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### 'The high cost and little reward of investigative journalism'

Posted: **17/04/09** By: [Helen Croydon](#)  
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Things are not good for investigative journalism.

Headlines are screaming that the end of the newspaper is nigh. If that happens, warn the media pessimists, there may be no one to fund investigations.

[On Monday The Guardian instilled yet more fear into the poor investigative reporter](#) by pointing out that new rules requiring telephone and internet companies to keep logs of who phones whom and when, means journalists can no longer protect their sources. No whistleblower, no story.

For the investigative journalists themselves, it seems the rewards are fading by the day. There's more competition from bloggers and the new citizen journalist; it's harder to

stay anonymous in a digital era; and there's even less appreciation from an information hungry public, who want a quick news fix from the click of a mouse.

This week we heard Iranian-American journalist [Roxana Saberi](#) has gone on trial in Iran accused of spying for the US. She was arrested back in January yet we've heard little of her plight.

Nearly a month ago, [US journalists Laura Ling and Euna Lee from Current TV were detained in North Korea](#), again with very little fuss over their doubtless terrifying ordeal.

The US captain of a naval ship held hostage by Somali pirates, however, has been granted worldwide heroic status by the media. Laura, Euna and Roxana, who have risked their welfare to bring us news from two of the most repressed nations in the world, go unnoticed.

Investigative journalists, as well as being an endangered species, are always on the D-list.

Vincent Brossel from Reporters without Borders says it shouldn't be like that: "These are two clear examples of how risky investigative journalism can be - and also how important it is. They bring so much more to a story. We need them to be appreciated and supported by the media industry."

I was particularly shocked and disheartened by news of Laura and Euna's arrest, as I'm a bit of a fan: I worked as a news producer for [Current TV](#) in the UK for nearly a year and am familiar with many of Laura's cutting-edge reports from uncovering slavery in Brazil to getting the inside story on drugs gangs in Mexico.

I met Laura in New York briefly last autumn when a Current TV contingent was in New York for the Emmys. Laura had been nominated for an award for her role as supervising producer for 'From Russia with Hate'.

I don't at all claim to know Laura personally, but I was a little awe-struck. She came across as passionate about her work, professional and focused. She looks no older than late-twenties and has such a tiny frame she could almost be described as frail. Yet she's travelled to some of the most notorious danger zones, producing TV reports from China, Haiti, and Africa. She's even journeyed through the Amazon with native tribes to demonstrate the effects of deforestation. She's brought out more of the unreported world than a lot of life-long journalists.

The Vanguard journalism department of Al Gore's channel works out of LA. It aims to cover real world issues not world events. It describes itself as anticipatory not reactionary, covering stories the mainstream media hasn't touched.

Having worked in broadcast journalism for seven years it's refreshing to see original short reports commissioned for TV. Such exclusivity is usually restricted to print journalism or time consuming

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documentaries. Daily news broadcasters rarely dare stray from the main news agenda.

It's not just investigative journalists like Laura Ling and Euna Lee I have respect for. Investigative journalists are an exquisite breed who need protecting. They work in a lonely world, pouring over laborious details for days to collate enough information for a story. Very often they hit a brick wall or their interviewees bail. They have passion, persistence, discretion, but, sadly, little recognition.

Thank goodness for [the Huffington Post's announcement last month to launch a not-for-profit investigative journalism venture](#). Even if the project unfurls nothing spectacular in its first year, it's brought investigative journalism into the spotlight and hopefully has got the media world suitably worried to start planning how to save the species.

If the pessimistic media pundits are right and there is no sustainable business model to support investigative journalism we may have to resort to good causes and subsidies to keep it alive.

ProPublica and Voice of San Diego are two such non-profit projects set up to keep public interest journalism alive.

It's a bit like saving the environment: we can't ask an airline passenger to voluntarily pay the fuel surcharge because 'you'll miss the ice caps when they're gone'.

Likewise we can't reasonably expect the public to buy a newspaper for the double-page splashes, when they can go online and get their hits for free - and at the same time click on YouTube and watch a policeman allegedly slap a woman G20 protestor - but they will miss us when we're gone.

*[Helen Croydon](#) is a freelance broadcast and print journalist. She worked for several years as a news producer for ITN and Current TV and more recently ventured into investigative pieces for newspapers. She's written for The Mirror, The Guardian, The Mail, The London Paper and several magazines.*

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