Global Challenges Quarterly Report

Watchdog for the future: the journalist as pioneer of a new global narrative
GLOBAL CHALLENGES QUARTERLY REPORT
WATCHDOG FOR THE FUTURE: THE JOURNALIST AS PIONEER OF A NEW GLOBAL NARRATIVE

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THE GLOBAL CHALLENGES FOUNDATION works to incite deeper understanding of the global risks that threaten humanity and catalyse ideas to tackle them. Rooted in a scientific analysis of risk, the Foundation brings together the brightest minds from academia, politics, business and civil society to forge transformative approaches to secure a better future for all.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors. Their statements are not necessarily endorsed by the affiliated organisations or the Global Challenges Foundation.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 1. Watchdog for the future</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 A front row seat to history – <em>Lynn Walsh</em></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 The journalist and the UN – <em>Janine di Giovanni</em></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Keeping powers in check – <em>Amanda Siddharta</em></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Reshaping climate reporting: four challenges and one sign of hope – <em>Kristine Angeli Sabillo</em></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 2. The journalist as pioneer of a new global narrative</strong></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Champions for change: building global narratives in a fragmented media landscape – <em>Cristina Manzano</em></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 From fragments to pattern: weaving new global narratives – <em>Amy Wilentz</em></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Time for the rise of global journalism – <em>Peter Berglez</em></td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Beyond Babel: participatory platforms and cross-border narratives – <em>Katharina Kloss</em></td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 The power of a single frame: photojournalism and global consciousness – <em>Katie G. Nelson</em></td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 How to overcome public indifference? – <em>Netta Ahituv</em></td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Relatable heroes – <em>Dina Samak</em></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endnotes</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing the conversation</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Global risks require global solutions. Global solutions require global institutions. This is the premise for the work of the Global Challenges Foundation. In line with this premise, in 2017, the Foundation launched the New Shape Prize Competition to develop a blueprint for new global governance models that might help us address our most pressing challenges. The competition received more than 2700 entries from 122 countries. The winners, selected by a jury of international experts, will be announced to the world on May 29 at the New Shape Forum in Stockholm.

Global institutions, however, cannot be created, updated, or indeed adopted, without global support. Therefore, the work of the Global Challenges Foundation extends beyond the New Shape competition to a range of activities that engage other sectors of society whose support is crucial to new global governance models. These include the present quarterly report series, and an Educators’ Challenge offering ten prizes of 5000$ to develop effective engagement strategies on the topic of global risks and global institutional reform.

Everyone has a role to play in this process. Business leaders, by choosing how companies are managed and what KPIs they use to measure success. Public administrators at all levels of government, by supporting the development of more effective and better aligned policy frameworks. Tech innovators, featured in our previous Quarterly Report, by developing the technological infrastructure that can support new forms of global governance. But an even more crucial role may be that of developing the new narratives that will cement a sense of collective belonging beyond the borders of nations.

For global institutions to gain legitimacy, new global narratives that bind us together are an essential element. The nation state has only been around as a dominant form of social organization for about 300 years, yet the powerful narrative around nations has made innumerable individuals willing to sacrifice everything, including their life, for that idea of the nation. What alternative stories of similar binding force can bring us together and inspire collective action on a global scale at this crucial moment in history, when action on ecological issues alone in the next 50 years will determine the course of the next 10,000?

To address this question, in this report, we turned to journalists, the voice of the people and storytellers of our times. We asked them to share their reality – how their work can ensure that powers are accountable for their actions and lack thereof beyond the short-term, how the dispersed elements of an increasingly connected global story can come together, and how collective action can be catalyzed on a global scale. Journalists, indeed, are the pioneers of our new global narrative, and watchdogs of our collective future.

Mats Andersson
Vice-chairman, Global Challenges Foundation,
Former CEO, Fourth Swedish National Pension Fund,
co-founder Portfolio Decarbonization Coalition
Executive summary

Julien Leyre, Global Challenges Foundation.

The Global Challenges Foundation Quarterly Reports examine how the world is currently jeopardized by global risks of catastrophic magnitude, and what solutions might directly or indirectly reduce, mitigate or – at best – eliminate those risks. In this issue, we focus more particularly on the stories that drive global action and the writers of those stories. What we need to see at this point in global history is global action. This requires global narratives. Therefore, we give center stage to voices from the global media to share perspectives on their work.

The first section of the report, ‘watchdog for the future’, offers four pieces that explore the role of the journalist in guiding public action and holding institutions to account. In the opening piece, Emmy award-winning journalist Lynn Walsh advocates the need for journalists to occupy ‘A front row to history’. The public has a right to know what is happening around them. But in a world that is increasingly global, where facts are often unclear and technological developments blur the distinction between the real and the fake, how can journalists ensure that this right is met? When decisions made on one point of the planet often affect people on the other side, it is vital that journalists can maintain first hand access to leaders, no matter where they are. Without this, we would be without perspective, without context, and in some cases, without the truth.

As the growing threats of war, weapons of mass destruction and climate change increase the need for a form of global government that can protect vulnerable populations, what is the role of journalists when reporting on our foremost international institution, the United Nations? Janine di Giovanni, Edward Murrow Senior Fellow with the Council on Foreign Affairs in New York, reflects on this essential question in ‘The journalist and the UN’. In spite of brilliant work from the new Secretary General Guterres, the UN still faces numerous challenges and limitations, particularly the need to placate the current United States administration. Journalists have a role to play in this context, by working with the organization to continuously increase its transparency, and meet the request of our times for truth telling.

If anyone has the power to solve global crises, it would seem to be our officially elected leaders. However, the leader of a nation only holds responsibility to their national constituencies. This is the premise for Indonesian journalist Amanda Siddharta’s contribution, ‘Keeping powers in check’. How can we incentivize leaders to go beyond the narrow terms of their mandate and address the global challenges that will affect their constituents in the future? Journalists have a crucial role to play in underlining not only crime and corruption, but also abuse of power in the form of neglect. They can alert the public when leaders are not serving its long-term interests and effectively fail to deliver on their mandate, and thus increase the chances that leaders will live up to their moral obligation.

Media interest towards climate change swelled in the run-up to COP21, but after the event, coverage was neither sustained nor effective in mobilizing people. Why does climate reporting fall short of achieving the effects required by the seriousness of the issue, inquires journalist Kristine Sabillo in ‘Reshaping climate reporting: four challenges and one sign of hope’. Indeed, the structure of media organizations favors regular beats and news that sell over climate related issues, there is a lack of journalists trained on the issue, funding for climate reporting is inadequate, and multi-sensory stories accessible to non-expert audiences are difficult to produce. However, global collaboration around climate reporting has already given birth to remarkable projects, and offers great hope for the future.

The second half of the report focuses on the need to develop new types of stories that effectively connect events happening around the planet and make sense of our new shared condition. Media power today suffers from the simultaneous shockwaves of changing business models, fake news, and fragmentation through social networks, explains Cristina Manzano from esglobal in ‘Champions for
change: building global narratives in a fragmented media landscape’. In this context, how can the media construct and disseminate global narratives? In the past century, governments and political leaders played a major role in building global consensus. Today, however, a broader range of actors are trying to make their voices heard. In this new landscape, an incipient global conscience is emerging around issues led by “champions” of all sorts, through a bottom-up approach that harnesses the power of technology. A new role for the media may be to identify those champions, and help their voices stand out from the surrounding noise.

Amy Wilentz, writer and professor of literary journalism at the University of California, explores a similar topic from a different perspective in ‘From fragments to pattern: weaving new global narratives’. With digital development and greater ease of transport, human stories are increasingly intertwined today. Yet the connection between the broader narrative and local circumstances is often lost, whether for climate change, the global refugee crisis, or the ongoing nuclear weapons disaster. Three things must change for global reporting to better weave the stories unfolding across the planet. We need platforms and institutions where work can be shared and fast translations made. We need new models of collaboration and new cross-border agencies. Finally, we need financial support for those platforms and for cross-border investigative projects.

In an increasingly connected world, how can we address the democratic need to adequately inform the public on cross-border issues, such as climate change, financial meltdowns, or big data society? Traditional foreign correspondence overemphasizes domestic interests, argues Peter Berglez, professor of Media and Communication Studies at Jönköping University in ‘Time for the rise of global journalism’. Instead, what we need today is global journalism, an approach to reporting concerned with the interconnectedness of things, where local or domestic affairs are contextualized in relation to global sources.

Could new forms of participatory media powered by digital technology unify people around new global narratives? Katharina Kloss, editor in chief of Cafébabel, one such platform started in 2001 to share stories by and for young Europeans, explores this question in ‘Beyond babel: participatory digital platforms and cross-border narratives’. Four characteristics of participatory digital media are of particular relevance today: they support new forms of cross-border investigations, they allow stories to circulate across linguistic and cultural silos, they support stories natively framed from a global perspective, and they gather audiences that reach beyond national boundaries. Thus, new media platforms, in Europe and elsewhere, might offer a path towards a deeper sense of shared belonging beyond the borders of languages, cultures, and nation states.

Visual storytelling often moves readers more than words ever could, as Katie Nelson, journalist and photographer, states in ‘The power of a single frame: photojournalism and global consciousness’. Powerful images not only make the news, but they can also prompt collective action to face a given challenge. With the rise of digital connectivity, there has never been a better time to use the power of photography. And yet, when the challenges of our times are more intertwined than ever, and billions of photos – real and fake – are shared online everyday, what does the future of photojournalism look like? Emerging initiatives that not only harness the power of photography but also integrate data and research might serve as a rallying call to catalyze viewers into action on behalf of the greater good.

The media should continually remind the public of what is important. But this comes with a price: the more audiences are reminded of a particular issue, the more indifferent they become. How can journalists overcome this challenge, particularly when it comes to the pressing global environmental issue? People want hope, proposes Netta Ahituv from Haaretz in ‘How to overcome public indifference’. And so, by sharing positive stories that nurture this desire for hope, the media can emphasize the urgency of the environmental crisis and develop the need for action, while avoiding the risk of indifference.

When global challenges are covered in the media, how much attention is paid to the most affected citizens? People don’t change their beliefs based on facts and numbers, argues Dina Samak from El-Ahram in the final piece, ‘Relatable heroes’. Inspiring stories of people who choose hope over despair, however, could have this effect. Therefore, when giving disaster a human face, the media may do better than showing only the victims. Relatable heroes, if their stories are shared, could inspire collective action beyond the borders of nations.
Part 1
Watchdog for the future
1.1. A front-row seat to history

Lynn Walsh, journalist.

The public has a right to know what is happening around them. But in a world that is increasingly global, where facts are often unclear and technological developments often blur the distinction between the real and the fake, how can journalists ensure that this right is met? When decisions made on one point of the planet often affect people on the other side, it is vital that journalists can maintain first hand access to leaders, no matter where they are. Without this, we would be without perspective, without context, and in some cases, without the truth.

LYNN WALSH

Lynn Walsh is an Emmy award-winning freelance journalist, creating content focused on government accountability, public access to information and freedom of expression issues. She’s also helping to rebuild trust between newsrooms and the public through the Trusting News project. She is currently based in San Diego, USA, and regularly contributes to Voice of San Diego, the Sunlight Foundation and the Society of Professional Journalists. Lynn also is an adjunct professor at Point Loma Nazarene University.
It’s a description I have heard more than once when people describe what it is like to be a journalist. In a sense, it’s absolutely true. We cover events as they happen, before they happen and after they happen. We sometimes arrive on-scene before first responders. We listen, we watch, we question, we try to understand.

Being in a position to experience history first-hand may sound like an incredibly exciting opportunity, and sometimes it is, but it is an opportunity that comes with great responsibility.

Why? While a journalist is watching a natural disaster or government meeting unfold in front of them, they are not just experiencing it, they are trying to remember everything while using their judgement and knowledge to decipher what information, and in what context, is the most important to share with the public.

I think – and certainly hope – we can agree the public has a right to certain information, a right to know what is happening around them. It’s a journalist’s role to fill that need and that right.

Sometimes that role is easy. We have straight facts. Nobody disputes them. Story deadline met early. Most of the time though it’s more complicated. Very rarely are the facts cleanly laid out on a platter in front of us. Even rarer: all sides agreeing with what is being said.

This is becoming more and more the case when political leaders and those with power are involved. Between public relations teams bigger than some newsrooms and direct communication through social media, access to politicians, government employees and business leaders is becoming increasingly difficult.

In a world that is becoming more global, where decisions made on one point of the planet can often affect people on the other side, it is vital that journalists can access leaders no matter where they are if the public is to understand how governments and businesses are operating, and what impact their decisions will have, close and far. Lack of access is a threat to democracy and freedom. And at the end of the day, it’s the public who suffers the most.

Technology has made communication easier than ever but it has also allowed an ever more confusing mix of information to take over our inboxes and social feeds, making it harder than ever before to sort fact from fiction. As digital technology progresses, manipulated photographs, videos and sound recordings are less and less distinguishable from truthful originals, while armies of bots, less and less distinguishable from humans, can spread those fabricated facts and the stories they support wider and wider.

With all of this information coming so quickly, journalists have to make sure they are deciphering what is real and what is fake – and on this basis, what are facts, what is opinion, and what is pure propaganda. Once that is figured out, the task is to then make sure they can talk to the right stakeholders and the people who will be impacted.

All of this becomes more difficult when meetings are held behind closed doors or information is withheld to protect those in power, particularly when crucial decisions are made in distant international forums. If journalists are not allowed access to meetings or information, the public is left in the dark as well. Without access, without information, journalists have a harder time doing their jobs, which is to keep you informed.

When journalists have access, they can fulfill their public duty: attending long, sometimes arduous, government meetings, public hearings and court cases, so the public knows what is happening in their community and beyond, how they could be impacted and what people in power are doing.

In some cases this means journalists are provided special access members of the public are not. I have been asked more than once why this access is important. Why do journalists get access to a president, a prime minister, a CEO or government meetings?

The answer is, it’s all for you.

**Without this access** the public would be left in the dark, with only information coming from those in power. Would you trust that completely? I don’t. So, it’s journalists that listen to what those in power have to say, then research, fact-check and provide context to what the powerful say.

Journalists seek truth and report it. We do so by minimizing harm to those involved. We act independently. We are transparent. We hold ourselves accountable.

We produce stories that do not make everyone happy. When we hold the powerful accountable, they push back. While it may be easy to take what they say personally and even easier to back off our questioning, we push forward and continue digging. We do this because our stories can help oppressed communities. Our stories can shed light into the darkest pit.

That’s why maintaining journalists’ access to the government, powerful institutions and individuals is so important. While there is more information...
available from more sources than ever (which is a great thing), the role of a journalist, to help people make sense of it all, is also more important than ever – particularly when things make sense only through complex chains of causality that extend beyond the boundaries of a single country.

As journalists we must keep this in mind ourselves. When we are given access, we must remember we have this access for the public. We must not let our personal relationships get in the way. We must remember that access does not mean we will turn a blind eye or ignore something we see, no matter the consequences.

The same holds true in our newsrooms, when we hand the story over to an editor or a publisher, we must make sure that the people we saw and the voices we heard are indeed highlighted, not those an editor or publisher wants to highlight from an office, a block, or a nation away.

When it comes to global stories this is particularly important. We may think that reaching across the planet through phone calls or video chats is enough to say that we have obtained access. But actually living somewhere, immersed in a culture, is different from Skyping in once in a while. Many facts will get lost at a distance, and even when they don’t, without an understanding of the context, they will fail to make proper sense.

As journalists, we need to be where news is happening. We need to be inside meetings with the stakeholders. We need to be walking alongside the protesters to see what they see. We need to meet the community. We need access. The public needs access.

Without journalists and without access we would be without perspective, without context, and in some cases, without the truth. We would live in a world where propaganda is accepted and facts can be debated.
1.2. The journalist and the UN

Janine di Giovanni, Edward Murrow Senior Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations.

As the growing threats of war, weapons of mass destruction and climate change increase the need for a form of global government that can protect vulnerable populations, what is the role of journalists when reporting on the foremost international institution, the United Nations? In spite of brilliant work from the new Secretary General Guterres, the UN still faces numerous challenges and limitations, particularly the need to placate the United States under the leadership of Trump. Journalists have a role to play in this context, by working with the organization to continuously increase its transparency, and meet the request of our times for truth telling.

JANINE DI GIOVANNI

Janine di Giovanni is an award-winning author, foreign correspondent and foreign policy analyst. She is currently the Edward Murrow Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, researching minorities in the Middle East. Janine di Giovanni has contributed to publications including The Times, Vanity Fair, Granta, The New York Times, and The Guardian, worked as Middle East editor at Newsweek, and is the author of The morning they came for us. She is also a frequent moderator of high-level panels, an analyst on foreign policy at conferences and has worked for the World Economic Forum, the World Bank, the UN, Harvard's Kennedy School, Princeton, the LSE, and many other institutions. In 2016, she was awarded the Courage in Journalism Award for her distinguished work in war zones focusing on tracking war criminals over the past 25 years, and most recently in Syria. She tweets at @janinedigi.
P

t-9/11 and post-Arab Spring, we are living in
to protect vulnerable populations against the threat
war, weapons of mass destruction and the ravages
climate change. In such times, what role could
and should journalists play when reporting on the
people and institutions that are currently doing that
much needed work – and foremost among them, the
United Nations?

It has never been a better time to be a reporter.
The fallacies of the Trump administration have
in a sense been an incentive for reporters to dig
deeper, and spend more time on investigations. The
journalist plays a pivotal role in bringing the truth
to light, by revealing hidden facts, interpreting
them in context, shaping narratives, and informing
the public to guide collective action. On one level,
this has caused the press to emerge as stronger than
ever in a time when democracies and human rights
are under threat – but it has equally incentivized
journalists to report about the UN and other
international organizations.

The UN has its own challenges these day. In the
midst of turbulent times, the new Secretary General,
Antonio Guterres has proposed a new strategy to
reform the UN, largely based on making it leaner
and making important cuts in budgets. Guterres is
possibly the most intellectual and humanitarian
Secretary General in the past two decades. But he
faces the extreme hostility of the United States,
an important permanent member of the Security
Council, under the administration of President
Trump. Guterres has had to placate Washington, a
job that one UN observer says takes up an enormous
amount of his time, and to monitor the ‘learning
curve’ of Nikki Haley, US Ambassador to the UN,
who did not come from a foreign policy background.
On both fronts, Guterres has done an impressive job.

In spite of being the world’s main international
institution, tasked with a crucial mission, and
operating on what is in absolute terms a large
budget and a lot of capacity, the UN is nonetheless
limited in what it can do. In particular, the need
to placate member states limits the capacity
for the Secretary General to lead large internal
policy changes that the organization needs. Here,
journalists may have a role to play. For instance,
the Syrian conflict has dragged on with massive
casualty to civilians as well as atrocities and war
crimes from both sides (though one side more than
the other). The role of journalists in unearthing data
on chemical attacks, human rights violations and
casualty rates has been urgent and impressive.

I began reporting on the United Nations – largely
their peacekeeping missions – in the early 1990s.
Writing about the international organization from the
outside was a frustrating, sometimes thankless task. In
those days, technology which we take for granted these
days – instant messaging, Skype, WhatsApp, even
Internet – did not exist. Our means of communication
was usually an expensive satellite phone.

Therefore, those of us working in the deep field – in
Bosnia, in Rwanda, in Somalia – usually existed in
a bubble where the real story and the real news did
not exist unless we excavated it ourselves. So, the UN
communications team (often consisting of a single
spokesperson) who would descend on an emergency
or crisis zone was imperative to our field work and our
research.

The spokesmen (I can’t ever recall a spokeswoman
in those days) varied from the excellent (Peter Kessler,
now a Senior UN official at UNHCR comes to mind) to
the truly dreadful bureaucrats, sometimes sent on a
mission without a real grasp of what was happening on
the ground, or just a clear loathing of reporters and the
industry. There were occasions when they concealed
the truth, or deliberately led us off track, which to
a reporter is akin to lying. This was not so much an
internal culture of secrecy than an attempt to keep
reporters in the dark, without the true and full facts. In
this, the UN was not behaving exceptionally.

Times have changed in terms of bringing the news to
the public. The UN’s Department of Public Information
under the wing of Secretary General Antonio Guterres
has grown and advanced and is now led by a former
New York Times Foreign Editor, Alison Smale, who is
an excellent journalist and reporter, and leading a team
of hundreds. In terms of logistics, communications
have made the UN more accessible. This is purely a
matter of technology – the UN web pages and archives,
as well as photo libraries, are available to anyone.
Agencies like UNHCR or UNDP have their reports and
their data on line, making it impossible for a reporter
to say they could not access information. In the past,
we had to rely on getting someone on the phone to
check facts or get statistics. That could sometimes take
days, or weeks.

But the organisation is still not completely
transparent to reporters. Several times when I have
done ‘deep dives’ into investigating various UN
agencies or divisions – the Syrian peace talks, or the
role of the new Secretary General, Antonio Guterres
– I still encountered a cloak of silence. I also found,
however, that there were plenty of whistleblowers, ready to step forward and point out the gaps, the discrepancies and the dead ends in the UN system. Some of them came forward because they were aware of wrongdoings, and their moral imperative made them want to speak the truth.

**Our times call for truth telling.** This changing atmosphere opens a great opportunity for journalists to work more closely with the UN, and play a role in supporting the development of positive, transparent and ethical global governance institutions. There is also more crossover with reporters – such as myself – who work as consultants for the UN on various projects in which we have expertise, and can thus increase transparency.

I’ve never given up on reporting and the urgency of it, particularly in a time when the public needs to know the global risks facing us all. It has been a hard three decades working world-wide, bringing out the news. But it is a task that has left me greatly fulfilled, and a task which I hope has in some way shaped policy, particularly towards civilians in times of war or conflict.
1.3. KEEPING POWERS IN CHECK

Amanda Siddharta, journalist.

If anyone has the power to solve global crises, it would seem to be our officially elected leaders. But the leader of a nation only holds responsibility to their national constituencies. How can we then ensure that leaders go beyond the narrow terms of their mandate and address global challenges that will affect their constituents in the future? Journalists have a crucial role to play in underlining not only crime and corruption, but also abuse of power in the form of neglect. They can alert the public to breaches of trust, when leaders are not serving their long-term interest and effectively fail to deliver on their mandate, and thus increase the chances that leaders will live up to their moral obligation.
I f anyone has the power to solve global crises, it would seem to be our officially elected leaders. Their roles are crucial in light of the global crises occurring all over the world today: terrorism, poverty, rising inequality, more than 65 million people displaced – as well as the looming environmental catastrophe of climate change, and the real possibility that one billion people will be climate refugees by the end of the century. Such crises warrant immediate action, and for this, who but our leaders can we put our hopes in?

It is only natural that when we give a few select individuals the power to lead, we expect them to lead for the better. But the leader of a nation only holds responsibility to their national constituencies. For now, we do not have elected global leaders explicitly responsible for solving crises that are increasingly global in scope. Thus, national leaders need to go beyond their mandate in order to address global issues, not only on moral grounds, but also from a pragmatic perspective – because those issues affect their countries. How can we then ensure that national leaders step up to global challenges? How can we hold them accountable to the long-term welfare of the world?

Going unchecked, an immense power is prone to abuse. We typically think of abuse as corruption or oppression. But it can also take the more insidious form of neglect: neglecting issues that will affect the population only with a delay – issues that will affect people too young to vote, or issues that will affect mainly people yet unborn.

This is where the journalist comes in, to serve as a watchdog over those who might hold the key to solving the world’s most vexing issues. It is not a journalist’s job to appease the government in power, but to question whether every step taken is serving the public’s interests. It is a journalist’s job to inform the public of any wrongdoing by the government, and ensure that the right issues are given priority.

There are times when leaders decide on a course of action that they think will address an ongoing problem – and in the process violate some of their citizens’ most basic rights, or even commit crimes against them. But leaders can also fail in their duty to stand up to crises by neglecting their global mission in favor of short-term interests or for political gains. This occurred when the elected leader of the US, one of the world’s most influential nations, declared his intention to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, putting collective efforts to deal with climate change in jeopardy. We cannot expect every single elected leader to readily go beyond their mandate and forsake their immediate interest for a bigger cause. But journalists, with the help of public pressure, can push those in power to take action – not only for the short term, but for the long-term.

Perhaps the world is still haunted by the image of a dead Syrian boy washed up on the beach in 2015. The photo and subsequent news reports incited an international outcry and forced most European countries to change their stance on the refugee issue. Through stories like this one, the media can highlight the plight of people directly affected by the crisis and harness the power of public emotion towards collective action, demands or resistance, ultimately leading to changes in policy.

The media can also track the progress of international agreements to solve ongoing crises. Reporting should not stop after an agreement has been made, but ensure that execution follows and continues over time. Extensive coverage on the countries that pledged to the Paris agreement, for example, is needed to ensure that their leaders will remain true to their words, and effectively take measures to stop further temperature increase.

Given the importance of the media in spurring the leaders’ decisions to address the most crucial issues, while complying with the rule of law and respecting human rights, journalists need to maintain a consistently critical stance toward leaders and continue to monitor events unfolding in the world. By doing so, the media can increase the chances that leaders will live up to their moral obligation. Without often realizing it, journalists play an important role in promoting better global governance simply by reporting a story to the public, and alerting them to breaches of trust, when leaders are not serving their long-term interest, and effectively fail to deliver on their mandate.

In turn our leaders owe it to the public to let journalists do their jobs in informing the people. Any crime against media workers by any governing individual or institution – and, worse, impunity for those crimes – should cast a serious doubt over the intentions of those holding power.

After all, as the saying goes, journalists are there to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comforted – not only within the boundaries of one country, but on a global scale.
1.4. Reshaping climate reporting: four challenges and one sign of hope

Media interest towards climate change swelled in the run-up to COP21, but after the event, coverage was neither sustained nor effective in mobilizing people. Why does climate reporting fall short of achieving the effects required by the seriousness of the issue? Four key reasons might explain this: the structure of media organizations favors regular beats and news that sell over climate related issues, there is a lack of journalists trained on the issue, funding for climate reporting is inadequate, and multi-sensory stories accessible to non-expert audiences are difficult to produce. However, global collaboration around climate reporting has already given birth to remarkable projects, and offers great hope for the future.

KRISTINE ANGELI SABILLO

Kristine Angeli Sabillo is a multimedia reporter of ABS-CBN, the leading television network in the Philippines. She was formerly Chief of Reporters of INQUIRER.net, a top news website in the country. While with Inquirer, she covered the aftermath of supertyphoon Haiyan, as well as the 2015 climate negotiations in Paris, as part of CFI’s Media 21 Asia program. She regularly reports about climate change, politics and consumer issues.
The force unleashed by super typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines has been described as comparable to that of an atomic bomb. The statement should not be discarded as pure rhetorical excess. Although typhoons leave no lasting radiation behind, they do release energy that is sometimes equivalent to multiple nuclear explosions.

The devastation wrought by typhoon Haiyan confirmed this. It exploded on the city of Tacloban, where storm surges claimed the lives of thousands of people. Journalists like myself sent to survey the aftermath of the typhoon considered it a war zone. Villages were reduced to rubble. Bodies littered the streets. The living had nowhere to go.

It was there that I realized the threat of climate change was real. Climate change is not just a slow rise of the average temperature, resulting in more balmy nights and sweatier days: it brings extreme material destruction and human suffering in its wake.

Two years later, I found myself in Paris, covering the climate negotiations. With me were 3,000 other journalists, more than three times the number present in Lima for the Conference of the Parties (COP) the year before.

Media interest in climate change swelled in the run-up to COP21 in France. But once the show was over, it was business as usual for many of these reporters. Despite the interest drummed up by the high-profile event, media coverage was neither sustained nor effective in mobilizing people, at least according to a paper published last year by the Nature Climate Change journal.

Climate reporting falls very short of achieving the effects required by the seriousness of the issue. Four key reasons explain why this is the case.

First, inadequate coverage of climate change may be traced to the structure of media organizations. Many of them follow old beat systems, whereby each journalist specializes on just one core topic or location. Unlike politics or business, climate change is not a regular beat. There are no daily events that help generate news about it. Reporters get caught up in the daily grind of breaking news, and have little time to work on extensive stories about climate change. Meanwhile, in the context of commercial competition between media outlets, editors are made to focus on news that sell – consumer stories, political controversy, business or sports.

Second, in cases when media organizations are interested in regularly covering climate change, it takes a while to find the right person. Climate reporting is not offered as an elective in most journalism schools. Journalists often learn on their own through self-directed, online courses like that of Poynter’s News University or by applying for fellowships abroad.

Third, with media organizations unable to fund climate-related investigations or even spare journalists to focus on in-depth stories, reporters who want to pursue the topic of climate change need to seek institutions and networks who are willing to foot the bill. Some initiatives do exist, but their numbers are extremely limited.

Fourth, it is difficult to produce reports on climate change that fully engage the audience. Stories that will convince people to care and act are the ones that put a human face on the issue, or capture it in one iconic and memorable image. This is even more important and difficult for stories about climate science that need to visually capture the passage of time and make abstract models concrete. New media does allow journalists to produce compelling, multi-sensory stories. However, such engaging cross-platform reports are still too rare. Costs are high, teams are large – and both funding and expert journalists are in short supply.

A sign of hope, however, is that global collaboration on climate change stories has increased.

In the aftermath of Haiyan, climate change brought Filipino journalists together. Instead of out-scooping each other with stories, journalists on the ground offered each other food, water and satellite phones. Unlike other beats where competition is cut-throat, climate change has become a common enemy for many journalists. More practitioners seek cross-border reporting projects or learning opportunities. Networking has become as important as skills training – as demonstrated by the success of the Global Investigative Journalism Conference and similar events, gathering thousands of journalists in one venue.

Some remarkable projects have emerged from those collaborations. The Guardian teamed up with non-government organization Global Witness to document the deaths of environmental activists who went against destructive industries. In the months leading to COP21, the Earth Journalism Network developed “A More Vulnerable World,” a compilation...
of 40 remarkable in-depth stories about the world’s most climate-vulnerable communities. This project resulted in the formation of more local organizations for environment journalists and increasing interest around the world in stories about climate change. Technology supports this active collaboration. Besides facilitating discussion, new media allows journalists to produce compelling, multi-sensory stories across different platforms. The New York Times’ interactive story “Greenland is Melting Away,” published a month before the Paris talks, made use of drone footage, satellite imagery and maps to illustrate how scientists get data to test climate models. Last year, The Economist released “Ocean: The mystery corals,” a 360 degree virtual reality experience that shows how the coral reefs in Palau are able to survive warm and acidic water caused by climate change. But those are only two projects out of a handful each year, when many more would be needed.

It is crucial that such collaborations can occur on a larger scale, as happened when hundreds of journalists worked together on the Panama Papers and the Paradise Papers. Not only does the work require massive manpower, it is also essential that multiple voices and perspectives be heard. A shift in focus should accompany this change in magnitude. Journalists have explored how climate change resulted in melting permafrost, rising seas, bleached corals, and extreme weather. Perhaps it is time for us to move the story forward and shift our collaborative efforts towards holding government and companies accountable.

For this, new questions need to be answered. What is the best funding source for climate change related projects? Are funds allotted for projects used properly? Are international efforts truly benefiting climate-vulnerable countries? Questions will have to be more pointed. Targets will have to be bigger. Collaborations will have to be grander in scale. Stakes will be higher as journalists play a crucial role in guiding the world towards a sustainable future. The media needs to choose now if it will give climate change problems and solutions front page treatment – or whether we would rather wait for scenes of chaos and disaster to take over headlines across the globe.
Part 2

The journalist as pioneer of a new global narrative
2.1. Champions for change: building global narratives in a fragmented media landscape

Cristina Manzano, director, esglobal.

Media power today suffers from the simultaneous shockwaves of changing business models, fake news, and fragmentation through social networks. In this context, how can the media construct and disseminate global narratives? In the past century, governments and political leaders played a major role in building global consensus. Today, however, a broader range of actors are trying to make their voices heard. In this new landscape, an incipient global conscience is emerging around issues led by “champions” of all sorts, through a bottom-up approach that harnesses the power of technology. A new role for the media may be to identify those champions, and help their voices stand out from the surrounding noise.

CRISTINA MANZANO
Cristina Manzano is the director of esglobal, an online publication on global affairs in Spanish (former Foreign Policy Magazine Spanish edition). She is now a columnist for El Periódico, and writes for the Spanish-language Huffington Post. She is also editor of Pensamiento Iberoamericano, a magazine about political economy, trends and cooperation in Latin America, after a career in media, think tanks and corporate communications. She sits on the Advisory committee of the Real Instituto Elcano and is a member of the European Council on Foreign Relations.
I. It was already a best-seller, but when Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg mentioned Moises Naim's *The End of Power* as one of his favorite readings, the book became a worldwide hit.

What Naim describes in it is how power in all spheres – from politics to business and from ideas to religion – is more and more fragmented; how it is easier than ever to reach, but also easier than ever to lose; and how all that is happening at a faster pace.

That is happening to media, too. Once an extremely powerful industry – the press, a pillar of democracy – it is now suffering several simultaneous shockwaves. On the one hand, the change of business model, pushed by the economic crisis in general, the advertising crisis in particular, and the birth of the Internet, with its immense universe of free content. On the other hand, the growing threat of fake news, whereby progress in digital technology increases both our capacity to manipulate images, sound and videos, and our capacity to share ‘alternative facts’ on a large scale. While manipulation and distortion are nothing new, the emergence of an army of trolls and bots able to spread blunt lies to a worldwide audience and the quite certain suspicion that some governments may be behind them have undermined the trust of the public in the media.

A third major element contributes to the fragmentation of media power: social networks. Newspapers, TV and radio stations were for a long time the main agenda-setters. What was featured on their front pages and opening pieces signaled what the audience had to pay attention to. Now, a growing number of people get informed through the scattered landscape of social media, without a given order or hierarchy. This environment often acts as an echo chamber where opinions and preferences only get amplified, rarely confronted.

**In a recent Pew Research survey** of 38 countries worldwide, a median of 42% say they get news on the Internet at least once a day. Overall, a global median of 35% get news daily through social media. A similar trend is observed by Latinobarómetro, the main regional survey in Latin America: while traditional formal (news outlets) and informal (friends) sources of information see their influence decrease, social networks see theirs increase.

This new environment makes the construction and dissemination of global narratives only more difficult. In fact, it has never been an easy task.

Audiences around the world declare that they follow national and local news closely (as per the Pew Research survey abovementioned), not so much international or global news. That fact is aggravated by the lack of global, or even regional outlets.

This, in part, can also be explained by a language factor. CNN was successful because they could reach an extensive – and quite elitist – audience in English, inextricably linked to a Western view of the world. Later, Al Jazeera or RT, among others, came to offer their own perspectives and agendas, in their own languages, to other kinds of audiences. However, these networks seem to increase polarization and fragmentation rather than to channel global collaboration. Accusations against RT, described as a weapon of misinformation by the Kremlin, or blunt attacks on Al Jazeera in the battle among regional powers in the Middle East are just two examples.

**Whenever global consensus** has been built in the past century, the voices of governments and political leaders have played a major role. It was the case with the creation of the United Nations and, at a regional scale, with the European Union, after the cathartic experience of WWII. It was the case again with different attempts to foster cooperation among African countries and Latin American states, and later on with the gathering of 10 Asian countries around ASEAN.

Today, however, any attempt to build a global narrative linked to the construction (or reconstruction) of global governance structures must face the co-existence of many different actors – political leaders, activists and NGOs, corporations, experts – all of them trying to make their voices heard. Moreover, the mere reference to the need for such global mechanisms is often met with opposition and suspicion. This dispersion increases the difficulty of articulating global narratives that resonate with the public, at the very same time that the media must adapt to a new technological, economic and cultural environment.

And yet, if media fragmentation poses challenges to global narratives, it also offers new opportunities. A bottom-up, more democratic approach that takes advantage of the possibilities of technology is emerging. The result is an incipient global conscience around certain issues – not so much around structures – led by “champions” of all sorts.

**Probably the most impressive** example is the Women’s March. Gathered around the opposition to President Trump. The movement took more than 6 million people to the streets in 34 countries around the world to defend women’s rights, equality and empowerment the day after his inauguration. More
important, it has since then renewed the debate on gender equality worldwide. It is difficult to imagine the #MeToo movement, and its powerful impact, without the atmosphere created by the Marches – an atmosphere that was captured, circulated and amplified by the media around the world.

The media themselves can be the leading actor in bringing a crucial issue to the attention of the global community, as the Panama and Paradise Papers show. Here, a global network of journalists and media organizations joined forces in a unique manner to tackle a pressing global challenge: money laundering and corruption.

New platforms, such as Change.org or Avaaz, are instrumental in harnessing collective action around some of today’s most pressing issue. Avaaz, for example, claims to have mobilized more than 1.5 million people around the world to push for the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, at a point when expectations of achieving any meaningful result at the summit were very low. In Europe, despite the traditional apathy of European societies towards the European project, thousands of youngsters showed their support to a common future based on a given set of values, coordinated by the movement Pulse of Europe.

In this new landscape where individuals, movements or civil society organizations become “champions” driving collective action, one of the most pressing tasks for the media may be to identify those champions, and help them consolidate their work amidst all the noise. But after all, serving as a filter, a watchdog and a disseminator of social change has been the traditional role of the media for a long time, hasn’t it?
2.2. From fragments to pattern: weaving new global narratives

Amy Wilentz, writer and professor, Literary Journalism program, University of California.

With digital development and greater ease of transport, human stories are increasingly intertwined today. Yet the connection between the broader narrative and local circumstances is often lost, whether for climate change, the global refugee crisis, or the ongoing nuclear weapons disaster. Three things must change for global reporting to weave stories unfolding across the planet in a more comprehensive and powerful way. We need platforms and institutions where work can be shared and fast translations made. We need new models of collaboration, including cross-border agencies where reporting is gathered, circulated and refashioned into global reports. And finally, we need financial support for those platforms and for cross-border investigative projects.

AMY WILENTZ

Amy Wilentz is an American journalist, writer, and professor at the University of California, Irvine, where she teaches in the Literary Journalism program. She was Jerusalem correspondent for The New Yorker, and is the author of a number of books, including Farewell, Fred Voodoo: A Letter From Haiti (2013), which won a National Book Critics Circle Award. She is a contributing editor at The Nation, and her work has also appeared in a broad range of publications, including The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The New Republic, Harper’s, Vogue, San Francisco Chronicle, The Village Voice, The London Review of Books, The Huffington Post, The Daily Beast, The Los Angeles Review of Books, Democracy, and Politico. She has received the Whiting Writers Award, the PEN Martha Albrand Non-Fiction Award, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters Rosenthal Award.
2.2. FROM FRAGMENTS TO PATTERN: WEAVING NEW GLOBAL NARRATIVES

There have always been shared human stories that unite the globe. Among the earliest are the handed-down narratives of the world’s religions, some of which have helped diasporas around the world to share an important element of their culture globally, in spite of very different day-to-day experiences. Other global stories brought together dispersed groups in a connected set of events: usually these had to do with war or trade, as in the hideous global story of African slavery that connected so many parts of the world. But most often, there were simply similar human stories happening separately, in many places: stories of cruel dictatorships in Indonesia and Paraguay, say, or broken families in France and Nepal, or poverty in so many places around the world.

With greater ease of transport, infinitely faster dispersal of images and words, and a stunning pace of development in so many populous corners, shared human stories today are increasingly intertwined. Yet reporting on those new global stories proves to be one of the hardest tasks for journalists, and the subjects of those stories often fail to see the connection between the broader narrative and their daily lives.

Thus: climate change, a planetary catastrophe we all must deal with, or fail to deal with at our peril. Thus: environmental disasters and the rapid disappearance of species. Thus: the world’s refugee crisis that involves so many nations in a chain of misery and dilemma. Thus: the ongoing nuclear weapons disaster, affecting all humankind.

One of the gravest problems in dealing with these issues on a global scale – where they need to be dealt with – is that the stories often remain unconnected. So that a drought in Africa that causes a massive exodus around the Mediterranean, say, is not clearly seen to be a result of climate change; or a series of terrible floods in South Asia are not seen to be a result of climate change and also the cause of increased human trafficking from the region – in both cases, because different journalists operating in different spaces are in charge of each thread, but no one is explicitly responsible for weaving them together.

The climate change narrative is a particularly hard one to globalize because it happens on so many levels, in so many ways, all the time. The structure of the world’s most prominent media outlets is not normally a cooperative one. Every news outlet wants as much market share as it can get, and all see themselves as in competition with one another. In addition, it’s entirely possible that a Montreal newspaper, an American television station, and a Mexican radio journalist might be working on the same regional climate change story at the same time, and publishing or airing at the same time, yet never connect with one another. Both language barriers and competitive traditions are obstacles to global narrative sharing.

But there are some hopeful signs. When language is shared, stories can travel speedily around the globe and narratives can be connected. One such story was the 2013 Rana Plaza garment factory collapse in Bangladesh, in which 1,134 people were killed and another 2,500 injured. This story was quickly globalized because – as a consequence of colonialism – English is a language shared between the reporters who covered the collapse and those writing about garment workers in the Anglophone world. Pretty quickly, the world was made to understand the relationship between the building’s pancaking to the ground, the cynical, money-grubbing, depredations of unscrupulous middlemen, and the blind-eyed behavior of fast-fashion mega-chains, and then, finally, the complicity of the Western consumer in the deadly system. This global narrative changed some business practices.

The Syrian war has also raised the global community’s awareness of our most serious shared problems. The mutual destruction of so many factions, the utter victimization and eventual displacement of large chunks of the Syrian population, and their subsequent arrival on foreign shores, has shown us just how global the narrative of a civil war can become; and the media has treated it as such.

In both cases, it was possible to weave the global narrative because the story was dramatic and photogenic, and touched nerves in many nations. Climate change stories have been more gradual and often less visible – they’re hard to capture in a snapshot – and need to be taken up as global narratives more consciously and efficiently to have this impact and reach.

Three things must change for global reporting to become more than a pot-shot possibility.

We need platforms and institutions where work can be shared and fast translations made, not just from Spanish or English to French or Arabic, but from hundreds of prevailing languages throughout all continents. Including important local narratives in the global conversation would add a sense of urgency for influence wielders and policy makers. Agricultural workers in California’s Central Valley walking miles to
fetch water might be interested to hear about African villagers suffering under the same burden for some of the same reasons.

We need better models of journalistic collaboration. They cannot all be wikis. Direction and management – what are known as “gatekeepers” – are necessary for such platforms to be successful: a crowd-sourced website will not be adequate, although it could function as a part of the mix. We need to develop continent-wide news agencies where professional and citizen reporting is gathered, circulated and refashioned into global reports. Those would connect us and pull together the threads of the common narrative.

Finally, we need financial support for those platforms and for cross-border investigative projects. Many news organizations have cut back their foreign coverage in the turbulent wake of the Internet onslaught, but this coverage needs to be restored. Public financing, charitable corporate underwriting, and lots of creative thinking needs to be called upon to establish such institutions. If we fail to achieve this, we will only continue with narratives of climate change, refugees, and the dangers of nuclear armaments fragmented into their constituent parts. This fragmentation sucks the true force and meaning out of these global narratives, and allows the interests that fuel these crises to continue on unimpeded.

2.2. FROM FRAGMENTS TO PATTERN: WEAVING NEW GLOBAL NARRATIVES
2.3. Time for the rise of global journalism

Peter Berglez, Professor, Media and Communication Studies, Jönköping University.

In an increasingly connected world, how can we address the democratic need to adequately inform the public on cross-border issues, such as climate change, financial meltdowns, or big data society? Traditional foreign correspondence overemphasizes domestic interests. Instead, what we need today is global journalism, an approach to reporting concerned with the interconnectedness of things, where local or domestic affairs are contextualized in relation to global sources.

PETER BERGLEZ

Peter Berglez is Professor of Media and Communication Studies at Jönköping University, Sweden. His research primarily focuses on the relation between media and globalization and environmental/sustainable communication. He is a member of the advisory board of the media platform project The Global Academy, and is the author of Global Journalism: Theory and Practice, published in 2013.
The digital revolution generates enormous masses of information that circulate among ever more people worldwide. And yet, life in the global village does not necessarily generate media information about this village. This is a serious democratic problem. Today’s globalized world requires a new kind of journalism that investigates how the practices, problems and life conditions of people in various parts of the world are interrelated. Only journalism equipped with a global outlook, i.e. a global journalism, can develop adequate coverage of climate change, financial meltdowns, drug and human trafficking, Internet surveillance, life science, big data society, and other cross-border issues.

This new form of reporting, which is still in its initial stages, has three main characteristics. Interconnected processes and events that occur simultaneously in separate places across the world are explicitly brought together. Global power plays – whether conflicts, trade patterns or negotiations – are analysed as a complex mixture of domestic, foreign and global drives. Groups and political identities are presented in a manner that shows continuities across borders.

Global journalism is a democratic must because life at the local level is increasingly influenced by decisions, actions and processes taking place somewhere else. And yet, the processes of globalization often seem abstract and invisible, and therefore, active efforts to understand it appear as not so urgent. This is treacherous.

Journalism is part of the problem. It promotes a “national container” perspective, to use the words of Ulrich Beck, whereby society is continually reduced to the home nation-state. However, in today’s news ecology, something quite different is needed, otherwise media will gradually lose contact with an increasingly complex society. Journalism could be part of the solution if the perspective shifted, so that global and local realities would be presented as intertwined, not distinguished.

Global journalism should not be confused with traditional foreign correspondence. This form of journalism specializes in covering events abroad for domestic audiences, often overemphasizing domestic interests – how will the results of foreign elections affect our nation, or were “our” citizens involved in a disaster that occurred on foreign soil? In contrast global journalism is occupied with the interconnectedness of things: the practice is not centered around a distant event but instead a relation between “here” and “there”, which also becomes the point of departure for journalistic explanations.

International news services, such as Reuters and AP, but also CNNI and BBC World, with their cross-border scope, might be viewed as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (pre-) version of global journalism, but they still fall short of covering relations between cross-border events and peoples, and thus actively bringing the world’s continents closer to each other. Perhaps, tomorrow’s global journalism will primarily be developed in the context of domestic reporting. This is because global journalism might also be viewed as a necessary updating of domestic media information in which local or domestic affairs are increasingly contextualized in relation to global sources. Implanting this global outlook in domestic media could also make it commercially sustainable, as most studies of media consumption conclude that people prefer information about geographically and culturally proximate events.

Is a paradigm shift in the history of media production realistic? Media experts of the tech-romantic kind suggest that more and freer digital networks are the answer to the problem, but they tend to forget that the global outlook also requires a new form of storytelling and thus a new journalistic mindset. Thus, it is not the case that specific platforms (for example, social media rather than TV) automatically generate global outlooks. Others argue that global challenges such as the energy issue and oncoming water supply crisis increasingly force media to become cross-border. This might well be the case, but the process goes too slowly. Like ostriches, too many media organizations bury their heads in the hyperlocal sand, repressing the external world for the sake of “business as usual”. So far, there are no obvious signs that transnational regions, such as the EU, are generating more and better cross-border journalism than other parts of the world.

Actors on the media market leading the development of global outlooks are likely to become winners in the longer term. In the competitive race, those nation-states with populations that quickly adopt a global outlook on society will have an advantage, and become highly equipped for cross-border collaboration. A shift probably requires initiatives from both the market and the State/public service system but also from independent projects. In the latter case, a promising example is the media platform The Global Academy (in
development), which covers and explains global issues by bringing in academic scholars from all parts of the world in the journalistic production.

Today’s embryonic examples of global journalism cover global crises such as climate change, or the dark side of the global economy, such as ICIJ’s Panama Papers story. But future global journalism could and should include many more stories in which unknown cross-border relations are brought to public daylight in a systematic manner. In turn, this will create appetite among the readership for news coverage that goes beyond the artificial boundaries of nations, and properly renders the complex chains of causality that prevail in the age of globalization. In a world characterized by emergent need for problem solving across national boundaries, is not this the only way for media to remain democratically relevant?
2.4. Beyond Babel: participatory platforms and cross-border narratives

Katharina Kloss, editor in chief, Cafébabel.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, new cross-border digital media platforms have emerged – such as Cafébabel, a magazine sharing stories by and for young Europeans. Could those new forms of participatory media powered by digital technology unify people around new global narratives? Four characteristics of participatory digital media are of particular relevance today: they support new forms of cross-border investigations, they allow stories to circulate across linguistic and cultural silos, they support stories natively framed from a global perspective, and they gather audiences that reach beyond national borders. Thus, new media platforms, in Europe and beyond, might offer a path towards a deeper sense of shared belonging beyond the borders of languages, cultures, and nation states.

KATHARINA KLOSS

Katharina Kloss is editor in chief of Cafébabel, award winning media by and for young people in Europe. After European journalism studies and various media experiences in Germany, France and the UK, she has worked as a journalist and editor in Paris since 2007. Fluent in 4 languages, she is especially interested in cross border approaches. Her stories are also featured on arte, L’Express, New Eastern Europe or ParisBerlin. In 2017 she has edited XYZ, a crowdfunded book featuring a best-of Cafébabel features from the last 15 years.
At a time when the digital media revolution has brought forth an age of global conversation and financially pressed newsrooms must diminish their correspondent networks abroad, transnational approaches to journalism could be the solution to provide the citizens of the world with the information they need, and unify people across borders around new global narratives. This is of particular relevance in light of the challenges we face today: climate change, tax evasion, or the ongoing refugee crisis, all reach across national borders and require new approaches.

Cafébabel, which started in 2001, is part of this new approach, as the first multilingual participatory magazine made by and for young Europeans. The platform is anchored in the continent’s core values of tolerance, peace and respect for diversity – even as it supports a robust discussion of shortcomings in the current political project and its inability to meet the challenges of our global societies. In that respect, it can be seen as an expression of the European project, born of a desire to avoid the future possibility of conflict between the nations that had just experienced the atrocities of the Second World War.

Cafébabel is part of a broader trend towards the development of new forms of media. The first participatory digital media platform, OhMyNews, was created in Seoul in 2000, and published a Korean, a Japanese and an international English platform. Most of the content was written by freelance contributors – ordinary citizens rather than professional journalists. In recent years, many more outlets with similar models have emerged around the world. Citizen journalism platforms such as Global Voices or even Huffington Post or Medium, as well as participatory translation projects such as Amara – an inclusive subtitling platform for worldwide video contents – play a role in creating more inclusive global narratives and bridging cultures to uncover stories underrepresented in mainstream media.

Four developments made possible by those new forms of participatory digital media are of particular importance today.

The first is a capacity to develop world-wide investigative projects using the power of the crowd. Bellingcat for example, launched in 2014 by British blogger Eliot Higgins, combines open source technologies and social media to investigate global stories such as the conflict in Syria or Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine. The Italian project Generation E partnered up with several media outlets such as German CORRECTIV and journalism++ to crowdsourced data on Europe’s migration wave. “The Migrants Files”, which it developed, have been the biggest investigation into the deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean area so far.

The second is a capacity to get information and stories out of language silos. Since 2006 Beijing-based Yeeyan operates a platform crowdsourcing the translation of Western news into Mandarin – and has gathered a community that counts over 600,000 members today. Meedan – a word meaning ‘town square’ in Arabic – created an online forum to reveal and discuss contrasting perspectives on events between the Arabic and the Western world, through human and machine translation. Cafébabel took on a similar challenge for the European continent, and publishes stories in six languages. In the biblical story, the tower of Babel was a construction of human pride, and resulted in punishment for humanity, which was dispersed around the globe, and separated into different languages. The magazine aims to reverse the curse of language barriers, and bring people back together around a multilingual public conversation in a virtual café.

The third is the capacity to develop a natively global understanding of current affairs. News do not stop at the border, yet often, journalists remain attached to their local context. So that citizen journalism can create more integrated narratives, a particular editorial approach is required that breaks the typical national-foreign correspondent bubble. Contributors must focus not only on their national readerships, but brainstorm topics and angles that might engage readers from different cultural backgrounds.

Finally, participatory media is in a unique position to create a unified audience across borders. In particular, participatory outlets developed online are in a good position to cross borders through social media channels, newsletters and content partnerships. Strategies for further audience development include harnessing the Facebook algorithm for automated content distribution according to the geographical location of the reader. Teaming up together via content syndication presents another strategy for future cross-border journalism. New syndication platforms for independent European media, or the more recent Newsmavens.
With continuous globalization, digital disruption and decreasing revenues in the media sector, sharing resources and relying on a strong community becomes more crucial. “If it had to be redone, I would start with culture.” This famous sentence attributed to Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of the EU – although he might have never pronounced it – contains a very simple truth: it is mostly culture that ties the people in Europe together, and the development of a unified culture is at the core of peace-making. 

Cafébabel’s primary purpose is to accompany Europe’s integration process. When Europe is ready to speak with a common voice in the world, we’d be probably ready to go more global. With decreasing demographics on the ‘old continent’, participatory journalism by and for young people will have to watch out beyond European borders to reach new audiences. Recently, cafébabel featured a multimedia piece on a European initiative empowering girls in Nepal through skateboarding. This kind of stories could be springboards towards more global conversation between continents – and why not one day the creation of a local hub on another continent.

People have been willing to die for national narratives – and continue to this day. If we want to build a joint sense of belonging to our increasingly integrated planet, we must build the conditions for a sense of common destiny. For this, participatory digital media has a crucial role to play.
2.5. The power of a single frame: photojournalism and global consciousness

Katie G. Nelson, journalist and photographer.

Visual storytelling often moves readers more than words ever could: powerful images not only make the news, but they can also prompt collective action to face a given challenge. With the rise of digital connectivity, there has never been a better time to use the power of photography. And yet, when the challenges of today are more intertwined than ever, and billions of photos – real and fake – are shared online everyday, what does the future of photojournalism look like? Emerging initiatives that not only harness the power of photography but also integrate data and research might serve as a rallying call to catalyze viewers into action on behalf of the greater good.

KATIE G. NELSON

Katie G. Nelson is an independent journalist and photographer covering human rights, global health and accountability issues in East Africa. Her writing and photographs have been published by Al Jazeera, Associated Press, National Geographic and Public Radio International. She also contributed to a 50-state investigation into accountability, transparency and corruption for the Center for Public Integrity and Center for Global Integrity. Prior to this, Nelson has worked in the humanitarian aid sector in Africa. Her work as a journalist is rooted in the desire to connect seemingly disparate narratives into a collective sense of humanity.
As a journalist and photographer, I have spent much of my career capturing stories of inequality, corruption and man-made tragedy across East Africa and the United States. From crouching under cars to photograph dust storms in drought-stricken northern Kenya, to staying in secret safehouses to document the plight of gay and transgender Ugandans, I have used photography as a catalyst to inspire action on a global scale.

Photographs have been long been a central part of news reporting. From the long-exposure glass plate cameras to the development of the compact 35mm camera, journalists have sought to document reality and bring life to otherwise static stories across the planet and for the planet.

These days, the importance of photography often runs parallel to the story itself. From the largest daily to the smallest monthly, nearly every newspaper publishes their lead story with an accompanying photo. And even journalists rooted in the hard-nosed techniques of an investigative news reporter realise that visual storytelling often moves readers more than words ever could.

From the jungles of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where Brent Stirton photographed a group of grief-stricken men carry a makeshift gurney holding Senkwekwe, a 500-pound silverback mountain gorilla who was slain during the region’s ongoing and brutal conflict, to the cracked, wind-swept landscape of Somalia, where James Nachtwey documented the inhumanity of the 1992 famine that killed 260,000 people, to Eddie Adams’ 1968 image of a South Vietnamese National Police Chief holding a pistol to the head of a Viêt Cộng captain, photography has shaped history and shifted perspectives on events that would otherwise be forgotten.

These images not only made the news, but gathered attention and prompted collective action to face a given challenge. Stirton’s documentation of gorillas led to a legally binding treaty to protect the endangered animal in nine African countries including the Congo. Nachtwey’s image of the woman being carried in a wheelbarrow is credited with raising 250 million dollars for The International Committee of the Red Cross and helping save 1.5 million lives. Adams work bolstered policy and move minds? From composition, to lighting, timing and even mathematical theories, there are many factors that, when combined, can make a good photo. Photographs must also be timely, truthful and newsworthy; otherwise they’re not considered photojournalism. But at its essence, photojournalism is a tool for simplifying the complexities of a story into a single frame and providing a clear narrative that encapsulates the emotional, physical and mental dynamics of a story while maintaining the accuracy of the situation.

Beyond the technical beauty of an image is also a deeply emotional and subjective experience. Such images often portray a sense of vulnerability and softness within harsh circumstances, or juxtapose feelings of power against powerlessness. They connect humans through universal emotional experiences like love, loss, pain and most importantly, empathy for the subject.

But what separates good photography from great is its ability to capture a brief moment in time that can be extrapolated into a larger experience of collective humanity – essentially, of capturing the individuality of mass tragedy. A daughter’s grief as she watches a burial team collect her father’s body at the peak of Liberia’s Ebola outbreak, the fragility of a single emaciated Polar Bear foraging for food in the midst of global warming, a frightened Afghani girl posed in front of a bullet-riddled wall, these images illustrate the individual impact of complex and often intangible tragedies.

Despite the importance of photojournalism, it is unclear what the future of the industry will be, and what role photojournalism can play in addressing some of today’s greatest challenges – environmental degradation, climate change, ecosystem collapse and their impact on humankind.

Today, more than half the world’s population has access to the Internet and billions of photos – real and fake – are shared online everyday. Audiences are more immune to the power of images, and less likely to trust images they know might have been manipulated.

The great photographs of the past were made in a time when newspapers provided the world’s news feed, when readers waited with bated breath for the morning and afternoon editions to hit the stands. They were made when crises were relatively contained in time and space, and when newspaper budgets were bursting. Today’s global challenges are increasingly complex, intertwined and multilayered;
capturing those intricacies, providing actions to address them and maintaining the world’s attention at the same time is an increasingly difficult task.

As photojournalists, we know how to reveal emotions in the face of a person confronted with a challenge – but the story of humanity at risk is not a story of individual failing: it is collective failure to cooperate. What does a picture look like that highlights not individual suffering, but a call to action for institutions to collaborate?

While photographers will continue to grapple with that question, glimpses of new initiatives aimed at addressing a greater call to action are emerging, albeit slowly. PhotoVoice, a participatory photography program, supports marginalized communities to respond to global crises through photography. Wildlife researchers in East Africa are combining GPS-tracking cameras and user-generated photography to identify the role of climate change and ecosystem collapse on animal migration trends. Technology specialists are creating apps that help refugees report infrastructure and governance failures inside sprawling camps by using a location pin and photographic documentation. These initiatives are not only able to harness the power of photography but also integrate data and research to show the scale and impact of environmental destruction.

Still, there are no simple answers to solve the immense global challenges ahead of us. Climate change, pandemics and war are interconnected and multi-layered, and so are the solutions to solve them. While there is no one-size-fits-all model for impactful photojournalism, nor do most photojournalists believe their photo will single-handedly save humanity. But it is clear that photography can be used as a rallying call to catalyze viewers into caring and acting on behalf of the greater good.

As photojournalists, it is our role to seek out those who have been silenced, to document tragedy and to share our truth to the world. But our viewers also have a job in front of them: to engage with the world through our photography and to act on the stories we’ve so tirelessly fought to share.
2.6. How to overcome public indifference?

Netta Ahituv, journalist, Haaretz Newspaper.

The media should continually remind the public of what is important. But this comes with a price: the more audiences are reminded of a particular issue, the more indifferent they become. How can journalists overcome this challenge, particularly when it comes to the pressing global environmental issue? People want hope. And so, by sharing positive stories that nurture this desire for hope, the media can emphasize the urgency of the environmental crisis and develop the need for action, while avoiding the risk of indifference.

**NETTA AHITUV**

Netta Ahituv is a senior magazine correspondent and editor at Haaretz Newspaper, based in Israel. In 2014 she won the Pratt Prize for journalism in the category of “Extensive and Important Body of Work”. She also has a weekly radio program about urbanism at Galatz Radio Station. She has a master degree in Environmental Philosophy and a bachelor degree in Biology and Humanities, both from Tel Aviv University. She founded a woman soccer league in Israel, in which 100 women play soccer weekly as a hobby and as an empowering tool.
2.6. HOW TO OVERCOME PUBLIC INDIFFERENCE?

In his biography My Paper Chase: True Stories of Vanished Times, Harold Evans, the mythological editor of the British newspaper The Sunday Times, writes that the public tends to collectively forget burning matters. Therefore, one of the many roles played by newspapers and other news platforms is to continually remind the public that this or that issue is still at stake.

Evans is right – it is crucial that journalists will use the platform given to them to state what is important, what is worth covering and debating over and over again. But they must not forget that it comes with a price, a rather significant one, which Israeli journalists are familiar with. Reminding readers or audiences over and over again about a particular issue creates a public indifference towards it.

The Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz, for example, writes daily on matters related to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. The price we “pay” for that daily reminder is that most of the Israeli public has become “used” to reading about it by now, and therefore is somewhat apathetic towards its daily reality. Even Israeli readers who consider themselves as peace-seekers often feel desperate and helpless towards the issue, to the point that it numbs their potential activism. They are not to blame; it is hard to keep oneself highly interested in an ongoing daily matter. The newspaper is not to blame either; it is its duty to report.

The challenges reporters and editors have to overcome while reporting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are similar to those encountered by journalists and editors worldwide covering the environmental crisis. It is the media’s role to continually remind the public and its leaders that such an urgent crisis exists and that critical actions must be done to counter it, but while doing so – they might despair and numb the public opinion towards it.

Nevertheless, how can the international media regularly report on issues related to global warming, climate change, pollution and species extinction, as it should do, but at the same time refrain from creating this “indifference screen” of the public towards it?

The answer might lie in another British newspaper, The Guardian. In 2015, The Guardian launched an environmental campaign focusing on global warming and its connection to the use of fossil fuels. Its title was “Keep It in The Ground,” and it included articles, events, and actions aiming to broaden the use of clean energy sources and disinvesting from the fossil fuels industry. The campaign had two phases and after the first one, the editors browsed through the comments and remarks received by their audiences in order to decide what direction they should take for the second phase.

What they found out while “listening” to their readers is that “one message came through loud and clear,” as they described it in a Q&A regarding the campaign: “people want hope.” The editors wrote that “there’s no doubting that the challenges posed by climate change are monumental, but we believe that the potential of clean energy and the stories of people finding new ways to fight climate change are currently underreported.”

Within this answer, we can find a path that can crack the indifference wall. The positive narrative can function as a means to continually remind people about the urgency of the environmental crisis while refraining from arousing potential numbness.

I find it helpful when reporting on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. When describing a hopeful narrative within the complex conflict, readers are keener to listen. Positive reporting opens the heart, and the message is more likely to come through. Delivering the message of urgency and nurturing the need for action is one of the most important roles the international media has today regarding our planet.

The domino effect of “hopeful” journalism can be observed through the effects of media coverage during the Arab Spring – putting aside the varied results of the Arab Spring itself. In 2010, more than ten countries were carried away by revolutionary waves against corrupt and non-democratic regimes. Millions of people went out to the streets calling for change. The Arab Spring is attributed mostly to social media, mainly Facebook and Twitter. It is true that social media supplied significant leverage to this uprising, but it is also the standard news outlets that made it THE hopeful story of its time, while spreading an optimistic vision from one country to the next.

The change-demanders went out to the streets because they were carried away by a hopeful narrative. It was a mesmerizing moment in global history, in which a vast cross-border community emerged after collectively realizing how similar their claims were, and how powerful their unity.

The Arab Spring is a lesson to us all. It hints that a global uprising against the big corporations contaminating our land, waters and skies and
against their collaborators in key positions – those allowing them to keep compromising our health, our environment and our safety – might be closer than we think. The outline is not so different from the Arab Spring – a global community, fed up with influential figures affecting their lives without accountability, realizes that they share the same problems, and thus feels that together, they can change this reality. When we frame it this way, it seems that an Environmental Spring may be just around the corner.
2.7. Relatable heroes

Dina Samak, journalist, Al Ahram.

When global challenges are covered in the media, how much attention is paid to the most affected citizens? And how often are they painted as protagonists in stories of resistance, rather than helpless victims? People don’t change their beliefs based on facts and numbers, but inspiring stories of people who choose hope over despair could have this effect. Therefore, when giving disaster a human face, the media may do better than showing only the victims. Relatable heroes, if their stories are shared, could inspire collective action around the world.

DINA SAMAK

Dina Samak is a journalist, editor and writer. She is currently the Deputy Chief Editor of Ahram Online, the English-language news web site published by Al-Ahram Establishment, Egypt’s largest news organisation. For more than 20 years Dina Samak has been covering and writing about major developments in Egypt’s politics and economy. Her work has been featured in a number of leading newspapers and TV and radio broadcasters, including BBC Arabic and Al Jazeera TV. She has also been a juror for a number of journalism awards, including the Journalistic Distinction Award given by the Egyptian Journalists Syndicate.
In December 2016, almost all major news outlets reported the death of Anas El-Basha, “the last clown of Aleppo”. Anas El-Basha was centre director at Space of Hope, a civil society group working with children in ISIS-held Syria. He was killed in an airstrike over the eastern part of the city.

As a news editor based in Egypt, I have followed the events of the Syrian civil war since its beginning. Yet the colourful face of the 24-year-old activist El-Basha is the image I remember most to this day, more than the spiralling figures of raids, casualties, and bombed cities, or the international players involved in one of the deadliest wars of this century.

However, as a journalist, I have wondered what made El-Basha’s death newsworthy, while his life was just another detail in the devastating picture that finds its way to our screens every day. Could the story of a “clown” who devoted his life to cheering up traumatized children in a city besieged by death and violence not make more of a difference if it were told as a message of resistance and inspiration, rather than another example of just how bloody the seven-year-old war in Syria has become?

The media covers contemporary global governance challenges and arrangements, and thus seeks to uncover the dynamics of power therein. However, as it does so, little attention is paid to the most affected citizens and what they are doing to address those challenges. Instead, the media often portrays them as victims of the actions and omissions of policy makers, not as survivors or, more importantly, protagonists in stories of success and resistance.

In recent years, more and more researchers have argued that people don’t change their beliefs based on facts and numbers. The fear of forces beyond our control makes denial the only defence mechanism we have. How can the media, then, help readers feel empowered, and thus more engaged? The main way that it can, I believe, is by sharing inspiring stories of people who choose hope over despair and resistance over apathy.

For years, the media has attempted to give disasters a human face, but the only faces it shows are those of the victims – images of a dead Syrian child washed up on the shores of Europe, or a mother sitting with her children in the ruins of a city levelled by a devastating earthquake in Haiti. These efforts have succeeded in raising readers’ sympathy, but media consumers are rarely given ways to help or act, other than perhaps through financial donations or by signing a petition. Donations may help release pain for a time in the most affected areas but, in themselves, they will not put an end to global crises, nor even make progress towards including citizens as active players in addressing them.

In the face of global warming, international terrorism, or military conflicts, media audiences feel no different than those watching a disaster movie: waiting for the world to be saved by a superhero with powers far exceeding their own. Could we, instead, present the stories of relatable heroes, individuals and collectives who, faced with adversity, find the strength and means to resist or even overcome their challenges?

Ayan Muumin, a Somali mother of eight living in Vollsmose, Denmark, gathered a group of mothers to set up an initiative called Sahan. The volunteering mothers, with growing persistence and enthusiasm, go door-knocking around the poor, crime-ridden suburb where immigrants reside, talking to neighbours and inviting them to share their food and stories. Many of the mothers volunteering were once victims of discrimination and alienation, while some had to deal with the threats of possible radicalization of their children, but instead of feeling vulnerable or helpless, these women chose to make a difference no matter how small it is.

Over 150 women volunteer for this organization today, running a community hotline to advise other mothers on how to deal with their children against radicalization. While dozens from Denmark have joined ISIS in the last few years, there are no reported cases from Vollsmose. I wonder how this under-reported success story could inspire mothers in countries like France and Holland or even Tunisia, Egypt, and Afghanistan – and beyond, what other initiatives it might inspire to overcome the barriers of national and cultural difference.

In 2011, while the whole world was watching the political and economic developments in post-revolution Egypt, some young environmentalists who themselves were present in Tahrir square on January 25 were starting a new initiative. Nawaya is an NGO that tries to help Egyptian farmers to switch from small scale conventional farming communities to sustainable ones. Since the 1950s when chemical pesticides were first used in Egypt, more than a million metric tons of pesticides have been released into the environment. But for the young men and women who launched Nawaya, the change they seek could only be accomplished by looking beyond organic or fair-trade production. With volunteer experts in the fields of sustainable agriculture, eco-housing, development, education
and social-integration, Nawaya trains underprivileged farmers and introduces them to a new mode of collective thinking and action.

In the micro societies that Nawaya attempts to build, everyone is involved in decision making and planning for the future. The same farmers who start as trainees become trainers themselves, passing the message and the experience forward. This initiative, which survived the political turmoil during the past years, is one of the few that have a comprehensive, collective vision about changing the rural community in Egypt from the bottom up. However, not many people know about Nawaya and the daily challenges faced by its volunteers.

Due to conceptual and practical factors, the media struggles to report on daily issues outside glass rooms and conference halls. Budgets are shrinking, and there is greater pressure than ever to produce more articles in less time to maximize audience and profit. With these factors in mind, putting a human face on global challenges is so difficult that these efforts should be applauded, even though they are not enough to inspire the kind of plural engagement in which global citizens grasp the importance of being part of a wider active network that has a vision towards the future of this fractured world; a network that can both learn from and inspire others around the globe.

At the same time that global challenges become increasingly pressing, fake news and alternative facts are creating more alienation, apathy, and pessimism. What we need from the media at such a crucial time is more stories telling us that we, as citizens, do matter and can have a huge impact. From migrant mothers fighting radicalization in Denmark to young people trying to build alternative sustainable societies in Egypt, only stories of real people resisting can inspire us to get out and make the change the world needs.
Endnotes

1. http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/624782/yolanda-czar-is-no-american-caesar
5. Gorilla in the Congo: http://100photos.time.com/photos/brent-stirton-gorilla-congo
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