CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

Department of Journalism

Master's Thesis

2024   **Allegra Diamond**

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Female War Correspondents and Access in Conflict Zones

Master's Thesis

Author of the Thesis: Allegra Diamond

Study programme: Erasmus Mundus Journalism, Media and Globalisation

Supervisor: Mgr. Veronika Macková, Ph.D.

Year of the defense: 2024

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 31 July 2024   Allegra Diamond

References

Diamond, A. (2024). *Female War Correspondents and Access in Cofnlict Zones.* Praha, 2024. 79 p. Master's thesis (Mgr). Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism, Department of Journalism. Supervisor prof. Veronika Macková, Ph.D.

Length of the Thesis: 99,838

Abstract

This study examines the impact of gender dynamics on the experience of female war journalists reporting from conflict zones. Despite significant research on the representation and influence of female journalists in media, there is limited exploration of how gender affects information acquisition in war zones. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the unique challenges and contributions of female war correspondents. Through thematic analysis of 10 semi-structured interviews with female war journalists, it investigates whether being a woman impacts a journalist's ability to access, gather and disseminate information from conflict zones. This research addresses two primary research questions: whether gender influences journalists' ability to operate in conflict zones and if these effects are positive or negative. The findings show that female journalists possess unique advantages due to their gender, such as better access to female sources and having the ability to blend in through use of head and face coverings. However, they also face challenges such as cultural restrictions, increased risk, and family pressure. This study also touches on the effects of intersectionality, specifically focused on how women with certain identities may have access to both the male and female population by being seen as a "third gender". By discussing the nuanced interplay between gender and war journalism, this research contributes to the broader discourse on media, gender, and conflict.

Abstrakt

Tato studie zkoumá vliv genderové dynamiky na zkušenosti válečných novinářek, které podávají zprávy z konfliktních oblastí. Navzdory velkému počtu výzkumů o zastoupení a vlivu novinářek v médiích, je zkoumání toho, jak gender ovlivňuje

získávání informací ve válečných zónách, omezené. Cílem této studie je zaplnit tuto mezeru zkoumáním jedinečných výzev a přínosů válečných zpravodajek. Prostřednictvím tematické analýzy deseti polostrukturovaných rozhovorů s válečnými novinářkami tato studie zkoumá, zda to, že jsou ženy, ovlivňuje jejich schopnost získávat, shromažďovat a šířit informace z konfliktních zón. Tento výzkum se zabývá dvěma základními výzkumnými otázkami: zda pohlaví ovlivňuje schopnost novinářů působit v konfliktních zónách a zda jsou tyto vlivy pozitivní, nebo negativní. Zjištění ukazují, že novinářky mají díky svému pohlaví jedinečné výhody, jako je lepší přístup k ženským zdrojům a schopnost splynout s okolím díky používání pokrývek hlavy a obličeje. Čelí však také výzvám, jako jsou kulturní omezení, zvýšené riziko a tlak rodiny. Tato studie se také dotýká vlivu intersekcionality, konkrétně se zaměřuje na to, jak mohou mít ženy s určitou identitou přístup k mužské i ženské populaci, protože jsou vnímány jako "třetí pohlaví". Tím, že tento výzkum pojednává o nuancích vzájemného působení mezi genderem a válečnou žurnalistikou, přispívá k širšímu diskurzu o médiích, genderu a konfliktech.

Keywords

Klíčová slova

Title

Female War Correspondents and Access in Conflict Zones

Název práce

Válečné Reportérky a Přístup do Válečných Zón

Acknowledgement

Thank you to my family, both born and chosen.

Mom and dad, thank you for supporting me day and night from over 5000 miles away. Knowing you're proud of me means the world. Sarah, you inspire me to be the best journalists I can be and, more importantly, have kept me sane for 25 years.

To my Mundus Family, especially the Prague cohort: I'm so glad we did this together. Thank you for answering all my silly questions. To my Mezibranská family, those who lived there and those who might as well have, thank you for everything. Above all to Lisa, Malene, and Adina, thank you for being my home base — for picking me up off the floor or joining me when I couldn't get up, for insisting I take a break and feeding me when I did, I wouldn't have finished this without you.

And of course, thank you to the amazing women who took the time to speak to me about what it means to be a journalist. You inspire me.

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism FSV UK

Research proposal for Erasmus Mundus Journalism Diploma Thesis

THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY STUDENT:

Student's surname and given name: Allegra Diamond	**Registry stamp: / Razítko podatelny:** Univerzita Karlova Fakulta sociálních věd Došlo dne: 11 -12- 2023 -1- Či: 476 Příloh: Přiděleno:
Start of studies for EMJ (in Aarhus) September 2022	
Your faculty e-mail: 53846929@fsv.cuni.cz	
Study program/form of study: **Erasmus Mundus Journalism**	

Thesis title in English:
Female war correspondents and access in conflict zones

Expected date of submission (semester, academic year)
(Thesis must be submitted according to the Academic Calendar.)
Spring semester, 2023/2024

Main research question (max. 250 characters):
How does gender affect a journalist's access to information in conflict zones?

Current state of research on the topic (max. 1800 characters):
Theory: Gender theory is a complex subject that explores the ways in which society constructs and enforces gender roles and expectations. Judith Butler claims that gender is a construct of society. It is not something inherent to an individual but rather a social construct that is performed through actions and behaviors. According to her theory, not only is your gender determined by what society thinks of how a body performs but also by what society does to that body. Gender is dependent on external societal actions to be created as much as on individual human performance Butler's theory highlights the ways in which gender is constructed and performed in our culture, and how harmful gender stereotypes and tropes can perpetuate violence (Butler 1990).
Women in conflict journalism:
In general, female journalists often encounter obstacles that hinder their advancement in the field. Such obstacles include gender bias, unequal opportunities for career growth, lack of representation in leadership roles, and harassment. All of these are manifestations of how female journalists are devalued compared to male journalists (Kim, 2006). These obstacles can be amplified in conflict zones.
In *Shape Shifting in the Conflict Zone: The Strategic performance of Gender in War Reporting*, the authors point to this expression of gender and how it affects possibilities in both a positive and negative way. Female reporters "shape-shift" in conflict zones in order to perform their jobs and access information. By either leaning into or eschewing their femininity, they can change how possibilities are presented to them. This finding relies on gender theory, specifically parody and subversion and identity as a site of power as mentioned above. Female reporters can shift their power by either parodying femininity by leaning into hyper feminism or subverting it by leaning into hyper masculine stereotypes (Palmer & Melki, 2018).

Expected theoretical framework (max. 1800 characters):
A baseline theory through which to analyse a gender specific section of any profession is Gender

Theory. Judith Butler's 1990 book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* had a profound impact on the field of gender studies and influenced the way we look at gender today. The pillars of her theory that I will be focusing on as a theoretical framework are performativity, parody and subversion, and identity as a site of power. These three pillars weave together to create the overall idea that external gender perception influences ones place of power in society. Therefore, a reporters being perceived as feminine affects the treatment they receive by the outside world.(Butler 1990).

Another theoretical framework we can use to analyse the question of gendered access is Feminist Standpoint Epistemology. Feminist Standpoint Epistemology is a framework within feminist theory that claims that the social positioning of individuals, which is informed by their identity including gender, affects their access to knowledge and understanding of the world at large (Brooks, 2007). This theory highlights the importance of women and other marginalized groups when it comes to relaying reality, since they have an awareness not only of their own realities but the realities of the dominant group as well, in this case men. This theory argues that the experience of oppression provides the oppressed with a unique insight into social and political power relations. This insight is an important nuance to capture in conflict reporting, and according to Brooks, women are better positioned to capture it. These insights are not clear to those who are more privileged, therefore men don't have access to this information purely based on their social situation (Brooks, 2007).

Expected methodology, and methods for data gathering and analysis (max. 1800 characters):

Semi-structured interviews, snowball sampling (followed by purposive sampling), literature review This study's goal is to answer the research question of how gender affects females war reporters' access to information in conflict zones. I am planning on conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with a consistent set of open-ended questions. The initial set of questions will be the same for all participants but I will be flexible to adding follow up questions related to answers the interviewees give. The questions will inquire about specific experiences where being a woman has affected how they do their jobs in conflict zones. I will then transcribe the interviews and categorize the answers into opportunities for access and barriers. I will find the interviewees through existing contacts, their snowball contacts, and cold outreach.

Expected research design (data to be analyzed, for example, the titles of analyzed newspapers and selected time period):

I intend to conduct semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions with 12-15 women who are working/ have worked as reporters in conflict zones. The requirements for an interviewee include: identifying and presenting to the world as a woman, having worked in at least one active conflict zone, and having worked in journalism within any medium but must have been present during the reporting or fact gathering (this does to include editors or producers who have worked on pieces from within a conflict zone but were not present in the zone). This will include foreign correspondents but will not be limited to the strict definition of foreign correspondents who live as well as work abroad. Journalists must have had their reporting published or aired through a traditional media stream (reporters publishing exclusively through social media or streaming for social media platforms only will not be included). Journalists from any country/region will be included as long as they have reported on an active conflict somewhere in the world. There is no specific regional focus. When possible, the interviews will be conducted in person and recorded with permission. Depending on the location of the interviewees, some will be done via video call where they will also be recorded with permission.

Expected thesis structure (chapters and subchapters with brief description of their content):

1) Abstract

2) Introduction
   a. Brief history of women in foreign correspondence
   b. Purpose of research
3) Literature review
   a. Theories (gender theory, standpoint feminism theory
   b. Current state of research
   c. Physical access
      i. Barrier
         1. Facilities
            a. Pregnancy/menstruation
         2. Safety
         3. Assignment by male superiors
            a. The special case of motherhood
      ii. Opportunities
         1. Female exclusive spaces
         2. Disguise through traditional face covering
   d. Emotional
      i. Barriers
         1. Being taken seriously
         2. Being protected from emotional harm by male colleagues
      ii. Opportunities
         1. "feminine" vulnerability and trustworthiness
4) Theoretical framework (see above)
5) Methodology and data (see above)
   a. interviews
      i. Method of selection
      ii. Questions
      iii. Format and length
6) Findings
7) Discussion and Conclusion
8) Bibliography

Basic literature list (at least 5 most important works related to the topic and the method(s) of analysis; all works should be briefly characterized on 2-5 lines):

1) Butler, J (1989) *Gender Trouble:Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
2) Lindsay Palmer & Jad Melki (2018) Shape Shifting in the Conflict Zone. Journalism Studies, 19:1, 126-142. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2016.1161494
3) Melki, Jad & Mallat, Sarah. (2016). Journalism Studies Block Her Entry, Keep Her Down and Push Her Out.
4) Kim, K.-H. (2006). Obstacles to the success of female journalists in Korea. Media, Culture & Society, 28(1), 123-141. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443706059578
5) Milly Buonanno. (2012). Women war correspondents: does gender make a difference on the front line?
6) Edy, C. M., ' Conditions of Acceptance: The United States Military, the Press and the "Woman War Correspondent", 1846–1945', Ph.D diss. (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012).
7) Natasha Simpson (2020). "The "Woman's Angle" and Beyond: Allied Women War Reporters during the Second World War". *University of Victoria*. pp. 18, 73.

8) Brooks, A. (2007). Feminist Standpoint Epistemology: Building Knowledge and Empowerment Through Women's Lived Experience. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Feminist research practice: A primer* (pp. 53–82). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984270.n3

Related theses and dissertations (list of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. theses defended at Charles University or other academic institutions in the last five years):

1) STRICKER, Annika Maria. *How gendered discrimination limits women's professional practice in conflict reporting in Latin America.* Diplomová práce, vedoucí Němcová Tejkalová, Alice. Praha: Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Katedra žurnalistiky. https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/176423

2) DI MAURO, Teresa. *Does gender play a role in peace journalism practices? An analysis of the Armenian and Azerbaijani coverage of the 44 days Karabakh war.* Diplomová práce, vedoucí Dimitrov, Michal. Praha: Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Katedra žurnalistiky. https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/177082

Date / Signature of the student:

THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY THE ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR:

I confirm that I have consulted this research proposal with the author and that the proposal is related to my field of expertise at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

I agree to be the Thesis supervisor.

Surname and name of the supervisor

Further recommendations related to the topic, structure and methods for analysis:

Further recommendations of literature related to the topic:

The research proposal has to be printed, signed and submitted to the FSV UK registry office (podatelna) in two copies, **by November 15**, addressed to the Program Coordinator.
Accepted research proposals have to be picked up at the Program Coordinator's Office, Sandra Lábová. The accepted research proposal needs to be included in the hard copy version of the submitted thesis.

RESEARCH PROPOSALS NEED TO BE APPROVED BY THE HEAD OF ERASMUS MUNDUS JOURNALISM PROGRAM.

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Introduction

> "The whole history of war journalism is one of journalists trying to get access to events in order to serve the interests of the public. The history of reporters' ability to follow unfolding events is as old as war journalism itself." (Høiby & Ottosen, 2019, p. 69)

Journalism can be seen as "the first draft of history" (Mclaughlin, 2002, p. 3) and history is full of war. For almost as long as humans have been fighting wars, we have been telling stories about them. From early depictions on cave walls and oral recounts of ancient battles to modern books and journal articles discussing the profound human impact of war, these narratives have played a crucial role in shaping our understanding of conflict. These stories cannot be recorded without those who witness and document them. And without access to the events, what is recorded cannot be accurate. Access to firsthand information is crucial as, without it, the stories that emerge can be misleading or biased. This issue of access becomes even more complicated when considering gender within war zones.

Most studies on female journalists, especially war reporters, focus on one of two areas. First, they explore the representation of women in the production of media such as how many female journalists there are in the newsroom and what level of power they hold. Studies such as those by North (2009) and Ross and Carter (2011) highlight the gender disparities in media organizations and show that women are often underrepresented in senior roles. This representation is particularly important when it comes to decision making within media organizations. Secondly, research focused on the angle and impact of women's reporting such as how the presence of

female journalists in conflict zones affects the narrative being told. Studies by researchers like Carpenter (2007) and Steiner (2012) explore how female journalists may tell more nuanced or emotionally in-touch stories centering more marginalized perspectives and voices. As Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Christian Baden (2021) put it:

> "Scholarly interest in the level and quality of women's representation in the media workforce is driven by two main considerations: first, a concern for equal opportunities, and second, an assumption that the extent to which women participate in the production of news discourse affects their ability to make a difference in institutional norms, professional styles, and news contents" (p. 235)

While both these areas of research are important, they are not the focus of this thesis. This research is focused on a third, less explored category — the effect of gender on information acquisition and dissemination in conflict zones. Despite robust research into some aspects of female war reporting, "there are still areas of war reporting that remain under-investigated" (Martinez et al., 2022, p. 16). One area highlighted by Martinez (2022) is the difficulties of access to various areas and sources. The importance of this focus is highlighted by Marte Høiby and Rune Ottosen in "Journalism Under Pressure in Conflict Zones." They argue that:

> "The media's ability to serve as the Fourth Estate, even in time of wars and crisis, depends on the journalist's ability to cover wars and international conflicts through first-hand knowledge…Truth is the first casualty in war if reporters are prevented access to unfolding events in the war zone." (Høiby & Ottosen, 2019, p. 70)

Any barrier to access is a barrier to the public knowing the truth. The fact that gender is a factor in access cannot be ignored.

The aim of this study is to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Does being a woman affect how journalists are able to access, gather and disseminate information in conflict zones?

RQ2: If gender affects accessing, gathering and dissemination of information in conflict zones, is it in a positive or negative way?

By exploring these questions, this study aims to highlight the unique challenges and contributions of female journalists in conflict zones, thus contributing to the broader discussion on media, gender, and conflict.

1. Literature Review

Female journalists often encounter obstacles that hinder their advancement in the field. Such obstacles include gender bias, unequal opportunities for career growth, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and harassment. All of these are manifestations of how female journalists are devalued compared to male journalists. It's important to note that this thesis employs a binary understanding of gender. The terms "women" and "female journalists" in this thesis only include people who are perceived as women by the general public. Therefore, nonbinary journalists and transgender women who do not present as female and are perceived as such may be excluded. That is, in and of itself, a level of gender discrimination and introduces bias to this study. The intersectionality discussed in the Theory (1.3), Finding (3.3.1), and Discussion (4.4) sections is, therefore, limited by these factors.

The obstacles mentioned above can be amplified in conflict zones. In this thesis, a conflict zone is defined as an area characterized by ongoing war or violent instability at a national level encompassing interstate and intrastate conflicts as well as encounters between official government entities and insurgent or terrorist groups. This definition excludes regions where the effects of past conflicts persist without current violent activity. The terms "conflict zone" and "warzone" are used interchangeably. This literature review will be split into three main sections. First, there will be a brief history of war reporting and women's contribution to the field. Then, it will feature testimonies from female correspondents and other examples from the literature that exemplify the various ways in which gender affects access in the field. Finally, the theoretical frameworks for this study will be outlined.

1.1 History of Female War Reporters

> "War has preoccupied human civilisation for at least 4000 years from the
> foundations of the world's first great empires to the empires of today."
> (Turner et al., 2019, p. x)

War makes good news. With a mix of urgency, drama, hope, and fear, it penetrates the public attention like few other subjects (Turner et al., 2019). It can be argued that war correspondence was invented in 490 BCE when Pheidippides ran from Marathon to Athens to announce the Greek victory over Persia. Studies state that the idea of war correspondence as we think of it today was created between the 17th and 19th centuries. The first weekly newspaper, printed in Germany in 1605, contributed to the advent of war reporting as we know it (Turner et al., 2019). While people have always been observing wars, the observers used to sing the praises of war victors and were far from neutral (Martinez et al., 2022). In the 19th century, that changed. Martinez, Ruellan, and Yaméogo (2022) characterised that change by explaining, "The observers, who begin to be called journalists and soon enough reporters, are sent by newspapers that intend to carry out their mission in a more autonomous manner, and position themselves as more independent from the belligerents and the powers at play." (p. 14).

The neutrality of war correspondents will always be questioned as ultimately, "war costs lives and vast amounts of money so the war needs to be popular...War weariness must be avoided and the press plays a large part in that," (Turner et al., 2019, p. ix). But, in theory, The change from "observers" to "journalists" marked a shift from biased accounts to those that claim to recount the facts of wars and

errected the modern idea of war correspondents. While the media along with academic research has portrayed war journalism as "the business of men only," (Martinez et al., 2022, p. 15), "women have also played an important role in the development of war journalism." (Martinez et al., 2022, p. 15)

Although various texts bestow upon different women the title of "first female war correspondent" the truth was that "anyone could (and often did) don and even flaunt the 'war correspondent' title." (Edy, 2019, p. 244). Because of this, it is difficult to definitively name the first female war correspondent. Some people called war correspondents were reporting from safety hundreds of miles from a battle front and others who were in the thick of the action were never recognized with the title due to not having their name accredited under the article (Edy, 2019). For this reason, it is important to clarify this study's use of the word "war reporter". The term "war reporter" refers specifically to journalists who have reported firsthand from active conflict zones. This definition excludes editors involved in stories coming out of these areas but who do not have direct on-the-ground experience, as well as journalists compiling information remotely. Conflict journalist, conflict reporter, war journalist, and war reporter may all be used interchangeably in this thesis. Despite the thought that female war correspondents are a relatively modern breed of reporter, between 1846 and 1947 "at least 250 women were identified by their own publications as war correspondents" (Edy, 2019, p. 244).

As the years progressed, more women came into prominence as female war correspondents. During the American Civil War, women like Mary Livermore and Frances Clayton took on the title (Knightley, 2000) while World War I and II saw an increase in the number of notable female war correspondents such as Peggy Hull and

Martha Gellhorn. With the onset of the Korean and Vietnam wars came more need for war reporters in general and many women embraced the role (Knightley, 2000). The number of women reporting from more recent conflicts has continued to expand. Marie Colvin, who reported from war zones including Iraq, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, and was killed in Syria in 2012, is one of the most recognizable names in contemporary war journalism (Hilsum, 2018). All of these women documented the realities of war from within. Their contributions were vital in shaping public understanding of conflicts and in advocating for those affected by war. This could only be done through access to those participating in and affected by the wars they were covering. However, not all access is created equal and the journalists' access to these zones and the types of information they could gather were influenced by their gender, a topic that requires further exploration. Before I can delve into how being a woman can affect the type of information journalists can access in conflict zones, I first must point out the barriers to getting to these zones in the first place.

Throughout the 20th century the two world wars caused an increased need for war reporters. However, female journalists were systematically kept from conflict zones. US officials found reasons to deny them credentials, the lack of restroom facilities were repeatedly used as an excuse to keep women from the front line, and authorities even claimed that "it was too dangerous for a woman to fly" (Chambers et al, 2004, p. 203). From fearing women would be "unable to work in the cold and wet" (Harris & Williams, 2018, p. 165) to resisting letting women stay overnight on location with men due to potential "distractions" (Harris & Williams, 2018, p. 165) the excuses keeping women from reporting on wars were endless.

The Vietnam War marked a shift in the presence and acceptance of female war

correspondents. Authorities found it more difficult to keep women out of war zones as guerilla war tactics ensured no rigid front line which, in turn, eliminated many military restrictions that were used as excuses to exclude female journalists (Steiner, 2016). There were also fewer limitations for journalists in general, as the ease of booking commercial flights eliminated the need for journalists to get official permission to organize their transportation to Vietnam. "It was this feature of easy access, rather than significant changes in attitudes about women, that allowed so many women to report from Vietnam" (Elwood-Akers, 1988, p. 165). New methods of reporting and a shift toward less traditional military tactics required journalists to be flexible and inventive. This need was the perfect opportunity for female journalists to break into the scene as they were thought to, "display more mental flexibility, apply more intuitive and imaginative judgments, tolerate ambiguity better, and have a greater tendency to plan long term," (Steiner, 2012, p. 206). This made them perfect for the new reporting atmosphere. There were still attempts made to keep women out, but they were increasingly less successful.

The climax in female conflict reporters, however, did not translate to wider acceptance. Despite a lessening of military and international restrictions, many women still struggled to make it to the front lines due to in-house restrictions from their media networks. According to Reuters (2023) only 22% of top editors and media personnel across 240 outlets are women. That means that men are making most of the decisions about who should be assigned to which projects. Regardless of a female journalist's feeling of safety, men often underestimate her ability to do her job in a conflict zone. As stated in "Gender, Risk and Journalism":

"A greater number of men than women thought it was more dangerous to be a

woman journalist. If more men have senior positions in the media, this might

impact on choices relating to who to assign to conflict zones" (Harris et al.,

2016, p. 907).

In the same research piece quoted above, 63% of female respondents suggested that

their gender was an asset in reporting. The reasons for this were varied and included

increased access to families and female sources, being seen as less of a threat, and

being underestimated leading to male sources revealing more than they would to a

reporter of their same gender. Despite this, only 35% of men saw it as an asset and

18% saw it as an outright disadvantage, with 47% thinking there was no change in

advantage (Harris et al., 2016). Since most decision makers are men, this imbalanced

perspective could result in less women being assigned reporting jobs in conflict

zones.

Despite persistent resistance, female reporters started to note and leverage

the increased access being a woman in a war zone could offer. Being conspicuous

could sometimes be an advantage as some female reporters noted that soldiers

preferred talking to them and their questions were often answered first at press

conferences (Rouvalis & Schackner, 2000).

1.2 Elements of Access

Female war journalists have long reported both advantages and disadvantages

to gathering information based on their gender. Eve-Ann Prentice, a British war

reporter who reported from conflicts in Serbia, Poland, Romania, Russia, and almost

died in a NATO bombing in Kosovo, reflected on her experiences in the Balkans

highlighting how being underestimated based on gender could work to her

advantage:

> "The Balkans is still fairly feudal in many ways, and some of the old-style
> political leaders…they think, 'Oh here comes a nice stupid woman, how
> wonderful.' But that's great; I love it—because the stupider they think you are,
> the more they are likely to tell you. So especially in my younger days I would
> shamelessly take advantage of this." (quoted in Playdon, 2002, p. 272).

Conversely, this same femininity was limiting for Belgian journalist Christine Ockrent during her time reporting from Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War. Ockrent was barred from interviewing a Saudi princeling as only men would be allowed to interview the royal. She recalled one of the royal's companions saying, "Il faut bien un journaliste pour interroger le souverain !—Ce n'est pas un journaliste, c'est une femme," (Ockrent, 1998, p. 45) meaning "There needs to be a journalist to question the sovereign! That's not a journalist, that's a woman!"

Apart from outright restriction, there are also less obviously gendered tactics used to limit female journalists access to information in war zones. Factors such as risk and pay can impact a woman's ability to reach a conflict zone or speak to sources. The stark pay discrepancy between male and female journalists has historically served as a deterrent for women from reporting on conflict (Chambers et al, 2004). This pay barrier has continued today (Carrié, 2018) which has potential effects that will be explored later in this study. It is not only relevant to look at the pay difference between male and female journalists of the same level within a company, but also to look at the difference between staff journalists (those employed and paid by a certain outlet) versus freelance journalists. In the chapter of *Reporting War and Conflict* titled "Gender, risk, and war reporting", Janet Harris and Kevin Williams describe how

freelancing has come more to be associated with women, even claiming it "is often described as 'women's work'" (Harris & Williams, 2018, p. 179). They cite research stating that over two thirds of freelancers in North America are women. This is no different in conflict journalism as, "historically, women have been disproportionately represented among freelancers – including in conflict work" (Steiner, 2016, p. 43).

Pay is not the only downside to freelancing. There is another side of the literature on freelancers that explores how freelancing affects access by mechanisms such as risk assessment and name recognition. A report by The International Federation of Journalists (2009) explained that freelancers are more at risk in conflict zones than staff reporters due to freelancers often being excluded from safety training. Journalists who are backed by outlets have the benefit of network sponsored safety training and access to safety equipment that freelancers do not have unless they front the costs themselves, which they often do not have the budget to do (Harris et al., 2016). Research claims that the increased risk reduces the access freelancers have to information. Part of this is due to higher risk aversion. Freelancers sometimes avoid putting themselves in risky situations such as talking to sources on front lines or going into heavily bombarded areas as they do not have the necessary safety training or equipment to take on the risk (Creech, 2017). This restricts their access to information. They have additional risk as well since "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" (Steiner, 2016, p. 43). Freelancers may otherwise choose not to go to conflict zones because some networks refuse to take stories from freelancers. "The BBC, for example, require that you have safety training"

(Høiby & Ottosen, 2019, p. 84) so freelancers are deterred from going into conflict zones as they know their stories won't be taken and therefore paid for. In section 4.3 gender's effect on freelancing will be connected to access and show that they are intrinsically linked.

Beyond the risks associated with freelancing, there are also risks associated with simply existing as a woman in the sphere of journalism. UNESCO's Global Survey on Online Violence against Women Journalists (2020) found that almost three quarters of female journalists have experienced online violence due to their job and one fifth had experienced attacks offline. This risk is amplified in conflict zones as the risks journalists face are dependent on the genre of work (Høiby & Ottosen, 2019) and war reporting is probably the highest level of risk (Konow-Lund & Høiby, 2021). Due to this, "there seems to be a trend to take decisions about risk assessment away from the women journalists more often than for the male… regardless of their age and experience." (Høiby, 2016, p. 81). There are many examples of, particularly male, assigning editors and bosses restricting female journalists from entering conflict zones due to safety concerns (Steiner, 2016b). In a survey of editors, many expressed their reluctance to send a female reporter to an area if any other woman had been attacked or harassed at that site. They did not express the same reluctance to send male journalists to places where other men had been attacked (Høiby, 2016), even though the most recent data by UNESCO (2022) on statistics of journalists killed showed that 89% of journalists killed are men. For example, the 2008 kidnapping of 3 journalists resulted in extra protections for female journalists including not sending them into conflict zones even though two of the three kidnapped journalists were men (Høiby, 2016). No such restrictions were put on male journalists. Following two

sexual assaults of female journalists in Egypt amidst protests in 2011, the French chapter of Reporters Without Borders urged international media to avoid sending female reporters to Egypt (Von der Lippe & Ottosen, 2016). There was massive backlash from female journalists to this statement as many objected to the restriction from male leadership and some resented editors choosing to limit their opportunities rather than making it safer for women to do their jobs (Harris & Williams, 2018). This issue is furthered when assigning editors simply do not want to have the added work of ensuring that an area is safe for a woman. In Sri Lanka, for example, female journalists have more trouble accessing the northern conflict regions. One editor determined that "sending the more 'fragile' of the human species would be cumbersome as their accommodation would have to be looked into with more detail than the men" (Bulathsinghala, 2005, p. 31). Sometimes the editors in question were not simply concerned for the physical safety of female journalists, but also saw it as their duty to protect them from emotionally damaging information. "One British newspaper editor insisted that there were stories to which he would not allow women to be assigned, arguing that 'there are some things women shouldn't see'." (Harris & Williams, 2018, p. 163). In addition to male bosses and editors restricting female journalists' access to conflict zones, attempts by male journalists to protect their female colleagues limit a female journalist's ability to participate in reporting in conflict zones. "Pseudo-protectionism in journalism (as elsewhere in other social institutions) has been found to constrain women journalists in their fight for the same opportunities as men" (Konow-Lund & Høiby, 2021, p. 1599). Male colleagues would often try to "save" female journalists from dealing with heavy news by restricting female journalists' access to information they may find upsetting (Elmore, 2009).

In addition to the restrictions faced by women due to their editors and colleagues mostly being men, the need to work with the military in many conflict zones acts as a barrier to access for female journalists. Sometimes the gender restriction is blatant.

> "Audrey Gillan of *The Guardian*, an embedded journalist during the Iraq War, was initially told by the UK Ministry of Defence that the marines and the 16 Air Assault Brigade did not wish to have women." (Tumber, 2006, p. 6)

This was after she had trained for months to ensure she had an appropriate level of fitness and preparation to be successful in a war zone. Other female journalists struggled to have open conversations with male soldiers, not due to a lack of respect by the soldiers for women, but quite the opposite. Soldiers would go to extreme lengths to "show respect and courtesy to women, making it more difficult to build up an effective working relationship" (Harris & Williams, 2018, p. 175). Women called this the "ma'am factor". As mentioned above, the issues of facilities for women were long used as an excuse to keep them out of war zones and military embeds. Although the excuse that there are no facilities for women in military zones can no longer be used, the "bathroom problem" is still relevant (Steiner, 2016b). In some units, "for safety reasons, reporters must always be in full sight of soldiers" (Steiner, 2016b, p. 313). That makes it more difficult for female journalists to be embedded with all male units.

Being pregnant in a war zone brings a whole new level of restriction to female journalists who want to report from conflict zones. Hannah Allam, an Egyptian American journalist, was pregnant while reporting in Iraq. She was restricted from

certain activities by military officials once her pregnancy started to show. Allam thought this was hypocritical stating, "Yes, it's dangerous, yes, I am responsible for another life, but I don't see how it's that much different than a man who comes here while his wife is pregnant at home. You are still putting a parent at risk, you are still putting your child's future at risk'" Steiner, 2016b, p. 325).

The excuse of stopping women from reporting due to pregnancy is not the only aspect of female journalists' family life that can be used to bar their access to information. Since women in some cultures are expected to respect the wishes of male guardians, external pressure on the family to restrict female journalists from working has proven to be an effective way to control female journalists and bar access. "When powerful individuals want to silence female journalists in certain patriarchal cultures, they contact their parents or husbands to control the women. Implicit in this strategy are the cultural norms and values that raise girls and women to respect the patriarch of their home." (Konow-Lund & Høiby, 2021, p. 1600).

Conversely, being a woman in a war zone can also lead to more access. A common reasoning from the literature is that many "male-dominated cultures can underestimate women, not only seeing them as being less threatening, but also of not being as professionally acute as men, so interviewees opened up more freely" (Harris et al., 2016, p. 909). Men not taking a female journalist interviewing them seriously often share more information, especially sensitive information, than if they were being interviewed by a man. Women are also generally seen as less threatening, not only intellectually but also physically. Many female journalists can use this to their advantage in war zones and gain access to restricted areas since their presence seems harmless. "Women journalists working in Arab countries have said they can get

through check-points more easily than men can; women's very subordinate status helps them get away with subterfuges" (Steiner, 2017, p.10). This can be aided by dressing like local women, who are even more overlooked or trusted than western women in many societies. In an interview with CNN, reporter Clarissa Ward stated that being able to wear a head covering and blend in with locals helped her in her access, "nobody looks twice at me whereas my male counterparts, Western counterparts, may have a tougher time getting through" (quoted in Harris & Williams, 2018, p. 172). Being a woman does not only help women get past checkpoints, but also grants them access to women-only areas that male journalists would be barred from. Harris and William summarize this particular benefit by explaining:

> "For example, in the Middle East women journalists can enter homes and speak to women, an undertaking that men cannot do. For a full picture of war, the voices of women and families are a vital component, and without access to them, a proper understanding cannot be given." (Harris & Williams, 2018, p. 172).

They explain that accessing civilian women gives a more nuanced picture to what it is like to live in a war zone. It may be more and more useful to have female journalists who can access women who are participants in war as well, especially as terror organizations like ISIS are recruiting more women to work behind the scenes raising funds, taking care of the headquarters, or even acting as suicide bombers (Harris & Williams, 2018). Sometimes the best strategy female journalists can use to gain information is by doing the opposite of blending in. Journalists like Desy Ayu Pirmasari (2016) have stated that her "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" (p. 133). There can be an advantage to being the only

woman that men, especially soldiers, have seen for months (Steiner, 2016b).

1.3 Gender Theory

A baseline theory through which to analyse a gender specific section of any

profession is Gender Theory. Judith Butler's 1990 book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism*

and the Subversion of Identity had a profound impact on the field of gender studies

and influenced the way we look at gender today. The three pillars of her theory that

this thesis will be focusing on as a theoretical framework are performativity, parody

and subversion, and identity as a site of power.

One of Butler's central ideas is the concept of performativity. She postulates

that gender is not something inherent to an individual but rather a social construct

that is performed through actions and behaviors:

"To be female is, according to that distinction, a facticity which has no meaning,

but to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform

to an historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to

materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to

do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project." (Butler, 1990, p. 902)

Gender, opposed to sex, is a fluid thing created through repeated behavior and

cultural norms, not by being born into a biological fixture. This theory helps us

understand how female journalists might change their access by performing their

gender in ways that either conform to or challenge societal expectations.

Building on performativity, Butler introduces the idea of parody and

subversion which shows that gender performance can be a tool to subvert expectations. Parody is the exaggeration of gender performance, toward either the feminine or masculine sphere, to disrupt the traditional perception of gender norms. The strategic exaggeration of gender is a way female journalists can negotiate their access in conflict zones.

The final pillar of Butler's gender theory that will be touched on is the idea of identity as a site of power. This pillar of Butler's theory is heavily influenced by Michel Foucault's ideas on power and identity. She explores how identity, such as gender identity, are both sources of power and sources of constraint. This notion is integral to this exploration on how gender biases in war reporting can be both a restriction and an advantage depending on how that identity is wielded.

These three pillars, performativity, parody and subversion, and identity as a site of power, weave together to create the overall idea that external gender perception influences one's position of power in society. Therefore, a reporter being perceived as feminine affects the treatment they receive by the outside world. That includes the perception of colleagues, audiences, sources, foreign dignitaries, and bosses which all affect the access a woman is granted to reporting in a conflict zone. The general power imbalance favoring men limits the access female journalists have to information in war zones. However, by strategically performing either femininity or masculinity, female war journalists can shift the balance of power in their favor to gain more access to information. Butler notes that the female body's expression in the world must be understood as the fulfillment of a set of historical possibilities (Butler, 1990). These possibilities have been limiting historically and continue to be limiting in the present day.

In *Shape Shifting in the Conflict Zone: The Strategic performance of Gender in War Reporting*, Palmer and Melki (2016) discuss the expression of gender and how it affects possibilities in both a positive and negative way. Female reporters "shape-shift" in conflict zones in order to perform their jobs and access information. By either leaning into or eschewing their femininity, they can change how possibilities are presented to them. This finding aligns with gender theory, particularly with the ideas of parody and subversion and identity as a site of power as mentioned above. By choosing when to parody femininity and when to subvert it by leaning into hyper masculine stereotypes, female journalists can create the best circumstances possible to gain information. The advantages of embracing femininity include increased access by appearing to be less threatening, being allowed into female exclusive spaces, and encouraging trust. The advantages of leaning into a more masculine presentation are being taken more seriously, being more likely to be assigned "important" or hard news stories which is an umbrella conflict journalism is included under and allowing male sources to feel like they can speak more candidly particularly about darker or more serious topics (Palmer and Melki, 2018). This is an example of how gender performance can be used as a form of resistance against oppressive gender norms and expectations as Butler (1990) touched on in her theory of parody and subversion.

Another useful framework under the umbrella of gender theory is Feminist Standpoint Epistemology. Feminist Standpoint Epistemology is a framework within feminist theory that claims that the social positioning of individuals, which is informed by their identity including gender, affects their access to knowledge and understanding of the world in general (Harding, 1993). This theory highlights not only the role of gender in levels of access, but also the importance of women and

other marginalized groups when it comes to portraying reality, as they possess insight not only of their own realities but the realities of the dominant group as well, in this case men. Feminist Standpoint Epistemology, also known as strong objectivity, argues that women are better positioned than men to produce comprehensive and objective interpretations of social reality due to their experience of oppression, which provides unique insights into social and political power relations (Brooks, 2007). This theory argues that the experience of oppression provides the oppressed with a unique insight into social and political power relations. This insight is an important nuance to capture in conflict reporting, and according to Brooks, women are better positioned to access it. These insights are not clear to those who are more privileged, therefore men don't have access to this information purely based on their social situation (Brooks, 2007).

A repeated theme in the literature is how intersectionality affects gender specific access. Intersectionality is a framework used to understand how different aspects of a person's identity, such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, overlap to impact individuals in a unique way. In her 1989 paper, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*, Kimberlé Crenshaw explained the importance of understanding intersectionality as traditional feminist and gender theory do not satisfactorily reveal the unique challenges that women of color, poor women, or queer women face. Intersectionality is an important theory to employ when looking at war journalism as it helps understand journalists with multiple marginalized identities and how those identities influence how they navigate their work and their access to information.

Intersectionality is relevant to this thesis particularly when it comes to female journalists in conservative Muslim cultures. The intersection of gender and ethnicity for Western female journalists in conservative Muslim societies often result in them being perceived as a "third gender," neither entirely female nor entirely male (Von Der Lippe & Ottosen, 2016). This unique situation "can be exploited by white women reporters in order to improve their access to information" (Von der Lippe & Ottosen, 2016, p. 11) as they have access to information from both men and women which would be inaccessible to both male journalists and local female journalists. Eva Boller, in her chapter "There Are No Women" from *Gendering War and Peace Reporting* (2016), recounts how her foreign status enabled her to act more assertively than a local woman could, thus granting her more access. Harris and Williams (2018) found the same pattern in their research but also pointed to Melki and Mallat's (2014) findings that being an Arab woman correspondent can have its advantages as well.

> "For many Arab women correspondents, the increased access in conservative societies is related to 'traditional patriarchal values' such as sense of duty in protecting women and the view women are less threatening than men" (Melki & Mallat, 2014, p. 67).

Ethnicity is just one aspect of intersectionality. In this case, being a white woman grants different access than being an Arab woman despite the shared identity of gender.

2. Methodology

The aim of this study is to answer the following main research questions:

RQ1: Does being a woman affect how journalists are able to access, gather and

disseminate information in conflict zones?

RQ2: If gender affects accessing, gathering and dissemination of information in conflict zones, is it in a positive or negative way?

To answer the research question, this study employs a qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to examine the experiences of female war journalists reporting from conflict zones. Qualitative methods were chosen because they effectively explore individual lived experiences which may not be captured as well by quantitative methods (Bryman, 2016). This section will outline the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen methods along with why these particular methods were chosen and detail the particulars of the study participants and the interviews.

2.1 Qualitative Research Analysis

This thesis uses a qualitative research approach in order to understand the experience of female war journalists working in conflict zones. Qualitative research methods are ideal for analysing nuanced topics as they focus on personal experience and perspectives (Silverman, 2016), and are particularly effective for topics that are not well researched. By using qualitative methods, this study aims to explore how gender influences the work of female journalists in war zones. A key reason this study is using qualitative research is the method's flexibility. The researcher can expand their questions to ensure the greatest level of understanding and to adapt to unexpected answers (Bryman, 2016). Flexibility is particularly important for this subject as gender affects vary greatly depending on context such as region and

specific cultural norms.

2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

This study uses semi-structured interviews as the main data collection method.

Interviews facilitate an understanding of the experience of female journalists in

conflict zones and allow qualitative data to be collected not only through stated facts

but through emotions and experiences that may be more nuanced, as gender issues

generally are (Adams, 2015). Semi-structured interviews use a predetermined set of

open-ended questions which allow respondents to share their unique experiences

while also ensuring some consistency in the topics discussed (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

The researcher can ask follow-up questions to expand on particular challenges or

advantages brought up by an interviewee, allowing the researcher to gain as much

detailed information as possible (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured

interviews also lead to natural conversations making the interviewees feel more

comfortable which encourages participants to open up and provide more detailed

information (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Despite the many advantages, there are some drawbacks to the method of

semi-structured interviews. A major drawback is the time-intensive nature of semi-

structured interviews. This is not only a barrier for the researcher as it eats into the

time the researcher could use for analysis or more interviews, but it can also

discourage the participation of interviewees making it more difficult to gather enough

respondents (Guest et al., 2012). In addition, the researcher needs to have enough

interviewing experience and skill to ensure a high quality of responses (Opdenakker,

2006). Finally, the responses collected though qualitative analysis are often complex

and detailed. This type of data needs an equally nuanced method of analysis (Braun &
Clarke, 2006) which is why this study is using thematic analysis.

2.3 Thematic Analysis

Using semi-structured interviews in conjunction with thematic analysis is the most
effective research combination as thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify,
organize, and interpret patterns from qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
Thematic analysis involves collecting data, familiarizing oneself with the information,
and codifying the raw data into subsections based on relevance to the researcher.
Those codes are then organized together under broader themes that highlight a
significant pattern in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

One benefit of using thematic analysis particularly when dealing with
qualitative data in the form of interviews, is its ability to identify both explicit and
implicit information. It examines not only the words that are being said but the
underlying ideas and assumptions as well as body language and tonal indicators. The
flexibility of the method allows for an in-depth analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke,
2019).

The drawbacks of this method are similar to those of semi-structured
interviews, namely that both are time-consuming. Familiarising oneself with the data,
coding, and identifying themes and patterns takes a long time especially when the
data set is large such as long interviews (Guest et al., 2012).

By using thematic analysis, this study aims to organize and understand
qualitative data in a nuanced way and expose patterns to help shed light on the
research topic.

2.4 Research Design

Data was collected from 10 interviews with female journalists from seven different countries who have reported from areas of active conflict in more than 20 countries. The details of the participants can be found below in Table 1. The original goal was to conduct 12 interviews in order to align with Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's (2006) theory of data saturation, which is when data collection gets to a point where no new information is being presented. This number can vary and due to difficulties getting responses or aligning schedules for interview times due to the busy nature of the eligible interviewees, I was satisfied that data saturation was reached within 10 interviews. This number aligns with Creswell and Poth's (2016) recommendation of conducting 5 to 25 interviews.

The interviews were conducted virtually and lasted between 31 minutes and 1 hour and 8 minutes, with the average length being slightly over 42 minutes long. Seven of the interviews were over video call, two were voice only calls, and one was conducted via email. Each of these methods come with their own benefits and drawbacks which affects the quality of the responses. Video call was the preferred method of communication as it allowed the researcher to assess nonverbal cues and information such as facial expressions and body language along with the verbal information. These visual clues can help better understand interviewees emotions and subtle meaning (Opdenakker, 2006) and cannot be gathered over voice only calls or email. Being able to see the interviewer can also make the subject feel more familiarity with the interviewer which may lead to them being more comfortable opening up and answering questions (Lo Iacono et al., 2016). On the other hand, the

lack of face-to-face interaction during a phone call interview can make some participants feel more anonymous and therefore more comfortable answering questions honestly (Novick, 2008). Both video calls and phone calls allow for immediate follow up and clarification which email does not allow. However, email has its own benefits as it allows for greater flexibility and convenience meaning the researcher may get more respondents as well as allowing the participants time to reflect on their answers which might lead to more thoughtful responses (Meho, 2006).

The requirements for the participants were as follows: the participants must interact with society as women and have worked from an active conflict zone in the field. Only journalists who identify as women and are also perceived as women by most of society were included in outreach. This has an impact on intersectionality as mentioned at the beginning of this report. The participants must have worked in an active conflict zone, meaning those who reported on the aftermath of a war or on affected people in the diaspora were not eligible. This study was open to participation form journalists working in any medium including but not limited to writing, broadcast, audio, video, and photography. Freelancers as well as staff reporters were included and many of the interviewees had experience working as both staff and freelance journalists. The interviews started with a set of open-ended questions intended to determine if and how being a woman affected the participants' reporting, specifically their access to conflict zones as well as sources and other forms of information within those zones. A list of questions can be found in Appendix no. 1. The questions left room for the interviewees to discuss their personal experiences. Follow-up questions were asked if necessary to delve deeper into gendered access.

The questions aimed to focus on the interviewees' personal experiences. Interviewees were initially recruited using the researcher's network along with cold outreach and supplemented with snowball sampling. Using the researcher's network was the initial recruitment method as it yields a higher likelihood of responses and ensures an established level of trust which encourages open and honest responses (Noy, 2008). As this approach has the potential of introducing bias into the sample and leading to a lack of diversity in the findings (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981), the researcher also used cold outreach to contact participants. Cold outreach involves contacting potential participants without a preexisting connection which can lead to a lower response rate (Sedgwick, 2013). However, this method can diversify the sample (Sedgwick, 2013). Both methods were supplemented with snowball sampling as this method is a good way to find more subjects. The drawback here is, again, the risk of introducing bias into the sample as interviewees found through snowball sampling may share similar perspectives to those who recruited them (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

With the interviewees' permission, each interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed. Following the structure in Braun & Clarke (2006), themes were found, reviewed, and defined through coding relevant information from the interviews. The codes were gathered under four overarching themes: positive access, negative access, variable access, and neutral access. Each thematic umbrella was split into more specific subcategories which will be relayed in section 3., Findings.

The details from the participants were collected from the interviews and put into Table. 1 (see below). This table shows the name codes of each interviewee, their age, country of origin, how many years they have been working in journalism, and the

countries they have reported from with active conflicts. P1-P10 represent the name of

each participant in order to uphold anonymity.

Table. 1

Name Codes	Age	Years of experience	Country of origin	Conflicts reported on
P1	29	5-10	USA	Israel/Palestine, Ukraine
P2	38	10-15	USA	Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Ukraine
P3	48	25+	Kuwait/ Palestine	Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Ukraine
P4	39	10-15	France	Libya, Syria, Tunisia
P5	41	15-20	Yemen	Yemen
P6	41	15-20	Lebanon	Iraq, Lebanon, Syria
P7	38	15-20	Australia	Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan
P8	54	25+	Netherlands	Israel/Palestine
P9	73	25+	USA	Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria
P10	66	25+	USA	Angola, Israel/ Palestine, Pakistan, Rwanda,

3. Findings

This section presents significant quotes from the semi-structured interviewees. The findings provide examples from female war reporters of the nuanced effects gender dynamics have on journalists and the information they are able to gather in the field. They show both advantages and disadvantages to being a woman in conflict journalism.

As mentioned above, the experiences relayed by the interviewees have been split into four broad categories: positive access, negative access, variable access, and neutral access. Within the categories the experiences are gathered into themes that offer a detailed view into the individual perspectives shared. The categories were determined by the methods detailed for thematic analysis.

3.1 Positive Access

Positive access here is used to describe a situation or case where being a woman directly granted the interviewee more access to information than being a man. All 10 interviewees cited instances of positive access. Under the umbrella of positive access, they explained that being a woman granted them access to female only spaces their male colleagues could not enter, disarmed interviewees by appearing more trustworthy, more empathetic or weaker, encouraged access to sources or events and areas due to the novelty of being a woman in a war zone, or allowed them to blend in and access more restricted areas by way of head and face coverings that their male colleagues could not wear.

3.1.1 Women Only Spaces

Interviewees often told stories of being able to access sources their male colleagues could not, specifically in conservative communities. This was due to the limited interaction allowed between genders, especially in religious countries where women were not supposed to speak to men without a male chaperone such as a father, brother, or husband. One interviewee said:

> "I can get into beauty salons in Saudi Arabia, I could follow the women activists who wanted to drive because in Saudi Arabia, you can't. There's two sections to every restaurant, there's the family section, and there's where the guys are. And the men, unless they're accompanied by a woman, cannot get into the family section. And I always could." (P9, 2024)

Another said:

> "I think it's probably accurate to say that women, especially in conservative communities, are not comfortable talking to men… So I think [male journalists] would definitely find that challenging" (P6, 2024)

Interviewees did not only refer to spaces that were physically exclusive to women, but also areas of conversation in which only women could comfortably get the full story.

> "One of the defining characteristics of the war in Tigray, Ethiopia was the use of sexual violence against women of Tigrayan ethnicity… men can do [interviews] but personally I already feel like speaking with survivors of sexual violence is so sensitive, and it's asking so much of people specifically in in more conservative cultures. So to not have that connection of 'we're sitting together as two women who have, despite immense differences between us,

walked through the world as women', to not have that as common ground when you're asking someone to share the most horrific thing that's ever happened to them, I can't really imagine. So, I do feel like it opens up access. I did similar stories about women in the Central African Republic who had been raped by Russian mercenaries, which again, those were rooms that my male colleagues couldn't be in." (P2, 2024)

3.1.2 Disarming Sources

Another way being a woman helped interviewees access information was by disarming sources which resulted in them sharing information more freely. There are many aspects to this. Several interviewees explained how women often appear less threatening than their male counterparts, making sources more comfortable allowing them into their spaces:

"Sometimes I would have easier access to certain stores, especially in conservative areas where I can enter the women's places and just take their pictures. And again, as women we impose less threat so when they see us it's completely different than seeing a man with heavy equipment." (P3, 2024)

Others said they were underestimated by being thought of as dumb or weak which they used to their advantage:

"In the documentary about the Wagner group, this Russian guy at a gun Expo…was walking me through the guns that they had. And he said so many times during the interview, 'well, you're a tiny girl' …it definitely did speak to how they underestimate you. So then it does feel like you have this moment of getting to ask tough or unexpected questions. I wonder all the time if we

would have gotten the access to the Wagner group that we did if I wasn't a woman." (P2, 2024)

In some cultures, the cultural norm is to try and protect or shield women from harm. One interviewee detailed how this norm aided her as a woman in situation where men would not have received the same protection:

"What I call the Savior complex, the tendency to just want to save the day. A few times there were certain situations where I needed to take a plane, but I had no cash. And people would just do things that would not happen in normal times where you do get a flight ticket without paying a dime for it because people want to help you. Whether it's helped additionally by the fact that they see you as maybe more vulnerable or you need their help and they have a chance to save your day. Maybe [being a woman] made it an extra bit easier." (P4, 2024)

Finally, many interviewees found that people simply see women as more empathetic or nurturing and are more willing to open up to them:

"People are much more likely to talk to me rather than talking to my male correspondents. I mean, you can contribute that to so many different things. Maybe he just didn't look very welcoming and I'm very smiley…there's something about the empathetic nature of women. People have complained about things, or they want to talk about what's really going on, maybe they have a bad commander, maybe they haven't gotten any food in two weeks and they're eating like horrible shit. I feel like a man to a man isn't necessarily going to open up as much as all of that versus if I'm honestly asking him, 'what's your experience with what's going on?' I feel like they're much more

receptive to actually answering and to actually telling me what their

complaints are versus if I was a man." (P1, 2024)

Interviewees often found sources, both women and men, more open to sharing

sensitive information since they were women:

"In many cultures female journalists often have an advantage over men in

winning the trust of sources who are children or other women. Sometimes

male sources don't take us as seriously and we can disarm them in interviews.

Or a chivalrous military guy will offer us the choice seat in the jeep." (P10,

2024)

3.1.3 Novelty

Many of the archival interviews from female war correspondents touched on the

novelty of women in a war zone. Although there are more women seen in conflict

zones these days than during World War one, World War two, the Vietnam war, or

even the conflicts of the early 2000s, women are still seen as a curiosity in war zones.

Although that can draw unwanted attention, according to the interviewees, that same

attention can be a benefit when trying to acquire information:

"We can use a bit of charm without being disgusting about it in ways that I

think men don't, can't, or won't. Charm gets you a long way. And, in

conservative societies, a lot of times people want to talk to women because, I

used to say, 'we're unicorns for them'. In the first gulf war in '91, I used to get

invited to dinner parties with princes all the time not because they wanted to

talk to National Public Radio, but because they never had a woman at dinner

before. And that was just so interesting that I would get invited to these places." (P9, 2024)

Even when the singularity was unintentional, one interviewee still found it beneficial:

"[Men] will just sort of say anything they want to a woman because it's like, 'oh, there's a woman in the war zone'. This is such a novel thing that they don't really have a filter" (P1, 2024)

3.1.4 Blending in

Historically, even male journalists have adopted the use of head covering in conservative Muslim societies to access dangerous or restricted areas (McGeough, 2003). Several interviewees who worked in regions where head and face coverings are common among women emphasized the advantage they had by using the expectation of women to cover their heads to blend into a crowd of locals. Sometimes blending in granted interviewees access to restricted areas or ease passing through checkpoints.

"If I'm wearing a hijab out people won't pay attention to me so much. And so just being able to cover myself up, often that would be a good way to just stay low profile and gain access on the pretense of you being the wife of someone or the sister of someone. Male Western journalists didn't really have that option." (P4, 2024)

Blending in did not only help people overlook them, it also acted as a layer of protection:

"Especially in conservative societies, Iran was always like this, in a headscarf I look like everybody else. I could disappear. Saudi Arabia was the same, I could disappear. Afghanistan, I could disappear. And that was huge for us, that we could not be noticed. And it gave you a certain freedom...Both times in Iraq, '91 and 2003, when our male counterparts would come in, they'd all have to dye their hair. Because if it wasn't black... you know, people were getting their heads cut off. So, you didn't want to be picked up by any of those people who like to cut off heads. I didn't have to do that, I just had to wear a scarf." (P9, 2024)

Overall, the interviewees explained that being a female journalist often resulted in unique access in a war zone that their male colleagues could not get. The general sentiment of many participants was echoed by the words of Participant 4:

"Does it help being a woman and the situation? Overall, my answer is yes. But I've never been a man." (P4, 2024)

3.2 Negative Access

Negative access here is used to describe a situation where being a woman acted as a barrier to accessing information. Although every interviewee described instances of positive access, the vast majority also described instances of negative access. It's important to note that the two interviewees who did not cite instances of gender being a barrier to access (P4 & P3, 2024) made it clear that they benefited from a level of variable access, meaning they only saw the positive access because they were

white, spoke the language, were from a favorable country, or a favorable network according to them.

3.2.1 Assignment Restrictions

The first step to accessing information in a war zone is, of course, being sent to that zone. Many interviewees said women have a harder time simply being sent to war zones, so they never have the opportunity to access the information there. In some more conservative places, women won't even be considered in the hiring process.

> "When I first went to apply for a job as a photographer. It was in [Yemeni Agency]. It's one of the biggest agencies in Yemen… And he looked at me and he said, We don't hire women… In fact, I never applied as a photographer after that, because I knew they would not [hire me]." (P5, 2024)

Outright discrimination is not the norm, however. More often than not, women will be overlooked in favor of male colleagues.

> "When I think about that, I think when deploying journalists to war zones editors first think about men before they think about women to deploy them. Same thing for photojournalists." (P6, 2024)

Even journalists with more appropriate expertise or experience found themselves less likely to be sent to conflict zones.

> "A colleague was put on a lot of Europe stuff … She's Arab, so she wanted to be covering ISIS and that sort of thing. And the bosses just kept not putting her there. That could have been for many reasons, but she kept seeing our male

colleagues getting these opportunities when they didn't speak Arabic" (P2, 2024)

Part of the hesitation from bosses to send women to warzones may be from the negative feedback the network receives when they do show women reporting from war:

"A lot of female correspondents have told me that they felt it was because they wanted this male presence in the field, because it was also something that viewers liked more. Viewers don't like to see a pretty girl on their screen reporting from war. You can see these comments on my Twitter. Anytime I'm on the border people will be like, 'Oh, you have to get that girl out of there'." (P1, 2024)

3.2.2 Being Dismissed

Another element that made it hard for the interviewees to access information in war zones was being dismissed. This was often done by men from conservative religious communities:

"The men in these communities, they're not comfortable talking alone, or sitting alone and talking to women alone, or talking to women full stop. So if it's a conservative community I did find it more difficult for people to engage and to really open up and really want to talk to me" (P6, 2024)

This caused a problem when trying to get sources to answer questions because they either would not engage at all:

"There's certain times I have to ask my cameraman. I said, 'I can tell this guy is not going to talk to me. He's not interested. He doesn't want me here. Here's what I want to ask him. Can you go do the interviews for me?' We've had to do that a few times…I can't do it because he's a man and he doesn't like me being here." (P1, 2024)

Or not give the journalist in depth information:

"If you're dealing with someone who has, for instance, strict religious ideas about the relationship between or the interaction between men and women, it can work against you…you feel that you didn't get the real answers." (P8, 2024)

This problem was even more pronounced when the sources the journalists were trying to engage with belonged to radical religious groups.

"I think the hardest people for a woman to talk to are the Islamist radicals. They are deeply, deeply conservative, and they don't talk to women, and they won't look you in the eye, you can't shake their hands. Iran is like that. northern Lebanon is like that…It's very hard to talk to those people. It's so much easier for the guys. (P9, 2024)

3.2.3 Physical Restrictions

In many cases, the interviewee ran into situations where their movement was restricted, or they physically were not allowed to enter certain areas due to their gender. One interviewee explained that when she had to move to a certain region within Yemen to do her reporting, she was not allowed to rent a house without a male

chaperone. She was not even supposed to move around the country without one. This restriction on her movement made it difficult to report:

> "In Yemen, being a female, you cannot travel alone. When I got arrested, that was the reason, because I traveled with no Muharram... Muharram is a male relative that goes with you wherever you go. And so, when I was in the interrogation he said, 'how dare you travel with no Muharram?''." (P5, 2024)

Another interviewee faced physical restrictions to areas in two very different regions where she worked. The first was due to misogynistic norms related to the military:

> "Access, I would say, is the main issue for female journalists, especially wartime journalists. There's very much this atmosphere that it's an old boys club...certainly in terms of interviewing people and trying to work with the Army. I definitely faced a lot of resistance. I wanted to do a report involving this unit of soldiers ...And the message back from the commander was that there are no girls allowed on the pirate ship," (P1, 2024)

The second instance of restricted access was due to religious norms:

> "I've been to mosques in Israel where they're super strict and say 'we can't let you in here at all because you're a woman...", which is fine, but it's never great for you when you can't do your job just based on this." (P1, 2024)

Some interviewees resorted to sending their male colleagues to get information when they were denied access. This often was an issue in and of itself as the colleagues were sometimes cameramen or other coworkers not trained in interview techniques, which could act as a further impediment to gaining information:

> "I would have just said for my two male colleagues to go and film it. But in the end they didn't [grant us access]" (P2, 2024)

The reason often given to the interviewees as to why they were not allowed to go certain places was the claim that being a woman added an extra element of risk which was said to endanger both the female journalist and those hosting them. Either the women were too weak to take care of themselves or the environment they were trying to enter was extra risky for women.

> "Sudan and Somalia, where I work, are both very strictly adherent Muslim countries. So there's so many different ways where being a woman, you're sort of fighting an uphill battle. There are situations where, if you're of fighting for frontline access or an embed with a rebel group... you do have to convince them of even your physical fitness. Because to them women are weaker, and they have no restraint about saying that... I remember in the Central African Republic, they didn't want to take us to the frontline, because they didn't want us to see them using child soldiers. But he kept saying, 'well, we would, it's just that your ovaries would explode'." (P2, 2024)

Even sources who were generally accepting of female reporters could be guilty of impeding access despite, and sometimes because of, their care for the reporters:

> "He would always refuse to take me [to the front line]. The consensus was that if I was there, they would have to take care of me. And it was one more person that they had to look after and be concerned for and they were so worried about my safety... then I finally got somebody to say yes...And then at the last

minute they're like, 'Oh, just kidding. We can't actually have another body in the car'. But then they took a male journalist with them." (P1, 2024)

Of course, being a woman can legitimately be a safety concern. The same novelty that can lead to positive access can cause extra risk for women. In cases such as that, women have to weigh their safety with the potential access to sources and areas.:

"There were many situations where I was more vulnerable than men. Especially if you went to areas, for instance, refugee camps, Palestinian refugee camps, or near Gaza. There were young kids and men not used to seeing Western women so you would draw a lot of attention. And if you're trying to do your job as a journalist, this is not what you want. You want to be able to be unremarkable, and to blend in." (P8, 2024)

In addition to being risky, that extra attention can also be insulting to some women:
"He said, 'you can tell so and so has such a crush on [P2]' talking about one of the Russian sources that he had seen our interactions on camera. That may be true but that actually was not my feeling. Of course, every journalist wants to think that they got the access purely on merit... perhaps being a woman was helpful, but equally the idea that people think that this access that I worked on for three years was because this guy had a crush on me..." (P2, 2024)

Additional risk also means that foreign female journalists rarely go out alone. This not only makes it harder for them to blend in, but also can be intimidating to sources and discourage them from speaking to the journalist in question.

"If they're freelancers they will go out alone, but most foreign female foreign journalists in the Middle East never go out alone. They always have either a

man or a woman fixer with them…I think it is easier and I think people just
maybe worry less if one person is interviewing them than two people. Yeah,
maybe less intimidating." (P6, 2024)

3.2.4 Family Pressure

Family pressure is a common barrier for access for female journalists. Sometimes the
pressure comes from within the journalist's family to stop working, especially in
conservative societies:

> "My father, he is an imam. He's an imam for a mosque. And one of his friends
> told him 'your daughter was arrested because she was covering [the protests].'
> And my father, he didn't know I was working in the newspaper because he
> would not let me work while I was a student and so my father, he stopped me
> from work, from school, from everything." (P5, 2024)

Other times the resistance is from colleagues, bosses, and society in general to stop
working if female journalists want to start a family:

> "Maybe people think about women getting married and getting pregnant and
> having babies and having to take maternity leaves longer…So I feel like maybe
> that's why it's easier to deploy men to warzones or you know, hire more men
> than women" (P6, 2024)

Pregnancy specifically was cited several times as a barrier to access. This barrier
often came from media networks themselves.

"I remember when I was pregnant, and anytime someone would find out that I was pregnant, it would be like, 'your war zone career's over.' And I used to get really angry about that... you would never say that to a guy." (P7, 2024)

Another interviewee said:

"[A specific media organisation] doesn't lets people go on assignment to certain places after five months pregnant. I'm not 100% sure if that's a rule. But I have heard that from colleagues in this region." (P2, 2024)

The same source also spoke of the barrier from sources regarding pregnancy and starting a family.

"Our last big embed was for this documentary on the Wagner group in the Central African Republic. I was six months pregnant at the time and so we were concerned that if they knew that, because of the macho environment of all armed forces...we were worried that they wouldn't let me go on helicopters, and deep into the field with them, and all that sort of thing. So we didn't tell them that I was pregnant." (P2, 2024)

3.2.5 Financial Restrictions

Not having the funds is another barrier for many women. Having enough money to go to an area or pay for protection, especially when you are freelancing, is an important element in being able to report from a war zone (Creech, 2017). Sometimes my interviewees found out they were making less money than their colleagues by chance:

"I worked at a local newspaper in Lebanon and one of my very close friends, he was a guy, started at the same time as me, and then we later found out that he

was making more than I was making, which just didn't make any sense." (P6, 2024)

Other times, however, they had to put themselves in an unfavorable financial situation in order to be granted the chance to report at all. After being denied the chance to be a photojournalist for a paper in Yemen, one interviewee took a position as a secretary instead. She used the position within the paper to find out what photos needed to be taken.

"I said, I'm going to do it. And I have my camera, so I did it all voluntarily, I was not getting paid for it." (P5, 2024)

3.3 Variable Access

Variable access here includes any situation where a factor other than gender impacted the access to information an interviewee had. This includes exploring the intersectionality of gender, race, region, language, and other identities. This also includes journalistic identity such as being a staff writer vs a freelancer and which outlet the interviewee represented. As mentioned in section 2.3 on gender theory, access is not based solely on gender, but on the intersectionality of identities as well. 9 of the 10 journalists interviewed mentioned other factors that affected their access to information in the conflict zones they worked from. Some of these appeared to have no relation to gender (such as freelancing, language spoken, etc) and some changed the gender dynamic within the zone (such as race and region).

3.3.1 Identity and the "Third Gender"

Many interviewees cited their identity as equally or more important factors than their gender when it came to accessing information in conflict zones. Language has an enormous impact on what information journalists can access:

> "I think certain stories were definitely assigned to me because I'm a woman and I would have better access to women. And then I think the rest is because I spoke Arabic and I was in an Arabic speaking region. So probably, it was those two things." (P6, 2024)

Sometimes language proficiency was not as important as other unifying regional experiences:

> "I never thought they weren't sending me to do anything because I was a woman. Sometimes it was like, Oh, they're not sending me because I don't speak as fluent Hebrew as the native Israelis or because I didn't serve in the army." (P1, 2024)

Being foreign rather than local was often seen to grant more access in certain countries, especially if the journalists were western. Being associated with certain countries could be a benefit:

> "So many people that you talk to felt it was more important to talk to a Western journalist than a female Arab journalist, so there was all kinds of permutations to what your access was" (P9, 2024)

This was largely dependent on the country being reported from and the geopolitical factors involved there:

"In Libya, it helped because there was this association that the Western

coalition was helping them… All of a sudden they were really doing everything

to facilitate journalists' access into the country, wherever they could. And

surprisingly, I think my identity as a Western journalist really trumped the

gender factor, things that would not happen in Libya usually like letting you

sleep in the same room as a male colleague… they really didn't care at that

point…I was a French journalist and the fact that I was a woman really didn't

matter." (P4, 2024)

Sometimes it was less important which country the journalist was from and more
important where she was not from:

"If you were Israeli, and they knew you were Israeli, you couldn't go to Gaza at

the time. When I was there, there were a lot of kidnappings of Western

journalists. So it was already dangerous for me, but you certainly couldn't go

into Gaza if you were Israeli… and if I were Palestinian or Arab? Well, I

suppose the access would be easier" (P8, 2024)

Most interviewees who mentioned origin explained that in certain situations being
foreign was a benefit, but in others it was a drawback:

"[Being foreign] gives me both immense privilege and probably also some

drawbacks. Compared to female Somali journalists reporting on the ins and

outs of her own country…a local journalist will be able to get better access and

situations than me…There would be situations where I would say to my

[Somali] colleague, 'you should probably make this call,' and others where she

would say, 'Oh, they're gonna give us the visas faster if they hear an American accent'." (P2, 2024)

The above examples refer to times where origin and language were independent of gender. However, when speaking about identity, there is one example that was repeatedly mentioned in which gender and origin intertwined in such a way that access could not have been the same without the intersection of both western and female identities. The concept of "the third gender" found in the literature was corroborated unprompted from several interviewees. Three of the interviewees reflected on how their positive access due to their gender was solely because of their western origins. They explained that female Arab journalists would not have seen the same expansion to their access as they had:

> "You're sort of a third gender. You're not a man, you're not one of their women, they recognize that Western women are different. And so you sort of have this arbitrary law, which is actually quite beneficial because you have access, then to pretty much 100% of the population. You can go and sit with the women, but you could also go sit with the men…Foreigners, you're in a different category. I mean, they expect you to be respectful of their culture, but they're not expecting you to behave how they expect their own women to behave… I think definitely now it would be next to impossible for an Afghan woman living there to be able to kind of go and do any kind of journalism. It's hard enough for the men to do anything, let alone the women. There definitely is a different standard there." (P7, 2024)

This sentiment was repeated by another interviewee who clarified that even if an Arab woman was not part of the community she was reporting from, her appearance

could cause the local community to make certain assumptions which would, in turn, restrict her access:

> "I also have met colleagues that are female journalists who definitely didn't have the same experience because the fact that they were Arab, the gender factor was, again, computed in. Well, it wasn't for me. But because she was Arab, and so they thought she was Muslim. That idea of gender not mattering so much wasn't the case for them. I think it was the case for, strictly speaking, Western journalists who were not seen as part of their community." (P4, 2024)

One interviewee explained the steps she had to take to ensure her freedoms as a female reporter:

> "He said if I wanted to be free and have as much freedom as I liked within Palestinian society, there were certain rules I should live by. 'Don't get a Palestinian boyfriend because before you know it, you become a Palestinian woman and you lose a lot of your liberties because they'll consider you as such…if you play your cards right in that neighborhood where you're moving now, you will be considered as half a man, half woman and you'll have all the freedom that a Palestinian man enjoys.' And I stuck to that, and he was completely right." (P8, 2024

Another interviewee spoke about class when discussing identity and variable access:

> "The only time I saw the military grouse about us was not about gender, but it was about class. In the first Gulf War there was a media officer who was heard to call us all 'yuppie scum'. And that was a class issue, not a gender issue." (P9, 2024)

3.3.2 Freelancing and Outlet Hierarchy

The network a journalist represents was often brought up as a factor when discussing access. Having a notable outlet was often a benefit when it came to sources providing information. Those from small, local channels or freelancers without the name appeal of a big international outlet often found it more difficult to get people to speak to them or even get accreditation to get into war zones they needed to report from. They explained that in these situations, they didn't see their gender as a factor. They also explained that the nationality or political leaning of the publication sometimes mattered as much or even more than how recognizable it was.

> "You stand on your coverage. So, if you work for the New York Times, they know who you are. If you work for The Washington Post and even NPR. They know who you are…And they know that it is worth their while to talk to us because we do the same thing that the men do…the deal is, who do you work for… if you want to talk to the New York Times, you'll talk to whoever shows up" (P9, 2024)

The status of a journalist within an outlet also plays a role in how willing sources are to speak to them:

> "People take you much more seriously. Even if I said, I'm a staff writer for Time Magazine versus saying I'm freelancing for Time Magazine…it's easier. It's easier to do everything from the mundane like getting paperwork and visas and letters written for you and all of that, which is always a struggle in

this region, to being on the ground…So yes, I think having an outlet backing you, in terms of getting access, it really increases your credibility." (P2, 2024)

Sometimes certain outlets, even famous ones, acted as a barrier to access. In particularly tense situations, journalists from outlets that were perceived to have a particular political leaning or from certain countries were denied access to areas or information:

"Depending on whether that was considered to be a media outlet on the side of whomever you were talking to at the moment or not, it would influence your access and the way you were approached… it was deemed to be a good thing to talk to Western press by the Palestinian side at the time. But on the Israeli side, it was the reverse. The Israeli army wasn't too keen to speak to us." (P8, 2024)

This experience was corroborated by another interviewee:

"In Ukraine working for an American publication, it poses absolutely no question. They love Americans there. But if you go somewhere else where people are having problems with American foreign policy then they would have a problem with the publication you work for." (P3, 2024)

In one case, a respondent recounted how being a freelancer can actually help when it comes to accessing certain information.

"Oh, I'm freelance, I'm not sure where the story's going…then they're not putting [themselves in] any box specifically. If they're like, 'Fox News is right or MSNBC, they're super left. So I'm gonna say this and that'. It does definitely

give you that level of ambiguity to ask what you want and say what you want."

(P1, 2024)

The nature of the conflict itself also has an effect on accessibility for freelancers:

"Those were conflict zones that freelancers rarely had access to because it was

very expensive to go there. You need to be embedded often with armed forces

you need to be accredited so well, what really changed with the [Arab]

Spring...everybody can buy himself a flight ticket to go to Tunisia to go to Cairo

and then figure out your way into Libya... it was a lot easier to be a free agent

during the Arab Spring than it was in conflict before then." (P4, 2024)

3.3.3 Regional Differences

The participants also emphasized the importance of a journalist knowing the region

they are working in. How well a journalist know the culture of their interviewees is a

vital indicator of how much information they will be able to access:

"It all depends on where you are, the culture of the place, how much you know

about the place, the language you speak. If I go to a place where I speak the

language, I would have a much easier access to everything...you understand,

you're alert to what's happening. The minute you don't speak the language

where you are going. That's it, you are completely cut off" (P3, 2024)

Sometimes, regional access is tied to gender access:

"The gender issue becomes much more relevant, in some ways, in the Middle

East than it does in other places. I feel like they're easier to navigate. In

Ukraine, I tried for months to try and get them to give up on not taking me to the position. Versus, if I show up wearing a full skirt and a hijab [in the Middle East], I can get by…it's a simpler thing to work around versus others where it's just that they don't necessarily want [women] to be on the front lines doing anything" (P1, 2024)

3.4 Neutral Access

Neutral access refers to when an interviewee expressed the belief that their gender did not impact the information they had access to. Many of the interviewees expressed that, in the end, journalism and getting information is about interpersonal relationships, trust, and situational awareness regardless of gender.

3.4.1 Interpersonal Relationships

The argument repeated most often for neutral access was that regardless of your gender, region, language, or identity, journalism is all about trust. Interviewees said that building interpersonal relationships is the most important part of getting access to information for both female and male journalists.

"Journalism is such an interpersonal job that what you're doing is very much dependent on what the person in front of you feels about you whether they feel they're going to open up to you or not…This may sound strange because it's the first time you meet someone, but it's still a trust issue. And everything factors into that including gender" (P8, 2024)

Some benefits, such as a journalist gaining information because a source had a fondness for them, was gender exclusive:

> "Men, of course they get protection because they get women who are attracted to them or love them...so I would not say it's about women...It's building trust between people that gives you access whether it's to women or men." (P5, 2024)

The same idea was brought up when discussing information sharing within the newsroom:

> "It really depends on your relationship with them. There's some male colleagues who I have zero relationship with and then some who will chat all day long...so I think it completely depends on just who your team is." (P3, 2024)

3.4.2 Situational Access

Another argument was that of situational access. Often, interviewees felt like any journalist who had been present at the right time or place would have gotten similar access to a story:

> "It was also a very personal thing. I think that's what people on the outside tend to not realize is that a lot is determined by specific situations and the people in those situations." (P8, 2024)

The situational access or war can outweigh even deeply ingrained cultural norms:

> "I remember one of the soldiers, he cried in front of me...Men, they grow up learning that you don't cry. It's not that you don't cry in front of women, you don't cry. So he cried in front of me...I think it was the situation I think it could've happened to whoever was there." (P5, 2024)

3.4.3 Changing Rules in War

Another facet to the idea of neutral access is the specific atmosphere of being in a war zone. In a war zone, some interviewees felt the rules of gender did not apply:

"The other thing with conflict and war is that the usual rules don't really apply. People have different priorities." (P4, 2024)

This proved to be true even in countries that are known to be more difficult for female journalists to work in:

"Covering Syria, I didn't feel there was gender at all. In Damascus, when I would go, I would see politicians, especially those in the opposition, and they're all very open...I think they were eager to talk and they've been waiting for this opportunity for so long." (P6, 2024)

3.4.4 Different Process, Same Result

Often when an interviewee did state that their gender had no impact on their access to information, they added the caveat that they could access the same information, it may just be more difficult due to their gender. They expressed that despite an added difficulty, the interviewees always ended up accessing the same information as their male colleagues. Because of this, the gender difference was often discounted.

"I do think there's still a natural inclination to somehow think that men are more capable of handling elements of danger than women...when you're trying to get to the front line or something you have to work a little bit harder to convince people that you are capable...but eventually, it always works out... Men would have to work less hard to achieve the same outcome.It's never

really impacted my ability to get an interview. Some conservative hardline

leaders in Afghanistan may have not wanted to meet with me. But in the end,

they all did" (P7, 2024)

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In answer to the research question: Does being a woman affect how journalists are

able to access, gather and disseminate information in conflict zones? And, if gender

affects accessing, gathering and dissemination of information in conflict zones, is it in

a positive or negative way? — this thesis supports the findings from the literature

that, overall, being a woman does affect the access female journalists have to

information in conflict zones. All interviewees provided examples of a time where

their gender significantly impacted the information they were able to gather while

working in a war zone. These examples align with records of other journalists as well

as the theory that gender affects how society perceives women (Butler, 1990; Palmer

& Melki, 2016). Some interviewees leaned into the stereotypes of femininity in order

to access more information, a tactic mentioned by Judith Butler (1990) in her writings

on parody and subversion, as well as by Palmer and Melki (2016) in their study on

gender performance in conflict zones.

Similar to previous studies, the data collected for this paper does not show an

exclusively positive or negative impact. Most interviewees acknowledged both the

benefits and the drawbacks of being a female journalist in a war zone.

4.1 Advantages

The literature highlighted several advantages to being a woman in a war zone that were corroborated by the experience of the interviewees. Eve-Ann Prentice's experience of being underestimated in the Balkans illustrates how, sometimes being underestimated by male sources led to gaining more information (Playdon, 2002). Interviewees reported similar advantages, with men often speaking more candidly to them as they underestimated their intelligence or reach as a journalist due to their gender, or allowing them into restricted areas because they did not see the women as a threat. Like Prentice, one interviewee said she was happy to be underestimated because she knew that would lead to more information, "I actually much prefer a scenario where people underestimate me at the beginning and then are surprised" (P2, 2024). Other participants in the study substantiated the claim that being a woman helped them get through checkpoints particularly due to their ability to blend in by way of head coverings (Steiner, 2017).

The literature claims that the gender divide in some societies made it possible for women to gain access to exclusive information by speaking to local women (Harris & Williams, 2018). Most interviewees who have worked in countries with a traditional gender separation revealed they had experienced situations where they were only able to speak to women due to their own gender identity. Whether that be in situations where they were allowed into female only spaces or because they were able to speak to women one-on-one, interviewees gained access to information unreachable by their male colleagues.

4.2 Disadvantages

The literature also listed significant barriers to access for female journalists in war zones. The first step to accessing information is being assigned a story. Data shows that over three quarters of top decision makers in media are male (Eddy et al., 2023). Interviewees explained that they were often overlooked for assignments in conflict zones by their male superiors, even when they had the same amount or even more experience working in volatile areas. One respondent supposed that reluctance to send female journalists into the field may have to do with outdated views on motherhood, much like Hannah Allam was quoted as expressing in the literature (Steiner, 2016b). "People think about women getting married and getting pregnant and having babies and having to take maternity leaves longer…So I feel like maybe that's why it's easier to deploy men to warzones or hire more men than women" (P4, 2024).

Another respondent supported Konow-Lund and Høiby's (2021) assertion from the literature that, in patriarchal cultures, family could be used to restrict women from reporting. P5 (2024) detailed her experience of being removed from her school in Yemen by her father after he learned that she was reporting for a local paper without his permission.

Furthermore, concerns for physical safety disproportionately affect female journalists. Much of this restriction came from concerns from their colleagues as suggested in the literature (Steiner, 2012; Høiby & Ottosen, 2019) and male sources unwilling to put the journalists at risk by taking them to unstable areas. As one participant put it: "that's just sort of like journalism in general, you're constantly getting told no, you're constantly being told you can't do something. And being a

woman, it gives them one more reason to say no." (P1, 2024). The risk assessment was not only performed by men. Interviewees also cited times where they decided to bar their own access to stories based on personal risk assessment that their male colleagues did not have to consider. Two interviewees in particular told of times where they limited their pursuit of stories due to the risk of rape while in the field, a threat that male journalists rarely receive (P5 & P9, 2024).

4.3 Freelancing, Gender, and Access

Financial barriers are another consideration women must think about when reporting. Freelancing, as the literature shows, is often feminized work. Harris and Williams (2018) argue that "the choice of which journalist or director to send to a war zone depends on many things: experience, character, connections and cost. The last factor is increasingly offered as an explanation for the growth in women war correspondents'' (p. 167). This observation was backed up in the data collected, as interviewees provided both examples of being less costly to their employees (P5 & P2, 2024), and explained their own reasoning for switching to freelancing related to their gender. One interviewee, for example, explained how she turned to freelancing after the birth of her first child (P7, 2024).

The data collected also showed a trend of freelancers facing greater barriers to access than staff journalists. Having to frontload the cost of a reporting trip, not having inside network contacts, and the lack of a recognizable outlet name can all be barriers unique to freelancers, all of which are discussed in the literature (Harris et al., 2016) and supported by the interviews. Although it may appear that the relationship between freelancing and negative access has no relation to gender, there

is a connection between the barriers to freelancers and freelancing being more common for women. Female reporters are more likely to be freelancers than their male counterparts, leading to increased challenges in accessing information in conflict zones.

4.4 Intersectionality and Access

Several studies touch on the impact of intersectionality, particularly the intersection between Western identity and gender (Harris & Williams, 2018; Boller, 2016; Von der Lippe & Ottosen, 2016). This is supported by the data collected in this paper. Interviewees felt that their female identity allowed them access to the female half of society, where men generally were not welcome. They also noted that their identity as white women allowed them to also interact with the male half of society as they were seen as foreigners before they were seen as women.

Western interviewees cited instances of being allowed to sleep in the same room as male colleagues, speak one-on-one with male sources, and even enter male-specific areas of worship spaces because their foreignness gave them status as neither fully male nor fully female. One interviewee was pleasantly surprised when an Imam from a conservative mosque in Israel allowed her into the men's prayer room. "He said, 'If you want to come in here, this is the men's prayer, but you're allowed to film, you're allowed to talk to people'." (P1, 2024). They were simply seen as foreign journalists, not expected to conform to the gender norms of the society they were reporting on. Arab women, however, were expected to align with the cultural expectations in the majority Arab or Muslim regions and therefore did not have the same access to the male part of society. This dual identity gave foreign

interviewees access to the entire society, a unique advantage in conservative societies where men and women are expected to remain within their own spheres, particularly in religious contexts where women were expected not to interact with men they were directly related to or married to.

4.5 Limitations and Future Research

The insights from this study corroborate much of the existing literature on gender's effect on journalists' access to information in war zones. It supports the need for policies that consider and offset the unique challenges faced by female reporters in conflict zones, such as the need for specific training, financial support, and added safety measures. It is especially important to include freelancers in these training as they are disproportionately women who already face increased risk in war zones. Additionally, there should be specific training for assigning editors to reduce the risk of unconscious gender bias when it comes to assigning stories.

This study acknowledges several limitations in its data collection. The sample size was on the smaller side due to the reliance on cold outreach, resulting in a low response rate. Ongoing significant conflicts, such as those in Ukraine and Israel, made many potential participants too busy to interview, further restricting the sample size. There was also a language barrier, as the researcher could only interview women who speak English or French at a proficient level, largely limiting the interviewees to Western women. Many of the interviews were conducted in languages that were not the participants' first languages which can also act as a limitation to the depth and nuance of the participants' responses.

Further research could mitigate these issues by utilizing researchers who have fluency in more languages in order to include the experiences of a more diverse population. Additionally, this paper is limited in its discussion of intersectionality. While intersectionality is explored, it is not an exhaustive look into the various dynamics of race, class, sexuality, and religion, all of which have a profound impact on the experience of journalists. Future studies should centralize a more in-depth look into intersectionality in their research.

Moreover, the participants in this thesis were primarily journalists who work for well-known outlets and were possible to find through online research. Future research should aim to include lesser-known journalists to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges they face. The fact that gender can influence access to information and the ability to report accurately from conflict zones is a critical issue that warrants closer examination.

4.6 Conclusion

This study sought to explore the impact of gender dynamics on war reporting. The research highlighted the unique advantages and challenges female conflict journalists face when collecting information due to the complex interaction of gender and journalism in war zones. A first step to ensure a more equitable environment for female war journalists is for news organisations to invest in training to offset implicit and explicit bias faced by women.

Implementing these measures will not only create a supportive environment conducive to female journalists effectively doing their jobs but will also improve the quality of journalism in general. By addressing gender-specific challenges in war

reporting, news organizations can ensure that audiences gain a more inclusive and nuanced insight into war zones. This keeps the public well informed and provides a better understanding of global conflict world-wide. Ultimately, this will create an environment conducive to informed dialogue and positive change.

Summary

Tato studie zkoumá vliv genderové dynamiky na zkušenosti válečných novinářek, které podávají zprávy z konfliktních oblastí. Navzdory velkému počtu výzkumů o zastoupení a vlivu novinářek v médiích, je zkoumání toho, jak gender ovlivňuje získávání informací ve válečných zónách, omezené. Cílem této studie je zaplnit tuto mezeru zkoumáním jedinečných výzev a přínosů válečných zpravodajek. Prostřednictvím tematické analýzy deseti polostrukturovaných rozhovorů s válečnými novinářkami tato studie zkoumá, zda to, že jsou ženy, ovlivňuje jejich schopnost získávat, shromažďovat a šířit informace z konfliktních zón. Tento výzkum se zabývá dvěma základními výzkumnými otázkami: zda pohlaví ovlivňuje schopnost novinářů působit v konfliktních zónách a zda jsou tyto vlivy pozitivní, nebo negativní. Zjištění ukazují, že novinářky mají díky svému pohlaví jedinečné výhody, jako je lepší přístup k ženským zdrojům a schopnost splynout s okolím díky používání pokrývek hlavy a obličeje. Čelí však také výzvám, jako jsou kulturní omezení, zvýšené riziko a tlak rodiny. Tato studie se také dotýká vlivu intersekcionality, konkrétně se zaměřuje na to, jak mohou mít ženy s určitou identitou přístup k mužské i ženské populaci, protože jsou vnímány jako "třetí pohlaví". Tím, že tento výzkum pojednává o nuancích vzájemného působení mezi genderem a válečnou žurnalistikou, přispívá k širšímu diskurzu o médiích, genderu a konfliktech.

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List of Appendices

Appendix no. 1: Interview Guide (Question List)

Interview Guide

Intro questions:
1. Please tell me about yourself (name, where you are from, region)
2. Please tell me about your journalistic career (how long you have been a journalist, in what medium do you work, are you a freelancer or backed by an outlet, where have you worked and what conflicts have you covered)

Topic questions:
3. Does being a woman affect how you are able to gather and disseminate information in conflict zones?
4. If so, how?
   a. Can you think of any situations in which your gender affected your ability to access information or changed what information people shared with you (either in a positive or negative way)?
   b. Can you think of any situation where your gender affected your ability to access areas (either in a positive or negative way)?
5. Have you experienced discrimination due to any other reasons (not only for being a woman)?
6. Is there a question you wish I had asked or anything else you'd like to add?