In the Crosshairs: The Perils of Environmental Journalism

By Eric Freedman
Professor and Knight Chair in Environmental Journalism
Director, Knight Center for Environmental Journalism
404 Wilson Road #305
Michigan State University
East Lansing MI 48824 US
(517) 355-4729; freedma5@msu.edu

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Abstract

Journalists covering environmental issues around the globe are at heightened risk of murder, arrest assault, threats, self-exile, lawsuits, and harassment because environmental controversies often involve influential business and economic interests, political power battles, criminal activities, and corruption, plus politically, culturally, and economically sensitive issues concerning indigenous rights to land and natural resources. This study uses in-depth interviews to explore such situations, including the psychological effects on these journalists' sense of mission and professional practices.

Introduction

Environmental journalism has been characterized as "one of the most dangerous beats in journalism"; one estimate put the death toll at forty journalists who died between 2005 and September 2016 because of their environmental coverage – a figure that totaled "more than all the journalists killed covering the U.S. war in Afghanistan" (Warren, 2016).

Journalists covering environmental issues are at greater risk of arrest, murder, assault, threats, abduction, self-exile, lawsuits, and harassment than their peers on some other beats. While they confront many of the same perils as colleagues covering other issues, they may risk greater dangers because environmental controversies often involve influential business and economic interests, political power battles, criminal activities, anti-government insurgents, and corruption. Further complications include the ambiguous distinction between "environmental journalist" and "environmental activist" in many countries, and the fact that some stories also involve contentious politically, culturally, and economically sensitive issues concerning indigenous rights to land and natural resources.

While most reported incidents occur in lesser-developed countries, journalists covering environmental controversies in developed countries are targeted too. For example, a study of Finnish journalists identified environmental matters, along with coverage of immigration, racism, religion, and gender equality, as "trigger subjects that generate threats and harassment" (Hiltunen, 2017, p. 69). Interviewees in this study include Global North journalists arrested while reporting on protests again an oil pipeline in the United States and hydraulic fracturing in Canada, as well as those covering toxic dumping, the oil and gas industry, environmental health problems, environment-related corruption, illegal mining, and other environmental topics.

Research question

What are the psychological and professional effects on journalists who have been arrested, attacked, sued, harassed, fired, or otherwise threatened because of their coverage of environmental news?

Prior research

Press rights advocates and defender groups such as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters without Borders (RWB, or Reporters sans Frontières), and human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International monitor incidents of abuse and issue reports, public statements, and protest letters on behalf of imperiled journalists. Most of their activities address problems faced by journalists in general, regardless of the topics they cover. However, RWB issued a 2015 report called "Hostile Climate for Environmental Journalists" highlighting environmental journalists who were murdered[1] or otherwise attacked in Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Egypt, Uzbekistan, and elsewhere. In 2010, the Deutche Welle Global Media Forum included a workshop about risks facing environmental journalists (Smyth, 2010).

There have been studies about the psychological impacts on journalists who have gone through such situations. Ananthan observed that most "exhibit resilience despite repeated exposure to … traumatic events" but said a "significant minority are at risk for long-term psychological problems" (2017, p. 17). Lupis (2005a, 2005b) reported on stress, trauma, and anxiety among post-Soviet journalists in Central Asia and noted a "psychological cost…for practicing their profession"; both those studies addressed journalists in a specific geographical region, not those

[1] Press rights groups and news organizations have reported on a number of journalists murdered because of their environmental coverage in recent years. Victims include Hang Serei Odom (Cambodia, 2012, illegal logging); Taing Try (Cambodia, 2014, illegal logging); Gerardo Orega (Philippines, 2011, mining and gas); Jagendra Singh (India, 2015, illegal mining and land seizures); Mikhail Beketov (Russia, 2013, highway project through a forest); Sandeep Kothari, (India, 2015, illegal mining and quarrying); Suon Chan (Cambodia, 2014, illegal fishing); Chut Wutty (Cambodia, 2012, wine production in protected forest region); Datu Roy Bagtikan Gallego (Philippines, 2011, mining and tribal rights).

covering the environment or any other specific beat. Kurambaev (2018) noted that much of the previous research focused on psychological pressures in war and conflict zones such as Iraq, Mexico, and Pakistan. Some of the literature addresses dangers and psychological effects in what are perceived as "safe" countries such as Australia (e.g., Anderson, 2017). Interestingly, in a study of U.S. journalists, Beam and Spratt found that

> having been in danger had no association with either job satisfaction or perceived workplace morale…. As might be expected, journalists who had been in danger said that they dealt more frequently with traumatized sources or subjects than did journalists who had not been in danger. They also reported feeling better-prepared to deal with those sources or subjects. However, being in danger did not have a significant relationship with career commitment (2009, pp. 431-432).

There have been too few studies about the impacts on journalists who were imprisoned, kidnapped, assaulted, sued, threatened, or harassed from the perspectives of targeted journalists in general, let alone from the perspectives of environmental journalists in particular. Including the voices of journalists is essential to such research. For example, Kurambaev (2018) interviewed 27 journalists from private, independent, and state-owned news organizations in Kyrgyzstan about their use of avoidance strategies and self-censorship to protect themselves from arrests, lawsuits, physical attacks, and other adverse ramifications of practicing their profession. Feinstein and Pavisian (2017) used a website to solicit information from Iranian journalists about such stressors as arrest, torture, assaults, and threats to their families; they found that 78.1 percent of respondents had ceased work on a story due to intimidation, and close to one-third self-medicated with barbiturates to ease their emotional distress. Hughes and Márquez-Ramírez conducted a national survey of Mexican journalists to explore their precautionary and protective risk-avoidance practices; they found that physical insecurity

combined with overlapping economic pressures deter the press from carrying out important public interest functions.

Few studies have delved into what happens to imprisoned journalists after release, such as psychological, emotional, and career impacts. One of them (Freedman, 2017) was based on in-depth interviews with eight journalists who had been jailed from two weeks to more than two years in six countries. Respondents discussed their decisions to return or not to return to journalism, their experience of "being the news instead of reporting the news" (p. 23), and their handling of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and survivor guilt. In another of the few interview-driven studies of journalists who had been imprisoned, Kanver (2015) interviewed six who had been jailed in Turkey between 2008 and 2013; they were among 200 accused by the government of terrorism during that period. Kanver explored how the regime indirectly and directly censors the press, such as interfering with broadcast and print outlets and pressuring editorial staff, media owners, editorial staff, and reporters.

Nor has beat-specific vulnerability of journalists been deeply researched. One exception is a study about sports reporters. Citing a CPJ statistic that 2 percent of journalists killed around the world between 1992 and 2016 covered sports, Sparre noted that reporters on that beat suffered "verbal abuse, assaults, attacks, personal and social media harassment, detention legal pressure, and killings" perpetuated by government and sports club officials, athletes, fans, and coaches (2017, p. 205).

Thus, while international scholarship into journalists' safety and advocacy of journalists' rights is fortunately expanding, (for example, Carlsson and Pöyhtäri, 2017), more work is needed that draws on the experiences of victimized journalists who can provide unique individual perspectives. That is particularly true for environmental journalists whose vulnerability is

exacerbated by the economic, political, and cultural sensitivity of the controversies they cover and by the criminal, indigenous rights, and corruption components of many of those stories.

This study attempts to help close that gap pertaining to the experience of environmental journalists.

Method

This project used documentary material and in-depth semi-structured interviews with present and former journalists who had been assaulted, jailed, sued, threatened, abducted, harassed, fired, or otherwise attacked because of their environmental coverage, and with other experts. Some victims primarily reported on environmental news; others covered environmental controversies as part of a broader portfolio, such as investigative, business, or general assignment reporting. Some were staff members at the time of their situation; others were freelancers.

This study identified potential respondents from multiple sources. Many were identified from: reports, statements, press releases, and other documents issued by international and domestic press rights defender and human rights defender organizations, such as CPJ, RWB, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, or from news articles. Others were identified through their membership in the Society of Environmental Journalists and other professional journalism organizations, as well as by snowball sampling (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004) through referrals from other interviewees. The author initially contacted them by email to solicit their participation. The author interviewed 11 journalist-victims involved in such situations and three other journalists with relevant expertise, and the study does not try to generalize their experiences with those of all journalists targeted for their environmental coverage. However, a small number of cases may permit researchers to associate closely with respondents by using in-depth

interviewing (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). That is an appropriate method in studies such as this that "scrutinize the dynamic qualities of a situation (rather than elucidating the proportionate relationships among its constituents)" (p. 483). Crouch & McKenzie wrote that this kind of interview "target[s] the respondents' perceptions and feelings rather than the social conditions surrounding those experiences: at least, the collection of the interview material and its interpretation and analysis are not primarily directed toward establishing 'objective facts' concerning these conditions" (p. 485). Silverman said the researchers' intent is to ''generate data which give an authentic insight into people's experiences" (1993, p. 91).

Interviews took place by telephone, Skype, or email in February and March 2018. Journalist victims received informed consent information and had the option of being identified or being anonymous in publications; all consented to use of their names and professional affiliations. The author analyzed the interviews by grouping the responses based on common content.

The study also draws on earlier telephone interviews for Freedman (2017) with clinical psychologists Katherine Porterfield and. Hawthorne Smith, who counsel journalists and other torture victims through the Bellevue/New York University Program for Survivors of Torture. Their program has helped journalists from around the world. In addition, the study is informed by documentary research, primarily compiled by press rights and human rights defender organizations, and by the prior research about press constraints and interviews with non-U.S. journalists, journalism faculty, and press rights advocates.

The incidents covered in the interviews involved journalists on five continents. The interviewees were (alphabetical order):

- Keya Acharya (March 11, 2018): The Indian freelance journalist faced a $16.3 million legal notice alleging that she defamed the founder of an export company in her coverage of the Indian rose industry's operations in Africa. The plaintiff never formally took the case to court.
- Tristan Ahtone (March 15, 2018). The Neiman Fellow is a board member of the Native American Journalists Association.
- Augustina Armstrong-Ogbonna (February 13, 2018): The Nigerian radio and online journalist was threatened and harassed while reporting on allegations that an oil and gas company owned by a former national cabinet minister was illegally dredging without an environmental impact assessment or government approval. She now lives in the United States.
- Bram Ebus (March 20, 2018): The Colombia-based Dutch journalist and his companions were detained and interrogated by the National Guard and military intelligence while reporting on illegal mining in indigenous communities in Venezuela.
- Saul Elbein (February 23, 2018): The U.S. freelance journalist who covers international environmental conflict, has interviewed journalists and the families and colleagues of murdered environmental journalists in Cambodia and elsewhere.
- Bartolomaeus Grill (March 1, 2018): The South Africa-based correspondent for *Der Spiegel* and a Swedish freelance photographer were detained by village residents and then by police and threatened by a rhino poaching kingpin in Mozambique while reporting about poaching. They were released after diplomatic intervention.
- Jihan Hafiz (February 13, 2018): The U.S. freelancer was arrested and her equipment seized while covering protests on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota

against the Dakota Access Pipeline. Charges were dismissed. She has also been deported from Canada and Honduras for her work.

- Miles Howe (February 13, 2018): The Canadian journalist for Media Co-Op was arrested three times while covering protests by the Elsipotog First Nation against hydraulic fracturing in New Brunswick. Police also came to his house with warrants and offered him a bribe to tell who had torched construction equipment. Charges were dropped. He is now a Ph.D. student.
- Desislava Leshtarska (March 16, 2018): The Bulgarian newspaper and online journalist was threatened and targeted in a smear campaign for her coverage of a mountain ski resort monopoly situated in a UNESCO-protected area where large-scale environmental violations have occurred.
- Jenni sieh(February 1, 2018): The U.S. freelancer and filmmaker was arrested while covering protests on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation against the Dakota Access Pipeline. She has been arrested or detained by police eight times in total, including twice while covering environmental issues in Honduras and Canada.
- Abeer Saady (February 2, 2018): The Egyptian journalist was physically assaulted by thugs working for a company dumping toxic waste into the Nile River. She later left Egypt and now trains international journalists about safety.
- Bruce Shapiro (February 27, 2018): The executive director of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism is an award-winning reporter on human rights, criminal justice, and politics. The center conducts research and training on the trauma that journalists may suffer. Its work has made significant contributions to the growing body of literature, both professional and

scholarly, about the psychological impacts of repressive techniques on professional journalists.

- Rodney Sieh (February 1, 2018): The Liberian newspaper journalist was jailed for three months for defamation for reporting about a former agriculture minister's involvement with a corrupt financing scheme for treating a parasitic infectious disease, Guinea worm disease. A $1.6 million libel fine was canceled. He left the country to report elsewhere in Africa and the United States, later returning to his newspaper in Liberia.
- Sharon Wilson (February 27, 2018): The U.S. blogger fit the legal definition of journalist under Texas law at the time an energy company sued her for coverage critical of hydraulic fracking.

Findings

Psychological impacts

Research has identified a variety of possible responses to trauma and stress. At one end of the range are psychiatric disorders such as PTSD, depressive disorders, and substance use disorders; those who display resilience fall at the opposite end of the spectrum (Iacoviello and Charney, 2014). Psychologists Smith and Porterfield have described how formerly imprisoned journalists may face a variety of psychological problem, including PTSD and depression (Freedman, 2017); such problems also may affect those who are assaulted, kidnapped, harassed, or otherwise targeted for their reporting. Their capacity to concentrate may be impaired, and they may live in a state of fear of future incidents.

Counseling and therapy

After Grill was threatened, detained, and interrogated while reporting on rhino poaching in Mozambique, the long-time Africa-based foreign correspondent dreamt about the poaching kingpin who threatened him. After a nightmare, he contacted the widow of a man whom the same kingpin had killed. “In front of her he shot her husband in the head,” he recalls. “She said, ‘I’ will never forget those eyes.’ And those eyes were chasing me.” Grill then underwent therapy for the first time in his career. “I had a few sessions with a trauma counselor to get rid of this image of those big eyes. The psychiatrist said you have to diminish this giant into a dwarf.”

However, the reluctance of most interviewed journalists to seek therapy or counseling appears to reflects why Ananthan describes journalism as “a profession in denial” (2017, p. 17), even as some of these journalists acknowledge the psychological price they have paid for their work. For example, Saady says she was not “lucky enough” to have counseling after the experiences of being physically assaulted in Egypt, later covering wars and other conflicts, and having journalist friends killed by ISIS. She did “some self-mitigation,” including returning to school, becoming a trainer on journalist safety, and relying on her religious faith. “The part of Islam that helped me is talking to God.” Monet did not seek therapy after her arrests at Standing Rock and elsewhere but talked over her experiences in detail with friends.

Some of their experiences were haunting. Sieh describes the horrors of three months in a notorious Liberian prison:

> The prison conditions alone, the way people are treated there, are horrible. That alone sickens you, it makes you lose some kind of morale. It’s meant to intimidate, it’s meant to demoralize you. If you don’t have the right people around you, the right setting to survive post-prison, it puts you in a position where you have to think twice about where you live, about your work.

Liberia had only one psychiatrist at the time of his release, he says, and he did not seek therapy. Acharya also cited the absence of counseling services in India:

> Any kind of help for journalists in such situations, especially for freelance journalists, even if they're senior, is non-existent in India. It would certainly have helped me if I did have some counseling, but since there's no such system in this country, it didn't even occur to me to seek help. I wouldn't have known where to look.

For Howe, serious psychological problems followed his multiple arrests and the seizure of his professional equipment, coupled with the death of his partner during the time he was covering the anti-fracking protests in Canada. “I do continue to suffer from psychological impediments related to these arrests and … speaking on this topic usually does trigger difficult emotions for me to deal with,” he wrote in an email (personal communication, February 7, 2018). In the interview, Howe says, “What did it do me? It made me upset, angry. It made me elitist in some sense.” He, too, did not receive therapy until he left journalism more than two years later. “In hindsight I should have. I didn’t have the wherewithal.”

Support and betrayal

Several journalists say the support—psychological, legal, publicity, financial—they received from their news organizations, from colleagues, and from press rights defender groups was important during and after their ordeals.

However, freelancers point out that their lack of an “employer” meant they had no institutional employer support. In fact, Acharya encountered hostility and professional repercussions from Inter Press Service, the news agency she was freelancing for in coverage of the Indian rose industry. She voices a sense of betrayal by her own editor who removed the story and terminated

my association with IPS in 24 hours. He refused to take my calls, also told me… that "his job was on the line" and basically assumed I had written a load of rubbish. It felt really bad to have an editor not just cut me off and leave me to the wolves, but to slam my work.

While feeling abandoned by her freelance employer, she did receive support from London-based Media Legal Defence Initiative, which covered her legal expenses, from editors at several newspapers, and from many senior journalists who covered her case and kept CPJ informed.

Saady, who had been assaulted in Egypt, also complained how journalists who receive threats and make sacrifices are mistreated by their employers: "You can do the story and survive all the harms and the story is not published because that company [which was investigated] is publishing advertising in your own media house."

Shapiro, of the Dart Center, observes that the culture of a news organization is important. Returning to a "supportive newsroom" after a traumatic incident "is protective." That is true especially for environmental and social justice reporters "who are drenched in highly toxic material all of the time." If they come back to a "hostile or chaotic" newsroom, "in a sense the social contract out there is broken. When a newsroom mirrors that, it can be damaging."

Resilience

Resilience is generally defined "as adaptive characteristics of an individual to cope with and recover from (and sometimes even thrive after) adversity" (Iacovillo & Charney, 2014, p. 2) or as "…the capacity for successful adaption, positive functioning, or competence…despite high-risk status, chronic stress, or following prolonged or severe trauma" (Anastova, 2014, 6).

Some trauma sufferers undergo post-traumatic growth, or PTG: "Up to 70% of the people who suffered trauma report that they still see at least one positive outcome of that negative event in

their lives" (Anastova, 2014, p. 8). "PTG can include changing one's life goals, better relationship with others, as well as change in religious or spiritual beliefs" and "entails an increased level of psychosocial function compared to before the traumatic event."

Formerly jailed journalists whom Porterfield's and Smith's center worked with at the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture displayed high resiliency despite "enormous barriers" in getting back on their feet and returning to their work. "Every one clearly met the criteria for PTSD, and many were suffering from other physical ailments, as well as depression and mood disorders," he says. "In spite of this, you still see people saying, "'I've got to get back out there.'"

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma's Shapiro says,

> Overall, journalists are a pretty resilient tribe. Their rates of PTSD and depression are comparable, 13-15 percent, to first responders. This again associated with a sense of mission, a sense of training. With environmental of social justice reporters, you're often dealing with a higher-than-average sense of mission and purpose and a higher level of skill. I think that's protective.

This study found several examples of such a rebounding, of recommitment to their mission as journalists in general and as environmental journalists in particular. For Sieh, prison in Liberia failed to accomplish what authorities hoped for: "to keep me silent." To the contrary, he says, "it really elevated our work to an international level that we would never have had if I weren't arrested. It made us stronger, bigger, better…We keep the pressure on the government."

Similarly, Leshtarska says that threats of a smear campaign for reporting about environmental violations by a Bulgarian ski resort "didn't make me 'less aggressive' but more aware of what

these people are capable of and what their methods are. Now I knew what to expect. They strengthened my belief in the need of high quality independent journalism."

After Ebus's release from detention in Venezuela, he resumed his investigative reporting project about illegal mining. "I never felt so motivated to continue with this research… For myself, it got more motivated after the detention," he says. He also says he suffered "very little" emotional impact from his detention and interrogation while reporting in Venezuela but acknowledges that his conscience bothers him for exposing his detained companions—a driver, a local indigenous leader, and a human rights worker for the Roman Catholic Church—to danger, although they all were fully aware of the potential risks.

Career and professional impacts

An incident or attack can may an immediate negative effect on a journalist's work, as happened to Jihan Hafiz when police seized her camera when she was arrested at Standing Rock. "They confiscated my livelihood and my ability to work. There was a lot going on around me. I could only report on the telephone or write an article but I couldn't photograph it, and that's what I do." Although she got her camera back, she was threatened with being held in jail until trial if she went too near the pipeline project's construction equipment. "It just made me more cautious about my surroundings and prevented me from going closer to the action… It altered my ability to work. I was concerned about being arrested again. What if they confiscated my equipment again? Or erased my video?"

In the longer-term, their experiences dramatically affected the career paths of some interviewees. For example, even before receiving the former Nigerian minister's threats over her investigation of illegal dredging, the United Nations Correspondents Association recognized Armstrong-

Ogbonna's courageous reporting: she "braves dangers to report on Nigeria's coastal communities ravaged by conflict and degrading environment that affect development and human lives" (BellaNaija.com, 2015). After being threatened, tracked by state security forces, and accused by one of her news directors of "being paid by foreign people to make my country not produce oil," she left journalism and her country. Now living in the United States, she says, "I've done my piece for the world. I've done my piece for the environment… Nobody came to my rescue."

For those who stay in journalism, the experiences can affect their ability to do their jobs. For example, Acharya whose investigation of India's rose industry sparked legal action, says:

> I got a sort of mental block, after that (legal) notice, for a long period. I couldn't write any more. In fact, I've not been able to recover my spate and my speed of work since then. I felt tired of chasing field stories—in any case I had no regular publication after that, and I didn't have the energy to build up a relationship all over again somewhere else. But what I did do was turn to training/ teaching/organising and guiding journalists (media fellowships etc.).

Before she left journalism, Armstrong-Ogbonna also found assignments had dried up. She expected a lot of colleagues to give her work but most didn't.

Journalists who've undergone imprisonment, retaliatory litigation, or attacks may discover that sources are understandably reluctant to cooperate with them, especially in authoritarian countries where journalists are closely monitored (e.g., Freedman, 2017). In this new study, one journalist declined to answer when asked whether such a personal experience had an impact on that interviewee's sources.

Discussion and implications

Although each interviewed journalist's experiences were unique, commonalities emerged from the analysis that are relevant not only to individual environmental journalists at risk but also to news organizations, mental health professionals, press and human rights defender NGOs, journalism educators, and governments.

Ethical issues

Saady, who was assaulted in Egypt, says, "I believe in the environment but I am not an activist… I am a journalist who believes in the environment. Being an activist is a tempting thing, I know. I realized that crossing that line for me was going to make me be classified, and I don't want to be classified." Her position reflects the predominantly Western expectation that journalists maintain objectivity in their work—even when covering a topic they feel passionate about—and avoid conflicts of interest.

Yet scholars and journalism professionals have long acknowledged that ethics standards, expectations, and on-the-ground realities differ from country to country and from time to time (e.g., Jones 1980). Many subsequent studies have explored such differences and the reasons for them (e.g., Limor & Himelboim, 2006; Hanitzsch et al., 2011). Those differences include demarcations among "objective" journalism, advocacy journalism, "citizen journalism," and advocacy. They also reflect differences among media platforms (newspaper, magazine, broadcast, online, social media) and media ownership (for-profit, nonprofit, government, oppositional).

Freelance journalist Saul Elbein, who covers international environmental conflict, describes how the boom in illegal logging and deforestation "has turned the environmental beat into a new sort of conflict journalism." The murder victims have overwhelmingly been local reporters … covering illegal mining or logging. They are largely independent, poorly educated, untrained, and despised by their nations' Establishment Media. Reporting on a violent, corrupt frontier, they are never sure when they'll cross a line and end up dead. Their lives in their hands, they head into the woods (Elbein, 2016).

Elbein traveled through rural Cambodia, where local journalists covering illegal logging have been killed by gun and axe, to interview journalists and their surviving colleagues and relatives. He notes that professional ethical values are different than in the West and that it is not uncommon for journalists there to accept money from sources and from loggers. He describes a comment from a local journalist that just because the way of doing journalism in Cambodia is not up to U.S. ethical standards "doesn't mean they're not real journalists."

> They seem pretty mission-driven. That was "we will stand up to local power brokers. We will stand up to the army. We will stand up for forest communities but we'll also be able to achieve some power." Life in rural Cambodia and other rural areas is really hard and there aren't many avenues for addressing it. Corruption and impunity are so institutionalized…that journalism creates one possible channel for doing something, and if you can make a few bucks from it, great.

In parts of the world where little or no independent professional journalism takes place, bloggers may fill some of the informational gap, and it may be difficult to differentiate "blogger" from "journalist." In Vietnam, for example, which lacks a free press, the government charged a blogger with trying to overthrow the regime, stripped him of his citizenship, and deported him;

among Pham Minh Hoang's articles that offended authorities were ones about environmental degradation (CPJ, 2017).

Another implication of this study is that the unwillingness or inability of trained journalists to cover environmental controversies in places of peril or to access credible news sources needed in remote and indigenous areas will lead to more activists and bloggers "reporting" the new—often with no background in established professional and ethical standards. As Smyth (2010) observed, "Environmental reporters are more often silenced quietly through economic pressure… The pressure may be so great on traditional journalists … that bloggers may emerge as the chroniclers doing the best reporting."

That said, bloggers also can serve as important news providers in countries such as the United States where independent professional journalists do cover the environment. Texas blogger Wilson, who was sued by an energy company, sees herself as providing such service. "I consider myself a journalist. I have a blog… I do original investigations," she says, adding that she fits her state law's definition of a journalist as "anyone who informs the public by doing journalism and makes part of their income by doing that." She continues, "I'm a resource and the [news] media actually comes to me for information. I inform the public and do these investigations but I know I'm just a little blog here. I turn my investigation over to them and they write a big story, and sometimes they credit me."

Indigenous-environmental issues

Krøvel (2017, p. 191) pointed out a nexus between journalists and indigenous rights in describing how South American indigenous journalists play an increasingly vital role in uncovering the vast legal and illegal exploitation of natural resources, forests, and land there. That research

illuminates the intersection of anti-journalist violence, environmental journalism, "indigenous journalism," natural resource issues, and the sometimes-blurred dividing line between "environmental journalist" and "environmental activist." The study used the murder of an "indigenous environmentalist" in Honduras to shed light on "the problems of demarcating the border between journalists and non-journalists" (p. 195); the victim was simultaneously a leader in a grassroots anti-dam campaign, co-founder of an indigenous rights organization, and the founder and operator of three radio stations. Based on interviews with indigenous and community journalists in Colombia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador, Krøvel noted that "most 'indigenous journalists' prefer to be referred to as 'communicators' instead of 'journalists'" (p. 192). In much of the continent, "recognition as journalists is crucial for the right to protection, for gaining access to the airwaves[,] as well as numerous other issues related to freedom of expression" (p. 196).

Monet, who was arrested at Standing Rock, has covered other stories rooted in that nexus, including deforestation and logging in a tribal area in Brazil's Amazon region. "Most times I'm with indigenous people [on such stories] and I see things through their eyes."

Howe, who was arrested covering a First Nations protest against fracking, says, "When I got into journalism, it wasn't my intention to pick up the Eastern Canadian indigenous beat. I was interested in environmental problems." As he became acquainted with members of the local indigenous community "it became clear there was an environmental component as well" to those stories.

That nexus is evident in the 2011 murder of Datu Roy Bagtikan Gallego, a radio commentator and tribal president in the Philippines. As the International Federation of Journalists (2011) reported, he had frequently criticized mining operations and made broadcasts in defense of tribal

rights. It is also evident in the arrest of tribal journalist Somaru Nag in India; he reported on rural issues such as development and access to electricity and water (CPJ, 2016).

That nexus also connects with ethical issues, as Tristan Ahtone, of the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA), points out: "We saw that clearly in Standing Rock. With NAJA, we had to put out ethical guidelines for journalists. We saw it mostly with young Native reporters who were happy to blow the [ethical] line and didn't see any problem with that." The reasons were partly training and partly cultural. "A lot of it is having a different world view. In NAJA, we follow SPJ (Society of Professional Journalists) protocols and ethics but feel there is an increased need to indigenize that, for lack of a better word, can accomplish multiple journalistic traditions."

The vulnerability of environmental journalists to violence, retaliation, obstruction, and abuse of power is disturbing, as is the fact that those responsible often operate with impunity. Meanwhile, there seems to be less awareness of that vulnerability in environmental coverage than in what are perceived as higher-risk beats such as organized crime and drugs, war, and corruption.

Areas for future research

This study involved a variety of journalists covering a variety of environmental issues in a variety of developed and lesser-developed countries. Many factors shaped their experiences, including the type of media organizations they reported for, the government in power, national laws and regulations regarding the press and the environment, their gender, length of time in the profession, and the nature of the controversy. Those arrested and jailed were held for differing amounts of time under different conditions. Those who were assaulted, sued, threatened,

abandoned by their employers suffered different types of physical, psychological, financial, and professional repercussions.

We need additional studies of the effects of these types of mistreatment on the work of these journalists, their peers, their newsroom supervisors and media outlet owners, their families, their audiences, and their news sources. Among the questions needing further examination: How did these experiences impact their approach to reporting, both immediately and in the longer term? How did they deal with sources afterwards, especially sources with good reason to fear for their own wellbeing? How did their editors and news directors subsequently treat them in terms of assignments, play for their stories, and salaries?

On a practical level, the findings raise questions of whether press rights groups need to develop different strategies to successfully protect and advocate for environmental journalists and to prevent future abuses. If so, what might those strategies look like? In addition, the findings suggest that more environmental journalists need the type of safety training that many war, foreign, and conflict journalists now receive. Professional organizations—both international ones such as the Society of Environmental Journalists and national ones such as the Brazilian Network of Environmental Journalism—could provide leadership in such endeavors.

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