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Imagined Networks:

How International Journalism Innovators Negotiate Authority and Rework News Norms

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how logics of news innovation intersect with traditions of foreign correspondence. We focus on 2010-2011 Knight Foundation News Challenge winners whose projects focus on facilitating international information flow, asking what kind of "foreign correspondence" emerges from their design decisions, built systems, and user communities. We find that innovation takes place along two key dimensions: data- and mission-driven approaches for negotiating with authority and power; and the cultivation of a set of news work norms and practices governing audience engagement, expertise and sourcing, information verification, and community collaboration. Following Anderson's "imagined community" model, we suggest that contemporary foreign correspondence involves "imagined networks" whose compositions and dynamics emerge from sociotechnical infrastructures created by news innovators.

*Keywords:* International journalism, networked news production, technology innovation, imagined communities, foreign correspondence, Knight Foundation News Challenge.

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### Imagined Networks:

#### How International Journalism Innovators Negotiate Authority and Rework News Norms

Two intertwined forces are at work in international journalism today. The first is conceptual: a reimagining of the very idea of foreign correspondence by those who make and use news infrastructure. As reporters shift from being translators (with privileged access to people, cultures, and events) for home audiences to being participants in a networked ecosystem of information producers (many of whom can create media alongside the traditional press), it is unclear exactly what the goal of foreign correspondence is, or should be. What is being translated, who are the imagined recipients, how do the narratives of news professionals differ from those of locals, what languages are assumed, and what function do such translations even serve?

The second, related force is material: a reconfiguration of the technological conditions under which international news is created and disseminated. That is, a new suite of internet-based tools and practices make it possible for ideas, issues, events, and people that were once distant and not easily accessible to be closer and seem more familiar. Some of the people who foreign correspondents historically considered sources and audiences are now active in the news-making process – expressing perspectives that often live alongside those of professional journalists in social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. Indeed, these social media are even becoming journalistic beats in themselves – places where journalists expect foreign news to happen and sources to be (Archetti 2012, Cozma and Chen 2012). These technologies

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and practices—and their power to disrupt the dynamics of foreign correspondence—are often celebrated by a new set of actors: system designers explicitly working to disrupt and reimagine the very ideas of “foreign” and “correspondence”.

Our study unpacks a meeting of these two forces. We trace how one set of innovators—winners of the 2010-2011 Knight Foundation News Challenge focused on international information flows—thinks about and designs for international news work. Even if they do not use the term themselves, what kind of “foreign correspondence” do these innovators imagine and realize in their systems and communities? As they create new technologies, practices, and audiences that mediate among people from different countries, what assumptions and values guide their design decisions? What goals do they have for their systems, how do these aims relate to traditional norms and practices of international reporting, and how do they define and measure the success of their projects? Our aim is to understand, for these set of innovators, what international journalism is and why it matters, so that we might contribute to the larger contemporary discourse on the practices and meanings of foreign correspondence in a networked age.

### **Foreign Reporting, Imagined Networks & Boundary Newswork**

The history of international journalism is, in many ways, the story of two intertwined norms: distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘other’ upon which international translations and global discourses rest; and a set of assumptions about what global public spheres require. That is, foreign correspondence makes and relies upon assumptions about what kind of news about “others” matters, what differences among people and circumstances are meaningful and worthy of

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translation, and what role media systems should play in fostering international discourse and management of global public goods. A common feature of these assumptions, distinctions, and ideals is the very idea of a nation state as an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983): an identifiable collective distinct from others that depends upon, and is limited by, people and technologies to depict and distinguish social relationships. The nation state—with all its accompanying cultural and institutional features—has historically been a conceptual container (Beck 2005) the foreign correspondent could use to distinguish what is close and familiar from what is distant and unknown. The nation—as an *idea*—does symbolic work, signposting for reporters and readers the concepts, events, and cultures that they assume need translating; and—as an *institution*—the nation serves as an organizational apparatus for efficiently allocating news organizations' foreign reporting resources in ways that make sense to established beat structures and news topics. For example, reporters can anchor stories in the priorities of state sources (Livingston and Bennett 2003) and share public diplomacy work with government officials (Seib 2010), but they can also prefer eye-witness accounts of local residents over statements of foreign governments (Hamilton and Lawrence 2010) and be critical of foreign wars independent of the discourse of state elites (Althaus 2003).

Without framing international news in terms of established nation states and geopolitical dynamics, foreign correspondents would have to acknowledge their role as subjective sense-makers who decide for home audiences what they should know about the world. Traditionally, this has been an uneasy position for journalists to find themselves in when their aims have been to be objective, professional communicators (Carey 1969). Whether as a source of routine, a

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space for dissent, or as evidence of objectivity, the idea of the nation state in foreign correspondence has represented what "foreign" means, and why it matters.

This is not a new tension in the history of the press. When Lippmann (1922) lamented the "world outside" created by the news media who put "pictures in our heads," he was simultaneously assuming an objective, distant reality that could be depicted by journalists (criticizing WWI-era foreign correspondents for mistaking state propaganda for news) and expressing skepticism that citizens would know what to do with an objective, distant reality if one were presented to them. Lippmann's question was: what principles and practices should guide the re-presentation of an 'other' in ways that fulfill journalistic criteria and make sense at home?

Lippmann's challenge exists today, but its formulation needs updating. Especially in the context of contemporary "network journalism," (Heinrich 2012) the very idea that identifiable, agreed upon 'others' can be bounded by nation-states and then translated for passive, domestic audiences by gatekeeping journalists is deeply problematic and visibly unrealistic. Evident not only in the increasing presence of social media in news practices, but also in related, emergent global protest movements like Occupy and the work of international philanthropies like the Gates Foundation and the Clinton Global Initiative, there exists a kind of distributed "global outlook": an epistemological and stylistic approach for "understand[ing] and explain[ing] how economic, political, social and ecological practices, processes and problems in different parts of the world affect each other, are interlocked, or share commonalities." (Berglez 2008) Such an outlook depends upon, and helps to create, impressions of how stories are "solely domestic or foreign news" (p. 845) and, more broadly, part of a global public sphere (Volkmer 2003). This is

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a pan-national space in which the “movement of public opinion” (Castells 2008) is channeled and constrained by networked actors working both in collaboration with and opposition to traditional, mainstream notions of foreign correspondence.

Anderson’s “imagined communities” certainly still exist, but they are complemented by a set of “imagined networks” whose members and relationships both make and make meaningful the collectives and distinctions that signal to international correspondences and audiences alike what differences can and should be attended to. These international *networks*—with all their powers to connect and distinguish—become conceptual containers and instrumental tools for seeing difference, for rendering people, events, and ideas as “us” or “other.”

Much as in the past (Barnhurst and Nerone 2001), today’s networked press conceives of and crafts narratives in ways that are inseparable from the ideologies and circumstances that structure newswriters’ imaginations (Ryfe 2006). That is, it is only possible for foreign correspondence to report the relationships and distinctions that its infrastructures—values, tools, discursive practices, “professional visions” (Goodwin 1994)—lets it see. This infrastructure of contemporary, networked foreign correspondence is essentially “newsware” (Ananny In press): “networked technologies, algorithms, interfaces, practices and norms that constitute the shared, embedded and largely invisible set of material and ideological conditions and logics governing press-public interactions online.” Such information infrastructures (Bowker and Star 1999) are places to see what Gieryn (1983) calls “boundary work”: ideologically driven coordination among people with different perspectives, skills, and values who nonetheless work to maintain the conditions under which collaboration can take place. Reading the collaborations and products that emerge from these interdisciplinary “trading zones” (Galison 1997) can help

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uncover evidence of the ideological negotiations taking place at any given moment in time, for any particular configuration of actors. That is, the very existence and negotiation of these mutually sustained infrastructures (Lewis 2012) creates what Bourdieu (1984) calls the "space of possibles" in which new forms and practices of news take shape. Understanding the "imagined networks" of contemporary, networked news production entails tracing the practices and assumptions of those who create and use newsware.

Today, a set of entrepreneurial actors and communities of practice are doing this boundary work, creating what Star and Griesemer (1989) call "boundary objects" that leave clues about what they think international journalism could and should be. What has yet to be studied in detail is the kind of news values underpinning such projects and communities. What assumptions do they make about how international journalism works, or should work? What metrics of success guide their work, what types of public participation do they aim to support, and what social changes are they working to realize?

This project explores these questions by studying a subset of actors creating new forms of international, networked journalism: organizations with a focus on international news or information flows that won a Knight News Challenge grant in 2010 or 2011. A major funder in the space of news entrepreneurship, the Knight News Challenge intends to fund "the best breakthrough ideas in news and innovation" (KnightFoundation 2012), creating a "space for external actors (like technologists) to step in and bring innovation to journalism." (Lewis 2012) Indeed, Knight applicants, finalists, and winners all seem to favor "participation and distributed knowledge (i.e., crowdsourcing and user manipulation) and other features not typically associated with journalism (e.g., software development)." (Lewis 2011) And although the Knight

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Foundation is US-based, “innovators from all industries and countries are invited to participate,” (Knight Foundation, 2012), grants in 2008 explicitly focused on attracting international applicants, and there is no statistical evidence that US applicants are preferred over those from other countries (Lewis 2010).

### **Empirical Sites & Method**

To explore how Knight News Challenge startups are imagining and constructing new forms of international news tools, practices and products we identified eight international projects awarded the prize in 2010 and 2011. We include both projects inside and outside the US, with the explicitly stated aim of addressing or providing tools or platforms for international publics. (Several of the projects have changed names since they won so we refer to them by their name at the time of the interview with the original name in in parenthesis at the first mention.)

**Basetrack** (Basetrack One-Eight) won a 2010 Knight News Challenge grant for their project to re-engage the public interest in the war in Afghanistan by using a combination of embedded journalist reporting, social media, and family reports to chronicle a battalion’s in-field experiences. The project was shut down and the embedded reporters asked to leave in February, 2011, earning it even more widespread participation and media attention. Two thousand eleven winner **Tiziano 360** similarly aims to leverage social media to improve coverage of conflict, post-conflict and underreported areas by combining professional and community journalists. As part of Tiziano 360 Kurdistan, for example, professional journalists went to Iraq to report and



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train a group of locals in multimedia journalism skills, helping them to create stories for the Tiziano platform in mobile- and tablet-friendly formats accessible by news organizations and the public.

**Stroome**, a 2010 winner, lets distributed journalists more easily share, edit, and remix video. It focuses on supporting the dissemination of eyewitness video, a ubiquitous part of the emergent mobile and networked environment, by creating new shared access and publishing tools. **iWitness**, a 2011 winner, aggregates professional and citizen-produced social media content according to the content's embedded geolocation metadata. During a news event such as elections, earthquakes or protests, journalists and publics can use iWitness to browse geocoded photos, text and videos that make it easier to juxtapose location-specific, first-person accounts with professional news reports of the same location.

Several of the others startups also include mapping components. In 2011 **SwiftRiver** won the News Challenge grant to develop a platform complementary to 2009 winner Ushahidi (meaning testimony in Swahili), a crisis reporting tool developed after Kenya's post-election violence in 2007 and now being deployed in dozens of crisis situations around the world. Initially planned as a verification tool to help fact-check information reported on Ushahidi maps, SwiftRiver is now being developed as a curation and filtering tool for people to quickly make sense of large amounts of online and mobile information including SMS, email, Twitter and RSS feeds. **Tilemapping** (TileMill), a 2010 winner, is a wiki-like mapping platform for creating community maps from local data. (A prototype was used after the Haitian earthquake to map Port-au-Prince neighborhoods and support Ushahidi's work crowd-sourcing reports of where people needed help. Beyond crisis mapping, Tilemapping aims to help journalists and

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community members use maps to tell nuanced, location-based stories about local communities.

**Public Laboratory** emerged from a grassroots mapping project developed at MIT's Center for Future Civic Media in which Gulf Coast residents used helium balloons and cameras to create satellite maps of the BP oil spill. They won a News Challenge grant in 2011 to expand this tool kit beyond aerial mapping, to work with local communities to create and use open-source reporting technologies on location-specific issues. Finally, **SocMap** (GoMap Riga) is a Latvian-based project that displays local media content—Facebook status updates, tweets, news stories—on an interactive map to give geographical context to user-generated content, using this content to drive state-managed, legislative change. Their goal is to extract community issues that the state can then address by mining and re-presenting existing social media activity.

Between April 23 and May 4, 2012 we conducted 8 semi-structured interviews via Skype lasting approximately 45 minutes to an hour with founders and leaders from each project. We asked them to describe the project's origins, evolutions, goals, competitors, and staff, and then analyzed these accounts for evidence of value-based design decisions (Nissenbaum 2001, Friedman, Kahn et al. 2006). We then conducted a category system analysis or “categorical aggregation” (Creswell 1998) to iteratively identify indicators and categories of values that seemed to emerge from our interview data (for example, “inclusiveness” and “participation” emerged as value clusters among several participants). Each author conducted a close reading of each transcript, coded for specific instances of explicitly mentioned indicators as well as for values and indicators that had not yet been identified. We compared our independent analyses, discussed interpretations, refined the indicators and values, and revisited the texts several times to check for their prevalence and meanings within the interviews. We also frequently consulted

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publicly available project prototypes and information before and after conducting the interviews.

We identified five categories—participation, collaboration, connection to authority, raising awareness and learning communities—that account for our data and acknowledge that they are not mutually exclusive.

### **Findings**

Our overarching aim was to understand how a relatively new set of actors—Knight-funded innovators targeting global issues and audiences—imagine and realize infrastructures for international, journalism-like information flows. That is, recalling Anderson’s argument that institutions and technologies imagine and construct the nation-state, how do these networked infrastructures resemble and challenge traditional, fourth estate dynamics? We found two main themes in how these actors understood and structured their projects: renegotiated relationships to authority, and novel journalistic norms.

#### ***Connections to Authority: Challenging and Depending Upon Sources of Power***

The mainstream U.S. press long depended upon and contested various forms of authority and power. For example, Cook’s (1998) “new institutionalist” framework shows how the press has historically relied upon the state for the infrastructure necessary for the production and dissemination of news – providing everything from reduced postal rates and state-regulated telecommunications systems to exemptions from child labor laws for newspaper deliverers and access to restricted press conferences and government information offices for credentialed professions. News organizations have also engaged the “adjunct reporting” of quasi-official

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state-sponsored workers—*e.g.*, census takers and Center for Disease Control health workers who generate newsworthy information (Downie and Schudson 2009)—as well as military officials who provide access to soldiers and battlefields (Pfau 2004) and government whistleblowers who work with journalists to reveal information (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hunt 2012).

These collaborations sit alongside contestations (Christians, Glasser et al. 2009), moments when the press adopts an adversarial role to challenge authority and power. These confrontations have historically taken different forms, *e.g.*: during press-state conflicts like the Pentagon Papers and Watergate (Schudson and Tifft 2005); iconic, genre-creating investigative programs like *60 Minutes* (Campbell 1991); and collaborations with quasi-journalistic organizations like Wikileaks to source information and critique the state (Lynch 2010). Essentially, journalists explicitly pit themselves against authorities, using their own notions of justice, morality, and accountability to select, narrate, and defend investigations (Glasser and Ettema 1989).

Today, it is unclear how these dynamics of dependency and contestation appear in the networked infrastructures that organize international information flows. That is, what assumptions about power, authority, and journalistic norms, are implicitly and explicitly “baked into” the design of tools meant to be used by global networks of professional journalists, citizen reporters, and interested audiences? We identify two sites where our news innovators articulated this dialectic with authority: in their systems’ use of data, and in their mission-driven organizational partnerships.

***Data-based connections to authority.*** Several projects explicitly define themselves as organizations that govern data. iWitness, for example, sees itself as an intermediary that

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interprets and re-presents geo-tagged data from social media sites. It depends upon social media services like Twitter and Facebook to make their users’ data available, on network service providers for their geo-coded metadata and, ultimately, upon users to create geo-tagged media. iWitness depends upon these actors making their architectures open to third-party application developers.

Similarly, Mapbox’s TileMill relies upon various sources of power who internally access, vet, and publicize data that can be appropriated. TileMill’s Barth explains that data for its Amazonia project comes “to a very large degree from institutions like the NASA or the Brazilian Statistical Institute, which are highly reputed and which have all their own data verification systems ... trust is within those networks of experts.” Similarly, when they created their Pacific Rim data sharing platform they “grabbed all the data that this network of experts and governments had and ... put it on this map ... there was no need for going out and getting more data than what was already there.” More recently, Mapbox is working with FourSquare, seeing the chance to work with an already established “massive social network” as a “huge vote of confidence” in their own approach to managing and presenting data. These collaborations help Mapbox reach new audiences and help their users create maps with previously inaccessible data sets, but they can also create new challenges. As Mapbox’s Alex Barth puts it, “some of the actors that we work with—government and national development and multilateral organizations—[can] be very political. There’s only certain things that the World Bank can say, right? So that’s sort of holding us back here a little.” Mapbox’s must simultaneously rely upon trusted experts and institutions for access to existing, high-quality data while ensuring that they

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can appropriate and re-interpret this data in ways that are meaningful to them and their constituents.

This data-based relationship to authority is at the heart of the Public Laboratory’s goal to generate *new* data for contesting the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) account of pollution in Brooklyn’s Gowanus Canal. Public Laboratory’s “Gowanus Low-Altitude Mappers” group has “doing balloon maps, and kite maps, and also surveys in canoes in the canal, and finding new [pollution] inflows, and very active ones that were not on the EPA map, and then submitting them to the EPA [to] change the EPA’s approach to the clean-up.” At its core, the Public Laboratory aims to contest narratives *through* data, challenging the idea that only official agencies produce reputable data. As the Public Laboratory’s Jeff Warren puts it:

[C]itizen-reported data is called into question almost as a second-nature; people essentially assume that it’s worthless data. [But] a lot of data that is acted upon at a policy level is essentially just assumed to be authoritative because you paid for it ... [Y]ou paid for someone who says that they are a mapping firm or an engineering firm, so that must be correct, you know?

Public Laboratory’s larger mission is to develop data-based skills and organizational partnerships among environmental activist groups that are currently

structured around the premise that they essentially can’t gather information themselves, or that they can do so only at great expense. And so that’s part of the challenge for our community is to try to develop not only the tools themselves, but the support networks and structure that will help the people who have been doing this for years and years and years or that leverage it.

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iWitness, TileMill, and Public Laboratory all collaborate with and contest sources of power through data. As they link to, interpret, repackage, create, and organize around data and data-driven skills they create sociotechnical networks that define the shapes and scopes of contestation – defining what kind of critiques can be made imagined and realized.

*Mission-driven organizational connections to authority.* Across several of the projects, we observed not only data-based relationships to power, but also process-based, organizational dependencies in which projects relied upon skills and expertise they knew they did not have internally.

For example, although iWitness’s Jesse Garrett, says that it sees its success partly in terms of how well it can “start a conversation about broadcasting your location and what that means,” it relies upon others to assume responsibility for privacy implications of using geo-indexed social media:

The question of anonymity and identity in social media I feel is a problem that the burden is on the social media services to address in their relationships with their users. All I'm really doing is layering on top of whatever terms and conditions they have, they are enforcing, in their relationships with their users ... I think there is a need for that problem to be truly owned by the social media services. [T]here is a responsibility on the part of the social media services ... to educate users as to the consequences of turning on location services for their Twitter client, for example ... [B]asically, I think that everybody here is responsible, except me. <laughs> ... iWitness really is just an intermediary. We are not here to provide any kind of a filtering function. And the news organizations then have the

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responsibility to be respectful of the rights of the people who use those social media services.

iWitness depends upon an ecosystem in which geo-tagged social media data is created by users, stored by social media services, and used by news organizations, but it eschews responsibility for the data’s generation, depiction, or dissemination. It expects its partners to assume responsibility for individuals’ privacy, relying upon them to educate users or assume liability.

Similarly, SocMap both needs and critiques state agencies to meet its own metrics of success. It relies upon governmental agencies to lend legitimacy to its, as SocMap’s Krisofs Blaus puts it, “crowd-sourced legislation from the people,” while simultaneously critiquing state-led participatory processes. A major motivation for the SocMap legislative product—in which 10,000 SocMap-gathered signatures guarantee an issue’s placement on Latvia’s parliamentary agenda—is their observation that local municipalities are

quite reluctant to make a public hearing, public discussions, because [they’re] always trouble. You have to ask people out. They never want to come. If they come, they actually shout at you and tell you are a very bad mayor or something. And people see it’s a lose-lose case, because it’s boring for the people, and they can’t have any impact on the decisions if they don’t go court the local municipality ...[L]ocal municipalities don’t want to listen to the people, and that’s why the people don’t take any reasonable action to get heard, to express their ideas.

And yet, despite this critique of government-led processes, it sees its role in state-sanctioned processes as a key indicator of its own success:



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The more laws we pass, the more public discussions are organized through our tools, the more suggestions come from the people and the more suggestions that come from the people are getting done from the municipality—[that’s] success, it's the impact.

And, financially, SocMap is only viable with government investment: “we say to local municipalities, ‘Of course we can do something nice like this, but we need the guarantee that you will take this seriously and you will use this, so you have to sign a contract to pay for it.’” To make such investments, governments must adopt SocMap’s vision of deliberative democracy, accepting SocMap’s vision of who they see as their ideal users, participants they call “cofounders” of Latvia who do not

when they see something they don’t like, just move to another country. There are people that when they see something they don’t like, they just have no belief they could change anything. They are just people that are lazy. There are lots of people that are incompetent, that are angry and everything. But there are also those kind people – really kind, competent, active. They really care for the place and for the society. They want to get the best out of their country, the best out of their city, because they really feel themselves a part of it ... They see it’s their property, it’s their own little startup, maybe. So it’s not an age; it’s not a gender or a profession. It’s a state of mind ... They have the competency, the courage—everything—to take some action ... That’s our perfect user, and we try to get as much as we can of those kind of people. And we also have built some perfection mechanisms so these angry and incompetent and frustrated people can’t use our applications just as a platform to express their angers.

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A vision of the ideal citizen underpins SocMap. Those who fit within that ideal—who already possesses courage and competency to take action, and see their cities as their own properties and start-up organizations—are supported and encouraged while those who do not—angry, incompetent, frustrated citizens—are not designed or accounted for, or engaged with.

Similar to SocMap’s reliance on—and critique of—the state for access to legitimacy, BaseTrack navigated a complex relationship with the U.S. military. As project director Teru Kuwayama says, the goal was to create a “social media experiment ... to see what would happen if we created a direct pipeline between a thousand marines and their families.” The project was designed to do two things: to address what its creators perceived as a deficiency in the mainstream media’s depiction of the war in Afghanistan (“I didn’t fundamentally believe that nobody cares about [the war]”); and to give voice and visibility to those who do care about the war (the “social graph surround the U.S. military”). But creating a platform with which the military’s social graph could tell stories meant gaining access to the “mom, dad, wife, etc.” of U.S. marines – access that could only be gained through official relationships with the military. BaseTrack had to relied upon their relationship with the U.S. military and, by extension, the *military’s* understanding of social media – an appreciation that Kuwayama discovered depended greatly upon local commanders’ valuation of social media and their interpretations of official policies governing marines’ communication. Although they gained access to the marines and created connections for their family members—military families were “literally being flooded, comments on the Facebook wall, emails, boxes of cookies”—they measured a different kind of success by being *rejected* by the military. After families began using BaseTrack to talk publicly about casualties, the military removed BaseTrack’s access to the marines. Kuwayama explains:

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there was one mother who when one of the marines in her son's unit had his legs blown off by an IED, she posted on the Facebook wall asking people to pray for him. And she got a satellite phone call from Afghanistan from the second-in-command of the battalion telling her to take the comment down. [B]asically, they just didn't want people talking about casualties. [T]hat particular mom emerged as a sort of Erin Brockovich of the base family; she just went on the warpath because her attitude was 'this is not right.' And I think she was very correct in that. And rather than kind of allowing herself to be bullied, she actually stuck her neck out and made a stink about it. And I think that came as a huge surprise to the commanders of this battalion who were basically just used to being obeyed, and didn't even realize that that kind of chain of command doesn't extend outside [the military].

Shortly after this incident BaseTrack was asked by the military to stop the project and access to the marines was revoked. Rather than seeing this rejection as a failure, BaseTrack viewed it as a sign of success:

[M]y only empirical proof of impact of any kind is being kicked out. It's definitely the first time in two decades of working in the media that I have ever known for a fact that somebody in the U.S. government has sat up and taken notice of anything that I've done.

BaseTrack reveals a dualistic connection to authority: articulating a shared interest with the military (*e.g.*, depicting the war's importance in a way not represented in the mainstream media) and negotiating access based on that mutual appreciation; and an emergent need to see the project's success in terms of its ability to resist or reject the military's official priorities.

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Negotiating and eventually rejecting military authority were key elements to BaseTrack’s success.

Another type of connection to organizational power is a reliance on professional expertise and pre-existing social systems. SwiftRiver, for example, ideally and eventually, sees its success deriving from collaborations between local participants and subject experts with domain-specific knowledge who can vet information during crises and conflicts “who are far more expert in [a] particular area.”

Similarly, Tiziano Executive Director Jon Vidar, says their projects “are run by professional journalists or professional documentary filmmakers who serve as community editors [who] work with the community to produce quality journalistic content,” comprising a network of professional journalists who have experience mentoring. [E]specially at the beginning we’re not going to be open for anyone to just go in and create something. It’s going to be an application process where we work directly with an individual, or directly with organizations to help craft their project to the quality that we want to adhere to so that when people come to this website, they know that it’s community-produced content, and it’s quality community-produced content that has been vetted ... [O]ur large goal is to elevate the quality of community journalism and kind of help the field evolve in the broad sense.

If Tiziano relies upon the authority of media professionals and expert producers to create and curate quality content, it relies upon a different kind of authority when it outsources conversations *around* its content to social media services like Facebook and Twitter:

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We're not trying to reinvent the wheel on anything we're producing. So if we can tap into the largest social network first, let's do that and then start integrating other methods of conversation. If we have Facebook commenting where as soon as somebody comments it posts on people's walls, that's going to help us in a much larger way at this phase in our development than it would to allow people to create a user profile in our own kind of confined environment.

Tiziano essentially distributes its organizational goals between existing expertises and infrastructures. Content is generated and curated by a small community of professionals who mentor less experienced contributors and (reminiscent of Mapbox's relationship with Foursquare) the content disseminates and scales through the norms and audiences of existing social networks chosen for their popularity and large audience sizes.

**Conclusion.** Two broad patterns emerged in the projects' relationships to authority. First, they both rely upon and challenge authorities to generate, access, vet, and disseminate data. In doing so, they discovered how creating new, citizen-led data alone does not ensure social change; such data-focused approaches need connections to activists who are accustomed to challenging authority and to state and commercial actors who can by association open up new forms of data or expertise to legitimacy. Second, to achieve their aims, projects distribute their organizational missions among sites of power and expertise. They align themselves with other organizations and professions, delineate their responsibilities from those of others, and judge their success according to how well they partner with and resist different forms of power. To appreciate projects like these as new forms of international journalism means understanding how they both create and traverse networks of authority. Like traditional mainstream news

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production, these projects depend upon knowing which types of power they need and which types they can contest.

### *Reworking News Norms*

Journalism scholarship on news norms has traditionally focused on objectivity and the practices implemented to achieve it – balance, accuracy, and reliance on bureaucratically credible sources (Schudson (1978)Schudson, 1978; Schudson and Manoff 1986; Sigal 1986). Today, a new set of actors and circumstances in the journalistic field have prompted scholars and commentators look beyond objectivity to consider norms, practices, and values implicated in the design and use of networked technology – how networked infrastructures both afford and constrain journalistic practices. Stray (2012), for example, identifies participation and engagement as emerging norms; Benson (2010) sees the re-emergence of a journalistic commitment to facilitating pluralism and dialogue; van Dalen (2012) traces the role of information algorithms in structuring news work; and Lewis (2012), among others, has outlined ways in which collaboration is replacing competition in journalism. Here we trace the norms and practices inherent in the motivations and designs of Knight-funded international news entrepreneurs.

*Engagement.* Across many of the projects engagement and a dissatisfaction with the mainstream media—rather than neutrality, objectivity or a desire to collaborate with traditional news organizations—was a driving force for both starting and structuring projects. Kuwayama, for example, developed Basetrack because of his frustration with mainstream media coverage of the war in Afghanistan:

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Despite the fact that Afghanistan is the longest war in U.S. history, as far as I can tell, it's completely off the radar and public consciousness. And there was, I think, a 2010 poll ... by the New York Times and CBS news that showed that 3% of U.S. voters identified Afghanistan as their most pressing concern as a top priority. And so, really I guess the genesis of the project was this frustration, one, with the way the conventional media was reporting on Afghanistan. And the fact that I didn't fundamentally believe that nobody cares about this. [M]y gut feeling was just that traditional journalism hasn't been doing a good job of delivering or communicating. It's not a situation of just apathy and disconnectedness.

His "gut feeling" spurred Basetrack's goal to reconnect the public to the Afghanistan war, by engaging with military families:

If there is this specific population [military families] that is intrinsically focused, and perhaps even obsessed, with this issue, that according to all the opinion polls the rest of the population is completely uninterested in, maybe there's a way to use that dynamic and to access that window and to see if we can reach the rest of the population. And I think that's where social media is fundamentally different and better than traditional media. I kind of use the analogy of conventional, traditional media being like carpet bombing where you have one message that you just bombard a general audience with. And social media, I'd say, is a lot closer to the Hailfire missile approach where you're specifically tracking specific people, targeting them, and really hitting them in a very specific and concerted way.

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Similarly Tiziano's Vidar describes his projects as emerging from a desire to correct mainstream media misrepresentations:

I kept going to these regions that my friends and family would be like, "Oh, you've got to be careful. You've got to be safe." ... I'd been to Turkey for the last eight years in a row, and Iraq for the last three or four years now, and I mean I literally have friends that I consider family there. And so to have my friends and family in Los Angeles be telling me, "You've got to be careful. It's so dangerous. Aren't you worried," everything else. I would be like, "No. Just go. Have fun. It's a great place. I would love to go there for a summer." So there was definitely an element of me wanting to help people get over misconceptions by mainstream media.

Just as the motivation for Basetrack emerged from a desire to connect with—and tell the stories of—military families, Tiziano is premised on the idea that there is a fundamental mismatch between the entrepreneur's experiences and those portrayed in the mainstream media.

Engagement is also central to Ushahidi and Map Box, in which local voices are leveraged to create maps that tell alternative stories and contest official narratives. According to Ushahidi's Rotich, international professional journalists got the story of post-election violence in Kenya wrong:

When you have what I call helicopter journalists, who fly in with really cool flak jackets, it's very easy for them to simplify an issue because they don't have the local context. So one of the narratives that we were starting to hear during the post-election violence in Kenya was that, "Oh, it's another Rwanda." But it was not. If you were listening and looking at the bloggers who were trying to make sense of what was going in the country, it



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would have been very clear to you that this is not another Rwanda. This is fundamentally a political problem that ... expressed itself in an ethnic way. But it started as a political problem. It did not start as an ethnic problem. So that's also something to look at.

Rotich emphasizes the value of local expertise in creating narratives that reflect a reality not portrayed by the mainstream media. As whole, the projects privilege new, or newly accessible forms of expertise and sourcing based on authenticity and local knowledge – contrasting them against what are perceived as inadequate or incorrect narratives circulating among mainstream media networks.

*Expertise and sourcing.* The idea of journalistic expertise is central to all projects, but each project emphasizes the need to surface and legitimate new types of expertise. For example, several of the projects aim to expand the notion of a bureaucratically credible source, a cornerstone of mainstream media reporting routines.

This is particularly evident in the many projects with mapping as a central component. For example, Public Laboratory’s primary goal is to develop new data that challenges the notion that data that have been officially sanctioned and commodified are the only reliable data. Their entire project is premised on the value of alternative maps that tell stories using data generated by, and reflecting the interests of, community members. And for Ushahidi, the most valuable sources of information in a crisis situation are locals, as Rotich explains: “We absolutely have to start listening to the crowd and we have to collaborate in order to make sense of what's going on and to have situational awareness around crises.” She further describes: “What we're shooting for is that the local people are empowered enough, that they have at least a tool [so] that they don't have to start from scratch to contextualize an issue, to collect data about that issue.”

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Basetrack and Tiziano are also driven by the goal of making more central a source whose credibility derives not from her affiliation with a news organization but, rather, from proximity to an issue or story. Basetrack not only embedded themselves at the site of the story (a military base in Afghanistan) but also leveraged the voices of those seen to have the greatest personal investment in the story (military families). Similarly, Tiziano focuses on training local journalists (publishing stories that emerge from local experience and relationships) and iWitness aggregates location-specific content for the explicit purpose of surfacing the place-based perspectives of “ordinary citizens” who can be ready to tell an “unexpected story where no one is looking.” Essentially, instead of traditional journalistic routines of distancing, objectivity and neutrality, these entrepreneurs created systems that explicitly privileged proximity, personal investment, and local knowledge.

**Verification.** Stories that emerge from personal investments complicate how to reliably understand how and why information should be trusted. Several of the projects offload responsibility for verifying data and content to the very people invested in the story. For example, as Barth’s TileMill explains, their project relies on experts and transparency as their means of verification:

Aside from working here with groups of experts, I think that the other element here to verification is to be radically open about what we publish ... The trust is within those networks of experts and the checks and balances that openness provides.

Similarly, Public Laboratory relies on experts to facilitate various projects but, akin to a Wikipedia model of verification, credibility is established based on the merits of contributors. Warren describes that the site’s quality emerges from

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the way that people show appreciation for each other and build reputations, and build essentially governing structures in the ways that do and don't work. There's been a lot of discussion recently about Barnstars, which is an awards structure on Wikipedia.... I really like the idea that this kind of awarding doesn't have to come from any central authority, and it's wonderful, and it kind of is in the spirit of Public Laboratory as well.

In the case of Tiziano, though, stories earn legitimacy through oversight by professional journalists:

So every single one of the students and their stories – we've either gone with them and shot them, or we've been there editing their raw footage. Like we know that everything they're producing is real; one thing that we serve as [is] this kind of role of editor within the community where we can be that verification for them so that people can come to the site and realize that this is trustworthy content.

Others, though, either don't feel they have the responsibility (iWitness) or ability (Swiftriver) to verify the content associated with their platforms. Swiftriver's Meier explains, “Because the platform is free and open source we won't have control over how people use it. So [verification] would be more or less completely out of our hands.”

Across the different systems, we observed different practices and standards of verification. Some re-assigned the journalistic act of verification from the designers or creators of the tool to the *platform* itself, expecting the system's stories to derive their legitimacy from a highly contested and contingent mix of system affordances and constraints, and participant intentions and actions Gillespie (2010). Others invoke a longstanding division within of mainstream journalism (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004; Murdock, 1977; Schudson, 2005) in which

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the validity and legitimacy of stories depends both upon “operational” moves (*e.g.*, decisions individuals make about who to interview, how they write, when to be satisfied with a story’s authenticity) and the “allocative” actions (*e.g.*, organizational decisions made by managers and designers about how and when to distribute resources, afford actions, and constrain individual freedom). That is, tracing verification within these international, networked reportorial systems means complementing traditional views on journalistic accountability (within a mix of professional cultures, personal decision-making, and organizational routines) with perspectives that trace the idea of verification across sociotechnical assemblages – actor-networks (Latour, 2005) of designers, users, audiences, data, engineering norms, modes of interactivity, and digital technologies that dynamically construct and surface verification practices and standards.

***Collaboration.*** Perhaps the strongest shift in norms seems to be from competition to collaboration. Despite a legacy of “scoop and shun”, in which journalists kept information and sources to themselves, focused on getting stories out before competitors, or ignored stories because they came from others (Glasser & Gunther, 2005), all of the projects examined here either depended upon or facilitated collaboration with the public and among journalists.

Stroome, for example, is explicitly designed to allow journalists to share and remix videos with little regard to geographic location or organizational context. As Stroome’s Nonny de la Peña explains, the culture of journalism is slowly shifting toward collaboration:

Can people work from across the globe, across the country, on the same story and a city in a collaborative way? That would be my dream come true with Stroome, [a] measurable success. Walls among newsrooms are starting to break down... When you think that so

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many places now only have one city newspaper, it's not the same competitive environment; they need to collaborate to survive ... It seems like a no brainer, but that doesn't mean it's going to get easily adopted. There's a lot of traditions that have been around for a century. It's going to take a while for those traditions to change.

Similarly, Tiziano and Public Laboratory facilitate collaborations among journalists, experts and publics in order to generate new data and stories, relying in part on other information outlets to distribute their stories. Similarly, iWitness is currently testing its software with five news organizations; it sees its ability to work within and be relevant to journalistic workflows (*e.g.*, orienting reporters to geo-tagged social media sources) as key markers of its own success. And Swiftriver—already fundamentally based on a collaborative model in which information is collected and filtered through joint efforts of experts and publics—is also envisioned as a tool to give traditional newsrooms a competitive edge in reporting. Swiftriver's Meier told us: “I do see the SwiftRiver platform as a way that a news room could help stay on top of breaking news in a way that maybe that gives them an advantage over others who perhaps don't have the same tools.”

**Conclusion.** Although these projects are supported by the Knight Foundation because of their potential contributions in the field of journalism, they see themselves as outside of the traditional press, crafting new norms and practices that are markedly different from the routines of mainstream media reporters. All of the projects embrace engagement and collaboration as key to their own organizational missions and each, in different ways, views expertise and sourcing as dynamic and contestable concepts that depend upon both their design decisions and the participants they attract. This makes the entire notion of information verification contingent and

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dependent upon networked norms that cannot be designed *a priori*. That is, the authenticity or legitimacy of these systems depend upon a mix of experts with professional knowledge, transparent processes, actors with situational awareness and proximity to local events, technical affordances of the infrastructures that support collaboration, and a willingness to reject the dominant narratives of mainstream media and traditional journalism.

### Discussion & Conclusion

In his account of how nationalism emerged from colonial technologies and institutions, Anderson (1983) argues that the map, census, and museum created a “classificatory grid” (p. 184) to “say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there. It was bounded, determinate, and therefore—in principle—countable.” These inextricably linked tools, practices, ideologies, and norms made it possible to create a “style of imagining” (p. 185) through which people, resources, and ideas could be linked within the container of the nation state.

Today, the meaning and significance of this container is in flux as the nation state’s technologies and modes of association are shifting. These moves reflect—and are caused by—changes in how institutions like the press adopt and adapt to networked technologies, and how newly influential actors like technology entrepreneurs are creating infrastructures that span national contexts. One way to trace this transition is to study how instances of journalism emerge from these actor-networks – how they both challenge and recapitulate journalistic practices in their innovations, simultaneously upending and recreating press-public dynamics through which nation states have imagined and realized themselves. Essentially, to understand contemporary nationalism—as a *networked* phenomenon that invokes and depends upon

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institutions like the press—we need to describe today’s “classificatory grid” of individuals, organizations, practices, norms, and technologies that structure how people are juxtaposed, share consequences, and imagined to be interdependent.

This study investigates one small aspect of this imagination: how Knight Foundation funded designers, journalists, and technologists collaborate to create new spaces for international news and information flows. We find that they use data-based and mission-driven approaches to both rely upon and distance themselves from authorities, while simultaneously crafting news norms for engaging, sourcing, verifying, and collaborating with people who have not traditionally been involved in news making. Taken together, these findings suggest how design innovators create the conditions under which international news networks are envisioned and constructed, helping us understand the highly contested and contingent nature of the very phrase “foreign reporting.”

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