

Chapter 3

Objectivity – An Ideal or a Misunderstanding?

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Objectivity is often seen as an emblem of Western journalism, but in the developed countries the notion of objectivity has declined. Still, journalists from other parts of the world point to it as an export of Western, especially American, journalism.

At the same time, American journalism teachers impress on their students the futility of objectivity, and Alex Jones writes that ‘we may be living through what could be considered objectivity’s last stand’ (Jones 2009). As Durham states (1998:118) ‘journalistic objectivity has always been a slippery notion’.

Research shows that objectivity worldwide ‘is present and locally generated and negotiated in several ways’ (Krøvel et al. 2012:24). The concept of objectivity has many layers, and one could say that the perception of it is tainted with misunderstandings. As Muñoz-Torres (2012) emphasizes, its philosophical origin is rooted in how we see the world, our understanding of what knowledge is and our perception of the truth. Others write about a practical (Jones 2009) or functional (Rhaman 2017) truth as the one journalists are aiming to discern.

This study explores objectivity as seen by journalists and journalism students transnationally, although very much rooted in their culture and politics, specifically in Norway, Tunisia and Bangladesh. Are there differences and/or similarities, and if so, what are they? Furthermore, armed with theoretical approaches from Streckfuss (1990) and Muñoz-Torres (2012), among others, the aim of this chapter is to clarify different positions, as well as views among our interviewees.

The notion of objectivity in journalism

Richard Streckfuss (1990) looked at historical documents in order to trace when and why objectivity was introduced to journalism in the USA. In the 1890s, working journalists and media commentators used the words *unbiased* and *uncolored*, but *objectivity* was not introduced before 1928.

The mood of the late 1920s was far from the reigning thoughts of the American Revolution, when people thought that humans were rational and moral beings and the truth would win out. Circumstances were different in the 1920s – the First World War had ended, the free market was tainted with propaganda and communist scare led to a rise in patriotism.

Under these conditions, Walter Lippmann and others were concerned about the role of the press and how it affected the democratic system and the citizen as a voter. Streckfuss writes (1990:974): ‘Objectivity was founded not on a naive idea that humans could be objective, but on a realization that they could NOT.’ Hence, journalists ought to be trained in methods that drew upon a strict methodology of scientific naturalism. Lippmann called this ‘new objective journalism’, and he believed it would lead to journalism turning into a real profession (ibid:981f).

However, Streckfuss found that when the word objectivity had made its way into journalist text books, it had shrunk to ‘a practical posture of day-to-day production’ (ibid:982). That meant separating facts from opinion and impartial and balanced reporting; however, also the notions of impartiality and balance are debated (Wallace 2013, Kovach & Rosenstiel 2014).

The ideal of objectivity still seems ‘to dominate many newsrooms across the globe’ (Hanitzsch 2007:367), although to several journalists and academics it seems ‘old-fashioned and outdated’ (Jones 2009:82). Juan Ramón Muñoz-Torres (2012) points to the never-ending debate on objectivity. He finds the discussion mired in errors due to the blurred notions of the concept. Objectivity as the idea of value-free facticity in journalism, where journalists put their opinions aside, rely on facts and report in a neutral way, is the *epistemological* meaning of the word.

However, alongside the epistemological understanding there is also, Muñoz-Torres argues, the *ethical* side. On this side, Muñoz-Torres conceives ‘everything with regard to what is called “balance”, “fairness” or “non-distortion”’ (ibid:570), in other words, the journalists’ moral integrity.

In order to tidy up the confusion about the concept, Muñoz-Torres seeks its philosophical origin in the theory of scientific objectivity from ‘empiricist philosophy and its heir, positivism’ (ibid:571). In his opinion, the notion of objectivity is based upon the mistaken premises of positivism, where facts are seen as value-free. The fact-value dichotomy is false, he argues, since there can be no knowledge without a subject, the knower, acknowledging the object known (ibid:575).

Furthermore, if the knower is a *tabula rasa*¹, he or she would not know what to look for, and how to recognize a fact when finding it. To Muñoz-Torres the apparent opposite of positivism is relativism. Under relativism there is no truth, hence your truth is as valid as mine. In fact, Muñoz-Torres claims that relativism and objectivism are ‘two sides of the same coin, because both of them are part of the positivistic conceptual framework’ (ibid:577).

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014:9, 49) state that journalism’s first obligation is to the truth. So, what is truth?

Absolute truth is not the same as practical truth (ibid:50ff). Furthermore, 'objective validity is a matter of what is, in fact, *true*, not of what we take to be true' (Fultner 2003:xv). Truth claims, what we presume to be true, even when well justified could 'turn out to be false' (Habermas 2003:38). Jones quotes Jeff Jarvis in a speech where he said that journalists' job is not to deliver the truth, but to help the public decide what is true (Jones 2009:83). Jones writes in favour of journalistic effort to 'discern a practical truth, not an abstract, perfect truth' (ibid:88). Rhaman agrees and says that the truth journalists seek is a functional one (Rhaman 2017:82).

In Gaye Tuchman's opinion objectivity is a strategic ritual for newsmen. Facts, Tuchman writes, are 'highly dependent upon social processes' (1972:668). When looking at the feminist approach, it is relevant to notice that Tuchman, as well as Harding and Durham, dislikes how the media exclude women (1978). Sandra Harding (1995) remarks that objectivity is attributed to masculine, European, bourgeois values.

Harding, as well as Meenakshi G. Durham (1998), argue for 'strong objectivity' and standpoint theories. Both suggest giving voice to people from marginal groups – the starting point of any news story should be the point of view of the voiceless.

Michael Ryan (2001), however, expresses the opposite when he point out that to approach a story from a particular standpoint does not lead to balance. He defends objective journalism, but acknowledges that it could benefit from including aspects from its critics' standpoints – epistemology, existential journalism and public journalism. Journalists, says Ryan, must admit that absolute objectivity is seldom achieved and acknowledge their biases.

The empirical findings that follow come from the *Shared Horizons* research project. Consequently, the methodology is discussed in the Appendices that close the book.

Empirical findings: Is objectivity possible?

One of the Norwegian interviewees explains what objectivity in news journalism is, in his opinion:

We have yet to see that anyone can be neutral. Journalists carry with them a set of values, knowledge and other things in their work, which makes neutrality barely achievable. But objectivity can be achieved for instance in a case always being see from both sides, so that what is perceived as completely natural from one party is also seen from other people involved. So, objectivity is a form of allowing all parties involved to be heard, so that you can show what A, B and C believe. I would say that objectivity is showcasing a story from as many sides as possible. If not, it is bias and then it is not objective (Interviewee 39).

Using the vocabulary of Muñoz-Torres (2012), the interviewee refers to both the epistemological and the ethical side of objectivity. Firstly, the interviewee does not

believe anyone can be neutral, nor that value-free facts exist. Thus, this interviewee does not believe in epistemological objectivity.

However, the interviewee then sets out to explain how it nevertheless is possible to achieve objectivity in journalism. The side of objectivity now discussed is the ethical side of the concept, and whereas the interviewee believes that objectivity, in this sense, is possible, the concept has to a large extent been reduced to a matter of balance and impartiality.

The above quote is an example of how most Norwegian journalists and editors as well as journalism students conceive the concept of objectivity. In the survey, 58 per cent of the journalism students in Oslo state that they ‘never’ or ‘rarely’ find it possible to achieve objectivity in news journalism.

As for the Tunisian students, only 8 per cent answer the same. In our survey we defined objectivity as the belief that a journalist may cover a story independently from his/her personal thoughts, background, beliefs and knowledge. In other words, our definition is an epistemological one.

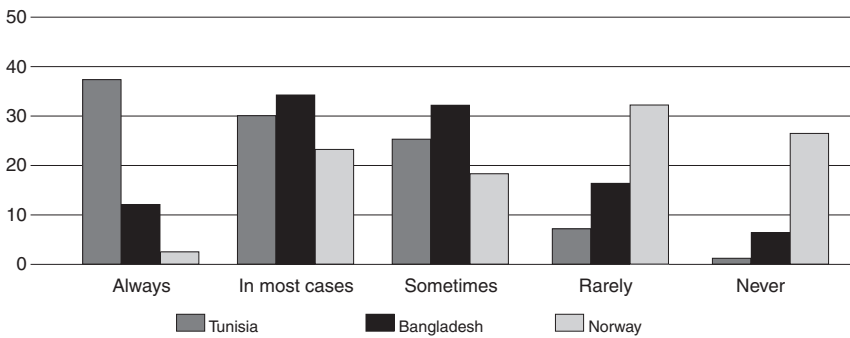


Figure 1. Perceptions of whether objectivity is possible (per cent)

Comments: The question was posed ‘To what extent do you find it possible to achieve objectivity in news journalism?’ The numbers of respondents were 100 (Tunisia), 202 (Bangladesh) and 133 (Norway).

As seen in Figure 1, whereas the Tunisian students seem to think that it is possible to report objectively, the Norwegians do not. The Bangladeshi students, for their part, are divided, leaning slightly more in favour of objectivity being possible.

Our control question linked objectivity directly to each respondent – and how the students answered is shown in Figure 2.

For the Bangladeshi and the Norwegian students, there is coherence in how they answer the two questions, as the interviews confirm as well. In addition, Norwegian respondents show coherence over time, as students from Oslo assessed the possibility of objectivity negatively also in Splichal and Sparks’ study from 1994.

The Tunisian students, on the other hand, seem to express more doubt about objectivity in Figure 2 than in Figure 1. When interviewing the Tunisians, and including journalists and journalist teachers alongside students, the answers are even more diverse.

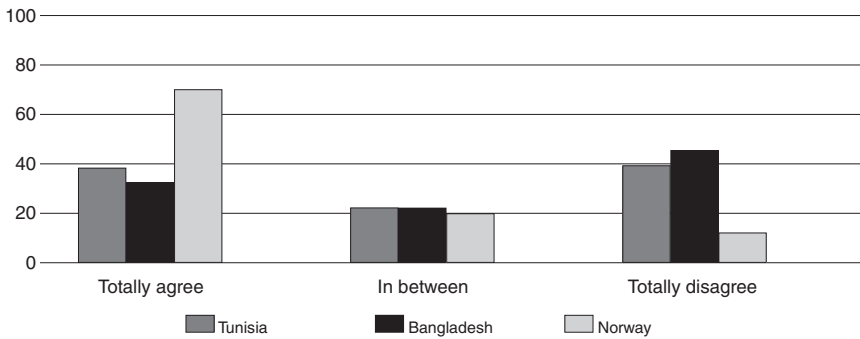


Figure 2. Perceived influence of respondents' own values (per cent)

Comments: The question was posed 'Do you believe that your personal values influence the way you write an article, take a photograph or chose your sources?' The numbers of respondents were 99 (Tunisia), 194 (Bangladesh) and 132 (Norway).

Most of them believe it is possible to achieve objectivity, but some oppose that stance and state that it is not possible or very hard to obtain objectivity, because 'it is just an abstract value' (Interviewee 25). Still, most of the Tunisians answer in accordance with this statement: 'objectivity is the heart of the journalism profession' (Interviewee 37).

Also at the roundtable conference (see Appendices), the two Tunisians give different opinions. One talks about objectivity as the keystone of journalism (Interviewee B) whereas another argues that it is not possible to achieve objectivity (Interviewee C). Moreover, in Tunis and in Dhaka, there are interviewees arguing that journalists in developing countries should *not* be neutral – they should take the advocacy position and work in the best interests of people, support progress and better conditions. Krøvel et al. found that ten out of 60 interviewees were inclined to take this position; all ten were from developing countries (Krøvel et al. 2012:22).

One of my interviewees says: 'I cannot be neutral. As a Tunisian journalist, I am engaged in a struggle to defend legitimate rights and universal values' (Interviewee 34). This is a statement that could be classed as advocacy or subjective or opinionated reporting, and might be more honest and true (Wallace 2013:64). In addition, it is one of many quotes in this chapter showing that 'the gulf between norm and practice is as gaping as ever' (Joseph 2005:577).

The Bangladeshi interviewees offer multiple views. One says 'in a hundred [per cent of the] cases it is possible to achieve objectivity' (Interviewee 16), but others state 'in many cases it is not possible to achieve objectivity in journalism' (Interviewee 8). This latter statement goes hand in hand with the Norwegian view: a majority of the interviewees and the participants at the roundtable claim that objectivity is impossible to reach as 'there is not any pure form of objectivity' (Interviewee 40).

This view points towards philosophical theory. Furthermore, it confirms that Norwegians are situated in the post-modernist, Western world, where the metaphor

on mirroring the world started to lose its meaning when Tuchman wrote 'News is a window of the world. Through its frame' (1978:1).

Hard to achieve

Then, it maybe gets confusing, as the Norwegians state that they are struggling to achieve some sort of objectivity in journalism. As one interviewee puts it 'that is what you endeavour to do' (Interviewee 40).

Regarding more practical day-to-day-journalism, the majority agrees that a journalist should try to be impartial and fair, seek several sources and give them equal space in the news story. A Norwegian, who thinks that personal values hinder objectivity, seeks a solution through being conscious of the process: 'For as long as you are aware of your own situation and position, I think it is not that hard to show all the different angles, and that your own angle does not necessarily appear' (Interviewee F).

This statement aligns with Kovach and Rosenstiel who write that the job is to 'become more conscious of the biases at play in the given story' (2014:128). Struggling with objectivity can take many forms – from picking the right words to deciding the angle of the news story. As one interviewee admits: 'Even if it is not intended, those values of mine do influence my work. In theory, they should not but they do. I choose my sources; I choose the angle I want to pursue' (Interviewee C).

Indeed, there is power in choosing an angle and picking sources. A story with only one source is not regarded as good journalism, balancing two sides is a minimum, and several interviewees state that a journalist should try to show an event or a case 'from as many sides as possible' (Interviewee 43). This subject's statement is on the same lines as the 2006 proclamation from the former BBC World Service director Peter Horrocks, who considered adopting "radical impartiality" – the need to hear the widest range of views' (Wallace 2013:69), as opposed to balancing Right and Left (ibid:64).

When journalists let random voices go up against each other, Durham states, balance and fairness expose the intellectual weaknesses of relativism (1998:125). One interviewee uses the example of a TV debate on climate changes, where a sceptic who represents only a tiny part of scientific opinion gets equal exposure as highly recognized researchers. This 'does not make a truthful portray of reality. So the balance ideal can actually be something that journalists often unconsciously abuse' (Interviewee 46).

Jones states: 'He-said/she-said reporting, which just pits one voice against another, has become the discredited face of objectivity. But this is *not* authentic objectivity' (Jones 2009:83). Jones calls this illusion of fairness, 'phony objectivity' (ibid:84).

Standpoint epistemology's answer to 'the view from nowhere' (Durham 1998:128) is to begin all reporting from the perspective of the underprivileged. Then, knowledge will become 'less partial and relativistic than the kind of knowledge that is presented by the journalist/insider as value free' (ibid:132). Ryan, however, argues that 'balancing is not achieved by a journalist who approaches a story from a particular standpoint'

(Ryan 2001:15). Rather, in order to make objectivity stronger, journalism needs to include multiple experiences based on an understanding that social identities are complex and heterogeneous (ibid:17f).

As there is a norm regarding impartiality with sources, there is also a norm that requires journalists to find the best-suited and trustworthy sources. As Lippmann argued, ‘sources forming public opinion must be accurate’ (Streckfuss 1990:978).

Several Norwegian interviewees emphasize that sources may have an interest in presenting information with a twist to suit their own needs – they may have an agenda or they could flat out lie. As journalists write ‘the first draft of history’ (The Big Apple 2009), it is important to be aware that the story could flip as new sources appear and more information is gathered. So, in journalism education, the students are told that journalists need to dig further, checking and verifying to get accurate facts.

Facts and verification

Both the survey and the interviews show that verifying and fact checking is a common value in the three participating countries. As one Tunisian student puts it, ‘to provide credible information is not an option, but a moral obligation and a job requirement’ (Interviewee 23). Another expresses that journalism is not ‘only collecting and transferring information, it is above all verification and checking of facts’ (Interviewee 32).

Still, there are differences in the way they perceive the notion of facts and how to use them. Connected to a belief in pure objectivity is a faith in letting the facts speak for themselves. Although Thomas Hanitzsch (2007:377f) correctly emphasizes that believing in facts versus analysis is not the same as believing in objectivity, there could still be a connection. In the survey we connected facts and context and asked: ‘What do you think is most important when making a news report/news article?’

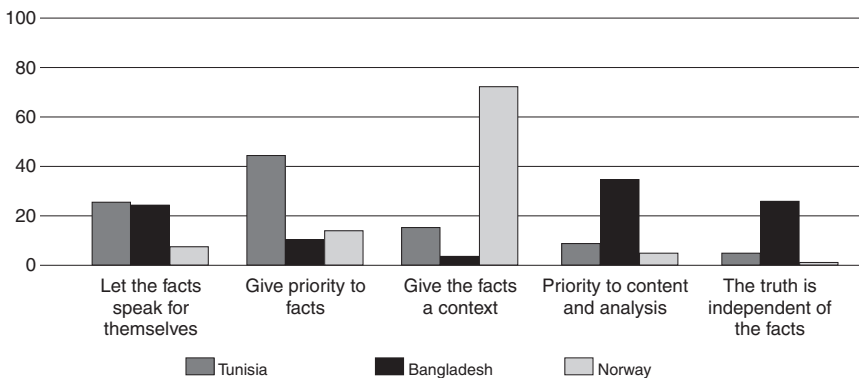


Figure 3. Perceptions of how journalists should deal with facts (per cent)

Comments: The question was posed ‘What do you think is most important when making a news report/news article?’ The numbers of respondents were 99 (Tunisia), 202 (Bangladesh) and 133 (Norway).

Figure 3 shows that 44 per cent of the Tunisian students state that facts should be given priority and 26 per cent of them believe in brute facts ('Let the facts speak for themselves') – and, as we have seen, the Tunisians have a strong belief in objectivity. In contrast, three quarters of the Norwegian respondents think that facts need to be contextualized; the Norwegian students, thus, do not find facts to be natural, pure or something that can be taken-for-granted (Tuchman 1978:210f). Again, we find that the Bangladeshi students are divided. About a quarter of them agree with the Tunisians that facts can speak for themselves, but 35 per cent accentuate the value of content and analysis.

In addition, Figure 3 shows that almost one third of the Bangladeshi students believe the truth to be independent of the facts. This standpoint may be connected to the bias I find in most of the answers from the Bangladeshi students answering the survey, implying that the Bangladeshi society is polarized.

Indeed, the dichotomy between the two political parties, Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, is in evidence in the answers to the questions of how to perceive reality and what truth is. One of the Bangladeshi students says, 'News lost its objectivity and accuracy because of the imbalance in the presentation of all parties' (Interviewee 2).

This reveals something about how the Bangladeshi students perceive journalism. Although the percentages vary, there is a large group of students on the side of factual knowledge and objectivity as well as a group that to a great extent does not require neutrality and has no faith in absolute truth. The group that believes in factual knowledge and objectivity connect fact checking to the notion of truth, as do the Tunisian and the Norwegian students. In accordance with Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014:9), who defined the essence of journalism as the discipline of verification, verifying and checking is what journalists do, most of the students say.

Truth in journalism

Verifiable facts are essential in news journalism, and they are connected to the concept of truth. The students believe that journalism has an obligation to be true and correct. Muñoz-Torres writes that the key question is whether objectivity could replace the concept of truth – his own answer is that it could not (2012:575).

The results from the survey, the interviews and the roundtable discussion show that our research subjects believe something to be true, while other information is twisted, untrue, biased and not accurate. In other words, they are not relativists – not even the Norwegians – defined as thinking there is not *one* truth and *any* truth is valid.

Muñoz-Torres, again, claims that the fact-truth dichotomy is false, since 'factual knowledge cannot be dissociated from subjective perception and, consequently, from man's capacity to judge' (2012:573). Leaning on naturalistic science, one can find empirical facts by counting or measuring, and therefore it is possible to tell if a person

is tall or not. Still, I would claim, in order to be recognized as tall in Norway, one has to be taller than in Bangladesh. Therefore, being tall has to do with how we view the components, which constitute a fact.

On the other hand, Muñoz-Torres says, being nice is a quality ‘as real as being tall, although [it] is not verifiable and consequently does not produce maximum certainty’ (2012:579). Without interpretations of values in a societal context, it will be impossible to distinguish nice from nasty. Acknowledging truth in domains other than the physical world implies evaluations, which consist of moral values. Could the Norwegian novelist Karl Ove Knausgård be right when he states: ‘The moral is the we in the I, thus a quality of the social, and it is above the truth’ (Knausgård 2011:790; own translation)?

Adding religion into the discussion, the difficulties of verifiable knowledge increase for some of us. For others, religious belief is superior to anything that may be measured and/or proved the scientific way. For them, it is untrue that ‘truth may always “outrun” justified belief’ (Fultner 2003:xviii).

Furthermore, personal and bodily experiences are difficult to measure, but that does not imply they are unreal or false. Knowledge needs both reason and experience (Muñoz-Torres 2012:578). One can measure how much money someone has, even test which bodily marks poverty and wealth carve out. Yet, with these pieces of evidence, one has not reached a complete understanding of being poor or rich.

As well as admitting the existence of multiple perspectives on the world as such, journalists are trained to acknowledge that true and false information exists. Jones (2009) refers to the abstract, perfect truth as the opposite of practical truth, which is the kind that journalistic objectivity wants to discern. Furthermore, he states that if ‘the evidence is inconclusive, then that *is* – by scientific standards – the truth’ (ibid:88).

Analysing explanations and comments

As the interviews open up for reflection, we wanted the interviewees to comment on the results from the survey about objectivity. We also asked for their opinions about the differences between the three countries’ journalism students.

Firstly, 17 out of 18 Tunisians interviewees do not agree with the Tunisian answers from the survey. These 17 interview subjects say that it is *not possible* to be objective in the Tunisian media landscape. They express that the media is biased, that it broadcasts insults and misinformation. They refer to the coverage of the 2014 elections, when the media took sides and acted in a partial way. Several of them also point to the media owners, and their ties to political parties: ‘They defy their enemies and promote their allies’ (Interviewee 30). Others emphasize that the journalists themselves are not impartial. One says the journalists in Tunisia are subjective, not even trying to be objective (Interviewee 36).

One interviewee thinks that the journalism students want to believe in objectivity, since that is what people wish for (Interviewee 37). This statement resonates with

Hallin's and Mancini's point on the normative character of journalism – that 'due to its rooting in professional education, where it is more important to reflect on what journalism *should be* than to analyse in detail what and why it is' (2004:13). Indeed, the statement of the interviewee is also rooted in the Tunisian context. After living under dictatorship, people were tired of biased and untrue information as well as censorship. They expressed clearly that journalism should be neutral, made by journalists who were not 'whores of Ben Ali'² or 'journalists of shame' (Frey 2016:181).

The interviewees give some interesting explanations for the students' answers in the survey, such as this quite harsh one: 'The Tunisian students are lying! Well, perhaps they answer like this because they have not yet worked as journalists and discovered how difficult it is to achieve objectivity' (Interviewee 33). Some interviewees connect the survey's answers to the Tunisian post-revolutionary context:

The Tunisians answered like this because of our immaturity in this domain. We must not forget that we have started to live with democracy and freedom for just four years. In my opinion, it is very hard to achieve objectivity. Over time, we will know that objectivity is not always obvious (Interviewee 30).

Yet, one journalist goes further in her explanation, saying 'Tunisians and people of under-developed countries, or conservative people in general, are submitted to their religions, their traditions and their culture. They believe they contain the absolute truth' (Interviewee 31). In her opinion, this explains 'the positivism of their answers'.

Some of the Bangladeshi interviewees talk about their nation as a third world country. Several think their students' survey answers are due to private media – also mentioned on occasion by Tunisian interviewees – and that they have to 'stay with powerful political parties and media owners' (Interviewee 1). In Norway, as well, there are private owned media, but for the Norwegians ownership does not seem to play a part in the question of objectivity. It did some decades ago, before journalism was professionalized and the newspapers broke their ties to the political parties (see chapter 2).

All interviewees emphasize that economic, social and cultural differences, as well as the level of press freedom and freedom of expression in the three countries, are probably the reasons for looking differently at the concept of objectivity. One Bangladeshi answers that there are many aspects connected to the question of objectivity, for instance, pressure against journalists, the right to information, the level of freedom of speech and respect for human rights (Interviewee 9).

However, many interviewees from Tunisia, and especially interviewees from Bangladesh, are surprised by the Norwegian answers on objectivity. One Tunisian thinks that, in demanding their media to be more honest and credible, the Norwegians are 'looking for perfection' (Interviewee 38). A Bangladeshi even asks if the Norwegian students learn proper journalism, adding 'I am very disappointed about what the Norwegian students say' (Interviewee 10).

The Norwegian view surprises them, since they find the level of freedom high in Norway, a developed country with good social structures and a thriving economy.

One of the more fascinating attempts to explain the Norwegian disbelief in objectivity is this: ‘The Norwegian people may be more individualistic and do not like talking with other people to share information. As a result, it is difficult for journalists to get information’ (Interviewee 5).

This statement clashes with the Norwegian interviewees’ view on themselves and their society, representatively stated by this quote: ‘At least, we Norwegians like to think we are very egalitarian. Most likely there are not many countries where you can interview a minister in sneakers. But that is very positive’ (Interviewee 40).

Most of the Norwegians do state that they do not sufficiently know the other countries and, as a result, are reticent about giving explanations. Nevertheless, one interviewee conjectures that if you live in a country that does not have a high degree of democracy, journalists might want to take a role in the process ahead and act ‘in spite of the way things are’ (Interviewee 41) – and so you believe in objectivity *because* you want it to be true.

Another interviewed subject talks about ‘excitement for the ideal, which is understandable’ (Interviewee 46). In his opinion, the situation in Norway when it comes to objectivity is the following:

Journalists have just begun a type of self-conscious, self-critical reflection on this, in many ways stimulated by journalistic education, where you philosophize and reflect more on the traditional objectivity concept. But maybe we have not reached the point where we are embracing a newer understanding of objectivity, like an attitude, an approach to understand the reality based on factuality – and use of a good method and source criticism and so on.

Conclusion

This chapter has plunged into the concept of objectivity as journalists and journalism students in Bangladesh, Tunisia and Norway see it. Through quantitative and qualitative methods, I have looked into which positions the respondents and interviewees adopt towards objectivity as a core value and in the practical journalistic aspect of their daily work. The main question was which differences and/or similarities exist.

Not surprisingly, my research confirms that the notion of objectivity is as debated, disputed and defended as ever. One thing is for sure, the concept still arouses heat concerning what journalism is and should be, which – in my view – is a fruitful and important discussion.

The Tunisian students answering the survey position themselves on the positivist side: a journalist simply holds up a mirror to reflect the world and let the facts speak for themselves. Interviews with Tunisian journalists, though, show more nuanced views on objectivity; it is an ideal for some but not so much for others, and they seem to agree that, in practical journalism, it is not as vibrant.

The Norwegian students and journalists lean more to the side of believing in accurate and checked facts, situated truth and acknowledging that ‘subjectivity and inter-subjectivity are part of the honesty that is included in objectivity’ (Interviewee 46). In Norway, objectivity is a highly debated value even though it makes its mark on daily journalistic routines.

In Bangladesh, finally, the concept is part of a distinct, ongoing struggle about what truth is and how the world is seen. Some of the Bangladeshi respondents agree with the Tunisian respondents and some of them share the views reported by Norwegian journalism students. As one says, ‘objectivity is a core value of journalism, but it cannot be attained all the time’ (Interviewee D). Still, according to the majority of the interviewees in all three countries, the journalistic methods connected to objectivity are the guidelines in ‘practical posture of day-to-day production’ (Streckfuss 1990:982).

Students and journalists struggle with conducting themselves according to the abstract and complicated philosophical meaning of objectivity – either it clashes with journalism as practiced in the media or the principle itself is hard to grasp and embrace. As Muñoz-Torres writes the concept ‘has so many aspects and approaches, that it seems almost impossible to encompass all of them’ (2012:567).

A transnational debate on objectivity, as displayed in this chapter, is packed with various definitions of the concept and significant variations in how journalistic culture locally is ‘conceptualized and operationalized’ (Hanitzsch 2007:368). Furthermore, it seems that no matter their opinion on the concept, our respondents and interviewees strive to bend and redefine objectivity to make it fit as a guiding path through their journalistic working methods and their ethical approach to their profession.

Notes

1. Tabula rasa means ‘blank slate’.
2. The dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Ben Ali for short, was the President driven out of office and out of Tunisia by the revolution of 2011.

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