

Nieman



NOT A 'CRIME OF PASSION'

Covering domestic violence as an urgent social crisis, not a private family matter

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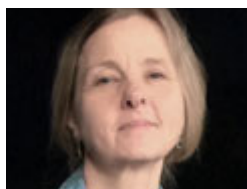
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In the United Kingdom, two women a week on average are murdered by a husband, partner, ex-boyfriend, or family member. London-based photographer Claudia Janke's project "Two Every Week" puts the focus on women who were killed in 2016 and 2017. The victims are memorialized on candles with a picture provided by their loved ones, the date of death, the woman's age, what each died of, and who is suspected, charged, or jailed as the perpetrator. She writes, "'Two Every Week' draws attention to the women and brutality behind the chilling statistics of domestic violence deaths in the UK attempting to shift the narrative to the damage and misery caused by male violence and the impact it has on the freedom of women and society as a whole."

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COVER: Photos by Claudia Janke from her "Two Every Week" project

COVER DESIGN: Arthur Hochstein

“If You Want to Save Democracy, You First Must Save Yourself”

With the U.S. president no longer defending the essential role of journalism in a democracy, news outlets worldwide step up their fight for survival

BY ANN MARIE LIPINSKI

IN THEIR PRESS freedom ranking of 180 countries, Reporters Without Borders this year named Norway its valedictorian. So free is the country from censorship, political pressure, or violence against journalists, that the headline atop the annual report’s section on Norway read, “Faultless or almost.”

So I was surprised, during a recent visit from several Norwegian journalists, by a conversation about the demagoguery and denunciations of journalism emanating from U.S. politicians. It was dangerous, I agreed, and encouraging that countries like theirs persisted in defending press values.

“Yes,” said the woman from Norway, “but this rhetoric, it’s contagious.”

As President Trump and his allies have amplified their attacks on journalism, the impact has spread beyond the U.S., with even stable democracies wary of its polluting influence. This rhetoric *is* contagious, and is now one of our leading cultural exports. While the nation’s own press freedom ranking fell to 48—the result of physical attacks, the deadly shooting at the Annapolis Capital Gazette, and threats requiring some media companies to hire security guards for their reporters—Trump has found an eager chorus among other world leaders and applauded their ominous echoes.

The president’s forgiving embrace of Saudi authorities in the wake of columnist Jamal Khashoggi’s murder and dismembering last fall marked a new low. “The level of violence used to persecute journalists who aggravate authorities no longer seems to know any limits,” said Reporters Without Borders.

Gone is the historic role that U.S. presidents played in defending the essential role of journalism in a democracy, replaced by White House succor for autocrats and authoritarians seeking to silence independent reporting. We are now—in the words of Stalin, Mao, Nazi propagandists, and Trump—“enemies of the people,” language weaponized during some of history’s darkest hours.

“Trump inhabits the global showcase,” said Salvadoran author and journalist Oscar Martinez. “In attacking the U.S. press, he attacks all of the press and puts it at risk.”

The kinship Trump exhibits for fellow enemies of independent reporting was evident during this March exchange in Washington with newly-elected Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro.

Bolsonaro: “Brazil and the United States stand side by side in their efforts to ensure liberties and respect to traditional family lifestyles, respect to God our creator, against the gender ideology or the politically correct attitudes and against fake news.”

Trump: “I’m very proud to hear the president use the term ‘fake news.’”

Bolsonaro wasn’t bluffing and in his brief tenure has used social media to attack reporters whose coverage he doesn’t like, suppressed government advertising to weaken the press, and, most recently, threatened American journalist Glenn Greenwald with imprisonment for stories questioning the ethical conduct of Brazil’s justice minister.

Some of journalism’s harshest antagonists—Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, Myanmar state security officer U Kyaw San Hla, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu among them—have all parroted Trump’s cries of “fake news” to advance their own press wars.

“[I] would like to send a message to the president that your attack on CNN is right,” said Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, dismissing reports of corruption and sex trafficking in his country. “American media is very bad.”

Said a shameless al-Assad, one of the world’s most murderous dictators: “We are living in a fake-news era.”

One of the unfortunate consequences of this hostile environment is that it compromises the possibility of genuine reflection about journalism’s failings. In the U.S., the “fake news” complaints clotting public discourse are now so suspect, and the skepticism from journalists so heightened, it is hard to imagine how the conversation is bridged. Honest response to legitimate criticism is difficult when the criticism comes in a torrent of false accusations. It’s like trying to separate raindrops.

I recently watched a video of a 1962 Oval Office interview that three network news reporters held with President John F. Kennedy. The civility is nearly unrecognizable and a reminder of how distorted our discourse has become. Kennedy, like every president before and since, took umbrage at some White House coverage. He refers to the press as “abrasive” and implies that news can be distorted for political purposes. But his fundamental respect for its role in a democracy is sufficiently strong that he says Nikita Khrushchev, then premier of the Soviet Union, is disadvantaged without it.

“Even though we never like it, and even though we wish they didn’t write it, and even though we disapprove, there isn’t any doubt that we couldn’t do the job at all in a free society without a very, very active press,” Kennedy said.

How do we get back to that discussion? Are we as journalists doing enough in our work and in our communities to advance that conversation and earn that respect?

Although there are countries that never tolerated an independent press, the retreat in places that once did have such a press shows how precipitous the change can be. Hungary’s free fall in world press freedom rankings—down 14 positions to 87 this year—mirrors the country’s overall decline across other measurements of democratic health, including treatment of the courts, schools, and religious organizations.

If you seek a playbook for how to weaken and eventually erase a free press, turn to Hungary since the 2010 election of Prime Minister Viktor Orban’s Fidesz party. The harassment and shuttering of independent media alongside the creation of a pro-Orban consortium of private TV, radio, newspapers, and websites have virtually strangled critical voices.

“When Mr. Orban came to power in 2010, his aim was to eliminate the media’s role as a check on government,” a former public radio anchor told The New York Times. “Orban wanted to introduce a regime which keeps the facade of democratic



Gazeta Wyborcza, Poland's most widely circulated broadsheet, is a prime target of President Andrzej Duda

institutions but is not operated in a democratic manner—and a free press doesn't fit into that picture.”

Last year I visited Warsaw's Gazeta Wyborcza, a newspaper founded in the late '80s out of the Solidarity movement. After years of success, the independent daily has emerged as one of the prime targets of President Andrzej Duda and his Law and Justice Party, elected in 2015. Like Hungary's Orban, Duda and party leaders have sought to mute the press as part of their dismantling of Poland's hard-won, post-Soviet democracy.

In doing so, Duda has displayed a familiar fealty to Trump, earning him a description in *Foreign Policy* as “perhaps the savviest of all Trump's ego massage therapists.” Using Trump's preferred communication channel, Duda has tweeted his alignment: “President

Trump @realDonaldTrump just stressed again the power of fake news. Thank you. We must continue to fight that phenomenon. Poland experiences fake news power first hand. Many European and even US officials form their opinions of PL based on relentless flow of fake news.”

Jerzy Wojcik, publisher of the *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and Jarosław Kurski, the deputy editor-in-chief, described a relentless government campaign of economic suffocation. They say this has included stripping traditional government advertising from their pages; diminished access for the paper to the national network of government-controlled gas stations (long a source of single-copy newspaper sales); and government pressure on the private industry to pull advertising.

Wojcik said the paper lost approximately \$5 million during the new government's first year and had to lay off 170 employees.

“Censorship would be too obvious,” said Wojcik. “The main strategy to kill us is to kill our revenues.”

The newspaper has been the target of organized protests, including one outside the building that began with a priest performing an exorcism of the *Gazeta Wyborcza*. “What does it mean when people are shouting and singing and praying for your soul?” Wojcik asked. “We give you this description as an

example that there is no red line, there are no limits.”

The paper has also been attacked by the government-controlled State TV Network, run by Jacek Kurski—the brother of *Gazeta Wyborcza*'s deputy editor. What is that like for you? I asked him. “Not good,” Jarosław Kurski said. “We mostly don't talk anymore, only about our mother who died a couple of years ago.”

The paper is racing against time and government forces to create new, more lucrative subscription models and increase revenue from other company enterprises, including cinema, book publishing, and outdoor advertising. They have also joined with a European news consortium to share stories without cost.

“If you want to save democracy,” said editor Kurski, “you first must save yourself.”

Wojcik and Kurski were almost apologetic at one point, saying they don't want to sound like they're complaining, even as they describe journalism as “the last obstacle” to authoritarianism in Poland.

“I wake up here, I read the news from Poland and around the world, and think no, no, no, no,” said Wojcik, with a resigned smile. “But next I drink a coffee, smoke a cigarette, and say, ‘Okay, try to do something good, something to make a difference.’” ■

“
The attacks on journalism by Trump and his allies are contagious, and the rhetoric is now one of our leading cultural exports

ARTUR WIDAK/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

“Have more faith and trust in the public to be able to digest challenging information and to actually be looking for that”

Mother Jones CEO Monika Bauerlein and editor-in-chief Clara Jeffery on growing their audience and revenues

Mother Jones, the 43-year-old San Francisco-based publication named for the intrepid activist Mary Harris Jones, has been reinvigorated since Monika Bauerlein and Clara Jeffery took over as co-editors in 2006. Under the pair’s leadership, the nonprofit magazine’s audience has grown, with a large digital presence and print circulation stable around 200,000 subscribers, and its newsroom has expanded with bureaus in New York and Washington, D.C. Mother Jones is a powerhouse of investigative reporting, and has been winner of several national journalism awards, including being named Magazine of the Year by the American Society of Magazine Editors in 2017.

In 2015, after nearly a decade as co-editors, Bauerlein became CEO of Mother Jones while Jeffery took over as editor-in-chief. Both have worked at the publication for close to 20 years—Bauerlein joined as an investigative editor in 2000, and Jeffery started as a deputy editor in 2002. Jeffery worked at the Washington City Paper and was senior editor at Harper’s. Bauerlein has been a correspondent for the Associated Press and managing editor of the Minneapolis-based alternative weekly City Pages.

Bauerlein and Jeffery visited the Nieman Foundation to accept the I.F. Stone Medal for Journalistic Independence in May, and, during the presentation, discussed Mother Jones’s success, covering the 2020 presidential election, and more. Edited excerpts:

On the success of Mother Jones under their leadership

Clara Jeffery: When we took the helm, there was a lot of talk of a leadership vacuum, that we’d be in catfights, that we’d pull each other’s hair, that we were job-sharing when that was never true, unless you can share a

19-hour day that each of us had many times.

Thanks to the amazing team at Mother Jones and the faith that our board and others put in us, we’ve grown exponentially. Our organization has three times the budget now. It has 10 times as many people in the newsroom, 15 times the audience. We now reach about eight million people a month and we’re fortunate enough to employ about a hundred of the best journalists in the country.

Monika Bauerlein: It is an arc that we’re not seeing enough of in news at the moment. It’s an incredibly tough time for our profession, but journalism has tools to defend itself.

Maybe the most important tools are these values that we come from and that we have seen—that when you can communicate to audiences that you stand with them, that your alliance or your allegiance is not to a hedge fund or a billionaire—even a nice one—but that you are there for the public interest, wherever that may take you, that people do respond to that.

Public trust is actually rebounding. People are engaging with journalism in ways that they haven’t for a long time. It shows us a path where the people who can save the journalism that the public needs is the public.

On being truly independent

Jeffery: There are many forces that you need to be independent of. One is to sometimes challenge the folks who are more inclined to your publication. We’ve done that a lot in the past few years. I think that that is something that is more and more fraught, at least online, sometimes to do.

It’s also having the financial and structural independence from just one or two really rich people. It’s re-engaging the audi-

ence, making them feel that they are a part of us. That’s in order to get them to share and spread your work, but it also has this ancillary benefit of many of them financially supporting your work.

On not catering to preconceptions

Bauerlein: As journalists, we were trained to believe [that if you seek member support, you are under pressure to serve their preconceptions and beliefs]. That’s why it took so long for newsrooms to orient themselves toward the audience—because we assume that if you do that, then you’ll be catering to the lowest common denominator and you will not be making these august decisions about what’s important and what people should hear about.

That’s a sad statement about our relationship with the people on whom we depend and for whom we do this work. Have more faith and trust in the public to be able to digest challenging information and to actually be looking for that. We get a lot of feedback from our audience saying, “I didn’t like this or that or the other thing that you wrote, but I’m glad that you did [it].”

Jeffery: I think that it’s true always, but more true recently, that you’ve got to plow ahead and try and tell the story as best you understand it, realizing that there are going to be people who legitimately disagree with you or attack what you’re doing to signal something to their tribe.

There’s more of that going on now than used to be visible. It can be a negative force in public discourse, but by steering the ship as best you can and acknowledging these factors, even in your own reporting, you can win people over.

On making the value proposition of giving journalism away for free but asking people to support it

Jeffery: David Carr was an old boss of mine. When he was at The New York Times before he died tragically, we used to get into somewhat of an argument. I was like, “Why doesn’t the Times start a nonprofit piece so that people could give it money without having to get the dead tree shipped to them?” He was like, “We can’t do that because of our advertisers.” We were already down this road. So it was interesting to watch the Times after [the election of] Trump essentially make that proposition. They’ve gone to a model that allows people to support them whether or not they read them in paper form because they know that people want to support the journalism.



Monika Bauerlein and Clara Jeffery of Mother Jones at the Nieman Foundation in May

We all wish it were more people, but when we make that clear to readers, they do respond. They know that journalism is needed now more than ever. Whether it's their local paper or national papers or any kind of media that they care about, many of them, when it's put to them in that way, will step up.

On the business models of the future

Jeffery: It's not going to be advertising. It's going to be subscriptions, or donor support, or nice billionaires, or a combination of the above. I think advertising is going the way of when Napster disrupted the music industry. Nonprofits and things that had to be scrappier realized this earlier just because we didn't get the lush six-page Versace ads.

If we could go back in time, certainly in the news business, we would have taught our audience better why their paper was so cheap. Why you could get *The New Yorker* for \$12 a year, whatever the price used to be. It is not the price to produce the stuff that's being made.

If advertising cannot subsidize it, and in this country, government is unlikely—and probably at least for the moment, that's a good thing—to help, then who's going to do it? It has to be the public in one form or fashion.



The people who can save the journalism that the public needs is the public

On being transparent with audiences about the cost of producing journalism

Bauerlein: It's a big bet born of a deep assessment of the factors involved, but also the fact that when you're a journalist, you have a hammer. Every problem is a nail and your hammer is explaining things in a story.

It occurred to us that, as journalists, we were having a relationship of depth and explanation with the content, but not on the fundraising and marketing side. Might it make sense to have that same high-level conversation with our audience when it came to how the organization runs and the role that they play?

On the importance of following up

Jeffery: I won't say that we at all do a perfect job of it, but that precise reason [of wanting to follow up on investigative reporting years later] is why we went to our board in the Mother Jones 2.0 initiative [when Monika and I took over] and said, we can't do investigative reporting with the model that we had at the time, which was mostly freelance investigative reporters and editors at Mother Jones.

We need to go down rabbit holes we know might not be productive. We need to be able to follow up. We need staff writers in a more newspaper-like staff structure. That has paid off enormously in being able to follow up.

Another thing that we've done is dedicate reporters to beats that might be a little bit more unusual. For example, Julia Lurie has had a beat [looking at the opioid crisis from a different angle]. After the 2016 election, I was looking at a map of where Trump won and didn't win. I had looked at a map of the worst parts of the opioid crisis, and I was like, "There's something here." We'll do a lot on the opioid crisis, but we're going

to get into who's making money on it, and how this is affecting the political landscape.

Having staff writers and being able to dedicate someone for a few years to, in some ways, an esoteric kind of beat, has been great. That's when we've done our best work, frankly.

On overcorrecting for accusations of bias

Bauerlein: When you yell at the press long enough and hard enough about the truth being an exercise in bias, people start to overcorrect for it and bend over backward to appease the people who are often doing the yelling in bad faith.

There are people who in good faith have criticisms of the press. We need to engage with that and listen to it and be made uncomfortable by it. But there are also people who are pursuing an agenda of making us less bold in pursuit of the truth. We don't have that much time to get this right.

On covering the 2020 election and not repeating the same mistakes

Bauerlein: The question is have we learned enough from what happened in 2016 in terms of better covering a changed political landscape? It would be a huge stretch to say that we've learned the lessons, as a profession. All of us made mistakes. All of us missed part of the story.

Some improvements have been made, but there also is a degree of defensiveness and allegiance to the way that we have historically done things that is particularly powerful in the context of a presidential campaign where muscle memory kicks in and it's very, very difficult for any of us to confront just how flawed the traditions and habits of the profession are.

Jeffery: There were a lot of mistakes made and stories not told or not amplified well enough. One of the greatest problems we have throughout the industry, but particularly amongst the biggest, heaviest hitters, is that there's not a willingness to own up to what happened and report out what happened.

Eventually we'll learn, but if journalism was more honest about when it screws up and why, our democracy will be better off.

If we could do one thing, it would be bring back the ombudsmen and do more media reporting that was about that and really probative and thoughtful and not just "got you" or who got fired. That is one thing I would like to see our profession invest more time and money in. ■

Watching “the true saga of the climate crisis unfold” in global communities big and small

John Sutter, NF '19, seeks to make a multi-generational climate change documentary

THE MOST INTERESTING stories last more than a lifetime.

This was especially apparent to me on a recent visit to Shishmaref, Alaska, an Inupiat village near the Arctic Circle that is faced with the prospect of relocation because of the climate crisis. I flew up there as part of the “Baseline” documentary series I’m directing with the support of Knight Visiting Nieman fellowship and a grant from the National Geographic Society.

The point of this series, which is still in early development, is to stretch the public’s collective memory of environmental change by filming intimate portraits of a few climate hotspots—and then committing to revisit those same places well into the future. I’m in my mid-30s, and, strange as it sounds, it’s a project I hope will outlast me.

I landed in Shishmaref on a tiny plane carrying only me, my colleague, our equipment, some mail, and the pilot. I’d been to the village



Young people hunt for small birds outside Shishmaref, Alaska, in the spring of 2019. They face uncertain futures because of the climate crisis

twice before while reporting for CNN, but it continues to strike me how edge-of-the-world and yet familiar the community feels.

The village’s problems are clear: The permafrost is melting, the sea ice is disappearing, and the now-fragile land is crumbling into the water like brittle cornbread. One house already has fallen off the edge. The community has voted repeatedly to move away from these climate-era dangers, but they haven’t come up with the money to do it. One point of the “Baseline” series is to see what happens. Will the community move? How will people protect themselves? What aspects of the Inupiat identity will morph or be lost as these shifts unfold?

On my first trip to the village, in 2009, I met Shelton and Clara Kokeok. They lived—and still do—in a blue house at the very edge of the land. On their coffee table is a photo of their son, Norman, who died in 2007 after he fell through the ice.

Elders said the ice should have been solid

that time of year and in that location. Some, including Shelton and Clara, blame the climate crisis for his death.

There’s a tradition in Shishmaref. Children who are born after someone in the village dies often are named after that person. It’s not just about family linkages. It’s about the community’s story continuing.

The young Normans are in school now. The older boy, 11, took me hunting outside of town. Spending time with him, I felt like I saw a part of the Norman who fell through the ice, and of the future of the climate emergency. The generous spirit his neighbors talk about, the deep interest in hunting and tradition.

The true saga of the climate crisis will unfold here, with Norman and his neighbors, and in communities big and small around the world. Yes, it is a crisis. Yes, it is now, not only in the future. The loss of ice and culture and livelihood are present and past problems in Shishmaref. ■

Chasing Down the Sounds

With a podcast, Dina Kraft, NF '12, taps her inner audio reporter to tell stories of friendship and connection between Israelis, Palestinians, Jews, and Arabs

IHAD LONG been a print reporter with a serious crush on audio. But until the opportunity to host a podcast fell in my lap, becoming lucky enough to make audio stories seemed like

an elusive dream.

Now I’m a year into creating and hosting “The Branch,” a podcast about Palestinians, Israelis, Arabs, and Jews who work together, “even when it’s complex,”

as the tagline says.

Each episode in the series, sponsored by Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, focuses on a different pair who have become close through their work together.

Where I once chased words, I now also chase down sounds. In one episode I tried to position myself on the edge of a stage to get the best audio of an Orthodox Jewish oud player singing classic Arabic love songs alongside his longtime musical partner, a secular Muslim pia-

nist. And I have become attuned to the pitch of a voice, the peel of a laugh, and how those make characters feel real. That felt especially true recording a conversation between two prominent feminists and close friends, one Palestinian Israeli, the other Jewish Israeli, who together ask why leaders of the Women’s March in America think they have to agree on everything in order to work for the same cause and capturing one of them say, with a laugh, “Why do we all have to be in the same ship? Why

After 32 Years, Free at Last

Investigative journalism students taught by Jenifer McKim, NF '08, play a key role in overturning a conviction

ABOUT FIVE YEARS ago, I received an unusual proposal.

A convicted murderer contacted me to say he wanted to write for the New England Center for Investigative Reporting, the nonprofit news outlet where I work.

Darrell Jones sent a message through his wife that he was uniquely positioned to report on criminal justice because of his 30 years behind bars. He invited me to talk about ideas at the maximum-security Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center, about an hour outside Boston.

I accepted the invitation. As we talked in the prison's visiting room, I realized the most interesting story to tell was that of Jones himself. He told me that at age 19, he was wrongly convicted by an all-white jury of a fatal shooting in a Brockton parking lot.

Jones said that the state's case against him included no physical evidence, motive, or eyewitness who definitively pointed to him in court.

I took the question of whether Jones was innocent to an investigative journalism class I teach at Boston University, where students and professional journalists work side by side. Students learn investigative tools like filing public records requests, reading court records, analyzing data and interviewing sources while working on real-world stories.

During this semester, students read court transcripts of the 1986 murder trial and knocked on the doors of witnesses.

We broke into groups, each focusing on a topic: The defense attorney who, in connection with charges of stealing from a client, was suspended from work after Jones' conviction; the eyewitnesses who wouldn't testify that Jones was the murderer; a deep-dive look at Jones himself.

The process went on months after the class disbanded. Some of my students stayed on the team as volunteers. Leading the group was attorney Leonard Singer, who started out as one of the most skeptical and emerged as one of the most dedicated to telling Jones' story. His classmate Evelyn Martinez, an Emerson College graduate student, also kept chasing leads to those who were near the Brockton parking lot where an alleged drug dealer died by a single shot in 1985.

After the class ended, WBUR news reporters Bruce Gellerman and Jesse Costa joined our project. Gellerman tracked down juror Eleanor Urbati, who said that she was never convinced of Jones' guilt and regrets her decision to go along with the 11 other jurors to convict him. She told us that she believed two jurors were racist—a statement key to Jones' release.

The investigation led to an award-winning five-part radio and video series.

After the stories ran, Superior Court Justice Thomas McGuire Jr., in a highly unusual move, called back Urbati and other jurors to hear about claims of a racist jury. Finding the case was tainted by racial bias

and police misconduct, he eventually vacated Jones' murder conviction.

In June of this year, Jones was retried. His attorneys focused on the fact that witnesses described a shooter who was significantly shorter than the victim. Jones, at 6 feet, is nearly the same height as the man who was killed. A new, more diverse jury found Jones not guilty after barely two hours of deliberation.

One of his attorneys, John J. Barter, said that when he first reviewed Jones' case he believed the only way the conviction would be overturned would be if something magical happened.

Barter said magic did arrive: First when the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision regarding the right to have jurors without racial prejudice and again when our reporting led to information about such bias. New technology also allowed development of proof that police had altered key evidence and lied about it.

These efforts led to a Boston man's exoneration after 32 years in prison for a crime he always insisted he didn't commit. Heading toward the new academic year, I'm excited to think of where our students will focus their attention next. ■

Darrell Jones celebrates with his lawyers



can't we be on different boats going the same direction?"

Every episode becomes my favorite one as I work on it, but Episode 10: "From Gaza to Tel Aviv" has special personal resonance. It's the story of a rare friendship made possible by journalism and the captivating personalities of Jonathan Ferziger, NF '96, aka my first boss (I interned for Jonathan in Jerusalem as a college student) and Saud Abu Ramadan, his fixer turned friend. It's a connection that began over 30 years

ago and has endured wars and heartaches and woven a path to include their wives and children in a place where people from Israel and people from Gaza rarely, if ever, mix, let alone forge life-changing friendships.

In our conversation held in Jonathan's living room—in itself a minor coup as Gazans rarely get permits into Israel—they tell me of times they saved each other's lives.

The stories unfold, one more interesting than the next, from the smugglers they encounter

running networks of tunnels underneath the Egyptian-Gaza border showing them their wares—everything from Viagra to KFC—to the time after the 2009 war between Israel and Gaza when Jonathan's wife, who had been sick with worry for Saud's family during the fighting, packs up a care package for them that Jonathan then delivers.

One of our listeners wrote that when peace one day comes to this seemingly intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it will be in agreements signed on

by the leaders, but the groundwork for that peace will be made by people like those interviewed on "The Branch." To be sure, if the political situation does not change, friendships like Jonathan and Saud's will go extinct. But that listener's sentiment pushes me forward to search for more stories of connection that challenge and defy the fear and doom and give room for those cracks of light that I, as a journalist, and my listeners, too, need to keep going in what feels like an extremely dark time. ■

“WHEN YOU SEE ME ON THE NEWS, YOU’LL KNOW WHO I AM”

Journalists often withhold details of mass shooters and suicides to discourage copycats. Should that “strategic silence” be extended to extremist speech, misinformation, and propaganda, too?

BY JON MARCUS





In Loving Memory Of



Tom Teves holds a T-shirt with photos of all 12 victims of the 2012 Aurora movie theater shooting, including his son, Alex Teves, at a press conference in Centennial, Colorado in 2015. Teves is an advocate of "strategic silence," and founded the organization No Notoriety to push for starving mass shooters of media attention



New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern vowed to not name the man who killed 51 in the March 2019 mass shooting

WHEN A

gunman killed 51 people and injured dozens more at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in March, the official response was swift. Restrictions were imposed on military-style semiautomatic weapons and assault rifles, and on magazines and ammunition. The ban was made permanent by an all-but-unanimous vote in Parliament, followed by a \$136 million allocation to buy back semiautomatic firearms by December. And the prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, wore a hijab to console families of victims and other Muslims.

But it was another gesture that most caught the attention of a group of American

activists and policymakers: Ardern proclaimed that she would never name the shooter, and a judge ordered that photos of his face, when he appeared in court, be blurred “to preserve any fair trial rights.” They were, though some journalism outlets that complied with the order also published or posted images of the suspect in which his face was visible. When the accused returned to be formally charged with murder and terrorism—his trial will begin next year—some of New Zealand’s major media organizations vowed “to the extent that is compatible with the principles of open justice, [to] limit any coverage of statements that actively champion white supremacist or terrorist ideology.”

It was the highest-profile validation of an idea that has come to be known as “strategic silence,” pushed by relatives of victims, law enforcement agencies, criminologists,

academic researchers—and a growing number of readers, listeners, and viewers—to downplay the names, images, and ideologies of perpetrators of mass crime. It was also an example of how media organizations are struggling with this strategy.

It’s not clear where the expression “strategic silence” originated as it pertains to journalism (it’s long been a term of art in crisis public relations). danah boyd and Joan Donovan, former colleagues at the research institute Data & Society, are largely credited with using it most prominently last year in a story in *The Guardian* about efforts through history to “quarantine” the Ku Klux Klan, but the two activists say it didn’t actually start with them. Among the earliest instances in which journalists used those words were in the mid-1990s to describe not something they were doing, but that the Clinton administration was, stonewalling the media in

PREVIOUS SPREAD: ANDY CROSS/THE DENVER POST VIA GETTY IMAGES
MARK TANTRUM/GETTY IMAGES



the midst of Whitewater and other scandals. But the concept itself has been around for almost a century. It was known as “dignified silence” in the 1920s, when the black press used it to downplay news about the Ku Klux Klan, and “quarantining” when Jewish organizations pushed journalists to give less attention to the ideas of white supremacists and American Nazis.

Whatever it’s called, it’s gaining traction. A study of 6,337 stories about the Christchurch attacks found that only 14 percent of U.S. publications named the shooter and almost none linked to his manifesto or the forum where he posted it. A handful of prominent journalists have said they’ve made a policy of this, including CNN’s Anderson Cooper. Media watchers say there’s anecdotal evidence that news outlets no longer splash the names and faces of mass shooters on screens and pages as much as they once did.

There’s another thrust of the strategic silence movement: to stop journalists from sharing not only shooters’ manifestos, but incendiary political and cultural speech, and to debunk it, even when it’s coming from the White House. This has gotten much more limited momentum; a review by the progressive research organization Media Matters for America suggests that, in the case of untrue tweets by President Donald Trump, for instance, media outlets continue to more often amplify than filter or rebut them.

Political journalist Michael Barbaro, host of The New York Times podcast “The Daily,” said it would be selective about reporting Trump’s remarks on immigration before last year’s midterm elections. “‘The Daily’ is deliberately playing down these events because they are clearly not policy remarks or policy announcements,” Barbaro tweeted. “They are deliberate attempts to inflame the electorate before the midterms.” And MSNBC opted to not air a speech by Trump around the same time about the caravan of Central American migrants Trump called an invasion. “In an abundance of caution, we’ve decided to monitor those remarks, fact-check them ... and then bring you the important news from them,” the anchor said.

Proponents of strategic silence applaud depriving mass killers of the fame that some research has concluded helps motivate their crimes. They also applaud media that decline to publish or broadcast extremist credos or false claims, stopping the propaganda from finding wider audiences they say their promoters have become adept at manipulating journalists into supplying.

Journalists including Washington Post media critic Erik Wemple respond that this is a path as dangerous as it might be well intentioned. Deciding that it’s not appropriate to post, publish, or broadcast an untrue tweet from a person of national importance, or information about someone who shoots people in a school or church, “starts to run into the public’s right to know,” says Wemple, “and that is in the extent to which it suppresses legitimate journalistic inquiry.”

For his part, filmmaker Errol Morris, who couldn’t get U.S. distribution for his 2018 documentary about Steve Bannon, “American Dharma,” isn’t sure that hearing contrary points of view helps people better understand and therefore outmaneuver them—that “feel-good ideas will win out over bad ideas.” But he bristles at a strategy of blocking or—as it’s also started to be called—“de-platforming” them. “I don’t think the ostrich approach here is recommended—that I’ll just stick my head in the

Ardern’s decision not to name the mass shooter was the highest-profile validation of an idea that has come to be known as “strategic silence”

ground and hope the danger passes.”

It’s a fraught and complex debate now being played out in more and more newsrooms with what some critics say are the highest possible stakes. Since political strategic silence ebbs and flows with the election cycle, it’s likely to present itself again as 2020 nears. To boyd—Data & Society’s founder and president, who styles her name in all lowercase letters—the question isn’t whether or not the public should know, “but at what point are you reporting on something that’s happening and at what point are you aiding and abetting the conspiracy?”

There does seem to be consensus about one thing: That this is, as Morris puts it, “an expression of enormous frustration that people feel—I might say including myself—that politics has gotten out of hand. That it’s not just about right and left; it’s about reason and unreason.”

Trouble is, he says, “if you curtail free speech, who gets to decide? Who gets vested with the authority to say?”

Strategic silence isn’t necessarily encouraging journalists to censor themselves, says Whitney Phillips, an assistant professor of communications at Syracuse University and an expert on online trolling who has studied how the media help amplify the ideology of the alt-right. “I understand the kneejerk response of, ‘Somebody is telling me not to do my job any more,’” she says. “That isn’t it.”

The focus needs to be on the “strategic” and not the “silent” part of the term, says Phillips, author of “The Oxygen of Amplification,” a report about this topic.

“There are ways to communicate stories without playing into a manipulator’s game,” she says: by focusing not just on the speaker or the speech, but on the people affected by it. When journalists report about conspiracy

theories, political misinformation, and racist or misogynistic messages, says Phillips, “what’s missing from that account in almost every case is the perspective of the people who are being targeted by that offensive speech. It’s almost always all about the speech and not about the victims.”

The controversial November 2017 New York Times story “A Voice of Hate in America’s Heartland,” about the far-right Midwesterner popularly remembered as “the Nazi next door,” for instance, left out the perspective of neighbors who might have been the targets of his animosity, she says. “It didn’t consider what that framing is like for them. That’s not balanced reporting.”

Phillips returns to the example that has so far dominated most discussion of strategic silence: the person who commits a mass crime. “Why does the camera have to automatically be pointed in the shooter’s face? You can engage with the stories with a shift of the camera, and suddenly you’re talking about people other than the shooter,” such as victims and responders.

News organizations practice on a daily basis even more complete strategic silence than that, she says. Among other ways, that happens when they decide to withhold information about suicides for exactly the same reasons some people are advocating for strategic silence in the reporting of hate speech or mass crimes: to avoid encouraging copycats.

They’ve also held back information about journalists abducted abroad. The New York Times led a media blackout about the kidnaping of its correspondent David Rohde, along with two Afghan colleagues, in Afghanistan by the Taliban until he managed to escape. Several major media outlets knew about a prisoner exchange to win the release of Jason Rezaian, Tehran bureau chief of The Washington Post, but didn’t report it. NBC kept secret the abduction in Syria of correspondent Richard Engel and his crew until they were freed.

“Why will you do it for your own but you won’t do it for my child?” asks Tom Teves, whose son, Alex, was among the 12 people killed in the Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting in 2012 when he stood up to pull his girlfriend to safety. Yet after Aurora, Teves said, “All the media showed was the killer, the killer. None of it was about the victims.”

Teves has established No Notoriety, one of two principal organizations that have been pushing to starve mass shooters of media attention. The other is Don’t Name Them, coordinated by the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center (ALERRT) at Texas State University.

“Why will you do it for your own but you won’t do it for my child?”

—Tom Teves, No Notoriety

Neither advocates for suspects’ names to be withheld altogether; No Notoriety says the facts about their backgrounds and motivations should be reported, but that journalists should resist “adding complementary color to the individual or their actions, and downplay the individual’s name and likeness” unless he’s still at large. Manifestos should never be shared, it says, while names and likenesses of people killed and injured should be elevated “to send the message their lives are more important than the killer’s actions.”

Don’t Name Them counsels law enforcement officers to not sensationalize the names of shooters in media briefings, recognize media outlets that downplay the names, circulate petitions encouraging journalists to shift the focus to victims and people who intervene, and provide letters readers, listeners, and viewers can send to media outlets. Once the killers are captured, it says, the killer’s name is “no longer a part of the story.”

That there are life-and-death repercussions to what journalists decide to include and exclude from their coverage is backed up by a 2015 study led by Sherry Towers, a research professor at Arizona State University who uses mathematical and computational modeling to study such things as the spread of disease and behaviors. It found “significant evidence” that high-profile mass killings using firearms provoke copycat incidents soon afterward in what Towers has called “a contagion effect.” More recent research, led by University of Alabama criminologist Adam Lankford, did not find that short-term contagion had occurred, but that there may have been some imitators motivated over the longer term.

Something similar happens when radical and racist ideologies are shared. This, at least, is not a new phenomenon; when the New York World ran an investigation of the Ku Klux Klan in 1921 that included an image of a secret membership application, according to historian Felix Harcourt of Austin College, thousands of readers ripped it out and joined. The American Nazi Party recruited more members in areas where local newspapers

covered its resurgence in the 1960s than in places where Jewish community groups persuaded them not to, say Boyd and Donovan, who is now director of the Technology and Social Change Research Project at Harvard Kennedy School’s Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy.

But the advent of social media has accelerated the phenomenon. As soon as journalists started to report about how Pepe the Frog had become a symbol of white supremacists, searches for and shares of it only propelled it into the mainstream.

Repeating Alex Jones’s assertion that the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut was faked helped it spread, Boyd says.

And when a 25-year-old Canadian rammed a van into pedestrians in Toronto, killing 10 and injuring 16, news coverage widely included the fact that he subscribed to an obscure misogynistic subculture of men who consider themselves involuntarily celibate; online searches for it spiked, Google Trends data show, increasing 20-fold in one day, and staying higher than before the attack.

Instead of giving audiences road maps to these kinds of things, advises Boyd, journalists should “talk about toxic forms of masculinity. Talk about hate-fueled attitudes that lead to terrorism. Just don’t amplify the phrases and logics that hate-mongers are seeking to amplify.”

Reporters say they can’t ignore, for instance, the perversity of people who believe that Sandy Hook was staged. Critics argue this perpetuates such theories, or sends audiences off to seek out further information elsewhere. “Yes, there’s a reason to say that is occurring, but there’s no reason to name Alex Jones or InfoWars and make the story about him,” says Boyd, who prefers the term “strategic amplification” to “strategic silence.”

In one case, two news organizations confronted this in different ways.

The first, NPR, last year broadcast an interview with Jason Kessler, who organized the Charlottesville rally and was organizing a follow-up in D.C., in which Kessler said, among other things, that “as a matter of science,” blacks were the least intelligent among racial groups. In the resulting uproar, listeners reminded the network of that time when the New York World was turned into an involuntary recruiting tool for the KKK, says Elizabeth Jensen, the network’s public editor. “They were saying, ‘You’re no different,’” Jensen says. She writes in a column about the interview that the network was not necessarily wrong to run the interview, but NPR was wrong to not use facts to challenge

Kessler's ranking of intelligence by race; he cited the work of controversial scholar Charles Murray, and the host responded only, "Charles Murray? Really?" NPR did not air the portion of the hourlong interview (it was reduced to seven minutes) in which Kessler was asked about the death in Charlottesville of counterprotester Heather Heyer.

The second, HBO's "Vice News Tonight," also covered the white nationalist protesters who had descended on Charlottesville. Yet while it, too, got some criticism for providing them with exposure, there was positive feedback for the way that the reporting by correspondent Elle Reeve contradicted assertions by Trump ("I think there is blame on both sides") by showing persuasively that the white nationalists had been driven less by ideology than by a determination to cause violence. One of the white supremacists on whom she focused, Christopher Cantwell, was subsequently charged with and pleaded guilty to two counts of misdemeanor assault and battery for pepper-spraying people at the rally; his Facebook and Instagram profiles were shut down because of statements he made about it, and he said Venmo and PayPal disabled his accounts.

There's pressure, too, for journalists to do a better job of calling out the growing number of instances in which Trump and others misstate facts. In their own tweets, they repeat the president's misinformation 65 percent of the time without rebutting it, a Media Matters study found, or 19 times per day. Matt Gertz, a Media Matters senior fellow who coauthored the analysis, calls this "privileging the lie."

He cites a good and a bad way to handle this. The bad: A "Face the Nation" tweet that said, unquestioningly, "The chant now should be 'finish the wall,' as opposed to 'build the wall,' because we're building a lot of wall," @realDonaldTrump said today." The good, from The Washington Post: "Trump claims a wall is needed to stop human trafficking. No data back up his claim."

These days, Gertz says, some longstanding journalistic practices should fall into question, "and one is that what the president says is inherently newsworthy." If it is, and it's true, he says, "by all means tell the public about it. If it's not true, do the work of pointing that out rather than amplifying information that isn't accurate."

It's those shootings that most directly

suggest the copycat effect. There's an abundance of evidence that the killers study and are inspired by the actions and messages of earlier offenders, such as the spreadsheets of incidents with perpetrators' names and body counts that was kept by the 20-year-old who fatally shot 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook. These also lay bare how many are motivated by a desire for fame. "When you see me on the news, you'll know who I am," said the 19-year-old who allegedly killed 17 people and wounded another 17 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

The strategic silence movement, as it applies to tragedies like these, is "not suggesting hiding people from the public. We're just saying that the focus needs to be switched," says J. Pete Blair, a criminologist and ALERRT's director. "crime prevention 101 says there are certain things we know can reduce crime, and one of those things is if we reduce the rewards for the crime."

This idea is finding widespread acceptance from law enforcement officials on whom journalists depend for information. The International Association of Chiefs of Police, in a resolution, urged what it called

A candlelight vigil is held for the victims of the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School





Vice's Elle Reeve with white nationalist Christopher Cantwell in Charlottesville

“responsible media coverage for the sake of public safety,” meaning that journalists should restrict their reporting of the names and photos of alleged assailants unless they are at large. The Major Cities Chiefs Association has adopted a similar policy.

These decrees have started spilling over into practice. After a 26-year-old Air Force veteran killed a couple dozen congregants and wounded 20 others at a Baptist church in Sutherland Springs, Texas in 2017, authorities stopped saying his name. The sheriff overseeing the response to the 2015 Oregon community college shooting, John Hanlin, also would not name the shooter publicly. Police investigating a shooting in Virginia Beach that killed 12 people in a municipal office building in May said they would name the shooter only once.

In none of those cases were the names withheld from official documents, and most media organizations used them. But some of the pressure has been more strident, suggesting that journalists may be morally complicit if they do not follow edicts on withholding the names of shooters.

The Washington Post's Wemple decries external pressure like this. These decisions should be confined to newsrooms, he says: “It’s not the role of a sheriff or the attorney general or the town police chief to tell the news media how to roll. If they want to say, ‘This is what we’re doing and we think it’s a good idea,’ that’s in their purview. We in the

media will do what we feel is newsworthy and ethical.”

But other journalists have said that they agree with the idea of lessening attention given to the killers. The most prominent: CNN’s Cooper, who Teves challenged on the air just days after his son was killed. Cooper’s colleague, Chris Cuomo, also noted that, in his coverage of the Orlando Pulse nightclub shooting, he never used the shooter’s name, and Megyn Kelly, who was then on Fox News, tweeted after the shooting at Umpqua Community College in Oregon: “TV gives infamy he prob[ably] desired. Don’t!”

Kyle Clark, an anchor at 9News in Denver who was on the air for 17 consecutive hours on the day of the Aurora shootings, has also chosen—with his station’s support—to downplay the identities of shooters. There’s no formal protocol, Clark says; it’s a case-by-case decision, and a matter of the names becoming of declining importance as investigations mature.

“On the first day their names matter a lot,” says Clark, recounting how this worked in the wake of a shooting in the Denver suburb of Highlands Ranch in May that killed one and injured eight; the suspects are an 18-year-old and a juvenile. “And the first time that the adult suspect appears in court, I believe that images of that person matter a lot. It’s very important, especially on the local news level that people hear the name and see the face so they can come forward

with information, if they have any.”

After that, however, Clark begins to pull back on naming suspects. A story may identify an alleged offender once, but then refer to him as “the suspected shooter.” “When we are seeing research and evidence on top of anecdote that contagion is real and that people are seeking notoriety, journalists have a responsibility to minimize harm while balancing that with the public’s need to know and the public’s right to know,” Clark says.

Local journalists may be more receptive to this than national reporters who parachute into crime scenes, Clark says, since they see more immediate evidence of how naming perpetrators affects victims and survivors.

Many other media have landed in a middle ground. NPR standards and practices editor Mark Memmott, for example, has advised in internal memos that “the name of the shooter does NOT have to be endlessly repeated.” As an example of this, he drew attention to a “Morning Edition” segment about the Las Vegas attack about, among other things, how the gunman had modified his rifles. But it never used his name, which wasn’t pertinent to the policy question over continuing to allow the legal sale of bump fire stocks that can turn a rifle into a semiautomatic weapon. “I don’t think anything was lost because of that,” wrote Memmott.

Including listener interest, according to other research conducted by scholars at

Northeastern and West Chester universities. It shows that readers, listeners, and viewers don't need the intimate details of perpetrators' lives to be drawn to stories about mass crimes. Seventy-three percent read a story beyond the first paragraph that focused on a person who stopped a shooting at a school, compared to 56 percent who chose to read past the first paragraph of a story that focused on the killer. Fifty-two percent read past the first paragraph of a story about a victim. Media outlets that provide excessive coverage of the perpetrators of such attacks "may not be giving consumers what they want," the researchers concluded.

There's pushback against the various kinds of strategic silence, too.

CNN's Don Lemon said of the Oregon shooter, "We must identify him, because that is our job." The people lobbying against this "could do more harm than good," USA Today editorialized, "if they give public officials an excuse to withhold information, impede investigative reporting on what makes killers tick, or provide the gun lobby with a way to point fingers at the news media in an effort to deflect pressure for common-sense laws."

Rather than diminish the Sandy Hook shooter, the Hartford Courant spent five years in a legal battle that went all the way to the state Supreme Court to get access to his journals. That was meant to give not only a clearer picture of the motivations behind that crime, but the red flags that could prevent more like it, publisher and editor-in-chief Andrew Julien says.

But the newspaper was mindful of the issues raised by the strategic silence movement when it presented the resulting coverage, Julien says. (The documents were also part of a collaboration between the Courant and "Frontline.") The shooter's name was in the headline, but the lead image was not of him; it was of the sign outside of Sandy Hook Elementary, draped with balloons. Nor was there a photo of the gunman on the Facebook page or in the thumbnail on the homepage of the Courant's website. And that spreadsheet of the earlier mass killers that he kept? It was reported about, but not among the documents the newspaper republished.

For Clark, too, there are limits. He says journalists shouldn't set hard-and-fast rules for themselves or take pledges to do things one way or another, as No Notoriety proposes. And he's cautious about extending the same principles into coverage of hate speech or conspiracy assertions, especially from political figures. "When you're talking about a public figure, there's a duty for journalists

to show and report what they say, no matter how outrageous," says Clark.

That's an example of how journalists and activists who push strategic silence differ. When someone says something odious or untrue, repeat it, but debunk it, says Mike Jempson, director of the MediaWise Trust, a British nonprofit that provides training in ethics for media professionals and studies the impact of their work.

Journalists' responsibility is not to filter what they tell the public, but "to provide some sort of context," Jempson says. "And if people are saying things which are evidently wrong or false, it's our job to challenge that. So saying all Mexicans are rapists or whatever nonsense Trump has been saying, I think we need to know that this person has these views and that they're factually inaccurate."

That thinking holds that media-savvy readers, listeners, and viewers can see this for themselves, or can interpret—if they can only read them—how repugnant are the messages of extremists. "It's upsetting to hear blatant lies and racism and hate speech. But if you believe that humans have rationality, put it out there in the marketplace of ideas, along with the truth," says Paul Levinson, a longtime journalist and now a professor of communication and media studies at Fordham University.

Assuming media literacy in the fast-moving blur of the digital landscape, however, may be optimistic, says Aimee Rinehart, partnerships and development director at First Draft, which uses technology to decide which purposefully misleading messages to address and correct—and which to ignore—based on the likelihood that they'll be spread.

Journalists' assumption is that "you throw facts at someone and that's going to change their minds," says Phillips. "That's not how people make their minds up." Pre-existing bias, personal characteristics and experiences, and other factors have much to do with it; a study in December by the University of Chicago Booth School of Business found that people make judgments and decisions based on comparatively little new information.

**Some, like
CNN's Don Lemon,
think it's the
media's job to
identify shooters**

Consider the flip side, says Mark Follman, national affairs editor at Mother Jones: If the media doesn't initially confront an issue such as white supremacists and what their motivation is, or who it was that opened fire on a crowd, "then you have bad actors on social media putting up false information—using the opportunity of an attack to say, 'Look, it was a Muslim who was shooting up this school.'" That's what happened in the case of the Umpqua Community College shooting, after which right-wing websites variously called the 26-year-old student who killed nine and injured eight a Muslim, an Islamist, or an ISIS sympathizer. He was a student who described himself as nonreligious and a Republican.

The debate rages on, but journalists and others who pay attention to strategic silence say they've started to see coverage slowly change.

"Certainly after Charlottesville, that's where the receptivity shifted," Phillips says. "And then the Christchurch shootings, that has been an even more marked point of shift, where folks are increasingly aware of amplification chains. There's no easy solution. People are more willing to do it better and concerned about the importance of doing it better."

Follman says he thinks a better way to describe the new approach of many journalists is "strategic diminishment. I don't think it's silence." For example, he says, "In my view it's much more about proportionality and balance. When big attacks happen now there tends to be less of a front-and-center spotlight on the perpetrators, on focusing and reporting on them in ways that makes them almost exclusively the story."

During the South Florida Sun-Sentinel's Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage of the Parkland shootings, the newspaper's reporters—under pressure from advocacy groups and some readers—started leaving the suspect's name out of stories, says Dana Banker, managing editor.

She made them put it back, within reason. "We told the staff, 'You've got to stick to your basic standards here,'" says Banker. She defines these as, "Our obligation first and foremost is to our readers and to get the information out there."

In Parkland, too, digging deep into the alleged shooter's history and motivations had important policy implications, since authorities had missed or failed to respond to signs he was a threat. "What happened with this kid and his experience in the school system is important. It's important to know," says Banker.

That's been true not only in Parkland. It was after the publication of the manifesto of the man known as the Unabomber that his brother recognized the writing, helping catch him. Coverage of the perpetrators of the shootings at Virginia Tech, the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas exposed shortcomings in mental health and criminal record-keeping and reporting and loopholes in gun laws.

The Sutherland Springs shooter, for example, should not have been allowed to buy or possess firearms or ammunition, since he had been convicted of domestic violence in a court-martial while in the Air Force. But the Air Force failed to submit the conviction to the FBI database that's used for gun checks. When this fact was unearthed by journalists investigating him, the Air Force promised a review.

But even where journalists stand firm about the public's right to know, they say the strategic silence movement has them thinking.

In the early stages of the Parkland shooting, "we probably played the guy's picture a little bigger than we should have on certain occasions," Banker says of the teenager who allegedly carried it out. "Certainly the outreach and the complaints made us more aware of the issue. We did get more sensitive about not throwing his name into headlines. I do think our sensitivity certainly grew after the initial weeks."

She'll have more opportunities to test this; the Parkland suspect's trial is tentatively scheduled for January.

So will the Courant's Julien. That's because the lawsuit brought by six Sandy Hook families against Alex Jones is also slowly moving through the courts.

"We don't go into great detail about all the conspiracy theories, because if you read some of this stuff, there's some really dark things being said about the kids and their families," Julien says. "But in a court proceeding that balances issues of what is inappropriate and what is free speech, we don't think we can ignore it just because some people might Google Alex Jones."

He, too, says there's much more conversation in his newsroom now, and among editors around the country, about how to cover lies, mass crimes, conspiracy theories, and the ideologies that drive them. "What we're really talking about," Julien says, "is what's the right balance between not aggrandizing these things and also fulfilling our fundamental obligation to inform the public about what's going on." ■

VIEW FROM APPALACHIA COVERING WHITE SUPREMACY AND WHITE NATIONALISM

Establish a community of practice, focus on people experiencing hate, share and corroborate data **BY DANA COESTER**

Since 2016 there has been a dramatic rise in the number and activities of white nationalist groups in the U.S. The number of far-right white supremacist groups has increased by nearly 50 percent from 2017 to 2018; far-right terrorist attacks more than quadrupled in the U.S. between 2016 and 2017, killing an estimated 40 people.

Predictably, along with the rise of right extremism, a new reporting genre has arisen with its own ethical and practical dilemmas: the white supremacy and white nationalism beat.

I have a somewhat unique perspective on white supremacy, being an editor, a reporter, and an academic researcher on the topic. And I am an affected community member. My community, my neighbors, and my friends are experiencing the fallout from recruitment activities and increasing radicalization in Appalachia. Members of my family are targets of hate: My son is the imam of our local mosque, and my daughter-in-law, grandchildren, and extended Muslim family members have increased their level of threat assessment as part of daily life.

So I have professional and personal thoughts I'd like to share on covering white nationalism and white supremacy in America.

In April of 2017, 100 Days in Appalachia, which I edit, covered the Pikeville, Kentucky white supremacist rally staged by Matthew Heimbach and the

Traditionalist Worker Party along with a motley coalition of uniformed neo-Nazis, military-gear "patriot" groups, and Confederate flag-waving members of the League of the South. The event signaled a moment when many national and international media finally acknowledged the endemic racism rooted in populism that characterized the resurgence of the white ethno-state.

A few months after Pikeville we published a historical contextual op-ed that asked our readers to take a good long look in the mirror, and we published a community aftermath piece in response to Charlottesville.

Recall that in Appalachia, and for many other communities across America, Donald Trump's election was not a surprise. The election and subsequent acceleration of public displays of white nationalism and the increase of hate activities merely confirmed for the rest of the world what for millions was simply lived experience.

I struggled with how to dissect the current administration's normalization of white nationalism from within a region that overwhelmingly supported Trump, from ensuring we cited the early investigative work of black women experiencing the online culture that seeded this highly networked, weaponized racism to explaining how this latent cancer was spread by a host of bad actors, from anarchist trolls to Russian agents, and the economic model and ethics vacuum of the social

media platforms themselves.

We have quietly accumulated data and acquired a deepening expertise in several overlapping areas of research that are now feeding larger investigative work. Our immersion engendered an increasing respect for the knotty complexities, historical precedents, and political backdrops in the region and around the world, as well as the increasing security risks to my team and their sources and, above all, the peril to affected community members.

I thought it would be helpful to share the kinds of questions I've asked myself as an editor and explain why we stopped publishing single stand-alone pieces and pivoted to larger cumulative, collaborative, and solutions-focused work.

Who is my audience? If the answer is “other journalists and researchers,” I've declined to publish, and instead have shifted to sharing data directly with a small community of researchers and reporters who I trust.

In the summer of 2018, I was fortunate to participate in a work session hosted by the research institute Data & Society on the topic of covering hate. Data & Society was founded in 2013 to address social and cultural issues and risks at the intersection of data and technology. In the aftermath of Pikeville and Charlottesville, their researchers had the foresight to recognize the lack of information, shared vocabulary, ethics models, and security practices for journalists wading into this milieu.

The workshop assembled approximately 30 local, regional, and national reporters along with researchers and activists. Sessions and conversations helped to steer journalists to move past the spectacle of rallies and protests—and the oversimplified, stereotypical “lone-wolf/troubled-individual”

coverage that has characterized so much white nationalism reporting—and to provide additional context for placing their coverage in the arc of history. Perhaps even more importantly, it began to establish a community of practice.

This is ugly, traumatizing, and lonely work. Community is necessary. That said, as difficult as it is for researchers and reporters covering it, I know personally how much more deeply traumatic it is for affected community members living it.

Who is missing? These are the people, in fact, most consistently left out of coverage: community members experiencing the impact of hate and threats in their lives as well as the rise of radicalization among loved ones.

I understand the rationale behind admonishments to cease reporting on white nationalists at the risk of amplifying hate. And for most of the reporting I've read, I agree we need way less of it. Our own internal motto is, “First do no harm.”

Despite all the coverage of far right figures, from my community's perspective there has been a fundamental failure to see the problem hiding in plain sight. The subtleties of this ecosystem include coded language and an online grooming process decoupled from swastikas and other overt symbols of hate. Decoding these strategies and tactics may help community members identify susceptible individuals and take actions to disrupt the radicalization process before it's too late.

Does the work offer solutions? A few weeks ago, a mother in my community sat on my porch and said, “I'm afraid my kid is becoming a Nazi, and I don't understand why.”

A woman protests the presence of white nationalists in Charlottesville in 2017

She is not on Twitter following white supremacy journalists or reading research from academics. Even if she were, would that help her? She desperately wants to understand what is happening in our community and in her home, and she deserves to be informed in a way that enables action. She wants more information, not less.

To help her and others achieve that, we are engaging community members as collaborating partners in devising practical interventions, not simply as sources or “characters” in a story. This personal outreach, using old-fashioned community organizing methods, is enabling us to conduct focus groups by word of mouth with parents, youth, teachers, librarians, church leaders, and other members of our community who have the potential to disrupt or counter exposure to radicalizing content.

Likewise, our reporting must fully engage the targeted communities of hate. What do each of these affected community members need from this reporting and research? We are asking them. This includes hosting small focus groups in protected settings with Jewish, Muslim, and black youth and parents and using methods to ensure their anonymity.

If there is anything the past three years of work on this topic has taught me, it is that we need

to have the courage and humility to eschew scoops in order to build a larger community of intervention. We need to share and corroborate each other's data and research. We need to connect the dots across our respective rabbit holes of knowledge and expertise. And this call for collaboration must extend beyond researchers, activists, and journalists to center the needs and questions of affected community members.

The Saturday morning after the Christchurch shooting in New Zealand, in which a man killed 51 and injured many others at two mosques, my extended family sat in resigned sadness in my kitchen. We strategized about security and conducted threat assessments.

One family member took notes, making a list of things to do. The fact that the piece of paper was set aside with a sigh at the futility of devising solutions tells me something about what is missing in our reporting. The first step is to increase security, the second to consider active shooter training, but subsequent steps to address the systemic problem remain elusive.

While media dwell on trauma and dissects the psychological states of individual characters, what should the third step be?

As journalists and researchers, we must work with our communities to help fill in the blank. ■



NOT A 'CRIME OF PASSION'



Covering domestic violence as an urgent social crisis, not a private family matter

BY SUSAN STELLIN



WHEN MELISSA JELTSSEN Googled Lorena Bobbitt's name a few years ago, she was surprised to learn that the woman known for cutting off her husband's penis in 1993 had started a charity to help victims of domestic violence. Jeltsen covers domestic

violence for HuffPost and was a child when that incident happened. She says she didn't remember learning about the domestic violence aspect of the Bobbitt case. "In the cultural memory, she was just a vindictive woman who lost her mind and assaulted him."

Jeltsen contacted Bobbitt and eventually convinced her to be interviewed for an article published in December 2016, "Lorena Bobbitt Is Done Being Your Punchline." Besides examining Bobbitt's legal case in light of contemporary views about domestic violence and sexual assault, Jeltsen calls out her harsh treatment by the press—a theme that's striking in the "Lorena" docuseries the article inspired, which debuted on Amazon in February.

"As I was revisiting the media coverage and the footage of the trial I was just so shocked," Jeltsen says. Clips in the four-part series show that it wasn't just late-night comedians and tabloids that overlooked the record of sexual and physical abuse in Bobbitt's marriage; leading media outlets made questionable ethical decisions that further sensationalized the case. For instance, while a Vanity Fair article included a lengthy discussion of the marital rape aspects of the case, the photographer for the magazine persuaded Bobbitt to pose in a bathing suit in a pool, reinforcing the "hot-blooded Latina" narrative that dominated the cultural conversation.

A year later, in 1994, the Violence Against Women Act was passed, the first federal legislation acknowledging sexual assault and domestic violence as crimes, which expanded services and protections for victims.

More recently, the #MeToo movement and revela-

tions of misconduct by dozens of high-profile men ignited a torrent of media coverage of sexual assault—including accusations of wrongdoing by top news anchors, editors, reporters, photographers, and radio hosts. But journalists who cover domestic violence say the topic hasn't had the same cultural reckoning among the public or the press. Despite the recent popularity of documentary series like "Lorena," media coverage of domestic violence has not yet led to widespread understanding of just how pervasive a problem it is.

Given the historical underrepresentation of women in many newsrooms, particularly in leadership positions, it's not surprising that reporting on domestic violence has not gotten the same level of attention as some other social issues. "I think that did shape the coverage," Jeltsen says. "If it's only men telling the stories, what lens are they looking through?"

Jeltsen and other journalists are finding ways to elevate reporting on domestic violence, while also advocating for more sensitivity and accuracy in how it is covered. Reporters are exploring how factors like race, class, and immigration status can influence victims' vulnerability to domestic violence and willingness to report it, as well as how the criminal justice system and service providers deal with these cases. They're also examining the roots of the problem, efforts to rehabilitate perpetrators, and patterns of abuse, such as strangulation, that are more likely to end in the victim's death.

While domestic violence can include sexual assault, it also refers to physical, emotional, or psychological actions or threats to gain control over a current or former intimate partner. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner; 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner, such as slapping or pushing. But the limitations of national government surveys, gaps in crime data collected by

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFTEN HAPPENS IN PRIVATE, PERPETUATED BY SECRECY, SHAME, & SILENCE



PREVIOUS SPREAD
Hundreds of red shoes representing victims of domestic violence are spread across Habima Square in Tel Aviv, Israel in 2018 as part of a nationwide strike in protest of violence against women

LEFT
A rally against gender violence in Valparaiso, Chile in 2016

the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and under-reporting by victims have made it difficult for journalists to obtain statistics capturing the scope of the problem, as well as to convince editors and readers to care. Finding sources willing to speak openly about their experiences with domestic violence can also be a challenge, particularly when an abuser is still a threat.

Based on 2016 homicide data collected by the FBI, a study by the nonprofit Violence Policy Center found that, in the U.S., 962 women that year were killed by a husband, common-law husband, ex-husband, or boyfriend. However, neither Florida nor Alabama submitted data and the relationship of perpetrator to victim could not be determined for all homicides. A study by James Alan Fox and Emma E. Fridel at Northeastern University found that 44 percent of women killed between 2007 and 2015 were killed by an intimate partner, compared with 5 percent of men who were killed by an intimate partner.

“It’s very difficult to report on because there’s already so much blame that exists beneath the surface for women who are in abusive relationships,” Jeltsen says. These judgments can include speculation that she “must’ve done something to deserve it” or believing “it would never happen to me,” as well as questioning why women in these situations don’t just leave. In order to address those assumptions, Jeltsen says, it’s important to present the complexities of the decisions a woman may face, like a husband who threatened to kill her, or a lack of financial resources, or a reluctance to report a crime that could lead to a lengthy prison sentence, particularly for an African American man. Jeltsen has written features that highlight broader themes about the perpetrators and victims, such as “The Super Predators: When the Man Who Abuses You Is Also a Cop” and “The Quiet Crisis Killing Black Women,” about how racism in the criminal justice system and society at large makes black women less willing to report domestic violence crimes.

Describing her feature on black women’s distrust of the criminal justice system, Jeltsen says: “I couldn’t have written that story the first year I was on this beat because I didn’t understand those nuances as much.” Jeltsen began reporting the story after Delashon Jefferson was killed by her boyfriend, whom she had reported to the police for assaulting her and threatening her with a gun. She and other witnesses decided not to cooperate with the prosecution if the case went to trial, so he was granted a plea deal that included probation, drug testing, anger management classes, and a prohibition on owning a gun—although within a year he fatally shot her in front of their young son.

“You look at that from the outside and you’re like, ‘The criminal justice system failed,’” Jeltsen says, explaining that she could imagine people reading it and being judgmental about Jefferson’s decision. But she had come to understand that reluctance given how the criminal justice system treats black men. “Talking to her family and people in her community, I can understand why she did not want to be responsible for him spending 15 years behind bars.”

The failures and limitations of a criminal justice system long dominated by men and the toll on children are



Lauren Justice sought to capture the perpetrator’s perspective when she photographed men participating in a batterer intervention class. Clockwise from upper-left: Victor, Rodney, Teddy, and Jake

powerful themes in the documentary “Home Truth,” directed by April Hayes and Katia Maguire. Filmed over nine years, it chronicles Jessica Lenahan’s fight to seek justice for her three young daughters, who were murdered by their father in 1999. Lenahan (formerly Gonzales) sued the town of Castle Rock, Colorado and its police department for not enforcing the restraining order she had been granted against her estranged husband Simon, who had engaged in threatening behavior after their relationship ended. Officers didn’t investigate the girls’ disappearance the night he took them and shot them, despite the court order restricting his contact with the family. The Supreme Court ruled 7-2 against Lenahan in 2005, raising questions about the value of restraining orders and whether they’re taken seriously by law enforcement and the judicial system.

One of the most galling moments in the film is the late Justice Antonin Scalia’s flippant comment that Castle Rock was also a 1920s dance.

“We included that Scalia joke because that was something Jessica said really bothered her,” Maguire recalls. “She felt the justices were very cavalier in this moment



when she was getting a decision about the most traumatic thing that happened in her life.”

Restraining orders were introduced in the 1970s and, in Lenahan’s case, a Colorado court determined that Simon’s meetings with his daughters had to be arranged in advance. But questions have been raised about the effectiveness of these orders and whether gender bias in policing has impacted how they are enforced. Jeltsen’s article about domestic abuse by police officers cites a 1991 survey of more than 700 police officers finding that 40 percent admitted that they had “behaved violently against their spouse and children.”

Even witnessing domestic violence can have long-term effects on children’s mental health and is associated with offending as an adult. A 2011 Department of Justice report found that 1 in 9 children were exposed to some form of family violence in the past year, mostly witnessing violence between their parents or a parent and partner. About 450 children on average are killed by a parent every year in the U.S., according to an analysis of FBI data.

“Home Truth” makes the girls more than just victims by showing many home videos Lenahan shared—holidays and birthday celebrations juxtaposed with footage of their funeral—which also reveals how domestic violence can impact what may seem like a typical home. But the film is primarily about the toll of her lengthy legal and advocacy battle, particularly how it impacted her son, Jessie. He acknowledges conflicting feelings in interviews throughout the documentary, commenting that Lenahan “chose the case over me” and later saying, “I can’t even begin to judge my mom because I haven’t lost my children.” At different points, Lenahan admits, “He wants me to be unbroken and I’m not ... I feel pretty deserving of his distance from me.”

Sharon Jefferson holds her grandson, Rayray Rainey, whose mother Delashon Jefferson was murdered by her boyfriend. HuffPost’s Melissa Jeltsen wrote about Delashon and other black women who were murdered by intimate partners

Maguire says she and Hayes were grateful for how generous and open Lenahan and her son were, and tried to give an honest portrayal of their bond, including the tension between them at times. They filmed Lenahan and Jessie separately and together over the years, hoping to show “how two members of a family who have gone through this really traumatic experience of losing these girls process things differently,” Maguire says. “We definitely made choices in terms of what to tell and what not to tell. As in all families, really hurtful things were said at times, and we didn’t want to shy away from that. We also wanted to make sure it was fair to our overall sense of what their relationship was and where it was heading.”

Another challenge for the filmmakers was the long wait to find out if Lenahan would achieve anything through her fight. They first met her in 2008, as she was taking her case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, an attempt to get a regional body to take action after she lost her Supreme Court case. Lenahan became a collaborator, occasionally filming herself during the three years she waited for the commission to rule that the U.S. had violated her and her daughters’ rights—footage that shows her perspective and lets viewers experience some of her frustration. But it took another four years before the Justice Department issued guidelines on preventing gender bias in the way law enforcement responds to sexual assault and domestic violence.

For Rachel Louise Snyder, author of “No Visible Bruises: What We Don’t Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us,” published in May, the prolonged time frame of domestic violence cases is critical for journalists—and readers—to understand. “I think the most important thing to consider when reporting on domestic violence is what most people are up against with time,” she says.

WITNESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A CHILD IS ASSOCIATED WITH BEING AN ADULT OFFENDER

“Domestic violence is ongoing, oftentimes for years.”

Because of that lengthy timespan, as well as the impact of trauma on memory, someone who has experienced or even witnessed violence can appear to be unreliable when describing what happened to them. In an article for Nieman Storyboard, Snyder recently analyzed her 2013 article for *The New Yorker*, “A Raised Hand: Can a new approach curb domestic violence?”—an assignment she landed by pointing out that if women were killing their husbands at such an alarming rate it would be front-page news across the U.S. She also has written about the under-examined link between domestic violence and traumatic brain injury, which can be caused by physical blows as well as strangulation and losing consciousness, and says she uses various strategies to help sources recall past events.

“What I have people do is recount their stories again and again to me,” she says. “In any traumatic situation, we know memory is faulty. But if I hear a story five times, some of those details will be recurring.” She also asks sources to write out a timeline and draw a bird’s-eye view of the scene, which can prompt details they’ve buried to rise to the surface. “It’s like it loosens them up,” Snyder says. “As they’re focused on drawing, it allows their memory to kick in.”

In order to protect the identity of victims, who in many cases are still vulnerable to future violence, Snyder says she’ll identify someone as 30-something instead of giving a specific age or say she lived in the northern part of New York instead of naming a city. She has heard comments like “he broke CDs and threatened to slit my throat” often enough during the decade she has covered domestic violence that she feels comfortable including that detail in a story without it being obviously linked to a specific case.

Inevitably, these are painful stories to share—and hear. Reporting on this topic requires empathy and patience, particularly when sources are still in danger and may change their minds about being in an article or need time to weigh the risks. Snyder points out that patience and restraint are also important during interviews, when she has learned to wait out difficult silences and resist the urge to interject or react. “You have to fight against every instinct to comfort them and just allow them to sit in that awkward space and experience that moment again,” she says. “Because that’s when you’re going to hear the truth.”

Snyder says that technique also applies to her conversations with perpetrators, mentioning a man she interviewed in prison who broke down and let out “an animalistic noise” after describing “the worst thing somebody can do to someone they know.” That perspective can be much more difficult to capture, she says, explaining that she has found that victims are much more willing to talk than the perpetrators. “We don’t spend enough time trying to find out why violence happens in the first place,” she says.

Snyder also mentioned that domestic violence against men and within the LGBTQ community has not been discussed as much as violence against women, in part because of stigma. “There’s deep shame associated with being a victim no matter who you are, but that shame is

amplified when you’re a man.”

Lauren Justice, a photographer based in Madison, Wisconsin, set out to explore the perpetrator’s perspective with a project that was published in *The New York Times* in March: “What Would I Have Done if I Would Have Killed Her That Night?” During a three-year mentorship program sponsored by the Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Justice began photographing women she met at a shelter for victims of domestic violence, initially intending to document how they started over after leaving an abusive partner. “Then I realized I wanted to focus on the root of the issue,” she says. “I wanted to talk to the people who were perpetrating the abuse.”

She first interviewed a local professor who had run batterer intervention programs, research that helped her understand how they worked before she connected with a facilitator who introduced her to Victor, one of the men she eventually interviewed and photographed. After speaking on the phone, they met on “neutral ground”: an Arby’s, where she explained what she was hoping to do with the project. At that meeting, she didn’t turn on her recorder or take any photos. “I knew from the beginning it was going to be a very long process and the main thing was to be patient and persistent,” she says.

By attending the batterer intervention class, she gained a deeper understanding of the situations the men described—about their childhood, their dating history, and their life experience—as well as whether they expressed any empathy or accountability, factors program facilitators told her they use to measure success. “Being present for those conversations in the class helped guide my interviews, and when to ask a question again or a different way,” Justice says.

In some cases, she was able to speak with the men’s current and former partners and included their perspective about the impact of the class in her essay. One woman who resumed a relationship with her partner Jake after a few years apart is quoted saying, “You can tell that he was taught a different way on how to handle himself through that class,” while another woman who is no longer with her former partner said she didn’t observe a positive change after he completed the class.

Justice continued to volunteer at a shelter while she worked on this project, and in the essay accompanying her photo series writes about “listening to terrifying stories of survival” from the women, then attending the batterers intervention class and hearing “these men’s minimizations and denials”—as well as the breakthroughs that sometimes happened. She also discloses her own history of being in an abusive relationship, a fact she shared with the men if they asked.

Justice’s essay ran in the Op-Ed section of the *Times*, but she said she worked hard not to let her personal experience or opinions influence how she presented the men in her series, who reveal a range of self-awareness about their behavior. “I spent a lot of time talking to the facilitator after classes and also a network of advocates,” she says. “I also had a really great support system through the journalism community and that mentorship program. Having that balance was really important.” In addition, conversations with the program facilitator and researchers

who study domestic violence helped her ensure that the information she included in her essay was “in line with what the experts had experienced as well.”

One of the things journalists who cover domestic violence wrestle with is finding angles to report on that go beyond describing what happens to victims—ideally, giving readers a fuller perspective on the complexities of this crime. Editors who green-light pitches are known for asking, “What’s new about this?” and, after spending a while reporting on domestic violence, it becomes apparent just how common it is. As much as media coverage of mass shootings follows a familiar narrative, too, those events draw camera crews. Domestic violence typically happens in private, perpetuated by secrecy, shame, and silence.

For the series “Behind the Front Door – Inside Domestic Violence in Greenwich,” Emilie Munson wanted to explore how those factors impact the way that domestic violence is dealt with in a wealthy community in Connecticut. The five-part series ran in Greenwich Time in late 2017, with separate installments focusing on the victims, the police, the courts, the children, and the abusers. Munson was hired to cover education for the paper, but ended up spending 16 months working on this project. “Domestic violence is the number one violent crime in Greenwich and it is the second most investigated crime overall—second only to larceny,” Munson says. “We wanted to explore the role of wealth in domestic violence in particular and how that can exacerbate the problem.”

She first met with staff at the YWCA Greenwich, the only certified provider of services to domestic violence victims in town, and did training on how to do trauma-sensitive interviewing with victims. Munson says it was difficult to find survivors who were willing to share their stories, particularly in a community where people are “very careful about media exposure” and often reluctant to speak to reporters. Although she interviewed a dozen survivors, not all of their stories made it into the

series, which also included articles about the Greenwich Police Department’s domestic violence unit and the way that perpetrators can use the court system to harass and financially bankrupt their victims.

Some articles, like “Wealth Does Not Protect the Abused” and “Male Power, Privilege Drive Most Abusers,” directly address the intersection of money, power, and gender—illustrating how wealthy perpetrators can control their victims by denying access to bank accounts and exploiting their partners’ fear of challenging men who wield influence in the community.

Munson says she became interested in the law enforcement response because police officers are often the first outsiders to find out about domestic violence the victim has kept secret from family and friends. “It might be that spur of the moment 911 call that brings the first person into the home to see there was an issue,” Munson says, adding that she also wanted to explore the emotional toll on officers who respond to sometimes horrific scenes. Besides many interviews with the head of the domestic violent unit, she spoke with at least four other police officers who work in the unit, saying they were very candid when discussing “the strengths and shortcomings of the police apparatus to respond to these cases” as well as describing the relationships they built with survivors.

For her article, “A Child Silenced by Domestic Abuse,” she ended up profiling a woman who had experienced domestic violence as a child and years later helped her daughter escape a similarly violent marriage—illustrating the multigenerational effects of domestic abuse. That article was accompanied by a list of symptoms of domestic violence exposure for children in different age ranges, while others in the series listed domestic violence hotlines and local service providers. Munson also hosted Facebook Live events to answer readers’ questions throughout the publication of the series, saying the response was “overwhelmingly positive.”

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT NARRATIVES OF ROMANTIC LOVE IN THE MEDIA ABOUT DOMESTIC ABUSE DEATHS CAN LEAD TO LIGHTER SENTENCES



Vanessa Wilson is the domestic abuse services manager at YWCA Greenwich. In a five-part series, Greenwich Time investigated how domestic violence is addressed in the wealthy Connecticut town

The questions ranged from inquiries about the criminal justice system—e.g. “Why don’t judges enforce court orders to protect women?” and “How often do DV perpetrators end up in jail versus in a diversionary program?”—to curiosity about the reporting process, like “Have you ever felt unsafe reporting these stories?”

Listing a domestic violence helpline with articles about this topic is one of the recommendations in media guidelines issued last year by the U.K. feminist group Level Up. Titled “Dignity for Dead Women,” the guidelines offer best practices for journalists reporting on domestic violence deaths. They include tips like clearly placing the responsibility on the killer (without using clichés like “jilted lover”), naming the crime as domestic abuse or violence (not a “tragedy” or “horror”), and avoiding insensitive or trivializing language and images (bearing in mind the impact on children who may read graphic reports about their mother’s death).

Rossalyn Warren, a London-based freelance reporter who was an advisor for the guidelines, says she was approached by the group because of her criticisms of the way the British press cover women murdered by a current or former partner (about two deaths per week in the U.K.). “I think one of the biggest issues is the idea of the motivation of the perpetrator of domestic violence. A lot of the narrative in these stories is centered around something the victim did that led to their murder,” Warren says.

Warren says that type of victim blaming is apparent in articles that suggest a man was jealous because he found out his former partner had a new boyfriend, or “flew into a rage” when he learned she was going to leave him. Although leaving an abusive man is when women are at high risk of being killed, articles that fail to provide context about that history of violence misinform the public by framing a murder as an incident rather than the culmination of a pattern.

In 2016, Warren wrote an article for BuzzFeed News about “The Men Who Murder Their Families,” pointing out that in news coverage of cases of murder-suicide in Britain and Ireland, “[T]he press focused on how the men were upstanding members of the local community, with little mention or detail of the women and children who had been killed.” Instead of quoting researchers who have studied these types of “family annihilators,” journalists tended to quote neighbors or friends describing the perpetrator with phrases like “a real gentleman” and “a good man.”

The Level Up guidelines recommend centering an image of the deceased woman, and including a photo of the perpetrator lower in the article. The report also provides a link to royalty-free images of models taken by Laura Dodsworth, who was commissioned by Scottish Women’s Aid and Zero Tolerance to take a series of photographs that “do not show bruises, or physical violence”—highlighting that domestic abuse can also be emotional, financial, and verbal.

Although Warren has found that younger journalists in the U.K. are more aware of domestic violence and committed to covering it fairly, particularly since the #MeToo movement, she feels that this topic has not had the same impact yet. “I think there hasn’t been a

PERCENTAGE OF MURDER VICTIMS KILLED BY AN INTIMATE PARTNER, 2007-2015

44%
WOMEN

5%
MEN

SOURCE:

“Gender Differences in Patterns and Trends in U.S. Homicide, 1976-2015” by James Alan Fox and Emma E. Fridel

great reckoning with the scale of domestic violence in society,” she says. “Training within newsrooms would be hugely beneficial.”

For instance, the Level Up guidelines cite research showing that narratives of romantic love in media reports about domestic abuse deaths can lead to lighter sentencing in court—even when there is clear evidence of violence preceding the murder. “Every article on domestic abuse is an opportunity to help prevent further deaths,” the guidelines advise, noting that perpetrators often share behavioral patterns that reveal risk. In the U.S., one of those risks is being involved with a violent partner who owns a gun.

Dawn Wilcox, a school nurse in Plano, Texas, started tracking women and girls murdered by men in the U.S. after she noticed the outpouring of sympathy following the killing of a gorilla at the Cincinnati Zoo and a lion shot by a Minnesota hunter in Zimbabwe. Hoping to generate similar outrage about female victims of violence, she started a public spreadsheet called Women Count USA, which lists the names, ages, photographs, locations, and cause of death of women and girls allegedly murdered by men. She also includes the names and photos of the alleged perpetrator, suspect, or person of interest and other details about the crime, such as whether the man had been in the military or worked in law enforcement—in part because the public can’t access officers’ disciplinary records involving abuse and also “they’re deciding whether or not sexual assault cases move forward.”

Wilcox estimates she has documented about 1,650 cases on her 2018 spreadsheet so far. “I only have women on my list that journalists cared enough to write about, so I haven’t even done open records requests. You’d have to go to each police department because you can’t rely on federal statistics.”

“One thing I’ve come away from this work with is the absolute horror of witnessing how brutal, callous, and vicious men are when they kill women,” Wilcox says. “I want people to scroll through my spreadsheet and I want them to be shocked. I want them to be sad and angry and I want them to act and care.”

Wilcox uses the phrase “corrective femicide” in her spreadsheet, highlighting cases where men rationalized a killing with excuses like “he heard her talking to another man” or she “disrespected him.”

As someone who has been in an abusive relationship, she views the use of “survivor” or “victim” as a personal choice, although she has concerns about removing the word victim from this discussion. “It doesn’t bother me to be called a domestic violence victim or a sexual assault victim because I am both—I don’t think it portrays me as weak,” she says. “But for me when you eliminate the word ‘victim’ it clouds the mind that someone did something to someone.”

Her media criticism and advocacy stems from recognizing the power of the press, to change laws as well as public opinion. The latter role is critical for improving the public’s understanding of domestic violence.

After all, she points out, “These are people who are going to be on juries”—and can ultimately impact whether the perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. ■

CHILE, KENYA, CHINA: HOW THE MEDIA COVERS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Chile: Femicide is not a “crime melodrama”

BY PAULA MOLINA
TRANSLATED BY
DICK CLUSTER

THERE ARE NO crimes in Chile more violent than the ones committed against women.

In the country with the fewest homicides in Latin America, and one of the safest, a woman is found unconscious, her eyes ripped out. The body of a young woman, seven months pregnant, is found a year after her disappearance just a hundred yards from her house, under a layer of lime and concrete. A woman is murdered, at home, alongside her mother. Another is recovering in a hospital after a knife attack that killed almost all of her family; her mother and younger sister died, her father managed to escape with a chest wound, crying for help.

These are not crimes linked to drug traffickers, gangs, or political repression. These are examples of women attacked in Chile by men with whom, in most of the cases, they were in intimate relationships—current or former husbands or domestic partners, a crime that in Chile is called femicide. They are recent cases of extreme violence

against women in a country which, even by official figures, has seen 24 such femicides in the first half of this year, and 53 attempted ones.

And yet, femicides and other attacks against women—in spite of their frequency, in spite of specific legal prohibitions, in spite of longstanding efforts by public and grassroots organizations to make violence against women more visible as a widespread public and social problem—are still portrayed in large swaths of the Chilean media as exceptional and isolated events.

Whether in the form of a news brief in a mainstream newspaper or of serialized reports in the tabloids and on morning TV shows, violent crime against women tends to appear in the media as an individual or family drama.

This stubborn narrative of violence against women as a personal issue (that is, as private and even shameful to the women) traditionally figured in the Chilean press under the rubric of “crimes of passion.” Mistreatment of women was presented as a result of a kind of fit or outburst, terminology that can also be used in court cases as an extenuating circumstance. The perpetrator “killed for love” or “was blinded by jealousy,” which meant that the woman attacked or killed

A rally against gender violence in Santiago, Chile in 2018

was, in some fashion, complicit with her attacker. Her clothes, her physical characteristics, her habits, her hidden motives were all things the attacker could not resist.

Today, in many national media, this narrative has taken a new form: a crime melodrama or detective story. Its leading platform is the television screen, especially on the morning shows, with their blend of information and entertainment.

In these serialized stories—which follow unsolved or high-impact cases—the attacker appears as a mere instrument, the medium through which inscrutable and capricious fate has found a victim. The murderer’s intelligence challenges police and prosecutors or exposes their incompetence. The disappeared or murdered woman is scrutinized—not to humanize her, not to tell who she is, but rather to find in her life the keys that will unlock the mystery of her death. Her Facebook page, her habits, her makeup, or her clothes are no longer explicitly suggested as provoking the attack. Instead they become clues, but their function within the story of aggression is strangely similar, and the effect—to sow suspicion

about the victim or put her on the spot—is the same.

The medium of television adds new doses of spectacle to the formula: dramatic re-creations with evocative soundtracks, accompanied by the opinions of retired detectives or even so-called clairvoyants. In recent years, the institution that receives complaints about television programming, the National Television Council, has logged a record number of such comments about the coverage of two cases of violence against women. In one, the psychological profile of a murdered young woman was divulged by a TV station. In the other, gynecological information about a woman was revealed in the middle of the trial of her aggressor.

It's as if we were reading "The Handmaid's Tale" in the key of "Murders in the Rue Morgue."

"Above all, the morning shows appeal to a sense of spectacle," says Claudia Pascual, who was Chile's first minister for women and gender equity, a cabinet-level position created by President Michelle Bachelet. "They drag out an old case with novel episodes. They spin theories, speculate, create a spectacle without at all aiding the investigation. And there's no reflection or analysis, no condemnation of the crime as a case of gender-based violence. They turn it into a show, a Netflix series."

The persistence of these narratives in their various forms contrasts with the long history of the Chilean feminist movement, whose leaders raised their voices almost a century ago, and with the tenacious work that hundreds of women began under the Pinochet military regime to make violence against women a public policy issue.

It is, on the other hand, consistent with persistent gender inequality that is

demonstrated by the small number of women in any positions of power in the country, whether it be in government, business, or religious organizations.

It wasn't until 1994 that Chile approved a family violence law. In 2005, it made "habitual mistreatment" a crime. In 2010, it passed a femicide law that applied to murders committed by current or former spouses or live-in partners. The introduction of the term "femicide" and the public record-keeping of such crimes propelled discussion and attention to domestic violence. It gave the mass media an accurate term to describe the murders of women by their partners. It showed the pattern of violence that had, in many cases, gone on for years. Often, the response of the police and the justice system had been insufficient.

In 2018, Chilean women, drawing on the international #MeToo movement and the Argentinian anti-femicide movement #niunamenos ("not one [woman] less"), gathered force, paralyzing universities and bringing thousands of women into the streets.

One of the main effects of this "third wave" Chilean feminism on the press has been to open more spaces for voices demanding gender equality and calling out machismo. Grassroots groups that had been doing community work for years began to be heard in the media, which started giving more space to conversations about sexism, street harassment, and gender stereotypes. In many cases, the press began to react to pressure from social networks in which activists and others called on the journalists to give non-sexist coverage to these cases.

Thanks to all of this persistent political, institutional, and social effort, it has grown and more difficult for the media

to continue romanticizing femicides as crimes of passion, to present these crimes as an abnormality affecting the life of just one woman, whose misfortune the audience can watch with horror or commiseration, but above all, as a curiosity.

Yet, in spite of all the legislative advances and vigilant work by activists, civil society, readers, viewers, and NGOs, the media repeatedly fail to present these stories as the most extreme expression of an inequality that permeates all realms of the nation's life.

Journalism must not justify crimes against women by way of romanticizing the perpetrators, nor by playing the puzzled detective. The challenge to the press is to see and present violence against women as a problem that affects not only those who are attacked or killed, or their families and friends, but every single member of society. ■

Kenya: Blaming the victim, excusing the perpetrator

BY CHRISTINE MUNGAI

FIVE YEARS AGO, I was nearly killed by a man I shared a home and two small children with.

As I lay in the dark, waiting for it to be safe to leave, I don't really remember crying, or even feeling physical pain—yet. In moments of such great anguish, the mind has a strange way of distracting itself with seemingly small things. As Chinua Achebe said, it is like the man who is carrying the carcass of an elephant on his head and is searching with his toes for a grasshopper.

So that night, I remember thinking of a statistic I had just come across that week, as part of my data journalism work, that a woman is more likely to be killed by a current or former

intimate partner than anyone else; more than 69 percent of women murdered in Africa in 2017 were killed by a current or former intimate partner or family member. These were no longer mere numbers to me; they had taken on a terrifying life of their own. And I remember thinking that if I died, a story could very easily be spun in which I would be framed as responsible for my own murder. I wanted to live to tell the story of that night. Most of all, I wanted my mother to hear it from me.

Mine was by no means an isolated case. In the first six months of 2019, at least 60 cases of women killed by current or former intimate partners were reported in local Kenyan newspapers.

But that's usually just the beginning of the ordeal. Media reporting invariably tends toward blaming the women for their own deaths. Take Sharon Otieno, a 26-year-old student who, at seven months pregnant, was found raped and stabbed to death, including a stab wound that killed her fetus *in utero*, allegedly on the orders of her lover, a local governor. Her gruesome murder provided fodder on talk radio for weeks, where she was vilified as a "slay queen" who deserved what came upon her, as if these were the natural consequences of being the mistress of a powerful man. ["Slay queen" is a derogatory term for women who are in transactional relationships with older, wealthy men, termed "sponsors."]

In another horrifying instance, Ivy Wangechi was a sixth-year medical student who had just finished her ward rounds when a man she knew, who had been stalking her, attacked her with an ax, killing her on the spot. A number of local blogs reported that she had been killed because she had infected the man with HIV, unsubstantiated claims in several blog posts that seemed

to reference each other as sources. The rumor spread like wildfire on social media. It got so bad that her family actually had to come out of mourning to set the record straight in a press conference.

On the other hand, the alleged perpetrators are typically painted with a kind, humanizing touch in media reports, and their brutal actions rationalized.

A leading newspaper ran a story with the headline “Ivy Wangechi’s killer: A quiet worker and teetotaler” the day after her murder. In media reports, the man was apparently incensed after she refused to pick up his phone calls, especially after he had sent her money on a number of occasions: “He claimed he had invested a lot in the girl but that she did not reciprocate his kindness and financial support.”

In Otieno’s case, the governor linked to her murder was arrested, but some media reports focused, for a time, on the big question of how the high profile and wealthy governor was adjusting to tough jail conditions, framed in such a sympathetic tone that he almost seemed the hero for braving it all.

Just a few weeks ago, one of the highest-rated morning radio shows in Nairobi asked, “Guys, what’s the worst thing a woman could do to make you end her life?” The question invited listeners to debate possible justifiable reasons for murder, live on radio and

on their social media pages, cheerfully punctuated by banter, and advertisements for detergent and the like. It was only in the wake of outrage on social media that the offending posts were deleted after the show, but the radio hosts and station suffered no consequences.

The rationalization for this kind of murder is just part of the unrelenting physical, social and psychic violence directed toward women in Kenya, and in many other parts of the world. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 69 percent of all women intentionally killed in Africa in 2017 were killed by intimate partners or other family members. According to Kenya’s Demographic and Health Survey, among ever-married women, the most commonly reported perpetrator of physical violence is the current husband or partner (57 percent) followed by the former husband/partner (24 percent). By contrast, only about 1 in 10 men who have experienced physical violence since age 15 mention their current spouse as a perpetrator of physical violence.

These are not spontaneous “crimes of passion” or “love gone wrong” as the Kenyan media frequently frames it. Murder is often just the last and escalated act of violence against women.

Women’s lives are objects “upon which men specifically, and society in general, can inflict their hatred, derive

their pleasure, and exact their ownership over their lives and bodies at will,” without regard for the rights and freedoms of women, according to activist group The Feminist Collective, who are calling the crisis for what it really is—not domestic violence, or the consequence of “immorality” typified by the so-called slay queen, but *femicide*. It is murder that targets women specifically, a direct consequence of inequality created by patriarchy, exacerbated by a justice system that favors the powerful (mostly men), and public opinion that rationalizes violence against women. It is a tool “used to subdue women who are seen to have ‘overstepped their bounds’ at home, and in public and political spaces.”

The crisis is getting public attention, in the wake of increased pressure from groups like The Feminist Collective in Kenya, and the amplification of the issue by the social media activism of ordinary people.

Groups of women in three major Kenyan cities came together on March 8, 2019, International Women’s Day, to protest against femicide in Kenya, organizing under the hashtag #TotalShutdownKE. Counting Dead Women Kenya (@deadwomen_ke) is a Twitter account that does the grim and necessary work of tracking femicide cases reported in the media.

With this kind of sustained pressure, public sentiment is growing that this is no trivial matter. Dominant media framings, as a result, are frequently being challenged in op-eds and on talk shows, especially by feminists who are calling attention to the broader misogyny and impunity that leaves women most vulnerable to violence. They have called

for crimes against women to be taken more seriously and that they must be treated as actual crimes; they have called for a broader conversation that must involve men, who have a lot of unpacking and unlearning to do, especially “with their entitlement to woman’s bodies, time, space, labor, and energy,” said activist and lawyer Vivian Ouya in an interview with The Star newspaper.

Other voices have argued that the murders are related to rising rates of depression in men, or that it is a simply a generational crisis, in which today’s young men in particular are entitled, socially adrift, and unable to deal with rejection, and young people in general are stressed by the worst effects of poverty, limited economic opportunities, and a culture of political violence.

Still, the official—government—response has tended to disconnect femicide from broader political and economic dysfunction, as if murder is an unfortunate but merely extreme version of ordinary relationship drama. It isn’t. Violence against women escalates when impunity reigns and when political systems favor the powerful (mostly men).

Journalists should explicitly make these connections, so that violence against women is not rendered unthinkable—it is, in fact, the job of journalists to make any crisis thinkable. The media should avoid falling back on the familiar, sensational tropes that frame this kind of violence as “killing for love,” or that blame women for their own deaths. And media outlets should not get away with hypothesizing murder for the sake of entertainment, as that Nairobi radio station did.

Ultimately, it will take a much deeper national reckoning to make women’s lives matter. For me, I was fortunate that I managed to escape with my life and my children—and that my mother heard the story from me. ■

Kenyans protest during an International Women’s Day March in Nairobi in 2019



China: Educating the public about domestic violence

BY JIEQI LUO

TRANSLATED BY ANNE HENOCHOWICZ

ON FEBRUARY 19, 2013, when lawyer Guo Jianmei was on a business trip, her phone rang. The moment had arrived for the review of Li Yan's death sentence.

Li Yan, a woman from Anyue County in Sichuan Province, was the defendant in a case of intentional homicide. On November 3, 2010, while defending herself against her husband's extreme abuse, she killed him, then dismembered his corpse. She was given a death sentence at her second trial in August 2012. From there, her case went to the Supreme People's Court for review. Li's lawyers, including Guo, argued that domestic violence had driven Li to commit the crime, and that she did not deserve the death penalty.

Guo decided to follow the American justice model and use Li's case to push for a national law on domestic violence. She called a reporter, in the hope that the media would speak up for Li. As a public interest lawyer, Guo had a list of journalists with whom she often worked. Guo also notified a number of NGOs, hoping to ignite public discussion of the case.

Her plan worked. The intense media coverage educated the public about domestic violence. The effect was substantive as well, as public opinion exerted pressure on the high court. In the end, Guo saved Li's life—while Li was given the death penalty, her sentence was suspended for two years. She was told that her sentence would be commuted to life

with the possibility of parole if she didn't commit a crime during that period. She remains in prison.

When China's Domestic Violence Law was drafted in 2013, Li's case pushed the bill into public view. At the time, Guo's law center had ample funding from a number of grants, and many of the lawyers there were working on domestic violence cases.

In 2016, China finally passed its Domestic Violence Law, which took effect in March of that year. The law stipulates that the injuring party's act of domestic violence constitutes a civil infraction, not a criminal offense.

At least one in four married women in China has experienced intimate partner violence. According to a 2015 report by the Supreme People's Court, nearly 10 percent of intentional homicide cases involve domestic violence. But for a long time, government employees, both lawyers and judges, have had little understanding of domestic violence. The new law has helped to make them more aware of the issue.

Guo believes the Domestic Violence Law stands as the greatest advancement for women's rights in China. The issue could easily have been ignored because it has little to do with national politics or the economy.

Two years after the new law went into effect, Equality, a Beijing-based women's rights organization, in its report on media coverage, found 533 cases of domestic violence homicide in China in the roughly 600 days between March 1, 2016 and October 31, 2017, leading to the deaths of at least 635 adults and children, including neighbors and passersby. There was on average more than one domestic violence homicide every day during that period,



and the great majority of victims were women.

In a survey of media coverage of over 300 cases of domestic violence, 249 cases occurred in urban areas, comprising 81.9 percent of the total sample; while 55 rural cases were covered, comprising 18.1 percent. This highlights the media's focus on urban domestic violence, while incidents in rural areas are overlooked.

It is also hard to find official media coverage of particularly vulnerable groups, such as ethnic minorities, people with serious illnesses, people with disabilities, and sexual minorities. Coverage about the particular demands of combating domestic violence is also lacking.

Despite China's progress, the national climate has impeded action on domestic violence. According to the Equality report, support for civil society organizations

Lawyer Guo Jianmei sought coverage of Li Yan's case

(CSOs) is lacking at all levels of government, and the growth of such organizations has plummeted over the past two years. There are a scant number of anti-domestic violence CSOs, scattered across Beijing and the provinces of Guangdong, Yunnan, Shaanxi, and Hunan. It is difficult for grassroots organizations to obtain legal status as NGOs, and supportive government policies are particularly lacking. Guo's firm has also been affected by the political climate and funding has dried up.

Li's 2013 case stands as the most influential in China's movement to end domestic violence. The combined efforts of public interest law, the media, and NGOs have not had another major breakthrough since. ■

“TO WITNESS AND SHOW AUDIENCES UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS”

In documenting moments of domestic violence, photojournalists try to balance the private and the public dimensions of the problem

BY TARA PIXLEY

A YOUNG BOY named Charlie pauses on his tricycle beside his backyard pool, mouth agape in a wail as his father grabs his half-naked mother. Two-year-old Memphis sobs as she sees a fight between her mother and her mother’s boyfriend erupt into violence in their kitchen.

Though the two moments were witnessed and photographed 30 years apart by different photographers—Donna Ferrato and Sara Naomi Lewkowicz, respectively—the scenes of domestic violence are nearly identical in content and emotional resonance. Both images are single, stunning snapshots in photo essays that graphically depict the complex intimacies of relationships fraught with violence.

Ferrato’s and Lewkowicz’s photos speak to the photographers’ individual commitment to documenting difficult but compelling moments, as well as to the ability of photojournalism to evoke the kind of public awareness that gets policy written. Yet, we are also forced to sit with the discomfort of whether anyone has the right to witness and publish such private moments of violence. What does it mean to circulate such photographs of children caught up in their parents’ violent feuds? Charlie (full names of survivors are not disclosed to protect their anonymity)—whose father was infamously photographed hitting his mother in the ’80s— would be well into adulthood now.

As much as these stories should be told in order to effect change, journalists are also beholden to the people in the stories we tell. Where is the line between respecting the needs of trauma survivors or the deceased and the public’s need to know?

There is some hope that informing audiences about important issues and appreciating the boundaries

of those who have experienced trauma are not always at odds. Rich Glickstein, a photojournalist turned clinical social worker, has deeply considered this intersection, due to his experience working closely with people recovering from trauma. He sees a benefit to traumatized people sharing their stories with journalists and, by extension, the viewing public. It “allows them to engage their grief and start to rebuild trust in taking back the narrative that someone essentially wrote for them when being battered or assaulted,” says Glickstein.

However, the way reporters address and relay narratives around domestic violence impacts audience interpretation as well as those whose stories are being told. The framing through which we see violence deeply affects whether the result of that viewing is empathy—which evinces understanding and a recognition of shared humanity—or merely sympathy, which is less tied to action. One frame through which we often view domestic violence is the police photograph: images of women visualized entirely as victims, their skin raked from fresh scratches, purple bruises blossoming across eyes, cheeks, and extremities.

Mugshot-esque ruminations on abuse leave out so much necessary context. Looking directly into the camera—whether defiantly or imploringly—the portrait subject is made to stand in for both a decontextualized version of him- or herself and to represent a compendium of enacted violence on so many others experiencing similar trauma.

An insistence upon capturing visual evidence of abuse under the stylized eye of crime photos underscores the necessity of seeing the violence enacted on women in the moment or after the fact for it to be believed.

Yet photography, including those police images that define abuse as merely represented by the evidence of physical trauma, misses an opportunity to educate us about traumas otherwise not so easily visualized. Mental illness, socioeconomic status, and the failures of the state to protect abused individuals or rehabilitate their assailants are only a few of the issues at work in the cycle of domestic violence abuse. Glickstein also points to journalism’s difficulty representing the extreme complexity of domestic violence, saying “that’s one of the things we unfortunately miss, because we try to distill it and make it digestible.”

Wisconsin photographer Lauren Justice took an alternative approach when she turned her camera on domestic abusers in a batterers intervention class. While the men acknowledge responsibility for their violence to varying degrees in Justice’s account of their conversations, her moody portraits of violent offenders portray an array of competing emotions. The audience is left to contend with what these men have done and might yet still do, just as they appear to be struggling with themselves. Taken in conjunction with images of those who have suffered abuse, this nuanced approach eschews the simplistic narratives to which domestic violence coverage often falls prey. Instead Justice’s project exemplifies good journalism: seeking out many angles to provide deeper knowledge.

Kelli Moore, an assistant professor of media, culture, and communication at NYU who is writing a book on the media history of photographic evidence of domestic violence, says domestic violence “photojournalism operates best through an ethos of development—of people and ideas that challenge us to think critically about how

to repair the effects of the cycle of violence.” Longform documentary projects offer just such an opportunity for a more critical engagement with the underlying issues of domestic abuse.

In Lewkowicz’s photo essay about a volatile relationship between a young mother, Maggie, and her boyfriend, Shane, the intimate view makes plain the surrounding issues that often inform an abused woman’s options. It’s important to delve into the cyclical nature and uneven power structures of domestic violence to bring attention to both the severity and ubiquity of the problem, as well as how it can be difficult for women to leave such relationships due to lack of financial resources or alternate housing. Without acknowledging the undercurrents of ever-present control and psychological manipulations in a home that has become a war zone, we can’t hope to address this social crisis.

In addition to educating the public about this problem, interactions between a photojournalist and trauma survivor can be productive when great care is taken to build a relationship on honesty. One of the most important things a photojournalist can do when covering a subject like domestic violence is be truthful upfront that the story might be packaged and disseminated in ways that are often beyond even the control of the photographer.

Glickstein suggests explaining that it is the work of journalism to turn intricate issues into stories that are both succinct and compelling to the public. “Tell them I’m going to do the best I can in telling this story, and that might entail there being some difficult images to look at,” says Glickstein. “Prepare for that, prepare to have a camera pointed at you when you may be at your most vulnerable.”



Sara Naomi Lewkowicz began photographing Shane for a project about the stigma of being an ex-convict, but ended up documenting his abusive relationship with his girlfriend, Maggie

“From a psychological perspective, from the subject’s side they’re giving trust and then realizing that the person they’re giving trust to is worthy of it, recognizing that can be restorative,” says Glickstein. “They’ve confided, they’ve put their truth out there and were able to say, ‘This is what happened to me as I remember it.’ That can be a cathartic experience.”

It’s evident from the intimacy depicted in Lewkowicz’s photos of Maggie that an incredible level of trust was established early on. Both Lewkowicz and Maggie exhibit bravery by collaborating to tell Maggie’s story. The photojournalist chose to remain in a dangerous space, making it possible for others to later know that story. She didn’t simply determine it was a private matter and leave a family to suffer alone in a potentially deadly situation—what so many others in positions of authority have done. Rather, she stayed true to the edict to witness and show audiences uncomfortable truths.

Maggie’s courage in sharing those difficult moments with someone else was an implicit recognition that people need to know not just that this

happens but *how* it happens. Thus, the photo essay and accompanying text vividly narrate the evolution of a loving relationship prior to violence, the couple in the moment of a physical attack, and the aftermath of violence as a mother and her children struggle to find a way forward.

Because Lewkowicz continued photographing Maggie and her family for years after the initial attack, she was able to document what recovering from abuse entails and how the choice to leave a violent partner can have long-lasting effects. Moore says “when photojournalists and survivors create images *together*, picture taking can become a real moment of learning and reflection for both.” This kind of insight and access is made possible by a dedication to open collaboration and a commitment to telling an ongoing, unfolding story that is emblematic of so many other domestic violence stories.

Ferrato’s collaborative and continuous approach to documenting a family fractured by violence offers a similar intervention in the history of popular photojournalistic treatments of domestic violence. She, too, went on to photograph Elisabeth (the

mother of Charlie, mentioned earlier) in the aftermath of the attack captured on camera as she and her five children left their abusive home, attempting to start anew. Both Ferrato and Lewkowicz share an understanding that telling an honest and complete story about domestic violence doesn’t end with depicting an attack. That’s only the beginning of trying to depict a problem as insidious and pervasive as domestic abuse.

Additionally, each photographer attempted to intervene in the violence as they strove to tell the story unfolding in front of them. Lewkowicz made certain 911 had been called before continuing to photograph the attack, and Ferrato has said she raised her camera because she believed that photographing the violence would stop the attacker.

As an audience to the documentation of such familial violence, we are not allowed to callously blame these survivors for their own trauma, nor can we pretend we don’t know it is a substantive problem. Good journalism makes us aware of a problem we didn’t realize existed, helps us understand an issue more clearly, and galvanizes us to act. The photos of Lewkowicz, Ferrato, and Justice do precisely that. ■



REPORTING WHILE TRANS

How trans journalists are changing—
and challenging—journalism

BY LEWIS RAVEN WALLACE

ILLUSTRATION BY JOEY GUIDONE



KATE SOSIN AND Nico Lang landed in Anchorage in March 2018 and got into a Lyft to their hotel. The Lyft driver asked what the pair was doing in town.

“I was stupid enough to say, ‘Oh, we’re reporters,’” Sosin recalls. They told the driver they were there to report on Proposition 1, which would have required trans people to use the bathroom or locker room associated with the gender on their birth certificate. Turns out, bringing it up was a mistake.

“He started spouting off all of this transphobic rhetoric about how ‘we’ didn’t want men in women’s bathrooms,” Sosin says. As a trans journalist, Sosin found it a nerve-racking introduction to Anchorage, where they’d come to report for the week leading up to the city’s historic vote on the measure. These so-called “bathroom bills” are predicated on the myth that trans women are predatory men masquerading as women. Sosin and Lang were both staff writers at Into, the national LGBTQ outlet associated with the gay dating app Grindr, and they pitched the story because they believed Anchorage was a bellwether.

Sosin says their editor at Into was affirming and supportive, quickly agreeing to assign multiple features on the topic. Sosin and Lang produced in-depth coverage on the lead-up to the vote and the outcome, both during and after their trip to Alaska.

Sosin’s trans identity often made it easier to connect with sources and to tell stories that were deeply reported and empathetic.

“They found all these different access points for people reading this story,” says former Into managing editor Trish Bendix, who is a cis queer woman. “There’s a way to make these stories, like any story, find some central human interest point, and I think that Kate can balance that with making sure that it’s still very centered on trans people and trans issues.”

For example, an article about community organizers coming together against Proposition 1 included drag kings, leather daddies, and climate change activists who brought an anti-Proposition 1 banner to the Iditarod, the annual long-distance sled dog race. Sosin and Lang focus on trans people while including the stories of straight and gay allies, who all rallied together to defeat the ballot measure.

Transgender journalists in the United States are a small but growing group. As we become more visible, trans journalists are asking journalism leaders to confront the structural barriers that make it hard for trans people, particularly trans people of color, to enter and remain in the industry. We are also pushing cisgender editors to be more cautious and accountable in their coverage of gender issues. Still, there are very few trans people in leadership positions, a reflection of the many obstacles trans journalists still face.

In just the last couple of years, the number of out, visible transgender journalists and editors has increased noticeably. Queer outlets like Into and them, a Condé Nast website focused on culture, employ a bevy of trans writers and several trans editors. Raquel Willis took the helm as

executive editor at Out magazine, a gay fashion and lifestyle magazine, and trans journalists now have a prominent collective presence on Twitter, a private Facebook group, and various other private networks.

Trans writers have been outspoken in favor of hiring trans people to cover LGBTQ issues and have a growing collective voice in critiquing inaccurate and insensitive coverage, which has implications for newsrooms that have long been covering transgender issues without the visible presence of trans writers. Trans people often bring connections and insights that are very different from their cisgender editors and colleagues, including a tendency to question traditional “objectivity” in the newsroom. For those seeking a trans writer, it is easier than ever to tap into networks of trans journalists via social media.

Despite the structural limits to trans people entering journalism, these efforts have begun to have an effect. In 26 states, it’s still legal to fire or not hire someone for their gender identity or expression, and the effects of anti-trans discrimination don’t fall evenly across the community. Trans women of color are disproportionately likely to live in poverty and to face violence; trans people overall have a high risk for homelessness and suicide. And many people of color and poor and working class people (trans or not) can’t access the education, social capital, and other forms of preparation and connections that allow them to enter the field and advance to leadership positions.

Trans journalists who do break into the industry face a slew of challenges if they are out on the job: questions about health care access, discriminatory treatment, microaggressions from colleagues and sources, tokenism, frequent misunderstandings of trans issues from editors, and challenges with going through legal name and gender changes. That said, it appears the presence of trans people in newsrooms is beginning to move the needle in terms of the quality and quantity of trans coverage.

Sosin didn’t initially see herself as a “trans reporter.” Born and raised in the Chicago area, they started reporting while visiting Haiti in college, telling stories about communities that were not their own. Then they worked for several years at Chicago’s Windy City Times, and after that about a year and a half at The Boston Courant, a hyperlocal print paper that covered affluent areas of Boston. Sosin wasn’t intentionally in the closet, but says their identity as a nonbinary trans person was so marginalized that they effectively were. Their boss once even said to them, “I wouldn’t want to use the same bathroom as *you*,” Sosin says, which they took to imply that they, a nonbinary and masculine person, were too womanly to share a bathroom with a man.

“That is the job that sort of ended journalism for me,” Sosin says. Sosin felt it was too hard to find a job where they could get paid enough, be respected, and also be out about their identity.

Working at Into helped Sosin realize the importance of queer media. “I felt like they actually really valued the identities of their reporters,” they say. “Mainstream journalism just does the opposite. Into was so respected because it empowers writers to tell stories about their own communities.” Sosin’s coverage of the anti-trans initiative in Alaska is a good example of that.

Former Into editor Bendix says that creating a trans-affirming environment for reporters requires a proactive attitude. “As editors, the people making the decisions, you have to be not just willing, but you have to be the ones saying, ‘Yes, this is how we should be evolving,’” she says. She gives the example of integrating they/them pronouns or using terminology that may be familiar to trans people but is uncharted territory for many mainstream publications. “You have to be saying, ‘This is going to be the right way to tell the story,’ instead of telling trans reporters or subjects, ‘Sorry, that’s not a possibility here.’”

False balance and false equivalencies are areas in which trans reporters like Sosin have pushed back. While some coverage of the North Carolina bill to restrict restroom access for transgender people gave credence to the right-wing claim that cisgender women had reason to be concerned about sexually predatory men coming into women’s rooms if trans women were allowed to use women’s restrooms, Sosin’s coverage didn’t engage with this mythology, which has no basis in fact. While the pro-Proposition 1 arguments—for example, a canvasser who was quoted asking a voter, “Do you want men in your little girl’s bathrooms in elementary schools?”—were mentioned in the coverage of the upcoming referendum in Alaska, the focus was on the community organizing effort to defeat it.

The Anchorage reporting Sosin produced with Lang shows how a trans journalist can see the importance of coverage a cisgender journalist might not see at all. Into was almost the only national outlet to do in-depth coverage of Proposition 1, which ultimately didn’t pass.

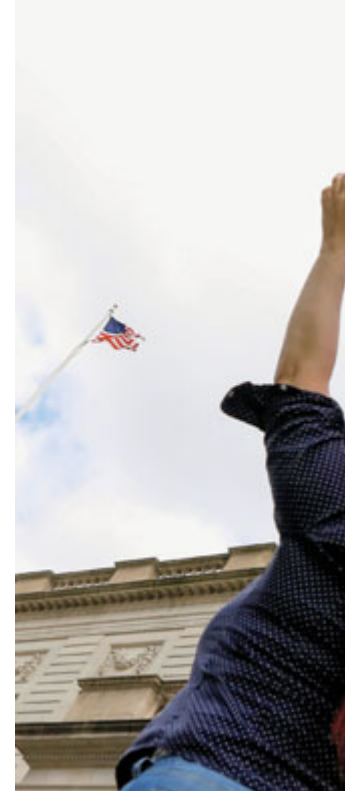
Both Sosin and Bendix were laid off from Into when Grindr shuttered the publication in late 2018. Yet, Sosin says, working for a news outlet that actively valued their trans identity made them want to stick with journalism. They are now a freelancer focused on the LGBTQ beat.

When Meredith Talusan became a writer in 2014, she also became a “trans writer.” At the time, it wasn’t really a choice. She is a transfeminine person who was good at writing about gender issues and, like a lot of writers from marginalized backgrounds who come into journalism through the chaotic freelance market, Talusan started out writing personal essays and hot takes. She freelanced for a couple of years while she was in grad school for literature. An editor friend of hers encouraged her, noting that there weren’t enough trans writers in national media.

But she was cautious. She had been living as a woman for a long time, but wasn’t out as trans in every context. Being an out trans writer required playing the role of translator, explaining the subtleties of trans experiences to an often-unfamiliar and sometimes hostile audience. “Do I really want to deal with this in my life? Do I really want to be openly trans in the world?” she asked herself.

Ultimately, she decided it was worth it and became BuzzFeed’s first openly trans staff writer in 2015, on the LGBTQ beat. She subsequently became the executive editor of them, and she is now working on a memoir about her early life as an albino Filipina trans woman.

Talusan has never had a trans editor but, like Sosin, she’s had good experiences with some cisgender editors. She recalls working on a major investigation of



**TRANS
JOURNALISTS
IN THE
U.S. ARE
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BUT
GROWING
GROUP**



A rally for transgender rights in front of City Hall in New York City in October 2018

murders of trans people—with editor Gabriel Arana at Mic—which attempted to count how many trans people had been murdered in the U.S. since 2010, a number not otherwise tracked. “From 2010 to 2016, at least 111 transgender and gender-nonconforming Americans were murdered because of their gender identity; 72 percent of them were black trans women and gender-nonconforming femmes, who identify as neither male nor female but present as feminine,” Talusan wrote. The chance of being murdered for a young black trans woman was 1 in 2,600, while among the general population it was 1 in 19,000.

“I feel like I had an unusual amount of latitude with that feature,” Talusan says, “because Gabe and I had a strong working relationship, but also being a racial minority himself and working on diversity issues extensively, he understood the importance of the piece being simultaneously for trans people and a broader audience.”

Arana had prior experience covering trans issues, and he was aware of the power dynamics that can arise between editors and reporters writing about marginalized communities of which they are a part. “I’ve edited other LGBTQ writers, where I’ll raise an objection that a reader might have and say that we need more context, and someone will think that I’m questioning the validity of their experience,” Arana says, adding that walking this line requires trust and humility on the part of the editor. “Some editors see themselves as hard-asses and want to come in and radically revise the text, but when you’re dealing with more sensitive topics that are close to somebody’s heart, you have to be more sensitive.”

Both Talusan and Arana acknowledge the tensions that can arise when trans journalists are asked to explain concepts that may be familiar in trans communities but unfamiliar to a majority-cisgender audience. Lots of trans articles end up doubling as trans 101s, providing explanations of issues like pronouns and assigned sex, or explaining terms like cisgender. In Talusan’s Mic feature

on trans murders, not a lot of time is spent explaining what a transgender woman is. But there are moments of explanation and education, such as the definition of “gender-nonconforming femmes.”

“The public in general is ignorant about transgender issues,” says Arana. “So you want to give good-faith readers a lifeline to help them understand, in this case, the epidemic of violence against transgender people.”

Talusan and Arana show that editors are well-served by listening carefully to trans people’s perspectives while also having the confidence to push for clarity. There is almost inevitably going to be some tension between writing for a trans audience and writing for a general audience. Cisgender editors should start by listening to and trusting their trans reporters.

Trusting trans reporters is a particularly sensitive issue given the public rhetoric on trans people. Talusan and other trans journalists and editors I interviewed talk about the frustrating realities of false balance in coverage of trans issues. Trans people’s personal stories are often “balanced” with the opinions of those who question our fundamental rights to health care, safety, and employment, or depict us as dishonest or untrustworthy. And while trans people are often expected to disclose and probe our own “bias” as trans journalists, cisgender journalists covering trans people are rarely asked to do the same probing of their own gender experience and how it might shape their work. To counter this, activists have advocated for media outlets to hire trans people to cover trans stories, as a way to proactively address the structural inequity that still allows cis people to be the most well-known journalistic voices on trans issues.

Of course, there are plenty of trans journalists who don’t want a trans or LGBTQ beat. I worked for five years as a journalist in mainstream public radio, in newsrooms where I was always the only out transgender person. I rarely covered trans topics, but I always had to navigate my identity, particularly when I was starting a job.

In my very first journalism position, at WBEZ in Chicago in 2012, I was pleasantly surprised by how little fanfare my gender created. I was nervous about everything: what to wear, how much space to take up, what to do with superiors or peers who called me the wrong pronouns, what bathroom to use.

I located a gender-neutral bathroom, and my supervisor found out what pronouns I used and told others. The only time in the onboarding process when my trans identity stood out was a conversation with the managing editor about conflicts of interest. I had been a sex educator and given trans ally workshops for many years and, initially, the managing editor suggested I avoid covering queer and trans issues. My supervisor pushed back, noting that my work had been educational in nature, not advocating for any specific policy. I was allowed to cover trans issues, although I ultimately pursued a beat where I was unlikely to come across perceived conflicts of interest.

Later, I moved to a small-town newsroom in Ohio, WYSO, where I received a warm welcome combined with some awkward communication about employer health insurance. As with many trans people, my official legal documents didn’t—and don’t—align with the name

I use and didn't reflect my current gender identity. For a variety of reasons, it makes sense for me to continue to receive health care as "female." Until a nonbinary option exists vis-à-vis health insurance, many trans and nonbinary people find ourselves in difficult positions in this regard. The best thing an employer can do is tread lightly, respect confidentiality, and recognize that the problem is not the trans person, but the inflexible system in which we're working. If you're confused about what is respectful, ask rather than guess. My manager at WYSO did just that; health care questions were quickly resolved, and we moved on.

The more difficult thing about being a trans reporter in a small town was my level of visibility. Even though I rarely covered LGBTQ stories, I was on the radio nearly every day, many people knew I was trans and, for many people, I was the only trans person they knew—or, at least, that's what they thought. I was often asked for information on trans issues, which was not a role I relished.

I did not want to be tokenized while I was just trying to do my job as a journalist. And honestly, I didn't want other people to know how traumatized and angry I was over a decade into my experience as an out trans and nonbinary person. I was called the wrong pronouns, was scared or unable to use bathrooms in many reporting situations, and never had an active ally or support while navigating that at work. My composed outer shell was important to me and helped me do a complicated job. Why should I be asked to be vulnerable in ways that my colleagues rarely were?

Requests for education and information mostly came from outside my workplace and had little to do with my employers themselves. Still, the pressure to be an educational resource, representing your whole diverse community, remains near-constant for trans people, even those of us who don't open ourselves up to it. I tend to think this dynamic is no one's fault in particular, but our cisgender colleagues can be sensitive to it by not asking trans folks to speak for "the trans community" or educate them, knowing that many of us will have been asked that too many times to count.

Another aspect of trans sensitivity in newsrooms close to my heart relates to the longstanding debate over objectivity and whether journalists can, or should, strive to be objective about their subject matter. Transgender experience has a complex relationship to "objective" science, as modern science has long claimed that there are "objectively" two biological sexes, even as trans and intersex bodies and experiences predate Western medical understandings of biological binary sex. The Vatican in June released a document in which it rejected the notion that individuals can choose their gender. Psychologists and medical doctors remain gatekeepers over who is recognized as trans. And many trans people encounter conflict, violence, and abuse as a result of others believing we are "objectively" the sex we were assigned at birth.

Thus, many trans journalists are well situated to question the premise that anyone can look objectively at gender or sexuality—although, of course, some trans people believe in the concept of objective news reporting. Many black and indigenous journalists have advanced similar critiques of objectivity for decades,

TRANS PEOPLE WHO DO BREAK INTO THE JOURNALISM INDUSTRY FACE A SLEW OF CHALLENGES IF THEY ARE OUT ON THE JOB

Out magazine's executive editor Raquel Willis, who is trans, speaks at the Women's March on Washington in 2017

pointing out that it tends to assume the neutrality of a white, male perspective. In my own experience, I have had to be an activist and advocate for myself and my community in order to get into newsrooms at all; drawing a clear line between activism and journalism often appears to me a function of privilege.

Trans coverage, even employing outspoken trans journalists at all, remains highly politicized. My experience bears mentioning. In early 2017, I was fired from a national reporting job at "Marketplace," a show produced by American Public Media, after I publicly critiqued the limitations of objective news reporting in the Trump era and called for journalists to stand up against white supremacy, xenophobia, and transphobia. I went on to research the history of objectivity in journalism and the impact of marginalized journalists on the profession. My book, "The View from Somewhere: Undoing the Myth of Journalistic Objectivity," published by the University of Chicago Press, comes out in October.

I have been out since I was a teenager, so I never had to go through the experience of transitioning or coming out while in the workplace. But technology reporter Ina Fried did. She transitioned at work in 2003 while a writer at CNET, a tech news site, a few years after she came out in her private life. "I didn't think I would get fired," she says, "but I was worried I would have a hard time doing my job. And there weren't a lot of examples, particularly at mainstream newsrooms, of reporters transitioning."

Because she had a developed beat covering technology in the Bay Area, she had to contact hundreds of sources about her change of pronouns and presentation in addition to coming out to her colleagues. This process tends to be exhausting, overwhelming, and rife with oversharing from others about how they feel about your transition. A lot of people change jobs, or even move, to attempt a sort of fresh start. Fried loved where she was and what she did but says it was a lot to go through: "It's not easy to transition in place, if you will. It's hard for coworkers, or sources, who have only known you as one gender."

She was also distracted at first by questions about whether colleagues and sources were seeing her as a woman. "My sense of self would rise and fall with somebody using the right pronoun or not." But ultimately, the payoff was high for both her and her employers. Now a technology reporter at Axios, she has a track record of bringing fresh ideas for LGBTQ technology stories into her work, such as a 2015 piece about a tech employee who



THEO WARGO/GETTY IMAGES
OPPOSITE: LUCY NICHOLSON/REUTERS



came out to millions of people via text message.

Fried thinks the last couple of years have been hard even for the most apolitical trans journalists. “Being trans, especially at this moment, there’s an element of it that’s just political by its nature,” she says. “It is challenging to live at a time where my identity and the identity of my community are under near constant attack. It makes it challenging to be in a role that I believe strongly in, which is a journalist writing without bias.”

While she says she hasn’t become an activist, she says the Trump era has put a strain on her ability to stand on the sidelines, both as a trans woman and as a Jewish person. When she talks about these issues within her newsroom, she says, colleagues are receptive and thoughtful, and younger journalists are grateful for the example she sets by speaking frankly.

In my experience, trans people aren’t inherently more knowledgeable than cis people about gender and its discontents, but chances are high that we have thought about these issues a lot more than the average cis person. Still, we all have a lot to learn, and trans and queer terminology and discourse are constantly being refreshed and updated by younger generations. Just as trans journalists are having an effect on which stories get covered and how, trans editors and leaders are important to building a media landscape that does a better job representing marginalized people and communities.

Almost every one of the eight people I interviewed for this story said they’d never had a trans editor. I have been one and had one once, Meredith Talusan, when she was at them. This reflects the structural barriers to entry for trans people such as legalized discrimination and the emotional and economic costs of transition.

Molly Woodstock, a nonbinary, indigenous journalist based in Portland, Oregon, responded to these barriers by starting their own show. When they’re not working as an editor at SagaCity Media, which owns Portland Monthly, Seattle Met, and other publications, Woodstock hosts and produces a podcast about gender called “Gender Reveal.” They air weekly interviews with queer and trans people; their current season focuses heavily on interviews with journalists. “My whole life is about being trans and being queer and being indigenous, and other forms of intersectionality,” Woodstock says. “I started the podcast to create a space where trans and nonbinary people could have those conversations.”

“Gender Reveal” can also be the educational resource

Protests were staged around the U.S. in October 2018 after the Trump administration proposed limiting the definition of gender to male or female at birth

that trans journalists on the job don’t want to be. “‘Gender Reveal’ is a space where we do ask the intrusive personal questions in a way that’s hopefully respectful, and people are going into it consenting,” Woodstock says.

On one recent episode, Woodstock talked with trans reporter Katelyn Burns about Burns’ experience covering Congress. Burns and Woodstock also critique a recent New York Times story about chest binders, written by a cis reporter, for dabbling in false equivalencies by quoting anti-trans extremists. This kind of self-made trans media is part of a long tradition of “for us, by us” media by marginalized communities that doesn’t take the place of mainstream journalism, but creates space to surpass as well as criticize it.

Willis is perhaps the most high profile trans person in an editorial leadership position. In December, Willis became the first black trans woman executive editor at Out.

Her path to the job involved advocacy. She studied journalism in college and put in a year as a reporter, in the closet, at a small-town Georgia paper. “Being marginalized and feeling like I was so silent for so many years about my own trans identity made the perfect conditions to want to be a storyteller to liberate other people,” she says.

But after she came out as trans, Willis became frustrated with the journalism industry, its value of objectivity, and the constant transphobia and microaggressions she experienced in that world. She shifted her focus to activism, taking a job at the Transgender Law Center in communications. “I really value that experience because it gave me more of an authentic opening to the actual needs and desires of the trans community, stripped away from this media narrative that’s focused on this post-Caitlyn Jenner world where being trans is either glitzy and glamorous or it is tragic and all about death and the murders of black trans women. It gave me a more holistic idea of what the rest of my people were going through.”

Willis has always struggled with the notion of “objectivity,” which is why a job for an explicitly LGBTQ outlet made sense for her. “Stripping yourself of your identity, not having a lens or a perspective ... that’s a very privileged approach,” she says. “It’s very easy to be like, ‘You shouldn’t have an agenda,’ when the agenda is a white heterosexual Christian man’s agenda, so that doesn’t seem like an agenda to those people.”

Out caters to a niche audience, but it’s also trying to change its niche. In the past the outlet focused predominantly on white gay men but has recently hired a new editorial staff that leans heavily toward trans, women, and people of color. Hiring Willis sent a message about that new focus, and her new team will more closely reflect the members of the LGBTQ community most in need of better, more varied representation.

“The truth is, no one writes for everyone, even in journalism,” Willis says. “I hope that as our community continues to grow and our voice continues to grow there will be more opportunities for trans people of all different backgrounds to make their experiences known. We don’t have a monolithic experience. We come from every corner of society that is imaginable and that’s a beautiful thing. And we need to hear all of those stories.” ■

JOURNALISM AND LIBRARIES: “A COMMUNITY NEED AND A STRATEGIC FIT”

How—and why—libraries are stepping in to help news organizations promote media literacy, spur civic engagement, and even assist with reporting projects

BY ERYN CARLSON

ILLUSTRATION BY SÉBASTIEN THIBAUT





IN WEARE, NEW Hampshire, a small town about 45 minutes from the state's southern border with Massachusetts, the local newspaper is largely a one-man show. Michael Sullivan is de facto publisher and editor-in-chief as well as reporter, layout designer, crosswords creator, printer, and deliveryman. (The one thing he doesn't do is photography.)

But Sullivan is quick to tell anyone who asks: he's no journalist. Rather, he's a librarian—just one who happens to run the only publication dedicated to covering his town and its 8,966 residents.

Sullivan is director of the Weare Public Library, where he—with some help from his fellow librarians—produces *Weare in the World*, a weekly publication that aims to fill part of the void left when the quarterly *Weare Community News* shuttered in October 2016. "It wasn't much of a newspaper to begin with, but when that thing closed down, it really left us with nothing," says Sullivan. "The regional papers around here don't pay attention to a little town like this, and the one local paper

[The *Goffstown News*, a small weekly serving communities northwest of Manchester] that was covering us pulled back and stopped covering our area. We were left with no news outlets at all."

A few months later, during Weare's March Town Meeting season, locals were complaining that there wasn't enough information to help them make decisions when electing local officials and passing budgets. That's when, at a community meeting hosted at the library, one of the candidates running for town selectman turned to Sullivan and asked him what he, as town librarian, was going to do about it.

A week later, the first issue of *Weare in the World* appeared, providing election results alongside calendar listings for the Weare Middle School's production of "Roald Dahl's *Willy Wonka, the Musical*" and a community spaghetti dinner at the local American Legion post.

Since then, the print publication—also posted weekly on the library's website—has remained heavy on calendar listings and events coverage, but aims to keep the town informed about local politics as well as goings-on in the community. Sullivan considers stepping in when a local news outlet is missing part of the public library's duties to serve its patrons: "We're here. It's not everything you want, but it fills a need. That's really where libraries should be."

Increasingly, libraries are playing a greater role in journalism, as journalists and librarians—long entwined by common goals, and facing similar challenges as their industries undergo rapid transformation in the digital age—find ways to collaborate. Some librarians help where news organizations are absent, in news deserts such as Weare, or have been decimated in recent years, such as in Longmont, Colorado, where locals are debating whether to launch a tax-funded "library district" that produces community news alongside operating the local library. Other librarians are teaming up with journalists to promote media literacy and tackle misinformation, develop community journalists, spur civic engagement, and even to take on reporting projects.

Long gone at most news outlets are the days of morgues and librarians, once a mainstay at larger newspapers, magazines, and broadcasters. And yet, most librarians these days wouldn't be completely out of their element in a newsroom, or vice versa. Many journalists would find some of a reference librarian's primary duties not too far afield from their own research and reporting experiences. Librarians are, after



INCREASINGLY, LIBRARIES ARE PLAYING A GREATER ROLE IN JOURNALISM, AS JOURNALISTS AND LIBRARIANS—LONG ENTWINED BY COMMON GOALS, AND FACING SIMILAR CHALLENGES—FIND WAYS TO COLLABORATE



Brianna McCain listens as Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings answers questions from McCain's fellow high school students participating in Storytellers Without Borders, a program conducted by The Dallas Morning News and the Dallas Public Library

all, what David Beard, writing for Poynter.org, dubbed journalists' "information-gathering cousins."

"Journalism and librarianship both exist to support strong, well-informed communities. We're all working to provide reliable information in a context that makes it as useful as possible," says Laurie Putnam, a communications consultant and lecturer at San Jose State University School of Information who often writes about the intersections between libraries and journalism. "We believe in facts. We grapple with the concept of neutrality, and we fight for equal access and intellectual freedom. We're part of the communities we serve, and we care about keeping our democracies healthy and our citizens engaged."

What's more, Putnam says, libraries are often well-equipped to provide resources and manpower that news organizations, especially local outlets, may lack. "When it comes to libraries and journalism, there's both a community need and a strategic fit. News organizations are struggling in many communities, and libraries are in a position

to help. There are very real opportunities for long-term partnerships that support community information needs."

One major reason for news organizations to partner with libraries: people trust them. In a 2017 Pew study looking at the percentage of U.S. adults who trust information from different sources, local public libraries and librarians topped the list, with 40 percent of respondents saying they had "a lot" of trust in them. That's compared to only 17 percent saying they had that amount of trust in national news organizations; trust in info from local news organizations wasn't much better, with only 18 percent of respondents having a great deal of trust in them. Another Pew study published the same year found that more than 78 percent of U.S. adults feel that public libraries help them find trustworthy, reliable information (that number was even higher for millennials, at 87 percent), and more than half said that libraries help them get information to make personal decisions.

The trust factor was a motivating force behind Spaceship Media's decision

to partner with librarians when working on The Many, a dialogue journalism project that connected hundreds of women, from different backgrounds and political leanings, to discuss political and social issues in closed Facebook groups. The Many Facebook groups—which ran from February 2018 until the midterm elections—provided a jumping-off point for stories by Spaceship's local media partners, including news outlets of different sizes and mediums in Alabama, Louisiana, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, and Michigan; articles highlighting aspects of conversations that the project fostered were also published by Spaceship on Medium.

Led by Adriana García and Eve Pearlman, the Spaceship team moderated discussions among the participating women on Facebook and, when questions arose about a topic—say, then-judicial appointee Brett Kavanaugh or immigration policy in the U.S.—or conversations were at an impasse, sought to provide carefully sourced and vetted facts and figures. Called FactStacks, this non-narrative style of reporting was

usually provided by the Spaceship team or journalists from media partners they worked with on past projects, but this time around, that's where the librarians came in.

The advantages of recruiting librarians from the Birmingham Public Library in Alabama (as well as the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh for a localized spinoff group, The Many Pennsylvania) to compile FactStacks were twofold. Not only were many of the participants likely to consider information coming from librarians as more trustworthy and objective than had it come from reporters, says García, but this also freed up more time for the journalists to focus on reporting and writing stories inspired by the conversations. "We began to see that by partnering with libraries, which are far more trusted than journalists right now, we could build on their relationship with the public at large," says García, who is director of innovation at Spaceship and served as project manager of The Many. "Librarians are a source of information that hardly anyone questions; in a world where everything has become polarizing, libraries have remained above the fray."

When Spaceship's moderators came across participant questions or discussion

points that would benefit from further information, García copied and pasted relevant portions of the conversations into an email and sent them over to the library. At Birmingham, five librarians alternated spending a few hours or days on a topic before sending their completed FactStacks back to García (who, in turn, would copy edit and fact-check what the librarians had sent her, making sure sources represented various viewpoints) to share with the Facebook group. This was just a "natural extension of our role," says librarian Mary Beth Newbill.

"Libraries and librarians share many of the same values and ideals of journalists," García adds. "This is a new way for library partners to do this—to connect to journalists in a new way and to lend their expertise to supporting the civil fabric of the communities they serve."

In Kansas City, Missouri, librarians are lending their expertise to help citizens learn more about their own locale—and about how they can track down such information themselves—through an ongoing partnership between the Kansas City Public Library and The Kansas City Star. Launched last October, a project

called "What's Your KCQ?" invites locals to submit questions about their city that journalists and librarians will investigate and then, on the Star's website, share their answers with the public. Questions don't have to be pegged to a specific news topic or even be current; rather, they just have to be city-centric. Queries related to the city's history and to its infrastructure, existing or long gone, are particularly popular with readers, such as "What happened to the old City Hall at 5th and Main?" and "Why does Kansas City have a 'bridge to nowhere?'"

The Star's relationship with the Kansas City Public Library began prior to "What's Your KCQ?" A working group at the newspaper—including Mary Kate Metivier, who until recently led the "What's Your KCQ?" project as the regional growth editor at the newspaper—had been working with the News Co/Lab, a collaborative venture based at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, on experiments to increase audience engagement and transparency. One of these was "Java with Journalists," where Star journalists would hold listening sessions, complete with coffee and doughnuts, at several branches of

BRYAN SNYDER/REUTERS
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TO COLLABORATE**



Copies of Weare in the World stacked for distribution at the public library in Weare, New Hampshire

Weare's public library stepped in to produce a weekly paper to fill the gap left after the town's only news source shuttered in 2016

the library system to ask readers in different neighborhoods, "What do you want us to cover? What stories are we missing?"

Metivier and her colleagues realized uniting with the library again for "What's Your KCQ?" made perfect sense given their reach as well as the overlap in the two institutions' missions: keeping Kansas Citians informed. "Our overall goal at the Star was to arm people with the facts and teach news literacy and be transparent about it. That's a lot of what we get out of a relationship with the library," says Metivier, who left the Star to join the Los Angeles Times as audience engagement editor in February.

Seeking not just to answer readers' questions but to show them how they arrived at those answers, "What's Your KCQ?" keeps readers engaged throughout the whole process. Readers can choose to notify the Star if they don't want their name published, but must give their name and contact information along with their questions—submitted on the paper's website with help from Hearken, a startup that builds platforms to help newsrooms engage with their audiences—so reporters can follow up if further information is needed. Then, the audience votes on which questions they are most interested in seeing the answers to, and the Star and the library get to work. Queries are divided up based on who's best outfitted to address them; the newspaper usually focuses on more present and future-focused questions, while ones about the city's history get passed on to the library.

In one memorable example from the holiday season that piqued the interest of many readers, a resident asked what happened to the Christmas decorations—especially the giant, colorfully-lit crowns—that, starting in the 1960s, hung above the streets downtown for many years. In his answer, librarian Michael Wells featured several historic photos of Kansas City from the library's archives and was able to shed light not just on the background of the crowns and why they were no longer displayed, but about the decline of the city's downtown shopping

district and the urban renewal that gave way to changes in the architectural environment that no longer supported such large, street-spanning adornments.

In addition to their aligning missions and skill sets, another reason librarians are ideal collaborators for journalists is that they are often well-connected with and suited to serve two wide-ranging populations: young people and minorities—groups traditional news organizations often struggle to reach. Millennials are more likely than any other adult generation to regularly visit libraries and use public library websites; according to Pew, 53 percent of Americans ages 18 to 35 visited a public library or a bookmobile in the past year (and that number is likely much higher when academic libraries are taken into consideration), compared to 45 percent or less for all older generations. According to another Pew study from 2017, millennials are the most likely of all adult generations to say libraries help them find trustworthy and reliable information, learn new things, and receive information that helps them with decision-making.

These numbers, and views on the overall usefulness of libraries, are even higher for minorities in the U.S. Hispanics and blacks are more likely than white people to report that public libraries help them find information that is trustworthy, reliable, and aids decision-making. Other Pew research finds that Hispanics and African Americans, as well as lower-income Americans, are more likely to say that libraries significantly impact their lives and communities in ways that range from help in searching for jobs to offering programs to support local business development. Such programming and extra services, as well as the widespread access to computers and an Internet connection, likely accounts for the widespread popularity of libraries among young people and minorities compared to older white Americans.

The usefulness of libraries to minority populations is a big part of the reason why, over the course of a few months in the



In 2018, the Birmingham (Ala.) Public Library hosted women from The Many, Spaceship Media's dialogue journalism Facebook group, to discuss the benefits of open, honest discourse

fall of 2018, The Dallas Morning News decided to host a series of community office hours at local branches of the Dallas Public Library. Originating as part of the newspaper's Curious Texas project, which, similar to "What's Your KCQ?," invites readers to submit their own questions—particularly ones about the culture and institutions of Dallas and greater North Texas—that Morning News reporters then seek to answer and share with audiences, the office hours were conceived in part to get locals involved in a reporting project. Perhaps more importantly, however, the office hours were an opportunity to have a visible presence in the community and to introduce the newspaper to new audiences.

For audience development editor Hannah Wise and engagement reporter Elvia Limón, the forces behind the office hours' series, libraries were an obvious location to set up shop as opposed to, say, a local cafe or in the Morning News's newsroom. For Wise, who has several librarians in her extended family, this was motivated in part by a lifelong love of libraries, but it was also a recognition of the important role libraries often play in communities, especially disadvantaged ones—something Limón had experienced firsthand.

Growing up in Pleasant Grove, a lower-to middle-income neighborhood in southeast Dallas, the local library was a valuable resource for her and her family, and a place

she would spend hours hanging out and doing homework. "The library was kind of this haven—to do work with friends, [where] my mom would take classes for her GED and English language," says Limón, adding that the library provides a similar haven—and acts as a particularly valuable resource—for Dallas's disadvantaged populations, whether it's homeless individuals seeking a welcome (and temperature-controlled) respite from the outdoors during the day or immigrants seeking to take citizenship and English classes. For Limón, being present at libraries "was a perfect way to reach out to people... [especially] people who wouldn't normally be exposed to the paper."

Wise and Limón focused their efforts on library branches in neighborhoods, many of them with majority Hispanic or African-American populations, that were typically underserved by the paper and other mainstream media outlets in Dallas and the surrounding area, such as Oak Cliff and South Dallas. Limón—sometimes joined by Wise or another Morning News reporter—would set up a makeshift office of sorts, complete with business cards and a box for visitors to leave comments or questions in, inside the five library branches at which they held office hours. Staffing the table for up to four hours, Limón—greeting people in both English and Spanish—had a goal to have at least 10 meaningful interactions at the first office hours, held at the North Oak

Cliff branch in September. She wasn't there to sell subscriptions or necessarily even to get story ideas; rather, she was just there to listen—whether people had questions about Dallas, the paper, or journalism in general, or even if they just wanted to share things that were going on their neighborhood that they thought deserved coverage. Complaints were welcome as well.

Wise says the office hours were an effective means for engaging with people who aren't regular news consumers, but have the potential to be. "We would just try and have a conversation with people—it's something my team does regularly with subscribers," says Wise. "If we go to libraries, we can tell people, 'Oh, you love the Rangers? We would love to hear from you. You should follow our Rangers reporter Evan Grant.'"

Though it wasn't the point of hosting the office hours, a couple story ideas did end up coming from the efforts. When the newspaper's Report for America fellow, Obed Manuel, joined Limón at one of the office hours at the North Oak Cliff branch, a conversation with a subscriber led to a story about Trinity River Mission, a neighborhood nonprofit providing tutoring, mentoring, scholarships, and other services to low-income students, and how the program's scholarship fund was strained due to the success it had had getting local graduating seniors into college or vocational programs.

For Limón, the interactions she had

with community members made her think as much about what the paper *is* covering in underserved neighborhoods just as much as what they are missing. One of the most memorable exchanges she had was when visiting the Polk-Wisdom branch in Oak Cliff, a predominantly African-American neighborhood in southwest Dallas, on Halloween, when her office hours coincided with an afterschool program. She ended up talking to many of the program participants—kids around 8- to 12-years-old—about issues in their neighborhood they were concerned about, and what they were used to seeing on television and in the media, in the Morning News and elsewhere. Their overwhelming answer? Police brutality against African-Americans. That was a revelation for Limón, striking her that these children needed—and deserved—to see more positive news about their community along with the negative, but often necessary, coverage of violence and race relations.

That’s something the newspaper’s other collaboration with the Dallas Public Library, a program designed to train young community journalists and promote media literacy, can possibly help address. Called “Storytellers Without Borders: Activating the Next Generation of Community Journalists Through Library Engagement,” the eight-week program pairs each teen participant with a mentor from The Dallas Morning News and has them come to the library one evening per week for sessions led by the paper’s reporters, editors, and photographers. The teens learn to report, write, and edit their own news stories and take photography workshops with Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists, but they also have the added benefit of learning more about the library and how it can serve them.

Lauren Smart, Storytellers Without

Borders program coordinator, notes one advantage of partnering with the library: a multitude of resources—including librarians themselves—that can help the student journalists with their work. For many of the participants, exposure to the library is an important element of the program. “I think, for a lot of the students, this is the first time they’ve walked into a Dallas public library. What the library is and how it functions [is something] that a lot of young people don’t understand in the 21st century,” says Smart, who teaches journalism at Southern Methodist University.

Every session, library staff show participants how to use the archives and other resources at the library to help with their reporting; several students end up using photos they find in the library’s archives to pair with their stories, or look through the library’s back copies of The Dallas Morning News to search for background on whatever local topic they’re reporting on.

While teens from all types of socioeconomic backgrounds have participated in the program, Smart and Melissa Dease, the library’s administrator for youth services, have worked to reach out to students from low-income schools that likely have fewer resources and opportunities to serve teens interested in journalism and writing.

Storytellers Without Borders has also proved beneficial for Dallas Morning News reporters who have gotten involved, says Smart. “The young people have these ideas that the seasoned journalists often have overlooked or aren’t particularly aware of. I think it’s been a nice initiative for them. They’re able to come out of the program with a renewed sense of purpose.”

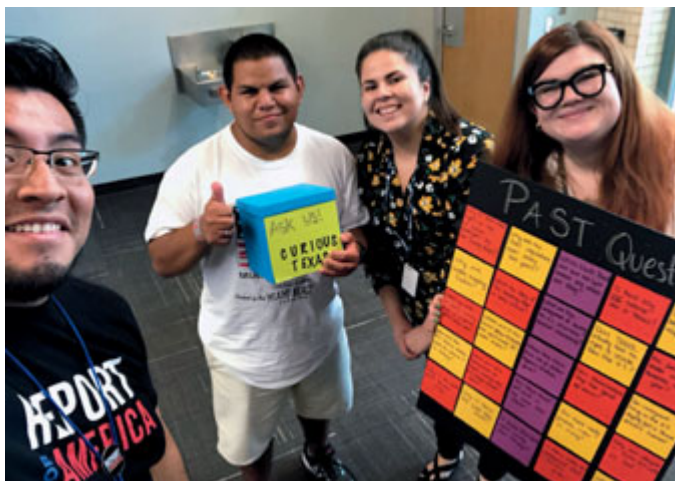
This includes reporter Dom DiFurio, who saw getting involved as a good opportunity to give back—and as a way to reaffirm some of the reasons he’s a journalist in the first

place. “It causes me to rethink the basic principles of journalism,” says DiFurio, who covers breaking business news at the paper and has served as a Storytellers Without Borders mentor as well as teaching classes about interviewing basics. Teens DiFurio has mentored have pursued tough, important stories—from a profile of a teenage Iranian refugee to a student reporting on his own school’s controversial enrollment expansion—that he thinks deserve attention but that the paper doesn’t necessarily have the resources to pursue in-depth. Training the teens how to report on their own communities, DiFurio says, is the perfect way to invest in the future of journalism—especially local journalism. “We need local journalism more now than ever, and if we can expose young generations that are passionate about storytelling to what local journalism looks like and the power and the impact that it can have, all the better.”

One thing the program is intended to do “is not just train journalists but to train civically engaged citizens,” says DiFurio, who, when teaching the class on interviewing, has tried to gauge the news literacy of the participants by asking them where they get their news. “What we’re tackling here is something that the education system has yet to tackle, which is news literacy and critical thinking.”

Putnam adds that banding together to promote news literacy is perhaps one of the most realistic ways for librarians and journalists to collaborate. “There is an essential need for media literacy education, and this need creates lots of room for new ideas and collaborations. School and academic libraries have been teaching increasingly sophisticated forms of information literacy for decades—where they used to teach ‘library skills,’ now they’re teaching life skills that help students navigate a complex and confusing digital landscape,” says Putnam. “There’s an equally important need in the public sphere, and many adults are looking for opportunities to learn more. Librarians and journalists, together, can help fill that need.”

Of course, libraries and librarians will never serve as an adequate replacement for news organizations and journalists. That’s even true in news deserts like Weare, New Hampshire, where Sullivan—the librarian who publishes Weare in the World—is the first to admit this. “I would love it if somebody would move into my little town and start a real newspaper. I’d be more than happy to close up shop on mine,” says Sullivan. ■



A library patron stands between Obed Manuel (far left) and Elvia Limón and Hannah Wise at The Dallas Morning News’s first office hours at a Dallas Public Library branch

THREE NEWS OUTLETS

DISCOVER FRESH COLLABORATORS AND AUDIENCES IN LIBRARIES

BY ERYN CARLSON

Libraries and news organizations are increasingly collaborating to better serve their communities, with librarians teaming up with journalists to promote media literacy and tackle misinformation, develop community journalists, spur civic engagement, and take on reporting projects. Some of them are sharing physical spaces, with newsrooms—temporary or permanent—popping up amidst (or at least not far from) library shelves to enable even greater engagement between reporters and librarians—and the citizens they both seek to serve. A look at three news organizations that have found homes inside libraries:

WGBH STUDIO AT THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

When the historic Boston Public Library was undergoing renovations in 2015, it sought a vendor to occupy a corner of the new space, an open area with huge glass windows facing a busy downtown thoroughfare. Instead of selecting one of the usual suspects—like a coffee shop or retail—the library settled on a different kind of tenant: a public radio station. NPR member station WGBH now operates a 1,000-square-foot TV and radio facility right inside the library, with no walls

restricting library-goers from wandering into the main studio (and the aptly-named adjacent eatery, the Newsfeed Café) and watching twice-weekly live tapings of the local program “Boston Public Radio” as well as broadcasts of other feature programs, interviews, and musical performances.

This unusual arrangement has proved to be a boon for both the library and WGBH. The studio provides a space for collaboration between the two institutions—for example, WGBH has teamed up with the business library to put on a financial workshop, and children’s programming events have been hosted inside the studio—as well as a chance to attract new audiences. It “really adds another reason for people to come to the library. It raises the profile of the library in the community as a whole,” says David Leonard, president of the Boston Public Library. “You will frequently, with some of the special guests they have in when they’re broadcasting live, have standing room only.”

Meanwhile, WGBH gets an opportunity to show library-goers how public radio works, up close and personal, and

expose them to notable guests—everyone from James Comey to Kristine Lilly to Celtic musicians—they might not normally have access to. More essential is that the library satellite studio, in a sharp contrast to WGBH’s main studio on the outskirts of Boston, allows the outlet to more directly interact with Bostonians and engage with them in their programming, through segments like “Hear at the Library,” where library patrons are invited to weigh in on a wide-range of topics, from the most memorable Red Sox moments to gripes with Boston’s public transportation. Most importantly, perhaps, the shared space is helping change the notion of what a public library—and a news outlet—can be in 2019: the Boston Public Library, says WGBH’s BPL studio director Linda Polach, had a mission to “take libraries into the next realm, into the 22nd century, by making them more accessible and inviting and interesting and stimulating. We’re part of that ... We bring something vibrant and exciting and different into a library.”



The public radio station WGBH has a satellite studio inside the historic Boston Public Library downtown



Local students write up a news report in The Sprawl's pop-up newsroom at the Calgary Public Library; Sam Hester, a comic artist for The Sprawl, drew cartoons of students who visited the pop-up newsroom and investigated questions about Calgary's future

THE SPRAWL'S POP-UP NEWSROOM AT CALGARY PUBLIC LIBRARY

In Canada, the crowdfunded, Calgary-based online news organization The Sprawl—which, in the style of slow journalism, focuses in-depth on a single topic at a time—provided a model of how newsrooms and libraries can share space in a more ephemeral manner. Like its journalism projects, The Sprawl's newsroom at the Calgary Public Library was a pop-up, located inside the new central library for the first few months of 2019. The library was looking for a way to activate an open area called the Create Space, while Sprawl founder and editor Jeremy Klaszus was looking for a way to get out of the office and engage with citizens. "People often come to the library to find out more about where they live [and] that's exactly what we're trying to do, too, with The Sprawl. We want to tell the stories of this city. We want to tell them in an in-depth way. Those things totally jive," says Klaszus.

Rather than a place for Klaszus and Sprawl contributors to take up residence to do work, the newsroom was more of a mini-exhibit for library-goers, both to get familiar with the

history of Calgary and its news outlets and to provide input for the news outlet's project at the time, which was centered around the topic of "what's next" for Calgary and what the city will look like—politically, socially, culturally—25 years from now, in 2044. In a space that was both informative and playful, visitors could use a typewriter to jot down their thoughts on what they want the Calgary of the future to look like, while also taking a look at a curated collection of old articles on the topic. "One of the cool things we did for the newsroom was worked with the local history librarian to dig through a bunch of archival material and look at, 'OK, Calgary has wrestled with this question many, many times in the past. What direction should the city go? What's next?'" says Klaszus. "When you come to the newsroom, you can read about how, in the 1970s, Calgary was trying to figure out a planning blueprint for its growth, or 15 years ago Calgary was talking about, 'How do we transition away from being a one-industry town?' You get a portrait of some successes, but also some failures."

Klaszus and freelancers working on the Calgary 2044

edition would frequently spend time at the pop-up newsroom to interact with locals and answer questions about journalism and Calgary; The Sprawl also hosted a live edition of their podcast inside the library's theater. One of the main benefits of engaging with people—students, especially—in the pop-up newsroom, for Klaszus? The idea that exposing them to a newsroom, even if a temporary one, might increase their interest and trust in news organizations. "How do you take that newsroom idea, break it open, invite people into it, and let them explore the inner workings of it? That's been fun with the students because they ask, 'How do these decisions get made?' They have all kinds of questions about the news, how it's changing. There's for sure a news literacy element to it."

NOWCASTSA AT THE SAN ANTONIO PUBLIC LIBRARY

Nonprofit news organization NOWCastSA is located on the sixth floor of a bold, colorful building designed by renowned Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta in San Antonio, a building that also just so happens to be the city's

central library. NOWCastSA—described as a sort of local C-SPAN by executive director Charlotte-Anne Lucas—livestreams local events and news and has two offices housing their studio and staff (largely made up of college interns) inside the San Antonio Public Library, which covers the online news outlet's rent in exchange for coverage of certain library programs and events and additional video services. "One of the joys is that we are not a department of the city," unlike the library, says Lucas. "We're an independent 501(c)(3) that happens to live [at the library], and has a great partnership."

Besides covering some of the institution's programming, NOWCastSA has teamed up with the library for events, such as working with the teen services department to put on storytelling classes and a Mini Maker Faire last fall. The library and NOWCastSA also work together to put on media literacy workshops that Lucas calls "Crap Detection 101." Library director Ramiro Salazar has called the unique partnership between the two entities "a perfect fit" and Lucas—who happens to be the daughter of a librarian—agrees: "For us, it's a joy-and-a-half." ■

Introducing the 82nd Class of Nieman Fellows

The 27 journalists studying at Harvard in 2019-2020 include Nieman's first fellow from Niger



Rania Abouzeid
Australia/Lebanon

Journalist who has covered wars and upheaval across the Middle East and South Asia, studying the dynamics of post-civil war societies



Jasmine Brown
U.S.

Producer for ABC's "Nightline," studying the role of implicit bias in police misconduct and how coverage can illuminate how encounters turn deadly



Ana Campoy
Mexico/U.S.

Senior reporter at Quartz, studying the backlash against globalization and how the media can foster fruitful debate on such polarizing issues



Robert Chaney
U.S.

Staff writer and photographer at the Missoulian in Montana, exploring how the rural-urban divide affects U.S. environmental policy



Selymar Colón
U.S.

Most recently editor-in-chief of digital news at Univision, researching how to effectively reach audiences during periods of low or no connectivity



Alex Dickinson
Australia

Formerly a top editor at Gizmodo Media, studying journalism business models and what can be learned from the video game industry



Matthew Dolan
U.S.

Investigative reporter for the Detroit Free Press, studying how increasing technological disruption in the auto industry impacts local communities



Hannane Ferdjani
Niger

Lead presenter and producer for Africanews channel in the Republic of the Congo, studying how to develop solutions-journalism methods



Anne Godlasky
U.S.

Enterprise editor at USA Today, studying the mental health effects of media consumption and exploring the growing problem of news avoidance



Natalia Guerrero
Colombia/U.S.

New York-based contributor to the BBC, researching an adaptable toolkit for innovative journalism that is aimed at 16- to 24-year-olds



Gülsin Harman
Turkey

Freelance reporter at The New York Times Istanbul bureau, studying how new challenges to journalism, like distrust of media, impact democracy



Lucy Hornby
U.S.

Deputy bureau chief in Beijing for the Financial Times, studying the role of international capital in China's state-led economic model

In selecting the Nieman class of 2020, Nieman Foundation curator Ann Marie Lipinski, a 1990 Nieman Fellow, was joined by Michelle Boorstein, a religion reporter for The Washington Post and a 2017 Nieman Fellow; Felicia Fonseca, also a 2017 Nieman Fellow and an AP reporter covering Native American tribes; James Geary, Nieman's deputy curator and a

2012 Nieman Fellow; and Ryan McKittrick, director of artistic programs and dramaturg at Harvard's American Repertory Theater.

For the second time, Nieman will welcome three journalists chosen as the Abrams Nieman Fellows for Local Investigative Journalism. After two semesters at Harvard, they will work on a public service



Ji Tianqin
China

Chief writer for Caixin Media, studying how to tell the stories of individuals in societies that suffer breakdowns in democratic rule



Carrie Johnson
U.S.

National justice correspondent at NPR, studying the vanishing U.S. criminal trial and threats to the Sixth Amendment right to counsel



Pavel Kanygin
Russia

Correspondent for Novaya Gazeta, studying the ways mass media can counter misinformation in social networks



Johnny Kauffman
U.S.

Reporter with Atlanta's public radio station WABE, studying voting in the 21st century, with a focus on how to analyze election policy and security



Lisa Krantz
U.S.

Photographer at San Antonio Express-News, studying the relationship between photojournalists and their subjects during trauma



Nour Malas
U.S.

Reporter for The Wall Street Journal, studying transitional justice issues in Syria, examining the use of land as a tool in conflict settlements



Obey Manayiti
Zimbabwe

Senior investigative reporter at Alpha Media Holdings, studying illicit financial flows, focusing on how governments steal resources



Ashwaq Masoodi
India

Most recently a national writer for Mint financial daily, exploring ways to battle stereotypes and improve reporting on Muslims



Andras Petho
Hungary

Co-founder and editor of Direkt36, studying how investigative reporting teams operating in hostile environments can thrive



Chastity Pratt
U.S.

Covers urban affairs for Bridge Magazine, studying how multimedia storytelling can amplify solutions to urban education's destabilization



Karyn Pugliese
Canada

Former executive director of news at Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, studying strategies newsrooms can use to support indigenous peoples



Oliver Roeder
U.S.

Senior writer at FiveThirtyEight, studying how journalism might be used to track and demystify the rise of advanced artificial intelligence



Alexander Trowbridge
U.S.

Digital producer at "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," researching ways to create better video recaps of the most important news of the day



Todd Wallack
U.S.

Data investigative reporter for The Boston Globe, studying how newsrooms can be better watchdogs of companies and government agencies using AI



Tennessee Watson
U.S.

Education reporter for Wyoming Public Radio, studying how to produce more nuanced reporting about the challenges young people face

reporting project and participate in specialized journalism education. The fellowships are funded by a generous grant from the Abrams Foundation designed to strengthen local news coverage in underserved communities across the United States. The 2020 Abrams Nieman Fellows are Matthew Dolan, Johnny Kauffman, and Tennessee Watson.

Robert Chaney is the Harry M. Davis Nieman Fellow in Science Journalism. The fellowship will be supported during the 2019-20 academic year by a gift from an anonymous donor made on behalf of Ella (Davis) Mazel in memory of her brother, Harry M. Davis, a science journalist and a Nieman Fellow in the class of 1941.

1959

Mitchel R. Levitas, a longtime editor for The New York Times, died June 22 in New Marlborough, Massachusetts at the age of 89. Levitas spent nearly four decades at the Times, including as editor of the Metro section, the Op-Ed page, and The New York Times Book Review. In his 20s, he won a George Polk Award for a series on labor racketeering.

1975

Andrew Drysdale died in London in April. A South African journalist, Drysdale was editor of the Pretoria News from 1975 to 1982 and, later, editor-in-chief of the Cape Argus newspaper.

1976

Dale Burk has been inducted into the Montana Outdoor Hall of Fame for his work in environmental journalism. Starting in 1968, Burke spent a decade at the Missoulian newspaper, where his groundbreaking reporting on clearcutting by the Forest Service helped spark the passage of the National Forest Management Act.

1977

Paul Solman is a member of the “PBS NewsHour” team that won a Peabody Award in the news category for “The Plastic Problem,” a series of segments exploring how the world’s dependence on plastic is harming ecosystems and how recycling alone will not solve the growing crisis.

1978

Molly Sinclair McCartney is the photographer behind “Syria: Fabric Torn, Fabric Stitched,” an exhibit at the Jerusalem Fund’s Gallery Al-Quds in Washington, D.C. June 14 through July 19. The exhibit

featured McCartney’s photos of pre-war Syria.

1998

Howard Berkes is a member of the NPR and PBS Frontline team that won a national Edward R. Murrow award from the Radio Television Digital News Association. The team was honored in the investigative reporting network radio category for “Coal’s Deadly Dust,” a story and documentary on the black lung epidemic among coal miners—and how regulators could have stopped it.

Phillip Martin is a member of the WGBH-FM Boston and New England Center for Investigative Reporting team that won a national Edward R. Murrow Award from the Radio Television Digital News Association in the investigative reporting large market radio category for the five-part series “The Business of Illicit Massage.”

2001

Ken Armstrong’s story, “An Unbelievable Story of Rape,” a collaboration between Armstrong—then at The Marshall Project—and ProPublica’s T. Christian Miller that won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting, has been turned into a television miniseries titled “Unbelievable.” The eight-episode series will premiere on Netflix in September.

Andrew Sussman is the executive producer of “The Journal,” a podcast co-produced by The Wall Street Journal and Gimlet Media about money, business, and power that debuted in June.

2008

Gaiutra Bahadur has joined the faculty of Rutgers University-Newark as an assistant professor of journalism, where she’ll

begin in September teaching two classes, including one she designed about covering immigration.

Jenifer McKim is a member of the WGBH-FM Boston and New England Center for Investigative Reporting team that won a national Edward R. Murrow Award in the investigative reporting large market category from the Radio Television Digital News Association. The team was honored for the five-part series “The Business of Illicit Massage.”

Simon Wilson is the new regional editor for the BBC World Service Europe and Americas Region. Wilson provides managerial and editorial leadership for staff working for BBC’s Russian, Ukrainian, Serbian, Azerbaijani, Spanish, and Brazil services.

2010

Janet Heard is managing editor at Daily Maverick, an online website in South Africa. Besides co-managing the editorial desk, she co-established an internship program.

Boris Muñoz is a winner of the 2019 Maria Moors Cabot prize, which—administered by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism—honors journalists for career excellence and coverage of the Western Hemisphere and comes with a prize of \$5,000. A native of Venezuela, Muñoz was recognized for his decades-long career as a reporter and editor in both the United States and Latin America, and for his current role as the opinion editor for The New York Times *en Español*.

2011

Tony Bartelme and his colleagues at the Charleston Post and Courier in South Carolina are the winners of the

inaugural Victor K. McElheny Award from the Knight Science Journalism Program at MIT. Bartelme and his reporting team were honored for their investigative series that revealed a little known impact of climate change: changes to the Gulf Stream current, which—causing sea levels to rise and altering weather patterns—could have devastating results for the East Coast.

2012

Jeff Young is a member of the NPR and PBS Frontline team awarded a national Edward R. Murrow award from the Radio Television Digital News Association. The team was honored in the investigative reporting radio category for “Coal’s Deadly Dust.”

2013

Brett Anderson has joined the Food desk at The New York Times as a contributing writer. He will remain based in Louisiana, where until recently he was restaurant critic and features writer for The Times-Picayune. For his coverage for the New Orleans paper, he is winner of both a 2019 Society for Features Journalism Award in the commentary category and the James Beard Foundation’s 2019 Jonathan Gold Local Voice Award, his third James Beard award.

Yaakov Katz is the author of a new book, “Shadow Strike: Inside Israel’s Secret Mission to Eliminate Syrian Nuclear Power,” published by St. Martin’s Press in May. In the book, Katz shares the inside story of Israel’s covert 2007 operation to destroy a suspected nuclear reactor being built in Syria.

2014

Issac J. Bailey is the winner of a 2018 Sigma Delta Chi Award, honoring excellence in journalism, from the Society

of Professional Journalists. Bailey was recognized in the online column writing category for his monthly columns on journalism ethics for Nieman Reports.

Tim Rogers is a member of the “Real America with Jorge Ramos” team that won a national Edward R. Murrow Award, from the Radio Television Digital News Association, in the hard news large digital news organization category. The team was recognized for the segment “Nicaragua’s Refugee Crisis.” Rogers is a producer for “Real America,” which is a Univision news show that appears on Facebook Watch.

2017

Tyler Dukes is a member of the WRAL-TV team that won a regional Edward R. Murrow Award in the excellence in innovation category from the Radio Television Digital News Association. The North Carolina broadcaster was recognized for “Presumption of Fear,” a five-part multimedia series about the state’s Castle Doctrine, which justifies the use of deadly force to defend oneself against an intruder.

Marcela Turati is a winner of the 2019 Maria Moors Cabot prize, which—administered by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism—honors journalists for career excellence and coverage of the Western Hemisphere and comes with a prize of \$5,000. Turati was recognized for her reporting on crime and violence in Mexico, especially documenting victims’ search for justice, her work on collaborative projects, and for advocating for press freedom.

2018

Tristan Ahtone is the winner of a 2019 National Native Media Award, given by the

Native American Journalists Association to recognize excellence in reporting on indigenous communities in the U.S. and Canada. Ahtone won first place in the online best news story category for “National Congress of American Indians Roiled by Claims of Harassment and Misconduct,” his High Country Today investigation.

Sipho Kings has been appointed news editor at South Africa’s Mail & Guardian. Previously, he covered the environment as a reporter for the newspaper. Kings is also the co-author of a new book, “South Africa’s Survival Guide to Climate Change,” which was published by Pan Macmillan South Africa in August.

Frederik Obermaier is the co-author of a new book, “The Ibiza Affair: Interior Views of a Scandal,” published in German by Kippenheuer & Witsch in August. The book traces the rise of two right-wing populists and the scandal that led to the collapse of the Austrian Kurz government.

2019

Benny Becker is a member of the NPR and PBS Frontline team that received a national Edward R. Murrow award from the Radio Television Digital News Association. The team was honored in the investigative reporting radio category for “Coal’s Deadly Dust,” a collaboratively-reported story and documentary on the black lung epidemic among coal miners—and how regulators could have stopped it.

P.E. Moskowitz is the author of a new book, “The Case Against Free Speech: The First Amendment, Fascism, and the Future of Dissent,” which was released in August by Bold Type Books.



2002 Nieman Fellow Dejan Anastasijević in an undated photo

A war reporter who held onto his love of pop culture

Vladimir Radomirovic, NF ’15, reflects on fellow Serbian journalist Dejan Anastasijević, NF ’02

When I first met Dejan Anastasijević in 1994, he was a leading reporter for *Vreme* weekly, one of the few independent media outlets in Belgrade during Yugoslavia’s bloody collapse, and I was starting my career in journalism. Dejan’s voice had become familiar before that via his radio show on comics and graphic novels, which he left to focus on covering the civil war and its brutal consequences. He died April 24 in Belgrade at the age of 57.

In 2002, he testified for the prosecution at the war crimes trial of former Serbian president Slobodan Milošević. “I must say I was nervous because one thing Milošević can be given credit for is humiliating other people,” Dejan wrote in *Vreme*. “As my testimony progressed, the nervousness subsided as I realized the defendant—in line with his general contempt for journalists—had not really prepared to question me.”

Five years later, Anastasijević became a victim of both the Hague tribunal for Yugoslav war crimes and of suspected war criminals. Apparently, the prosecution had leaked a list of witnesses for another trial but had not notified Dejan he was on the list. In April 2007, two hand grenades exploded on the window sill of his first-floor apartment, with Dejan and his wife narrowly escaping death. Investigation into this crime never got anywhere, with Dejan later claiming two officials who had been indicted for war crimes had ordered to have him killed.

One story I will forever remember Dejan by was his investigation of the deaths of 11 workers at a plant in suburban Belgrade in 1995. Dejan discovered that—contrary to all safety rules—a chemical plant was turned into a rocket-fuel production facility to supply the army after it ran out of fuel. The workers had not been trained to handle explosive materials and the plant was not safe enough for that sort of production, all of which led to a massive blast which killed 11 and injured another eight workers. The official investigation never produced any results and, in his exposé, Dejan blamed the prosecutor, Vladimir Vukčević, for catering to politicians’ requests by stalling the investigation so that “higher interests” could be served.

It is perhaps the most telling testament to Dejan’s work that the same prosecutor—who in the early 2000s was named Serbia’s chief war crimes investigator—attended the memorial service for one of his fiercest critics.

A Historian's Approach to Journalism

“Journalism became a vehicle to pursue the kinds of narratives that first got me interested in history: those that question the official story and defy power”

BY LAURA N. PÉREZ SÁNCHEZ

NEVER DREAMED of being a journalist. I came to this profession without studying it in college, guided by my love for the written word. I had studied history at the university, and always imagined that choice would lead me to an academic career in which I would divide my time between archives and the classroom.

But two years after my college graduation, I found myself, by chance, in The Associated Press bureau, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, debuting as a journalist, though I did not even dare to call myself that. If someone asked me in those first years what I did for a living, I would typically answer “I work as a journalist,” instead of saying “I am a journalist.” Today I realize that this was a manifestation of a severe case of impostor syndrome. But, reflecting on why, in 2005, when I started working as a reporter for the AP, it was so hard for me to state my profession, I realize that a great part of that difficulty came from a deep respect for the trade and the personal and social responsibility that comes with being a journalist.

Little by little, however, I realized that even when I came into journalism because of my interest in writing, it was the historian skills I learned at the University of Puerto Rico that, even today, 14 years later, work as the perfect backbone for the type of journalism I like to explore.



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Starting out as a reporter at the AP, I mainly covered breaking news; when I had the time, I reported and wrote features. Those were the ones I enjoyed the most. It all started with a little story, based on newly released public data, about the large traffic jams in the San Juan metropolitan area. Instead of writing a spot news story, I dared to play with the language and images of bored drivers who withstood these jams day after day. After reading it, my editor encouraged me to continue writing that way.

That day I discovered that, in journalism, I was also allowed to be creative, and thus began my eternal search for important stories that I could tell in a more literary and narrative manner. I was also noticing how little I liked to rub shoulders with politicians and those in power—a peeve that lasts to this day—and that daily news, especially what is tied to agendas imposed on us by public relations specialists, bored me greatly. Journalism, then, became a vehicle to pursue the kinds of narratives that first got me interested in history: those that question the official story and defy power.

And then I rediscovered the archives.

While at the investigative unit of the daily newspaper *El Nuevo Día*, I started working on stories that allowed—and, moreover, required—me to dive deep into historical archives to understand the present. Oh, did I like it.

Exploring the archives, I managed to decipher, for example, how much money the Puerto Rican government had spent—more than \$250 million—during three decades of endless feasibility studies for the construction of a cargo port that never materialized and that was being proposed yet again. Combining historical research with data journalism techniques, I explored the origin of dozens of tax incentives that were in effect in Puerto Rico, even when the government could not identify all of them or offer an estimate of their impact on the treasury.

Reviewing documents and old newspaper articles or photographs felt like home. But I didn't make an immediate connection between that part of my job and my college background, because it all felt so journalistic. It took me a few years to notice that the stories I enjoyed working on the most, the ones with impact, were relevant to the present but also had an important history unknown to or forgotten by the majority of the public. Once I allowed myself to fully accept that my academic training was seeping into my work, I started pursuing these kinds of stories with intention.

Not long after that, I found myself back in the archives, this time in an attempt to understand why an iconic hotel in the Puerto Rican capital had been closed for almost half of its existence. I learned that the same features that make it distinctive and make most people oppose its demolition—its boat-like structure and the tiny and emblematic corner of one of San Juan's older neighborhoods where it sits—are some of the main reasons for the failure of its multiple iterations, some even at the expense of public funds.

This approach to journalism from a historical perspective is what I hope will now help me investigate and narrate the post-Maria Puerto Rico, and tell the stories of my country with the appropriate nuances. Because the crisis on the island—much less the political, economic, and social inequalities that Puerto Ricans face—did not begin with the hurricane on September 20, 2017. All these are decades-long—historical—issues that can only be fully grasped, and, hopefully, resolved, if their causes and origin are explored and understood. ■

Laura N. Pérez Sánchez, a 2019 Nieman Fellow, is an investigative reporter from Puerto Rico

“You’ve got to look at what’s happening now. Don’t be so focused on what happened in 2016 and trying to avoid those mistakes that you make all sorts of new mistakes that then we’ll have a conference about.”

—
Amanda Terkel

Washington bureau chief, HuffPost



HuffPost’s Amanda Terkel speaks on a panel—also featuring, from left, BuzzFeed’s Ben Smith, Sam Feist of CNN, and moderator Margaret Talev of Bloomberg—at the 2020 Campaign Journalism Conference hosted by the Nieman Foundation and the Institute of Politics at the University of Chicago at Google’s Chicago headquarters in April 2019

NiemanReports

Working Across Disciplines:

A Manifesto for Happy Newsrooms

In today’s newsrooms, interdisciplinary teams are increasingly common—and essential—for successful innovation. For those hoping to set up their own interdisciplinary teams, 2019 Nieman Fellow Uli Köppen, who studied interdisciplinary newsroom management during her fellowship year, created a guide with input from various newsroom leaders on the different approaches at their own organizations.

Breaking the Silence About Corruption in Spain’s Press

David Jiménez was appointed the editor-in-chief of one of Spain’s biggest dailies, *El Mundo*, following his Nieman fellowship in 2015. Little did he know then that the role would be a tumultuous one, spent defending *El Mundo*’s independence amidst a sea of political and economic corruption. His new tell-all book, “*El Director*” (“*The Editor*”), details his year at the paper’s helm, and a translated excerpt published by Nieman Reports breaks the silence on corruption in Spain’s media.

NiemanLab

The New York Times Chinese Edition Looks for New Audiences

There’s a lot of big news coming out of China this summer, from the Hong Kong protests and the trade wars to the 30th anniversary of Tiananmen Square. Nieman Lab chats with 2009 Nieman Fellow Ching-Ching Ni, editor-in-chief of *The New York Times*’s Chinese edition, about the site’s rising traffic, audience, and outreach.

NiemanStoryboard

Rethinking How We See and Understand News—and Who Frames It

It may be the golden age of visual storytelling, but it’s also the age of digitally manipulated images. However, as the digital revolution challenges the trustworthiness of certain visual images, it also inspires a multitude of diverse, innovative ways to depict truer—and more complex—news stories. Photographer Nancy Farese, founder of the visual storytelling nonprofit *CatchLight*, shares some creative and compelling examples of ways innovators are rethinking the visual delivery of news.

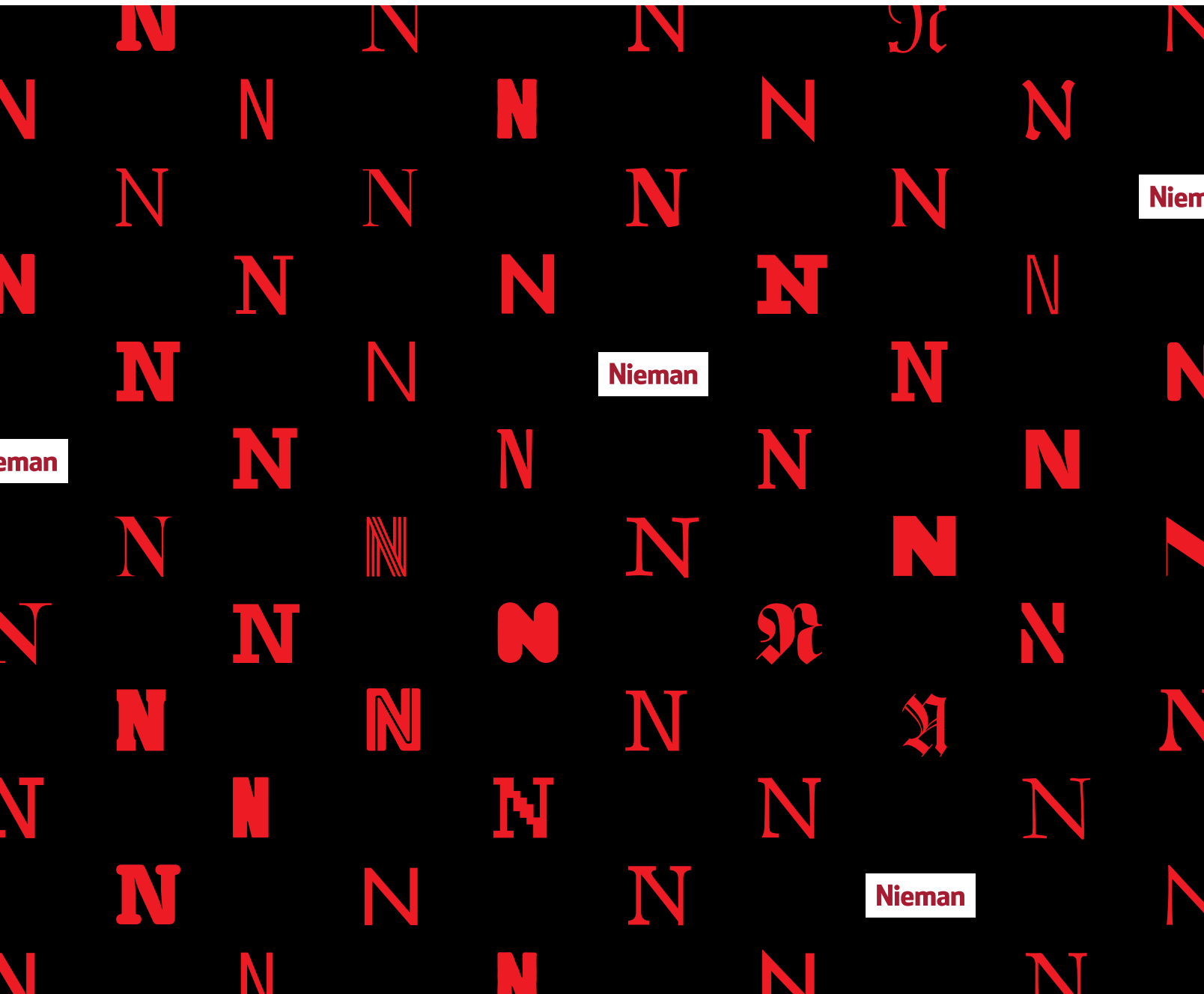
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COVERING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY