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"Media and conflict in crisis situations"

Female War Correspondents and Gendered Safety

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Abstract

This thesis examines the work of female war journalists and discusses how women in this profession perceive and navigate gender-specific safety challenges in war and crises. Furthermore, the thesis examines how these challenges impact decision-making processes, reporting practices, and access to sources. Although every war journalist faces risks and dangers as a result of the job, there are additional threats to women in the profession, often related to gender. These include sexual harassment, discrimination, and cultural limitations. Through a comprehensive literature review and interviews with 11 female war journalists from across the globe, this paper identifies the risk mitigation strategies and professional adaptations these women employ to perform their jobs in high-risk areas as safely as possible. The thesis also examines how gender influences access to sources, particularly for women and civilians. The underlying feminist media theory and the concept of situated safety create an examination of institutional gaps. These findings indicate a significant need for inclusive safety training and mental health support within the industry. Overall, the findings contribute to a further understanding of the different realities of female war journalists and call for changes in the system that should ensure more support for women.

Explanation of AI usage

I wrote this thesis with the responsible assistance of AI tools. The AIs used are Microsoft Teams (transcription), DeepL (translation), ChatGPT, and SciSpace. The AIs were used for brainstorming purposes, to translate short text sections and interviews, to research academic literature, and to transcribe the interviews. At no point were texts generated by AI copied directly into the thesis. The final complete work was written by me, including the interpretation. AI tools merely served as a support during the editing process. All academic sources were analyzed, edited, and cited by me.

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1 List of Appendices

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2 Introduction

As the world gets further impacted by wars and conflicts every day, it simultaneously becomes more important to understand the different realities that come with it. The people most affected by war have always been and still are civilians. To report to the world about the brutal realities people live in, war correspondents who live in these zones of conflict or head towards them to inform the public often risk everything. According to multiple sources, including media outlets and NGOs such as Amnesty International and the Geneva Academy, by the end of 2024, there will be over 114 armed conflicts worldwide. This includes more than 45 in the Middle East, over 35 in North Africa, 21 in Asia, seven in Europe, and six in Latin America (Today's Armed Conflicts - The Geneva Academy Of International Humanitarian Law And Human Rights, o.d.b). The news outlet *Vox* starkly titles its coverage, "The world is getting more violent" (Keating, 2024). With each conflict that erupts, destruction is unleashed on countries, regions, and their people, displacing, traumatizing, and killing civilians in vast numbers. Amnesty International highlights that "some civilian groups face increased risk of harm during wars. These include women, older people, people with disabilities, and children" (Amnesty International, 2025).

If looked at from a Western or European perspective, a region that is widely exempted from armed conflicts, some of them may feel closer to home than others. However, it is nearly impossible to truly grasp what it means to live in a war zone or be forced to flee one's home. For the people unaffected by the brutalities, the only way to learn about them is through news reports, documentaries, and articles, which provide a glimpse into the bitter realities that others endure daily.

The crucial task of reporting on conflict zones falls on the shoulders of war and conflict correspondents, whose work sheds light on the realities of war for the world to see. However, conflict reporters can't always avoid exposing themselves to major risks and challenges while working close to the frontlines. War correspondents face significant threats, including injury, abduction, harassment, imprisonment, and even death as they try to collect and report stories from some of the most dangerous regions on the planet. Despite the dangers, their work

remains essential for understanding the complexities of conflict and the effect it has on humans (McLaughlin, 2016).

A steadily growing proportion of these war correspondents today are women. Historically, women were not always permitted to participate in the workforce and were primarily expected to fulfill domestic responsibilities (Yellen, 2020). In the 1960s, only about six percent of war correspondents were women, whereas 30 years later, in 1992, the number had increased by 24 percent (Kratsev, 2004). While there are no exact statistics on the number of female war correspondents worldwide, the participation of women in war reporting has changed increasingly over time. The progress has been ongoing despite conventional gender, reinventing the way conflict stories are told. Nowadays, female war correspondents play a crucial role in delivering thorough coverage of international conflicts, bringing distinct viewpoints and understandings (Editorial Team, 2024).

The dangers and risks of being a war reporter are immense. However, being a woman in this field presents even more potential dangers. Gender and gender inequality remain widely discussed and relevant issues in society, and journalism, especially war journalism, is no exception, as “a female war journalist is more exposed in conflict settings” (Orgeret, 2016, p.5). Anyone working in a war zone faces inherent dangers. However, why are women in this field more exposed than men? Female war journalists encounter gender-based discrimination, significant challenges, and risks, including the questioning of their capabilities, which can lead to shortcut access to pivotal information and limited support in carrying out their jobs as journalists (Editorial Team, 2024). And even worse, pervasive sexism and hostility from their superiors, colleagues, and the public. Many also experience sexual violence and are often discouraged from reporting such assaults to continue working (Avagyan, 2023; Steiner, 2017). Furthermore, the International News Safety Institute and the International Women’s Media Foundation issued a survey in 2011. One of their findings showed that “about 64% of female journalists have experienced some form of intimidation, threats, or abuse in relation to their work” (Avagyan, 2023), and nearly half have encountered physical violence, including sexual assault.

Another way in which gender impacts female journalists is in their access to sources. This challenge works in two ways: while they may have better access to women and children in some cultures, they may be denied opportunities to speak with male officials or enter certain areas in others. Cultural and social barriers often require them to adhere to specific dress codes or rely on male or, in some cases, female camera people, depending on the country. In certain cultural contexts, female journalists are perceived as less threatening, which can foster more open dialogues and facilitate honest reporting (Avagyan, 2023).

2.1 Structure of the Work

This thesis will research the question, *"How do female war correspondents perceive and navigate gender-specific safety challenges in conflict zones, and how do these perceptions influence their decision-making, reporting practices, and interactions with sources?"* for its significance holds a big importance. The following literature review will initially address three components of the research question, which will be presented in three chapters.

The first section will focus on the historical development and trajectory of female war correspondents beginning in the mid-19th century. It will also address the challenges and obstacles women have faced in this profession over the past 150 years, up to the present day, to illustrate the history of women in this profession from the beginning. This will be done by presenting multiple female war correspondents from each century as examples, demonstrating their challenges and struggles and how their work has contributed to the development of women in this profession. The second part will look into what gender-specific safety challenges are and why and how they are distinguished from regular safety challenges that all conflict reporters are facing. It will contextualize gender-based discrimination, as gender inequality remains a pressing issue, particularly in journalism and, specifically, war journalism. The evolving dynamics of war reporting necessitate understanding how these gender-specific challenges shape how female correspondents choose, collect, and report stories from conflict zones. The chapter will also explore the risk mitigation strategies that

female conflict reporters make use of to adapt and protect themselves in dangerous situations. Furthermore, the psychological impact that war and crisis can have on reporters will receive attention, as well as the coping strategies applied by affected journalists. Finally, this section will also consider the role news organizations play within this framework and investigate what they are doing to support and protect their employees. The following third section addresses the access female war journalists have to their sources. It discusses the advantages that, in particular, white Western female journalists have when dealing with sources and also explains why this is the case or, conversely, why non-Western female journalists are at a disadvantage and even more at risk in some situations. Lastly, emphasis will be put on evolving norms in the industry. What changes have been made, and what is urgently needed to support female conflict journalists in their work?

Before the results of the interviews are presented, the Methodological Design provides an insight into the working methods and the preparation of the interviews. The methods used are presented, the tools are shown, and the procedure and background information about the interviewees are shared. This is followed by a presentation of the findings of the interviews. These are outlined by individual quotations in structured format to fit the context of the research question as well as the literature.

The discussion examines the findings in depth and places them within the literature already compiled. Finally, the research question is answered on the basis of the collected data. Ultimately, the conclusion provides a review of the entire topic, describes deficits and prospects, and suggests possible new research approaches

This research underscores the importance of increasing awareness and support for female war correspondents as they strive to convey critical insights and human stories from the frontlines to a global audience.

3 Literatur Review

3.1 Historical context

The profession of journalism has a comprehensive history, including significant transformations, especially concerning women. The beginning of industrialization and with it

advancements in newspaper technology, made printing faster and cheaper, revolutionizing the work of reporters. At the turn of the 20th century, journalists were able to expand their influence by disseminating news more quickly and reaching a broader audience. World War I marked a time in which reporting became even more crucial as well as challenging, as on one hand, technology became limited again, and on the other, political interests became even more difficult to navigate (Jeki, 2023, p.2). “Journalists encountered censorship, dangerous working environments, physical difficulties, communication barriers, psychological burdens, propaganda, manipulation, language and cultural challenges, difficulties in accessing information.” (Jeki, 2023, p.2).

Between the 19th and 20th centuries, the transformation of women entering journalism and war correspondence began, leaving behind traditional gender roles such as wife and mother (Jeki, 2023, p.2; Avagyan, 2023).

In this period of time, the choices for women in the workforce were quite limited. Most of the professions in which they were allowed in, were traditionally ‘female’ occupations in childcare, teaching, domestic service, or as a factory worker. The prospect of entering a male-dominated profession seemed unattainable. However, a few women who were determined to change their situation began to understand the potential of journalism for themselves as a pathway for self-expression and engaging more in society. The press revealed itself as a powerful tool to also voice their perspectives, address social issues, and make space for women in public discourse, challenging the still intact norms of gender and labor (Jeki, 2023, pp. 2-3). These victories were hard-earned. Institutional and societal barriers made the journey an uphill battle for the women. During the Second World War, women were frequently denied access to the front lines, as it was believed their presence would disrupt military discipline, as well as in Vietnam, where female reporters had to endure efforts trying to banish them from the battlefield, showing the persistent sexism in their field of profession. But against all odds, having the patriarchy and societal conditions against them, women would still pursue their often hard-to-follow work. Despite these circumstances, or perhaps because of them, many female correspondents adopted a more narrative and subjective style of reporting. This approach,

while criticized for lacking traditional objectivity, allowed them to convey the emotional and human impact of war more effectively. Journalists like Martha Gellhorn focused on personal storytelling rather than strictly factual accounts, believing that this method could better influence public opinion (Lebovic, 2024, pp. 143-144).

3.1.1 Florence Nightingale, Margaret Fuller, and Jane Cazneau

Tracing the stories of female war correspondents throughout history becomes increasingly challenging the further back in time one goes. During the Second World War, several prominent female journalists, such as Martha Gellhorn and Clare Hollingworth, introduced in the following chapter, emerged and gained recognition. Delving into the 19th century, the landscape looks markedly different, where fewer women in the field were documented or acknowledged. That said, some stand out despite the circumstances of the time. One of the most famous names 1900s of women working in war zones is Florence Nightingale. The British nurse and statistician is mostly known for reforming the modern way of nursing. While caring for British soldiers during the Crimean War from 1853 to 1856, she initiated the formalization of nursing education, which eventually led her to establish the first scientifically-based nursing school, the Nightingale School of Nursing, in London in 1860 (Selanders, 2025). Even though she might not have been the typical war journalist, she did write and publish about war, just with a rather different approach. Looking at the data that she collected herself to analyze and improve the health of the British army, and finally, the education of nursing (Rogers, 2021).

Another name that resurfaces, in researching female war correspondents in the 19th century, is Margaret Fuller. Fuller was a pioneering figure in the evolving role of women in war journalism, born in 1810 and dying in 1850. Commissioned by *The New York Tribune*, she became the first accredited woman foreign correspondent when she was sent to Italy in 1848 to cover the Roman Revolution (Jeki, 2023, p.2; McAfee, 2017). She was a radical feminist, known for her intellectual ability and her work as an editor of Emerson's transcendentalist magazine, *The Dial*. Her reports from the frontline of the Roman Revolution showed a new perspective on war reporting. In her reports, she furthermore highlighted

figures like Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi, documenting their efforts to establish a democratic Roman republic. Her work about the French siege of Rome was described as emotionally intense and with a lot of attention to detail.

Apart from her work as a journalist, Fuller also helped and tended to wounded soldiers in hospitals, supporting the nurses and showing her dedication. Through her contributions, the perception and role of women in war journalism have significantly changed. With her work, Margaret Fuller paved the way for future generations of female correspondents. The challenges that she highlighted and how she highlighted them underline the importance of having women report from conflict zones, setting a precedent for everyone following in her footsteps (McAfee, 2017).

Frequently mentioned alongside Margaret Fuller is Jane Cazneau. Cazneau, as well as Fuller, is recognized as one of the trailblazing American female foreign war correspondents. She uniquely reported from behind enemy lines during the U.S.-Mexico War (1849-1848) for *The New York Sun*, making her the only U.S. journalist, male or female, to do so (Griffin, 2010, pp. 418-421; Jeki, 2023). Nevertheless, she, like her female colleagues in this field, had to navigate numerous challenges and obstacles throughout her career. Because men still dominated the workforce, she worked and published under various pseudonyms. Despite these challenges, she managed to gain significant influence over public opinion through her role as a journalist at *The New York Sun*. While she supported U.S. expansionist policies, she did not hesitate to criticize American military actions, pointing out the moral shortcomings of the military and the impact those had on civilians in wartime (Griffin, 2010, pp. 416, 419, 422).

3.1.2 Martha Gellhorn, Clare Hollingworth, and Cathrine Leroy

Martha Gellhorn, born in 1908, is one of the few women of the 20th century who gained recognition for her work. During her 50-year career, she reported on multiple wars, including the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Vietnam War (1955-1975), multiple conflicts in Central America, as well as many crucial moments of World War II (1939-1945) (Hartley, 2022; Kohlmaier, 2022, pp. 65-66). Gellhorn was the first female reporter to cover the D-Day landings in Normandy on June 6, 1944 (Philibert-Ortega, n.d.). Gellhorn experienced the

liberation of Europe (1945) firsthand and was among the earliest journalists to enter the Dachau concentration camp. The devastating events of the Second World War did not deter her relentless passion for war reporting. Her dedication to uncovering the human stories behind the wars she covered inspired many women to pursue careers in war journalism (Syeda, 2021).

Another great example of a female journalist of the 20th century is Clare Hollingworth. Born shortly after Martha Gellhorn in 1911, Clare Hollingworth, to this day, is considered a trailblazer when it comes to overcoming countless challenges in reporting wars. Entering her career at the beginning of the Second World War with a scoop about the war outbreak, she still had to battle multiple official restrictions that forbade women from being close to the frontlines. Throughout her life as a war correspondent, she had to deal with institutional sexism, such as being denied formal accreditation to ban her from conflict areas, for the simple reason of being a woman. These institutional restrictions, however, didn't stop her, as she joined military operations in Cairo and other zones of conflict. She wrote history as the first female defense correspondent for *The Guardian*. In her career, she pointed out the ongoing challenges faced by female journalists. Her achievements opened doors for future generations of women in the field (Sebba, 2017).

The mid-20th century saw women like Martha Gellhorn and Clare Hollingworth carve a path for future generations of female war correspondents, challenging societal expectations and institutional restrictions. Even though their contributions were groundbreaking, the struggle for equal access and recognition for women in war reporting persisted. As the world transitioned into the post-war era of the 1950s and 1960s, conflicts changed and evolved into different dimensions. During the Vietnam War (1955-1975), it was quite uncommon for women to have the means or the imagination to travel to war zones.

Catherine Leroy, who covered the Vietnam War between 1966 and 1968, was the only female photographer during that period. A lot of young men with little experience as journalists, let alone war correspondents, traveled to Vietnam and were readily accepted by their male peers, while women faced numerous barriers even before arrival. The women who

decided to report on Vietnam often lacked guaranteed jobs, accommodation, or health insurance. In addition to that, they faced major sexual harassment, not being seen as colleagues but as potential romantic interests, and were completely disrespected for their professional abilities.

The field of journalism at that time was very much a 'boys' club', making it incredibly challenging for women to be taken seriously (ABC News, 2022). For female war correspondents, this period represented both progress and ongoing adversity.

Although more and more women entered the field of journalism, they were still confronted with repeated gender-based discrimination, as they were denied frontline access or doubted in their ability to cover violent conflict (Editorial Team, 2024). Yet, many pushed forward, proving their capability and resilience in war zones across Vietnam, the Middle East, and beyond. This persistence led to gradual, yet hard-won, changes in the field. From the Vietnam War to contemporary conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, female war correspondents have continued to fight for their place in the industry. Women not only reporting from battlefields but also shaping how war is perceived and understood by a global audience is an achievement that influences the world to this day.

Their work has been instrumental in bringing human stories of war to the forefront, often with a deeper focus on the civilian experience. However, challenges remain, from institutional barriers and safety risks to digital harassment and the evolving nature of war reporting in the 21st century (Mammadov, 2024, pp. 51-52; Steiner, 2017, pp. 11-13).

3.2 Marie Colvin and Katrin Eigendorf

With the rise in the number of female war correspondents since their first representatives in the mid-19th century, there are now more stories and career paths to explore than ever before. Some stories have gained significant recognition due to the bravery and dedication of their protagonists. It is almost impossible to research female war journalists, or war journalists in general, without coming across the name Marie Colvin.

Marie Colvin, born in 1956, is considered a journalism icon of our time, serving as a role model and mentor for many of her colleagues. After 30 years in the field, the reporter with the eye patch, which she wore after sustaining a severe war injury, was killed in Homs, Syria, in 2012. Her life was adapted into a film, and a journalism program in the USA was named in her honor. (Kohlmaier, 2022 p. 119)

Marie Colvin made significant contributions to the field of war journalism. Her fearlessness shows in her reporting. Writing about some of the world's most dangerous conflict zones set a new standard for bravery and dedication in journalism. Colvin's work points out the importance of bearing witness to the human cost of war, as she often focused on the stories of civilians caught in conflict. Colvin's legacy includes breaking down barriers for female journalists by proving that women could report from the frontlines with the same tenacity and skill as their male counterparts. She inspired many women to pursue careers in war journalism and served as a mentor and role model for aspiring female correspondents (About Marie-V1 - Marie Colvin Memorial Foundation, n.d.; Courage Knows No Gender - Marie Colvin - Marie Colvin Memorial Foundation, n.d.; Kohlmaier, 2022, pp. 118-123).

Similar to the other female war correspondents in the field, the German war journalist Katrin Eigendorf has worked in multiple countries and zones of conflict. From Chechnya in Russia to Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, and Afghanistan, Eigendorf has uncovered stories from each of these countries. For nearly three decades as a journalist, she encountered numerous women whose stories profoundly impacted her, as well as brave female journalists who could only perform their duties under significant peril (Schellong-Lammel, 2022). After finishing her studies in Dortmund and Paris, she started working as a correspondent for the German ARD in Paris (Kohlmaier, 2022, p. 19). About that time, Eigendorf (2022) recalls in an interview how fortunate she was, as the German Correspondent Ulrich Wickert was in Paris at that time, so she just called him and asked for a job, which he gave her. She realized early on that, as a woman, one cannot wait for someone to offer a job. This understanding led her to independently go to Russia, driven by her fascination with the country. In another

interview, the multi-award-winning correspondent reveals what guides her as a war journalist. For her, the focus is on showing what happens and presenting it as authentically and factually as possible (Eigendorf in Kohlmaier, 2022, p. 24).

I cannot solve the problems; that is for others to do. But I can gather the necessary information, so people can form an opinion. Because without information, there are no political decisions. And without political decisions, there is no action.
(Eigendorf, 2022).

In a report for the newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Eigendorf writes about how female war correspondents like Christiane Amanpour brought a new focus to war reporting. As more women entered the field, they brought attention to the experiences of women in conflict zones, including the use of rape as a weapon of war in Yugoslavia. Despite these advances, the focus of war reporting often remains on the battlefield rather than on civilian victims, including women. Eigendorf underscores the importance of diverse perspectives in war journalism, as seen in the Ukraine conflict, where the contributions of women, including female soldiers, are frequently overlooked in media coverage (Eigendorf, 2022).

When asked by Rita Kohlmaier (2022), “And have you ever felt: That's it! I'm not going to cover any more wars!” Eigendorf (2022) answered, “No. [...] My work is truly meaningful to me. It is a task that I fully support and stand behind.”

In conclusion, this chapter shows that the contributions of female war correspondents have transformed the landscape of conflict reporting significantly. The unique perspectives and voices of women in the field have not only revealed the human dimensions of war but also challenged traditional norms within journalism. The following chapters will examine closely how things have shifted up til today and which challenges still have to be addressed. They will dissect the safety risks that are still in place, working as a female journalist in a zone of conflict, and how that is interconnected with gender-based violence.

3.3 Gender-Specific Safety Challenges in Conflict Reporting

As the previous chapter introduced multiple female journalists through time and the struggles they had to endure, with this chapter, the focus will shift from historical developments to how the circumstances for female journalists are substantiating today. What has changed, and which issues have to be dealt with today, regarding the work environments of female war correspondents? This work has the goal of finding out how female conflict journalists are navigating gender-specific safety challenges in the field and how the media industry is intertwined with it. The next sub-chapters will display a thorough analysis of the topic, trying to answer these questions and to build a literary base for the upcoming interviews and their examination.

3.3.1 Types of gender-specific threats

At the beginning of 2024, the *International Media Support* released a report addressing the “Safety of women journalists” (2024). Emanating from the Human Rights Council Resolution 33/2 which in 2016 among others “condemns unequivocally the specific attacks on women journalists in the exercise of their work, including sexual and gender-based discrimination and violence, intimidation, and harassment, online and offline;” (United Nations, 2016), the report stresses the ongoing ‘gender-based violence’ and assesses different perspectives looking at the complex context of it. Gender plays a significant role, not only in mainstream journalism but particularly in war journalism.

Taking a step back to assess the topic from a rather critical feminist perspective reveals how patriarchal structures within the system still practice and support the “discrimination, oppression and violence against women” (International Media Support, 2024, p. 2). To clarify how and where gender-based violence can express itself, the report identifies three different categories:

- 1) Physical and sexual violence – including killing and any other physical harm, but also online abuse and verbal attacks,

2) Workplace harassment and discrimination, also considering inequality at the workplace, gender pay gap, lower chances of promotion, and access to decision-making ranks, and

3) Social pressure, meaning women are still thought of as the main caregiver in the family and often judged if they don't act accordingly.

These inflicted commitments can cause disadvantages for women in the workforce (International Media Support, 2024, p. 2). The report presents multiple reasons that show how important an examination of gendered safety concerns is. These concerns have been identified and condemned by the United Nations, as well as multiple international organizations, such as UNESCO and the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) (Jamil, 2021, pp. 1-2).

Being a journalist, let alone a conflict journalist these days, has become increasingly dangerous (Slavetcheva-Petkova et.al, 2023, p. 1211). Even when not working in a zone of conflict, but covering one from afar, reporting on politics or elections, journalists put themselves at risk. But the threat to journalists' safety may also come from the inside, as discrimination at the workplace or general societal pressure, which might not threaten their lives but their mental well-being, executing their daily jobs (Slavetcheva-Petkova et.al, 2023, pp. 1211-1212). To figure out where a journalist's safety is at risk, one must first define safety in this context. While academia has defined safety "from a perspective of its absence" (Slavetcheva-Petkova et.al, 2023, p. 1213), another component should also be taken into consideration and included in a general definition. This means that journalists are threatened not only by physical harm but also by risks to their psychological, digital, and financial well-being. The dimensions are explained as covering any obstacle that would impair a journalist performing their job, whether that be personally or infrastructurally, summarizing all as 'occupational safety' (Slavetcheva-Petkova et.al, 2023, p. 1214).

The range of safety challenges faced by journalists, particularly female journalists, is vast. Moreover, this issue affects female war correspondents globally, spanning countries across all continents. The *International Media Support* 2019 has published a piece about "The

safety of women journalists: Breaking the cycle of silence and violence’, in which it analyses nine different countries on that matter. The report reveals that both male and female journalists become victims of all sorts of assaults, but women also more often bear the risk of sexual attacks. Even in surroundings where it is less expected, as they are labeled as ‘safe’, for example, the office of a news outlet. The perpetrators in these environments are their male colleagues, superiors, or even family members (IMS, 2019, p.12; Steiner, 2017, p.12).

Although it is nearly impossible to make generalized statements about journalists from different countries, there are overarching accords that appear when looking at some of them, “sexual harassment particularly in the workplace” (IMS, 2019, p. 10) being one of them. “She got harassed not only *in the field but also at the office*. Harassment came from sources and colleagues,” (Aderia, 202, p.74), reads a journal about Indonesian female journalists and their experiences with harassment at the workplace. The *IMS* furthermore outlines, referring to a worldwide study of the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), that about 26% of female journalists have been physically attacked, out of which 70% named ‘being a woman’ as a crucial factor for the attacks (IMS, 2019, p.12). Reporters in the global south are indeed put at risk even more, as oftentimes they live in countries or regions that are ruled by authoritarian regimes, without any journalistic freedom or protection. But throughout the last years, even journalists in the Global North, like Western Europe and North America, have been facing threats. Logically, war correspondents from these areas travel to conflict zones and put themselves at risk simply due to the nature of their job. But even journalists who live and work in Western countries are put in jeopardy of being attacked, predominantly online (Waisbord, 2022, p. 1949).

So in addition to the physical violations journalists, and again, distinctively female journalists, have to cope with online harassment (International Press Institute, 2024). The assaults that happen online have the potential to unfold through a wide range of platforms, threatening journalists directly (Waisbord, 2022, p.1950). The International Press Institute has gathered data that shows that 24.6% of attacks against female journalists within the European Union are committed online, while the numbers for male journalists, with only

12.5%, are way lower. The threats, among others, include doxxing, sexual harassment like rape, and death threats (International Press Institute, 2024).

But it is still not everything that female journalists have to endure. As mentioned before, the International Media Support created three pillars within journalism that categorize gender-based violence. The third point is social pressure. This category doesn't describe gender-based violence in a traditional physical way, however, it explains how women are impacted by their male colleagues, superiors, news organizations, and society as a whole because they are still seen as the 'weaker sex', and with that often not trusted to handle jobs that are traditionally viewed as men's work (International Media Support, 2024, p. 2; Palmer & Melki, 2016, p. 7). Even basic sanitary situations, such as uninterrupted access to a bathroom, managing menstruation, or dealing with pregnancy, are issues that women in the field are facing and that can still be held against them by men (Palmer & Melki, 2016, p. 2). Another component reveals itself, looking at female journalists who are also mothers. Since the 19th century, women in conflict journalism have not been expected to have children. Although more women entered the field over time, societal perceptions remained unchanged, and women continued to be stigmatized for being mothers while working in conflict areas. The strategies of coping with that societal judgment and the guilt that it can inflict are as diverse as the women concerned with the issue. While some decided to stay with their families and not revert to the conflicts of the world, others continued relying on their salaries or saw their work intertwined with their identity, and therefore felt compelled to go back (Steiner, 2017, pp. 11, 17-18).

These are just some of the strategies of female journalists to navigate through their profession. More of these strategies by women are reviewed in the following chapter.

3.3.2 Female Risk Mitigation Strategies

Overcoming societal obstacles as a woman is the usual. As a female war correspondent, there are even more challenges to withstand. Mitigating risks while preparing to go into a war zone is fundamental for all journalists, male and female. It is necessary to gather a trustworthy team around oneself and to be equipped with essential gear, like a safety vest and helmet, as a

basic form of preparation. Furthermore, “safety assessments, security routines, and knowledge of first-aid” (Frey, 2023, p. 1011), while crucial, are not always a given. Just as important are coping strategies, post-traumatic care, and resilience-building efforts to support a journalist's mental well-being in potentially traumatic situations. It includes informing themselves about the location and circumstances that they are investigating, and also considering cultural conditions, such as language or customs (Orgeret, 2016, p. 4). Part of the preparation involves ensuring “good equipment, and investing in good loyal fixers and drivers” (Orgeret, 2016, p. 5), protective gear, and insurance (Frey, 2023, p. 1010). These preparation measures can be especially challenging for freelance journalists as they often have to pay for such essentials themselves (Steers, 2014). It also means that in a worst-case scenario, the reporting journalist must adjust to high-pressure situations, and if necessary, quickly change their reporting practices even if a story might not get told. This goes for all conflict journalists, but there is an extended list of risks that women in particular have to anticipate, which will be further discussed in the following chapters.

As mentioned above, it is especially suggested that female journalists urgently choose colleagues they trust to work with. Having male colleagues might also be helpful, even though, as outlined earlier, there is a possibility that male colleagues can become part of the problem for women. Additionally, even more than their male colleagues, women in the field have to be informed about the cultural norms of the places they travel to, especially in regions where gender roles are more pronounced. There are strategies some journalists revealed, like using a fake wedding ring or holding a business card with fake information. It is also recommended to refrain from wearing earrings or to tie their hair in a ponytail, as both could get grabbed (Orgeret, 2016, p. 5).

In their article, Palmer and Melki speak about different ‘shape-shifts’ that female war correspondents switch into, to lower potential risks and to be less hindered in reporting and doing their jobs in affected areas (Palmer & Melki, 2016, p. 6). Whether that means downplaying their gender to adopt a more masculine approach and evoke professional equality, or emphasizing traditional feminine traits like emotional accessibility to build trust

and connect with sources. It can also involve accepting or portraying vulnerability, for example, by accentuating or even acting out a pregnancy to minimize risks in dangerous situations while still carrying out their work as journalists. The authors call the three main adaptation strategies 'Bracketing difference, establishing, camaraderie, and accentuating vulnerability'. In every case, female war reporters navigate and embody culturally shaped ideas of gender to be able to do their job effectively (Palmer & Melki, 2016, pp. 6-14).

These methods are used by female correspondents during deployment, adapting in the moment to increase their chances of safety. They are, however, highly individual and mostly developed by the women on the spot. These are not procedures taught in standard safety training (Palmer & Melki, 2016, p. 15). Individual risk mitigation strategies are also affirmed by a report about female conflict journalists in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Interviewing women from three different cities in the country, the report reveals a lack of extensive safety training. Even though journalists are familiar with Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT), it is criticized for not covering gender-related safety risks like gender-based violence. Neither are topics like economic security or psycho-social support discussed. Although HEAT does not claim to address such aspects, there are also no comparable trainings that incorporate them. The journalists mostly depend on their own experiences and experiences from others, stating the wish for a wider-ranging training that also addresses mental health (Free Press Unlimited & BH Novinari, 2022, pp. 1-3, 8-9). The report from Bosnia-Herzegovina reflects only the perceptions and experiences of women journalists from that region; however, it is not the only country where female journalists are restricted or impacted in their work due to their gender.

In another study, women journalists from Ghana were interviewed about professional safety risks and, among other things, asked what strategies they use to ensure their safety. The findings revealed that some interviewees would even avoid certain assignments to avoid putting themselves in danger. Specific topics were seen as particularly sensitive and thus posed a greater risk for women (Adjin-Tettey et al., 2023, pp. 1-3). These included elections, issues related to ethnicity, and conflict. Because news organizations in more remote towns do not provide transportation for their employees, journalists reporting on, for example, elections

must expect to travel home alone late at night. This is one of the reasons many women choose not to cover such stories. The fear of being attacked due to the political nature of the topics being reported on also leads many women journalists to decline certain assignments. This, in turn, means that women miss out on opportunities to advance their careers and cover the topics they are passionate about, solely because of their gender (Adjin-Tettey et al., 2023, pp. 143-144).

So, what can be taken from these reports? The strategies used by female conflict journalists to protect themselves are diverse: from wearing a fake wedding ring, spontaneously adapting to all sorts of situations, slipping into different roles, especially around men to gain access to information and be able to report, to relying on their own and other women's experiences, participating in trainings that only cover certain risk factors, and even turning down assignments because they may be too dangerous to life and limb. This alarming reality clearly shows how essential it is to continue engaging with the topic of safety in conflict reporting, especially with the specific challenges faced by women journalists in a nuanced way. Physical safety is a big aspect of working as a war journalist, but it is just as important to broaden the perspective and also look at components such as mental safety or mental health. How do conflict journalists deal with the psychological consequences of reporting from war zones? Psychological impacts and how journalists cope with trauma and stress will be analyzed in the following chapter.

3.3.3 Psychological impact and coping strategies

As of today, the safety of journalists has won on prevalence. Since the beginning of the 1990s, journalists have been killed every seven days on average, related to their profession. The threats to their safety that have been looked at were mostly physical. That has changed. The different types of threats to journalists can even be categorized due to their variety as previously mentioned in chapter 3.1 (Slavetcheva-Petkova et al, 2023, pp. 1211-1213). Some of these risks to safety are even amplified for journalists working in war zones or areas of crisis, including their mental well-being.

As a pioneer in this field, Professor of Psychology Anthony Feinstein (2020) has been researching the psychological risks in conflict reporting since 1999. Part of that is researching the gendered dimensions of psychological harm. A study done by Feinstein and Sinyor (2011) “examines whether the same gender differences occur in war journalists” (p. 29) as have been found in previous studies unrelated to war journalists, just focusing on men and women. Referring to studies about males and females of the general population as comparison, the study acts on the assumption that women more often show ‘anxiety’ and ‘mood disorders’ as well as being “twice as likely to suffer from (PTSD) than men.” (Sinyor & Feinstein, 2011, p. 29). The findings about war journalists, however, looked different. Sinyor & Feinstein’s (2011) conclusion based on their findings is “that female war journalists are no more depressed, psychologically distressed, or troubled by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms than male journalists” (p.33). Trying to explain this anomaly, the authors suggest that female war journalists make up a particularly resilient and self-selecting group, which could explain why their psychological symptoms are similar to those of their male colleagues. Parameters like their education, relationship status, and the fact that they choose to stay in such dangerous jobs for years are seen as signs of this resilience (Sinyor & Feinstein, 2011, pp. 30-31; Frey, 2023, p. 1010).

Resilience in this context describes the ability of a journalist to come back to a ‘good life’ after experiencing trauma while working in a war zone. This resiliency is largely developed by the individual due to the lack of comprehensive training. The benefits that could result from a trauma-informed training for war journalists would help them to manage their stress, find the right coping strategy, and approach their trauma in an adaptive instead of a maladaptive way (Slavetcheva-Petkova et.al, 2023, p. 1220). Generally, coping strategies happen in two steps: first, the affected person assesses the harm that they have suffered; second, they check their surroundings for resources that can support them in coping. The two typical ways of coping are adaptive and maladaptive. Maladaptive coping describes navigating a trauma with “denial, suppression of emotions and thoughts, and social withdrawal” (Slavetcheva-Petkova et.al, 2023, p. 1221), overall avoiding it. This can potentially result in the misuse of alcohol and

narcotics. A better way of handling a traumatic event would be in an adaptive way. In this case, the journalist would work problem-oriented and look for social support in family, friends, and peers, which would help them to develop resiliency and compliance as the social support system is considered to be an essential and influential part of coping with trauma. In case the journalist chooses a maladaptive way of coping, the final result will eventually come down to avoidance and finally “resistance, submission or exit” (Slavetcheva-Petkova et.al, 2023, p. 1221). An example of choosing a problem-oriented approach would be for a journalist to make adjustments to their practical work, some of which are described in Chapter 3.2.

These events should be highly alarming for the industry as they not only affect individuals but also threaten conflict journalism as a whole. News organizations should put the well-being and safety of journalists at the top of their agenda. That being said, the following chapter will focus on institutional gaps in war journalism with special recognition of women in the field.

3.3.4 Institutional Gaps – Gendered Safety

Women in war journalism are especially at risk in the context of trauma and mental health, as many don't feel comfortable telling their superiors about their mental strain, afraid they'll be seen as weak and won't be sent back into conflict zones to do their job. As a result, they often try to endure the trauma on their own, may not seek professional help, and the risk of slipping into a maladaptive coping strategy increases (Feinstein, 2020; Orgeret, K. S., 2016; Slavetcheva-Petkova et.al, 2023, p. 1221; Steiner, 2017, p. 21).

This issue also stems from media organizations not providing their full support. A study about the coping strategies conflict journalists apply based on interviews, while maybe not representative of a larger population, still gives an insight into some journalists' experiences with their employing news organizations. More than half of the questioned journalists stated that they don't feel “safeguarded or looked after by their employer” (Frey, 2023, p. 1017), nor were they provided with access to trauma support. Similarities can be found in the earlier-mentioned report by *Free Press Unlimited*, where the traditional HEAT trainings are criticized for predominantly focusing on physical risk management and not

having a sufficient approach for psychological effects that war and crises can cause. The report also points out that the majority of safety trainings, including HEAT, don't train for gender-based risks like sexual harassment or others. The female conflict journalists interviewed for the report, when asked about their editors' support, stated that they would not always get the support they needed from them (Free Press Unlimited & BH Novinari, 2022, pp. 1-2, 9).

With conflicts increasing worldwide, concerns arise about the profession of journalism and the safety of those who practice it. The concern relates to the resources that news organizations provide or do not provide, but the appeal for action for security is directed at the global community, since journalism expresses the right to freedom of expression, and preventing its exercise is an attack on democratic rights for all. (Lock, 2024; Orgeret & Tayebwa, 2020; Høiby & Ottosen, 2017, p. 1).

The demand for a concrete analysis of 'non-negotiables' is becoming more urgent because the well-being of journalists is linked to it. Safety for practitioners should always be paramount, but the profession presents many different sources of risk, especially for certain groups like women or marginalised people. If we look at conflict journalism separately, it becomes evident that the risks here are even greater than in other areas. Journalists who go to war zones expose themselves to dangers to life and limb. In some cases, women are more vulnerable than men in conflict zones. However, this is not due to their gender in the conventional sense. Women are just as capable as men of working in war zones; they are just more vulnerable because structural inequality often puts them at a disadvantage and therefore exposes them to greater risks (International Media Support, 2024, p.2; Lock, 2024). "Far too few people working in journalism safety are women, even fewer come from identities marginalised by their ethnicity, racial, or sexual identity" (Lock, 2024). In addition, physical safety should be equally accessible for everyone. Comprehensive training on safety in war zones should therefore include everyone and accordingly be offered by women and for women, as well as marginalized groups. The current situation needs to be significantly improved.

Overall, looking at different data, such as interviews, academic sources, and voices from the industry, the risks for female conflict reporters are striking. They could be avoided or

at least reduced if media organizations would take on more responsibility and begin to recognize the importance of psycho-social support for occupational safety (Free Press Unlimited & BH Novinari, 2022, p. 16; Kotisova, 2024, p. 8).

3.4 Intersectional Advantage and Postcolonial Ambivalence in Female War Reporting

This chapter will focus on the interactions female journalists have with sources in conflict zones and how gender and intersectional differences can impact safety and access. The previous chapters have highlighted the extent to which women are still disadvantaged because of their gender and the dangerous consequences this can have. However, there is another side to it. Being a female journalist in a war zone can also open up possibilities that male correspondents do not have the opportunity to explore. In a YouTube video by Vice, photojournalist Lynsey Addario is asked whether she feels that her gender has impacted her work. Her answer to that is,

[...] there are times where my gender is an asset [...] that's mostly in the Muslim world, when I'm covering Muslim women. I often have access to women that my male colleagues don't, simply because I'm a woman, I'm allowed into people's homes, I'm allowed to spend extended periods with Muslim women. (Vice, 2019)

This example shows that there is a whole other side to the picture. The journalist and author Kristin Skare Orgeret (2016) discusses "The advantages of a hybrid position" (p. 8). It means that female journalists from Western countries, covering stories in countries or regions where gender roles are more pronounced, often have the advantage of being granted access to both male and female sources. The same does not apply to male journalists in similar situations. One of the female journalists interviewed by Orgeret confirms that, as a woman, she can enter spaces that are inaccessible to men (Orgeret, 2016, p. 8).

Other academic literature also refers to the 'hybrid position' as the 'third gender', though this label is not entirely unproblematic. As the journalist and scholar Julia

Lönnendonker (2019) reviews the book *Gendering War and Peace Reporting* by Berit von der Lippe and Rune Ottosen, she points out one chapter of the book that critiques the concept of the 'third gender' as a 'post-colonial' anachronism (p.74). This refers mainly to white, Western women who travel as reporters to predominantly Muslim countries. The term 'third gender' comes from the assumption that female journalists in these countries are treated neither as stereotypical women from that region nor as men. In that context, they have a separate role, with access to different areas and people that neither their male colleagues nor non-Western or local female reporters have. The authors von der Lippe and Ottosen assess this advantage, which some journalists exploit, as imperialistic, as it perpetuates and reproduces stereotypical role models of traditional Arab women and progressive Western women (Lönnendonker, 2019, pp. 74-75).

This aspect shows how the concept of intersectionality is very intertwined within journalism, just as it is in society. The term intersectionality, introduced by the African American feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes the intersection of different social identities, such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, and their effects on experiences of discrimination and oppression. Crenshaw argues that people often overlook these interactions when they consider only one dimension of oppression. Moreover, intersectionality is a crucial approach to understanding and combating the complexity of social injustice (Beck & Plößer, 2021, p. 84).

Intersectionality in journalism and specifically war journalism shows that there are multiple realities, in which some are more affected than others. "studies show that members of marginalized communities, including people of color and queer individuals, are at a significantly higher risk of being targeted by GBV" (Byerly et al., 2023, p.255). War journalists already put themselves in dangerous situations as part of their job. Women in this profession, as discussed in previous chapters, are sometimes at even greater risk than their male colleagues. Suppose a female war journalist is also Black or a Person of Color, or part of another minority, Queer, or part of another category of inequality, sometimes also defined by nationality. In that case, she may be affected by intersectionality. The likelihood that she will

experience gender-based violence in the course of her work as a conflict journalist increases considerably due to the intersectionality of her role (International Media Support, 2024, p. 2; Kotisova, 2024, p. 11; Sifris & Tanyag, 2019, p. 401).

The case, which Lönnendonker analyzes, concerns the different perspectives of women. It is differentiating between women journalists who live in affected regions and report on the conditions of their own country potentially being affected by intersectionality and women who work as war correspondents from Western countries reporting on conflicts in non-Western countries, able to move and report as the 'third gender' (Lönnendonker, 2019, p. 74; Mellor, 2019, p. 266). These inequalities should always be kept in mind when talking about women in war journalism.

With this in consideration, there are situations in dealing with sources where women have better access or are better suited than men because of their gender (whether affected by intersectionality or not). In their article, Lindsay Palmer and Jed Melki (2016) allow several women to speak about their experiences. One reports that she was able to speak to a Salafi woman simply because she is a woman herself. The Salafi woman was not allowed to leave the kitchen to talk to men, but the journalist was permitted to join her there. Another example concerns Afghan culture, where women are only allowed to be seen by men who belong to their family, which excludes all of the journalist's male colleagues as potential interviewers (p. 10). In another article by Orgeret (2016), a Ugandan female journalist describes that she approaches her stories very differently compared to her male colleagues. For example, instead of reporting from the battlefield, she prefers to talk to survivors of rape (p. 15), because apart from her interest in the stories about the people, some women feel more comfortable talking to other women rather than men especially when it is about sensitive issues like rape (Mellor, 2018, p. 266).

These various perspectives demonstrate that being a woman in war journalism entails risks and challenges, yet also offers unique access and responsibilities.

3.5 Evolving Norms

As the previous chapters have presented in different contexts, there are several systemic failures in conflict journalism, especially for women practicing this profession. War journalists face physical, psychological, digital, and financial risks (Slavetcheva-Petkova, 2023, pp. 1212-1213; Free Press Unlimited & BH Novinari, 2022, p.8). Freelancers in particular have to worry about their safety in terms of insurance and equipment, as these are often not covered or provided by assigning news agencies (Steers, 2014). Another critical shortcoming is that institutions are not taking enough decisive action against gender-specific violence. Although the UN resolution has made it unmistakably clear that it condemns gender-based violence, women still have to constantly expect and endure these attacks (International Media Support, 2024, p. 2). It is also problematic how the industry has long placed its focus on war journalism solely on physical injuries, with little to no access to psychological trauma treatment and mental health (Slavetcheva-Petkova et.al, 2023, pp. 1211-1213). The conditions were sometimes so bad that many female journalists were afraid to tell their employers that they had experienced trauma after a deployment, fearing job loss or stigmatization (Feinstein, 2020). Although there is a growing shift towards taking trauma and mental health more seriously, there is still a need for more comprehensive support from the industry, such as “wellbeing techniques and circles of exchange intersecting various contexts [...] tangible support networks” (International Media Support 2024, p. 6). Based on this, there are calls for comprehensive safety training that takes trauma prevention into account, while also addressing gender-specific safety concerns and intersectional realities, as well as points of vulnerability, and incorporating these into training plans (Free Press Unlimited & BH Novinari, 2022, p. 9). To achieve this, the International Media Support calls for stronger laws against online and offline harassment. Policymakers and news organizations should implement measures to ensure psychological safety and protection against gender-based harassment (International Media Support, 2024, p. 6).

Even though the industry still has much space to improve the navigation of trauma support, gender-based violence, online and offline harassment, as well as financial support for

employees, in particular freelancers, there are signs of norms beginning to shift. Reuters provides an example of making psychological support available to its employees. As one of the world's largest news agencies, *Reuters* has implemented Critical Incident Counseling (CiC). After suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), reporting on multiple conflicts and crises around the world, the *Reuters* journalist and editor Dean Yates has advocated for mental health, not just for journalists but in workplaces in general. In 2017, he became “The Head of Journalist Mental and Wellbeing” at *Reuters*. In addition, *Reuters* provided access to peer networks, allowing journalists to speak with experienced colleagues who support their mental well-being (Thomson Reuters Corporation, 2025). The organised exchange with colleagues that *Reuters* goes hand in hand with the appeal listed in the International Media Support report for “recognizing the power of solidarity” to “Implement mentorship programmes that pair seasoned journalists with newcomers, providing guidance and a platform for sharing experiences” (International Media Support, 2024, p. 6). Nevertheless, Reuters is not the only organization that has the right approach.

The Coalition for Women in Journalism (CFIWJ) is an institution that has taken up the cause of supporting female war journalists in multiple ways. Their philosophy reads,

The Coalition for Women in Journalism fosters and supports camaraderie among women journalists worldwide. We were the first to launch worldwide peer-support networks for women journalists. Through our mentorship program and advocacy for a safe and flourishing professional environment, we are creating spaces for women journalists where they can be nurtured, stay safe, and expand their skills. We work with no national or ethnic boundaries, and offer support to women from all backgrounds (Our Philosophy — Coalition for Women in Journalism, 2025).

The organization's website provides information about global wars, crises, and grievances, written by a female journalist, as well as reports on the violation or killing of female journalists. It also offers the possibility to find help for mental health issues, including videos,

guidelines, yoga courses, and links to trauma support networks and suicide hotlines. Additionally, they offer a report button on the site to disclose a violation or harassment. It is also possible to apply as a mental health coach to support other journalists (Coalition for Women in Journalism, 2025).

A similar organisation is the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF). "The IWMF works quickly and holistically to support journalists in need through emergency assistance, training and trauma support" (IWMF, n.d.). The trainings offered by the foundation focus on the identity of journalists, tailoring to each journalist's needs, whether they are female or non-binary, as this impacts the risks they face (IWMF, n.d.). Inclusive trainings like that show how norms within the industry are slowly changing, as organizations respond to the individual needs of conflict journalists. The IWMF is one of the few organisations that has understood the necessity of viewing journalists as a whole, meaning that, especially freelancers and marginalised groups, are extremely vulnerable and should be supported with the necessary means. Therefore, a redefinition of safety in journalism is needed. Slavetcheva-Petkova et al. (2023) argue that it is not just about protecting journalists from physical harm, but about understanding safety as a broader, multidimensional concept that also encompasses psychological, digital, and financial security.

This new understanding of safety reflects a growing recognition of gendered and intersectional issues within conflict journalism. However, to understand whether journalists working in the field experience these shifts and how their work generally aligns with the academic literature, the following chapters delve into the findings of interviews with 11 female war journalists.

4 Methodological Design

Answering the research question, *"How do female war correspondents perceive and navigate gender-specific safety challenges in conflict zones, and how do these perceptions*

influence their decision-making, reporting practices, and interactions with sources?” the chosen data collection method is semi-structured interviews with female conflict journalists. This particular method is selected because it allows for following a certain structure with the questions or areas of topics, while leaving enough space for the interviewees to answer freely, using their examples and experiences. As the whole field of war correspondence and working in conflict zones can bear very sensitive and traumatic stories, it is important to leave adequate spaces for the journalists to talk about complex and sensitive topics, including gender, gender discrimination, or even gender-based violence, as well as potentially adding new themes to the conversation originating from being in a conflict environment. The 10 interview questions were all open-ended, also asking for specific examples or individual experiences. The last question was directed to the women, inviting them to add anything that they found important in the context of the overall topic. The interview questions were open and aligned with theme blocks that mirror the research question. The theme blocks ensure the comparability of the answers in the following coding process.

The collected data is based on the personal experiences of the journalists. It includes their perceptions of gender-specific safety risks and how to cope with them, their decision-making processes, and their interaction with sources as female journalists. The aim here is to capture their subjective perceptions, which reflect both on the individual realities and common challenges within the field.

The analysis of the data employs the purposive sampling method, which involves the researcher applying their subject expertise to select participants who are the best fit for the interviews. The research topic falls into the category of exploratory research on an under-researched issue. Although the topic of safety in war journalism has been widely discussed within academia, the gender aspect of it has not. The purposive sampling, while not completely free of sampling bias, is the best fit for a qualitative exploratory research, aiming for a comprehensive insight into the interviewees' personal experiences. The researcher selected participants primarily based on their gender and profession, as well as their availability. It was also to interview journalists from many different countries and continents to gain as diverse

an insight as possible. Finally, 11 journalists from 10 countries and six continents, all within the age range of 30 to 70, participated. Three of the interviewed women are photojournalists. Four of them are working or have worked as freelancers. The purposive sampling method enables the researcher to select female journalists who work or have worked in war or conflict zones worldwide. Two journalists sent in their answers in writing. One journalist was interviewed in person. Two journalists, due to a troubled internet connection, were interviewed on the phone, while the rest of the interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams. All the names of the interviewees are pseudonymized. Their 'names' are Journalist 1-11, in the chronology of the interviews conducted.

The method was chosen to minimize selection biases by selecting a group of interviewees with relevant insights into the topic, as well as a diversity of age and origin. The tools used to conduct and analyze the data include Microsoft Teams for calling interviewees and conducting interviews, as well as Microsoft Teams AI for transcribing the interviews. Since not all interviews were conducted in English, ChatGPT 4 and DeepL were utilized for translation purposes. The interview transcripts, as well as the two translations, have both been manually edited after being generated to get rid of unnecessary and distracting elements, such as filler words or sounds and AI transcription errors.

For the coding process, MAXQDA24 was applied. The thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data. Codes were generated based on recurring themes throughout all interviews using the MAXQDA24 software. During the process, the codes were assigned titles based on what they describe. Finally, the codes/themes that were best suited to answer the research question were interpreted in the discussion of this work.

The analysis builds upon the feminist media theory. The theory views journalism as heavily influenced by gendered power structures, which concerns both content and media institutions (Carter & Steiner, 2005, pp. 1-6). The theory helps to understand the gendered power structures that female journalists in war zones are facing and that can influence their way of performing their job, whether that is accessing sources or creating individual safety strategies. Furthermore, the analysis also builds on the concept of situated safety, which is shaped by

social identities like gender and race, and influenced by local and institutional conditions (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023, p. 1214). The concept helps to understand how war journalists make decisions in conflict environments.

5 Findings

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis and evaluation of the interviews conducted with 11 female conflict journalists. The structure of the analysis will be based on the coding that was created using MAXQDA24 software. The frequency of the codes will be taken into account, as well as matching elements that appear in the literature analysis.

5.1 Effects on safety and coping strategies

Nine out of 11 female journalists shared what they considered a potential threat to their safety and their strategy for navigating it. The strategy may or may not be “female-centered” because of the danger to the female gender. More on gender-based danger will follow later. The aspect of security describes how women react to dangerous situations, what they are doing to avoid or minimize the danger, starting with a general gut feeling, some of them describe as an indicator to stop, whatever the situation they are in might be.

So you know, at that point I kind of stopped, and cause even my cameraman was like, I'm not feeling good about this anymore. Like, where are we headed? It's like if we said we were gonna meet here, we were suddenly going here. And we're like, wait, hang on. So we stopped, and we didn't do it. You know, we didn't do it. [...] And so you really have to rely on your instincts at every point to be like, this is a dangerous situation.

(J.9, 2025)

Another one recalls,

I had a trip to Sudan in 2022, and I ended up cancelling it last minute, and I really didn't want to because I, you know, I'd worked hard to get that visa [...] spent money on it [...]

But I just had a gut feeling [...] Something wasn't right. And I cancelled it, and I felt momentous relief in that [...] But this was a case where I just didn't feel safe. And maybe if I were a guy, I would have felt a little bit stronger about that decision. But that was a safety decision based on gender [...].

(J.8, 2025)

These measurements are quite drastic, considering that the potential danger or threat is preventing the journalist from following through with their work. In another case, the journalist would avoid working at night as a female, as well as always plan their route and be very aware of the surroundings and potential escape routes (J.7, 2025). Journalist 4 emphasizes that she always tries “to come up with a plan to reduce the risk of rape, that means not travelling alone, and preferably traveling with a male colleague” (J.4, 2025) Another way of tending to their safety is to “dress and behave in a culturally appropriate manner” (J.4, 2025), or to disguise themselves “hair inside and wearing large clothes. I was looking like a teenage boy.” (J.8, 2025). As a precaution, Journalist 11 (2025) said that before she leaves for an assignment in the field, she lets her partner or mother know, “If I'm not going to appear in 24 hours, that's gonna be fine. After those 24 hours, you worry.” So that if something happens, somebody is aware and can call for help.

Women took these security measures to ensure their safety, whether it was impacted because of or despite their gender. The interviews provide examples for both however, security being impacted by gender has been mentioned far more. Journalist 9 does not assign this to the profession of journalism or war journalism, but to something that women are confronted with in every profession all over the world. Simply because they are women.

I think it's a given that as a woman, regardless of your profession, we know this, right?

You're always going to be at risk. It's unfortunately just how the world works.

So I don't think you are in any more danger because you're a journalist. It's simply because you're a woman. The only difference is that if you're a journalist, you have access to more dangerous places.

(J.9, 2025)

Journalist 1 (2025) explains that she was attacked because she is a woman, but also because she is a female journalist.

It was about pushing journalists out of public space, especially women. Why specifically women? I can't say for sure. Maybe because women play a certain role in society. In that case, it was remnants of Mubarak's regime who mainly hunted female journalists, as well as local women. [...] it became well-known after a picture circulated of the military humiliating a woman, stripping her down until her blue bra was exposed, broadcast all over the media. This was clearly meant as a warning, especially in a cultural context where shame doesn't only affect the woman, but dishonors the whole family. These attacks were deliberate, and I was heavily assaulted. [...] Yes, the attack definitely happened because I was a woman.

(J. 1, 2025)

Many of these threats to the journalist's safety are related to sexual harassment or worse.

So I had to sit there for quite a while with the cameras off and have tea with them. So it's me, the cameraman, and all of these older men. And me with my wearing a head covering and whatnot. And by the end of it, you know, he just looks at me and he says, Oh, I have a son, he is looking for a bride. And I was like, oh, you know what I mean? That is not where I thought this would go. [...] and I was like, I have a husband, and of course, I did not have a husband. But what are you going to say? [...] and then it's the only way they can maybe leave you alone, 'cause then they think, you belong to another man already. [...] I realise that 'cause he looked and I said I wasn't wearing a ring and I remember after that, I went and I bought like a ring. So that way I'm just asked again, you know, because I just thought, oh Lord, this got weird really fast [...] and, what are

you going to say? I'm sorry, he's not my type. I don't like the AK-47 he's carrying. You know, what do you say?

(J. 9, 2025)

Journalist 8 recalls,

[...] it's several times, but it's always the same thing. When I was working in Egypt.

It wasn't a war zone, but it was very tense because it was a year after the revolution, and the country was in transition. [...] and it was still the army in power and there was a lot of protest in the city center in Cairo, on Tahrir Square, more specifically and the thing over there is that when you are a woman [...] covering these those protests you face a lot of sexual harassment, which means, like you can be in the crowd and then you will feel a lot of hands on your, on your bump, on your breast. Or everywhere, and it can become worse. [...] luckily myself, I just had those hands touching me, but there were other stories of women being harassed and raped in this crowd.

(J. 8, 2025)

These are just some of the many examples of women experiencing sexual harassment while working. One component of sexual harassment is sexual harassment by colleagues, which is also addressed in the literature review. One journalist elaborates, “I also had the case [...] with male journalists pretending there is no other bedroom in the hotel to book, and we have to sleep in the same room. It happened to me twice.” (J. 2, 2025) The fact that female conflict journalists don't even have to look out for themselves in high-pressure situations, but also in moments where they consider themselves among colleagues and trusted people, is horrific. Being able to trust the people you are working with in conflict zones is indispensable.

Almost all interviewees report the necessity of being able to depend on and trust their colleagues, as well as the fixers and locals. In journalism, fixers are locals who support foreign correspondents with translations, setting up interviews, and navigating logistics on the ground

We must function as a team, that's clear to all of us. We must be able to rely on each other unconditionally. Before every assignment, we go over it again: where are we going? Are we doing this? Is it too risky? Is it worth it? These are the kinds of discussions we always have within the team. And the rule is: if someone says no, that no applies to the entire team. And that's fully accepted.

(J. 10, 2025)

As much as sexual harassment can come from within the network, the network may also prevent sexual harassment from happening.

I built very strong networks, a trusted team of networking among journalists. That is the one important thing among journalists. Why? Because when you're with, for example, male journalists and female journalists, the sexual harassment is reduced.

[...] So I make sure to build a strong network with fellow reporters.

(J. 7, 2025)

Journalist 2 (2025) strongly emphasizes that, being on the ground, she always moves with her trusted team, "I won't go anywhere without them. Everything is based on my team and trusting them. Everything." But also, the fixers are heavily relied on by journalists. "We need to arrange to have a good fixer, that we trust because it's also a matter of security." (J. 8, 2025) and "[...] my most trusted person is that fixer and the driver [...]" (J.5, 2025).

Never without the fixers! Impossible! Impossible! I would never do it. Never, ever, ever. I trust them perfectly, and because they know the cultural rules are. I feel they know he's travelling with a woman, they will tell me what I can do and what I can't do, and then for me it's the safest way.

(J. 2, 2025)

So, working with fixers and locals is one of the many strategies for war journalists to take precautions for their safety. To adjust their reporting practices is another code that recurs often and relates directly to the research question. Generally speaking, all the interviewed journalists are familiar with adjusting or changing their reporting practices, but this can often be related to the job itself and not necessarily with being a woman influencing it in the first place. There are many reasons for a journalist to change their plans, including unsafe roads, high potential for kidnapping, rebels nearby, missing the proper gear, shootings, and many more (J. 4). To name one clear example of changing reporting practices because of their gender, Journalist 2, a photojournalist, tells a story about reporting on the mines in the Congo where women are not allowed. The reasoning behind it is cultural and religiously motivated. The locals in that region believe that women bring bad luck or are even cursed. And because of the dangerous nature of working in the mines, she was intimidated and finally not allowed in, nor could she take a picture because she is a woman (J. 2, 2025). This shows bluntly that there are situations in which you are at a disadvantage or even discriminated against because of your gender. There are multiple reports about changing reporting practices or not being able to get access to sources because of their gender. But on the other side, there have also been just as many situations described by the interviewees where their gender was an advantage and where they got access solely because they are women.

5.2 Source interaction as a woman

The interaction with sources in conflict zones is always driven by respecting the person in front of the journalist “You always have to treat your interview partners with respect, no matter what role you see them in” (Journalist 10, 2025). Respecting their culture, their religion, as a common courtesy, but also as a safety measure.

First thing is to understand the environment you are entering, in terms of social customs and traditions, and other elements such as religious practices, etc, to not cause offense, which can get you into trouble and put you in danger. Be respectful, and find ways to do

your job. In some places, women and men don't co-mingle in public, but as a female journalist, I have to. I haven't found that to be a problem so long as I am respectful and serious about my work. People generally understand that we are there to do a job and give us the space to do that, even if it isn't the norm in their society.

(J. 3, 2025)

Journalist 5 is behaving similarly when it comes to source interaction, she adds,

Abide by the religious dress, and not that I would ever wear a burka, but I certainly cover my head appropriately and the rest of my body, and I guess position yourself in a way that you are present. You're presenting yourself as sort of a hearing to their local customs and making them feel a little bit more comfortable. Because what is often not acknowledged is that to them, not looking at you or not shaking your hand, not acknowledging you, is actually a sign of respect. To them, you know, looking at you, shaking your hand can be disrespectful. So it's sort of the opposite of Western culture. And so I have to remind myself that this isn't necessarily them being rude, it's them projecting their sort of local customs, where you know a woman is sort of with her husband or future husband or family, and they're being respectful by not acknowledging me in that way. So it's something you just have to adapt to.

(Journalist 5, 2025)

When asked about whether their gender impacts their access to sources in any way, many of the journalists pointed out that being a woman often benefited them in speaking to people in different ways. Journalist 1 talks about not being taken seriously as a woman and therefore appearing less threatening, so people would speak more openly to her (J. 1, 2025). Other journalists see cultural or religious reasons as crucial when it comes to access. Finding out about the stories of women in countries where gender roles, cultural and religious conditions

are more pronounced, the evolution and achievements of women in this job become even more evident as they reveal insights that have never been seen before.

I was a producer then for CNN. [...] on the camera was a woman, and we were allowed in places that only women were allowed to go, and so they had at that point never seen an all-woman team. And so we had access to things that we had never been able to film before because of that. So that's what I mean, it's really a balance. And at the same time, can you imagine telling the story from a woman's perspective, very different, very different. [...] When you're seeing widows and you're speaking to orphans and you're talking to the little girls and you're in the section of the mosque that's only for the women. You get a completely different perspective on the conflict.

(Journalist 9, 2025)

I have to talk about the access to women [...] and I was wondering how the hell the reporting has been done till now because there were no female journalists before. It means that it's a whole field that you can cover now, and that has not been spoken about before.

(Journalist 2, 2025)

Some of them also pointed out that being a woman not only gave them the advantage to access female spaces but also allowed them to talk to males. Important to notice in this context is that these statements were made by white Western journalists, who were very aware of their privilege, as this is often not the case for local female journalists.

I had an advantage. As a woman, I had access to women's spaces. But as a Western woman, I was also often allowed into male spaces. That gave me a rare insight into two separate but intertwined worlds.

(Journalist 1, 2025)

5.3 The partaking of the News Industry

The research question aims to figure out what challenges female war reporters face while performing their jobs. The news industry plays a major role in this, as the question is to what extent it supports or should support journalists, especially female journalists, in war reporting. This topic is particularly important to identify deficits and strategies to address them. Almost all of the women interviewed had comments on issues within the industry. Something that is mentioned especially by freelance reporters is resources, financial resources and insurance in particular.

Journalist 8: “So as freelancers, we don't have much support. We need to organise this ourselves. Well, the first thing, of course, is to have your gear like vests and helmets and a first aid kit.” Researcher: “You organise that yourself?” Journalist 8: “Yeah, yeah, I bought it myself.” She elaborates,

What we should have is insurance. Insurance is so expensive for war zones, and it's almost impossible for a freelancer to pay for it. So when I'm assigned, for example, lately it was for Le Monde here in Ukraine, then they asked me, Do you have insurance? I said I have just Ukrainian insurance. It's not like the best, but it's the only one I can pay, and then they put me on a French insurance for the time I'm on assignment with them.

(Journalist 8, 2025)

It's hard. They can't send people into dangerous areas lightly. If someone loses a leg, or worse, who pays for that? They don't want the liability. So they buy footage from freelancers, treat them terribly, even though they're the ones truly on the ground.

(Journalist 1, 2025)

But apart from the insufficient resources, there is another drastic comment by a freelancer expressing how some newspapers seem not only not to care much about assigned freelancers but are even willing to knowingly risk a reporter's well-being for a good story.

You can read to laugh. You have to write it down because. They don't give a shit. [...] Maybe now it's changing, but when I got arrested, [...] it was two years ago. I was there (to a conflict zone) for a newspaper. They didn't pick up their phone when I called back the chief editor. That shocked me a lot, and I didn't receive anything. They just said that I would go with a journalist who works with them full time. [...] and we got arrested and sent back to Belgium. That was a huge thing. How would they know if they don't pick up the phone when I call? No. Nothing. Anything could have happened to me that night. Nothing. They didn't care. They gave a shit, and once, even worse, there was another even higher director. It was a few years before, and I was with this newspaper, and I knew about some journalists who had been kidnapped in the country, and he told me. Wow, that could be cool if it could happen to you, because you see, it brings great publicity for the journal, because of our competition. And he meant it. That is crazy.

(Journalist 2, 2025)

This particular story can not be applied to the whole industry, but it shows possible aspects of it. Journalist 9 is pointing out another very important topic that has only within the last years received more attention by the industry, talking about mental health. She gives an insight into how news organizations would deal with journalists who have experienced traumatic events.

You know, each person, I'm sure, would react differently to these things. But, like, how do you, you know, trauma is a trauma, right? [...] originally, there was a company assessment. So it's like people were sent into places that the company had assessed, like there would be a general, oh, this is considered this level of danger. This is considered this level of danger. And then it was up to you to decide according to what

they might tell you if you wanted to expose yourself to that or not, you know. But the difficulty is, if you say no, like if they come to you and say we'd like to send you to wherever, and you say no, you have to understand that you might never get the chance again. They always say it's going to be fair and they're not going to take it against you, but believe me, they are going to take it against you. Like I remember the story, there was a female correspondent who was in Jerusalem, you know, this was a while ago. And I think there was a lot of violence and a lot of, as usual, it comes and goes right? So she was exposed to that. And I think she had a bit of a nervous breakdown. In Jerusalem. So they had to pull her out, you know. They never quite trusted her to report again after that. It's fortunate you know. So obviously, she needed help. The company was kind of forced to pay for her therapy and to give her a mental break, and whatever, and presumably it's all done confidentially. You get the help, you go on sabbatical, they give you the break, and then you can come back and everything will be as before. Except that she came back, and everybody knew that she had a mental breakdown or that she had a nervous breakdown. Everybody knew that she had to go and check into an institution. And so now, when she came back, everybody's treating her with kid gloves, and she was never sent out again. So, what do people do when something happens? They don't say anything because they think it's the only way to keep the job. It's only in the last, maybe 5-10 years, that people are more and more speaking about the mental health needs of journalists who are out experiencing things. It was not like that before. Believe me, it was not like that before at all. Because the way it was seen is like, if you're not strong enough to take it, you're not strong enough for the job.

(Journalist 9, 2025)

However, it is not just traumatic events that happen in war zones that can become fatal for a journalist's career. Journalist 9 also addresses the way some news organizations deal with sexual harassment.

If you want to keep the job, you're not gonna say anything, [...] and it is not just what you experience out in the conflict zones, but for many women they have to fight every day in their own news organisations because the sexual harassment that happens is real. It's there [...] and that's why I say, it's just a reflection of the world at large. It's not unique. Know it's just the way it's been. It doesn't mean it has to keep being like that. It doesn't mean it's accepted and it's the norm, but it doesn't have to be what we take.

(Journalist 9, 2025)

5.4 Industry Stagnation and Adaptation

As the previous chapter portrays the experiences of female journalists within the industry and how they have been treated by it, this chapter focuses on the women's perception of change in the industry.

This is going to sound a little bit funny, but I think that media outlets are super aware of covering media issues now, and I mean, not all of them, but some independent media outlets in Colombia are incorporating into their agendas the gender perspective, the gender issues. That's great indoors. There is also, in some of them, and I'm going to say like the minority, there is this concern of how many women work in our media and how this influences the way we talk about some issues, or like this internal concern of gender. I think it's like evolving, but I don't see an evolution in security specifically, concerns for reporters. I say it's funny because we are trying to cover this more to be more aware of violence against women, to be more aware of these issues of war and violence against women [...] and we have to address it in different ways but there's this concern but it is very like [...] more like paradox that we have this concern but in terms of how do you protect your journalists when they are doing the reporting, there's zero.

(Journalist 11, 2025)

I believe that for many years, especially in this job, it was really difficult. Let's say: that's changing now, and it's good that it's changing. I do think I have colleagues who had to fight for a long time to be allowed to do what they're doing now. But I also have a colleague, for example, who had a child while in this reporter pool position, and she's continuing in the job. And what does 'still' mean, even? I'm already catching myself sounding that way, I think the decision to pursue this profession shouldn't depend on gender. It should be an individual choice for anyone, and I think it's great that it's now becoming that way.

(Journalist 10, 2025)

She elaborates,

I spent many years in newsrooms, in foreign affairs, and I'd say that the women who did these jobs weren't that many of them. You could almost count them. At our organization, and I don't think it was much different at other broadcasters either. I think that maybe in Germany, we've lagged a bit behind in that regard. If you look at someone like Christiane Amanpour, for example, then I think it's a positive development that things are changing now, and I also believe that for many women, it's been a long struggle.

(Journalist 10, 2025)

I haven't observed anything specific in that way. I think if anything, news organizations probably don't want to bring up the issue of gender because you know, for the obvious sort of #MeToo movement things that they don't want to become a sense of 'you being discriminated against'. So I think that it's not something anyone's ever really talked to me about.

(Journalist 5, 2025)

I see that the media realised that women can do some stories that men can't. For example, you need to have access to females or to women or families, it's easier. If you work in some

very religious communities and then men cannot enter the home if the man of the home is not there. I think the media realised this, so in terms of being on the field, I think now it's OK. [...] I mean, I think now the time is changing. More and more newspapers call men and women, it doesn't matter. I think it was not the case. Like maybe when I heard my colleagues maybe 20 years ago, if it was an assignment on a war zone newspaper, we'd rather call a man than a woman, and it's not such a long time ago. [...] But now I see more and more women in the field.

(Journalist 8, 2025)

Yes, because I've noticed so much not just for prints, but even for television, for radio. And that's because there have been a lot of reports on GBV in the newsroom, so because of a lot of violations happening in the newsroom, there has been a great shift, there is more focus on the women. Fighting for the rights of female journalists because they're often the ones facing violations, so advances are made towards them, and cases that have been reported are mostly done by female journalists, so there's been a great shift towards that.

(Journalist 6, 2025)

The comments on changes within the industry towards a more supportive and responsible network for female journalists go both ways. Generally, it is hard to compare different realities of journalists worldwide, but questioning women who are in the industry from 10 different countries gives a peek into their work and their point of view.

The following chapter takes a distant look at the results of the interviews. Based on the interview statements and the literature already discussed, a clear answer to the research question is developed and comprehensively explained.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

Delving into the work of female war journalists, this work has asked the question *"How do female war correspondents perceive and navigate gender-specific safety challenges in*

conflict zones, and how do these perceptions influence their decision-making, reporting practices, and interactions with sources?"

To answer this question thoroughly, the first chapter took a look back at the history of women in war journalism. The retrospective aims to provide an understanding of the development of women in this profession, thereby revealing a better understanding of the background to current problems. Consequently, Feminist Media Theory is consulted during the process. The theory described by Carter and Steiner (2005) states that journalism as an industry is strongly permeated by power structures that are highly influenced by gendered norms. These patriarchal structures still favor discrimination and oppression of women today (International Media Support, 2024, p. 2). As the first chapter shows, using various examples, women have had to fight against these rigid power imbalances ever since they first set foot in the field of war journalism. The groundwork that women like Margaret Fuller, Martha Gellhorn, or Marie Colvin have set for those to come is pioneering.

Beginning with the first part of the research question, *"How do female war correspondents perceive and navigate gender-specific safety challenges in conflict zones [...]"*. As for the interviewees' perception of gender-specific safety challenges, not all of them see dangers within a war zone as threats only because of their gender. It is challenging to determine whether a threat exists in a fundamentally dangerous environment due to the environment itself or for another reason, such as gender. Just as difficult can be identifying whether safety is even more impaired due to gender, in addition to the existing dangers. Journalist 9 describes another perspective that must also be considered. For her, every situation, whether in a war zone or elsewhere, is always more dangerous as a woman than as a man. Of course, a war zone is more dangerous than a 'normal' workplace and therefore also increases the danger. But unlike men, women always bear a basic danger. She recalls a situation in which she and a cameraman didn't have a good feeling and thus decided to cancel the assignment. Both she and her male colleague made this decision. In this case, a possible gender-specific safety challenge was not necessarily perceived as such, but rather as a general

safety issue. A comment from Journalist 5 leaves the question open whether her acting was impacted by her being a woman, and if she might have acted differently if she were a man.

Nevertheless, the literature reviewed emphasizes that gender is strongly affected by security, especially in war journalism, and some of the journalists' statements can also confirm this. As a direct measure of reducing the risk of rape, Journalist 4 makes preparations, such as ensuring that she does not travel alone and, ideally, has a male colleague with her. Another way to reduce gender-specific threats is to dress respectfully and appropriately or even disguise oneself as a boy/man to avoid attracting attention, Journalist 4 and Journalist 8 reveal. In a very clear statement by Journalist 1, she explains that she was undoubtedly attacked and assaulted because of her gender.

In order to additionally approach the issue of security from a theoretical perspective, Chapter 3.1 in the literature review explains exactly what is understood as a gender-based threat. Three main types of gender-based threats are identified, including physical and sexual threats, such as rape or even murder, but they also cover intimidation and verbal attacks. The second type depicts workplace harassment and discrimination. Whereas the third category focuses on social pressure, incorporating psychological, digital, and financial means. Planning never to travel alone (J.4), not to work by night (J.7), to dress thoughtfully (J.4), or to disguise oneself as a man (J.8) are all reactions or strategies to avoid the first type of gender based threats, such as what happened to Journalist 1. Sexual harassment is included in the three types of gender specific safety threats. It can fall under the first and the second category, depending on whether the perpetrators are colleagues or not. The interviews verify both. Journalist 8 recounts a scene in Tahrir Square in Cairo where she was groped by men on various parts of her body. Journalist 9 reports that a rebel leader asked her to marry his son while men with machine guns stood next to her. Journalist 2, on the other hand, was confronted with two male colleagues who tried to sleep in the same room as her.

Circling back to answer the first part of the research question, it can be said that gender-specific safety challenges are not always perceived as such. It can sometimes be difficult to attribute threats only to gender or only to the conflict zone or the job as a female war journalist.

There are various answers, all of which have their justification. However, when threats are assigned to gender, which happens especially in cases of sexual harassment, there are many different ways to navigate them. All female journalists take preventative measures to protect themselves. Many of these risk mitigation strategies described by the interviewees have already appeared in the corresponding chapter of the literature review 3.2, and show a clear consensus, such as putting on a fake wedding ring, not reporting at night, or omitting certain topics or assignments in order to stay safe. In addition to physical dangers, there are also dangers to mental and financial well-being. The definition of safety introduced by Slavetcheva-Petkova et. al (2023), as well as the types of gender-based safety threats by the International Media Support (2024), includes any obstacle that hinders journalists in their work, called occupational safety.

Keeping the occupational safety in mind, the focus will now be put on answering the second part of the research question of *“how do these perceptions influence their (female war reporters) decision-making, reporting practices, and interaction with sources?”* Following on from the answer to the first part of the research question, that based on the perception of gender-specific safety challenges. One could assume that, as the perceptions differ and can not always be assigned to one or the other, the influence on the decision-making should differ depending on the perception. But that is not quite the case. This might have to do with working in high-risk areas, in which basic security precautions are taken to limit threats of all kinds. Journalist 10 emphasizes that within her team, everyone has to be able to rely on each other. The aspect of trusting one's team, colleagues, and also the fixers runs through all interviews. This is underscored by Journalist 2 *“Never without fixers! Impossible! Impossible! I would never do it. Never, ever, ever”* (2025). So being able to trust the team and the fixers they are working with is one major part of the decision-making process, as well as changes to reporting practices, as they are essential to operating in a war zone in general. As previously mentioned, all interviewees are used to changing their reporting practices in a heartbeat, no matter the situation and the surroundings they are in.

Moving on to the last part of the research question, the interaction with sources. *How does their gender impact female war correspondents in interacting with sources?* The literature reveals that often times being a woman in this regard can turn out as an advantage. Especially in countries and regions where gender roles are more pronounced, male journalists sometimes would not be able to gain access to women at all, because of religious or cultural conditions. Females, on the other hand, would not just be able to speak to other women but also have the advantage of speaking to men. The literature review picks up on this fact and classifies it as the ‘third gender’, a privileged position only white Western female journalists can be in. This is where the topic of intersectionality comes into play. It describes how female journalists who are Black, People of Color, or who belong to other minorities, who are Queer or are part of another category of inequality, run a greater risk of being exposed to intersectionality and thus gender-based violence. This aspect also appears in some of the interviews where, for example, Journalist 1 confirms that she is very aware of her privilege as a white Western journalist.

Other statements of interviewees show that regarding access, their gender is more of an aid than an obstacle. While of course there are some situations in which access is denied because of their gender, it is revealed by multiple interviewees that mostly their gender is an advantage. The reasons for that can be different. What was mentioned by Journalist 1 is that as a woman, she is normally not perceived as a threat, even more, she is not taken seriously, and therefore is allowed access to multiple sources. Another reason was that rape survivors might talk to a female journalist, rather than a male.

Overall, to answer the last part of the research question, being a woman in a war zone is potentially more dangerous, especially if in any way affected by intersectional discrimination. Also, being a woman can hinder a journalist from getting access, for example, to the male rooms of a mosque or the situations in the Congolese mines that journalist 2 describes. But in most cases, women do have an advantage as they are not perceived as threats to men; they can speak to women and children who, in some regions, are by religion or cultural customs restricted from speaking to male journalists.

Even though not specifically mentioned in the research question, there are some components that have been discussed in the literature review as well as in the interviews. The topic of mental health is addressed in Chapter 3.3. Although an important component of the overall theme, this thesis cannot focus primarily on psychological impairments, as the scope of the work does not permit a detailed debate about them. Mental health is also not comprehensively addressed in the interviews. What is mentioned, however, is mental health in the context of the media industry and how this is dealt with in addition to other problems. Generally, the media industry plays a crucial role in the whole context of war journalism. It is also a topic discussed with the interviewees. In this regard, freelancers gained more attention as they are not well supported by the industry and carry a lot of risks and financial load, as insurance or gear. Another part of the problem of support within the industry, which also happens to staff reporters, is dealing with traumatic events experienced on the job. Throughout the interviews, it becomes evident that there are still significant shortcomings within the industry regarding the support and responsibility of female war journalists.

Nevertheless, most of the interviewed journalists are confident that things will improve in the future, since there is already a visible change for the better, highlighted in the last chapter of the literature review. It points out that major media companies such as Reuters are already responding to the definition of security by Slavetcheva-Petovka et. al (2023) and taking not only physical threats but also psychological dangers such as trauma seriously and facilitating access to support services. Other institutions are also working hard to support, in particular, female war journalists through various measures, such as trauma and peer support, suicide hotlines, and financial support, as well as help in emergencies. The IWJMF even offers safety training tailored to the individual needs of the journalists.

Overall, the research question can be answered as follows: female war journalists have a complex perception of gender-specific safety challenges, as they often overlap with fundamental dangers in war zones. This leads them to use diverse and individual strategies that can influence their decision-making and reporting practices. In most cases, while

sometimes a barrier, their gender gives them privileges that allow them access to different sources, especially in restrictive environments.

In conclusion, there are some limitations that this work could not address due to its scope. As previously mentioned, the psychological aspect, which is primarily dedicated to coping strategies after traumatic events, could not be dealt with comprehensively. However, this is a field in which further research should be conducted from both the psychological and media sides to ensure a better way of navigating mental health among war journalists in the media industry. The topic of intersectionality concerning female war journalism and security was also discussed. Here, too, an academic examination of the topic is highly relevant to generate awareness and thus adequately protect those affected in their working environment.

A final limit to this work is the difficulty in this case of comparing the statements of 11 different women war journalists from multiple countries on six continents. Although they give an insight into their realities, they cannot make general statements about entire industries, just about their individual experiences working in and for the system. Even if there are difficulties in making global comparisons, at least country-wide studies on the safety of female war journalists should be carried out in order to compare them with studies from other countries. This would provide a more comprehensive view of the issue, and women in war journalism would receive more attention and therefore more support and ultimately more safety.

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