

Reporting Revolutions: Don't Forget The Aftermath (Guest blog) #Polis12

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Woman at War: Hilsum in Benghazi

This report by Polis intern Barbara Feeney on our Reporting Revolutions panel discussion at the [Polis Journalism Conference](#) chaired by Richard Sambrook of Cardiff University with BBC's Lyse Doucet, Lindsey Hilsum of Channel 4 News (who has a new book, [Sandstorm](#), which tells the story of the Libyan revolt) and Tom Coghlan of The Times.

Despite the bloodshed and savagery which has occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, there was a sense of immense satisfaction and privilege as Doucet, Hilsum and Coghlan drew on their experiences from the Arab Revolutions. Hilsum, a journalist for over 20 years, said the Arab Spring was 'why I went into the profession'; while Doucet remarked

that it was "an extraordinary time to be a journalist".

This was a unique set of events that journalists had not encountered before; described by Coghlan as "a great departure from usual work".

The unrestricting environments teamed with cooperative civilians and rebel groups, provided the journalists with greater freedom to report the events. The receptivity of the people was effective in allowing the world to hear the voices of the ordinary man on the street, who'd been oppressed for years by strict regimes.

Hilsum described the "incredible privilege" she felt reporting the stories of the voiceless. The panelists' interaction with civilians and eyewitness reports captures their efforts to forge relationships with local people, in order to gauge an in-depth understanding of the situation. Doucet went on to explain journalists' role in helping people to discover themselves, "their sense of identity and their pride".

Coghlan said the introduction of new forces in citizen journalism was creating an increasing reliance between mainstream media and amateur 'citizen journalists', presenting new challenges and opportunities to professional journalists. The Arab Spring saw a huge amount of amateur footage and images being used by the mainstream media, as well as eyewitness reports from civilians on the ground. News agencies are becoming increasingly more sophisticated about handling amateur footage, as we witness the creation of a hybrid media, possessing elements of professional journalism, as well as citizen input.

When addressing the necessity of having journalists as eyewitness reporters, Hilsum argued that it is crucial that there are reporters on the ground, otherwise you "don't really know what is happening", making particular reference to Marie Colvin's final report in the Sunday Times, that drew attention to the 'widows' basement' in the Syrian city of Homs.

Coghlan also stressed the importance of recording history as eyewitness reporters: "Anyone who has a sense of a great narrative of history, would like to have a sense of adding to this knowledge". He expressed fears that events in Syria are "disappearing into a black hole", because of difficulties accessing the country.

Throughout the talk there were recurring references to the obstacles and dangers experienced by the journalists; despite the thrill and excitement of reporting from the ground, danger is inevitable.

A final concern amongst the panelists was the lack of coverage in the aftermath of the revolutions. Hilsum described how “We are so obsessed with Syria at the moment that the aftermath of the other Arab Springs is going undercover”. “Often there are bigger things happening” and it’s difficult to “convey complexities on TV”, explained Hilsum. These stories have to be told, we need to continue to follow these stories as best we can”, said Doucet.

This report by Polis intern Barbara Feeney

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