The traditional ‘watchdog’ role of journalism in promoting democratic accountability through investigation and exposure as a function of freedom of expression has been, at one and the same time, facilitated and challenged by a global proliferation of accessible data and their easy transfer made possible chiefly by the use of digitised information and communication technologies (ICTs). This has fostered transnational cooperation among investigative journalists in order both to enhance their capacity to manage more readily available large volumes of data, and to provide effective counters to (hold to account) the extended power of institutions and individuals that operate across borders. Arguably, there was little which was novel, both as activities and in creating scandals, in money laundering, tax evasion, environmental degradation, trafficking, crime or political corruption – or that they crossed national boundaries. What did change, however, was their global scale and their digitally enhanced speed and reach. Investigative journalists responded not by abandoning their established modes of operation but by augmenting them and pooling resources. The global growth from the mid-1990s of Freedom of Information and more latterly Right to Information legislation coincided with an increase in uptake of digital ICTs, providing investigative journalists with access to masses of both open and via leaks private data, helping them to pursue the same inquiries, often simultaneously, in many countries, and allowing them to establish and track transnational connections. Nevertheless, the ability of the mainstream media to support such investigations waned as they were themselves either incorporated into global entities (many of which had creative tax arrangements and close political affiliations) or struggled to stay in business (Sambrook 2018a: 1). At the same time, journalists, and in particular investigative journalists, have been confronted by increasingly hostile environments, often created by governments and politicians even in European countries such as Bulgaria, Turkey and Austria (Reporters without Borders 2018a; 2018b). In China the number of investigative journalists declined by 57.5 per cent between 2011 and 2017 (Anon 2018). Organisations such as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), formed in 1997, and the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN), founded in 2003, stepped in to foster and coordinate cooperative transnational investigations. This was exemplified by the global exposure under the auspices of the ICIJ of a series of tax evasions involving politicians, corporates, banks, celebrities and criminals through what became known as the Luxembourg Leaks (2014), the Swiss Leaks (2015), the Panama Papers (2016) and the Paradise Papers (2017).
What the ICIJ called ‘the secrets of the global élite’ were laid bare. It remains a moot point, however, as to how many publics were scandalised by such revelations.

On the one hand, Iceland’s prime minister, Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson, resigned ‘amid mounting public outrage that his family had sheltered money offshore’, and the Pakistani prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, was removed from office by the country’s Supreme Court (and later banned from politics for life) for concealing his offshore assets, as revealed by publication of the Panama Papers (Henley 2016). On the other hand, Gunnlaugsson was swiftly re-elected to Iceland’s parliament (Jónsson 2017), having been replaced as prime minister by another politician named in the leak of papers (Taylor 2017). Moreover, that the names of the US President Donald Trump and the British Prime Minister David Cameron appeared in the papers seemed to have no noticeable effect on their political careers (Cuthbertson 2017; Stone 2016). By 2019, The Guardian newspaper, one of 90 collaborators in the Paradise Papers investigation, could report only that the case had led to ‘new or expanded criminal investigations in Switzerland and Argentina and accelerated the process of reform in the European Union’. On the other hand, one of the journalists, Pelin Ünker, had been imprisoned in Turkey on charges of ‘defamation and insult’ for writing about the offshore finances of the country’s former prime minister as part of the investigation (Borger 2019). As Ettema and Glasser (1998: 2–4) have argued, investigative journalists may identify ‘the public moral meaning’ of events or circumstances, and ‘can issue a compelling call for public moral indignation’, but ultimately it is the public which has to act to recognise and then redress any scandal.

The foundations of transnational investigative journalism

Traditionally, investigative journalism worked on local, regional and national levels within nation-states. As such, many investigations had significant impact only within the single nation (Castillo 2018; Jensen 2002). Consequently, they often remain unknown outside the country of origin, an example being the 1970s Poulson Affair, investigated by the Bradford Telegraph and Argus newspaper, which despite being labelled ‘Britain’s most notorious corruption scandal’ (Anon 2009), is viewed chiefly as a defining case solely within urban Britain in the second half of the twentieth century (Jones 2012). In larger countries, such as India, some activities exposed by investigative journalism attained significant notice only at the level of the sub-national state (Pal 2017). Within this context, investigative journalists have both access to the (sub-)national polity and the capacity to provoke (sub-)national legislative change. In the nineteenth century, W. T. Stead, who has been called ‘Britain’s first investigative journalist’ (Robinson 2012) and whose investigation into child prostitution led to the introduction of the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1885, went so far as to claim that he practised a form of ‘government by journalism’ (Stead 1886). Such investigative journalism focused on cases within nation-states and drawing them to the attention of their publics. Individual scandals publicised as a result of journalistic investigation may have piqued a wider, global interest, but that a number (among them the Watergate, Iran-Contra and Abu Ghraib scandals) did so largely reflected the global importance of the USA and, to a lesser extent, other countries in the global North. Even where a case had a truly global dimension, such as the sale and use of the drug thalidomide which caused journalists to gather evidence from Australia, Kenya, Sweden and the USA as well as the UK, it was more often than not associated with a single (national) journalistic effort, in this instance that of the London Sunday Times newspaper (Knightley 1997).

Investigative journalists did cooperate transnationally before the digital era. The US-based organisation Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) sought from its foundation in 1975 to provide opportunities for ‘journalists throughout the world . . . [to] help each other by sharing
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story ideas, newsgathering techniques and news sources’. In 2002 IRE introduced a special citation for an international entry into its awards, bestowed annually from 1979, although it was discontinued in 2005. Since 1984, journalists have been recognised by IRE, although not always with an award, in Australia, Austria, Bosnia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Georgia, Hong Kong, Mexico, New Zealand, Serbia, South Korea, Sweden, the UK and Ukraine. However, it was only in the twenty-first century that transnational investigations began to feature in the awards. Thereafter, they appeared quite regularly with the ICIJ being cited seven times in ten years. IRE has also acknowledged the work of both the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCR) and the European Investigative Collaboration network (EIC).

OCCR began supporting collaborative reporting in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America in 2006 and has involved 150 journalists in 30 countries. By 2017 it claimed 60 transnational investigations a year. EIC, founded by the German news magazine Der Spiegel with media partners in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Romania, Serbia and Spain, made an investigation into the terror attacks in Paris in 2015, its first joint venture. In 2011, six newspapers from the largest EU countries – the UK, France, Spain, Italy, Poland and Germany – formed the Europa alliance ‘to investigate the European predicament’. Such initiatives were not confined to Europe. The African Network of Centers for Investigative Journalism (ANCIJ), established in 2014, is a collaboration of ten newsrooms, and the Norbert Zongo Cell for Investigative Journalism in West Africa was formed in 2015 with an original 18 members. Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ) started in Jordan in 2005 and operates across nine Middle Eastern countries (Coronel 2016). In Asia, collaboration among individual titles seemed to be more common (Dhyatmika 2017). Nevertheless, Chavarong Limpattamapanee of the Bangkok daily newspaper Thai Rath argued that ‘the future of investigative journalism in Asia must lie in cross-country cooperation’ (Anon 2014). In 2017 GIJN reported that it had reached 155 groups in 68 countries; by 2016, 144 offline stories had been generated in 13 languages, and 350 online stories authored by 96 journalists from 29 counties (Hume and Abbott 2017: 9). Leon Willems, director of the Netherlands-based Free Press Unlimited, argued that where journalism adhered to its ‘myopic’ national focus it was ‘dying’ as a practice (Hume and Abbott 2017: 11).

All the same, US investigations, mostly into domestic issues, continued to dominate the IRE awards up to 2017 (the latest available). Even within the European Union (EU) – ‘by far the best integrated transnational political zone in the world’ (Hafez 2011: 492) – Schlesinger (2008: 87) noted that ‘traditional print journalism centred on Europe has not easily transcended national boundaries’. Furthermore, ‘the rise in transnational investigative journalism’ did not mean that scandals ‘easily spread across national boundaries as perceptions of norm violations still vary substantially’ (Meyer 2009: 1058). Where collaboration in investigative journalism did occur it was more likely to be intra-national (Anon 2018; Lewis 2018: 7–10; Sambrook 2018b: 33). Or investigations were internationalised, chiefly through coordinated or uncoordinated publication of either the original or additional material in more than one country (see Investigative Reporting Project Italy 2018); for example, the 1980s arms-for-hostages deal brokered by US president Ronald Reagan – ‘the biggest presidential scandal since Watergate’ (Brown and Vincent 1995: 69) – was first made public by the Lebanese weekly Ash-Shiraa, and then taken up, hesitantly at first, by investigative journalists in the US press, including the Los Angeles Times, the Washington Post and the New York Times which amplified it (Brown and Vincent 1995: 70; Hersh 2018: 264). Ash-Shiraa ‘broke the story but the [New York] Times made it a world headline’ (Byrne 2014). In 2017 Poynter listed 56 collaborative investigative reporting projects of which only nine were transnational (Kramer 2017). Furthermore, investigative journalists have customarily eschewed forms of collaboration with other, national bases of political, economic and social power: transnationalism may have exacerbated this tendency.
by encouraging adversarialism in investigative journalism in non- and emerging democracies, putting it at odds with governments and their associates (de Burgh 2008: 91).

Because of investigative journalism’s close association with liberal democracy, its adversarialist and public service orientation and its basis in a developed professionalism among journalists, it has tended to be prevalent in what have been categorised as the North Atlantic countries (the USA, the UK, Ireland, Canada and, by extension, Australia and New Zealand) and, to a lesser extent, Northern and Central Europe (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland) (Bromley 2017: 220; Hallin and Mancini 2004: 233). By comparison, it has been less well established in countries where journalism is less independent of state and political structures, such as France (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 122), although the French daily Le Monde played a leading role in the Swiss Papers case. Transnational investigative journalism displays origins, therefore, in the liberal democracies of the global North. GIJN, OCCR and ICIJ are all based in the USA (with varying degrees of operational devolution to other countries). Major philanthropic sponsors include American (Open Society Foundations, Skoll, Ford, MacArthur and Logan foundations), Dutch (Adessium Foundation), Belgian (Pascal Decroos Foundation), Swiss (Oak Foundation), British (Sigrid Rausing Trust) and Australian donors. Government funding has been provided by, among others, the US State Department and USAid, the European Union and the Danish, Norwegian, Belgian Flemish, Swedish and Swiss governments (Hume and Abbott 2017: 5, 13, 16–20; Sullivan 2013: 27). This patronage can be viewed as a way of promoting liberal democratic values through transnational investigative initiatives in non-democratic and transitioning countries (Kaplan 2013: 11; Statsministeriet 2003) including professionalising journalists (Kaplan 2013: 44). It has also led to anxieties about the hybridisation of journalism – a ‘blurring of roles’ of journalists and others, such as NGOs, with specific different interests (Koch 2018: 65–69).

Transnational investigative journalism in the twenty-first century

Since the turn of the century a transnational investigative journalism landscape has evolved which is multi-faceted and multi-layered and in which mainstream media and professional journalists work with not-for-profits, NGOs, philanthropic funds, activists, online portals, projects, centres, platforms, units, independent journalists, citizens and production companies, some creating content, others providing funding and various forms of capacity-building from training to open databases. This web of overlapping networked alliances share resources, engage in advocacy, provide support, establish presence (commonly online) and offer security against hostility to investigative journalism (Hume and Abbott 2017: 11, 14). This has seen a shift from competitiveness (among journalists to ‘scoop’ other journalists; among media to maximise audience share) to forms of mutuality facilitated by third-party organisations affording an infrastructure of intermediaries, hubs and umbrella associations (Alfter 2018: 48; Sambrook 2018b: 33–34). Whether this is truly innovative, or born out of necessity as reporting the world becomes more complex, difficult and expensive, or no more than a transitory fad remains a moot point (Kayser-Bril 2018: 61–62). Nevertheless, it is widely seen as effective. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) concluded that ‘international consortiums of investigative journalists are an example of international cooperation that leads to tangible results’ and that ‘transnational networks and consortiums of news professionals facilitate investigations that were unimaginable ten years ago’ (OECD 2018: 3–4).

How do the most widely celebrated (or notorious) examples of what appear to be transnational investigative journalism fit into this environment? Both WikiLeaks and, by implication,
the 2013 NSA global surveillance leaks by Edward Snowden have been decisively dismissed by the veteran British editor Harold Evans (2011: 344) as ‘not investigative journalism’. The scandalous topics – scurrilous diplomatic cables; secret communications on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; unwarranted surveillance of citizens; etc. – were certainly of global import and interest. However, Julian Assange, the editor of WikiLeaks, and Snowden identified the media they wished to use so as to effect, in Assange’s words, ‘maximum impact’ (Quinn 2011: 241). In Snowden’s case that was operationalised through the selective release of different elements of the data to a range of media around the world, largely utilising the intermediation of the journalist Glenn Greenwald and the documentarian Laura Poitras (Maas 2013). This seemed to lack prearranged transnational collaboration among journalists. Similarly, after Assange had agreed to release documents to The Guardian in the 2010 Cablegate case, he, rather than the newspaper, sought the participation of the New York Times, Der Spiegel, Le Monde and El País (Leigh and Harding 2011: 109–110, 170). However, in both this instance and the parallel investigation into telephone hacking by British tabloid newspapers, The Guardian saw advantage in collaborating with the New York Times, partly because of the protection offered by the US First Amendment which was not available in the UK (Davies 2014: 152; Rusbridger 2012: 132). These arrangements may be compared to the Investigate Europe (2018; emphasis added) initiative of nine individual journalists from eight countries who ‘research as a multinational team . . . share, merge and crosscheck facts’. And, indeed, to the decision taken by the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung to seek assistance from the ICIJ when given access to the Panama Papers because of the sheer amount of data which needed to be analysed.

Such variations in configurations of transnational investigative journalism led Heft, Alfter and Pfetsch (2017: 6–7) to suggest that this kind of journalism was characterised by a matrix of degrees of collaboration and of organisation and control determined by the size and durability of the cooperation, the intensity of the teamwork and the ownership of the project. As described above, ‘transnational journalism networks can be established with a “top-down” approach, when leading media organisations initiate collaboration across borders, or a “bottom-up” approach, when individual journalists and actors from within the professional community strive to foster cross-border collaboration’ – and at many points in between (Carson 2013, 18–19; Heft, Alfter and Pfetsch 2017: 8; Hume and Abbott 2017: 7). The greater the intensity and stability of the collaboration among journalists and the more rigorous (top-down) the management of the effort (whether by mainstream media, not-for-profits, NGOs or funders), the more likely, it seems, that the same scandals will be publicised at the same time in different countries, that the same actors in those scandals will appear in all the media irrespective of countries of origin and representation, and that the same explanatory frames and concepts will be used by the media (although the evidence for this is as yet inconclusive) (Heft, Alfter and Pfetsch 2017: 3, 14–16).

Scandalous topics

Two approaches appear to underpin all transnational investigative journalism. The first is positive and holds power to account and informs publics; the second is negative and exposes corruption in many forms — political, administrative, financial, business, in sport and in aid projects (OECD 2018: 3; Sullivan 2013: 10). Transnational collaboration also serves to protect both freedom of speech and journalists and the media from retribution in the forms of censorship, prosecution and (sometimes violent) intimidation (Rusbridger 2018: 328–334). Much of the corruption is itself criminal but crime, such as cross-border trafficking, is also a common focus of attention.2 Perhaps more contentiously, transnational investigative journalists may work to
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promote social justice, reform and ‘strengthening civil society’ (Kaplan 2013: 11). In sum, the underlying orientation of transnational investigative journalism is, as noted above, to work to foster and uphold liberal democratic principles.

A list of scandalous topics was compiled for this chapter using the archives of five transnational investigative journalism initiatives (ICIJ, GIJN, OCCR, ARJJ and ANCIJ) and the Transnational Investigative Journalism social media space (@TIJcommunity), with references in parentheses where the authors were part of the project. Where appropriate the name of the project is also given. The list is no more than illustrative of the scandals tackled by transnational investigative journalists in recent years (c.2008–2018). In addition to the various financial scandals exposed in the Papers series and governmental corruption, they are:

- The World Bank’s failure to protect vulnerable populations;
- Criminal trafficking of migrants;
- Money laundering (Russian Laundromat; Investiga Lava Jato);
- Secrecy behind EU confiscation of criminal assets (Confiscati Bene);
- Child sex tourism;
- The trade in stolen cultural artefacts (Memoria Robada);
- Treatment of indigenous peoples;
- Activities of mining companies (Fatal Extraction: Australian mining’s damaging push into Africa);
- Human rights violations;
- Trade in human body parts;
- The organised crime of ‘disappearing’ people (Desaparecidos. Duelo Eterno);
- The tobacco trade;
- Asbestos sales (Danger in the Dust: Inside the Global Asbestos Trade) (Koch 2018: 65);
- Illicit trade in minerals;
- Deadly work-related diseases;
- Use of Interpol files to target political opponents;
- Migration routes (El Nuevo Éxodo Latino);
- War profiteering;
- Climate change lobbying;
- Subversion of a US global AIDS initiative;
- Drug trafficking;
- Stolen works of art (Las Últimas Prisioneras de los Nazis en América Latina);
- Sales of contaminated meat;
- Pharmaceutical companies’ monopolisation strategies (The Big Pharma Project);
- Overfishing;
- Deaths of migrants (Migrants’ Files) (Kayser-Bril 2018: 59);
- The finances of soccer players (Football Leaks);
- The presence of the Mafia in Africa (Mafia in Africa);
- Bribery in business;
- Mistreatment of injured protesters (Upside Down).

The largest transnational collaboration, involving 400 journalists from more than 100 media organisations in 76 countries, came in the Panama Papers investigation (Sambrook 2018: 31). The smallest were undertaken by no more than two journalists; for example, Saadah Abdul Qader from Egypt and Najwa Hamami from Tunisia who authored Upside Down (see above). Consequently, not all transnational investigations were global, or even regional, but many were
bilateral (Romanian fugitives in Costa Rica; the failure of Spanish contractors to deliver basketball training to Georgians).

**Latin America: an exemplar?**

Transnational collaboration has been described as ‘the new paradigm’ in investigative journalism in Latin America. Insofar as there are shared languages and a largely common journalistic culture, as well as similar problems of corruption and impunity, mutual experiences of migration, economic integration and regional crime – and declining investment in journalism by mainstream media across the continent – the situation has proved to be conducive to cross-border cooperation, in order both to foster investigative journalism and to protect journalists. Furthermore, the development has been supported by US governmental funding (Castillo 2018; Linares 2017). Latin American journalists participated enthusiastically in the Panama Papers investigation: 96 (almost a quarter of the global total) from 15 countries (20 per cent of the total) contributed (Linares 2017). Flores and Huertas (2018: 99) believe that the experience ‘awoke a sleeping lion in Latin America so that all kinds of journalistic collaborations are now being produced’. As noted above, Latin American transnational collaborations have been responsible for a number of significant cross-border investigations:

- The Institute of Press and Society (Instituto de Prensa y Sociedad or IPYS) was set up in 1993 in Peru and has correspondents in seven countries. It acts chiefly as a journalists’ defence organisation and collects and publishes data.
- Connectas is a Colombian-based hub made up of 200 journalists in 17 countries.
- IDL-Reporteros, founded in 2009 in Peru, claims to have completed more than 500 investigations into corruption, drug trafficking, etc.
- The Investigative Reporting Initiative in the Americas has expanded its coverage beyond the mainland to the Caribbean. It has undertaken 135 investigations into: money laundering between South America and the United States; crime and violence; the environment; drug trafficking; governance and corruption; mismanagement of public funds; human trafficking; and the rights of marginalised populations.
- ALiados is an alliance of ten news organisations in nine countries: Agência Pública (Brazil), Animal Político (Mexico), CIPER (Chile), Confidencial (Nicaragua), El Faro (El Salvador), El Puercoespín (Argentina), IDL-Reporteros (Peru), La Silla Vacía (Colombia), Plaza Pública (Guatemala) and The Clinic (Chile).
- Agência Pública in Brazil uses a Creative Commons licence to allow republication of its investigations which were carried by 700 outlets in 2017 and brings overseas journalists to Brazil to report on human rights (de Assis 2018: 40–42).

**Conclusion**

Transnational investigative journalism (in a variety of forms) grew substantially over the first years of the twenty-first century as a means of bringing to light a wide range of cross-border abuses and presenting them for public consideration. This might be considered to be a journalistic offensive in response to declining investment in investigative journalism in the global North and to ‘backsliding’ on transition to democracy in the global South and the former Soviet empire (International IDEA 2017: 70–87) – an attempt to (re-)establish the value of traditional journalistic practices made more potent and relevant to the early twenty-first century by the adoption of digital ICTs and cross-border collaboration (Gearing 2016: 351). However, many
parts of the world were also experiencing profound change at a time when communication
capacity was increasing, and these conditions are likely in any event to have been favour-
able to investigative journalism (Bromley 2017: 224–225). Nevertheless, press freedom provides
the critical context for investigative journalism to flourish, and much of its capability is still
‘underexploited’ (OECD 2018: 5–7, 18). Given its liberal democratic orientation, transnational
investigative journalism is attempting to export scandal to often unresponsive non-democratic
and transitioning states (Tumber and Waisbord 2004: 1034–1035). In any event, in order for
corruption, abuses and criminality to evolve into scandals, they need not only to be constructed
as ‘public events’ but received as such by publics (ibid.: 1034). Even at the level of the nation-
state there is little evidence that publics are readily scandalised (ibid.: 1032). Revelations in the
Panama Papers led to mass demonstrations in Iceland in 2016 (Osborne 2016); at a transnational
level, public response to the revelations of cross-border investigative journalism has been largely
muted. Transnational investigative journalism may be better at producing evidence of gross
misconduct than it is at generating scandal per se.

Notes

1 The situation in Latin America is explored later in the chapter.
2 The theme of UNESCO’s World Press Freedom Day 2018 held in Ghana was ‘Keeping power in check:
   media, justice and the rule of law’ (United Nations 2018).
4 See also www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/pages/panama-papers-about-the-investigation/
5 International IDEA (2017: 72) identified some of the countries mentioned in this chapter among the
   ‘backsliders’: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Thailand, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine.

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