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Review: *Don't Shoot the Journalists*

Peter Laufer (ed)

*Don't Shoot the Journalists: Migrating to Stay Alive*

London and New York: Anthem Press, 2025. 207 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-83999-484-5 (Hbk)

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On Sunday 10 August 2025, an Israeli airstrike in Gaza killed six journalists, including four from Al Jazeera—among them, correspondent Anas al-Sharif. They were deliberately targeted, with Israel alleging that Sharif had been the leader of a cell of the Palestinian militant group Hamas. Sharif had denied this. Even the BBC, whose editorial practices require that Israel is always given the right of reply (disclosure—I covered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for the BBC from 2002-2004) were reluctant to take the idea of Sharif as some kind of Hamas fighter at face value. 'Israel provided little evidence,' the BBC wrote.<sup>1</sup>

None of the journalists whose stories are told—by themselves, and others—in *Don't Shoot the Journalists* would have any difficulty believing that governments would kill reporters just for doing their job. Another correspondent from Gaza, and author of a chapter here, Youmna El-Sayed, writes of her experience covering the current war, 'I realized that my press vest was labeling me a legitimate target for the Israeli army.' Her distressing account of the bloodshed she witnessed is shot through with the tension between her unshakable dedication to her work, and her desperate fear for the fate of her family. Eventually, they are able to leave for Egypt.

The Mexican journalists Juan de Dios García Davish with Maria de Jesus Peters Pino share their experience of fleeing their homeland after publishing stories which were, 'the possible causes of death threats to us and our families'. The volume's theme is journalists forced to leave, and the co-authors of this chapter neatly subvert the lazy idea that migrants are always after an easy living. 'Coming to America was not a dream,' they write.

*Don't Shoot the Journalists* is based on work presented at a symposium hosted by the University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication in April 2024. The experiences related here come from a wide geographical area: the Middle East; Latin America; Afghanistan; Zimbabwe. There is also a broad understanding of the idea of exile: Kimberley Mangun's chapter on the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Black editor and activist Beatrice Morrow Cannady makes the persuasive case that the racism which further worsened with the rise of the Ku Klux Klan was itself a form of exile 'because of distance or segregation'. The inclusion of Jeff Kamen's account of being beaten while reporting on violent opponents of the 1960s civil rights movement in the United States dispels any sense of western smugness that journalists are always safe in countries that consider themselves established democracies.

Naturally, in those parts of the world where all forms of free expression are suppressed, the boundary between reporting and activism is often unclear. This does not mean that they are not separate activities. To identify Alexei Navalny as ‘an exiled journalist’, as one chapter does, is to understate the significance of his journalistic activity. Navalny was not a journalist or broadcaster by training profession (though he shone in both roles). His professional background was in law, and business. His use of journalism showed its value as a means of resistance against tyranny, as well as a means of communication.

Perhaps because the volume’s timeliness meant it was put together quickly—admirable work by the editors in this respect—the chapters could perhaps have been ordered more effectively. There are some shocking and moving accounts here of first-hand experience—but only in Chapter 3, after introductory material and the preceding two chapters, do we hear directly from journalists in exile. The inclusion of verse is a refreshing idea, but uplifting lines about a ‘Canary in the Mind’ do not necessarily sit well immediately after El-Sayed’s terrifying account of her work and what she saw while doing it.

These are minor concerns compared to the volume’s overall importance and impact. In her chapter on the Mexican press, Katherine Corcoran writes that the question she is asked most often is ‘Why do they do it?’. The answer she gives is both simple, and inspiring: ‘their devotion to the public’s right to know, to the importance of a free press in building a democracy.’ The word ‘journalism’ shares a root with the French word, ‘jour’, meaning day. Journalism is about what is happening now. Yet as Corcoran reminds us, when assessing Mexican journalists’ defiance of the dangers they face, ‘It’s act of faith for them, for all of us, that even if nothing changes now, it will someday.’

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<sup>1</sup> [UN condemns targeted Israeli attack that killed four Al Jazeera journalists - BBC News](#). Accessed 15 August 2025