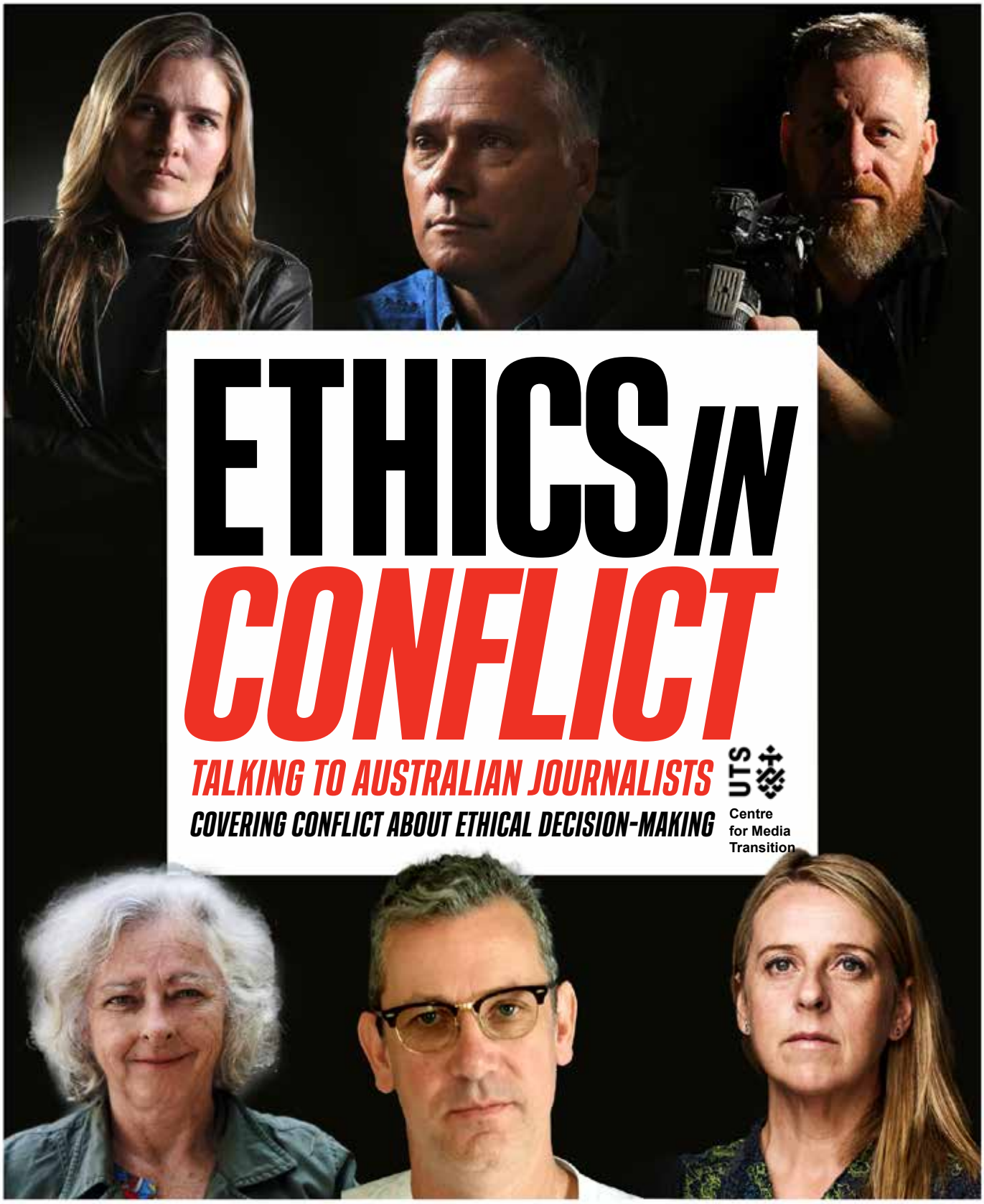


ETHICS IN CONFLICT

TALKING TO AUSTRALIAN JOURNALISTS

COVERING CONFLICT ABOUT ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

UTS
Centre for Media Transition

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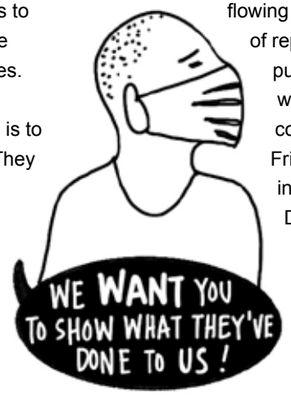
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1 INTRODUCTION

No field of news reporting is more dangerous than reporting conflict. Dangers abound for journalists, their crews, their local fixers and their producers. And there are dangers for those they are reporting on and their contacts. However, not enough is known about how journalists apply ethics in the face of all these dangers, and in the face of various competing interests and loyalties.

This research project is the result of a partnership between the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Centre for Media Transition (CMT), University of Technology Sydney (UTS). The project's aim is to explore the ways in which journalists navigate the often-treacherous terrain of ethics in conflict zones. Humanitarian agencies work on the basis of a commitment to 'do no harm'; their clear objective is to help those in crisis. But what about journalists? They report on the conflicts and other disasters that are of public interest value for audiences, and sometimes circumstance demands that they work hand-in-hand with humanitarian agencies, but do they share the same motives? Or do they play by their own – different – ethical rules?



The project had two distinct parts: a series of interviews with journalists; and a half-day symposium.

In August and September 2021, we conducted in-depth interviews with six Australian reporters and photojournalists – Kate Geraghty, Stan Grant, Sophie McNeill, Richard Murray, Gary Ramage and Ginny Stein – about their ethical decision-making when reporting from conflict zones. It emerged that their ethical approaches vary considerably; however, there is also significant consistency. With the exception of Geraghty, these reporters take little notice of formal codes of ethics. Several interviewees had no idea what these codes contained. Rather, they all said that their work was based on internalised principles such as 'do no harm' or 'don't hurt people'. These self-generated principles were often founded on the concepts of respect and dignity.

Each of the interviewees also said that their ethical decision-making was often motivated by their relationships, although the specifics of this motivation varied. For McNeill, her paramount concern was always the people in her story. For Ramage, the relationship with the source demanded honesty and trust. And for Murray, the relationship with his perceived audience was crucial. The interviewees also emphasised the importance of their own personal moral compass: Grant's ethics were largely informed by his Indigeneity; whereas Stein was shaped by her early Catholicism; and for McNeill caring about people always came before getting the story. And, contrary to stereotype, the interviewees all believed that journalists sometimes should become involved to save lives and do good rather than being merely dispassionate and uninvolved observers.

The second stage of the project involved a more free-flowing and public symposium covering the ethics of reporting in conflict zones and how this vital public sphere work intersects with the law and with humanitarian goals. Held on a virtual conference platform (due to COVID-19) on Friday, September 17, 2021, the symposium included opening remarks by the ICRC's David Tuck, a keynote address from Sophie McNeill, and two panel sessions featuring journalists, academics and lawyers. The first focused on journalistic practice; and the second focused on theoretical and legal issues.

The tricky ethical decisions facing reporters in conflict zones and in humanitarian crises are not abating. Indeed, they are likely to compound, as conflicts and crises continue to be drawn out, and as much legacy journalism finds itself in an ongoing and debilitating financial crisis, paving the way for more fly-in reporters without institutional backing. It is an unfortunate fact that when newsrooms consider budget cuts, they think first of cutting foreign bureaux when they have them, or international coverage generally. All of which makes it vitally important to shine a light on how reporters in conflicts and crises are making ethical decisions. That's what this project aims to do, for the benefit of journalists present and future, but also for the benefit of those they report on, and, in turn, for the benefit of journalism's audiences.

2 | SYMPOSIUM
INTRODUCTORY REMARKS



Date: 17 September 2021
Time: 9am
Speaker: David Tuck,
Australian chef de mission, ICRC

A very good morning from Ngunnawal land, Canberra, and, on behalf of our partners at the Centre for Media Transition at the University of Technology in Sydney, good morning from the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. We pay our respects to their elders, past and present. Please feel free to acknowledge the country from which you are joining us, here or even abroad, in the chat.

Thank you for joining us at such a trying time for many Australians and, indeed, for so many around the world. It's actually quite odd, in some respects, that we, the International Committee of the Red Cross, or ICRC, would co-host an event on communication. Our organisation is, after all, traditionally discreet. Our preferred mode of action, as we call it, is confidential, bilateral dialogue. Someone relatively reserved in nature joining the ICRC in, say, 2006, would have very safely assumed that they'd never have the terrifying task of public speaking alongside some of Australia's best professional communicators. But it's now 2021, and here I am.

We, journalists and humanitarians alike, are navigating dynamic, interconnected global communications, and we absolutely must have a credible voice. We need to communicate – sometimes more, and always better. Not only 'doing no harm', but actively furthering our objectives. Not solely 'respecting', but also protecting the dignity of the people for whom we work. It is really this, a desire to learn and improve, that has led us, together with the Centre for Media Transition, to today's symposium: 'Conflicting Ethics in Conflict Reporting'.

But let me just rewind one moment, because the ICRC has always had strong engagement with media professionals. In armed conflict, we are a constant voice on the safety, well-being and dignity of all civilians, including those who are responsible to tell the most important stories. We promote the protection of journalists to warring parties, be they states or armed groups, and we work, often discreetly, for the benefit of individuals. We also have an institutional interest to have the laws of war, first, presented and, second, presented accurately. We put journalists in stuffy rooms, subjecting them to lengthy powerpoints, teaching the international normative framework for armed conflict.

What is really interesting though is that, often without even knowing it, media appropriates legal language. Just the term 'civilian' has legal, and I would even say 'ethical', implications. It suggests that, whereas some people, the civilians, are protected, others, the non-civilians, are not. It invites an apparently easy but often immensely complex question, who exactly is a civilian?

I must add that we totally depend on journalists. We depend on the information. Good reporting is context, it supplements or complements our understanding and, very often, it opens our eyes. We also depend on the representation. Journalists generate support, political and material, for humanitarian operations – support that, now with growing needs and declining resources, underpins services to millions of people, year in, year out. And what is really exciting, turning to today, is that there is so much more. There are a huge range of synergies, similarities, between journalists and humanitarians, in terms – sometimes sadly – of risk and consequence, but also in terms of opportunities, objectives, tools, methodologies and so much more. And in this convergence of our professions, there is an enormous conversation just waiting to happen. I'm genuinely curious to know:

- How do journalists protect sources, and spare them from re-traumatisation?
- How do you protect and spare yourselves?
- How, in our digitised world, do you safeguard sensitive data?
- How, in the dusty, stressful, imperfect conditions of conflict, do you obtain your sources' meaningful, informed consent?
- How have you been impacted by the counter-terrorism response of the last two decades, which, even inadvertently, can criminalise legitimate activities, like reporting in armed conflict?
- How, with increasingly protracted wars, many of which are seemingly remote – Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen to name but three – do you keep and hold public interest?
- How, if at all, do you perceive the relevance of neutrality, independence and impartiality, sacrosanct pillars of our identity?
- And, perhaps above all, how do you tell a meaningful, impactful, respectful and dignified human story?

Evidently, it's not a small conversation. It won't be resolved today. It's a conversation that requires a partner dedicated to ethical and other frameworks for the fast-changing digital ecosystem and committed to sustainable solutions to the challenges of conflict reporting. A partner that can navigate the intersection of media, journalism, technology, law, ethics, regulation and business. A partner, like, let's say, the Centre for Media Transition at the University of Technology Sydney.



In many ways, this partnership began as a mutually held desire to, broadly, lift the ethical lid on the work of journalists in armed conflict. War evolves, as does reporting. Journalists face new dilemmas, for themselves and for the people that they represent. And yet, ethical guidance perhaps doesn't exist, might not be appropriately adapted or sufficiently promoted. It may simply be unknown. There is a space here to reflect and to grow.

But really selfishly, the thing that most excites us, is that we have also turned the mirror upon our own humanitarian efforts. Through this symposium, we are not only inviting you – journalists, reporters, media professionals – to reflect on the ethics of your communication, but, in doing so, we are in fact asking that you would help us to reflect on the ethics of ours.

To begin to do so, we are absolutely delighted to have a keynote address by Sophie McNeill. Frankly, whose career better showcases both journalism and humanitarianism? Sophie will be followed by two main panels – First, 'In the Field', and, second, 'Virtues and Rights'.

For us, let me thank the Co-Directors of CMT, Professor Monica Attard and Professor Derek Wilding, as well as the entire team for their willingness and energy to explore the ethics of conflict reporting. I would also like to thank, again, Professor Attard, as well as Dr Chrisanthi Giotis and Dr Sacha Molitorisz for their ongoing research into ethical decision-making. To Sophie McNeill, to all of our incredible line-up of contributors, and to all of our guests, thank you for bringing your experience to this symposium and contributing to what might yet be just part one of a longer conversation.

Finally, look, I'm in total awe of journalists. All humanitarians are. Journalism, good humanitarian storytelling, is part of the fabric of oversight, or accountability, in conflict. In some cases, journalists do or say what humanitarians can't. And let's be honest, for all of the importance, every single day, of humanitarian action, our work is rarely a substitute for meaningful political process towards peace. Journalists influence such processes with every single story. It is certainly not lost on us, because we have seen it every day for nearly 160 years, that the most powerful arguments against conflict are the stories of the people affected by it. Thank you, to all of the reporters out there, for playing such an important role.

JOURNALISTS FACE NEW DILEMMAS, FOR THEMSELVES AND FOR THE PEOPLE THAT THEY REPRESENT. AND YET, ETHICAL GUIDANCE PERHAPS DOESN'T EXIST

3 | SYMPOSIUM
KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Date: 17 September 2021
Time: 9.15am
Speaker: Sophie McNeill, researcher with Human Rights Watch, ex-journalist at ABC, SBS
Summary: Monica Attard

Sophie McNeill's journey to becoming a foreign correspondent began when she was 15. She sold Freddo Frogs to raise the money to pay for an airfare to travel to East Timor to make a 26-minute documentary about an American doctor treating patients injured during that nation's fight against Indonesian occupation. At that tender age came McNeill's first confrontation with the sort of ethical dilemma she would face many times thereafter.


SOPHIE MCNEILL WITH RAHAF MOHAMMED

After being told one of the nurses at the clinic had just died, the American doctor became visibly emotional and needed a moment to collect himself before seeing his next patient. But McNeill was filming. Should she stop? The doctor hadn't asked her to. So, she continued filming to get what she needed, then she stopped.

During a subsequent cadetship at SBS, McNeill recalled the MEAA code of ethics being mentioned, but she credited *Dateline* editorial meetings as providing the masterclasses of her ethics training.

'There were vigorous, passionate debates over what we could say, what evidence we had, how far could we push it, what was accurate and fair,' McNeill recalled. These meetings gave front row access to a fascinating debate over whether *Dateline* should broadcast a global scoop - pictures of US soldiers torturing prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison – when no US outlet would air them. In the end, *Dateline* did broadcast the footage and it was McNeill who was tasked with taking possession of the disc containing the explosive photographs, meeting the source in the 'middle of nowhere' somewhere in the US. She knew not to ask questions.

The biggest challenges for McNeill were the day-to-day decision-making required of journalists covering conflict, where you come face-to-face with the victims of conflict but are required to get 'the best story', the one that best illustrates what you are covering. It was flying in, searching for the best 'talent', then flying out, leaving behind victims who were lost, penniless, broken.

People such as 61-year-old Syrian refugee Nazieh Husein, who had lost contact with his wife and children as he arrived on the Greek island of Lesbos from the Turkish coast in 2015, at the height of the civil and geopolitical war in Syria. Thirty thousand Syrians were smuggled in on boats. Nazieh was one of them, lost, with no money, only the Quran and his identity documents in hand and a 50-kilometre journey ahead to the Lesbos capital. Nazieh wasn't in McNeill's reporting brief for the day, but she and her crew refused to leave him to fend for himself. Defying a local law that made it illegal to provide transport to asylum seekers, McNeill and her small team drove Nazieh to the main port to look for his family. After an unsuccessful search, they left Nazieh with a Syrian family who promised to look after him on the journey to Athens. When this family found themselves suddenly having to leave the Greek capital and Nazieh, McNeill, about to board a flight back to Jerusalem, made her way back to help a helpless man. Eventually – with the help of McNeill, her local producer and the ICRC – Nazieh found his family.

NO 'STORY' WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SOMEONE'S REAL LIFE
... AND NO ONE COULD ARGUE I DIDN'T GET A GREAT STORY OUT OF IT

'But I did get in trouble with my boss at the time. I was told I had "crossed the line" and "placed too much stress on the team" on Lesbos by prioritising helping Nazieh,' said McNeill. 'That upset me greatly that they felt that way, but I had absolutely no regrets. I was always humanitarian first and journalist second. No "story" was more important than someone's real life. If I hadn't helped Nazieh find his family, I'd be consumed by guilt to this day. And no one could argue I didn't get a great story out of it.'

McNeill has given money to the victims of conflict, during her reporting on them. She has provided shelter to an 18-year-old Saudi asylum seeker, Rahaf Al Qunun (who later changed their name to Rahaf Mohammed) escaping domestic abuse and family violence, holed up in a Bangkok hotel, both reporter and asylum seeker under threat of arrest. She filmed the stand-off for *Four Corners*, to the consternation of ABC management, who expressed concern she'd be accused of activism.

'The ABC sent an email around to everyone saying that before I appeared on air it had to be pointed out that I was "on leave writing a book" at the time I was with Rahaf.

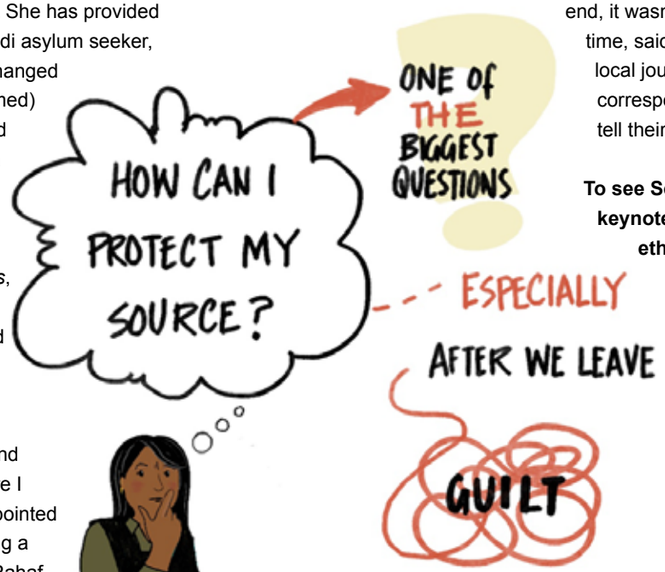


I think that the belief that reporters have to be dispassionate, neutral observers is built on a fallacy.'

McNeill didn't see the help she offered to Rahaf Mohammed as activism.

'While I'd never pick a military "side" in a conflict, I was always firmly on one side – that of the civilians, the women and children, the victims of the violence and the war crimes, the one caught in the middle without the power of the gun or the warplanes. I don't think that's "attachment" or "activist" journalism – I just believe that centering ethical decision-making at the heart of your journalism makes better journalism.'

Sophie McNeill has now left journalism. She felt she didn't fit in. Convincing editors to let her do stories they insisted would be unpopular, being asked to simply 'get the story' rather than worry about the fate of the victims of conflict, got to her. In the end, it wasn't enough. Perhaps it's time, said McNeill, to empower local journalists whom foreign correspondents hire as fixers to tell their own stories.



To see Sophie McNeill's keynote address in full, go to ethicsinconflict.com

4 | THE INTERVIEWS BACKGROUND

In academic circles, a global approach to media ethics, including to journalism ethics, is emerging (Ward 2013, 2021). On the ground, however, the reality is much more splintered. There is certainly no broadly accepted ethical protocol for journalists in conflict zones.

Adopted in 2019, the IFJ Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists is one general code, but is little-known among Australian reporters, even though it draws on international law to define journalists' ethical duties and rights. More specifically, the United Nations Global Protection Cluster Guidelines cover the ethical reporting of gender-based violence in humanitarian contexts. In Australia, meanwhile, there are codes aplenty. Most media organisations have formulated their own proprietorial codes to guide the behaviour of their journalists alongside editorial policies. The most significant code, though, is the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) *Journalist Code of Ethics*, which prescribes that MEAA members engaged in journalism commit themselves to honesty, fairness, independence and respect for the rights of others. It then lists 12 clauses, followed by a final guidance clause recognising that:

> *Basic values often need interpretation and sometimes come into conflict. Ethical journalism requires conscientious decision-making in context. Only substantial advancement of the public interest or risk of substantial harm to people allows any standard to be overridden.*

In other words, there is an abundance of guidelines and prescriptions, none of them universally accepted, with the MEAA Code, which is applicable only to journalists who are MEAA members, even acknowledging the difficulty of 'conscientious decision-making in context'.

What's more, in fields of conflict, rules do not always make sense; nor are they always applicable or even appropriate. At other times, pressure to 'get the story' overrides written principles. The financial constraints imposed by crashing media business models have seen bureaux slashed and freelance fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) reporters replace older, seasoned, long-term foreign correspondents. Entering hostile and dangerous environments, paid by the story, lacking institutional back-up, these FIFO reporters are particularly vulnerable, and sometimes the subjects of their stories are also particularly vulnerable to the reporters' lack of experience or their overriding imperative to get the story.

The role of a foreign correspondent – broadly defined to cover both those posted to a country and those who are less permanent – includes observing and reporting human catastrophe. Then the reporter or photojournalist leaves. Reporting practices are often respectful, protective of the identity of people who may suffer consequences and observant of local custom. Sometimes, however, they are not.

In looking to the motivations for decision-making in the field, we aim to shed light on how reporters and photojournalists reflect on their practices in the moment, as they confront the challenges of 'bearing witness' to conflict.



The challenges are many. Internally, the profession has been challenged by debates around 'journalism of attachment'. For its supporters, journalism of attachment contrasts with objectivity as journalism that 'cares as well as knows' and that involves evincing an emotional attachment to the 'good guys' in any conflict (O'Neill 2012). For its detractors, it's 'highly selective' (Tumber 2013: 65); 'opening the door to mistaken accounts of conflicts' (Tumber 2004: 201); and 'overlooking complexities and political nuances substituting morality tales for tough reporting' (O'Neill 2012). In particular, journalism of attachment has been linked to humanitarian military interventions by western powers, with journalists accused of consciously campaigning for them (O'Neill 2012). This has opened up further debates around the role of both the military and humanitarian organisations acting as guides for journalists in conflict zones and whether this in fact leads to self-censorship (Carruthers 2004; Polman 2010; Tumber 2013).



Meanwhile, a recent tranche of important industry and academic research has highlighted that foreign correspondents, local journalists and fixers are increasingly operating under dangerous and sometimes deadly conditions and are increasingly targeted for doing their jobs (Palmer 2018, 2019; Armoudian 2016; Cottle, Sambrook, and Mosdell 2016; Picard and Storm 2016; Harris and Williams 2018). In recent decades, awareness has grown substantially about the impact of this type of work on reporters. Before the turn of the millennium, reporters were expected simply to deal with exhaustion and swallow their stress. Today, organisations are considerably more aware of the dangers to their correspondents, both physically and mentally. And journalists themselves have become acutely aware of the risks. As former foreign correspondent Sally Sara has noted in relating her struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):

> *One of the big misconceptions is that PTSD is all about the blood and bullets and the bombs and the fear. But, for many people it's more complicated than that. Mental health experts use a term called moral injury. That means that what you saw was not just physically confronting, but it was wrong, morally wrong (Sara 2014).*

Technological developments have created an environment where stakeholders, benign or otherwise, have the capacity to produce their own content at the same time as the rhetoric of 'us and them' has intensified. This polarisation means journalists are more targeted even as the us and them rhetoric 'increases the importance of available, independent non-partisan information' (Cottle, Sambrook, and Mosdell 2016: 201).

The literature also highlights that local journalists and fixers are the ones at most risk of intimidation, violence and death. (Fixers are locals employed by journalists to help them do their jobs; sometimes fixers are themselves journalists.) Palmer (2018) notes that hazardous environment training and other security resources are focused on foreign correspondents; by contrast, local journalists and fixers need to take care of themselves while also keeping the fly-in foreign correspondent out of danger. This has led to another important internal debate around the ethics of conflict reporting, as local journalists and fixers are paid less and receive less recognition (Murrell 2009; Palmer and Fontan 2007; Palmer 2019; Veis 2007).

Separately, as conflicts multiply and draw out, and as traditional newsroom pathways disappear, there is concern that independently travelling to a war zone to work as a freelancer has become an acceptable career path for the young and inexperienced. Describing his conversations with journalism students, BBC World Affairs producer Stuart Hughes notes that their interest in travelling to a war zone is less in reporting the particulars of that conflict and more in the perception it is 'a rite of passage for a young journalist', almost like a 'gap year' (cited in Cottle 2016: 135-6).

Today's conflict reporters may also find themselves called to testify against human rights abuses in international tribunals. This has divided the profession. Ed Vulliamy of *The Guardian* testified at The Hague before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), whereas Jonathan Randal of the *Washington Post* refused to answer a subpoena in 2002 ordering him to appear before the ICTY (see 'Panel 2').

5 | THE INTERVIEWS METHOD

We invited six journalists to participate in this study because of their experiences reporting from conflict zones: *Sydney Morning Herald* photojournalist Kate Geraghty, ABC reporter and commentator Stan Grant, journalist-turned-humanitarian Sophie McNeill, journalist-turned-academic Richard Murray, ex-News Corp photojournalist Gary Ramage and former foreign correspondent Ginny Stein. The interviews sought to understand how journalists deal with complex ethical questions in the heat of the moment. In doing so, we considered ethical decision-making processes in a way that looks beyond codes of conduct, such as the MEAA's *Journalist Code of Ethics*.

The six interviews were conducted by video-conference or by phone and were semi-structured to canvas the following questions:

GENERAL:

- When you were making decisions in the field, did you differentiate between issues of ethics and issues of logistics?
- Is there an instance (or more than one) in your work as a conflict zone journalist that stands out for the way it raised ethical issues? Can we explore this?

DIFFERENT ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS:

- What role did codes of ethics play when you were reporting in the field, particularly in conflict zones? Which codes, specifically? The MEAA *Journalist Code of Ethics*? Your organisation's code of ethics?
- Were your ethics driven by other principles, such as principles based on dignity and respect?
- Were your ethics in the field determined by weighing up risks/harms and benefits? If so, consequences for whom? And how did you weigh up factors that are difficult to weigh up, such as exposing corruption vs the risk to a source?
- What about 'virtues' or 'character'? Were you motivated by cultivating virtues such as resilience, courage, empathy, or other characteristics? Do you have an idea in your mind of what it is to be a good conflict journalist?



- Were your ethical decisions driven by relationships (an idea at the heart of the ethics of care)? If so, which relationships? With sources? With colleagues? With your audience?
- Did any further ethical frameworks play a role in your decision-making? For instance, Catholicism? Or non-western frameworks from countries where you were posted, such as Confucianism or Buddhism?
- How much did you just fall back on your personal moral compass? If so, what makes up the ethics of your personal moral compass?

ETHICAL ATTACHMENTS AND TENSIONS:

- Have you heard the phrase 'journalism of attachment'? If so, what are your thoughts?
- What is, and what should be, the relationship of journalist to NGO?
- Are there situations when journalists should stop being journalists and become involved, such as to save lives?
- Did your ethics align with the ethics of the organisation you were working for? The ethics of your colleagues? Or was there a tension?
- What happens when a code of ethics conflicts with your own moral compass? Or when your gut says one thing and your head says another? Has this happened to you?
- What do you think of 'embedded' correspondents in warzones, such as with the military?
- And what happens when there is an ethical tension between the norms of different countries, such as Australia and the country you're reporting from?

TO CONCLUDE:

- Reflecting on our discussion, how do you think you made ethical decisions in the field? On what do/did you base your ethics and morality as a reporter in a conflict zone?



PHOTO: GARY RAMAGE, EAST TIMOR

DID YOUR ETHICS ALIGN WITH THE ETHICS OF THE ORGANISATION YOU WERE WORKING FOR? THE ETHICS OF YOUR COLLEAGUES? OR WAS THERE A TENSION?

6 | THE INTERVIEWS FINDINGS



KATE GERAGHTY

'The responsibility crackles'

The first time Kate Geraghty viewed conflict through the lens of her photographer's storytelling eye she hadn't been sent by a newspaper. It was in East Timor in 2000, in the aftermath of the independence referendum violence. At the time, she was working for the *Border Mail* in Albury-Wodonga.

Geraghty had grown up with 'war at the Sunday dinner table'. Her German grandparents had lived through World War 2 in Europe, but had had very different experiences of that war, which had left different effects. 'I knew that every single person who has been through war has an incredible story,' Geraghty says. 'I knew that every person has something to tell or that we can learn from.'

With war on Australia's doorstep, watching her grandparents' reactions to the events, and knowing the long history of East Timorese support for Australian soldiers, Geraghty felt compelled to go. She took holidays and travelled with the support of an NGO.

The second time Geraghty was in East Timor she was sent by the *Border Mail*. Her editor had realised the importance of continuing to cover the story, especially given the large defence force population in the town. Since then, Geraghty has covered war, terrorism and their aftermath as a photojournalist in Indonesia, Lebanon, East Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, The Solomons, The Philippines, Syria, Iraq (multiple times), Afghanistan, Myanmar and more.

Her first overseas assignment for *The Sydney Morning Herald* was three months in Bali after the 2002 terrorist attack, an experience of both brutal horror, as piles of burnt bodies were sifted through for recognition of loved ones, and selfless humanity, as the local community, even down to schoolchildren, offered what help they could.

'If you covered that without crying you shouldn't be in the game,' Geraghty says.

Yet, a decade later, when photographing one of the perpetrators of that attack, Idris, now a free man, Geraghty was as respectful of his wishes, in terms of how he was photographed, as she was for the victims whose portraits she also took. For Geraghty the ethical position was clear: 'You've got to afford them the same respect as a Bali bombing survivor. Your job is not to judge'.

Geraghty's respect for individuals stems from a personal moral code. However, she also works for a newspaper that emblazons its ethic of independence on the walls of the building (see 'The Interviews: Discussion', below). She believes that ethical codes have an important role in terms of organisational ethos; for example, she has never clashed with editors around the need to obscure identities. Codes also offer practical guidelines; she teaches younger photographers about UNICEF's ethical reporting guidelines that flow from the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child. The respect for the subjects of stories and for the story itself is also reinforced by senior journalists Geraghty has worked with and colleagues in the field.

The principle is the same, it's about respect. Ninety-nine percent of photojournalists who work in this environment have the same ethics. We come from all different countries around the world but have the same code. The hairs on your skin stand up. You have to do it justice, you have to get it so right because it's so important, because there is an audience back home that will look at this. The responsibility crackles.

Geraghty is critical of reporters and photographers who move things to create an image or who use set-up scenes – for example, of guns being shot – that have been put on for the media. At the same time, she doesn't agree with the other extreme, a position taken by some that 'you're invisible'. 'You are a human being first,' says Geraghty.

Geraghty is also grateful she has entered the profession at a time when ethics and the difficulties of conflict reporting are talked about more often, because this helps lessen the risk of 'moral trauma', which is the risk of PTSD caused not by exposure to physical danger, but the assault caused by witnessing morally disturbing situations. However, this risk culture can be taken too far. Geraghty was once forced to work with a paid security guard. 'Never again.'

She says that whether you want to or not your presence changes the situation and you have to think of consequences. With a trained security guard, probably an ex-soldier, maybe even previously having fought in that town, the dynamic is changed completely. This is happening more and more, which worries her.

Consequences resulting from the presence of reporters need to be taken into account. There is a '100 per cent clear responsibility' to protect interviewees, and to protect local colleagues who are at risk of reprisals. In a hospital in the Democratic Republic of Congo, she and a colleague stopped an injured combatant from talking to them, because they didn't know who was in the bed next to him. However, she notes that this understanding is also something that comes with experience and she may not have been so 'dogged' about protecting sources and colleagues when starting out. Someone flying into a conflict situation for the first time may not be aware of how inflammatory or dangerous their question could be.

IF YOU COVERED THAT WITHOUT CRYING YOU SHOULDN'T BE IN THE GAME

Famously, Geraghty became part of the story when she and journalist Paul McGeough were aboard the MV Marmara passenger boat, part of the Free Gaza flotilla attempting to pass through a sea blockade when it was attacked by the Israeli Navy. Asked to testify by the Turkish Government as part of an international case, she said no. Later, when the UN asked her to verify reports about her treatment, she again refused.

Our testimony is what we reported on our front page. That's the story of what went down, and we weren't in the story, you know, it's not about us. We were journalists. If we did go in support of the Turkish Government, well then that is actually taking a side, isn't it? We didn't think that that was ethical.

Decisions about when and when not to take a photo are also ethically fraught. In the Hamlin Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia, Geraghty decided not to photograph a two-year-old girl who had been brought from Somalia after a bullet had been fired into her vagina. The doctors wanted the horror to be known and reasoned that the child would not remember the incident. Geraghty refused, arguing that the photo would live on online as the child grew up. By contrast, in a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh, Geraghty chose to photograph a dead child. Geraghty made the decision as she watched the child being dressed in her best clothes and caressed by the many mourners' hands.

Because in that moment, I felt that there was more dignity and love being shown to that little girl than what was afforded to her in life in Myanmar. And I just thought what a preventable death. She died of measles, you know? And she spent the last days of her life fleeing a country.

It's not easy putting a dead child on the front page of a newspaper.

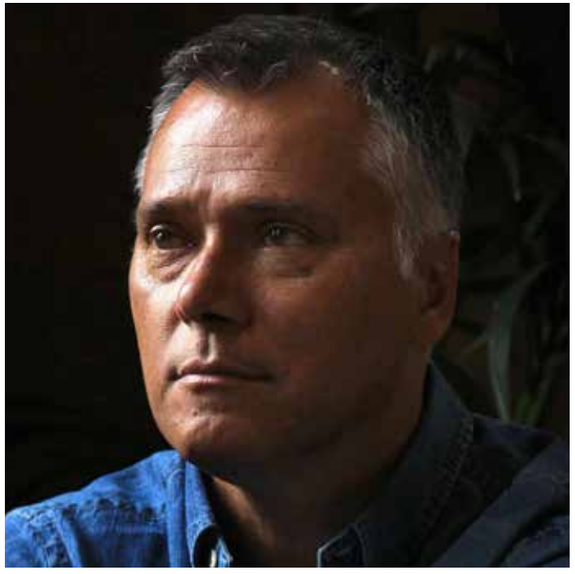


PHOTO: DEAN SEWELL

STAN GRANT

'I come from the people who are products of war'

Stan Grant has been a news reporter since 1983, and in that time covered small to large scale conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, South East Asia, Northern Ireland and the Pacific. Throughout it all, Grant says he juggled personal ethics, logistics and survival. And throughout it all, it was, he says, his own experience as an Aboriginal man that informed his ethics.

Written codes he says, are lost on the battlefield. Finding a way to balance 'getting the best story' with what you can live with is more important.

For most of my career, I think I've abided by some really strong ethical codes around people's dignity, their right to privacy, the permission that is needed in doing anything. A lot of this comes from my own background, being an Aboriginal person. I know the extent to which our own privacy, our own dignity, has been trashed by media in Australia. If you think you can go into any Indigenous community and film whatever you like, and to walk onto people's property, that they become subjects, subjects to be examined or subjects to be reported on, rather than human beings ...

Critical for Grant was the need to turn the camera outwards to see the situation through the eyes of those he is reporting on, rather than looking at victims through the camera lens.

A lot of the decisions that were made were calculated decisions about the level of risk, the level of our exposure, and the percentages of survival. There were times when I have gone into Taliban areas, for instance, where essentially I'm giving myself over to them, in the hope that I will get out and, on balance, that the story that we were doing was worth it.

That is logistics, says Grant. Then there's ethics.

There are cases where I spoke to people who were wanted by authorities. Was my responsibility to the story that I was going to tell? Or should I have contacted the police or the authorities and told them what I was doing to lead them to that person? [But] I'm not there as a spy. I'm not going to gather intelligence for intelligence agencies. I don't work for the police. I'm not there to represent any particular government. If you want to be a spy, go work in intelligence, because if you're going to play that sort of game, it's like carrying a weapon as a journalist.

Deciding if you can protect people against the consequences of speaking to news media can be a challenge. Sometimes, Grant says, preventative measures don't work. He interviewed a woman in Shanghai in a secret location, but was observed by neighbours and reported to the authorities. The woman was arrested, as were Grant and his CNN crew. He knew the risks. So did his source. 'You can always say we're not going to do the story at all,' he says. 'In which case, what are you doing there?' Grant was always guided by balancing what the source wanted and the importance of the story.

Then there's the ethical responsibility to the everyday people you are reporting on.

When you're going into communities in foreign countries, particularly in conflict where people are under a lot of stress, you owe an ethical responsibility to the people that you're reporting on because their lives have been turned upside down, because they've been made homeless, because they're in fear of their lives. It doesn't mean that they lose the right to the respect that we should pay to everybody, [and to] the right to privacy.

There's a balance to be struck between getting the story and respecting privacy and grief. After the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, Grant and his film crew followed a family back to their devastated town where a mother discovered their son's body had been found and buried.

We know that television is an emotional medium. And there is a line between the emotion that carries the story and connects with the audience and the person's right to their own grief and their own privacy. I made a part of the story that we will turn the camera off. And in the story, the camera went to black … there are things that the camera should not show. That was her grief.

Respecting grief and privacy are prescriptions in the MEAA Code of Ethics. But for Grant, the source determining his behaviour is personal, ingrained.

I come from the people who are the products of war. Aboriginal people in Australia are the product of conflict, conflict that still plays out in people's lives today, conflicts that have never ended, the trauma that is passed from generation to generation. And when I often looked into the eyes of people in Afghanistan or Pakistan, North Korea, wherever I was, I would recognise a lot. I know it, because I've seen it in my own life, from where I'm from. And I know that I carry, for instance, accumulated inherited trauma that dates back generations, my own family. When you go to Afghanistan … I look into the eyes of children and people who have never known any peace, what it is to carry the accumulated trauma of conflict.

A LOT OF THE DECISIONS WERE CALCULATED ABOUT THE LEVEL OF RISK ... EXPOSURE AND SURVIVAL

However, fending off the voyeuristic tendencies of television news in order to preserve the dignity and respect of victims of conflict can often be seen as sanitising conflict. But getting the balance right is achievable, says Grant. He remembers an image from Beersheba in Israel after a 2004 bomb blast killed more than 100 people travelling on a bus.

I remember seeing an image of a packet of children's chocolate biscuits and on the packet was the bloody handprint of a child that told me more about the horror of this, that a child on a bus with their parents eating a packet of biscuits, nothing can be more normal, and in an instant gone. And I think that's a way of conveying the power of that story that is far more in keeping with my own ethical position, and I think, in fact, is going to have an even stronger impact than to get close up shots of people's dead bodies.

A journalist's relationship with the victims, he says, is critical. However, cowboy foreign correspondents might see it differently. Grant says they are there. Sometimes they are the product of seeing too much that can't be unseen. Other times, it's a question of character. 'Restraint, respect, empathy, and an understanding of dignity, compassion,' he says. 'Those things are far more important to me than things like people being tough.'



PHOTO: GARY RAMAGE, PAKISTAN



PHOTO: DEAN SEWELL

SOPHIE McNEILL

'You can operate like a human. You can put ethics first'

Sophie McNeill has a simple approach to reporting: being ethical comes first; the story comes second. However, she also believes that being ethical makes the story better.

'Being ethical was always my number one priority,' McNeill says. 'One hundred per cent. It was never just a story for me. And if you're ethical, you can do the best journalism.'

McNeill is self-taught. As a teenager, she borrowed a video camera from her high school and flew from her Perth hometown to Dili to film a story about the East Timorese struggle for independence. Since then, McNeill has reported from Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Egypt and Turkey, as well as the Palestinian territories. After working for SBS, she became the ABC's Middle East correspondent for three years, based in Jerusalem. In 2010 she won a Walkley Award for her investigation into the killing of five children in Afghanistan by Australian soldiers, and in 2016 she won two more Walkleys for her reporting from Yemen and Syria. In 2020, her first book – *We Can't Say We Didn't Know, Dispatches from an age of impunity* – was published, giving her own account of her work as a journalist.

Most of her career has placed her in the thick of humanitarian crises. McNeill has filmed starving toddlers dying in front of her in Yemen; she has interviewed families near Mosul weeping as they describe being used as human shields by ISIS during coalition bombardment; and in 2020 she locked herself in a Bangkok airport hotel room with a young Saudi Arabian woman, Rahaf, who was seeking asylum in fear of her life.

I've always focused on the humanitarian consequences of war. One of the first stories I did at Foreign Correspondent was to pitch a half hour in Za'atari refugee camp, to show what was happening with these millions of Syrians who'd fled. I've never called myself a war reporter. It's not, 'I'm on a patrol with the SAS'.

Ethical issues have arisen for McNeill in several guises, including: the choice of which stories to cover; how to care for her sources and interviewees; and how to make sure she and her team were not exposed to unnecessary risks. She says she made these decisions by listening to her gut.

'For me, it wasn't an academic exercise,' McNeill says. 'It was about my gut.' But she acknowledges that concepts such as dignity and respect informed her decisions.

Of course, it's totally about respecting people. That's why I like being a video journalist. Because I could choose when to keep filming or not. I would be in a hospital in Gaza and the mum's just heard some bad news and is crying. So, I get a shot, but then I put my camera down, and I'd give the mum a hug. This is a moment of incredible trauma for them and we didn't need to keep filming. If it was a soldier trying to get me to stop filming, nothing would make me stop filming, because they were the ones who had the power. But if it was about someone's dignity, and respecting them, then there are times where you just stop filming. Or you stop filming for long enough to acknowledge their pain, and show that you're human. It's all about being respectful, that you're not just there as some voyeuristic bloodthirsty journalist.

Having never trained as a journalist, McNeill says her ethics were not driven by the provisions of any journalistic code. 'I wouldn't know what they say to be honest.' Rather, her approach involves putting people first, and her sense of care for people. She says her relationship with the subjects of her stories is much more important to her than her relationship with her audience. And, contrary to the traditional ideal of the dispassionate and disengaged reporter, she says journalists should get involved and help.

I think we get tied up about bias. You can operate like a human. You can put ethics first. And that doesn't in any way affect your accuracy, or your commitment to the facts and representing the absolute truth of the situation. People think we have to be robots to do that. I totally disagree. Me being a human in no way distorts my commitment to the facts.

YOU CAN PUT ETHICS FIRST. AND THAT DOESN'T IN ANY WAY AFFECT YOUR ACCURACY, OR YOUR COMMITMENT TO THE FACTS

This extends to giving financial help from her own pocket to desperate families she met on the road. For instance, after filming children die in Yemen, McNeill gave money to one family for food for their other three children.

I didn't want them to die too. You have to be able to live with yourself. It's got nothing to do with the process. You've made it clear that you're not going to pay them for the interview. They've spoken to you and you've literally said goodbye [when you give them money]. My ethics have just always been based on actually caring about people. Their wellbeing has always been my priority. And I'll get a good story. I'll be able to fulfill all my commitments, but the priority is always people's lives. And this is why I've actually left journalism. I hated the way I just got moved on to something else.



NAZIEH HUSEIN WITH SOPHIE McNEILL

McNeill is now working with an NGO, Human Rights Watch. In her work as a journalist, her humanitarian streak sometimes earned her rebukes from editors. Asked to follow a family of asylum seekers fleeing Syria, she instead reported on Nazieh, an aging Syrian refugee she found lost and crying on a Greek beach. He had become separated from his family. Her reporting then traced the attempt to reunite Nazieh with his family.

That doesn't meet the brief of what I've been asked to do, but of course we're not just going to leave him. Also, it was a great story. The Greek government had made it a crime to assist. But we put Nazieh in our car. And I gave Nazieh my hotel room, and our hotel was full and I had to go off and stay somewhere else and I paid for that with my own money, because I didn't want to be accused of using the ABC's money. I did get in a bit of trouble from my managers who thought that I had placed undue stress on the team and that I went too far.

On that same trip, after receiving a distressed phone call from Nazieh, McNeill made a last-minute decision to miss her flight home. She says these decisions come down to what you can live with.

This is my whole point. If you act ethically right, or if you always do what feels right, then you can keep doing this work. Because if you don't, that's what haunts you, and that's what gives you PTSD. If I'd just kept flying on having got that call, till this day, I'd be haunted by Nazieh and what happened to him. Did he die on a street in Greece? I couldn't have lived with myself. I couldn't sleep at night. I didn't do formal journalism training. I don't know how you're supposed to do it. I don't know what the rules are supposed to be. I just did what felt right.



RICHARD MURRAY

'What matters is people's stories.'

Having reported from Kashmir, Nepal and Korea, Richard Murray says his journalism was motivated by a personal desire to escape and keep moving. Rather than altruism or the greater good, his journalistic ethics were driven by the simple imperative of getting the story.

In hindsight, there wasn't much altruism in it. If anything, it was driven by a much greater sense of wanderlust, or this idea of getting the story, being the first person there. And then being able to regale other people with these stories.

Now a journalism academic at the University of Queensland, Murray is a New Zealander who started in news in 1996, as a roundsman on a daily newspaper in Wellington. In 2000, after moving to Melbourne and working as a freelancer, he took a six-month job in Mumbai with *The Times of India*. In 2001, Murray reported on the violent suppression of Muslims in Srinagar. The welcome wasn't always warm.

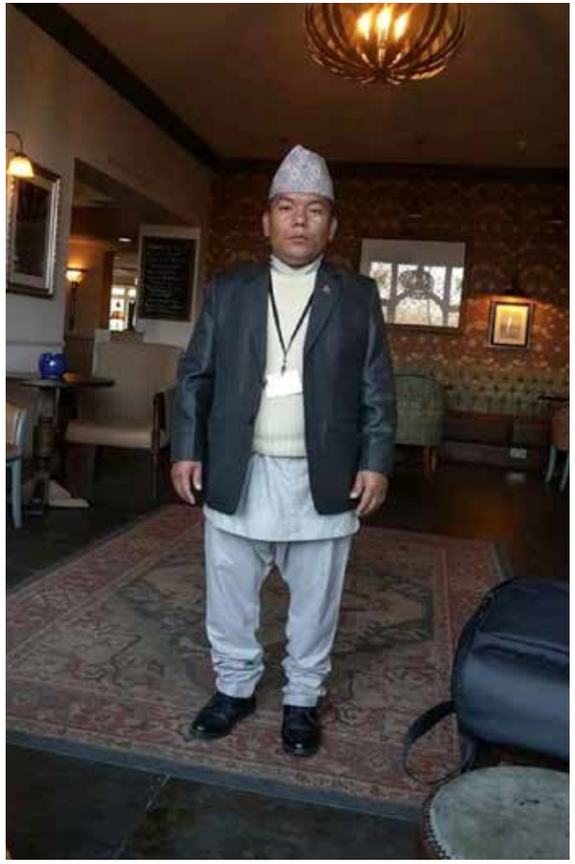
For all intents and purposes, I was just another bloody colonist. You know, I was someone who was there just as a voyeur. There were lots of people who didn't want anything to do with me because of what I represent.

In Nagaland, near Myanmar, Murray covered an area where separatists were looking to establish their own state. Then, two years after arriving in India, he was posted to Nepal as a 'glorified stringer' to cover the civil war triggered by the assassination of the King by his brother. The post was difficult, not least because Murray felt unprepared for working at altitude. It also led to a defining ethical moment with his fixer, Dev.

There was one village that we visited in the Anapurna region, an ancient fortified town. We arrived there and there had been fighting between the monarchists and the Maoists, and people had been burnt alive in their homes. There were no troops, there were no villagers, there were charred remains of people in their homes … Dev was from the lowlands. He was well out of his ethnic comfort zone. Earlier on, he'd done a master's degree and his research found the girls in Maoist-controlled areas had much better access to education. But after he published his results, he had been picked up by the government and thrown in prison for six months and tortured on a regular basis. He was traumatised … and we walked into this place, and it was just … it was just visceral. He fell apart. And I didn't know what to do. So I just kept on, kept going. I just remember being angry with him. When I think about this now, I cringe. That's the one that still wakes me up.

Murray and Dev remain close. Of all the ethically salient moments in his career, Murray isn't sure why this one affects him. He has come to realise, however, that his work and his decisions were informed by the abuse he himself suffered when he was young. As he says, 'I grew up in a really, really rough environment, with a lot of violence. I was subjected to a lot of physical and sexual violence growing up. One of my driving factors was to get as far away from that life as I could.'

In 2002, after Nepal, Murray landed a job in South Korea with Associated Press; and in 2012, he was one of the team that opened the AP bureau in North Korea. In his work, he says he didn't take much notice of codes of ethics. 'The AP have a clear code,' he says. 'I don't think I ever read it. There certainly was no sort of professional development. They needed someone to go and cover this part of this conflict, and I was in the region, so I became that guy.'



PEMA, FIXER, NEPAL (see pp 33-34)

In Nepal, the sensory overload of war – what you see and smell – left little room to engage the mind through reflection on written principles: 'To be actually in a war zone, and to have to tell stories, and then somehow reflect upon a code of ethics … for me, it wasn't going to happen. I didn't have the intestinal fortitude to do all three of those things at once.'

Though Murray never followed a formalised code, he did follow his own internalised ethical principles. The bottom line was, 'Always try to do the right thing by the people around me.'

In the pursuit of a story, I'd never willingly hurt someone. I know what it's like to be profoundly hurt by someone who professes responsibility or love for you. I don't want to revisit that on other people. But that didn't necessarily apply to myself. I'd work very, very, very long hours, more than I had to, to chase stories endlessly to the point of breakdown, on numerous occasions, because I didn't understand that those principles apply to myself. This is something I've learned later in life. I'm not an island, I don't live beyond the bounds of society. If something happens, of course it affects other people. There was a self-harming mechanism that went in there. And I think I see it a lot in journalism.

Over time, Murray's ethics increasingly became based on care and connection – the antithesis of 'parachute journalism'. And he increasingly found himself drawn to his Korean peers, rather than ex-pats from North America, many of whom had a gung-ho attitude. For this, he was called a 'race traitor'. Ultimately, relationships became crucial for Murray's reporting: to sources, to place, and to audience.

A lot of the people who were doing the job, I thought were lazy. They weren't bothering to learn the local language. They weren't at all interested in where they were. Their narratives became repetitive, and cyclical, and sensational. But first and foremost, what I'm talking about is probably more relationship to your audience, or your perceived audiences. I felt that I had a responsibility to my audience to tell stories in a way that I thought was accurate.

Murray thinks there is a place for subjectivity in journalism, as long as journalists are clear about their subjectivity. Journalists shouldn't always stay detached, he says. They should get involved and help people.

Journalism should be about revealing humanity, and inhumanity as well. I don't think you can tell these kinds of stories without feeling some humanity. This whole idea of full objectivity, that you're somehow just a fly on the wall … I always used to hide behind this idea of political economy. I was interested in who was pulling the strings. I was interested in descriptions of weaponry. I was interested in, you know, the size of a military force. Looking back, these were things that didn't really matter. What matters is people's stories.

I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE PROFOUNDLY HURT BY SOMEONE WHO PROFESSES LOVE FOR YOU … I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THAT THOSE PRINCIPLES APPLY TO MYSELF

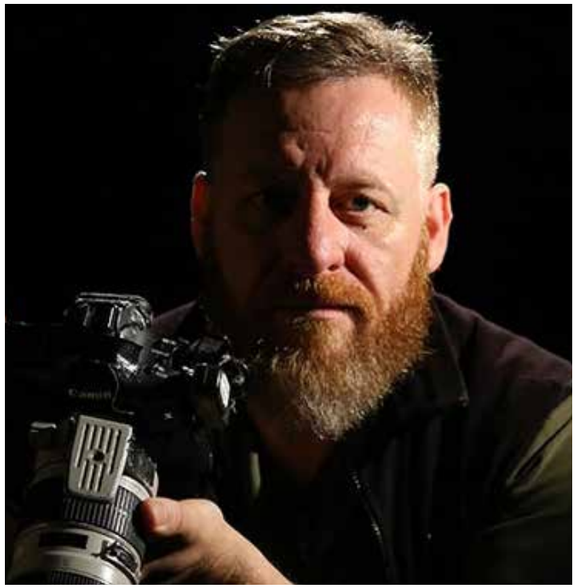


PHOTO: MARCO CATALANO

GARY RAMAGE

'If you're not willing to respect the people, stuff's going to fall apart'

Gary Ramage has seen a lot of war, both as a soldier and a photographer. Ramage joined the Australian Army in 1985 as an infantry soldier and spent five years training with the military in photography and video, and the next 15 years as a military field photographer. Thereafter, he joined *The Australian*, chasing conflict around the world, embedded with the Australian and US military. He has covered conflict in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Bougainville and Afghanistan.

Ramage says his military background imbued him with an internal code that demanded he respect the human dignity of those he was filming or photographing. He first witnessed combat and death in Somalia in 1993 as a photographer with the Australian military. When he was called to the incident, Ramage had no idea that the victim was an Australian soldier.

I raced up to the hospital and went to the theatre where they're all injured. I set up the video camera on a tripod, and there was some screaming and stuff going on. That's when I realised it was one of our guys. I sort of looked at the CO [Commanding Officer] and then took my camera off the tripod and just put it on the ground … You don't want to be cast out as the black sheep. It looks like you've betrayed their trust.

As a documenter of conflict for news media, Ramage doesn't see the mateship ethos as having been problematic in the field. He sees it as having given him an immutable understanding of what it means to respect the victims of war. This respect was not learned from any journalism code of ethics.

I've actually never looked at the [MEAA] code of ethics before I deployed or was deployed. I've got my own set of ethics, that I use as my guide, my moral compass, so to speak … It really depends on the situation you're in and the people you are with, how you act as a photojournalist. And as you know, a human being, really. And whether you show compassion. So you're making those split-second decisions as to whether or not you will take a shot of somebody who's in distress.

It is an intuitive and personal code for Ramage. One example Ramage cites took place in active combat between US troops and the Taliban in Afghanistan. An injured marine was being dragged to the safety of a military helicopter, which had landed in the combat zone.

I didn't start shooting because the first thing I noticed was his pants around his ankles. I had this little devil on my shoulder which has gone, 'Take a picture, take a picture.' And another devil's saying, 'Don't take the fucking picture, because his pants are around his ankles.' I didn't want his parents to see the last image of their son on a helicopter bleeding out with his pants around his ankles. Now, there's a lot of other people out there that would just take the photo and not worry about it. But at that split second, that's what I was thinking.

Ramage sees his role as a storyteller. He often took photographs that he didn't use because just a few, which respected the dignity of the subject, were sufficient to tell the story. He has also downed tools to assist in helping a victim of war. Others, he says, would not have done so for lack of first aid experience or out of a desire to 'get the story'. The driving ethic for Ramage is: do nothing that would cause more distress.

He also believes in respecting local culture. In Afghanistan, 'If you're not willing to respect the people, stuff's going to fall apart'. He once inadvertently filmed women without the permission of local men, which caused unnecessary tension.

What you have to have is at least some sort of personal discipline. You've got to try and fit in to a certain degree, you don't want to go to these places and be a burden on the soldiers. Because that happened to me when I was a serving member of the military, we'd have journalists turn up, who didn't have a bloody clue about anything.

Ramage says that most journalists he's worked with were seasoned reporters who had experience covering conflict. He agrees that the phrase 'practical wisdom' describes how they behaved in the field.

In conflict zones, Ramage says it comes down to you, alone, 'without an editor telling you what to do.' He's never been debriefed or counselled after witnessing conflict and death. When four Australian soldiers were killed in Uruzgan Province in Afghanistan in 2010, Ramage bore witness to the distress experienced by the survivors. 'Nobody trains you for that, you don't get trained on how to deal with those emotions.'

I'VE GOT MY OWN SET OF ETHICS, THAT I USE AS MY GUIDE, MY MORAL COMPASS, SO TO SPEAK

And he says the criticism of embedded journalists and photojournalists is misplaced.

I didn't go out there to cover the story of the Afghans and the Afghan war, I wanted to cover the Australians who'd been sent by the government, to help Afghanistan, the people, and that was my focus. But it's insane [to think] that if the boys had stuffed up while I was with them, it wouldn't have been reported. You don't turn a blind eye to that, right?



PHOTO: GARY RAMAGE, AFGHANISTAN



GINNY STEIN

'I'm not a war junkie,
I'm not that sort of person'

Ginny Stein never set out to cover conflict. It came with the territory of being a foreign correspondent. Starting in South East Asia for the ABC, Stein was first thrown onto the frontline when events unfolded in (what was then) Burma and then Cambodia and East Timor. Later, as a reporter for SBS *Dateline*, she reported conflict across Africa and in the Middle East, often operating as a sole operator, and in the early days one of the few women in the field. Throughout it all, the role she saw for herself was simply that of a journalist.

In not defining herself as a conflict correspondent, she was also defining the type of journalist she was, both in terms of story choices and ethical principles, and this was something she discussed with other correspondents in the field.

I'd say to them all the time, 'You're just so enamored of learning what category type of gun it is - it's a gun!' You know, like, let's talk about the victims. Let's talk about the people who are hit by said gun, not what type of gun it is. But it's just that sort of different ethos.

Rejecting the gung-ho ethos came to the fore in East Timor in a volatile situation where correspondents were travelling through the country together. Working on a difficult story – where a journalist that was known to them had been killed – and trying to find his body, Stein and other foreign journalists were told by the locals to leave. They had been there too long and it was turning dangerous for all involved. When one of the correspondents wouldn't leave, Stein gave him an ultimatum: he had three seconds to return to the group or he was being left behind – and he was left behind. Later, that journalist admitted his mistake; but for Stein the right thing to do in that situation was obvious, because ensuring the safety of others is a key ethical principle that becomes part of the habit of reporting in dangerous situations.

There are basic principles of don't get anyone killed, if you can help it, do sensible things. And look after each other. So those basic principles, they're kind of there in the MEAA code of conduct if you look at it, obliquely, but it is just kind of rules of how to operate as human beings. And as journalists, you're there to observe, you're there to witness, you're not there to harm, in that same sense of a medical code of conduct of do no harm.

The logistics of getting the story without endangering the lives of her collaborators was a key part of the ethical decision-making process for Stein and under constant discussion. But this regard for the consequences of her actions also extended beyond physical safety to the types of questions asked. Stein is adamant that everyone has the right to be asked if they want to tell their story, and she is critical of NGO workers who are over-protective of victims of violence, as it may end up silencing people who don't want to be silenced. However, she is also clear that there is an important ethical imperative in how you ask questions, including in situations of war rape, and that some 'dumb, inane' questions may cause more pain than they are worth.

On reflection, Stein realises that her moral compass guiding her in the field is shaped by the Catholicism she was raised in but walked away from. She says: 'deep down, there's some basic tenets of "do no harm", or you know, "don't do unto others what you wouldn't want done unto you" type things that I cannot get out of my head.' There is also a strong element of wanting to maintain her character, which again ties back to relationships in the field.

I think personally, you would want to be known as an ethical journalist, I would like to be known as someone who is fair, honest, accurate, and is committed to getting the story, but not at anyone's expense, I guess, except my own.

Relationships with colleagues, and especially managers, can also come to define whether actions in the field are seen as virtuously courageous or dangerously foolhardy. Stein worries that the modern era of risk-assessment is devaluing courage. Moreover, the standardisation of processes can lead to worse outcomes than previously, when it depended on people taking individual ethical responsibility.

THE SHIFT IN ETHICS IS HUGE. IT'S ABOUT MONEY

It's hard because you had good managers who would care about people, and you also had managers who didn't care. And it could go either way, I guess. But now, no one cares. They're just following … the rules.

Stein points out that those rules are especially poor when it comes to treatment of freelancers, with modern conflict reporting often done by poorly paid locals who are sometimes asked to supply nothing more than raw images.

The shift in ethics is huge. It's about money. That just becomes a cheap way to do journalism. How can we do it cheaper and cheaper and cheaper? And now we pay the person less, they have no control over the story. We care less about the content, or we think we do it better because we're doing it on our end, but you have no feedback at this end. So how's that journalism?



PHOTO: GARY RAMAGE, EAST TIMOR

7 | SYMPOSIUM
PANEL 1 - IN THE FIELD

Date: 17 September 2021 **Time:** 10am
Moderator: Chrisanthi Giotis
Panellists:
Kate Geraghty, Photojournalist, *The Sydney Morning Herald* / *The Age*
Matt Brown, Deputy International Editor, ABC
Hamish McDonald, Inaugural Fellow, Australian Institute of International Affairs
Sophie McNeill, Researcher, Human Rights Watch

When bringing together four respected and experienced correspondents – who between them share 19 Walkley Awards for journalism – the aim was obvious: let the conversation flow.

Two panel members, Sophie McNeill and Kate Geraghty, had already reflected on their ethical decision-making in the field through the research interviews, while Hamish McDonald and Matt Brown had been able to read the preliminary report of the research findings from our interviews, before the panel. Overall, the conversation kept returning to the key ethical tension that correspondents must navigate in the field: the safety of themselves and especially of their collaborators, balanced against the importance and power of their narratives. Influencing this discussion was the changing role of technology and geopolitical shifts that impact what gets reported and how.

Kate Geraghty related how the power of photojournalists is shown in the way that she is asked by families, doctors and nurses to 'come in and photograph and show what they've done to us', with that reporting sometimes constituting testimonies of war crimes.

> *We met a group of women in Kassai region in the Democratic Republic of Congo that had just escaped, that were sex slave survivors and the only reason they were speaking to us was to highlight that there were 94 other women and children. So we then go to the UN and we tell them.*

Yet this also makes journalists, photojournalists, their sources and their local colleagues targets of authorities. Hamish McDonald raised the fact that local journalists are often the ones to bear the brunt of retaliation from regimes for reportage done by foreign correspondents and Matt Brown discussed the importance of drawing on the knowledge of local partners who understand the risks because they

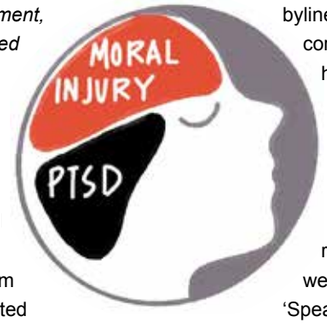


live them every day. Using the example of political protests, Brown said that this understanding is needed to make the process of consent meaningful, and it had to include multiple considerations of risk mitigation:

> *Is there a danger while we're doing it? Is there a danger in the protest of singling you out? Can we mitigate that by dealing with you more substantially elsewhere? Can we use your own smartphone vision? Does your government have biometric databases or do you simply have an ID card? Do you realise that the internet is pretty enduring and searchable? That there can be crowdsourced ways of identifying people? We try and unpack that as much as possible, sometimes in the moment, and try and aim as best we can with informed consent not just: 'Are you happy to be identified? Right-O. Let's go.'*

For Sophie McNeill, especially in her role now at Human Rights Watch, informed consent also meant advising on the likelihood of a source speaking out making a difference – although she would never stop a source from speaking who wanted to. Matt Brown highlighted that in visual media this ethical principle of agency extended to how identifiable a source was:

> *They might wear a surgical mask and then it's explained, 'Well you know, there are still some biometric points that are visible.' They're like, 'Yeah, I want to be seen, I don't want your audience seeing a blur, I don't want your audience seeing only a shadow.' And, of course, we do that, and it's very hard to know when that's right and wrong, but it's really important.*



LOCAL JOURNALISTS ARE OFTEN THE ONES TO BEAR THE BRUNT OF RETALIATION FROM REGIMES FOR REPORTAGE DONE BY FOREIGNERS

Drawing on the example of the tense Chinese-Australian relationship that has seen journalists become 'pawns in the battle', Hamish McDonald said that the power in speaking out doesn't just relate to specific issues, but it is geopolitically important:

> *Unfortunately, when you can't get into China or the Chinese are not reporting us, we can't do that kind of personal story type of reporting that really does so much to leaven all the strategic punditry that's flying about. It tends to dehumanise the other country and I think that's a big danger.*

Sophie McNeill said that, through technology, we've improved at getting and following the story, even if not in-country. However, Kate Geraghty also raised an example that sometimes the international media can be empowering for the photographers and journalists inside countries. 'A friend of mine from Syria is a photographer and he said, "Without all of you guys, as in other photographers, I'm more exposed, I'm out there by myself, I don't want my name, my byline shown".'

By contrast, Hamish McDonald argued that providing bylines to local journalists assisting the foreign correspondent can raise their status, which may help to protect them. Yet in other cases it may make them a target. All this pointed to the complex, and situationally specific, ethics involved in weighing up the dangers to fixers and translators. Matt Brown noted that this ethical quandary may have only recently reached public consciousness through the western military withdrawal from Afghanistan, but: 'Speaking personally, and in my role in the ABC, the consciousness is not overdue because we've had it all the time.'

Sophie McNeill added that, given the way authoritarian regimes increasingly try to control diaspora communities, this sort of ethical risk-consciousness needs to be extended to all journalists, not just those operating in war zones.

Asked about where their ethical guidance was found, panelists referred to codes and training, but also the role of peer mentorship. And Matt Brown pushed back against the notion that journalists rely on their personal moral compass instead of on codes of ethics:

> *I think it might be a false dichotomy that has been drawn in the whole discussion. I can't reel off what the particular codes of practice under the codes of ethics for the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance union are, but I actually know that all of what we've talked about here, a lot of it is respecting people's privacy, respecting their dignity, respecting confidences, they're all in the code of ethics. The union probably played a more front-and-centre role in the journalism industry, say, 20, 30 years ago, but a lot of the values and the ethics that we've been talking about have been promulgated by a written code and they've been naturalised by a lot of people.*

To see the In the Field panel in full, go to ethicsinconflict.com

8 | SYMPOSIUM

PANEL 2 - VIRTUES AND RIGHTS

Date: 17 September 2021 **Time:** 11.20am
Moderator: Sacha Molitorisz
Panellists:
Dr Kathryn Greenman, Lecturer, UTS Law Faculty
David Tuck, Australian chef de mission, ICRC
Stan Grant, Professor, Charles Sturt University, Global Affairs Analyst, ABC

When journalists make ethical decisions in the field, they also need to keep the law in mind, whether domestic law or international law. However, the relationship between ethics and law is anything but straightforward. Our second panel opened by exploring this relationship. As Kathryn Greenman said:

There's no straightforward or direct relationship between saying that something is right or wrong, moral or immoral, and saying it's lawful or unlawful. That's not to say there's no relationship … the prohibition on genocide, torture or apartheid, obviously these rules have some sort of moral quality. But if we look at other bits of international law, we might think they're actively immoral. If we think about the WTO's intellectual property rules that prevent countries in the global south from making generic vaccines while multinational pharmaceutical companies make billions of dollars. So, they [ethics and law] are different. They've got different sources, they're enforced by different institutions, but they're both also vocabularies that can be used by journalists and humanitarians to further their projects of justice or accountability.

David Tuck responded by saying the law plays a crucial role in conflict zones.

When you walk into any sort of humanitarian situation, you're asked to make a sort of moral or ethical judgment about what the humanitarian concerns are, because you need to identify those concerns before you can then make a strategy to address them. And of course, what one person identifies as the concerns may differ very much from what another person sees or identifies. This is where, in my career, the law has been an absolute and vital constant.

This was brought into relief for Tuck when he visited a place of detention in the mountains of Eastern Afghanistan, which periodically came under mortar fire. The detainees were particularly vulnerable, because they couldn't leave. The law prescribes that detainees must be protected from hostilities.

Knowing the law gives us this great sort of universally accepted standard for what might well be a humanitarian concern. I also don't like the idea, though, that we limit our humanitarian thinking to just what the law says. There's heaps that we can do that is not necessarily written in the law.

For Stan Grant, however, the law is sometimes the problem, when it oppresses the vulnerable rather than protects them. He bases his actions on an ethical approach largely determined by his Indigeneity.

Can I just say that I'm on Gadigal and Bidjigal land today and honoured to be here and pay respects to the people of this land. And I say that because those values that I hold come directly from my own background, my own culture, the values that I was raised in. I've reported from a lot of parts of the world and in Australia, where people's relationship to power makes them both more vulnerable to the imposition and intrusion and exploitation of the media and also more vulnerable to the law. The law may in fact be set up to establish and protect people's rights. I've reported from many parts of the world where that just isn't the case. Even in countries like Australia, where ostensibly you have a legal framework that protects people's rights, we know that your relationship to the law and your relationship to the society and your vulnerability, or your poverty, will often dictate just how often or how much the law can actually protect you.

For Grant, journalism is by nature exploitative, and the media holds the power. To point a camera at someone in a refugee camp, said Grant, is an act of power, and some journalists do this without thinking of the dignity of their subjects, or their safety or suffering. Grant makes it his aim to tell the stories of the vulnerable.

The way that I tried to frame a lot of my reporting was to look at who was the most vulnerable, who were the people who were the most exposed, what the relationship to power was of those people, and to report through their eyes what they were experiencing. Reporting conflict zones was far less for me about what we call in journalism the bang, bang – you know, the bombs and the explosions and the gunfire. For me, who are the people suffering the most? How vulnerable are they? What is their relationship to power? And how do we allow them to tell their stories using our resources?

In conflict zones, said Greenman, journalists are civilians, and are protected as such. This means that they cannot be deliberately or directly targeted. However, journalists can lose this protection if they become involved in the conflict, including by doing things that directly affect military operations. A more likely scenario is when the journalist effectively, rather than legally, loses the protection that goes with civilian status.

That might be because a journalist is, you know, following very closely a military unit, or getting very close to military objectives. Those are legitimate targets. And in a sense, the journalist takes the risk. International humanitarian law doesn't require the party to a conflict to necessarily stop just because there's a journalist in the mix.



There are similar issues with journalists working with the protection of security guards. As Greenman said:

It doesn't change the legal status of a journalist, but I think that is the type of situation where they're risking in practice being confused with a combatant and being targeted. You're in a situation where journalists are travelling with armed security guards, especially in conflict situations where maybe there's already a sense of the distinctions between combatants and civilians being blurred. It's a practical danger.

And Grant added:

In many of the places that I reported, of course, journalists are targets themselves. I've been in situations regularly where I would go out to do interviews, and I would be in an armoured vehicle, I would have armed security with us. That was how we had to operate and that made us targets. Indeed, I lost colleagues who came under fire because they were targeted in just that way. That line between being an unarmed non-combatant journalist or a target was completely blurred. And in countries like China, of course, where I spent a decade, there was no inherent legal protection for journalists to operate. We were enemies of the state, constantly under watch, constantly under suspicion, constant imposition, harassment, being beaten up, being arrested. We ran an obstacle course all the time in having to deal with the authorities because there was no legal protection for what we were doing essentially. And the people that we interviewed suffered even more.

The hardest decisions Grant had to make concerned protecting his sources, because some of them were placing themselves at great risk by speaking out. One emerging legal issue concerns the extent to which journalists can be compelled to reveal their sources or testify before international criminal tribunals. 'They do have some protections in that respect,' said Greenman. 'And there are some decisions of international criminal tribunals that extended those protections in really interesting ways. But there are also some limitations.'

One case involved Jonathan Randal, who refused to testify in front of the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia. Randal didn't have a confidential source; he had published an interview with one of the defendants. He received a subpoena to testify, but he and the *Washington Post* refused. In 2002, they won the case on appeal, by arguing that routinely compelling journalists to testify would undermine their ability to report from war zones. This set a precedent establishing a degree of immunity from involuntary testimony for war correspondents. Greenman noted:

The International Criminal Tribunal said there is some protection. Journalists can't be compelled to testify, unless the information that they're going to bring is of direct importance to an issue in the case and it can't be got in any other way. That's really interesting, right? It's a protection that goes beyond just confidential sources and protects them from being compelled to testify at all. At the same time, the standard isn't that strict. So we've got this rather vague idea of being important and direct in terms of a core issue in the case, and it also doesn't really enable potential harm to the journalist to be taken into account either.

To see the Virtues and Rights panel in full, go to ethicsinconflict.com

9 | THE INTERVIEWS DISCUSSION

When six very different reporters, who also have varying life experiences and career trajectories, were asked to reflect on their ethics, a range of views emerged. This range is unsurprising, and is as important to explore and acknowledge as any common ground. However, what is perhaps surprising is that there was a lot of common ground. There was significant overlap in ethical approaches taken, even though our interviewees mostly attributed their journalistic ethics to personal beliefs, rather than any written code. Below, in keeping with our semi-structured interviews, we tease out these contrasts and commonalities thematically, as follows:

- the role of formal codes;
- the role of principles;
- dignity and respect;
- consequentialism, or ethics as defined by risks and benefits;
- virtue-based ethics;
- relationships and the ethics of care;
- further ethical frameworks and approaches;
- the role of the personal moral compass;
- the ethics of being embedded; and
- the question of when, if ever, it is right to become involved in the story.

CODES. Most of our interviewees (five of six) said they were not motivated in their decision-making by written codes or commitments, such as the MEAA *Journalist Code of Ethics* or the proprietorial codes of their media outlets. Several had no idea what the MEAA code or other applicable codes prescribed.

The exception was Kate Geraghty, who was inspired by the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s ethos of independence, which dates from the foundation of the *Sydney Herald* in 1831.



PHOTO: GARY RAMAGE, AFGHANISTAN

The commitment is prominently depicted in a large painting, still on display at the paper's new home in North Sydney, showing the words, 'Our Editorial management shall be conducted upon principles of candour, honesty, and honour … We have no wish to mislead; no interests to gratify by unsparing abuse, or indiscriminate approbation.' Geraghty also invokes international codes when training new colleagues. This perhaps reflects a newer and positive development in conflict reporting preparation, which sees seasoned conflict reporters and photojournalists stepping up to train those about to enter the field.

For now, however, our interviews suggest that the role of codes needs to be reassessed, given their limited impact.

PRINCIPLES. While written codes did not generally inform their ethical decision-making, our interviewees were very much motivated by personal principles. For several interviewees, these personal principles were a variation on the prescription of 'don't hurt people' or 'do no harm', the latter also constituting a cornerstone of medical ethics. In Murray's words, 'In the pursuit of a story, I'd never willingly hurt someone.' The MEAA *Journalist Code of Ethics* refers, among other things, to respecting grief and not placing unnecessary emphasis on irrelevant personal characteristics; however, there is no explicit call to 'do no harm'. This is particularly relevant when considering that conflict situations have such a high capacity to generate dangerous situations in which reporters can do considerable harm to people.

Kate Geraghty was conscious of this type of principle when considering whether it was safe for an interviewee to talk or have their photo taken – bearing in mind that photo of trauma will live on far longer than the event. Geraghty worried about inexperienced reporters, for example, in East Ukraine, wandering up to people in line at a polling booth and asking about their vote. Stan Grant spoke of making considerable efforts to protect the identity of sources in China and Afghanistan, who would face intimidation or worse for speaking to a western reporter. Consideration for the welfare of his subjects motivated Grant to rent an apartment in Shanghai to interview a dissident, who nonetheless was reported and arrested, along with the then CNN reporter. Similarly, Gary Ramage refused to identify some subjects of his work, and Richard Murray fought until he was 'blue in the face' to keep some sources anonymous.

Further, all interviewees raised the need to protect their local colleagues, including fixers, from the harm that can be caused by working with foreign media. It is for this reason that the *Sydney Morning Herald* has helped fixers move to a safer country once their position became dangerous; and it is for this reason that Ginny Stein walked back into a police station at a time of volatility and violence in Zimbabwe to make sure that her translator's driver's licence was not kept on file.

While principles of 'do no harm' and 'don't hurt anyone' were consistently held by our interviewees, more active and imprecise positive duties such as 'do good' or 'help people' were not the norm. The clear exception here was Sophie McNeill, whose career was driven by a humanitarian ethic that would see her routinely intervening to help the subjects of her stories. In 2020, McNeill left journalism to join Human Rights Watch as a researcher.

DIGNITY AND RESPECT. Often, the ethical principles that motivated our interviewees were founded on notions of dignity and respect for humanity.

Stan Grant: 'I think I've abided by some really strong ethical codes around people's dignity, their right to privacy, the permission that is needed in doing anything. A lot of this comes from my own

background, you know, being an Aboriginal person. I know the extent to which our own privacy, our own dignity has been trashed by media in Australia.'

Gary Ramage: 'We ran across an open field, while this fighting was going on to try and get to this guy that these Marines were dragging through the long grass ... I didn't start shooting because the first thing I noticed was his pants around his ankles. I didn't want his parents to see the last image of their son on a helicopter bleeding out with his pants around his ankles. Now, there's a lot of other people out there that would just take the photo and not worry about it. But at that split second, that's what I was thinking.'

Sophie McNeill: 'Totally it's about respecting people. That's why I like being a video journalist. Because I could choose when to keep filming or not. You know, that you're not just there as some voyeuristic bloodthirsty journalist.'

For Kate Geraghty, the principle of respect seems to be a universal for photojournalists. 'The principle is the same, it's about respect. Ninety nine percent of photojournalists who work in this environment have the same ethics. We come from all different countries around the world but have the same code.' And that principle is extended to all her subjects, even when she was photographing a perpetrator of the Bali bombing: 'You've got to afford them the same respect as a Bali bombing survivor. Your job is not to judge.'

Beyond general notions such as dignity and respect, the principle-based approach of two of our interviewees was bedded in a strong sense of social justice drawn from the frameworks of Catholicism and Aboriginality.

Ginny Stein realises she is shaped by the Catholicism she was raised in but walked away from. She says a principle such as 'don't do unto others what you wouldn't want done unto you' stays with you, even if the exact phrasing can be elusive. Indeed, variations of this rule of reciprocity are found in most ethical traditions, including the well-known, 'Treat others as you would want to be treated.' The principle is sometimes described as the 'Golden Rule' of ethics.

And the ethics of Stan Grant were largely informed by watching Indigenous communities being observed and reported on by white reporters with no lived experience of the circumstances and no framework for making their observations:

> *In my case, being someone who's very attentive to that … who grew up seeing the real-life consequences of when you become merely a subject and lose that agency and that dignity, I've really, really stuck to that ... to the point where I've almost come to fists, arguments with people I've been working with, because I will not abide by that.*

CONSEQUENCES.

It's not surprising, given the gravity of stories and the often-dangerous circumstances for reporters abroad, that consequences are dominant in their thinking. This was borne out in our interviews. This potentially aligns with the consequentialist school of ethics, which looks to determine the right way of acting by reference to the consequences of that action, and by weighing up prospective harms and benefits.

Naturally, our interviewees often bore in mind prospective harms and benefits to themselves, their team and the subjects of their reporting. They were highly concerned about risks to their sources, about the safety risks to themselves and their teams, as well as the wellbeing of the people they were reporting on.



Often, questions about ethics became tied up with issues of logistics. For Ginny Stein, the two constantly ran together:

> *If I was weighing up a trip, I would weigh up, is it safe enough for me and for the people I'm involved with? Can I get there? Can I get out? And how much time have I got to do it … All of those were factors before I even went in. And then it was a case of logistics. At that time [in Zimbabwe] there was no fuel, and so logistics were a major consideration … I was just working to ensure that I was safe, and those around me were safe.*

Stan Grant cites logistical considerations as weighing heavily, given they often had ethical implications:

> *There were logistical decisions, of course. What the point person was, what the distance was going to be, what times we were expected to be at certain places. What were we required to take on a journey like that? What were the worst-case scenarios? And what were the contingencies? That covers everything from food and water to petrol and spare tyres. All of those little decisions we had to make. Ultimately, the final call on those things would come to me.*

For Gary Ramage, however, ethical considerations and logistical considerations were kept entirely separate. As an ex-military man, Ramage says logistics are fundamental.

> *Logistics is something that I can do with my eyes closed, it doesn't faze me. I'm a constant planner. I don't like surprises. [But] ethics would be the biggest issue I've ever had in regard to trying to do my job or not do the job.*

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the risks to personal and mental health for conflict reporters. Richard Murray describes a state of permanent exhaustion. 'It was a case of being extremely exhausted all the time, and feeling more like you're on autopilot,' he says. And Ginny Stein describes putting herself in danger 'too often'. In the past, reporters were simply expected to tough it out. Today, however, there is an increasing acknowledgment by media companies that the mental and physical health of their reporters, crews and photojournalists matters. And among reporters themselves, there is the growing recognition that looking after your own safety is important and that there is a duty of care towards the team that comes with being a foreign correspondent. Stan Grant faced the burden of this responsibility over many years in many places, which meant a careful assessment of risks and consequences. The toughest decisions were whether to chase a 'good story' when the danger in doing so was clear and present:

IT'S ABOUT RESPECTING PEOPLE. YOU'RE NOT JUST THERE AS SOME VOYEURISTIC BLOODTHIRSTY JOURNALIST

> *They were the toughest ones in terms of weighing up what the balance of probabilities were. You know, I have a family. What were the risks going to be that I wouldn't come back? And what are the consequences for the people who were working with me? As the senior journalist in those situations, I was the team leader and that meant, you know, a camera person, a fixer, sometimes a producer, sometimes a security person as well. The decisions that I was going to make were decisions that I would have to live with, in the worst of all possible circumstances, that one or all of us may find ourselves killed.*

However, our interviewees also said that sometimes the modern approach to risk assessment gets it wrong. Ginny Stein is concerned about the rise of a tick-box mentality, which is in fact more about managers absolving themselves of responsibility rather than any meaningful assessment of ethical risks. And Kate Geraghty has concerns about the more frequent use of security guards travelling with media crews in war-torn regions, especially when those security guards are often ex-military and bring with them their own biases and also change the dynamics of interviews.

VIRTUES.

Virtues such as courage, resilience, empathy and honesty would seem, logically, to be key character traits for reporters in conflict zones. And indeed, philosophers from Aristotle to contemporary virtue ethicists argue that we should cultivate our characters so that we then flourish and live good lives. However, when making ethical

decisions, our interviewees said they didn't generally have notions of virtue or character at the front of their minds. But such notions weren't entirely out of mind, either. As Richard Murray said:

> *It's not something that you're really conscious of, but I think it's something that sort of burns away in the background there. You know, how do you want the world to see you? But I think a lot of it comes down to reputation as well.*

Our interviewees said that maintaining good character – and being seen to maintain good character – was sometimes a positive influence on their decision-making. When Richard Murray decided to stay long term in South Korea, maintaining his reputation as someone who reported honestly became more important. Ginny Stein said that she wouldn't have wanted to be known as an unethical journalist. And Gary Ramage spoke of wanting to be seen to be a good person by his peers and acting accordingly.

Some of our interviewees also addressed specific virtues. For Stan Grant, empathy and honesty were core to his behaviour in conflict zones. In fact, Grant has a list of characteristics that a conflict reporter ought to cultivate, and being tough doesn't loom large: 'Restraint, respect, empathy, and understanding of dignity, compassion, you know, those things are far more important to me than things like people being tough.' Meanwhile, Ginny Stein spoke to the virtue of courage, adding that the role of courage is complicated by the modern culture of risk assessment. She worries that courage is valued less in an environment of risk management, unless there is strong support from managers.

RELATIONSHIPS.

Without exception, the interviewees said that relationships were crucial for their ethical decision-making. These relationships took several forms, including relationships with sources, relationships with the subjects of their reporting, relationships with their team, relationships with their journalism colleagues, and also relationships with their audience.

The relationship with sources was particularly important. As Gary Ramage says:

> *It's a fine balance that you have to manage. Obviously, you don't want to screw over a source or a contact because you won't get that info ever again. Yeah, it's in relationships. If you abuse the relationship and the friendship, then your information dries up, and therefore you can't do your job.*



PHOTO: GARY RAMAGE, IRAQ

For Sophie McNeill, the relationship with audience didn't count for much. What she cared about was the people right in front of her, who were often the victims of war or other humanitarian crises. 'Even if you're only in someone's life for half an hour, you form a relationship with them,' she says. She also had very strong relationships with fixers. 'They're looking after you, you're worried about them,' she says. 'They want to get a good story. But they also really think about your safety.'

For Murray, by contrast, two relationships he identifies as particularly important were to the place/people where he was stationed, and to his audience.

> *Sometimes it was a relationship to place. A lot of the people who were doing the job, I thought, were lazy. They weren't bothering to learn the local language. They weren't at all interested in where they were. Their narratives became repetitive, and cyclical, and sensational. But first and foremost, what I'm talking about is probably more relationship to your audience, or your perceived audiences. I felt that I had a responsibility to my audience to tell stories in a way that I thought was accurate.*

On a related note, we asked interviewees about the 'journalism of attachment', an approach that encourages journalists to abandon any pretense of objectivity and to take sides. It bills itself as 'journalism that cares as well as knows'. Our interviewees generally were not familiar with 'journalism of attachment', and not particularly impressed with the notion of taking sides. (However, see also 'Getting involved', below.) The exception was Richard Murray, now a journalism academic. As he said:

> *I've got no problems with it. This is something that* The Guardian *pioneered, going back a little way. I don't see any problems with subjectivity in journalism, as long as you're clear about your subjectivity. There's a place for the inverted pyramid, but there's more than one type of journalism. You can indulge multiple different journalisms, as long as you're clear about what you're doing.*

A final point to note here is that the 'ethics of care' is a significant ethical framework that posits relationships as central to our ethical decision-making. In our interviews, we did not explicitly address the ethics of care. However, given the importance our interviewees place on relationships, we suggest that one potential avenue for further research involves a more thorough examination of how the ethics of care might apply to conflict reporting.

FURTHER ETHICAL APPROACHES.

In our interviews, we acknowledged that the western-based ethical frameworks we were discussing were not exhaustive. We also discussed the existence of many further ethical frameworks, including frameworks based in the countries where our interviewees were working. While we didn't explore any of these frameworks in depth, we did ask interviewees whether they had ever encountered further ethical approaches, and whether these had ever been in tension with their own approaches. The clearest example came from Richard Murray, who recounted travelling on a bus with a Nepalese fixer, Pema.

> *He had a very strict code that he lived by. You know, what it meant to be a Sherpa, what it meant to be a Nepali, was very, very clear in his eyes. To deviate from that was kind of a curse. I remember being on a bus once, travelling from Pokhara, the closest city to the Anapurna ranges. There were a group of Israeli backpackers on the bus and one of them claimed that his camera had been stolen. They got up in formation and basically got the driver to stop the bus and then got everyone off the bus and started searching them. Pema just lost his mind. He was like, 'No, you're not. This is Nepal. I'm a Nepalese man. You're not going to search me.' And I remember at that point having to make a decision, 'Do I weigh in against these guys, who have just clearly come out of the*

IDF [Israeli Defence Force] very well trained?' Having to make a decision to go with Pema at that point, 'Yeah, you're not going to search me either.' Showing Pema that I supported him, even though I was a bit pissed off, and quite frankly, quite terrified of what these guys were going to do.

Ethical decision-making is subtle and complex. At this point, as well as opting to act according to Pema's code rather than his own, Murray was also making a decision informed by his relationship with Pema, who remains a close friend.

A PERSONAL MORAL COMPASS. Perhaps the most striking consistency is that every one of our six interviewees said that they followed their personal moral compass, and that it played a big part in their decision-making. Often, they referred to this as 'following their gut'.

'I always followed my gut,' says Sophie McNeill. For McNeill, following her gut was all-important. She says it kept her safe, it meant that her journalism was better, and it means that she can now sleep soundly at night. 'If you act ethically, or if you always do what feels right, then you can keep doing this work. Because if you don't, that's what haunts you, and that's what gives you PTSD,' she says.

For Gary Ramage, there is 'no bit of paper' that can trump his gut feeling and personal moral compass: 'I value myself as a good person, I wouldn't want to think that I'm viewed by my peers or friends as a horrible person in their eye. I try to go out of my way to be as friendly to people as I can be.'

And for Kate Geraghty, who grew up with her German grandparents' stories of war, her gut is constantly reminding her about the importance of doing justice to the experience of conflict. 'The hairs on your skin stand up,' she says. 'You have to do it justice, you have to get it so right because it's so important, because there is an audience back home that will look at this. The responsibility crackles.'

IF YOU ACT ETHICALLY, OR IF YOU ALWAYS DO WHAT FEELS RIGHT, THEN YOU CAN KEEP DOING THIS WORK

Each of the interviewees was highly sensitive - albeit sometimes only in retrospect - to the ethical issues that arise in conflict reporting. Each interviewee also had a robust set of internalised values that they apply to their work. This is reassuring. However, it opens up further questions about what it is exactly that informs these internalised sets of values. In other words, how has that personal moral compass been set? As we have seen, common ingredients include notions of respect and dignity, as well as the importance of relationships, while more personal ingredients include the values of Christianity and Aboriginality.

And sometimes a personal ethic was set by something more specific. The work of Ginny Stein, for instance, was influenced by an instinctual revulsion to the 'gung-ho famous war correspondent' ethos. 'I'd say to them [other correspondents] all the time, 'You're just so enamored of learning what category type of gun it is - it's a gun!' You know, like, let's talk about the victims. Let's talk about the people who are hit by said gun.'

THE ETHICS OF BEING EMBEDDED.

This is a complex and divisive issue for many journalists and photojournalists. Embedded journalists and photojournalists have, at times, been accused of being hostage to the hosting military. However, Gary Ramage, whose coverage of conflict was always as an embedded photojournalist,



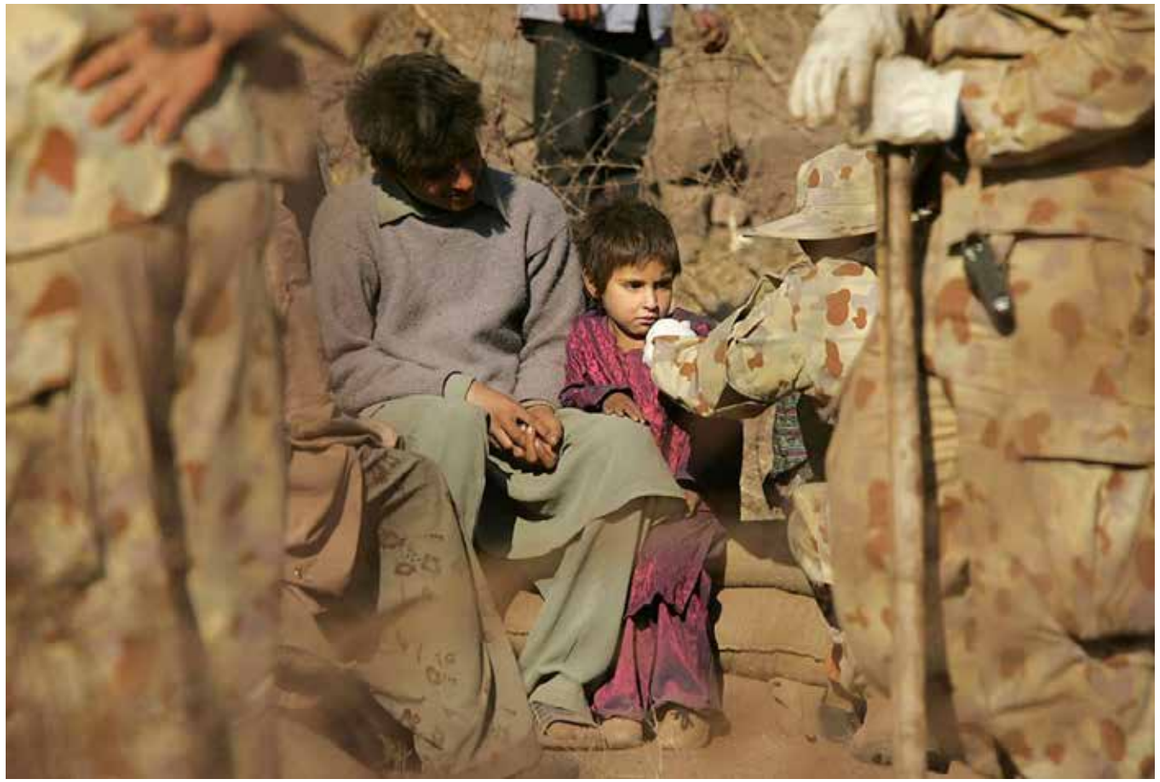


PHOTO: GARY RAMAGE, AFGHANISTAN

believes the quandary is easily resolved with a focus on intention.

There's a lot of people in the photography community who look down on being embedded because they didn't understand it properly. But, you know, I made an ethical decision a long, long time ago that the story that I wanted to cover was the Australian involvement in the war in Afghanistan. I didn't go out there to cover the story of the Afghans and the Afghan war, I wanted to cover the Australians who'd been sent by the government to help Afghanistan, the people, and that was my focus. But it's insane [to think] that if the boys had stuffed up while I was with them, it wouldn't have been reported.. You don't turn a blind eye to that, right?

By contrast, Sophie McNeill approached her journalism from a humanitarian standpoint. Her interest was always in reporting on the world through the eyes of civilians, including victims of war.

I think you start to see the situation through more of a soldier's eyes and the military's eyes, rather than the civilians', if you spend too much time hanging out with the soldiers. I'm not saying you shouldn't do that. But in the last 40 or so years, in the Middle East you can see that perhaps there was too much focus on that. Like, looking at things through that Western view or the occupying troops rather than the actual civilians and the people who live there. I'm not a huge fan of that.

McNeill once did an embed with the Pakistani military, who flew her in a helicopter to a mountainous region near the Afghanistan border. McNeill says, 'They're like, "Look, we got rid of the Taliban." But they had completely destroyed this village. There wasn't a single person left. They were just gone.' After some inquiries, McNeill located some of the villagers, who had fled to Peshawar.

We drove up there, which was quite dangerous at the time. There were a lot of Taliban around and people were being kidnapped. So, we just went up there quickly for the day, and we found these people and they're like, 'We hate the Pakistani army. They destroyed our village.' It was that importance of accurately portraying the situation if you're going to do those embeds. Because it's all about power, right? And the military is often the one with the power. So, if you're going to make that the focus of your story, and get that access, then you also are obliged to seek out the other side of the story.

GETTING INVOLVED IN THE STORY.

Traditionally, the credo of good journalism is objectivity. (Although objectivity has its detractors, including supporters of advocacy journalism.) But in fields of conflict, objectivity can be especially difficult to achieve and maintain. The six interviewees in our research all agreed that sometimes the right thing to do is not to stay dispassionate and disengaged, but to become involved. Sometimes, they said, they didn't want to keep the human suffering they were witnessing at arm's length.

Gary Ramage has often downed tools to assist the subjects of his stories. On one occasion:

I shot a bunch of pictures that I was happy with that I thought would tell the story. And I didn't feel the need to continue that when, you know, there's a young boy dying at my feet, and one guy is trying to save him and he's running out of breath. In that split second in that helicopter, I decided to try and help. Yeah, I've got the basic first aid training. If I had no basic first aid training, I would not have got involved.

IN THAT SPLIT SECOND IN THAT HELICOPTER, I DECIDED TO TRY AND HELP

Sophie McNeill was particularly willing to become involved. Her journalism career is marked by intervening on behalf of the subjects of her stories: she completely rescheduled her international itinerary to help a Syrian man reconnect with his family; she gave money to Yemeni parents whose children had died of starvation; she flew to Bangkok to help an 18-year-old Saudi who had locked herself in an airport hotel room, where she was seeking asylum and in fear of her life. For McNeill:

I think we get tied up about bias. You can operate like a human. You can put ethics first. And that doesn't in any way affect your accuracy, or your commitment to the facts and representing the absolute truth of the situation. People think we have to be robots to do that. I totally disagree. Me being a human in no way distorts my commitment to the facts.

As westerners, conflict reporters can be seen by those they are interacting with as already involved. In a hospital in Iraq, Kate Geraghty was invited to take photos as a doctor, a father and an uncle were holding down a nine-year-old boy while shrapnel was being removed from his body. He needed to be held down because there were no painkillers. After taking the photos, Geraghty was asked to hold the son's hand while the father had a cigarette. Immediately, Kate said yes, but as she did the doctor said: 'You do not cry, because your country has done this too.' Kate says she has 'held heaps of hands, why not? If a kid puts his hand out or if a mother shoves a baby at you while she looks after another child, you're not going to say no, are you?'

As Geraghty says, 'I'm a human being first.'



PHOTO: GARY RAMAGE, EAST TIMOR

10 | CONCLUSION

University journalism schools like to imbue students with the importance and efficacy of ethics in codified form: a set of rules to guide reporters and photojournalists when they are, inevitably, confronted with challenging decision-making in the field. In Australia, the MEAA *Journalist Code of Ethics* tends to be the go-to document. However, our exploration of ethics in conflict reporting – based on interviews with current and past foreign correspondents and photojournalists as well as a symposium with practitioners and experts – indicates that written codes of ethics play a peripheral role. The journalists were aware, for example, of the existence of the MEAA Code; however, they had limited awareness of what it contained. The Code is only short, but some had never read it. And there were varying degrees of awareness about further codes and standards, including proprietorial editorial codes. But this doesn't mean the journalists acted unethically in the field. Rather, they tended to rely on their own personal moral compass.

But what is the true north of this personal moral compass? Is this true north the same for every journalist? And does this true north happen to coincide with the principles contained in codes of ethics?

We approached journalists to look for the source of their ethical decision making in the field, and we found similar approaches that seemed to stem from very different sources. For some of our interviewees, their decision-making was based on the fundamental principle of 'do no harm'. For another, do no harm alone was insufficient; it required another step – helping people. For another of our interviewees, it was the lived experience of being, and being observed as, a member of an Aboriginal community that informed his approach. While for another, her upbringing as a Catholic had influenced her more than she appreciated until asked to reflect on it. It was of consequence too that while all had at least fleeting knowledge of both the MEAA Code of Ethics and the more specific editorial codes of their employer, few went into the battlefield, so to speak, armed with words on a page to guide them. They consistently referred to the human condition, to the need to be human, to respect and protect the dignity of people who were vulnerable.

What is clear is that the moral compass that guides correspondents in conflict zones is important for all journalists to understand for at least two reasons. The first is because they ought to be (and, as it turns out, often are) calibrated according to notions of dignity and respect, the foundational requirements of ethical behavior. The second is that technological change means any journalist, anywhere in the world, can write a story about conflict and those it impacts. Budget cuts have tended to target foreign correspondence, such that major foreign events are often covered from a desk. These stories are high stakes, and whatever the circumstances under which a story is written, respect, dignity and humanity need to come first.

Our interviewees and symposium participants were unanimous in their dedication to respect and dignity. This also led many of them to propose that the only ethical position to assume in many cases was to become involved in the story as more than just a detached observer. However, it was a question of degree. Holding the hand of an injured child suffering in a hospital is at one end of the spectrum. At the other is defying management orders and missing your flight home to tend to a lost asylum seeker. At both ends of the spectrum, the issue was articulated as 'what lets you sleep at night'.

Ethics is not only about a code, or rote-learning clauses. It's a living thing that deepens as we understand more about the human condition, and as we wrestle with how to apply principles of dignity, respect and humanity to ourselves and to others. The more that we ask questions of how decisions are made in the field, the more that journalists tackling issues of conflict can be armed with greater clarity of purpose, including by understanding how complex these issues can be. In this way, journalists will be better placed to adjust or attend to their personal moral compass. Ultimately, what would be ideal is a situation where both the personal moral compass and the written codes that guide journalists are neatly aligned. To some extent, as Matt Brown noted in the first panel session of our symposium, this is already the case; but our research reveals that both journalistic practice and written codes need attention. They need to be discussed in newsrooms around the country, in editorial meetings and news conferences. That discussion needs to consider changes in technology and modes of warfare and to unpack what reporters in conflict zones actually do when in the field – the daily dilemmas that may, on occasion, in their resolution, conflict with a written code.

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ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR MEDIA TRANSITION

The Centre for Media Transition (CMT) is an applied research unit based at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

Launched in 2017, the CMT is an interdisciplinary initiative of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Law. It sits at the intersection of media, journalism, technology, ethics, regulation and business. Working with industry, academia, government and others, the CMT aims to:

- Understand media transition and digital disruption, with a view to recommending legal reform and other measures that promote the public interest;
- Assist news media to adapt for a digital environment, including by identifying potentially sustainable business models;
- Develop suitable ethical and regulatory frameworks for a fast-changing digital ecosystem;
- Foster quality journalism, thereby enhancing democracy in Australia and the region;
- Develop a diverse media environment that embraces local/regional, international and transnational issues and debate;
- Combat misinformation and protect digital privacy; and
- Articulate contemporary formulations of the public interest informed by established and enduring principles such as accountability and the public's right to know.

The CMT's published works include reports on digital defamation, trust in news media, the state of regional news and news media innovation. Current projects include work on industry self-regulation, privacy, news verification, foreign reporting and press freedom.

The CMT has consulted for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and the Australian Communications and Media Authority. We are also the home of the Asia-Pacific bureau of First Draft News, which combats misinformation.

The Centre regularly hosts public events, conferences and forums. You can sign up to our regular newsletter at go.uts.edu.au/CMT-eNews-Signup. Details of events and the CMT's work can be found on our website at **cmt.uts.edu.au**



SOPHIE McNEILL, YEMEN PHOTO: AARON HOLLETT'