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## Remembering 13 Unsung Heroes of Photojournalism

Posted by David Walker on Wednesday February 29, 2012 | Photojournalism



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News stories of the deaths in Syria of American reporter Marie Colvin and French photographer Remi Ochlik totaled in the thousands last week. That was followed by hundreds of stories yesterday about the rescue of British photographer Paul Conroy, who was injured in the same attack in Homs, Syria that killed Ochlik and Colvin.

Lost in much of the coverage about Conroy's rescue was the fact that 35 activists helped Conroy reach safety in Lebanon, and 13 of them died during the rescue mission. AP reported those deaths, which occurred when government troops attacked the activists.

Meanwhile, the death last Friday of Anas al-Tarsha, a young Syrian videographer and the fourth journalist to die in Homs within a week, was virtually unreported by the news media, except in Spain. The Committee to Protect Journalists, NPPA, Lightstalkers, and a few others also mentioned his death. The death of the fourth journalist, Syrian video blogger **Rami** al-Sayed, also received much less coverage last week than the deaths of Ochlik and Colvin.

In other words, Western journalists get into trouble, and it's big news. Local journalists and fixers and others who get injured or killed along side them are too often relegated to the footnotes.

Of course, hundreds of Syrians have died and thousands more have been injured in Homs, where government troops have been shelling rebels and unarmed civilians alike for three weeks in order to keep the unpopular Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad in power.

But a disproportionate amount of Western media attention and outrage seems reserved for its own journalists, and it raises (again) the uncomfortable questions about the risks that Western journalists impose not only on themselves, but the locals who aid them. (The issue arose last spring, when a driver for four *New York Times* journalists went missing after they were detained at a checkpoint in Libya. It wasn't until November that *The New York Times* quietly acknowledged the driver's death.)

This isn't to say that the deaths of Colvin, Ochlik or any other journalists are anything but a tragedy, regardless of their nationality. Nor is it to suggest selfishness or callousness on the part

of individual journalists for whom drivers, fixers, or anyone else risks life and limb. (Conroy's wife [has told \*The Western Morning News\*](#) that the photographer "is obviously very concerned for all the people who lost their lives in helping them out. It's a real burden on him to know that so many people died.")

What makes the issue so complicated is that journalists endanger themselves and others for good, defensible reasons. By bearing witness to the savagery committed by al-Assad, journalists are trying to help the Syrian people. And they are making a difference. The images and reports have turned the international community (with the glaring exceptions of China and Russia) against al-Assad, and put pressure on him to allow the Red Cross and Red Crescent in to help evacuate the dead and wounded.

That's why al-Assad is targeting journalists with intent to kill them, while Syrian citizens are risking their lives to help those same journalists. The Syrians who died in the rescue of Paul Conroy undertook the mission voluntarily. But their deaths shouldn't be his burden to bear alone, because they might have died for any journalist in Conroy's predicament. To recognize and honor them for their sacrifice is to elevate and honor not only them, but all who put themselves at risk anywhere in the world to make the work of journalists possible.

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**Tags:** Anas al-Tarsha, Marie Colvin, Paul Conroy, Rami al-Sayed, Remi Ochlik, Syria

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