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‘An investigation of foreign correspondents’ perceptions of trauma, objectivity and emotionality’

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Contents

Abstract 3
Acknowledgments 4
1. Rationale 5
2. Literature Review 7
  2.1 – Objectivity in Journalism 7 - 12
  2.2 - Emotionality in Journalism 13 - 17
  2.3 – The Conflict Zone 18 - 19
  2.4 – Mental Health and War Reporting 20 - 22
3. Method 23
  3.1 – Sample 24
  3.2 – Individual Interviews 24 - 25
  3.3 – Reconstructive Method 26
  3.4 – Thematic Analysis 27
4. Findings 28
  4.1 – Objectivity 28 - 32
  4.2 – Emotion 33 - 36
  4.3 – Trauma 37 - 45
  4.3.1 Perceptions of and Attitudes to Trauma 37 - 40
  4.3.2 Impact of Trauma 41 - 43
  4.3.3 Dealing with trauma 44 - 45
  4.4 – The Future 44 - 45
5. Conclusion 47
  5.1 – Looking forward 50

Bibliography 51

Appendix 54
  i. Sample Information Table 54
  ii. Information Sheet 55-56
  iii. Interview Questions 57
  iv. Reflective Texts 58
Abstract

This research attempts to address common issues experienced by foreign correspondents in the context of news production, by examining journalist’s perspectives on how these issues can ultimately impact their ethical conduct and ultimately the reportage produced. The study focuses on the topics of emotion, trauma and objectivity, in order to gain a deepened insight into journalistic perspectives such in the context of the conflict zone.
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1. **Rationale**

In an era of significant socio-political unrest, divisive journalistic techniques and the global proliferation of information technologies, the importance of reliable and high quality journalism is of particular salience. Dr Maria Armoudian of the University of Auckland states, ‘Responsible journalism impacts life and death by helping people better understand the complex realities of conflicts, informing their decisions with accurate, contextual information’ (2016: 3). As the traumatic side of covering conflict becomes increasingly apparent and integrated into journalism discourse, this study takes a constructionist approach to news practices by investigating journalistic perspectives of how this aspect of the job impacts journalists’ reportage and their ethical conduct.

This study therefore prioritises the importance of emotion, situated within the wider social science research agenda that has manifested into ‘the affective turn’ (Richards & Rees, 2011; Du Toit, 2014). Richards and Rees define this agenda as ‘the diverse collection of cultural trends and phenomena concerned with acknowledging, understanding, and managing emotions in diverse spheres of life’ (2011: 851). Influenced by this turn in research, this study recognises the important influence emotion has on judgement and thought, and understands that we as humans are ‘constantly governed by emotion’ (Du Toit, 2014: 5). This research too recognises both literary and political concerns regarding the influence journalists have over the ‘emotional public sphere’ (Richards, 2007; 2009). Considering the instrumental role the media plays in setting the public sphere’s emotional tone via journalists own emotional labour (Richards & Rees, 2011: 853), it is imperative to gain insight into the emotional experiences of and processes implemented by journalists. As Feinstein et al put it, ‘good journalism depends on healthy journalists’ (2014: 6).
Previous studies have called for future research both into the emotional and psychological impact on war journalists (Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Aoki et al, 2013; references) and the furthering of understanding the practicalities of ethical principles such as objectivity (Post, 2015). Monteiro et al’s meta-analytical systematic review of empirical research from 2002 to 2015 in this area, describes future qualitative contributions as ‘sorely needed to broaden the understanding of journalists’ occupational stress’ (2016: 767). This study attempts to respond to this need in an area of research that relies heavily on anecdotal reports and quantitative studies, with the type of qualitative research suggested by those referenced above; asking, how does a focus on emotionality lead to a better understanding of journalistic practise and ethics? The sub-questions of this research include, is the traditional premise of objectivity practical considering the emotionally strenuous nature of war reporting? How do traumatic experiences and emotional processes affect the way in which journalists report conflict? As the increasing dangers of the warzone for western journalists contribute to the common reliance on citizen journalism by institutions, how will this impact the future of conflict journalism?
2. **Literature Review**

2.1 **Objectivity in Journalism**

Objectivity functions as one of the key ethical ideals that make up the foundations of western journalism. Initially prioritised in journalism as a marketing tool (Pedalty, 1995: 7; Schudson, 1978: 4), the ideal was implemented in order to accommodate the shift in audience demographic from elite to mainstream (Pedalty, 1995; Santos, 2010), and exacerbated by the ‘aggressive professionalism’ adopted by journalists in response to the rise in public relations (Santos, 2010: 18). The topic has historically attracted attention from a variety of disciplines, in regards to the complexities surrounding the very definition of ‘objectivity’ and how it is understood (Cunningham, 2003; Hearns-Branaman, 2016; Maras, 2013; Mueller, 2007; Post, 2015). The ideal of realism is adopted by western media’s general practise of objectivity, perpetuating mirror theory and the presupposition that news media content is ‘factual’ (Hearns-Branaman, 2016: 26). Yet, the epistemological difficulty faced when proposing an ultimate ‘truth’ exists and is attainable has been, when in reality it does not – only individual interpretations of such, has been recognised by the Society of Professional Journalists (Cunningham, 2003: 2). Due to the ‘amorphous nature of truth’ (ibid), the goal of objectivity is often paired alongside ‘neutrality’ and ‘balance’ in journalistic practise (Hackett and Zhao, 1998: 58), qualities seemingly easier to measure.

Traditional journalistic objectivity has been described as ‘reductionist’ (Ward, 2017), in that it reduces investigative journalism to ‘testing for facts and neutrality’ (ibid). Gaye Tuchman famously labelled the practise as a ‘strategic ritual’, implemented mostly to avoid accusations of bias and libel lawsuits (1972). There is ongoing debate around the suggestion that occupational rituals that so often constitute objectivity are used as justification for passive and observational journalism (Cunningham, 2003: 26; Ward, 2017; 2005), such as reporting
two sides of an argument to suffice as balanced reporting, despite the need for deepened analysis (Smith, 2008: 43). When reporting topics as imperative as war, prioritisation of balance can be problematic, by perpetuating a disproportionate portrayal of events (Pedalty, 1995: 171) which is often motivated by ‘professional survival’ (ibid: 174), as opposed to accurately portraying unbalanced conflicts. CNN’s Christiane Amanpour argues that to express neutrality by drawing moral likeness between victim and aggressor in cases such as Bosnia (1992-1995) is a ‘short step to becoming an accessory to […] evil’ (cited in Hume 1997: 6). Similarly, a decade on, James Mueller expressed his concern, ‘The journalism profession, by trying to be nonpartisan, is failing to take a stand on the great issues of our time’ (2007: 18), potentially compromising the effectiveness and democratic purpose of journalism. The devotion to such a mandate potentially urges humankind to believe that to observe fellow human suffering dispassionately is more morally correct than to do so with indignation; compromising the proliferation of humanitarian ideologies within modern society.

It is not uncommon for adherence to the law of objective journalism to waver in times of war, though typically only deemed acceptable when expressing support for the home nations military, to upkeep morale and express nationalism (Hallin, 1986; Morrison & Tumber, 1988: 122; Aday et al, 2005; Foerstal, 2006: 88); commonly done through the use of first person pronouns, despite existing research suggesting audiences do not appreciate this tone (Morrison & Tumber, 1988). Where outsourcing opinion (Hacket and Zhao, 1998) and strict adherence to the official narrative of events (Mueller, 2007) and the sphere of consensus (Hallin, 1986) is common practise, deviation from such carries a stigma. Such as when the BBC was branded the ‘Bagdad Broadcasting Corporation’ by conservative American news outlets for reporting Iraqi perspectives on the 2003 invasion (Morrison & Tumber: 1988;
When a story strays from the bounds of traditional reporting, and violates norms considered to constitute normal journalistic behaviour via the introduction of contradictory and deviant frames, the mainstream media must act to reclaim credibility and authority (Bennet et al. 1985). This exemplifies the hypocrisy exhibited by a media obsessed with objectivity, yet when neutrality is practiced and a variety of perspectives are reported, an institution is demonised and enters ‘the sphere of deviance’ (Hallin, 1986).

Other aspects specific to war reporting can cause difficulty for journalists when attempting to remain objective, such as the practise of embedding, a strategy initially implemented as part of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The war-zone has gradually become more dangerous for journalists, contributing to the practise for reporters to function closely alongside military personnel; although, research has suggested that both unilaterals and embeds had very similar levels of exposure to danger, furthering questions around the validity of the practise (Feinstein & Nicolson, 2005: 131). The implications the process has on a reporter’s ability to remain objective has also been subject to debate, with previous research arguing embeds tend to perpetuate a limited perspective of conflicts (Aday et al, 2005; Foerstal, 2006), and can result in journalists identifying with military as their protectors (Foerstal, 2006: 132). This relationship too encourages the controversial use of the personal pronoun ‘we’, as previously mentioned (Morrison & Tumber, 1988; Aday et al, 2005; Foerstal, 2006), prompting concerns around attachment and arguably contributing to the dangerous and growing perception of journalists as representatives of their home nations military efforts. This relationship has also been argued to exacerbate the conflicting identity crisis experienced by war reporters (McWethy cited in Foerstel, 2006: 87; Morrison & Tumber, 1988: 123; Ward, 2010: 313), as they must maintain impartiality whilst reporting on a conflict involving their home nation, alongside their home troops. Journalist Dhar Jamal argues, ‘when you choose to
embed you're giving the military power to control where you go, how you get there, what you see, and when you see it – and in a lot of instances even how you’re going to report that’ (in Lowery & Pilger, 2010: 18:30).

The understanding that no journalist can be truly free of bias had led to multiple calls for the ideal to be readdressed (Pedalty, 1995; Hacket & Zhao, 1997; Ward 2005; 2010; 2017, Mueller, 2007; Maras, 2013; Hearns-Branaman, 2016), with claims that theorisation has grown stagnant since the 1970s (Hearns-Branaman, 2016). As a journalistic norm, objectivity embodies detrimental dualisms. Ironically, objective journalism is itself a political perspective, in that it embodies centris (ibid: 171). The presence of constant dualisms continue to compromise the effectiveness of the current approach to objectivity in western journalism (Cunningham, 2003; Richards & Rees, 2011: 861; Maras, 2013), whilst the popular argument that journalists should adopt a scientific, methodological approach to attaining objectivity in their reporting (Meyer, 1973; Tankard, 1976; Dennis, 1990; Morrisons & Tumber, 1998; Donsbach, 2004; Ward, 2005; 2010; 2017), as early as journalism education, (Donsbach, 2004: 152; Dworznik & Grubb, 2007) remains prevalent amongst academics. Yet, despite this long-standing argument, research has identified the failure for such attitudes to resonate with journalists (Donsbach & Klett: 1993; Post: 2015). Post’s 2015 study compared the attitudes of 297 German journalists, academics and scientists towards objectivity, and found a ‘refusal’ (Post, 2015: 744) amongst journalists to adopt systematic methods of evaluating objectivity. Rather, they maintained a preoccupation with ‘letting the facts speak for themselves’ (ibid: 741) in order to attain objective status.

The circumstances and experiences of the war-zone, such as difficulty maintaining detachment and emotional investment in a story can render adherence to the traditional
mandate of objectivity unrealistic. Advocated is the acceptance of unavoidable subjectivity by journalists and the management of such by providing transparency for readers (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007; Phillips in Franklin & Carlson, 2011). Mueller argues a return to open partisanship, in order to establish a level of transparency that could be the ‘saviour’ of a distrusted media (2007: 18). Similarly, Ron Smith explores the benefits of dedicating efforts to establishing a level of transparency in reporting referring to the popular decision for The Dallas Morning News to use online blogs to explain controversial journalistic decisions to readers (2008: 83). This approach signifies progress in terms of the recognition of the limitations of traditional objectivity in journalism, and reflects the attitudes of academics, that ‘one needs to present findings in a way that others can understand how they were obtained’ (Post, 2015: 741). In the context of war reporting, transparency regarding reporter’s experiences in the war-zone, whilst maintaining reasonable discretion, could be potentially beneficial in order to better clarify the influential factors on the journalist’s perspectives, such as Mueller argues (2007).

Somewhat encompassing of the call for transparency and a scientific approach, is Ward’s theoretical response to the reconceptualization of objectivity coins ‘pragmatic objectivity’ (Ward, 2005; 2010; 2017); an approach he argues denies dualisms, without requiring detachment from values and perspectives, ‘an impossible demand’ (2005: 263), and rather ‘tests the essential activities of interpreting, evaluating and adopting a perspective’ (ibid). The concept is based on the premise that journalists can identify and improve their schemes of understanding, but cannot transcend them (ibid: 264). In order to sustain ‘objective evaluation of enquiry’ (ibid), Ward proposes the implementation of guidelines in the form of standards of evaluation (2017). This systematic method is in line with recommendations present in previous literature, whilst
reflecting a shift in epistemological understanding. The concept responds to calls for implementing pragmatism (Hearns-Branaman, 2016), and is valuable in that his proposed reconsideration ‘disciplines and tests our interpretative tendencies’ rather than dismissing them’ (Ward, 2017), without prioritising adherence to a non-negotiable version of events (Ward, 2005; Phillips in Franklin & Carlson, 2011: 57). Although, the concept fails to address issues of practicality and time-constraints faced by journalists (Tuchman, 1972), issues of particular significance in the digital news landscape.
2.2 Emotionality in Journalism

According to previous studies, the adherence to the mandate of objectivity when covering subject matter as important and sensitive as war has been found to be obstructive to the take-up of an emotional literacy agenda in journalism (Richards & Rees, 2011: 863). The findings of the study reified the apparent ‘complex and fundamental tension in the professional discourse of journalism between objectivity and emotional engagement’ (ibid), as participants recalled instances where they struggled to remain ‘objective’ or ‘detached’ and emotionally engaged. Perpetuating the calls to readdress the ethical foundations that guide western journalism, the study concluded that the premise of ‘objectivity’ in fact embodies the remanence of 19th century positivism (Pedalty, 1995: 190), subsequently posing a significant threat to the functionality of journalists in the emotional domain (ibid).

It has been argued that passive observation cannot suffice as responsible journalism in the context of war. ‘To create change, you have to tell human stories. That means building relationships with our subjects as real people’ (Moffeit cited in Santos, 2010: 36).

‘Journalism of attachment’ (Bell, 1998), spurred by the Bell’s sense of responsibility experiences throughout his time covering the war in Bosnia, is a style of journalism that prioritises closeness with sources, and advocates that journalists must be willing to recognise the limitations objectivity in times of social and moral injustices, in order to maintain moral integrity (Bell, 1998; Ruigrok, 2008). Jody Santos argues that without an ‘emotional dimension’, reporting of such sensitive and personal topics as human suffering cannot be comprehensive or totally accurate (2010: 34), and in order to attain truthful content, journalists must be willing to transcend limitations of ‘detachment’ to know subjects on a personal level, allowing them to delve deeper into sensitive issues than superficial and observational journalism would permit (ibid: 36). Anderson Cooper exhibited the advantages
of such an approach whilst interviewing Muslims in Bosnia in 1993, by removing his bullet proof vest in order to make a human connection with his sources, and a willingness to be vulnerable with them. This made the vulnerable subjects more willing to open up to him, enabling him to attain a more deep and significant understanding of their suffering and allowing his report to prompt communal dialogue centred in issues of shared concern (Hacket & Zhao 1997: 224) based on an ideological consensus.

Despite the common attitude that emotion has no place in journalism, history dictates that throughout periods of particular social injustice, emotionality in journalism has been regarded as some of the best of its kind. CBS reporter Edward Murrow supposedly ‘changed the nature of his profession’ by purposefully engaging with concentration camp victims during coverage of WWII (Santos, 2010: 19-20). Similarly recognised for challenging McCarthyism, resolute attitude towards the civil rights movement and critical coverage of the Vietnam war was Pulitzer prize winner David Haberstam, one of the integral players in the radical movement that ‘briefly redefined the nature of journalism’ (ibid: 26) during the 1960s. Fittingly, a content analysis of celebrated, Pulitzer prize winning articles from 1995 – 2011 (Wahl-Jordgensen, 2013) proposes that a ‘strategic ritual of emotionality’ is as present in highly esteemed journalism as a ‘strategic ritual of objectivity’ (Tuchman, 1972), yet is seldom addressed due to taboo (Pedalty, 1995: 170; Wahl-Jordgensen, 2013). The study found that all the winning articles, irrespective of genre, contained ‘personalised story-telling and widespread invocation of emotion (Wahl-Jordgensen, 2013: 137). This emotionally engaged style of journalism not only offers in depth insight into topics of human interest, but too sheds light on the needs and vulnerabilities of subjects (Santos, 2010: 37). On some level, it also seems that an emotionally literate approach to journalism doesn’t just potentially benefit the subjects of news and its audiences but institutions from a business standpoint also. Ron Smith
argues that many editors believe that ‘compassion makes for better reporting’ (2008: 215), whilst Richards and Rees suggest that material containing emotional content, especially that pointing to danger or loss, provides the most profit (2011: 854).

Expectedly, journalism of attachment has come under much critique. One being that the practise could allow for ‘celebrity journalism’ to prosper, by reporters exploiting vulnerable subjects to boost their own persona as heroic (Bell, 1998: 108). Without self-reflection, and sufficient guidance based around the critical perspective of objectivity, ‘journalists as eager participants, may fall into the dogmatic belief that they have the one truth or the uniquely right moral standard’ (Ward, 2005:313), running the risk of encouraging the creation of a ‘crusader’ (Morrison & Tumber, 1998: 130). Of course, to advocate for the reckless use of emotion and injection of personal feeling into journalism would be irresponsible, therefore measures must be implemented to ensure emotional accounts are as truthful and accurate as possible. Though, emotive journalism need not be reduced to dramatized accounts and loaded language. Wahl-Jorgensen uses a Pulitzer prize winning article on Rwandan slaughters, written by Mark Fritz, to exemplify how emotionality can be inserted into a story without the explicit use of emotional language, but rather the basic appeal to shared ideologies regarding children dying in order to portray the true extend of the horrors experienced during the era (2013).

Whereas Tom Wolfe’s anthology of News Journalism argued that journalists who develop relationships with their sources produce ‘second-rate work’ (1973), Martin Bell, declared that his newfound approach to reporting was to make the point that ‘we in the press [...] do not stand apart from the world. We are a part of it’ (Bell, 1997: 8). As the work of organisations such as the DART Centre for Journalism and Trauma, and the Canadian Journalism Forum
for Trauma and Violence is increasingly felt in the industry, the idea of ‘journalism’s moral superiority (which in turn allowed reporters to act with impunity)’ (Santos, 2010:37) exhibited by Wolfe is beginning to shift, as Bell’s perspective is becoming increasingly considered less taboo. As such think tanks advocate through their education of how to deal with victims of trauma, it is increasingly apparent that journalists must identify subjects as ‘humans first, sources second’, (Santos, 2010: 37) and must balance the desire to get the story with concern for their subject, for the benefit of the source but also to aid in avoiding common feelings of guilt experienced by journalists after maintaining detachment from vulnerable subjects (Santos, 2010: 62; Brown et al, 2012). Rather than continuing to dismiss the acknowledgment and acceptance of emotion from journalism discourse, blindly committing to objectivity and detachment to the detriment of the story, the subject, the (emotional) public sphere and the journalist themselves, discursive change is necessary.

Ward discusses the way in which attached journalism can function in relation to pragmatic objectivity. The premise dictates ‘all journalists [must] make their primary attachment to the public at large’ as opposed to serving a particular group (2005: 312), yet accepts that if one believes the public would benefit from a deepened insight gained via building relationships with subjects, that such is justifiable, when sufficient measures are taken to evaluate influential factors on perspective. Ward argues that quality attached journalism can provide strong argument, diverse perspectives and objective support for claims, on the condition that journalists transparent about an attached perspective (2005: 312). He goes on to propose, ‘Positive talk about attachments, combined with emotional appeals to social justice, can rationalize an unbalanced journalism of ideology, of faction, and of prejudgement’ (ibid: 313). The key underpinnings here are again, transparency, and the need for open dialogue about emotion and attachment in order to establish a healthy approach to monitoring quality.
As it has been previously argued, ‘A more self-reflective and consistent understanding of [journalism’s] emotional dimensions can only help journalist report the world more clearly’ (Richards and Rees, 2011: 865), as one of the key factors of emotional literacy (Richards and Brown, 2001) is the condition that individuals develop the capability to observe emotional states in both themselves and others. This emotional reflexivity allows for deepened awareness of the external world to guide assessment and judgement, registering subjective feelings without compromising perception (Richards & Rees, 2011: 865). Having considered the potential shortcomings, emotionality in journalism is quite possibly an ‘indispensable prerequisite of political action (Boltanski, 1999) and therefore pivotal in times of war.
2.3 The Conflict Zone
In recent years, statistics, journalists and scholars have described the warzone as becoming increasingly dangerous war-reporters, with 281 being killed since 2014 alone (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2017). The evident dangers have resulted in the need for many organisations dedicated to the protection of journalists and the free press, such as the Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters sans Frontieres. Feinstein and Nicolson’s study (2005) into the relationship between embedding and post-traumatic stress disorder in the context of the Iraq war (2003), revealed that on average both embeds and unilaterals had been exposed to 22 ‘intensely traumatic’ events prior to entering Iraq, the majority of which occurring within conflict zones (2005: 131). Furthermore, the research revealed that journalists in Iraq averaged 3 further ‘life-threatening events’ within just the first few weeks of the conflict (ibid), validating the extreme dangers faced by war reporters in their day to day work.

The significant increase in the number of violent attacks and kidnappings of western journalists has been described as a ‘dark era’ and a ‘drastic shift’ from the historical attitudes towards journalists (Armoudian, 2016: 1) that were typically tolerant. This tolerance was often due to the perception that journalists offered rebels and freedom fighters an opportunity to have their voice heard. Yet, the development of mobile and communication technologies has diminished this reliance on journalists (Hilsum: 2016, Armoudian: 2016), subsequently contributing to their vulnerability in foreign regions. According to Nik Gowing of BBC News, the very same technology contributes to the new information dynamic that enables journalists to be far more intrusive, and therefore deemed more threatening by insurgents, rendering them more vulnerable (cited in Foerstal, 2006: 84). Replacing the prior perception of journalists as neutral message carriers is the perception of reporters as an extension of the
conflict itself (Capagna cited in Foerstal, 2006: 32), something that Chief correspondent for Reuters wire service David Schlesinger attributes to the common use of ‘we’ in western journalism that results in the association between the press and the state (cited in Foerstal, 2006: 86).

Expectedly, the heightened risk for journalists entering warzones has resulted in a reluctance for institutions to send reporters into high risk areas (Foerstal: 2006; Armoudian: 2016: Hilsum: 2016), and ethical concerns, such as the growing unwillingness to hire freelancers from certain areas, as to not endanger their lives (Armoudian, 2016: 3; Hilsum, 2016: 9). This has resulted in a higher dependence on secondary material/evidence, such as citizen journalism (Anden-Popadopolous & Pantti, 2011: 9); ot, ‘outsourcing the role of the eyewitness’ (Zelizer, 2007: 425). The increasing proliferation of mobile technology has redefined the nature of war-reporting (Wall, 2012: 3), by providing institutions with real-time visuals and instantaneous, personal accounts of foreign conflicts without the need to leave the office. This example of convergence has been described as a cost friendly, ‘unique and headline grabbing source’ (Mortensen in Wall, 2012: 126). The ubiquitous term ‘citizen-journalism’ used for amateur footage is argued to discourage questions around author motivations (Al-Ghazzi, 2014). It is often very difficult to vet the sources, and subsequently the agenda, of much of this material - causing ethical concerns for mainstream news outlets (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Mortensen in Wall 2012: 132). Journalist Lindsey Hilsum has expressed her concerns in regards to the practice, arguing citizen-journalism offers a restricted perspective of conflicts, and concluding ‘being an eyewitness will always be the most honest form of journalism’ (2016: 9).
2.4 Mental Health and War Reporting
An abundance of anecdotal, and empirical research has deduced, a ‘significant minority of journalists’ (Feinstein & Nicolson, 2005: 132), particularly war-reporters (Feinstein et al, 2002; Ghaffar & Feinstein, 2005; Dworznick and Grubb, 2007; Buchanan & Keats, 2011) are at substantial risk of developing negative psychological symptoms or conditions as a result of their occupation. The most common are posttraumatic stress disorder, secondary traumatic stress, depression, anxiety (Aoki et al, 2013; Feinstein, Owen, & Blair, 2002; Pyevich et al, 2003) and ‘moral injury’ (Feinstein & Storm, 2017). In fact, a study into the mental health of 140 ‘frontline correspondents’ found that 21% of participants suffered with major depression, 29% suffered from PTSD; in context, at time of publishing, these figures reflected 4-5 times more symptoms of PTSD and major depression than the general population, double that of traumatised police officers (Feinstein et al, 2002). Others participants also struggled with anxiety, intrusive thoughts and panic attacks (Feinstein, 2000). Specific aspects of to the job make journalists much more vulnerable to negative repercussions of covering conflict, such as feelings of guilt, from inability to help or intervene in afflicting situations (Ochberg cited in Santos, 2010: 62; Brown et al, 2012).

Similarly, exposure to graphic images or shocking events are found to be likely to cause ‘trauma memory’ in the form of intrusive thoughts (Feinstein, 2000; Ochberg cited in Santos, 2010: 62), found to be the most common affect (Feinstein & Nicolson, 2005). Yet, despite the increasingly recognised relationship between covering conflict and mental health issues for such journalists, it’s argued the industry is yet to address the problem sufficiently.

The issue of trauma and the mental health of war reporters is of growing concern both academically and within the industry. This concern has been particularly expressed by the industry think tank the DART Centre for Journalism and Trauma. The centre’s mission
dictates the intention to ‘Advocate ethical and thorough reporting of trauma; compassionate, professional treatment of victims and survivors by journalists; and greater awareness by media organizations of the impact of trauma coverage on both news professionals and news consumers’ (Dart Centre, 2017). Considering the frequency of traumatic events experienced by journalists (Feinstein & Nicolson, 2005) and the evident dangers face of the conflict zone, the movement is to be expected. Yet, despite the recognition of these problems as prevalent, journalists receive insufficient pre-emptive training, and support when dealing with work related trauma and mental health issues, as previous empirical studies have repeatedly revealed (Simspon & Boggs, 1999; Ghaffar & Feinstein, 2005; Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Buchanan & Keats, 2011). Buchanan and Keats argue that in comparison with other professions that incur high risk of traumatic experiences such as the police or military, journalism is ‘very far behind’ in providing substantial support to those suffering with trauma (2011: 129), Ochberg as much as twenty years (cited in Santos, 2010: 61), and attributes this lag to the stigmatisation of dialogue around the topic. Journalists participating in previous studies have revealed their experience of this stigma, describing discussions about the impacts of trauma as ‘uncommon’ (Richards & Rees, 2011) and experiences of ‘silencing their distress’ to avoid being viewed as weak (Keats & Buchanan, 2009). The suppression of emotional distress and the subsequent failure to deal with traumatic experiences by journalists can be linked to findings that show avoidance and substance/alcohol abuse are common coping mechanisms amongst war journalists (ibid; Feinstein, 2000; Ghaffar & Feinstein, 2005).

Recommendations for improvement to how the industry supports journalists who have endured traumatic experiences include the need to offer appropriate psychological assistance ‘as part of the job’ (Keats & Buchanan, 2009). The findings of Feinstein and Nicolson’s
research brought them to call for ‘vigilance’ in identifying who of the workforce is suffering, even if silently, and providing sufficient treatment and support (2005: 132). Fortunately, dialogue around trauma is increasing as the movement picks up momentum throughout the industry (Richards & Rees, 2011: 859), but due to the complex nature of mental health in general, there is still much room for further understanding of how reporting conflict impacts the mental health of journalists. Considering, ‘good journalism depends on healthy journalists’ (Feinstein et al, 2014), and ‘good journalism’ is seldom more critical than during periods of war, it is important that money and effort continue to be invested into education and support surrounding this issue, alongside sufficient and in-depth empirical research (Aoki et al, 2013).
3. **Method**

Considering the aim of this study is to gain insight into the opinions, emotions and judgements of individual war-reporters, this research therefore is best suited to a qualitative method (Pathak, et al. 2013: 192), as such methods are said to give voices to participants (Gibson, et al. 2004). Qualitative methods have been long considered to allow for more in-depth analysis in a way that quantitative research cannot (Priest, 1996), subsequently rendering the salience and strength of large-scale qualitative studies dependent on the qualitative studies that inform and contextualise them (Flick, et al. 2007: 48).

The general research area of trauma in journalism and the psychological impact of the job on journalists is largely dominated by quantitative studies (Simpson and Boggs, 1999; Teegan & Grotwinkel, 2001; Feinstein et al, 2002; Pyevitch et al, 2003; Feinstein & Nicholson, 2005; Backholm & Bjorkqvist, 2012; Browne et al, 2012; Aoki et al, 2013; Feinstein et al, 2014), as is the topic of objectivity in journalism. Despite the presence of qualitative studies (Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Richards and Rees, 2011) that provide valuable contributions to the complex topic, they are sparse. The method of this study is designed around the aim to respond to the need for more qualitative research in the field in order to provide a much deeper understanding of the complexities of trauma experienced by journalists and subsequently the impact of such on their reporting. As Iorio states, ‘qualitative researchers aim to explain the world rather than measure it’ (2009: 6). As plentiful quantitative studies have already measured the prevalence of issues with mental health amongst journalists, this research aims to assist in explaining the impact of such on both journalist and subsequently their journalism.
3.1 Sample
Due to the ‘elite’ nature of the interviews needed to provide this study with valuable contributions from experienced war-reporters, naturally the availability of participants was limited. This in combination with the scope and resources available for this research and the need for in depth interviews rendered it best to keep the sample size low; although, the sample size of this research could be argued to be a limitation when considering the aim to identify themes in responses. Ten journalists were contacted via email, addresses either attained online or through university staff recommendation. Five of which volunteered to participate, four male and one female. Jonathan Rugman (JR), Jonathan Miller (JM), Lindsey Hilsum (LH), James Rodgers (JRS) and Matthew Green (MG) (See Appendix i sample details). Although the sample exemplifies a gender imbalance, the foreign correspondent occupation is typically male dominated, therefore the sample aims at reflecting the heterogeneity present in the profession (Flick et al, 2007:48).

3.2 Individual Interviews
Due to the sensitive subject matter, interviews were conducted individually as not to jeopardise participant’s contributions by adding the pressure of conformity that can be present in a group interview environment (Isenberg: 1986, cited in Frey and Fontana: 1993). The interview questions were designed based on the dominant topics of interest identified in this study’s literature review, in order to attain maximum ethnographic results (Flick et al, 2007: 43). These topics include the viability of ‘objectivity’ in conflict journalism, attitudes towards trauma in the newsroom, the influence trauma and distress has on the way in which journalists approach their work in conflict zones, and the future of the foreign-correspondent role in an increasingly dangerous and digitised landscape.
The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed enough scope for both the participant and the interviewer to explore issues that arose specific to each individual’s accounts and experiences, that may have not been apparent until the interview was underway. As O’Keeffe et al agree, ‘a significant advantage of semi-structured interviews is the opportunity for previously unknown information to emerge’ (2015: 8226). This interview format allows for in depth exploration of participant’s contributions and any relevant inputs there in.

Considering the sensitive and even potentially emotionally strenuous subject matter, I wanted interviews to last no more than an hour in order to minimise the distress and disruption for the sample. This condition meant that the number of interview questions had to be reasonably limited, considering the interjection of impromptu questions based on interviewees responses were probable. After considering the key issues the questions were to address, I concluded the number of questions at six.

Due to the busy schedules of participants and some currently working abroad, four of the five interviews were conducted via Skype, the outlier being conducted face to face. Before the interviews were conducted, each member of the sample was emailed an information sheet outlining their rights, explaining the context in which their contributions would be used and their rights to remain anonymous and to withdraw at any time (Burnett, 2009: 176). Interviews began with requesting verbal consent and agreement that the participant had read the information sheet and was happy to proceed, before declaring whether or not they wished to remain anonymous. Interviews were audio recorded, in order to remain unobtrusive (O’Keeffe et al, 2015: 8228; these recordings allowed for transcription of the interviews before undergoing thematic analysis.)
3.3 Reflective Interview Method
Influenced by the method implemented in Lohner, et al’s (2016) study, this researched employed a reflective interview method (Flick et al, 2007), by using the previous work suggested by participants to reflect on during the interview process. This encouraged them to recollect and reconstruct emotions and events experienced throughout their stay in that particular war zone, or whilst covering that specific conflict. This method was implemented in order to attempt to gain deeper insight into individual journalistic accounts, in the hope of avoiding generalised answers.

Prior to interview, participants were asked via email to provide an example of an existing article they had produced, that focussed on a conflict or event that they felt caused them some sort of trauma or significant ethical difficulty. All participants provided an article that met this criterion, apart from one. Instead, MG, chose to provide an article he wrote about a meditative trip to India he took in order to attempt to recover from the stress of touring Afghanistan with US Marines and his hotel having being attacked by suicide bombers in Kabul in 2011. Despite the interview with MG differing in format from the other four interviews, the interview went ahead, as his inability to report on the event in Kabul and his choice to take a meditative trip in itself offers insight into the ways in which journalists deal with psychological struggles. This need for flexibility in the research design demonstrates the difficulties faces when researching such sensitive subject matter, and the importance of remaining responsive to the needs of participants and their real-life situation when addressing such emotive content. The other journalists chose to discuss periods spent reporting conflicts in Rwanda, Gaza, Libya, Chechnya and Iraq.
3.4 Thematic analysis
Similar to the method implemented by Richards and Rees (2011), interviews were firstly transcribed, before conducting a thematic analysis. Relevant and recurring concepts were identified, before being sorted into key themes that guide the discussion of findings below.
4. Findings

4.1 Objectivity
All participants expressed interpretations of objectivity that recognised the premise as complex, exhibiting the way the mandate differs from its most simple definition when in practise, particularly under the strenuous conditions of the conflict zone. MG stated, ‘There’s no such thing as perfect objectivity. Every story is framed by the perspective of the teller and the institution and the culture’. Similarly, JRS said, ‘It is often difficult and you often accept you’re not going to try and achieve it’. More specific to war journalism, three of the five participants chose to touch on the topic of limited perspective. MG, who was embedded whilst covering the invasion of Iraq (2003) reflected on an instance in which the US marines he was embedded with detained Iraqis for interrogation and told him could not watch. He explained his inability to contest the decision, to avoid being ‘left to hitchhike your way home’. MG goes on to say, ‘you could argue that in a case like that your options of what questions you’re going to ask are very constrained’, before highlighting the fact he would be nowhere near as close to the conflict if not embedded. The limitations highlighted by MG here link to Dhar Jamal’s criticisms of the embedding process (in Lowery & Pilger, 2010: 18:30), whilst the overall responses demonstrate the acceptance by participants that traditional ‘objectivity’ is impractical.

Similarly, MG contradicts Foerstal’s suggestion that journalists are likely to be sympathetic to military perspectives due to identifying with them as ‘protectors’ (2006: 132) by recalling when he was asked to hand over his Reuters satellite telephone, but secretly held on to one despite a potential security risk identified by the military. LH explored similar practical restrictions that result in a limited perspective of conflicts for journalists. She stated, ‘If I go in with the Syrian government, […] there are things I’m not allowed to film, or see’. JRS too reinforced this point by arguing, ‘The thing about conflict is you’re almost always on one
side […] around one set of people, whether combatants or civilians, there is inevitably a risk that you’re going to reflect their point of view’. As argued in previous literature, (Capagna in Foerstal, 2006: 32) JRS went on to say he feels the struggle to gain insight into both sides of a conflict has been exacerbated by the change in perceptions towards journalists in more recent years, by claiming, ‘It is rare to be able to go to both sides, particularly these days as journalists are no longer seen as neutral observers’. These contributions demonstrate a significant understanding amongst the sample that one’s ability to attain objectivity is hindered by the circumstances of the war zone that impose limitations on what can practically be accessed.

Two participants explained that in order to minimise the compromise imposed on their reporting by the practical limitations of the war zone, they believe in providing audiences with transparency. MG argued, ‘Be honest that nobody is really objective, we all have a point of view, be transparent about it. Give the audience transparency about where you’re coming from’. JRS suggested journalists can compensate for their limited perspective by embodying an attitude such as, ‘“I can tell you what I’ve seen and heard today and what people are telling me, I can’t pretend to know anything else in the same amount of detail” You try to put that in a wider context.’ MG reiterated this point by stating, ‘I think the key to all this is actually to just be honest about where you’re coming from. Be honest that nobody is really objective, we all have a point of view, be transparent about it’. This approach is reflective of suggestions made in previous literature (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007; Phillips in Franklin & Carlson, 2011); reminding audiences that there are other interpretations of the conflict in question, which they are free to explore. Though, one interviewee felt the responsibility does not belong entirely to the journalist. Whilst discussing the limited perspective available to those embedded with the military, MG recommended attempts should be made to get as much
of the picture as a whole at an organisational level, ‘there is nothing wrong with institutions having reporters that are embedded, but you also need to have others that aren’t’, linking back to JRS’s point about the need to put reports in a wider context.

Findings suggested that the impracticalities of achieving ‘objectivity’ have manifested into the understanding of objectivity as an approach to journalism as opposed to an attainable status. JRS says, ‘I think it’s impossible to achieve true objectivity, I think of objectivity as more of an approach you take towards reporting’. Due to such epistemological complexities, this approach encompasses similar values, such as neutrality, impartiality and balance such as Hacket and Zhao argue in their literature (1998: 58). MG described the process as ‘verifying claims and getting opposing perspectives, ticking those boxes. It’s what you have to do if a story is to pass the desk’: an interpretation of objectivity that is reminiscent of Tuchman’s ‘strategic ritual’ (1972).

When discussing the difficulties achieving objectivity whilst covering conflict, JRS explained he thought of the ethic as a ‘framework’ that ‘assists you to deal with the difficulties’ by guiding decision making. This understanding differs from the attempt to produce reports free of individual perspective and opinion, and is shared by JR who argued, ‘I do believe in impartiality and I do believe in objectivity, but I also believe it’s possible to be passionate and judgmental and even opinionated at the same time’. Similarly, to how JR here couples the notion of objectivity with impartiality, JM too repeatedly referenced how imperative he deemed impartiality to be when questioned about the viability of objectivity in war reporting. Likewise, JRS thought of ‘fairness’ as ‘one of the big measures [of objectivity]’.
Such as Tuchman’s (1972) literature dictates, these contributions reiterate the notion that journalists understand objectivity as a ritual, a method that can be understood in tangible measures. Although, when discussing the quality of balance, two participants highlighted that they felt there is a potential difference between conducting standard occupational rituals and attaining the ethical status in their reporting. MG stated, ‘there could be a lot of daylight between that day to day process of reporting and creating a really objective view of what’s happening’. Similarly, LH, whilst discussing the process of interviewing both victims and perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide said, ‘is that balance? To me, that’s just a form of trying to understand what’s going on’. JRS addressed the limitations of this approach in terms of the reportage it can produce. ‘It is very difficult sometimes to avoid “he said, she said” reporting […] sometimes you do have to do that, […]but it’s not entirely satisfactory as I think your audience looks to you quite often for some sort of conclusion or analysis’. This contribution shows concerns regarding occupational rituals leading to passive and uninspired reporting, as expressed in previous literature (Cunningham, 2003; Ward, 2017; 2005; Smith, 2008).

Similarly, when asked his opinion about adhering to the mandate of balance in an unbalanced conflict, JM admitted, ‘I have been frustrated in the past by the need to put in an Israeli perspective because I just don’t feel that it warrants it, but it has to be there to be accepted as an objective piece of reporting’. Here JM touches on concerns expressed by Santos in regards to a blind adherence to neutrality compromising a reporter’s ability to truly portray the proportion of a violent incident (2010: 3). Yet, he goes on to explain that he relies on fact to exhibit the imbalance in conflict as opposed to risking coming across as partisan. ‘Those figures [death toll] speak for that imbalance you’re trying to communicate’. Similarly, JR argues for reliance on fact by arguing journalists ‘have to let the pictures do the talking’ as
opposed to relying heavily on emotive commentary. This reliance on fact supports Ward’s argument (1998: 124) in his critical response to Bell’s ‘journalism of attachment’ (1998), whilst supporting findings from Post’s previous research that suggested journalists prefer to ‘let the facts speak for themselves’ than adopt a scientific method of attaining objectivity (2015: 744). The complexities of objectivity in practise and the synonymous nature of qualities just as balance, fairness, and neutrality contributes to the convoluted understanding of objectivity embodied by participants, who all exhibited nuanced differences in the way in which they define, understand, and practice it within the conflict zone environment.
4.2 Emotion

When asked if there’s place for emotion in conflict reportage, every single participant felt it could be a valuable asset, when used correctly. Three participants in particular voiced the opinion that emotion is actually an integral part of reporting conflict. *MG* described emotional involvement ‘inevitable’ when reporting conflict, before going to argue ‘it’s a hallmark of good journalism’. Likewise, *LH* added, ‘I think journalists should care’; ‘It’s not an advantage not to have emotion, it’s a disadvantage. If you don’t have feeling, you can’t be a journalist’. Similarly, *JR* argued, ‘I think if you don’t write emotionally you can’t sort of lead the viewer through the situation as you saw it. If one wrote in a neutral way, one would be letting the story down and not actually telling the truth. The truth can be emotional.’ Interestingly, *JR* here dismisses the perception that there is no place for emotion in the search for objective truth, by arguing that one cannot reflect the truth without the presence of emotion. Though, *JR*’s stance on emotion in journalism was made more clear when he chose to mention the work of Martin Bell, describing Bell’s work (1998) as giving ‘us on the frontline a bit more freedom to know we could express ourselves and express our view’.

Similarly, when discussing what content is imperative to provide to audiences when reporting conflict, *JM* argued, ‘It’s the geopolitics of it, but also the emotional trauma and the human side of war, and to me that lies at the very heart of it’, whilst *JR* argues the need to ‘rise to the occasion of the humanitarian situation that you are witnessing’. These statements demonstrate a subtle humanitarian theme, exhibiting the belief held by these three experienced journalists that emotion is somewhat crucial when reporting on war and the human side of conflict, supporting Santos’ argument that journalists must be willing to transcend detachment in order to achieve accuracy when reporting on such subject matter.
When asked if they had experienced difficulty maintaining detachment whilst attempting to report objectively, interestingly, two participants expressed the opinion that they do not feel the need to be emotionally detached in order to report objectively. JR claimed, ‘I don’t see it as my job to be detached’, whilst LH stated, ‘Objectivity doesn’t mean not caring’ and ‘Detachment doesn’t mean failing to engage your emotions’. All participants expressed the belief that journalists are able to be emotional in and about their work without compromising their professionalism and ethical credibility. MG stated, ‘You can feel outraged or indignant or angry or upset by seeing the impact of conflict, but I don’t think that stops you from being able to do your job in a professional manner.’; JRS likewise claimed, ‘You can express emotion and still be objective’, whilst JR argued, ‘I do two things at once. I have a professional detachment to get me through the day of the job, but I also have to write emotionally to the pictures’. Whereas JRS, JR and MG suggest it is possible to do both, the remaining two participants, LH and JM actually suggested that one should aim to do so. LH stated, ‘I see no contradiction, you have to do both. You have an emotional thing and an intellectual thing going on at the same time’; whilst JM argued one’s reportage can potentially benefit from such, ‘I think the passionate response, the natural human response to seeing that sort of traumatic event lends itself to the drama of the reportage and therefore the impact it can have’. The whole sample believed it possible to practice a way of being both emotionally engaged whilst retaining journalistic ethical oversight.

Despite participant’s hospitable attitude towards the presence of emotion in their reportage, all of them ensured they made the point that journalists must be careful not to cross the line into partisanship. Both LH and MG described becoming partisan as ‘not acceptable’, whilst JRS claimed one must ‘be fair to all involved, even those you disagree with’. Both JM and LH drew on examples of being able to remain non-partisan but still communicate the honest
truth of the matter. *LH* said, ‘take the holocaust – you’re not partisan. But you’re not going to motor down a central line between exterminating the Jews and not. Exterminating the Jews is a very wicked and terrible thing and the job of the journalists is to expose that’. Similarly, *JM* argued, ‘but while you can be impartial about taking sides in a conflict, when it comes to the human side of conflict there is right and wrong’, and, referring back to his witnessing of the targeting and killing of Palestinian children by Israeli forces, ‘the pressures on my need to remain scrupulously impartial are tested. I have to often defer to my colleagues to make sure I don’t cross lines in how I report because I feel angry’. These responses exhibit an awareness of the fine line between evident emotional investment in the story and becoming partisan, and subsequently offer insight into how one participants actively aims to prevent the latter (*JM*).

One of the major criticisms of Bell’s journalism of attachment (1998) is the likelihood of opening up a platform for ‘celebrity journalism’, where the reporter becomes a ‘hero at the heart of the action’ (ibid: 108). Although interviewees expressed a somewhat embracing attitude towards the presence of emotion in their work, four of them specifically made the point that this is only acceptable if the emotion is that of the subject or story, not the reporter. *LH* stated, ‘I don’t think my emotion is important. It’s an important tool to understanding the people I’m reporting on’. When discussing the way in which emotion can be injected into a story, *JRS* argued, ‘journalists have to be very aware of not becoming the story themselves’. This notion of having to be careful was reinforced by *JM* who stated, ‘It has to be reined in’, and *JR* who said, ‘you have to keep it in check’ and ‘as long as the emotion flows from the situation and is not imposed by the reporter – it’s never about you’. Though, both *JR* and *JM* mentioned a difference in attitudes to emotion in print and television journalism. *JM* said, ‘I think there are extreme examples of emotion in TV journalism in particular when reporters openly weep on camera or get actively involved’, recalling when CNN reporter Anderson
Cooper intervening to help an injured child in Haiti on camera. *JR* went as far as to say, ‘I think there are some TV reporters who actually see it as their job to become the story’, making a clear distinction between the genres. These responses exhibit a significant awareness amongst the sample of the risk of celebrity journalism and the conscious effort to avoid it, arguably demonstrating minimal risk of the journalists becoming the ‘crusader’ (Morrison & Tumber, 1998: 130) when emotionally invested.
4.3 Trauma

4.3.1 Attitudes and perception of trauma

*JM, LH and JRS* all expressed the opinion that attitudes towards the work-related mental health struggles of journalists have changed within the industry over time, reflective of findings in Richards & Rees’ study (2011). *LH* stated, ‘It’s quite different to how it used to be’. When asked if the topic of journalist’s emotions is taboo in the news room, *JRS* answered, ‘It probably was not that long ago but that’s changed’. Both *JM* and *JRS* described experiences in the past in which older colleagues would be ‘dismissive’ of counselling and even hostile environment training, something *JRS* attributed to the generational differences such as the older journalists he worked with having completed national service. Both *JM* and *JRS* used the term ‘machismo’ to describe attitudes prevalent in the news room in the past, but three participants were confident in arguing that things are different now. *LH* attributed the start of this change to the early nineties; ‘It changed around Bosnia and Rwanda, you had an awful lot of people going out, a lot of whom were inexperienced and you didn’t know if they could cope. That sort of grew over the following ten years, it grew more and more accepted’. *JRS* too recalled the first time he was offered counselling, ‘It was quite a new thing in 1995, before Feinstein’s first major study on PTSD had been published’.

Despite this change beginning around this time, *JM* argued that it is only ‘in very recent years’ that institutions have worked to assist journalists in dealing with work related trauma and stress, and went on to discuss organisations such as the DART centre and how their work has influenced institutional approaches. The general response showed that participants believe organisations now offer ample support, marking a change since previous studies suggested otherwise (Ghaffar & Feinstein, 2005; Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Buchanan & Keats, 2011). *JRS* attributed the change in attitude to a ‘stronger duty of care’ felt by employers, influenced by ‘a greater awareness of mental health issues in society in general’
and an increase in the number of female foreign-correspondents in what was almost an entirely male field.

Relating to the topic of gender, interestingly, the only female participant LH shared her experience of being demonised for coming back from Rwanda ‘not traumatised enough’. She stated, ‘I think if you’re not traumatised, like me, you’re made to feel like the hard-hearted bitch from hell. In life, not just in journalism’; before going as far to say she believes there is ‘an expectation you will be traumatised, that you will not be coping’. LH’s comments here can be linked to societal gender stereotypes that lead to the common expectation of women to be openly emotional and sensitive, as none of the male participants claimed to share such an experience. This point could open up possibilities of future research into the impact of gender on journalistic experiences of trauma. Participants responses here generally refute Ochberg’s (cited in Santos, 2010) argument and Keats & Buchanan’s (2009) findings that suggest discussion around the topic of trauma is uncommon due to stigma and dear of being deemed ‘weak’ (ibid), again reifying the apparent change in newsroom attitudes to trauma and emotion.

When discussing the times that interviewees had felt the biggest strain on their mental health because of their work, MG, JRS and JM all shared the view that psychological collapses or breakdowns are a build-up of different factors, or as MG put it, ‘There’s always a lot going on in these sorts of cases’. MG described witnessing a suicide bombing in a Kabul hotel as ‘just another drop in the glass’, as he was simultaneously dealing with the breakdown of a personal relationship, and described his psychological collapse as an ‘accumulation of different things including being in all of these environments’. Similarly, JM reflected on the series of events that led him to seek help in coping with work stress and the psychological
repercussions of such. After learning that one of his good friends, Martin Adler, was killed working in Mogadishu, having to deliver the report of the incident on the news that night, he was sent straight to Gaza to work and had to fly straight from Gaza to Sweden for his friend’s burial. On arriving at check in to find the desk closed, he ‘broke down sobbing’ and realised he had to seek some help. Both JRS and JM linked the lack of sleep experienced by journalists in conflict zones to their emotional frailty. JRS reflected on a time he was brought to tears because he witnessed a Gazan man unable to afford a football for his children. He stated, ‘When you’re tired you’re more emotionally susceptible’, whilst he and JM both described feeling ‘emotionally and physically exhausted’ returning home from a stint in a war zone, JM describing, ‘you’re emotionally and physically exhausted, it’s the dregs of you that are left. You’re just a crumpled wreck, you’re knackered’. Here three participants exhibit the opinion that it is not one traumatic event that leads to breakdowns of journalists, but a combination of factors such as witnessing a traumatic event, lack of sleep and the breakdown of personal relationships. This demonstrated the complexities of trying to understand the stability and triggers of differing individuals who all have a different psychological make up, whilst showing that work too is often not the sole cause of struggling to cope amongst journalists. As Ochebrg put it, ‘biology comes into play with [PTSD]’ (in Santos, 2010: 62).

All participant’s experiences of trauma ranged from admitting to being ‘very traumatised’ (JM) to never having experienced what they would deem ‘trauma’ at all. For instance, when discussing his experienced in Kabul, MG repeatedly stated, ‘It wasn’t traumatic’, explaining ‘It was stressful and unpleasant, but it didn’t shatter my world view’, whilst JR described, ‘I think the trauma was more for our viewers than for me’ when referring to covering his piece on the Yazidis on Mount Sinjar. Interestingly, both LH and JRS exhibited the belief that journalists almost lack a right to claim to be traumatised when witnessing what local civilians
endure in conflict zones. LH said, ‘I was in Rwanda for about three months. Rwandan’s have a lifetime of this stuff. So, the idea we get traumatised and they are fine is nonsense. We get to leave’. Similarly, JRS contributed, ‘Being a western correspondent, you can always leave’ and ‘You’re not a civilian with no way out – you realise you’re relatively privileged’. I believe these responses shed light on an interesting attitude to trauma adopted by some journalists who compare their ordeal with that of the victims of conflict, subsequently rendering their suffering as undeserving of the title of ‘trauma’. This could possibly act as a way of assisting journalists in coping with their struggles by providing an element of perspective.
4.3.2 Impact of traumatic and stressful experiences

Expectedly, when discussion turned to the affect their traumatic or stressful experiences had had on the way in which each journalist performed their job, responses differed greatly between each individual. JR explained he felt such experiences ‘change your calculation of risk’, after drawing on the helicopter crash that killed his pilot the day after he took him up into the mountains to film and rescue Yazidis, ‘I would think twice about getting in a helicopter after that’. This contrasts with MG’s experience who argued the suicide bombing in a Kabul hotel, ‘didn’t make me more cautious. I was pushing hard to go to Libya straight after’. LH explained that her time working alone in Rwanda, ‘helped me to appreciate, later on, the value of working in a team as opposed to being isolated and by myself’, and ‘[Rwanda] changed me as a person so it must have changed me as a journalist. It affected my world view’. Whereas, JM explained how he has not been hardened by what he has witnessed, to the benefit of his reportage; stating, ‘I haven’t been so immured by the things I’ve seen to be able to report it blandly and factually, it is still visceral and real’, suggesting emotional responses either positive or negative, to be an asset.

Again, as expected, when asked about the impact of their emotionally strenuous experiences on a more personal as opposed to occupational level, the variety in responses persisted. When questioned on how his experiences in Chechnya had affected him personally, JRS recalled having the same nightmare about surviving an air raid in Chechnya that killed two men he was speaking with. This nightmare recurred over three consecutive nights, whilst holidaying six months after the incident. JRS described the recurring nightmares as ‘a physiologically my body saying okay; you’re going to be alright now. It was almost like the poison leaving my body’. LH claimed her experiences in Rwanda spurred a ‘philosophical crisis, not a psychological one’, in that it made her ‘more pessimistic about human nature’, but did not cause her to have some sort of breakdown. In fact, similarly to JRS, she described having
nightmares and intrusive thoughts in a positive light, as proving ‘how normal and stabilised I am’. Likewise, JM stated, ‘I don’t find it easy to deal with and that’s a good thing’, meaning it is a healthy and normal human response to such experiences. Although, he makes this statement in regards to how he struggles to cope as opposed to managing well. ‘I have not become hardened, in fact the opposite. I find it increasingly difficult and emotionally straining to cover conflict’. JM also on more than one occasion specifies exactly what aspect of covering conflict affects him most. ‘It’s the killing of the civilians that gets me to the core. It stays with you; it doesn’t leave you.’ Contrastingly, JR discussed the way in which he avoided becoming ‘traumatised’ by his experiences of the Yazidi’s desperation when reporting from mount Sinjar. He said, ‘my professional detachment at the time acted as a firewall to prevent me from being traumatised’. When explaining how he’d rarely experienced what he would deem trauma, he related this to his role as a foreign correspondent not revolving solely around conflict, but political affairs and other topics.

Whilst on the topic of returning home from conflict zones and the process of adjusting back into ‘normal’ home life, both MG and JM explained how it can be very difficult for journalists covering war to integrate back into a safe and stable environment. MG argues that one suffers a physiological imbalance on returning home, after adjusting to a consistent level of stress, ‘people can feel very empty or dead inside without that excitement to stimulate them’. Relatedly, JM explained how his time in Gaza made him ‘unable to extract myself because I was too heavily invested’, when returning home to his family. ‘I was constantly in touch with my friend in Gaza, reading and watching everything that was being put out’. He went on to explain the strain this put on his relationship with his wife on a family holiday in Greece soon after leaving the conflict zone, ‘My wife went absolutely nuts at me because I wasn’t present, I was still in Gaza in my head’. This contrasts greatly with JR’s previously
mentioned contribution in which he explained why he struggles very little to adjust to being back home. ‘People who spend too much time in conflict zones can have problems but my work is very varied’. This variety of responses is relevant when considering the different degrees to which each participant has felt affected by trauma, as they reflect the different amounts of exposure to conflict each individual has experienced in combination with each participant’s psychological state.
4.3.3 Dealing with trauma

Naturally, the variety in the degree to which each participant has felt affected by their traumatic experiences was subsequently mirrored in the different ways participants dealt with psychological stress and/or trauma. The article MG chose to reflect on for this study focussed on the way in which he dealt with his ‘psychological collapse’, as it described his experiences at a meditative retreat in India after trying therapy and medication to no avail. Contrastingly, JR claimed to simply ‘[spend] time with family, outdoors, walking the dog’. LH too found her own way of dealing with the repercussions of the genocide she witnessed in Rwanda, without seeking any institutional support. ‘I did a lot of writing, I talked to people who had also lived through it. Two of my Rwandan friends had nervous breakdowns, I spent time trying to look after them to some extent’. JM also mentioned the comfort he found in ‘talking about it’ with colleagues who had shared his experiences in the conflict zone, something he describes as helping him ‘process it on the spot’. His method of coping included seeing a psychotherapist for a number of years, whom he chose and the institution funded. He described this process as, ‘exorcizing those demons’; as well as finding comfort in the work of Don McCullin who he describes as giving him ‘comfort in knowing it’s okay to feel like I do’. JM also elaborated slightly about his choice to become Channel 4 News’ Asia correspondent, explaining, ‘If you find yourself getting incredibly depressed about the world it’s time to stand back and do something else’ after feeling all he ever worked on was wars in the Middle East. This active change of surroundings in order to gain some sort of relief was shared by LH, who reflected back on when she requested the foreign editor of the Observer to stop sending her to Rwanda and the DRC, and was subsequently sent to Mexico to complete work she ‘very much enjoyed’. When asked if he felt the need to seek help to cope at any point in his career, JRS replied, ‘no, but it affects people in different ways’. Here JRS highlights the fact that psychological complexities render every journalist different in how
they are affected by traumatic and distressing experiences, and subsequently how they deal with those affects.

*MG* and *JM* associated the high paced nature of the role of the foreign-correspondent to why some journalists find it hard to cope with their experiences. He argued, ‘because you’re moving to report something else, you don’t really have time to process it’. Correspondingly, *MG* explained an ‘unconscious process’ that he described to be ‘quite a common phenomenon amongst war-correspondents’ and like an addiction in some ways’. This process consists of journalists immersing themselves in work, persistently seeking out further stressful situations as a means of ‘avoiding dealing with your actual stress from other experiences. You’re running way constantly’. He drew on his own experience with the example of pushing hard to go and cover conflict in Libya straight after the bombing incident in Kabul. Although he too highlights the consequences of this process, ‘I wasn’t in a fit state to go to Libya. When I got home I had a complete psychological collapse. I was ill’, reiterating *JRS*’s previous statement about the problems experienced by journalists that spend ‘too much time’ in war zones.
4.4 The Future
In regards to the future of the role of the foreign correspondent, all five respondents agreed that the role will always be critical in war reporting despite the rise institutional use of citizen journalism, based on the argument that the traditional journalist is superior in experience, training (JM), building a relationship of trust with audiences over long period of time (JM), has a ‘value system’ (MG), and offers an outside perspective of a conflict (MG, LH) as opposed to citizen journalists who ‘have their own agenda’ (JRS, JR, MG); an issue identified in previous studies (D’Angelo & Kuyper, 2010; Mortensen & Wall, 2012). Similarly, both JRS and JM touched on the need for journalists the verify citizen journalism, specifically commenting on the unreliability of news on social media. LH emphasized the importance of ‘the eyewitness’, whilst expressing concerns that recent the emphasis on citizen journalism ‘leaves little room’ for such. Although, she and JRS both described access to this content as advantageous and having ‘massively advanced what we do’, but doesn’t replacing it, as LH argues the key to the future is to ‘find a balance’ between the two differing genres.

Two interviewees expressed concerns about the impact of shrinking budgets and dangers of the war zone, as LH predicted the role would become ‘worse paid with no careers in it. The level of experience will fall’; whilst JRS suggested the impact of digital technologies will render ‘good news’ expensive, resulting in audiences ‘getting what they can for free online’. The sample’s responses on the topic on the future of the foreign correspondent show a resounding opinion that the role remains critical now in the realm of social media more than ever, whilst recognising the threats the digital landscape and increasing dangers of the conflict zone impose on the role.
5. Conclusion

The findings of this research demonstrate evidence that journalists understand that ‘true objectivity’ does not work in practise. Yet contrary to the hypothesis that encouraged this study, it is not as much the emotional aspect of reporting war that prevents this, but more so the practical restrictions of operating within a warzone. Respondents exhibited a resounding awareness of the limited perspective available to them within the practical confines of the conflict zone, whether embedded or not. Interestingly, the findings revealed that accepting this, participants value transparency and rely on context to counter act the detriment imposed on their reports by their limited access and perspective.

As previous literature in this area argues, the journalists who partook in this research dealt with the impracticalities of attaining true objectivity by adopting rituals (Tuchman, 1971) that allow them to attain relatable qualities, such as balance, impartiality ad neutrality (Hacket & Zhao; 1998). Just as Post’s (2015) findings suggested, this research found that the approach taken to objectivity by journalists is not scientific or methodical as Ward would recommend (2010), rather based on personal value judgements of ‘right and wrong’, whilst relying on letting facts and pictures speak for themselves.

Undeniably, the act of witnessing and reporting death and destruction is an emotional process for journalists, therefore a focus on emotionality is somewhat logical when attempting to understand journalistic ethics in practise. The findings of this research revealed a subtle theme of humanitarian values amongst participants, who repeatedly highlighted the value of the victim’s voice and the denouncing of detracting attention from the victims of war on to the journalist, whilst describing the death of civilians to be the most traumatic factor of their job and the cause to serve; albeit some more than others.
This attitude underpinned the general welcoming of emotion in their reportage, seen as a tool to do the human side of war ‘justice’. Yet, the valuing of emotion in their reportage was consistently overseen by journalistic oversight and ‘judgement calls’ that ensured participants retained professionalism in their journalism, as participants explained ways of finding a balance between the two as opposed to deeming them dichotomous (Ward, 1998). The attitudes exhibited by interviewees share significant similarities with the DART Centre’s rationale, that dictates a degree of reflexivity can assist journalists in minimising the risk of adverse impacts on themselves and sources, whilst making well informed news choices and maintaining their own resilience (Dart Centre, 2003; Dart Centre Europe, 2007).

This study’s findings clearly demonstrate a sufficient level of care offered by institutions to journalists who are struggling to cope, and an increasingly supportive attitude exhibited by news organisations, contrary to findings of older studies (Simspon & Boggs, 1999; Ghaffar & Feinstein, 2005; Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Buchanan & Keats, 2011). Whereas the limitations of the sample could come in to play considering three of five participants work for Channel 4 News, participants spoke generally about their knowledge of the industry and did not limit their comment to one organisation. In combination with existing literature (Richards & Rees, 2011) there is substantial grounding to assume the findings of this research are accurately indicative of an industry increasingly tolerant and welcoming to the discussion of emotion, mental health and trauma, arguably reflective of an engaged and functioning emotional public sphere (Richards, 2007).

In terms of establishing how traumatic experiences affect the way in which conflict is reported by journalists, responses were extremely varied and lacked dominant themes. This
could be indicative of either the incredible difficulty faced when attempting to compare different individual’s psychological processes and tendencies, or the limitations of the sample size of this research, as the limited number of participants did not allow for enough responses to identify significant themes.

Similarly, attempting to identify themes among responses that detailed the way in which journalists deal with their traumatic experiences had the same issue. Answers were very varied. Although, patterns could be identified amongst a minority of respondents who acknowledged the value of working with colleagues as opposed to alone in conflict zones, in order to allow them to talk about their experiences and subsequently ‘process’ them in a very high paced and intense environment. Similarly, a theme identified was the opinion that too much time in such environments is problematic for the mental health of the journalist, even if it is their own decision. These contributions could suggest measures to be taken by institutions to monitor the amount of exposure journalists have to conflict environments, perhaps issuing regulations on the maximum amount of time one should be allowed to spend there in order to prevent overworking and psychological repercussions.

Finally, discussing the indeterminate future of the foreign correspondent role in the increasingly dangerous and digitized world, all participants recognised that the amorphous nature of citizen journalism can never replace the journalism that comes from the professional and ethical practices of a traditional foreign correspondent. Recognised was the way in which a balance must be attained between the use of citizen journalism by institutions and the input of trained journalists in order to minimise the ethical risks posed to news outlets (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Mortensen in Wall 2012: 132), whilst the cost of the vetting and verification process was acknowledged in the context of strained budgets and current
cutting back on foreign bureau funding. These evaluations by respondents resulted in speculation about the detrimental impact of the current news landscape, such as lesser pay resulting in lesser experience and quality news becoming costly and inaccessible; though the general response exhibited a significant uncertainty amongst the journalists as to what the future holds for the news industry as a whole in the context of the modern digital landscape.

5.1 **Going Forward**

The findings of this study have provided understanding of journalistic perspectives of trauma, ethics and emotionality, revealing strong insight into the topic of objectivity in conflict journalism and increased understanding of attitudes towards trauma in the industry. Whilst suggesting that the traumatic side of war reporting encourages the emotional reflexivity in participants, and subsequently the presence of emotion in their reportage and conduct. Yet the scope of this research in combination with the sensitive and individual nature of mental health has rendered dominant themes and definitive conclusions on the topic of the impact of trauma on reportage difficult to attain. For this reason, I would argue for further qualitative research to be conducted on a mass scale, in order to contribute to the lacking qualitative contributions in this area, as this study aimed to do, with more conclusive and definitive results.

As the topic of this research is broad, spanning several issues, I would argue that further research would benefit from a more specific focus. For example, the issue of gender in relation to journalist’s experiences of trauma, or the differences between print and TV news in relation to emotion, as encouraged by the findings of this study.
Bibliography


Markham, T., 2012. The Correspondent’s Experience of War. At the Interface / Probing the Boundaries 80, 167–190.


## Appendix

### (i) Sample Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journalist</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Organisation/ work status</th>
<th>Specialism</th>
<th>Experience (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>MG</td>
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<td>Freelance Reuters, Financial Times</td>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JM</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>ITN: Channel 4 News</td>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>ITN: Channel 4 News</td>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRS</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Ex BBC and Reuters (Now journalism lecturer and Freelance)</td>
<td>Armed Conflict</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>LH</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>ITN: Channel 4 News</td>
<td>Foreign Correspondent</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ii) Information Sheet

An Investigation of War Journalists’ Perspectives of Trauma, Ethics and Emotionality

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project for the University of Leeds. Please use this information sheet to understand the purpose and aims of this research, and what it will consist of. This should assist in guiding your decision regarding whether or not you would like to take part.

Please do not hesitate to ask us if you have any questions.

Purpose of project
The research project is a Communications Dissertation for the University of Leeds. The study aims to gain insight into the war journalists’ perspectives of trauma, objectivity, attachment and emotionality in the context of the conflict zone, in order to provide an empirical contribution to the growing understanding of mental health issues amongst journalists.

You have been chosen to participate due to your experience in this area, as we believe your contributions would be invaluable considering your career and prior experience reporting conflict. You are one of five journalists that have been invited to take part.

Do I have to take part?
Participation in this research is completely voluntary, and refusal to contribute will incur no penalty to yourself, and you are free discontinue participation at any time you wish, without having to provide a reason. If you do wish to participate, this information sheet will be yours to keep for future reference and you will be asked to either sign a consent form or give verbal consent at the time of interview.

What do I have to do?
Your contribution would be in the form of a one off one-to-one reflective interview that should last no more than two hours. The interview will be six questions long, but will be semi-structured, which means new questions may arise based on your answers throughout the interview process. During this interview, we will be reflecting on some of your prior work from a conflict-zone that you feel is particularly relevant to your experience of trauma and ethics in the war zone.
Once all interviews have been completed, your contribution will
You are expected to be honest, but do not have to discuss anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
Due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter this study focuses on, you may have to revisit memories that you may find uncomfortable or upsetting.
You will not be asked to discuss anything you do not want to, what you disclose is completely at your discretion.
**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**
Whilst there are no immediate benefits for participants, it is hoped that this work will contribute to a gap in in-depth research into journalist’s experiences whilst reporting on conflict and the repercussions of such. This should assist in a better academic and industry understanding of journalist’s needs, and assess the relevance and effectiveness of the current ethical undertones of western journalism’s approach to covering conflict.

**Will my contribution be kept confidential? What will happen to the results?**
Any information collected will be kept strictly confidential, You will not be identifiable in any report or publication, unless you request otherwise.

**Will I be recorded? How will the recorded media be used?**
The interviews will be audio recorded. These recordings will be used for the sole purpose of analysis and transcription. No other use will be made of them without written permission from yourself, and nobody outside this project will have access to the recordings.

**Contact for further information:**
Please feel free to contact either myself or my dissertation supervisor if you have any questions or concerns.

**Talah Kaddourah**
cs13tk@leeds.ac.uk
07507610460

**Dr Katy Parry**
K.J.Parry@leeds.ac.uk
01133434586

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for considering to participate. This sheet is yours to keep for future reference.
(iii) Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about how you got into reporting on conflicts? Was this something you always desired or an unanticipated direction in your career?

2. My main research is on the emotional and even traumatic side of journalism, so I’d like to ask you specifically about this aspect. Can you think of an instance when there were particular emotional or psychological experiences during your time in war-zones that you feel affected your ability to remain objective when producing reports?

3. I have/you have brought along an example of your reporting. Can you talk me through the context to this report and its significance to you with regard to trauma/ethics etc.?

4. Did you experience anything particularly traumatic during your stay in this conflict-zone? If so, how do you feel it has impacted your reporting both in this instance and on a macro level (beyond the question of objectivity, perhaps more about their own ethical approach, how they might protect themselves or others from potential harm).

5. Do you believe that traditional objectivity is viable in times of war, and is there any place for expressing emotions in war reporting?

6. At a time where the reliance on citizen-journalism and outsourcing of eye-witnessing is becoming increasingly common practice by news institutions, do you feel that this is affecting your own practices as a journalist? What do you feel is the future of the foreign-correspondent role in the digital news landscape?
(iv) Reflective Texts

LH: https://granta.com/where-is-kigali/

JM: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilOxxSPgS-M

JRS: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4063033.stm


MG: http://matthewgreenjournalism.com/2012/01/07/meditation-vacation/