



Miranda

Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone /
Multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on the English-
speaking world

2 | 2010

Voicing Conflict : Women and 20th Century Warfare

Roles in Conflict: The Woman War Reporter

Maggie Allison



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/1120>

DOI: 10.4000/miranda.1120

ISSN: 2108-6559

Publisher

Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès

Electronic reference

Maggie Allison, « Roles in Conflict: The Woman War Reporter », *Miranda* [Online], 2 | 2010, Online since 03 July 2010, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/1120> ; DOI : 10.4000/miranda.1120

This text was automatically generated on 19 April 2019.



Miranda is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Roles in Conflict: The Woman War Reporter

Maggie Allison

- 1 Women and war are two terms which may appear inimical, but the actions and influence of women in war-torn areas from World War 1 and World War 2 to conflicts in Bosnia and Iraq are legendary. Women and journalism, likewise, have not always mixed well, with, until relatively recently, a predominantly male presence and environment in the worlds of press and audiovisual media reporting. There is all the more reason, therefore, to focus on the combination of “women”, “war” and “reporter” by looking at the roles of the woman reporter in conflict situations, and examining her own conflicting roles in the theatre of war or civil unrest.
- 2 Clearly the conflicts and dilemmas involved in war reporting do not apply solely to women, but it is the gender dimension which will be the main focus here. Nor is it possible in the space available to look at a whole range of women reporters of war. This article will, therefore, address the issues through the prism of one BBC reporter in particular, the well-known Kate Adie. It is important to stress here the fact that she, herself, may not see her “career” in terms solely of a war reporter, but in Britain at least she has come to symbolize the fearless woman in situations of danger, another notion which Adie challenges. There will also be passing reference to Lindsey Hilsum, (International Editor for Channel 4 News); BBC’s Orla Guerin (BBC, formerly Middle Eastern, then African correspondent, now BBC Pakistan correspondent in Islamabad) and, for France, Patricia Allémonière (TF1 *grand reporter*), and Christine Ockrent, the *grande dame* of French television, formerly of France 2, now director general of AEF (*Audiovisuel Extérieur de France*). After providing a brief overview of Adie’s biography and career this article will examine her approach, first to the occupation of reporter, then to her presentation of herself as the woman just “doing her job” in situations of danger; it will address the implications from a gender perspective for her and other women journalists in the theatre of war, and the relationship between the woman journalist and the military, then with local populations.

1 Adie: a brief biography

- 3 Kate Adie (OBE, Order of the British Empire), was born just post-war in 1945, a point she makes great play of in her autobiography and other writings, in the northern British town of Sunderland which saw severe bombing in World War 2 (Adie, 2002, 2003); she took a degree in Scandinavian studies at Newcastle upon Tyne University in the UK, began her media life as station assistant at BBC Radio Durham, was subsequently producer for BBC Radio Bristol, later reporter for BBC regional TV News in Plymouth and Southampton, eventually joining the national BBC news team in 1976. By chance she covered the Iranian Embassy siege in 1980, which thrust her into the limelight, as normal broadcast schedules were halted to allow live coverage of the siege, a practice which was to recur night after night two years later during the Falklands War of 1982. From then on Kate Adie became synonymous with situations of crisis and conflict; the saying among the military was: “If Kate Adie’s coming, we’re in trouble!” In 1989 she filed chilling and dramatic accounts of the Tiananmen Square massacre. Now, no longer out in the field, she presents the BBC Radio 4 programme: *From Our Own Correspondent*. In 2009 Adie returned to China to look back on the sites where the violence took place, not just in Tiananmen Square, but also the side streets of Beijing (then Peking) where mere residents and by-standers were shot by the military, where she and her crew, at great risk to themselves, had helped rush injured people to hospital.

2 The road to becoming a front line woman reporter

- 4 How did all this happen? Adie is at pains to point out, both in her autobiography and in speaking engagements¹ that not only did she *not* set out specifically to be a war reporter, she never envisaged that journalism would be her life’s work. She insists, perhaps over-emphasizes, that “in her day”, in the early 1960s, the word “career” was not mentioned to young girls, their being led to believe that “Our future was assured: we were the housewives and mothers of the future [...] The word career was never uttered at school.” (Adie 2002, 15), and that from her private Church of England girls’ school she was the one who had to be eased into University, by the back door, to enhance the school’s reputation. “The head made a few phone calls, and in a year when the government was tootling a fanfare about the newly operational student admissions system [...] I went straight in the back door.” (Adie 2002, 20) As for journalism, that was something she fell into by accident, for nothing was further from her schoolgirl thoughts: “[...] the spotty lads who chewed their pencils and scribbled weird symbols in their notebooks under the suspicious eye of the headmistress hardly held out the promise of an exciting world entered through journalism.” (Adie 2009, 7) Interestingly, a 2006 report by the Sutton Trust found that 54% of today’s British news journalists were educated in the private sector, a far cry from the spotty boy image.²
- 5 Adie regularly insists that she never had any specific training in journalism, that she painfully developed her skills at a rather amateurish and haphazard BBC, describing it as she first knew it in the mid to late 1960s as “a brilliant cultural circus presided over by a wily civil service-type management [...] creative geniuses were tolerated as long as they didn’t go outside and frighten the horses.” (Adie 2002, 3) Nonetheless, she is well aware of the stature of the BBC at home and abroad: “I associate the Beeb with style and presence

at all major happenings; it had been part of history during the war, it made comedy and drama, I was a child of radio's Home Service *Children's Hour*." (Adie 2002, 45) For someone who bemoans not having any of the formal training now available to media personnel, she is highly meticulous and professional as to her reporting and conduct, having now become an icon in the world of British journalism. There is here a detectable conflict between different schools of journalism if one compares Adie's stance with that of Christine Ockrent, an icon of the French media, educated at *Sciences Politiques* in Paris and who swears by her tough "on the job" training with the American CBS network, but insisting on the professionalism of her "*métier*". She says of fellow CBS journalist, Mike Wallace : "*De lui, j'ai appris l'endurance, la méticulosité, l'importance de ce qui ne se voit pas et se prépare en amont.*" (Ockrent 33)

- 6 If Adie did not set out to be a war reporter, nevertheless many aspects of her life predisposed her to the atmosphere of war, or at least its aftermath. Born in 1945, she seems acutely aware of the residue of war both on people's lives and "on the ground", particularly in her home town of Sunderland, the fourth most bombed town in England where there was severe devastation of the shipyards, leaving ruins and waste areas aplenty, even in suburban areas, spaces in which she played as a child: "Sunderland was littered with bombsites. They were natural adventure playgrounds for us, with huge chunks of concrete, softened by buddleia." (Adie 2002, 13) Arguably, this coloured her approach to life in Britain and to her own trajectory in the second half of the 20th century; the stiff upper lip attitude of her elders pervades her own reporting and writing, as in her book, *Into Danger* (2008) where she asks what it was like for locals "lying awake listening for the drone of the Luftwaffe". She concludes that: "None of the residents of this bombed street seemed to recall such thoughts. It was over. Let's not drag it up—let's put that behind us." (Adie 2008, 6)
- 7 By contrast, Adie also emerges as fun-loving and something of a dare-devil in her quest for news and truth, a product of the lively swinging 60s, rather than the weary 1940s. She discovered quite early on in her life as a journalist that: "if adventure and reporting went together, it was a slice of luck on my plate that I had never expected. And I loved it." (Adie 2002, 113-4) Is this dare-devil side of her accompanied by an awareness of the danger she is often going into? On this point she insists that as a journalist she is "only doing a job", that an assignment is an assignment, whatever its nature and that the same rules apply. She plays down danger, and when asked what was the most dangerous situation she was in, replied "I don't do lists"³ (Allison, July 2009), pointing out that other people who choose dangerous professions, such as bomb disposal experts, those who "just did their bit" in the war, are the ones who merit attention, this being the whole premise of her exploration of dangerous professions in *Into Danger*. One could say that there is a contradiction between the public's image of her and her perception of herself. Indeed, she points to misconceptions on the part of the public as to levels of danger: a propos of the Iranian Embassy siege she said: "The tabloids made a fuss of the Embassy siege because a woman popped up, but they didn't report about me in Northern Ireland which was far more dangerous." (Allison, July 2009) So, is a woman in danger more compelling, better TV than a man in danger? How does the gender factor come into play?

3 Seeing action: women journalists and French-English contrasts

- 8 For many journalists, in particular women, it is said to be the chance occurrence or the “lucky break” which shapes their career, as we saw with Adie and the Iranian Embassy siege: thereafter she was not just a household name, but a force to be reckoned with. Her “unlucky break” was to have food poisoning just as the BBC were hunting for someone to go to the Falklands at the beginning of the conflict in 1982; others were occupied elsewhere and the relatively unknown Brian Hanrahan became the daily voice of the BBC for some three months, while Adie had to content herself with being posted in Chile—the nearest available point. Twenty years later, she admits in her autobiography:

Knowing what he faced, I’m not sure that I’d have risen to the challenge—I knew nothing of the military and less of war. However, I had an extraordinary few months on the fringe of it all, and I am still staggered by the way in which war fever gripped so many people, and took over every aspect of journalism. (Adie 2002, 129)

- 9 It must be noted that the only woman on that mission was official artist Linda Kitson, who produced impressions of the action, since the British Ministry of Defence was reluctant for the grim reality to fill British screens; moreover the technology for transmitting media images at that time was comparatively poor. Kitson later suffered a severe nervous breakdown. But Adie did get to the Gulf War in 1990, and it was put to her in an interview that for French women journalists, at least, this war was their lucky break: the conflict began in early August when French male journalists were “*en vacances, en famille*”, while unattached women journalists were “free” to go to war. Her response was quite scornful, and she put her view in a completely different context:

You can’t compare with French TV journalism [...] French television is *tiny* (her oral emphasis) compared to Great Britain—they only recently got a 24 hours news channel.⁴ But look, when war breaks out all leave is cancelled. You can’t draw conclusions from that situation. It doesn’t stand up. (Allison July 2009)

- 10 By contrast, French women journalists *had* drawn their conclusions. Patricia Allémonière, (who is still a special reporter [*envoyée spéciale*] for TF1 and was embedded in the American army in Afghanistan in June of 2009)⁵ was adamant that this had been the case when interviewed in January 1999, and many other women journalists concurred; these women were referred to as “*les baroudeuses de l’info*” or “women news warriors” (Allison in Gregory and Tidd 80).⁶ There is clearly a cultural difference, not to say conflict, here, as French women journalists in general have perhaps had a more difficult struggle than their British counterparts, as would appear to be borne out by the activities and campaigns of the *Association des Femmes Journalistes* and their publication: *Dites-le avec des femmes: le sexisme ordinaire dans les medias* (Barré et al.1999).

4 A woman journalist in the war zone

4.1 One woman among two thousand men

- 11 How, then, do women journalists cope, in the predominantly doubly male environment of media reporting and war? Although Adie foregrounds her girls’ school background, she makes it clear that when a student at Newcastle University, women were in short supply,

to the extent that “women had to be raffled for some formal occasions, so scarce were we” (Adie 2002, 108). She was, therefore, obliged to adapt to a masculine context, not unlike the situation in press journalism at the time, the 1960s, and later in radio and television, with sound and video recordists being mainly male. But even her Newcastle experience had not prepared her for the hostility, even aggression, of some colleagues in the “neolithic Crew Room in London, which contained a fair number of beer guts and Old Hands” (Adie 2002, 108). She chose not to rise to such provocations and to “let these things go”, rather than be seen as “not being able to hack it” (Adie 2002, 109). In the course of her career she was skilful in bonding with her crews, developing mutual respect and responsibility; despite the fact that when on a mission *she* was heading up *her* team—she talks of “my crew” “my cameraman”—she often relied upon them to extricate her from a tricky situation, once being carried aboard a plane by her cameraman, Chris, following a royal tour with Prince Charles to India where she contracted amoebic dysentery (Adie 2002, 213); on many occasions she would “borrow” a member of the crew to simulate a male partner when on mission in a country which doesn’t “understand the rights of women”:

[...] even the most benign Arab souk or African village has both men and women who don’t or won’t understand the rights of women. So innumerable cameramen have kindly endured shopping expeditions and healthy walks, and occasionally announced that I am married to them—arrest and detention are particularly tricky times, but if you make enough fuss, you get to share a cell with your instant husband—in relatively greater safety [...]. (Adie 2002, 284)

- 12 The gallantry of Adie’s closer media colleagues would seem to complement, and compliment, her professionalism, and mirror that of the military: talking to Jenni Murray on Radio 4’s *Woman’s Hour* programme in October 2002 she pointed out that by the time she got to the Gulf she was “a middle-aged woman” and not afraid to say to the young soldiers “I am not going to jump off this vehicle, I’m going to have a hand and climb off this vehicle, because I’m old enough to be your mother!”⁷
- 13 Issues related to being a woman journalist in the middle of an army of two thousand men going to battle can be considerable, not only regarding security and personal safety but very personal matters to do with privacy and hygiene, which Adie recounts with much humour, in particular the thoughtfulness of an escort officer who solved the problem of there being no cover for a woman to go to the lavatory in the desert, by driving her a considerable distance from the camp, with the instruction “ [...] you go round the back, and I sit in the front, stare out the window and think of England” (BBC Radio 4, 7 October 2002). These instances of what might be seen as special treatment to a woman journalist indicate a certain blurring of the boundaries and roles. So are there conflicts here in the middle of conflict?

4.2 Cross dressing and blending in—or not?

- 14 Adie adapts, as she is required to do if she is to do her job, and “blend in”, an expression she is fond of, and not get in the way of the action. Hence, in 1990 prior to the Gulf War, she found herself in battle fatigues for the first time, so as not to be a separate target, and this is perhaps the most common image the public have of her. As she admits, “Nothing preens quite like a journalist when putting on a military uniform.” (Adie 2003, 253) Having been involved in amateur theatricals at University (although not in an acting capacity), she could here be seen to be dressing up, or even cross-dressing, in the theatre

of war. However, one tiny feminine detail is to be found in her perennial pearl earrings, always there, occasionally visible. Asked why she always wore them, she claims “one has to maintain standards [...] It’s to do with routine [...] I’m in control of myself, one doesn’t let things slip” (Buxton Festival, 14 July 2009).⁸ If circumstances made it impossible for her to feel clean, then at least she could look or feel presentable for the viewer. When not in military attire it is her custom to dress as plainly as possible for a report to camera in order not to distract from the message, saying she “decided to non-dress”:

How a female was supposed to dress posed problems. If someone commented on my clothes it was deemed I’d committed some kind of gaffe. So I decided to non-dress, to wear unremarkable clothes—something that “looked right”, but didn’t deliver its own message on screen. (Adie 2002, 406)

- 15 However, often when doing a stand up piece to camera she needed to borrow a “clean white shirt” from one of her crew: “[...] cameramen have those large suitcases, so their clean shirt supply is endless [...]” (Adie 2002, 263). Could this be seen as some other kind of cross-dressing, the donning of a male or androgynous persona? Moreover, her non-dress policy extends to definitely not adapting to the ambient culture when in a country whose customs and attitudes to women differ from those in the West, particularly in a Muslim environment. Here she will not “blend in”, unlike her colleague, Lindsey Hilsum, reporter for Channel 4 News. When it was pointed out to Adie that Hilsum often wore a scarf, either round her neck, or over her head when reporting in a Muslim context, her response was swift and cutting:

Well, she’s a silly bitch! One doesn’t dress for the audience or draw attention to oneself to the detriment of the reporting. One should blend in. In war you might cover your head for protection, but not [...] because of the sexual views of the host population. You don’t wear fancy dress! (Allison, July 2009)

- 16 Consequently she is also critical of reductive, distancing camera images of peoples trapped in conflict; referring to Bosnian women she says: “The camera can zoom in and look at the miserable faces: under the headscarves, in funny flowered trouser skirts. They’re not the people you’re going to meet in Marks and Spencer.” (Adie 2002, 302) Deprecatingly she referred in conversation to the women as “bagheads in Bosnia”. (Allison, July 2009)
- 17 One might argue, however, that Lindsey Hilsum does cover her head “for protection”, given some of the hostile environments in which she finds herself. Blending in as a woman in her ambient surroundings could save her life; at the very least it allows her to show empathy with or courtesy towards women in her host culture. For instance, during her reporting prior to the August 2009 elections in Afghanistan, Hilsum was pictured in a rally, positioned among the women behind their perimeter. Here she covered her head with a scarf, amid other women, some wearing the burkha, others in rather androgynous outfits, with caps covering their hair. Subsequently she was present at a “shura”, a meeting of male elders, again prior to the elections, where her head was covered in a shawl and her bright red shirt merged totally with the carpet upon which the men in the background were sitting. This may well have been a coincidence, but was visually most striking. On other occasions she readily sits on the floor with her male interlocutors. The blue burkhas prominently visible in the rally described above remind us that it is not only women war reporters who adopt local dress or occasionally cross-dress: the BBC’s senior political correspondent, John Simpson, famously entered Afghanistan in September 2001 on the back of a truck dressed in a burkha to penetrate behind enemy lines; so female local dress can protect the male, too.

- 18 As regards women in locations where western visitors would perceive them to be under serious oppression, as they often are, it could be said that the reactions of Hilsum and Adie differ, but for both of them their concern for women is certain. Hilsum will cover her head and appear therefore to identify with the women around her; Adie most certainly will not, but her empathy with women's plight is nonetheless strong. She recounts an incident where forty women in Jeddah drove, which was then illegal for Saudi women, through the city; their leader, a university lecturer, was later shot by her father in front of her family. Adie's reaction was: "I drove our four-wheel-drive vehicle around Dharan with added determination." (Adie 2002, 377)

4.3 Asserting one's authority as a woman journalist in conflict zones

- 19 This raises the issue of women journalists needing to assert their professional authority when confronted with Middle Eastern male attitudes, a situation which Adie has had to face, as has Ockrent. In the run up to the Gulf War in 1990 British troops and journalists were stationed in Dharan in Saudi Arabia, where, Adie says:

There were bad-tempered incidents with the presence of women in uniform—both women reporters and energetic young soldiers (i.e. women)—constantly showing up the narrow and unpleasant atmosphere. (Adie 2002, 376)

- 20 But the arrival of a Saudi "princeling" to visit the British troops and media brought this into sharp focus:

The plump head honcho, followed by a local TV crew catching his every gracious move, beamed grandly at us, asking who was in charge. I stepped forward, watching as this minor member of the Saudi royal family made a split-second decision whether to advertise his ease with Western ways, or treat me as an untouchable second class citizen. He fixed his teeth in a cold grin, and he brushed my hand rather than shook it [...] as the prince turned abruptly away [...] all three members of the [Saudi] crew shoved me physically aside and hissed abuse, fortunately in Arabic. (Adie 2002, 376)

- 21 Ockrent had a similar experience regarding her authority on the occasion when, again in Saudi Arabia, she was confronted by protocol which dictates that the sovereign can only be interviewed by a man, but there was no male senior reporter present:

On parlemente : "Il faut bien un journaliste pour interroger le souverain !—Ce n'est pas un journaliste, c'est une femme !" [...] De guerre lasse, considérant mon apparence, cheveux courts et pantalons, ne me confèrent nullement l'allure d'une femme, on me laisse pénétrer dans le bureau du roi. (Ockrent 45)

- 22 Ockrent's natural appearance, then, sometimes considered to be androgynous, enabled her to carry off this challenge. Indeed, Rambert and Maquelle refer to "*le style Ockrent, volontairement ambigu, cette beauté asexuée, charmeuse, cérébrale et dominatrice*" ("the Ockrent style, purposely ambiguous, an asexual beauty, charming, cerebral and dominating" [Rambert and Maquelle 137]). By contrast, Adie's more "masculine" battle fatigues and her professional presence did not convince her male Saudi interlocutors.

4.4 Taking sides? Remaining true to yourself

- 23 The question of "blending in" with the host community, be it in gender or more general terms, is part and parcel of a greater, overarching, concern: can the journalist, and in particular the war correspondent, be "neutral", even-handed in his or her approach?

Furthermore, can the journalist remain detached and stand aside from the military operation? With regard to the former, Adie certainly strives for this objective, insisting that she “tells it as it is”, gives an “eye-witness account”. Describing her early days at the BBC, she explains how it was “dinned into us [...] in news, facts came first, with opinion, speculation and personal emotion considered improper and distracting”. (Adie 2002, 5) In her reporting she has a very direct, often urgent, delivery in a very clear, almost strident voice, possibly due to a level of congenital deafness.⁹ If her version is at odds with the official line, she is not afraid to stand by her report, as happened early in her career at BBC Radio Bristol when challenged regarding an edition of *Womanwise* featuring the topic of incest. Her response was: “Yes, I know what I’m doing and I’m prepared to stand by every word.” (Adie 2002, 74) Much later in her career, in the first of her fifty-six reports following the 1986 US raid on Libya, lacking information as to Gaddafi’s fate, she says:

I stuck to reporting what we had seen [...] When I wrote my story [...] I did so entirely from the point of view of an eye-witness [...] mindful of the unusual nature of the country and the need to explain to people at home the precise result of the British involvement in a botched American raid. (Adie 2002, 355)

24 For this honesty she very nearly lost her job, due to political pressures, but claims: “I said at the time that I stood by every word of my broadcast reports. Every single allegation made against those reports proved groundless.” (Adie 2002, 355) By contrast to Adie, Channel 4’s Lindsey Hilsum, although clear, is more low-key, almost downbeat, but equally concerned to put both sides of the argument. She says: “The worst journalists are those who go to places knowing what’s right and what’s wrong, which side is good and which is bad. You have to be prepared to have your expectations overthrown.”¹⁰ Orla Guerin appears more cutting, and was criticized for being biased during her time as Middle East correspondent for the BBC; following a complaint from the Israelis she was removed, became Africa correspondent in January 2006, and is currently, in 2010, BBC Pakistan correspondent in Islamabad.

25 However, at times, particularly when in the front line with the military, journalists need to be embedded, and so switch sides from “hacks” to “foot soldiers”. Adie was no exception; asked by Jenni Murray on BBC Radio 4’s *Woman’s Hour* programme: “You were very closely associated with the Army; how afraid were you that you would lose that famous independent mind of yours?” she replied:

[...] in a nutshell, it’s an argument about loyalty and patriotism, and taking sides as opposed to journalistic independence and objectivity [...] you have to resolve it somehow. You have to work out why you’re there, and the argument is a) facts, and b) audience. Very much so. (*Woman’s Hour*, BBC Radio 4, 7 October 2002)

26 On other occasions, the journalist has a commitment to his or her own government—sometimes being the only reliable source of information or intelligence between them and the situation on the ground, as happened to Adie in Libya. On one occasion, having visited hostages, but feeling keenly the inability to help, she consoled herself with: “[...] at least I’d extracted enough information as possible about where they were held and what the security was like, which I passed on later in London, suggesting that a rescue attempt would see them all killed.” (Adie 2002, 344) In a further instance of the blurring of the boundaries of the journalists’ sphere of responsibility, Adie even had occasion to counsel Colonel Gaddafi’s chief advisor:

At one point Colonel Gaddafi’s chief advisor contacted me from Libya, saying the colonel was uncertain which side of the fence to choose, having an equal dislike of ‘American imperialists’ and what he termed ‘fundamentalist Gulf layabouts’. I

suggested that if the Colonel wanted a few bombers diverted over Tripoli from the massive allied-force gathering in Saudi, he could do no better than to back Saddam Hussein. A call came back a day later saying that the Colonel was going to sit firmly on the fence—and for once, he shut up. (Adie 2002, 382)

- 27 Journalists in these situations, then, are not “just reporting”, but being part of the action and the diplomacy. There is, therefore, a role shift, and maybe a conflict of interest. The press, so often criticized and derided, serve a different purpose just by being there. However, it is important not to overstep the mark: Adie reportedly revealed the schedule of the British Prime Minister on one occasion, and fell from grace. Likewise, John Simpson, following the burkha incident of September 2001, was filmed marching into Kabul on 13 November 2001, later saying: “It was only BBC people who liberated this city. We got in ahead of Northern Alliance troops.” This perceived arrogance earned him some considerable reprobation from politicians and public alike.

Conclusion

- 28 As has been demonstrated, the role of the war reporter is complex indeed, and that of the woman journalist in war and conflict zones is arguably more difficult, for all that Kate Adie might say she is “just doing her job”. A propos of the Iranian Embassy siege, she maintains that “[...] all this stuff about women journalists comes from sexist and male-oriented tabloids. For me, I was just doing my job—it didn’t change my life” (Allison, July 2009). However, even she recognizes that her “difference” creates added complications, if not conflicts.
- 29 It must be acknowledged also that although the public expect reporters to be doing a professional job of news-gathering, there is often a strong streak of humanitarian commitment in their work, and a public expectation of that. When reporting in Northern Ireland, Adie was criticized by a backbench MP in the House of Commons for not rushing to help save a soldier in flames: Typical of the callous press, filming a man in agony [...] Typical of media bias and the media’s sensationalist approach’, he said. (Adie 2002, 166) Her view was that to have assisted would have complicated the situation:
- I had nothing with which to douse the flames, but the soldier’s yells were truly awful. I also know that his mates were with him—and that we were unknown, unidentified figures who might be considered hostile if we suddenly rose from the ground and headed for him. I didn’t formulate those thoughts in any detail at the time, but I knew we were useless in that situation. (Adie 2002, 165)
- 30 To conclude, therefore, one must recognize the stress which all war reporters face, both women and men, and the role they play in bringing the reality to the viewer, listener or reader. This was illustrated in 2009 both by an article in the French publication *Télérama*, and a BBC documentary in which Kate Adie returned to Beijing twenty years after the Tiananmen massacre.
- 31 The *Télérama* article, “*Les baroudeurs ont le droit de pleurer*”, raises the issue of war zone working conditions for journalists and the risk of post traumatic stress disorder for men and women alike, together with the stigma of admitting that one has been affected by the horrors of war.
- Témoins du bruit des bombardements, des cadavres mutilés, de l’odeur des charniers, ils sont nos yeux et nos oreilles. Sur le terrain, les reporters et les photographes de guerre affrontent l’horreur pour nous la restituer, la transmettre. A quel prix ? Si les blessures physiques, les enlèvements ou les assassinats de

reporters sont régulièrement évoqués dans la presse, leurs souffrances intimes, elles, restent tues. (Télérama 3-9 October, 2009, 46-48)¹¹

- 32 Similarly, a maturing Kate Adie, twenty years on from one of her major reporting assignments at Tiananmen Square in June 1989, returned to Beijing to witness the changes and meet some of her informants at the time of the massacre, “to hear the memories of those who survived and to find out what happened to them and their dreams of freedom” (BBC1 3 June 2009).¹² In this documentary she is in reflective and sober mood, belying her feisty report to camera on the night itself, overlaid with gunfire: “They are shouting: ‘Stop the killing!’ and ‘Down with the Government!’” Now she consults her diary of that time, reflecting on her priorities as a reporter and the impact on her of the suffering of ordinary, innocent people. Poignantly she returns to the hotel which housed most of the media crews at the time; from here she and her BBC colleagues were some of the very few TV reporters who ventured onto the square that night—many of the others watched from the balcony:

[...] one of my worries was that after two and a half hours on the streets, we had seen just one other member of the media [...] the majority of the press I later learned, were still gathered in the square—or, like my own colleagues, had stayed in the Beijing Hotel to watch events from the balcony. (Adie 2002, 365)

- 33 She, by contrast, felt it incumbent upon her to be witness to the arbitrary killing of ordinary civilians, not only in Tiananmen Square itself, but in the back streets, far away from the demonstrations. In so doing she took enormous risk:

I felt a huge conviction we should stay on the streets for as long as possible, and I went way beyond the boundaries which I would normally set about how dangerous it was getting. I went way beyond that and decided to stay [*reflective pause*] and get the pictures. (BBC1 3 June 2009)

- 34 The documentary closes with Adie in sombre mood, remembering the death of a woman killed by a bullet which ripped through the wall of her home in a side street.
- 35 The account of these events is emblematic of Adie’s integrity and courage as a reporter: her role in conflict never to “be” the news, but to “get” the news and ensure it is transmitted; to evaluate the risks not just to herself but also to her crew; never to forget that one is reporting about human individuals and their often broken lives. Paramount objectives for Kate Adie in resolving the conflicting roles of the woman war reporter.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adie, Kate. *The Kindness of Strangers*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2002.

---. *Corsets to Camouflage: Women and War*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003.

---. *Into Danger: Risking Your Life for Work*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2008.

Allison, Maggie. “Women and the Media.” In *Women in Contemporary France*. Ed. Gregory, Abigail and Ursula Tidd. Oxford: Berg, 2000. 65-87.

Barré, Virginie et al. *Dites-le avec des femmes: le sexisme ordinaire dans les médias*. Paris: CFD-AFJ, 1999.

BBC 1 “Kate Adie returns to Tiananmen Square”, 3 June 2009.

Ockrent, Christine. *La Mémoire du cœur*. Paris : Fayard, 1997.

Rambert, Catherine and Sylvie Maquelle. *Des Femmes d’influence : Pouvoirs et télévision*. Paris : Hachette Carrère, 1991.

Télérama “Les baroudeurs ont le droit de pleurer”, 3-9 October, 2009, 46-48.

The Observer 28 May 2006, Interview with Mark Townsend

NOTES

1. Kate Adie. *Into danger: risking your life for work*. Lecture at the Buxton Festival, 14 July 2009.
2. The report by the Sutton Trust: *Educational backgrounds of leading journalists, 2006*, found that “over 54% of the country’s leading news journalists were educated in private schools which account for 7% of the school population as a whole”. consulted 27/01/2010.
3. Telephone conversation with Maggie Allison, 15 July 2009.
4. *France 24*, part of *AEF, Audiovisuel Extérieur de la France* of which Christine Ockrent is Director General.
5. See: <http://lci.tf1.fr/monde/asia/2099-06/bagram-ou-le-barnum-de-la-base-americaine-4904997.html><http://lci.tf1.fr/monde/asia/2099-06/bagram-ou-le-barnum-de-la-base-americaine-4904997.html>. Consulted 15 March 2010.
6. See also: Allison in Gregory and Tidd, 2000. 65-87.
7. *Woman’s Hour*, BBC Radio 4, 7 October 2002.
8. In an interesting parallel, Margaret Higonnet in her article in this issue: “X-Ray Vision: Women photographers in WW1”, refers to Olive Edis, a World War 1 photographer who always wore five strings of pearls while on assignment. Edis was appointed an official war artist and photographed British Women’s Services and the battlefields of France and Flanders 1918-19 for the Imperial War Museum.
9. It was only after a close encounter with an exploding grenade in Beirut that she learned, following a hearing test, that she was congenitally partially deaf in both ears. (Adie 2002, 239)
10. Interview with Mark Townsend, *The Observer*, 28 May 2006.
11. “Witnesses to the noise of bombing, the mutilated corpses, the stench of mass graves, they are our eyes and our ears. On the ground, war reporters and photographers confront the horror to convey it back to us. At what price? If the physical injuries, the kidnapping and killing of reporters are regularly discussed in the press, their intimate, personal distress goes unmentioned.”
12. Kate Adie returns to Tiananmen Square, BBC1, 3 June 2009.

ABSTRACTS

This chapter addresses the conflicting roles of the woman journalist in the context of war and crisis. While referring to a number of women journalists, three British and two French, it focuses on the issue through the prism of the now iconic BBC reporter Kate Adie, famous in particular for her reporting of the 1980 Iranian Embassy siege in London, the events of Tiananmen Square in 1989 and, embedded with the British forces, the 1990 Gulf War. It first traces Adie's career development from local radio assistant to prestigious war reporter. There follow examinations of: the gender factor for the woman reporter in a war zone; the question of "blending in" or not in terms of military and local dress; asserting one's authority as a woman in conflict zones with cultures other than one's own; maintaining one's standards of impartiality while having a privileged role as a war reporter, vis-à-vis the military, one's own government and the local governments in the theatre of war.

Cet article traite des rôles conflictuels de la femme journaliste dans des contextes de guerre et de crise. Tout en se référant à plusieurs femmes journalistes, dont trois britanniques et deux françaises, l'article s'intéresse tout particulièrement à une femme journaliste britannique, l'icône Kate Adie, rendue célèbre par son reportage en direct du siège de l'ambassade d'Iran à Londres en 1980, celui des événements de Tiananmen en 1989, et, intégrée dans les forces britanniques, de la guerre du Golfe en 1990. Suit le parcours d'Adie, débutant comme assistante dans une station locale de la BBC, jusqu'à sa célébrité en tant que grand reporter de guerre. L'article examine : la question de genre, s'agissant d'une femme reporter en zone de guerre ; la question "d'assimilation", ou non, en termes vestimentaires ; l'affirmation de son autorité en tant que femme en milieu culturel non-occidental ; le maintien d'impartialité, tout en reconnaissant son rôle privilégié en tant que reporter de guerre, que ce soit vis-à-vis des forces militaires en place, son gouvernement national ou bien le gouvernement local dans le théâtre de guerre.

INDEX

Mots-clés: BBC, zone de conflit, journaliste intégré, genre, medias, reporter de guerre, femme journaliste

Keywords: BBC, conflict zone, embedded journalist, gender, media, war reporter, woman reporter

Quoted persons: Kate Adie, Patricia Allémonière, Prince of Wales Charles, Colonel Gaddafi, Orla Guerin, Brian Hanrahan, Lindsey Hilsum, Linda Kitson, Jenni Murray, Christine Ockrent, John Simpson

AUTHOR

MAGGIE ALLISON

Honorary Visiting Senior Lecturer
University of Bradford
M.E.Allison@bradford.ac.uk