources), is an image of a Kurdish

woman taking care of flowers on one of the graves of the 5000 Kurds killed in gas attacks in Halabja in Northern Iraq in 1988. The sole woman represents the soft, caring and concerned side of society – a woman without a name.

Gender is a most interesting parameter for inclusion in discussions of war and conflict situations. It is well-documented that women and children suffer terribly in war. The dangers of war go far beyond the violence of combat. In situations of armed conflict, women suffer some of the greatest health and social inequities in the world. Such perspectives, including how women in war-torn societies face sexual violence, sometimes applied systematically to achieve military or political objectives, are quite well covered in the newspapers analysed.

### Qualitative analysis – reading the newspaper stories with a combination of feminist approaches

Below, I suggest discussing some of the newspaper articles in light of some of the main feminist approaches. In some perspectives the power relation between the genders receives the most attention; in others the global power relationships are predominant. The main point here is to show some tendencies and paradoxes concerning gender and conflict reporting, rather than to categorise all newspaper articles strictly.

#### *Newspaper stories combining aspects of liberal feminism with difference feminism*

In the selected newspapers, substantial attention is given to how women and children suffer the most in times of crisis and war. South Sudan is described as one of the world's most dangerous places for women (*Aftenposten* 19 May 2014). A number of articles focus on how women and girls in conflict areas are also victims of extended gender violence and rape (for example, *Bergens Tidende* 22 July 2013, *A Magasinet* 30.5.2014, *Dagsavisen* 18.5.2015, *Klassekampen* 24 July 2015). In some of these articles, the women are depicted as powerless sufferers and there is an implicit suggestion (and sometimes even an explicit statement) that the women need help from (masculine) forces outside their own society – for instance against Boko Haram or ISIL.

Although not very frequent, and indirectly rather than directly, there are some articles in the selected material which echo Abu-Lughod's description of how the imperial discourse in its present-day form is often based on the construction of a misogynistic "Muslim world" that must be civilised by a liberal enlightened West. Studies of imperialist feminism have repeatedly pointed out that the Orientalist construction of Islam as barbaric and misogynist is part of pro-war propaganda, a process entitled the 'saving Muslim women' trap (Abu-Lughod 2013).

*Newspaper stories combining aspects of liberal feminism  
with equality feminism*

Significant scholarly focus has been given to the problematic of feminist aims taken up and co-opted in ways that absorb the meanings of the original concepts to fit them into the prevailing political priorities (for example, Lippe 2012; Fraser 2014; Kumar 2014). We recognise this way of argumentation in the manner that gender equality in the Norwegian army is used as a rhetorical tool to legitimise actions of war. This may be labelled ‘Western cultural essentialism’ in the words of Alison Jaggar (2005: 50) or a ‘feminist war rhetoric’, in the words of Berit von der Lippe (2012: 32), as it combines a gender equality approach (for Western women) with an imperialist approach that sees cultures as internally homogenous and sees ‘the West’ as free and fair, and ‘the South’ as the opposite. That the action to include more women in Norwegian army is seen as gender equality, is stressed by Brigadier Frode Kristoffersen in an interview (*Aftenposten* 24 August 2015); further implications of participation in war is, however, not mentioned, and the article leaves the impression of war journalism rather than of peace journalism. This may also be seen as an example of what Nancy Fraser (2014) describes as the co-option process, the co-opted concept of gender equality is not ejected, but an additional implicit war rhetoric has been introduced and this rhetoric nurtures the feminist concept in a totally different manner from the way it was first formulated. As such, co-option is a useful means of containing and maintaining large areas of silences. It is a practice that both absorbs and neutralises the meaning of the original concept of equality. Pierre Bourdieu’s understanding of the concept ‘doxa’ is relevant here. According to Bourdieu (1984), doxa indicates “thoughts which are thought through”. Bourdieu’s point is that in any society there are topics never questioned because someone wants to present ‘something’ – in many cases the most important aspects of, and control of, societal structures – as something given and natural.

Liberal feminist perspectives have routinely viewed women’s participation in the military as positive. Typical of this perspective in the articles is that they often talk about peace making instead of violence or war, and in some cases they even use gender equality to mobilise support for war. This is what Leila Ahmed (1992) has called ‘colonial feminism’. It may combine the idea of the liberation of Norwegian women, combined with the protection (or victimisation) of oriental women – for instance in the Middle East.

An interesting genre in the selection of articles, is the portrait interview with persons who play an important role in processes connected to conflict, war and peace internationally. In the selected newspaper articles most of these persons are Norwegians. In the interview with Lindis Hurum of Doctors without Borders (*Aftenposten* 9 September 2015), gender is not the main issue; the interview is mostly about Hurum’s remarkable experiences working in West Africa during the Ebola crisis, and about her engagement in humanitarian issues. Only in the introduction to the article is it stated that Hurum received a prize for being “the most courageous woman of

the year” in 2014. Apparently it is Hurum herself who recounts that “many ask me whether it is because I don’t have a husband and children that I live this life. Perhaps it is the other way around.” If there was a question that initiated this answer, it is not reflected in the article.

From the analysis of the newspapers, it is clear that women have to ‘defend’ their choice if they are single or without children more frequently than men. Women in important positions are also asked to justify their choices if they do have a family and still travel to work in conflict zones. “I feel I have sacrificed a lot in relation to family and friends, at the same time I am most grateful for the life I have lived and the jobs I have had,” says Elisabeth Rasmusson to *Aftenposten* when she is elected “the most important Norwegian internationally” (11 April 2014). Rasmusson is UN’s World Food Programme’s assistant executive director in Rome. The article emphasises that she is married without children. Studies of the portrayal of gender in news show that there is a four times higher probability that a woman’s family status is mentioned than that of a man (GMMP 2010, 2015).

In the portrait interviews, gender equality is often equated with Norway as a Western liberal democracy, and the agency of foreign women is manifestly absent. Many of the articles, which fit into the combination of liberal feminism and equality feminism, are based on an implicit presumption that the women’s movement in Norway successfully achieved its goals long ago and that the fight for equal gender rights belongs to the past. Here, gender concepts are not just neutralised or absorbed, but may in fact also work against mobilisation for real changes. It is difficult to mobilise for equal rights if there is consensus that they are already there. However, several recent studies show that even in Norway there is still a long way to go to obtain gender equality.

Even though the women portrayed represent (Norwegian) gender equality, in several cases we see signs of this being a normative contradiction in terms; what is *different* is portrayed as *normal*, whereas the fact that the cases do *not* represent the norm is exactly what legitimates the story’s journalistic angle (see, for example, Kjos Fonn et al. 2012). An example of this in the analysed newspaper material may be Major General Kristin Lund, the first female leader of the UN peace-keeping forces (UNFICYP). Lund is interviewed twice, in two different newspapers, during the period of analysis (*Dagsavisen* 9 August 2014 and *Aftenposten* 16 May 2015). In terms of gender representation the two interviews are fundamentally different, and it is interesting that both reporters are female. The *Aftenposten* story includes interviews with both the special advisor of the secretary-general on *Cyprus*, Espen Barth Eide, and Major General Kristin Lund. There is nothing in this story to stress that the two important UN persons are of different genders. Barth Eide is portrayed as a caring person paying a lot of attention to little details, such as arranging “silver-coloured drinking cups” in preparation for a peace dinner between the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots whereas the major general takes a more classically masculine (top-down) distance to the ‘feminine’ preoccupation with table decorations, as she oversees from the side.

The *Dagsavisen* interview with Major General Lund (9 August 2014) is radically different. Here, the fact that the leader of the UN peacekeeping forces is a woman, is the leitmotif throughout the interview and stressed in virtually all the reporter's questions. Among several inquiries which seem to resonate with the historical 'difference feminism' way of thinking, Lund is asked about "instances in which men are better leaders than women", about "being the first woman" in a number of positions in the army, and whether she has "any specific tools she uses when operating in a male-dominated field". At the same time, the reporter stresses how *tough* Lund is and always has been. "She was beating up the boys in her class from the very first day at school", and how "after that several Norwegian men were to feel beaten by Kristin Lund". Lund herself seems more careful to differentiate biological and cultural gender differences, as she describes how being a woman may be an advantage when operating in highly gender segregated cultures: "When you are a woman, you always reach 100 per cent of the population. This is not always the case for my male colleagues".

It is interesting that the reporter sees the need to include a confirmation from the Norwegian Defence Ministry that Lund was chosen "due to relevant experience, competence and that she performed best during the interviews." It should be obvious that a UNFICYP leader is appointed for achievement and competence. However, in this interview it is also stressed that the UN secretary general, Ban Ki Moon, stated in Lund's inauguration speech that, "the best leaders are often women". It is difficult to imagine a similar interview with a high ranking male UN leader stressing the need to justify the choice of the candidate. The new UNFICYP leader, however, rejects the reporter's somewhat essentialist assumptions, that there exist some "specific traits of a female leader". Instead, Lund emphasises the problematic aspects related to the fact that women in the global South "are often *seen* as victims, not as a resource", once again stressing the cultural rather than the biological differences.

That being a (foreign) woman in a culture defined by gender segregation may be an advantage is echoed by many of the female sources in the selected material, such as Afghan human rights activist Horia Mosadiq: "As a female researcher I am privileged: men tell me the stories they never dared to tell to anybody, not even to their wives. In addition, I have access to the women's Afghan human rights activity (*Klassekampen* 25 March 2015).

It is remarkable that from the portraits of women in important positions linked to war, conflict and peace resolutions, there are not many signs of the peaceful, mild and smiling woman. Rather, the findings here resonate with Lippe and Stuvøy's (2013) assertions that Gayatri Spivak's catchphrase "white men protecting brown women from brown men" has now become "white women and white men protecting brown women from brown men". When it comes to obtaining gender equality, women in other cultures are considered to need 'our' help – the agency of women in the global South is manifestly absent in the selection of newspaper stories.

*Newspaper stories combining postcolonial feminism  
with difference feminism*

In the newspaper articles analysed there are also a few interesting examples of how white women could need some protection from white men. Referring to UN statistics, that every third woman in the world is victim of sexual or other kinds of violence during her lifetime, an article (*Bergens Tidende*, 8 March 2015) stresses that Norway is not able to guarantee women and children a life without violence. In Norway, the newspaper article reminds us, 800 women and children live at secret addresses because of a violent ex-partner. Such articles illustrate that the liberal/imperial paradigm's simplistic division between (underdeveloped) violent societies in the South and (developed) peaceful societies in the North is not valid. In these articles we find examples of a more nuanced, or even radically different approach from the liberal/imperialist paradigm's tendency to equate countries in the global South with violence and the suppression of women's agency. These articles reject the simplistic manner of describing women in the South as being in need of help from (men or women from) the North.

However, in terms of gender the articles found here are more essentialist. Some articles emphasise that, given the opportunity, women will be 'much more hard-working' than their male counterparts. Siri Thorkildsen from the Norwegian NGO, Strømmestiftelsen repeats a common cliché which stresses the inherent differences between men and women: "If you give a dollar to a man, you feed one person. If you give a dollar to a woman you feed an entire family" (*Dagsavisen* 12 August 2015).

What is specifically "feminine" is explicitly referred to in several articles, such as in the interview with Michelle Bachelet, then director of UN Women, who states in *Dagsavisen* that "women are more peaceful" (15 October 2014), strongly echoing the difference feminism tradition and using the differences as a spur for change to more equality. Quite a few of the articles belong to this category in that they easily portray women (in both the South and the North) as guided by pacifism and concern for others, and that this is an exclusively feminine attribute. It is within such discourses that the title of this chapter – the question whether 'peace is a smiling woman' – finds its *raison d'être*.

On the other hand, little is said about masculinity in the analysed articles. One of the few voices which does mention and describe masculinity, is that of Torild Skard in an op.ed. in *Klassekampen* (12 January 2015), where she argues that "even if warfare and the army is rendered harmless, the military industry is not an ordinary place of work". Here, Skard is unpacking some of the co-option processes that neutralise the meaning of the original concept of equality to fit into prevailing political priorities about war. This is a good example of peace journalism too, in the way that Skard shows that developments other than the military are possible. At the same time, in her description of the army ("One is to learn violence and how to kill, in contrast to women's upbringing in giving life") she seems situated within a rather essentialist approach to what women and men are. She goes on to say that it is argued that the army gets "better" with more

women, but that it will take a lot to change the “violent masculinity” (*Klassekampen* 12 January 2015). Both Bachelet and Skard are using rather essentialist gender roles in their efforts to bring more women into decision-making processes and create more equality – however, Skard does not claim that the difference is innate but, rather, links it to culture and simultaneously points in a peaceful direction.

Implicit in some of these discourses of women as victims or as caring and hardworking, is the image of men as violent, uncaring and lazy. This approach recognises bias, for instance in journalism in general and war coverage in particular, by accentuating what has been left out of feminine perspectives – sometimes expressed as ‘women’s ways of knowing’. The articles that have traits of both postcolonial *and* difference feminism traditions focus on women’s ‘natural’ kindness, nurturing, pacifism and concern for others – hence that women *are* essentially different from men, but equal in value.

The newspapers’ cultural sections, covering artistic expressions of war and peace, also allow for gender stereotypes to thrive. An article describes an art exhibition, which “stresses the female expressions” where “Men spread death. Women get everything to grow” (*Bergens Tidende* 12 June 2015). However, there are a few articles that expose and challenge such a traditional view, such as the one in *Klassekampen* (15 June 2015), which argues that when female artists use violence in their work there are no rules other than those for male artists.

### *Newspaper stories combining postcolonial feminism with equality feminism*

Combining the perspectives of postcolonial feminism with equality feminism may involve an anti-essentialist approach against seeing culture as internally homogenous *and* against biological determinism. Although some cultures are definitely less gender equal and less gender sensitive than others, this approach would be careful not to describe entire groups of people as without agency or as inherently violent or peaceful.

As men predominate across the spectrum of violence worldwide, and there are numerous examples of how constructions of masculinity and femininity tend to normalise or naturalise violence against women (Gilani 2008; Moghadam 2005), essentialists will argue that men are inherently more aggressive than women. However, cross-cultural studies of masculinities reveal a diversity that is impossible to reconcile in any simple manner with a biologically fixed pattern of masculinity (see, for example, Connell 2000). We must therefore also scrutinise social masculinities for the causes of gendered violence. Furthermore, to fully open up for a non-essentialist way of understanding gender and violence, it must be possible to admit that women are also capable of committing violence and horrific acts – and there are plenty of such examples in recent history of conflict, such as female warders abusing prisoners in Abu Ghraib, or in the example in the analysed material, in which the Norwegian journalist Erling Borgen reminds us of how female torturers at Guantanamo also abused the male prisoners sexually (*Dagsavisen* 23 February 2015).

In *Dagsavisen* (16 March 2015) the fact is stressed that among the Westerners who have left Europe to support ISIL, around 550 are women. Compared to most of the analysed material, this article is quite exceptional in its openness about women as violent actors. According to the French secret service, the article states, the wife of Amedy Coulibaly, Hayat Boumeddiene, who killed four hostages and a policewoman in the January 2015 terror in Paris, is even more extreme than her husband and is now probably in Syria where she recruits more girls and women to ISIL. Journalist Heidi Skjeseth put it this way:

We are not used to talking about women who fight in war. Or about women as extremists. But they are active, conscious and many are as ‘trigger happy’ as their male adversaries (*Dagsavisen* 16 March 2015).

This confirms earlier research, which has stressed how the focus on women as either victims or peace makers often involves neglecting their contribution to violence and the possibility of their expressing different types of agency (see, for example, Wilcox 2010). An article in *Aftenposten* (11 May 2015) is one of the few to open up such a perspective: “Women who support the Islamic state are not oppressed and do not lack courage. They find it difficult to live in Europe and wish for the purposeful life that they believe IS can give them.” There are several voices in the analysed news material which focus on how women should be seen as agents themselves. In an interview with *Aftenposten* (3 August 2013), Anita Pratap said: “We can support and assist women in other countries, but they have to go through the struggle themselves.”

Within this anti-imperialist equality feminism approach, women in the global South are also provided with agency and courage, such as in the article in *Aftenposten* (25 January 2015) interviewing Samira, a young Yezidi girl. Samira was kept as a sexual slave by IS, but managed to escape, and showed ingenuity and courage. In *Klassekampen* (13 May 2015) we learn how the peace negotiator Luz Mendez, has been fighting against sexual violence on women in conflict situations in Guatemala. To stay within the terminology of Spivak, Mendez is a “brown woman helping other brown women”. The story is both exceptional in this material, and resonates well with the peace journalism perspective in the manner through which it contextualises and focuses on peace-building opportunities.

In a non-essentialist perspective, as we get when we combine approaches, the men in are not all portrayed as violent or oppressive either. An article describes how five men from the group Afghan Peace Volunteers, in Kabul, dress in burkas to demonstrate their solidarity with Afghan women. Twenty-nine year-old Bashir is quoted: “The best way for a man to really understand how it is to be a woman is to put on a burka” (7 March 2015). This story is also one of the few in which the gender dimension is raised in stories about conflict and peace, although the focus is on men. It may remind us of the words of Robert Connell (2000: 30):

Some of the qualities in ‘traditional’ definitions of masculinity (e.g. courage, steadfastness, ambition) are certainly needed in the cause of peace. Active models of

engagement are needed for boys and men, especially when peace is understood not just as the absence of violence, but as a positive form of life.

Very few of the articles combine different parameters of identity or power when describing gender characteristics, but there is at least one good exception in the selected material. Peder Kjøs in *Klassekampen* (27 September 2014), describes how in ‘post-violent societies’; where the life, health and property of the citizens are protected by the state and not by individuals, men who express themselves through violent behavior are considered less worthy compared to those who express themselves with empathy and intelligence. In its analysis of power structures, the report combines aspects of sexuality, ethnicity, geography and social class with gender, and stands out as a good example of an intersectionality approach, against a background of articles in which gender stories seldom include other parameters of identity or power.

### Towards less essentialism?

Most of the articles in the newspaper material discussed here manifest the image of women as peaceful and caretakers, often smiling. This may be seen as positive in the light of peace journalism. At the same time there is a tendency in the material to neglect women’s contribution to violence and conflict. Explicit discussions of men and masculinities are also largely ignored and a conception of women and gender as equivalent is reproduced, and gender stereotypes reinforced. In its pure form, such rhetoric approaches a biological determinism, where simplistic conclusions from biology are adapted to psychology without including historical or social perspectives.

Such difference feminism, although useful in certain contexts to promote a larger space for women (for instance in peace processes), can be dangerous because it may easily reinforce gender stereotypes and differences which perpetuate bias and discrimination. There is a need to be aware when a potentially violent reality is veiled by discourses about gender equality, such as when discourses promoting more women in the army may be used to legitimise actions of war *and* that such discourses also may stick to an essentialist way of portraying gender, with women representing peaceful actions and values whereas men are violent and aggressive. A good example here is UN Resolution 1325, adopted by the Security Council in October 2000. The resolution has been rightly praised for its focus on women and equal participation in the resolution of conflicts and in post-conflict reconstruction, but it has also received censure for not attempting to change the way in which the concepts of gender, violence and security are understood and applied (see Wilcox 2010). Resolution 1325 at its best provides women in the global South with agency, but at the same time it tends to employ a rather essentialist approach to gender: that women by nature are more peaceful and caring.

The need to problematise the binary division where men equals violence and women peace was also underlined in the interview with Barbara Among. Being one of very

few female reporters covering war in the region made her reflect a lot about the need for women's angles in conflict journalism, but she also evoked a certain frustration over women constantly being described as 'soft victims.' During her coverage of violent fights in northern Uganda, Among reacted upon the portrayal of young women who were forced to join up with rebels. There was little doubt about gendered violence and power abuse – however, Among stressed that some of these women also played an active part in the warfare.

These wives were indeed forced to marry the rebels' commanders, but they were rebels as well, fighting on the frontline. They attacked villages, and killed people. It is very complex. So in the media they are portrayed as victims but they are in fact also perpetrators. And they have committed unforgivable atrocities (Barbara Among, interview February 2015).

Among emphasised the need to see both men and women as complex, carrying potential for *both* good and bad, peaceful and violent actions.

## Conclusion

The representation of gender in media in times of war and peace-building processes is a highly important topic, not least since, globally, traditional female roles are still considered 'private.' This chapter's discussions show that to open up for more multifaceted representations of both femininities and masculinities in conflict and peace building it is crucial to counteract conceptions reinforcing gender stereotypes. Multifaceted and relational dimensions of gender should be given room in journalism and one should in particular be careful about generalising the experiences of women or men without taking their specific trajectories into account. More complex gender representations may also help to counter social hierarchies based on associations with male and female traits, which often tend to block female participation in post-conflict societies and deny men the right to be a victim.

To obtain sustainable peace it is important to also include the difficult and complex discussions about the underlying reasons for conflict. This echoes Galtung's (2002) urge for truth rather than propaganda, people rather than elites and solution-orientated rather than victory-orientated journalism. The postcolonial feminism perspective and the theoretical field of peace journalism are both concerned about getting more voices and perspectives heard. To move forward however, instead of co-opting women in the war discourse in the name of liberation and equality – there is also still a need to open up for multiple versions of masculinities that challenge the traditional patriarchal masculinity often closely connected to violence and competition. Combining approaches to feminism may help us to see men and women as equal in terms of their affinity for war and for peace and offer increased possibilities also of peaceful solutions to conflict.

To operate journalistically in this complex terrain may be challenging; The stories we write will always be influenced by the doxa, what is taken for granted, in the culture and society and society we belong to. The findings here show that the more journalism moves in a non-essentialist direction, in terms of gender and geographical power structures, the closer it gets to peace journalism and nonviolent responses to conflict.

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## Part IV. Masculinities, Heroes and Victims



## Masculinity, Iconisation and Fictional War Heroes in the GWT

Rune Ottosen

### Abstract

The article claims that the ideology based on hegemonic masculinity in the Pentagon's propaganda has little in common with the real war experience of US soldiers. The war journalism stories of claimed US heroes and the more nuanced stories based on the experiences of Norwegian soldiers, both see the war through lenses of hegemonic masculinity.

Keywords: masculinities, global war on terror, peace journalism, facts and fiction, visual culture

The hypothesis in this article is that through gendered images of alleged heroes the media blur the male experience from the battlefield. I will use two case studies from the US to explore the hypothesis that, historically, the traditional 'American hero' has been a cornerstone of US war propaganda and then, using examples from Norway, discuss what relevance this might have for Scandinavian relations. In Scandinavia, the influence of American popular culture is substantial, and since Norway is a small NATO country the US examples discussed here are, in my view, also relevant to the Scandinavian media scene.

There are, however, cultural and political differences between the US and NATO countries like Norway. Humanitarian values and the notion of promoting peace through the UN has historically held a stronger position in Scandinavia than in the US (Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2014). But since Norway has contributed with 'feet on the ground' in the global war on terror (GWT), it can be argued that the influence of the US culture of war has also been strengthened in Scandinavia. Steinar Bryn has introduced the notion of the 'Americanisation' of Norwegian popular culture (Bryn 1992). This can be used as background to an understanding of the duality in the ideals of masculinity among Norwegian soldiers. On the one hand you historically have the admirable 'John Wayne' type of hero but on the other hand a long tradition in which the ideals of peace have also been celebrated in Norwegian masculine culture (Townes 2014; Leira 2004). In this chapter I will argue that the latter is losing ground.

## Theory of hegemonic masculinity and peace journalism

The need for heroes is essential to the efforts to recruit new soldiers to the battlefield. By producing stereotypes of supposedly brave, fearless and patriotic male combatants, the media draw attention away from the more realistic male experience which in many cases ends in substance abuse, suicide or long-term effects such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). By investigating the stories of Blake Miller (the ‘Marlboro Man’) and Pat Tillman, I will show – through the theory of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995), critical discourse analysis, peace journalism theory and visual theory – how the media images of these two men falsifies their personal stories and promotes a culture of war based on a certain image of masculinity.

In gender studies, hegemonic masculinity is a concept, popularised in the early works of the sociologist R. W. Connell, of practices that promote the dominant social position of men. According to R. Hanke, the concept of hegemony helped to make sense of the diversity of images in mass media portraying different kinds of masculinities (Hanke 1992). Connell, by adapting Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, describes hegemonic masculinity as located at the top of the relations of dominance and subordination among groups of men (Repo 2006: 19). Jemima Repo makes the point that: “There can be no equivalent hegemonic femininity because although there are hierarchies among femininities, all femininities are subordinate to the hegemonic masculinity” (op. cit.: 20).

Media researchers began mapping the relations between representations of differing masculinities in different historical circumstances (Connell 1995: Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). Categories of masculinity may be broken down into social, biological and cultural constructions which focus on how femininity and masculinity are fluid entities and how their meaning is able to fluctuate depending on the constraints surrounding them. I will argue that the hegemonic masculinity promoted by the Pentagon and the US military-industrial complex has little in common with the real experiences of soldiers in real wars. When media uncritically promote the hegemonic image of the US soldiers as courageously driven by a patriotic duty to fight for the fatherland, they blur the other masculinities experienced by soldiers.

Johan Galtung’s model of peace journalism has no clearly defined gender platform (Galtung 1992). It builds on the dichotomy between what he calls ‘war journalism’ and a ‘peace journalism’ approach. The model includes four main points which contrast the two approaches: war journalism is violence-oriented, propaganda-oriented, elite-oriented and victory-oriented. This approach is often linked to a dualistic approach, a zero-sum game where the winner takes all (as in sports journalism) (Ottosen 2010). The war journalism approach fits well into hegemonic masculinity, albeit sometimes challenged by other masculinities more in line with the peace journalism approach. But, as pointed out in the Introduction to this volume, Galtung’s model lacks an analytical tool to deal with multiple masculinities and femininities.

## Iconic role models

In her book *The American Manhood*, Susan Faludi discusses the need for iconic role models as a special feature of government propaganda promoting recruitment for wars. This had been acknowledged by General Dwight D Eisenhower at the end of the Second World War: “All in that gigantic fighting machine agree in that selection of the one truly heroic figure in that war. He is GI Joe (Faludi 1991: 17, quoted by Krog 2006: 10).

The heroic marines of Iwo Jima represent what Faludi calls “the supreme expression of the nation’s virtue” as they plant the flag on Iwo Jima as a symbol of masculine victory. The irony of course is that this iconic moment has been revealed in the film ‘Flags of our fathers’ as a piece of deception and a staged propaganda story. But, more important than whether the Iwo Jima story was true, was the part it played in fundraising, promoting staged welcome scenes where the soldiers were celebrated as heroes with yellow ribbons, confetti and champagne (op.cit.: 17).

Berit von der Lippe (2004: 188) has made the point that in the public discourse about war the male body and physical strength represent bravery and heroism. Even though there are female soldiers in war zones they are usually reduced to the ‘motherly’ functions of nursing, support and comfort.

Courage and heroism are qualities now admitted to some women too, in the name of liberal feminism, particular in the Nordic countries (Lippe 2012). Still, the traditional gender dichotomies dominate, in US media more than elsewhere.

During the last decade, however, a few women soldiers are seen fighting alongside their male compatriots. The slogan of gender equality has reached the battlefield (Lippe 2012). This gendered representation of war also has consequences for the few examples where women play an iconic role, fitting a liberal feminism, particular in the Nordic countries (Lippe 2012). The critical question is whether the military-industrial complex can be a tool for human liberation, regardless of gender. To make a polemical point: would it be progress for women’s liberation if the Norwegian pilots in charge of the NATO bombing in Libya in 2011 were women rather than men? Does liberation in any form have common interest with the US war machine in its struggle for global hegemony (Chomsky 2004)?

A masculinity with clearly defined boundaries has been important to the American sense of what it means to be American. In his book *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, Michael Kimmel (1996) agrees that proving ‘manhood’ is a dominant theme in American history (Kimmel 1996). The hegemonic masculinity in the armed forces is linked to bravery and heroism. This hegemony was challenged during the Vietnam War when the US began to lose on the battlefield. Brenda M. Boyle, in her book *Masculinity in Vietnam Narratives*, shows how the Vietnam War became a turning point in American conceptions of masculinity. Whereas previous wars had produced anxieties about masculinity, the Vietnam War became part of an era that defined gender and other social identity roles for many Americans:

The traditional American ethos contends that boys become men through experience in war, and that conversion makes them real Americans. American boys are convinced that fighting in a war or participating in its violent counterpart is something they should aspire to do, and men who have not participated in a war sometimes are made to think they missed a rite of passage. What it means to be a man, though unspecified in this mythology, is tacitly understood to be white, heterosexual, and able-bodied; what is masculine and to be masculine is to be a man (Boyle 2009: 3).

In her work, Berit von der Lippe has described the mechanisms of upholding a hegemonic masculine culture in the framing of war in news and entertainment. What is often framed as a national culture in reality represents a set of values that are not universal but the values of a limited segment of society:

Ethnicity and class or gender differences within the nation are transcended. Probably, the master-spinners of identity tales designed to make some of us feel part of an imagined community are not rival ethnic groups or nationalist movements, but exist on a larger scale: the American neoconservative power elite. They are the dominant master-spinners of today's tales of freedom, civilisation and democracy. These spinners all tend to fix, eternalise the identities that serve as vehicles for their control (Lippe 2006: 65).

Today, some are also invited to take part as vehicles for a postmodern gender-equality myth as proof of Western civilisation and individualism. The promotion of selected values to create heroes fits the needs of the military-industrial complex, the weapons industry and the Pentagon. The anti-thesis to creating a hero is to define the villains in order to motivate young men to join the armed forces and live up to expectations as a hero. As the American scholar Robert Ivie writes, the dichotomy between hero and villain must be clearly defined: "On both sides of the divide, the dialectic of rival religious visions transforms the act of killing civilians and/or destroying life-sustaining infrastructures into necessary and legitimate consequences of exercising righteous force over a demonic antagonist" (Ivie 2003, quoted by Lippe 2006: 65). In his book *Faces of the Enemy*, Sam Keen maintains that these images display stereotypes of the enemy as aggressor, criminal, rapist, animal and so on (Ottosen 1995). In an earlier work, I have argued that enemy images are essential in war propaganda – and in war journalism clearly-defined images of the enemy support your own government in their preparation and mobilisation for war. Pictures, cartoons and other visual elements play an important role in creating enemy images, fitting well into Galtung's notion of war journalism (Ottosen 1995). Since visual persuasion takes a short cut to our emotions (Eide 2005), the presence of visuals should also play a more important role in the debate about how hegemonic masculinity is framed in war propaganda.

Through R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity Berit von der Lippe considers the power relations between men and the hierarchical structure to which both men and women have to relate. The way men and women are framed are instru-

mental to the *de facto* masculinisation of the state. The creation of the iconic status of president George W. Bush in the victory ceremony on the battleship Abraham Lincoln, falsely declaring victory in the Iraq War, on 1 May 2003, serves as a good example. It is no coincidence that the images in that propaganda show are suggestive of heroes in popular culture, in this case Tom Cruise in the movie ‘Top Gun’ (Lippe 2006: 67-68).

Robin Andersen (2012), in a more recent example, analyses the film ‘Act of Valor’ as a Pentagon public relations vehicle promoting the gender values so typical to the military-industrial-media complex. The story portrays US navy seals as an instrument in the hunt for Osama Bin Laden in the endless GWT. Through constructed images of the navy seal soldiers as masculine superheroes, a positive connection is made in support of the GWT and the US war machine’s own terror, torture and clandestine killings are justified. By promoting these ideals the film sanitises illegal wars, and through the masculinity ideals presented it suppresses universal values such as human rights, equality and democracy (Andersen 2014).

### Blurring the difference between entertainment and journalism

The merging of journalism and entertainment in the representation of wars is in itself a field to be explored with more empirically-based research. The hegemonic masculinity promoted through entertainment often blurs the borderline between fact and fiction. Evan Wright, the author of the book *Generation Kill*, spent two months living with twenty-three marines from First Recon, the elite unit which spearheaded the invasion of Iraq (Wright 2004). Wright refers to marines talking among themselves about the game ‘Grand Theft Auto: Vice City’ while they were in a middle of a battle and about to attack a group of insurgents:

I was just thinking one thing when we drove into that ambush: ‘Grand Theft Auto: Vice City’. I felt like I was living it when I see the flames coming out of windows, the blown-up car in the street, guys stealing out around shooting at us. It was fucking cool (ibid.).

The structural relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon is central to an understanding of what Robin Andersen label the military-entertainment complex (Andersen 2006). The Pentagon gets about a hundred movie manuscripts in their hands every year and decides to cooperate in about a third of the cases. Negotiations and compromises are often necessary in order to satisfy the Pentagon. Then, there is also the competition between the different branches of the military – a liaison officer from the US Air Force works full-time to ‘sell’ the Air Force to Hollywood, and the Air Force lent producers of the major movie ‘Air Force One’ six F-158 planes free of charge (Gunn 1999).

## The masculine icons – two cases

The two cases presented here offer examples of hegemonic masculinity and the promotion of war journalism playing into the propaganda efforts of the Pentagon and the US empire. Pat Tillman and the Marlboro Man have in common attempts through mainstream media and popular culture to place them into a framing described above as ‘classical American hero’ with the masculine narrative created to fit into the propaganda of the military-industrial complex during the GWT. Both of their real stories were very different from the iconic framing they were forced into.

Using the Vietnam War as a backdrop, Brenda Boyle had defined some criteria through which masculinity is expressed. The paradox is that even though Vietnam was in many ways a traumatic experience for the US, and the war itself remains controversial given the strong anti-war sentiments of the American public, the masculine ideals defined by the political elite still serve as a litmus test for being a ‘proper’ man. In every presidential campaign each candidate is measured by Vietnam experience: “Words like ‘character’, ‘honour’, ‘integrity’ and ‘duty’ have been deployed as euphemisms for ‘masculinity’, and these turn-of-the-century presidential campaigns revolved around the ‘politics of gender’ ...” (Boyle 2009: 148). As we will see in the presentation of the cases, these ideals still live on as criteria for masculinity in the GWT. Through critical discourse analysis I will investigate the media representation of the two cases.

Norman Fairclough, highly inspired by Foucault, placed emphasis on how the language used in a certain political or social setting constitutes the power to define which relevant discourses are prioritised and which are removed to the background (Fairclough 1995: 135). Since Fairclough only rarely deals directly with mass media, the media institutions should be understood as ‘institutions and organisations’. The visual representation, combined with textual analyses, will be used in these two case studies.

## The media discourse on Pat Tillman<sup>1</sup>

Sports stars, according to Toby Miller, play a significant part in promoting heroism as a necessary element in the propaganda for the GWT: “The sports star is simultaneously a product of popular culture, a marketing system, a social sign, a national emblem, an outcome of capitalism and individualism, and an object of personal and public consumption” (Miller 2013: 237). Pat Tillman, killed in Afghanistan on 22 April 2004, is a good example to prove Toby Miller’s point. He was not an ordinary soldier. Before going to war he was a professional football-player for the Arizona Cardinals. After 9/11 he and his brother Kevin, coming from a family with strong military traditions, saw it as their duty to fight for their country in time of crisis. Pat Tillman’s decision to join the army soon hit the headlines.

The secretary of defence, Donald Rumsfeld, had a personal interest in the case – he had written a letter in the campaign to use him in the propaganda for the war. As Toby

Miller puts it: “Tillman’s recruitment delivered a ‘testosterone cocktail ... impossible to resist’” (Zirin 2005, in Miller 2013: 238). The Pentagon planned a campaign to use him in a recruitment campaign for the army, but Pat Tillman refused and insisted on being treated as an ordinary soldier. In her Master’s thesis in journalism, Elisabeth Lind Krog has documented how the journalistic representation of Pat Tillman before and after his death featured him as a masculine icon. Sports journalism, in particular, portrayed him as the classical American hero. In the book *I’ve Got Things to do With My Life: Pat Tillmann and the Making of an American Hero*, Mike Towl wrote:

Real heroes never think themselves as heroes. They see themselves as ordinary people performing acts any other right-minded person would do if in their shoes ... Jump into the foxhole and sprawl across the bodies of your buddies, shielding the form grenade’s flying shrapnel. Bust down the cockpit door of your hijacked jetliner and dive the plane into the ground before it can crash into US Capitol. True heroes are ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances. Pat Tillman was just such an American hero (Towl, quoted in Krog 2006: 8).

We find another example of the iconisation of Tillman in the book *Fields of Honor: The Pat Tillman Story*, in which Jonathan Rand pursues the mythmaking of a hero: “Pat Tillman’s loyalty, bravery and sense of sacrifice for his country and his fellow man ...”. Rich Wolfe goes even further in the book *Pat Tillman 1976-2004 He Graduated Life With Honors and No Regrets*:

As long as you live you will never see another Pat Tillman. This book will make you laugh, make you cry and make you re-examine your priorities in life as you read about the most amazing athlete, soldier hero and role model in our lifetime (op. cit.: 9).

## The suppressed peace discourse

After his death, the Pentagon tried to withhold the circumstances around his death, to maintain the heroic mythmaking. But the reality was that Tillman’s experience could also be an example of an alternative masculinity inspired by peace journalism. Tillman had changed his mind regarding the role of the US in the GWT. He was in contact with Noam Chomsky with whom he wanted to discuss how to go public with his war resistance (Ottosen 2009). His family first learned that he had died in battle. After his mother learned that he had been killed by ‘friendly fire’, she told the *Los Angeles Times*: “I’m disgusted by things that have happened with the Pentagon since my son’s death. I don’t trust them one bit.” She accused the army of having burned his uniform and equipment to destroy evidence of the circumstances around his death. His father accused the Pentagon of suppressing the truth even from his family. He told the *Washington Post*:

They purposely interfered with the investigation, they covered it up. I think they thought they could control it, and they realised that their recruiting efforts were

going to go to hell in a handbasket if the truth about his death got out. They blew up their poster boy (*Washington Post* 23 May 2005).

Pat's brother Kevin suggested during a hearing in the US Senate on 24 April 2007 that Donald Rumsfeld was involved in the cover-up: "It's a bit disingenuous to think that the administration did not know about what was going on, something so politically sensitive" (Kevin Tillman, quoted in the *New York Times* 25 July 2007)).

Susan Faludi uses the Pat Tillman story to show how the iconisation of the masculine war hero draws upon memories from the Second World War in a manner that she calls "the supreme expression of the nation's virtue":

A team of anonymous, duty-bound men successfully completing their fathers and their fathers' fathers had laid out for them, defeating a vile enemy and laying claim to contested frontier – this would be a template for a post-war manhood (Faludi 1999, quoted in Krog 2006: 10)

In her work, Berit von der Lippe shows how bodily strength is typical of war propaganda:

Wars mostly ... are waged by men in the political and military elite. Women are seldom framed as active and in the mass media they are often constructed as helpless victims together with the children and the elderly. This is the manifest gender manifestation. The gendered is taken for granted, but is never the less gendered (Lippe 2002: 168, author's translation).

In rare cases when women are introduced as heroes, such as the Jessica Lynch story during the Iraq war, they are framed both as icon based on traditional feminine attributes and still dependent on the male soldiers to be 'saved' (Ottosen 2009).

The real Pat Tillman, as a potential critic of war with a reflective attitude towards his own role as football player and soldier, did not fit into the stereotypical picture and gendered myth of a classical war hero. To maintain the masculine hegemony, the Pentagon had to lie and construct a fictitious Pat Tillman.

## The iconising media discourse of the Marlboro Man

The story of James Blake Miller is one in which hegemonic masculinity is challenged by Miller's own experience. The mythical Marlboro Man is the story of a working-class boy who enlisted in the army hoping to get an education and a safe future for himself and his family. For a short while he was on front pages all over the country. A hero was created, but in real life he was an ordinary soldier who ended up with PTSD and a discharge.

Norman Solomon has reconstructed the story in the essay "Media's war images delude instead of inform". The whole iconisation was built around a photograph of Miller's face, taken at the battlefield in Fallujah during the Iraq war in 2004, dirty from

spending days at the front. The close up is of the tough guy with seemingly focused eyes and a cigarette dangling from his lips, connoting the stereotypical Marlboro Man from cigarette advertisements. Miller became a fictional figure, constructed by the media as the Marlboro Man, a living icon represented on more than hundred front pages all over the US. On CBS News, the anchor Dan Rather made this statement while the portrait of Miller filled the screen:

The picture. Did you see it? The best war photograph of recent years is in many newspapers today, front page in some. Taken by Luis Sinco of the Los Angeles Times, it is this close-up of a US Marine on the front lines of Fallujah. He is tired, dirty and bloodied, dragging on that cigarette, eyes narrowed and alert. Not with the thousand-yard stare of a dazed infantryman so familiar to all who have seen combat firsthand, up close. No. This is a warrior with his eyes on the far horizon, scanning for danger (quoted in Solomon 2006).

The tabloid *New York Post* used the picture on the front page with the title: “The Marlboro men kick butt in Fallujah”. Through this discursive construction the iconisation was transferred to all those fighting in Fallujah. In reality, the town of Fallujah was left in ruins after one of the most deadly battles of the Iraq War (Ottosen 2009).

### The suppressed truth

His family tried in vain to reconstruct the myth. His mother and brother were invited to the CBS breakfast show. His younger brother, Todd, said: “He’s just a normal person. Just mellowed out. He doesn’t see nothing big about this” (quoted in Solomon 2006). But the programme host wouldn’t listen. The picture of the Marlboro Man came up on the screen and he said: “See it, study it, absorb it, think about it. Then take a deep breath of pride.” In another interview with CBS, his mother said: “I’m proud and he may be an icon, but to me, he’s my baby. He’s my son. And I just want him home.”

In an essay, Naomi Klein wrote of how the Marlboro Man also created an association to John Wayne and how ironic it was that instead of discussing the reality on the ground in Iraq, the only criticism came from non-smokers, angry about the cigarette in his mouth (Klein 2004). Another aspect of the story are the restrictions on the reporters covering the war in Fallujah at the time (November 2004). Several months before, in April 2004, the first attempt to take over Fallujah had been a failure. At the time, pictures from the hospital in Fallujah showed injured civilians. This time round the hospital was closed to journalists.

Where lack of photos was a problem, the iconic picture of the Marlboro Man could fill the vacant space. Norman Solomon tried to give a more realistic picture from the frontline through a statement by Robert Acosta, a twenty-one year old soldier who had lost an arm in battle. Acosta tried to give the American public a reality check:

A lot of people don't really see how the war can mess people up until they know someone with first-hand experience ... I think people coming back wounded – or even just mentally injured after seeing what no human being should have to see – is going to open a lot of eyes” (quoted in Solomon 2005).

The real James Blake Miller eventually reached the news of 3 January 2006. The iconic picture of the Marlboro Man once again hit the screen in the CBS breakfast show. The news was that James Blake Miller had snapped and knocked down a man who had whistled – Miller thought the sound was the whistle of a bullet. He was discharged from the army after the episode. He said to the journalist: “I'm continuing my therapy. I continued up until the day I got out, actually.” About his fellow soldiers he said: “

The more and more I talked to them, the more I found out that there were a lot of marines that were going through same, similar emotions. And I mean, it's ... it's tough to deal with. I mean, being in Iraq is something that no one wants to talk about (ibid.).

Few journalists found it newsworthy that the Marlboro Man had PTSD. One exception was Matthew Stannard, a journalist on the *San Francisco Chronicle*. An important observation here is that a male reporter is choosing a peace journalism approach, openly challenging the hegemonic masculinity frame. Stannard visited Blake Miller and made the point in a feature story of the difference between the iconic and the real. He tells Miller's story about his grandfather, a war veteran and a heavy smoker who died of lung cancer before he was forty. The guy who married his mother and was a father figure to Blake Miller was a Vietnam veteran with PTSD. Blake Miller remembered him:

Sometimes, Papa would get crying drunk and start telling the story about the boy who came into the camp in Vietnam one night, and how they had to shoot him. Then he would stop speaking, and look at the little boys hanging on his every word. “You've had enough, Joe Lee,” his wife would say then. “It's time to go to bed.” It wasn't that he liked to drink – that was how he dealt with it, Miller said (quoted in Stannard 2006).

He explains how he was convinced to join the army through propaganda about the images of ‘tough guys’ and the persuasive skills of a recruitment officer: “I thought, ‘Well, damn, that's amazing.’ Hell, here I am, eighteen years old – I can have all this in the palm of my hands just by giving them four years” (ibid.).

Miller was placed in 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division. He increased his smoking to control his nerves:

Right before we got ready to leave for Iraq, I guess I was a little nervous. I started smoking more – I went from about a pack-and-a-half a day to two-and-a-half packs a day,” he said. “When we got to Iraq ... I was smoking five-and-a-half packs.

The day the picture was taken (8 November) the attacks on Fallujah had started. The phosphorus of grenades lit up the sky. He admits to being scared after receiving

heavy fire from resistance forces. In the chaos he met the photographer Luis Sinco from the *Los Angeles Times*. He took a picture and the rest is history: “I was never so happy in all my life to take that handset away from my head,” Miller said. “I lit up a f -- cigarette.” The day after, his sergeant came up to him. “Would you believe you’re the most famous f -- marine in the Marine Corps right now? Believe it or not, your ugly mug just went all over the US.” (ibid.)

The public relations people wanted him to leave the front to be used as a poster boy for recruitment purposes, but Miller insisted on staying with his comrades. He received fan mail from all over the US and many sent him cigarettes.

His wife remembered the first time she saw the picture of him as Marlboro Man. She was relieved to learn that he was alive, but sad to see how he looked:

Some people thought it was sexy, and we thought, Oh, my God, he’s in the middle of a war, close to death.” We just couldn’t understand how some people could look at it like that ... But I guess for some people it was glory, like patriotism ... But when it comes out and there’s actually a personality behind that picture, and that personality, he has to deal with all the war, and all he’s done, people don’t want to know how hard it actually is (ibid.)

Stannard’s is a peace journalism account challenging the hegemonic masculinity promoted in the false story of the heroic Marlboro Man. By telling the real history of Blake, Stannard indirectly proves the point made by Jemima Repo (referring to Goldstein) that men therefore must either “pay the price of a warrior mentality – anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), emotional difficulties in relationships – or pay the price of humiliation and shame that faces the sissy as a failed man” (Goldstein 2001: 269, in Repo 2006: 20).

## Hegemonic masculinity and the war against IS/ISIL

The self representation of the brutal and ritual killings by the front soldiers of the so-called Islamic state (IS/ISIL) has some parallels to the hegemonic masculinities already discussed in this article. The women in IS propaganda are even more absent than the women in Western war propaganda. As Marta Kollárová points out in her chapter in this volume, Muslim women in the media are usually framed as passive ghosts and brainwashed by dominant men and Islamic religion, described as not being able to understand their humiliation owing to tradition, patriarchy and manipulation. Western elite women are placed in the forefront of the emancipation of Muslim women. As Jemima Repo has pointed out, the way George W. Bush

has managed to construct himself not only as a hegemonic leader in wartime, but also as the leader of a mission for a ‘greater cause’, is also in this respect interesting. In contrast to these American masculinities are the masculinities of the terrorist, i.e. IS, Afghani and Iraqi men” (Repo 2006: 24).

By looking into the representation of male ‘Others’, Repo is interested in how their subordination “is established through gendering” and thus the importance for the self-assurance of American masculinities. Repo asks the essential question:

How is this enacted in US discourses of women’s rights and democratisation in Afghanistan? On the other hand, how is the disciplining of Muslim male bodies gendered? What are the competing masculinities and by what methods are disciplined bodies demeaned for control? How does this define the sexuality of the US self? (op. cit.)

The enemy images of Muslims play a specific role in this pattern (Ottoesen 1995). Judith Lober makes the point that the masculinity of the ‘evil-doers’ was also especially discursively constructed, functioning to demonise and dehumanise Muslim men as the Other, victimising Muslim women and idealising American men and women to legitimise the US military retaliation (Lorber 2002: 379 in Repo 2006: 52). Repo (2006: 52) argues that this discourse “not only constructs a particular the enemy as the Other, but also [defines] the righteous self”. The terrorists were framed as unpredictable, irrational and uncivilised “Islamic fundamentalists”. The combination represents the ultimate cocktail of danger (op.cit.)

### The hegemonic masculinity approach and the relevance for Scandinavia

In the period after Norwegian independence from Sweden in 1905, the idea of peaceful conflict resolution as foreign policy strategy was strong and influenced the role of masculinity (Leira 2014: 153-155). Traditionally, Norwegian masculinity has differed from American hegemonic masculinity through the Norwegian military tradition of conscription and the idea that military force should be avoided and, if necessary, should be within the framework of the UN (Græger & Leira 2005: 56). This has changed since Norway became active in the new NATO “out of area” doctrine (with the 1999 bombing of former Yugoslavia without a UN mandate as the first example) (Nohrstedt & Ottoesen 2014). Norway’s participation in the NATO ISAF forces in Afghanistan for more than a decade has changed the way politicians and the media discuss the role of the military (Ottoesen 2009; Eide & Ottoesen 2013). The ultimate change to a more hegemonic masculine culture among Norwegian soldiers came when Norway took a leading role during the bombing of Libya in 2011 (Heier 2012).

An area for in-depth investigation could be the issue of which masculinities have had hegemony in the media discourse over the coverage of the military presence in Afghanistan since the first soldiers arrived in late 2001-early 2002. It’s fair to say that for many years Norway promoted the warfare in Afghanistan as a “humanitarian intervention” and refused to admit that Norwegians were taking part in a war (Eide & Ottoesen 2013). Obviously, this also had consequences for how masculinity was framed in the coverage of the Norwegian presence in Afghanistan. The promotion

of the Norwegian soldiers as good-doers and “helpers” framed masculinity in a way which made the Norwegian soldiers feel uncomfortable since they felt that they were taking part in a war (Ottosen 2009). The Norwegian journalist Tom Bakkeli broke that pattern in 2009 by the book *Norges Hemmelige Krigere* (*Norwegian Secret Warriors*) which presented a picture of the Norwegian special forces in Afghanistan more in line with the hegemonic masculinity of the US media (soldiers as brave and heroic). Norwegian coverage became more realistic when the Norwegian freelance journalist Anders Sømme Hammer moved to Kabul and settled there to come closer to the sources and build his own network. This is another example of the significance of a journalist influenced by peace journalism making a difference (see Ottosen 2010b), challenging the hegemonic media framing (in this case the propaganda for humanitarian intervention).

After living there for several years, Sømme Hammer has published several critical articles, books and reportages in various media. Together with the Norwegian Broadcasting company’s investigative magazine *Brennpunkt*, Sømme Hammer made a critical documentary offering a more realistic picture of the Norwegian soldiers. The documentary was broadcast on 3 March 2009 and caused extensive public debate. In 2010, he published the book *Drømmekrigen* (*The Dream War*). Here he also reflected on the inability of Norwegian media to present a more realistic picture of the experience of the Norwegian ISAF soldiers. One could say that it contributed to challenging the picture of Norway’s ‘humanitarian intervention’ in Afghanistan (Ottosen 2010; Hammer 2010, 2013).

This created a new opportunity for Norwegian soldiers to present their own notions of masculinity in the public space. The Norwegians were now ready for the soldiers to express their hegemonic masculinity in their own words. This became evident when a group of anonymous sharpshooters published the book *Med mandat til å drepe* (*With a Mandate to Kill*) in 2010 in which they could openly express their excitement at taking part in targeted killings. In the same year (2010), TV2 published footage from cameras fixed to soldiers’ helmets for documentation from the battlefield. Killing an Afghan, an excited soldier cried out ‘lovely’ as the Taliban fighter fell to the ground (Borchervink 2013: 194).

A woman reporter from *Aftenposten* met a soldier by chance on a train station in Oslo; in their conversation the soldier openly said he wanted to go Afghanistan to be able to kill a person. Surprised and a bit shocked, the reporter asked why. “I want to know how it is. What it feels like.” She reflects on the answer: “He doesn’t talk fast and is without guilt. Obviously this is something he has been thinking about” (*Aftenposten* 27 September 2009).

In 2010, Norwegian media published a video of a ritual where Norwegian soldiers gathered before a battle in Ghowrmach, Afghanistan. The commander was wearing a traditional Viking helmet and was shouting to the soldiers: “You are the wild animals. Taliban is the catch. To Valhalla.” (In Nordic mythology, Valhalla are the big halls where the dead heroes meet to celebrate after battles (*Dagbladet* 28 September 2010)). In

the video one of the soldiers said that “war is better than sex”. Rune Wenneberg, the commander of the unit of special soldiers in ‘Telemark bataljonen’ in Afghanistan, where the incident took place, tried to calm down an astonished public in the popular talkshow ‘Skavlan’ on Norwegian television (NRK), saying that the ritual was meant to build confidence in the group and shouldn’t be taken literally (the question is whether the opposite was actually the case). In a rare moment the Norwegian public got to see hegemonic masculinity as it lives on the ground in the battlefield on a daily basis. According to the homepage of NRK, Wenneberg said:

We live in a very special world down there, and when a person in his mid-twenties is going to try to pin down the extreme emotions that emerge after a combat situation, the lack of context explains the reference to sex.

He also said:

We are working on the basis of a theory that people have a resistance to killing, well documented in modern research. Thus, we must work with the ethics behind what we are doing, and we have to try to normalise it that soldiers have to take lives (NRK 2010) [Both quotations translated by the author].

The iconisation of alleged Norwegian war heroes on the battlefield in Afghanistan is most clear in the (nine) cases of Norwegian soldiers dying in battle in the GWT. When Tor Arne Lau-Henriksen died in Afghanistan, his iconic face filled the front page on the newspaper *VG* under the title: ‘Killed in action against Taliban. Tor Arne gave his life for freedom’, linking him to the classical Norwegian polar heroes Roald Amundsen and Fridtjof Nansen. *VG* had met the soldier on an earlier occasion “... when he was about to fulfill his childhood dream by skiing the 2542 kilometres along the border to Sweden from Halden on the southern Swedish border to the river Grense-Jakobselv in the north” (*VG* 27 July 2007).

When Norwegian soldiers die on the battlefield this hegemonic masculine frame is combined with the one as ‘worthy victims’ with family values:

Tor Arne Lau-Henriksen killed on a foreign mission for Norway was a loving dear and calm family father. The thirty-three-year-old leaves behind a wife and a little daughter, who together with his mother, father sisters and brothers, parents-in-law and other close family are gathered in their mourning, in his home community Elverum (ibid.).

As in the other cases reviewed here, iconisation covered up the ‘true face of war’. This became evident when another Norwegian icon died on the battlefield in Afghanistan. When a soldier in the special forces, Trond Andre Bolle, was killed by a road bomb by the Taliban, pictures of him as a special soldier in uniform filled Norwegian media, obviously playing visually on his classical masculine attributes – smiling face, a cigarette in his hand, sunglasses. Another iconic picture in *VG*, of Bolle in full uniform with all his medals, was presented side by side with the ultimate Norwegian hero of

the Second World War, Gunnar Sønsteby. Sønsteby was quoted claiming Bolle should be awarded the highest military honour in Norway (*krigskorset post mortem* (VG 29 June 2010). But once again the brutal reality of war eventually spoiled the framing of the masculine hero, when Bolle's wife, in an interview with NRK, said that at the time of his death Bolle had begun to doubt whether Norwegian warfare in Afghanistan had had any value at all (NRK Hedmark og Oppland 22 September 2012).

In the long run, peace journalism might be used to question the false creation of icons and create the ground for alternatives to hegemonic masculinity. In a survey (with a few exceptions not mentioned in the mainstream media in Norway), 11 per cent of the Norwegian soldiers with experience of Afghanistan said they had been involved in incidents that were 'morally doubtful'. Forty-two per cent had witnessed such incidents themselves and 22 per cent said they had experienced things that "nobody at home would understand" (Eide & Ottosen 2013: 20).

## Conclusion

In Norway, hegemonic masculinity became visible to the public when the propaganda about "humanitarian intervention" was challenged by the soldiers themselves, and their families, as contradictory to their own experiences.

The hegemonic masculinity in the Pentagon's propaganda has little in common with the real war experience of the US soldiers. The war journalism stories of the Marlboro Man and Pat Tillman, and the Norwegian stories from Afghanistan, symbolise the propaganda aspect of the masculine iconic frame. The media presented tough war heroes but it turned out that many of them proved to be vulnerable and thoughtful men with problems created by the war. Few of them matched the stereotypical heroic images in the media framing. The reality of war is brutal and far from the myths of war journalism and popular culture.

Gerry Canavan has made the point that the heroic soldier has become an important trope in the modern culture of war. Superheroes are introduced in the media and popular culture to generate profits and at the same time to create myths about the reality of war (Canavan 2014). Robin Andersen argues that part of the problem is the lack of critical appraisal by journalism of hegemonic masculinity war culture. The Pentagon, with its Psyops units, promotes the idea that "killing the 'bad guys' with hyper-tech weapons as action-packed pleasure are core values" (quoted in Andersen 2014). The trope of the mythic soldier as a superhero which was created for recruitment denies the emotional costs of war, with the consequence that the public is denied the true face of war. Peace journalism should aim to define an alternative gendered arena (Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2014, 2015). But then, gender needs to be implemented in the peace journalism model. Since the model itself does not deal with gender, one could assume that Galtung lacks a perspective of multiple roles – of both men and women – although, in all fairness, Galtung is open to this kind of thinking when he writes:

“But is it really true that men would be disinterested in the news offered by peace journalism? The political left-right axis would play a role if we assume the political right to believe more in ‘my country, right or wrong’ values” (Galtung 2002: 266). In my view, Galtung limits the gender issue to the traditional left and right segments in politics whereas multiple gender roles should, rather, be included in the model. There are several masculinities and several femininities, some of which are peace-oriented, and some war-oriented.

## Note

1. The two cases presented here were previously published in Norwegian in the book *VG, Saddam og vi* (Ottoesen 2009). All the quotes here are from that book.

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## Why War – Still?

### *Albert Meets Sigmund in the Ultimate Match-Up*

Toby Miller<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

After reviewing various theories of why wars occur, notably feminist, postcolonial and political-economic perspectives, this chapter takes a moment from long ago as its touchstone: a venerable debate about why war happens. It took place in correspondence 85 years ago between two founders of masculinist modernity: Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud. Their debate offers us some clues about how technocracy and masculinity meet in metaphorical trenches, and what journalism should do to cover that encounter.

Keywords: Einstein, Freud, causes of war, journalism

Few historians, strategists, or political scientists have been able to transcend Carl von Clausewitz's definition of war (Sharma 2015), even if his use of the first person plural is troubling in its certitude about the universal desire for power. Von Clausewitz said: "War is ... an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will" (1989: 75). He avowed that "war is not merely an act of policy but a true political Instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means" (1989:87).<sup>2</sup>

Why do we have such conflicts? Michael Howard summarised the principal arguments thirty years ago: wars have been understood for centuries as "an aberration in human affairs ... an occurrence beyond rational control", and more recently as effects of masculinity, class greed or evolutionary necessity (1984). Those accounts still resonate, but we have some newer ones.

Institutionalist political science identifies "power theories, power transition theories, the relationship between economic interdependence and war, diversionary theories of conflict, domestic coalitional theories, and the nature of decision-making under risk and uncertainty" (Levy 1998). The development economist Frances Stewart (2002) advises that:

- The incidence of war has been rising since 1950, mostly within rather than between states

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Miller, Toby (2016). Why War – Still? Albert Meets Sigmund in the Ultimate Match-Up in Berit von der Lippe & Rune Otosen (eds.) *Gendering War & Peace Reporting. Some Insights – Some Missing Links*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

- Wars are often prompted by race and religion, but have underlying economic causes as well
- The principal stimuli to war include political, economic, and social inequality; extreme poverty; economic stagnation; poor government services; high unemployment; environmental degradation; and individual (economic) incentives to fight

The Royal Geographical Society nominates “land disputes, politics, religious and cultural differences and the distribution and use of resources” as causes, while the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research database finds that ideological struggle is a source of most wars, generally nested with other factors.<sup>3</sup> Quantoid neoliberals advise that:

There are two prerequisites for a war between (rational) actors. One is that the costs of war cannot be overwhelmingly high ... there must be some plausible situations in the eyes of the decision makers such that the anticipated gains from a war in terms of resources, power, glory, territory, and so forth exceed the expected costs of conflict ... Without this prerequisite there can be lasting peace. ...

Second, ... there has to be a failure in bargaining, so that for some reason there is an inability to reach a mutually advantageous and enforceable agreement (Jackson & Morelli 2011)

This decontextualised game theory, founded on rational action as defined by a capitalist consumer mentality, dominates the deracinated world of mainstream political science – the reductive, selfish side of rationality (Altman 2015; Meadwell 2016). Psychological explanations have also been diminished to game-theoretical assumptions and their cosily artificial experiments (Böhm et al. 2015). Cliometricians, too, are subject to this warlockcraft’s imposing spells (Eloranda 2016; Jenke & Gelpi 2016).

These approaches form part of the warfare/welfare service mentality that colours US and northern European social science. In the case of war, we see such forms of life adopted and encouraged by technocrats and militarists alike (Roxborough 2015). In short, mainstream academia and diplomacy are wedded to the notion that “war between states is to be seen in terms of rationally decided aggression rather than in the internationalisation of social conflict” (Halliday 1990: 207).

*Contra* these perspectives, we confront: J.A. Hobson’s (1902) ideas about imperialism driven by the capitalist problem of over-production; Marxist theories of class war caused by unequal control of the means of production; Maoist arguments about the peasantry versus the urban working class as motors of revolutionary change; feminist critiques of masculine violence; and postcolonial insights into wars that derive from decolonising cartography (Gruffydd Jones 2006).

Keynes (1936) provides a succinct political-economic explanation:

War has several causes. Dictators and others such, to whom war offers, in expectation at least, a pleasurable excitement, find it easy to work on the natural bellicosity of

their peoples. But, over and above this, facilitating their task of fanning the popular flame, are the economic causes of war, namely, the pressure of population and the competitive struggle for markets.

Wherever you look, from diplomats to bombardiers to correspondents, war is an implicitly male activity. This is rarely if ever recognised in mainstream media coverage and academic knowledge, or problematised as such (Sjoberg 2013; Ackerly et al. 2006; Hearn 2012). The astonishing inequality between men and women, in socioeconomic power and cultural representation alike, relies on the threat and the actuality of violence to undergird it, as exemplified in the fact that so many more men than women bear arms, both outside and within the military. Violence between men is also important in determining who among them obtains the spoils of this gendered dominance, and as an index of, and displacement from, other crises such as perceived economic disadvantage (Connell 2005: 82–83). The claim that women are naturally nurturing or pacific has not stood up to a multitude of counter-examples, from feminist guerrilla to women who are violent to children (Rayas Velasco 2009; Enloe 1983; Feinman 2000). But this violence is in no way symmetrical with male militarism. The feminist strand of international relations theory stresses the significance of gender in the causes of war, emphasising these factors at structural and interpersonal levels, from across the world system to internal dynamics within nations, including the masculine priorities and personalities that drive conflicts. The quest for feminist explanations of and interventions into the gendered pattern of war continues, especially given the way that women's vulnerability is frequently invoked as a justification for conflicts, even as they suffer from the violence that ensues in specific ways (Riley et al. 2008; Mackie 2012).

Drawing on these latter approaches, this chapter takes a moment from long ago as its textual touchstone: a venerable debate about why war happens. For having reviewed the theories listed above, and finding myself compelled by feminist, post-colonial and political-economic perspectives, I am drawn to a correspondence from eighty-five years ago between two founders of masculinist modernity: Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud.

Together, the two men stand as emblems of powerful and very male discourses – one of mastering the universe, the other of mastering the self. Those quests for mastery continue today. Einstein's and Freud's discussion of war is largely forgotten now, but I think it can shed light on this volume's deliberations in terms of the causes of collective conflict, the perils of technological rationality, the masculinist presumptions that undergird war and its representation, and an emergent guidance on how to report it.

### The correspondence

In 1932, just prior to the fateful, fatal triumph of national socialism in Germany, Einstein was invited by the League of Nations Paris-based International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, a precursor to UNESCO (Laqua 2011), to engage with

an interlocutor of his choice “on any problem that I might select” (Freud & Einstein 1932 et seq.). This was part of the Institute’s remit to promote and publish dialogues between public intellectuals on matters of general consequence.

Einstein lit upon Freud as someone who could help him confront “the most insistent of all the problems civilisation has to face – Why War?” (Freud and Einstein 1932). Who better to involve than the men who had recast our material and emotional worlds, even if Freud often disavowed sociological or programmatic uses of his theories (Leith 2000; Medoff 2009)?

Einstein was confronting the alpha and omega of his intellectual and institutional existence. The application of instrumental reason, of means-ends rationality, was generating new and horrifying capacities to cause harm at cosmic levels through applied science in ways that subordinated peaceful concordance and nature to seemingly inevitable, teleological advances in technology. Einstein believed that progress towards a more rational world, a better one, was signalled by technological development, not least because it indicated a capacity for universal improvement in the quality of life. Technological change seemed to be a corollary of applying reason to understand and control natural forces, and perhaps one could govern human affairs via equivalent principles of rationality. He favoured “the setting up, by international consent, of a legislative and judicial body to settle every conflict arising between nations.” Einstein recognised that:

... we are far from possessing any supranational organisation competent to render verdicts of incontestable authority and enforce absolute submission to the execution of its verdicts. Thus I am led to my first axiom: the quest of international security involves the unconditional surrender by every nation, in a certain measure, of its liberty of action, its sovereignty that is to say, and it is clear beyond all doubt that no other road can lead to such security...

Of course, the League of Nations, the very sponsor of Einstein’s and Freud’s correspondence, was an actually-existing failure at world government. The League’s few successes, like those of the United Nations today, came in fairly technical areas such as postage, health, agriculture, and scientific education, rather than the tumultuous sphere of peacekeeping.

In seeking to understand why a universal government of arms had not come to pass, Einstein sought a rational explanation of this seemingly irrational outcome:

... strong psychological factors are at work, which paralyse these efforts. Some of these factors are not far to seek. The craving for power which characterises the governing class in every nation is hostile to any limitation of the national sovereignty. This political power-hunger is wont to batten on the activities of another group, whose aspirations are on purely mercenary, economic lines...

He identified a “small but determined group, active in every nation, composed of individuals who, indifferent to social considerations and restraints, regard warfare,

the manufacture and sale of arms, simply as an occasion to advance their personal interests and enlarge their personal authority” – in other words, a ruling class coalesced over twin drives and groupings—political power and economic advantage. Together, this formation controlled the organs of meaning that dominated the culture of a society: “the minority, the ruling class at present, has the schools and press, usually the Church as well, under its thumb. This enables it to organise and sway the emotions of the masses, and make its tool of them.”

Beyond that sociological fact, though, what could explain something deeper – perhaps the darkest of all questions: “How is it these devices succeed so well in rousing men to such wild enthusiasm, even to sacrifice their lives? Only one answer is possible,” thought Einstein. “Man has within him a lust for hatred and destruction.” Step up, Dr Freud; Dr Einstein is poised to hand you the baton. He has reached the limit of his relay-run capacities. And Einstein posed his foundational question to Freud like this:

Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war? It is common knowledge that, with the advance of modern science, this issue has come to mean a matter of life and death for civilisation as we know it; nevertheless, for all the zeal displayed, every attempt at its solution has ended in a lamentable breakdown...

This all seemed irrational and unreasonable to him. It confronted the limits of rationality as a means of understanding: “... my thought affords no insight into the dark places of human will and feeling”. What could be done to counter these horrendous drives? Einstein asked: “Is it possible to control man’s mental evolution so as to make him proof against the psychoses of hate and destructiveness?” Essentially, he wanted to know the keys to civilisation, to pacific life, to rationality – to decency. Such were the great relativist’s concerns.

The great psychoanalyst responded with a bravura blend of zoology, anthropology, pre-history, sociology and psychology:

... conflicts of interest between men are settled by the use of violence. This is true of the whole animal kingdom, from which men have no business to exclude themselves. To begin with, in a small human horde, it was superior muscular strength which decided who owned things or whose will should prevail. Muscular strength was soon supplemented and replaced by the use of tools: the winner was the one who had the better weapons or who used them the more skillfully ... intellectual superiority already began to replace brute muscular strength; but the final purpose of the fight remained the same – one side or the other was to be compelled to abandon his claim or his objection by the damage inflicted on him and by the crippling of his strength. That purpose was most completely achieved if the victor’s violence eliminated his opponent permanently – that is to say, killed him ...

Freud discerned a Darwinian motion, from primitive violence to technological violence to state rule. This was evolution beyond “the original state of things: domination by

whoever had the greater might – domination by brute violence or by violence supported by intellect. As we know, this régime was altered in the course of evolution.” That path had “led from violence to right or law” because “the superior strength of a single individual could be rivalled by the union of several weak ones”. In other words:

Violence could be broken by union, and the power of those who were united now represented law in contrast to the violence of the single individual. Thus we see that right is the might of a community. It is still violence, ready to be directed against any individual who resists it; it works by the same methods and follows the same purposes.

One can interpret this transformation as a shift in power from brute masculine physical force to the equalising influence of technology, where simple differences of size and strength are minimised by bombs and other tools. Nevertheless, Freud confronted the fact that

... war might be a far from inappropriate means of establishing the eagerly desired reign of “everlasting” peace, since it is in a position to create the large units within which a powerful central government makes further wars impossible. Nevertheless it fails in this purpose, for the results of conquest are as a rule short-lived: the newly created units fall apart once again, usually owing to a lack of cohesion between the portions that have been united by violence ...

This was the stunning truth of empire: its cruel overseas success derived from harnessing national energies that otherwise threatened its very origin, as domestic class struggle was overdetermined by the need for external unanimity. Once a peace was won, those tensions re-emerged to undermine that unity in a contest for the spoils that flowed from triumph. In other words, the conflictual basis to individual psyches and human development that Freud theorised would always reassert itself at a collective level.

Freud favoured the same initiative as Einstein to counter and corral these tendencies:

Wars will only be prevented with certainty if mankind unites in setting up a central authority to which the right of giving judgement upon all conflicts of interest shall be handed over. There are clearly two separate requirements involved in this: the creation of a supreme agency and its endowment with the necessary power.

But something else was lurking in Freud’s sense of what articulated these fundamentally materialist explanations of conflicts and how to prevent or manage them. He felt more comfortable theorising eerie, unworthy drives than did Einstein:

... human instincts are of only two kinds: those which seek to preserve and unite – which we call “erotic”, exactly in the sense in which Plato uses the word “Eros” in his *Symposium*, or “sexual”, with a deliberate extension of the popular conception of “sexuality” – and those which seek to destroy and kill and which we group together as the aggressive or destructive instinct.

One instinct (Eros) favoured life; the other (Thanatos), death. By invoking them, Freud echoed what Hobbes had maintained 300 years before:

... the causes of war and desolation proceed from those passions, by which we strive to accommodate ourselves, and to leave others as far as we can behind us: it followeth that that passion by which we strive mutually to accommodate each other, must be the cause of peace.

Freud argued that it would be facile, if not impossible, to draw a hard and fast ethical distinction between these two drives, to admire Eros and abjure Thanatos, or (paradoxically) to destroy the latter, because

Neither of these instincts is any less essential than the other; the phenomena of life arise from the concurrent or mutually opposing action of both. Now it seems as though an instinct of the one sort can scarcely ever operate in isolation; it is always accompanied – or, as we say, alloyed – with a certain quota from the other side, which modifies its aim or ... in some cases ... enables it to achieve that aim.

What a marvellously Derridean formulation – the old boy rejecting binarism and arguing for the interdependence of supposed opposites!

That said, Freud was, as I mentioned, Darwinian – he saw culture evolving towards pacifism as more and more people rejected violence and war by dealing with the urges of Thanatos through reason. Anti-war movements represented such tendencies, as did free-trade opposition to war because it obstructed economic growth – an argument that was popularised during the inter-war period by the Nobel laureate and bestselling author, Norman Angell (Miller 1986).

But what if war is seen not as the opponent of rationality, unity, and government but rather their acme, given its organisation of technology, people and plans? What if war involves love combined with hate – Eros *as* Thanatos? Perhaps culture develops in ways that are in step with, or even generative of, killing machines – and loving one's nation necessarily involves devaluing others.

Then there is the question of language. Einstein's and Freud's use of male-oriented terms was presumably meant to signify people more generally. That was common at the time and beyond. But it gives us pause to ponder the specifically male domination of public life in general, decisions to go to war in particular, and the exercise of war, both then and in our own time.

So often, war is defined and exemplified in terms of male power and male loss, with the impact on women and children almost a matter of collateral concern, despite the active role a minority of women play in waging war, and the huge impact on all women through grief and sexual violence. Similar intellectual and professional exclusions apply to journalistic personnel and coverage (Rayas 2009; Jones 2003; United Nations Security Council 2015).

One might also turn the debate towards Romantic aesthetics and associate Eros with the beautiful, the charming, the peaceful; and Thanatos with the awesome, the

powerful, the violent: Eros is gendered as female and Thanatos as male. Perhaps the technological rationality and governmental rule favoured by Einstein and Freud are overdetermined by an ongoing dialectal oscillation between the two drives, abetted by an inner logic of machinery that animates the outer logic of war as couched in terms of national interests or human rights.

That socially, textually, and scientifically determined world would be what Dwight D Eisenhower (1972) so memorably condemned in his exit speech as US president: “the military-industrial complex,” pervaded with love, affection, rationality, and fear – but above all, a clientelist logic.

Of course, Einstein’s scientific ideas, and his opposition to fascism, together helped to enable the Manhattan Project.<sup>4</sup> A few years after the exchange with Freud, Einstein urged Roosevelt to forestall German efforts to develop nuclear weaponry by any means possible. Although personally excluded from developing the atomic bomb because of his progressive politics, that intellectual and programmatic complicity with Hiroshima, Nagasaki and mutually-assured destruction haunted the remainder of this vegetarian pacifist’s life.<sup>5</sup>

The noted physicist J Robert Oppenheimer, who led the Manhattan Project, testified to the US Atomic Energy Commission about the instrumental rationality that animated the people who created this terrifying technology. Once these scientists saw that it was feasible, the device’s impact on the Earth and its inhabitants lost intellectual and emotional significance for them. Such considerations were overtaken by a “technically sweet quality ... when you see something that is technically sweet, you go ahead and do it and you argue about what to do about it only after you have had your technical success. That is the way it was with the atomic bomb” (United States Atomic Energy Commission 1954).

According to Ulrich Beck (1999, 2001, 2002), a science-laden, technologised society such as our own, which Einstein helped to create, must confront the “unintended consequences” of modernity, not only via technocrats seeking solutions to problems created by themselves or others, but also via transparent decision-making systems that encourage public debate, rather than operating in secret or deriding public perceptions as *ipso facto* erroneous (Beck 1999:3, 5). Hence the importance of considering what these architects of the contemporary world, from physics to therapy, thought they were doing.

For if early modernity was organised around producing and distributing goods in a struggle for the most effective and efficient forms of industrialisation, with devil take the hindmost and no thought for the environment, contemporary society enumerates and manages the resultant dangers (for example, establishing markets for pollution that send murky industries offshore). Put another way, whereas modernisation initially concentrated on establishing national power and accumulating and allocating wealth, developed modernity produced new risks, beyond collective security and affluence. Contemporary populations face crises brought on by deliberate policy, for example nuclear energy, genocidal weaponry, biotechnology and industrial pollution – “professional miscalculations and scientific discoveries hurtling out of control” (Kitzinger &

Reilly 1997: 320). This is often problematised as a typically male response to problems caused by technology – find a better technology as a way of fixing things. Such precautionary criticisms had to await the global threat of human-made climate change to come into being. They remain contentious, because of their opposition to the dominant discourse of growth, and have had little discernible impact on the waging of war.

## Reportage

How could this account of masculinist scientific and technological rationality and unconscious drives help us to understand and improve contemporary reportage? We know that reactionary commentators, male and female alike, valorised the hyper-masculinity that was unleashed beyond even its normal limits in the US after 2001, specifically highlighting working-class male chivalry, domination, and certainty. Major female commentators Camille Paglia, Peggy Noonan and Ann Coulter mandated a fully-formed, stable identity and fulsome heterosexuality (Cole 2008: 123-24; Miller 2013). It is clear that these public intellectuals, who continue to command column inches and video clips, took the opportunity presented by war to push a domestic agenda in favour of male power. Their use of international relations to attack queer-ness and feminism needs serious engagement via content and textual analysis that can identify trends in their work and check their facts. These women, and others of their cohort, get a great deal of media time in the United States, and are dedicated to attacking all forms of progressive politics.

They advocate the Thanatos-Eros couplet I have identified. Male valour is understood through bloodshed and leadership, and incarnated in the US military as the national embodiment of power, spirit, religiosity and victory. These writers represent the ideologues that Einstein identified as crucial to warfare, albeit with a focus on masculinity that he did not bring into question. Women's overt references to gender hegemony are much clearer than is the case when their male equivalents speak, where this dominance is assumed rather than highlighted.

As this volume makes clear, the experience of reporting war, as opposed to commenting on it, is very gendered. While women journalists sometimes get *entrée* denied to men in human-interest stories, personal confessions, and family perspectives, they are routinely excluded and patronised by everyone from translators to editors-in-chief, and held back from opportunities, told that the front is no place for a woman. We need all war correspondents, women and men alike, to be alert to gendered questions as a core component of their work, as per the examples of Maggie O'Kane in Bosnia (Ó Tuathail 1996) or Jamie Tarabay (2013) and Sabrina Tavernise (2007) in Iraq (Tarabay on National Public Radio, Tavernise with the *New York Times*).

What might this mean in terms of both the background to conflict and the lived experience of it? I offer this list, based on what I learnt from the event that birthed this book and the literature I surveyed for this essay:

- a focus on violence to women as constitutive, not collateral
- questioning male collective violence
- interviewing arms manufacturers, government procurers, commanding officers, and troops on the basis of the gendered workforce and impact of their professions; and
- investigating the targeting of women for military recruitment and as rhetorical victims in need of salvation

## Conclusion

The correspondence *Why War?* found Einstein stressing the conjuncture's pervasive lack of rationality, and Freud focusing on Thanatos as an essential counterpoint to Eros, a violent death drive of equal power to the reproductive, generative one. One man noted an absence of reason, the other *explained* it. The point is to change it, and to do so through the lens of gender.

Consider the appalling images of violence that have become part of media coverage of war, such as the impact of napalm on villagers, or military sadism on prisoners. The meaning of such pictures is not self-evident, for all the visceral emotions they may generate. That meaning is set and fixed, fleetingly, by the telling of stories, by the mounting of interpretations, by the testimony of journalists. The claim that such violence is aberrant neglects its simultaneously crucial and banal role in projects of gendered imperial war (Davis 2008).

How can you and I put this jumble together logically? The interplay of reason and emotion, of solidarity and hatred, of equality and hyper-masculinity, will go on and on. There are no signs of their baleful dances concluding any time soon. The binaries are too finely interwoven, their contradictory sinews too close together. We can hope to ameliorate the situation by pointing out how and where political economy, gender, rationality, technology, postcolonial geography, and instinct intersect. The notion of universal government is deeply problematic, as its treble struts, of reliance on the ultimately harmonious interests of states, the capacity of states to retain their power as uniquely legitimate users of force, and the rule of international law, have all been found wanting as a permanent peacekeeping institution (Kennedy 2006). The utopia prescribed by Einstein and Freud is beyond us.

But a strong, critical, and informed third sector may not be—one that is not only realistic about the prospects for world peace, but that understands the centrality of the gendered planning and execution of violence as a core aspect of what must be reported and resisted.

Feminism has a long history, like civil rights, human rights, Marxism and liberalism, of imagining a different future, of seeking a better life for all. That ability to think

of a different time is a quest for making the imagined something real and tangible, and in a form that will make not only a pacific future, but a safe present (Davis 2008).

## Notes

1. Thanks to the editors and copy editor for their helpful remarks on an earlier draft, to Horst Ruthrof for alerting me to the correspondence that is at the heart of this chapter, and to the people at the conference, who stimulated me to write it.
2. That formulation does allow us to transcend sovereign-state actors and include more complex collectives, albeit ones that seek hegemony over terrain as per states.
3. <http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Schools/Teaching+resources/Key+Stage+3+resources/The+geography+of+conflict/The+causes+of+conflict.htm>; [http://www.hiik.de/en/konfliktbarometer/pdf/ConflictBarometer\\_2014.pdf](http://www.hiik.de/en/konfliktbarometer/pdf/ConflictBarometer_2014.pdf).
4. Women were more involved in the construction of the atomic bomb than he was (Howes and Herzenberg, 1999).
5. <http://hypertextbook.com/eworld/einstein.shtml>; <http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/einstein/peace-and-war/the-manchattan-project>

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## Subversive Victims?

### *The (non)Reporting of Sexual Violence against Male Victims During the War in Bosnia-Herzegovina\**

Anette Bringedal Houge

#### Abstract

During the wars in the former Yugoslavia, both men and women were subjected to sexual violence while held captive, by all sides of the conflicts. Yet what we heard about sexual violence in the media concerned women victims almost exclusively. This study analyses one major Norwegian news outlet's gendered coverage of such crimes from a feminist, critical constructivist perspective.

Keywords: sexual violence, gender constructs, peace journalism, content analysis

During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, thousands of women were raped and sexually tortured as part of a war strategy to passivize, frustrate and demoralize the enemy and also to build a 'brotherhood of men' among allied soldiers and increase one's own population through forced pregnancies<sup>1</sup>. Public awareness of these war crimes was tremendous, and the mass media's continuous attention to the crimes and to the women victims of them probably helped put the Bosnian war on the international agenda and, further, illuminate and question a military tactic of extending the battlefield onto female bodies. As a response, several studies<sup>2</sup> have been undertaken that deal with the extensive abuse of women during wartime, and the feminist stand that 'the personal is political' has received wider endorsement. Although these points mark the outset of this article, the focus of attention is on a rather unknown group of victims of sexual violence in war – men and boys.

According to the UN Commission of Experts' Final Report (CEFR)<sup>3</sup> on the atrocities in Bosnia, sexual abuse was also, to a great extent, aimed at male prisoners at detention sites on all sides (see also Gutman 2001:x; Zarkov 2001: 71). Why did the media fail to present these violations described in CEFR, when they generously unveiled and denounced the atrocities committed against women? One immediate and ungendered answer could be that these incidents must have been few and isolated, or at least that the extent to which this affected men must have been much smaller than the extent

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to which this affected women. And true, there was no pure all-male rape camps, as was the case for women. Nevertheless, these types of abuses and assaults were hardly uncommon and no less planned than were the assaults perpetrated against women. Further, the brutality of the sexual violence committed against men during the war in Bosnia fulfilled without a doubt the criteria underlying the infamous journalistic proverb 'if it bleeds – it leads'.

The present article will suggest that the answer is indeed gendered, and that it has to do with masculinity constructs and a lack of gender sensitivity. The analysis will be performed within a framework of critical constructivism, feminism and peace journalism. The following pages will discuss the extent to which the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* encompassed male victims in its coverage of sexual violence perpetrated during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the implications such reporting has.

### *Structure of the article*

The article begins with a presentation of background literature on sexual assaults and the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, followed by a presentation of the analytical and theoretical framework in which the research question will be addressed. Accordingly, the methodological approach will be introduced, the findings from the content analysis presented and the results from the content analysis of texts from *Aftenposten* discussed. In the same ways that the media portray worthy and unworthy victims based on, *inter alia*, ethnicity, culture and religion, the argument of this article is that there also exists a *gendered* division, as the stories of female victims of sexual violence were reported extensively, whereas those of male victims were not, or at least not to the same extent. The preceding section is intended to show how media representations of sexual violence are gendered in themselves, and finally, to stress the importance of a gendered perspective when doing peace journalism.

### **Sexualized violence as a war strategy**

During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, over 20,000 women were raped (Skjelsbæk 2001: 54). Historically, the raping of women has been accepted as a natural, inevitable consequence of war<sup>4</sup>. Feminists and human rights activists have fought for years to make women's experiences from war and conflict matter when building peace and doing post-war justice. Thus, when sexual abuse was recognized as a *crime against humanity* following the extensive, organized use of sexual violence in the war in the former Yugoslavia, part of a substantive – however overdue – battle was won. The mass media's exposure of the atrocities put pressure on the international society to recognize this. What is more, by creating public awareness about the rapes, the media made it possible for NGOs to raise money to start reconciliation projects and crisis centres for the women directly affected (Crowo 1994). Further, the CEFRR suggests that the

media attention might have caused a real-time decline in the number of incidents of sexual violence (Bassiouni 1994b)<sup>5</sup>.

### *The UN commission of experts' final report*

According to CEFR, the use of sexual violence aimed at *men* in detention camps was a widespread phenomenon in Bosnia. Yet to my knowledge, no estimates of the number of male victims of sexual violence exist, as they do for women. This paragraph provides some insight into the findings of the Commission.

During the years in which the Commission of Experts travelled around Bosnia<sup>6</sup> to gather testimonies for the CEFR, they received information about a total of 715 camps. Out of these, 162 were continually reported to be sites in which detainees were sexually assaulted, the perpetrators being “guards, police, special forces, and others” (Bassiouni 1994a). The report states that the Serbian side held almost 55 per cent of these sites, and that these were the camps in which the worst assaults were committed against the largest number of detainees. The Croatian camps – approximately 10 per cent of all camps – were then again worse than those run by the Bosnian side, who ‘only’ comprised about 5 per cent of the camps. Fourteen, or almost 9 per cent of the camps in which sexual violence took place were run by Croats and Muslims together (Bassiouni 1994a)<sup>7</sup>. The reports of sexual violence seem countless, and involve prisoners being forced to rape women, prisoners being forced to perform sex and same-sex acts on guards and each other, and prisoners being subjected to castration, circumcision and other sexual mutilation. The excerpts hereunder, none of which are exceptional compared to the rest of the report, are included to illustrate some of the assaults, and hence also to verify the aforementioned allegation about the ‘if it bleeds...’ proverb.

Men were subject to genital beatings and castration. [A] victim reported that he was repeatedly beaten in the genital area (...) and that a group of male prisoners, including himself, were lined up, their genitals were tied together with wire, and they were forced to walk around the room in which they were held (Bassiouni 1994a).

Another ex-detainee told of suffering electric shocks to the scrotum and of seeing a father and son (...) forced by guards to perform sex acts with each other (Bassiouni 1994b).

Male prisoners were forced to rape women and each other (...). In another incident, one man was forced to bite off the testicles of four men, reportedly after performing oral sex (...). In another incident, one man's testicles were tied with a wire. The other end of the wire was tied to a motorcycle. A guard drove the motorcycle off, castrating him (Bassiouni 1994a).

The practice of castrating and assaulting men sexually during war and conflict is not new to history – it was “practiced by Chinese, Persian [and] Egyptian (...) armies” (Goldstein 2001: 357). The purposes might be manifold, but one repeated reason is that such practice serves the purpose of un-masculinizing, or feminizing, the enemy

(Goldstein 2001: 357; see also von der Lippe 2004: 277). In a phallogentric culture, taking away the symbol of a man's manhood, i.e., his penis or his testicles, corresponds to taking away his power. Zarkov (2001: 71-78), whose analysis deals with constructions of masculinity in Croatian and Serbian newspapers during the war, argues additionally that notions of masculinity and heterosexuality are inextricably linked to notions of ethnicity. Other commentators emphasize the "reciprocal relationship between militarism and masculinity" (Hopton 2003: 113) and that "[m]ilitary masculinities are embedded into discourses of nationalism" (Higate 2003: 209). Accordingly, forcing a man of another ethnic affiliation to perform same-sex acts or castrating him is "a proof not only that he is a lesser man, but also that his ethnicity is a lesser ethnicity" (Zarkov 2001: 78).

### Analytical approach

This analysis is based on a *feminist, critical constructivist* approach to international relations (IR) in general, and to war and peace journalism in particular. The combination of a feminist, critical constructivist approach sees patriarchy, the social context in which we live, as responsive to change. This makes the understanding of gender constructs, especially that of masculinity, essential for understanding *and* changing the political culture and hence also IR. In short, the critical constructivist approach emphasizes the possibilities we have to change the world. It understands the social world as one we construct and comprise as individuals through our intersubjective understanding of the social world, of its norms and its rules – hence, all social knowledge and social reality are socially constructed, and thus, amenable to change.

The feminist approach emphasizes the importance of a gendered perception of the world – of *seeing* gender everywhere – and recognizes the relation between – *and within* – the genders as power relations. Further, the approach is based on a belief that "the sources of discrimination against women [are embedded] in the economic, cultural, and social structures of society" (Tickner 1992: 15). These structures compose a larger *patriarchal social reality*, which is understood as a system that in various ways perpetuates the privileging of some men, associated with certain types of masculinities, over other men and women who fail to meet those 'standards' (Skjelsbæk 1997a: 23)<sup>8</sup>. Here 'masculinity' refers to the socially constructed gender identities of male human beings, i.e., it is built on a non-essentialist understanding of the term 'gender'<sup>9</sup>. In most societies, the hegemonic masculinity identities – that is, the dominating ideals of what is masculine – besides their being white and heterosexual, contain characteristics such as autonomy, strength, and to some extent aggressiveness. Finally and central to theory is the conception that 'the personal is political'.

It must be emphasized that this focus on men is not intended to challenge the focus on women victims or to shift the focus away from women victims, who in the world society at large, during peacetime as well as in war, comprise *the* largest demographic group of victims of sexual violence. Yet, based on the feminist approach advocated

above, focusing on *all* the victims of sexual violence during the Bosnian war, including men, can provide valuable insights into the understanding of masculinities and patriarchy. As such, it does not oppose the framework presented, but rather enforces it. Also, the goal of feminism, as I see it, is to achieve *de facto* political, economic and social equality for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, *and* gender<sup>10</sup> – not to replace a patriarchal society with a matriarchal one. Thus, taking male victims of sexual violence seriously is a righteous execution of the aphorism that what is personal – to women *and* to men – is also political. Further, the non-reporting of such violence is as detrimental to the ‘feminist agenda’ as it is to the stigmatized men who have been subject to the violence, as it sustains the very masculinized ideals and identities that continue to undermine women (and men) in patriarchal societies and ‘lock’ men into ideal hegemonic masculinity constructs.

### *Feminist constructivism and peace journalism*

Peace journalism (PJ) is in many ways to journalism what feminist constructivism is to IR theory. Just as constructivism does, PJ advocates a people-centred focus, emphasizing complexity and process, and is solution-orientated. Just as feminist constructivism is considered a ‘softer’ form of theory, a minor niche stand of IR – so is PJ cut off from the mainstream, and not implemented in typical reporting (Lynch & McGoldrick 2004:195). Just as feminist constructivism is pushed aside by *realpolitik* – which sees the world in a more static and dichotomous way with winning and losing states, with fear and deterrence politics – PJ is also pushed aside by war journalism – which is war, violence and victory oriented (Galtung 2002: 261). Consequently, starting from a feminist constructivist perspective on IR, it is not hard to choose PJ to be the journalistic out-look for the media analysis in question.

One of the main focuses of PJ is that it has to be people-oriented. This involves, quoting Galtung (2002:261), a “focus on suffering all over; on women, aged, children, giving voice to the voiceless”. In contrast, war/violence journalism is elite-oriented and thus focuses “on ‘our’ suffering; on able-bodied elite males” (Galtung 2002: 261; Lynch & McGoldrick 2005: 6). Thus, “[p]eace journalism is a ‘journalism of attachment’ to *all* actual and potential victims” (Galtung 2000: 262), and hence, reporting on sexual violence committed in detention camps during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina should also include male victims. But, when Galtung (2000: 263, 267-268) acknowledges the importance of gender in his presentation of PJ, it appears that by ‘gender’ he actually means ‘women’, and by the differentiation between male/female he seems to be referring to biological sexes, not socially constructed genders amenable to change. For PJ to under take a conscientious understanding and adaptation of gender perspectives in analysis and reporting, it has to define gender as comprised of various constructs of femininity and masculinity, which affect and construct both women *and* men. Having a gender perspective involves more than just reporting the suffering of ‘women, children and elderly’ – men possess gender too. In other words, “[s]tereotypical essentializing

of women as ‘victims’ and men as ‘perpetrators’ of political violence and armed conflict assumes universal, simplified definitions of such phenomena” (Moser & Clark 2001: 4). When writing about PJ, and more important, when doing it, this should be emphasized to avoid the essentialist fallacy of gender. Accordingly, this article can also be read as a well-intended criticism of peace journalism’s (poor) gender perspectives.

## Methodological choice

The research question is addressed through the use of content analysis of relevant newspaper texts from a period of 13 years, from January 1<sup>st</sup> 1992 until December 31<sup>st</sup> 2005, with a heavy focus on relatively straightforward quantitative measures. According to Weber (1990:9), “[c]ontent analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text. These inferences are about the sender(s) of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message” – the discussion in this article will involve, to a varying extent, inferences about all these aspects.

The Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* was chosen for the analysis based on consideration of several aspects. First and foremost, a written media was chosen for the sake of convenience; a comparable analysis of TV news or radio broadcasts would be too time consuming, considering the time-span of the analysis. Second, *Aftenposten* was favoured above English and/or international newspapers on account of availability.

Atekst<sup>11</sup>, the web-based archive from which the textual units for the analysis were gathered, consists of Norwegian newspapers, and is easily available to students enrolled at Norwegian Universities. Third, due to limits of space, the analysis is restricted to only one newspaper, and *Aftenposten* was favoured because it is the largest national non-tabloid newspaper in Norway.

Atekst allows specification of universe, time-span and search variables. To ensure that all articles relevant to the analysis were included in the search, several ‘pilot searches’ were performed using different defining variables. In this way, the variables finally used for analysis are believed to include all texts reporting on the war in Bosnia that specifically involve some sort of sexual violence<sup>12</sup>. To ensure accuracy, sexual violence is defined according to the definition provided in the Final Report as rape or any other “forced or coerced sexual acts [and] sexual mutilations” (Bassiouni 1994a).

The search variables turned out to possess some ambiguity in terms of meaning, and were not specific enough to exclude all excess texts that were irrelevant to the analysis. This made more in-depth reading of the articles necessary to define which were relevant, in this way compensating for the insufficient variable validity. This makes replication of the analysis more laborious, yet these criteria were kept, out of concern that some relevant articles might otherwise be excluded. When the articles relevant for analysis were set, their content was divided into mutually exclusive categories of gender and ethnicity specified for both victim(s) and perpetrator(s), and then the type of sexual assaults were counted. The results are presented in the next section.

The analysis is complemented by information obtained through short e-mail interviews with journalists who wrote some of the analysed texts. The selection of journalists was made based on the relevance of their articles' content.

### Gendered victims or gendered women?

The immediate search result in Atekst was 421 texts. A qualitative content check<sup>13</sup> of these texts results in a final number of 193 texts. Articles that implicitly bring up sexual assaults using terms such as 'atrocities', 'war crimes' etc. are not among the final 193 unless they also contain one or more of the defined search variables (see endnote 12). The 193 texts were divided into two categories: one in which the subject of sexual assaults is essential to the content, which was the case for about 30 per cent of the text units; and the other category, the 'mention only' category, consists of texts in which the sexual assaults are simply mentioned without the topic being critical to the content or further developed. The latter category includes the remaining 70 per cent of texts.

Furthermore, the texts were examined with respect to gender and ethnicity presentations of both victims and perpetrators of sexual violence. The ethnicity variable is included to see whether the analysis showed any difference in the gender presentation in relation to ethnicity of victim and/or perpetrator. The analysis encompasses presentations of perpetrators to see whether these are more or less gendered than are victims. This will help in making inferences about masculinity constructs in the media in the discussion part of this article.

The results show that in the vast majority of texts, the victims of sexual violence are women, or the gender is not defined (see bottom horizontal line, Table 1 below). Gender is defined in 54.9 per cent of the texts. 85 of the 87 texts in which gender is not defined belong to the 'mention only' category above. The residual two texts that do not define gender and that have sexual violence as a main subject are, respectively, a debate contribution from a reader and an article dealing with forced nudity, and as such, not 'typical' sexual violence. In only four text units are the victims of sexual violence exclusively men, out of which one text is a note, and the remaining three texts are under the 'mention only' category. In contrast, 90 texts mention women exclusively. Sometimes sexual violence is listed as one of several assaults or means of torture to which 'men and women' were exposed, without specifying which assaults were perpetrated against women and which were perpetrated against men. These texts comprise the 'Both' category, together with the texts in which the crimes are specified for both genders.

The quantitative analysis of the ethnicity variable in Table 1 (column furthest to the right) shows that in about 50 per cent of the texts, the victims of sexual assaults are Bosnian, Bosnian/Muslim or Muslim, out of which 60 per cent are Bosnian women. Bosnian women comprise 63.3 per cent of all texts exclusively reporting female victims, who again comprise 46.6 per cent of all victims. 30 percent of the analysed texts do

not define the ethnicity of victims of sexual assaults. Out of the four text units that exclusively mention male victims of sexual assaults, two refer to Bosniaks, whereas the remaining two are not defined and under the 'Other' category, respectively. None of the victims are reported to be Croatian.

**Table 1.**

Ethnicity	Female			Male			Gender			Not defined			Ethnicity	
	N	P <sub>f</sub>	P <sub>EB</sub>	N	P <sub>m</sub>	P <sub>EB</sub>	N	P <sub>b</sub>	P <sub>EB</sub>	N	P <sub>ND</sub>	P <sub>EB</sub>	N <sub>Tot</sub>	P <sub>Tot</sub>
Bosnian	57	63.3	60.0	2	50.0	2.1	5	41.7	5.3	32	36.8	33.7	96	(49.7)
Croatian	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Serbian	2	2.2	50.0	–	–	–	1	8.3	25.0	1	1.1	25.0	4	(2.1)
Non-Serbian	1	1.1	25.0	–	–	–	–	–	–	3	3.4	75.0	4	(2.1)
Any Combination	10	11.1	66.7	–	–	–	2	16.7	13.3	3	3.4	20.0	15	(7.8)
All Parties	6	6.7	40.0	–	–	–	4	33.3	26.7	5	5.7	33.3	15	(7.8)
Not Defined	14	15.6	24.1	1	25.5	1.7	–	–	–	43	49.4	74.1	58	(30.1)
Other <sup>14</sup>	–	–	–	1	25.5	100	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	(0.5)
Gender, N <sub>Tot</sub>	90(46.6)			4 (2.1)			12 (6.2)			87(45.1)			193 (~100)	

*Note:* Specification of victims' gender and ethnicity in all text units. Explanation of entries: '*Bosnian*' refers to any of the three references 'Bosnian', 'Bosnian Muslim' and/or 'Muslim'; '*Serbian*' refers to 'Serbs' or 'Bosnian Serbs'; '*Any Combination*' refers to any text in which two different ethnicities are presented in combination as victims; and '*All Parties*' equals 'Serb', 'Croats' and 'Bosniaks'. 'N' equals absolute numbers, whereas numbers under 'P<sub>X</sub>' are percentages. 'P<sub>f</sub>' is, thus, the percentage female victims of a given ethnicity comprise out of all texts mentioning female victims. The total of female victims can be read from the bottom horizontal line, with the percentage these comprise out of all victims in all texts in parenthesis. The same applies to all categories of gender. Numbers under 'P<sub>EB</sub>' give the percentage the given gender comprises of all victims of the given ethnicity. In the right hand column, the total of victims belonging to a given ethnicity can be read, with the percentage these comprise out of all victims in all texts in parenthesis<sup>15</sup>.

As for the perpetrators, none of them are explicitly said to be women, and most of them, 71.1 per cent, are not defined to any gender (see bottom horizontal line, Table 2 below). Out of the five texts in the 'Both' category, one refers to an incident in which demonstrating Serbian women denied UN forces access to a mental hospital abandoned by the employees. Several patients in the hospital were wandering around naked in the cold, and needed care. The sexual assault was indirect and not caused by these women, but is nevertheless included (NTB et al. 1993). Another text states that women were also perpetrators (Andenæs 1994), and the latter three refer to women who became pregnant after rape and subsequently abandoned their newborns, hated them and/or killed them. Although these actions are not sexual in any way, they are the direct results of sexual violence and therefore included. These women are also defined as victims of sexual violence in Table 1.

The quantitative analysis of the ethnic variable for perpetrators of sexual violence in Table 2 (column furthest to the right) shows that 46.1 per cent of the texts define the perpetrators as Serbian or Bosnian Serbs, out of which 46 per cent are male Serbs. Texts referring to male Serbian perpetrators comprise over 80 per cent of all references made to male perpetrators. About 35 per cent of the texts do not define the ethnicity of the perpetrators and one explicitly identifies the perpetrators as Bosnian. Of the 14 texts (7.3 per cent) stating that all parties were involved in sexual atrocities, 11

emphasize that the worst atrocities were committed by the Serbian side, and that the Serbian warring fractions were responsible for the largest number of such atrocities.

**Table 2.**

Ethnicity	Female			Male			Gender Both			Not defined			Ethnicity	
	N	P <sub>r</sub>	P <sub>EB</sub>	N	P <sub>m</sub>	P <sub>EB</sub>	N	P <sub>b</sub>	P <sub>EB</sub>	N	P <sub>ND</sub>	P <sub>EB</sub>	N <sub>Tot</sub>	P <sub>Tot</sub>
Bosnian	–	–	–	1	2.0	100	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	0.5
Croatian	–	–	–	2	3.9	50.0	–	–	–	2	1.5	50.0	4	2.1
Serbian	–	–	–	41	80.4	46.0	1	20.0	1.1	47	34.3	52.8	89	46.1
Any Combination	–	–	–	4	7.8	26.7	3	60.0	20.0	8	5.8	53.3	15	7.8
All Parties	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	20.0	7.1	13	9.5	92.9	14	7.3
Not Defined	–	–	–	1	2.0	1.5	–	–	–	66	48.2	98.5	67	34.7
Other <sup>16</sup>	–	–	–	2	3.9	66.7	–	–	–	1	0.7	33.3	3	1.6
Gender, N <sub>Tot</sub> P <sub>Tot</sub>	–	–	–	51(26.4)	–	–	5 (2.6)	–	–	137(71.0)	–	–	193 (~100)	–

*Note:* Specification of perpetrators' gender and ethnicity in all text units. Table 2 is to be read as Table 1, only change 'Victim' for 'Perpetrator'.

In sum, gender is more visible for victims than it is for perpetrators – the 'Not Defined' category constitutes 45.1 per cent and 71 per cent, respectively – and as expected, women victims are by far more exposed than are male victims. Further, the ethnicity variable is to a slightly higher extent defined for victims than for perpetrators (the 'Not Defined' category constitutes 30.1 per cent and 34.7 per cent, respectively). Notwithstanding, the most prevalent group of victims presented corresponds relatively well with the most frequently reported ethnicity of perpetrators; 49.7 per cent of the victims are identified as Bosnian, Bosnian/Muslim or Muslim, whereas 46.1 per cent of the perpetrators are defined as Serbian or Bosnian/Serbs in the analysed texts from *Aftenposten*.

Finally, the kinds of sexual assault *Aftenposten* reported during the defined time period were counted and the results are listed in Table 3 below. The table also includes a gender specification of victims of the sexual assaults defined. Several assaults are sometimes mentioned in the same text, and if they are gender specific but different assaults, and victims of both genders are mentioned, Table 1 above presents the victims' genders under the category 'Both'. Here, this is largely avoided because the assault itself is specified. Thus, the numbers presented here do not correspond completely to those in Table 1, as a total of 214 references to sexual violence were made in the 193 conferred texts.

Table 3 reveals that 183 out of the 214 reports (85.5 per cent) deal with rape as sexual violence, and that 83 out of the 89 text units for which the victims' gender is not defined concern rape. In addition, this table reduces the 'Both' category in Table 1 from 12 text units to six reports. One of the six assaults that are removed from the 'Both' category deals with male victims, whereas the other five were moved to the 'Female victim' category. Out of the six cases that still involve victims of both genders, three do not specifically state that men were subject to the *sexual* violence, but list sexual violence as one of several assaults to which 'men and women' were exposed. Out of 214 reports of sexual violence, in 193 text units, nine (4.2 per cent) are specifically

reports about men who have been subjected to sexual assault. One involves a man who refused to rape a woman, one involves only external military personnel, one mentions forced nudity and six report sexual mutilation.

Compared to Table 1, where each individual text unit determines the gender presentation and not each specific report of sexual assault, there is a moderate shift towards a higher gender specification for victims, evident in the change in percentages under 'Not Defined' – from 45.1 per cent to 41.6 per cent. Also, the percentage share of male victims of sexual assault was doubled, from 2.1 per cent to 4.2 per cent, which still is a low number (nine reports). Overall, the relative shares of the different genders are not substantially changed when the assaults are specified compared to Table 1's presentation of text units.

**Table 3.**

Type of Assault	N	Victim (F)	Victim (M)	Both	Gender (ND)
Forced Prostitution	2	2			
Forced Rape and subsequent killing	2		1	1	
Mass Rape	29	14			15
Rape	120	51	1	2 <sup>17</sup>	66
Rape Camps	1	1			
Rape as WOW <sup>18</sup>	14	12		1 <sup>19</sup>	1
Revenge Rapes	2	2			
Systematic Rape	13	12			1
Castration	2		2		
Circumcision	1				1
Forced Nudity	4	2	1		1
Forced Pregnancy	11	11			
Mutilation	1	1			
Prisoners forced to bite off the testicles of other prisoners	2		2		
Prisoners forced to castrate each other	2		2		
Sexual Assault	6			2	4
Sterilization	1	1			
Witness to Rape	1	1			
N <sub>Total</sub>	214 (100)	110 (51.4)	9 (4.2)	6 (2.8)	89 (41.6)

*Note:* The 214 sexual assaults to which the 193 text units refer, with sub-categories of the victims' gender (Female = 'Victim (F)'; Male = 'Victim (M)'; Both = 'Both'; and incidents for which no gender are identified = 'Gender (ND)'). The bottom horizontal line presents the cumulative actual (absolute numbers) and relative (percentages) representations of gender for all sexual assaults. Numbers in parenthesis in the bottom horizontal line give the percentage the specific gender of victim comprises of all reports on sexual violence.

The two articles in the category 'Forced rape and subsequent killing' in Table 3 report two specific events related to the practice of forcing prisoners to rape each other. The first article briefly mentions that a Bosnian man was killed in detention at the Omarska camp because he refused to rape a young woman (Haabeth 1993: 2). The other, which

is an article about the conditions at Omarska, reports on a Muslim man who was forced to undress together with a young girl and then told to rape her, which he refused to do. Consequently the guards beat him and then told him to rape her with his fingers. The man did so, and was then killed (Nordström 1996: 7). The first article is included even though no actual rape took place, because the killing was a direct result of the practice of rape and forced rape.

### *Lack of information*

Three journalists responded and reflected on my request concerning the issue of sexual violence towards men during the war in Bosnia. None of them knew about the sexual assaults directed against men at the time they were reporting and two said they could not remember if they had read the Final Report. One said that if s/he had heard of extensive sexual abuses of men, s/he would not have hesitated to further investigate them, or to write about them, nor would the newspaper in general (Interviewee A 2006, pers. comm.). Another interviewee had a limited role in the coverage of Bosnia, as s/he was working in another office at the time. Because of that position, the interviewee did not participate in the current discussions about the newspaper's coverage and priorities on the subject (Interviewee B 2006, pers. comm.). Interviewee B emphasized that s/he did not know, at the time of the reportage trip, about the extent to which sexual violence was committed against men, and further that there was little focus on this phenomena in general. Of the three respondents, interviewee B was the only one whose articles on sexual assault had been published prior to the release of the Final Report. Interviewee B still reflected on the issue of a potential taboo in the media related to sexual violence against men, but rather suggested that there probably is a greater stigma attached to being a male victim than a female, which makes reporting on such violations more difficult for journalists.

The last journalist who responded had not read the Final Report and could not remember it being mentioned in any other media. The interviewee concluded that *Aftenposten* had not made a conscious decision not to focus on sexual violence against male victims, and asserted that there are no constraints whatsoever that make male victims to sexual assaults less 'attractive' to media institutions than female victims (Interviewee C 2006, pers. comm.).

## Negotiating gender

### *Evaluation of findings*

This analysis started from a few underlying assumptions: i) that the media, as represented by *Aftenposten*, gave a poor presentation of male victims of sexual assault in coverage of the war in Bosnia; and ii) that the poor presentation had to do with, *inter alia*, masculinity constructs and a lack of gender sensitivity. The CEFR provides valu-

able and extensive information about the practice of sexual violence towards both women and men<sup>20</sup>. However, as no estimates exist on the number of men who were subjected to sexual violence during this war, it is hard to approximate what would be a fair presentation of these victims in news coverage. I still hold that the actual presentation evident in *Aftenposten* was poor. Not a single article dealt in-depth with male victims of sexual assault.

As mentioned, the analysis encompassed presentations of perpetrators to see whether these were more or less gendered, i.e., presented as holders of sex, than were the victims. The results are clear: In *Aftenposten* victims were more gendered than were perpetrators. Whereas 71 per cent of the presentations of perpetrators were neither specified as male nor female, and about a quarter of them identified the perpetrators as men, only 45.1 per cent of the victims were not gendered, and 46.6 per cent of the victims were identified as women (41.6 per cent and 51.4 per cent, respectively, if using Table 3). According to the presented framework this finding can be interpreted as asymmetrical gender sensitivity, sustaining the acceptance of dominant masculinity constructs that undermine women and men who fail to meet that standard.

It could be argued that the 89 reports of sexual violence for which no gender is specified, or the 87 texts in which no gender is mentioned, also include male victims, precisely because of their gender neutrality. Even so, there are some linguistic connotations to be addressed that can substantiate the counter-argument that these 87 texts (45.1 per cent) did not leave readers with the impression that they also concerned men. To illustrate, some of the analysed texts listed several assaults that men and women were subjected to, among which one was 'rape' or 'rape as a weapon of war'. For instance, one report about the prosecution of a war criminal in ICTY states: "Dusan Tadic (41) is charged with murder, torture and rape of Muslim (...) women and men" (Mathismoen 1996, my translation). The immediate perception of this statement is likely to be that Tadic raped (and murdered) women and murdered and tortured men. Correspondingly, when reports of rape and mass rape do not report the gender of victims, it is likely that the reader unconsciously perceives the victims of the sexual violence to be women.

Thus, from a critical constructivist and feminist perspective, it can be argued that the (female) gendering of victims and the overall non-gendering, or non-reporting, of male victims reinforce the traditional gender roles feminists try to escape – roles in which women are innocent, inherently peaceful, passive victims, and men are the opposite: independent and inherently aggressive actors, and thus left out of the role of victims of sexual assault. *Aftenposten* did not report 'suffering all over' in its neglect of male victims, a central prerequisite of PJ.

The lesser extent to which perpetrators are presented as gendered would seem to contain at least two aspects. First, 'man' often represents the norm, i.e., the natural gender, when it comes to positions of power. Accordingly, "he can appear to be asexual or gender neutral in language usage" (Eide & von der Lippe 2003: 266, my translation). For instance, we rarely read or hear about 'male lawyers', 'male Supreme Court advocates'

or 'male Secretaries of State', as these would be considered pleonasms. On the contrary, presentations of a 'female lawyer' or a 'female Supreme Court advocate' would hardly make anyone wonder about the terminology. Correspondingly, it is no surprise that presentations of perpetrators of sexual violence are ungendered more often than not, because they are *expected* to be male. In contrast to this, 'female victims of rape' is not as apparent a pleonasm, when comparing the gendering of victims to that of perpetrators (Table 3 + 4). Again, this supports the traditional 'women as victims' gender role, and is therefore not unexpected from the perspective of a theoretical framework that sees most societies as patriarchal structures with self-interests in keeping this tradition.

Second, when the media presents a perpetrator of sexual violence as gender-neutral, this obscures an action that is gendered *per se*. After all, it is as possessors of gender that perpetrators commit these violations and victims are exposed to them. Hence, in accordance with the feminist approach emphasized here, both perpetrators and victims should always be identified with their gender. Such a simple terminological move could serve the purpose of reminding both the writer and the reader of gendered power relations (Eide & von der Lippe 2003: 277). Further, it would ensure that both female and male victims (as well as perpetrators) become visible in media, and none neglected due to ignorance or presumptions about gender.

The ethnicity variable was included to see whether the analysis showed any difference in the gender presentation in relation to ethnicity of victim and/or perpetrator. As mentioned, the CEFR estimated that the Serbian side held over half of the camps in which it was reported that the largest number and worst kind of sexual atrocities took place. Table 2 shows that 46.1 per cent of the analysed texts present the perpetrators as Serbian or Bosnian Serbs. As for Bosnian-run and Croat-run camps, they comprised respectively 5 per cent and 10 per cent of the total of 162 camps. In Table 2, only 0.5 per cent of the texts identify perpetrators as Bosnian and only 2.1 per cent are identified as Croats.

In relation to both perpetrators and victims, definitions in ethnical terms are used to a higher extent than is the gender variable. In 63.8 per cent of the text units, the perpetrators are associated with their ethnicity, and the corresponding number for victims is 69.5 per cent. As stated, only 29 per cent of the perpetrators are gendered, compared to 54.9 per cent of the victims. Hence, in sum, ethnicity is valued more in describing victims and perpetrators of sexual violence than is their gender. In light of the overall presentations of this particular war in the media as a whole – i.e., as a nationalistic and ethnic war – the emphasis on ethnicity is nothing more than expected. Yet, if one accepts that it is as carriers of gender that perpetrators rape or otherwise sexually assault, it is conspicuous that their gender is not deemed equally important?

### *Possible explanations*

Given that the coverage of male victims of sexual violence is poor, what might be the reasons for this? According to three journalists who covered the sexual violence,

there is no explanation they can give for the lack of coverage other than the fact that they did not know about the extensive abuses of men. There is no reason to question them on their comments, and it is possible that their comments are generalizable to all journalists covering the war. Obviously, a reporter cannot write about something she or he has never heard of. Notwithstanding, considering that the CEFR was publicly available from May 1994, not knowing about the sexual violence against men in the *succeeding* years of coverage may serve as an explanation for the actual, deficient coverage, but not necessarily as a justification for it.

Following Kempf and Luostarinen (2002: 8), the issues that get reported in the news are generally those with “easy access, journalistically interesting material, dramatic David-and-Goliath constellations and public relations effort”. Two of these four demands are not fulfilled when it comes to sexual violence against men; the access issue has already been addressed, and second, to some extent, the “David-and-Goliath constellations” are not as evident, as it is mostly men raping or performing sexual acts on other men. Further, as “journalists suppressed news stories that satisfied all criteria for newsworthiness but did not fit the image of the enemy” (Kempf 2002: 60) during the wars in the former Yugoslavia, one might wonder if some journalists have also unconsciously suppressed stories that do not fit the image of masculinity.

Another and less controversial reason for the insignificant reporting of male victims of sexual violence is the social stigma attached to rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Potentially, and probably, there is an even greater social stigma attached to men than to women, as men risk the association to homosexuality. Indeed, one commentator stresses that “[s]hame is the glue that holds the man-making process together. Males who fail tests of manhood are publicly shamed, humiliated, and become a negative example for others (...). The power of shame should not be underestimated” (Goldstein 2001: 269). As mentioned previously, homosexuality often does not correspond to the dominant masculinity construct standard of what is deemed ‘a real man’ and what it is to be ‘masculine’. In addition, men probably choose not to come forward, as there generally are few who share the same experience (Skjelsbæk 1997b). Thus the ‘gatekeepers’ who decide whether or not these forms of violence reach the news are not exclusively or necessarily the journalists or the editors, but the victims themselves – an acknowledgement that makes the very reporting in the media even more valuable. Not only can the media be “regarded as social tools to construct gender” (Eide & von der Lippe 2003: 278, my translation) in the ways they emphasize and present news and individuals. Also, media “give signals not only about *what* is important, but about *who* is important, who matter in society” (Eide & von der Lippe 2003: 279, my translation). Thus, if the media also take male victims of sexual violence seriously, and report about them, the social stigma will probably be relieved, at least to some extent, by making these individuals visible and worthy of reporting.

## Concluding remarks

At the core of this article was a postulation about the importance of a fair understanding and adaptation of gender perspectives in the journalistic process. Hopefully, this article can function as a helpful reminder that we need to 'see gender everywhere'. The implementation of such perspectives in relation to male victims of sexual assaults can potentially impact both the micro and macro level of society. As for the micro level, reporting on both male and female victims of sexual violence is likely to reduce the social stigma most victims experience. Atrocities such as these should never be allowed to go on in silence and unchallenged, no matter the numbers of victims to them. Further, if the media address the issue of sexual violence against men, they will not only give a voice to those affected by such violence, but also challenge, instead of perpetuate, discriminating masculinity constructs at the macro level.

This analysis acknowledges that, for a journalist, "[t]o 'report the facts', in the time-honored phrase, *is* to suppress – inescapably" (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005: xvii). Every single atrocity committed in war simply cannot make it to the media outlets, even less to a single newspaper. Thus, every media outlet *has* to select and omit, and this selection process inevitably silences the stories of those countries, groups and individuals that are not reported on. Is it reasonable to expect of journalists and editors that they, in the selection process, take into consideration feminist perspectives, and also report stories that involve subversive constructs of masculinity? I argue that, for journalists aiming to do PJ, this is not a preposterous assumption. Both on a general basis, and in particular in relation to the coverage of sexual violence, it will ensure that no victims are silenced merely because of their gender. It being difficult at times is no excuse for not doing it.

\* The article is a revised version of Houge, Anette Bringedahl (2008). Subversive Victims? The (non) Reporting of Sexual Violence against Male Victims During the War in Bosnia-Herzegovina, *Nordicom Review*, 29(1): 63-78.

## Notes

1. In the former Yugoslavia, kinship is patrilinear, that is, the ethnicity of a child follows that of the father. Thus, raping women was a way to increase one's own ethnic population through forced pregnancies.
2. See, *inter alia*, Stiglmeier (1994) and Moser & Clark (2001).
3. CEFR was established pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992), and was completed the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 1994. The mandate was to provide "conclusions on the evidence of grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and other violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia" (Bassiouni 1994d).
4. Ruth Seifert (2001: 58) argues that there are three explanations for widespread use of rape in war: i) a historical acceptance of the winning party's right to the counterpart's women; ii) rape as message to the counterpart that he and the men around him are unable to protect 'their' women; and iii) gang rape – which is common particularly in war – creates solidarity and enforces the 'brotherhood of men'.
5. When references are made to different sections of the CEFR, they will take the form of 'Bassiouni 1994...'. Mr. Bassiouni was the head director of the Commission.

6. The Commission started its work in November 1992 and concluded its work in April 1994.
7. 35 of the 162 camps, about 20 per cent, were run by unknown forces.
8. Here, the notion of patriarchy is not meant as the domination of *all* men over *all* women. Rather it is the domination of some (male) actors over other (male and female) actors who to a greater or lesser extent are passivized.
9. Gender is understood as constructed in interaction (sociology of gender), not determined by or inherent in the individual's biological sex. Who you are is defined by the kind of person you are socialized into being, which depends on each individual's lived experience and, *inter alia*, on the contemporary, contextual constructs of femininity and masculinity. Those constructs represent what having a specific gender means at the time, and are – and this must be emphasized – dynamic, i.e., culturally, socially and historically specific (Connell 2000:25).
10. – or any other socially constructed divides of human beings –
11. Web-address: <http://www.retriever-info.com/services/archive.html>
12. The criteria defining the units of analysis.

#### Search criteria

Universe: Articles from *Aftenposten* and *Aftenposten Aften* in the time period 01/01/1992 until 31/12/2005

All words: bosn\*

One or more

of the words: \*voldtekt\* OR seksu\* OR kastrer\* OR testikle\* OR penis\* OR nak\* OR kjønnsorgan\*  
[\*rape\* OR sexual OR castrat\* OR testicle\* OR penis\* OR nak\*/nude OR genital\*]

*Asterisk:* the ending/beginning of the word is not defined – ensures that verbs, adjectives, singular and plural forms of every core word are included.

13. Qualitative content analysis here refers to the process of excluding articles for which the search criteria were fulfilled but in which the variables referred to other events than those in question. An example is the use of metaphors: 'the naked city of Sarajevo' or 'the rape of Bosnia'.
14. The one unit that falls under the 'Other' category refers to an incident in which a Dutch NATO corporal accused two British soldiers of raping him while on duty in Bosnia (NTB/DPA 2001).
15. To illustrate: If starting at first entry in the left hand column, 'Bosnian', what can be read from left to right, is: 57 text units mention exclusively Bosnian female victims to sexual violence. Bosnian female victims comprise 63.3 per cent of all references to female victims in *Aftenposten*, and the 57 text units comprise 60 per cent of all text units that mention Bosnian victims irrespective of their gender. The corresponding numbers for male Bosnian victims can be read from the next three columns, then for both genders and finally for victims for which no gender was mentioned.
16. The 'Other' category here refers to an incident in which British soldiers allegedly raped a fellow UN soldier from the Netherlands; a case where UN soldiers of different nationalities while on duty in Bosnia were suspected for visiting a brothel where women were forced into prostitution; and an article in which Islamic extremists were believed to be involved in grave violations during the war in Bosnia.
17. These two articles do not specifically state that both men and women were raped, but rape is listed as one of several assaults which 'men and women' were exposed to.
18. WOW= Weapon of War. Refers to rape as a strategy to achieve military goals. Three of these specifically stated that rape was part of a strategy to perform 'ethnic cleansing'. All three stated women as victims.
19. See footnote 17.
20. Of particular relevance are Annex IX: Rape and Sexual Assault and Annex VIII: Prison Camps (Bassiouni 1994a; 1994c).
21. For a future study, it would be interesting to see how well theories of gender constructs and the reporting of male victims of sexual abuse resonate with the theory of worthy and unworthy victims in the news coverage. Such an analysis should also include the recent media coverage of abuses in Abu Ghraib, Iraq.

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## Contributors

EVA BOLLER is a journalist and communications scientist. She is concluding her PhD thesis on the 'Visual framing of war reporting' at the University of Hamburg. [eva.boller@gmx.net](mailto:eva.boller@gmx.net)

ANETTE BRINGEDAL HOUGE is a PhD researcher in the Department of Criminology and Sociology of Law, Faculty of Law, University of Oslo, focusing on international/supranational criminology and criminal justice, collective violence in general, and sexual violence in particular. [anette.bringedal.houge@gmail.com](mailto:anette.bringedal.houge@gmail.com)

ELISABETH EIDE is an author, journalist and professor at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences. [elisabeth.eide@hioa.no](mailto:elisabeth.eide@hioa.no)

MARTE HØIBY is a PhD candidate at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences. She has worked with international and local NGOs and holds a Master's in Media, Peace and Conflict Studies from the UN mandated University for Peace in Costa Rica. [marte-havikbotn.hoiby@hioa.no](mailto:marte-havikbotn.hoiby@hioa.no)

SADIA JAMIL is a journalist and media academic. She has completed her PhD at the University of Queensland and holds postgraduate degrees in Media Management (Scotland) and Mass Communication, Karachi. She is vice-chair of the Journalism Research and Education Section of the International Association of Media and Communication Research, and a visiting scholar at the University of Karachi. [sadia.jamil@ymail.com](mailto:sadia.jamil@ymail.com)

QUHRAMAANA KAKAR is a peace activist and women's empowerment practitioner and advocate. She is the founder and director of Women for Peace and Participation. [quhramaana@icloud.com](mailto:quhramaana@icloud.com)

MARTA KOLLÁROVÁ is graduated from Aberystwyth University and Central European University in the UK. She specialises in theories of international relations, feminism and the position of women in international politics. [martakollarova55@gmail.com](mailto:martakollarova55@gmail.com)

#### CONTRIBUTORS

BERIT VON DER LIPPE is professor in rhetoric at BI Norwegian Business School. Her main publications are articles and books about language and power, political rhetoric, first and foremost foreign policy rhetoric and gender.

berit.v.d.lippe@bi.no

SARAH MACHARIA is a feminist, political economist and researcher. She leads the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), a 114-country longitudinal research and advocacy initiative for gender equality in and through the news media running since 1995.

sm@waccglobal.org

TOBY MILLER is emeritus distinguished professor, University of California, Riverside; Sir Walter Murdoch Professor of Cultural Policy Studies, Murdoch University; professor Invitado, Escuela de Comunicación Social, Universidad del Norte; professor of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University / Prifysgol Caerdydd; and director of the Institute for Media and Creative Industries, Loughborough University London.

tobym69@icloud.com

KRISTIN SKARE ORGERET, Dr.art is professor at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences.

kristin.orgeret@hioa.no

RUNE OTTOSEN is a journalist and political scientist. He is a professor in journalism at Department for Journalism and Media Studies at Oslo and Akershus University College for Applied Sciences.

rune.ottosen@hioa.no

DESY AYU PIRMASARI holds a master in conflict resolution and peace studies. She is a journalist and is currently doing her PhD in Politics at the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion, Lancaster University.

desy.pirmasari@gmail.com

LINDA STEINER is a professor in the College of Journalism at the University of Maryland and editor of 'Journalism & Communication Monographs'.

lsteiner@umd.edu

LILIAN NGUSUUR UNAEGBU is a gender and communication expert. She is an independent researcher on gender media and conflict from Nigeria.

lunaegbu@gmail.com

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In yearbooks, newsletters and survey articles the Clearinghouse has an ambition to broaden and contextualize knowledge about children, young people and media literacy. The Clearinghouse seeks to bring together and make available insights concerning children's and young people's relations with mass media from a variety of perspectives.

WAR REPORTING has traditionally been a male activity. Elite sources like politicians, high ranking military officers and state officials are collectively still dominated by men, and it will take more than the presence of an increased number of female journalists to change this male hegemony. There is, though, no deterministic link between sex/gender and more peaceful news or a more peaceful world.

This book offers analytic approaches to how traditional war journalism is gendered. Through different case studies, the book reveals how the framing of different femininities and masculinities affects the reporting and our understanding of war and conflicts.



The essays in this book compile theoretical and professional approaches to understanding the gendered intersections in traditional masculinist narratives still dominant in war reporting. The book also offers strategies for resistance while arguing that transformation is indeed possible.

ROBIN ANDERSEN, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies,  
Department of Communication and Media Studies at Fordham University

This is groundbreaking work on war and peace reporting. Located at the intersection of gender studies, media work, and post-colonial approaches, it shows in a convincing way how traditional norms on gender are embedded in narratives of war. These rich essays are a must-read for all who are concerned about peace and security in world politics.

MAUD EDWARDS, Professor in Political Science, Stockholm University

# NORDICOM

Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research

University of Gothenburg  
Box 713, SE 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden  
Telephone +46 31 786 00 00 • Fax + 46 31 786 46 55

E-mail [info@nordicom.gu.se](mailto:info@nordicom.gu.se)

[www.nordicom.gu.se](http://www.nordicom.gu.se)

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