Global Investigative Collaboration

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In this chapter, we focus on how investigative cross-border collaboration has arisen and developed in the digital era by drawing upon our relatively unprecedented access to several news workers at the *Forbidden Stories* organisation in Paris during its formative phase. This collaborative network grew out of the desire of a professional journalists' collective to defend their freedom of speech following the Charlie Hebdo terror attack in 2015. Forbidden Stories seeks to protect and redistribute investigative projects where the journalists who initiated them are either imprisoned or endangered and does this by organising transnational and investigative collaborations in Europe and, more recently, in a broader Global North and Global South context. We conducted our interviews with informants at the organisation, as well as some of its networks, in 2018 and 2019. We were especially interested in the hybrid aspects of these global

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collaborations with respect to technology, culture-specific modes of communication, and professional practices and standards. Rather than perpetuating the fraught divide and binaries between 'mainstream and alternative, digital and non- or pre-digital journalism' (Witschge et al., 2016, p. 2), we studied the ways in which they mixed and combined various methods that led to the common goal of holding power to account around the world.

This is captured in Chadwick's observation that 'hybridity alerts us to the unusual things that happen when distinct entities come together to create something new that nevertheless has continued with the old' (Chadwick, 2017, p. 4). Chadwick's historical approach to this notion goes back to the seventeenth century, when hybridity carried 'a racial meaning as a label for mixed racial inheritance', but extends into the present context, where it implies that something traditional is merging with something new to create 'a mixed character' (Chadwick, 2017, pp. 10–11). Given the sheer scale of the ongoing dispersion and hybridisation of journalistic activity, both obvious and less so (Domingo, 2016, p. 145), the term hybrid might appear too general or all-encompassing to be useful as an approach, yet academics have relied on it nevertheless. It has been applied in journalism studies to entire institutions (Reese, 2021), media systems (Chadwick, 2017), and professional cultures in a global context (Waisbord, 2013). Yet, such studies tend to often overlook exactly how their subjects became hybridised.

Arjun Appadurai (1990) talks about how hybridity takes place in global flows, where 'sameness' and 'difference' blend to produce the 'triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular' (Appadurai, 1990, pp. 307–308). This quality, Appadurai suggests, emerges as a consequence of disjunctive flows of people, technologies, money, ideologies and media within what he describes as the 'global cultural economy', which is marked by a 'tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization' (Appadurai, 1990, p. 295). This tension has been exemplified through the empirical study in this chapter, where investigative collaborations exhibit shared elements as well as elements that are unique to individual iterations, reflecting the fact that 'sameness' and 'difference' can exist simultaneously. Furthermore, and as a result of the simultaneous flow of homogenisation and heterogenisation, Appadurai suggests that this new global cultural economy 'cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries)' (Appadurai, 1990, p. 296). Because

new media ecologies and networks continue to emerge, we will use the present study to engage with how hybridisation is both negotiated and, ultimately, normalised (Örnebring, 2016).

This trend is particularly evident in the current practice wherein investigative reporters who are working on open-source investigations, for example, must collaborate with non-journalistic emerging actors who are tech savvy, such as Airwars, Bellingcat, Forensic Architecture and Syrian Archive (Müller & Wiik, 2021). There is clearly increasing awareness of the need for hybrid collaborations across disciplines, across cultures, and across investigative reporters themselves in a more globalised world. In a strategy report on the global diffusion of the practice of investigative journalism, Kaplan (2013) considers globalisation critical to the ways in which watchdog reporting had transformed and points to the related need for public accountability, particularly when journalists are targeting crime and corruption. One of his main concerns is the lack of financial support for non-profit investigative groups, though he ultimately concludes:

> Global and regional networks of investigative journalists backed by donors and fuelled by globalization and an explosion in data and communications technology are growing increasingly effective and sophisticated. Journalists are linking up as never before to collaborate on stories involving international crime, unaccountable businesses, environmental degradation, safety, and health problems. (Kaplan, 2013)

This rise of a 'Global Fourth Estate' (Berglez & Gearing, 2018) is also obvious in the response to global criminal networks and organised crime presented by the work of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), which insists, 'With the help of a "criminal service industry" – corrupt banks, law firms, registration agents, and lobbyists – criminal networks have steadily grown their markets, and the world's most corrupt officials and tycoons look, launder and hide stolen money for future use […] OCCRP believes in a network to fight a network' (from the OCCRP website). In this sense, insight into the rise and diffusion of investigative global collaborations and networks could not be more relevant.

DIFFUSION OF INVESTIGATIVE GLOBAL COLLABORATIONS AND NETWORKS

Pioneering American initiatives such as the Global Investigative Journalist Conference and the Global Investigative Journalist Network (GIJN) paved the way for world-spanning collaborations. According to David Kaplan, the GIJN executive director, the idea of cross-border journalistic collaboration was initially slow to take root (personal communication, 17 July 2019). The first Global Investigative Journalism Conference, at Lillehammer in 2016, arose through the efforts of the executive director of the Investigative Editors and Reporters (IRE) organisation, Brant Houston, and Danish investigative reporter Nils Mulvad. According to Kaplan, Houston was a guest at Mulvad's home in Aarhus, Denmark, in the spring of 2000 to host a program for journalists about computer-assisted reporting (CAR), and he suggested that the next time they offered the program, they should 'invite the world' (Kaplan, 2016). By the time the Lillehammer conference took place, the GIJN[1] network had grown to 138 members in 62 countries (Kaplan, 2016).

In what follows, we will explore the hybrid aspects of the work at Forbidden Stories following a description of the origins of the organisation, focusing on the roles played by digital technology, communication and hybrid professionalism in its collaborations. It is worth noting that most of our Forbidden Stories informants were still recovering from the traumatic experience of being first at the scene of the terror attack at Charlie Hebdo in 2015. This event inspired the Forbidden Stories founder, Laurent Richard, to propose a professional collaborative network which could publish the projects of endangered journalists for free, both in Europe and elsewhere. Forbidden Stories has also coordinated cross-border collaborations involving unfinished projects by killed, imprisoned or persecuted reporters, evoking, in turn, the equally spontaneous response of Dan Bolles' journalist colleagues following his murder in 1976 in Arizona by resentful subjects of his reporting. This response became known among watchdog reporters as the Arizona project (Grey, 2021), and it involved people taking time away from their own media organisations and projects to complete Bolles' unfinished investigative

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[1] The Global Investigative Journalism Network is a hub for reporters around the globe. The aim of the network is to build and strengthen watchdog journalism around the world with a specific focus on the parts of the world where journalism is repressed by regimes.

stories. Like the Arizona project, Forbidden Stories underlined the message that killing the journalist will not kill the story. By using technology to connect reporters across borders and cultures, Forbidden Stories is able to digitise the ideological reaction of its 'custodians of conscience' and realise important progress in the practice of investigative journalism.

CONSTRUCTING A GLOBAL INVESTIGATIVE COLLABORATION AND NEGOTIATING HYBRID ELEMENTS

One scholarly approach to journalism positions its norms and practices as the means through which its work (and perspective on actual events) is constructed and shaped (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Tuchman, 1978). In line with Paterson and Domingo (2008), we hold that understanding the actual production process of journalism is essential to a broader view of the field, but one must discern between it and the sponsoring organisation's ideals (Paterson & Domingo, 2008, p. 2). As Schlesinger memorably wrote, ethnographic methodology opens the black box of production by seeking out 'basic information about the working ideologies and practices of cultural producers'. Production studies have long revealed a rather one-sided focus on the physical newsroom, whereas the emergence of a hybrid media ecology (Reese, 2021) has now forced the consideration of virtual spaces and engagements as well. Unlike the first and second 'waves' of journalism studies (Cottle, 2000), then, we now find researchers more interested in bottom-up collaborations and online networks than top-down organisational strategy and tactics (Berglez & Gearing, 2018; Heinrich, 2011).

As an analytical device, hybridity naturally undermines the typically dichotomous approach of many studies—an approach which views the profession of journalism as either unified *or* divided in terms of practitioners' attitudes and goals (Waisbord, 2013, p. 229), but rarely both at once. When hybridity is used as a lens through which to view cross-border collaboration, though, its value is even more evident in the context of a world which has increasingly become more networked in terms of geography but also professional (and academic) discipline.

Method and Empirical Data

For this chapter, we draw upon semi-structured qualitative interviews that took place in person in London and Paris and on Skype in 2018 and 2019. We engaged our informants in three dedicated phases related to (1) how the Forbidden Stories global network was first established, (2) how its practices were implemented and organised, and (3) what the salient experiences, challenges and benefits related to cross-border collaboration were, particularly in terms of the Global South and Global North. In the first phase, we focused on interviewing reporters, managers and a developer-reporter at Forbidden Stories. Next, we conducted follow-up interviews with the founders and original team at Forbidden Stories a year later, as well as a network collaborator based in the Global South and several others who had a lot of experience with cross-border collaboration between the Global North and the Global South. In the third phase, we again interviewed experienced cross-border collaborators.

As background to our research here, it is important to note that we came across the newly established Forbidden Stories while conducting a different study. One of our informants told us that the platform was positioning itself to impact the field in terms of overcoming journalist endangerment, and we were able to secure unprecedented access to the professionals who were most involved in putting it together. Since that time, other scholars have taken an interest in Forbidden Stories (Grey, 2021), but no one else was there when it first came together. At that time, it had only a few employees, but they all possessed unique knowledge and insight into its entrepreneurial phase, making them 'elite informants' (Figenschou, 2010). We also saw Forbidden Stories as particularly interesting because it was a direct and constructive response to a critical event (the Charlie Hebdo attack) (Konow-Lund & Olsson, 2021), and its first cross-border collaborative investigation focused on another critical event—the killing of Maltese blogger and investigative reporter Daphne Caruana Galizia. As a result of this event, 45 reporters from 18 different news organisations and 15 different countries joined a collaboration led by Forbidden Stories called the 'Daphne Project', which produced articles in the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*, among other places.

After our initial round of interviews with the Forbidden Stories founders, we returned to Paris in 2019 to ask follow-up questions concerning the organisation of work at the platform. The core team was very small, originally consisting of four people, including war correspondent and

experienced foreign correspondent Laurent Richard. He was supported by a documentary producer and two reporters; before long, the platform took on another experienced reporter and another documentary maker, plus an editorial manager. In 2018, Forbidden Stories also hired an experienced tech reporter and developer. We conducted two interviews in Paris in the summer of 2018 and one on Skype in the early fall of 2018, as well as several interviews in London with reporters who had taken part in Forbidden Stories collaborations but also worked with the European Investigative Network (EIC), the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), and the Global Investigative Journalist Network (GIJN). The Global Investigative Journalism Network is a hub for reporters around the globe and it aims to build and strengthen watchdog journalism around the world with a specific focus on the parts of the world where journalism is repressed by regimes.

Ultimately, again, our study relied upon the qualitative research methodology known as 'elite' interviews, which tend to involve top-ranking executives (Giddens, 1972), skilled professionals (McDowell, 1998), or experts with unique insights and knowledge (Richard, 1996; Vaughan, 2013). While this is not a new research methodology, it remains relatively rare in the field (Figenschou, 2010); still, it suited our available informants, especially given their pivotal roles in Forbidden Stories from the start. The interviews lasted from 50 to 90 minutes, which allowed for productive depth regarding certain details.

How a Terror Attack Led to a Global Investigative Collaboration

Through our interviews, it became clear that the establishment of the Forbidden Stories network arose out of certain professionals' anger at how the Charlie Hebdo attack tried to undermine basic journalistic norms and values, as one informant told us:

> We were the first ones to go in there. They [the colleagues at Charlie Hebdo] were working on the same hallway as us, so we saw the two brothers coming in the building, we heard everything, and we were the first ones to try to give help. So, we saw them, we arrived, and it was already too late. They were motionless, they were already dead, but it had a huge impact on us, obviously, because they were killed because of their drawings. (Informant, Forbidden Stories, 20 August 2018)

According to this informant, the terror attack led to a desire to do meaningful work to protect both journalism as a form of freedom of speech as well as the journalists themselves. After all, the informant stressed, there are 'dozens of journalists killed every year' due to their work:

> A lot of them, they're all working on global public interest issues. Several of these journalists are also covering wars – that's information we need – but a lot of them are also working on local issues that are also global issues because they're involving a lot of companies or businesses that are today global. They're all working on human rights violations. There's different topics – environmental issues, corruption, tax evasion. (Informant, Forbidden Stories, 20 August 2018)

Several informants we interviewed noted that the establishment of Forbidden Stories also pointed back to a tragic event which took place in Arizona in 1976:

> The idea [of the platform] is not new, actually. Don Bolles was killed in the USA in Phoenix, Arizona, in a car bomb. He was working on local political corruption but a few days after he was murdered, 38 journalists from 28 major organisations gathered to pursue his work and publish it'. (Informant, Forbidden Stories, 20 August 2018)

While this informant insisted that the work at Forbidden Stories was not therapeutic as such, he still believed that the experience of finding their slain colleagues motivated the organisation's establishment.

Another informant had a lot of experience as a war correspondent and had even been badly injured while working. He covered challenging global issues such as money laundering, corruption within the medical sector, and terrorism. He was quick to acknowledge that journalists living in a democratic state and enjoying freedom of speech could use their privilege to help journalists who were less fortunate in this regard:

> I arrived [at Charlie Hebdo] just after the terrorist escaped the building, and then it was really an extremely difficult situation where we saw some friends or colleagues die and many of them were already killed some minutes before our arrival. That day changed my life, and I really decided to think about what we can do – what I can do personally as a journalist to keep stories alive, to capture the work of assassinated reporters. As my skill is investigative, my question was how can I do journalism to defend journalism? The

other questions are how can collaborative journalism defeat censorship, and how can we send a powerful signal to enemies of the press that you tried to kill the messenger but you will never kill the message. (Informant, Forbidden Stories, 19 July 2019)

The quotes above demonstrate how two professional journalists sought to make something useful out of the destruction wrought by an act of terror, yet Forbidden Stories also owes its establishment to the larger investigative-journalistic ecology. After the terror attack, the organisation's main proponent secured a useful scholarship at MIT in the United States, where he met key people who had been involved in the organisation of the Panama and Paradise Papers collaborations and even reached out to Edward Snowdon to discuss the creation of a safe drop box for leaks. It was during his MIT fellowship that the Forbidden Stories founder fully worked out the idea of his network as a gateway for stories which were thought too dangerous to publish in the mainstream media.

After having worked on investigative projects for years, the founder had concluded that the most efficient way to work on international investigative journalism was to collaborate with other journalists but also incorporate well-known media organisations. This was to counter several types of global threat to the practice:

The collaboration is a natural way of seeing journalism evolving because the threats are global, the traffic is global, the crimes are global. So, we need a global answer, and the global answer can come from that kind of collaboration, and if you show that [alignment], then you can fight all this conspiracy [theorising] you get, like 'CNN is a fake news corporation'. But if CNN is collaborating with the *Guardian*, with *Le Monde*, then we cannot blame them if they are driven by some corporate interests or some political agenda, because collaboration is a multiple interest. So, you cannot be accused of playing just for the interests of the owners of *Le Monde* if you're also collaborating with the *Guardian*. So, I think that's a first good way to break this kind of argument. I think that when you are collaborating regarding these kinds of fake news issues, collaboration brings protection, of course – brings much more precise information because when you are 20 journalists working on one sentence and how to factcheck it, these guys say, okay, this minister is corrupted, how can we say that? So, you will have the lawyers of the *Guardian*, the lawyers of *Le Monde*, they will debate all together about can we say that? In the end, the information we are producing and delivering to the consumer, to the readers, is something that is way more processed

> [...] So, I think this makes sense too, and the third thing that kind of collaboration can also explain is for whom and for what we are working. We are working for the public interest when we are investigating environmental crimes. (Informant, Forbidden Stories, 11 July 2019)

What this means is that media organisations can come together to empower each other as well as journalists, and this holds for traditional efforts but especially for cross-border investigative collaborations operating across the Global North and Global South. This is not only a means of pooling resources and syndication in line with the original establishment of the Associated Press (Gramling, 1940) but also a means of reinforcing one another's brand and credibility. From our first round of interviews, then, we were seeing the impact of hybrid thinking on journalistic practice at Forbidden Stories.

GLOBAL INVESTIGATIVE COLLABORATION AND ORGANISATION

When we returned to our informants in the summer of 2019, Forbidden Stories was launching an investigative collaborative project devoted to environmental crime and corruption. Like the Daphne Project, it sought to pool resources among reporters and certain legacy media companies. Individual reporters would be encouraged to contribute their specific skills and experience to the field investigations (informant, Forbidden Stories, 10 July 2019). When cross-border collaboration is involved as well, we have what Waisbord calls 'hybrid professional cultures', where 'Journalistic cultures have always been sensitive and permeable to ideas from other countries. Yet the particular dynamics of the contemporary globalized, networked journalism accelerate the blinding of occupational cultures' (Waisbord, 2013, p. 229). This sort of exchange is only possible via what former *Guardian* investigative editor David Leigh calls a mutual journalistic mindset—one that can be absent in some collaborations, such as those between reporters and various hackers:

> The WikiLeaks collaboration was very interesting for that reason, and one of the conclusions to which it was tempting to come was to think hackers and journalists don't really mix because their mindset is so different. And the mindset of somebody like Julian [Assange], who is basically a hacker, is completely different from ours, and it came to a head over the quarrels about

whether everything should be published or whether we should keep things out because they might harm people or endanger people. My personal feeling is that there will never be a meeting of minds because hackers are people who get a sense of power and satisfaction from basically stealing material, and they don't have any journalistic values. Their values are they want to be able to acquire stuff to show their skills and then they think they should publish it because they've got these rather simple-minded ideas that information should be free and transparency is a good thing. It's all just shallow. Whereas journalism is all about selection – selection according to your values of what you think is ethical or not ethical and, indeed, what you think is relevant or not relevant. (David Leigh, Former Head of investigations, *The Guardian*, Former Professor of Journalism at City University, 24 April 2018)

From the data we acquired, it appears that there are at least three prerequisites for a 'global collaboration': (1) an investigative journalistic mindset, (2) agreement on the ethical aspects and (3) an agreement to disagree. In addition, the dimensions of global, national and local must be able to coexist. These conditions involve both what the investigation is about and who is involved in it:

For instance, in Africa, in Tanzania, we did an investigation on a gold mine. It was essential for us to also have an African journalist who knows the field better. He can find his way in an area where there's not a lot of journalists and not a lot of white people as well. But that's one example. Another example is, for instance, this year, since we were working on environmental issues, we had the chance to work with the *Guardian*'s reporter who was in charge of their environmental desk. (Informant, Forbidden Stories, 10 July 2019)

Another important aspect of global collaborative investigation is reporter recruitment. One informant noted that the Forbidden Stories team had to 'explain how collaboration works' to those who had never done it and generally preferred to engage with 'journalists who are used to working on collaborative journalism' (informant, Forbidden Stories, 10 July 2019). This is because the circumstances of such hybridised collaborations are relatively unique:

That's something new – that, I would say, five years ago it was more of a professional mistake to share information with another reporter. Now it's becoming a model to bring more and more skills and force to an investigation'. (Informant, Forbidden Stories, 10 July 2019)

GLOBAL INVESTIGATIVE COLLABORATION
AND HYBRID TECHNOLOGY

Like the ICIJ's Panama Papers cross-border collaboration, which had to develop technological applications for the purpose of searching the leaked data (Baack, 2016),[2] Forbidden Stories boasted an advanced digital technology strategy already in its very first collaborative investigative project, following the work-related murder of Maltese blogger and investigative reporter Daphne Caruana Galizia, who focused on corruption, nepotism, patronage and money laundering, and who was killed via car bomb on 16 October 2017 (Konow-Lund & Olsson, 2021). Forbidden Stories responded with a cross-border collaboration involving 45 reporters from 18 outlets around the world, as well as powerful media organisations such as the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and Reuters. The work on Galizia's unfinished stories demanded a nuanced approach to technology-related tools such as Signal[3] and Telegram,[4] for example:

> We use Signal because it is the opposite of Telegram – everything is open source with regard to the Signal encrypted protocol, which is not entirely the case with Telegram. If I'm not mistaken, what's happening inside the server of Telegram – like the end-to-end communication – is okay, but what is happening inside the servers is not open source, so we don't know. And Signal has not been broken yet. There's no stories about any leak or information breach in Signal. So that's one way. There are also other ways, and I'm not going to tell [you about] every way we talk with sources and journalists, but […] Signal is a great tool. You can create threads regarding stories, chats […] it works well, but it's not perfect. On the Daphne Project, we had a problem with the number of messages we were putting on Signal, so that's a problem. When you're investigating on a collaborative project [and] you receive 400 notifications a day, it's hard to follow everything, and, to ensure security, we set up disappearing messages on Signal. [The timeframe] goes from a few minutes to a week, depending on how sensitive the

[2] See https://medium.com/@sbaack?p=9c6b5eafa7d3

[3] This is a communication app which supports messaging, voice, and video calls. Signal is free and open source, and it is also characterized by end-to-end encryption.

[4] While end-to-end is offered by default on Signal, this is not the case for Telegram, another communication app, which only provides it for secret chats.

information is. So, if you go, for instance, on a vacation for a week and you come back, you can't catch up on everything. So Signal is a great tool to communicate, to exchange information quickly and globally, but for the Daphne Project we also needed a tool to gather all the information we had. That's why we reached out to OCCRP. They provided us with an encrypted Wikipage which they developed themselves. It's a platform where we were able to put everything. (Reporter, Forbidden Stories, 20 August 2018)

As mentioned earlier, Forbidden Stories projects were not like those which responded to a major data leak, for example. Instead of being reactive, they sought to be proactive (Konow-Lund, 2013). One interviewee explained that some of the reporters associated with the platform had experience with investigative television documentaries, which required them to travel to certain locations and produce sources by working in the field. They combined this physical travel with their virtual research and collaboration when developing their own hybridised journalistic practices:

I think the most challenging thing in collaborative journalism is that collaborative journalism, so far, is based on data journalism and […] on receiving a leak. So, the Panama Papers is foremost a leak. So […] you're receiving a leak – it's big, and you have a lot of data – and then you call some friends or ICIJ and say, okay, let's share and let's split the work. With Forbidden Stories, we don't have any leak. We sometimes don't have any sources. But we think and we feel that there is a good and important investigation to be done – important because someone has been killed for the story. And the story is important for not only the local community but the entire world, because it's about the minerals, for instance, [or] about money laundering. (Informant, Forbidden Stories, 11 July 2019)

Forbidden Stories embraced these new practice models despite their costs and risks in the interests of advancing investigative journalism in a global and digital age.

Hybrid Professional Cultures in the Field

In 2018–2019, Forbidden Stories took on a 'wide-ranging investigation called the Green Blood Project, for journalists killed or silenced for environmental reporting' (Grey, 2021, p. 83). A particular priority of this project was the ability to factcheck by 'adding different databases of different groups', among other things:

> We started to work on the supply chain of the different minerals we were working on to check the names of the companies we did investigate, and we asked partners to check in on the Panama Papers and the Paradise Papers. (Informant, Forbidden Stories, 10 July 2019)

In the global collaborative investigative ecology, that is, databases once pored over for tax haven abuses remain available to future investigations of other issues as well. Additionally, those future investigations might use different methods to produce different outcomes:

> I think that where our collaboration is different is because we are not working based on the leaked documents, where you start with the documents and investigate them for the participants to find the story they want to pursue. What we do is different because we investigate the same story but with a lot of different journalists at the same time. So, you do not want to step on someone's toes, particularly when you want to meet someone or locate a source. You do not want the journalists to call the same people at the same time, otherwise you risk revealing the work of the consortium at the start of the project. You do not want to reveal that. That is one of the strengths of a consortium – to have journalists collaborating without making too much noise. (Informant, Forbidden Stories, 10 July 2019)

Another strength of these collaborative arrangements involves the way in which legacy media organisations or prominent existing cross-border collaborations can reinforce the work of individuals or organisations with fewer resources. According to the study informants at Forbidden Stories, there are many media organisations which do not have the resources to launch field investigations lasting months. Better-endowed peers can enable such organisations to concentrate their work on angles most relevant to their own interests or market.

The Green Blood Project, for example, extended its focus to what has been called the 'Sand Mafia' which was illegally controlling the Indian market for sand and gravel (https://forbiddenstories.org/sand-mafias-silence-journalists-in-india/). Two Forbidden Stories reporters travelled to the Indian state of Tamil Nadu in autumn of 2018 to conduct interviews and collaborate with a local investigative reporter who had published several stories on the environmental impact of mining sand. We reached out to this reporter as part of our research in Paris on the Forbidden Stories platform, and she told us about how a chain of decisions and coincidences led to a dangerous situation, not only for the two

Forbidden Stories reporters who had gone to India but also for her. One of those Forbidden Stories reporters described her predicament from his perspective:

> [She] cannot go back to Tamil Nadu to investigate. She's been working on it for the last five years. But she cannot go in the field or in the villages because it's too dangerous for her. She's been targeted. I mean, a campaign of communication against her has been organized by some miners. She cannot go down. So that's a direct impact in terms of how harassment effects a journalist. (Informant, Forbidden Stories, 10 July 2019)

The other reporter framed the situation in relation to the general journalistic practice which had emerged at Forbidden Stories. He noted that the local investigative reporter was already at risk, and the French reporters collaborating with her could not go with her to the region they were investigating. Her safety was their responsibility while they were there, so they could not tell anyone who they knew or why. In general, during investigations abroad they would always be very cautious about sharing information. He added that they kept in touch with the local reporters with whom they collaborated in the aftermath of the investigation, which offered some degree of protection as well, because so many journalists were involved in the work. He concluded by emphasising that 'we are very cautious in the field to try to not make any moves that can put the local people in danger' (informant, Forbidden Stories, 11 July 2019). The visiting reporters faced risks themselves too—after visiting a site run by a national mining agency, for example, they found themselves branded on posters as 'spies', and the local reporter had to help them get out of India as fast as possible. All three of these reporters emphasised to us that cross-border collaborations involve significant cultural challenges including different languages, different codes of conduct, different journalistic norms and values, and above all different cultural characteristics. Developing ways to capitalise on these variations and differences was vital to the success of Forbidden Stories.

Final Thoughts

This chapter addresses a gap in the literature regarding how professional investigative journalists develop global investigative collaborations in response to literal and figurative attacks upon their stories and colleagues.

The nonprofit collaborative Forbidden Stories network harnessed bottom-up innovation to hold power to account even when its journalism was under threat, leveraging hybridised physical and virtual practices to collaborate upon and publish their stories. Such reporter- and editor-driven horizontal networks are forced to develop hybrid ways of pooling resources and safeguarding professionals to advance projects across the Global South and Global North among organisations with very different levels of resources.

Bregtje van der Haak, Michael Parks and Manuel Castells (2012) argue that 'the notion of the isolated journalist working alone, whether toiling at his desk in a newsroom or reporting from a crime scene or a disaster, is obsolete', thus supporting the notion that networked practices of journalism can be regarded as the future of journalism based on 'networked information-gathering and fact-checking' (p. 2927). They observe, 'The actual product of journalistic practice now usually involves networks of various professionals and citizens collaborating, corroborating, correcting, and ultimately distilling the essence of the story that will be told' (van der Haak et al., 2012, p. 2927). Particularly evident in the case of Forbidden Stories is how 'as a network, we can optimize resources and generate synergy, and new creativity will emerge from our sharing' (van der Haak et al., 2012, p. 2935) as a direct result of all the resources and talent brought together by the organisation. In all, the practices developed at Forbidden Stories evoke Appadurai's description of a global culture where 'sameness' and 'difference' blend to produce the 'triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular' (Appadurai, 1990, pp. 307–308). New applications of the traditional and traditional applications of the new at Forbidden Stories add up to a hybrid form of journalism which may represent the very future of the field.

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