

UNBIAS THE NEWS

WHY DIVERSITY MATTERS
FOR JOURNALISM



UNBIAS THE NEWS

*Why diversity matters
for journalism.*

Editor-in-Chief

Tina Lee

Regional Editors

Mohammad Bassiki

Priyanka Borpujari

Piotr Drabik

Tabea Grzeszyk

Esther Nakkazi

Henrique Kugler

Purple Romero

Ali Shehab

Hannah Spyksma

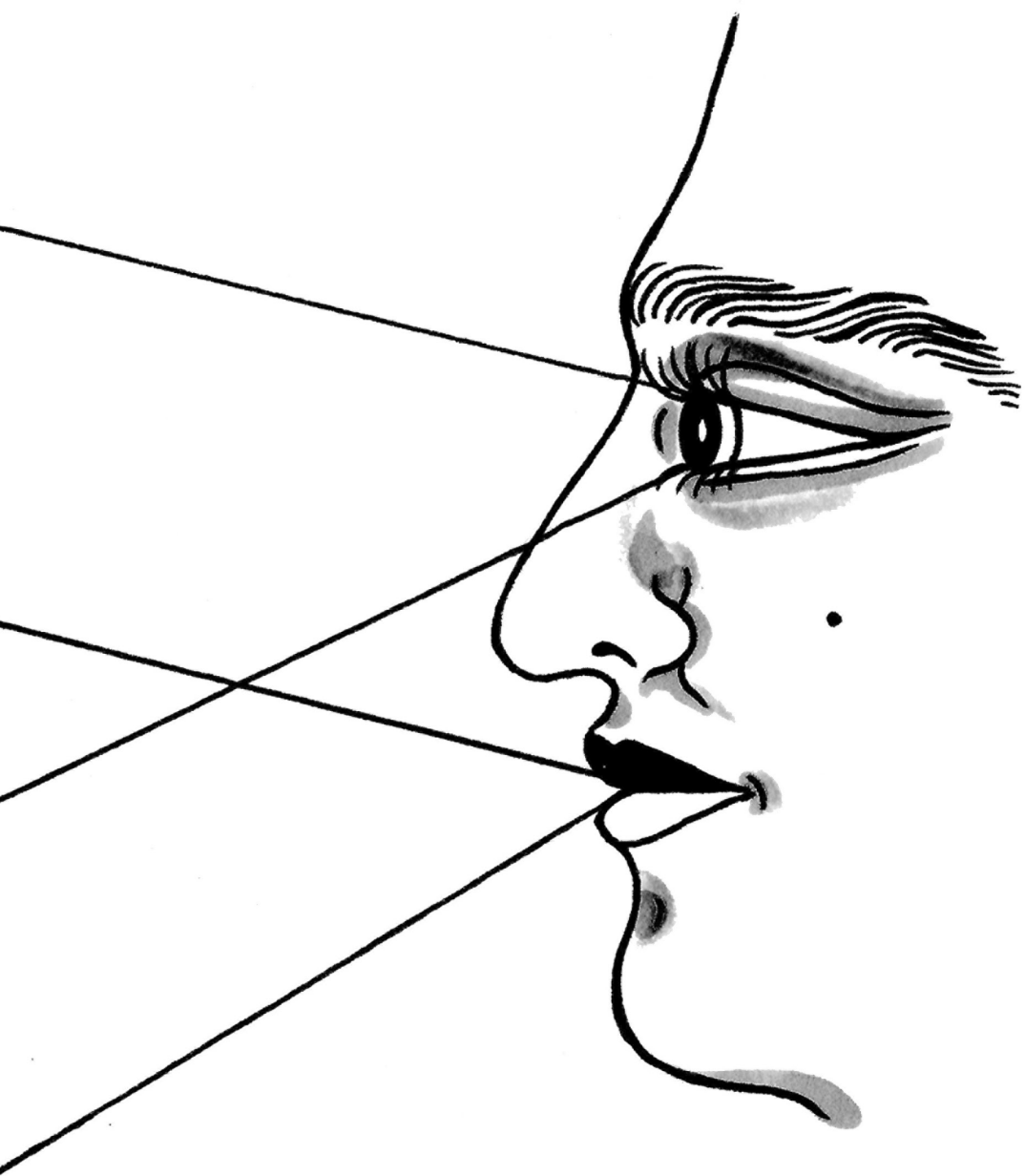
Qian Sun

Parfait Tabapsi

Copy Editors

Bernadette Geyer

Tina Lee



Unbias The News
Why diversity matters for journalism.

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Printed in Latvia / Livonia Print / Riga
Layout / Design: Andy Wilke
Illustrations: Moshtari Hilal

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Text:
Hostwriter gUG (haftungsbeschränkt)
c/o Haus K166
Karl-Marx-Straße 166
12043 Berlin

For more information:
www.hostwriter.org
www.unbiasthenews.org

ISBN: 978-3-948013-03-5

Publisher:
CORRECTIV - Verlag und Vertrieb
für die Gesellschaft UG
(haftungsbeschränkt)
Huyssenallee 11
45128 Essen

Handelsregister Essen
HRB 26115

Managing Directors:
David Schraven, Simon Kretschmer

For more information:
shop.correctiv.org

The information and views set out in this book are
those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect
the official opinion of Hostwriter.

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FOREWORD

Have you ever missed a journalistic opportunity because you were denied a visa for the trip? Have you ever had to stop an interview because the person you were interviewing started flirting with you? Have you ever had your name left off a byline because your colleague considered you a fixer? Have you ever had difficulties in gaining high-ranking interview partners because your audience was not important to them? Have you ever concealed information because it would have compromised your own safety or that of your family?

With these questions, we opened an “Unbias the News” panel at the International Journalism Festival in Perugia, Italy, in May 2019 on behalf of the Hostwriter organization. We organized a journalistic “Privilege Walk,” in which all panel participants and a guest from the audience stood along a line and took one step aside each time they answered the question with *Yes*, and stopped at a *No*. At the end of the five questions, we stood in Piazza Sorbello, spread all over the room. Some had taken several steps aside, some less – but we all moved.

What we wanted to show with this exercise was that we are all journalists, but have different privileges that help determine what we perceive and what we can report about. We all research, interview and verify facts, but we see the world from different angles. Many are excluded. It makes a difference whether we are white, black or brown, male, female or non-gender binary, whether we publish in English, Spanish or Chinese, whether we were born in, or migrated or fled from the country we're reporting on, whether we are young or old, with or without physical or mental disability, whether we come from an academic or a working class family. Because personal background has an influence on what access we have to, how we interpret facts, which stories catch our eye – and which we overlook. And the sum of our privileges also determines whether our research is listened to or not.

All this stands in sharp contradiction to a journalism that sees itself as neutral, objective and impartial. For which the individual journalists have no body, no gender and no history, as they supposedly see world events from the outside as independent observers. But an objective perspective that emerges out of thin air, a “view from nowhere,” does not exist.

In fact, the world view of white men is predominantly expressed in international reporting. In 2018, 77.4% of journalists in the U.S. were white and 59% male.¹ The latest figures from Great Britain from 2016 showed that 94% of the journalists were white, of whom 55% were male.² That doesn't make white men bad journalists. But it means they don't fully represent the societies they report on. Like all people, journalists have unconscious bias, stereotypical assumptions and national or cultural ideas that affect their view of the world.³ Fighting for more diverse reporting is therefore not a question of political correctness or patronage. It's a question of quality. These days, journalism cannot tolerate the dramatic underrepresentation of the perspectives of women and People of Color, among others.

We understand diversity as a form of journalistic fact-checking. Stereotypical narratives, reductionist notions, structural racism, or hard-as-nails sexism can usually be deciphered by affected journalists in the twinkling of an eye – if they are given the space. This is exactly the motivation behind our *Unbias the News* anthology: we have asked journalists about their history, their experiences, their suggestions and desires for a more inclusive journalism that is as diverse as our

societies. Many thanks to all the authors who do not mince their words and who share their perspectives with some very personal contributions.

To avoid falling into the trap of our own unconscious bias as a Berlin-based organization, we have collaborated with a ten-person strong Hostwriter team from China, India, Cameroon, Lebanon, New Zealand, Brazil, the Philippines, Poland, Syria and Uganda for the selection of texts and editorial work. Without the great personal commitment of all participants under the leadership of Tina Lee – and a shared desire for cross-border discussion – this book would not have been possible.

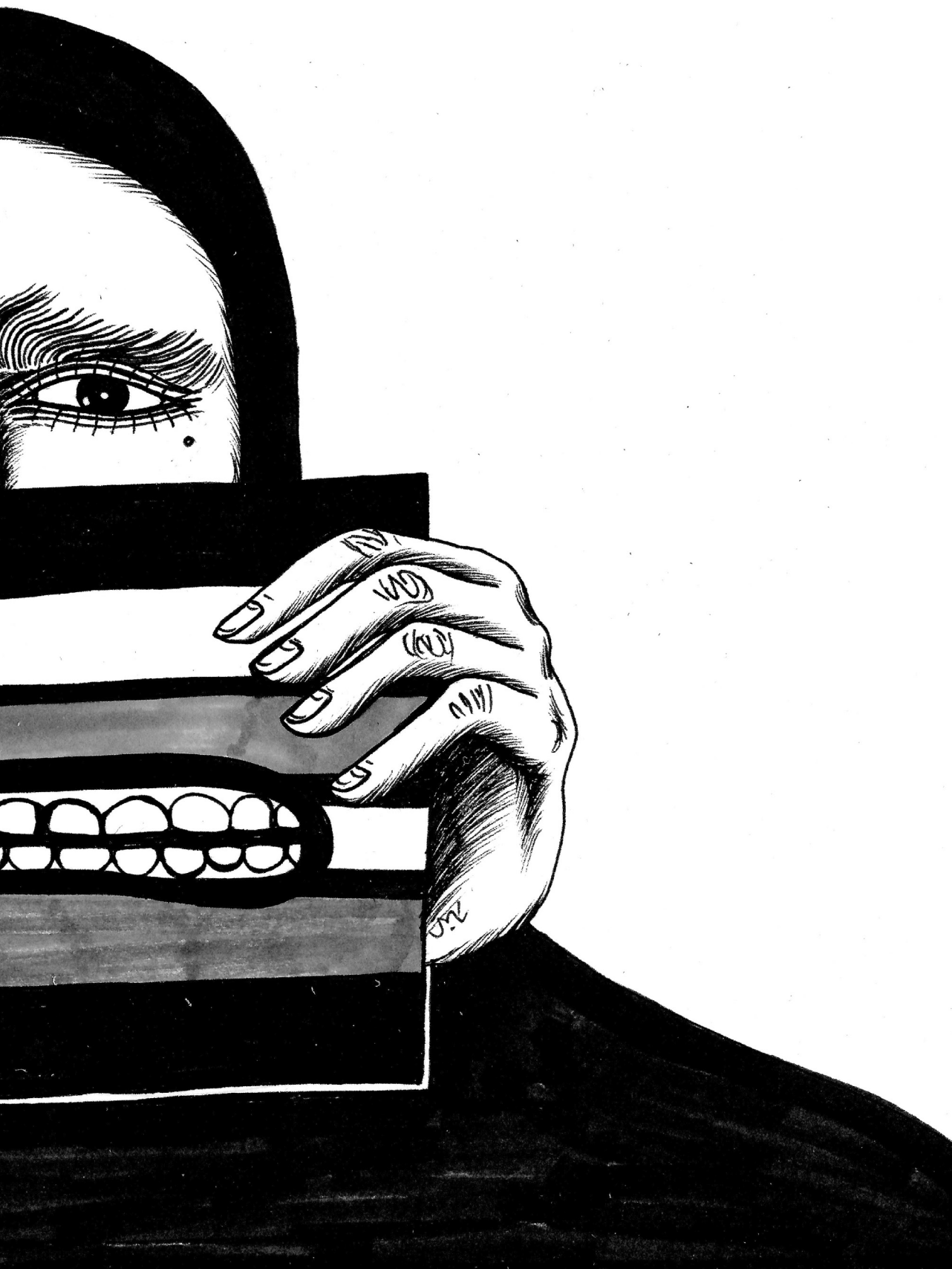
A big thanks also goes to David Schraven from Correctiv, who supported the project from the beginning without reservation and made this book production possible.

On behalf of the entire Hostwriter team, I wish you, dear readers, a thought-provoking, inspiring and – in the best sense – unbiassing reading of *Unbias the News!*

Tabea Grzeszyk

Journalist and CEO of Hostwriter





***WATCH YOUR
LANGUAGE:
WHY IS
MULTINATIONAL
COVERAGE SO
MONOLINGUAL?***

The dominance of the English language might be skewing our reporting, writes **TANYA PAMPALONE** from South Africa.

Everyone in the room thought they got the joke. When Trevor Noah announced *Black Panther* for Best Picture at the 2019 Oscars, a wave of laughter washed over the crowd as he talked about growing up in the fictional country of Wakanda. As T'Challa flew over his village, Noah said, he was reminded of a great Xhosa phrase. "Abelungu abayazi ukuba ndiyaxoka," the South African-born comedian explained, meant "In times like these, we are stronger when we fight together than when we try to fight apart."

Xhosa speakers watching the show at home exploded in hysterics. Noah, who grew up speaking Xhosa, had just pulled one over on Hollywood. The correct translation? "White people don't know I'm lying."

It was a well-deserved poke at the English-speaking Western-centric whitewashed world. After all, the language has doled out its share of humiliation and pain. As writer Jacob Mikanowski eloquently lined up his *Guardian* piece, "Behemoth, bully, thief: how the English language is taking over the planet,"⁴ it has been the inspiration for everything from Korean tongue tissue snipping (in pursuit of smooth English pronunciation) to the bastardization of the European novel, now brought to you with a "denatured, international vernacular."

My own father – who arrived in the U.S. from North Africa in the early fifties – refused to speak to his children in Italian (which he spoke at home with his Italian-born parents) or French (which he spoke in school) never mind Arabic, which he spoke on the streets in Tunis, where he grew up. He didn't want us to have accents, believing it would work against us in school and on America's immigrant-suspicious streets. My daughter, meanwhile, has grown up in Johannesburg and took Zulu – one of the country's 11 official languages and the home language of most South Africans, followed by Xhosa – for six years in the local public schools. But she'll hardly utter a word of it in public. I can't blame it entirely on her eye-rolling teenagedom, or the fact that her home language is English. On the playground of our Johannesburg suburb, English is the *lingua franca* and, as a journalist friend whose home language is Zulu recently lamented – with no small level of embarrassment – his child is only using English. Somehow, 25 years after apartheid, speaking one of the African languages at school, at least in these leafy, formerly designated "white" areas, has somehow been dubbed "uncool."

As a journalist, it's my job to be sure that, no matter where I'm living or working, I try to cover issues as broadly and deeply as I can. But it also means that my built-in language bias can be part of the problem, further skewing the global narrative, from basic news reports to media education.

The Power of Language

Kai Chan, a distinguished fellow at the INSEAD Innovation and Policy Initiative, put together the Power Language Index,⁵ noting that while over 6,000 languages are spoken today, just 15 of them account for half of the languages spoken globally. Chan wanted to find out which had the most influence and reach, so he created a system for evaluating them. It includes 20 indicators, such as land area, GDP, academic institutions, diplomatic impact and internet content. In his 2016 analysis, he found that English was, by far, the most powerful, followed by Mandarin, French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian. He also points out something that official data don't often show: English is the *de facto* second language in most countries, making it the global language of business, technology, academia, tourism and, all too often, international news.

This is certainly true for the Global Investigative Journalism Network, where I am now the managing editor. While our virtual headquarters is

based in the U.S., our far-flung regional editors put out stories and social media feeds in eight different languages. But our daily communications with one another – despite the fact that we easily share over a dozen languages between us – are almost exclusively in English.

Researchers Lei Guo and Chris J. Vargo found, in their analysis of 54 million news items from 4,708 news sources in 67 countries in 2015, that wealthier countries not only continue to attract most of the world news attention, they are also more likely to decide how other countries perceive the world.⁶

For my colleague, GIJN's Bangla Editor Miraj Chowdhury, the power of the global English-language narrative is glaringly obvious.

"There are 10 widely circulated newspapers," he says of Bangladesh. "Two of them have circulations of over 500,000. Then there is the *Daily Star*, which has a circulation of 50,000. But it's in English. So, the *Daily Star* dominates the narrative about Bangladesh internationally." Conversely, he says, "When something happens in France, we will try to figure out what is happening from the English news. In countries like Bangladesh, we are obsessed with *CNN*, *BBC*, *Al Jazeera*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*. That's the global media imposing a narrative of their own."

Lost in Translation

But even while the influence of English and its associated Western narrative continues to spread, the fact is the majority of people in countries like Bangladesh don't have English in their professional toolkit, creating an elite barrier of exclusion and inequality along the way.

"You have to be able to communicate with other journalists [outside of Bangladesh] in English if you want to collaborate, use technology or to talk to sources," says Chowdhury. "Without it, you won't have access to knowledge, tools or guidebooks; many of the recommended journalism textbooks are also in English."

That English handicap has left Russia's officials "elated," GIJN's Russian-language editor, Olga Simanovych, says. "It means that Russia's official state media can deliver their own stories direct to the people," she says, without even having to build a firewall like China's, even if they are planning one.⁷ But that dominance can also mean a story isn't a story until it appears in the English media. Journalists Ben Nimmo and Aric

Toler wrote about the Russian journalists who initially exposed the troll factory in St. Petersburg back in 2013, when it was focusing on influencing domestic opinion, not the American elections.⁸ (Which, some might observe, roughly translates as: what happens in Russia stays in Russia, especially if it is in Russian, that is, until it has to do with the Americans.)

Of course, not recognizing a story outside of the Northern hemisphere is not always a problem of language. Journalism Professor Jay Rosen has noted “how ungenerous *The New York Times* can be in crediting others’ prior work,”⁹ giving a rightful nod to South Africa’s *Daily Maverick* and the investigators at *amaBhungane* on their essential reporting around the Gupta brothers in South Africa.¹⁰ But while the #GuptaLeaks reporters were recognized at their country’s premier awards, many local journalists have been left out.

After the ceremonies last year, Unathi Kondile, the editor of South Africa’s Xhosa paper *Isolezwe lesiXhosa*, pointed out that the Sikuvides – Xhosa for “we hear you” – don’t actually “hear” the country’s vernacular papers.¹¹

“For us,” Kondile wrote, “such awards are an absolute waste of time as many of those judging can only properly judge English and Afrikaans, hence you rarely see vernacular titles scooping multiple awards. Especially for content. So why bother?”

Chowdhury, who is based in Dhaka, feels Kondile’s pain. For international conferences and fellowships, journalists often have to submit their applications in English – including GIJN’s global conferences, which are mainly presented in English as well as the language of the hosting country.

“You read their pitches and you think, this guy writes well in English,” he says. “But you have another guy applying for the same fellowship who is maybe even a better journalist but doesn’t write well in English.”

The consequences are obvious: If you are reading a second-language speaker’s application in English and you don’t seriously take that bias into consideration, guess where the fellowship – and the awards and opportunities – go?

Remember the Englishes

But, of course, this not just about the big picture. English dominance gets right down to the nitty gritty. That is, how you report, who you

talk with and how you talk with them, what questions you ask and, as Kwanele Sosibo, a senior editor at South Africa's *Mail & Guardian*, reminded me, even the words that journalists – some of whom are non-native speakers talking and translating other non-native speakers – use to communicate their story in their non-native language.

"There are different Englishes, in my point of view, and I feel to some extent writers should have the leeway to express this," Sosibo says. "Readers, too, should have the opportunity to enjoy this. Most people in South Africa mix languages when they speak, but the journalists themselves are not allowed to reflect this in their writing, and the speakers' speech in the case of quotes is policed by translations. There should be phrases English-only speakers should feel compelled to look up because they have not been offered for translation, thereby shifting them closer to the point of view of the subject/narrator/writer. Not all things are translatable."

I was taught the importance of voice and style early in my career when I worked with the author Greg Critser, then the deputy editor of *Buzz* magazine, when I was in my twenties in Los Angeles.

My reluctant mentor would edit articles that were faxed in on paper, and sometimes I'd ask him if I could input the story with his changes. It was a way to learn from the master. On the page, he showed me how to move in and out of someone's work, making it better, deeper, stronger, without changing their voice. "Never work for a newspaper," he warned me, "they'll ruin your writing."

As the magazine industry began to dry up, I was forced to go to the dark side. But I wasn't going to be the person who ruined writing. I wanted to be the editor that made writing better. To do that, I try to listen to the voice, the cadence, the meanings and intentions behind sometimes not-so-straightforward translations.

It's something we all need to think about. As English Linguistics Professor Edgar W. Schneider noted in his study on World Englishes, as localized varieties of English continue to emerge, it can no longer be thought of as a "single, monolithic entity" but rather as a set of "related, structurally overlapping, but also distinct varieties, the products of a fundamental 'glocalization' process with variable, context-dependent outcomes."¹² Turns out Los Angeles, with all of its Englishes, was good training ground.

Howling at the Moon

I'm not sure that there is any way back from English dominance. As Mikanowski says, "Protesting it is like howling at the moon." And while I think the preservation of languages is crucial, there's no easy way around the idea of a shared global language. After all, maybe having a common language in order to communicate is better than having Siri – until she learns how to up her Google Translate game – do our talking for us.

So, what can we do to mitigate some of the challenges around English dominance? Listen more. Listen better. Observe. Contextualize. Ask more questions. Be respectful. Slow down. Spend lots of time in the field. Remember the Englishes. But, most of all, watch our language in the same way we are just beginning to check our privilege.





***BIG NAME
ISN'T ALWAYS
BIG NEWS***

Funders want to see their stories published in big name outlets, but this can create an ethical dilemma for freelancers who aim for local impact, argues Nigerian journalist **KOLAWOLE TALABI**.

When my journalism career began, I felt somewhat privileged that my first major story would be published by the *Nigerian Tribune*, one of Nigeria's leading national dailies. Prior to that, my work had only been circulated by a local web-based newswire with a marginally syndicated column in another popular Nigerian newspaper. The thought of having a byline in a newspaper that my family had favored for weekend reading was exciting. But my excitement wasn't just about the byline, the story was backed up by a grant from a media project supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – another career first. I had gotten a princely sum of \$7000 to investigate how poor water supplies in two cities in West Africa had affected public health. During the reporting, I was mentored by foreign journalists, went above the call of duty to produce extra multimedia clips and worked hard to meet impossible editorial deadlines.

As an unknown freelancer, the chances of getting my story published by the *Nigerian Tribune* was almost zilch. I used an old contact who was impressed that a novice reporter had gotten such a huge grant to get a meeting with the paper's editor-in-chief. My efforts to have my article published by other dailies had been to no avail. Most Nigerian publishers were simply unwilling to bet on a rookie. I knew I had the goods, but nobody wanted them.

Journalism grants are one of the means of funding underreported stories. In some cases, as I discovered in my early years of reporting, they will also give one's career a major boost. Yet some programs and funders prefer to work only with prominent journalists or freelancers who have been previously published by major media outlets like the *New York Times* or *Economist*. The idea is that prominent journalists and newsrooms have larger audiences, thus stories published on their platforms will gain more traction. While this is true, what it translates to is that only successful journalists should get opportunities for more success. Yet some stories are intrinsically local or regional and don't always need the national or global reach of big-name media outlets. This preference for the "who's who" in lieu of what a story might augur for the public is a big disservice to upcoming journalists, news consumers and the entire media world.

When I applied for the grant to cover the water story above, the funders were only interested in my story ideas – the *raison d'être* for the investigation. Besides the pitch and a weblink to a previously published article, they placed as little barrier as possible to ensure that many journalists could apply. Applicants were not constrained by a list of requirements that could have stifled their chances of participating in the program.

But this case is an exception to the rule. The Pulitzer Center is a U.S.-based sponsor of media practitioners working on underreported stories globally. It disburses around \$2 million annually in reporting grants to individual reporters and news organizations, but the emphasis is on American mainstream media. Among its roll call of media partners are big names like *Time*, *National Geographic* and *The New Yorker*.

Under its ongoing Rainforest Journalism Fund, one of the application terms for journalists specifically requires a distribution plan from a big-name media house. The call for applications on its website explicitly states: *"Proposed projects must include a credible plan for broad dissemination of the resulting work in U.S. and/or European news media. Applicants should be able to demonstrate interest from editors and/or producers working in wide-reaching U.S. and/or European news media outlets. The credibility of a distribution plan is generally most evident in an applicant's track-record working with the listed outlets."*¹³

The obsession with big names either by media practitioners or organizations stifles the practice of local journalism, especially in newly

democratizing societies where media development is weak. Three years ago, two professional experiences that occurred in tandem absolutely disabused my perspective on mainstream media and its purported significance and apex positioning in today's evolving journalism landscapes.

In 2016, I had obtained a small grant to report on biodiversity loss from the Earth Journalism Network, a project of Internews. Internews is an international nonprofit organization that describes its mission as “empower[ing] people worldwide with the trustworthy, high-quality news and information they need to make informed decisions, participate in their communities, and hold power to account.” Their focus on people and communities is no wordplay. Unlike the Pulitzer Center, the mission of Internews evokes inclusiveness, and this became very evident during my interaction with them. As applicants, candidate grantees were required to indicate official editorial support from a publisher. I opted for a small but emerging Nigerian publisher, because the foreign big names wouldn't give their support. But once the grant was approved, I ditched the domestic media house and began pitching to the foreign big names again.

It was a litany of *Nos* – with and without reasons. Nonetheless, I was quite desperate to have the story published by mainstream media. Undeterred by prior rejections, I sent the final draft to an editor at *Mongabay*, an American media outlet that had initially turned down my story at the outset. When the story was eventually published, it was well received going by the number of online interactions it garnered, but alas, it had zero local impact!

As a form of professional penance, I ensured the subsequent story I worked on got published by the Nigerian publisher I had ditched earlier. This time around, I was no longer interested in the foreign big names and the global visibility their platforms might offer to my story. Although the second report lacked the backing of mainstream media or the financial and technical support they usually offered, the story won an award for “Best Audience Engagement” in an international journalism contest that took me on a press tour of the leading media establishments in the United States. Free from the burden of signed agreements that usually constrained local journalists supported by outside funding and the endless meddling by foreign editors whose knowledge of the complexity of local issues is almost non-existent, I could focus on the who, why and how of the story. The entire experience was a watershed moment in my career as a freelancer.



While the roles of media organizations like the Pulitzer Center and their mainstream media partners cannot be ignored, it is important that the news industry works hard to create equal opportunities for those without international clout. Recent events suggest this is beginning to happen. As part of its Rainforest Journalism Fund, the Pulitzer Center, starting from late 2019, will begin offering grants to reporters working for local and regional platforms in Africa and Asia. Although this decision seems like a footnote in a biography, it is to their credit that such an opportunity is being offered to journalists who would otherwise have been overlooked and, subsequently, prevented from participating in the program. By this turn of events, the Pulitzer Center is demonstrating its readiness to contribute to a more inclusive media community whose members cannot be separated by orders or borders.



***IF IT WEREN'T
FOR THE
NEWSROOM
PREDATORS***

Indian journalist **ANURADHA SHARMA** asks where she would be in her career without the constant obstruction of sexual harassment by male colleagues.

Last year, more than seven years since I quit a stable job to embrace the insecurities of freelance reporting, I faced the truth for the first time: my journalism career was wrecked because I was not a man.

It amazes me now – or, perhaps not – that I had lived all those years in denial. I had refused to see myself as a victim; I saw myself as a player who risked it all. Whenever I told others, “I took up freelancing because of the freedom and challenges it offers,” I was hiding from myself, as much from them, that I was actually on the run. I was constantly trying to escape predatory male behavior and newsroom patriarchy.

This was not what I had bargained for when I had started out, idealistic and full of dreams.

I began my journalism career in 2002 in my hometown in Siliguri, a trade town in the sub-Himalayan region of India’s northeast. At that time, there were only two women reporters in Siliguri. Women in small towns had just begun to enter what had always been men’s bastion, a fact that was evident in how newspaper offices were yet to have toilets for their female

staff. Not that we made any issue of it – we, the small-town women professionals, were only too happy to enter the man’s world of journalism; we couldn’t risk that with our fight for toilets, or even beats.

Raised in a liberal all-woman home, it was in the newsrooms that I got my lessons in patriarchy. Crime, politics, sports and often business – these were the all-important beats that were typically meant for men. Women did the “womanly” beats, writing “soft stories.” Workplace patriarchy ensured that women were kept in their place.

Did I complain? No. How could a 20-something girl question the status quo? My internalized patriarchy kept me “within my limits.” But I did try to change that, even without talking about it. I grabbed every chance to pursue the “hard news” – a small bureau in a small town created such opportunities, especially when the men were on leave. But my work went unrecognized, even if my stories were important enough for the front page.

It takes a special male talent to consistently deny a woman her place. My immediate senior – let’s call him Predator I – who headed the tiny four-member bureau thought he was well within his rights to insert his name in the byline to my big stories. Why? “Because I was also there.” That’s true, he would always be wherever I went – exhibitions, press meets, conferences. He would always find a way to tail me around – more about that later. And just when I would sit down to write a political story, he would start jumping, “But I’m doing that story!”

One day, he followed me to the press conference of a local political leader. Just as I began to write the piece, he stopped me. “I’m doing the story. It is a political story, and politics is my beat.”

A little later: “I’m the head here.”

“But why did you assign me first?” I argued, exasperated.

“Because you speak Nepali.”

He had deceived me into going to the press meet only so that I could translate for him: I was the only person at the bureau who could speak Nepali, which the politician spoke. After several years in journalism and rising up to be the principal correspondent, reporting on politics, as well as heading the team before he had joined, he conveyed that I was unfit to do the story. He was a stark outsider who did not know the local language nor have any idea of local politics, yet he felt entitled to write such important pieces. What is worse – your boss not letting you work freely, or that he’s always stalking you, even dropping by your house in your absence?

Predator I would end up at my friends' and acquaintances' homes, asking about me – who did I hang out with, why did I divorce my husband, how did my father die? He took it within his responsibility to “call on” my family members when I was busy slogging it out at the office.

I complained to senior heads in the Kolkata office, 600 km away. Nothing happened. I slunk away, clinging to my dignity like a drowning man holding onto a straw. I quit; he stayed put.

I moved to Kolkata for a job on the desk, to work with a former boss, with whom I was a trainee years before. I was in awe of him; I saw him as my mentor. I look back now and decide the best way to address him is “Predator II.”

The thing about predators is that they can smell their prey from a distance. Predator II was sharp. My “savior,” he “salvaged” me from my doom by offering me a lower designation and a lower salary. “My dear, this is a rescue operation. That’s the best I can do,” he had said even without my asking.

In spite of feeling short-changed, I did not challenge the terms of appointment. I kept mum and carried on, dealing Predator II with the respect his position commanded. But he was clearly out to extract more “gratefulness.” “When was the last time you had roaring sex?” he texted one day. Another day, his hand suddenly massaged the back of my neck while I was deeply engrossed in designing a page on the computer. After that, I avoided any chance to engage in non-work conversation with him.

But Predator II was not the kind to take a snub lying down. He exacted his revenge: he refused to grant me leave when I was selected for a prestigious fellowship in the U.S. It was then that I understood why some women colleagues laughed at his crass jokes and did not object even when he addressed them as “*lasyamayi*” (sexy, in Bengali), or even touched them in their napes.

A colleague, who only wore loose athletic wear to the office, told me much later that she wanted to hide from him. “I just wanted to remain invisible.” Predator II’s creepiness and accompanying viciousness percolated at different levels of the office, making it a hostile space. Everyone would treat the other with suspicion. My work suffered; my peace of mind vanished.

Less than three years later, I quit. This time, without a job in hand. After frying pan and fire, I jumped into freelancing.

One evening, while I was editing a political copy while still in Predator II's fiefdom, I got a call from someone asking for Ladybird. Then came another call, and another. The calls for Ladybird kept coming, especially at nights. "What is your rate?" It was only when one of them asked me this that I understood that these callers were seeking sex, assuming I was a sex worker.

Someone had scribbled my phone number alongside "Ladybird" everywhere – toilets (mostly), railway platforms, abandoned structures. I began mapping the callers. They corresponded to the movement of Predator I: the first call had come from someone who found my number on the wall of the toilet at an eatery close to my previous office in Siliguri. Calls came from Delhi, when I would learn that Predator I was in Delhi through the professional grapevine. Once, my brother-in-law confronted Predator I. The ex-boss did not deny scribbling my phone number on the walls at public spaces, no explanation given. In his own version of "revenge porn" – and I still don't know what for – he got an army of sex-starved men to harass me. He had outsourced sexual harassment.

I changed my phone number, risking the loss of contact with sources that I had cultivated as a journalist. My old number lay unused for a decade. Only recently, I reactivated it. Ten years is a long time for entire memories to be erased, but every once in a while, I still get calls asking for Ladybird.

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A beautiful thing happened to the Indian media in October 2018. Women started speaking out. Soon after Bollywood actor Tanushree Dutta spoke about her harassment at the hands of legendary actor Nana Patekar, journalist Sandhya Menon tweeted about the ordeal she was subjected to by her male colleagues. A dam had burst. Media women came out in droves with their stories of horror and pain. It was India's own #MeToo storm.

One by one, top names in the field and revered editors were stripped bare before the post-Weinstein audience. Most notable was M.J. Akbar, a legendary editor who had helped launch two major Indian newspapers in the past and had risen to become the country's Minister of State for External Affairs. Women spoke of his dreadful acts – abuse of power, molestation, rape. He had to step down from this position.

Predator II was also among those named. His infamous statement within the newsroom, "If I find a mistake, I will take off your panties," was quoted.

For a long time, I had not paid attention to the movement. As a busy wife and mother to two kids, while trying to continue as a journalist, I was slow to process the developments. Then one tender moment, during a WhatsApp conversation with other members of the Network for Women in Media in India (NWMI), the deluge swept me off. Everything came back in a flash and the veneer of poise was shattered into a thousand pieces. What hit me was the truth.

There was no more escaping the fact that in 2011, when I quit after a decade of being a feisty reporter and an industrious copy editor, I was more a woman trying to protect her dignity than a newfound freelance journalist driven by adrenaline.

All this while, I was in denial. Both times that I quit my jobs, I had not seen myself as a victim. I had the swagger of a free, adventurous person who made her own choices, who didn't live by the codes that usually applied to "normal" people. I did not want my predators to think that they had won, that they had pulled me down. And I also had to prove to the world that I was doing great things. Everything was alright with me.

#MeToo held the mirror before me, and for the first time, I saw myself as a victim. For the first time, I thought about the person I would have been and become, had it not been for these harassments.

For the first time, I missed the career I would have had, if I were a man.



