Public violence against journalists and media
Introduction

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rganizations like the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) have established that violence against journalists continues to escalate around the world. IFJ's Anthony Bellanger and Maria José Braga from the FENAJ (National Federation of Brazilian Journalists) address the issue in these pages. Journalists are killed, kidnapped, injured, threatened, assaulted, intimidated, harassed and insulted for the work they do, their investigations, for belonging to a so-called elite, for their political ideologies or simply for being a journalist: a hack trafficker in fake news and a shill for deep-state media.

Violence against journalists is nothing new. It has been around in various iterations for decades: harsh criticism of the profession, media headquarters ransacked and destroyed, journalists considered bargaining chips or a means to apply pressure during periods of conflict, or during political, economic and underworld turmoil. War correspondents are the most mediatized victims (Tumber, 2006), but this should not overshadow the violence local journalists experience in conflict zones (Palmer, 2019), or while investigating organized crime, drug trafficking or criminal economic and political activities. This violence against journalists by citizens and institutions is recorded, cataloged and denounced. It is also the subject of many studies on the various levels of violence in the Middle East, in North America (González de

Bustamante & Relly, 2016), Central America (Benítez, 2017) and Africa (Frère, 2015). The profession is under siege and violence against journalists continues in its many forms (Brambila & Hughes, 2019). Some attack press freedom and freedom of speech (Badran, 2017) and have become global human rights issues (Relly & González de Bustamante, 2017). Others expose gender (Sreberny, 2014) and racial (Louback, 2018) disparities in the acts and representations of the violence that reflect the ideological and political contexts that condone the violence, when not actively promoting it.

Nerone's work (2008) has distilled down a set of factors that can serve to ascertain the likelihood of this violence taking place: its prevalence in the society or political system (cultural norms), the level of professionalization of the news media and journalists (professional norms) and how useful violent acts are in shaping public opinion. According to Nerone, this violence always has a strong symbolic element, which may, in fact, be central to the perpetrators' goals. This occupational jeopardy is often studied from two perspectives: before-the-fact consideration may be given to the security of journalists in a particular geographic area (for the Arab world, for example, see Hard, 2019), measures to be taken for risk evaluation (Torsner, 2017) or how security protocols should be taught journalists in training (see the work on Pakistan from Jamil, 2018); or after-the-fact, through public denunciation of violence against journalists, or through international professional solidarity in the vein of the organization Forbidden Stories[1], which takes up the investigative work of journalists who are killed and silenced (Konow-Lund & Olsson, 2020).

Within the community, in newsrooms and professional journalist groups, violence also garners attention and provokes discussions on work conditions and expectations and how, as a group, journalists feel about their freedom to act (González de Bustamante & Relly, 2016b) and the public image they reflect, convey and construct collectively. The violence journalists endure at public protests has also compelled them to question how citizens view their work. The Gilets Jaunes movement in France, for one, was loud and clear in its criticism (Sebbah et al, 2018) of journalists and provoked a rethinking of professional practices and how the public sees the media ecosystem and journalism (Joux, 2019). Public aggression towards journalists is quite widespread. With respect to China, Fang (2017) points out that media coverage of public health issues must contend not only with state repression of journalists, but also pressure and threats from sources who, as a group, tend to blame journalists for their troubles. In a sharply polarized political context, as was the case during the last presidential election in Brazil, some journalists are victims of online violence from political supporters and par-

ties through "bots" and false profiles on social media (Ramos & Saad, 2020).

In some countries, the violence shifting online first manifested as state surveillance of journalists. The scope has widened from physical threats in the field to online trolling, hacking of news professionals' computers, geo-tracking and leaking personal data[2]. But the most discussed and heavily mediatized issue of the moment is anti-journalist and anti-media hate speech and online harassment of professionals. In many contexts and countries, journalists have suffered widespread abuse. A study of Swedish journalists by Löfren Nillson and Ornebring (2016) showed that a third of interviewees had experienced an increase in the volume and means of harassment and had suffered consequences as a result of this intimidation. The study demonstrates that these acts of violence can be considered threats to the institutional standing of media, as the professionalism of journalists is often targeted, not just their ideology or cultural group. But they also single out types of harassment that directly attack immigration, multicultural societies and gender equality. "Readers' comments, social media, and email, in this sense, represent platforms where different forms of cyberbullying can be used as tactics to force the media to include what is perceived as excluded ideas and groups" (Löfren Nillson & Ornebring, 2016: 888). This ideological pressure often goes hand-in-hand with attacks that go beyond criticism of journalistic work (the case in France) and include radical positions more often than not associated with the far right (Mercier & Amigo, 2021).

But cyberbullying goes beyond applying political or ideological pressure; it is also very personal. Female or minority journalists, or those working on subject matter of concern to the far right, are likeliest to be targeted, resulting in a type of populist or societal censorship (Waisbord, 2020). Female journalists are victimized most often (Posetti & Storm, 2018). Numerous recent academic studies addressing cyberbullying and the relationship with audiences (Lewis, Zamith & Coddington, 2020) – female sportscasters are a case in point (Everbach, 2018; Antunovic, 2019) – reveal that the situation is widespread transnationally (Chen et al, 2020). These attacks are perpetrated by consumers and sources alike and solicit testimonials and censure from female journalists (the recent Belgian documentary on cyberbullying of women in media, #Sale pute (#FatUglySlut), comes to mind). But these condemnations remain infrequent, and this violence often results in female media workers withdrawing from social media, and in some cases even changing their area of specialization.

Online violence will be the topic of an upcoming issue of Sur le journalisme-About Journalism-Sobre

jornalismo, and will include a look at systemic abuse – the kind suffered by journalists in the newsroom itself. Here, too, abuse is varied: hierarchic, legal, economic, relational, sexist, homophobic, racist, or related to handicaps. The present issue on public assaults on journalists and media, however, will not focus on the daily manifestations of this abuse as much as examine its overarching significance. Despite considering themselves vital to democratic governance (and sometimes still considered so by the wider public) and the link between current events and what and how citizens view them, journalists have not been spared criticism, and online and physical assaults seem to have devolved into a powerful political weapon to construct and deconstruct reality, or at the very least muddy the waters. In the short term, Reilly, Veneti and Lilleker (2020[3]) are concerned about the increasing violence against photojournalists, camera operators and Black journalists covering #BlackLivesMatter protests. They put the blame squarely on Donald Trump, who was president at the time, and his attacks against media, and other politicians' silence. Political polarization (for the situation in Brazil, see Rios & Bronosky, 2019) leads to an increase in violence against media as a form of protest: journalists become targets and enemies (regardless of their affiliation sometimes). Such a political context engenders an increased permissiveness towards abuse (as manifest in states' recourse to violence, for example. See Blazquez, 2020) and cannot be seen as distinct from the precarity of many social groups, a society deeply divided on what are the most pressing threats and vulnerabilities (climatic and other) and widespread uncertainty. In this context, the journalistic profession suffers abuse because media not only showcases violence (sometimes ad nauseam), it also contributes to it: keeping some topics and populations invisible; the choice of words and expressions used to describe certain events or realities; and the hybridization of the forms of journalism and the status of journalists are all precursors to violence perpetrated by media, which select, exclude and mislead at times. Any understanding of public violence against media and journalists is incomplete without considering the dialectical relationship between bully and victim. In this sense, journalism is both abused and abuser, but it may also ward off or thwart certain forms of violence. This thematic issue will attempt, however modestly, to tug on some of these threads.

Translation: Helmut Obermeir

Notas

[1] https://forbiddenstories.org/

[2] Henrichsen, J.R., Betz, M., & Lisosly, J. M. (2015). *Building digital safety for journalism: A survey of selected issues.* UNESCO Publishing.

[3] Reilly, P., Veneti, A., & Lilleker, D. (2020). Violence against journalists is not new, but attacks on those covering# BlackLives- Matter protests is a bad sign for US press freedom. *USApp–American Politics and Policy Blog.* http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/105538/1/usappblog_2020_06_12_violence_against_journalists_is_not_new_but.pdf

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