

The
Bruno Kreisky Forum für International Dialogue

kindly invites to the following discussion:

Cairo – Tel Aviv – Gaza – Vienna

The Courage to Speak: Women, Media and the Public Opinion

Panellists:

Randa Abou Azm - Taghreed Al Khoudary - Gudrun Harrer - Anat Saragusti

Moderation:

Viola Raheb

Wednesday, January 30, 2008, 19.00 hours

Bruno Kreisky Forum, Armbrustergasse 15, 1190 Vienna

SUPPORTED BY THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA AND THE CITY OF VIENNA

Randa Abou Azm: Masters Degree in Islamic Art and Architecture at the American University in Cairo, 1995 (thesis on Mamluk Pottery), BA: Economics Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, 1983. Since 2003 Cairo Bureau Chief of *Al Arabia News Channel*. Worked and produced a number of documentaries, e.g. *The Muslim Brotherhood, The 9/11 Impact, Does the Arab World Really Hate the US?, Chaotic Buildings in Cairo, The Suez Canal*.

Taghreed Al Khoudary: Palestinian Journalist from Gaza. She covered the second Intifada and Israel's disengagement plan from Gaza for *The New York Times* and for *Al Hayat-LBC TV*. Currently she covers Gaza for *The New York Times* and trains women at the Women Affairs Center in the field of communication skills and media. She obtained her BA in journalism and mass communication from the American University in Cairo, was a Fulbright scholar in the US where she obtained her MA in mass communication. After covering the Israeli implementation of the disengagement plan in the Gaza Strip, she spent a year at Harvard as a Nieman Fellow.

Gudrun Harrer: Senior editor of the Austrian daily newspaper *Der Standard* and lecturer of Modern Arab History at Vienna University and Diplomatic Academy Vienna. MA in Arabic and Islamic Studies and PhD in Political Science. Gudrun Harrer was Special Envoy of the Austrian Presidency of the European Union to Iraq in 2006 and wrote a book about the reasons of the Iraq war (*Kriegs-Gründe*, Mandelbaumverlag, 2003).

Anat Saragusti: Director of film documentaries and television journalist at *Channel 2 News*. Her main focus is the Arab-Israeli conflict and the social situation in Israel. She was a correspondent in Gaza strip for two years and for 10 years worked as a journalist and news photographer for a weekly news magazine, where she mainly focused on the occupied Palestinian territories and the war in Lebanon in 1982. A law graduate, she is board member of human rights, feminist, and media monitoring organizations.

Viola Raheb: MA in Education and Theology from the Ruprecht-Karl-University in Heidelberg/Germany. Work experience: 1995-1998: Head of the Public Relations Department at the International Center of Bethlehem; 1995-1998 Deputy Schools' Director of the Evangelical Lutheran Schools in Jordan and Palestine; 1998-2002: Schools' Director of Evangelical Lutheran Schools in Jordan and Palestine. Viola Raheb currently works as a consultant on development aid and adult education in Vienna. She is a member of numerous organizations and committees promoting peace and dialogue and has published books and numerous articles.

Gertraud Auer

Good evening. Thank you for coming tonight to a very special panel discussion with women who in the last three days worked on the invitation of the Minister for European and Foreign Affairs on a workshop where women from different countries of the Middle East talked about different issues. One of the issues was media. The first follow-up workshop was in the media issue. I am very happy and thankful to the Ministry for European and Foreign Affairs, specifically to Sabine Kroissenbrunner who was the organizing body in the Ministry. And, of course, I am extremely grateful to Viola Raheb who was the organizer of the whole thing and with whom I succeeded to do the package of tonight's open public discussion. I am especially grateful to Leila Odeh who jumped in at the very last moment to participate at the panel discussion as her colleague from Gaza, Taghreed,

was not allowed to leave the country and could not come to join neither the workshop nor the panel discussion. Laila comes from Jerusalem, was able to come to Vienna, and she accepted to speak tonight. I want to welcome the other participants, Randa, Anat, and Gudrun. I leave the floor to Viola, and thank you all for coming tonight.

Viola Raheb

Good evening and welcome to this very special evening with four outstanding women in media from whom we read sometimes something they wrote or we see them on the TV. The five women of us here on the panel have been working thirteen hours a day the last two days. We have been discussing also so much in the last two days in the workshop which was organized by the Ministry on media training. So actually we don't have so much power to talk, but still we wanted to take the chance since the workshop was actually a silent colloquium, also in order to safeguard the women who participated. We wanted to take the chance and present a glimpse of what we were talking about to a wider public. We thought the best place to do that was this house which carries the spirit of Bruno Kreisky who was actually the Austrian who set the path to put the Middle East on the agenda of the Austrian foreign politics. We are very grateful for being hosted tonight here.

I would like to present to you my four outstanding colleagues. We are very sad that our colleague Taghreed Al Khoudary from Gaza could not come. But again, this is part of the reality in which we are living. We spent at least two weeks now on the phone both with Tel Aviv and with Cairo trying to get her out. At the end it was impossible. Again, I also would like to thank Laila Odeh who accepted to join this panel. Laila Odeh is a Palestinian, originally from Bethlehem, but residing in Jerusalem. She studied English and Russian in Russia. She is a reporter for various satellite channels, has been working since 1993 in that area, mainly with Abu Dhabi TV, but also with Bahrain TV. She was given the Abu Dhabi Arab Press Prize, the Personality of the Year 2001. Welcome, Laila, to Vienna and to the Bruno Kreisky Forum. My second colleague is Ms. Randa Abou Azm from Egypt. She holds a Master in Islamic Art and Architecture from the American University in Cairo. Since 2003 she is the bureau chief of the Al Arabia satellite channel in Cairo. She has produced a number of documentaries. I will just name two, *The 9/11 Impact* and *Does the Arab World Really Hate the US?*. Welcome to the Bruno Kreisky Forum. Anat Saragusti is from Israel. She is the director of film documentaries and a television journalist at Channel Two News. Her main focus is actually the Arab-Israeli conflict and the social situation in Israel. She was a correspondent in Gaza Strip for two years. She is a feminist. She also covered the Lebanon war in 1982 and is engaged in media monitoring in Israel, how does the Israeli media present the conflict. Welcome tonight among us. Last but not least allow me to welcome Gudrun Harrer whom I don't need to present. I hope you all read her article in today's *Standard* on the conference. She gave a very good insight to the workshop. She is the senior editor of the *Standard*, a lecturer of modern Arab history at the University of Vienna. I would also like to congratulate her to her Ph.D. Let me introduce myself. I am Viola Raheb, originally from Palestine, now an Austrian citizen. My studies were in theology and education. I work as a consultant in Austria.

Each lady will talk for five minutes about her personal experience as a woman working in media. Then we will have a short discussion on the panel before opening it for you to interact with our guests. I would like to start with Ms. Odeh and her personal experience.

Laila Odeh

Thank you. I am so happy to be here. This is my first visit to Vienna. I am a journalist since fifteen years. Almost half of my life I spent working as a journalist. I did not decide to be a journalist because it was always a matter of chance. It was a challenge for me with my own family, with my own father, to have his acceptance to let me go forward with this job. It is not really known in our society. This issue is relatively sensitive. It was a challenge for me to have his agreement. The other challenge was to prove myself as a journalist because we live in a very hot spot in the world and in a very difficult situation there. As a woman I try to do all my best, not to be a man, but to be in front of any man working in this job. This was also one of my challenges. I think since my 14th year working as a journalist I achieved something. Not because I am famous now in the Arab world or in Palestine. No, because I achieved this for myself, for my future, for the future of my children. I felt a lot of difficulties, of being a woman, struggling in such a difficult situation, leaving the house so early. I got married after that and have already two children. It was difficult to leave them at home, difficult to make the decision to stay in the office and to go to very difficult places in West Bank or in Gaza. The most difficult thing was when I was shot in Rafah. In hospital I was told that my children could not watch TV because they did not want to see their mom covered with blood. When I went to Al-Maqased hospital in East Jerusalem the first reaction of them was that they did not give me a hug because they were shocked. This was a very difficult moment for me. Of course, I saw a lot of horrible picture, a lot of painful pictures. The main message for me was to have the facts because our job depends on one

sentence. If you don't have a picture for the fact, for the action, you won't have any news. So I always try to have it. The other thing is to educate myself to be an educated woman because if we won't work on ourselves on this side we won't be able to follow up the whole situation and the whole world. It is a very difficult job. It is a real challenge. It is a daily challenge.

Anat Saragusti

Thank for having me here. It is a great experience to visit Vienna. It was a really powerful workshop. It is a very emotional visit here to the Kreisky Forum because I remember Bruno Kreisky's name from many years ago. I became a journalist by chance. I went to the university like any other young Israeli and studied Hebrew language. At a certain point I decided this is not a real profession and went to study photography. When I finished the school of photography and all my colleagues went to work in commercial photography I decided to go and work as a news photographer. When I started there were very few women in this job. I went to work in a weekly news magazine in Israel. It doesn't exist anymore. He was very close to Bruno Kreisky and was German by origin. When I started there I think my first serious job was the funeral of Anwar Sadat in Cairo. I was so tense because this was my first, it was an international event, Nixon was there, and very high profile politicians from all over the world. I didn't know what to do because all the colleagues surrounding me were men. I thought what should I do, how would I push myself in front of them. And then I realized because I am so short I can stand before them and it was not problem. So this is what I did. Suddenly I found the power in myself and used my disadvantage as an advantage. But it was not easy to be a news photographer in Israel surrounded by men. First of all, the equipment was very heavy. It is not like today that everybody has a camera and a cell phone. I had to carry everything, lenses, and substitute cameras, the films, and do everything by myself. But it was really very powerful to be a photographer because I could express myself in a very unique way and not through words. There is a famous cliché which says that a good photo is worth thousands words. This is how I became a journalist. And then I started writing. I was a team, a writer and a photographer in the same woman. I was driving around in the occupied territories and in Israel for several years until this magazine was closed. And then I got an offer to become the first TV correspondent to Gaza. This was right after the Oslo Agreement where everything was very hopeful and everybody looked at the future with hope and a smile. These were extremely interesting times. I felt I touched history. But being a TV journalist is a very demanding job. My son was very young then. He will always remind me that I didn't go with him to his first day in school because I had to be at my work. It is always a torn position to be a mother, to be at home, to have a career. Now he is grown up so I can travel a lot. I was a single mother and I had to take care of him. So I stopped being a reporter and moved to the newsroom. The hours are more flexible. I could be at home with him when he grew up. Now I am doing mainly documentaries for the weekend magazine. It is a privilege because I am not working on a daily basis. I don't have to provide a story every morning. So I can go in depth to different topics. At a certain point I decided that journalism is also not a profession and I went to law school and studied law. Then I decided journalism is better than being a lawyer. And then I decided to do a master in law because it really is very interesting. I studied human rights and stuff like that. I am a lawyer by education, but never practiced law. This is where I stand now; I don't know what the future will bring with it.

Randa Abou Azm

I am the Cairo bureau chief of Al Arabia News Channel which was launched back in 2003. In contrast to my two colleagues here I never started as early as they did. I was a housewife. I am a single mother. My whole experience started back in 1995. My daughter was only three years old. And that was the real challenge in my life, to start a career from scratch. And what a career. This is a very challenging career, a challenging career for a man and a woman. I was well educated. Because of my parents and because of myself I wanted to be well educated. I graduated from the faculty of economics and political science, Cairo University, which is a very prestigious university. And then, when I got married I did not want to stay at home without doing anything, I started my master's degree in Islamic architecture because I could not work as a banker, I could not relate to numbers, and I wanted something concrete to see. And then I decided to work in something completely new, something untraditional. I didn't want to sit in an office. I didn't want a job from nine to five. I worked with MBC which is the Middle East Broadcasting Center. I was so lucky to start with them. Back in 1995 MBC was the first Arab satellite channel launched in the Middle East. It introduced the concept of news bulletins on the international level. Of course, it was so difficult to convince people that a report is only two minutes. People in the Arab world, in Egypt if I go and have an interview they would expect the full interview to be in full. And when I tell them to their disappointment it is only twenty seconds, they can kill me. It was so difficult to introduce the concept and to let them understand the concept. The news was so new to the Arab world, but it grabbed the attention of everyone. And then the Arab news channels started unfolding. Till Al Jazeera it was the first 24hours news channel, and

then Al Arabia back in 2003. I am proud because I was the bureau chief of MBC in 2000 and now am with Al Arabia working. As all my colleagues have said here it was a real challenge to make the balance between home and work. I was not amazed, but I was so glad when I came here to Vienna to find that we are all sharing the same experiences as women, many of us were single mothers or even mothers and wives. We have to take the same challenges whether Anat from Israel, me from Egypt, Laila from Palestine, our Austrian friend. We are all human beings sharing the same challenges. Again, we would talk about this more than about the conflict. This can bring us together more than the conflicts that happen around us. I can relate to them, they can relate to me, not just as women, as human beings. This is what we are lacking unfortunately. The differences between us are so small. Then we are faced with conflicts all the time. Yes, I am living in Egypt, but I have the same problems as somebody who is living in the United States. Probably, that can be reflected. Anyway, working in Egypt, it is not a conflict area, but it is a very rich country, full of diversity. It is the hub of the Arab world with its 80 million people in population. One day I will wake up doing the Gaza Strip and the people coming from Gaza to Egypt. The other day I will be doing the Iraqi conflict. The third day I will be doing the drama and the cinema. Next day I will do something about the military trials of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is very enriching, but yet very hectic and very challenging. I wish I can go on with the same passion that I started with back in 1995 and can continue to work managerially and on air as I am trying to do.

Gudrun Harrer

We have three professional speakers here. I am not. I cannot even contribute to the single mother thing. I only can tell you that my friend Johnny Bunzl just reminded me that three years ago I invited him for dinner. It means I am working much. Honestly, I told Anat before I am a little bit like the parsley on the schnitzel, I cannot compare myself with these ladies. I am an outsider writing for outsiders more or less. I am outsider who doesn't always behave like outsiders, but very much like insiders. So I can have only a faint idea of the difficulties what it means working in difficult areas, on difficult themes, plus being a woman. Of course, I go regularly to the Middle East, but there is always a plane waiting to take me home. Women in journalism are underrepresented. We are there, very strongly there, but still have to conquer certain jobs in policy making and so on. Regarding my being a woman and working on the Middle East in most cases I am reminded of being a woman only by the questions which are put to me back home. The question always is, how is to work as a woman in the Middle East? Many people ask you, do you have to wear hijab? Well, how is it really? I am really not in danger of romanticizing the Middle East. Parts of it are conflict areas which are dangerous and cruel to everyone, not only to women. Other areas are terribly unfree. But generally I can confirm that Middle Eastern societies are very respectful. The good people are really good and most people in the world are good everywhere. Of course, as a younger journalist I tested this goodness sometimes really to the limit. You can also call it stupidity which it certainly was. I remember once in Bagdad in the middle of the 1990's, people were very poor, and some of them ready to kill for very little money. I accepted a lift in the middle of the night to take me to my hotel, and nothing happened to me.

Perhaps one story. It was in Vienna, it was an interview I did with Tariq Aziz which I never will forget. He is a Christian. He confirmed to me that culture is above religion, it is not identical, you cannot speak about culture is religion. We made this interview, it was in the beginning of the 1990's, and I brought with me a very politically interested photographer, very intellectually looking gentleman. He asked me if he could stay on in the interview which is normal. Normally the photographer makes the pictures and leaves. I said, of course you can, you are welcome. I made this interview with Tariq Aziz, putting my questions, the photographer finished his work, and sat on my side. From that point Tariq Aziz was answering the questions I was putting to him to this photographer. I am sure he did respect me as a professional, but it was too much for him. He could not ignore this man.

Viola Raheb

Once if I have some time I will try and collect some of the anecdotes that were told by women during these two days. This would be an experience to go through. Let me go back to the panel. It seems women stumble into media and men work their way for a career in media. It is not only the Arab world, it is not only Israel. It is not different in Austria. We heard that this is a reflection of the global reality of women. This is actually a very untypical setting because the percentage that women are having on this panel is way beyond any women representation in any journalistic work. That is why I wanted to do this evening. Each one of you works on the other side wherever that other side is. I would like to ask you to share with us your personal experience because we know so many theories. Did the work on a story from the other side change your perspective and the way you do journalism? What do I mean with the other side? I will start with Anat. In her story you are the other side or I am the other side. Did the experience in Gaza change something in the way you do journalism?

Anat Saragusti

When I came to Gaza I was already cooked because I was covering the first Intifada for this news magazine. That is why they called me to be a journalist in Gaza. When they asked me to be a TV journalist in Gaza, and this was the establishing of the commercial television in Israel, they thought it would be a nice gimmick to have a woman in Gaza Strip to draw viewers to the new television. That is why they chose me. They chose me because I was an expert on the conflict, but they chose me especially because I was a woman. I went to Gaza on a daily basis. It affected me on two levels. At the personal level because when I came home the comparison between the children in the refugee camps and my son living in a very comfortable and normal atmosphere was overwhelming for me. On the other hand as a journalist I tried to give the Palestinians names and not to talk about them in general. Whenever the TV station needed an analysis about the situation they brought in the military correspondent to explain the situation to the viewers while I was doing the minute and a half story about the Palestinian family. This was really striking me and I was so furious.

Viola Raheb

Gudrun, your six months in Iraq.

Gudrun Harrer

This was different because I have no other side. One of my principles which I try to uphold is empathy for both sides, knowing that it is not a symmetric thing, and also one of the principles that I insist that it is never ever a so-called cultural conflict. What you are alluding at is my experience as a diplomat in Iraq. It did not change my opinion on Iraq and my analysis of Iraq. But, of course, it changed the perspective. I learned to understand the other side a little bit better. I gained also new knowledge. I thought that lots of things are done because some people are so cynical. But now I know it is done because they are so stupid. Not everything which happens is conspiracy and there is a master plan. Some things just happen. It is incredible how they happen. What was difficult for me after coming back to journalism? I am very glad that I did the step back. But at the beginning it was the problem of the ownership of the news because as a diplomat I was not allowed to talk. Perhaps I should say this. After one of my interviews from Bagdad I told a friend, now it is time to stop, I am nearly getting accustomed to lying. It was after they killed the Al Kaida leader Zarqawi. As a diplomat you had to say, now there is new hope and everything will change and get better. Of course, we knew that it is not true. But as a diplomat you cannot go and say, nothing will change. This was an interesting experience. Coming back to the ownership of news, if this knowledge which I had accumulated in Bagdad really was owned by me or owned by the Ministry I was not sure at the beginning.

Viola Raheb

Two days before Randa came I was wondering will she really make it, is she still there. And then in the morning I had Al Arabia on. She was live on the TV, reporting about Rafah and El Arish. It was so wonderful to hear her voice. So I called her and told her, I saw you this morning, I know you are coming. She told me a story on reporting from the other side which you would like to share.

Randa Abou Azm

The incident of the Palestinians from Gaza going to the border, going to Egypt, I knew about it at 2 am and then we started coming live and getting information from our sources, and sending the crews over there, and the technicalities. But by the hour, by each news bulletin I have something new to say. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon one of our anchors was asking me questions about how the situation was. I was just telling her that more like 700.000 people have gone in El Arish and in Rafah, and prices have gone up by 50%, it is a very difficult situation, those people have been collectively punished, more than a million and a half Palestinians are being punished for something they did not do. And then I told her that I have this information now that many supplies are coming to El Arish from the nearby areas, from Ismailiah. Then she said, is it for free? Of course, not, and I was laughing because the second thing if it were for free everybody in Egypt would go to El Arish. Not being on the other side in Egypt as diversified as it is, like one day I will be reporting about Gaza, the other I will be reporting about something, we have to be as per international standard as balanced as possible, bring all views, bring every voice to be heard, as ethically, as balanced, as also not to be called biased. I made thousands of reports. The most interesting was the coverage of the Parliamentary elections in 2005. You can get carried away by being in the field, by seeing what you have to see. We are field reporters, we see things first hand. But where is the truth? The truth is not one face. There are many facets to the truth. This is how you have to get to your audience, not reflecting one picture. You are there. You can get carried away by what you see. But there are many facets to the picture. That is how difficult it was to reflect what we are seeing right now and let's say the Muslim

Brotherhood and the other side is the government. And then the audience would make their own judgment. It is not left for me to make a judgment. I am not supposed to make any judgments. I am not supposed to side with one. There are the pictures, there is the footage, there are the people, and I am always trying to be as balanced as possible. It is like walking on egg shells, like this is the government and this is the Muslim Brotherhood. Sometimes it is overwhelming and the audience will make the judgment. This is not by being on the other side. Sometimes you are standing in demonstrations and you can see some brutality, and sometimes you are hit. I was hit not in a demonstration but during the elections. Out of my own fury I can go out and say things. But I just hold myself. Many times I have reported about crises. There was a train once being burned with all its passengers, 300 passengers. I got thick after the coverage, for one week. But I tried to be as balanced as possible. I went to the prime minister and asked him, what went wrong, what led to this? Sometimes you are a human being after all, but you have to be so professional while reporting. But at times it gets to my own health because of what you see.

Viola Raheb

Thank you. I am glad that you expanded the terminology of the other side. That is how I meant it. But it seems we are already working with very set terminology that when we are saying the other side it usually is meant as the enemy which I never meant. The other side could be from within. So thank you for this because this is very important when we reflect about it. Laila.

Laila Odeh

There is a big difference between talking about the facts and looking for these facts. Through my work as a field journalist I had a lot of difficulties. I almost lost my life at least three times. In my situation it is different from my colleague Randa because she is an Egyptian and it is much easier than my situation. I have to deal with the others. The others here, of course, if we want to be educated people and we want to touch the facts because even though if you will try to hide these facts, if you try to avoid these facts, you can't kill these facts, you can't hide these facts forever. The fact is that we have occupation in the Palestinian territory. The fact is I am a journalist. The fact is I am Palestinian. The fact is I am a woman. The fact is I am a human being. The fact is I am a human being, a Palestinian, an Arab, a refugee living under occupation, trying to show that she is challenging all these things but trying to keep her mentality, her education, her point of view of having a good future, a step forward, not six or ten steps back. I am educated. I have to look for that. When becoming a journalist I looked at myself, at my background, at my future and thought I am Palestinian, I am a refugee, I am without ID, I have an Israeli ID, I have a Jordanian passport, I have Palestinian blood, but I am a human being over all these things. If I work as a journalist I have to know all these things and because of these challenges to challenge myself at first and to go forward. I have one thing that I always mention because it is so important. When I grew up my brother was killed by the Israelis. It was a very difficult thing to lose your brother. Because of that I decided not to fight the Israelis with a weapon, but to give the Israelis the lesson that even though I am under occupation, even though they are challenging me, even though they are trying to kill me, to evacuate me, to find another place for me, to humiliate me as a human being, I will keep standing, I will keep going forward as an educated woman. Another challenge were my Israeli colleagues. Because of that it was very difficult for me to work with these issues and to deal with the other. It is a matter of understanding the other and how Israelis understand me.

Viola Raheb

Thank you Laila. I will open the floor for the audience.

Question

I would like to ask Laila. I am a journalist, too, and have to rely heavily on material I get through agencies and through other reporters from Gaza. I could only go there twice myself. Very often there are Palestinian women living here in Austria contacting me and asking me why I would use such horrible footage from the Palestinians, why I would use pictures of young children being shown with rockets, why I would use teenage men in masks to portray the situation of the Palestinians. Unfortunately, very often I have to tell her that the material I am getting is very often from Arab journalists, female journalists who are doing such pictures. I have to look very hard and very often I am looking unsuccessfully for footage or for text illustrating the human side of the conflict, the human side of the Palestinian side of the conflict. I always thought that is very much up to the women who would be hopefully in a better position than men to portray the social side of the conflict. I can't really understand why there is so little footage coming out showing more female and children suffering and less the military side of the conflict.

Question

My question is the classical journalist dilemma between being impartial and being clear about the beliefs and the issues you believe in. You all are working in a region which is not only filled with very strong emotions, but where there is also from the national governments involved a lot of manipulated media information. How do you deal with this conflict?

Question

I am not a journalist. I am working for Women International Zionist Organization. I am Austrian. We are taking care of aware building day care centers and taking care of them in Israel for Arab and Israeli society. Randa and Laila, since you are single mothers, did you have such a thing because WIZO is doing the day care center since the 1920's? Do such things exist in your countries? One of our day care centers that was fortunately protected against rockets was hit about ten days ago in Sderot. Children lived there since seven years and they get rockets every day, sometimes fifty in a day. Do you report about these things or do you report just about your suffering? The third question is to Laila personally because you said you wanted to hit back by being a journalist. Isn't a journalist supposed to be objective and give the facts as they are and not to fight back?

Question

I have a question to all of the ladies here who are from the Arab world, to Randa and Laila. You are two women who have made it, who have had the chance to get an education. You look like any Western elegantly dressed women. How does this reflect on the women in your own society? I am interested in the question of the woman in the Arab world. The question, of course, is a much differentiated one. How do you feel? How are you regarded by your male colleagues? Is there any animosity? Is there envy? Is there competition? Are there all sorts of hard feelings about you? Having reached the position that you have, how does this improve the situation of other women in the Arab world?

Question

Gudrun, I am interested in your story about Tariq Aziz when you mentioned that he was on the one hand looking at the photographer. You can understand the good quality about it that he could not ignore his existence. To what extent do you think is the media sensitive to such good qualities when they address the Middle East or the Muslim communities covered by Western media?

Anat Saragusti

The problem with Gaza is that hardly any journalist from the outside can get in. This applies definitely for Israeli journalists but also for others. In my TV station it is the same. We all have to rely on local footage that local photographers send to the news agencies. Usually it is a kind of reverse stereotyping because they think this is what the world wants to see, violence and blood because blood sells. So this is what they send. If you would go there you probably would look for something else. But then you are one person. But this is what we get in our TV station. It is very difficult to sort this very hard footage that we get and to look for the human side of it. This is my view. I think it is the same all over the world. You get the same thing from Kenia now.

Laila Odeh

I wanted to make the same point but from a different side. It is connected to different things. It is connected to the closure for Gaza, not allowing journalists in because they don't have Israeli press cards. So not everyone is allowed to enter Gaza and take what he needs in Gaza; pictures of rockets, demolished houses, or the killed people. We have Palestinians working there for several agencies, for AP, for Reuters, for France, for every foreign agency they have their own photographer, reporter, producer, offices there. We have a lot of pictures. I myself have a lot of pictures. Other colleagues have a lot of pictures. The question is until which distances these agencies are allowed to have these pictures from their own point of view. It is the focus of the news. Any agency if they want to have this point of view they have to make news. How to make news? Through which pictures we have to make news depends on the agency itself. It is not something depending on the Palestinians. We can't always blame the people living there or the journalist living there because at the end it is not their own decision to broadcast these pictures. It is the decision of the editorial room wherever they have their office, in Jerusalem, in Tel Aviv. It is the news desk there. They have a lot of pictures, but it depends on the agency where to focus and on what to focus.

Randa Abou Azm

I am working for a satellite channel. We have an office in Gaza. We have our own crew and we have our own correspondent who can give us different footage than the networks. Thus, you will see a different set of stories,

human interest stories, things that can speak for the people themselves. But unfortunately, when you talk about very violent footage, this is part of the reality. Hard as it is we have to face it. But we as a satellite channel, having access inside, have a variety of footage that you can always watch and you can even share it with those satellite channels other than the networks that keep feeding you with the stories.

Impartial views. It is a very difficult thing to do. You should not ever include your own view in the report that you are doing. But here I am talking about the situation in Egypt with the diversity of the things that we are tackling. You would be surprised how difficult it is for us to include government officials in our reports in order to make it a balanced report, in order to have the two sides of the story or the two sides of the opinion. I keep telling them every day, please; get me someone who can speak. Unfortunately this is due to so many things. Bureaucracy is one of them. An official cannot speak because of the sensitivity of the issue, because he did not get the okay from his boss. It is a chain of old heritage, unfortunately. Things are a little bit better. It is not the best we hope for. But we are still trying; we are still pressurizing them to speak. If we need someone from the opposition ten people will come forward and they are speaking eloquently. But if we need someone from the government to represent the other side we have so much difficulty. Whenever they get me someone he or she has to be equally strong. Otherwise it would look intentional that we are weakening some side and strengthening the other side. This is a real dilemma. It is very difficult. It is not just in the reports. It is in the commentators that we get on sensitive issues. And the issues now are mostly sensitive in Egypt.

The day care. We have day care centers. It is really painful to see any soul getting killed, especially children, whether Israelis, Palestinians, Iraqis. Believe me. If I am sitting in my home and see such a picture it feels very bad. But let me see the other side as well. It feels as bad as it is. It is not that one life here is worth five lives there. If one life is lost this is a disaster. We should never sacrifice. As Al Arabia we have an office in Gaza and one in Jerusalem, in Ramallah. It is a human interest story whether it happens in Israel or elsewhere. But what is behind the story? Unfortunately, it is the politics, it is the policy makers. This is what is creating this thing. We are humans here. We can relate to each other. But we are not policy makers. We are in the media. We are trying to do our jobs as much as we can.

Being a woman. It was very difficult for us to become what we are and to keep our jobs. It is a daily struggle. This is not a job. This is a very hectic place, the survivor of the fittest. It is not because I am a woman that I was chosen, or because he is a man that he was chosen, the best one for the job was chosen. And you keep fighting on a daily basis whether for men or women. Sometimes the fight for women is worse. How can we make this better? I am the Cairo bureau chief and I have four other women colleagues. One of them is a producer. She started with us when she graduated. She is really dedicated, she is very good. Her heart and mind is in her job. Then she got married. Definitely the performance would be a little bit less because she has other responsibilities. Being a woman here I would feel for her. I would let her because I know that she is sincere in whatever she is doing. I don't want her to lose her job and I don't want her to lose her house. When she had her child I told her, take as much vacation as you want. I will not abide by the three or six months. Because I know that she is so dedicated I can never replace her. When people feel that you are personally behind them they will give you their best, they will perform better. That is what she is trying to do. And I have another female reporter. She has two kids. And I keep asking her before going to any report, are you ready to do this report, because her kids are more important than her career.

Laila Odeh

I always have this problem with the Israeli side. When you want to have a reaction, or you want to deal with a very hot point, for example the Intifada or what is happening in Gaza, the Israelis decide to close themselves. They prevented Palestinian journalists from becoming closer to them. They blame the Palestinian journalists not to have their reactions or not to be dealing with them. We struggle with that. If I am having an interview with any Israeli official I am sitting in front of him as a journalist and I have to deal with him as a journalist.

You mentioned the children. In my stories I try to have both sides. Some of the times when I was in danger of losing my life was in Israeli areas such as Haifa, Tel Aviv, West-Jerusalem when there were suicide attacks. They saw that I am speaking Arabic; they found that I am Arab and Palestinian. I have a logo written in Arabic. So they try to harass me, to treat me as their enemy. It looks like I am responsible. I am trying to have both opinions. If I will have what is happening with the Israelis I will have what is happening with the Palestinians. If we will have the Israeli in Sderot, the children fleeing from rockets, we have on the other side Palestinian children who are hungry, who are afraid. They can't sleep. They can't eat. They don't have milk. They don't have food. They don't

have security. They don't have peace. And most of all they don't have identity. They don't have themselves. They are nothing. I think it is an issue of not complicating all these things, not to play the role of the victim. Everyone is a victim. If you have occupation everyone is a victim. If you have such a complicated situation, if you have such leaders – I don't think that we have good leaders now – and such continuation in the complicated situation I think we will have rockets on Sderot, we will have raids and shelling in Gaza. We will continue with this very difficult situation. It is one issue, not always play the role of the victim because if you are a victim the other side is a victim, too.

Viola Raheb

So hitting back as a journalist, does that mean it is one thing to hit back in being biased over and against Israel?

Laila Odeh

No, I didn't mean that, although I have the right for that. I have the right for expressing myself not as a terror, not as someone who wants to put an end to Israel. No. Something complicated should be understood. I spoke to several Israeli journalists. I think they have the same feelings. We are talking here in Vienna. But the situation in Palestine is different. I decided to be a journalist not because I want to be a bad person or to work against anyone. No. I became a journalist because I want to show that we as educated people can do two things. We can change things, and we can show the other picture of the situation. It was a misunderstanding.

Gudrun Harrer

I want to add something regarding the photos. This is exactly what I meant when I said we need more women in media policy. It is true that these photos are part of the reality, but they are only one part. I think women, if they want, could change some things. I don't know much about peace journalism. But the older I get the more I think about it. There is also the fact that if we would ask for different photos perhaps we would get them. If we would tell Reuters every day, please, your photos are terrible. There is a real need to encourage constructiveness and constructive forces. I don't know if women are better. We can only state as it is now, and women are absent. Perhaps if they come into the play it becomes better.

Tariq Aziz and the interview. I am afraid I have to disappoint you. I was not at all amused at that time. I was angry. It was some years ago and I was just too shy to protest. But also the analysis came much later. I don't know if I at that time I exactly understood what was happening. I only thought old macho or something like that. I understand your question also in a different way. I think that journalists – and there are specialized journalists in the German speaking world – are better than their reputation. And there are a lots of journalists who culturally have a certain understanding of what is going on. But I don't think we have to accept it. Even if I understand why he does it I could tell him. I adapt to him, but also he has to adapt to me.

Anat Saragusti

I believe I have a different view because I am a woman. A couple of months ago I decided to bring to my viewers a different picture of Sderot. So I went and lived there. I rented a house there and lived there for a month. I took a small camera with me and did some sort of a diary of persons from Sderot. I tried to feel the reality. Usually journalists hit and run. They come for one day, they see whatever they see, and they come back to the studio, they edit it very quickly, two minutes, and it is gone. So I decided this is not the right thing to do for a city that is in the news for so long. It has been seven years now. So I went and lived there. I must tell you I saw a completely different picture although I intentionally looked for it. I looked for the stronger part of the society there, not the people who usually go to the city center and cry their pain out. I went to see different faces of the city. There is a beautiful cinemateque there. I went to see films almost every night. These things you don't usually see on the daily news. There is an amazing college there in which they teach journalism. So I looked for the different sides, the different faces of the city. I got lots of feedbacks for this story. So this is a different point of view.

Randa Abou Azm

A different approach. Actually the different approach to any story is very important. I send all my reporters and colleagues to El Arish and to Rafah and told them, the first two days you will report about what is happening, the going on, but after that I want each of you to do me a human interest story about those people. Because these are people, they are not numbers. They are not just Palestinians. They are Ahmed, Mohammad, Ali. They are individuals and we need to know them. And we need to report about this. It was very difficult for us to get to El Arish before this. It was banned. The pilgrimage from Gaza could not go in. We tried to go in. Our correspondent could not. So we told him, do us a story about El Arish. It is the creativity, the different approaches. It is not the

stereotyping that you get to see every day, bombing, bombing, bombing. But there are people behind this bombing. There are babies that are killed here. People cannot live there. So we need to see them which is more powerful than anything else.

The impact of my work, and being a role model. I don't like to be described as a role model because I am always trying, every day. I would love to be a role model at least for my daughter. This is something I am trying to do as much as possible. I have never seen myself as a role model. But I would like to prove that when people try, when women try they can reach it. I don't like to disassociate myself in gender, women, and men. Any human being, any person who tries as hard as he can, can reach success. I was faced with many challenges. I think my family and my father is very proud of me. It is empowering other women. When they see that there are women on camera, there are women making it whether in Al Arabia, whether at Al Jazeera, whether with Laila, then there is hope. It gives others hope. It is not just those stories of success. In Egypt we have so many women supporting their families. Each one of them is her own success. She doesn't have to be the bureau chief of Al Arabia, If she can manage to teach her children the right way. I have a maid at home. She is teaching, she is raising six children on her own, trying to make it every day. This is empowerment. What are we doing for these women? Are we paving the way for them? This is another road. But, unfortunately, in some countries it is not by law, it is by figures. The First Lady has do adopt a certain pose in order to make it. Like the amendment of the constitution when a woman can give her nationality for her children if she is married to her foreigner. This was adopted by the First Lady. If people in authority can adopt a pose then that can finds its way. What if we don't have someone interested? It is not just about me and other women, it is about power, it is about people in power.

Viola Raheb

Allow me to add two points to this since I am also an Arab woman. I think there is also a big sentimentalization in this issue. And I think it has also very much to do with stereotyping. I refuse to be seen as unrepresentative or as privileged because I am not. My mother who already worked as a teacher for blind in the sixties was my role model. It is not that I made it out of nothing. No. The majority of our women are actually role models. My grandmother who was blind and was working already at the end of the 20th century was a role model. It is not because now we are speaking a foreign language or we are well dressed or whatever, this has nothing to do with role models. I am not sure if my son will see in me somebody who is a role model. Secondly, I think there is a problem in seeing the oppressed women as representative of the majority because this is falling in the trap of stigmatization. My third point, what Randa was just saying about power and the role of women, this is not specifically Middle Eastern. In Austria it is the same. If you want to change a law regarding women it has to do with power and it has to do with male.

Question

To Randa and Laila. You are strong women, you are self-confident women, you are educated women, you are successful women. On the other side, as well as in Egypt and in Palestine, there are strong extremist movements which are gaining more and more ground. You will speak about the Muslim Brotherhood on the one side and the Hamas on the other side. All these movements have a tone which is for us really disturbing. Is the situation going to be more complicated for women under these circumstances? Do you think these extremist movements; will they get into power in Egypt or in Palestine at all? Will they be softening or will they lose power?

Question

Gudrun, I have to disappoint you now. In the last human rights report they said the media, in Europe in general and in Western Europe in particular, is biased towards Muslims. If the media is covering everything impartially and balanced whether it is in the Middle East or in the West where is the problem behind the gap between the image or the perception we have developed in time and the reality?

Question

To Anat. I want to come back to the concept of the other in two ways. How are you being perceived as a reporter addressing Palestinians? Do you feel that they think you are the enemy? Or do they perceive you as help to address an Israeli audience? As to consumers, are Palestinian viewers watching Israeli TV? Do you get reactions? Did they read your magazine?

Randa Abou Azm

I will talk about the Muslim Brotherhood because we don't have Hamas in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood is a group that was formed more than seventy years ago. Of course, they have been trying to reach power. We all

understand that. They were not allowed to form a party. It is a very strange situation where you don't have them as legal and they are still holding 88 seats in parliament. How did they get into parliament with 88 seats? How many people voted in Egypt during the parliamentary elections? 20% of the voters. How many people are registered already in the votes? I don't know because none that I know is registered. I myself never go to vote. They could have got more than 88 seats, probably more 105 seats. But is this representative of the Egyptian choices? You can never know because the percentage that went to vote was very small. Those who are voting have managed to get the people they know because they are very dedicated to vote for them. This is the only way to show who can get into power. There is a democratic reform. It has picked up in 2005 with the presidential elections or the first presidential elections that we have seen in Egypt. The path is not going as fast or as good as we wish it to be. It needs to be accelerated. It needs to be put into perspective. That is what many are demanding. The fear for the Muslim Brotherhood if they form a party, let them be a party, let's try. We have to have a democratic path. We have to have a democratic chain like every other country. But as long as it is democracy because you can always make the mistake in your choices, but as long as there is democracy then the mistake can be put into perspective. Am I afraid of the Muslim Brotherhood? No, I am not. Egypt is so strong to hold any extremist movement. If they ever rule they have to change their perspective. No, I am not afraid as long as there is a democracy.

Laila Odeh

The Hamas. As a journalist, as someone who is trying to monitor the situation there I start from the point where Randa started which is going back two years when Hamas won the elections in the Palestinian territories. It was confirmed by the European observers that it was a normal, honest election which does not have any dust on the results. Considering Hamas as an extremist, terrorist movement, it depends. Seen from outside it does not connect to the existence of Hamas in the Palestinian territories. If you follow some of the most important Israeli writers and some officials and analysts they are urging the Israeli government to start talking with Hamas, to open minds with Hamas because they are feeling that if we will Hamas as a terror movement and we deal with Hamas as a terrorist movement we could not achieve anything. So let's give Hamas a chance. They are controlling now one and a half million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. They exist also in the West Bank and also in Jerusalem. We have her writers' opinions that Hamas is the most terrifying enemy in the Palestinian territories. They are enemies, they are dangerous. But I think it is an issue of different opinions. For Hamas it is another thing. It is occupation. It is resistance. It is a right to fight the occupation, to have independence. This is the issue of all these things.

Is the situation more complicated? You have to put the facts on the ground. It will be very complicated. I think the region will be facing a very dangerous situation for the coming few months only. The new Middle East will the real first step in the coming few months. The beginning will start from Gaza. Will these movements lose power? I don't think so. Maybe they will become weaker but you can't end them. You are dealing with people. You have to deal with mentality. If you will deal with them as people, if you understand them, if you understand why Hamas exists, why we have Palestinians insisting in killing Israelis ... He is now Defence Minister. He said once if I was a Palestinian I will be a terrorist. It was the only right statement Barak said in his whole life. He touched the point at that time because he forgot himself as an Israeli and he put himself as a person facing the facts. If I come at you and take your notebook or your car you will fight for that. Just think from this point of view.

Anat Saragusti

Do the Palestinians see me as an enemy? On the contrary. When I used to go to Gaza when it was still open for Israeli journalists I never felt afraid. This was a constant question asked me by my friends. Aren't you afraid to go there? No. I never felt a threat. In those years most of the Palestinians used to watch Channel 2 news and they used to call me from the end of the street, hey, Channel 2 news, why don't you have translation to Arabic so when can understand better. They grew up under the occupation and most of them spoke Hebrew. Nowadays I don't know. Last time I was there was two years ago.

The magazine is a long story. I won't get into it. It was a left wing approach magazine. The editor was Uri Avnery. He was very famous among Palestinians. So I was very welcomed then as a photographer and reporter of this magazine.

Gudrun Harrer

This reminds me of the story when the war in 2003 in Iraq started I called my friends in Bagdad and asked them what are you doing. They said, we are watching CNN.

I have a very simple answer. I did not say the media. I did say the really specialized journalists we have. I have a MA in Islamic Studies. Especially in Germany in the good quality newspapers you have those people. I never would say the media. You are right, it is a problem. What I find especially disturbing is the connotation of religion and Islam with violence and also with very subtle means and manipulation. But I also want to bring the other side. Suppose you are not a specialized journalist and you have a terrorist who with the Koran in hands blows himself up. So what do you do? Are you as a non-educated journalist the one who says, no, please, this is not Islam, this is misunderstood. It is very tough. It is an alliance between extremism and misuse of religion and ignorance. But don't judge and say they are against. Each one knows very well that I really try not to fall into traps. But I can tell you even sometimes I myself reach limits. I brought this example in the conference. It happened here in Austria that a radical FPÖ politician offended the Prophet and said certain things. I together with a very dear friend of mine who is an eminent scholar of Iranian studies, published a piece trying to explain where this anti-Islamic discourse comes from. It is nothing new. It has a history. You can identify it. This article used a very condemning language. It was clear for everyone. An embassy contacted him and told him, but you don't condemn this woman, there is no line that you are against it. We were really shocked. We could not believe what was happening to us in a way. Or the lack of language on their side, the lack of cultural understanding, or my suspicion is also that they really want us to buy into Islam completely. Perhaps they expected a piece where we praised the virtue of the Prophet. But we cannot deliver that. We see it from an academic atheist point of view, Mohammad as a historic figure, and we can analyze whatever. Maybe it is a cultural gap.

Viola Raheb

With this I would like to end this evening. I would like to thank you all for having come tonight, also in the name of the Kreisky Forum. The Kreisky Forum wanted to give faces to some of the names you knew. I would like to take some of the sentence or some glimpses of what was said that we might take with us tonight. Working in journalism as women is tough. We very much appreciate and are proud of all the women journalists not because of their gender but because of the excellent work they are doing. You give the names to the faces of the others. We want to wish you all the strength and the patience to continue your journey of balancing. It takes courage for women to speak and it took courage for these women to say yes, we will sit on a joint panel, because some are crossing red lines. For that we owe them the respect and the solidarity. I hope you had a wonderful evening. Usually I hate listening to journalists because they are so boring. But tonight it was such a pleasure listening to these women. I wish this pleasure could be also present in the media that is presenting the work of these women to us. With this hope I leave you. Have a good way home.