



*Half the story
is never enough:
threats facing
women journalists*



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Canadian
Commission
for UNESCO



jhr

Mobilizing media.
Changing lives.

Contents

Half the story is never enough: threats facing women journalists worldwide and what to do about them 2

By: Rachel Pulfer

Country: Canada

Silent no more: what Indigenous women journalists in Canada face, and what can be done to help them 10

By: Karyn Pugliese

Country: Canada

Stigma and stereotypes prevent women from succeeding as journalists in the African Great Lakes Region 20

By: Sandra Safi Bashengezi

Country: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Entering the domain of men: women journalists covering conflict in Syria 26

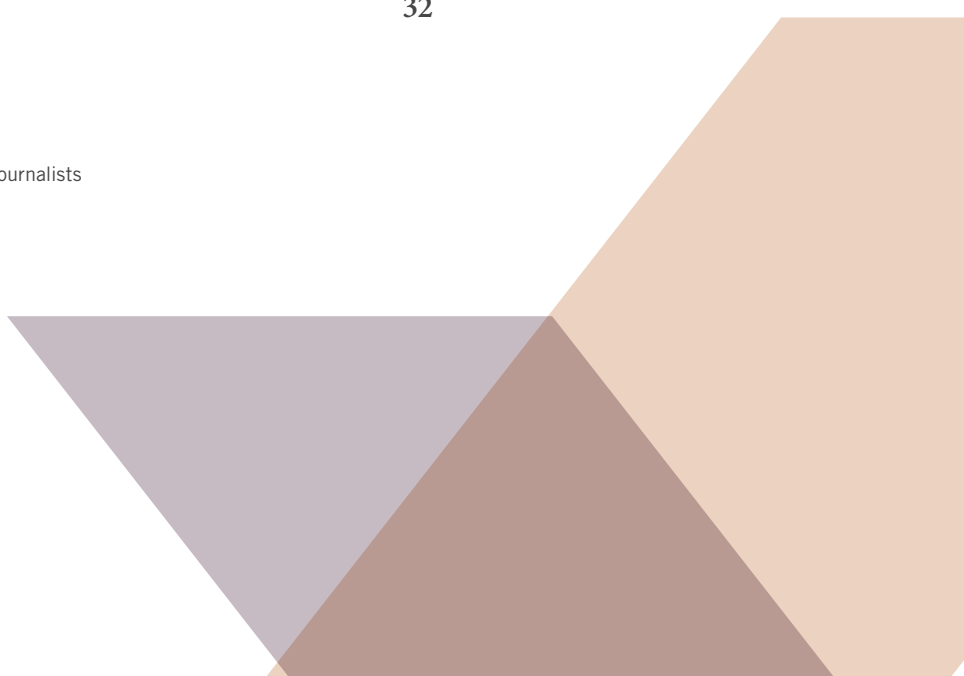
By: Nisreen Anabli

Country: Syria

Acknowledgments 32

Half the Story is Never Enough: Threats Facing Women Journalists

K34-13/2020E-PDF
978-0-660-36656-2



Half the story is never enough: threats facing women journalists worldwide and what to do about them

BY: **RACHEL PULFER** COUNTRY: **CANADA**

Rachel Pulfer is a Canadian journalist and non-profit executive who worked in print journalism from 1999 to 2009. From 2009 to 2010 she was the Webster McConnell William Southam Journalism Fellow at Massey College, part of the University of Toronto. She subsequently became programs director and then executive director at Journalists for Human Rights (JHR), Canada's leading media development organization and the co-publisher of this series. Based in Toronto, Canada, Pulfer works to amplify women's and girls' voices and enhance their human rights globally, most recently launching JHR's biggest-ever program, Canada World: Voice for Women and Girls, a partnership with Global Affairs Canada.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research paper, by a Canadian journalist running media development initiatives at home in Canada as well as across Africa and the Middle East, focuses on challenges that female journalists face as they work to advance their careers, and the ways in which women journalists themselves, newsroom managers, male allies, and actors in the international community can help to mitigate these challenges.

The author has prepared this paper based on three sources: her own personal experience, interviews with leading journalists, including Maria Ressa, CEO of Rappler; Lisa LaFlamme, Senior Editor and Chief Anchor, CTV News; journalist and gender expert Sally Armstrong; and Rodney Sieh, publisher and editor of FrontPageAfrica in Liberia, as well as studies on gender equality and analyses of women's advancement in media.

It looks at:

- the influence of gendered attacks and sexual harassment globally;
- the global impact of #MeToo;
- the question of who owns the newsrooms in which women work and its impact on women's advancement;
- the 2020 anti-racism movement and its implications for, in particular, women of colour in Western media environments; and
- what these trends mean for the way in which women are portrayed in media and perceived in society.

This piece also introduces three other papers in this collection, written by leading women journalists Nisreen Anabli of Syria, Sandra Bashengezi of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Karyn Pugliese, Algonquin and Pikwàkanagàn journalist and professor working in Canada.

STARTING OUT

Canada has seen an evolution in the experiences of women in media since I joined the profession in 1999. One incident from the early years remains with me.

I was working at a business magazine and was the only female in management in a newsroom made up mostly of older men. I recall an absurd newsroom debate when I queried why we didn't feature women on the cover, only to be told that the one time the magazine had done so they'd produced the worst-selling edition in its history. (Ordinarily, a journalist offering up a sample size of one as conclusive evidence of a systemic problem would be laughed out of the room. In this case, it had been the deciding argument keeping women off the cover for years.)

Kathy English, the former Public Editor of the Toronto Star, and now Chair of the Canadian Journalism Foundation has been a journalist for more than 40 years.

Working her way up in the Toronto Star newsroom in the 1980s, English describes a scenario where there was "room for one good 'girl reporter,' and otherwise a pitting of women against each other."

English helped coordinate a group of women pushing for change: Star Women on the Move Up. They did a content analysis of the assignments men and women received. It turned out men were getting the fast-track to promotion stories; women, by contrast, were getting soft news, and of minor importance like lifestyle stories, the so-called "fluff".

"That kind of coming together was helpful in raising some consciousness," English says. But it still didn't guard against a situation where, for example, having a child was regarded not as a human resources issue, but rather as a woman's problem to manage alone.

I'm pleased to report that by 2020 some degree of change has come to Canada. We've seen investigative journalist Robyn Doolittle shatter stereotypes about investigative reporters, while up-ending police practice with her "Unfounded" investigation into systematic police inaction towards complaints of sexual abuse. In 2011, Lisa LaFlamme took over anchoring CTV National News, the biggest news broadcast program in Canada, and promptly expanded both its audience and its long list of awards. In 2017, Irene Gentle became the editor of the Toronto Star and made history as the first female editor-in-chief of a major broadsheet in English Canadian media. (Lise Bissonnette from the French language *Le Devoir* had preceded her in 1990.) Women also occupy the top jobs at the CBC (Catherine Tait), Walrus Magazine (Jennifer Hollett) and Maclean's magazine (Alison Uncles). The chair and executive director of the Canadian Journalism Foundation, a non-profit that works to support journalists, are both women; so is the outgoing president of the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ), Karyn Pugliese.

But the statistics tell a more complicated story. A [Women in View study](#) from 2019 finds that the percentages of women receiving work as writers, directors, and cinematographers in publicly funded television between 2014 and 2017 hovered at a quarter of the total, with APTN leading at 27.3%, closely followed by CBC at 26%. When women were employed as showrunners, their shows achieved gender balance in the positions of writer, director, and cinematographer. When men ran the show, the number of women employed in those roles dropped to 14%.

In the U.S., as per the [Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2017 Report](#) by the Women’s Media Center, women journalists made up only 38.1% of newspaper newsrooms in 2017. That finding means the number of women journalists in American newspapers has only advanced *a mere 1.3%* since 1999. The gender disparity is however most pronounced in American broadcast news reporting: men report 74.8% of the news; women report 25.2%.

Take a closer look at who ends up getting quoted in content, and you’ll also encounter some eye-popping numbers. A 2016 [content analysis](#) by Marika Morris for Informed Opinions found that despite women’s progress into top roles, men are still overwhelmingly the ones being quoted. Of over 1400 pieces of Canadian news media content studied, 71% of the quotes were from men.

Where women journalists and sources do receive massive attention is in online attacks on social media. As has been well documented in [studies](#) in Canada and elsewhere, women suffer disproportionate attacks online. Up to 73% of women and girls are abused online internationally, according to the [UN Broadband Commission Report](#) from 2015.

Women’s leadership and greater visibility can serve as a lightning rod for ever-more personalized attacks from both audiences and authorities. Lisa LaFlamme says the greatest threats she now faces are on social media: “Anonymous, vitriolic attacks that confirm being a female journalist still makes you a mark for trolls no matter how much ‘real world’ progress has been made.”

Or consider the extraordinary experiences of Filipina journalist Maria Ressa.

Ressa’s career bridges North and South. Previously the lead investigative reporter for CNN in Asia and its bureau chief, she converted her experiences with the American network into co-founding the Filipino media conglomerate Rappler, where she is now CEO. “About six years ago, Demos did a [study](#),” Ressa said over videochat from Manila. “It indicated women journalists are targeted for online harassment at a rate three times those of men. Now, the rate of online harassment is ten times what men face.” Ressa herself receives online hate messages at a rate of 90 an hour. Her global visibility as the Philippines’ most successful female media executive and an international press freedom icon has become a double-edged sword.

IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Another factor holding women back has been their own attitudes to their skills and capacities. Many prominent women journalists admit to battling imposter syndrome, the feeling that, despite all evidence to the contrary, you are not qualified to hold the job you are in. The gender disparity of this issue is best expressed in the [well-documented](#) confidence versus competence gap, a phenomenon in which a man will put himself up for a job if he considers himself 60% qualified, whereas a woman will not, despite in many cases being more qualified than male colleagues. Lisa LaFlamme shared that when she goes overseas in her role as an ambassador for Journalists for Human Rights or other INGOs, working with young female journalists in Canada, Afghanistan, or Democratic Republic of Congo, a common thread is still their feelings of self-doubt. “They may well be outpacing their male colleagues at every turn but seem



Of over 1400 pieces of Canadian news media content studied, 71% of the quotes were from men.

to universally suffer a lack of self-esteem,” LaFlamme reports. “The confidence gap is perhaps one thing that has not changed in thirty-three years.”

#METOO

Whether online or offline, #MeToo helped put the systemic issues of sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse in the workplace squarely on the agenda for newsroom managers. As leading Canadian journalist and noted global women’s rights expert Sally Armstrong sees it, this has helped women raise their voices, exert their rights, call out workplace abusers, and fight to change newsroom policies to ensure more meaningful gender diversity and inclusion.

More newsrooms are now governed with harassment policies containing provisions designed explicitly to protect women, nonbinary, and transgender people from sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse. All of this has, in theory, helped empower women journalists to be able to do their jobs, without worrying that they might have to sleep with their boss (or source) in order to exercise their right to work.

In sum, most interviewees agree there has been some progress. Lisa LaFlamme describes walking into an edit suite thirty years ago, only to be confronted with a series of photographs of naked women in submissive poses splashed all over the walls. “Three decades later, the sexy pictures are gone from the edit suites,” LaFlamme reports. “And when it comes to gender, the newsroom staff better represents the community we cover. In fact, in many places there are more women than men.”

INTERSECTIONALITY

Through the surging anti-racism movement of summer 2020, journalists shared posts, threads and tweets outlining common experiences of isolation, hostility, and outright racism across newsrooms. Black, Indigenous, and other women of colour led the critique.

Indigenous show host Christine Genier quit CBC Yukon in June, citing a toxic culture of racism and harassment. In mid-summer layoffs at Global News, dozens of journalists lost their jobs; disproportionately journalists and in particular women of colour were affected. By September, Egyptian-Canadian journalist Pacinthe Mattar had published a blistering [attack](#) on the media sector in the 2020 issue of *The Walrus*. She called out systemic racism across almost all forms of media in Canada.

Nana Aba Duncan is a 2020-2021 William Southam Journalism Fellow at Massey College. She’s also the host of CBC radio’s show *Fresh Air*, and the founder of *Media Girlfriends*, a podcast series discussing the experiences of women, in particular women of colour, in media. As Duncan, who is Ghanaian-Canadian, puts it, BIPOC mid-career women face a cascading series of challenges. They’re derided as “activists” if they bring stories from their communities, and then they’re pigeonholed into covering those communities. Further, BIPOC journalists tend to be treated worse, the more successful they become. (Academic researchers call this the phenomenon of going “from pet to threat.”)¹

1. Psychological Health of Women of Colour: Intersections, Challenges and Opportunities, edited by Lillian Comos-Diaz and Beverly Greene, p. 276. http://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=gbSNAQAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&ots=IOlr7DghU6&sig=dnumSOpCrNp3LFrhYcn0XGQ9HRs&redir_esc=y#v=snippet&q=%22pet%20to%20threat%22&f=false

Indigenous female journalists in Canada also face a double whammy, as Karyn Pugliese’s paper in this collection so powerfully outlines. They’re more likely to encounter disproportionate amounts of violence on the job, while navigating the impact of generations of trauma in their personal lives. Being pigeonholed by managers as the Indigenous reporters covering the “Indigenous” topics forces these women to continue to revisit personal trauma in their professional lives. It also blocks them from receiving a broader range of assignments or promotions.

Result? Look for the women of colour in those mainstream newsroom leadership roles, and in too many newsrooms, they just aren’t there. The outgoing president of the CAJ aside, most women in leadership roles in media in Canada are white anglophones. And when asked about the threats women journalists now face, Sally Armstrong, Kathy English and Lisa LaFlamme all pointed to the needs and concerns of women journalists of colour, both in North America and across the Global South.

The work ahead, LaFlamme notes, now includes a concerted effort to increase the number of Black, Indigenous, and persons of colour in the average newsroom. “This under-representation has a damning domino effect on democracy overall,” wrote LaFlamme in an email, “and filters through to the people actually quoted in the stories we cover. So, despite the mini-revolutions fought to get to where we are today, there is still a long road ahead for full and fair representation, especially in key-decision making positions.”



Look for the women of colour in those mainstream newsroom leadership roles, and in too many newsrooms, they just aren’t there.

WHOEVER PAYS THE BILLS

Despite some progress, the power in media still rests with men, in part because media companies are still mostly owned by men. As Kathy English puts it, this creates a dynamic in which a high-achieving female journalist may secure a leadership role, only to find herself isolated as the sole woman in the boardroom. “You’re made to feel grateful, just for being at the table,” English says. Such women might have been included in leadership roles as tokens to satisfy diversity quotas, but they are hardly empowered to remake the table according to their own concerns, priorities, and interests.

Award-winning Liberian newspaper editor and global press freedom advocate Rodney Sieh doesn’t waste his time with tokenism. Instead, Sieh has deliberately cultivated an all-female senior management team at his newspaper, FrontPageAfrica. “The truth is, women journalists are key to unlocking stories that male reporters would only dream of reporting,” says Sieh. He points to senior journalist Mae Azango’s award winning investigation into female genital mutilation that helped get the law changed in Liberia to ban the practice. “Promoting women is something we at FrontPageAfrica take pride in.”

Other ongoing threats to the success of women journalists include the stubbornly persistent pay gap, which owners are in a unique position to fix, yet don’t. “When the CEO of a company can be shamed for paying a woman less than he pays a man for the same job, we’ll truly be getting somewhere,” says Armstrong. “But let me be clear — we’re not there yet.”

THREATS AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS NAVIGATING CONFLICT

As Congolese journalist Sandra Bashengezi reports in her paper for this collection, women journalists in her part of the world face a culture of violence and harassment on a scale beyond what those of us in the west can conceive of.

In Bashengezi's account, female journalists in the DRC face down the violence that permeates their lives with courage and resilience, all the while navigating the hyper-constrained gender roles that Congolese society prescribes. For example, women journalists in Kinshasa interviewed by JHR trainer alumna Michèle Ouimet of La Presse are habitually late to work. This is not due to some kind of inherent laziness on their part, but rather due to the inundation of family care that they are solely responsible for in their households, prior to getting to work in the morning. In addition, women journalists in Goma interviewed by JHR ambassador Lisa LaFlamme reported spending the night in their newsrooms after late deadlines, in order to avoid being raped on the way home.

Writing about Syria, Nisreen Anabli reports challenges that range from being overlooked for promotions to being unable to mingle with, let alone interview, rigidly conservative Syrian men in opposition-controlled Aleppo. And she describes a newsroom culture in which women journalists are forced to endure sexual harassment by older male peers, as part of the price they pay for choosing such a visible role in society.

Then there is the insight of Maria Ressa.

Ressa's leadership on media freedoms was on impressive display during a webinar in September 2020, co-produced by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and World Press Freedom Canada. Ressa deftly sketched out the link between persecution of journalists, the decline of the media business model, social media platforms abandoning the responsibility to guard the public sphere, and the death of democracy. "You say a lie a million times, it becomes a fact. Without facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust. Without these, democracy as we know it is dead," Ressa said.

Ressa's ability to clarify the link between broken information systems and broken democracy has justly earned her global recognition. It's also translated into huge backlash at home. Ressa's organization Rappler ran high-profile investigations into the way disinformation and misinformation on social media helped distort election outcomes towards populist leaders with authoritarian tendencies in the Philippines and the U.S. in 2016. After the populist government of Rodrigo Duterte was elected, Ressa and her team went to work documenting the thousands of extrajudicial killings that his government unleashed on its own people. This drew the ire of misogynist trolls and a misogynist President alike.

Duterte wielded his power to appoint judges to silence his critics, including Ressa. Starting in 2017, she began receiving a slew of charges for something called "cyber-libel." In June 2020, a Filipino court found her guilty of this crime; the offending article was published seven years before the law banning "cyber libel" was even passed. Ressa faces millions in fines and the possibility of jail time.

“What’s keeping me going?” Ressa asks. “The international human rights treaties and covenants that the Philippines is signatory to.... those treaties and covenants are my last legal hope.”

HALF THE STORY IS NEVER ENOUGH

As Sally Armstrong puts it, if you don’t have women covering the news, you’re only getting half the story. And if only white women are covering the news, you’re not getting genuine coverage of diverse perspectives, nor are you achieving true balance, accuracy, and fairness in reporting across all demographic communities and groups.

The questions of who voices the news and who gets quoted as leaders and experts can normalize greater expectations of women’s potential. Yet journalism can also perpetuate stereotypes in ways that have helped keep fifty percent of humanity subservient to the other gender for generations. As has been well documented elsewhere through evidence-based studies of best practice in international development, community development worldwide is driven by women and girls’ educational empowerment and economic advancement. In this light, normalizing female leadership in public by getting women into the anchor’s chair, into the ownership suite and onto the editorial board is long overdue.



As Sally Armstrong puts it, if you don’t have women covering the news, you’re only getting half the story.

AUTHOR’S CONCLUSIONS

As you consider how to improve the situation for women journalists in Canada and abroad, I urge you to read the other pieces in this series. They’ll fill you with hope and suggest excellent ideas for how the international community can help.

Drawing from the combined wisdom of those interviewed for this paper, here are some strategies for how to solve women journalists’ most persistent problems.

Newsroom owners and managers should not just promote but also genuinely empower women they have put in leadership roles, by ensuring those women are not just included at the decision-making table but are also leading and actively contributing to the agenda.

As per the Ontario College of Art & Design (OCAD) president and former executive of the Canadian Film Centre Ana Serrano, managers should, wherever possible, promote and empower women of colour in clusters, three or five at a time. This can help to ward against tokenism and isolation.

Newsroom reporters themselves can adopt learning from women staffers in the Obama Administration, in which a group of women, frustrated at being left out of critical decision-making, adopted what’s known as Shine Theory to amplify the group’s collective talent and potential. The concept itself is simple: I don’t shine, if you don’t shine. If a woman proposed an idea, another seconded it, crediting the woman who first came up with the concept. This normalized a culture in which women were proposing great ideas, supporting one another to lead initiatives based on those ideas, and being recognized for their contributions.

For her part, LaFlamme shares her longtime strategy: “avoid negative distractions, choose your battles carefully, and make your journalism unassailable.”

Sally Armstrong emphasizes the need for male allies, calling on men to step up and support women, particularly women in leadership roles. “Nothing is really going to change unless men are involved,” she says. “Women journalists need to convince men that they’re not taking their jobs. They’re expanding and redefining them.”

Managers and staff alike can institutionalize the work of #MeToo by demanding better newsroom policies on sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse be developed, approved, and enforced.

They can also work together to ensure abusive behaviour is identified and called out, rather than enabled through a culture of silence.

At a time of great media disruption, women can also network to help one another launch their own media businesses, in their own way, and adopt and enforce more gender-equitable policies towards promotion and cultivation of talent.

For those in the international community who want to help women journalists in countries where the rule of law is compromised, Maria Ressa for one applauds the international community’s efforts to call for Magnitsky sanctions against those who are targeting her and other journalists. (Unlike bilateral or multilateral sanctions, which penalize entire populations, Magnitsky sanctions target individuals who have committed documented human rights abuses, such as the general who ran the Duterte government’s program of extrajudicial killings. The sanctions block that individual’s access to visas for international travel and/or freeze assets in international bank accounts.)

Ressa also cites promising civil society initiatives like the “Real Facebook Oversight Board,” a group of individuals who are not affiliated with Facebook, which works to clean up what she calls the disinformation “sludge” in the social media platform’s information ecosystem.

Such initiatives underscore, for Ressa, the importance of building a community of support across media, government, and civil society, both domestically and internationally, for the work journalists do. “Right now, journalists are too weak to hold the line,” she says. “The only reason Rappler is holding the line is because we have international help.”

Silent no more: what Indigenous women journalists in Canada face, and what can be done to help them

BY: **KARYN PUGLIESE** COUNTRY: **CANADA**

Karyn Pugliese aka Pabàmàdiz, Algonquin, Pikwàkanagàn First Nation. Pugliese is best known for her work as a Parliament Hill reporter and as the Executive Director of News and Current Affairs at APTN, where she ran the news department for seven years. She joined the Ryerson School of Journalism in the Spring of 2020 while completing a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University. Pugliese has worked in daily news and on long-form investigations at various outlets, including ichannel, VisionTV, CBC, and CTV.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report, Karyn Pugliese draws from in-depth interviews with 15 female Indigenous journalists (FIJs) working in media in Canada to illuminate the issues threatening the advancement of women Indigenous journalists in Canada.

These interviews identified key issues, which are the result of Canada's systemic racism against Indigenous people, as well as the still male-dominated newsroom mentality. Indigenous women in the general population experience higher levels of violence and sexualized violence than other women, or Indigenous men, because of the intersectionality of gender discrimination and race. Journalism does not protect FIJs from these experiences; instead, they face additional risks because they are often brought to the frontlines. This report covers:

- Physical violence and harassment, including from police;
- Violence and harassment from Indigenous leaders;
- Colonialist structures and sexual harassment in newsrooms;
- Family and kinship responsibilities; and
- Personal trauma triggered by journalistic experiences.

Although Canada has laws against assault, as well as discrimination based on gender or race, and although the country has ratified the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Pugliese suggests systemic racism and sexist discrimination against FIJs persist, both in Canadian society and Canadian newsrooms. Canada needs to reaffirm its commitment to UNDRIP, particularly Article 16:1 and 2, which asserts the right of Indigenous peoples to produce media.

Additionally, she advises that news outlets promote a critical mass of Indigenous women to decision-making roles, and that newsrooms build in specialized mental health support for FIJs who are covering traumatic and traumatizing issues.

Country context

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN) are the two largest media employers of Indigenous peoples. The [CBC, in 2019, reported](#) that 2.1% of its approximately 7000 staff identified as Indigenous, compared to 4.9% of the general population. However, not all of those people work in the news and we don't know how many are in senior positions. APTN has a news staff of approximately 65 people, 75% of whom are Indigenous, including technical staff. A breakdown from their website shows that women hold the top two editorial positions in the news, represent half of the host producers, 25% of mid-level staff, and 56% of reporters.

Of approximately [12,000 working journalists](#), the author estimates that fewer than 250 are Indigenous men and women.

The [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#) (RCAP; 1996) and, almost 20 years later, the [report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) (TRC; 2015), drew attention to the role Canadian news media plays in shaping public perceptions. As the TRC concluded: "... [the media has had the potential to either fuel conflict or facilitate conflict resolution and peacebuilding.](#)" The 2019 [Final Report of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry](#) (MMIWG) connected media portrayals of Indigenous women to the disproportionate violence they experience.

All three reports recommended the hiring and promotion of Indigenous journalists in newsrooms. They believed better representation in newsrooms would result in better reporting, an end to harmful stereotypes, the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, and a fuller depiction of our humanity. The TRC report stated: "... fair and non-discriminatory reporting on Aboriginal issues... is consistent with Article 16:2 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." These reports now span a 24-year period during which there has been minimal improvement in media representation. All [non-Indigenous media outlets](#) admit to underrepresenting Indigenous people in the newsroom.

METHODOLOGY

Karyn Pugliese interviewed 15 female Indigenous Journalists (FIJs) separately, over Zoom, asking open-ended questions. Please see Appendix for the list of women who participated. The author thanks Terri Monture, a Mohawk from Six Nations, who has worked for the union Canadian Media Guild (CMG) for 10 years. The CMG represents CBC, APTN, Reuters, Canadian Press, TVO, Vice, and other media outlets. She has been able to lend to this report her comprehensive knowledge of the industry.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT TOWARDS FIJS

Any journalist may encounter physical violence, but FIJs face different risks because of who they are and the stories they cover. Indigenous women and girls are twelve times more likely to be murdered or go missing than other women in Canada. [More than half experience domestic violence.](#) A journalism diploma is not a shield from these issues.

Since the 2000s, Indigenous peoples in Canada have been increasingly involved in political actions, such as MMIWG vigils, peaceful marches, and roadblocks. Recently, counterdemonstrations have led to physical clashes. FIJs covering these news events face harassment and risk injury. Beverly Andrews, an Anishinaabe journalist from

Tootinaowaziibeeng, reported that “I have gotten ‘stupid squaw, dirty squaw, put your camera away, you dumb squaw.’” Brandi Morin, a Cree/Iroquois journalist from Treaty 6 in Alberta, freelances for multiple outlets. At a recent counterdemonstration, she reported that one man pulled down a display of red dresses from where they had been hung as a memorial for MMIWG. Another man disrupted women drummers. Morin interviewed both with the live stream, and the men became less aggressive when they noticed she was recording their actions. Kerry Benjoe, Saulteaux/Dakota/Cree from Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation, who often worked in Regina’s North Central neighbourhood, at the time known for its high crime rate, notes other female journalists were offered a companion for safety. She was not. “I think a lot of it was because they just assumed, I would be okay because the majority of people in that neighborhood are Indigenous.”

It’s been well-documented¹¹ that police in Canada use excessive force against Indigenous people who are protesting over unresolved land claims. Because of the history of human rights abuses at these confrontations, journalists—usually those working for alternative media—try to be on-site to witness police actions. As Indigenous people themselves, FIJs expect to encounter discrimination from the police. RCMP have increasingly used so-called “exclusion zones” to keep reporters several kilometers away.

Exclusion zones were used three times in 2019–20 in the provinces of Nova Scotia and British Columbia, despite a [review by the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission](#), which stated these actions are beyond police powers. In 2019, a court case reaffirmed media rights to cover such events. Nevertheless, police have proceeded to detain five journalists and arrest two others this year. Not all of those detained or arrested are Indigenous journalists. However, all incidents took place at Indigenous land actions, which [FIJs are frequently called upon to cover](#). APTN’s Angel Moore has reported on racism by police toward Indigenous people, and police also threatened to arrest her at an exclusion zone. She is nervous about repercussions for her journalism. “I was afraid, driving on the highway. If I get pulled over by an RCMP driving the APTN vehicle, right?”

VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT FROM INDIGENOUS LEADERS

Violence and intimidation against FIJs can also come from Indigenous political leaders, both male and female, when these journalists are looking into concerns over accountability in leadership. In 2013, the son of a chief ran APTN reporter Melissa Ridgen’s car off the road and into a snowbank. She said: “This truck is coming at us head-on... he [the chief’s son] had a gun on the top of his truck... He was demanding the camera.” Three men at a local band office swarmed APTN’s Larissa Burnouf when she asked the chief for comment. When she returned to the community a month later

1. Erasmus, G., & Dussault, R. (1996). Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Vol 1: pp 198-200, Vol 2: pp 418-419; Final Report of the Ipperwash Inquiry, Ontario, 2007 vol 1; Neu, D. (2000). “Presents” for the “Indians”: Land, colonialism and accounting in Canada. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 25(2), 163-184; Lambertus, S. (2014). *Wartime Images, Peacetime Wounds*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. See also Roache, Trina *The Law of the Land*, APTN <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyv4bvkkbxU> (2018); Moore, Angel “Private Facebook groups loaded with racist comments by RCMP members still thriving”, APTN, Aug 31, 2020.

for a follow-up, ten men and women from the band office swarmed her. “I got death threats, saying, ‘Get the F out of here. We’re going to kill you.’ I remember having to pull over on the side of the road because I was crying.”

At a press conference in July 2019, a communication advisor grabbed APTN Beverly Andrews’s arm and tried to slap the microphone from her hand because she had asked about an allegation of sexual harassment. A female politician subsequently escorted Andrews from the building, scolding her for “splashing our dirty laundry all over the place.”

Mi’kmaq reporter Amber Bernard had a similar experience on two occasions when trying to interview the Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde at public events. On one occasion in 2018, an advisor pushed Bernard’s microphone; in 2019 another advisor physically blocked her and made physical contact with Bernard in order to prevent her from asking the National Chief questions. “You can’t help but notice male journalists who are also doing the same thing you’re doing, and they don’t get the same sort of treatment... so there’s gender-based violence,” Bernard says.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON THE JOB

There are no statistics specific to the journalism industry that indicate the rate of sexual harassment, but in the wider population, Indigenous women report they are sexually assaulted at a rate that is more than triple that of non-Indigenous women (35 per 1000). It is no surprise then that five of the women interviewed reported experiencing sexual harassment on the job. Sometimes it was in the office. When Andrews worked at a mainstream broadcaster, her male coworkers showed her “dick pics.” Andrews kept the harassment to herself, believing that she would be fired if she complained.

Benjoe said she was harassed by sources, including one politician who hugged and kissed her, despite her protests. The first time it happened, Benjoe’s editor blamed her. Afterward, when Benjoe encountered unwanted advances, she said nothing, “I knew that if anything happened... I wouldn’t be able to count on her [the editor in chief] to protect me.” Leena Minifie (Gitxaala) remembers the women in her newsroom had nicknames for some men who were known harassers, like “Creepyjohn” who frequently commented about women’s bodies or spoke of sexual experiences in the office. Minifie complained to management but was told it was part of the office culture and there was nothing they could do.

SYSTEMIC RACISM IN THE NEWSROOM

CBC’s journalistic standards and practices (JSP) prohibits journalists from expressing personal views on controversial subjects on all CBC platforms, as well as on social media accounts because this “can undermine the credibility of CBC journalism and erode the trust of our audience.” When Indigenous journalists assert that Indigenous land is “unceded”, white managers often consider this a personal opinion rather than a fact. Asserting that a specific statement by a public figure is racist can also be construed by management as an opinion rather than a fact. Monture says at least three journalists faced discipline so far this year for posting these kinds of statements on social media.

“The lens through which we view the news is, actually, a white supremacist lens and not that objective one that you think,” says Monture. Even navigating an Indigenous newsroom like APTN can be problematic, says Jamuna Galay-Tamang, Métis/Dene. At its base, the APTN journalism policy is rooted in western cultural practices. Galay-Tamang found aspects of the policies contradicted some cultural practices around gift-giving in Indigenous communities, and she had to push back. The experience left her wondering if there was a place for her in journalism.

Canada’s history of racism does not stop at the newsroom door. In the early 2000s, Minifie became frustrated with comments by colleagues about Indigenous peoples being alcoholics, drunks, or drug addicts, but no one in human resources took her seriously. Andrews overheard colleagues in the newsroom, making derogatory comments about Indigenous people. When she complained, her producer said, “suck it up.” CMG representative Monture says little has changed in twenty years. She continues to learn of racism in the newsroom and out; white colleagues tell FIJs they were only hired, or only won awards, because they are Indigenous; they mock words in Indigenous languages; producers ridicule FIJs for their accents. Kim Wheeler brought a list of racist statements made to Indigenous colleagues by co-workers to newsroom managers, who agreed they were shocking. Wheeler says, “There was no follow up with the managers...HR didn’t follow up with me. They walked out of the room and kind of went ‘okay we had our meeting on racism, like, we’re good here.’”

FIJs have introduced new subjects and sources into newsrooms, but they have not effected change as much as they hoped. As expressed by a source who preferred to remain anonymous, it is painful because of the impact they believe journalism could be having on human rights. Working at a private broadcaster, Andrews said she had to fight to do stories important to the Indigenous community, including MMIWG stories. “In my experience, non-Indigenous women don’t have to fight for stories. They just have to say, ‘this is a story that’s important to me.’” When Kim Wheeler worked at CBC, she had to push hard to convince her producers to do a special episode on the TRC’s first public event in Winnipeg because the topic was “off-brand” for that particular show. Ultimately, the episode won the New York Festival silver medal and two ImagineNative awards.

On the flipside, Andrews found she could not get herself off the “native beat” at the private broadcaster where she worked. She trained several young non-Indigenous reporters who were promoted over her. CMG Representative Monture says “the tokenization of Indigenous reporters” is a problem, especially when it comes to promotions. Management candidates are expected to have diverse portfolios, she adds, which is challenging when FIJs are pigeon-holed into only covering Indigenous issues.

Monture says gender bias also plays a role. She has seen male Indigenous reporters more often get promoted, despite there being more Indigenous women in the industry. “There’s an immediate skepticism with Indigenous women in the way that the men don’t encounter... when you look in Canadian settler terms and how they think, Indigenous women don’t have a voice. They’ve never heard our voices throughout their history.” Andrews described mainstream news as a boys club; Wheeler is more direct: “You get ahead at CBC by being a good or ‘yes’ Indian, by not rocking the boat, by doing exactly what they asked you to do. And by having a penis.”



CMG

Representative Monture says “the tokenization of Indigenous reporters” is a problem, especially when it comes to promotions. Management candidates are expected to have diverse portfolios, she adds, which is challenging when FIJs are pigeon-holed into only covering Indigenous issues.

Monture has also seen FIJs be paid less for equal work, and despite equal experience. In one case, the difference was \$20,000 a year less. There are no industry statistics to say how often this happens in journalism. [Statistics Canada](#) figures suggest that across industries, Indigenous men with university degrees have a median income that is \$11,000 higher than the median income of Indigenous women with the same level of education.

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY

In every society, women bear the brunt of family obligations. For Indigenous women, there is an extra layer of responsibility that is not often understood by their white colleagues. For example, Indigenous families do not have a tradition of paid babysitting. Canada's history of residential schools² and the "Sixties Scoop"³ mean Indigenous families don't trust outsiders with their children. Many of the interviewees entered the workforce as single mothers. Three of the women, Benjoe, Ridgen, and Morin, all regularly brought their children to work. Benjoe's workplace made an exception for her, APTN allows children in the office, and Morin is a freelancer.

FIJs also have kinship obligations that extend beyond the nuclear family, into the larger community, which mainstream workplaces often do not understand. And those communities are in desperate need because of historical trauma: "Sometimes what's going on with the family is heavy... it's frequent, and you may not want to go in and be constantly telling your boss about the crazy stuff that's going on in your family because it doesn't look good," explains Monture. She went on to say, "In our families, too, we are dealing with the trauma of colonization, so drug addiction, family breakup, family separations." Benjoe and Minifie, whose families have a history of residential schooling, were the first in their families to graduate college. Minifie describes "a whole expectation of being able to support or give money or give time... About a variety of things: health, law, advocacy for doctors, advocacy for lawyers... deal with their jail sentence or whatever."

The personal roles of nurturer combine with journalism in ways that can be exhausting. FIJs are on call around the clock to both kin and sources. "For us as Indigenous people working in the media, it's not just a job, it's a lifestyle," says Wheeler. "Oftentimes, I'm working so late," says Tina House. "People are contacting me all the time about story ideas or phoning me or texting me, you know, horrific situations that they're dealing with. And of course, you can't not reply if it's something serious."

Stories covered in their newsroom often touch their families, and their personal and professional lives intersect: House takes care of her brother who is often homeless in Vancouver. "So here I am covering these stories about people that are living in the Downtown Eastside, and especially during this pandemic, and I'm dealing with it

2. Residential schools were government-sponsored, church-run schools which operated from 1870 to 1996. They were established for the purpose of removing thousands of Indigenous children from their homes and attempting to assimilate them into Euro-Canadian culture. Sexual and physical abuse was endemic at the schools.

3. The term Sixties Scoop was coined in Johnston, P. author of *Native Children and the Child Welfare System* (1983). The term refers to the mass removal of Indigenous children from their families into the child welfare system, during the 1960s and 70s. A settlement agreement, signed in November 2017, set aside \$750 million to compensate the thousands of First Nations and Inuit children who were removed from their homes. The current removal of children is referred to as "the millennial scoop."

myself, with my own brother.” Both House and Bernard have relatives who were in the news as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women stories. House sought permission to cover her cousin’s murder because she knew her presence would be healing for her family. “There is no, no, separation,” says Bernard. “I’m going home, and the news is there, there, there, whether it’s through work or through personal life.”

TRAUMA FROM THE ASSIGNMENT

News stories can often trigger personal trauma for FIJs because they have experienced colonialism in the same way as the people they cover. FIJs say covering the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls National Inquiry was incredibly distressing because the crimes often involved sexualized violence, brutality, and torture. Burnouf explains, “It may not be violence towards me directly, but you feel that violence, you know, you feel that pain when you walk into that house.”

Their bosses seemed unaware of the trauma the work was inflicting on the women. One FIJ said her work triggered personal trauma in a way she was not expecting: “I told my supervisors I was drowning, and I didn’t receive any response... I didn’t have the tools on my own.” Minifie covered the trial of a serial killer in British Columbia. Hearing the gory details of torture and brutality, and watching the impact on the women’s families, took its toll. Minifie asked for health support at the time, but she was told that getting used to hearing painful things was part of the job.

Other issues are also triggering. At a mainstream newsroom, Moore was assigned to read dozens of racist comments about Indigenous people, “I was at a point of throwing up and not sleeping, you know, when [the media manager] said, ‘Well, you have to toughen up and learn to face these things.’ And I thought this is not appropriate at all.” Ridgen says covering children in state care has made her ill, and that she’d lost an unhealthy amount of weight, “I lose sleep over it. I don’t eat sometimes ... I have to talk myself off that ledge often.”

AUTHOR’S CONCLUSIONS

The RCAP and TRC reports instructed Canada that increasing the number of Indigenous journalists would have tremendous positive benefits: doing so would improve news coverage of Indigenous people; increase public education and empathy; and improve democratic and human rights. This has not happened.

Few mainstream newsrooms have hired Indigenous journalists, and the intersectionality of race and gender leads to harassment and discrimination on the job, which has limited the ability of FIJs to effect change in newsrooms or news coverage of Indigenous peoples.

I have found it deeply frustrating to watch another generation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada lose an opportunity for reconciliation. The news media bears responsibility for its role in failing to recognize and correct the systemic racism in the industry highlighted by RCAP more than twenty years ago. With a few notable exceptions, newsrooms have impeded the advancement of FIJs’ careers and hindered our ability to make meaningful improvements to news coverage. The stories

of harassment, violence, and the intersection of racism and sexism in this report reflect my own experiences in the industry. Like the other women in this report, I have pushed for change in the industry throughout my career and have achieved regrettably few results. Studies of Canadian media such as *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers* (Mark Cronlund Anderson, Carmen L. Robertson, UBC Press, 2011) demonstrate Indigenous people continue to be portrayed in the media as inferior to whites.

This inaction only highlights the need for intervention in 2020. The good news is #BlackLivesMatter has raised awareness of the lack of diversity in mainstream newsrooms, and Canada is particularly responsive to international pressure. It is possible this international pressure will finally result in systemic change.

This international pressure could be exerted in a few ways. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous peoples could conduct a more thorough examination of the issues raised in this paper and suggest ways Canada might better support its commitment to [UNDRIP Article 16: 1 and 2](#). It could also encourage Canada to consider how it will support Indigenous media in light of disruptions impacting the industry's business model, and for Canada to recommit to Article 16. At the very least, a thorough demographic survey of the Indigenous population in media needs to be performed.

I challenge the UN and other international actors to pressure the Canadian government to pass clear laws preventing police from interfering, detaining, or arresting journalists who cover Indigenous land actions; to ensure Canada's federal police force is transparent about how it handles issues of harassment, racism, and disciplining officers; to offer training, support, and equipment for FIJs who cover conflict areas. And for the UN to reconsider their relationship with Indigenous leaders who tolerate violence or harassment of women, including FIJs.

Closer to home, this report shows that Canadian, and western, newsrooms need to recognize their diversity challenges and address these issues by promoting Indigenous journalists, and in particular Indigenous women, into leadership roles. Additionally, these newsrooms need to understand and accommodate the severe psychological impact of the job on Indigenous women journalists.

THE INTERVIEWEES

Beverly Andrews, Anishanabe, Tootinaowaziibeeng First Nation. Andrews has worked in media for over a decade, including broadcast, film, and the arts. She joined APTN in January 2017 from Regina, Saskatchewan, where she was a video journalist for CTV and Indigenous Circle. She has also worked at Global Television.

Kerry Benjoe, Saulteaux/Dakota/Cree, Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation. Benjoe is an award-winning journalist who covered Indigenous issues in Saskatchewan for the Regina *Leader Post* for more than ten years. She currently works with the CBC.

Amber Bernard, Mi'kmaq. Bernard worked for APTN in Saskatchewan and Ottawa. She contributed to a joint investigation into consultation with Indigenous groups along the proposed Transmountain Pipeline, which won an RTDNA Award in 2019.

■
Closer to home, this report shows that Canadian, and western, newsrooms need to recognize their diversity challenges and address these issues by promoting Indigenous journalists, and in particular Indigenous women, into leadership roles.

Larissa Burnouf, Canoe Lake Cree Nation. Burnouf is currently working toward a Juris Doctor Degree candidate at the College of Law, University of Saskatchewan, 2021. She has worked at APTN as a reporter and video journalist covering Saskatchewan, and as a Radio host at MBC Radio in La Ronge, Saskatchewan.

Jamuna Galay-Tamang, Métis/Dene. Galay-Tamang was the 2019–2020 Fox International Fellow at Yale University; she produced a half-hour documentary with APTN Investigates and has worked with CiTR 101.9 FM, *Discorder* Magazine, and Lowd Television Productions. Her latest research examined the impact of lead in drinking water on the health of Indigenous peoples. She has a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and has experience working in remote Indigenous communities in Canada.

Tina House, Métis. House is an award-winning reporter whose work has been recognized by Amnesty International. She is a former entrepreneur who operated her own talent agency, video production, and promotions company, appropriately called the House of Talent, for 12 years before joining APTN.

Leena Minifie, Gitxaala Nation. Minifie is the only First Nations woman to participate in the Aspen Institute and the U.S. Embassy's Edward R. Murrow Journalism Program in Washington, DC. Her career spans sixteen years in media, working as a journalist, videographer, and producer. Minifie is the owner of Stories First, and she is currently working on a TV series for the Knowledge Network and developing a feature documentary on Indigenous land protection. Minifie is also a co-founder for ricochet media and the Indigenous Reporting Fund. She has worked for CBC Radio One & Radio 3, and APTN.

Terri Monture, Haudenosaunee, Six Nations. As a Staff Representative, Human Rights and Equity at Canadian Media Guild, Monture has more than ten years' experience representing media workers at APTN, Canadian Press, CBC, TVO, Vice, and others. She is interested in all forms of mediation, negotiation, conflict resolution, and advocacy for workers.

Angel Moore, Cree, Peguis First Nation. Moore earned a journalism degree from the University of King's College. She also has a degree from Dalhousie University in International Development Studies and Environmental Sustainability. Moore interned at CBC before joining APTN News in 2018. She is currently a video journalist covering Atlantic Canada.

Brandi Morin, Cree/Mohawk. Morin was born and raised in Alberta and possesses a passion for telling Indigenous stories. Based outside Edmonton, Morin has freelanced and writes for several news organizations, including Indian Country Today Media Network, Aljazeera, the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, the *National Observer*, CBC, and APTN.

Melissa Ridgen, Red River Métis. Ridgen is an award-winning journalist who has spent more than fourteen years covering crime, courts, politics, business, and entertainment for newspapers in four provinces. She then joined APTN in 2009 and has garnered numerous awards, including recognitions from the World Indigenous Television Broadcasters Network (2013), Canadian Association of Journalists (2016, 2019), and the Canadian Screen Awards (2018, 2019).

Kim Wheeler, Anishinabe/Mohawk. Wheeler has a twenty-year journalism career working for the Canadian Press, CBC, and others. Her work on the CBC radio series ReVision Quest garnered a New York Festival silver medal and two ImagineNative awards. Wheeler has worked as an associate producer for the CBC Aboriginal Digital Unit and Unreserved on CBC Radio One.

(Note: 3 women preferred to remain anonymous in their contributions. Their information was used but they are not named in the article.)

Stigma and stereotypes prevent women from succeeding as journalists in the African Great Lakes Region

BY: **SANDRA SAFI BASHENGEZI**

COUNTRY: **DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC)**

I am a 28-year-old Congolese journalist, trainer and filmmaker. I live in Bukavu in eastern DRC. I am co-founder and director of the Technical School of Journalism and I coordinate the programs of the organization Journalistes pour la Promotion de la Démocratie et des Droits Humains (JPDDH) as well as those of a network of journalists for the promotion of gender.

I am actively involved in the promotion of human rights, especially women's and children's rights. I am convinced that media can positively change lives, especially those of girls and children who are generally marginalized.

In 2012, I won the "JHR Award" for the best radio report on human rights, offered by the NGO Journalists for Human Rights. Since then, I have been committed to working to get more journalists interested in human rights issues.

As a mother of five daughters, I love adventure, traveling, discovering new horizons and landscapes.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sandra Safi Bashengezi, a journalist in the Democratic Republic of Congo, uses in-depth interviews with male and female journalists and media professionals to shed light on issues related to the advancement of women journalists in the DRC. As in many countries, the biggest challenge to women's success is that gender inequality is culturally entrenched. Local culture teaches citizens that the public square is not for women, and that therefore women should not be journalists. Women journalists are despised because they are not traditionally feminine and are sometimes perceived as promiscuous because of the obligation to make themselves known to the public. They are not given assignments that are not "feminine," such as politics and investigative journalism, and worse, they are sexually harassed by their informants and colleagues. Leadership and training roles are not offered to women because the culture in the DRC is that a man should not take orders from a woman. The DRC has laws on gender equality, but these have not led to a change in culture. The author suggests training for women to put them on an equal footing with men; a change in local culture, allowing women to take on leadership roles; and additional support for gender equality laws and agreements already in place in the DRC and other countries in the African Great Lakes Region including Rwanda and Burundi.

STEREOTYPES AND “WOMEN’S ROLES”

Even before starting to work in the media, women in the DRC are confronted with gender stereotypes in the community that discourage them from pursuing such a public profession. From an early age, whether in the family or at school, men are educated to lead and dominate; women to endure or perform. When women begin working in the media, they have to overcome these stereotypes, both personally and in relation to their male colleagues. “It is difficult then for many men, especially in rural areas, to recognize the value of women, without prejudice, when they are leaders or when they do a good job as journalists,” notes Nelly Adidja, program manager of Mama Radio, a feminist radio station that promotes women’s rights in the DRC.

Douce Namwezi, coordinator of Uwezo Africa, an organization for the promotion of gender in the DRC, also shares this point of view. “There are social and cultural aspects that are reflected even in the newsrooms. The result is a gendered distribution of roles among journalists,” she observes.

Julienne Baseke, coordinator of the Association of Women in the Media (AFEM) identifies that one of the challenges is the education received in the social environment where they grow up. This is manifested by the fact that from early childhood, women learn that they are made for cooking and housework, obeying and staying in the shadows. Men, on the other hand, are made to study, lead and shine.

“There are several customs that place women at a lower rank than men,” observes Douce Namwezi, “the perception is that women cannot lead men. According to some customs, speaking in public when you are a woman is a crime,” she admits. “The traditional role of women is to keep quiet. But when you’re a woman journalist and you speak, you lead the debate, you question people, and then you cross that traditional line and people judge you as they see fit,” Namwezi observes.

In several Congolese newsrooms, the perception of the image of women by their male colleagues has not evolved from what they were taught in childhood.

“Some male journalists think that women cannot host political programs or shows. For example, that they can’t cover stories that require a little more effort, like sports, or investigate serious issues like corruption. That their competence is limited to light subjects such as health, cooking, beauty,” says Trésor Panda, editor-in-chief of Bukavu University Radio and a member of the Journalists’ Network for Gender Promotion (JPG).

“In addition to the image a man receives of a woman, we must also consider the image a woman received of herself when she was a child,” says Panda. “Women are educated by prejudice. It makes them stand back when they are appointed. A woman thinks that the man should lead because that is what the society she lives in expects. So women often give up when they are competing with a man for a promotion opportunity or when they have to elect a new leader in their newsroom,” he adds.

Whether in the work environment, at home, or in the image of women reflected by society in general, women journalists experience a daily struggle for work recognition.

Country context

In December 2019, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) experienced its first peaceful transfer of power between an incoming and an outgoing president. Joseph Kabila, thus gave way to Felix Tshisekedi. Located in central Africa, the DRC is one of Africa’s most troubled regions, with rebellions and militias raging in the east since 1996. Numerous massacres and human rights violations are also recorded there. In addition, the economic situation has become more volatile.

In the DRC, according to a study conducted by the Congolese Union of Media Women (UCOFEM), only 33% of journalists are women. Only 19% hold positions of responsibility.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Getting promoted in the media sector is a major challenge for women in a world generally dominated by men. More than 90% of media promoters (owners) in South Kivu are men. “Only Mama Radio in Bukavu and Bubusa radio in Mugogo were initiated by women’s organizations or are run by women,” explains Douce Namwezi. The same is true throughout the DRC.

Because of gender bias, many male media promoters prefer to entrust the management of their media enterprises to men rather than women. Media services and flagship newspapers, such as publishing and programming, are also run by men. “Women are generally assigned to roles as cashiers or receptionists,” notes Raïssa Kasongo.

Olivier Kiriza, coordinator of the Réseau des radios et télévisions communautaires du Congo (RATECO South Kivu), gives one reason: “There is a perception that women are careless and less rigorous in management. This is why it is men who are promoted at the expense of women in the media”. But Kiriza goes on to say: “However, the trend has changed in recent years. Some media promoters are beginning to realize that women can do as well as men. But there is still a lot of work to be done to give women the same opportunities as men.”

RATECO is a network of 40 member-owned community radio stations in which there are currently only three women directors. This is an improvement compared to ten years ago, when there were no women heads of these stations and no women held important positions in the media.

In the private sector, several women have also been promoted to managerial or senior positions in recent years. Although the percentage remains low, it is encouraging to see some women in leadership positions.

In 2018 Faraja Zawadi was promoted to director of a local private media in Bideka, in the same Walungu territory. However, some of her male colleagues were unable to accept her new status as media director and she was forced to resign. “I received several threats. I was clearly told that as a woman, I had no right to tell men what to do or to criticize them,” she says. “Many thought I was inferior, that I had no right to lead a group of men. One day, the chairman of the radio station’s board of directors, without consulting me, sanctioned one of my journalists. As general manager, I opposed the procedure because he simply could not do it without going through me. In the middle of the meeting, he told me bluntly: you are a woman, you don’t have the right to oppose what a man decides,” Zawadi recalls.

Nelly Adidja was promoted to director of Ngoma ya Kivu Radio and Television, RTNK, a private local radio and television station in Bukavu. This was a first for this radio and television station. Adidja has worked hard, caught up on the backlog, strengthened the radio signal, improved the quality of the image on television and put in place a strong editorial team, which has helped significantly increase its audience. But she remembers that it was never easy. She would lose her courage when fellow directors or her own male subordinates reminded her that she was “just a woman”. “Men often have a hard time accepting the authority of a female director,” says Adidja.

“In cases where it was necessary to punish a staff member who was out of line, there was resistance from some men. For them, I was just a woman,” she recalls. Nelly left



Because of gender bias, many male media promoters prefer to entrust the management of their media enterprises to men rather than women.

this position before devoting herself, over the past few months, to directing Mama Radio's programs. After she left, the promoter of RTNK replaced her with another woman to run the station.

Mamy Mirindi, director of Radio Impact in Uvira, is experiencing the same reality. For the past five years, she has been the sole director of a dozen media outlets in her city. But being a woman and the director of a group of men is not an easy task. "There is strong mistrust on the part of some journalists just because I am a woman," she admits. "Sometimes I make a remark to a subordinate, and he tells me impolitely that he already has a nice wife at home, that I shouldn't talk to him in that tone and that I owe him respect," says Mirindi.

Solange Shagayo, director of Radio Star, a youth radio station in Bukavu, did not have as much trouble with her male subordinates. However, joining her city's media directors' school proved to be the real challenge. "In the beginning, when there were media directors' meetings, I was not invited. Some people didn't highlight my skills and insulted me by saying 'she must have got this job because she is the girlfriend of the promoter.' Because I was a woman, they couldn't understand that it is thanks to my skills that I could become a producer and run a radio station". Solange Shagayo has been running her radio station for 10 years now. At first, she was the only female media director in Bukavu, but she has since been joined by five other women.

NO ROOM FOR FAILURE

Despite the recent increase in the number of women in leadership positions, many still believe that they will always have something to prove. "Men demand a lot from women. They cannot fail, otherwise men will judge them on the basis of their gender and not on the difficulties they face," says Nelly Adidja.

"It's as if we're putting women to a dual challenge. If a woman fails, it will not be the person's fault but the fault of her gender (because she is a woman). But strangely enough, if a man fails, it is not every man's fault, it is the fault of one person," she notes.

Douce Namwezi also agrees. "Many men believe that women will fail. And if a woman makes a mistake, you hear that it was predictable because a woman is in charge."

ORGANIZATIONS IN THE DRC, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

In order to promote the idea of having women as leaders in the media, several organizations have set up different programs over the last few decades. In 2003, the Association des femmes dans les médias (AFEM) was created, and it is currently conducting awareness raising and training activities throughout the DRC. "AFEM specializes in advocacy for gender equality in the media. It has organized trainings targeting women to make them more competitive, and it has engaged with men in the media so that they are supporters of women and not barriers to their success. Some men are increasingly aware of this," notes Julienne Baseke.

In 2018, AFEM initiated a charter on gender equality and respect for gender in the media. "This charter contains commitments to which media managers have adhered,

which give women the same opportunities as men when they are promoted in their structures,” notes Julienne Baseke.

According to Julienne Baseke, the concept of the charter has made media managers more aware of the effects of gender discrimination. “But we must continue to promote the charter by organizing several trainings sessions to further involve women, men and the community in gender mainstreaming.” Among the important initiatives, AFEM has launched Mama Radio, which “aims to set an example and show other media promoters that a woman can also run the radio,” she says.

Journalistes Pour la Promotion de la Démocratie et des Droits Humains (JPDDH) -- a local organization for the promotion of human rights through the media -- organizes community awareness-raising activities on gender. “Our main objective is to make the community understand that the profession of journalism is ... suitable for both men and women. That a woman journalist should not be subject to stereotypes,” says Théophile Ombeni, JPDDH program manager. JPDDH also trains journalists, with a focus on women journalists, through its professional training center, the Technical School of Journalism. “The more well-trained women we have, the more convinced we are that we will also have a significant number of women in leadership positions in the media,” says Théophile Ombeni.

Local and international organizations are helping to improve the consideration of women’s work in the media. But much remains to be done to end gender discrimination in the media.

AUTHOR’S CONCLUSIONS

The interviewees expressed their belief that it is necessary to work both on the woman journalist herself and on her social environment.

“Many women journalists do not have good training opportunities because training is reserved for men. I think we have to start there. To equip them with skills so that they can compete on an equal footing with men,” says Namwezi.

Nelly Adidja agrees. “Women also need to specialize in certain areas that men take for granted, such as politics, sports and investigations. This will give them the same opportunities,” she says.

The Canadian NGO Journalists for Human Rights is working with journalists in the DRC, currently running a training program of this type called Canada World: Voices of Women and Girls. JHR is implementing this program with the support of Global Affairs Canada. This program is an important initiative for media, the civil society and the community to improve the perception of the image of women and to respect their rights.

Male journalists must also be trained in gender equality so that they can become allies in the struggle.

Finally, Théophile Ombeni believes that it is also necessary to raise awareness about stereotypes and antiquated habits that play against women in the media. “There are several local customs that discourage women from appearing in the media. For

example, some cultures believe that a woman cannot be a journalist because she does not have the right to express herself in public. Local communities and traditional authorities need to be challenged to end this perception and understand that a woman journalist is more of an asset to the community,” he says.

Since 2006, the Democratic Republic of Congo has adopted a policy to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. Article 14 of the country’s constitution states that “the public authorities undertake to eliminate all discrimination against women and to ensure the protection and promotion of their rights.”

The country also ratified several international agreements for the advancement of women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The same approach has been adopted by other countries of the Great Lakes Region including Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda, which have committed to fight against discrimination against women. However, in practice, the implementation of these commitments continues to stall. This is due to local customs, mainly patriarchal, which discriminate against women by giving more room to men than women. In addition to the customs, the religions practiced there, mainly Christian and Muslim, also force women to remain in the shadows, even depriving them of the right to speak in public.

All this has a negative impact on the perception of the image of women in the DRC and generally in the Great Lakes region.

The agreements signed by the DRC, the Great Lakes countries and Africa to protect women’s rights must be enforced. The public authorities must ensure that laws for the promotion of women and their protection against all forms of discrimination are enforced. International advocacy activities should therefore aim to ensure that the authorities respect their commitments.

Although some progress has been made, much remains to be done. By giving a more positive image of women journalists, many taboos and community barriers will be broken and women’s rights will improve.



Although some progress has been made, much remains to be done. By giving a more positive image of women journalists, many taboos and community barriers will be broken and women’s rights will improve.

Entering the domain of men: women journalists covering conflict in Syria

BY: **NISREEN ANABLI** COUNTRY: **SYRIA**

Nisreen Anabli is a Syrian human rights journalist who has worked for the past decade for independent and publicly owned media outlets. After 2011, she reported on human rights in Syria and Syrian communities in neighbouring hosting countries for pan-Arab newspapers. Based in Istanbul, Turkey, currently reporting for independent media, Nisreen Anabli is a leading journalist in efforts to stop gender-based violence within her community.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research paper by a Syrian journalist currently living in Turkey focuses extensively on the challenges faced by female journalists in conflict zones in Syria and neighbouring hosting countries. The journalist has prepared this paper based on three sources: the journalist's personal experience, interviews with twelve female journalists, and reports on gender equality and women in Syrian media. The author explores the experiences of Syrian female journalists both before the Syrian Revolution began in 2011 and after, when alternative media institutions emerged, outside the regime.

The paper explains the security and social risks that prevent women journalists from performing their duties optimally. It also looks at how traditional and conservative societies perceive women working in media. Lastly, it examines gender equality policies, as well as how women are systematically excluded from administrative positions. With women absent from senior positions, there are many deleterious effects: the resulting media overlooks many sensitive problems that women face in times of war, women are portrayed in negative or stereotypical ways in the media, and female journalists have limited freedom to select issues of focus.

In conclusion, the research paper provides some recommendations for those in charge of managing media institutions and civil society organizations, especially inside Syria, as well as for funding bodies and others in the international community.

BEFORE THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION

Female journalists faced many challenges even before the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011. We were often limited to reporting on certain fields, such as society, services, arts, and entertainment programs. Women were underrepresented in the political press. When I started working for Al-Thawra newspaper, which is one of the regime's official newspapers, I was assigned the task of doing press coverage of fine art exhibitions and writing cultural articles. The majority of female journalists were

specialists in cultural, social, and artistic affairs, while political and economic columns and articles were the domain of male journalists. On television, women were limited to presenting news bulletins, while political and economic talk shows were assigned to men.

Often the female journalists' chances of landing a job in official newspapers were linked to their physical appearance. Additionally, organizations are sometimes required to have a token female on staff; when I was a fresh graduate journalist, one editor-in-chief offered to publish reports and articles under my name without my writing a single word. He wanted to use my female name, but he didn't trust me to write the reports myself.

Connections also played an important role in securing women their jobs. The Journalists Club in Damascus was a place for making acquaintances and finding job opportunities. Connections played a big role in employment. Female journalists who are connected to the power structure of the regime had, and still have, an advantage in employment in any sector. That advantage is especially obvious in the media sector, which doesn't hire a great number of people and is easily manipulated by security forces through threatening journalists or tempting them with privileges to change editorial direction. This practice has led to a decrease of public trust in existing media.

Before the revolution, women in media experienced a lot of harassment, more commonly than in other industries. Politicians weren't interested in enacting legislation and laws to protect female journalists from exploitation, sexual harassment, and extortion. It was very common to see elderly male journalists harassing young female journalists. We women had no recourse because most of the harassers were influential people with strong relationships with important figures in the state, and therefore were protected by their influence and authority. For example, when I was harassed by the brother of the Syrian ambassador in Kuwait, who was working as an editor-in-chief in an official newspaper, I could do nothing but quit my work as there are no laws or groups I could ask for help. I was afraid he would retaliate and defame me—a common practice.

Despite the presence of a good number of female journalists working in the regime's newspapers, these women remained far from being the decision-makers. They were unable to steer the discourse. Throughout my work and moving between several newspapers, I have never met a female journalist who held an important position, with the exception of one woman who was the editor-in-chief of Tishreen newspaper.

The absence of women in decision-making positions not only left women open to harassment but also shaped the media's portrayal of women's issues. For example, the Syrian media's handling of many sensitive issues like "honour crimes" portrayed women as perpetrators who deserve punishment, and men as "heroes" who deserve to be praised for their crimes. These incidents were approached as entertainment and did not receive thoughtful coverage. Often, they ignored the truth about the male perpetrators and failed to push for justice for the victims. The media reflected and indeed reinforced society's expectations about the issue of honour crimes.

Country context

After decades of advocacy from Syrian civic actors to advance gender equality in Syria, in March 2020 the Syrian parliament reformed a law that had previously reduced the sentence for honour killings. With the reform, honour killings are now treated as a crime. However, it should be noted that Syrian women represent less than 12% of parliament's members.

Political, social and economic discrimination and inequalities are also reflected in the media sector ([MENA Gender Equality Profile, UNICEF, 2011](#)). Although the representation of women in the emerging Syrian media ranged up to 54% in 2017, only 4% of senior journalists are women. Women's representation in news departments in television stations is 43.9%, while they make up only 6.5% of television directors ([Women in Emerging Syrian Media by Syrian Female Journalists Network, 2017](#))

AFTER THE START OF THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION

After 2011, the conflict and the violent actions by the regime forced emerging media outlets and many of their journalists to constantly relocate or leave the country. The security forces retaliated against anyone streaming, broadcasting, or reporting on the regime's violations of human rights. Enab Baladi newspaper and Souritna Magazine and many outlets lost colleagues and were forced to leave Syria and operate from Turkey. Women journalists wanted to communicate the reality of what was happening on the ground to the outside world, and women were motivated to engage in media work as activists and journalists. It is a testament to these women that they emerged even from very conservative social environments, which strongly opposed female work. Women wanted to prove themselves and change the prevailing idea that women were inefficient in crises.

Unfortunately, the representation of women in the field of media remained weak. Opposition media have more freedom compared to the regime's media, but the status of female journalists has not changed either in terms of opportunities or laws. Only a few female journalists were able to obtain administrative positions in these institutions.

Sadly, some media organizations have increased their numbers of female journalists only to satisfy the funding agencies, and not because they believe in the need for female journalists to participate. This is the case both inside Syria and in countries where Syrian media is working, such as Turkey.

Therefore, leadership positions are still given to men even if they are not professionally qualified. I recall that the director of the newsroom in one of the Syrian radio stations that I worked at in Turkey had only a high school diploma. Most of the opposition media organizations that I worked at were run by men, some of whom had no background in the media profession at all.

These leaders often weren't interested in the issues that women journalists wanted to highlight. For example, I wanted to publish a press report on the problem of the lack of monthly menstrual health supplies for women in the camps and the besieged areas in Syria. I tried hard to convince the editor-in-chief of the importance of shedding the light on this problem. I was ridiculed and bullied by my male colleagues who believed that the issue of monthly menstrual health supplies for women would cross a "red line" according to the standards of our conservative societies. They had a narrow view of the problems and needs of women in wartime, which they summarized as merely lacking food supplies.

There was no improvement after the revolution began: opposition media institutions still didn't develop internal regulations to respect the privacy of a female journalist or protect her from exploitation and sexual harassment. According to a survey of female journalists and human rights defenders conducted by the Syrian Female Journalists Network in October 2019 through the Security and Safety Program, approximately 26% of the participating female journalists have been subjected to direct harassment (10% reported sexual harassment, and 31% reported abuse related to their sex or gender). Seventy percent of respondents confirmed that there was an increase in the amount of violence that Syrian female journalists face, including online and direct violence.

PHYSICAL THREATS TO FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN CONFLICT ZONES

Syria ranks 174th out of 180 countries on the 2020 World Press Freedom Index due to violations against journalists. Since the war began, female journalists face many risks, obstacles, and challenges.

According to a report issued by the Syrian Journalists Association (SYJA) entitled “Female Journalists: Reality and Challenges, 2017,”¹ 22 violations against women in media have been documented in Syria since the start of the Syrian revolution. This includes six female journalists who were killed, 12 cases of arrest and kidnapping, and six other violations that include wounding, beating, threats, violence, and pressure to prevent them from working in the media. Media sources associated with the regime reported that three female journalists were killed by mortar shells fired by the opposition factions.

In addition, women who got detained were subjected to harassment and rape inside detention centers. Not only is this a tragedy for the women who experienced this abuse, but it also means that any woman who is arrested, even for a short period, is suspected of having been raped and is therefore stigmatized.

Female journalists face extra challenges when it comes to traveling around the country to do reporting. There are security barriers and checkpoints, and limited transportation in the hot spots. In 2012, when the city of Aleppo was divided into two parts, an eastern opposition-controlled side and a western regime-controlled side, I found it difficult to travel between the two sides to document what was happening, due to the violent clashes and the complete power outage in the city. Harassment of women at the security barriers increases in conditions of chaos and insecurity.

SOCIETAL PRESSURE WOMEN JOURNALISTS ENCOUNTER

Family pressure and stress is an important factor in a journalist’s decisions of whether to go out on an assignment or not. The journalist’s family worries daily that she may be murdered, arrested, or disappeared.

One of the obstacles I encountered during my presence in the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo city was that the society did not accept female journalists because it was extremely conservative. It was unacceptable for women to work in jobs religious leaders consider masculine. To that community, it was reprehensible to see a girl without her hijab (headscarf). There were expectations on the type of clothing and my external appearance. Additionally, some people refused to deal with me or give me any information because I was a woman. It is important to note that this problem still exists in the opposition-controlled territories (north-west) as some heads of local councils, bodies, and organizations inside Syria refuse to grant me any press access because they don’t mingle with women.

22 violations against women in media have been documented in Syria since the start of the Syrian revolution.

1. Note that the SYJA website is now under review and this report taken down.

In other Syrian cities like Idlib, Raqqa, Deir ez-zor, and in the countryside outside Damascus, which are under the control of opposition factions and militant Islamic groups, female journalists faced the possibility of murder or abduction by militants. They have no protection from either the community or the military factions they were reporting on. One of the interviewees resides in Idlib countryside in northern Syria and works as a reporter for a TV channel in Turkey. She said she finds it difficult to cover the violations committed by some factions against civilians because she's afraid she'll be exposed as a journalist and then killed. Journalist Ruqia Hassan was arrested by ISIS in Raqqa in 2015. She was killed on charges of communicating with foreign parties.

Many female journalists receive electronic death threats. They are accused of atheism or blasphemy -- accusations made by supporters and members of Islamic factions against anyone addressing the violations committed by these factions against civilians. One female media activist who was expelled from Eastern Ghouta reported receiving messages on Facebook threatening to kill her because she had criticized the practices of the Army of Islam, a militant group which was controlling the area. The Army of Islam is responsible for the abduction of the activist Razan Zaitouneh, who founded the first media office for the coordination committees in the city of Douma in Eastern Ghouta in 2013. Her fate remains unknown.

CHALLENGES TO COVERING WOMEN'S ISSUES AND VIOLATIONS DURING WARTIME

Female journalists especially face threats and bullying when they try to cover violations of women in traditional Islamic societies, such as gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, and child, early, and forced marriage. The community's local culture prioritizes family and tribe, and they resist media coverage of violations of women's rights. Even in opposition media institutions, women's issues are seen as marginal and superficial, and media coverage of violations is limited. They prioritize military and field news, without examining the impact of conflict on women's lives.

For example, I wanted to cover the fact that women in refugee camps were being harassed by humanitarian workers responsible for distributing relief aid. But there was resistance. Members of the local community considered these accusations offensive to the women's reputation and honour. Indeed, the women themselves were blamed, and the harassers were not exposed or punished.

The journalists I interviewed for this report said that they find it difficult to prove the violations committed against women in conflict zones. Many abused women are reluctant to talk about what happened because they fear further persecution or even threats from their own family and the community. The journalist herself may receive threats, especially when she is working as a freelancer and is not supported by an institution or an official party. This is even more likely to happen if she is a local journalist and belongs to the community where the violations occurred.

One journalist I spoke to who headed a women's association for empowering women in Idlib spoke about receiving threats of harassment and defamation. The local residents thought that her journalistic and feminist activity posed a danger to girls and spread

moral corruption. She received threats that she would be prosecuted before the Sharia court of the Levant Liberation Committee, Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham, if she continued conducting field visits to houses and camps in order to educate and support women.

Some media outlets cover the violations committed against women during conflicts, but they tend to minimize the incidents by presenting them as individual cases. This approach does not reflect on how the society's structure creates the root problems. For example, the women faced harassment in shared bathrooms in refugee camps. They asked for more bathrooms that allow women privacy. The male media executives didn't understand that women were put at risk every time they went to the bathroom. But this issue was not seen as important. Instead they wanted coverage of how women struggled because of food shortages, and because they had lost their breadwinners and homes. Those were the issues that men could understand.

AUTHOR'S CONCLUSION

There are many intersecting problems that need to be resolved to allow women journalists the chance to succeed.

Within Syria and other conflict zones, civic actors, including community-based organizations, women's rights organizations, and media organizations need to advocate for legislative reforms that encourage gender equality when it comes to specialization, promotion to senior positions, and wages for journalists.

Media institutions should adopt bylaws or codes of conduct that guarantee legal protection for female journalists in the event of any violation or psychological or sexual harm. They should also provide full institutional support to female reporters, including insurance, sick leave, and other available resources in the event that they are exposed to any physical harm or threat from any of the parties in a conflict zone.

Lastly civic actors, including civil society organizations, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, and informal power structures (which are dominant in some parts in the Middle East) should work to change the prevailing perception of women journalists in local communities, and to raise awareness of the importance of their work in the journalistic field.

Without international pressure, many of the above suggestions will not be taken up. Therefore, I also suggest that the international community hold media organizations that receive international funding to account for implementation.

Media organizations in Syria and other Arabic-speaking Middle Eastern countries tend to rely on international media development organizations for the purposes of funding or/and capacity building. These international organizations have the leverage with those media organizations to require the adoption of codes of ethics, by-laws, and policies that could protect women journalists.

International development organizations could also observe, monitor, and report on the appropriate implementation of adopted codes and policies.

These suggestions would be applicable in many countries affected by conflict and where women's rights are not recognized by society and the law.

Acknowledgments

Rachel Pulfer would like to thank interviewees Maria Ressa, Nana Aba Duncan, Kathy English, Sally Armstrong, Lisa LaFlamme, Rodney Sieh, and Erin Millar for the time they took to share their wisdom and experiences with her on the collection's opening paper. The Canadian Commission for UNESCO and Journalists for Human Rights would like to thank editor Kendall Anderson and JHR's team Zein Almoghraby, Aicha Touré, Nesreen Abusultan, and Moro Siaka Diallo, as well as Karyn Pugliese, Sandra Bashengezi, Nisreen Anabli, Sarada Peri, Ana Serrano and Helen Clark for their insights into the conundrum of what keeps women, and in particular women journalists, back and down rather than leading and in front, and ideas on how to improve the situation for women in media.

Why does this all matter so much? In short, because the leadership of women is important. We have seen stark disparities in outcomes between countries with capable women leaders and countries with strongmen populist leaders on such issues as the government's response to the coronavirus threat. The question of women's advancement in media and in society has the potential to transform the way we live and govern ourselves—for the better for us all.

