

Nieman Reports

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Iran: Can Its Stories Be Told?

21st Century Muckrakers

Public Health, Public Safety, Public Trust

Words & Reflections

Objectivity: Time to Say Goodbye

Books: About Journalists, Religion, Blogging,
Ireland, Post 9/11 America

'to promote and elevate the standards of journalism'

Agnes Wahl Nieman
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Nieman Reports
The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University

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4 Iran: Can Its Stories Be Told?

Treatment of Journalists

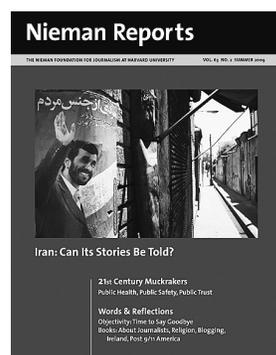
- 5 Understanding Iran: Reporters Who Do Are Exiled, Pressured or Jailed |
By Iason Athanasiadis
- 7 Journalism in a Semi-Despotic Society | *Byline Withheld*
- 9 An Essay in Words and Photographs: Peering Inside Contemporary Iran |
By Iason Athanasiadis
- 14 When Eyes Get Averted: The Consequences of Misplaced Reporting |
By Roya Hakakian
- 15 Imprisoning Journalists Silences Others | *By D. Parvaz*
- 17 'We Know Where You Live' | *By Maziar Bahari*
- 20 An Essay in Words and Photographs: A Visual Witness to Iran's Revolution |
By Reza
- 26 Film in Iran: The Magazine and the Movies | *By Houshang Golmakani*

Women Reporters, Women's Stories

- 28 Your Eyes Say That You Have Cried | *By Masoud Behnoud*
- 29 Telling the Stories of Iranian Women's Lives | *By Shahla Sherkat*
- 30 Iranian Journalist: A Job With Few Options | *By Roza Eftekhari*

View From the West

- 32 Seven Visas = Continuity of Reporting From Iran | *By Barbara Slavin*
- 34 No Man's Land Inside an Iranian Police Station | *By Martha Raddatz*
- 35 The Human Lessons: They Lie at the Core of Reporting in Iran | *By Laura Secor*
- 38 Iran: News Happens, But Fewer Journalists Are There to Report It | *By Mark Seibel*
- 40 When the Predictable Overtakes the *Real* News About Iran | *By Scheherezade Faramarzi*



Cover: Waving hello or goodbye? Iranian Presidential candidate Mah-moud Ahmadinejad in an election poster from 2005 in the conservative South Tehran district of Meidan-e Shush. Ahmadinejad's working-class, pious background and his experience as mayor of Tehran allowed him to sweep most of the capital's districts in that election. *Photo and caption by Iason Athanasiadis.*

Nieman Reports Online

www.niemanreports.org

The Web and Iran: Digital Dialogue

- 42 Attempting to Silence Iran's 'Weblogistan' | *By Mohamed Abdel Dayem*
46 The Virtual Iran Beat | *By Kelly Golnoush Niknejad*

49 21st Century Muckrakers

- 50 The Challenges and Opportunities of 21st Century Muckraking | *By Mark Feldstein*
53 Investigating Health and Safety Issues—As Scientists Would | *By Sam Roe*
55 Rotting Meat, Security Documents, and Corporal Punishment | *By Dave Savini*
58 Mining the Coal Beat: Keeping Watch Over an 'Outlaw' Industry | *By Ken Ward, Jr.*
62 Reporting Time and Resources Reveal a Hidden Source of Pollution |
By Abrahm Lustgarten
65 Pouring Meaning Into Numbers | *By Blake Morrison and Brad Heath*
67 Navigating Through the Biofuels Jungle | *By Elizabeth McCarthy*
70 Going to Where the Fish Are Disappearing | *By Sven Bergman, Joachim Dyfvermark,
and Fredrik Laurin*
74 Watchdogging Public Corruption: A Newspaper Unearths Patterns of Costly Abuse |
By Sandra Peddie
76 Filling a Local Void: J-School Students Tackle Watchdog Reporting |
By Maggie Mulvihill and Joe Bergantino

Words & Reflections

- 78 Objectivity: It's Time to Say Goodbye | *By John H. McManus*
80 Worshipping the Values of Journalism | *By John Schmalzbauer*
82 When Belief Overrides the Ethics of Journalism | *By Sandi Dolbee*
83 Religion and the Press: Always Complicated, Now Chaotic | *By Mark Silk*
85 Journalists Use Novels to Reveal What Reporting Doesn't Say | *By Matt Beynon Rees*
86 Life Being Lived in Quintessential Irish Moments | *By Rosita Boland*
91 An Enduring Story—With Lessons for Journalists Today | *By Graciela Mochkofsky*
93 They Blog, I Blog, We All Blog | *By Danny Schechter*
95 Fortunate Son: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson | *By Adam Reilly*
97 The American Homeland: Visualizing Our Sense of Security | *By Nina Berman*
3 **Curator's Corner:** The Journey of the 2009 Nieman Fellows—And of the Foundation |
By Bob Giles
101 **Nieman Notes** | *Compiled by Lois Fiore*
101 Jobs Change or Vanish: Nieman's Discover an Unanticipated Bonus in Community Work |
By Jim Boyd
104 Class Notes

The Journey of the 2009 Nieman Fellows—And of the Foundation

In their experiences, conversations and future directions, they create a portrait of what is happening in journalism today.

BY BOB GILES

Dramatic changes in the world of journalism weighed heavily on the lives and outlook of the Nieman class of 2009: news of layoffs from their newsrooms (and of one of their newspapers disappearing), worry about the future of newspapers, uncertainty about their own paths as journalists. Even as fellows wrestled with these realities, what remained firm was their knowledge that journalism is essential as a bulwark of democracy. Over time, the transformative nature of the Nieman experience broadened their outlook, encouraging them to envision roles in journalism's future and finding their places in it. They learned how emerging technologies enable connections with larger and well-targeted audiences while at the same time empowering them to tell their stories on multiple platforms and to interact more directly with the public while still adhering to journalism's core values.

The fellows also found many supportive voices joining the conversation throughout the year speaking to the value of journalism. Following a ceremony at Lippmann House, when the fellows received certificates for completion of their fellowships, Harvard University President Drew Faust urged them to use the digital tools wisely in moving past the mere rapid transmission of information into the tougher work of ensuring understanding. “Go forth,” she said, “to change the world not only in a way that will enable us to survive but to thrive.”

A few days earlier, Martin Baron, editor of *The Boston Globe*, had reminded the fellows that “Good journalism, as you know, does not come cheap. The most powerful journalism—breakthrough journalism—can be shockingly expensive.” He warned that the “end of reporting that requires a major investment of resources ... means we will see a huge void in American journalism. And it will allow people who are powerful, or crafty, or both, to engage in wrongdoing without fear of being held accountable.”

That same evening, the Nieman class honored one of its own, Fatima Tlisova, with the Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism. In presenting the award to Fatima, a brave reporter and sensitive spirit, David Jackson, her classmate, said that we were bearing witness to the reality that “no government can commit serious crimes against its own citizens—can practice abduction, torture or genocide—without first silencing the press.” [On page 49 are descriptions of Tlisova's investigative reporting with excerpts from remarks she and Jackson made at the Lyons Award ceremony.]

Tlisova, like many journalists, is at risk in her homeland, and she knows a life of struggle lies ahead by retaining her dedication to bearing witness. Like her, many Nieman Fellows come from nations torn by conflict and often in the grip of authoritarian rulers employing repressive measures to restrict press independence and freedom. For a year, they live in what Jackson called a “privileged exile.” For them, uncertainties lie ahead as they weigh the risks of returning home against the difficulties of finding ways to stay in the safe sanctuary that America offers.

In this time of challenge and crisis for journalists and legacy news organizations, the Nieman Foundation remains fundamentally optimistic. Our fellowship program is forward looking—providing fellows with the all-too-rare opportunity today of being able to think deeply and reflect on how they can best contribute to journalism's future while fostering the values of excellence and high purpose.

Throughout its existence, the foundation has spoken in a variety of ways to the widening range and of journalism's possibilities.

- Since the first issue of *Nieman Reports* was published in 1947, it has been fulfilling its founding purpose: to explore the responsibilities of the press and expand understanding about how journalism can be strengthened.
- The Nieman Watchdog project revolves around the idea that asking the right questions lies at the core of meaningful journalism. In serving as a surrogate for the public, the press is obliged to ask probing questions, from town meetings to the state house to the White House.
- On the *Narrative Digest*, well reported, powerfully written stories demonstrate why long-form journalism matters as a way of conveying deeper understanding. Here excellent storytelling is showcased and its methods explained.
- The Nieman Journalism Lab, launched last fall in response to industry's search for workable business models for journalism in the era of digital media, provides real time updates on the rapidly shifting ground on which journalism is rebuilding.

These endeavors speak to the enduring principles of quality journalism. At a time when some believe the best of times are in the rearview mirror, the paths that lie ahead for this year's fellows and for the foundation—while sure to be bumpier than usual—are embedded in promise. ■

Iran: Can Its Stories Be Told?

On a spring afternoon, Iason Athanasiadis, then in his Nieman year and a photojournalist who'd worked in Tehran for three years before arriving in Cambridge, urged me to have Nieman Reports illuminate the ways in which Iranian and Western journalists and those who carry dual citizenship work in Iran. His vision was of a wide-ranging exploration of on-the-ground reporting. A year later, stories woven with threads of reporting experiences remind us of why it's difficult for outsiders to truly understand what is happening in Iran.

Roya Hakakian grew up in postrevolutionary Iran. Now, as an Iranian-American author and journalist, she yearns for a clearer view of her homeland to emerge. "Poor reporting from and about Iran has kept the West in the dark," she writes. "In this lightlessness, Iranians are rendered as ghosts."



Wearing an Iranian flag, a Metallica T-shirt, and bandanas supporting reformist candidate Mostafa Moein, two friends attended a 2005 pre-election rally in a Tehran soccer stadium. *Photo by Iason Athanasiadis.*

Journalists still push against boundaries of what Iran permits to tell what is happening there. Doing so invites the tactics of intimidation, threats and interrogations and the risk of imprisonment, banishment, torture and, in some cases, death. A reporter who has been imprisoned and is writing without a byline says: "It is undecided life, with the risks taken being unpredictable, since its press law is

open to interpretation. Punishment for breaking the law depends on many things, too, including who you are and what your job is." Another reporter sent us an e-mail to explain why words intended for our pages would not be on them: "If it was a better time, I would have done it. I am under a lot of psychological pressure, and I am trying not to let it affect my work. My neighbors keep getting calls from security officials who tell them that I am involved in drug smuggling. I am assuming that they want to intimidate me with embarrassing charges before the election."

Others in our Nieman family provided invaluable guidance, and I am grateful to them. Roza Eftekhari, once an editor at Zanan, a women's magazine in Iran banned in 2007 by the Press Supervisory Board, reached out to Iranian journalists and asked them to write for this issue. She also found a Farsi translator, Semira Noelani Nikou, a 22-year-old student at Scripps College. Hannah Allam, Scheherezade Faramarzi, Dorothy Parvaz, Nieman Fellows in this year's class, generously offered advice, with Scheherezade and Parvaz, both with family ties to Iran, joining their words to our pages, giving a gift to us all. ■—Melissa Ludtke

Understanding Iran: Reporters Who Do Are Exiled, Pressured or Jailed

‘Roxana’s work consistently gave the lie to the narrative of a monolithic Islamic Republic.’

BY IASON ATHANASIADIS



Roxana Saberi (right) with a friend in Tehran in 2006. Photo by Iason Athanasiadis.

On May 10th, an appeals court in Iran suspended the prison sentence of American-Iranian journalist Roxana Saberi, who had been held in detention for more than three months. After being released from jail, she returned to the United States. In mid-April, Iran’s Revolutionary Court had charged her with spying for the United States and sentenced her to eight years in prison. This essay was written during the time Saberi was in Tehran’s Evin Prison about her and the challenging circumstances under which she and other journalists work in Iran.

She joined our improbable group halfway through the academic year and stuck it out until the end. In class she was calm, courteous and reserved. Her notes were assiduous, her questions intelligent. But she refrained from the cut-and-thrust that the rest of us thrilled in engaging in with our rather serious foreign ministry professors.

Roxana Saberi was self-possessed, unflappable and inscrutable.

We were a strange group even before Roxana, the Japanese-Iranian-American broadcast journalist beauty queen, joined

us. There was a blonde Scottish Oxford graduate who managed to combine the flimsiest of mandatory headscarfs with superb Persian delivered in an upper-crust British drawl; an American jurist who enthusiastically embraced her suffocating, government-mandated hijab long after it was spelled out to her that she could get away with less; a likeable South African diplomat in a perennial black “Reservoir Dogs” suit and string tie who was quiet for weeks at a time aside from occasional eruptions into frustrated, anti-imperialist screeds; a devout Saudi whose nationality was revoked after she met a Shi’ite Iranian fellow student at a university in the United States, married him and moved to Iran, and a Turkish diplomat about whom we learned very little except that he liked Iranian kebabs.

Roxana floated serenely over our rambunctiousness. She handed in her assignments on time, even while struggling to make ends meet as a freelance correspondent. Just before the end of the year, she received a summons to the ministry of education. If only such Sisyphean harassment of foreign students wasn’t the bread-and-circus of Iran’s rambling bureaucracy, the incident might have been prophetic.

Patient, punctual and self-possessed, Roxana went to the

meeting. But the person she was supposed to see was not there, nor would he be back that day, an assistant told her as if arranging a meeting, skipping out on it, and then denying its existence was the most natural thing in the world. This charade played out a few more times until Roxana was told the reason behind her summoning: As a journalist, she was ineligible by Iranian law to receive her master's degree.

No apparent logic was offered to explain the verdict. After all of her hard work, Roxana was denied her degree because of an unknown technicality. She knew how the system worked and that she could do nothing about it. She just had to put her head down and deal with it. As my endlessly frustrated Iranian friends never tired of reminding me, logic controls little in Iran.

This denial was only one of many frustrations imposed on Roxana as she struggled to live for her first time in Iran, work and reconcile her Iranian and Japanese identities with an American upbringing in North Dakota. When BBC World took her on in 2006 for the post of second correspondent, it was a long-awaited break. But a few months later, her accreditation was revoked and she was forced to return to low-profile freelancing.

Whenever I saw her, Roxana never betrayed the difficulties she was going through. She was always willing to help, pass on a contact, or inquire about my problems. She never mentioned that she was working on a book. But judging by her stoic character, a book she wrote would almost certainly have avoided the self-indulgencies of so many other expat memoirs that focus on personal journeys of self-discovery rather than the extraordinary, wonderful and deeply frustrating society that usually just provides the background.

Meanwhile, Roxana, her turquoise headscarf, videocamera and tripod were a fixture at press events. Her fluent Persian allowed her to give the kind of deep insight into the human side of Iran that is intentionally stripped away from the bombastic statements about Israel, threats to shut down

Committee to Protect Journalists, Inc. Petition

Petition for the Release of Roxana Saberi



Petition Completed!
TOTAL SIGNATURES COLLECTED: 10,669

Take the next step! Join one of the causes that featured this petition: [Join a Cause](#)



Petition Sponsor:
Committee to Protect Journalists, Inc. wrote and will deliver this petition.

About this Petition:
American Roxana Saberi, an internationally respected freelance journalist who has worked for National Public Radio, the BBC, ABC News, and other international media outlets, has been held without charge since the end of January in Iran. We would like to encourage her friends, supporters and fellow journalists to sign this letter to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad requesting his ... (read more)

The Desired Outcome of this Petition:
Update: We have read the reports that Roxana Saberi will be released "shortly" but until she is, we will be collecting signatures.

Because of the outpouring of support for Roxana, we have decided to extend the deadline for this letter until Monday. We have far exceeded our original goal of 1000 signatures and now hope to deliver as many as 10,000 signatures on ... (read more)

Total Signatures:
10,669 of 10,000 signatures

Causes Featuring:
-- Select One --

Top Signature Gatherers:

-  Carol
337 signatures
-  Andrew Levinson
326 signatures
-  Meredith Greene Megaw
254 signatures

Intense international pressure was exerted by journalists and political leaders to urge the Iranians to release Roxana Saberi, which happened on May 10th.

the Persian Gulf, or announcement of fresh technological leaps.

Language, Meaning and Depth

Therein lies the rub. Roxana's work consistently gave the lie to the narrative of a monolithic Islamic Republic. It went counter to the tension-escalating script that sees journalists focus on hard-line prayer sermons, anti-American demonstrations—dominated by government civil servants—and suicide-bomber registration drives, in which “bombers” register but don't carry out an operation. It's all part of Tehran's never-ending baiting of Washington.

Roxana was no spy. Anyone who has experienced the difficulty of working as a journalist in Iran can tell you that researching a balanced story about the nuclear issue, let alone infiltrating the Islamic Republic's deepest secrets, is near impossible. But Roxana was so good at what she did as to become a thorn. Her work cut away from the herd to focus on Iran's tumultuous and deeply fascinating society. How disruptive this must have been for

the regime's painstakingly constructed image of a stiff upper-lipped Islamic society dedicated to revolutionary ideals rather than the proliferating plasma TVs and home appliances over which Iran's materialistic postwar middle class (post-sanctions, they are now also nouveaux pauvres) salivate over.

There is a constant to Iran expelling journalists once they become too well versed in the country. Hyphenated Iranians, who cannot be expelled, instead experience the pressure being ratcheted up on them until residence there becomes unbearable.

Iran turned into a security state after the 2005 election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Sanctions were imposed, the covert intelligence war between the Islamic Republic and the West swelled, and the authorities announced they had broken up several intelligence networks and carried out repeated sweeps of dissidents. Workers' protests and a number of unexplained explosions rocked the country from 2005 onwards, putting the regime on edge. As correspondents for Agence France-Presse, The Associated Press, The Independent, The Guardian, and the Financial Times were barred, the

foreign journalist exodus began.

Far better, Iran's sphinx like bureaucrats thought, to give finite visitor visas to clueless, non-Persian speaking foreigners than to have permanently accredited (and bothersome) correspondents understanding the country and its culture. Instead, these outsiders would scoot around the Tehran-Qom-Isfahan triangle with their state-appointed guide, breathlessly interview a few regime-sanctioned reformists, indulge in some surreptitious flirting with Iran's abundance of luscious womanhood, and come away mouthing similar platitudes about this "complex civilization," "paradoxical" country, and "layered" society.

By summer 2007, Roxana, working without a press permit, was one of a very few journalists still surveying the scene. The night before I left Iran in 2007, an Iranian political analyst for a foreign embassy told me that the Iranian government abhors foreign journalists, who are seen as proffering

"social intelligence" about their host country. Unlike truly locked-away lands such as North Korea, Iran is an open society proud of its contribution to world civilization. But the current security-minded regime wants to minimize the outflow of information.

Despite the abundance of information available about Iranian society, CIA agents allegedly speak Tajik-accented Persian, the kind of hillbilly squawk that might secure them road-construction jobs in provincial Iran but probably not high-level political access. Over at Langley, they watch Iranian cinema for clues about the target society or fish for scraps of information amid the exile communities in Los Angeles, Dubai and Baku.

The security-minded Ahmadinejad administration has sought to shut out information gathering of even the most innocent kind, an attitude diametrically opposed to the earlier Khatami administration's emphasis on debate and openness. But even if

the hard-line trend is now dominant—egged on by the Bush administration's provocative and threatening maneuvers among Iran's neighbors and Pentagon covert operations within its borders—journalists should not become sacrificial lambs.

Roxana and other journalists who reside in Tehran were massively hampered by existing in a state that viewed them as official spies. That was barrier enough to considering a freelance career as an intelligence informant. But what Roxana's case reminds us—aside from the great disservice it did to Iran's reputation—is that in our increasingly intertwined world journalists are not considered a protected species but treated as fair game. ■

Jason Athanasiadis, a 2008 Nieman Fellow and a freelance journalist in Iran between 2004 and 2007, wrote this article for The National, published in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

Journalism in a Semi-Despotic Society

'Censorship, low payment, and the high risk of arrest for any journalist who dares to take an investigative step, among other reasons such as lack of individual liberty, have pushed Iranian journalists to the virtual world of the Internet.'

This article is written by a journalist in Iran. No byline appears on it due to the situation this journalist confronts while working. This journalist has done reporting for Western television.

To be on the safe side, it is advisable to apply the prefix "semi" in describing events, politics, NGOs and journalism in Iran. "Here is not a democracy, but 'semi' democracy," some write. For others, "It is not a democratic, but a dynamic society." Sentences like these are used by nearly every Western journalist visiting Iran to describe the society safely while being certain of securing their next press visa and satisfying the curiosity

of readers in Europe, Asia and the United States.

But how does it feel to live and work in a "semi" society? It is undecided life, with the risks taken being unpredictable, since its press law is open to interpretation. Punishment for breaking the law depends on many things, too, including who you are and what your job is. For example, a blogger or print journalist committing the same crime might end up with different verdicts. A former classmate in high school writes for roozonline.com, a news wire based in Europe that is moderate in criticism. She is not arrested, though she lives in Tehran. Another person, writing for the same

publication, ended up in jail, was bailed out and had to escape Iran.

Reporters, when arrested, can end up in solitary confinement in the notorious Evin Prison. In fact, this is usually where journalists and bloggers are locked up at first for a couple of weeks or months. If they let themselves be co-opted, agree to act as a collaborator after being bailed out, or bid farewell to journalism and go abroad, their cooperation labels them as good or tolerable journalists. They can achieve this by volunteering information about their contacts or those they've interviewed, or even tell the interrogators about like-minded friends.

The income “good” journalists can earn is so meager (around \$500 a month) that they are forced to compromise their professionalism by being an advertising agent or by wheeling and dealing in planting favorable reporting to business or consumer goods. Many times one of my coworkers at my daily publication wrote letters in Farsi and English to Nestlé or other companies in Iran to negotiate the marketing of products under the excuse of writing “health or food stuff” pieces. Collusion involving moneymaking is also found among sports writers. The sports pages have among the highest readership, and dozens of male sportswriters are in jail because they’ve been involved in fixing matches or, in most of these cases, served as brokers in selling and buying soccer and basketball players.

Self-censorship: To write in Farsi is to push internalized red lines from the subconscious to conscious. Those well versed in the ways of self-censorship transgress these red areas unknowingly in the same way a soldier finds his way through a minefield. A well-experienced journalist is defined in this instance as “a person who can say what he means in a way that the friends (audience) can get the point and the enemies (censors and pressure groups) miss the point.” Another effective form of self-censorship involves distracting the focus of the audience (including writers at the dailies) to the disastrous woes of the current economic crisis in the United States, in particular, and the West, in general.

Heaping invectives on the U.S. administration and its misconduct can also be a way of continuing to work as a journalist while staying out of jail. Another tricky way to do this is to take advantage of the dichotomy of so-called reformist and conservative camps by acting as a journalist with impartiality. In short, whatever is written should prove that you are a strong believer in the ruling estab-

lishment and you see eye to eye with the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. When you are seen as a sympathizer to the regime, you can criticize the incumbent government. Translating Western newspaper articles can be used as a safety valve to say what you mean through other stories, for example about Turk or Arab societies or regimes.

Postal costs and subsidized dailies: The cost of publishing nearly all of Iran’s daily newspapers is subsidized by low interest loans. With monthly or weekly magazines (with the exception of the “yellow” press,¹) subscribers are diminishing in number as people lose interest in reading what they consider to be old and outdated articles and analysis, since many of these publications contain no firsthand reports. And postal costs have recently been almost tripled, which has only worsened this situation—a monthly magazine that costs less than one dollar now costs almost three dollars to be mailed. As one well versed journalist said, this additional cost has been the “finisher bullet” to any independent periodicals.

Lack of newspaper readership: Historically, with its low readership and circulation of dailies, Iranians do not rely on newspapers to get information. In fact, daily reporting of news about human events is not what the average citizen seeks. The Hamshahri (Citizen), the city of Tehran’s mouthpiece with the highest circulation of around half a million a day, is not sold for its news content but for its advertisements, real estate vacancies, and eulogies of the dead. Voice of America (VOA) and more recently BBC Persian (on radio and TV) and the Internet through proxies are the main sources for news for urban residents. To understand how small the impact of newspapers is, I remind you that for more than two weeks during the New Year holi-

days, which started on March 21st, no newspapers were published, and their absence was not felt at all.

Movement toward the Internet: Censorship, low payment, and the high risk of arrest for any journalist who dares to take an investigative step, among other reasons such as lack of individual liberty, have pushed Iranian journalists to the virtual world of the Internet. This is happening even though the adviser to Tehran’s general prosecutor has said that Iranian officials blocked about five million Web sites in 2008. This has forced some of these digital journalists to look for jobs at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (Radio Farda), VOA and BBC Persian, or simply seek a nonjournalistic or public relations job to promote goods rather than act as the conscience of public opinion. Some create their own independent press, if it is possible to do so. [See articles about the Web and Iran on pages 42-48.]

I used to see many of my journalism colleagues at Café Godot (named after Beckett’s play) near the University of Tehran; now I read their bylines or hear their voices in Radio Farda, BBC Persian, or VOA. Those who are like me—a young journalist who remains in Iran—have to write as a sycophantic journalist, finding some way to castigate the United States and Western society, in general, while at the same time saying something between the lines. This is not journalism, rather it is compromising one’s principles day in and day out. However, when journalists dare to write under pseudonyms for any Persian news wires outside of Iran, they will face a harsh punishment, such as happened with Sohail Asefi, who escaped, Nader Karimi, who is still in jail, Omidreza Mirsayafi, who died in jail [more information about his death is on page 44], and dozens of others who still are kept in Evin Prison. ■

¹ The “yellow press” is a popular name for newspapers and periodicals of the early 20th century that published news stories of a vulgarly sensational nature, a name synonymous with gutter press.

AN ESSAY IN WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Peering Inside Contemporary Iran

BY IASON ATHANASIADIS



A little girl looks out from a crowd of chador-covered women during a fire ritual that tens of thousands of women perform on the eve of the Shi'ite festival of Ashura in the town of Khorramabad in western Iran. Ashura is part of mainstream Shi'ite Islam but, similar to Sufism, certain of its rituals approach a mystic plateau that has led orthodox Muslim scholars to condemn them.

An exhibit of photographs of Iran featuring the work of Iason Athanasiadis, a 2008 Nieman Fellow, opened for a three-month show in January at the Craft and Folk Art Museum (CAFAM) in Los Angeles, California. "Exploring the Other: Contemporary Iran," the title Athanasiadis selected for his

collection, became the first exhibit of political photography from Iran to be shown at an American museum since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Now Athanasiadis is contributing some of the exhibit's photographs, along with others he took during the years when he lived and worked in Iran, to the

pages of Nieman Reports. His words that accompany these photographs were written for CAFAM's newsletter to introduce his show and explain how a photojournalist created an "artistic museum show about Iran." On the following page, this introduction appears in a reworked version.



Giant placards of the former and current supreme leaders of the Islamic Republic tower over the 100,000 seat Azadi Stadium in western Tehran during a soccer game. January 2006. *Photo and text by Iason Athanasiadis.*

It is the most hypothetical news story topping the international news agenda today. Is the Islamic Republic of Iran pursuing a nuclear bomb? Is it seeking to dominate the Persian Gulf? Sometimes it gets difficult to find the fire amid all the smoke of headlines and the heat of rhetoric.

Speculation and demonization consistently drown out the Middle East's most ethnically and religiously diverse culture. They obscure landscapes of rare variety and geological beauty pulsating with color and a rare light. Iran's mystical topography is the setting for a struggle between tradition and modernity that has been a constant of the modern era, first during the Qajar and Pahlavi empires, then

throughout the three-decade lifespan of the Islamic Republic.

I come from Greece, a country as rich in heritage and as culturally fractious as Iran. Moving to Tehran in 2004, I was struck by our shared experience of forming modern identities. Old civilizations find it particularly awkward to adapt to a rational present where culture and tradition stand for little, countries where indigenous religions—Greek polytheism and Iranian Zoroastrianism—are overshadowed by the doctrines of Christianity and Islam.

Greece and Iran have both been crossroads and laboratories for experiments in social conditioning. In Iran, the most radical consequence of this cultural struggle was the 1979 Islamic

Revolution, when social, religious and economic agendas collided. Perhaps the most visible outcome of this battle was the forceful imposition of state-sanctioned faith and the marginalization of indigenous traditions. Whether in the form of churches planted on top of marble temples or Zoroastrian shrines transformed into imamzadehs (burial shrines for Shi'ite saints), cultural history was whitewashed to make room for a new national narrative.

While living in Iran, I photographed the country from the perspective of charting two great civilizations' shared narratives and divergent fates. This photo essay reflects where the Iranian experiment at theocracy stands on the eve of its 30th anniversary. ■



Kurdish villagers head back to Horamane Takht in western Iran after a Sufi ceremony in a graveyard on the outskirts of the village.

Photo and text by Iason Athanasiadis.



Traditional women in Hormozgan Province walk along the Bandar Abbas-Jask route in the baking midday heat. Their peasant dresses contrast anachronistically against the heavy lorries transporting cut-price Chinese goods on the international highway west. *Photo and text by Jason Athanasiadis.*

Jason Athanasiadis is a writer, photographer, filmmaker and TV producer who has been reporting from the Middle East, Central Asia, and the southeast Mediterranean for various news organizations during the past decade. He covered the 2003 invasion of Iraq from Qatar for Al Jazeera, the 2004 Athens Olympics for BBC World, and the 2006 Israeli-Hizbullah war in Lebanon as a freelancer.



Dead soldiers look out of aging photographs in Golestan-e Shohada, a male-only martyrs cemetery in Isfahan.



Young women practice the mystical sama whirling dance in Tehran's Velinjak district. Sufism has flourished in urban areas over the past few years, far beyond its traditional heartlands in Khorassan, Kerman and Kordestan Provinces. Buddhism, Christianity and yoga retreats also are increasingly popular. *Photos and text by Iason Athanasiadis.* ■

When Eyes Get Averted: The Consequences of Misplaced Reporting

‘Poor reporting from and about Iran has kept the West in the dark. In this lightlessness, Iranians are rendered as ghosts.’

BY ROYA HAKAKIAN

On the day that the Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi, charged with espionage by Tehran, was handed her eight-year sentence, I received several dozen messages asking if I planned to write something about the case. It is a natural question for those who know me: I am Iranian. I write about Iran, and I often write what in journalism we refer to as human-interest stories. Yet as certain as I was about Saberi’s innocence, I refused to write only about her. That would be precisely what Tehran’s ruling puppeteers wanted everyone to do. And I am, above all, a writer, not a marionette.

I am also an American. I believe in our goodness and in our genuine desire to learn the truth. I reject my Iranian compatriots’ conspiratorial views about Big Brother’s hold on our media. Yet I cannot quite explain why the coverage of Iran in our press is so profoundly inadequate. Every week, so many hundreds of articles are written about Iran’s nuclear program that yellow cake now has the appeal of pastry to our palette, and its top chef, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is watched just as avidly. Espionage is cheap in Iran, and hundreds are charged with it every year, but few “spies” become household names. With Iran’s presidential election only weeks away, as I write this, I hardly call it a coincidence.

Events Overshadow Stories

Tyrannies are born in crisis. They thrive on crisis. Iran is no different. From its inception, the regime understood the value of a grand spectacle, and it has staged and exploited many

ever since.

On November 4, 1979, the day the American embassy in Tehran was seized, the world’s attention became solely focused on the fate of the 52 American hostages thereafter. That Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, in protesting the takeover, resigned and his highly liberal cabinet collapsed was scarcely captured by the foreign lenses. Neither were the subsequent execution of the foreign minister, Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, and the arrest of the government spokesman, Abbas Amir-Entezam, on the charges of espionage for the United States, a pattern that, astonishingly, still continues, as does Amir-Entezam’s detention.

The American hostages suffered greatly, yet were released after 444 days. But Iran’s political landscape was never the same in the aftermath of the takeover. While the world was consumed by the captive Americans, the hardliners in Iran, ceasing upon the global oblivion, obliterated the opposition—exiled, imprisoned and executed them—and implemented the repressive laws, including the Islamic dress code for women, which they had not been able to pass in the early months after the 1979 revolution.

Then came another leviathan crisis: the war with Iraq. Four years into the ordeal, when Saddam’s bombs had reached Tehran, I was standing on queue to receive our monthly allotment of eggs and other staples from the local mosque, when a neighbor complained of the shortages and the incessant shriek of sirens. A Revolutionary Guard member barked at him with a rejoinder, not unlike what the neocons used against those critical of the Patriotic Act: It was unpatriotic,

even un-Islamic, to complain when the country was at war.

With eyes averted to the war, droves of political prisoners were executed, even against the advice of the country’s second greatest clergyman, Ayatollah Montazeri. By August 1988, several thousand prisoners, even some who had nearly served their terms and were on the brink of release, were killed in the span of days. Montazeri had pleaded with the authorities to at least wait until after the holy month of Moharram had passed. But he was told that too many preparations had been put in place to stop the bloodshed. Because of his vehement objections, Montazeri, once in line to replace Ayatollah Khomeini as the supreme leader, has ever since been banished to his quarters in Qom, Iran.

The mass, nameless grave, where the relatives of the dead gather every September to remember their loved ones, is called Khavaran, a corner of Tehran’s main cemetery that the officials have dubbed “the Damnedville.” The thousands who lie there never made it to the headlines that August because in July, the USS Vincennes shot down an Iranian Airbus killing 290 passengers and crew aboard. Oblivion reigned once more, and the executioners ruled.

After the end of the Iran-Iraq war in late 1988, there was a new sensation. Salman Rushdie’s Satanic Verses took center stage, and the author singularly commanded the thousands of headlines that the dead never did. The word “fatwa” entered the popular lexicon. It was just the kind of drama the regime has always cherished: The West was riled up, and the dispossessed in the Muslim world, to whom Iran

increasingly appeared as pioneering their cause, were electrified. Ironically, it was the fair-minded Rushdie himself who began to speak on behalf of those dead and all the other tales that were going unreported.

Absence of Good Reporting

I revisit this history, in part, because it is ongoing but more importantly because it has far greater implications than we realize. Poor reporting from and about Iran has kept the West in the dark. In this lightlessness, Iranians are rendered as ghosts. Yet it is not for altruism, the mere defense of a people's dignity, that we must change our ways of telling the news of Iran. Rather, it is the ubiquitous encroachment of that darkness, even upon our leaders, that makes it an essential mandate, a point that veteran foreign policymakers, such as Richard N. Haass and Martin S. Indyk, formulate in this way: "The United States simply lacks the knowledge and the guile to [influence] Iran effectively."

Diplomats are human. They, too, must gather information in much the same way as the rest of us, only they have the disadvantage of having access to dubious sources such as the CIA. They, too, often rely on reporters. The absence of good reporting is one reason why Iran remains an enigma for the

elite and ordinary readers alike.

That is not all. Our inadequate reporting is also, in part, the reason for the inexplicable stagnation in Iran's reform movement. Iranians know that the outlandish rhetoric of their unpopular leaders capture the imaginations far more than the tales of their resistance against those leaders. When Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad proposes to hold a Holocaust cartoon exhibit, thousands of headlines report his intentions. But when the exhibit goes on and its halls go unfrequented, scant items tell of the nation's bottomless disinterest in their president's follies. When he speaks against Israel, the world stands at attention. But when he arrests journalists, writers and intellectuals who criticize their own government for diverting much needed funds at home to Hamas and Hizbullah, the lede, if written at all, is buried in a footnote.

In February 2006, when there seemed to be nothing but outrage against the Danish cartoons coming out of the Middle East, a bus strike as significant as Montgomery, Alabama's bus boycott brought Tehran to a standstill. Hundreds of drivers refused to work, and idle buses lined the terminals as far as the eye could see. But the only images that appeared on the evening news in the West were those of a handful of hoodlums pro-

testing in front of Denmark's embassy, throwing stones and smirking for the cameras.

Conscientious Americans always rant about the apathy of their fellow Americans. Iranians of all stripes always speak of despair among their people. Apathy and despair are among the offspring of oblivion. The hundreds of teenage girls and young women who stormed the Haft-e-Tir Square in Tehran in June 2006 to demand an end to gender apartheid in their country in a movement that has come to be known as the "One Million Signature Campaign" might as well have stayed home and killed their every hope because their presence, their subsequent arrests and imprisonment, went unrecorded. It was not reported in the American media until 2009.

Three years is an eternity for a 20 year old to know that others are not deaf to her, to keep herself from wondering if she is not mute, or if her existence matters. ■

Roya Hakakian is the author of "Journey From the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran," her memoir of growing up as a Jewish teenager in postrevolutionary Iran, published by Crown in 2004. She received a 2008 Guggenheim fellowship in nonfiction.

Imprisoning Journalists Silences Others

While most Iranian journalists have to operate with extreme caution, foreign journalists can be more frank on the issues they face in Iran.

BY D. PARVAZ

Secrecy, fear and a random justice system are together the currency of oppression. This is how a government typically attempts to buy silence and compliance. And the case of Roxana Saberi, a journalist who was detained in Iran in January, is a classic example of this semisuccessful strategy.

Arrests such as Saberi's don't just silence the imprisoned party. They create a freeze, a nooselike hold on Iranian journalists, both domestic and international. It's incredibly risky for a journalist holding an Iranian passport to speak the truth about what it means to work in Iran without risking life and liberty.

Initial stories indicated that Saberi was picked up on suspicion of purchasing a bottle of wine, which, like all alcohol, is prohibited in Iran. It was later reported that she had been working as a journalist on an expired or revoked permit since 2006 (an exceptionally reckless thing for a would-be spy to do). Saberi was ultimately



In late April, with Roxana Saberi still jailed in Iran, members of Reporters Without Borders held placards with her picture outside the IranAir office in Paris. *Photo by Michel Euler/The Associated Press.*

charged with espionage in March and, after a brief, closed trial received an eight-year prison sentence. Through her appeal, the American-born reporter was released in May.

Now, according to Iranian press laws, reporting without a permit equals illegally gathering news. This can lead to suspicion of spying, especially when the journalist in question reports for foreign media. Iranian authorities say Saberi confessed to the charges against her, though if she confessed to anything at all, it might have been only to working without a permit. Besides, confessing to crimes not committed is pretty much a national pastime. Iranians who are hauled into police stations for various alleged infractions often have the option of writing and signing letters of confession and apology. These letters are kept on file and can be held against the individual on a later date, but nobody wants to escalate a situation in the presence of police.

The good news is that we have no reason to believe that Saberi was physically abused (unlike photojournalist Zahra Kazemi, who was arrested and beaten to death in 2003), and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

took up her cause. The bad news is that Iran didn't recognize Saberi's American passport, so it dealt with her as an Iranian, which could have been a dead end. Prominent blogger Hossein Derakhshan—often referred to as Iran's "Blogfather"—has been detained since November after visiting Israel using his Canadian passport. He faces a potential death penalty. [See Mohamed Abdel Dayem's article about Iranian bloggers on page 42.]

Another blogger, Omidreza Mirsayafi, died in Evin Prison in March at the age of 29. While the list of people imprisoned, work ceased, and lives ended is long—and most remain anonymous to those of us in the West—Derakhshan and Saberi's cases are high profile because of connections they have to the Western countries and media. In a not-so-subtle political move, President Ahmadinejad has taken the exceptional step of asking authorities to reconsider their cases.

Of course, being a journalist in Iran has always been a challenge. The former shah also required journalists to have government-issued permits in order to work. Licenses were revoked, and journalists were imprisoned for publishing stories that were deemed

unfavorable to the crown. Yes, things were bad even then.

In "Journalism in Iran: From Mission to Profession," Hossein Shahidi chronicles the extent to which the SAVAK, the shah's intelligence organization, controlled the press, cracked down on dissent, and how that level of censorship affected the relationship between the public and the press. "There was such deep distrust in the Iranian press in the last decade of the shah's rule," wrote Shahidi, "that it was often said that the only truth in the papers was to be found in their death notices."

While most Iranian journalists have to operate with extreme caution, foreign journalists can be more frank on the issues they face in Iran. ABC News Senior Foreign Affairs Correspondent Martha Raddatz, for example, wrote a piece for abcnews.com on tangling with Iranian authorities in September. [Raddatz's words appear on page 34.] But then, Iran seldom arrests foreign journalists. Once in a while an Iranian, such as Azadeh Moaveni, gets away with the unthinkable—writing freely outside Iran and returning to the country without getting a private ride straight to Evin Prison.

Of Moaveni's return to Iran, the author and reporter writes in "Honeymoon in Tehran: Two Years of Love and Danger in Iran": "My ulterior motive was to discover whether I could return at all. In the two years that had passed since my last visit, I had published a book about Iran that was, effectively, a portrait of how the mullahs had tyrannized Iranian society and given rise to a generation of rebellious young people desperate for change."

Moaveni was lucky, it seems, but that she is free is in a way as disconcerting as Saberi's imprisonment: Both outcomes seem uncomfortably arbitrary. The uncertainty here is designed to produce alarm, trepidation and silence.

But what is behind the high-profile arrests of semiforeign reporters? Both incidents are seen only as examples of Iran's unjust, brutal regime. And that

might well be all there is to them. And yet—why would Iran complicate things just as President Obama’s administration is making what appears to be a genuine attempt to build a diplomatic relationship? Some speculate that forces in Iran that are aligned against creating any relationship with the United States are involved with these recent arrests. Despite the denial of Iranian officials, is it possible that Saberi was being held in exchange for the five Iranian diplomats the United States has detained in Iraq for over

two years? Or was locking her up yet another show of strength to the international community?

There’s also a real sense of justified paranoia present in Iran. The United States has a long, embarrassing history of meddling in internal Iranian affairs, and The New Yorker’s Seymour Hersh has reported on the clandestine U.S. military operations being carried out in Iran as well as the activities of CIA operatives working there.

In the absence of having a liberated, thriving press—one that can not only

shine a bright light on the facts but can operate freely and transparently—we’re left with the necessity of having to try to understand, rather than decide to just dismiss, the actions of a government that deals its most severe blows to its own people. ■

D. Parvaz, a 2009 Nieman Fellow, was a columnist and editorial writer at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer until the paper stopped its print publication in March.

‘We Know Where You Live’

Working for a Western magazine in Iran, a journalist finds that he has acquired some surprisingly close acquaintances—from the ministry of intelligence. And strangely, they are all called Mr. Mohammadi.

BY MAZIAR BAHARI

Maziar Bahari is an Iranian journalist and filmmaker who continues to work in Iran. This article first appeared in Index on Censorship and was subsequently published in the New Statesman in November 2007.

I’m not supposed to tell you this, but I met Mr. Mohammadi. In fact, I met three Mr. Mohammadis in four days. Mohammadi is the nickname of choice for the agents of Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence—the country’s equivalent of the CIA. They have other nicknames as well, most of which are variations on the names of Shi’ah imams such as Alavi, Hassani and Hosseini. I guess the names don’t indicate a rank or anything (I have to guess, because Mr. Mohammadi doesn’t tell you much. He asks the questions).

Mr. Mohammadi is responsible for the security of Iran. That includes protecting the values of its government. It’s a tough job. It’s like being in charge of Britney Spears’s public image. The values change so often

that the officials who put former colleagues on trial today are careful not to be incarcerated by the same people tomorrow (who may well have jailed them in the past). Mr. Mohammadi’s job is to keep the integrity of the regime intact and to stop those who plan to undermine the holy system of the Islamic Republic.

But what does undermining mean? And what if it is the government that is doing the undermining (as it does constantly)? These questions seem to puzzle Mr. Mohammadi. So he is more than a little paranoid and edgy these days. When he calls you for questioning, you don’t know if he’s going to charge you with something or seek your advice.

These days, Mr. Mohammadi’s main concern is that the American fifth column, disguised as civil rights activists, scholars and journalists, is destabilizing the Islamic Republic. The U.S. government has, after all, allocated \$75 million to promote “democracy” in Iran. It is also giving \$63 billion in military aid to Saudi

Arabia, Egypt and Israel to “counter Iran.” The United States would love to have agents in the country to take the money and spend it wisely. There are so many social and economic problems in Iran, that if someone wanted to exploit them to create dissent it wouldn’t be difficult to do so. But most activists I know inside Iran wouldn’t touch the money with a bargepole and resent the American government much more than their own. In the meantime, the Iranian government tries to find foreign perpetrators and domestic accomplices instead of solving the root causes of dissent, such as mismanagement of the country’s economy, poverty, internal migration, and drug addiction.

Hotels, Beverages and Conversation

In the 1980’s and 1990’s, intelligence agents were rough and scary, but nowadays they politely call you for tea at some fancy hotel or other to question you. I never understood their fascination with hotels. Why can’t you

just meet them in their offices? Or why don't they come to your office? Anyway, when you enter the hotel room you are offered a range of non-alcoholic drinks. Mr. Mohammadi is very generous with his beverages. As soon as you finish your tea you are offered Nescafé, then some kind of juice, then Fanta, Pepsi, etc. But he never offers anything solid. Why can you drink tea while being asked about plots against the government but not have a biscuit? Does an interrogation over a kebab lunch make it less trustworthy?

These questions pop into your head while you're enjoying the comfort of not being in Mr. Mohammadi's presence. He has killed many people in the past. And you know that he is capable of violence again if he thinks it necessary. Mr. Mohammadi's counterparts in the numerous parallel security apparatuses (intelligence units of the judiciary, Revolutionary Guard, and the police) still have not caught up with his methods. Recently a number of students and labor activists were arrested, and instead of being offered tea or Nescafé they spent days in solitary confinement and were beaten with electric cables and batons. But Mr. Mohammadi's Ministry of Intelligence is supposed to be the main agency. It is certainly the most professional and polite.

I met the three different Mr. Mohammadis while on assignment for Newsweek magazine. I was writing an article about the suppression of civil society and civil rights activists in Iran.

Day One: I've set up an appointment with a teachers' union leader at a café. I am supposed to meet him after an exam at the high school where he teaches. The teacher doesn't show up on time. I wait for an hour. Even by Iranian standards he is late. I call him on his mobile but it is off. Strange. He was so keen to talk the day before, so what has happened? I then get a call

from his mobile.

"Who is that?" the caller asks. It is not the teacher.

"I'm Bahari from Newsweek."

"News what?"

"Week."

"So you're a journalist. Will call later."

Mr. Mohammadi is now targeting my integrity as a journalist, explicitly trying to make a connection between me and a dissident, suggesting that we both work as agents of the Great Satan and that we are part of a bigger plot to topple the Islamic government.

I learn that the teacher was arrested during the exam and sent to prison. An hour later I get a call from a "private number." It is a new voice. He is much more pleasant. "Could you come to the ... Hotel at three this afternoon?" asks Mr. Mohammadi. It's been a while since I've been summoned. Naturally I oblige.

Mr. Mohammadi has become more polite, cordial and strangely reassuring. He sneaks a smile when I ask him, "Why am I summoned here?" He used to give me an angry look that would mean he was the one in charge. He begins by asking simple questions about me and my work: Who am I? How long have I worked for Newsweek? Why did I want to meet the teacher? Have I ever met him before? What is the angle of my story?

Easy questions to answer. Mr. Mohammadi is quite relaxed. He scribbles in his notebook while I talk and every now and then exchanges a smile with me. There's nothing remotely amusing about what I'm saying, but Mr. Mohammadi keeps smiling. That makes me think: What is so interesting about the banality I'm spewing here? Is he

really taking notes, or is he doodling a fish? Is it a dead fish? When is he going to let me out of here? Is he going to let me out of here?

I get tired of talking after a while. Then, like Muhammad Ali in the seventh round of his fight with George Foreman, Mr. Mohammadi snaps and starts to challenge me. He keeps on smiling. I wish he wouldn't. Why do I think an American publication is interested in talking to Iranian dissidents? Was I given a list of questions by American paymasters to ask the dissidents? Have I ever been to any conferences in the United States or Europe? Have I ever met any dissidents in Europe or the United States? How did I come to be chosen as Newsweek's correspondent in Iran and not someone else?

Mr. Mohammadi is now targeting my integrity as a journalist, explicitly trying to make a connection between me and a dissident, suggesting that we both work as agents of the Great Satan and that we are part of a bigger plot to topple the Islamic government.

Halfhearted Interrogation

If this session had been with previous Mr. Mohammadis a few years ago, I would be scared of a pending trial and imprisonment for something I had never done—a destiny that befell many of my friends and colleagues. But what makes this Mr. Mohammadi tolerable is his halfhearted approach to the whole thing. His expression is not a grin or a smirk. He almost feels sorry for himself and asks for your sympathy. He looks genuinely confused and somehow out of his depth.

His bosses have come up with a conspiracy theory and asked Mr. Mohammadi to validate it. He is a smart man and has been down this road many times since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. It's never worked in the past, and he really doesn't think it will work now. Mr. Mohammadi knows that he's wasting his time and mine.

He knows that his government should reform itself if it wants to survive. As the former minister of intelligence, Ali Yunesi (who was removed from office by the current president) put it the other day, “Transforming the opposition into our supporters should be the main security strategy of the government, but unfortunately these days we not only fail to do that, but change our supporters into the opposition.”

But a job is a job. And Mr. Mohammadi has to pay rent and put food on his family’s table. He wraps up our session with a few farewell sentences that all other Mohammadis use: “I hope you don’t think it’s personal. There are people who want to take advantage of your good intentions. We just want to protect you.”

And then he delivers the punch line: “We know where you live.”

Day Two: I’m meeting a labor union activist. I’ve set up an appointment with him for 3 p.m. I’m supposed to see him after he’s found out the nature of the charges against him in an upcoming trial at the Revolutionary Court’s headquarters. The activist is late for our appointment. I try to contact him, with no success. I call a friend of his: The activist has been arrested.

When I get home, a friend calls me from London and says that I’ve been accused of being an intelligence agent. Earlier this year, I made a film for the BBC about the MEK, an Iranian terrorist group that opposes the Islamic government. The film exposed the group’s cult-like aspects and its collaboration with Saddam Hussein and the Americans. In the film, we also showed how the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence deals with MEK prisoners relatively humanely—not torturing or killing them as they did in the 1980’s, but treating them as cult members rather than terrorists. This progressive approach is converting former MEK members into supporters of the government. As a result, the MEK now accuses me of being an agent of the mullahs. I should tell this story to Mr.

Mohammadi if he calls me again.

Day Three: Another Mr. Mohammadi calls: “The ... Hotel at 11 a.m.” Mr. Mohammadi likes my MEK story but wonders what the reasons were behind making the film. “When you make a film or write an article you do it because you think it’s an important story. I really don’t need ulterior motives for doing my job, sir.” He doesn’t look convinced.

“But ...” and he goes on asking me the same questions as Day One’s Mr. Mohammadi. And he smiles the smile as I start answering him. I give the same answers: “There is nothing surreptitious about what I do, sir. I’m just a journalist doing my job. I just report what I see around me. If there’s poverty, I report that. If there are terrorists, I write about them. And now when you arrest all these people, wouldn’t it be strange if I didn’t talk about them? Don’t you find it bizarre that the MEK calls me an agent in your pay and you question me as if I’m a guerrilla fighter?”

Mr. Mohammadi says that he is sorry for the trouble. He then gives me a modified farewell spiel. The conclusion remains the same: “We know where you live.”

Day Four: I’ve been meeting feminist activists to find out why 15 of them were sent to jail and how they were treated in Tehran’s Evin Prison. Apparently their Mr. Mohammadi was not that different from mine. He smiled and tried to find a connection between them and the U.S. government. Less than an hour after I leave the house of my last interviewee, I am invited to tea at a hotel. This time it’s different, more upscale. Finally, Mr. Mohammadi’s smile is gone. “There is one thing that you forget in your mature government theory.” I feel that he is finally coming out of his bureaucratic shell. “I’ve heard that you’ve studied in Canada.”

“Yes.”

“Good. Now imagine if Iran has 250,000 soldiers in Canada and Mexico (roughly the number of U.S. soldiers

in Iraq and Afghanistan) and then allocates a budget to help civil rights movements in the U.S., let’s say to the Black Panthers or a Native American movement, wouldn’t Americans be paranoid? We know our problems much better than anyone, and we do our best to tell those who are responsible about the social maladies you just talked about. But this is Iran. It takes ages for anything to happen. In the meantime we have a vicious enemy to deal with: the U.S. It’s determined to topple our government by any means necessary. As Tom Clancy says, the U.S. is: ‘A Clear and Present Danger.’”

The Islamic Regime Change

I don’t know how Mr. Mohammadi will react to my writing about these encounters. Not too happily, I guess. He strongly advised me not to talk about them with anyone. But it’s important to know that Mr. Mohammadi has changed. And if he can change, the Islamic regime can change.

I’m still not convinced by his point about the American threat. Throughout its history, the Islamic Republic has looked for foreign enemies and has usually found them in abundance. Yet on many occasions it has undermined its own legitimacy by linking genuine domestic opposition to its foreign enemies. It’s time for the international community, especially the United States, to accept that the Islamic Republic is a force to be reckoned with and deserves as much respect as any other sovereign nation. But it is equally important for the Islamic Republic to realize its own maturity and act responsibly.

Maybe instead of a conference on the myth of the Holocaust, our president could organize a conference entitled “Islamic Republic of Iran: 28 Years of Trials and Tribulations.”

On a more personal note, the change can start with the government treating its citizens with respect. I know Mr. Mohammadi knows where I live. He doesn’t have to brag about it. ■

AN ESSAY IN WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

A Visual Witness to Iran's Revolution

BY REZA



IRAN, 1980

A demonstration marking the first anniversary of the revolution.

In the mid-1960's, Reza Deghati taught himself the principles of photography as a 14 year old living in Tabriz, Iran. During the early 1970's, his pictures were of rural society and architecture, which he then studied at the University of Tehran. The Islamic Revolution in 1979 shifted Reza's focus to the city, where he covered the conflict for Agence France-Press and Sipa Press. Reza, who uses only his first name, then photographed events in Iran for Newsweek until 1981, when he fled Iran after being forced into exile. In the nearly 30 years since then, Reza has traveled throughout the

Middle East and Asia, and into Africa and Europe, and had his work published primarily in National Geographic. "I have been using my camera as a tool to bear witness," he writes. In Afghanistan, Reza founded a nonprofit organization, Aina, through which he has supported the development of independent media and fostered cultural expression. In 2008, National Geographic's Focal Point published "Reza War + Peace: A Photographer's Journey," and Reza has generously contributed photographs he took in Iran in 1979 and 1980 to our project. His words accompany the photos that follow. ■



IRAN, 1979

Reza photographed the first massive demonstration against the shah, and in his book he describes how he came to be there with his camera.

My life was turned upside down one fall day in 1978. I was working as an architect in Tehran at the time and was in the architect's office. Suddenly, I heard a strange, unfamiliar shout. Some angry protesters were screaming, "Marg bar shah!" ("Death to the shah!"). I went to watch from the window. Soldiers came and blocked the street from both sides.

The soldiers shot blindly into the crowd. The students could do nothing. Some died instantly, falling to the ground. Others, wounded, crawled away to protect themselves. Still others ran for shelter. Then I saw one student who was fleeing but taking pictures as he ran.

I stayed by the window for three hours, transfixed by the chaos below and in a complete state of shock. I made a decision. That night, I gave up my job. I turned in my keys to the architect's office, and I took up my cameras, which I haven't put down since. Instability ruled in Iran; unrest and demonstrations were occurring everywhere. At event after event, I met Don McCullin, Marc Riboud, Olivier Rebbot, and Michel Setboun, among many other

photojournalists who had come to Iran from all over the world. They showed me the ropes. After a few months, my photographs started appearing in the international press.

I became a correspondent for Sipa Press and for Newsweek. I covered the revolution, the riots, the war against Iraq, the war against the Kurds. Iran was boiling. The utopian fervor of the revolution had soon given way to repression. The shah had been brought down, but the mullahs who took power crushed every form of opposition, every difference of opinion. The first victims were the former political prisoners who had fought against the shah. This carnage led me to a sad observation: Hasn't history shown us that every revolution eats its own young?

In February 1981, I was wounded on the Iran-Iraq front by a shell blast. The Iranian government was closing down the borders. My wound served as a pretext for me to leave the country. I went overseas for medical treatment. A few days before I left, I had learned that I was a wanted man, sentenced to death because of my photographs. My journey outside my country would be a long one.

Photo and text by Reza.



FABRIC STORE, IRAN, 1979

For months, I had watched the black chadors take over, becoming more and more widespread in the towns and the countryside. Yet Iran has a variety of people, a multiplicity of colors and landscapes. Even though decades have passed since I last saw them, I can still recall the rural women with their colorful petticoats, which contrasted with the red of their houses, made of clay. And I can still see the vividly colored rugs and the fabrics with the elaborately worked embroidery.

When I entered this fabric shop, where the only choice lay in the weave of the material, I felt stifled and depressed. The only style available was for the chador; the only color offered was black.

During those days, I often felt that, unconsciously, the people of Iran had agreed to go into mourning.

Photo and text by Reza.



IRAN, KURDISTAN, 1980

Reza met an 11-year-old boy named Peyman in Kurdistan, whose father had been killed and, as they spoke, Peyman said to him, “What else is there to say about my life, about our fate as a people who are refused an identity? What about you? You say you know a little about us through your camera lens. You say you will tell the world about us. But I have a hard time understanding how you will do this. Come, I will introduce you to my grandfather.”

Reza went to his house, where they had tea. As he writes, “I thought about the Kurdish children I had come across, their eyes full of sadness. Peyman was watching me attentively but seemed distracted. He appeared weighed down, as though he were dozens of years older. Despite their grief, his family welcomed me. After we finished tea, I left the sad warmth of their home. As I reached the corner of the street, I heard a violent blast. Then there was silence, then screams, the despair and horror of a mother whose children have just been torn from her. I turned around. In the dust of the dirt and rocks pulverized by the bomb’s impact, I saw some motionless bodies.”

Peyman, his sister and his grandfather had just been murdered—bombed by the Revolutionary Guards.

Photo by Reza.



IRAN, 1980, AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI

At last, I had the opportunity to photograph Ayatollah Khomeini in an intimate, private setting. This would be my chance to try to gain some understanding of this man who had become such a powerful enigma. He was sitting in a bare room, which had no past or future, no history or memory. I had time to take only three photos. Then he cut me off, saying harshly, “I’m tired.” Throughout our session, he never looked me in the eye. I had sought his gaze to silence a doubt that had lurked in me since his return to Iran a year earlier. When he arrived, a reporter had asked him what he felt about being back after 15 years of exile. His reply, “Nothing.”

He was the symbol of hope for an entire nation. We had risen up against the shah in a revolution that had erupted spontaneously throughout the country. But after my brief encounter with Khomeini, the doubt I felt gave way to the certainty that a fist was about to come down on our dreams of justice and freedom.

A year after I took this photo, I left Iran, forced into exile. Earlier I had been arrested by the shah’s secret police for being a dissident. I was imprisoned for three years and tortured for five months. Now, because of my photographs showing the repression carried out by Khomeini’s regime, I was under threat from his government and had to flee. In the years since then, I have been a nomad searching for a part of my homeland in every country I visit—a quest that is like picking up and reassembling the scattered pieces of a puzzle. My camera is always looking for the truth that often hides in the shadows of events.

Photo and text by Reza.



IRAN, KURDISTAN, 1980

Kurdish house bombed by Iranian Revolutionary Guards.



CEMETERY, IRAN, 1981

In writing about his journey to becoming a photographer in Iran and his departure from his country, Reza observes that “Iran had become a huge cemetery, where figures dressed in black wandered among the tombs.” ■

Photos by Reza.

Film in Iran: The Magazine and the Movies

‘... there are two arenas—cinema and soccer—that while not completely impervious to the political torrents have a greater margin of immunity.’

BY HOUSHANG GOLMAKANI

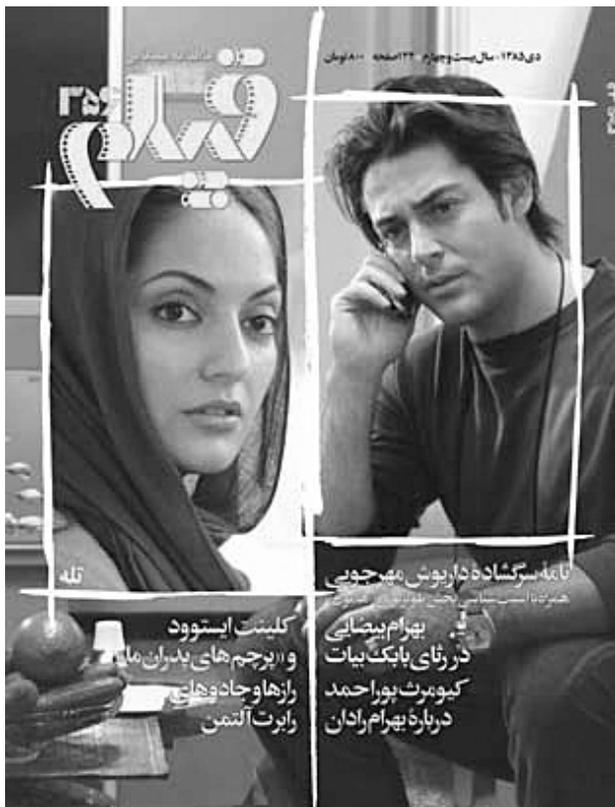
Some imagine Iran as a desert with black mounds, caravans of camels, men with harems, and oil wells. They might be surprised to learn that in this country we have three dailies and two weeklies about cinema and more than 10 film monthly magazines, almanacs, quarterly periodicals, one quarterly in English about Iranian cinema, and dozens of books on the subject published each year.

Why is so much written about film? Perhaps because each year more than 100 feature-length films and 2,000 short films and documentaries are made in Iran. Hundreds of TV shows and films are produced for 10 state-run broadcast channels. (Iran does not have private radio and TV.) Hundreds of students attend four public film colleges, and more private film academies are scattered throughout Iran. A government-owned firm and private companies also make films for release in shops and video clubs. What’s written gets consumed by many viewers of international films, which show up quickly for black market sale on city sidewalks.

Reporting on political matters is a risky business. Journalists have grown accustomed to the shutting down of publications, having to move and start new ones. Under such circumstances, there are two arenas—cinema and soccer—that, while not completely impervious to the political torrents, have a greater margin of immunity.

Film—The Magazine

The first film publication in Iran was published in 1930. By the time of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, there were about 30 publications, the majority of which had very short life spans. During the early years of the revolution—when



Accompanying Golmakani's words are covers of *Film*.

politics pervaded everything—the production and showing of films was still unorganized, there were no film publications, and the Iranian press rarely paid attention to cinema.

In 1981, a few friends and I decided to start a monthly film magazine; by June 1982, our first issue of *Film* was published with reviews of some of the better films being released in hundreds of video clubs in Iran. By choosing to feature film criticism—with the approach of critiquing the better films and excluding the weaker ones—*Film* has deeply influenced filmmakers, government officials overseeing cinema, and created a more serious generation of viewers. Many young Iranian film-

makers tell us that they learned about cinema from reading *Film* during their childhood and adolescence. At least it can be claimed that during the years of war, political upheaval, social despair, and dearth of film showings, *Film* kept love for cinema alive.

Now 27 years old, *Film* is Iran's longest-lasting publication about cinema. Through the years we've increased the number of pages, and since 1986 we have published seasonal special editions, including "Iranian Film Yearbook," added in 1991. Two years later, we were publishing a quarterly periodical in English.

As happens everywhere, the biggest quarrels that happen with the film industry are about criticism—*Film* twice faced boycotts by Iran's Film Producers Union. But this is not the only problem. In the 1980's, when *Film* was Iran's only magazine about cinema, officials in charge of cinema were opposed to the stardom of popular actors. They felt directors and screenwriters should be the stars, which is contrary to the general nature of cinema and the taste of cinemagoers who identify with films through their actors. Yet, in Iran, film publications, until midway through the 1990's, had to be cautious about framing issues relating to actors.

In these same years, restrictions on the showing of foreign films meant

that discussion in our pages about them was also restricted. Rarely was a picture of a foreign film or actor shown on the cover of any film publication. Even though in the past 10 years we've seen an astonishing increase in foreign films shown on Iranian public TV—the majority of which are American—those who write about them still risk being accused of “promoting the Western culture” for giving attention to them. Early in 2003, five film critics were arrested on this charge and were imprisoned for one to four months.

To be sure, this type of strict enforcement is not a general government policy. Rather it is the result of the multiplicity of views and actions of government bodies that at times have nothing to do with cultural matters. Film, by maintaining its emphasis on cultivating artistic taste, has continued along the path it carved without coming under the influence of extremist or very conservative sentiments. According to the Iranian saying, it has taken a “slow and steady” walk. This accounts for Film still publishing, while hundreds of publications have opened and been shut down during its lifetime.

Film critique is widely read and desired by Iranians. In the past 20 years, with an increase in film publications and the steady presence of film sections in the public press, the number of film critics has risen noticeably. They now have formed an association, and the 27-year-old Fajr Film Festival in February is the most important film event in Iran. In its early years, film critics would have fit in one row of seats; now at the festival there is one theater with three auditoriums for film critics, writers and reporters. The question and answer sessions after each film showing is so much in demand that sometimes a seat cannot be found.

It's a love and hate relationship between film critics and the film industry. Ads about films are very limited in the press; in many of Film's issues we have not one page of film advertisement. And to preserve Film's independence, most of its ads come

from noncinema sources. The relationship we have with the government, as an official supervisory apparatus, is that of principal to student. Like the press in Iran, making of film in Iran enjoys a minimum level of subsidy; the degree of support within a budget can vary depending on the adherence of the film's subject to state politics.

I write about all of this only out of my experiences with Film, where writing about cinema has given my life meaning. Along the way, I've discovered many companions and been connected with many more unseen friends. Sometimes I receive touching letters from readers, old and new, whose letters tell of their attachment to Film in such a way that reading their words brings tears to my eyes. At 55, the

smell of ink and newsprint from each issue that arrives from the printing house still overwhelms me, even though I've already read every word and know the details of its production. Flipping the pages of each new issue is still so pleasurable that I am unwilling to trade my job for any other in the world, even if it might be easier or higher paid. ■

Houshang Golmakani is the founder and chief editor of Film, a monthly magazine that has been published in Iran for the past 27 years. International Film, a quarterly magazine published by Film Publications, can be read in English at www.film-international.com.



Your Eyes Say That You Have Cried

'Today's generation of Iranian women reporters are doing big things. Their mark will be left on history.'

BY MASOUD BEHNOUD

Masoud Behnoud, a prominent newspaper editor in Tehran during the 1970's and 1980's, was imprisoned as part of the Islamic Republic's crackdown on nongovernmental and independent newspapers. Here he remembers some difficult moments involving young women reporters and the role he played as their journalism teacher in Iran from 1988 to 2002. He now lives in London, where he works as a political adviser for BBC Persian and has a daily BBC TV program in Farsi about Iranian newspapers.

With her small frame she would sit in the first row of class, squint her eyes, and listen. She never raised her voice, even at the end of the class when she would come to my office to ask something. One time, however, she did not learn a particular lesson, meaning she could not accept it, could not believe it. When I was saying that a reporter has to be objective, Fereshteh stood up and asked whether she still had to be objective in an interview with Saeed Criminal. I said, "Yes." With a pitch louder than usual she asked, "How can I be objective?"

Saeed Criminal was Saeed Hanai, the same guy who had strangled 16 women in northern Iran. He became a darling of fundamentalists because he claimed to have killed the women in order to purify the earth. Saeed Criminal was a monster. And Fereshteh means angel in Persian.

I was sure she did not accept the notion that a reporter has to be detached and objective. She did not accept it even when I reasoned that only with detachment would her work

be effective; only when it was not in opposition to someone or to a situation right from the beginning; only when she can lay out or question the situation effectively. Only then will the reader take a side in the end. "It will turn out the way you want it to," I said.

Even to influence, one has to be objective. A report cannot take a side and have a direction ...

Even when I said these things.

In the next class, Roya was the same, as she stood up and renounced the idea. She asked, "Are you objective?" and she firmly questioned how anyone can be objective.

In those years, Banafsheh was a young girl in that class. When I asked the class to write a report of their choosing, she described a man who had nice facial features, wrote well, and spoke romantically, but whose heart was not tender, maybe made out of iron. Banafsheh was describing me. She had not accepted that one could be objective, either, and she had voiced her dissent in that way.

Objectivity in a society in which violence against women has become institutionalized is a difficult task, and in vain I wanted young women to discover this—the very ones who can better feel pain. Why was I adamant to dictate callously and test them on classic journalism?

The day they arrested Fereshteh, I could not believe they would take that delicate girl to prison. But they did, and the newspaper picture showed her walking toward prison with a smile, staring straight at the camera—into my eyes. It was as if she was saying, "See professor, it's not possible to be

objective."

The day they were trying Banafsheh, I went and sat in the back of the courtroom. I hid myself pointlessly so she would not be embarrassed. I was mistaken; she was not ashamed to be standing on the defendant's stand. She stood tall and proud and said, "I wrote it. I gave my signature for women's freedom, in order to prevent oppression in a misogynist society and legal persecution of women."

She did not even ask for mercy. The judge, prosecutor, guard and court were all men; even Banafsheh's lawyer was a man. Except for a few members of her family and a couple in the audience, there were no women in the room. Still, it seemed to me, even the lifeless statue of justice with its empty scale was crying—the consequence of the words of a romantic young girl.

Our daughters, our students, young women reporters, in a traditional society like Iran, take photographs, conduct interviews, and write reports. Some like Asieh exhaust their own health in their effort to help young girls facing execution; some like Massih become wanderers. All because they say something their patriarchal society deems bigger than their mouth. They say you talk too much. A woman should be modest and chaste, raise kids, cook and clean the house for her man returning from work, tired and expectant.

Young women are doing in one generation something that in other societies it has taken many generations to accomplish. So what if they cannot be objective about Saeed Criminal who murdered all of those women and the serial killers who murdered 10 intel-

lectuals and dissidents.

Today's generation of Iranian women reporters are doing big things. Their mark will be left on history. Let the professor not accept their papers. Let

the heartless professor tell them that in writing a report they have to be objective. Objectivity only had meaning when Fereshteh smiled at her guard while being taken to prison, teaching

him that he was not her enemy and, if she had any enmity, it was with the tradition of misogyny.

She had learned this lesson from life. ■

Telling the Stories of Iranian Women's Lives

'Anyone who did research on women's issues benefitted from hundreds of articles, stories and interviews that were featured in Zanan.'

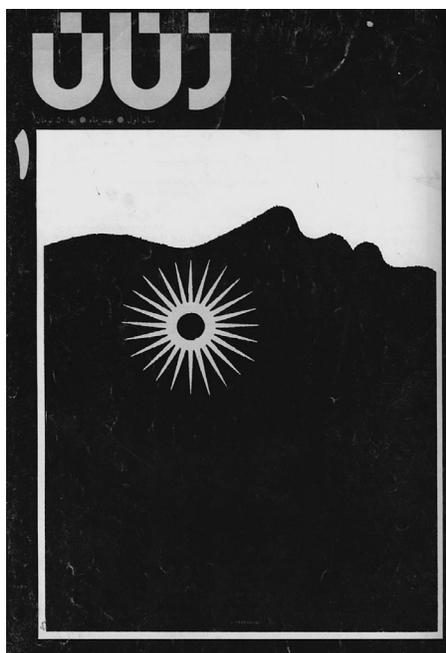
BY SHAHLA SHERKAT

I was 10 years old and every week my mother would buy Zan-e Rooz (Today's Woman), Iran's highest circulation women-oriented publication, from the neighborhood newsstand. She always said that when I read a magazine I can speak better. My sisters and I would wait for the magazine every Saturday, and I particularly enjoyed reading its illustrated stories.

In those childhood days I never imagined that I would one day become the chief editor of that magazine. For me, that job seemed like a succulent fruit on an out-of-reach branch, one that a small girl like me could not possibly reach. So when at 21 my sister called to ask if I wanted to be a journalist, I suddenly felt that the missing piece to the puzzle of my being had been discovered. Without hesitation I began to make my quiet and snail-paced move into the world of women's press.

For a decade I slowly and incessantly traveled this road, and with each issue of Zan-e Rooz published—despite our many limitations—we paved a rocky road smooth, so that the women's movement in Iran could progress along it. When accused of “promoting modernist, Westernized and feminist tendencies,” I was fired from the semipublic organization that published Zan-e Rooz.

However, I did not step aside from women-related journalism. Without hesitating, I set out to publish Zanan (Women) magazine for which I became



The first issue of Zanan, published in 1991.

the license holder. With greater control and speed, I was moving forward. Now I was in the arena of maximum expression of views and desires of women no matter their ideology, perspective, taste and approach. And our magazine welcomed them, not just a minority of women who had official legitimacy and whose thoughts and needs coincided with commonly prescribed standards.

Along this road, new pathways opened one by one. Women, as well as concerned and well-skilled men, warmly greeted my attempt to publish

a magazine that searched for solutions to the problems women confronted in intellectual, social, legal, political, educational and other arenas. At Zanan, we practiced collective work, democracy and tolerance for opposing views. Our governing principle was the elimination of sexism and the gaining of understanding of the problems facing women working in double shifts in public and private spheres. Zanan did not discourage anyone whose goal was to flourish; everyone could grow in accordance with her talents and capabilities. There was no place for hopelessness. Our answer to self-doubt in the fulfillment of objectives was “nothing is impossible.”

This intimate, unified and collaborative family worked—or, better put, lived—together for 16 years. Through joys and pains, opportunities and threats, poverty and prosperity, and highs and lows, the magazine's resolve did not break, and its efforts did not diminish. It was with this blossoming synchrony between stories we published and the goals of Iran's women's movement that had just taken a new breath for which Zanan served as its platform. Anyone who did research on women's issues benefitted from hundreds of articles, stories and interviews that were featured in Zanan. And the magazine served, too, as an indicator of the progress made by Iranian women, which was something authorities in Iran could also take advantage of in the international arena.

Unfortunately, in a society that has yet to reach political maturity and where democracy has not become institutionalized, political leaders see the survival of their system in the envelopment of a protective cover against criticism. They seem unaware that tossing ash on fire only hides its glow, and it resurfaces and burns when least expected. This outlook that exists in certain sectors of Iran's governing structure led them to shut Zanan after accusing the magazine of portraying the situation of women in a "dark light." What our journalists did to echo the needs and problems of women (with the intent of building awareness among Iranians and public officials so solutions could be found)

was interpreted as being a darkened portrayal. To prevent our revelations about women and their issues from disturbing the public's consciousness, Zanan was closed.

It has been two years since they have taken from our family our 16-year-old daughter, Zanan. I have walked up and down many stairs and corridors to find my lost one but have not had any success. Supporters and sympathizers have gone in one or another direction and crawled into a corner. Women professionals, artists, writers and critics have lost their tribune. Most of the individuals, whose work only Zanan had the courage to publish, no longer have an arena for the free expression of their thoughts and ideas.

After one year of unemployment, and for economic reasons, I accepted a management position in an arts and cultural institute; but my heart is somewhere else. Every day I arrive at work, but a piece of the puzzle of my being has been lost. ■

Shahla Sherkat, founder and editor in chief of Zanan magazine, received the Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism from the 2005 class of Nieman Fellows and the Courage in Journalism Award by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF). In 2007, the Association of Iranian Journalists named her as one of the five prominent journalists of the year.

Iranian Journalist: A Job With Few Options

After working for more than a decade at the now banned Iranian magazine Zanan, a journalist now in the United States describes her feelings of identity, location and loss.

BY ROZA EFTEKHARI

Iranian journalists, like their peers everywhere, make choices and decisions reflecting their individual identities, exigencies of time and place, and available options. How each answers the question, "What made you a journalist?" will vary as much as the lives do of those asked to respond. Yet they reach common ground with the recognition of how few options any of them have.

I became a journalist by coincidence, when a college professor asked me to assist the founder and editor of a newly published magazine in need of help putting together an editorial staff. The magazine, Zanan (Women), was postrevolution Iran's first feminist publication, launched with limited

resources in a small room inside an office building. It was founded by Shahla Sherkat, a professional journalist and a feminist with religious beliefs.¹ [Sherkat's article can be read on page 29.] I was going to work temporarily until she hired her editorial team; however, when new staff was assembled, I stayed.

In spite of Iran's political constraints and male-dominated media environment, Zanan grew rapidly. In a span of a decade, it attracted 20 journalists to its staff; many of these young journalists were turned into seasoned professionals trained in women's issues. Domestically, Zanan became an example of the successful merging of journalism and women's advocacy. In-

ternationally, it turned into one of the more reliable sources of information regarding Iranian women's issues.

While independent publications generally have a short life in Iran, Zanan enjoyed a longer run, largely because of Sherkat's acumen in dealing with sociocultural and political taboos. On several occasions, Zanan was summoned to Iran's press court, and the magazine was almost shut down three times. Some of its writers were banned from writing; others were imprisoned. Still, Zanan continued its remarkable journey.

In spite of all the difficulties and volatilities that characterized my professional life, I've never regretted becoming a journalist and working

¹ Shahla Sherkat received from the 2005 class of Nieman Fellows the Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism for covering politics and domestic abuse of Iranian women.

for Zanan. It's where I grew up—as a journalist and as a person. My work with Zanan had taken me inside people's homes and family courts, to the coroner's office, police stations and mortuaries, where I came face to face with the hidden and blatant inequalities of Iranian women's daily lives. I also became familiar with Iran's Constitution and civil code in the search for sources of violence against women. And with Zanan, I sat in meetings, roundtables and interviews with experts looking for solutions.

Leaving Iran, Exploring the World

The day I joined the magazine, I was a young, inexperienced college student majoring in English with barely any knowledge of journalism. Twelve years later, when in 2004 I left to experience a new world, I was a feminist and a journalist on my way to begin a challenging and rewarding year as a Nieman Fellow.

Though I didn't feel less capable than the other fellows, I was less vocal and more reserved. Looking back, I realize that I was in a state of shock, perhaps the shared experience of those who have lived in isolated societies for so long. I know I should have traveled more during that time, but working in Iran's independent press did not provide me with enough savings to do so. Even if I had the money, getting the required traveling visas was an ordeal. (To come to the United States, even with a proper invitation from the Nieman Foundation, my visa was denied when I applied first through the American Consulate in Dubai. I had to postpone my fellowship for one year to secure a visa with the help of various channels.) There were also times that I had to forgo trips to professional conferences or workshops because I was afraid of political repercussions for the magazine or myself.

Communicating in another language can be painful, especially for a journalist whose main skill is connecting with others. So mostly as a fellow I became a listener. As soon as I had pulled my thoughts together and was ready to



A Zanan cover story: "Women's Political Rights in Iran After the Islamic Revolution." 1979.

utter a sentence, the topic had moved in a different direction. How lucky I felt my Pakistani or South African colleagues were as they arrived speaking English well, while here I was, as someone who had majored in English and been a fairly good translator. I had no difficulty understanding people but, without having had a prior arena for practice at home or at work, speaking English was a chore.

The volume of one-sided news about Iran frightened me as well. It had never occurred to me that I also had to censor myself in the land of free press, lest I unwittingly reproduce the false and widely held clichés about my country. I read the news, listened to radio and television, and though I wanted to share my responses to it, instead I bristled.

More than classes at Harvard or discussions at the foundation, I benefited from the companionship of other journalists from around the world. We got to know each other; as we listened to each other's life stories, we found similarities, but differences, too. Such familiarity replaced my homesickness and awkwardness. Through our conversations, we were escorting each other to France, the United Kingdom, South Africa, places in the United

States, Mexico—and Iran. My years of isolation were compensated, and my vision moved from the geography of Iran to that of the world.

It is now five years since I left Iran. I had several reasons for lengthening my stay. But the most important was unabashedly selfish; to take even more advantage of the opportunity afforded me. I knew once I went back, there would be almost no chance for yet another extended experience. Working conditions for the press were also becoming more and more difficult, including at Zanan. In 2008, after 16 years of existence, my professional home was banned by the Press Supervisory Board without any clear reason given. All efforts to lift the ban were fruitless. Even before that happened, I worried that no journalism jobs would be available for me if I returned.

By staying in the United States, I knew my life as a journalist would enter a lull. The loss of audience can be as much a threat to a journalist as lack of press freedom. I could have written for the Iranian exile press or U.S. government-owned news media that targets an Iranian audience. To not do this was a very difficult decision, but that's what I chose. As I write now, I think of my colleagues in Iran and how the closure of Zanan changed their lives in ways that cut to the core of who they are and what they believe in.

Undoubtedly, these are wretched days for Iranian journalists. Some have chosen to live outside of the country, they hope temporarily; others had no choice but exile. Among those journalists who have stayed, a few have gone to prison, and some of those who are now free have no publications for which to work. I realize now that location has not made much of a difference for me. A reporter who has lost her audience or her publication, no matter how skilled and adaptive she might be, is still an unemployed journalist. ■

Roza Eftekhari, a 2005 Nieman Fellow, is a program assistant at the Eurasia Foundation in Washington, D.C..

Seven Visas = Continuity of Reporting From Iran

‘The Iranian government sometimes appears to favor U.S. reporters with little knowledge of the country who might be more amenable to spin, although that has not happened in my case.’

BY BARBARA SLAVIN

One of my favorite trips to Iran was in December 2001. A post-9/11 glow mellowed Iranian attitudes toward the United States, and politicians who previously would not have openly advocated normal ties said the time had come for the United States and Iran to end three decades of hostility.

Iranians, accustomed to being on the receiving end of terrible violence during the Iran-Iraq war, deeply sympathized with Americans, who had also been the victims of an attack by Arabs. There were spontaneous candlelit demonstrations on the streets of Tehran. The Islamic government suspended the ritual chants of “death of America” at Friday prayers and went so far as to provide tacit cooperation with the United States against what was, for a change, a mutual enemy: the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

I returned to Washington and wrote a cover story for USA Today, in my role then as the paper’s senior diplomatic reporter, about the new mood in Tehran. It was symbolized, I thought, by the fact that Tehranis at restaurants all over the capital were guzzling Coca Cola—the real thing, not some Persian knockoff. Coca Cola had just opened a bottling plant in the eastern city of Mashhad, a harbinger, it seemed, of reconciliation with the United States.

I felt certain that I would be back in Iran within a year. But I couldn’t get a visa for more than three years.

It is possible that I was a casualty of the downturn in relations that followed President George W. Bush’s decision in 2002 to put Iran on a so-called “axis of evil” with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and North Korea. Or perhaps the

**So far, non-Iranian
American journalists have
had an easier time—
perhaps because the
regime doesn’t consider
us so much of a threat.**

reason was personal. Among the half dozen stories I had written off the 2001 trip was one about Reza Pahlavi, the son of the late shah. Even though I reported that many Iranians thought the “baby shah,” as they called him, was no solution for Iran’s political problems, the mere fact that I had devoted an entire story to the topic had apparently rubbed some Iranian security types the wrong way.

The challenges of writing about Iran for a U.S. reporter are myriad. In some respects, Iranian Americans face greater danger because they must go to Iran on Iranian passports since

the regime refuses to let them enter as Americans. That opens them to the prospect of de facto house arrest—should the government decide to confiscate their passports—or outright imprisonment as alleged subversives seeking the “soft overthrow” of the Iranian government. This happened earlier this year to Roxana Saberi, a freelance reporter for National Public Radio. Even those who escape such punishment are obliged to report regularly to Iranian “minders,” as has been documented by Azadeh Moaveni, a former reporter in Iran for Time magazine.¹ That can lead to a certain amount of self-censorship.

So far, non-Iranian American journalists have had an easier time—perhaps because the regime doesn’t consider us so much of a threat. But challenges remain, the first being that of access to a country that has had no diplomatic ties with the United States for nearly three decades.

I have been fortunate to obtain seven visas in the past 13 years but learned with my Reza Pahlavi story that there are no guarantees. Gatekeepers change and new fixers can be required to smooth one’s path. The Iranian government sometimes appears to favor U.S. reporters with little knowledge of the country who might be more amenable to spin, although that has not happened in my case. In fact, it seems as though my access to officials has improved over time. It was on my fifth trip to Iran that I got my first

¹ Azadeh Moaveni wrote about this in her 2009 book, “Honeymoon in Tehran: Two Years of Love and Danger in Iran.”

big interviews—with then national security adviser Hassan Rowhani and former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. These interviews took a lot of preparation and vetting by people close to these top officials. To get the Rafsanjani interview, I first had to meet a diplomat close to the former president, one of Rafsanjani's sons, and a brother. I was also asked to extend my visit by several days. Top-level interviews in Iran invariably come at the last possible minute, often literally hours before getting on the plane to go home. So it was when I interviewed President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2006.

These interviews have provided fascinating glimpses into Iranian politics and decision-making. What keeps me going back to Iran, however, are the encounters with ordinary Iranians, from shopkeepers in south Tehran, to journalists, human rights activists, economists and young people out for a walk in the Alborz Mountains. Iranians are usually welcoming to Americans and surprisingly candid about their views. People make appointments and keep them—unlike their neighbors in some Arab countries—and there is a hunger to show that Iran and Iranians are better than their government and worthy of U.S. respect.

While I have not had a formal minder on trips to Iran, I assume that my driver and translator are obliged to report on what I do and whom I see. So I act in a way that is open and above board to cause the fewest problems possible for my Iranian employees as well as those I interview. I try to conduct myself with dignity and humility and to never lose my temper with Iranians, especially not about things that they cannot control.

The result so far has been reporting that keeps adding depth to my knowledge of a country that is increasingly influential in its region but deeply conflicted at home. The Iran I have come to know has the most compli-

cated and interesting politics in the Middle East, the best educated young people outside Israel, and a surprisingly sophisticated understanding of the Western world. It is a place where the odds of someone shooting at you are relatively small, the food is delicious,

What keeps me going back to Iran, however, are the encounters with ordinary Iranians, from shopkeepers in south Tehran, to journalists, human rights activists, economists and young people out for a walk in the Alborz Mountains. Iranians are usually welcoming to Americans and surprisingly candid about their views.

and hotel rooms have wireless Internet and satellite TV. The downside, as a woman, of having to wear a headscarf and modest clothing is a small burden to bear in return for the chance to report on this dynamic nation.

When I decided in 2006 to turn some of my experiences into a book, I discovered in my notebooks from prior trips to Iran a significant amount of detail and color that had not found its way into my articles for USA Today or had appeared in truncated form. I was also fortunate to obtain a fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars that gave me time to write and to fill in the blanks in my narrative. In writing "Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S. and the Twisted Path to Confrontation," I welcomed the opportunity to flesh out this material and produce something of more lasting value than a newspaper story. I wanted to educate Americans about Iran and the missed opportunities for improved relations during the past decade.

Delving deeper into the complex

history of Iranian-American relations, I tried to break through the misperceptions long held by people in both nations; I did this, in part, by showing that even supposedly hard-line groups in Iran, such as the Revolutionary Guards, are not monolithic, with some influential members and veterans advocating ties with the United States. I also showed that a substantial number of Iranian clerics oppose the system of theocratic rule. At the same time, I portrayed the success of government security forces in repressing popular dissent and suggested that those in Washington who thought they could bring about regime change in the near future were not being terribly realistic. In explaining Iran and the failure of previous U.S. efforts to improve relations, I hoped to inform Americans so that policymakers could avoid mistakes and citizens could better evaluate U.S. policy going forward.

In my new role, as an assistant managing editor at The Washington Times, I have sought to cover Iran and U.S. policy both directly and indirectly. I'm invited to meetings with Iranian leaders when they visit the United States, have recruited stringers in Iran, and also try to augment the work of my staff reporters by maintaining contacts with U.S. policymakers and other experts. I also hope to be able to return to Iran, perhaps after their presidential election in June. Given the Obama administration's stated goal of resolving the conflict with Iran through diplomacy, while not ruling out coercive measures, this topic is likely to—and should—remain on the front pages of U.S. newspapers for some time to come. ■

Barbara Slavin is assistant managing editor for world and national security of The Washington Times and the author of "Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation," published by St. Martin's Press, 2007.

No Man's Land Inside an Iranian Police Station

When Iran held a U.S. reporter, an American television correspondent recalled her own brief arrest by Iranian police.

BY MARTHA RADDATZ

In March, Martha Raddatz, who is ABC News senior foreign affairs correspondent, wrote a Reporter's Notebook entry describing what happened to her and her colleagues on a reporting trip to Iran. She wrote about this in the wake of Iran's arrest and jailing of American freelance reporter Roxana Saberi on charges of "gathering news illegally." In April, Saberi was charged with spying. Raddatz's words appeared on the ABC News Web site, and excerpts are reprinted here with permission of ABC News.

I have direct experience with the Iranian government's attitudes about "gathering news illegally." Last September, while on a trip to Tehran with my producer, Ely Brown, and my cameraman, Bartley Price, we were arrested by Iranian police for videotaping officers who were looking for women whose heads were not "properly" covered. Ely and I were both wearing a hijab, and we all had official Iranian press credentials. (I had sent in a picture of myself from a passport shop in the United States. When I picked up my press card in Tehran, the Iranians had Photoshopped in a head covering on my press card.)

The police loaded us into a van and had two other police vans escorting us through the city. They took Bart's camera, our press cards and, most disturbing, they took our passports.

We had no idea where we were headed and neither did our interpreters. When I tried to lighten up the mood in the van by joking with Ely and Bart about all of us being used to being in motorcades, the interpreter warned me not to laugh around the police, or they would think I was making jokes about them.

We drove for close to 45 minutes

before we pulled into a police station, and that is when we became worried. A busload of prisoners was just pulling out, faces pressed against the metal-meshed windows shouting for food and cigarettes. Worse yet, the police station we were taken to was "the Anti-Narcotics Division." Ely, Bart and I all had the same thought: "What have they hidden in our bags?"

Good Cop, Bad Cop

We sat for hours outside the office of a police official, and then we were brought in one by one to be questioned.

"Why were you arrested?" the officer said to me. I asked him the same question.

I explained that we were downtown taping people in a shopping district and noticed that the police came. Our cameraman started filming the police on patrol. He wrote all of this down, and then made me sign it, which I did not do until the interpreter assured me that was what it said.

At that point the classic "good cop, bad cop" scenario started playing out. The "good cop" said his boss would have to see the tape, and then we would be freed. But the "bad cop," who was clearly senior, kept telling us we shouldn't have been taping the police, and it was "a problem."

As we sat for hours on a row of hard chairs against a wall, we saw two boys dressed in athletic suits who couldn't have been more than 12 or 13 years old handcuffed together looking frightened. They were taken away. We watched a crazy scene where two of the police officers were shouting at one another and almost came to blows in front of us, shoving each other hard in the chest. We had no idea what they

were arguing about.

Every once in awhile, we would get pulled in again and someone else wanted to see the tape and ask more questions. There were frowns when they saw the images of the police on the tape, although the good cop said "no problem."

By early evening, still not knowing what was going on and now starting to demand information, one of the cops told us that the senior officer who needed to see the tape was not coming in until the morning. At every turn, there seemed to be one more person who had to see it before they would decide what to do with us. They all seemed scared to make a decision on their own, fearing it would be the wrong decision.

The police said they would allow us to leave (they knew exactly what hotel we were in), but they would hold onto the passports, and we could come and get them first thing in the morning. I said I wasn't leaving without my passport, but they just shook their heads. We were assured that if we arrived at eight the next morning and showed the tape to the senior officer, we would be free to leave the country.

That didn't happen.

Ringling the State Department

When we arrived at the police station the next morning, there was no senior officer, and those who were there seemed angrier about the tape than the night before. I started demanding our passports and threatened to call the U.S. State Department. Talk about an empty threat!

When I finally did call, I got an operations officer on the all-night desk. I told him that I was an ABC News correspondent and that I was being

detained along with my crew and that our passports had been confiscated. The state department representative said there was really nothing he could do because we don't have diplomatic relations, and said, "You know it is five in the morning here?" Gee—sorry to bother you. I did ask him to please make sure that he took down my name and make a note that I was being held along with my crew (in case we were never heard from again!). He said, "OK." I later asked a senior state department official who saw all the daily cables and traffic if he every saw that mentioned, and he said, "No, nothing."

By the end of day two, we were being told the situation was serious

and we had been taping illegally and that the situation would have to be looked at by yet another official. We were told that we would again have to come back the next day for our passports.

At this point, I took a chance—a big chance since I am a woman and didn't really know how it would play. In my best voice of indignation, I called the officer a liar. I told him that they had not been honest, that we had been told for two days that we would be given our passports and allowed to leave, and they had continually lied to us. I told him that we had to leave the country.

That little tirade at least made them stay later to deal with the bu-

reaucrazy of finding the right man to see the tape. To be honest, I am not sure what happened behind the scenes after that, but I know that two hours later, passport in hands, tape forever in Iranian hands, we left Tehran on the next flight out, and were very happy we did.

While the situation was uncomfortable at the time, I had nearly forgotten it until I read about Roxana Saberi, whose situation is clearly far more serious. I hope she will get more help from the state department (through the Swiss, I expect) than we did. I happen to be traveling with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the Mideast now. Her spokesman said, "We're looking into it." ■

The Human Lessons: They Lie at the Core of Reporting in Iran

'When we work in countries without press freedoms, we scarcely know the pressures on the people we encounter, the complexities of their motivations, the dimensions of their fears.'

BY LAURA SECOR

Before I left for Tehran in June 2005, Alireza Haghighi, a former Iranian official in exile in Canada, told me he was sure a conservative hard liner would win that month's presidential election. Haghighi was almost entirely alone in that opinion. The outgoing president, Mohammad Khatami, was a mild-mannered reformist. Former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a pragmatic insider running on a reformist platform, was far and away the favorite in the American press, which confidently offered up interviews with Rafsanjani about his future administration. What made Haghighi think that Iran was moving in a more conservative direction?

"Go to a mosque in south Tehran," he implored me. "Talk to young people there. You'll see."

American reporters are typically granted only short visas to work in Iran, with limited access to the country outside the capital. There is a lot we miss for lack of contact with rural Iranians, and even in Tehran, a sprawling city of 14 million, there is always the danger of sequestering oneself in too familiar a world. Haghighi, who grew up in a poor neighborhood in the south of Shiraz, complained that American reporters gravitated toward the glitz of the capital city's northern heights, where they found Iranians who resembled themselves and expressed the political views they wanted to hear.

Seeking New Conversations

To the city's south, the urban working class, hard hit by the country's

economic troubles, shares crowded quarters with recent migrants from the villages. This population is culturally conservative and religiously devout. In every way, the young people here have less freedom and privacy than their peers in the city's north: They share cramped apartments with their parents, they don't have cars, and their dress code and sexual behavior are heavily policed, both by their families and by the state.

As a woman, I could not mix easily at a mosque in this part of town, but my translator had another idea. We would go to the Bahman Cultural Center, a complex in south Tehran that provided a library, swimming pool, art museum, park and other amenities to poor urban youth. Under the shah, the neighborhood had been a squalid and dangerous wasteland of brothels and



A young girl wore a headband and waved an Iranian flag in support of then reformist presidential candidate Mostafa Moein at a pre-election rally. May 2005. Photo by Iason Athanasiadis.

shanties. The Islamic Republic had made the renewal of this area one of its signal accomplishments, building the cultural center where a vast slaughterhouse once stood. Not only were there parks and museums here now, but there were also police, so that women could walk safely at night.

My translator had a cousin who worked at the cultural center and welcomed us onto the premises. Nonetheless, we were told to report to the center's director, a woman in a blue flowered chador. She did not object when I told her I was there to interview young people, but she did press a tour guide on us. That young woman led us across the grounds, delivering rote descriptions of the facilities, which were well tended, linked by manicured lawns and paved walkways. On the outer walls of buildings, there were murals of militiamen with red headbands, and of martyrs from the war with Iraq, set against the ghosted image of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. There was also a mural of Charlie Chaplin, looking strangely sinister as he held a statue of himself in an improbably rotated, raised palm. Someone had affixed one of Rafsanjani's campaign bumper stickers to the mural, across the base of the statue.

As we left the library, I saw a lawn where young women sat studying on the grass. I told the guide that I wanted to talk to them. She left us there. At the edge of the lawn, two Revolutionary Guards stood watch. One was a man in olive fatigues, the other an angular-faced woman in a black chador. With my translator, I approached them and informed them that I would be interviewing the young women on the lawn. They told me to go ahead.

The first woman I approached gave her name as Leila Mehrzad. She was 18 years old and studying for the university entrance exam. She had not yet decided if she would vote for Rafsanjani, for Baqer Qalibaf, who was a hard-line former commander of the Revolutionary Guards, or for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the conservative mayor of Tehran, who was then the most obscure and least favored candidate on the roster of seven. The most important issues, Leila told me, were unemployment, the overcrowding of the universities, and inflation. "We should be able to have a free press and human rights," she told me. "Freedom is not just about headscarfs. We should have freedom of speech; we should be able to speak from our

hearts. But there are big differences between rich and poor."

Another young woman, who was reading under a tree a few feet away, told me she would vote for Ahmadinejad. "In all the interviews on television, he seemed trustworthy," she explained. "He talked about the economy." A young woman of 20 who had been reading nearby shyly approached us. Introducing herself as Zahra, she volunteered, "I'll vote for Ahmadinejad. He'll give us the things we want, like security and comfort, a place in society. He demonstrated this as mayor. He was so good—he did many things for the south of Tehran."

Before I knew it, I was surrounded by a widening circle of young women. My translator told me that some of them had thought that I was a fortuneteller, sitting there with a notebook talking to their friends. When they heard that I was an American journalist reporting on the election, they all started talking at once.

"I'm not going to vote," said one.

"I'll vote for Qalibaf," said another, "but I know Rafsanjani will be elected. There's no need for our vote. Rafsanjani has been elected already by the leaders."

Another girl interjected, "Rafsanjani is disgusting."

"At least Qalibaf is better looking than Ahmadinejad."

"Your brain is in your eyes, and that's not good."

The young women egged each other on in spirited argument, laughing and interrupting one another. I asked how many would vote, and very few raised their hands. "I won't vote," said one, "but I just want to appear in the street to show that we are backing the Islamic Republic. We don't want to be another Iraq."

A girl who had been quiet until then announced, "I'll vote for Qalibaf."

Another retorted, "That's terrible."

A third said, "You should respect everyone's opinion."

Another, referring to the populist reformist candidate, Mehdi Karroubi, who had promised every Iranian family 60,000 toman if he were elected, said, "All the candidates sound the

same except Karroubi. He says nothing, just, ‘60,000 toumans is my final offer.’” The whole group erupted in laughter.

Experiencing a Confrontation

Suddenly there was a hand on my notebook, pulling it urgently away. It was the woman in the blue flowered chador, flanked by the male and female Revolutionary Guards. I must give them my notes, the woman told me. I would not be permitted to leave the cultural center with that notebook. She pulled one end of my notebook, and I pulled the other.

At times, far less enraging encounters with the limits of the possible in Iran had left me passive, enervated, excessively cautious. At other times, like this one, I felt somehow convinced I faced a paper tiger. The notes were not extremely important; they might not even make it into the article I was writing. But where I came from, no one had the right to take them from me. Besides, there were days of work in that notebook.

“This is my work,” I told the woman in the blue flowered chador, somewhat nonsensically. I reminded her that I’d been granted permission every step of the way, by the cousin of my translator, the guard at the gate, the director herself, the guide, the Revolutionary Guards right here on the lawn. I wasn’t doing anything illegal, and she could not have my notes. “Just the notes you took here at the cultural center,” she insisted, through my translator. “You have to give them up.”

Some of the girls had vanished, but a tight knot of them remained, talking agitatedly. “We came to her,” they told the center’s director and the Revolutionary Guards. “She didn’t approach us.” I felt my stomach tighten as I looked at them. The girls had talked to me frankly, humorously, irreverently, about politics. My notes were an illegible scrawl, with almost no names attached, but they didn’t know that. If these girls saw me give the notes over, what would they think?

The argument seemed to last forever, with the center’s director tugging on

my notebook as I held it fast. And then I saw my translator’s face, which had turned a shade of white. She was worried, I realized, not just for me but also for herself. I felt a shock of shame.

“Please do what she says,” she told me in a strained monotone, “unless you want your trip to Iran to end very

The girls had talked to me frankly, humorously, irreverently, about politics. My notes were an illegible scrawl, with almost no names attached, but they didn’t know that. If these girls saw me give the notes over, what would they think?

badly.” And then, because the director, who still stood between us, did not appear to understand English, my translator suggested, “Why don’t you just tear out a couple of pages without any names on them, and tell her those are all the notes you took here?”

That’s what I did. And immediately, I regretted it: The girls who had defended me didn’t know there was nothing on those pages.

The Revolutionary Guards, and the woman in the blue flowered chador, escorted us out of the cultural center. We were conspicuous. There was my translator, my photographer, my driver, the cousin, the director, the Guards, and a few of the girls who had not abandoned us. I muttered to my driver, “I wish I had torn up those pages instead of giving them to her.”

My driver told the director what I had said. Through a translator, she replied, “You can have them back, if

you promise to tear them up.”

To my astonishment, she passed the pages back into my hands. I slipped them into my bag. As we exited the gate, the Guards stayed inside, but the director of the center slipped out with us, into the parking lot. For a moment I thought I would never be free of this woman in the blue flowered chador.

But she had not come to demand to see me shred the notes or to shower me with invective. Rather, she seized my hand in both of hers and looked into my eyes. For the first time, she spoke to me in English.

She said, “I hope you can forgive me.”

In the past four years that I have spent thinking and writing about Iran, I have returned to that moment many times in my mind. The decision to expel me and confiscate my notes had clearly come from the Revolutionary Guards. The director was at their mercy to a degree I had not fathomed.

When we work in countries without press freedoms, we scarcely know the pressures on the people we encounter, the complexities of their motivations, the dimensions of their fears. We do not float above the tensions and restrictions of their lives; we are embroiled in them, often in ways we cannot see. And we must constantly balance our commitment to our work with the admonition to do no harm—to our translators, our sources, even, sometimes, to the people who appear to be blocking our way. The conclusions we reach, we draw from an occluded view of a vast and diverse country. It is for us to find ways of seeing through walls, of learning about the people and places we cannot visit, and about the hidden layers of those we do. ■

Laura Secor completed in May a fellowship at The New York Public Library’s Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, where she was working on a forthcoming book, “Fugitives from Paradise: A Biography of Iran’s Movement for Democracy.” She has written on Iran for The New Yorker, The New York Times Magazine, and The New Republic.

Iran: News Happens, But Fewer Journalists Are There to Report It

In a time of global engagement—economic, political, environmental, energy and health, to name a few—budget cuts at news organizations severely limit foreign news coverage.

BY MARK SEIBEL

When Iranians go to the polls in June, McClatchy's Warren P. Strobel will be there. But we almost didn't send him. After all, we hadn't gone to Mumbai for last year's terrorist attack, nor had we sent anyone to Mexico for the emergence of this year's flu outbreak. We debated long and hard about whether to send someone with President Obama to the Summit of the Americas before agreeing that we would let The Miami Herald provide coverage for our newspapers—without the expertise of either of McClatchy's White House correspondents.

We did send Steven Thomma, a McClatchy White House reporter, to Europe to cover Obama's tour there. He didn't travel to and from Europe with the White House press corps, however. It was cheaper for him to get there on his own and then begin his reporting with the President in London.

Tired of reading about newspaper economics and what they've done to newsgathering? Maybe you should just stop here. There's no mistaking that the country's economic malaise—and the news industry's inability to come up with a surefire way to make money on the Internet—has taken a huge toll on the American news media's ability to track what goes on in the world. It's enough to make one long for the good old days when we could lay off reporters and insist with a straight face that there would be no change in our ability to cover the news. No more. The last year of layoffs, cutbacks and

consolidations have hurt. Bad.

The broadcast networks have all but shuttered their overseas bureaus. The list of newspapers that have abandoned the international playing field is a long one. Cox, Newsday, The (Baltimore) Sun, and The Boston Globe have

There's no mistaking that the country's economic malaise—and the news industry's inability to come up with a surefire way to make money on the Internet—has taken a huge toll on the American news media's ability to track what goes on in the world.

eliminated their international news bureaus entirely. The Dallas Morning News has cut back to just coverage of Mexico, as has the Houston Chronicle. The Miami Herald, once the newspaper of Latin America, pretty much now staffs stories only in Cuba and the Caribbean. The Chicago Tribune and the Los Angeles Times are working through a painful consolidation that will cut the total number of Tribune Company correspondents in the field by half; they've already made a similar consolidation of their Washington bureaus. The New York Times charges gamely ahead, mortgaging its headquarters, borrowing at usurious rates

from someone it should be investigating, refusing to slash its newsroom staff, and chalking up losses in the scores of millions of dollars. Let's hope there really is a better day ahead.

Cuts and Compromise

By comparison, maybe the news from McClatchy isn't so bad. Despite an agonizing series of cuts, we've kept our foreign bureaus. We still have operations in China, Israel, Iraq, Egypt, Russia, Kenya, Mexico and Venezuela. We've had three reporters in Afghanistan recently for extended stays—our Pentagon correspondent, another member of the national security team, and our Moscow bureau chief. We have a very productive stringer in Pakistan, and Jonathan S. Landay, one of the team that won accolades for debunking the Bush administration's Iraq WMD myth, will soon spend time there.

But we are not running at full steam in a world that deserves it. We've had a South Asia bureau in our budget for the past three years; I'm certain it will never open. The persistent hiring freeze has kept us from filling the Mexico City bureau with a full-time correspondent, even as drug crime explodes. When Hannah Allam took her leave to join the 2009 class of Nieman Fellows, we couldn't replace her, and Egypt remained vacant. Her Cambridge time ends just as our Baghdad bureau chief, Leila Fadel, rotates home, and she won't be replaced; we'll cover Iraq with reporters rotated in

from the United States, and Hannah knows that she'll be spending much of her time there, too. China, too, lies fallow; Tim Johnson has gone off to write a book. We'll rotate people in for six weeks at a stretch, but a lot of expertise will go missing.

I know, if I worked for the Rocky Mountain News or the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, I'd think this sounded like heaven. At least we're still doing the work we love. And we've gotten creative to stretch our dollars. We're now exchanging copy with The Christian Science Monitor; McClatchy takes their work from Mexico and India and we give them our stories from South America and Africa. It's how we covered Mumbai and the flu. The barter system lives.

McClatchy also is dedicated to keeping its Washington and foreign operation; corporate has made that clear. But the economic situation is hardly predictable. When I went away for a few weeks of vacation in February, I was assured that while cutbacks were likely throughout the chain, the Washington bureau wasn't expected to take a big hit. When I returned, the message was different: We cut expenses by more than 20 percent, everyone took a pay cut, and two people lost their jobs—a big blow in a small bureau.

When the State Department recently asked the news organizations that regularly cover it to agree on a new rotation system to decide who would travel with Hillary Clinton, we puzzled: Was it better to pick the system that would give us the most opportunities to travel or the one that would make it so we wouldn't have to say "no" as often? The problem with those rotations is that if you decline too often, you're disinvited. Still, any invitation to travel with the secretary now gets weighed carefully: Is she going to some place we already have someone near? Is she likely to make big news? Are the editors of our local papers likely to care? It's a pretty high threshold at a time when we are trying to hold onto as many of our diminishing dollars as possible for coverage of America's



In shift, Obama administration will join Iran nuclear talks

By Warren P. Strobel | McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration significantly stepped up its diplomatic engagement with Iran on Wednesday, saying it would break with former president George W. Bush's policy and permanently join international talks with Iran over its suspected nuclear weapons program.

The talks also include Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia, and the switch in U.S. policy was announced in a statement by the six nations after consultations in London.

At the same time, U.S. officials said, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's special adviser on Iran, Dennis Ross, is traveling this month to the Persian Gulf to confer with America's Sunni Muslim allies there about a new approach to the conservative Shiite regime in Tehran. » read more

Posted on Wed, April 8, 2009
 Comments

Despite Iran's tepid response, experts hail Obama approach

By Warren P. Strobel | McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — Under former President George W. Bush, America's rhetoric toward Iran was usually tough, but it often backfired and helped hardliners portray the United States as enemy, according to specialists in Tehran and Washington.



The Iran news page of McClatchy's Web site.

shooting wars. This year, we haven't gone on any trips.

Which brings us back around to Iran. We've gotten great stories out of Iran before, and Hannah's done some wonderful work there, and Warren, too. We even have a section on our Web site devoted to the topic, www.mcclatchydc.com/iran/, and U.S.-Iran relations are in flux. Obama supposedly is trying to reach out, Ahmadinejad could well lose, and the future of the whole nuclear program could be in the balance.

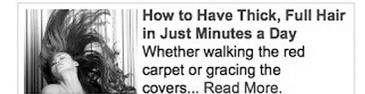
Most important of all, journalist visas have been hard to come by, and Iran is making them available for the election. In the end, that made the decision for us. But not without cost: Our Pentagon correspondents long-planned trip to Afghanistan was cancelled. That's the sort of balancing act today's economy forces us to make. ■

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IRAN QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Warren Strobel and Jonathan Landay

Mark Seibel, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, is managing editor for online news in McClatchy's Washington, D.C. bureau. In 1984 he joined The Miami Herald as its foreign editor, where for nearly 20 years he directed that newspaper's extensive international coverage, including the expansion in the reach of its International Edition. He became McClatchy's editor in charge of international and national security coverage in 2003, a position he held until assuming his current role in 2008. During the Gulf War in 1991 and the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, he was assigned to Knight Ridder's Washington bureau (then, the parent company of The Miami Herald) to oversee coverage of those stories.

When the Predictable Overtakes the *Real* News About Iran

‘What makes news in the West are Iran’s “menacing” actions in Iraq or words against Israel, with such stories told in a similar narrative, encased in little context and with a shortage of evidence.’

BY SCHEHEREZADE FARAMARZI

There’s plenty of news on Iran. But is it *real* news? Or does news reporting aimed at Westerners often confirm what they want to believe—and think they already know—about this foreign foe? And doesn’t the churning of news from the United States only serve to reinforce perceived and orchestrated fears that most Westerners have of the Islamic regime? With all too much of the coverage, the answer, at least to the last two questions, regrettably is yes.

In the context of the worldview that most Americans have, the Iranians are the bad guys, while the good guys are, always, themselves, followed by others in the West. Because of this narrow focus, the Iranian government is able to successfully exploit tensions with the United States and internally crack down on dissent by accusing its opponents of working for the American government.

Consequently, *real* news from Iran—along with much coming out of the Middle East—gets lost and is distorted and spun beyond repair. Iran is portrayed as a threat, especially now that it is said to be on its way to acquiring nuclear weapons. And its leaders provide plenty of provocative and sensational sound bites to illustrate this image, while at the same time insisting that the intent of its nuclear program is peaceful. So, of course, do Western leaders issue provocative statements, but their words are rarely challenged even though some of their more sensational sound bites have turned out to be lies they’ve told their own people.

Accepted by the press, for example,

without essential skepticism, were claims of Western officials when they insisted in 2007 that the 15 British sailors and Marines were seized by Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Iraqi waters. At the time, Iran’s assertion that the seizure took place in its territorial waters was considerably downplayed. Nor was much, if any, attention paid a year later when British Ministry of Defence documents revealed that the Britons were actually seized in internationally disputed waters. Turns out the incident had occurred because the U.S.-led coalition designated a sea boundary for Iran’s territorial waters without telling the Iranians where it was.

More recently, the press coverage of President Obama’s overture about the possibility of the two nations having some level of engagement—delivered on the occasion of Norouz in March—and Tehran’s response to it demonstrate how the Western news media are still trapped in their old mindset. According to most of the reporting about this exchange, the Iranians “rebuffed” or “dismissed” Obama’s message. But this is not the *real* news. Western news accounts failed to challenge the legitimacy of any of the demands that President Obama made of Iran; nor were there news stories of what Khamenei said in a speech he gave soon after the Obama message when he listed major complaints Iranians have with U.S. policies.

Nor do Western news media miss an opportunity to pick up every warning U.S. officials give of Iran’s advancing nuclear program. Yet these same news organizations give little weight

to reports by experts in the field such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) or even to findings by the U.S. intelligence that downplay the imminence of this threat. Rarely, if ever, is Iran’s plausible desire to obtain nuclear arms out of a belief that it needs them as a deterrent against continuous U.S. threats for regime change ever well explained. Nor is coverage given to the possibility that Iran’s nuclear strategy might be due to its geopolitical location: Its neighbors include nuclear Pakistan (and India is not too far away), and it is surrounded by U.S. military bases in Turkey, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and, of course, Iraq. The Persian Gulf is controlled by the U.S. fleet. Iran’s interest in being recognized as a regional power is also another key factor that receives scant attention in the Western press.

Iranian leaders don’t seem to be bothered by the negative portrayal in the Western media. In fact, they want to be seen in the Muslim world as defying the United States and thus use this as a badge of honor. And it’s a diversion that can be helpful domestically. Iranian officials must be grateful, for example, that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s incessant denial of the Holocaust has served to overshadow any reporting about the mysterious death of 25-year-old blogger Omidreza Mirsayafi in an Iranian jail in March. So it was, too, with the death of 49-year-old political activist Amir-Hossein Heshmat Saran, also in March, after five years in detention. The lengthy list of political prisoners who’ve died—Valiollah Faiz-Mahdavi

and Abdolreza Rajabi, among them—has been lost as well in the blur of the West’s all-too-predictable coverage of Iran.

The government’s brutal crackdown of women’s rights groups, students, journalists, scholars and even teachers and other laborers who strike for better pay hardly registers a headline in Western publications. Attention is roused slightly in the United States

when Iranian-Americans are detained in Iran, but unfortunately these situations are presented, for the most part, in the context of Iran’s hostility toward America. “They hate our civilization” is what seems to anger Westerners, not the Iranian government’s inhumane treatment of thousands of its citizens, including those who hold dual citizenship.

What makes news in the West are

Iran’s “menacing” actions in Iraq or words against Israel, with such stories told in a similar narrative, encased in little context and with a shortage of evidence. Every time President Ahmadinejad calls for Israel to be wiped off the map, the story is repeated as if it is new news, even though reporters (and policymakers) recognize the threat as rhetoric for the consumption of domestic and regional audiences. Seasoned journalists, at least, should know that such remarks are primarily targeted at the Muslim world, where they have a huge appeal. Do credible people truly believe that Iran will or can destroy Israel? To ordinary Iranians, including those who oppose the regime, support for its nuclear program emerges out of a sense of pride and because of how it bespeaks the defiance they want to express in the face of American bullying.

Journalists who have a deep understanding of Iran know that despite its ideological nature—and its leaders’ rhetoric—the Islamic Republic is, at its core, a pragmatic state. Attacking Israel would be strategically unwise, and Iranians know this. Yes, Hizbullah in Lebanon receives help in its fight against Israel, but Americans provide strong financial, military and political support for the Israelis. And the extent of Iran’s support for Hamas is routinely exaggerated as the reporting too often relies on Israeli and American sources and thus conveys their viewpoints.

By giving too much credit to Iran’s militarism and threats—with an implicit focus on misplaced fears—Western news reporters serve to strengthen the regime’s position in the Muslim world and hamper democratic strides being made inside the country. ■

Scheherezade Faramarzi, a 2009 Nieman Fellow, is a longtime correspondent with The Associated Press based in Beirut, Lebanon. Born in Iran and educated in the West, she has reported on the 1979 Islamic Revolution and its aftermath, the Iran-Iraq war, the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis in Iran, and more recent events involving Iran and Middle East conflicts.

'Theatrical gesture'

Mr Ahmadinejad announced the decision to release the Britons at a news conference in Tehran.

He spoke at length, attacking the West over its policy in the Middle East, and it was more than an hour before he even mentioned the captives issue.

He repeated allegations that the Britons were captured in Iranian waters, and awarded medals to the Iranian commanders responsible for detaining them.

It was all part of the build up to his extraordinary theatrical gesture, says the BBC’s diplomatic correspondent James Robbins.

"We have every right to put these people on trial," Mr Ahmadinejad asserted.

"But I want to give them as a present to the British people to say they are all free."

He said they were being pardoned to mark both the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday on 30 March, and the upcoming Easter holiday.

"I’m asking Mr Blair to not put these 15 personnel on trial because they admitted they came to Iranian territorial water," he added, referring to taped "confessions" made by the British sailors and marines.



“ The British government was not even brave enough to tell their people the truth ”

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

- ▶ Ahmadinejad excerpts
- ▶ Ending it with a flourish
- ▶ US welcomes release

UK VERSION OF EVENTS

- 1 Crew boards merchant ship 1.7NM inside Iraqi waters
- 2 HMS Cornwall was south-east of this, and inside Iraqi waters
- 3 Iran tells UK that merchant ship was at a different point, still within Iraqi waters
- 4 After UK points this out, Iran provides alternative position, now within Iranian waters

- ▶ Both versions in more detail
- ▶ Dividing lines of Shatt al-Arab
- ▶ Q&A: Iran’s handling

Reporting from the BBC’s Web site about the release of British sailors by Iran.

Attempting to Silence Iran's 'Weblogistan'

'Iran's filtering and blocking regime has been described by various experts as second only to China's.'

BY MOHAMED ABDEL DAYEM

Hardly a week goes by without Iran being featured prominently in the news. Usually the news is about the country's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's inflammatory rhetoric or its nascent nuclear program. But Iran is not the monolithic entity it is often portrayed to be in Western, and especially U.S., media.

While the Iranian government retains a monopoly on all television and radio broadcasting, the country continues to have an independent,

though reduced in size and severely battered, print media. Although many independent and reformist newspapers were launched during the years of the Khatami presidency (1997-2005), hardliners in Iran have shut down more than 100 of those publications and jailed dozens of journalists in the process.

It is perhaps no surprise then that during those years Iranians began taking to the Internet in droves. Between 20 and 25 million Iranians have regu-

lar digital access, giving the country the highest Internet penetration rate in the region. According to research by the Berkman Center for Internet & Society, the Iranian blogosphere currently boasts some 60,000 regularly updated blogs of virtually every political stripe. Others estimate that the number is closer to 100,000. Even Iran's president and supreme leader maintain blogs. "Weblogistan," as Iranians casually refer to the teeming and diverse world of Farsi blogging,

Blogging in Iran

September 2001—First Iranian blog appears on the Internet.

November 2001—Blogger Hossein Derakhshan develops a step-by-step guide to blogging in Farsi.

April 2003—Journalist Sina Motalebi becomes first Iranian blogger to be imprisoned. After more than three weeks in solitary confinement, Motalebi was released on bail. By year's end he sought asylum in Europe.

August-November 2004—Iranian authorities detain upward of 20 bloggers and online journalists. After being released, many of the imprisoned bloggers provided detailed accounts of mistreatment and torture while in custody.

January 2005—Government orders Internet service providers to filter a

number of the most popular Persian blog-hosting platforms.

August 2006—President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad launches a personal blog.

October 2006—Farsi becomes one of the 10 most used blogging languages, according to blog indexing service Technorati.

July 2008—Draft law being discussed in parliament adds the creation of Web sites and blogs that promote "corruption, prostitution and apostasy" to a list of criminal offenses punishable by the death sentence.

November 2008—Hossein Derakhshan is detained, allegedly in connection with comments he made about religious figures. No official charges have been filed against the blogger. Authorities

denied holding Derakhshan until December 30, 2008.

February 2009—Bloggers and online writers Roozbeh Mirebrahimi, Omid Memarian, Javad Gholamtamimi, and Shahram Rafizadeh, all of whom were mistreated while in custody in 2004, are sentenced to multiyear prison terms, flogging and monetary fines. This happens in spite of a pledge by the chief of Iran's judiciary that their abuse would be investigated and punished.

March 2009—Blogger Omidreza Mirsayafi, who was sentenced to a 30-month prison sentence in December 2008 for insulting religious and political figures, dies in prison under suspicious circumstances. He had just begun serving his sentence a month earlier. ■

is alive and well despite a seemingly endless barrage of legal (and at times extralegal) persecutions.

The rate at which the Iranian blogosphere has grown can be attributed to a host of factors, but two stand out.

1. The ability of women, ethnic minorities, and other otherwise marginalized groups—not to mention print journalists who have lost their jobs due to newspaper closures—to express themselves with relative freedom cannot be overstated. There is also a growing number of mainstream journalists who write online what they know will not be tolerated by the censors in traditional media. Additionally, the anonymity of writing online has largely eliminated a number of religious, social, and class-centered distinctions that have traditionally segregated society into segments that rarely interacted in the past.
2. High rates of Internet penetration coupled with a highly literate and very young population (70 percent of Iran's population is under 30 years of age) have also contributed to the burgeoning of blogging.

Government Clamps Down

Initially, the government did not implement any systematic measures to regulate the Iranian blogosphere. That soon changed when bloggers who discussed political, social, religious and cultural affairs—frequently in ways that were unimaginable in the traditional mediums of print or broadcast journalism—began to proliferate at breakneck speed.

In 2003, the government created a committee whose membership is drawn from various law enforcement, intelligence and legislative bodies and tasked it with designating and filtering “illegal” Web sites, which include but are not limited to Iranian blogs. Iran's filtering and blocking regime has been described by various experts as second only to China's. In late 2008, the gov-

ernment boasted that this committee had filtered upward of five million sites, though most independent observers believe that this number is inflated. A cybercrimes law introduced by the government in 2006 effectively put all forms of expression on the Internet on the same footing as other forms

Since the turn of the century, when blogging started taking a foothold in Iranian society, Tehran has detained dozens—and possibly hundreds—of bloggers. Some were held for months before being acquitted, but others have had to serve lengthy prison terms.

of journalism, which are governed by Iran's restrictive and highly punitive press law of 2000.

Since the turn of the century, when blogging started taking a foothold in Iranian society, Tehran has detained dozens—and possibly hundreds—of bloggers. [A timeline of blogging is on page 42.] Some were held for months before being acquitted, but others have had to serve lengthy prison terms. What is most peculiar is that those who feel the wrath of the state often don't fit the mold of the pro-Western, anticlerical youth. For instance, theology student and blogger Mojtaba Lotfi was sentenced to a multiyear prison term after he posted a sermon by renowned theologian Hossein Ali Montazeri in 2004.

The Fate of Two Bloggers

The cases of bloggers Hossein Derakhshan and Omidreza Mirsayafi (detailed below) illustrate that what the state perceives as subversive is constantly changing. Both men found themselves in the government's crosshairs, and in

both cases the reasons for their detention remain nebulous at best.

Hossein Derakhshan: In 1999, Hossein Derakhshan was a print journalist at the reformist newspaper *Asr-e Azadegan* (Age of the Free People). When the popular publication was shut down in 2000, Derakhshan turned to the Web. He began to regularly write online in 2001, becoming one of Iran's first bloggers. What propelled him to fame, however, was his development of a guide and a piece of software that enabled Farsi speakers to blog in their native tongue without having to resort to transliteration in the Roman alphabet. To this day many Farsi-language bloggers pay him homage by referring to him as the “blogfather.” Derakhshan's blog—written for many years from Canada—cannot be accessed inside Iran. His articles have been published by many international publications, including *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*.

The Iranian judiciary confirmed in a December 30th press conference in Tehran that Derakhshan had been arrested and is in the investigative custody of a Revolutionary Court. The reason given for his detention is remarks he allegedly made on his blog about a key Shi'a cleric and the third infallible Imam of Shi'ism. The exact date of his arrest remains unknown, but Derakhshan's last post on his blog is dated October 30, 2008. News of his detention first appeared on November 17th on *Jahan News*, a news Web site that is reportedly close to the Iranian intelligence apparatus. Until December 30th, authorities had denied that Derakhshan was in their custody; his whereabouts remains unknown to date.

Derakhshan rarely got into trouble with the authorities despite adopting a reformist editorial line for years. More recently, however, Derakhshan had written an increasing number of articles praising certain policies by President Ahmadinejad. Why the government arrested Derakhshan

after he had softened his position vis-à-vis some hardliners within the government remains a mystery and a frequent topic of discussion on many Iranian blogs.

Omidreza Mirsayafi: On March 18th, Omidreza Mirsayafi, who wrote on the now defunct cultural news blog Rooznegar, died under mysterious circumstances in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison, where he was serving a 30-month term after being convicted of insulting Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, leader of Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution. Mirsayafi had just begun serving his prison term in February. Mirsayafi's lawyer said that the sentence was rushed without the proper judicial procedures and that Mirsayafi had not been officially notified of the sentence before its implementation. Mirsayafi, in an interview after being sentenced, said he had been coerced into making a false confession. He also said that the court never specified which blog entries had been deemed offensive by the government.

The prison authorities claimed that Mirsayafi had committed suicide. But the journalist's attorney told The Times of London that Mirsayafi had repeatedly expressed concerns about his physical well-being, "but the doctors there didn't take this seriously and said he was faking it." Hissam Fairoozy, an inmate at Evin, told the organization Human Rights Activists in Iran that Mirsayafi was suffering from depression and had been taking antidepressants. Fairoozy, a physician who has been repeatedly imprisoned and has in the past treated jailed political dissidents and journalists at Evin including renowned pro-democracy journalist Akbar Ganji, said that he was concerned about Mirsayafi's condition and had unsuccessfully attempted to have prison doctors hospitalize the young blogger. (Dr. Fairoozy, after a previous stint in prison, wrote a detailed firsthand account of medi-

Rebel with a pause



Amir-Parviz Mirsayafi says his brother was beaten to death

by Peyvand Khorsandi
20-Apr-2009

News that 31-year-old Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi has received an eight-year jail sentence for being a US "spy" comes a month after 29-year-old blogger Omid-Reza Mirsayafi was found dead in Evin prison and deals a blow to President Obama's change of foreign policy tack with Iran's clerics.

It is, however, an apt blow – Obama's now famous Norouz speech, in which he stopped short of praising Ayatollah Khamenei's taste in underwear, eclipsed reports of Mr Mirsayafi's death.

On 28 March, Voice of America Persian's website published a report that quoted Reporters Sans Frontieres' Reza Moini, Amir-Parviz Mirsayafi, Omid's brother, and Masoumeh, his sister. In that report Amir-Parviz accused the prison authorities

of having beaten his brother to death – it was accompanied by a head-and-shoulders shot of Omid's roughed-up body.

A screen grab from an Iranian.com article featuring a translated excerpt from the Voice of America Persian interview with Amir-Parviz Mirsayafi on March 28, 2009.

cal negligence in Iran's correctional facilities on his blog.¹)

Mirsayafi's brother, Amir-Parviz, also disputes the government's rendition of events. He told Voice of America (VOA) on March 28th that his brother had no history of taking antidepressant medication and that his body showed signs of abuse, including a left ear that "was covered with blood." VOA's Web site posted a photo of Mirsayafi's face that showed significant facial bruising. The government would not disclose any details about the events that led to Mirsayafi's death and rushed to bury him within 24 hours of his death without conducting an autopsy.

Weblogistan Lives

The Iranian blogosphere continues to grow in number and impact even

as the government introduces new laws and technologies to regulate it. Most observers of Iran concur that the government is not trying to end or disrupt blogging per se; rather it is involved in a constantly evolving engagement with bloggers to define the boundaries of what can be said in Iran. Weblogistan remains a place where a vigorous exchange of ideas does occur—yet it is the place where the limits of free expression in Iran are being tested. ■

Mohamed Abdel Dayem is program coordinator for the Middle East & North Africa Program at the Committee to Protect Journalists.

¹ This blog entry, written in Farsi, can be read at www.hesamfiroozi.blogfa.com/post-17.aspx.

Publishing and Mapping Iran's Weblogistan

Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet & Society has been home to two unique efforts that make more visible to Western audiences what Iranian bloggers are writing. One of the center's projects involves mapping and analyzing the social networks formed by Iranian bloggers;¹ the other, Global Voices,² began as a blog at Berkman and is now a global community of freelance and volunteer editors, authors and translators who bring newsworthy blogs from many parts of the world, including Iran, to the attention of Western audiences by translating them and posting them on the Web site.

In "Mapping Iran's Online Public: Politics and Culture in the Persian Blogosphere," Bruce Etling, the Berkman Center's Internet & Democracy project director and John Kelly, who is founder and chief scientist at Morningside Analytics, use a combination of computational social network analysis and human and automated analysis to discover Iran's wide variety of blogging voices and to see how these bloggers tend to cluster themselves. Their analysis revealed four major networks (what they call "poles"), with subclusters of bloggers within each one. The poles they identify are:

1. Secular/Reformist: Contains expatriates and Iranians involved in a dialogue about Iranian politics and other issues.
2. Conservative/Religious: Two subclusters are focused primarily on religious issues; the other subcluster is on politics and current affairs.
3. Persian Poetry and Literature
4. Mixed Networks

The screenshot shows the Global Voices website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Countries', 'Topics', 'Authors', and 'Search'. Below that, a language selection menu lists various languages including German, Spanish, French, Italian, Malagasy, Portuguese, Swahili, Shqip, srpski, Macedonian, Arabic, Persian, Bengali, Hindi, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, and Japanese. The main navigation includes 'Home', 'About', 'For Bloggers', 'For Media', 'Special Coverage', 'Sponsors', 'Contact', 'Donate', 'Subscribe', and 'RSS Feeds'. The current page is 'Iran', with a 'Monthly Archives' dropdown and a button to 'Add live 'Iran' headlines to your site'. The featured stories section highlights two articles: 'MENA: Reflections on Durban II' by Eman AbdElRahman and 'Iran: Free Potatoes Inflamed Electoral Fever' by Hamid Tehrani. A map of Iran is shown on the right side of the page.

Iran's home page on the Global Voices Web site.

An interesting—and perhaps surprising—finding this analysis revealed is the existence of a subcluster within the Secular/Reformist pole comprised of bloggers living in Iran who write intensively about politics and current affairs and are linked in a contentive dialogue with the conservative political subcluster. It is also more common for bloggers in the conservative/religious pole to blog anonymously than for secular/reformist ones. The most frequently blocked blogs are those in the secular/reformist pole. As Kelly wrote on the Berkman Web site about his project, "Given the media environment in Iran today, blogs may represent the most open public communications

platform for political discourse."

For those interested in what bloggers in Iran are saying, Global Voices aggregates, curates, translates and amplifies their conversations. Its team of regional blogger-editors becomes guides to Iran's blogosphere. In Iran, where blogging happens in Farsi, what's being written is inaccessible to Western audiences. So Global Voices translates its selected blogs into English to be read by the site's English-speaking audience. Also, other relevant pieces are translated from English into Farsi so that conversations going on outside of the Iranian blogosphere become accessible to Iranians. ■—Melissa Ludtke

¹ http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/publications/2008/Mapping_Irans_Online_Public/interactive_blogosphere_map

² <http://globalvoicesonline.org/-/world/middle-east-north-africa/iran/>

The Virtual Iran Beat

‘Speaking Farsi helps expand our ability to gather news. It means we can tap into a more extensive network and speak to more Iranians, even if we’re not based in Tehran.’

BY KELLY GOLNOUSH NIKNEJAD

The Pakistani taxi driver I have directed to the Iranian Embassy pumps his brakes as we approach the U.S. Embassy, a seven-story building that resembles the hull of a battleship. Tall and arrogant, it looms large over the Abu Dhabi Desert. I had recently started a job in the capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as the diplomatic affairs correspondent for a new English-language newspaper. The American Embassy is down the road from the Iranian one—close enough that the Iranians refer to it when giving directions to their own.

“Here?” the driver asks, turning around for another quick look. I have olive skin and my dark hair is dutifully covered for the occasion. But the accent behind the hijab is unmistakably American. “No, the Iranian Embassy,” I repeat, this time with more emphasis.

As he pulls away from the curb, I feel a deep pang of separation, coupled with excitement: This is the closest I’ve been to Iran in more than 20 years. The embassy’s turquoise-tiled walls, evoking something in my childhood, shimmer in the distance. What look like thick black scribbles give way to fancy calligraphy—Qur’anic verses, I assume—as we get closer.

Like many Iranian Americans, I feel as if I’m from a broken home: The parents are divorced but still feuding after three decades. As a journalist, my position is more precarious.

In what has been called a cold war between Iran and the United States, the UAE has emerged as a Vienna of sorts—a place where America’s Iran-watchers can mingle with thousands of Iranians. One hub for this is the expanded Iran Desk at the U.S. consul-

ate in Dubai, the more cosmopolitan UAE city-state up the coast from the capital. If Iranians are suspicious of journalists, it’s partly because our reporting jobs can seem like the perfect cover to gather intelligence.

Iranians have a deep-seated paranoia about spies and conspiracies. There is a long history of political intrigue to explain such suspicions. In 1953, a CIA-engineered coup ousted the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and reinstated the shah, under whose reign American agents roamed the land. CIA and Israel’s Mossad reportedly trained Iran’s secret police. More intriguingly, CIA director Richard Helms was appointed U.S. Ambassador to Iran after he left the agency in 1973. (Incidentally, Helms started his career as a journalist.) When militants seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979, they dubbed it “the den of spies.”

The 1980’s were particularly bleak. Soon after the Islamic Republic was established, the regime consolidated power in the brutal ways a state does. While it fought an eight-year war that its neighbor Iraq started, it also waged internal battles with domestic foes—the Kurds, the communist Tudeh Party, and especially the Iranian Mojahedin, a quasi-Marxist cult on the U.S. terrorist list.

Much has changed in Iran since that decade in which I left Iran, but some important progress made in the 1990’s has been stymied by those who think the way forward is to revert to practices they themselves deplored under the shah—and ones that led to a revolution. Economic and cultural reforms slowly put in place after the

war were effectively rolled back in this decade, especially since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took office in 2005. Things got worse the following year, when the Bush administration asked Congress for tens of millions of dollars to secretly fund NGOs and activists to destabilize the Iranian government. It stoked government paranoia and became an effective tool in the hands of officials who have used it to stifle dissent and spread fear.

If the Iranians believe this is vital to their survival, the fear may be misplaced. As Ervand Abrahamian, a U.S.-based Iran scholar, argues in a recent paper, it was not a reign of terror, the eight-year war, oil revenue, or even the strength of Shi’ism that sustained the Iranian regime—but populism. The challenge the regime now faces, according to Abrahamian, is to “juggle the competing demands of these populist programs with those of the educated middle class—especially the ever-expanding army of university graduates produced, ironically, by one of the revolution’s main achievements. This new stratum needs not only jobs and a decent standard of living but also greater social mobility and access to the outside world—with all its dangers, especially to well-protected home industries—and, concomitantly, the creation of a viable civil society.”

The Iranian Press

The press is one place to start. The media in Iran is often state owned and always closely supervised. Those newspapers not run directly by the state are associated with political parties and prominent figures whose factional rivalries sometimes spill over

into the papers. Those in power often assert it by shutting down a rival's mouthpiece.

There's another reason to reform the press in Iran. Since a systematic crack-down, which has included journalists, bloggers, academics and researchers, journalism there has become synonymous with jail and tyranny. Adopting more liberal press practices is likely to do Iran far more good than harm, and here's four reasons why:

1. The work of any journalist or propagandist pale in comparison to the far-fetched scenarios swirling in Iranian living rooms, taxi cabs—and, above all, in the Iranian imagination. I've heard them all and, believe me, reality is not always stranger than fiction.
2. Satellite dishes are illegal but on the ascent in Iran. They crop up faster than officials can take them down. Most of the programs they watch stream in from Los Angeles, where there is a lot of singing and dancing, but from where dissidents have been unsuccessfully trying to topple the regime for 30 years. Both the British-funded BBC Persian service and the U.S. government-backed Voice of America have expanded their radio broadcasts to include television. So great is the audience, that essentially the government is not shielding anyone from anything.
3. Foreign journalists have a difficult time obtaining permission to report from Iran or to set up bureaus there. Visiting reporters are obliged to employ "minders" from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, something they fail to tell their viewers and readers. This might help authorities feel in greater control of the information that trickles out. But the news vacuum about Iran is filled not by The New York Times or ABC News but by information disseminated by interest groups, dissidents and other much more biased parties.
4. What do the arrests and jailing of journalists and bloggers accomplish? If anything, it attracts more attention to their work. And it reinforces the worst stereotypes everyone already



Tehran Bureau's home page.

has about Iran. Why not break them?

Tehran Bureau: An Online News Hub

The decision to create TehranBureau.com, an online news magazine to which journalists familiar with Iran contribute stories, emerged out of many conversations and e-mails with a classmate from Columbia Journalism School. Each of us wanted to report news about Iran, but not in the simplistic way that country is too often covered by the Western mainstream media. As much to avoid the dangers of Iran's factional politics as to escape the Western news media's bias against Iran and Iranians, we decided to take advantage of the Internet and set up a virtual bureau. In part, our thinking was guided by us knowing that Iranians are as much plugged in as any developed society.

At a time when world news should be more important than ever, news organizations continue their contraction, and to do this they've shuttered or scaled back foreign bureaus. Though the trend in journalism is specializa-

tion, news organizations appear to be investing fewer resources in the cultivation of editorial and reporting staffs who can become, in effect, area experts.

This reduction in reporting knowledge and resources has consequences, as information slips through as news that shapes Western perceptions and policy. Four years ago, soon after the last presidential election—the one Ahmadinejad won—a black-and-white photograph purporting to show the new president as a hostage-taker in the 1979 embassy takeover circulated widely in the media. To an Iranian, certainly, the person in the picture looks nothing like him. I e-mailed a professor who was working on a book about the hostage crisis to get his perspective.

"That was first sent out by an MEK-affiliated Web site," he wrote back, referring to the Iranian Mojahedin, an Iranian opposition group living in exile. "The two individuals in the photo have long since been identified as a MEK partisan who was later executed and another student who was killed in the Iraq War." More interestingly, in the eight years Ahmadinejad's predecessor

was president, the media remained quiet or ignorant about the leading role of many reformists close to President Mohammad Khatami in the embassy seizure, including his brother.

One of my primary motivations in setting up Tehran Bureau in 2008 was to assemble a staff in which reporters and editors speak the language—and can tell people apart. Speaking Farsi helps expand our ability to gather news. It means we can tap into a more extensive network and speak to more Iranians, even if we're not based in Tehran. We can read Iranian bloggers—those who write in Iran and those who live in exile—and scan the Iranian press and, by reading between the lines, we can ultimately deliver a more reliable product, even if we do so with barely any financial support. (We refuse to take money from any government agency, religious or interest group.)

Here are two examples of coverage of Iran by Tehran Bureau:

- In March, Gareth Smyth, who reported from Iran for the Financial Times, wrote “Hot times and cool heads,”¹ about political dynamics inside of Iran and the United States that might result in the two countries engaging in dialogue.
- The impact of Mohammad Khatami's withdrawal as a presidential candidate has been written about from several angles in blog posts as part of Tehran Bureau's reporting on the Iranian election in June.

Surprises Along the Way

The Iranian ambassador I had a meeting with that day had been the foreign ministry spokesman for a long time. He was sophisticated and media savvy. At that time, the circumstances in the UAE were stacked against me. The paper I was writing for had no name and was still months away from being published. As we started dry runs, I wrote stories on deadline for a paper with no name that no one out-

side the newsroom saw. Plus, as an Iranian American, I knew the Iranian authorities would never trust me. But in the course of my work, they gave me the benefit of the doubt and access and treated me with respect and my American colleagues, even more so.

My experience wasn't limited to the foreign ministry. The first time I spoke to one of Tehran's hard liners, I was based in London and working as an associate producer for “Frontline.” After many months had passed and it was pretty apparent my colleagues' visas weren't going to come through, I picked up the phone and dialed a number that wasn't all that difficult to find. “Salaam,” I said, introducing myself. “I'm calling from London,” I said. Strike one. (Many Iranians believe the British are worse than Americans when it comes to plotting against Iranians. The 1953 coup was initially hatched by the British, after all.) I continued, “I work for an American television station.” Strike two. “We're making a documentary about U.S.-Iran relations since 9/11,” I, an Iranian American, said. Strike three. I took a deep breath and braced for the worst.

“Can I see your programs on satellite television?” this official with a provincial accent asked after a pause.

“No,” I replied, but I sent him a link to “Frontline's” online archives. And I was impressed by his gmail

3.24.2009

Hot times and cool heads



In an unprecedented step, Ayatollah Khamenei responds to President Obama's Nowruz message himself. Pictured above, before a gathering in Mashhad, his hometown, on the first day of Nowruz. Photo/Leader.ir

As Ayatollah Khamenei endorses possible talks with the United States, Iran's pragmatic conservatives hope the presidential election will help trim Ahmadinejad's international role.

Beirut

By GARETH SMYTH

Tehran Bureau | *election coverage*

There are many asymmetries in the U.S.-Iran relationship. The United States is a huge military power and a massive economy. Iranians have a sense of history and geography that Americans simply do not understand.

As part of Tehran Bureau's pre-election coverage, Gareth Smyth wrote about U.S.-Iran politics.

address.

After a couple of days, he called me. “It's a good program,” he said. “It's certainly better than the other television programs there, anyway.”

Not long after this conversation, we were in. ■

Kelly Golnoush Niknejad founded Tehran Bureau in November 2008, initially as a blog. She serves as managing editor as well as one of its reporters. Tehran Bureau can be found at www.tehranbureau.com. Information about the “Frontline” documentary, “Showdown With Iran,” is at www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/showdown/.

¹ <http://tehranbureau.com/2009/03/24/hot-times-and-cool-heads>

21st Century Muckrakers

Fatima Tlisova witnessed the injustice of villagers being poisoned by pollution from a nuclear lab nearby; she reported their story in a place where journalists risk their lives for sharing truths considered harmful to those in power. When she learned about displaced people confined to a camp for 14 years, she took photographs of their Russian passports to display the empty space where official stamps should be.

As an investigative journalist in the North Caucasus region of Russia, Tlisova's series of reports about poisoned villagers, in time, persuaded the government to bring medical care. In letters written to her, Tlisova found out that stamps refused for 14 years now had been given, and these people were homeless no longer.



The Lyons Award plaque for Tlisova is inscribed with the words: “Fatima Tlisova, Independent Journalist, For bearing witness to the hidden truths of a violent place.” *Photo by Kane Hsieh.*

“Tonight we bear witness to the widowed mother of two who through sheer excellence of her craft shed light on this place,” said David Jackson, a Chicago Tribune investigative reporter and 2009 Nieman Fellow, in bestowing the Nieman Foundation’s 29th Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism honors on Nieman classmate Fatima Tlisova. He described Tlisova as a reporter

“who packed her crisp, dispassionate

AP reports with irrefutable detail. Whose hand-held video camera cast its ghostly light across a truckload of entwined corpses. Who reported being abducted by local officers of the Federal Security Service, dragged by her hair into the woods. Had her fingertips burned with cigarettes ‘so that you can write better.’ Who, one panicked day, finally located her 16-year-old son in the custody of local police—drunken thugs in uniforms, men with guns and secret lists.”

As Niemans, Tlisova observed, “We had many conversations on journalism and its future. Is it really worth all the sacrifices we have to make? Do people really need what we do?” In response, she gave examples of what happened because she’d borne witness, a few described above. “Fifty-eight prisoners in Nalchik [a city in the Caucasus region] told their lawyers that the torture ended after I published photos that were taken soon after the arrest with all the horrible signs of electrocution and other types of torture.” There were others who, she said, “decided the situation is too dangerous or too hopeless. We have to try anyway. My answer to all those journalistic questions is—yes.”

As the myriad of stories in this section will reveal, “yes” is still the journalistic answer for many reporters today. ■—Melissa Ludtke

The Challenges and Opportunities of 21st Century Muckraking

‘... investigative reporters are a hardy breed who will tenaciously uphold their watchdog mission in bad times as well as good.’

BY MARK FELDSTEIN

Since spring of last year, Nieman Reports has focused on 21st Century Muckrakers, a collection of articles about investigative reporting. What have we learned to take with us as we move forward?

For starters, watchdog reporting faces extraordinary challenges:

Profits in news organizations are plummeting as advertisers abandon newspapers and magazines, destroying the economic foundation on which print journalism has depended for the past century and a half. In turn, beleaguered news outlets, including television and radio, slash budgets, close bureaus, and lay off employees—especially expensive investigative reporters whose time-consuming work requires high-priced legal vetting and often antagonizes advertisers and government authorities.

Legal protections for anonymous sources have eroded in the wake of the Valerie Plame case, when reporters were driven to betray their vows of confidentiality. Worse, the government’s skillful use of source waivers now threatens to become a routine tactic to chill future whistleblowing.

The federal government has erected a wall of secrecy since 9/11, classifying documents that should be public and withholding information that once was routinely provided to the press. While the Obama administration ap-

pears to be loosening this stranglehold, transparency seems destined to give way to secrecy in the future whenever the government invokes national security.

Authorities around the world are covertly monitoring journalists and their sources with satellites, spyware and other technology. In turns, dozens of investigative reporters across the globe are censored, harassed, jailed, beaten up, and even murdered every year.

Pushback by multinational corporations, now more powerful than many governments, obstructs reporters by employing batteries of lawyers to scare off potential sources and media executives. Even at the local level, a proliferation of public relations spin doctors makes it harder for journalists to get access to information.

Finally, a cacophony of tabloid information masquerading as journalism routinely drowns out whatever high-quality watchdog reporting is able to survive these other obstacles.

Still, despite these economic, political, legal and cultural threats, embattled muckrakers also have important new weapons at their disposal:

Computer-assisted reporting offers sophisticated methods of social scientists to unearth information from databases and enable reporters to find miscon-

duct that otherwise remains hidden. Google, online chat rooms, and other emerging tools of social media—not to mention lowly e-mail—also make it easier for investigative reporters to track down and interview hard-to-reach victims and whistleblowers.

Citizen journalism, while imperfect, helps the public expose misconduct that otherwise might not come to light. Likewise, online crowdsourcing lets reporters canvass citizens for assistance on investigative stories. In addition, inexpensive video technology now helps journalists and the public collect visual evidence of wrongdoing.

Nonprofit investigative reporting is on the rise, producing important exposés by The Center for Public Integrity, ProPublica, Talking Points Memo, the Center for Investigative Reporting, and other noncommercial outlets. The Huffington Post recently launched a project to fund investigative reporting, and online sites focusing on local watchdog journalism have sprouted in San Diego, Minneapolis and other cities. Meanwhile, a nonprofit infrastructure to train investigative reporters has taken root, and philanthropic foundations are increasingly underwriting freelance writers to take on challenging muckraking projects. Leading universities, too, are joining in and guiding eager students through the rigors of investigative projects that often produce tangible results.¹[See the

¹ Among the more active university-based investigative projects are those at American University, University of California, Berkeley, Boston University, Brandeis University, Columbia University, Georgetown University, Northeastern University, Northwestern University, and Southern Methodist University. See Spring 2008 and Winter 2008 issues of Nieman Reports for articles about some of these projects at www.niemanreports.org.

article by Boston University's Maggie Mulvihill and Joe Bergantino on page 76.]

Cooperative investigative ventures among news organizations are expanding. The Washington Post and “60 Minutes” have pooled resources to boost exposure for their projects; other journalistic outlets are doing the same.² Perhaps the most ambitious such enterprise is the online global muckraking of The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, whose 100 participating reporters in 50 countries collaborate on exposés that cross national boundaries.³

Web sites such as “WikiLeaks” make it easier for whistleblowers to anonymously disseminate once-secret paperwork documenting wrongdoing. In theory, the Internet could even eliminate government censorship altogether. For example, a contemporary equivalent of Daniel Ellsberg could post today’s version of the Pentagon Papers online, and they could be downloaded instantaneously in millions of computer terminals before prosecutors had a chance to impose prior restraint.

Global Web-based glasnost also enables reporters to evade government censorship by using foreign ISP addresses to disseminate their exposés. In poor countries, this digital muckraking is accessible mostly to the wealthy elite who have access to Web portals; but as the cost of computer technology falls—with the proliferation of In-



Public Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestick, published by Benjamin Harris in 1690, was the first newspaper published in the English-American colonies and lasted for only one issue. Four days after it appeared, the governor and council of Massachusetts—distressed about its content—issued a broadside order forbidding the publication of the paper without legal authority. Pictured here is the first of the three-page issue. *Photo courtesy of The National Archives of The United Kingdom.*

ternet cafés and mobile devices—the unharnessed investigative potential in developing countries could literally be revolutionary.

In short, there is reason for hope as well as concern. Or to paraphrase

Mark Twain, the rumors of muckraking’s demise have been greatly exaggerated.

The Past as Prologue

A look at the history of investigative journalism offers a window on what its future may hold. As its best-known practitioner of the time, Lincoln Steffens, righteously declared nearly a century ago: “I was not the original muckraker. The prophets of the Old Testament were ahead of me.”

In fact, the earliest known muckraking on American soil can be traced to 1690, when Publick Occurrences, the first English newspaper in the colonies, exposed “barbarous” human rights abuses as well as a sex scandal in which the king of France was alleged “to lie with” his “Sons Wife.” The British crown was not amused and shut down the paper four days later—a foreshadowing of the difficulties adversarial journalism would face in the future from government authorities, as well as a harbinger of the contradictory mix of noble and lowbrow coverage that would characterize exposé reporting in the New World.

More than three centuries later, investigative journalism has evolved greatly in scope, style and technique. But its core remains the same: fact-gathering to challenge authority and oppose entrenched power—political, governmental, corporate or religious—on behalf of ordinary citizens. While America’s earliest journalistic crusaders were partisan advocates, financed by po-

² See Gary Schwab’s article, “When Fierce Competitors Join the Same Team,” in the Fall 2008 issue of Nieman Reports, www.niemanreports.org.

³ See Fernando Rodrigues’s article, “Global Efforts at Investigative Reporting,” in the Spring 2008 issue of Nieman Reports at www.niemanreports.org.

litical parties or ideological movements such as abolition or women's suffrage, most investigative reporters in the past century have been employed by nonpartisan commercial news outlets and have practiced a more objective style of storytelling.

The articles about public health, safety and trust in this issue of Nieman Reports are a reminder of the essential role that watchdog reporting plays in our lives. Contemporary exposés of tainted overseas drugs and toys, like recent reports about contaminated meat and produce at domestic grocery chains and fast-food restaurants, trace their origins to America's early muckrakers. More than a century ago, Upton Sinclair worked undercover to produce his epic investigation of meatpacking plants, "The Jungle," while Collier's and The Ladies' Home Journal documented dangerous "patent" medicines. These reports led to the kind of reforms that are once again being demanded in the wake of current food and drug scandals.

Throughout it all, this kind of muckraking has been cyclical, waxing and waning over time. It tends to increase in periods of turmoil, such as the American Revolution or industrialization or the political and social upheavals of the 1960's and 1970's. Similarly, new media technologies and journalistic competition have also

Pictures that Tell Their Own Stories

Collected and Presented by Edward Bok

Congressman White from North Carolina.

Congressman George Henry White of Tarboro, N.C., writes the following letter to Dr. Hartman regarding the merits of Peruna:

George of Representatives, Washington, Feb. 4, 1899.

Peruna Medicine Co., Columbia, Ohio.

Dear Sir: I am exceedingly satisfied with Peruna and find it to be an excellent remedy for the grip and cough. I have used it in my family and they all are in recommending it as an excellent remedy. Very respectfully,
GEORGE H. WHITE.

© FRANK L. LEITCHMAN. A LETTER ABOUT THE "CONGRESSMAN"

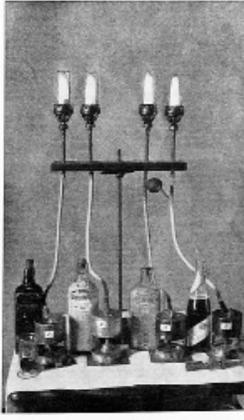
LETTERS FOR RENT

FOR RENT: A large number of letters for rent, including those of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and many others. Write for particulars to the Editor of this Journal.

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How Patents Will Burn

A Most Surprising Experience



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Mrs. Pinkham's



© FRANK L. LEITCHMAN. MRS. PINKHAM'S



MRS. WINSLOW'S SOOTHING SYRUP

© FRANK L. LEITCHMAN. MRS. WINSLOW'S SOOTHING SYRUP

In 1892, Edward Bok, editor of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, made his magazine the first to ban medical advertising. His target: patent medicine vendors selling dubious cures and treatments using false information. By 1904, as the sales of patent medicines continued strong, Bok began to publish what was actually in patent medicines and hired a lawyer and journalist, Mark Sullivan, to verify the facts and do research. On this page, above, Bok assembled a visual display of hoaxes as a way of trying to deter gullible consumers from purchasing these products. For example, Sullivan took a photograph of Lydia Pinkham's gravestone to show she had been dead for 20 years even though ads for her patent medicine for women invited them to write to her for advice. By 1906, the Food and Drugs Act was passed by Congress to protect the public's health through the control of advertising and claims of medical benefit. *The Ladies' Home Journal*, September 1905. *Photo courtesy of The Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.*

spurred muckraking, from the first mass-market national magazines of the early 1900's to the rise of broadcasting and digital media a century later.⁴

My interest in this subject is more than purely academic. Although I now teach college students investigative journalism, I first practiced it for 20 years. As a newsman, I was beaten up and sued in the United States, detained by police in Honduras, censored by authorities in Egypt, and escorted out of the country under armed guard in Haiti. But like so many of the writers who have recounted their stories in *Nieman Reports*,⁵ the obstacles I faced as a reporter paled in comparison to the satisfaction of seeing hard-nosed journalism lead to prison terms, forced resignations, and multimillion dollar fines for those who abused the public trust.

So what does muckraking's past tell us about its future? That the challenges of today are not new; that these difficulties will inevitably lead to tomorrow's opportunities, and that investigative reporters are a hardy breed who will tenaciously uphold their watchdog mission in bad times as well as good.

In truth, the woes now besetting investigative journalism should not be surprising. After all, powerful individuals and institutions rarely make it easy to uncover their transgressions. Muckraking has never been for the faint of heart. Every generation of

⁴ "A Muckraking Model: Investigative Reporting Cycles in American History," by Feldstein, appeared in the Spring 2006 issue of the *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*.

⁵ Many investigative reporters also described challenges they confronted in the Summer 2006 issue of *Nieman Reports*, "Journalists: On the Subject of Courage" at www.niemanreports.org.

journalists faces its unique challenges, of course, but the cycles of investigative reporting are eternal: corruption, then exposure, then reform—followed by more corruption, more exposure, and more reform—in an endless loop of societal self-cleansing.

If history is any guide, no matter

what form it takes, muckraking has a bright future. Just like the venality it exposes, it will outlast us all. ■

Mark Feldstein, a journalism professor at George Washington University, was an award-winning investigative reporter at CNN, ABC News, NBC

News, and various local television stations. His book, "Poisoning the Press: Richard Nixon, Jack Anderson, and the Rise of Washington's Scandal Culture," is scheduled to be published in 2010 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Investigating Health and Safety Issues—As Scientists Would

The Chicago Tribune paid to have state-of-the-art testing done on products people eat and use and the results provided ‘clear reporting entry points into what are complex topics.’

BY SAM ROE

Back in 2003, when my wife became pregnant with twins, one of my weekend duties was to go to the grocery store and carefully pick out small amounts of fish. We'd read that most seafood is contaminated with mercury, a metal that could harm fetuses. Pregnant women were advised to eat only a few ounces of fish a week. After I'd weighed deli tuna and selected only small pieces of frozen salmon for a few weeks, I wondered, "How did it get to the point where we have to keep track of how much fish we eat?"

I knew there was an investigative story in this situation. But where?

After talking with my editor, George Papajohn, at the Chicago Tribune, the newspaper decided to do something fairly novel. At least it was for us. We would buy dozens of samples of fish and have them tested for mercury levels at a laboratory. Similarly, in 2007, when we decided to gauge the amount of lead in children's toys, instead of relying on government figures, we tested more

than 800 toys ourselves. Ours turned out to be the largest study of its kind outside of the government's.

Doing rigorous testing ourselves costs money: For each of these two investigations, the cost was about \$9,000. Some will be surprised to learn that despite being in bankruptcy, the Tribune continues to support it. Last fall, the newspaper spent \$6,000 to test dozens of food products for "hidden allergens." These are ingredients not disclosed on labels but ones that are potentially deadly to those with allergies.¹ Our testing revealed hidden allergens in a variety of popular brand-name foods from cookies to chili to chicken bites. The result: Hundreds of thousands of such items were pulled from shelves nationwide.

As we look ahead, newsroom managers are discussing increasing our budget for testing products in the future, not decreasing it. Of course, there are benefits to the newsroom being so closely involved with the testing, and some of them include the following that have

given us an edge in reporting these public service stories:

- Selecting the items to send to labs for testing forced us to master the subject matter quickly and thoroughly.
- Being able to track the testing closely helped us determine precisely who might be potentially hurt by what.
- Having comprehensive access to the details of test results provided us with clear reporting entry points into what are complex topics.

We found, too, doing the testing in this way elevated our coverage. At a time when many government regulators aren't doing the kind of protective oversight that consumers want and expect, we could use our investigative journalism to alert the members of the public to health and safety dangers. Also, since we knew so well the methodology of the testing, it would be difficult for our findings to be disputed, though, as we found out, some of them still were.

¹ This investigative project, "Children at risk in food roulette," can be read at: www.chicagotribune.com/features/lifestyle/chi-081120-allergens-tribune-investigation,0,3661180.story.

Fish and Mercury

With the fish story, we wanted the testing to be done with as much scientific rigor as possible. So instead of buying a handful of fish at nearby grocery stores, we began by studying the methodology of similar scientific research and called experts for advice. In the end, we decided to test 18 samples (each) of nine kinds of seafood. To purchase the samples, we randomly selected stores. Doing such a random sampling would remove any biases—even if we might not think we brought any with us to the story. And in this way, too, the results of our testing would be representative of the entire Chicago area.

Fellow Tribune reporter Michael Hawthorne and I spent two weeks battling Chicago traffic to collect fish samples, including salmon, tuna and swordfish. We placed them in zip lock bags, packed them in ice, and shipped them overnight to Rutgers University in New Jersey. There, a lab experienced in mercury analysis conducted the actual tests.

In all, 162 samples were tested, which made this one of the nation's most comprehensive studies of mercury in commercial fish. We found that much of the seafood was so tainted that regulators could have confiscated it—if only they'd been looking. However, the Food and Drug Administration does not routinely inspect fish for mercury—not in ports, processing plants, or supermarkets.

Our test results, published as part of a three-day series in 2005, prompted reforms in both the United States and Canada.² Three years later, Congress passed legislation banning U.S. mercury exports so the metal won't end up on the world market where it might pollute the environment. (At the time, Illinois Senator Barack Obama introduced the bill in response to the Tribune's series.)

But not everyone embraced our



A University of Iowa lab analyst scrapes paint from a toy Godzilla. Tests sponsored by the Chicago Tribune found the paint contained 4,500 parts per million of lead, more than seven times the legal limit. *Photo by Heather Stone/Chicago Tribune.*

conclusions—or even our testing. In response, the U.S. Tuna Foundation, a lobbying group for canned tuna producers, issued press releases claiming that mercury in tuna was harmless. The industry-financed Center for Consumer Freedom took out a full-page ad in the Tribune and gave us its mock “Bottom Feeders” award for “whipping up needless fears about mercury in fish.”

Toys and Lead

Testing toys for lead was just as challenging, and our stories received a similar backlash from that industry. For \$3,000, the newspaper rented a hand-held device called an XRF analyzer for three weeks. It looks like a store-pricing gun on steroids; place its face against an object and pull the trigger, and it quickly estimates the item's lead content. One night I brought the scanner home and began testing toys in my kids' basement playroom. After three hours, with several “hits”

for lead, I came upstairs and placed the gun on the dining room table.

“What's that thing?” my wife asked.

“It's a gun to check for lead in toys,” I responded.

“How does it work?”

“I think it shoots out x-rays.”

“X-rays?” she asked, raising a brow.

“Well, x-rays or gamma rays.”

“I don't want that thing in the house,” she told me, and that night the XRF gun stayed in the garage. The next day, the manufacturer, as well as a physicist at the Illinois office of nuclear safety, assured me we had nothing to fear, so our testing continued. My reporting colleague Ted Gregory took the scanner and checked toys and other children's products on shelves of more than 40 Chicago-area retailers including big box stores, toy boutiques, discount outlets, and supermarkets.

Toys that registered over the legal limit of 600 parts per million of lead on the scanner were purchased and then

² The first part of this series, “Tribune Investigation: The Mercury Menace: Toxic risk on your plate,” can be read at www.chicagotribune.com/news/specials/chi-mercury-3-story,0,4192281.story.

sent to The University of Iowa Hygienic Laboratory to determine the total lead content. Children's jewelry and vinyl toys that tested high at the Iowa lab were then sent to Scientific Control Laboratories in Chicago for additional testing to determine whether the lead could leach out if parts of the toys were swallowed. Vinyl toys received even further analyses—"wipe tests"—to determine whether the lead could escape by merely touching them.

In the end, the Tribune identified a dozen toys that violated federal safety limits. Nine more exceeded stricter Illinois limits.

Our story was published in November of 2007,³ and immediately retailers and manufacturers pulled the majority of unsafe products we'd identified from shelves. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and the Illinois Attorney General's office

opened investigations. Our testing also prompted several manufacturers to take additional steps: Kids II redesigned its award-winning Baby Einstein Discover & Play Color Blocks, and Ty Inc. remade its popular Jamin' Jenna doll. With both, these companies replaced lead-tainted vinyl with other materials. And Alex Toys said it would overhaul its entire testing program. The company promised to check materials for lead during their overseas production and then reexamine the toys once they arrived in the United States.

With this story, too, our test results were challenged. Prior to publication, three toy companies disputed the findings we'd shared with them of the Tribune's findings and threatened legal action. One of the complaints arrived just as we were on deadline to publish the story. The firms claimed that their

tests showed their toys were safe, the Tribune's tests were faulty, and Illinois law did not apply to their products. The Tribune did not back down. Days after publication, these companies pulled their products from shelves.

My advice to those who might consider doing this kind of story: master the science and think big. Plan on not only doing the best study any journalist has ever done on the topic, but try to conduct one of the most valid studies any scientist has ever done on the subject.

There's no reason why your news organization can't. ■

Sam Roe is an investigative reporter at the Chicago Tribune. He was one of the Tribune reporters awarded the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting for his work on the newspaper's series "Hidden Hazards."

³ The first part of this series, "Hidden Hazards: Kids at Risk: Many more toys tainted with lead, inquiry finds," can be read at www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-leadmain-story,0,775666666.story.

Rotting Meat, Security Documents, and Corporal Punishment

A local Chicago investigative reporter uses shoe-leather techniques and digital tools to uncover health and safety violations and be sure the news is widely spread.

BY DAVE SAVINI

On a hot summer day, a truck backs into a loading bay in Chicago's popular Fulton Street meat market. The truck's driver has no idea his every move is being captured on a small video camera. Thousands of pounds of pork, cases of yogurt, and crates filled with fruits and vegetables are loaded onto a truck that has no refrigeration. It's an illegal load. Outside temperatures reach nearly 90 degrees. The yogurt can spoil in the heat. The

pork (whole pigs) is dripping blood and other moisture onto peppers and tomatoes, which is a serious violation of public health codes and can lead to cross contamination.

The contaminated load is about to be driven to a restaurant 100 miles away. Again, the driver has no idea he's being tailed by me. A CBS 2 photographer joins me during this trip. A producer back at the station is running the license plate, then crosschecking

the name and address with business licenses in Wisconsin.

We learn it is a Mexican grocery store that doubles as a restaurant serving fresh meals in the popular vacation town of Delavan, Wisconsin. Every minute counts, so I begin calling information for the names of agencies that might be able to inspect this load based on my findings. I finally reach an inspector who agrees to meet me en route. He three-ways the call to local

police and then gets them involved in a slow moving police chase as the truck driver tries to get away. The driver is eventually pulled over and allows the load to be inspected. Temperature readings are taken, the food is ordered destroyed, and numerous citations are issued. CBS 2 is thanked for keeping potentially hazardous meat, dairy and vegetables off the market. And a bigger story is developed on how the state of Illinois has only six inspectors available to examine the kinds of trucks used to ship food.

During this and other CBS 2 undercover investigations, I operate the camera and also am the reporter. I often shoot undercover video, and I've been doing so for the past decade. I usually start the surveillance projects on my own, figure out patterns, and then schedule a photographer to accompany me. Knowing what to expect helps cut down on wasted overtime; having a camera handy just makes sense in case something important happens. Maximizing resources are a must, since the days of coming up

empty on a shoot are over.

We also try to maximize the impact of our stories by expanding their scope. Here are two examples:

- Knowing we have a great example of an illegal food shipment, we then cultivate sources. Meat inspectors give us tips with the promise of confidentiality about other shortfalls with food inspection agencies.
- We learn no inspectors are sent to check large shipments of refrigerated meat after the trucks hauling it sustain damage in crashes. I begin staking out key roads where truck drivers often hit viaducts, in some cases ripping the tops of their refrigerated trailers and exposing frozen meat to sweltering heat. (Adulterated loads like these can be salvaged if an inspector can ensure food temperatures do not slip into the danger zone of 40 or more degrees.) We find two major loads compromised by heat with no inspectors notified. The loads are transferred to new trailers, refrozen and shipped days

later to wholesalers who had no idea the boxes of meat were tainted.

Prepare to Get Dirty

On a freezing, snowy Chicago night, a worker at a company hired to clean airplanes at O'Hare International Airport throws a clear plastic bag of documents into a garbage dumpster. Once again I am doing the video surveillance. This time I also jump into the dumpster and load my car with bags of confidential files left in the trash. I continue to visit this dumpster for two months gathering sensitive and confidential files including airport employee applications, Social Security numbers, and their FBI fingerprint check forms. The Social Security numbers enabled us to do background checks on workers to determine how many had criminal records.

This investigation also led to the discovery that access badges to the airports' secure entrances and checkpoints were missing. Not just one or two but 3,800 badges.

CBS 2 Chicago producer Michele Youngerman used documents I discovered in the trash as a basis for a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Discarded memos detailing missing worker access badges led to her filing an FOIA with the Chicago Department of Aviation, which oversees the employee badge program. We were given a computer disc detailing the entire debacle, including the names of all missing badge holders. The day after receiving the disc, the Department of Aviation and the Transportation Security Administration in Washington, D.C., asked us to give the disc



Visual evidence of a pig that was tossed into a pickup truck and delivered to a suburban Chicago grocery store. *Image courtesy of CBS 2 Chicago.*

back. We did not. Instead we did numerous stories that led to a federal and local investigation—more than 100 arrests, new security measures, and numerous awards for CBS 2 including the 2008 duPont-Columbia University Award.

Partnering With Print and Using Radio

Another survival tactic I have used the past four years is a method to combat another industry problem—a shrinking audience. I would strongly advise broadcast students to study print and print students to study broadcast. Many broadcast stations and newspapers now partner to reach more people. For example, to give my investigations a longer shelf life, I've been writing long-form newspaper stories with Youngerman for which we receive no pay. These are printed in suburban newspapers the day after our stories debut on our 10 p.m. newscast.

These articles keep the story alive; they are great for publicity and help us get tips from folks who might not have seen the television story. Our articles—typically told in ways that are more comprehensive than our TV format permits—allow us to actually advance the story with more facts and supplemental information. In exchange, the newspapers promote, on their front page, our TV story that will be broadcast that night. My contact information and our investigative brand, “2 Investigators,” are always included at the end of the copy. Often we receive numerous e-mail tips from the newspaper stories, and this makes our extra work well worth it.



A photo taken after a truck's top was ripped off, damaging refrigeration units and exposing meat to high temperatures. *Image courtesy of CBS 2 Chicago.*

Stories that are on TV and in the newspaper also tend to lead to talk radio hosts inviting me to advance the story further on their shows. Once again, this mixing of media leads to a branding of the end product with our investigative team and station. It's also important to remember that both media are now merged on news Web sites.

Background Checking and Social Networks

In this ever-changing world of journalism, we have to adapt quickly—and this includes adapting to new ways of doing our reporting and research.

Of course, we still use court records, property records, and Nexis to track information. But another useful tool that my team and I are using is social network sites. We use these to conduct background checks or find people we are investigating. Facebook is our primary source, and we've found it also is an incredibly powerful tool for marketing our story and advertising it to the computer entrenched younger generation.

Most recently, we exposed illegal corporal punishment in Chicago pub-

lic schools. We found hundreds of students who had been beaten by teachers, principals and other adults; some weapons used included belts, broomsticks and yardsticks. We also uncovered coaches padding athletes with wooden planks for missing plays.

To find those athletes and other students who had information about the banned

punishment, we used school yearbooks, team rosters, and searched Facebook. We also used Facebook to send messages (basically a promotion) to let these students know when to watch the story. After it was broadcast, we received numerous tips from other students that added to the story. In turn, these students then helped promote our follow-up stories by posting the information on their Facebook pages, which thousands of their classmates viewed. The investigation is still unraveling but has led to a new policy and the suspension or termination of numerous teachers, security guards, and coaches.

Textbooks can't be written fast enough to teach aspiring journalists how to meet the challenges created by technology and the ways in which we communicate today or will in the future. Don't throw out the old-school detective work and creative storytelling just yet; try blending it in with the opportunities that digital media and its ever-changing cybersuperhighway present. ■

Dave Savini is an investigative reporter with WBBM-TV, CBS 2 in Chicago, Illinois.

Mining the Coal Beat: Keeping Watch Over an ‘Outlaw’ Industry

Digging through records, creating new databases, and asking key questions leads a West Virginia reporter to important investigative stories about the coal industry.

BY KEN WARD, JR.

When federal regulators sued Massey Energy in May 2007 for thousands of water pollution violations, the initial press coverage was a bit confusing. At first, the lawsuit was described as a major action: Massey operations across Southern West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky had violated their permitted water pollution limits more than 4,500 times over a roughly five-year period. The suit alleged nearly 70,000 days’ worth of violations on dozens of Clean Water Act permits. One analyst estimated the potential fines at more than \$2.4 billion. However, by early the following week, news reports had already begun to downplay the case, citing Massey’s belief that the suit would ultimately have “no material impact” on the company’s finances.

Whether the Massey suit was a landmark case against a coal giant or a minor blip on a big company’s radar screen, what was buried in one of the follow-up reports was the grist of a much bigger story. Reporters were rightly asking the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) why the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency—instead of the state—was taking this legal action against Massey. Tim Huber, an Associated Press business writer, quoted a DEP spokeswoman, Jessica Greathouse, as saying that the agency had “at some point” stopped reviewing monthly discharge monitoring reports filed by coal companies.

“Discharge monitoring reports weren’t looked at on a regular basis to determine if there were violations being reported, and we weren’t catching them,” Greathouse told the AP. “We

have not done that, though we are doing that now.” She and other DEP officials told me the same thing. As she said this, I remember doing a double take: What? DEP isn’t looking at the discharge reports. This was the real story that needed investigation.

To understand why, some background is required. Discharge monitoring reports (DMRs) are a key part of the Clean Water Act. Any entity that receives a permit to legally pollute rivers and streams must file a DMR every month that lists their permitted discharge limits and the amount they actually dump into the water. This self-reporting process is the main way that regulators keep track of whether coal companies and other industries comply with their permits. If DEP officials were not bothering to even review the reports, how many violations were going uncorrected and unpunished?

Digging Into the Story

Scott Finn of West Virginia Public Broadcasting caught onto this issue right away. Finn did a follow-up radio story in which Randy Huffman, director of DEP’s Division of Mining and Reclamation, admitted his agency hadn’t been reviewing coal industry discharge reports for five to six years. “If the state isn’t even looking at the DMRs, it has no enforcement program,” environmental lawyer Jim Hecker of the group Public Justice told Finn. “It’s like trying to catch speeders by having the police sit in their cars at the police station.”

I wanted to dig deeper to find out how bad this problem was. How many

violations had DEP missed? How many water quality problems hadn’t been fixed? How much in fines had the industry avoided paying? These seemed like pretty simple questions. But DEP’s records were in such poor shape that even the agency’s best computer technicians weren’t able to put together very solid numbers. Their best estimate: more than 25,000 violations missed. Some staffers predicted the number could be much higher; others guessed it was lower.

With another industry in another state, this sloppiness might seem like an outrageous situation. But in my nearly 20 years of covering the coal industry in West Virginia, this kind of thing has become all too common. Critics call the coal business an “outlaw” industry, and sometimes it’s hard not to see their point. Violations of rules created to protect the environment, not to mention health and safety regulations, are not unusual in the coalfields. Yet media coverage of these problems is sporadic; historically it is tied to major disasters.

Unfortunately, the consequences of the press turning its watchful eye away from what is (or is not) happening behind the scenes have been all too visible in recent years. For example, on January 2, 2006, an explosion ripped through the Sago Mine, a small underground operation in north-central West Virginia. Thirteen miners were missing. Twelve were found dead after a more than 40-hour search that got nonstop television coverage. The New York Times, CNN and the rest of the national media pack parachuted in to cover the story. Most of the coverage focused on the human drama. But a few



Crosses in a makeshift memorial to the Sago miners. *Photo by Ed Reinke/The Associated Press.*

reporters picked up on the hundreds of previous violations at the Sago Mine and the meager fines handed down by the U.S. Mine Safety & Health Administration (MSHA).

For example, Thomas Frank at USA Today wrote that the federal government levied a larger fine (\$550,000) for the 2004 Super Bowl showing of Janet Jackson's breast than it did for the 2001 deaths of 13 Alabama miners in one of the deadliest mine disasters in a quarter-century. "And the \$435,000 fine against mine operator Jim Walter Resources was cut by a judge to \$3,000," Frank wrote in February 2006.

Journalists I talked with were shocked by the previous fines at Sago, often just \$60 per violation, less than some speeding tickets they'd gotten rushing to cover breaking news. Those hundreds of violations and minimal fines at Sago weren't unusual; coal industry officials seem to treat them simply as a part of doing business. One company's public relations person complained to me that I didn't provide the "proper context" when I wrote that

one of his firm's mines had 300 or 400 violations in less than a year. (It is true that underground coal mines are inspected much more frequently than most other American workplaces. At large underground operations, "resident inspectors" are virtually in residence.) MSHA inspectors are required to examine all underground mines "in their entirety" at least four times a year. No other industry has such a requirement. While routine to the industry, the consequences of these violations are anything but that to the families of dead and injured coal miners—all of whose names I know and all of which my newspaper publishes.

Learning From Data

After the Sago mine explosion, I spent six months examining coal mine safety as part of an Alicia Patterson Foundation Fellowship. With time to dig in ways I can't in the daily tug of reporting, I did read every coal mine fatality investigation report for the 10 years (1996 to 2005) and obtained

related electronic data from MSHA, none of which fully tracked the findings of these death reports. So I built a database in Microsoft Access, typing in company names, descriptions of accidents, and investigation findings. I made sure to include every fallen miner's name to help me remember that this was about people and not a bunch of numbers.

Once assembled, my database provided new insights into stories I needed to tell. The figures reminded me that disasters like Sago are rare. Most coal miners die alone crushed by heavy equipment, ground up by runaway machinery, or buried beneath collapsed mine roofs. And almost always, coal miners die because the companies they work for break the law. In nine out of 10 fatal coal mining accidents I examined, the deaths could have been avoided if mine operators had complied with well-established and longstanding safety rules.

And what kinds of punishments were handed down for these renegade operators? For each miner killed, agency officials assessed a median fine of \$4,250. But fines are lowered or thrown out by judges. MSHA settles for less to avoid legal fights. Companies go belly up and don't pay, or MSHA does not aggressively pursue payments. In some cases, appeals are still pending for deaths that occurred years before. In cases in which fines were issued and not appealed, I found that coal operators have paid a median fine per miner death of \$6,200. But fines were not issued in nearly a quarter of the cases, and decisions on fines had not been made for a few deaths from 2005. If all of the 320 miners' deaths during this decade are counted, the median fine paid by coal operators is \$250 per death.

Stories Get Told

I wrote about all of this in a story, "One by One," as part of a series we published called "Beyond Sago: Coal Mine Safety in America." This was certainly not the first time The Charleston Gazette had exposed such behavior by the coal industry. My colleague



There is no shortage of media attention as Richard Strickler, assistant secretary of the Department of Labor and director of the Mine Safety & Health Administration, speaks at the entrance to the Crandall Canyon Mine, August 17, 2007, in Huntington, Utah. The desperate underground drive to reach six trapped miners was suspended indefinitely after a catastrophic cave-in killed three rescuers. *Photo by Jae C. Hong/The Associated Press.*

and mentor Paul J. Nyden has been examining renegade coal contractors, corporate shell games, and industry workers compensation scams since I was in high school.

It was 10 years ago that I did my first major coal industry project, in which I applied the tools of investigative reporting to tell the story of mountaintop removal coal mining.¹ By learning in-depth about the regulatory structure and reading through hundreds upon hundreds of pages of permits, I was able to point to specific loopholes, inactions and oversights by regulators. I discovered how state and federal regulators approved dozens of mountaintop removal permits without the required reclamation variances and did not—as mandated by federal law—include plans for post-mining development of flattened land.

Then, in July 2005, residents near

the Raleigh County town of Sundial were upset about plans by Massey Energy to build a new coal silo as part of a plan to increase capacity of a coal processing plant located adjacent to Marsh Fork Elementary School. Part of the processing plant is a huge coal waste dam that towers above the school, just up the hollow. West Virginians remain wary of such impoundments, still recalling the day in February 1972, when one failed and flooded Buffalo Creek, killing 125 people.

Area residents and activists held protests and wrote letters. Ed Wiley, a grandfather of a student at the school, staged a sit-down protest on the state capitol steps, trying to get the governor to block the project. Apparently, no one bothered to look at the DEP-approved permit for the silo. After visiting with Wiley one morning at the capitol steps, I drove

across town to DEP headquarters and went to the mining department's file room. On earlier visits there, I'd reviewed mountaintop removal permits by looking through mounds of paper files. Now, with digital records, it took me about 15 minutes to pull the right digital video disc, find the proper maps, and see that Massey was building the silo outside of its original permit boundary—in violation of a federal law that requires a buffer zone between mining operations and schools or other public buildings.

I reviewed a few earlier versions of the map, submitted by the company over the years as mining progress reports. I printed some and took them to a local blueprint shop to have them transferred to transparencies. With these, I could easily show how the company had slowly expanded its permit boundary over the years—without asking for DEP permission and without agency officials even noticing. What these maps showed is that the enlarged permit area was just big enough, and shaped just perfectly, to allow the new silo to fit inside the legal boundaries. Within a week, I was meeting with top DEP officials and showing them my transparencies. In response, they revoked the silo permit, an action that remains in litigation today.

Lots of local media reported on the Marsh Fork controversy. But no other reporter took the time—or perhaps knew how—to go to look at permits to see if DEP was doing its job. Turns out that even though coal is “king” in West Virginia, few reporters here and in Appalachia (or in other regions of the country) follow the coal industry or know much about mining. During our round-the-clock coverage of the Sago disaster, reporters at the Gazette unwound from the intensity of our work on this story with bouts of laughter as TV anchors butchered mining terms or in other ways demonstrated their ignorance of the industry that provides half of the nation's electricity. A well-known cable news reporter told the

¹ Ward wrote about his mountaintop mining reporting in the Summer 2004 issue of Nieman Reports, www.niemanreports.org.

governor during Sago that he didn't realize miners still went underground to dig coal.

The national media had another chance in August 2007, when a huge underground mine cave-in trapped six workers at the Crandall Canyon Mine in Utah. Early in the coverage of this mine disaster, I thought nobody had learned anything from Sago. Initial wire service reports from Utah relied on comments from company President Bob Murray, who said the cave-in was caused by a natural earthquake and not any problems at the mine itself. Coal industry watchers knew this was nonsense. The mine had experienced a “bump” or a “bounce,” a phenomenon where the weight of the earth above the mine walls collapses them. The bump at Crandall Canyon caused a spike in seismic activity, not the other way around.

Some of the press coverage was excellent. Seth Borenstein, one of the AP's national science writers, picked up on the “bump” issue and did a fantastic story that explained the accident happened as the company had workers doing “retreat mining,” or pulling out the very coal pillars that held up the mine roof. For his trouble, Borenstein was singled out by Murray for criticism during one of the repeated rants in which the TV media—without questioning his words—allowed him time to rail against unions and blame God for the mine collapse.

Readers of the nearby Salt Lake Tribune were fortunate to have long-time coal industry reporter Michael Gorrell and his colleague, Robert Gehrke, covering Crandall Canyon. Gorrell covered Utah's last coal-mining disaster in 1984 and with Gehrke did a heroic job of uncovering various missteps by Murray Energy and by MSHA officials charged with policing the company.

After Crandall Canyon, my mine safety reporting continued. In September 2007, I discovered that MSHA had not completed the required quarterly



The Schean family's lake house, which they had spent the past four years restoring, was the first home to be hit by the massive coal sludge spill at the TVA Kingston Fossil Plant in Harri-man, Tennessee. *Photo by © 2009 Antrim Caskey.*

inspections at a Mingo County, West Virginia mine where a worker was killed in a roof fall. I found the same thing later that month after another mining death. Given this, I pulled computer records for dozens of mines across southern West Virginia and found that MSHA was way behind on its mandated inspections. Eventually, the agency had to admit the problem was widespread and seek additional money from Congress to pay inspectors overtime to catch up.

Then, in January 2008, a tip from inside MSHA led me to learn that the agency had not assessed mandatory fines for thousands of mine safety violations by coal companies. Again, MSHA was forced to admit the problem and come up with a plan to try to fix it. Both of these stories revealed that federal officials were simply not meeting even their most basic duties under the federal mine safety law.

And then late last year, a huge coal-ash impoundment in East Tennessee collapsed, sending a huge flood of toxic power plant waste out over homes,

fields and streams. This event got the national media—The New York Times and The Associated Press—paying attention to coal ash. But some coalfield reporters, such as James Bruggers at The (Louisville) Courier-Journal, had already been writing about it.²

Role for Journalists

What does my experience with the coal mining story tell us about journalism and, in particular, watchdog reporting? These days as blogging, sending Tweets, and connecting with one another through social media seems to be replacing the roles that newspapers used to play, journalism appears to be losing its capacity to perform this core function. While my job of doing watchdog reporting about the coal industry is a lot easier because of digital records and the new technologies that help me dig for information, my concern is whether these tools will be used in the public interest. Will there be journalists with the skills and resources needed

² See Ward's Nieman Watchdog post, at www.niemanwatchdog.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=ask_this.view&askthisid=00387.

to keep an eye on powerful interests? Mortgage lenders, investment banks, hedge funds, and government officials who regulate them come to mind as topics that were ripe for inspection but regrettably didn't receive enough of it. For people too busy getting kids off to school, paying the mortgage, and taking care of grandparents to be able

to monitor such entities themselves, there must be some way that this essential task we've called journalism can continue to play this vital role. ■

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a three-time winner of the Edward J. Meeman Awards for environmental reporting, one of the national journalism awards given by the Scripps Howard Foundation. In 2006, he spent six months studying coal mine safety as part of an Alicia Patterson Fellowship.

Reporting Time and Resources Reveal a Hidden Source of Pollution

'In many cases I had the budget to take chances and to not take no for an answer.'

BY ABRAHM LUSTGARTEN

The screenshot shows the ProPublica website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with a search bar and links for 'Sign In', 'New User? Sign Up', and 'Text Size A A A'. The main content area features an article titled 'Buried Secrets: Is Natural Gas Drilling Endangering U.S. Water Supplies?' by Abraham Lustgarten, dated November 13, 2008. The article includes a photograph of a natural gas drilling rig in a desert landscape. To the right of the article, there are several related links and a 'Graphics' section with a diagram titled 'What is Hydraulic Fracturing?'. The 'Who We Are' section at the bottom left describes ProPublica as an independent, non-profit newsroom.

ProPublica displays Lustgarten's story with links to news organizations that published his story. Other reporting he has done on this topic is also available.

I landed on the story of contaminated water from natural gas drilling because I had enjoyed flexibility rare in journalism today. In fact I had come to ProPublica, a start-up venture dedicated to investigative projects, precisely because I hoped to escape the story quotas and budget constraints that inevitably made my magazine reporting rushed and incomplete. In my new job, I was given time and support to investigate obscure leads and tenuous threads of interest until one critical issue emerged that could be spun into a project with currency and weight.

The project began with an investigation into chemical contamination in public drinking water supplies—a story originally focused on the agriculture industry in the Pacific Northwest. For months I dug into the banal science, learning how to read water quality analyses and understanding the nation's laws and convoluted methods for determining when a particular “constituent” became a “contaminant”—both terms that carry extraordinarily specific semantic meaning in the world of science.

Along the way I got an education in federal drinking water standards.

I met with municipal water managers, engineers from treatment plants, toxicologists and health officials. I became a voyeur into the precise world of environmental water science and found that its regulation, where almost every detail is explicitly laid out and considered, is intended to be equally exact. Very little seemed to be left to chance.

Then I stumbled on a water issue that appeared to be all about chance. I spoke with a hydrogeologist with the U.S. Geological Survey who was alarmed about a process being used by the energy industry in which a whole bunch of chemicals are pumped directly into the ground and could potentially reach water supplies. My source didn't know much more—in fact he explained that this process, called hydraulic fracturing, was not regulated by the federal government and that the Environmental Protection Agency didn't have the authority to examine it.

But there were new plans to drill for natural gas along the Eastern seaboard, including in New York City's watershed, and this person described a quiet undercurrent of concern that he said extended throughout the scientific community. At this point all that background fodder I had collected had a purpose; without my newly acquired knowledge of water science, I would never have been able to understand the implications of the drilling issue or expand it into a full-fledged investigation.

Digging Deeper

Hydraulic fracturing, I soon learned, involved shooting large amounts of water, sand and chemicals at high pressure down a freshly drilled well in order to crack the geologic deposits that hold natural gas thousands of feet below and release that gas so it can

flow back out of the well. The extraordinary water pressure—thousands of pounds—literally fractures the rock. Then the sand floats into tiny cracks and holds them open while bubbles of gas escape to the surface. A proportionally small amount of chemicals are used to control the viscosity of the water, kill off bacteria, and otherwise optimize the whole operation, but considering that several millions of gallons of water might be pumped into a gas well, that can amount to tens of thousands of gallons of toxic substances put into the ground.

The process is nearly ubiquitous. Hydraulic fracturing is used in nine out of 10 gas wells drilled in the United States and is crucial to extracting hard-to-reach geologic deposits of gas at a time when energy independence is of paramount importance. Plus, natural gas is viewed as a “transitional fuel” even by environmentalists—it is cleaner burning than any other fossil fuel and emits 23 percent less carbon dioxide than oil. For these reasons, plus the discovery of new deposits like those in New York State, gas drilling activity is expanding faster than any other domestic resource or energy program.

At first, I saw a straightforward explanatory story. Here was a fascinating technological process that few people seemed to know about. The state governments dealing with it should be able to address predictable questions about how the chemicals are managed and treated, what the risks were, and how they were handling them.

But when I eventually sat down with environment and gas drilling officials for New York State, they were caught off guard by the plainest of questions. What chemicals would they be permitting to be pumped into the ground? What waste would be produced, and where would it be disposed of? And did the practice threaten the state's

water supplies?

They could not answer any of these questions. In fact, they weren't even aware that chemicals were used in hydraulic fracturing. They had never asked and never been told exactly what was being pumped into the earth; they assumed that the primary byproduct of drilling was plain water. Thus they had no plans in place to dispose of the waste; by default it would be sprayed on roads and discharged through conventional sewage plants back into the area's rivers.

I wanted to drill deeper, but it would cost money and take more time. My editor, Steve Engelberg, said to go ahead. In fact, at each juncture in my reporting he continued to enthusiastically green light more time, more airplane tickets, more research.¹

As it turned out, the information I sought was clouded in secrecy. The identity of the chemicals used in the drilling was a closely guarded competitive secret, protected as proprietary trade recipes by the drilling contractors who used them. Neither the state agencies nor the EPA had a complete list of what was being used, and scientists were telling me that they could not measure any threat or decide if the process was safe, because they couldn't trace the source of pollution without knowing the names of the chemicals used in fracturing.

Gas drilling activities were further shielded by exemptions from the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Water Act—the two federal laws designed to maintain water quality and protect American's drinking supplies, as well as make the law consistent across the country. Those exemptions removed any federal oversight and left environmental enforcement—and the robust task of funding and conducting scientific research—to individual states like New York. It meant that federal science agencies were not even tasked

¹ His story, “Buried Secrets: Is Natural Gas Drilling Endangering U.S. Water Supplies?” was published by ProPublica on November 13, 2008, www.propublica.org/feature/buried-secrets-is-natural-gas-drilling-endangering-us-water-supplies-1113. The story was also published in *BusinessWeek* and on the front page of *The Denver Post* as part of ProPublica's effort to disseminate its investigative stories widely.

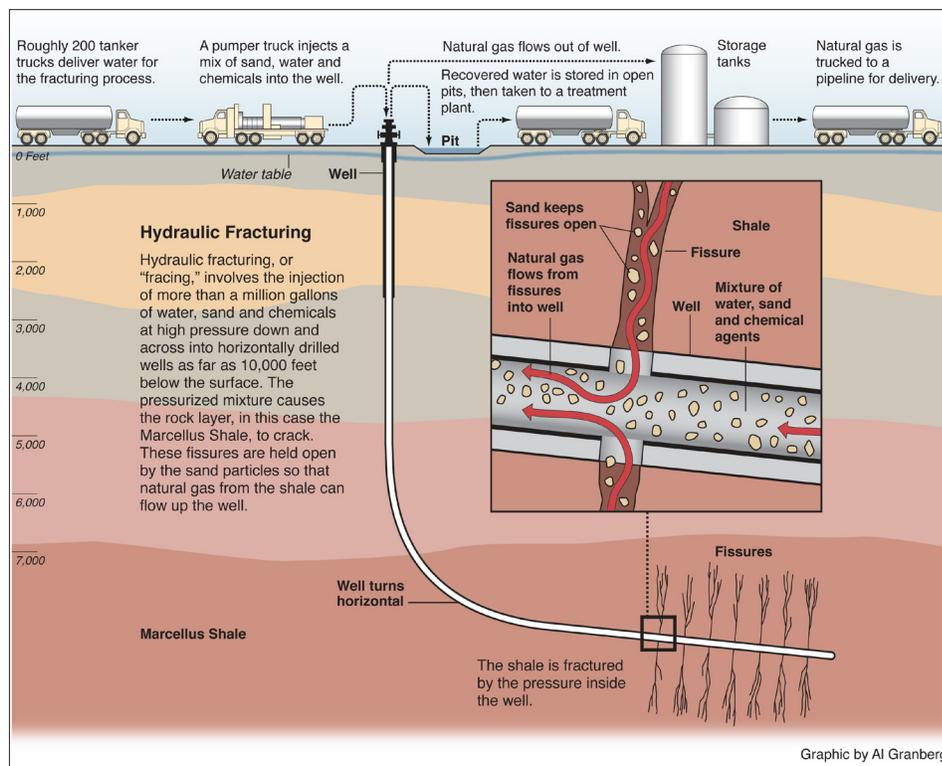
with examining the processes.

Employees of the oil and gas industry offered seemingly simple answers to the possibility that drilling posed a threat. The quantity of the chemicals they used is too small to have an impact, and it is diluted in vast amounts of water, they said. Those fluids can't leak underground from one geologic layer to another because the layers of rock provide a watertight seal. Occasional accidents have been statistical anomalies. Because of these factors, it wasn't necessary to divulge the exact recipes used in the fracturing fluids—the process was already proven safe. In fact, they repeated often, even though more than a million wells had been drilled, there had never been a single instance anywhere in the United States where hydraulic fracturing had been proven to result in contaminated water.

On the other hand there were shrill environmentalists who claimed the fluids were highly toxic and who painted a conspiratorial picture of a powerful industry that had lobbied the federal government to pass laws that would allow them to look the other way as a burgeoning gas drilling industry spread quickly across the United States.

I was tasked with finding my way through this minefield of statements and passionate opinions and discovering the truth, along the way striving to answer questions that sprung up far faster than they could be answered:

- If the fracturing process does not harm water, then why was a water-related exemption sought from the federal government?
- If chemicals could not move underground, then why wouldn't the industry release the names—even confidentially—to scientists trying to test water and measure environmental change?
- What scientific research justified the oil and gas industry earning legal privileges that are not afforded to the mining, auto, coal or agriculture industries?
- Most importantly, was it true that



A graphic display of hydraulic fracturing. *Graphic by Al Granberg.*

hydraulic fracturing had never contaminated water?

These are the kinds of questions that take time, travel and funding to answer.

Science and Sources

First I began to review spill records, which are not kept in many of the 32 states that permit oil and gas drilling but are substantially documented in both New Mexico and Colorado. Then I poured through more scientific literature, including several EPA studies that addressed hydraulic fracturing and wastewater—finding critical warnings buried hundreds of pages deep in otherwise boring reports. Finally, I traveled to the quiet rural towns across the Rockies where drilling was happening most, talked with ranchers and landowners about their experiences with nearby drilling and heard unpublicized tales about when things had gone very wrong.

The assertion that fracturing had

never harmed a water supply, I quickly came to understand, was based on a narrow interpretation that literally meant that the actual action of pumping fluids into the ground under pressure had not been proven to have directly resulted in an explosion or other accident that happened during that actual pumping process. It excluded everything else having to do with the fracturing process, including the mixing of chemicals, their transport, and their disposal.

But since this process brings a large quantity of chemicals to a site and creates substantial waste stream, I quickly found that if you look beyond the actual drill bits turning and pumping underground and include accidents happening on the surface, there was a sizeable impact.

In order to learn more, I focused on a handful of incidents—about a dozen to start with—in which the contamination was more than an allegation and had been thoroughly documented by state inspectors or been written about in a published official report of some

kind. I spent several weeks sitting on porches or walking in fields listening to the stories of people whose wells had been poisoned, or whose animals had died or, in some cases, who had been hospitalized after drinking or breathing fluids from fracture fluid accidents.

In many cases I had the budget to take chances and to not take no for an answer. When a nurse involved in a chemical spill said on the phone that she wasn't comfortable talking about her experience, I hopped on a flight to her hometown of Durango, Colorado anyway and knocked on her door. Meeting eye to eye instilled her with enough trust to share her story.

Trust was built similarly with sources at federal agencies, like the EPA, who are typically averse to handling controversial questions on the phone but tend to open up over lunch. That

patience and personal engagement may explain how I eventually saw a memo on federal government letterhead that alleged widespread contamination of a drinking water aquifer in Wyoming that researchers feared might be the result of drilling activities like fracturing.

Throughout, my project treaded into the realm of uncertainty that often stops environmental and health reporting in its tracks. If you cannot prove that contamination made it from point A to point B, if there is not epidemiological evidence that a cluster of illness is firmly linked, for example, to exposure to a chemical, then you do not have an investigation, and you do not have a story—or so the rules often go. And those were exactly the scientific weaknesses that the industry, which fought regulators, politicians and anyone who investigated these issues at every step, sought to maintain.

But in this case I embraced the gray area between those stark lines and sought to raise questions that underlined the uncertainty of the situation. All of the information I gathered established a sketch of a problem, and it seemed to exist in almost every drilling area that we examined. I couldn't prove fault—that would be the job of scientists and was the very opportunity that they were arguing for. I could establish that this process being used across the country, which had become an important link in an emerging national energy policy, did not appear to be as harmless as the industry and its regulators believed. At the least, it warranted further examination. ■

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Pouring Meaning Into Numbers

In using EPA data, USA Today's watchdog project empowered 'parents to learn about the types and sources of chemicals that might be in the air near their child's school.'

BY BLAKE MORRISON AND BRAD HEATH

James T. Hamilton's article in the spring issue of Nieman Reports about making sense of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) data argued for precisely the sort of work USA Today published last year in "The Smokestack Effect: Toxic Air and America's Schools."¹ This project exemplified the type of journalism Hamilton advocates when he suggests that TRI should be used for "watchdog articles ... written by algorithm in a way that

would allow readers to see a customized, personalized article about how a policy problem is playing out in their neighborhood, block or lives."

About eight months before our project was published, we'd begun to consider ways to give the TRI meaning. We learned that researchers at the University of Massachusetts Amherst had acquired the microdata for an EPA computer simulation called Risk-Screening Environmental Indicators (RSEI). It uses air dispersion

modeling and compares the dangers of one chemical to another as a way to give meaning to the TRI data. The microdata enabled us to use pollution emissions reports, submitted to the EPA as part of the TRI program, to assess the predicted concentrations of hundreds of chemicals in any square kilometer in the country. Simultaneously, we began gathering data to map the locations of almost 128,000 public, private and parochial schools. We obtained the locations from more

¹ The Smokestack Effect can be read and its interactive features used at <http://content.usatoday.com/news/nation/environment/smokestack/index>.

SPECIAL REPORT

 **The Smokestack Effect**

Toxic Air and America's Schools

USA TODAY used an EPA model to track the path of industrial pollution and mapped the locations of almost 128,000 schools to determine the levels of toxic chemicals outside. The potential problems that emerged were widespread, insidious and largely unaddressed.



Photo by Garrett Hubbard, USA TODAY

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 **Latest Stories**

Schools near industry face chemical dangers

The exposure to toxic chemicals in the air outside some schools appears so high that students could be at risk of suffering a range of ailments, from asthma to cancer.



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Video: Toxic chemicals outside our schools

USA TODAY examines the impact of industrial pollution outside the nation's schools and explores how toxic chemicals shuttered one elementary school in Addyston, Ohio, three years ago.



than two-dozen sources to ensure that the database was as complete and current as possible.

We focused on the locations of schools because children are as much as 10 times more susceptible than adults to the dangers of toxic chemicals. Pinpointing where they gather each day seemed appropriate, and the data we used to determine which schools were in toxic hot spots were based on 2005 TRI reports. (This was the most recent data on industrial pollution that the EPA had modeled.)

The RSEI model we used divided the nation into a grid with each cell measuring one square kilometer. Then it calculated how much of each chemical released by each facility is likely to

end up in the air in each cell. Those concentrations were then weighted, based on how much harm the EPA determined is likely to be caused by each chemical. In short: For each square kilometer, the model produces an estimate of which chemicals were in the air, where those chemicals came from, and how harmful they might be.

We spent months refining our analysis—and understanding its limitations. Computer models rest on sets of assumptions, and RSEI is no different. Because of those limitations, the EPA has balked at using the model to determine the health risks at any given location. Instead, it said, the model was meant as a screening tool—a way to

rank one location against another to determine which area might demand further scrutiny. Some researchers have tried to use RSEI to calculate the odds that exposure to air pollution will cause cancer. Mathematically, that's not hard to do. The government has a standard formula it uses to determine how much your risk of contracting cancer goes up based on exposure to various levels of toxic chemicals. But after much discussion, we opted against that approach. Instead, we developed what's called a "work-around," using the case of an Ohio school that had been shut down in 2005.

That school, Meredith Hitchens Elementary in Addyston, Ohio, sits across the street from a plastics plant. After residents complained, the Ohio EPA put an air monitor on the school's roof and took samples for seven months to determine the health risks there. Their results were stunning: Levels of carcinogens in the air were 50 times higher than what the state considers acceptable. The school district closed Hitchens immediately. So we used Hitchens as a benchmark. The monitoring done by the state EPA there—and the risk assessment that its monitoring established—became a means of using RSEI to identify locations where the relative risks to children appeared the same or greater than at Hitchens.

Using RSEI in just the manner the EPA intended, we found 435 schools that ranked worse than Hitchens did. In other words, the air appeared to be more toxic outside 435 schools than it was at a school that had been shuttered. Senator Barbara Boxer, who chairs the Environment and Public Works committee, described our findings "a shocking story of child neglect."

We listed all 435 schools in print. But we also published an online database to enable users to look up any school in the country. The database—which became the backbone of our reporting—has drawn about 1.7 million page views since we made it available on December 8, 2008.² It empowers

² The project's database is found at www.smokestack.usatoday.com.

parents to learn about the types and sources of chemicals that might be in the air near their child's school.

We weren't satisfied with simply modeling pollution. The computer simulation was meant as a screening tool—and so that's how we used it. That's why we partnered with Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health and the University of Maryland to monitor the air outside almost 100 schools. Reporters and editors were trained to use a variety of equipment—from pumps to metals filters—and scientists from the universities developed the protocol we used, analyzed the samples, and

interpreted the results. The results showed elevated levels of dangerous chemicals in the air outside about two-thirds of the schools.

The response to our work has been sweeping and dramatic. Hundreds of media outlets localized our stories or used our database to do similar reporting about schools in their area. One advocacy group tracked about 8,000 letters to Congress from parents and others in response to our stories. School districts from California to North Carolina called in regulators to begin long-term air monitoring after seeing the results of air samples taken by USA Today.

Earlier this year, the EPA launched a \$2.25 million initiative to monitor air quality outside 62 schools in 22 states. "Your stories raised important questions that merit investigation, and that's what we're doing," EPA administrator Lisa Jackson explained. "We want parents to know that the places their children live, play and learn are safe." ■

Blake Morrison is an investigative reporter and the deputy enterprise editor at USA Today. Brad Heath is a national reporter at USA Today, where he specializes in data-driven enterprise.

Navigating Through the Biofuels Jungle

'Given my years of energy reporting in California, I could spot several warning signs early on; others took additional reporting to uncover.'

BY ELIZABETH MCCARTHY

In his 2007 State of the State speech, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger launched the world's first low carbon transportation fuels standard for California. He touted the benefit of using biofuels, derived from crops such as corn-based ethanol and other plant-based feedstocks, to power cars as a way to produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions than gasoline. Carbon-light alternative fuels, he proclaimed, would strengthen the state's economy and security and improve its environment.

Moving these less polluting biofuels from the farm to the highway would take far more than regulations, he said. Instead, the marketplace would power this change, with standards paving the way. In early 2007, Schwarzenegger appeared confident that the free hand of the market would produce the necessary amount of less polluting plant-based fuels. At the same time, however, the governor, who portrays himself as a gung ho environmentalist, saw no need to give up his gas-guzzling



Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and, on the right, Bill Jones, a cofounder of Pacific Ethanol, at the July 2006 announcement of the governor's bioenergy action plan.

Hummer. Rather, he'd power it with an alternative biofuel.

From the start of this initiative, it was clear how critical it would be to

have a watchdog press keeping track of this unfolding effort. Given that much of this groundbreaking effort would circumvent traditional channels

of the legislative process, there would be even less of a chance for opposing views to be publicly aired and covered by the news media. Yet it seemed vital that consumers understood what was about to happen.

Given my years of energy reporting in California, I could spot several warning signs early on; others took additional reporting to uncover. The first red flag was visible right away. Positing this biofuels policy as a technical solution to a multilayered and complex set of energy and environmental problems was too good to be true. Soon, the second red flag emerged when, a few days after his announcement, the governor issued

allows for a public airing and debate about proposed statutory provisions. Furthermore, interactions among stakeholders during hearings provide clues into what is going on behind the scenes from highlighting what really is at stake to showcasing the inevitable jockeying for power.

The importance of such open and public decision-making hit home for me well before the biofuels beat grew in importance and complexity. When I covered California's 2000-01 energy crisis—a time when information blackouts were far more prevalent than power outages—then Governor Gray Davis and his top staff secretly negotiated at breakneck speed \$42

governor pledged that rules would be developed to ensure carbon-light biofuels would slash 13 million metric tons of carbon emissions in 13 years. By using crops and other plants to fuel transportation, Schwarzenegger intimated that Californians would not need to alter their energy-consuming lifestyles.

Red flag number three then surfaced. Although oft repeated, the devil is in the details, yet few specifics about how any of this would work emerged at or after the governor's announcement. Given the complexity and high stakes of this proposed development of a statewide alternative fuels policy, there was sure to be a lot of power brokering going on behind the scenes. To keep an eye on all of this, the press watchdog was needed.

Questions to Be Asked

As our staff reported this story for California Energy Circuit, a subscription-based and ad-free independent journal read by those with a stake in energy issues in the West, we sat in on obscure meetings. We read dense reports. We asked questions—lots of them—of scientists and other energy experts. We also spent time figuring out how the terms of the debate were being defined—and by whom. We did this because defining terms matters a lot in this new energy arena. How a particular word is defined and used affects decision-making and its implementation.

As development of regulations began, a lot of assumptions were on the table. Primary among them was that fuels made from corn, sugar cane, soybeans and other plants would help to slow climate change. Initial tests showed that corn-based ethanol fuel produces fewer carbon emissions than gasoline. However, the formula failed to take into account what happens when fields to grow corn expand into rainforests, wetlands and other sensitive lands. Add in those factors, and overall carbon emissions are higher.

On the global front, the expansion of crops to create biofuels to feed cars instead of people—supported by



A woman in Indonesia harvests palm to be used as a biofuel. *Photo by Tom Picken/Friends of the Earth.*

an executive order—effective immediately—mandating that California regulators create the low carbon liquid fuel standard blueprint.

An executive order isn't vetted as an actual bill would be over a course of weeks and months. While the legislative process is slower and more challenging, it is also more open—for taxpayers and the press. I've watched numerous bills get tangled in tit-for-tat legislative politics and, in the end, be tabled. But the deliberative process

billion worth of energy contracts. Many of these deals were overpriced and mismatched to the state's energy demand, and they significantly altered the energy landscape. It took utility customers years to pay off the tab (and cost Davis his job). This debacle highlighted the critical role the press has to play in monitoring this kind of close-to-the-vest dealmaking and the absolute necessity of public access to such information.

Fast-forward to 2007, when this

the European Union and the Bush administration—already had caused prices of essential staples to soar. People in struggling nations rioted in protest as the price of essential food stocks rose. That situation also had served to shift the focus of policymakers and regulators from crop-based biofuels to waste feedstocks, such as biomass.

Following the Money

Market forces also need to be brought into reporting about biofuels. For us, this meant keeping a watchful eye on those in California seeking a piece of the multibillion-dollar alternative fuels market. By what means were individuals and companies gaining a foothold? Were backroom deals part of the equation? The governor professed neutrality about which potential biofuels would likely qualify under the low carbon fuels standard in California, while ethanol blends were ranked first and second on a list of top 10. And standing on stage when the governor made his low carbon fuels standard announcement in January 2007 was Bill Jones, a former secretary of state and Republican lawmaker who had launched an ethanol production company in California called Pacific Ethanol. Jones had also been at the governor's side for his 2006 announcement of the Bioenergy Action Plan.

Certainly, the press handling this story in California has had an important investigative role to play in finding out to what degree taxpayers get stuck with any of the tab for private sector investments. No doubt this situation will confront journalists in other states as similar measures emerge.

Digging into the financial interests of the entity or person promoting an existing or emerging energy source is essential. As things turn out, discovering the details of such transactions can be hard. But sticking with the hunt is

By what means were individuals and companies gaining a foothold? Were backroom deals part of the equation?

part of the fun. A few months after the governor's biofuels' announcement, British Petroleum (BP) announced a \$500 million deal with University of California, Berkeley and two other partners to create a bioenergy laboratory. BP's proposal to own a part of a public university, as well as the large size of the agreement and its hidden terms, generated significant public controversy.

I devoted weeks of reporting in trying to get hold of the agreement. I didn't succeed and only could read the terms of the deal once they were released and after the contract was a done deal. When I finally read the agreement, it revealed that BP would be permitted access to the work of the university researchers. However, access to the oil company's work would be restricted.

I've covered the energy beat for nearly two decades and rarely have I seen this kind of skewed arrangement between public and private entities. Certainly, the practice of suppressing technology or scientific information is not without precedent. Think "Who Killed the Electric Car?." What was worrisome and different, in this case, was not having the opportunity for prior oversight by legislators—or journalists—of such a major agreement, given its enormous implications for future energy policy.

Navigating through this emerging

biofuels debate is challenging and fascinating. Trying to untangle its intersecting issues reveals the many complicated interconnections between them and the global forces involved. As Franklin D. Roosevelt once observed, "The throwing out of balance of the resources of nature throws out of balance the lives of men."

It's now more than two years later, and the biofuels revolution that Governor Schwarzenegger unleashed in California is still underway. In working to create a low carbon transportation fuels standard, the California Air Resources Board encountered a morass of unintended and overlooked consequences highlighted by a flood of studies and reports warning of biofuels' environmental downsides. Yet in April 2009 the board adopted a standard.¹ Mary Nichols, the board's chairperson, observed that, "We are attempting to set in motion something that will take several years to implement."

However, the answer to the key question of which plant-based fuels have lighter carbon footprints than gasoline remains unclear. At the same time, the urgency of calls for curbing global warming are escalating worldwide and the energy market—especially investments in alternative energy sources (biofuels, wind, solar)—has tumbled like the rest of the economy.

What this episode from the frontlines in the energy wars teaches us is why reporters need to understand the complexity of these issues and be willing to ask tough questions until answers are given. And it means monitoring those who are gaining power and poised to profit in the transition to new sources of energy. ■

Elizabeth McCarthy is the coeditor and co-publisher of California Energy Circuit, an independent publication that reports on government policy and energy and climate change issues.

¹ The board's regulation requires providers, refiners, importers and blenders to ensure that the fuels for the California market meet an average declining standard of "carbon intensity." This is established by determining the sum of greenhouse gas emissions associated with the production, transportation and consumption of a fuel, also referred to as the fuel pathway. Economic mechanisms will allow the market to choose the most cost-effective clean fuels, meaning those with the lowest carbon intensity.

Going to Where the Fish Are Disappearing

Investigative reporters in Sweden set out to tell the story of why and how illegal fishing of cod was happening—and what it meant to consumers and businesses in their country.

BY SVEN BERGMAN, JOACHIM DYFVERMARK, AND FREDRIK LAURIN

“Jupiter, Jupiter, Jupiter ... This is Norwegian Coast Guard vessel KV Harstad on Channel 16. We request to come on board for an inspection. Prepare a pilot ladder on the starboard side and reduce speed to 3 knots.”

The freezing northern winds blow with winter harshness causing the seas to roll and crash with ferocity. As reporters with Swedish National TV4, we are on board the KV Harstad, the Norwegian Coast Guard’s ultra modern vessel—a part of our journey to investigate the rise in illegal fish poaching in the Barents Sea. It’s been two days since we left the vessel’s base in north Norwegian Sortland, and we are now in the western part of the Coast Guard’s working area. The search areas are vast—the Barents Sea covers an area as large as Western Europe—and the vessel’s course is directed from ashore where an operation center compiles relevant data about the location of suspected fish poachers.

Our ship’s mission is to locate and inspect Russian ships that are catching, transferring and transporting fish (mainly cod) from fishing zones in the north to harbors along the European west coast. For us, this trip is part of our investigative effort to illuminate the illegal fishing practices that are damaging the fishing waters off our country’s shore.

For us, this trip is part of our investigative effort to illuminate the illegal fishing practices that are threatening the last stable stocks of cod on earth. Stocks of cod in Newfoundland, the Baltic, and the North Sea have all collapsed or diminished. There is one

place where the stocks seem healthy—in the Barents Sea between Norway, Russia and Spitsbergen, an island in the Arctic Ocean. The current scientific advice says that a maximum of 400,000 tons of cod can be fished per year from the Barents Sea without threatening the regeneration of the stock. But according to our sources, more than 500,000 tons is landed each year, and this means that massive overfishing is happening.

The commander of KV Harstad points his searchlight towards the towering silhouette—a Russian flagged refrigeration ship called Jupiter, which is suspected of connections to the illegal “black” fishing. With the aid

of an RIB (rigid inflatable boat), the Norwegian inspectors and we will board the vessel to inspect the cargo and check the catch logs.

The atmosphere is extremely tense. Only a few weeks earlier, two Norwegian fishery inspectors were kidnapped by the crew of the Russian trawler Elektron. The Norwegian Coast Guard’s dramatic pursuit was followed on TV screens the world over. A diplomatic crisis ensued and finally ended with the release of the two inspectors once the Elektron reached a Russian port.

“Prepare pilot ladder on starboard side!”

The Norwegian commander’s order is heard over our radio on the RIB as



A helicopter hovers over the Russian trawler Elektron that at that time had two fish inspectors onboard who had been kidnapped. This is a screenshot from “The Illegal Cod,” broadcast on Swedish National TV4.

we approach Jupiter. The waves are several meters high. In the deep troughs of the waves we can barely see the hull of the Russian refrigeration ship. An old, worn rope ladder is thrown over the rail. To have any chance of boarding the ship, we have to stand in the very bow of the RIB, wait for the next wave crest, and then jump to the ladder. Our hearts beat fast and hard under the thick survival suit. There is great risk in a jump timed wrong: the propeller whirls, darkness descends, and the biting cold surrounds us in the wind and the water.

“Wait ... wait ... now. Jump,” a crew member yells, as each of us prepares to leap.



The crew is shown relabeling packaging of fish aboard the freezer ship Turicia.

Documenting a Story: Illegal Cod Fishing

Our interest in fish, and particularly in codfish, started several years earlier. After tips from maritime researchers in Sweden, we decided to investigate the occurrence of fish poaching—more specifically illegal fishing outside the fixed fishing quotas in the Baltic Sea. Back then, in 2002, no one wanted to speak about this problem—not professional fishermen, not the Swedish Coast Guard, and not the retailers that sold the cod.

Our only way into this closed fishing industry was to form a phony trading company and begin trading with Baltic Cod. In this way we managed to uncover the drastic extent of illegal fishing. Most of the big food chains in Sweden, we learned, were involved in one way or another. The manager of one of the biggest filleting plants that made cod products under subcontract for Swedish Coop (the second biggest food chain in Sweden) admitted (in front of a hidden camera) that up to 50 percent of the cod they bought was “black.”

The reaction to our televised story was overwhelming. Large parts of the Swedish retail businesses began to boycott frozen cod from the Baltic and announced that they would purchase

their fish from Norway and Barents Sea instead. But within a couple of years, the sale of cod in Sweden had picked up again—with promises that the industry had learned its lesson. Or so the retailers claimed. “The frozen cod you can buy in Sweden comes from Barents Sea, and it is fished in accordance with scientists’ recommendations and guidelines. You can be absolutely sure it isn’t poached,” declared Yngve Björkman, chairman of the Federation of Swedish Fish Industries and Trade.

Such guarantees aside, we started to follow coverage of poaching in the Barents Sea that was appearing in the Norwegian news media. This was the last outpost of the cod fishing industry. This coverage showed that the Norwegian Coast Guard, unlike the Swedish one, was strongly committed to trying to chart the fish poaching, as was the Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries. During the past four years, these two authorities had charted how many fish had been caught, and their results were frightening.

In Barents Sea, an extra 100,000 tons of fish had been caught on top of the allowed quota every year. The initial value of poaching at sea was

calculated at more than one billion Swedish crowns (more than \$123 million dollars), and the final value once the fish was sold to consumers was much higher. “These are not poor fishermen, this is big business, and there is much money in circulation. It’s organized crime,” said Stig Flått, a fishery officer in the Norwegian Coast Guard. Most of the fish poaching was being done by Russian fishermen, but the fish didn’t end up in Murmansk or Moscow. Often, these Russian industrial trawlers turned out to be entirely or partly controlled by Western interests.

Our key question was an obvious one: If the majority of all frozen cod products being sold in Swedish shops come from the Barents Sea, are these poached cod? We know that 20 percent of the catch is illegal. But how could we tell a poached cod from one that was legally caught? We couldn’t see the difference, nor taste it, and the price was the same by the time the fish reached the counter. And we knew that asking the producers, wholesalers and retailers was futile. “We absolutely do not buy ‘black’ fish! Not what we ... Absolutely not!” responded Inger Larsson, quality manager at Findus,

one of the Swedish market's biggest food producers, when we asked.

To do this story, we decided to chart the flow of all frozen cod products being sold in Swedish shops and to restaurants and schools. With the help of markings on packages, questions to fish companies, searches in public registers, consignment notes and contacts with authorities in more than 10 countries, for several months we attempted to trace the origins of cod products. Only we did this by moving backwards—from store counters to fishing vessels.

At first, we visited many shops and, with the help of camera and notebook, we started to register all of the cod products we could find with notes about their origin and processing plants. Soon we had a list of several hundred products containing cod from the Barents Sea. Our next step was to determine the retailer of each product and from where the product had been bought and where it had been processed. What plant and when? Which agent had sold the cod to that plant? Where did the agent buy the fish? And which boat had caught the cod and when?

Here is what our charting helped us reveal:

- A large proportion of the frozen cod that was fished in the Barents Sea was then sold in Sweden.
- Much of these fish products, however, had made a long detour via China—more precisely through Qingdao Province. There the fish were thawed, filleted by cheap labor, packaged and then frozen again, before being transported back to Europe and the Swedish freezer counters.

In time, we were able to compile a long list of the trawlers who delivered cod to the Swedish market. Our next step was to investigate whether these boats poached fish.

At Sea—To Tell the Story

Now, here we were, again preparing to leap from our RIB in these choppy

cold seas onto the Russian freezer ship. Fortunately, the rope ladder held and, pumped full of adrenalin, we were at last on board, and the Jupiter's captain was offering us vodka and cigarettes in his dirty cabin. He made it clear that he regarded the Norwegian inspection as completely unnecessary. Everything is in order, he assured the Norwegian fishing inspectors, who politely but firmly told him that they wanted to see all documents. Not only the ones that concerned this cargo but earlier

Transports to foreign ports are not illegal; there is nothing that compels the Russian trawlers to leave their fish in Russian or even Norwegian ports. Of course the question remains: What motivates this extra sea voyage lasting more than a week?

We knew the answer—and we knew we wouldn't hear it today. In Russia and Norway, the fishing vessels risk being inspected by officials who check the boats' quotas, thereby distinguishing between legally and illegally caught



On the ground is a victim of a shootout in the violence that erupts as part of this illegal fishing market. Murmansk, Russia. This is a screenshot from "The Illegal Cod," broadcast on Swedish National TV4.

ones, too.

"Do you know where the last cargo of cod landed?" the Norwegian fishing inspectors asked.

"Previous captain ... He signed off ... He took with him ... all reports," the captain answered.

In the Barents Sea, we knew that the Russian factory trawlers mostly transfer the cod to refrigeration ships, like the Jupiter, which go to ports such as Grimsby, in England; Hirtshals, in Denmark; Bremerhaven, in Germany; Aveiro, in Portugal, or Eemshaven, in Holland. There, the catch is unloaded.

cod. In other European ports, the cod is treated like any other merchandise. The catch is off-loaded and passed on without any knowledge about fishing vessels' quotas. It is therefore evidently worth the trouble to reload one or even two times at sea to have the catch transported to "safe" harbors in bigger refrigeration ships.

When the Jupiter inspection ends an hour later, we head back the same terrible way we came up. As we clumsily disappear across the rail, the captain eyes us as he stands smugly on the bridge.

To Russia—To Find the Boats

In December 2005, we traveled to Murmansk, Russia, the base for Barents Sea fishing. It's bitter cold and our photographer is suffering from food poisoning. We are here with Dima Litvinov, who has worked in the region for Greenpeace for a long time and has contacts and entries into the Russian fishing industry apparatus. Our intention is to find out if the trawlers on our list have been poaching fish.

We'd compiled our list of fishing and transport vessels by charting satellite identities of their locations and call signals. We'd used bills of landing, inspection protocols, catch-landing protocols, and a commercial net service that accounts for reported catches. By doing this, we'd managed to chart how much cod the big factory trawlers have caught and delivered. But for us to prove that they have poached, we must know the size of the quota each trawler was given and what catch they'd reported to the authorities here in Murmansk.

In this quest resides our problem: The information is classified.

Yet plenty is at stake in finding the answer. Each year at least two people are murdered in Murmansk as a result of the fight for revenues from illegal fishing in the Barents Sea. With this danger in mind, it is understandable why few people are willing to speak with us. But after a few days, our perseverance pays off: We have a breakthrough when we are allowed a meeting with a key person in the fishery authorities. We leave the camera in the car outside but take a hidden transmitter microphone with us.

"Understand me right. I'll help with everything, but I don't want publicity. My job is to ensure the state's interest against fish poaching, and that is done today. It is well organized," he says to us, referring to the ways in which quotas are routinely exceeded. "As an example, I can tell about some companies who had a quota of 200 tons, which you can fish in a week, but they went to sea with that quota for a whole year."

This source also gave us access to the Russian boats' latest quotas. His new information tallied with older data about quotas we'd received from official sources in Norway.

When we got back to Stockholm, we worked on doing the math. The essential equation was this one: how much cod had each trawler caught vs. what their quota was during the same period. Here are a few examples:

- Factory trawler Koyda: Documented delivery 1,204 tons of cod, according to Norwegian authorities. Official quota: 479 tons, according to the Russian source. A difference of 725 tons.
- Factory trawler Eridan: Delivery 1,121 tons. Quota 291. A difference of 830 tons.

And so it continued—boat after boat, fabrication after fabrication.

Exactly how much illegally fished cod is sold in Sweden can't be established with certainty. But one thing is absolutely clear: The nation's big food suppliers' guarantee proved to be worthless.

Our investigation—and the two-part report, "The Illegal Cod," broadcast in January 2006 on Swedish TV4's program "Kalla Fakta" (Cold Facts)—had some major results:

- Several companies who traded with poaching trawlers (Findus, for example) immediately ceased doing business with them.
- Several Swedish food chains, after internal investigations, changed their suppliers of cod or changed their internal ways of controlling the delivery of fish.
- The Swedish and Norwegian fishery ministers joined forces and brought the matter to the EU Commission for immediate attention, and finally the EU, after years of handwringing, managed to enforce its rules on control of ports, and the illegal landings in mainland Europe came to a halt.
- By September 2006, promises had been made by a number of key countries to report on the deliveries of cod

taking place in their ports.

- The Danish police's economic crime unit began a preliminary investigation against one of the big wholesalers in Denmark.
- Environment organizations like World Wildlife Federation and Greenpeace took actions against the companies and authorities involved. Two years later, the Norwegian fisheries authorities reported that due to the decrease in illegal fishing, the increased value of legally landed fish was some \$300 million.

In the winter of 2006 on the Barents Sea, an object was picked up by the searchlight. It was a ship, and soon the Norwegian Coast Guard was requesting it to lower speed so it could be inspected.

"Inna Gusenkova!," called the commander of KV Harstad.

Just like the last time. Our RIB trip to the Russian ship was just as dark and bouncy, and our jump to the pilot ladder just as terrifying.

"Do you know who the buyer is?" the inspector asked, after he'd looked through the documents on board.

"Agent take the fish ... I have no problem ... agent give me papers ... I don't need to know more information ..." the captain answered, then continued. "I do my work and no more. If you know less, you will live longer." ■

Sven Bergman, Joachim Dyfvermark, and Fredrik Laurin have worked as freelance investigative reporters for more than a decade and as a reporting/producing team since 2000. "The Illegal Cod" was broadcast on Swedish National TV4 in September 2008, and it won The International Consortium of International Journalists' Daniel Pearl Award for the best investigation by an international medium. For their reporting of the 2004 story, "Extraordinary Rendition," which revealed the top-secret deportation from Sweden of two Egyptian men by masked American agents, they received many awards, including the Stora Journalistpriset, the Swedish equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize.

Watchdogging Public Corruption: A Newspaper Unearths Patterns of Costly Abuse

‘These are tumultuous and frightening times for newspapers, but this kind of reporting is what we do best.’

BY SANDRA PEDDIE

When a private attorney asked the school board of a small district on Long Island, New York, to put him on the payroll so he could get a pension and benefits, board members approved it without giving it a second thought. He assured them it was perfectly legal and that other people were doing it. “It wasn’t a big deal,” recalled former board member Lorraine Deller.

Little did these school board members realize that in making that seemingly innocuous decision in 1978, they set the stage for a scandal that would explode 30 years later on the front page of Long Island’s major newspaper, Newsday. In fact, the discovery of what had become a routine practice that bilked taxpayers of millions of dollars set off a cascade of investigative stories, federal and state inquiries, landmark pension reform in the legislature, and the return of more than \$3.4 million to state coffers, along with tens of millions more in savings to taxpayers once these illegal pensions were stopped.

The unearthing of these hidden deals—and the financial consequences they held for taxpayers—was a story very well suited to a newspaper. Within a year from when our reporting began, Newsday had published nearly 100 stories, columns and editorials about aspects of what, by then, had become a large and costly network of stakeholders profiting from this arrangement. The kind of sustained commitment Newsday made to telling this story is rarely found in broadcast media or on the Web, and unfortunately it’s becoming scarcer, too, at many newspapers as resources for investigative coverage shrink.

As this story built, outraged readers became engaged by contributing to it; their tips helped to drive the narrative. As momentum built, news of what we’d uncovered spread throughout the state of New York and to other parts of the country. It was an exciting and exhausting ride and a reminder to

the tiny units of local governance that handle services like water hookups and garbage pickups in specific areas. Such districts can be found throughout the country, but they are often overlooked by reporters because they are so small. Though small, the magnitude of the abuse was great. That is precisely why they made such a good subject for investigation. Such special districts cost taxpayers nearly \$500 million a year on Long Island alone.

Figuring all of this out, however, was not easy. Investigative reporting never is. It took months, for example, to get district payrolls, because no one had ever asked for them before. Once in hand, they showed wildly inflated salaries and benefits for jobs often held by a tight circle of political insiders. In one district, a meter reader was being paid \$93,000. In another, two ditch-diggers made more than \$100,000 a year. On top of those salaries were gold-plated health benefits, the kind rarely provided to workers in the private sector.

The reader who’d called with the tip said a private attorney, who was paid as a consultant, was placed on a school district payroll so that he could secure a guaranteed pension and health benefits. Public records showed the tip was right but even worse than he thought. Through my Freedom of Information Act requests for records from the state, county and school districts that employed him, I obtained a wide range of information—from the attorney’s pension history to his time sheets. These documents filled an entire file drawer. Getting the records from school board officials, who were loath to release them, took time and required frequent follow-up phone calls



Newsday’s story on Lawrence Reich.

those of us involved that newspapers occupy a singular niche in American journalism.

Uncovering Public Corruption

The trailhead of our reporting effort was marked—as many great investigative stories are—by a tip. A reader was angered by stories I’d written about spending abuses in special districts,

and, in some cases, formal appeals when requests were denied.

Within weeks of gaining all of these records, the full story emerged. Five school districts—at the same time—had falsely reported that the attorney, Lawrence Reich, was a full-time employee, while also paying his law firm \$2.5 million in legal fees. As a result, Reich retired with a pension of nearly \$62,000 and free health benefits for life. Then he returned to work for the districts as a consultant. The abuse was so flagrant that he was credited with working 1,286 days in a single year, according to records. What upset our readers the most was that state auditors knew about the arrangement—which is barred by the Internal Revenue Service—yet did nothing to stop it.

Reich agreed to be interviewed and defended the arrangement as common practice, but he did not agree to be photographed. So we assigned one of our photographers to watch his home and office; eventually we got a shot of him in his office parking lot. He wasn't aware that he had been photographed until his picture ran on the cover of *Newsday* with the headline, "Who are they kidding?"

Readers Respond, Legislators, Too

Newsday's front-page story set off a firestorm. Readers were furious. The FBI and IRS subpoenaed the school districts' records the next day, and New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo launched a parallel investigation days later.

My colleague, Eden Laikin, then joined me. Often we worked evenings and on weekends. Our challenge was to break new ground with each investigative piece as we kept up with fast-breaking news developments. The story built its own momentum, which helped ratchet up pressure on officials, who were feeling the heat from constituents.

Shortly after Eden began working with me, many of our newsroom colleagues, including a longtime editor who had helped shepherd the Reich

story into print, left. Economic pressures had forced *Newsday* to make painful cuts in staff and news hole. Fortunately for us, however, *Newsday* remained committed to the story.

Within weeks, it became clear that Reich's arrangement was not an isolated one. Records showed that 23 school districts—or nearly one-fifth of those on Long Island—had improperly reported their attorneys as employees, entitling them to good-sized benefit packages. This prompted New York



One of *Newsday*'s "double dippers."

Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli to launch a review of every attorney on a public payroll statewide. Meanwhile, Cuomo's investigators were expanding their probe statewide—netting, among others, the brother and sister-in-law of a top state judge.

All of this investigative action by public officials meant that we had to move fast simply to not be beaten on what had been our story. The pace was daunting. We requested more records, including vendor records and payments to all professionals employed by 124 school districts and 96 villages, meeting minutes, Civil Service records, and pension databases from the state's two largest retirement systems, among others. We built our own databases,

as well.

After prodding from readers, we also decided to write about a different kind of pension abuse, one that stunned the public with its scope and cost. At least 40 Long Island school administrators were "double dippers," meaning they had retired and then returned to work as so-called interim employees. Pension and payroll records showed that they were paid six-figure paychecks on top of equally lucrative pensions, collectively reaping at least \$11 million a year.

We found one superintendent collecting a pension of \$316,245 and returning to work as a superintendent for an additional \$200,000. Another superintendent, convicted of stealing more than \$2.2 million from his school district, was collecting a pension of \$173,495 in prison. In several cases, administrators literally retired one day and returned the next day to the same job. These double dippers had turned a system meant to provide security in retirement to one that minted millionaires once they turned 55.

Our stories hit a nerve. Newspapers throughout the state, as well as national law journals, picked up on our reporting. In New York, like everywhere else these days, there is a growing divide between the public and private sectors, as public-sector salaries have risen and private-sector benefits are disappearing. On Long Island, the average public-sector worker makes \$10,000 a year more than the average private-sector worker and gets a guaranteed pension and health benefits on top of that. Taxpayer resentment runs deep.

Readers deluged state legislators with letters and e-mails, and a rare public hearing on the issue resulted. Although the New York legislature has been branded as "dysfunctional" by some, the clamor was too much to ignore. In June 2008, the legislature unanimously passed sweeping pension reforms. The state's comptroller and the education department revamped their rules and beefed up enforcement. A few months later, state officials and legislators proposed an additional reform measure to address abuses in

special districts. By year's end, New York's attorney general and comptroller had reached settlements involving more than 75 lawyers and other professionals and recovered more than \$3.4 million. In addition, the state has saved tens of millions more in pensions no longer being paid.

For those of us who reported these stories, the most gratifying part was

our newspaper's willingness to stick with the story in spite of enormous economic challenges—Newsday was sold last year by the Tribune Company, which has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection—and pressures from people we were writing about. These are tumultuous and frightening times for newspapers, but this kind of reporting is what we do best. And, more than

ever, it's the kind of reporting that we must continue to do. ■

Sandra Peddie is an investigative reporter at Newsday, a daily newspaper on Long Island, New York. She and her colleague, Eden Laikin, won the 2009 Selden Ring Award for Investigative Reporting for their stories on special district and pension abuses.

Filling a Local Void: J-School Students Tackle Watchdog Reporting

‘Those of us who have been investigative reporters have a responsibility to ensure that local watchdogging remains robust in our industry.’

BY MAGGIE MULVIHILL AND JOE BERGANTINO

While investigative journalism remains a staple of many national news organizations, it's been eviscerated closer to our home in New England. The Boston Globe, our region's largest metro, is clinging to life. Local TV stations are shrinking their investigative units or turning them into ratings-grabbing “shock units” with stories about health scares or sex offenders that aim to frighten viewers into watching. And radio, with the exception of our NPR affiliates, seems only to tug at the extremes of political debate, backed up by little, if any, reporting.

This demise means New Englanders aren't receiving vital links in this informational chain. What occurs behind the scenes—the stuff unspoken in a press release or press conference—isn't made visible, such as what's behind a legislator's vote or why a business gets favorable treatment or how local banks are handling debt and mortgage situ-

ations. Such bottom-line local stories require focused and dedicated time for reporting and money to support what can be slow, plodding work. Those resources are in short supply.

This is where our efforts at the New England Center for Investigative Reporting at Boston University (NECIR-BU) will fill this void. Launched in January, NECIR-BU is the first university-based nonprofit investigative reporting collaborative with an exclusive focus on coverage of local and regional issues. Our funding comes from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the university's College of Communication, as well as from some civic-minded citizens and our media partners. The center has established partnerships with several of the region's leading news organizations.¹ It is also part of a national effort spearheaded by the Center for Public Integrity to create a network of regional investigative

reporting centers.

Our university-based model is a sensible response to the industry's grappling with how to keep investigative reporting alive during its transition to digital media in tough economic times. Already, the model we've built here is being replicated in Washington State and Colorado. There are many benefits in housing such an enterprise at a university, including these that relate directly to our situation:

- Having available the support and expertise of faculty—not just journalism professors but on-campus experts who teach across a range of disciplines related to topics the student journalists will cover.
- Access to a vast research library.
- Journalism alumni, many of them leaders in the industry, who support this effort.
- Experienced fundraising staff, as well as public relations and event plan-

¹ Principal media partners are The Boston Globe, boston.com, WBUR radio, the NPR affiliate in Boston, and New England Cable News. The center also works closely with ethnic media groups, including New England Ethnic Newswire, to tap into the often-ignored stories developing in ethnic communities across the region. Other local news organizations have expressed interest in becoming partners.

ning professionals to do the kind of outreach we'll need.

- A student-run, on-campus radio station.
- High-quality multimedia equipment that enables stories to be told in a blend of audio, video, print, photography, blogging and with the use of interactive data.

With the support of faculty and the college's dean, Tom Fiedler, the former executive editor of *The Miami Herald*, we will direct journalism students in their investigations of issues with local significance.² What they find out will be produced so that it can be distributed on multimedia platforms.

Our center's mission is clear: provide local and regional public accountability and train the "farm team" of investigative reporters. Few experiences excite or better prepare the next generation of journalists than to see semester-long reporting efforts be published or broadcast by the widely read and listened to news organizations in New England. We also offer two internships for students from Boston's high schools; they shadow our reporters and production work and assist with research. In this way, we bring students—as soon in their educational life as possible—into the process of serious investigative reporting.

Of course, once students finish their investigations, we want to secure the best way to generate maximum impact for what they've found. Our partners help make this happen by providing regional distribution. This collaborative arrangement then takes us in other directions: In exchange for content we supply, our partners contribute either funding or in-kind contributions, such as equipment, staff time, assistance with audio recording and videography, and editing facilities in support of our work. In turn, we help train some of the younger reporters in their newsrooms in investigative techniques, computer-assisted reporting, and access to public records. We also provide tips for daily

stories that we pick up as we work sources and do research for our investigative projects.

By mid-June, NECIR-BU will have broadcast the first set of our investigative stories. Its focus is on the economy; three other investigative projects are underway. For much of the spring semester, we've been educating our "reporter trainees" in techniques, such as recognizing what are the essential elements of a journalist's investigation, teaching them how to mine public records, learning how to do database analysis and conduct artful interviews, including those that turn confrontational.

This year the Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting went to *The New York Times*. It was a worthy project about what happens when major broadcast news organizations rely on retired military officers who are also consultants to military-related companies without alerting viewers to potential conflicts of interest. It explored the conflicts that exist when they explain the Iraq War to viewers without disclosing their financial interests. But for those families who struggle to pay the mortgage and stay ahead of the unemployment curve, what is happening in Washington, D.C., New York, and overseas wars can seem very far away. New Englanders want and need to know about issues and events directly impacting their lives, those involving their schools, hospitals, doctors, police, housing, roads and bridges (are they about to collapse?), energy and the environ-

The screenshot shows the website for the New England Center for Investigative Reporting at Boston University. The top navigation bar includes links for 'Who We Are', 'Mission & Principles', 'Media Partners', 'Education Partners', 'Code of Ethics', and 'Student Programs'. A prominent banner features a city skyline and the text 'Serving New England and educating journalists'. Below the banner, the 'Our Media Partners' section lists logos for The Boston Globe, boston.com, NECN, 90.9wbur, and NEWz. The 'Welcome' section contains a message from the center, stating its mission to provide high-quality, high-impact investigative reports and to train the next generation of investigative reporters.

ment, to name a few.

Our goal is to preserve this kind of reporting. Those of us who are investigative reporters have a responsibility to ensure that local watchdogging remains robust in our industry. We're encouraged by the efforts of new local news entities such as Wisconsinwatch.org, Texas Watchdog, and the Investigative Voice in Baltimore, as well as better known entrepreneurial Web operations such as MinnPost, the Beacon in St. Louis, and voiceofsandiego.org, an award-winner for its investigative reporting about San Diego's downtown development. It's likely that news organizations like these will be the employers of students at our center today. Our job is to see that they are ready to do the watchdog work so critical to journalism—and to our democracy. ■

Maggie Mulvihill, 2005 Nieman Fellow, is cofounder and associate director of the New England Center for Investigative Reporting. Joe Bergantino, an award-winning broadcast journalist, is the cofounder and director of the New England Center for Investigative Reporting.

² Students are taught by two former Boston Globe investigative reporters, Dick Lehr and Mitchell Zuckoff.

Objectivity: It's Time to Say Goodbye

'As a standard to separate news from nonsense and a guide to ethical reporting, objectivity is about as reliable as judging character by the firmness of a handshake.'

BY JOHN H. McMANUS

American journalism has long embraced an impossible standard—objectivity. Beyond being unachievable, it's undesirable because it rejects biases that are necessary if news is to be useful in a democracy—biases for the common good, for brevity, for making what's important interesting. Objectivity has also hobbled journalism, substituting accuracy—often the transcription of official quotes—for the more difficult goal of truth. If that weren't enough, neither journalists nor the public can agree on what it means. The resulting confusion sows mistrust.

When journalists are losing their jobs by the thousands and major newspapers are closing, it may seem that a discussion of objectivity has the urgency of deck chair arrangements on the Titanic. But when better to rethink the core principle of so essential a democratic institution as journalism than during a technological revolution that is ushering in new providers to fill the vacuum left by the departing professionals? Our new "journalists" range from concerned citizens, covert advertisers and press agents, Jon Stewart and Matt Drudge, to swarms of Flickr-ing shutterbugs, Twittering texters, and YouTube vloggers.

As a standard to separate news from nonsense and a guide to ethical reporting, objectivity is about as reliable as judging

character by the firmness of a handshake. So I propose we junk objectivity in favor of a more accurate, honest and demanding standard—empiricism—the scientific method of inquiry based on careful observation from multiple perspectives and logic that Walter Lippmann proposed for journalism nearly a century ago.

Empiricism's Benefits

Although the best news organizations are already moving in this direction, replacing objectivity with empiricism would represent a paradigm shift, not just a change of terminology. It would re-pour the foundation of reporting and redefine the relationship between news providers (whoever they might be) and the newly empowered group formerly known as the audience. Here's why:

- Empiricism doesn't pretend that news *reflects* reality. It recognizes that news *represents* a small part of it with carefully selected words, sounds and images. It's a partial *version* of what's real.
- Rather than assuming that news organizations and journalists render the world as it is—without any biases of their own—empiricism acknowledges bias as inescapable and attempts to limit partisanship through diversity, both of staff

and quoted sources. The social "faultlines" that the late Robert C. Maynard identified—race, class, gender, geography and generation—are taken seriously. So is the inherent conflict between public service and the news provider's self-interest in inexpensively attracting an audience and servicing its sponsors.

- As with science or law, empirical journalism is a self-reflective method of seeking truth. But because journalists do not enjoy extended periods of observation, laboratories or subpoena power, their reports are even more provisional and subject to revision. Admitting this uncertainty, empirical journalism requires transparency—a willingness to disclose how its version of what happened was gathered. Likewise, it must invite other credible versions. Objectivity is a lecture. Empiricism is a conversation.

Objectivity's Faults

My indictment of objectivity rests on four counts, none original.

The most fundamental is that humans can't achieve it. By definition an objective view of something would be unaffected by the viewer. It would record the occurrences in a locality like a giant video camera—a magic camera that shows everything going on above and below the

narrow spectrum of radiant energy visible to human eyes. In a truly objective account of a day's events, the story of each grass blade's growth—or its being cut down in the prime of life by a lawn mower—would be as important as the launch of a war. To elevate one over the other is to apply a value system. It is not objective, not value free. Objective reporting would describe everything in the enhanced viewfinder of the giant camera. No one would want to consume truly objective news. Way too much trouble!

This undesirability leads to my second count: Objectivity tosses out three useful biases along with all the destructive ones.

1. We want journalists to sift through the innumerable occurrences of the day and select those with the greatest impact on us. They should be guided by a bias for the common good of the community served, a pro-public slant.
2. People are busy. We want news to be brief, even though that requires a set of value judgments about what matters most.
3. We want journalists to use all of their talents with cameras, graphics and storytelling to render the consequential compelling. If news is to appeal to a mass audience, as it must in a democracy of any scale, journalists serve us best when they exercise a preference, a bias, for engaging detail and drama. We're more likely to read and remember stories that touch both heart and head.

My next concern rests with how objectivity as often practiced has impeded the pursuit of truth, which throughout history has been journalism's primary mission. Objective news providers typically act as if their observation from a single place and time, or that of an official source, provides an adequate representation of reality. As NBC reporter Ashleigh Banfield observed during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, reporters embedded

with U.S. soldiers “certainly did show the American side of things because that's where we were shooting [video] from. You didn't see what happened when the mortar landed. There are

When the official view is portrayed as an objective view, it gives voice mainly to the powerful. Civilian casualties are merely 'collateral damage.' In domestic reporting, the poor and minorities often become invisible, unless they break the law. And then their depiction contributes to a divisive stereotype.

horrors that were completely left out of this war.”

Such “objective” accounts require fewer perspectives, so stories are shorter, simpler and cheaper to report. There's also less friction with authorities when journalists surrender to them the power to say what's real. When the official view is portrayed as an objective view, it gives voice mainly to the powerful. Civilian casualties are merely “collateral damage.” In domestic reporting, the poor and minorities often become invisible, unless they break the law. And then their depiction contributes to a divisive stereotype.

Objectivity has encouraged passivity and invited official manipulation. Reporters who pursue the public's tough questions as opposed to merely covering what government and corporate leaders say or do are sometimes accused of “having their own agenda,” “making news” rather than “covering” it.

Objectivity, a least as some construe it, can result in journalists falling back on a “he said, she said” approach to reporting. Likewise, it can push them towards a false balance—equal time or space—when two or more sides do not have equal evidence for their positions. That has commercial value: To present one side as having the stronger claim

can spark controversy from powerful constituents, possibly advertisers, and alienate both sources and audience. But demagogues like Senator Joseph McCarthy and powerful industries like tobacco have taken advantage of such objectivity norms at great expense to society.

My last objection was captured ably by Brent Cunningham in the *Columbia Journalism Review*: “Ask 10 journalists what objectivity means, and you'll get 10 different answers.” And if you think journalists are confused, consider the public. According to surveys conducted by The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, Americans now see bias almost everywhere in the news. The confusion erodes public trust and breeds cynicism.

Empiricism would make journalism more “multiperspectival,” to borrow a phrase from sociologist Herbert Gans, thus more effortful. As it became more independent and skeptical of powerful sources, it would risk their wrath, even denial of access. Accuracy would become more necessary, but less sufficient, particularly when journalists asserted facts from their own investigations rather than relying on officials. Rather than pretending that they cover “all the news that's fit to print,” providers would have to acknowledge their limitations of staff and space or time and invite the public as a partner in what would be a more empowering and democratic form of journalism.

Now is the time. As news moves to the Web, it can more easily accommodate give and take with the community it serves. There's room for diverse perspectives. Updates and revisions are easy to accomplish. And news is easier than ever to share. ■

John H. McManus, a former journalist and academic, founded GradeTheNews.org. His recent self-published book, “Detecting Bull: How to Identify Bias and Junk Journalism in Print, Broadcast and on the Wild Web,” is available at www.detectingbull.com.

Worshipping the Values of Journalism

‘As I settled in on the National Desk, I gradually realized I had found the guide to my life I had been searching for. It certainly wasn’t religion in the classical sense; it was a secular substitute for religion.’

By JOHN SCHMALZBAUER

God and the Editor: My Search for Meaning at The New York Times

Robert H. Phelps
Syracuse University Press. 284 Pages.

Is journalism a religious calling? That’s the question raised in this engaging memoir by Robert Phelps. Tracing his journey from the shores of Lake Erie to the newsroom of The New York Times, Phelps describes a career that was nothing short of a spiritual quest.

With the publication of “God and the Editor,” Phelps joins a national conversation about the religious character of the journalistic profession. In works such as Mark Silk’s “Unsecular Media” and Doug Underwood’s “From Yahweh to Yahoo!,” scholars have uncovered the influence of religious values on American journalism. I found something similar in my book “People of Faith,” an exploration of the place of religious conviction in the careers of Cokie Roberts, E. J. Dionne, Jr., Peter Steinfels, Kenneth Woodward, and a dozen other prominent journalists. On more than one occasion, my respondents described their commitment to objectivity and fairness as an outgrowth of their Christian beliefs.

By calling The New York Times his “substitute for religion,” Phelps echoes a 2004 essay by journalism professor Jay Rosen on his blog, PressThink. There Rosen argued that “journalism is itself a religion,” complete with its own creed (written by Walter Williams of the University of Missouri), sacred

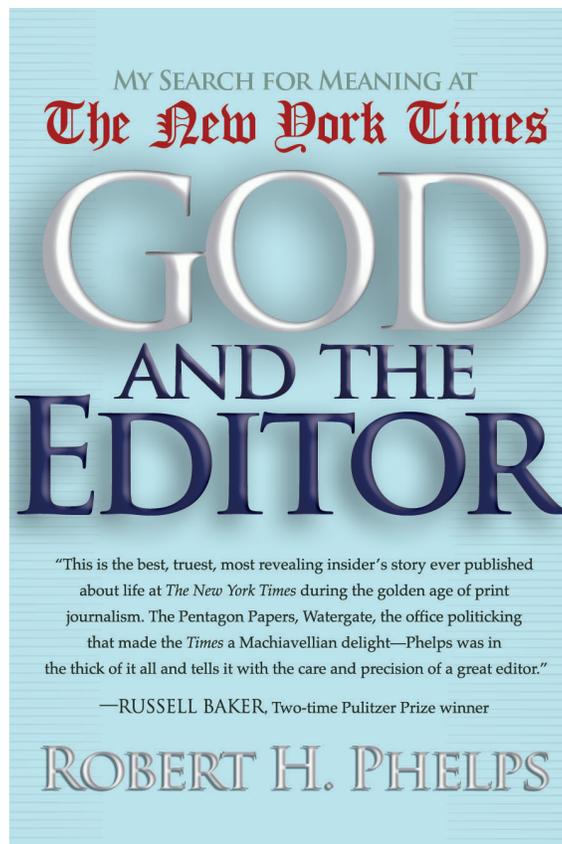
scripture (the First Amendment), and high priesthood (the members of the Pulitzer Prize board). Following Bill Moyers, Rosen identified the Columbia Journalism Review as the “high church” of journalism. He could just

Before and after World War II, he covered state politics for United Press in their Harrisburg bureau. Part of Tom Brokaw’s “Greatest Generation,” he served as a Navy correspondent in the Pacific theater, risking his life in the Battle of Okinawa. After a brief stint in public relations (which greatly troubled his conscience), he entered the holy of holies of American journalism, “the block-long newsroom of The New York Times on 43rd Street.”

Phelps is not the first writer to describe the search for meaning at The New York Times. John Cogley’s “A Canterbury Tale” includes a chapter on his years covering religion, as well as an account of his decision to leave Catholicism for the Episcopal Church. Recounting a 1985 sabbatical, Ari Goldman’s “The Search for God at Harvard” describes his struggle to reconcile the demands of Orthodox Judaism with the life of a reporter. Religion also appears several times in Gay Talese’s “The Kingdom and the Power,” a portrait of the Grey Lady during the postwar years. The chapter on evangelical John McCandlish Phillips is one of the highlights of the book, as is his account of editor A.M. Rosenthal “sitting shivah” after the assassination of Robert Kennedy.

A Spiritual Journey

At the outset of his book, Phelps notes that the reader will have to judge “whether my spiritual journey was authentic.” This appeal to per-



as well have mentioned this publication. During his decade as the editor of Nieman Reports, Phelps served on the Pulitzer Jury for National Reporting, confirming his place in the hierarchy of American journalism.

Though Phelps retired at the top, he began near the bottom, at the Daily Citizen in Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

sonal authenticity is not surprising in a nation of religious individualists. Identifying as a spiritual seeker, he distances himself from the Protestant revivalism he encountered as a youth. By praising Thomas Jefferson, Mary Baker Eddy, William James, and the Quakers, Phelps locates himself in an authentically American tradition, joining the “restless souls” chronicled by historian Leigh Schmidt.

One mark of Phelps’s authenticity is his willingness to acknowledge his own shortcomings. In “A Canterbury Tale,” Cogley apologizes for leaving out “my own sins of mind and flesh,” trusting “that these have been absolved through God’s grace and have been consigned to oblivion.” Not having the luxury of a confessional, Phelps takes a different approach. In Chapter 2, “Sex, Pacifism, and the Cub Reporter,” Phelps catalogues his youthful indiscretions. Painting a sobering portrait of his early career, he admits using “the power of the press for personal advantage,” fabricating a quote, deceiving his readers, and accepting free liquor from a politician. This confession of sin continues into the middle chapters of the book, where Phelps acknowledges his early blunders at The New York Times, including the use of his position to obtain a cheap Mercedes. When the car failed to please, Phelps concluded that “the god of newspaper ethics was trying to teach me a lesson.”

Never does this detailed examination of conscience descend into what theologians call a morbid scrupulosity—the tendency to turn minor mistakes into grievous sins. What saves “God and the Editor” from self-flagellation is its didactic purpose: Phelps uses his own life to articulate a moral vision for the profession. In confessing his sins, Phelps professes his belief in the religion of journalism. He says as much in the book:

As I settled in on the National Desk, I gradually realized I had found the guide to my life I had been searching for. It certainly wasn’t religion in the classical sense; it was a secular substitute for religion. It was journalism as practiced at The New York Times.

In Part II of the book, we are treated to an insider’s view of the Church of the Grey Lady, including such righteous crusades as the publication of the Pentagon Papers. Far from a hagiography, Phelps describes both the “winners and

What saves ‘God and the Editor’ from self-flagellation is its didactic purpose: Phelps uses his own life to articulate a moral vision for the profession. In confessing his sins, Phelps professes his belief in the religion of journalism.

sinner” in the organization.¹ Among the winners were the mentors who initiated him into the religion of daily journalism, including copyeditor John Stephenson. Among the sinners were stars like Harrison E. Salisbury, who is described as a “flawed role model.” Phelps reserves special criticism for Executive Editor A.M. Rosenthal, the man who ultimately blocked his career. Recounting Rosenthal’s volcanic temper and authoritarian management style, he calls him an “Imperial Editor.” By contrast, Phelps remembers being a “Partnership Editor,” recalling a collaborative relationship with his reporters during his years in the Washington bureau of the Times.

Between 1974 and 1985, Phelps preached the gospel of good journal-

ism at The Boston Globe. Criticizing his reporters for arguing with sources, taking sides in policy disputes, and showing favoritism to political candidates, he tried to bring “a good dose of discipline” to the paper. In the end, he was only partially successful in adding a measure of objectivity to the paper’s “enthusiasm for helping the weak and exposing the corrupt.” According to Phelps, there were many “nonbelievers in objectivity” in the newsroom.

After his retirement, Phelps himself began to question the religion of journalism. Ever thoughtful and introspective, he renewed his search for transcendence when his beloved wife, Betty, became ill, a search that intensified after her death in 2003. Reflecting on decades of marriage and work, Phelps observed that journalism left him “spiritually bankrupt, with an emptiness of heart.” About the same time, he experienced a series of mystical events, including a vision of Jesus in his backyard. Though he later discovered it was the result of a hall light, Phelps remains open to the possibility that something more was going on.

At the end of this refreshingly honest book, Phelps articulates a question that confronted the journalists I interviewed for “People of Faith”: “Cannot truth come through the spirit?” Like many Christian reporters, Phelps is unable to reconcile the empiricism of his profession with the reality of the supernatural. All he can do is to live in the tension. Such epistemological humility is commendable. American journalists would do well to learn from his example. ■

John Schmalzbauer is the Blanche Gorman Strong Chair in Protestant Studies at Missouri State University and author of “People of Faith: Religious Conviction in American Journalism and Higher Education.”

¹ Between 1951 and 1978, “Winners & Sinners” was the name of the internal bulletin of the Times, edited by national desk copy chief Theodore M. Bernstein.

When Belief Overrides the Ethics of Journalism

‘There was no wall between the beat and reporter. He was on a mission to promote religion with all the fervor and zeal of his own born-again faith.’

BY SANDI DOLBEE

Losing My Religion: How I Lost My Faith Reporting on Religion in America—and Found Unexpected Peace

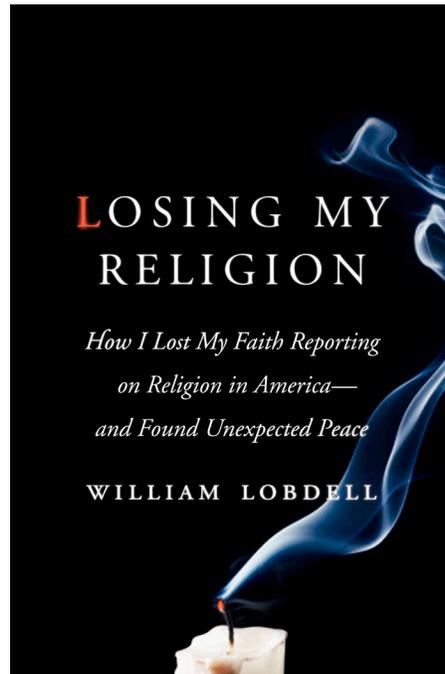
William Lobdell
Collins. 291 Pages.

William Lobdell’s memoir about covering religion for the Los Angeles Times wasn’t an easy book for me to read. As I turned the pages of “Losing My Religion: How I Lost My Faith Reporting on Religion in America—and Found Unexpected Peace,” my coffee grew cool, and I felt myself getting hot.

Agenda journalism has that affect on me. Listen to how Lobdell describes landing a gig writing a religion column for the newspaper’s Orange County edition: “I felt like one of the last tumblers in my Christian life had clicked into place. I was certain that God had made it happen; I was just His vessel.”

What came tumbling back to me were memories of my first years as religion and ethics editor of The San Diego Union-Tribune. I took the job in 1992 and almost immediately began attending the annual conventions of the Religion Newswriters Association (RNA), which represents journalists who cover religion in the secular media. With 19 years of experience in newsrooms from Washington State to California, I was appalled at some of what I encountered at the RNA meetings. Several religion reporters openly shared with me about how they felt their beat was a calling from God. Some wore crosses around their neck. At least one was an ordained clergyman, who wrote stories during the week and did baptisms on the weekend.

They were friendly and, I presumed,



talented people. But how could their news organizations allow them to cover this beat? Had they not heard of their profession’s code of ethics, especially the one about the need to maintain independence? Here’s how the Society of Professional Journalists puts it: “Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.”

I gravitated toward like-minded colleagues dedicated to promoting more aggressive journalism within our ranks. People like David Briggs, then the national religion writer for The Associated Press; Laurie Goodstein, who is now with The New York Times, and Gayle White, former religion reporter for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

I gradually came to believe that religion writing was the chink in the armor of many newsrooms. Adherence to belief directly related to the

subject at hand would be intolerable on other beats, yet on this one it was quietly accepted.

Missionary Zeal

“Losing My Religion” confirms that it wasn’t only smaller publications that fell victim to this misguided embedding. Read what Lobdell writes as he moved from religion columnist to full-time religion reporter for the Times: “God had answered my prayers more completely than I could have ever imagined I would be able to shape religion coverage at one of the nation’s largest media outlets.”

There was no wall between the beat and reporter. He was on a mission to promote religion with all the fervor and zeal of his own born-again faith. As I continued to read, I kept shaking my head. When I was on the city desk of various newspapers, I would caution reporters about not crossing the line between participant and observer. “Do that,” I would tell them, “and you stop listening with both ears and seeing with both eyes.” It’s like a soldier who stops paying attention in a minefield; the next step he takes could explode in his face. The reporter isn’t the only casualty when this happens. The collateral damage includes readers—and their trust.

A telling example of this danger happens early in his book, when Lobdell acknowledges that he set aside a pile of depositions and reports given to him by another reporter concerning Catholic sexual abuse allegations. He had “much more inspiring stories” to do, especially since he was not on the fast track to becoming a Catholic himself.

I admire his candor about this explosive story. I also admire his subsequent

scrambling when the scandal could no longer be ignored. To his credit, he began doggedly chasing the Los Angeles Archdiocese's wrongdoings, which would culminate in the largest settlement in the nation with victims of childhood sexual abuse.

His coverage of the Catholic scandal then opened up stories about other controversies—from Mormon excommunications to a two-part series detailing the lavish spending by founders of the Trinity Broadcasting Network, a worldwide television empire based in Orange County.

During this time, Lobdell went from promoting religion to deciding it was his mission to right its wrongs. "The Body of Christ was sick," he writes. "My investigative reporting skills could help uncover the infection and promote the healing. I was sure this had been part of the Lord's plan for me all along."

Guess what happened next? As the title suggests, Lobdell loses his faith. He had blurred the lines between his profession with his personal beliefs so completely that covering the human

foils of organized religion and its by-products was too much to bear. Before leaving the Los Angeles Times last year, Lobdell wrote a front page confession of this journey, which led to him to write this book. He is a compelling, gifted writer. His conversational style served him well in journalism as it does on the pages of his book. But his writing skills provide little solace for my indignation and my sadness, for him and for my beloved profession.

Lobdell is right about one thing. When he began thinking about becoming a religion reporter, editors regarded the beat as "an antiquated part of newspaper tradition." Today, editors are killing the beat or scaling it back dramatically. One excuse given is the results of marketing surveys, which apparently show little reader interest in religion coverage. Since roughly eight out of 10 people say they believe in God, and about half that number practices a faith regularly, I have a hunch the problem lies more in how the questions are being asked than what the surveys have so far revealed.

Regretfully, I fear Lobdell's book might give editors more ammunition to distance their newsrooms from covering religion. As for readers, I worry it will give them another reason to lose faith in our ability to inform and equip them in an unfettered, independent voice. On the other hand, if the pendulum swings back toward increased interest in covering what people believe and how they behave based on those beliefs, perhaps his book will serve as a compass pointing toward which reporters to assign to this beat—and which to put on a different one. ■

Sandi Dolbee was the religion and ethics editor of The San Diego Union-Tribune and a one-time president of the Religion Newswriters Association. She is a two-time winner of the Religion Reporter of the Year award and has been honored by the American Association of Sunday and Feature Editors, the San Diego chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, and the San Diego Press Club.

Religion and the Press: Always Complicated, Now Chaotic

In a time of a blogging explosion, '... the idea of a coherent mainstream journalistic identity is in this era of old media implosion on the way out.'

BY MARK SILK

Blind Spot: When Journalists Don't Get Religion

Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, Roberta Green Ahmanson, Editors
Oxford University Press. 240 Pages.

For the past 30 years, a staple of the culture wars has been the notion that journalists in general, and elite journalists in particular, are either hostile to religion or ignorant of it or (most likely) both. By this account, they belong to the "knowledge class"

responsible for leading American society to godless moral relativism. No matter that journalists are, according to the best surveys, as religious as Americans generally. No matter that, beginning in the mid-1990's, newspapers devoted more space and staffing to religion coverage than ever before. The antireligion trope is a conservative article of faith.

A collection of essays, "Blind Spot: When Journalists Don't Get Religion," is the latest and, I dare to hope, last hurrah of this misbegotten conviction.

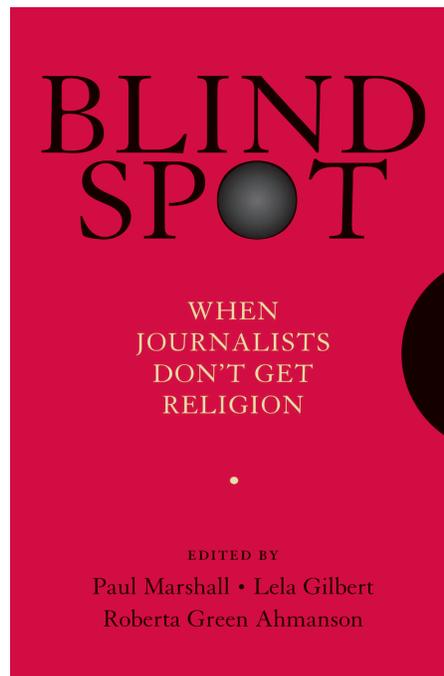
That's not because I believe the culture wars are at an end, though they may be winding down. It's because the idea of a coherent mainstream journalistic identity is in this era of old media implosion on the way out.

That news seems not to have penetrated the consciousness of the book's essayists, most of whom are academics and think-tank denizens, though here and there a professional scribbler can be found. Their premise is that the robust journalism of yesteryear is still hale and hearty but

that its practitioners have missed too many stories because of a failure to come to proper terms with religion. And their primary focus is on stories not covered by reporters who actually have the job of covering religion. Indeed, the biggest religion story in the history of journalism—the 2002-2003 scandal involving the Catholic Church’s cover-up of its sexual abuse by priests—receives nary a mention. Rather, complex events with religious dimensions, many of which have taken place in distant countries, grab the book’s attention.

While there have been, as always, mistakes in the coverage, the authors’ sins of commission and omission outweigh them. How does the book get this wrong? Let me describe a few of the ways:

- Allen D. Hertzke blames the press for failing to recognize that the campaign for international religious rights includes more than just evangelicals eager to make the world safe for evangelism. However, Hertzke fails to mention the fact that the prime legislative manifestation of the campaign, the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, arose from a desire on the part of President Clinton’s religio-ideological opponents to embarrass him.
- In castigating the press for focusing excessively on the question of anti-Semitism in “The Passion of the Christ,” Jeremy Lott ignores the ugly history of passion plays in Western culture. He also neglects to mention that the “group of liberal scholars” who expressed concerns about the representation of Jews in the movie was convened at the request of the official in charge of Catholic-Jewish relations for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- C. Danielle Vinson and James Guth take political reporters to task for casting religion and the 2004 presidential campaign too much in terms of the “God gap,” which describes the proclivity of the more religious voters to prefer Republicans to Democrats. As someone who, along with the



eminent and continually quoted John Green, did a lot to alert the journalistic community to that gap, I beg to differ.

- Amy Welborn claims that while journalists covered to a fare-thee-well Pope Benedict’s criticism of Muslims in his speech at the University of Regensburg, he was actually tougher on the West. My reading of the speech is that he came down equally hard on both sides and that, more importantly, the speech demonstrated the pope’s woeful ignorance of the history of Islamic thought.
- Michael Rubin contends that journalists do not recognize the importance of religion in interpreting the politics in Iraq. But a fair reading of the reportage shows that the war correspondents did a far better job of conveying the country’s religious dynamics to the American public than did the political leaders who took the country to war.

I could go on giving such examples, and I could mention some ways the authors get it right, just as they occasionally grant that the journalists have. The main problem, however, is the usual one: When the journalists

don’t tell the story the way “we” see it, then they’ve obviously missed the story. Yet as my comments suggest, it’s not hard to posit other plausible perspectives and informed points of view. Threading one’s way through the thicket, noting and parsing the interpretive differences, is what reporters have to do. The ideologically committed will always have bones to pick with reporting that seeks to find a fair balance.

But the authors of “Blind Spot” should breathe easier. In 21st century journalism, every person gets to play. Indeed, in no sphere of coverage today are there more online commentators, tipsters, reporters and screamers than the religious arena—or rather, the almost infinite number of arenas that engage the religious interests and commitments of humankind.

Though a faculty member at a small New England college, I am also a blogger on religion and politics (www.spiritual-politics.org). As such, I’m offered credentials to press conferences—and the presidential inauguration—and I’ve received phone calls this year from a White House official annoyed at my posts. Like many others among my blogging brethren, I think I know what the story of the day is in my corner of the news, and I do what I can to persuade journalists to take notice and tell their stories accordingly. Sometimes they do. The problem is, there are fewer and fewer of them to do it.

The pleasant thought that, yes, reporters would get it right if they only paid attention to me, is yielding to the reality of just a lot of voices, each shouting out his or her own version of the news. The churches are emptying and the streets are full of missionaries. Who are the passersby to listen to? ■

Mark Silk, director of The Leonard E. Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College, worked for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution from 1987 to 1996.

Journalists Use Novels to Reveal What Reporting Doesn't Say

'My pitch: An experienced journalist grows discontented with journalism's limitations and turns to fiction as a more accurate way to reflect the reality of life in the Middle East.'

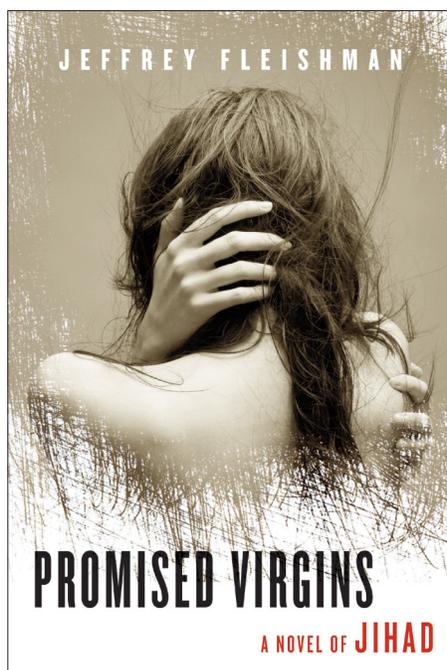
BY MATT BEYNON REES

Promised Virgins: A Novel of Jihad
Jeffrey Fleishman
Arcade Publishing, Inc. 253 Pages.

Jay Morgan, the central character of Jeffrey Fleishman's thought provoking "novel of Jihad," carries an undeveloped roll of film shot by his young photographer wife in the moments before she was killed in Beirut. Morgan lifts her wounded body to safety, but she dies anyway. It's a fitting image on which to build Morgan's deep bitterness and disillusion about journalism as he covers the war in Kosovo. In these days of cyberjournalism, idiotic reader "talkbacks" and nonsensical newsroom cutbacks, the only thing apparently more useless to the media industry than an undeveloped film or a dead photographer is a living foreign correspondent.

The story of "Promised Virgins" revolves around Morgan's trek through the mountains as he interviews Serbs, Albanians and CIA operatives on the hunt for a newly arrived jihadi who has brought Islamic fundamentalism to the otherwise nationalistic Muslims of Kosovo. In truth, the book is about a foreign correspondent's uncomfortable personal connections with the society he covers and his realization that they're the only things keeping him from despair at his ever-shabbier trade. The author mainly hangs that feeling on the unconsummated sexual relationship Morgan shares with his translator, Alija.

When Morgan, who narrates the novel in first person, describes Alija, we get the book's finest moments. It seems possible from the vigor and poetry of those passages that there



was someone like this for Fleishman, who reported from the Balkans and is now Cairo correspondent for the Los Angeles Times—someone local who lit him up creatively by the sheer foreignness of her being. It's the kind of connection that's beyond journalism to capture and, no doubt, one of the reasons he wanted to write this novel in the first place. By contrast the scenes of Morgan with another journalist interviewing sources are numbing and emotionally empty.

When the first of my Palestinian crime novels, "The Collaborator of Bethlehem," was published in 2007, I approached most of the American correspondents in Jerusalem to ask them to write about the book. My pitch: An experienced journalist grows discontented with journalism's limitations and turns to fiction as a more accurate

way to reflect the reality of life in the Middle East. No correspondent argued with me; most interviewed me with sympathy, swapping stories of the way their own publications failed to make use of the depth of their knowledge. The truth is that a foreign correspondent who spends any time with the people he covers, who doesn't just interview them and go off to drink with the other hacks at the hotel bar, will uncover realities that don't fit the black and white formula of journalism. These snippets of reporting—these glimpses of gritty reality—are the ones likely to be woven into a fictional account, given the layers of emotional depth they explore.

The duality of Fleishman's novel is a perfect illustration of this. Alija's personal story and her response to it is a compelling mystery that Morgan unravels gradually, almost by touch, as they sleep together. In contrast, Morgan spends the rest of the book on the trail of the jihadi in the mountains, which never seems like the big story he thinks it is and, in the end, turns out to be a bit of a dud. But Fleishman toys with us, seeming to promise that there'll be a journalistic payoff for Morgan, when in fact this story will retreat into insignificance beside the wrenching climax of his relationship with Alija. What you learn from the journalistic preference for promiscuous interviewing, Fleishman seems to say, isn't a patch on the insights gained in a single, deep relationship with a local.

The question that faces many foreign correspondents is whether to take their collection of exotic rugs, local robes, and war stories back to where they came from, exhibiting

them like trophies in their suburban homes while commuting to the op-ed desk, or to remain with the people they've covered and learned about. That doesn't necessarily mean staying in one location, as I've done—13 years in Jerusalem and counting. It can also involve a commitment to delve into the emotions that people who are no longer strangers unfold for you and to recount your responses. Usually, this will mean a turn to fiction. Journalistic memoirs require a personal, emotional narrative that few correspondents can supply, since most of them spent their time, like Fleishman's Morgan, interviewing people, filing and drinking, all rather dull activities when recounted in print. Rather it's what they heard and saw, not what they did, that has often burrowed its way inside of foreign correspondents and, in time, this tugs them into fiction.

The human connection with local people is, I think, what saves foreign correspondents from the worst effects of the dreadful things they see. (Most foreign correspondents are after all really war correspondents.) During the drafting of my second Palestinian novel, "A Grave in Gaza," I often cried as I wrote. At the time I thought, "Man, I'm good. I can even write myself into tears." Only when I had finished did I realize that my weeping was the result of the traumas I had expelled onto the page. Once I understood this, I noticed that the tears and quick rages and nightmares about burned, dismembered bodies, ceased. That would not have happened if I hadn't been able to connect on the page my feelings to the emotions of the Palestinians. The characters had to be real enough—I had to know the people on whom they were based well

enough—for them to carry the weight of my own intense feelings of horror and shock.

I can't say the same thing for journalism. As a reporter, almost the only time I cried over my copy was after I saw the edit. ■

Matt Beynon Rees is the author of "The Samaritan's Secret," the third in his series of Palestinian crime novels. "The Collaborator of Bethlehem," which introduced his lead character, Omar Yussef, won the Crime Writers Association's John Creasey New Blood Dagger that is given to the author of a first novel. He was bureau chief for Time magazine in Jerusalem. He wrote about his own turn to fiction in the Summer 2007 issue of Nieman Reports, www.niemanreports.org.

AN ESSAY IN WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Life Being Lived in Quintessential Irish Moments

BY ROSITA BOLAND

"Beyond the Moment: Irish Photojournalism in Our Time" is the title of a fine slab of a book recently published by the Press Photographers Association of Ireland. This is Ireland as observed by the press photographers who live and work there: the insider's eye on a country that has changed more times during the past 17 years recorded in this book than the mercurial weather it is famous for.

"Beyond the Moment," introduced by Booker Prize-winning novelist John Banville, is an unsentimental, thought provoking, and revealing examination of the big public moments and the smaller, quieter moments that make up the texture of daily life in Ireland. There are images from political events

that made international headlines, such as rioting on the streets of Northern Ireland—and Dublin—both before and after the Good Friday agreement of 1998. But in contrast there are also many glimpses of the more esoteric ways in which the business of politics is domestically conducted. Irish Times photographer Frank Miller's portrait of the returning officer in a small boat with a ballot box, sheltering under a cloth from the rain while returning with two votes from one of the offshore islands that traditionally ballot some days before elections, is a striking reminder of the truism that all politics are local.

You won't find pictures of Ireland's famously quaint, picturesque pubs in

"Beyond the Moment," but you will find gritty, unflinching images of the ever-present role that alcohol continues to play in Irish life. Such as in Kenneth O'Halloran's important series about the aftermath of a night out, which include a depiction of a dazed-looking woman dressed as a fairy trying to flag a taxi down with a magic wand at 4 a.m. and other images of people gathered like secular tableaux round the prone figures of friends too drunk to remain standing. There are images of familiar Catholic traditions, such as the annual pilgrimage of climbing the holy mountain of Croagh Patrick. But there are also images that show how Ireland is changing, as its immigrant population finally rises, in photographs



Michael and Matthew O'Halloran, who run a family undertakers in Corofin, County Clare, prepare for a funeral in June 2002 while Matthew's wife, Eileen, hangs out the washing. *Photo by Kenneth O'Halloran/Freelance.*

of a funeral at a Dublin mosque and the baptism of a member of the Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim Church Noah's Ark in a swimming pool in the west of Ireland. And there is the irony of a black immigrant, covered in blood, attacked while attending the first-ever antiracism rally in Dublin, which his assault in the preceding days had prompted. All these images tell stories, fragments of the larger narrative that has been going on through the years that saw the Celtic Tiger live and die.

The crazed property overdevelopment that is now hanging like an albatross around the neck of Ireland's economy is recorded here, too. A mound of mud in County Kildare with a sign that advertises show homes on view optimistically marks the site of a planned new housing development in 2006—perhaps the most relevant statement about the current state of the property market.

Sometimes, the date on the photograph seems extraordinarily at odds

with the subject, such as Lar Boland's picture of an exhausted-looking elderly woman, a study of work that is reminiscent of the 1950's, taken at the Dublin Fish Market in 2005, which closed that year. This is real Ireland. So is Mark Condren's compelling bird's-eye view, biographical picture of the chaotically bleak one-room flat occupied by a County Leitrim bachelor, also taken in 2005. So also is the image of a backyard in County Clare, taken in 2002, where two undertaker brothers prepare a coffin for a funeral while the wife of one of them calmly hangs the family washing on a line over the coffin.

Thankfully, no matter how grim the times are—and in 2009 they are as bad as the black days of recession in the 1980's were—Ireland has always been able to laugh at itself and see the humor that flashes through more serious situations. And so we see Gerry Adams spontaneously throwing a snowball in Matt Kavanagh's campaign trail picture and Colin Keegan's eye-

catching portrait of former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, as he appears to float surreally and saintlike above the freak flood waters that poured down on his Dublin constituency in 2002.

For me, the real spirit of Ireland is in Joe O'Shaughnessy's picture of the woman he found sunbathing on a Galway wall. Represented only by her bare knees and abandoned shoes as she lies back unseen from the camera, this is perhaps the most entertaining picture in the book, capturing a philosophy all Irish people will recognize—when the sun shines, stop everything and live in the moment. ■

Rosita Boland, a 2009 Nieman Fellow, is a features writer with the Irish Times. "Beyond the Moment, Irish Photojournalism in Our Time," is edited by Colin Jacobson and published by the Press Photographers Association of Ireland in association with that organization's AIB Photojournalism Awards. Images from the book can be seen at www.ppai.ie/books.



A young woman in a fairy outfit tries to wave down a taxi at 4 a.m. in the city center. Dublin 2006. *Photo by Kenneth O'Halloran/Freelance.*



The Taoiseach Bertie Ahern surveys the floods after the river Tolka burst its banks in his Drumcondra, Dublin constituency in mid-November 2002. *Photo by Colin Keegan/Collins Photo Agency.*



Garda Jim Brennan; David Alcorn, the presiding officer, and Donal ó Du-faigh, a radio reporter, return from Inishfree Island to Burtonport, County Donegal with the General Election ballot box, containing two votes, in November 1992. *Photo by Frank Miller/The Irish Times.*



A woman basks in the sun at Palmers Rock, Salthill, Galway in May 2004. *Photo by Joe O'Shaughnessy/The Connacht Tribune.*



The Dublin Fish Market in St. Michan's Street shortly before its closure for the last time in April 2005. *Photo by Lar Boland/Freelance.*



A Royal Ulster Constabulary officer shoots his pistol in the air to save an ambushed colleague during a disturbance in Derry in 1998. *Photo by Martin McCullough/Freelance.* ■

An Enduring Story—With Lessons for Journalists Today

During the time of ‘the disappeared’ in Argentina, when Robert Cox edited *The Herald*, the newspaper ‘became the most reliable source of information about human rights violations in Argentina.’

BY GRACIELA MOCHKOFISKY

Dirty Secrets, Dirty War: The Exile of Editor Robert J. Cox

David Cox

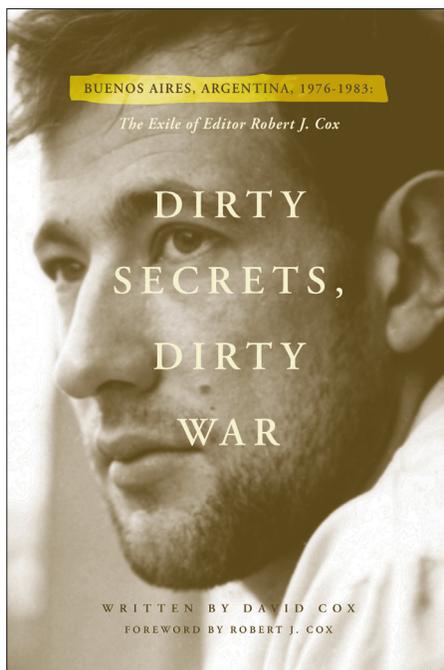
Evening Post Publishing Co. with Juggling Board Press. 232 Pages.

It might be argued that “*Dirty Secrets, Dirty War: The Exile of Editor Robert J. Cox*” should have been written three decades ago, most likely in 1981, when Cox was enjoying, as I do now, a Nieman Fellowship. He was then on his second year of exile, the bitter prize he had been awarded for making the English-language newspaper *Buenos Aires Herald* into one of the main advocates against state terrorism in Argentina.

The military junta was still in power, backed by the Reagan administration, and Latin American politics were a matter of public concern for a broad U.S. audience. Robert Cox’s book would have come out as a powerful indictment against the human rights violations taking place in Argentina at the time.

But he could not write this book then, neither can he today. “I have always believed in impersonal journalism, the reporter in a shabby raincoat that nobody notices who writes his stories without a byline,” he explains in the prologue to “*Dirty Secrets, Dirty War*.” Modesty, he concedes, was only one reason; it was too painful a story for him to write.¹

Twenty-eight years later, with Bue-



nos Aires now a favorite American expat destination, the past Argentinean tragedy awakens little interest in a country that’s beginning to come to terms with its own government’s human rights violations in the “war against terrorism.” But it is now when Cox’s son David, at last conquering his own arduous distance from the country in which he was born and raised, writes the book his father couldn’t write. Significantly, he does it in the year in which his father, 75 years of age, retired from journalism.

Is this story being told too late?

Or is the ordeal of a man who saw horror when most people around him were in denial still an important one to tell?

Cox’s Time and Place

In 1959, at 26, seeking to escape a dull middle-class existence in his native England, Cox answered a classified advertisement for a newspaper job in Buenos Aires. The *Buenos Aires Herald*, founded by a Scotsman in 1876 as a shipping news single sheet, was, 83 years later, a small daily newspaper for the equally small English-language Argentinean community. Cox said goodbye to his homeland and boarded a ship that traversed the Atlantic toward a life of adventure and exoticism.

He got much more than that. After two years as a reporter at the *Herald*, he was promoted to news editor and soon afterwards he married Maud Daverio, an Anglo-Argentine whose prosperous family claimed an aristocratic British lineage. Cox’s Argentina was quite different from that of most Argentinean journalists. Bob and Maud lived in a wealthy, Parisian-like neighborhood, owned a weekend villa in an exclusive country club, sent their five children to an elite English school, and spent their vacations in Europe. Cox entered a fraction of the Argentine society that was, for the most part, fiercely anti-Peronist (mostly for class reasons, Peronism being the party with which the working class identi-

¹ Robert Cox, a 1981 Nieman Fellow, finally did write about what happened to him and his family—the dangers and strains they faced—during the time of “the disappeared” in an article, “When Death Seems Inevitable,” which appeared in a collection of stories called “*Journalists: On the Subject of Courage*,” in the Summer 2006 issue of *Nieman Reports*, www.niemanreports.org.

fied), pro-military (several members of Maud's family were officers), politically conservative and, in many cases—to Cox's shock—anti-Semitic.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, when Argentina's working and middle classes radicalized, Cox opposed the guerrilla movements ("terrorism" in his nomenclature) and the political left. He received death threats by Montoneros, the Peronist guerrilla, and was viewed "as a right-wing imperialist by the left," as he puts it. When in 1976 a new military dictatorship overthrew a democratically elected government and took power with the stated purpose of crushing the "subversive elements" in the country, Cox, by then editor of the Herald, almost applauded.

The Herald supported the military junta and its first leader, General Jorge R. Videla, as did the majority of the press. Cox had good contacts in the armed forces and met often with high-ranking government officials. He supported the economic plan and had a dear friend who was appointed finance director at the Ministry of Economy.

Almost everyone Cox knew and loved saw the dictatorship as a way out from one of Argentina's darker periods. It would be, at last, an end to Peronism and its evils; it would transform the economic structure of the country and put an end to the political violence originated, as they saw it, in the "terrorism" of the left and the internal feuds of the Peronist party.

But Cox soon realized that something very different was taking place. In cocktail parties, in conversations with military sources, in calls from the Herald's readers, he started to hear about people being kidnapped and "disappeared." The first confirmation came from an English expatriate couple whose son had been abducted by a squad of policemen in the middle of the night and later found dead with signs of having been tortured. Far-right factions within the government, he concluded, had adopted the methods of the left-wing "terrorists." It had become, he deplored, "another terrorism."

While praising the economic plan and other aspects of the military administration, the Herald published front-page stories about the disappearances. Those articles saved lives: several people "reappeared." It was a courageous decision, and the Herald was mostly alone among Argentinean publications. The government had issued strict censorship rules, and reporters and editors were among the detainees and disappeared.

Herald News Editor Andrew Graham-Yool came up with the idea of having the relatives of the disappeared secure habeas corpus writs so that the reports of kidnappings would have an official source. Only one other Argentinean newspaper, *La Opinión*, followed the Herald in publishing the habeas corpus writs.

As a frequent stringer for American newspapers such as *The Washington Post*, Cox wrote the first stories about the gatherings of the relatives of the disappeared in front of the Government House. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and, later, the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, would become worldwide symbols of the fight against state terrorism as they gathered in crowds to clamor for the truth about their children's whereabouts.

The Herald's newsroom became a meeting point for the relatives of the victims—the only newsroom in which they were welcomed. A few other newspapers occasionally agreed to run lists with the names of the disappeared under the form of "solicitudes," paid ads. But Cox refused to take money from the relatives. The Herald also became the most reliable source of information about human rights violations in Argentina. It reached a circulation of 20,000 and gained international prestige. Argentines found in it what they couldn't find in their Spanish-language publications.

The Story's Personal Toll

Most journalists in Argentina know Cox's record. What not everyone knows is the price he and his family paid. David Cox tells of his father's severe asthma seizures. With threats

mounting against him and his family—Robert Cox was detained for 24 hours and faced the prospect of his own disappearance—his children "alternated their route home from school to the apartment, sometimes taking the train and other times riding the bus." He also became isolated from friends and people whom they thought were friends. To many in his own social circle, he'd become a "subversive Communist."

In June 1979, Cox lamented that, "People treat me, I imagine, in the same way they would treat a condemned man." He designed mental escape plans from his home and from the newsroom in case they came looking for him. He'd wake up in the middle of the night fearing someone had entered their house and, when he went to check on his children to be sure they were all right, found them awake and alert.

After three long years of living in fear, his son Peter, an elementary school student, received a threatening letter: It carried personal information that only someone close to the family would know. (Years later, they would learn that the informer was a cousin of Maud's who served in the Navy.) The letter stated that the family had the "option" of seeking exile or they would be "assassinated."

Cox asked General Videla for protection. When Videla argued he couldn't guarantee his own security, Cox decided to go into exile. Bit by bit he came to realize that it was not a fraction of the military involved in state terrorism, but the entire government. From the United States, Cox continued to be an outspoken critic of these human rights violations until in 1983 democracy was restored in Argentina.

It took years for the press, which had praised the dictatorship and omitted coverage of most of its crimes, to regain public credibility. But the Herald was never again such a fine newspaper. Last year, after a long financial struggle, the U.S.-owned Evening Post Publishing Co. sold it to an Argentinean entrepreneur of dubious reputation. At about the same time, Cox retired as assistant editor for

The (Charleston) Post and Courier of South Carolina.

Once or twice a year, Cox goes back to Buenos Aires, where he keeps an apartment. I met him there a few times at afternoon tea parties he organizes to catch up with his Argentine friends and acquaintances. He draws an odd, diverse crowd: Anglo-Argentines, high-society ladies, human rights advocates, a few young journalists. I first attended one of these gatherings while researching the life of Jacobo Timerman, a legendary Argentine newspaperman of his generation. Many

journalists whom I interviewed at the time argued I needed to understand “the context” in which they had lived; understanding that, they implied, their silence would be justified. Cox was the living refutation of that argument: He was able to escape his context.

That rarity speaks to the importance of Cox’s story. And today, when the ideals of journalistic truth risk becoming old fashioned and a “war against terrorism” with government sponsored torture and disappearances has again been waged, it is as important as it was three decades ago. ■

Graciela Mochkofsky, a 2009 Nieman Fellow, has been a journalist in Argentina for the past 17 years, as senior political correspondent for La Nación and until last year as a contributing political columnist for the newspaper Perfil, in Buenos Aires. Her articles have appeared in many Latin American newspapers and magazines, and she has written four nonfiction books; her most recent book, La Revelación, was published in August 2007.

They Blog, I Blog, We All Blog

An Australian blogger interviews dissident bloggers worldwide, and in his book he explains why what they do matters and who is trying to stop them.

BY DANNY SCHECHTER

The Blogging Revolution

Antony Loewenstein
Melbourne University Press. 294
Pages (paperback).

I am a blogger, a media critic, and a human rights-oriented journalist. I am also a fan of Australian blogger, freelance writer, and author Antony Loewenstein, because even as he profiles brave online journalists and writers in his “The Blogging Revolution,” he doesn’t leave his voice in the background. Nor does he avoid the deeper media crisis that creates all of the reasons anyone needs for appreciating the value and importance of the proliferating blogosphere.

When I started my News Dissector blog (www.newsdissector.com/blog/) 10 years ago, blogging was an emerging media form. No longer, and here are U.S. stats that offer a glimpse at the profound changes that have taken place (with more added every day):

- Now more than 12 million American adults maintain a blog.



- More than 147 million American adults use the Internet; 57 million read blogs. More than one-third of today’s blog readers started reading them in 2005 or 2006.

- More than 120,000 blogs are created each day: Nine percent of Internet users claim to have created one, and included among these people are six percent of the U.S. adult population.
- Among bloggers, 1.7 million Americans list making money as one of the reasons they blog. Of companies surveyed, 89 percent indicate that blogs will be more important to their business during the next five years. A bit more than half of blog readers shop online.
- Technorati tracks more than 70 million blogs.
- Nearly one quarter of the Web’s 100 most popular sites are blogs. There are more than 1.4 million new blog posts made each day.
- Blog readers average 23 hours online each week.

Whew. With the emergence of so many people expressing themselves so vigorously as part of the Web’s daily media stream, the relationship between their engagement and the established media’s decline becomes

abundantly apparent.

The revolution brought about by blogging—which Loewenstein dedicates his book to exploring—focuses on how blogs are being used by “the imprisoned dissidents everywhere.” He is clearly driven in writing this book by the mission of calling our attention to the struggle many dissidents face in countries where it is difficult—and dangerous—to try to get heard in these repressive environments. Governments would not crack down on the Internet and suppress its voices, if bloggers are not articulating messages and information that they find offensive or feel threatened by.

At the same time, Loewenstein is not unmindful of the challenges facing scribblers like himself who live in places where speech is not harassed. As he writes about our changing media, he speaks to issues of corporate consolidation and the economic decline that have led to deep cutbacks of reporters and the dumbing down of news outlets. Given these connections Loewenstein is making about the role blogging now plays throughout the world, it is significant that many news organizations that initially criticized bloggers as not being “real journalists” have now opened their pages to their staff blogs in a mode of “if you can’t fight them, join them.”

At the same time, what real journalism is remains unresolved—as if it ever could be fully defined. In the opening paragraph of his book, Loewenstein offers a quote from the now offline and in-exile Iraqi blogger Riverbend, with whom I’ve corresponded. (Disclosure: This blogger wrote a blurb on one of my books and is quoted in “When News Lies.”) She is quoted as saying:

Bloggers are not exactly journalists, which is a mistake many people make. They expect us to be dispassionate and unemotional about topics such as occupation and war. That objective lack of emotion is impossible because

a blog in itself stems from passion.

There isn’t one way to commit journalism. We know that in countries other than ours, reporters are expected to bring their personal perspectives to coverage. Nor is the AP Stylebook a universal guide.

Given these connections Loewenstein is making about the role blogging now plays throughout the world, it is significant that many news organizations that initially criticized bloggers as not being ‘real journalists’ have now opened their pages to their staff blogs in a mode of ‘if you can’t fight them, join them.’

The writers, diarists, commentators, artists and activists Loewenstein invites us to visit in his good read of a “blog around the world” book are a diverse lot, though each of them is challenging government and pushing back against orthodox ideas. He wasn’t content to work from secondary sources. As he traveled to meet bloggers in Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Cuba, he found an engaged, talented, sometimes tenacious decentralized tribe of committed and caring people, who speak in many tongues as they confront common enemies in the form of authorities who want them to disappear.

The remarkable diversity among these bloggers is what makes reading about them so interesting. It isn’t possible to boil down their words into sound bites. Each confronts a specific situation, and Loewenstein spends enough time with each to profile them within their circumstance’s context—and thereby offers readers memorable

moments and close observations about the culture and their experiences as well as their aspirations. It also helps that Loewenstein writes so well and knows how to tell a good story.

Restricting Online Content

Closer to home, Loewenstein explains how big U.S.-based technology companies have been complicit in helping governments monitor and restrict online content, especially in China, where its Great Wall is now the government’s firewall. His discussion about how American-made software—he names Google, Yahoo!, Cisco Systems, and Microsoft in this vein—has assisted with police prosecution of bloggers highlights the controversial intersection of business interests vs. the bedrock American principle of protecting freedom of speech.

All too often, such corporate practices are not the focus of human rights advocates, such as the Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Without Borders, who tend to be more concerned about government actions. In these cases, however, these organizations published detailed accounts from this cyber battleground and sent out action alerts to urge people to channel their outrage into action on behalf of bloggers facing persecution and jail. This is sadly a familiar story, even if an ongoing one.

On occasion, courageous bloggers are given awards for their work. Yet when this does happen, few U.S. news organizations send reporters to interview them or link to their blogs on their own Web sites. Rather than collaborate with them as colleagues, they and their words are marginalized even as crippling cuts in foreign reporting are happening at newspapers and television stations. At the same time, newsroom managers are not acting to make their international coverage more inclusive and decentralized, given the amazing resources that now exist online. There is one news outlet, GlobalVoicesonline.org, where

international bloggers' words are being published and, when necessary, translated into English.

"The Blogging Revolution" (www.bloggingrevolution.com) is not a guide on how to blog nor does it explain why so many people read blogs and write comments on them. Had Loewenstein done so, there would have been plenty of challenges and dilemmas for him

to explore—difficulties that go with maintaining a blog and marketing it to find an audience in what's become a very, very crowded arena. Instead, Loewenstein took on an original topic and did so as a global journalist with a focus squarely on some of the big issues of our time. In short, he has written a book that tells us why blogs matter. ■

News Dissector Danny Schechter, a 1978 Nieman Fellow, blogs on [Mediachannel.org](http://mediachannel.org). His book "Plunder: Investigating Our Economic Calamity and the Subprime Scandal" was published by Cosimo Books in 2008 and reviewed in the Spring 2009 issue of *Nieman Reports*. He can be reached at dissector@mediachannel.org.

Fortunate Son: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson

'... it was Thompson's great good fortune to come of age, professionally speaking, at a point where his own proclivities and the broader Zeitgeist dovetailed to an almost absurd degree.'

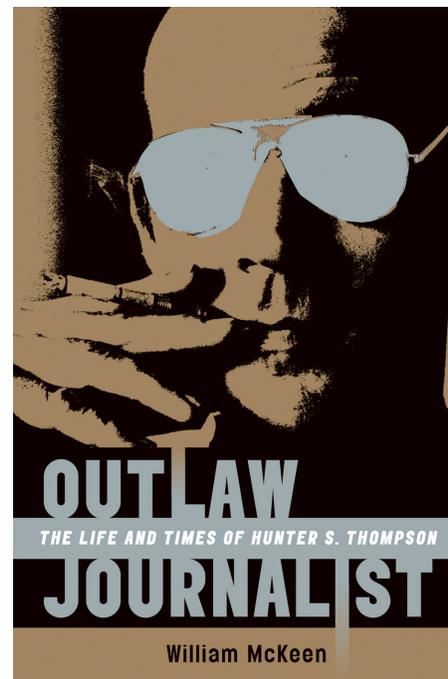
BY ADAM REILLY

Outlaw Journalist: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson

William McKeen
W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
428 Pages.

A scant few pages into "Outlaw Journalist: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson," his new biography of Thompson, author William McKeen—chair of the journalism department in the University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications—makes it clear that he has a rooting interest in his subject. "He was a good and decent man," McKeen says of him in the introduction. Then, a few sentences later, McKeen expresses agonized incomprehension at Thompson's 2005 suicide: "I may know something about Hunter Thompson, but I don't know why he did this. Say a prayer for him."

Such authorial sympathy doesn't have to be a problem. It could even inspire a biographer to ask bold new questions, or draw unexpected insights from seemingly familiar material, or even tackle a long-neglected subject in hopes of correcting the historical record (e.g., "Shakespeare's Wife," Germaine Greer's biography of Ann



Hathaway). But in "Outlaw Journalist," the opposite happens: McKeen admires Thompson so much that—try as he might—he simply can't make sense of him, as a private person or a journalist. Fortunately, though, he gives readers enough raw material that they can finish the job.

McKeen's misdirected sympathy

plagues "Outlaw Journalist" from the get-go. After trotting out the aforementioned encomiums, for example, McKeen builds a convincing case that, from his earliest years on, Thompson was actually a budding sociopath. A childhood friend explains that children rushed to befriend Thompson so he wouldn't beat them up; Thompson's brother, Jim, recalls the teenage Thompson as "intolerant and mean;" just before graduating from high school, Thompson and a friend successfully rob two couples making out in a parked car after Thompson threatens to rape one of the girls.

This is grimly fascinating stuff—and given his affection for Thompson, McKeen deserves credit for including it. Maddeningly, though, neither Thompson's darker tics nor his determination, evident from an early age, to hobnob with the social elite of Louisville (his hometown) keep McKeen from casting his protagonist as a tragically noble iconoclast. For example, here's his wince-inducing rendition of an exchange Thompson had with a high-school classmate: "As graduation neared, one Ivy League-bound snot backed up Hunter in the hallway and asked, 'Where are you going next year?' 'I don't know,' Hunter

said, ‘but I’m going somewhere.’ Why is McKeen so sure the kid in question was a “snot”? What’s more, given Thompson’s personality, isn’t it more likely that he was the one backing the “snot” up against a wall?

This unwillingness to square evidence with judgment persists throughout “Outlaw Journalist”—and ultimately dooms McKeen’s attempt to make sense of his subject. The interpretation of Thompson that he finally proposes (with assists from Rolling Stone’s Jan Wenner and Sandy Thompson, Hunter’s ex-wife) is both exculpatory and hagiographic: Thompson was a tremendously talented, fundamentally decent human being who was ultimately crippled by external pressure to play the part of the sociopathic buffoon.

Based on the trove of biographical detail McKeen provides, though, that can’t be right. Thompson’s darkest adult ties—his abuse of women, his self-mortification with drugs and alcohol, his seething contempt for all authority and convention (except literary authority, which he coveted), his narcissistic need to have all eyes trained admiringly on him—didn’t suddenly materialize when Garry Trudeau made “Uncle Duke” a regular character in *Doonisbury*. Nor did they bubble up when legions of professed fans who hadn’t actually read Thompson’s work started pestering him for his autograph. Instead, they were fully in keeping with the identity Thompson had cultivated from childhood on. That’s who he was.

Man and Moment Meet

Even if McKeen’s analysis falls short, his prolific reporting helps us make sense of Thompson’s place in journalistic history. There are those who sincerely believe that Thompson’s death left a profound vacuum. We still need his excoriating presence, or so the argument goes. But no one has quite managed to take up the Thompsonian torch.

In fact, Thompson’s stylistic inheritors are everywhere in contemporary journalism: think of Matt Taibbi (everyone’s favorite neo-Thompsonian) hilariously eviscerating Tom Friedman

... it’s often hard to say where, in Thompson’s oeuvre, the line of demarcation between fiction and fact can be found. In the 1960’s and ’70’s, this added to the Thompson mystique; today, it would make him a professional pariah.

in the pages of the New York Press; or food/travel writer Anthony Bourdain shocking his way to dyspeptic multimedia prominence; or sex columnist/Seattle Stranger editor Dan Savage licking doorknobs at the Iowa Republican caucuses in order to give Gary Bauer the flu and readers a great story; or even Time’s Mark Halperin telling Barbara Walters, during the fight for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, that John Edwards might back Hillary Clinton because he considered Barack Obama to be a “pussy.”

So why, then, does no one figure loom as large today as Thompson once did? To be blunt: blame the times. After all, it was Thompson’s great good fortune to come of age, professionally speaking, at a point where his own proclivities and the broader Zeitgeist dovetailed to an almost absurd degree. Prior to Thompson’s heyday, Americans were conditioned to view authority, convention and conformity with deep skepticism, both by the academy (think of David Riesman’s “The Lonely Crowd”) or the literary world (“Revolutionary Road,” “The Catcher in the Rye,” etc.). Then, just as the arc of Thompson’s career took off, that skepticism soured into downright (and often justified) contempt—courtesy of the civil rights movement and its opponents, and the assassinations of JFK and MLK and

RFK, and the Vietnam War, and the depredations of one Richard Milhous Nixon.

Absent foils like these—and without indirect assistance from cultural contemporaries like R.D. Laing, who subverted established definitions of sanity and mental illness—Thompson’s screw-the-hypocrites shtick might not have been quite so well received. As fate would have it, though, Thompson seemed, instead, to be offering just the sort of bracing journalistic tonic that the times required.

Don’t forget, either, that Thompson’s timing relative to the craft of journalism was ideal, too. When a drug-and-booze-fueled Thompson was hammering out his propulsive, hilarious, disturbing treatments of everything from the 1972 presidential campaign to the Kentucky Derby, the New Journalism was still ascendant. And within the journalistic fraternity, it was still acceptable—as it had been for Joseph Mitchell and A.J. Liebling decades earlier—to fictionalize large portions of allegedly “true” reportage. Of course, as McKeen rightly notes, it’s often hard to say where, in Thompson’s oeuvre, the line of demarcation between fiction and fact can be found. In the 1960’s and ’70’s, this added to the Thompson mystique; today, it would make him a professional pariah. (So, too, would Thompson’s habit of burning through mass quantities of expense money, then failing—or refusing—to write the item in question. The money was there then. It’s not anymore.)

This, then, is the profound revelation contained in “Outlaw Journalist”—even if it’s not what McKeen intended. Hunter S. Thompson wasn’t a tragic figure. He was, instead, a deeply flawed talent who was blessed to work at the best of all possible times. His untimely, tragic end notwithstanding, we should all be so lucky. ■

Adam Reilly is the media columnist for The Boston Phoenix.

Jobs Change or Vanish: Niemans Discover an Unanticipated Bonus in Community Work

From tutoring to volunteer firefighting to working with at-risk children, fellows use their skills to dig into their surroundings.

BY JIM BOYD

As I sit down to write this, I have just spent an hour thinning seedlings in my modest greenhouse, the one I always wanted but never had time for while I was working. Before the thinning, I finished off an important press release for a friend who owns a small lumber company. Before that, I attended a meeting of a broadband task force. Two days ago, I had three meetings focused on the feasibility of developing a community wind project. I had to miss a monthly meeting of the community foundation board on which I sit.

Those community volunteer roles form the core of my life these days. I do not intend to brag. I feel privileged that members of this community wish me to share the talents and skills I accumulated in a 30-plus year career as a journalist. For all those active career years, my life was steeped in an eclectic study of public affairs, yet the ethical strictures of journalism, with which I very much agreed, meant I was prohibited from participating in most aspects of community life.

My community involvement caused me to wonder if other Niemans, put out of work early, as I was, might be experiencing something similar. Might this be a silver lining to the current convulsions in the media world—an unanticipated opportunity for still-vigorous Niemans to harness journalism skills in volunteer work? Thus my query to my fellow Nieman Fellows in late March asking for information on volunteer work in which they might be engaged.

I recognize how fortunate I was to

be at the age I was when the convulsions hit. Many excellent journalists now find themselves out of work and still under obligations that require regular employment.

Roberta Baskin, NF '02, is an example. This celebrated television journalist went from receiving a duPont-Columbia award one day to a pink slip the next. She wrote that she missed the deadline for this article because she “was doing nine panels (!) at the Conference on World Affairs in Boulder last week. Today I’ve had two conference calls with journalism organizations I support. I’ve become the Queen of Pro Bono since losing my investigative reporting job in January. ... I do enjoy serving the world for free. But I’m also in need of paying tuition for two daughters in college ... And there’s that pesky mortgage, too.” Unfortunately, Baskin has quite a lot of company.

Frequently, we take for granted the skills we acquired courtesy of our careers in journalism. The ability to write coherent sentences is one of those. Nothing I have ever written professionally will be mistaken for great literature, but my sturdy meat-and-potatoes approach, and the ability to execute quickly, makes me a rare specimen in this community. Most of us also have the ability, given half an hour, to find the nut graf in a 90-page document, which gives us the ability to cut through verbiage to the essence of an issue. Over the years, we have developed excellent BS detectors. We do not hesitate to ask the dumb question if we think it will elicit needed

information. We know generally how to conduct a good meeting. We are excellent, quick-study generalists because we have had to be. Usually, we know a little about a lot of things. These skills, and others I have failed to note, have tangible value to our communities.

More than a handful of Niemans graciously wrote to say they were still working and couldn’t offer tales of volunteer experiences. Hearing from them was a treat. Those who did send information on their volunteer experiences wrote about situations that varied greatly, as did the form of their volunteer efforts. I found their e-mails touching, encouraging and very human, and I wish space had allowed me to include more from them. However, this is not meant to be the end of this conversation but a beginning. For members of the Nieman family, the new alumni section of the foundation’s Web site [www.nieman.harvard.edu] will make communication among us easier. And there will be a place to share your stories on this topic. My hope is that the dialogue I initiated by e-mail will continue through the foundation’s Web site.

H. Brandt Ayers, NF '68, reminded me gently that journalists traditionally have had a selective sense of where the line against participation is drawn. “I have been deeply and constantly involved in community affairs. It has long been my belief that a sense of community has been missing in metro journalism and may have contributed to its steep decline.” Ayers’s participation started “with raising reward

money for the arrest and conviction of a racial nightrider murderer and [ended] with the passing of the gavel to an energetic successor on a local education foundation serving at-risk students.”

Of course Ayers is right about journalists’ selectivity in drawing the line against participation. But for most of us, most of the time, most community activities were off limits. Ayers seems to believe that is a mistake. I offer his assertion in that regard for discussion on the Nieman Web site.

Bert Lindler, NF ’84, has the most unusual volunteer interest. When he didn’t like the direction new owners took his Montana newspaper, he quit and joined the U.S. Forest Service as a technical writer. He’s still working, but five years ago he “adopted an elk herd that winters near my home. Since then, I’ve spent a lot of time learning about fencing, weeds and population management through hunting.” Lindler proves my point about being excellent quick-study generalists.

One of the most poignant stories was offered by **Dean Miller**, NF ’08. He was fired “out of the blue” in February. He needs to work, but recognizes the job hunt will be long. Meanwhile, he has used his “newfound freedom from the need for official neutrality” to teach a journalism ethics seminar for the local branch of Drinking Liberally. The biggest change, he says, “is that I have time for something other than the needs of the newspaper. Last month, I got to spend five school-day mornings in my 9-year-old son’s class, helping them revise, edit, proofread and prepare for hardback publication their fairy tales.”

Jenny Lo, NF ’96, still has a job, but it is part time. “It’s great to be active and not a wage slave,” she writes from London. When she is not posted overseas, she volunteers as a literacy aid and an English tutor for adult Muslim men. She also is a school advocate for inner-city migrant communities. Lo volunteers as well for the National Trust and is active in “cultural heritage and environmental NGO activities in Malaysia.”

Leslie Dreyfous, NF ’95, believes

there is something to this idea of “the community energy unleashed when reporters are sprung from their obligation to objectivity.” Dreyfous left journalism because she “had three children in four years.” She writes that she was “at first uncomfortable and then gradually unstoppable in my commitment to improving our community of Half Moon Bay (Calif.). Environmentalism, school board politics, downtown ‘smart growth,’ lobbying state legislators ... chair of the parks and rec commission It was quite an experience to be on that side of things, particularly after having ‘studied’ community over the course of my career with the AP.” In fact, Dreyfous continues, she “wrote a book about citizenship and civic participation” It’s titled, “Getting a Life: America’s Challenge to Grow Up.”

Peg Simpson, NF ’79, writes that she isn’t retired, “just doing a lot of extra stuff.” That “stuff” includes being very active in an effort to build a “virtual community” in the DuPont Circle area of Washington, D.C.. The effort, she writes, is part “of the new national movement of ‘aging in community.’” Previously, she’d participated mostly in journalism groups, many with the aim of advancing the position of women and minorities.

Ralph Hancox, NF ’66, retired before the media economy got “cranky.” He “went into pro bono work at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, B.C., at the Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing.” One of the fruits of that labor [“Managing the Publishing Process”] is described at www.abcbookworld.com/view_author.php?id=9671. He’s edited a couple of master’s theses and “done some promotion work on a women’s fashion accessories Web site.”

Graeme Beaton, NF ’79, is an Australian Nieman who settled in the United States after his year at Harvard. He is a tutor for the local literacy council and gets “as much out of it as the students I tutor.” He will do more as he “winds down” from his second vocation—raising thoroughbred horses.

John Strohmeier, NF ’53, sold his interest in a Pennsylvania newspaper

in 1984 and moved to Alaska to teach, fish and write, but not necessarily in that order. Currently he is unpaid writer-in-residence at the University of Alaska, in Anchorage. He writes, “Being a Pulitzer Prize-winner and controversial journalist keeps me in demand for scores of unpaid appearances” as a speaker, panelist and academic adviser. “And thank you, Louis Lyons,” he adds.

Peter Almond, NF ’81, is closing in on retirement from his work as a freelance defense writer. But he is dabbling already in volunteer work. A letter he wrote to his local UK council was, he thought, “straightforward journalist writing.” But it was described to him by one council member as the “most powerful letter he’d seen in 25 years” and played a major role in getting the council to adopt the policy Almond favored. That and other small involvements, he said, opened his eyes “to what I could do.” But for the moment, “I still have to feed my mortgage and my family and not drive myself into the ground, broke and frustrated Save the world and get paid is my ideal plan”

Mike Pride, NF ’85, retired in 2008 from his position as editor of the Concord (N.H.) Monitor. He is moving “carefully” into the volunteer world, because he had so many requests to join community ventures, many of which were not a good fit. Plus, he wanted to reserve time for his passion, writing history. Pride did say “yes” to the N.H. Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, speaks around the state on New Hampshire history, served as a local impresario, and occasionally works as an overnight volunteer, with his wife, at a winter homeless shelter.

Rui Araujo, NF ’91, writes that the perspective on civic participation is a bit different in Portugal. Although he is still working full-time for a Portuguese television station, he has been actively engaged for years, as a volunteer fireman, helping immigrants in France by writing and reading letters for them, and working in an organization that helped poor city kids get to summer camp.

Nick Danilo, NF ’74, went into

teaching (“a good fit”) after his famous 1986 arrest in Moscow on trumped-up charges of espionage. He “got hooked on help to the children wounded in Russia’s war against Chechnya.” That led to a book, “The Oath,” and to participation in the International Committee for the Children of Chechnya.

Beatriz Terrazas, NF ’99, had already chosen to serve on the board of a literary center before she took a buyout from The Dallas Morning News in 2006. She had one condition: that she would do nothing for the newspaper at all related to the center. For income, she still works as a freelance writer and photographer. She now is getting involved in a nature center and preserve near home but avoids anything related to promotion or marketing. She believes doing that would cross an important line that is very clear in her head. It would compromise her credibility, “And my credibility is all I have.”

Michael H.C. McDowell, NF ’79, went from journalism in Canada to work as a trustee and senior fellow at the Panos Institute in Washington, D.C.. His reasons bear on the thesis of this essay: “I left journalism mainly because I wanted to influence policy and write about public issues and not be a voyeur all my life.” He has served on several boards, played a key role in the Northern Ireland peace process, advised the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and done other admirable work as well.

Bill Henson, NF ’78, writes that once he was freed “from the restraints of newsroom prohibitions,” he became a public library trustee, appointed by the school board. He’s also media adviser to a group that “works with children who have disabilities.” Finally, and near and dear to my heart, this fellow Vietnam vet serves as secretary to the 1,200-member 35th Infantry Regiment Association, where he helps write and edit the quarterly newsletter.

Jon Larsen, NF ’80, got an early start on nonprofit work “for various reasons” and “engaged in such while practicing journalism. I even voted throughout my career.” Larsen was an early, active participant in development of the

Natural Resources Defense Council. He served as an unpaid consultant for the start-up of the NRDC magazine, *The Amicus Journal*, which “morphed into *OnEarth*, and at present I am the chairman of the magazine’s editorial board. I am still on the NRDC board as an honorary member.” Larsen also served on the board of *Nuclear Times* and the *Columbia Journalism Review*. He is now president of the board of Cambridge College, which focuses on providing college education to working adults. “In the next year or two,” he hopes “to turn my attention to more local boards in Vermont.”

Ned Cline, NF ’74, “chose to leave newspapers early, not the other way around.” Because he did, he “has been able to serve as president of the Friends of the Library at the local university campus” and as president of the local historical museum. He also has written six biographies “of significant philanthropists in my state [North Carolina] who deserved recognition for good works but never received it.” Ned also has taught editing courses at the local university. “It has all been worthwhile to me and others. I could have done none of this if I had remained in the newsroom.”

Tim Giago, NF ’91, retired “for a couple of years.” But when the newspaper he had published folded, leaving no Native American press “to cover the Indian reservations of the Northern Plains,” he started a new one, the *Native Sun News*. “Now I am busy as hell and the paper is rolling right along.” Giago reinforces a good point: Simply doing good, honest journalism is a public service.

Like Cline, Daniloff and some others, **Douglas Cumming**, NF ’87, left journalism rather than the reverse. Thanks to a Freedom Forum fellowship, he earned a PhD in mass communications, now teaches at Washington and Lee University, and is awaiting publication of his first book, “Literary Legacies and the Challenge of Modernity.” He also enjoys being active in civic life, although “I still feel funny showing partisan bias or being active in a cause—so I guess I’ll always be a journalist in recovery.”

Laura Eggertson, NF ’96, is still working as a freelancer, but also finds “that my journalism skills are valuable and in some demand from the volunteer community. I am very active ... with the Adoption Council of Canada, helping to write grant proposals, doing some advocacy training, and helping craft long-term strategies.” She also uses her journalistic skills to help other organizations, including the North American Council on Adoptable Children, “to get their message across and to raise their profile with legislators and policymakers.”

To my reading, **Dan Rapoport**, NF ’71, is the quintessential hyperactive volunteer. After a long and varied journalistic career in Washington, D.C., Dan and his wife, Maxine, made a break for Canaan, in upstate New York. He’s writing a history of Canaan for its 250th anniversary; doing press releases for The Chatham Synagogue; involved in the annual book festival at the Spencertown Academy Arts Center; occasionally researches a story that needs telling and then bugs the editor of the *Chatham Courier* to follow up; sits on the Canaan Board of Assessment Review, and picks up highway trash. Dan has discovered that when you are open to volunteering “you don’t really get a chance to specialize.” The result, he writes, “is that I am busier than I’ve been in years and loving almost every minute of it.”

Gerald Jordan, NF ’82, also moved from practicing journalism to teaching it, in 1995. Once he was “freed from my ethical obligations as a daily working journalist,” he writes, “I was tabbed first for a lot of campus committees and subsequent community boards.” Jordan also is active in a number of “community-based nonprofits that serve at-risk youth and persons in similarly dire circumstances. ...” Then there is a “laundry-length list of organizations that support scholarships and related programs.” Jordan is careful because he still works summers as an editor at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*; if he “encounters a story that loosely connects to my advocacy back home, I defer editing it.”

Nancy Rhoda, NF ’81, retired early

from *The Tennessean*. She'd spent the last half of her career as a photo editor and "desperately missed photographing life in the real world." Rhoda found what she sought as a volunteer photographer for the Land Trust for Tennessee. Over the years, she has photographed "about 35 Tennessee landowners, and their farms, through the seasons of the year." Rhoda also trained her dog, Sandy, to work as a therapy dog. She and Sandy work with brain-injured adults and help children who have difficulty reading. When the kids read to Sandy, they make "amazing changes in their self-confidence and progress in their reading skills."

Last, but far from least, is **Arnold Markowitz**, NF '76, who writes that it "isn't a big deal" (but it is) that

he provides his skills to a fly fishing club, primarily as a volunteer at kids' fishing clinics. He also demonstrates fly tying and serves as an observer in sailfish tournaments. "I wouldn't have touched any of that during my reporting career," he writes, "even though I didn't work for the sports section." Markowitz also keeps his hand in journalism with a monthly fishing column for a local paper. Getting "mixed up in community life" is a great way to spend retirement, Markowitz writes, as long as you have something you love. "If you have no life or interests outside the news biz ... you'd better stay in it, or you're liable to go up the wall and not be able to come down."

Of the 999 living journalists who have participated in the Nieman pro-

gram, I heard from a very small sample. Are those who responded exceptional in their desire to put their talents to community use? Probably a little. But their stories do demonstrate powerfully the ways that journalistic skills can enrich community life when they are put to such use. A Nieman Fellowship is an awesome gift, one that I believe requires years of giving back. Volunteer work like that described here is proof that the giving back can continue even after Niemaners move out or move on from journalism. Let's keep talking about our journeys. ■

Jim Boyd, a 1980 Nieman Fellow, is former deputy editorial page editor at the Star Tribune in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

1951

E. Hugh Morris died on June 1st in Frankfort, Kentucky at 94. Morris began working at *The Courier-Journal* in 1937, where he held a variety of positions, including reporter, assistant editor, and assistant state editor. After service in the U.S. Navy, he returned to Frankfort and *The Courier-Journal*, where he worked for 23 years, 17 as bureau chief. Morris received a 1967 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service as part of a group of reporters who covered strip mine abuses.

Dick Wilson, a retired *Courier-Journal* colleague, said in an obituary at www.state-journal.com, "Hugh was the model for many young Kentucky journalists, including myself, who aspired to outstanding state government and political coverage. You couldn't keep up with Frankfort without reading Morris in the *Courier-Journal*."

1972

R. Gregory Nokes's book, "Mas-sacred for Gold: The Chinese in Hells Canyon," will be published by Oregon State University Press in October. The

book is the first authoritative account of the forgotten 1887 massacre of as many as 34 Chinese gold miners in Oregon's Hells Canyon, the deepest canyon in North America. The discovery of lost documents in recent years has made it possible to reconstruct what Nokes has called the worst crime in Oregon history and "in lives lost, one of the worst against the nearly 150,000 Chinese who immigrated to the American West in search of work in the 19th century." Nokes retired in 2003 after 43 years in journalism.

1983

Callie Crossley received an honorary degree at Cambridge College's 38th commencement ceremony in June. The Doctor of Humane Letters was awarded to Crossley, the Nieman Foundation's program manager and a television and radio commentator, public speaker, and the recipient of major journalism awards for her work as a producer on "Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years." Crossley, who also holds an honorary Doctor of Arts degree from Pine Manor College in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, is a Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellow.

1984

Nina Bernstein, a reporter for *The New York Times*, has received the 2009 Hillman Prize for Newspaper Journalism for "Deaths in Immigrant Detention." The Sidney Hillman Foundation presents this prize to "...journalists, photographers, writers and public figures whose work fosters social and economic justice." In describing her work, the foundation said, "Nina Bernstein's sweeping report provided the first important spotlight on the deaths of undocumented workers in detention." Bernstein is also the author of the prize-winning book, "The Lost Children of Wilder: The Epic Struggle to Change Foster Care." The Hillman Prize ceremony took place in May in New York City.

1988

William Dietrich gave a talk and read from his novel, "The Dakota Cipher," at *The Reader's Cove* bookstore on May 7th, hosted by Friends of Colorado State University Libraries, in Fort Collins. "The Dakota Cipher" is the third in Dietrich's series of his-

torical thrillers featuring the fictional American explorer Ethan Gage, after “Napoleon’s Pyramids” and “The Rosetta Key.”

Dietrich currently teaches environmental studies at Western Washington University and advises *The Planet*, the university’s student publication of environmental coverage and the only undergraduate-produced environmental magazine in the country. In 1990, while a reporter for *The Seattle Times*, he shared a Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting on the Exxon Valdez oil spill.

1989

Joseph Thloloe received the Alan Kirkland Soga Lifetime Achiever Award at the eighth annual Mondi Shanduka Newspaper Awards in Johannesburg on May 6th in recognition of his almost 50-year contribution to journalism in South Africa. “This year the award was renamed after Soga, a historic editor from the late 19th century whose credo was, ‘Gainst the wrong that needs resistance; for the good that lacks assistance,’” said Professor Guy Berger of Rhodes University’s School of Journalism and Media Studies and the chief judge. “Thloloe’s life personifies this motto. He is possibly the most respected South African journalist and a professional with an unparalleled wealth of courage, compassion and commitment....”

Thloloe is a former chairman of the South African National Editors’ Forum and president of the Union of Black Journalists.

Cynthia Tucker will become a political columnist based in Washington, D.C. for *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* this summer, with her columns appearing twice a week in the op-ed pages and online at ajc.com. Tucker was previously the editorial page editor of the *Journal-Constitution*. She has frequently appeared as a television commentator and has received numerous awards for her work. In 2007, Tucker won the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary.

Lois Fiore Lauded for 35 Years at Nieman Foundation

At the final dinner of the Nieman year, Bob Giles announced that Nieman Reports’s assistant editor and longtime staffer, Lois Fiore, has accepted Harvard’s early retirement offer, beginning July 1st. He said, “I want to say some words of thanks and appreciation for our friend and colleague who is bringing to an end a Nieman lifetime of 35 years of dedicated service to the foundation. Lois leaves several milestones. She worked for four Curators. She is the longest-serving member of the foundation staff. Her 35 years represent one-half the life of the foundation. Here is another impressive stat: During those 35 years, Lois touched the lives of 804 of the 999 living Nieman fellows....”

Editor Melissa Ludtke said, “I have relied on her judgment, her skill with words, her

eye for the poignant and powerful image, and her steadfast guidance about what aspects of Nieman Reports’ past must remain firm as the magazine evolves to meet changing demands. Most of all, I have valued our friendship. To say I will miss our editorial partnership only begins to touch on the feelings of absence we will have in our little corner of this foundation, for I know that her departure from our daily lives here will leave a void that all of us know will be impossible to fill.”

“I plan to first take a three-week train trip across the country,” Lois said, “and then settle into my studio at the Brickbottom Artist Building in Somerville as a full-time artist and, I hope, a steady correspondent with my treasured Nieman friends.” (www.loisfiore.com.) ■

1992

Charles Onyango-Obbo writes: “The Nation Media Group recently created an Africa Media Division to pursue our expansion and to launch a pan-Africa news magazine, an Africa news portal, and a 24-hour Africa news TV channel by 2012. I was appointed as executive editor to head up the division and make all this happen, so more hours at work and of travel.

“I am working on two books. One on what President Obama means for Africa and the other, on which I have done a little more work, on what it means to be an albino in Africa. With my new assignment the books will suffer, but also it gives me a better opportunity to get quality information and data for them.” Onyango-Obbo can be reached at cobbo@nation.co.ke.

1998

Christine Chinlund has been named deputy managing editor for news operations at *The Boston Globe*, running the newsroom at night. She will also be the senior editor responsible for journalistic standards. Most

recently, she was deputy health and science editor at *The Globe*, where she has worked since 1983.

2001

Ken Armstrong won The George Polk Award, The Michael Kelly Award, and The Payne Award for Ethics in Journalism for a series he did with Nick Perry at *The Seattle Times*. “Victory and Ruins” exposed the criminal histories of members of the University of Washington (UW) football team. The Payne Awards announcement said that the series “revealed a network of lawmakers, university administrators, and athletic boosters who protected more than two dozen UW football players who had been arrested while in college, some for violent felonies.” The Kelly Award praised Armstrong and Perry for showing “the commitment to truth that will alienate readers, risk advertising accounts, and jeopardize a newspaper’s standing during already precarious times.”

Armstrong and Perry are working on a book, “Scoreboard, Baby: A Team’s Rise to Glory and the Dark Side of Our National Obsession,” scheduled for publication in the fall of 2010.

Kirstin Downey's book, "The Woman Behind the New Deal: The Life of Frances Perkins, FDR's Secretary of Labor and His Moral Conscience," was published by Nan A. Talese/Doubleday in March. Perkins was one of Franklin D. Roosevelt's closest friends and confidants, the first woman named to a cabinet post, and a driving force behind the New Deal.

Downey did much of her research during her Nieman year and found obscure New Deal documents in the Harvard archives. Downey writes, "This is really a Nieman-created project. ... My colleagues listened patiently to my stories about my research and have been endlessly supportive over the past nine years I am very grateful to the Nieman Foundation for making it possible for me to do something that I have found so personally meaningful." Curator Bob Giles said, "I remember her great excitement at discovering boxes of papers in the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe that had been missed by other Perkins scholars. She knew it was a rare find." The Library of Congress will include the book in the National Festival of Books, to be held in Washington, D.C. in September.

Downey covered business and economics at The Washington Post for over 20 years, winning several awards.

Eugene Robinson Awarded 2009 Pulitzer Prize

Eugene Robinson, NF '88 and a columnist for The Washington Post, received the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary for "his eloquent columns on the 2008 presidential campaign that focus on the election of the first African-American president, showcasing graceful writing and grasp of the larger historic picture."

Amy Goldstein, NF '05 and a reporter with The Washington Post, was a finalist, with Dana Priest, for National Reporting. They are cited for work on immigration detention centers in the United States,

"melding reporting and computer analysis to expose sometimes deadly abuses and spur corrective steps."

Amy Ellis Nutt, NF '05 and a reporter for The Star-Ledger in Newark, New Jersey, was a finalist in feature writing for "The Accidental Artist," a "deeply reported story of a chiropractor who suffered a severe stroke following brain surgery and became a wildly creative artist, in many ways estranged from his former self."

The awards were announced in April at Columbia University in New York. ■

In 2008, she shared the Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News Reporting with her Post colleagues for their coverage of the Virginia Tech shootings. She left the paper in 2008 to finish her biography of Perkins. For more information on the book, go to <http://kirstindowney.com/book>.

2003

Ronnie Ramos is the managing director of new media strategies and content development for the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Ra-

mon, who began this job in May, is responsible for running the organization's Web sites. Ramos had most recently been sports editor at The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, where he worked for the past five years.

2004

Jodi Rave ended her newspaper career on May 4th to work on in-depth projects, including a book about Elouise Cobell and the Indian trust fund lawsuit. The book will be the result of more than a decade's worth

2009 Lukas Prize Project Awards Presented

Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism and the Nieman Foundation honored the recipients of the 2009 J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project Awards for exceptional nonfiction at a ceremony at the Graduate School of Journalism in New York City in May.

The J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize (\$10,000) was awarded to Jane Mayer for "The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned Into a War on American Ideals." The judges described the book as "the one indispensable narrative, as yet, of what really happened when the George W. Bush administration decided to use torture as a weapon in the war on terror." Mayer is a writer for The New Yorker.

The Mark Lynton History Prize

(\$10,000) was awarded to Timothy Brook for "Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World." The judges said that in the book, Brook "plays a dazzling game of extrapolation, looking closely at the domestic accoutrements in half a dozen paintings and demonstrating that Vermeer's ostensible subject—the provincial Dutch city of Delft—was actually a window through which we can today perceive the rise of international trade during the 17th century and the dawn of global commerce."

The J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award (\$30,000) was presented to Judy Pasternak for "Yellow Dirt: The Betrayal of the Navajos" (to be published by Free Press). This award is given to assist in

the completion of a significant work of narrative nonfiction on an American topic of political or social concern.

Established in 1998, these prizes recognize excellence in nonfiction writing that exemplifies the literary grace and commitment to serious research and social concern that characterized the distinguished work of the awards' Pulitzer Prize-winning namesake, **J. Anthony Lukas** (NF '69), who died in 1997. The Mark Lynton History Prize is named for the late Mark Lynton, business executive and author of "Accidental Journey: A Cambridge Internee's Memoir of World War II." The Lynton Family has sponsored the Lukas Prize Project since its inception. ■

The Charlotte Observer Wins Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Newspapers

The Charlotte Observer's series, "The Cruellest Cuts," has won the Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Newspapers for its coverage of health and safety violations in the poultry industry. Based on thousands of documents and hundreds of interviews, "The Cruellest Cuts" investigation focused on the North Carolina-based House of Raeford Farms and uncovered serious safety regulation abuses that included preventing injured workers from seeking a doctor's care, bringing injured employees back to work just hours after surgery, and hiring underage workers to perform dangerous jobs. Many of those workers were illegal immigrants who were reluctant to complain, fearing repercussions if they did.

Throughout the production of the series, the paper sought comment from Raeford

officials, even twice postponing publication to allow the company more time to respond to questions. Reporters for the series were Ames Alexander, Franco Ordoñez, Kerry Hall, and Peter St. Onge. Ted Mellnik was database editor for the series.

The Observer stories have led to Congressional hearings and efforts to punish the underreporting of workplace injuries, the indictment of a Raeford company manager, increased staffing in the North Carolina Department of Labor, and promises from federal and state legislators to protect young workers from hazardous jobs.

Curator Bob Giles noted that "At a time when the very future of print journalism is threatened, the Taylor Award illustrates yet again why the resources of an established newsroom are invaluable. The kind of

in-depth, time-consuming reporting that many newspaper reporters do is too often undervalued today. We salute the efforts of all the papers that produced such fair-minded entries in this year's competition as well as the critical role they continue to play in our democracy."

The award, presented in April at the Nieman Foundation, includes a \$10,000 prize for the winner. The award program was established through gifts for an endowment by members of the Taylor family, who published *The Boston Globe* from 1872 to 1999. William O. Taylor, chairman emeritus of the *Globe*, embraced the idea of an award for fairness in newspapers as a way to give something back to the craft to which five generations of his family devoted their working lives. ■

of reporting on the 13-year-old lawsuit against the U.S. government for failing to pay Native Americans billions of dollars in royalties from Indian trust lands managed by the Department of the Interior since 1887. Rave also plans to focus on Native American language revitalization programs and her community, Twin Buttes, North Dakota, home of Edwin Benson, the remaining person fluent in Nu'eta as a first language. Rave's final story for the *Missoulian* was a profile of Benson, 78 years old. Rave reported on Native American issues for *Lee Enterprises* newspapers for 11 years.

2004

Ju-Don Marshall Roberts was named executive editor and senior vice president of *Beliefnet*, a spirituality support Web site owned by News Corporation. Roberts will oversee the company's content divisions of editorial, community, video and product, according to a June 5th news release. Most recently, she was named deputy editor of the *Post's* new universal desk and has been the managing editor of *The Washington Post's* Web site. In 2008 Roberts led Web coverage of

the Virginia Tech shootings, which contributed to the *Post* being awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News Reporting. Roberts had worked at *The Washington Post* for 17 years.

2005

Amy Ellis Nutt is the recipient of the 2008 Sigma Delta Chi Award in Feature Writing (circulation of 100,000 or greater) and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing for her *Star-Ledger* story, "The Accidental Artist." This tells the story of Jon Sarkin, a once mild-mannered chiropractor who, after poststroke surgery, awoke with "a single, ferocious urge: to create art," Nutt wrote. Nutt has written for *The Star-Ledger* since 1997. She received a 2003 Distinguished Writing Award for Non-Deadline Writing from the American Society of Newspaper Editors and a 2004 Science Journalism Award from the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

2006

Chris Cobler received the first Editorial Achievement Award from

the Texas Daily Newspaper Association at its annual conference in March. The award recognizes "courage and commitment to the newsroom and leadership in the community" and "advocating and pursuing openness and accessibility to government." Cobler, editor of the *Victoria Advocate* since 2007, received the award for a series on law enforcement in Victoria County. Cobler has won numerous awards for his papers, including best front page for the *Advocate* from Inland Press Association in 2008, the International Perspective Award for the Greeley (Colo.) *Tribune* in 2006 and 2002, and the Robert G. McGruder Award for Diversity Leadership as editor of the *Tribune* in 2003.

Mary C. Curtis now writes for AOL's *MediaGlow*, which runs 70 online media properties. Curtis was one of 22 people hired for its new site, *Politics Daily*. Curtis, based in Charlotte, North Carolina, also contributes to NPR and the *Nieman Watchdog* political and media blog.

Jeb Sharp won a 2009 Dart Award for Excellence in Trauma Coverage for her five-part investigative radio series, "Rape as a Weapon of War."

The PRI series, edited by Jennifer Goren, examined “the brutality of sexual violence in conflict zones and the medical, humanitarian, legal and political response to it,” according to the press release. Judges commended Sharp for her great respect and compassion in reporting the survivors’ stories and her ability to convey the traumatic environments that led to the dehumanizing acts. Sharp and Goren were recognized at a ceremony in April at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, site of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma.

2007

Dexter Filkins received the National Book Critics Circle Award for General Nonfiction for “The Forever War,” his reporting on the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Juanita León has created the investigative political blog La Silla Vacía (The Empty Seat), dedicated to scrutinizing politicians and power in Colombia. León, with Colombia’s 2010 presidential elections in mind, started the project more than a year

ago with help from experts she had consulted during her Nieman year. León is a former editor of *Semana* magazine and *El Tiempo* newspaper and a current fellow of the Open Society Institute. Her blog is at www.lasillavacia.com.

Andrea McCarren’s “Project Immigration” for WJLA-TV was named a regional winner of the Edward R. Murrow Award for News Documentary (www.wjla.com/projectimmigration). McCarren reported, produced and cohosted the special, which explored complex immigration and labor issues, especially in the Washington, D.C. area, which has a high concentration of immigrants from El Salvador. Regional winners of the Murrow award are eligible for the national awards competition, which will be judged in June and presented in October.

McCarren has been a news anchor, reporter and producer for 26 years, the past eight at WJLA-TV until being laid off in January 2009. She is now freelance reporting and doing media training for nonprofits and corporations as well as broadcast training for print journalists. She is also gathering material for her first nonfiction book.

David Jackson received a 2009 Studs Terkel Community Media Award, presented at a 20th anniversary party to “... celebrate the talent in our ever-changing media landscape as well as Studs’ phenomenal life.” At the awards event in 2007, Terkel said the award is to honor journalists who take extra steps to report news “from the people who made Chicago, news that’s bottom up rather than up, down. That’s what this is all about.” Jackson met Terkel at his first internship at Chicago magazine in the 1980’s. Terkel introduced himself to Jackson and said, “I want to meet some young people. Can you help me?” So Jackson took Terkel to a few nightclubs. He remembers Terkel as larger-than-life, somewhat fragile, carrying a large reel-to-reel recorder over a shoulder and an “outlandishly giant” microphone. Jackson said, “It was the most amazing kind of journalistic theater I’ve ever seen.”

Update: In his Spring 2009 Notes article, **Andrés Cavelier**, NF ’08, writes about his new consulting venture. After the issue went to press, he renamed the company FastrackMedia. ■

Four Nieman Fellows Honored By Overseas Press Club

The Overseas Press Club (OPC) announced the recipients of their 2008 awards at their annual dinner in April in New York City.

Dexter Filkins, NF ’07, received The Cornelius Ryan Award for best nonfiction book on international affairs for “The Forever War,” a narrative about his experiences covering the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. OPC said, “his vivid portraits of the arc of violence and death that spreads from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Iraq and even the tip of Manhattan capture the fear and the feel of a global conflagration.”

Amy Goldstein, NF ’05, received The Joe and Laurie Dine Award for best international reporting in any medium

dealing with human rights, along with fellow Washington Post reporter Dana Priest, for the series, “Careless Detention.” The series exposed the unethical treatment and medical neglect of immigrants in deplorably run detention centers across the United States. The awards honored Goldstein and Priest’s careful, critical investigation depicting the “horrors and torture” that detainees endured.

Alma Guillermoprieto, NF ’05, received The Robert Spiers Benjamin Award for best reporting in any medium on Latin America for her *New Yorker* article, “Days of the Dead: The New Narcocultura.” The article portrayed the roots of the “narcocultura” that has “so convulsed Mexico as to raise

concerns about a failed state south of the border.” OPC commended Guillermoprieto for going beyond headline stories and adding new context to the public’s understanding of the situation.

Jeb Sharp, NF ’06, received The Lowell Thomas Award for best radio news or interpretation of international affairs for “How Wars End,” a series for PRI’s “The World.” Sharp reported the series and Patrick Cox was the editor. The series explored the issue of how to determine the appropriate time and way to “disengage from war.” One judge highlighted the series’ approach to thinking about “abstract questions, for example, the tension between stability and justice.” ■

Nieman Fellows 2009-2010 Announced

The Nieman Foundation has selected 24 journalists from the United States and abroad to join the 72nd class of Nieman Fellows. The group includes print and multimedia reporters and editors, radio and television journalists, photographers, book authors, a filmmaker and a columnist.

Curator Bob Giles notes that members of the incoming class reflect the changing news industry: "This year, we received applications from—and awarded fellowships to—more freelance journalists than ever before. They are highly talented professionals who by choice or circumstance don't hold staff positions with established news organizations. In response to their needs and those of all the Nieman Fellows, we will introduce a yearlong multimedia curriculum in the fall, designed to teach new media skills in what is becoming an increasingly competitive market."

U.S. Nieman Fellows:

Martha Bebinger, state house reporter, WBUR, Boston, Massachusetts.

Monica Campbell, freelance journalist based in San Francisco, California. She is the Louis Stark Nieman Fellow, the fellowship that honors the memory of The New York Times reporter who was a pioneer in the field of labor reporting.

Jeff Howe, contributing editor, *Wired* magazine, New York.

Beth Macy, *The Roanoke* (Va.) Times.

Liz Mineo, reporter, *The MetroWest Daily News*, Framingham, Massachusetts. She is the Donald W. Reynolds Nieman Fellow in Community Journalism.

Lisa Mullins, anchor/senior producer, *Public Radio International's "The World,"* Boston, Massachusetts.

Joshua Prager, freelance journalist and author, New York City.

Alissa Quart, author, contributing editor/columnist, *Columbia Journalism Review* and contributing writer, *Mother Jones*, New York City.

Kevin Sites, freelance multimedia journalist and author based in Los Angeles, California.

Anita Snow, AP Havana bureau chief.

Marcela Valdes, freelance writer from Annapolis, Maryland. Valdes is the 2010 Arts and Culture Nieman Fellow.

Shankar Vedantam, national science reporter, *The Washington Post*.

Nieman Fellow in Global Health Reporting:

Hopewell Rugoho-Chin'ono, documentary film director/news producer, *Television International*, Zimbabwe. He is the Robert Waldo Ruhl Nieman Fellow.

International Nieman Fellows:

Audra Ang (China), correspondent, *The Associated Press*. She is the Atsuko Chiba (NF '68) Nieman Fellow.

Maria Balinska (United Kingdom), editor, *World Current Affairs Radio*, BBC. She is the Ruth Cowan Nash Nieman Fellow.

Ibrahim Barzaq (Palestinian Territories), correspondent, *The Associated Press*. He is the Barry Bingham, Jr. Nieman Fellow.

Janet Heard (South Africa), executive editor, *Weekend Argus*. Her fellowship is supported by the Nieman Society of Southern Africa. Heard's father, **Anthony**, is a 1988 fellow.

Joana Gorjão Henriques (Portugal), deputy editor, *Público*. Her fellowship is funded by the Luso-American Foundation and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Jana Juginovic (Canada), director of news and programming, *CTV News*

Channel and executive producer, *CTV News Specials*. She is the Martin Wise Goodman (NF '62) Canadian Nieman Fellow.

Gary Knight (United Kingdom), photographer and editor, *VII Photo Agency* and *Dispatches Quarterly*. He is the Carroll Binder Nieman Fellow.

Alejandra Matus (Chile), freelance journalist for *The Clinic*, *Paula* magazine, *Terra* magazine, and *The Miami Herald*. She is a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Latin American Nieman Fellow.

Boris Muñoz (Venezuela), editor in chief, *Exceso* magazine. He is a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Latin American Nieman Fellow.

James Reynolds (United Kingdom), China correspondent, *BBC News*.

Maxim Trudolyubov (Russia), op-ed page editor for the business daily *Vedomosti*. He is the William Montalbano (NF '70) Nieman Fellow.

The U.S. fellows were selected by Marie Danziger, lecturer in public policy and director of the Communications Program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government; **Louise Kiernan** (NF '05), a senior editor at the *Chicago Tribune*, and **Michael Skoler** (NF '93), founder of *Public Insight Journalism*. **Bob Giles** (NF '66), Nieman Foundation Curator, chaired the committee.

The Nieman Global Health Reporting Fellow was chosen by Linda Harar, a documentary producer, director and writer, and **Stefanie Friedhoff** (NF '01), special projects manager for the Nieman Foundation. The Nieman Fellow in Arts and Culture Reporting was selected by Jack Megan, director of the Office for the Arts at Harvard University, and **Alicia Anstead**, editor of *Inside Arts* magazine, freelance arts writer, and the 2008 Arts and Culture Nieman Fellow. Bob Giles chaired the committees. ■

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IRAN: CAN ITS STORIES BE TOLD?

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

