

## THREAT FROM WARRING PARTIES: A CHALLENGE FOR LOCAL JOURNALISTS OF DISTRICT SWAT COVERING INTERNAL CONFLICT

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**Received:** 03 November, 2023 **Revised:** 20 December, 2023 **Accepted:** 24 December, 2023 **Published:** 31 December, 2023

### ABSTRACT

This research investigates the challenges and threats local journalists faced during the militant conflict in the Swat district of Pakistan. Through interviews with journalists in the region, the study explores how they navigate the complexities of reporting traumatic events, and threats while grappling with physical and emotional stress. Employing Pierre Bourdieu's Field Theory, the research analyzes journalists' strategies to counter threats from warring parties remain safe in the conflict zones, and ensure the journalistic principles. Using concepts like Habitus, and Doxa, the study situates journalists within the volatile social landscape to highlight the relationship of their professional and personal spheres. Despite possessing cultural and social capital, journalists face significant risks to their safety while fulfilling their reporting duties in dangerous environments.

Keywords: Local journalism, internal conflict, field, habitus, capital, Threats, pressure, routine

### INTRODUCTION

Conflict reporting requires professional excellence, valuable local knowledge and contacts, in-depth knowledge of the armed actors, and, most importantly, bravery. Local journalists, local to the site of conflict, entail a different approach and challenges to performing their professional duties. This paper examines the journalists' practices and challenges they face in the line of duty.

Local journalists covering their "own" conflict study and the analysis of the reflections of these journalists is a contribution to knowledge. Many academics and war journalists wrote researchers and autobiographies covering wars from a "distance" or visiting the conflict zones briefly. However, it is vital to understand the local journalists' response and experiences with the "insider" lens. This research thoroughly debated the local journalism environment and the journalists' criticism of their role and approach practiced while performing their duty during the "war on terror."

Researchers (Højby & Ottosen, 2019, Jungblut & Hoxha, 2017, Cozma, 2015) have examined the relationship between local reporters to reveal how local stakes are represented in global media in a conflict scenario. However, a focus is still missing on the structure of local journalism and how local relations of journalism transform in reporting the "war on terror" in the post-9/11 context. For instance, local reporters in the war-torn valley of Swat, Pakistan, are given bodyguards by the state to carry out their routine reporting assignments.

The safety issue of the local journalists exposed them to the warring parties, including the state, which increased threats to journalists and their friends and families. The state threatened the local journalists and provided them with particular security to militarize local journalism and expose them to militants through this preferential treatment [allowing them to carry guns or giving them special security personnel]. The battle over news stories in war is part of more significant societal conflicts and inequalities (Melucci, 1996), the complicity of journalists could

not be limited to perennial poverty or systemic violence only. Local Journalism in a state of war is worth investigating to help develop an understanding not only of the local reporters' subjectivity, professionalism, and contribution but also of those conditions under which they carry out reporting on systemic violence against their community, including their own immediate and distant family members (I. Ashraf, 2018) as is the case of the Swat conflict. Living with guns or accepting one from the state to protect oneself or one's family looks strange for a journalist, but it is understandable. Nevertheless, how this militarism affects a journalist is rooted in examining the structure of local journalism and its relationship to militarized violence at the state level and beyond.

#### Problem Statement

This research investigates the influences on journalistic working conditions in the Swat district, where local news media reported the 2006–2012 armed conflict. While applying qualitative research techniques, the aim is to find out how and to what extent local journalism was in the crosshairs of the warring parties during the conflict and what kind of journalistic practices emerged from compulsions of the war and traditional ways of doing local journalism. In other words, this research investigates the threats, pressure, and challenges reporters in Swat faced during the height of the conflict from 2006 to 2012 to understand their routine practices and approaches.

Developing insight into local journalism practices is important because it will highlight one of the most neglected areas of journalism where the lives of journalists are at stake. Local reporters find it hard to safely fulfill their tasks without proper training in a violent conflict zone. The warring parties have threatened and killed many journalists on charges of biased reporting. It was difficult for these journalists to meet such expectations during a war when they found their people, among whom they lived, under attack. These questions force us to know more deeply about these journalists and how they respond to the threats from warring parties.

The most critical aspect of this inquiry is to take local journalism as the focal point before examining the structure of local journalism in its relationship with global journalism.

Local journalists were sometimes threatened and killed for lack of objectivity while living inside the conflict zone. Therefore, this study not only

evaluates the broader impact of conflict on local journalism as well as journalists in conflict areas, but it also is one of the first such studies where local journalism is examined in its relationship to those threatening challenges that media workers, including journalists, faced locally in reporting on the 'war on terror' in Swat.

During the height of militancy in Swat (February 2009), local journalist Musa Khankhail was killed when he reported a military action and claimed in his TV report that "around hundred" militants were killed in the attack. Other TV channels used the word "numerous" instead of an exact figure in their news reports. In such situations, what options local journalists have to protect themselves are always significant. How can journalism in Swat cope with the profession's demand and maintain credibility living in a conflict zone known for the "war on terror"?

Many academics have tried to examine local Journalists in field settings by focusing on different conflict areas worldwide. Working conditions of the local journalists and news practices (I. Ashraf, 2018; Boczkowski et al., 2018) of local media practitioners have also been researched. However, there is a lack of insider academic views. Most of these academics visit the conflict zone, meet locals, conduct interviews with journalists who cover the local conflicts, and use their samples as a narrative to analyze them to arrive at specific findings.

#### Objectives of the Study

The objectives for this research are as follows:

- To evaluate the impact of threats to the local journalists in the conflict zone of Swat
- To examine the relationship between militarized violence [war on terror] and threats to local journalists in coverage of internal conflict

#### Literature Review

Some studies (Barrios & Miller, 2021; Jamil, 2018) found that the local population is affected by violence, and local journalists face pressure and threats from different sides in a conflict. Others (Bergen, 2009; Carpentier & Trioen, 2010; Hoiby & Garrido, 2020; Lynn, 2020; Mack, 1975; Taylor, 1992) argue that journalists in conflict scenarios faced different restrictions in access to the war zone and availed little support from the State authorities. Due to this, they also faced pressures from the warring parties local to the site of violence, who are generally held responsible for perpetrating violence on local people. Such barriers— such as lack of

accessibility and official cooperation—make it hard for local journalists to verify the news, which puts their safety at risk. This outline aims to raise the need to offer a thematic overview of the available literature to examine how scholars define the term 'local' in journalism and its relationship to journalists in different contexts and conflict zones. Local journalists' dangers and challenges remain untheorized, reinforcing the argument that they should be under consideration by media researchers (Garnham, 1979; Mosco, 2011).

The journalist may experience pressure to support one faction over another, such as the government (establishment) or the insurgency, particularly in an internal conflict (civilians attacking the military). Many academics have tried to examine local Journalists in field settings by focusing on different conflict areas worldwide. Understanding the working conditions of local journalists and news practices (I. Ashraf, 2018) is vital to local media practitioners.

A study titled 'Tribal Journalists Under Fire' conducted in the ex-FATA of Pakistan by Syed Irfan Ashraf and Lisa Brooten pointed out that local journalists in tribal areas are the only independent information sources on FATA. However, their working conditions are highly problematic (U. A. Pate & Idris, n.d., 2017). Local power brokers treat local journalists' labor as a capitalist appendage and deny them their democratic political rights, especially the right to free expression. Any local journalist in FATA is expected to cover terrorism because they are expected to be qualified by the national media. The authors identified three main issues concerning the reporters' reporting challenges from a conflict zone in the study. First, impunity has given rise to risks that turn journalism into a tightrope walk. Impunity is reinforced by institutional apathy with local power brokers to survive in the conflict zone, sometimes strategically cooperating with militants. The state's institutional passivity toward the militants negatively impacts local journalists' mental health. Second, the pervasiveness of direct (untraceable call, email, or SMS) and indirect (contacting family members, colleagues) threats means journalists cannot reach independent decisions without fearing for their lives and their family's safety. Finally, persons in authority put much emotional stress on journalists, including killing their colleagues and threatening to harm their families. Reporters discuss the death of a colleague in gatherings and warn each other to avoid such

stories, which cause the killing of their colleague. All of these factors influence reporters' choices about what to report.

Another study on 'Safety concerns in the Nigerian Media' by Lilian Ngusuur pointed out that over seven years of the Boko Haram crisis, the media practitioners faced hurdles; they were attacked by both terrorists and the military, who consider journalism as an obstacle to their duties. In the study, seventy-four percent of journalists face threats in their duty. This challenging situation compels media organizations not to send their reporters to conflict zones but instead to rely on local sources and security versions. This organizational move has another aspect of the working conditions of a local journalist covering the conflict from the inside.

Safety of journalists and local journalism direct exposure to violence

Lisosky and Henrichsen (2011) noted that local media workers have regularly been killed, threatened, and abducted while reporting conflict situations. Such risks are mainly because of the critical nature of these reporters' work to explore risky news. The risk involved in reporting a conflict scenario to the lives of local journalists is a matter of concern in academic and non-academic literature.

World-leading organizations for journalists' welfare insist on journalist safety as a priority rather than news. The 2017/2018 UNESCO World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development Report mentioned that 530 journalist killings were registered in 2012–2016, of which 92% were local journalists (UNESCO, 2018). Local reporters face major threats, including death, when revealing major corruption, drug mafia, identifying the people involved, and organized crime. Journalists receive death threats and routine matters for conflict reporters, but threatening families affect their routine practices (Høiby & Ottosen, 2019).

Despite the vital role of local journalists in the context of locally triggered armed conflict, the safety of journalists is always at stake. Some researchers, including Puddephatt (2006), argue that local journalism is difficult. Instead, the local media and working journalists associated with local media outlets, comparatively, faced multiple pressures and threats due to their direct exposure to violent or armed conflict than those foreign reporters (Al Ashry, 2019) who are covering the same conflict from a distance. Journalists' lack of safety and security is even more of a problem for the media and

the public. Eventually, these are hindrances to freedom of expression and freedom of the press, preventing the public from getting first-hand information about the conflict. In a conflict zone, according to Nohrstedt and Ottosen (2014), second-hand sources put journalists' safety at stake, and to avoid such issues and threats, a journalist needs to acquire some basic skills in conflict reporting.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research study on the working conditions and practices of local journalists in Swat covering the Taliban militancy is theoretically linked with French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1930-2002) field theory. The field theory of Bourdieu (1998) focuses on how the positions and powers of individuals posted in interlinked fields determine the available opportunities for individuals. Any field has a different structure with autonomy in social space, having specific regulations and authority. This theory will help understand how journalists cover the violent conflict in district Swat and military operations and define their role in journalism.

Further, field theory examines how individuals construct social fields, and then such fields affect [other] individuals. Hence, like the market and other fields of life, the social fields are environments where the race between individuals and groups occurs. Pierre Bourdieu (2005) mentioned that a field is a setting where agents and their social positions are located.

Journalism is a disciplinary and practical field with its settings, such as beats, routines, conditions, and practices. It is essential to know that these settings work according to the rules of the field. In other words, journalism, as a field, allows a journalist to follow specific rules as a code of conduct. The position of each particular agent (read journalist) in the field (read journalism) is a result of interaction between the specific rules (code of conduct), the agent's habitus (disposition or cultural and professional upbringing), and the agent's capital (experience). Each field has its own internal rules, guiding how people can enter that field, progress within it, or be rewarded (Dickinson & Memon, 2012).

To examine the threats and pressure on local journalism and its role in a state of war, the utility of field theory is of value for this research as the differentiated positioning of an individual local journalist in the journalistic field. The challenge of

reporting from the site of conflict is how to add objectivity and neutrality and avoid the threat.

Pierrie Bourdieu's 'Habitus'

The concept of habitus connects the individual level (agency) and the societal level (structure) by capturing internalized beliefs and dispositions that individuals acquire through socialization and accumulated capital. The relations between habitus and position within a field shape agency while, at the same time, actors lean more towards positions that best mirror their dispositions. Habitus's accumulated experiences in the field create a deeper understanding of the 'journalistic game' (Willig, 2013). The habitus is so ingrained that people often mistake their feel of the game as natural when it has been, in fact, culturally shaped. Bourdieu (1977) commonly uses sports analogies to explain the habitus, such as how baseball players know when to swing at a fastball without thinking about it consciously. As professionals in any field proceed throughout their careers, they tend to develop predispositions of what should be expected within the field. The greater their capital, in this case, experience, the more adept and creative journalists tend to be in 'integrating past experiences' as a matrix of 'perceptions, appreciations, and actions' that are used at every moment and 'make possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks' (Bourdieu, 1977). Habitus indicates the degree to which journalists have a script they follow; once they know the script, they can improvise on reporting decisions at the moment.

### **Research Methodology**

This research focuses more on the local journalists who produce news than the 24/7 corporate media and the internal situation of these journalists in a conflict scenario. The research question guiding this study is determining what conditions journalists face and make decisions during an armed conflict. How local journalists react and perceive their professional performance.

Local reporters and journalists working in District Swat are the population for this research.

The researcher selected the local journalists' members of local press clubs believed to be 'credible' and have at least twelve years of experience in the field. Each participant had a coded IP prefix (Interview Participant), followed by the number assigned to each participant (e.g., IP 1, IP 2, IP 3).

An in-depth qualitative methodology for data collection has opted to understand the dynamics of



local journalists working during conflicts. Thematic analysis (TA) approach is used to learn from qualitative data about people's beliefs, values, and knowledge. Further, this strategy identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns (themes) within the data (Braun et al., 2014).

### **Analysis: Threats Towards Journalists**

Threats to journalists in conflict emerged as another major theme. Local journalists in Swat faced multiple threats and immense pressure during the "war on terror" from 2006 to 2012. Progressive journalists committed to social duty and getting more significant threats frequently leave the valley (IP1, IP7, IP10, and IP14). Limited traveling, armed bodyguards, and receiving regular threats become routine aspects of conflict journalists' lives in Swat. IP4 reported on militants' various activities in Chuprial and Matta, including the looting of a bank, extortion of local businesses, kidnappings, and entering local houses without proper permission. The journalist received a threatening text message on his mobile and left Swat. Local journalists who left Swat Valley during the conflict and stayed in safe zones worked freely. These journalists used different datelines and credit lines and reported every event to their media outlets. They avoided any threat while those close to the war zones took extra measures to remain safe and do their reporting.

Local journalists believed that publishing a story with the version of only one group resulted from threats the journalist received. If a story is published without a military version, journalists receive a direct or indirect threat from army personnel (IP7). The direct or indirect threats by the army and Taliban affected journalists' choices of story angle selection and compromised other journalism principles.

Constant monitoring of information published in local media by the armed forces and multiple complaints towards journalists regarding military and militants' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with news content have become direct threats to journalists (Reporters without Borders, 2010).

In a conflict situation, threats to journalists had become the most practiced instrument to pressure and silence the press and compel the journalists to practice self-censorship. Informing family members and friends is the most common method stated by the respondents in this study. Besides, telephone calls and text messages are mediums for threats in conflict zones. IP16 expressed his most profound concern

that threats through family members were alarming and greatly impacted journalists' fear. However, Mullah Fazalullah, through illegal FM radio transmissions, threatened the journalists, lawyers, police, army, barbers, and females.

During the data collection process, the researcher silently listened to the stories of local journalists' conflict reporting, paying attention to their feelings of despair and hope. On many occasions, I discovered severe fear of danger, threats that their families are in dangerous situations, and complex personal relationships.

In the preceding section, the sub-themes are; i) reasons for being threatened, ii) threat of field jealousy iii) lack of training as threat, and iv) strategy to counter the threat.

### **Reasons behind Threats**

Mullah Radio was a continuous source of information for journalists in Swat. The interviewees claimed that they listened to the Mullah Radio regularly, first for information purposes and secondly to know whom they threatened through the illegal FM radio transmission. Local journalists faced death threats regularly and were regularly monitored by the government's officials and intelligence agencies (Jamil, 2020). When the government banned the coverage of TTP and its allied wings in national and regional press, the militants started threatening the local journalists. When the government becomes authoritative and monopolizes power, the media focuses only on using the government's voice to be safe from liability and threats from officials (Herman, 2000). IP3 describes the reasons for threats from militants and the military;

It was tough for the Taliban once the government banned their coverage. They start threatening us. Why do you call us terrorists, and why 'dead' instead of 'shaheed? Media organization policy was clear. They supported security forces and presented the militants negatively. Editorial judgment in the newsrooms puts local journalists in hot water (IP3).

Both parties harassed us for the coverage. Newspaper coverage makes us vulnerable. (IP14)

Both warring parties question the partisan role of journalists. IP1 expressed;

If we disseminated the army version of the story, the Taliban would threaten us and tell us, why did you report the army version? On the other hand, if we reported the Taliban version, the army would question why we gave coverage to the Taliban (IP1).

There was a continuous threat from the security forces side. Once, I wrote 'dead' (Jan-bahaq) on a security person's death, and then ISPR threatened me. (IP9).

Word selection was a challenging exercise in conflict; the wrong selection of words leads to mental stress and possible threats. The absence of government writ was also a threat to journalists. IP10 expressed that 'we were just a symbol of no value. We always cared for ourselves because no one was ready to take care of life (IP10). IP 7 believes that 'if the Taliban wanted to shoot you, no one was there to question them, even if the army wanted to kill you, no one was there to question them too. No FIR will be lodged. Our lives were not safe on both sides.

It happened many times. During the operation, the military chased, called from an unknown number, and asked to do this and do that. They harassed me many times and kept me in custody for 10 to 12 hours. Both parties did this (IP13).

The approach to threatening is different for each journalist. Sometimes warring parties pressurized them to reveal the kids' names, ages, and school names. IP 11 explained his agony in targeting family; They would tell you that you have this many kids, one is of this age, and the other is of that age. They also tell about your father's profession and role in society and your brother's. This way, they will indirectly threaten you (IP11).

#### Field Jealousy as a Threat

Local journalists in Swat were pressured by warring parties and suffered from field jealousy. Consider how jealousy can range from a common dilemma to severely obsessive manifestations. It is a hub of contradicting feelings, thoughts, acts, and reactions (Scheinkman & Werneck, 2010). Jealousy affected all spheres of man's creative activity. This contradictory feeling created problems for local journalists in Swat during the conflict. They blame each other for their double role. IP5 claims that no journalist is killed in Swat due to his reporting. He

further stated they all played a double game, sometimes supporting militants and next supporting the military. Journalists are not killed due to their reporting. No organization nor state encouraged or rewarded our colleagues on this sensitive reporting. These people [organizations and state] know the dual face of journalists (IP5).

The journalism profession is full of challenges and field jealousy. The latter is the conscious feeling of losing cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu was aware of the role that 'culture' played as a determinant factor in how people responded to their surroundings; in other words, their cultural background partly shaped their thoughts and actions. However, the journalists' initiatives to enhance their work conditions, professionalism, working practices, and opportunities for journalism training compose a complete war journalists' understanding of their sociological situation. 'Lack of training' as a potential threat will be analyzed as the next sub-theme.

#### Lack of Training as a Threat

Lack of training is a sub-theme under the significant theme of 'threat.' The participants in interviews widely discuss this threat. The participants (IP2, IP3, IP7, IP9, IP14, and IP 15) accepted that they had never been a part of any capacity-building program nor attended basic journalism training. On-job training makes them learn the basic technique of news writing. Informal or formal journalism basic teachings lay the foundations for the attitudes and knowledge of journalists (Joseph, 2019). IP2 admitted without hesitation that I learned to balance news content after receiving threats from warring parties. IP7 also admitted the lack of capacity for conflict reporting. With limited expertise, they raise the public's voice through their reports. He narrated We were not trained in war reporting and were unaware that life is more valuable than reporting. We tried to represent our public and the region. Once the army operation concluded, various NGOs and organizations trained us in basic journalism and conflict reporting (IP7).

We often enter conflict zones without any preparations and safety measures and narrowly escape the bullets of security forces. Media organizations did not train us to work in conflict, remain safe, or provide bulletproof vests and safety gear (IP4).

This section argues that journalists' response to a violent conflict can be attained through formal or on-the-job training. The current study indicates that conflict reporting requires more advanced knowledge and understanding of conflict dynamics from journalists and news editors in media offices.

Journalists were at risk because they did not know how to report during the war. All our national channel organizations asked for news, but there was no concern for the safety of journalists, and they preferred the news more than the reporter. (IP15)

#### Strategy to Counter Threats

After 9/11, many cub journalists joined Swat's journalism field and covered every beat. At the district level, journalists cover every beat: sports, crime, politics, tourism, or conflict. A common strategy to counter the threat was to inform the members of the journalists' union, press club, and media organization (IP4), which helped to reduce the mental stress of threat from warring parties. Journalists received threats, but they did not leave the valley. A journalist on a life threat commented;

I would never leave my soil, even at the expanse of my death. (IP1).

A strategy adopted by local journalists to counter threat was that a group of three or four journalists publishes/broadcast the news at some time. In sensitive situations, some local journalists in Swat did not struggle to break the news but waited to confirm it, balance it, and disseminate it (IP8). IP4 also practiced the same strategy of broadcasting news on all channels at one time;

We used to work very carefully. We used to broadcast the report on all channels at one time. This strategy helped us to remain safe, and nobody was blamed for the news (IP4).

This reveals the journalist's fragility because they cover paramilitary hearings closely and exhibit self-censorship. Even if a journalist avoided the threat, the poisonous effect of the menace kept the journalist aware by emphasizing that the armed group was following working routines. Research respondents agreed on the importance of the unity of the journalist community to counterbalance self-censorship because a lonely journalist is easy to target.

Local journalists believed that publishing a story with the version of only one group resulted from threats the journalist received. If a story is published without a military version, journalists receive a direct or indirect threat from army personnel. The direct or

indirect threats by the army and Taliban affected journalists' choices of story angle selection and compromised other journalism principles. Local journalists in Swat were pressured by warring parties and suffered from field jealousy. Consider how jealousy can range from a common dilemma to severely obsessive manifestations. This contradictory feeling created problems for local journalists in Swat during the conflict. They blame each other for their double role. Lack of training is a sub-theme under the significant theme of 'threat.'

#### Discussion of the Findings and Conclusion

The relationship between conflict and media is confusing; the latter is always blamed for projecting and promoting violence. Here, the role of journalism is essential but challenging for journalists in terms of staying neutral. Local journalists were sometimes threatened and killed for lack of objectivity while living inside the conflict zone. Therefore, this study not only evaluated the broader impact of conflict on local journalism as well as journalists in conflict areas, but it is also one of the first such studies where local journalism is examined in its relationship to those threatening challenges that media journalists faced locally in reporting the 'war on terror' in Swat valley. Two research objectives of this study are:

- To evaluate the impact of threats to the local journalists in the conflict zone of Swat

- To examine the relationship between militarized violence [war on terror] and threats to local journalists in coverage of internal conflict

Both objectives were achieved by formulating two research questions reflecting the critical thematic elements (factors influencing journalistic working conditions, routine, and practices). The data were collected through in-depth interviews, and a thematic analysis approach was applied to understand the data's pattern(s) and relationship(s). The themes that emerged from the data are corroborated, given that local journalists have had profound critical reflections on their experiences and professionalism during the Taliban militancy. Field Theory was used as a theoretical framework to answer these research questions, to develop some variables and tools for the methods, and to support the discussion and interpretation of the data. Collected data presented different dynamics of the journalistic field (e.g., conflict reporting) in Pakistan, its formation, and the role of capital, habitus, and doxa relating to the media system in which it is located. The journalistic field has a different structure with autonomy in social

space having specific regulations [doxa] (Bourdieu, 1998).

Local journalists covering internal conflict have contacts and sources within the military and the militants (the Taliban) who feed information to the journalists as news. According to Bourdieu (1998), this social capital indicates the possession of rare resources through connections usually used as a competition among the journalistic guild. A journalist with social capital is located along cultural and economic capital in the social space in a given society and at a given time.

The findings of this research suggest that the local media during the conflict contributed to the development of the social capital of local journalists. Local journalists face challenges, threats pressure, and responsibility to present news content in an acceptable way that increases social capital. It is clear from this argument that local journalists often develop a worldview of responsibility to protect and project community issues.

This research argues that local journalists covering the conflict displayed the 'doxa' in their articulation of principal values of journalism like a journalist should be 'unbiased toward any party' (IP4), 'provide an opportunity to each party to present their version in the story' (IP7), 'accurate and fair reporting' (IP11), 'provide background information to educate the audience on a specific issue' (IP15). 'Doxa' was explicitly strong in journalists' conceptualization of their role in covering the violent conflict in that they discussed the ethical concerns of their reporting. The concept of 'habitus' in Field Theory indicates the degree to which journalists have a script to follow; once they know the script, they can improvise on reporting decisions. Journalists needed help in the operation of their habitus. Habitus is often attempting to guide responses to a situation that is necessarily different than what is anticipated: the experience of the present is never the experience of the past (Bourdieu, 1977). Journalists articulated that they had various concerns about the operation of their roles, particularly the 'watchdog role' and 'informer role.' The local journalists in this study could improvise creatively due to their agency within the habitus, as it is a traditional location where journalistic roles operate in the field. Experience brings more creativity to journalists' roles (Willig, 2013). During the data analysis, journalists in the Swat conflict made decisions according to the situation and pressure. The greater their experience,

the more adept and creative journalists tend to be in 'integrating past experiences' as a matrix of 'perceptions, appreciations, and actions' used at every moment and 'making possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks' (Bourdieu, 1977).

The interview and thematic analysis of data answered Research Question 2, which interrogated the challenges that influenced the practices of conflict journalists in the Swat conflict. The factors included the accessibility [working conditions] of conflict journalists in Swat, objectivity, self-censorship [working practices], pressure, and threats. The analysis of the interview data reveals that the journalists' inability to visit conflict areas and the pressure from their organizations had impacted their work.

As there is still limited press freedom and local journalists in Swat lack the necessary skills, it is difficult for them to report a subject as complicated as the militant conflict. This research shows evidence that in the violent conflict in Swat, local journalists were not trained enough to report the events sensitively and responsibly. Special training in conflict reporting helps to elevate the quality and professionalism within the fieldwork areas.

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