

Module 1: Interview with Banu Guven - A case study from Turkey, support mechanisms

[00:00:00] Hi, welcome to the first margile of Online Harassment: Strategies for Journalists' Defense. In the previous two videos, we tried looking at online harassment from different angles. The first video focused on the theme in general about different experiences, definitions and response mechanisms. In the second video, you heard from Jennifer Adams, who shared with us the perspective of international organizations, the work that's been done and is yet to be done, how the issue of online harassment is being discussed on the government level, and how over the recent years it has become evident to engage other stakeholders in the discussion on measures to fight online harassment against women journalists. Before I welcome our next guest speaker, and as I promised in the first video, I would like to also go over a few techniques and coping strategies as this is something that we will also be hearing from our next guest speaker.

[00:01:01] Being harassed online can be an extremely lonely and frightening experience. This is why it is important to create a safe space where you can detox yourself from the experience and give time to process the anxiety, stress and emotional trauma. It is important during this time to take time off your digital presence. Deactivate your accounts on social media and take a break from emails. Find someone you can share your experience with. Addressing the emotional impact of online harassment is important, as it may also help you prevent the trauma of the experience from popping up again sometime in the future. Talk to a professional, a friend, people from your community who understand what you're going through. Stay active and socialize because being alone won't help in dealing with the emotional trauma. And remember, you are not alone in this.

[00:02:01] There are also other forms of coping techniques and strategies when it comes to addressing and treating your experience. Here are just some steps that you can take. And remember, there are additional recommendations I've shared with you in the reading list for this module. If you're on the receiving end of harassment, which is usually the case, try monitoring and reporting abuse, making a statement about the negative campaign that you're facing. Maybe disable some of the media social media accounts, which is what I had to do in my case when I was facing online harassment. You may ask a colleague or a friend to help you with this, because having done it myself many times, I can tell you it's not really a fun experience. So having someone with you to help you with this process is actually really good for you. You may also want to consider blocking or muting the harasser. I have tried also confronting my trolls, but I have never really had a positive experience speaking with them. So maybe you may want to reconsider doing that. It is, however, a technique that is being used and sometimes it is recommended to do that. And the case of cyberstalking, speaking with and seeking advice from a lawyer, may help depending on the country you live in and whether that country actually treats cyberstalking as a criminal offense. In case you're experiencing a denial of service attack, it is recommended that you contact the necessary providers to report the abuse. In case of doxxing, do report the dox immediately to the platform on which it happened and make sure to assess the threat. In general, regardless of the time of harassment that you faced, assessing the threats, documenting it and mentally and physically preparing yourself is really important as well as it is useful. If you have been hacked, do consider upping your digital security game. I call it digital hygiene. Make a list of devices you use, the kind of information you have on these devices, what you're storing there, who is using these devices, and how often you actually access these devices, and know how sensitive information is that you have there. At all times, identify a support community that you can rely on, and at all times, practice self care. These are the topics that you will be learning more about as the course goes on. If you are concerned about your own safety or the safety of your family members, consider contacting law enforcement, although that too depends on the country that you live in and the context within which law enforcement operates.

[00:04:51] When I had my first experience with online harassment, I intentionally decided not to go to law enforcement because first of all I wasn't in Azerbaijan at the time. And secondly, I didn't really trust them, and I didn't really think that they would do anything to protect me. If you're facing sextortion, or in other words, when a harasser distributes nude or sexually explicit images or videos of you in an effort to blackmail you, immediately flag the content for removal if it's happening on a social media platform. Contact the administrators of this platform, and once again, at all times, keep your support community informed about the experience you are facing and you're going through. Reaching out to third parties with access to these platforms where this

is happening is another way of addressing the problem, because not always you're going to get or be able to reach out to someone at the platform in order to be able to quickly receive adequate response. When Hadija, the journalist whose story of blackmail I shared with you in the first video, was blackmailed, one of the first things she did was to inform her immediate circle of friends, including her editor. Two days after she received the package, she also organized a press conference where she told other journalists about what happened to her and why it happened to her. This created a support network of sympathizers, even among some of the most traditional and conservative audience that she had. Surely this is not at all an exhaustive list of recommendations and solutions. However, it is a good place to start from and do check some of the resources once again that I've shared on the reading list and supporting materials for this module.

[00:06:38] Now, I would like to welcome Banu Guven, an established and well-known journalist from Turkey currently based in Germany. Banu will share with us her experience of harassment and how much of it was a combination of political context to her independent journalism work and cultural context. Banu, thank you for joining us today.

[00:06:59] Thank you, Arzu. My pleasure.

[00:07:02] Banu, let me kick off this class and this interview with a relatively broad question. In the first video, I talked about my own story and what online harassment is in general. In my case, when I had my first encounter, I didn't really know that what I was facing was online harassment. Perhaps you could start by sharing with us your story, and what did you do? What steps did you take? And did you know from the start that this was online harassment, targeted online harassment? Tell us a little bit about it.

[00:07:37] Sure. I mean, as it happened, I was actually on holiday, and it was maybe in the morning or the night before I had posted a comment on Twitter about the Kurdish Newroz. I mean about the ceremonies and so on. So the state wanted the people not to celebrate Newroz the way they do traditionally, so there was a discussion about it, also about the date, official date. And the one, I mean, the one I would say, and I just made a comment on Twitter. And then the next day I spent my day without touching my phone until five o'clock, five pm. And suddenly I saw messages like tens of messages coming from my friends, from my colleagues, telling me, "Banu, don't do anything. We are dealing with it. Are you OK?" And I was so worried. I didn't get it at the first instance. I didn't know what was happening. And then someone told me, "Check your Twitter timeline." And I was shocked because there were like hundreds of hundreds of comments, insults, threats. By real people. By trolls, I mean by both accounts, plus trolls. Later I found out that it was the army of trolls of one of the sons of the ex Ankara mayor, Melih Gokcek is his name. So his sons were small Gokceks, the little tiny ones, little Gokceks. I don't know. I mean, they were also having their empire I would say in this world of Twitter, and this guy owned or was the director of a TV channel as well. So he organized all these people, and all the trolls, and both accounts, whatever, to insult me online. And it was...at the beginning, I mean, that was the first time, and I didn't really know what to do.

[00:10:23] And when was this? Do you remember?

[00:10:29] It must have been like 2010 maybe. Or 11, I guess. I'm not sure now. I mean, in the next hour, I knew that it was an organized campaign, online harassment campaign, and the guy was also writing personally. And then I saw what the good thing was. I mean, I got such a good support from my colleagues, from my followers on Twitter. They reply to this guy directly. Not to the trolls, or some of them also to the trolls, but to this guy, they replied. And then they started to make fun of him. And the more they made fun of him, like they were saying, "If you love her that much, go and talk to her." Or things like that. Because he was insulting me all the time, and other guys were threatening me with every kind of sexual harassment and even murder. I should be burned. And so I wasn't really afraid, but this hatred was really...but I decided not to do anything about it, not to reply, not to retweet any kind of threat or anything. Because if you do it, you just make it echo stronger. So you are, I mean, you are making the effect bigger actually. That was what I thought, and I just went and grabbed some drink, and then some more, and some more. Yeah, I tried to get back to my villa. I told myself this is going to be over, but I knew that this guy was going to follow me. Follow my every move. That happened as well. I mean, I was right.

Because years later, again, he took a comment of mine. He sent his guys I mean... There were some of his reporters wanted to really question me about my comments on a different situation and so on, and then I ended up in the courthouse like being questioned by the prosecutor. This is because in Turkey, like many other countries, this issue of nationalism always pays off for those trolls and all these kinds of people. So that was the first time, and then there was also an aftermath to.

[00:14:03] Yeah, so you said that in Turkey, nationalism feeds into the narrative of trolls and harassment, but how much of it you think has changed or has it changed at all? Because this happened to you in 2010. My first experience with online harassment was in 2014, and I'm just really curious because I've been hearing from very different country contexts of different times when this has occurred. And I'm just wondering if you sense that the situation has improved or do you face the same amount of harassment? Because I don't. For me, it's the same amount of harassment, if not worse. So I'm just curious how it is in your case, and how do you assess this current environment?

[00:14:57] Well, you know what? Actually, starting from 2013 on, the government, the ultra nationalists or the smaller mafia like politicians, they realized what kind of useful tool they have. I mean, social media. And they they started to use it more efficiently. And then they were paying these people, these trolls, to act on their orders. And then, you know, they are like zombies, actually. Sometimes Twitter just makes a little bit of cleansing, which is good. I mean, I was so happy to see it. I mean, many, many trolls who attacked me and my other female colleagues back then. Now they are not on Twitter anymore, but new ones come. I mean, recently Twitter has made some cleaning. But new ones come, they are really like zombies. So we keep going through the same experience again and again, I mean, it was like maybe three years ago, four years ago, in this film in this documentary, I'm also talking about it. I'm also telling about the other experience. Years later, I made another comment on a politician on the actions and statements of a minister. And yeah, then I had to report...I could continue to do it...But I mean, I reported like 200 tweets to Twitters. And then I just left my computer there and everything, and I went out. This is another topic, maybe, that we are going to talk about how to cope with this. But no, you're right. I mean, it keeps coming, but you get stronger and you can evaluate it better. I mean, there are some people, some accounts, I know they pose a threat. They pose a real threat and danger, and I just I want to keep them under my eye. I mean, I don't want to lose them, really. But there are some others, I just block them, or I just ignore them. Yeah, I mean, you learn better how to deal with it all.

[00:18:01] Also, probably, you start recognizing them better. You know, it's almost like they fit into a description.

[00:18:11] I always take screenshots, and some of them you can see their identities. I mean, they are also because of this, I mean, they think that they can... In this government in Turkey, which is so protective of them, they will survive forever, they think. But of course they won't. But that's why some of them don't need to hide themselves. They are the trolls of these, or to some extent, voluntary trolls of these mafia type of politicians, political cliques and so on.

[00:18:56] OK, so you almost jumped ahead of me and already got into this this topic of how how to cope with it. You mentioned that you take screenshots. You mentioned that you document them, and you want to keep your eye on some of the accounts as evidence. And you've left your computer, or like you've had a community. You know, maybe of all the things that you've done or use for coping techniques, which of the methods have you found was the most useful and which of the methods you would really stress for up and coming journalists or anyone in the audience in this class to consider using? Because there are many different methods, and I guess it depends on the type of attack and harassment. But still, if you could share that with us.

[00:19:50] Yeah, I think I mean, first of all, I think it's useful to report to Twitter first. Taking screenshots always, always. And if you believe that there is rule of law in the country you live in, then go report to the authorities. I reported a few tweets to the authorities, but I didn't get any reply. A couple of years ago in one of the screenings of this documentary Dark Place, I met Nani Jansen from Digital Freedom Fund, and Nani is a lawyer. And I was sharing my experiences and then there was one case I was talking about. And then I said I didn't do anything because I don't

believe that anything will happen. Then she said to me, "You know, Banu, you should still go and file a complaint, and we should see what the result will be so that we can bring it to the international court. I mean, International Court of Human Rights as well." So we, especially women journalists, have to push the governments, the society, the social media world to create a better set of norms, values, standards, and also the authorities, the judiciary, the parliament. I mean, I think we need better written papers on all these things, I don't know how we are going to get to this point, but there are so many different attitudes and different procedures in different countries. In Turkey, it was different, even reporting to Twitter, reporting a case of Twitter, it was different. In Germany if you want to report a tweet or an account to Twitter here, you have to check some options like it's against article number this and that and so on. And, you know, you have to go Google and then look for yourself. What is this article? Am I right if I cross this one? You know, really difficult.

[00:23:06] But it's there. There are options.

[00:23:10] There are options, but you don't know really what these options mean. I mean, not everyone. So it makes the whole procedure a bit more difficult. Plus, I have to say, Twitter reacts quite fast to complaints. But sometimes I really get surprised because some accounts or some tweets, they found just normal. They said it's not against the rules, and I was really surprised. But still, I keep reporting to Twitter. And if you think there is not, I mean... I got these chats from Turkey mostly. If I would think that the threat seems to be a serious one and comes from someone near me, I mean in the same city where I live or in the country, in the case of Germany, I would be more careful. In Turkey, I was always careful when I went onto the street. I mean when I was in the street, I was always careful. And this whole thing turns our lives into....I mean, like you don't think extra about these things, but you start to get more and more cautious. And this is a situation that is not healthy, actually. Now, since I find myself in a more secure environment I realize that it's a very, very important thing. You just don't feel like...You think "I'm doing well." But actually, no. I mean, this thing causes harm actually.

[00:25:12] In the long term, especially the trauma that stays is quite long lasting, I have to say. But thank you so much for for this because I think it's really good to hear how the measures, first of all, that you find useful, but also how much of this online measures also have to be in parallel with the measures that you take offline. For instance, being careful when you go outside. Again, it changes from context to a context from country to country. But I have done the same when I was facing threats here in Turkey. It's almost automatic. You walk out into the street or you get into your car, you just make sure that, you know, no one creeps behind you because it becomes part of your psyche. And I thought what you also said, what you mentioned about Nani and her organization and her encouragement, I think it's also really important, and that kind of leads me to my next question that I wanted to ask you. And that is, you know, there are many different organizations like the one that you mentioned where Nani works that provide assistance to women journalists who come across those experiences that we faced. But I really wonder, like I didn't know about them when I was facing online harassment and only learned about them later. And I realized that there are actually so many different initiatives that help and whatnot. What about you? I mean, did you know how where to go and who to contact? How did you start learning about other organizations?

[00:26:53] Not at all. At the beginning in the first instance, I was telling you that I didn't know anything about those institutions. And then the second one, with the second big wave of hatred of a hate campaign and the sexual insults and everything together, was during the Gezi revolt in Istanbul in 2013. Then again, I mean, a group of women journalists were threatened with broken wine bottles like to get raped and to get murdered, and I mean, I was one of them. But the things they were written were really brutal. And then you see their photos of guys like... This is really incredible, That was the first experience... Like Brad Pitt or Tom Cruise. Because most of these accounts were bots back then. And then you are questioning yourself. Where can I start? I mean, there are no people who are tweeting at the moment, just machines and like that. So what am I going to do? You don't know what to do.

[00:28:32] But they still want to look nice, and they want to think that they're Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise.

[00:28:38] Really. And then what was I going to say? Yeah, the thing is, I mean, even if you know that these are not threats, these threats are not being made by real people, they are still online. I mean back then I didn't know exactly how to report to Twitter and so on, and Twitter didn't have these mechanisms, maybe, back then. I'm not sure. But as long as they stay online, they make you a target for those who are ready to act. These online hate tweets, they may encourage some people. So I didn't know where to go, but luckily I knew some lawyers in Turkey. You will guess whom? Sure, yeah. Yeah. And a couple of times, we filed a complaint. And then I believe that these institutions which support female journalists, they are not that old actually, or this is not a very old. I mean these are new fields for them to work on, but I'm very happy that there are now quite a lot. Yeah, and then I was also happy when we did this film with Jen and Javier, and you were there, too. We made our voice heard, and we saw that it was an issue and that was one of the biggest supports. Therefore, I'm still thankful to BOC and the IPI, International Press Institute, our beloved IPI. And Javier.

[00:31:14] Jen, actually mentioned this as well in our interview with her. I asked her what was one thing that that stood out among all the interviews that she did, traveling across the world with Javier, and she did this fact that women were actually wanting to get heard, to get the stories out was something that brought all of the stories together. So I think it really is important, especially when you don't know where to go, that what you're facing is actually targeted online harassment.

[00:31:51] May I just add something? I mean I said that I usually don't retweet or don't mention it when I get harassed. I mean, when I face online harassment. But sometimes politicians or some other opinion leaders, I would say, do it from the government side or who feel themselves close enough to the government, so they feel themselves safe enough. They think nothing will happen to them. And then it's good to share it with everybody then, so in order to build some pressure. And then they get such a reaction. Sometimes they have to, I mean, delete this tweet later. I mean it should be done because there are lots of sexist attempts also by these guys. So in some instances, I think it's good to show them too.

[00:33:11] Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. Naming and shaming. Sometimes it actually works.

[00:33:17] This is important, and they have to...it makes them think twice next time.

[00:33:30] Yes, absolutely. Which brings me to my final question. And that is, you know, you have so much experience as a journalist, TV journalism, online journalism, and you've been doing this for a while. What would you recommend to starting journalist or journalists in they're beginning, their careers are just beginning, or they're mid career? You know journalists who are facing or struggling with similar types of harassment and targeting. What would you recommend? What would be your wisdom that you would like to pass along for the participants of this of this class, of this course?

[00:34:19] Keep on getting concentrated on your job. I mean, these guys they aim to silence you. Don't accept that because they want to paralyze you. And don't let that happen to you. All the advices you heard from Arzu and my advice, think of them, and I'm pretty sure that you're going to have a list of places. You can always file a complaint, and share it with your friends. If you want to do something, I believe it's good to share it with your colleagues, to think twice about it, even if you feel yourself obliged to somehow to react promptly, still share it with a friend you trust. But just don't let yourself get paralyzed by these idiots.

[00:35:34] Banu, thank you so much for spending time with us today, sharing your experience really just. being here with us. I really appreciate it. I'm sure the students and the listeners are also appreciating it. Just one last thing to ask. If anyone wants to follow your work on Turkey or your current reporting, where can they find you?

[00:36:02] Well, check my Twitter account. Its @banuguven. Well, if you take my account, you're also going to see what I'm doing. Nowadays I'm mostly reporting, writing, broadcasting in Turkish and German, but I also contribute to some publications in English. But nowadays everything gets translated very easily. So just have a look.

[00:36:41] Thank you so much.

[00:36:42] Thank you, Arzu. It was a pleasure.