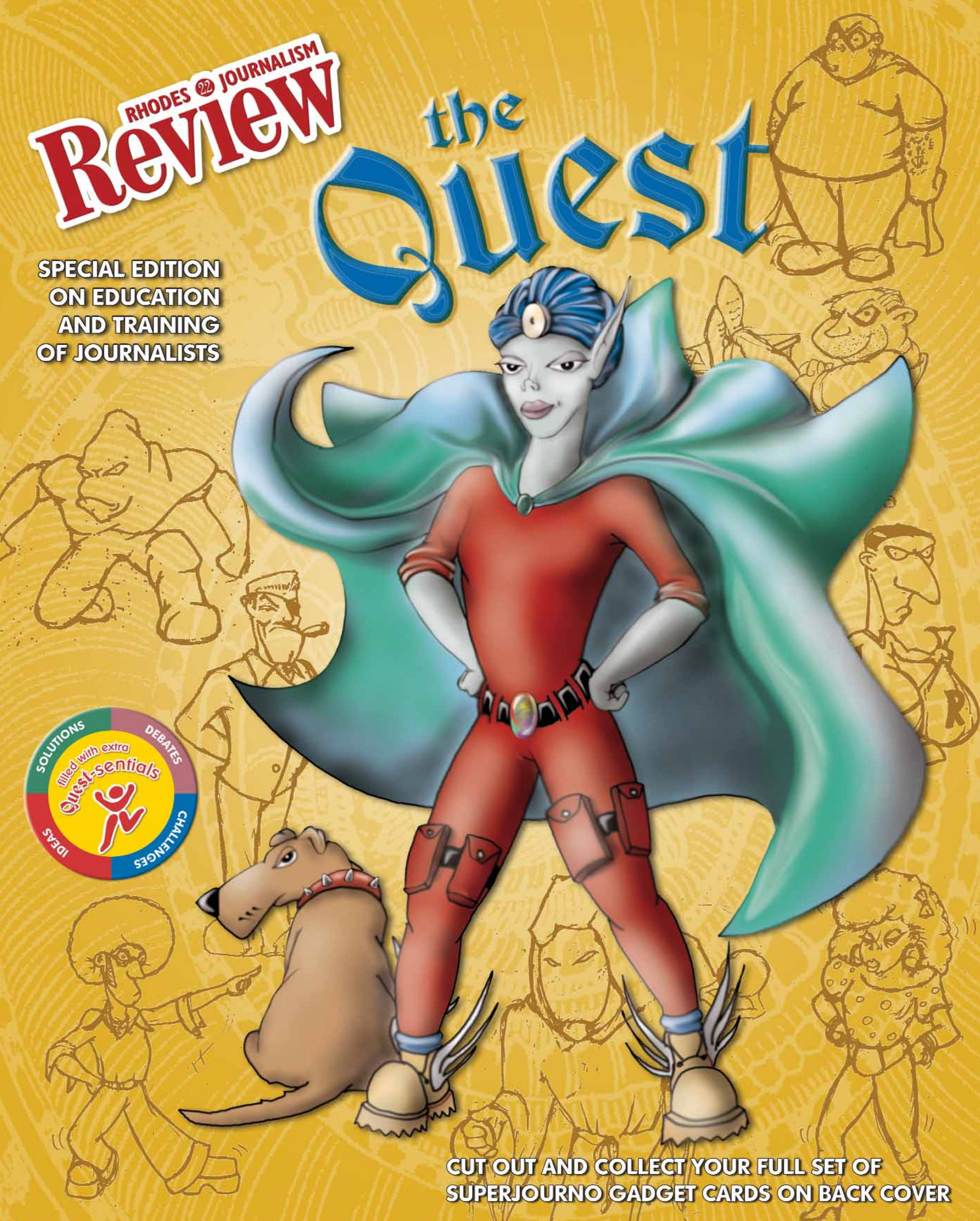
RHODES 22 JOURNALISM
Review

the Quest

SPECIAL EDITION
ON EDUCATION
AND TRAINING
OF JOURNALISTS



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Rhodes Journalism Review 22 September 2003

I. Debate: setting the tone

II. Ways that work: useful solutions

The Quest for the finest journalism

The Quest

Special Edition on Training and Education of Journalists

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Review

RJR 22 September 2003
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The Quest
Special Edition on the Training and Education of Journalists

Editor:
Anthea Garman

Commissioning Editors:
Sonja Boezak and Sarita Ranchod

Design:
Brian Garman and Jeanne Louise Moys

Illustrator:
Novak Miler

Image technician:
Marilyn Parr

Advertising:
Bryan Robinson

Administration:
Gwendolyn Johnson and Sonwabo Niwa

Mailing list:
Camilla Perks

Proofreading:
Camilla Perks

Publisher:
The Department of Journalism & Media Studies, Rhodes University

Publishing Group:
Rod Amner, Guy Berger and Nixon Kariithi

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All correspondence to:
The Editor
Rhodes Journalism Review
Department of Journalism & Media Studies
Rhodes University
Box 94, Grahamstown 6140
South Africa
Tel Department: 27-46-6038336/7
Direct line: 27-46-6224577
Fax: 27-46-6228447
Email: a.garman@ru.ac.za

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Advertising queries:
Bryan Robinson
Tel: 27-12-2051991
Cell: 27-82-8527807
Email: bmkrobin@mweb.co.za

African Time

Sonja Boezak

Sarita Ranchod

While the process of putting together this edition of Review has revealed many lessons, a key lesson has been the value of taking time, and having the patience to respect that things take as long as they need. It has shown us, again, that real and true change cannot be forced. And in taking stock of the project of training and educating for media transformation, we have learnt that although we are not where we would like to be, we are not doing too badly either.

We are not where we want to be in terms of skills levels in newsrooms, black participation and leadership in creating media, in ensuring that our teachers, trainers, 'knowers' reflect a diversity of experiences and a diversity of knowledges. But at the same time, the picture is changing: we are seeing black (male) African editors and women in some senior positions in newsrooms, academic and training institutions; still while knowing that simply replacing one set with another is not transformation. What needs to change are institutional and organisational cultures and practices that continue to hamper the process of real change. A simple racial changing of the guard is not the answer.

Once we realise that transformation is a process, not an event, not a deadline, not a quota; once we look at what we have indeed achieved, the roads we have indeed travelled, we start being able to change, and to prepare for what will follow. In acknowledging where we are on the road to uhuru, we open up the possibility for reflection and the continuation of the conversation we have started.

This Review is a showpiece of a brave new world, of African innovation, of thinking and storytelling. It does not fully reflect our dreams of an African ideal. As we have said, fundamental transformation of our media is in process – it has begun. We have a long and exciting journey ahead – one in which we determine the route, without forgetting where we come from. This is a brave new world where Africa takes its time to look itself in the mirror and be itself. This is an opportunity to show courage to be true. And to have the courage to be African.

Because things take time, because thinking and writing takes time, we would like to thank all of the contributors for taking the time to reflect and tell their stories.

Conversations that some of our brothers are having (and it is still the brothers doing the talking and writing) are beginning to define what it means to be African, engaging on issues of African first, or journalist first. Creating and choosing to be a part of building a new African media requires a taking on of the responsibility of seeing that process through by continuing to engage in every space and standing up to be. This kind of engagement takes time.

The continued absence of a critical mass of black voices in any of the spaces considered in this Review, puts a great deal of pressure on the few black editors, executives, thinkers and writers to be the (black) writers, speakers, thinkers, leaders in a multitude of spaces – leading to some very over-extended, determined bright stars in a lonely sky, now suffering a poverty of time. This situation is neither desirable nor sustainable, but gives us a sense of what still needs to shift.

The kind of honest reflection required at this point does not allow space for window dressing. It does not allow us to paint over the cracks and pretend that the real challenges do not exist. Africa can no longer afford to have its cracks painted over. We simply cannot afford to have cracks in our foundations either. There can be no shortcuts here.

This edition of Review on training and education for media transformation reflects critical voices, celebratory voices, voices of concern, creative voices – that reflect the innovation in classrooms and newsrooms, demonstrating the directions and shifts our media and society are undergoing. All indicating, one way or another, where we are on our African media transformation journey, honestly.

Why we need Di Versity the Superjourno

Anthea Garman

Training and education is a serious subject, and there are thousands (millions) of words to be said about it. But when you're putting a magazine together you need visuals too, and how do you illustrate this subject?

When we put our heads together on the issue we started to feel that some of the wish lists out there for newly-qualified journalists were verging on the extreme; in the line of: "Journalists should have newsgathering skills, and experience and good language skills and creativity and analysis and know how to research and interview and have historical knowledge and literary knowlege and be able to situate things sociologically and and and..."

It started to resemble a quest for the Holy Grail and that's when we came up with Superjourno – the hero to save the day! And we invented a team of baddies for her (of course she has to be female) to battle. This does not mean we don't take the issue seriously, we do. We hope you will enjoy the visual tongue-in-cheek commentary running alongside the articles in this edition, which we have called The Quest.

Changing the

YES. We want highly skilled, accurate, multi-sourced, race- and gender-sensitive journalism. We want graduating journalists to come out of schools prepared to take journalism forward for another 20, 30 years. We want them adaptive enough to think ahead, plan ahead, forge ahead. We want them not to be lured away into other professions.

But why? What is it about this particular pursuit that we care about so much, that we are putting all this energy into audits, conferences and endless discussions?

So, let's start with the big picture. Let's talk about the context that lies behind the concerns with knowledge and skills. Let's talk about what journalism is, what it does in the world, why it's different from other types of ways of knowing and doing.

In this section we set the scene by hearing from Sonja Boezak – on being someone who makes a difference; Sarita Ranchod – on our location in Africa; Mondli Makhanya – on the new, 'normal' South Africa; Francois Nel – on the shifts in the media industries; Justice Malala – on trying out something brave and new; and Fern Greenbank – on the politics of educating journalists.

THE POINT IS TO CHANGE THE WORLD.

subject

by Sonja Boezak

The pressures on a professional school like journalism are inevitably more textured/layered/complex than the pressures on an academic school like, for example philosophy. In philosophy we are already engaged in the thing itself – it is the nature of philosophical conversation and engaging, to engage in and with the subject, 'reality'. The reporter, however, in practising, is separated from the thing with which s/he is to engage – because "the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object of contemplation, not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively" (Feuerbach, 1972). It is separated from itself, from its own subjectivity, its being, its sensuousness. What this kind of journalism is engaged in and with, is not the understanding of the performance of reporting, but in the act of reporting. And it is engaged in it the way one engages in travelling to work, for example. It is not the journey that counts, but the outcome, the destination (the product). **The shortest route with the least traffic will be the easiest way there.**

In a school of journalism the complexity is brought into the 'newsroom' (its structure and form as from within the academy) by the very fact of this schizoid separation from engaging in understanding the meaning of its practice. **An 'old' philosophical dilemma**, albeit a different inflection of the mind-body dichotomy; a dilemma brought about by the location of professional schools within such ideological (read reflective, reflexive, theory-centred) spaces as universities – where the role of the university is understood as a place for the exchange of ideas and engaging in an understanding of itself as an actor in (if not a changing of) the world. And perhaps this is where the perceived split lies: journalists in their current practice of journalism, are engaged with changing the world (whether they want to admit it or not); theorists are engaged in understanding the patterns of these expressions of power.

If people like Keith Windshuttle (who sparked a fierce debate in Australia because of his stance that the study of media theory was damaging the training of journalists) is to be believed, or taken seriously, then his solution to this apparent dilemma is to separate the two once and for all. As far as he is concerned, journalism practice is only hampered by this engagement/enquiry into how it is practised.

From where I am sitting, this is an argument that lacks depth; what the often-cited Feuerbach would call a lack of sensuousness, an absence of subjectivity. What I would also call the absence of thought, understanding that **"thought is not a matter of theory, but rather a way of being"** (Braidotti, 1991).

But what indeed is the role of the journalist in (post-)modern society? Is it merely to observe and to report? Is it at all realistically possible to report (if we are to think of reporting as the verbatim notes on an event)? Does this kind of suggestion not necessarily require the reporter to step outside of him/herself; to extract themselves from their location, from their society, from their cultural identities? **Does (and can) such a person exist?**

Columbia University President, Lee C. Bollinger, in his statement on the future of journalism education says: "What leading journalists need to know, include, for example, a functional knowledge of statistics, the basic concepts of economics, and an appreciation for the importance of history and for the fundamental debates in modern political theory and philosophy." **A mouthful.** And while I celebrate his acknowledgement of the range, flexibility and expression of what would make a journalist, I am disappointed. I had expected more – and not necessarily a longer list. My disappointment is in the creation of an outcome; and the fact that there might be a checklist to evaluate and measure the outcome by. **And then I wonder,** is the point that these schools prepare a student for the furtherance of the profession, or for life with the profession as vehicle of expression, as lens for engaging with and understanding the world?

Then it also makes me wonder about the frequency with which Feuerbach's 11th thesis has been quoted in the last while – in particular in relation to practitioners of this profession: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it…"

Perhaps this is where I should stand back for a moment, and consider what it is that may have caused this personality split.

Finding and making meaning is something we all engage in, in everything we do. But when it comes to interrogating either our actions or our interpretations of a reality beyond the world of things (matter), we feel ourselves personally attacked. And this speaks to a pervasive schizophrenia. **Separating thinking from living is like separating the content from the frame, the body from the soul, sensuousness from its lived experience.**

While it is true that economic and social pressures prescribe early entrance into the professional world, so placing pressure on students (to finish degrees/diplomas; to do internships as soon as possible), the industry (to engage in skills training as a way to fast track this process), journalism schools (to teach and train for trade), it certainly is not and cannot be true that these agents have to indiscriminately bow to this pressure. The point is indeed to change the world. And change rests on understanding and engaging – an impossible task from the outside.

As a student doing research and some coursework on an international programme in the Netherlands, **I was the only black woman from**

Turn over for more...

Africa in the group. It was the first time I was to spend a considerable amount of time away from home, on foreign soil. Daily I was surprised by, and confronted with, the personal shifts and changes I was experiencing; feeling my difference, my otherness almost everywhere I went. And my course co-ordinator did not make it any easier. While I certainly had no expectations of preferential treatment, I also did not, with equal certainty, expect to be confronted with questions of difference and colonialism at every turn – as if I was somehow expected to have some **special insight into these matters.** I did not understand and often felt frustrated, somehow inadequate, lacking. I felt as if there was something I was meant to know, but did not. It was only toward the end of my stay that I was able to make a connection between these (ostensibly theoretical) questions and my very real experiences of otherness/foreignness. It was only then that I could begin to take up the challenge to understand the lived practice and engagement in and with theory (as a matter of being).

Some of what I learned then was that **it takes an exceptional guide to lead students** to that insight by themselves. To make a connection between theory and life is an art. To understand the nature of that art requires an engaging with the world that relies absolutely, fundamentally, on a respect for my histories and locations, whether they be personal, cultural, political; a fundamental, radical reliance on the creation of meaning and an interpretation of the world from where I stood. **In short,** in order to engage at all, one needs to understand; and understanding makes the way for change. For me to at last understand the meanings of the texts (out there), **I had to place myself at the centre.** I had to become the subject in order to change the subject.

And perhaps this is the greatest difficulty in reconciling journalism 'training' (directing, shaping modes of behaviour, skilling) and 'education' (facilitating understanding) with itself. Like any other discipline, journalism is itself also a (social) whole with its own history, historicity, political frameworks, politics, cultural and economic conditions that frame its continued existence. (Reflecting the necessity of borders, structures and definitions as a way of understanding and communicating that understanding of the world.) The vulnerability this (re-)insertion exposes us to lies in the fact that we are forced to **hold a mirror up** to ourselves, and in the fact that we, as journalists, as actors in the world have to look. There is no other realistic possibility to be. This is what journalism practice is faced with, not only within the academy, but in understanding its place in the world: it is asked to hold itself accountable and to be under (theoretical and practical) **scrutiny.**

> WE, AS SOUTH AFRICANS, ARE ALL QUICK TO SHOW OUR STRUGGLE CREDENTIALS, TO CLAIM A BLACK (READ COLOURED, INDIAN, BLACK AFRICAN... ANY APARTHEID RACIAL CLASSIFICATION OTHER THAN WHITE) HISTORY/LINE/GENEALOGY/ EXPERIENCE. SOMEHOW THIS IS WHAT MAKES US ACCEPTABLE NOW. THIS IS THE TICKET IN.

Journalism studies is asked to shift its outward gaze and **look itself in the eye** to understand its function in the world – as it relates to issues of power, politics, cultural and economic frameworks in the world(s) in which it operates, and as itself being a politically, culturally and economically powerful actor. This is the very thing that is imperative if journalism schools are to not churn out 'reporters' (read automatons), standing outside of events, unable to see the world because of the large shadows they themselves cast in their absence. For the reporter to become a journalist (present in themselves, in the world), s/he has to step back into her/himself. For journalism to be contributing to a body of ethically-sound engagement with the world, it has to understand its role as reflector and (change) agent in the world.

Where departments like philosophy have (until now) been left alone to engage with the world in the realm of ideas – because that is what there (apparent) nature demands – the difficulty in journalism and media studies departments is having to make their way back to themselves. The schizoid personality traits of journalism in this sense are not easy to treat. Symptomatic treatment will only **aggravate the dis-order.** Nor is assimilation an effective way to treat this psychological problem. By implication, assimilation requires that one or the other be subsumed, overridden… incorporated into one dominant category/set/cultural experience under a general (other) principle. What is instead required, in order to achieve, maintain and constantly renegotiate a (fine) balance, is respectful (read subjective, sensuous) conversation, dialogue and debate.

It is our responsibility as actors in the world, to know and understand the impact of our being and acting in and on the world. At the same time, this responsibility is impossible without admitting to oneself that **"I am a real and sensuous being"** understanding that "being … is sensuous being; that is, the being involved in sense perception, feeling and love" (Feuerbach, 1972).

The study and practice of journalism does not and cannot make allowance for journalists to write passively, absently, from a distance, or that other word **we have become afraid** of, "objectively". This, for at least two reasons: who we are is eminently important to what we write and what that writing means. And, who I am as writer or speaker is also defined by where my body and mind (as **sites of sensuousness)** are located (viz. those indelible connections we have with the cultural, political, racial, social). It is simply not possible to engage in or with the world without considering my own subjectivity, sensuousness and location(s). We do not come to the text (in its broadest sense) tabula rasa.

So what is needed is a renewed maturity and more encompassing sense of interconnection. We need **a transformation of consciousness** that allows one not to be nervous about the fact that what one is saying can be undermined by the way one says it. This requires an artistic acceptance of the multiplicities, diversities and contradictions within ourselves as sensuous beings. **This requires artful living** – meaning that art (re-)presents a truth of sensuousness. And, "that which art represents in the form of sensuousness is nothing else than the very essence of sensuousness that is inseparable from this form" (Feuerbach, 1972).

We need to forge a practice which takes into account the changing nature of life – not one that (pretends to) make(s) **a nice solution.** This requires holding what we believe as the principles of journalistic practice, up to the scrutiny of itself, and its being-in-the-world. This is itself a process, not an end. This kind of creative, artistic engagement and evaluation means having the freedom to assert difference, to recognise the transitory nature of social and political systems, so becoming an affirmation of chance, of change and even of chaos – giving new meaning to transformation.

"Intersubjective relations" (a notion borrowed from the philosopher and critical theorist, Jürgen Habermas, who worked with the notions of communicative action and moral consciousness as possible solutions for the malaise of modern society) **or sensuous conversation,** can create room for the creation of a (whole) identity and the recognition of boundaries between the self (as expressed in journalism practice) and the other (theoretical interrogation). Identity in this sense is not a construct, and is maintained and created via the continuous redefinition of boundaries between self and other. This kind of communicative action would suggest the political aim of establishing a community based on the tolerance and protection of individual and group difference(s), not the erasure/assimilation that a falsified sameness would create.

What is needed to change our perspective(s) is a thorough analysis of the present; an analysis of social life and the patterns that constitute it – we could then conceive of **constructive imaginative futures.** Crossing disciplinary boundaries without concern for the disciplinary distinctions which organise knowledge(s) is impossible without sensuousness, without subjectivity.

I have touched on the theory-practice dilemma and of 're-insertion into the text' as the only realistically possible solution. But what would the possible practice(s) of that solution be?

We, as South Africans, are all quick to show our struggle credentials, to claim a black (read coloured, Indian, black African… any apartheid racial classification other than white) history/line/genealogy/experience. Somehow this is what makes us acceptable now. **This is the ticket in.** The irony of this shift does not escape me, especially because it is still an 'out' in other spaces, but more so, because it is an artificial one.

In 2000, at the Beijing **+5** World Conference on Women in New York, I had an experience that made me come closer to an understanding of that shift. Forming part of a global media team as well as an African media team, I acted as go-between between the two groups – filling an in-between space. Apart from witnessing, experiencing and participating in the very different processes in both groups, the incident that marked the shift occurred over a brief much-needed coffee break with a European (how the meaning of that word too, has changed for us!) colleague. It was a

comfortable space. She very easily, comfortably, asked me how the African group was getting along (of course assuming that they were not), and in the same breath 'apologised' for not making use of as many African stories or African writers or technical skills in the global paper. "Because," she went on, as if I would have complete understanding of the unfortunate nature of the 'forced' decision, "they need too much help and we don't have that kind of time here."

I was stunned, outraged, shocked. And briefly, I even despaired. At the time I said nothing, but also heard the complaints of the few black (African as well as Latin-American) writers who were included in the global team – their stories were not being published, or their ideas for stories or approaches were politely excused and not taken seriously. The incidental irony was that the African publication by contrast was a showcase of creativity, good journalism, effective partnerships and unity of thought and diversity. All of it stayed with me, and just before my return, I mentioned the incident in an email to a South African colleague. Her response was different: she expressed her outrage and the issue was raised within the global network. A letter was drafted and an apology demanded and secured. **But the damage had been done.** The words had been spoken, and worse, the issue had now been dealt with, and as a consequence, could no longer be spoken of. **Subject closed.** We could get on with business as usual.

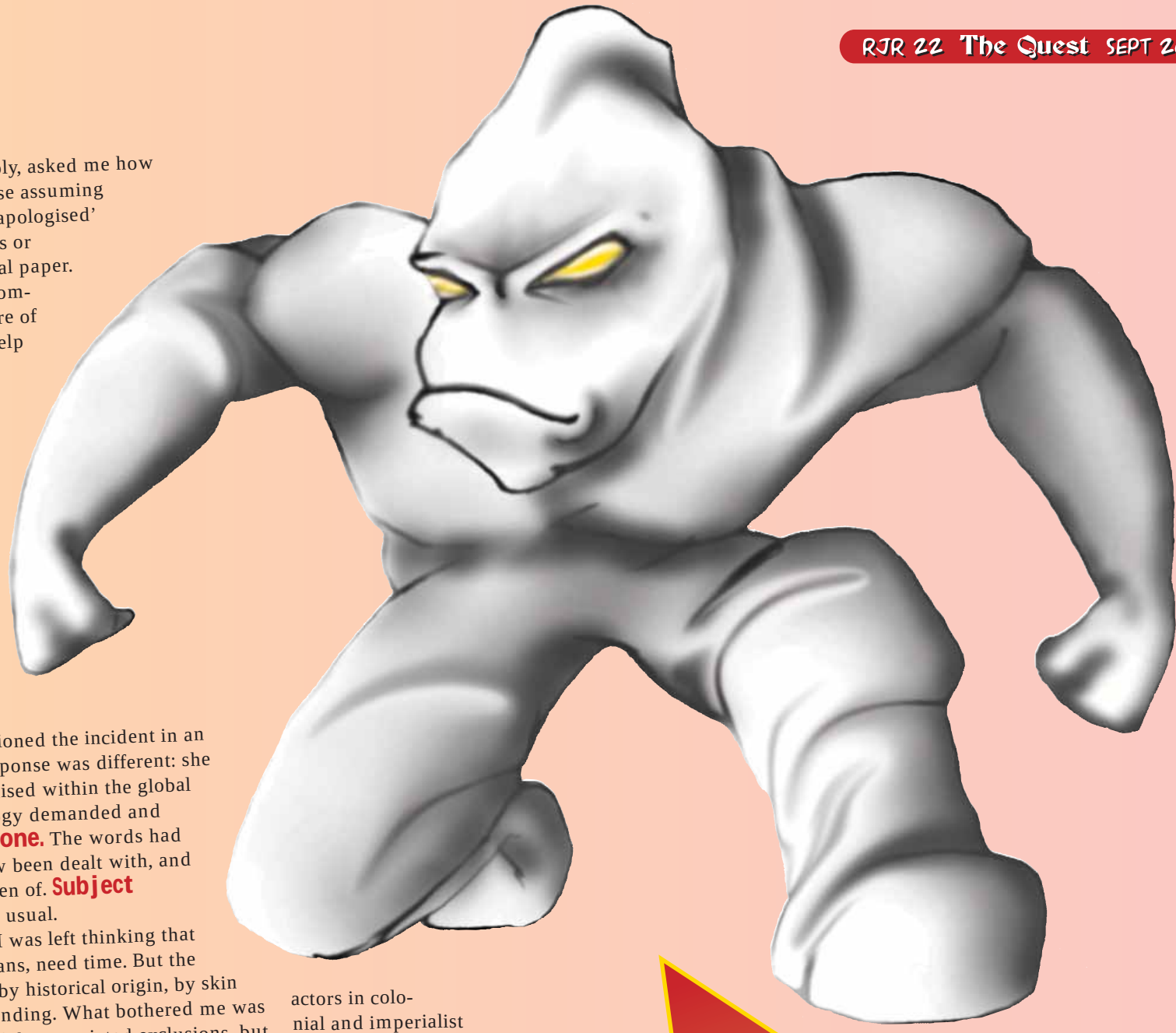
Still, it bothered me. In part, because I was left thinking that she was at least half right. We do, as Africans, need time. But the African-ness I speak of cannot be defined by historical origin, by skin colour, by gender, by social or political standing. What bothered me was not the fact of the exchange, nor the fact of the associated exclusions, but the ease of the exchange and the inherent assumed justification of the acts of exclusion. The implication of that speaks even louder than anything else to me. The reasoning goes something like this: **1.** They (Africans, by extension, blacks) are unskilled. **2.** We (white, northern) are skilled and benevolent. **3.** Because of 2, we have to give them an opportunity to acquire skills with us as teachers. **4.** They are slow learners. **5. We know the way. 6. Our way is the right and only way.**

What struck me in the argument, was the assumption that I would agree with the racist, northern-biased underlying 'facts'. **Of course these are not things to argue with! It is the way of the world!**

But my colleague was brave enough to recognise her own discomfort and spoke it. In her speaking, however, she expressed the need to explain to me why African writing, leadership, content, expertise, were being excluded from this publication. She did not assume that this is the way things should be. Of course I am giving her the benefit of personal insight. She could just as easily have been thinking or alluding to her own racist assumptions – setting up an us and them and including me (for the moment) into her us. And that is what offended me, stayed with me, created the brief despair: I had been made one of them, those We's that exclude us. From her perspective, she shifted my position from object to subject. A subjectivity that without doubt was not mine to accept.

And still I am comforted by her bravery for speaking out, for saying something, and I am saddened that these are the things that course through the lifeblood of the body of – dare I say it? – the white world.

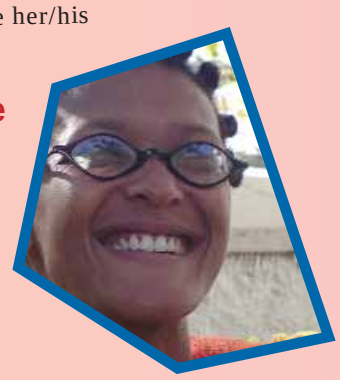
Just as African is not about a race or referring to a continent, white is not a race or skin colour. **Both of them are attitudes, ways of being, ways of being in the world.** Africans can no longer be recognised by where they live or the colour of their skins. Similarly, whiteness is neither defined by genealogy, nor is it a racial marker. While my definition would certainly include colonial practices, one is not white by virtue of a historical or genealogical link with the actors in colonial and imperialist plays. Whiteness, in the sense in which I use it here, includes the assertion of difference based on (an external, imposed) racial classification, politics, social status, gender. African in this sense speaks of a oneness, a collective memory and enactment of that memory, that celebrates the whole through the individual – based on a fundamental respect for life and all who share in it.



Sneaking and nasty, Ray Sism is the baddie we all have to battle. Since 1994 he has become a shadow of his former self, but he still lurks in dark language, unsuspecting issues and pops up in the most unexpected places – like news conferences. Difficult to detect, he remains one of Di Versity's strongest foes. He is often blamed for the work of the more sophisticated, but just as sinister, Klaus Bias.

And this is the role of the (post-)modern African journalist in the 21st century. **Times have changed;** we can no longer ignore the effects and affect(ation)s of post-colonial society. We cannot pretend that the products of colonialism do not exist in the world, or that this is not the world in which we live. We cannot disengage from the debate; we cannot afford to (again, still) silence ourselves through white impositions. In its practices and inception, the raison d'être of the media as a white (read colonialist, imperialist) concept and imposition, is set up to other, to maintain distance, to hold on to its schizophrenia, when the point is engagement, sensuousness. The role of the African journalist is to make her/his way through the world by engaging in African ways; by being African. The tools (albeit white) at our disposal can and must be used to **release the world and the face of the media from white supremacy.**

Sonja Boezak has worked in varying capacities in communications and media and has spent the greater part of the last 15 years thinking (and writing) on issues of race, ethics and being. Her email address is sonja@ananzi.co.za



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AFRICAN STORY

by Sarita Ranchod

The story of the African people is a fight against subordination, domination and oppression. It is about battles for freedom – freedom from domination, imperialism, freedom to be, to choose. It is a celebration of survival. And in surviving, there is a story of sustaining – of holding on to a value system, of holding on to ways of life, ways of healing, ways of communing that respect life, that respect the earth and the soul. It is a story of victory of good over evil.

That great African philosopher, Bob Marley says "half the story has never been told", and in the context of telling the African story, Marley's words ring true. In South Africa, do our children know the stories of slavery and the victorious battles for freedom from slavery, of torture? Do they know of the battles against colonialism fought by their forebears? And do they know the more recent **stories of victories of good over evil?**

Our African stories need to be told, celebrated. Told in ways that reach all of us so that we can all share in celebrating where we come from. Our stories need to be told in languages we understand, crossing barriers of literacy. How are our media telling our stories? And whose stories are we telling? Why do we tell those? How do we choose whose story is more important, more valid, more newsworthy?

If the role of the media is to inform and educate, what do we know of the region we live in, the countries beyond South Africa's borders? Aside from economic interest stories (often linked to natural resource extraction), stories on the HIV situation, and the odd tourism story, what do we know of our neighbours? And, through whose eyes are these stories told? **We need to get to know our country, our region, our continent, our peoples, our stories – African stories.**

If we compare media output originating from and about our continent and its peoples (including film, publishing, newspapers, broadcast media and the Internet) with that of Europe and the United States, we begin to get a picture of how **half the story has never been told.** We continue to occupy disproportionately little space – including media space.

We cannot solve our problems outside of the processes and structures that shape our contemporary world. That would exclude us more, make us even more marginal. By its structure and nature the global status quo is in opposition to notions of a fair and equal world for all – rich and poor. African media in particular have a responsibility to **stop insulating the rich from the poor.** We cannot ignore the reality of income poverty that surrounds us. We cannot ignore the legacy of under-development and the huge challenges that these backlogs in development cause. We cannot perpetuate the continuing marginalisation of the economic haves from the economic have-nots. I would argue that responsible media claiming a public interest have a moral imperative to actively question and challenge the morality of existing global trade, financial and investment regimes in

advocacy organisations and activists? Do the media have a role to play in changing our world? Or do we merely report on what we see?

Thabo Mbeki has commented that **the African intelligentsia** does not have the luxury of merely interpreting the world; we need to do something to change it. I would argue that as media practitioners, as Africans, we have a moral responsibility to use our skills and capacities to change the shape of the world to one that benefits all its people. From where I sit, that is what the struggle for liberation from oppression and the resultant transformation process is about. And when it comes to the media, as in other spheres, we are barely at the beginning of that process of fundamental transformation.

The image we have been fed of our continent from time immemorial is the colonial and racist view that is contemptuous of things African – that associates Africa with war, disease and famine. How much has that view changed in 2003?

When I speak of telling the African story, I refer to a fundamental transformation – one in which we are all conscious and active participants. One we define and lead, as Africans. Consciously and actively shifting the gaze, defining and leading the future of our local and our global realities **to ensure real and lasting global peace and freedom from want in a world of excess.**

At this point in our global history and in the history of the world's media – where sensationalism and simplification seems to be the order of the day, there is real need for intelligent, **out-of-the-box,** African media – media inspired with new vision, by new visionaries able to grapple with complexity, differing and competing interests, values, desires. Media located in a multi-cultural African reality, able to grapple with the paradox of our two-nation state, able to reflect and change all the time. Media able to define and locate themselves within a global and a local community/world, that grapples with our position and our interests within a unipolar, imperialist cultural paradigm focused on consumption. Media able to recognise that they are not benign in this project.

Media scholar, Peter Kareithi aptly argues: **"Consumerism, not Christianity, is the religion of this latest phase of imperialism, and global media are its missionaries."** Given this global context, what is the role of African media? If our role is to forward the consumption project, whose interests are we furthering? And are those interests really what is best for the African public interest, or indeed for the global public interest?

In engaging with the training and education for transformation debate, the obvious question is transformation from what, to what? Is there an assumed standard to which we should aspire, and what is that standard? Further, who sets the standards? Our current reality is one that has not existed before. And so, there are no experts in how to do this thing we are trying to do. **We do not want to replace THE media that did not serve the public interest (certainly not the whole public) with others that serve the same old interests plus that of an emerging black bourgeoisie.** This kind of transformation is dishonest and a quick fix that will not sustain in the long-term. It deals with change by promoting a few black editors, ensuring a few blacks are in positions of authority. It views the new black bourgeoisie as a potential market – **a market to target, a market with money.** This market-based transformation is not transformation. It is merely a strategy to take cognisance of shifting market realities. Cashing in on new market realities and the transformation imperative are different things.

As African media, engaging with transformation on a local and global scale, the primacy of the US/European (economic interest) perspective in how the world is reported, reflected, valued in the news and how the media are effectively being used as a tool for reflecting that unipolar global order should be cause for great concern and debate. Where is this debate? The silence is deafening. Does the silence suggest complicity, disinterest… what does media silence mean?

We live in a time of possibility, of achieving the impossible. We have at our disposal the tools and the implements to create a better, more equitable world. We live in a country that many in the rest of the world are looking to for guidance in finding a socially-just way forward. Within these debates, there is an assumption that democracy equals capitalism.

The democracy-equals-capitalism given does not allow much space for manoeuvre in relation to the fundamentals. **And so as thinkers and creators we are left with the space in between. And with that space in between, we need to bring the margin to the centre. Make the periphery central. Insert our voices, our views.** The views of the economic South; the voices, views and interests of the peoples of the world who have been colonised and dominated for centuries – the new, free voices. This is the essence of telling the African story – and a few notable African thinkers are putting their voices, hearts, minds to work and bringing those marginal voices to the fore. Some of these young Africans giving meaning and texture to the African Renaissance include playwrights Xoli Norman and Nadia Davids – young Africans taking up the challenge to tell their stories, adding their voices, challenging the dominant gaze, occupying space until very recently denied them. And in speaking, in voicing their truths, challenging, and sometimes subverting the dominant gaze. And so, there is hope.

Davids' play, At Her Feet engages with the experiences of contemporary Muslim women in different contexts, taking up issues of media representation, portrayal, stereotypes about veiled women, and perceptions of the rights of Islamic women and women living under Islamic law. Davids speaks to the issue of the dominant gaze when a character says, "I don't want you looking at me the way you look at them". She speaks to that dominant gaze – the them who look at us as other and the pressure on a young Muslim woman torn between wearing a scarf because she wants to, and living in a society that equates veiled women with terrorism, dangerous, other. Davids' line raises an additional issue. Who do we, the post-colonial subjects, the object of study for so long, in taking up space, address? Are we speaking to each other, or do we speak back to the dominant gaze? Do we maintain the centre even in challenging that centre?

We need to witness power shifts in the media, not only in staffing and recruitment practices, but in content. We

Turn over for more...

With a nose for news, Watcher, the Newshound helps Di Versity sniff out a good story. He also has the knack of digging up dirt when needed. The evil team is seldom safe when Di and her dog are on the prowl.

need to build a new base of South Africans; Africans who know their continent, know their stories, know the stories of how their stories were kept from being told, deliberately silenced. And now, as we approach **10 years of freedom** we have the opportunity to creatively and critically engage in dialogue like we never have before. We have the opportunity to exercise our freedom, to work for the dream of a united Africa, to tell our stories, to create African media with African hearts and minds.

We need to move away from the sustaining world view that places Africa as the dependant, and the recipient of charity, to an Africa that creates, shares, tells Africa's stories – through the media, through theatre, by writing, by speaking up, rising up, making our voices heard, putting ourselves at the centre, never to return to the periphery.

The stories of Africa and the African diaspora are ones of paradox. Of living in a world of opportunity that favours the developed world through trade and other regimes designed to benefit the few. Of living outside of those systems of benefit; living in places of rich natural wealth, rich heritage: in economic poverty. **And yet, we are free. Free from domination.**

We come from a culture that has challenged domination. Why are we so silent now on global domination – apartheid on a global scale? Have we been cornered, nowhere to turn, or is there space for manoeuvre? Are we at the mercy of circumstances that define our future? Are we merely conduits? We need to take up our space. Occupy space. Space that as Africans we have historically been denied.

Next year South Africa celebrates 10 years of freedom. In the same year, **Haiti celebrates 200 years of being the first independent Black Republic.** An important time to reflect on where we have come from and where we are going for African peoples on this continent and in the diaspora.

Given our history and the point at which we find ourselves now – celebrating African freedom from adversity – we have the possibility to shape new media, media that are fundamentally different from the media of our past – in values and sentiment.

We have a responsibility to our hard-won freedom. That responsibility does not allow for complacency or apathy. No matter the colour of your skin, the African Century is the business of all Africans. **We come from different experiences, and newsroom cultures and values need to reflect this difference and diversity, not silence it, or force it to fit old moulds. The old moulds are no longer valid. You have pressed an incorrect key.**

My first official newsroom experience was as a journalist intern at a large Johannesburg daily. The process of newsgathering was a mystery to me. My previous, less official experiences had been in student newspapers. Newsgathering in the student media was a different story. A collective process. The responsibility of chairing a newsgathering process rotated. This sharing of responsibility built leadership, skills and confidence. Newsgathering was open to ideas, suggestion – a space in which all voices got to speak. Not only did everyone speak but also, if a particular journalist was interested in following a particular story, they f ollowed that story.

At my Johannesburg daily, a few senior members of staff disappeared to conference twice a day. After some time I realised that conference was where stories were decided and assigned by management. When would I have the opportunity to share my story ideas? I remember approaching the news editor with story ideas. He was surprised – I'm not sure how many journalists, least of all a student, had come up with their own story ideas in that newsroom. The prevailing newsroom structure did not enable space for participation in the news agenda.

There was no way those in management were going to have the same story ideas I had. **Our realities were different.** Our journeys, routes (even to the office) and roots were different. Our experiences were different. And we needed to bridge that gap. Their response to my initiative was to offer me a job. I was not interested. And perhaps if I had been I might have had a shot at changing a newsroom culture and style that was established, tried and tested, but didn't work for me. It didn't encourage fresh thinking, there was no space for sharing and challenging, learning from each other by talking; no space for different perspectives and experiences. The existing newsroom culture did not give me a sense that my experiences, the place from which I came, my individuality would be valued.

The process of gathering news then was an experience open only to a few. I don't doubt that the management in question simply had not thought to include others. Processes and people who exclude rarely set out to exclude. I can see the reasoning for allowing

management to determine the news agenda. It's simply more efficient. But is it smart, creative, out-of-the-box? Or is it same-old-same-old? Exclusive processes do not lead to a sense of ownership. And we don't need a business degree to know the positive benefits of a sense of ownership.

I wonder now, 10 years down the line, has that newspaper's newsgathering approach changed? I hope so. Newsgathering can be a creative and empowering process. It can build skills and confidence. It can generate fresh ideas, critical thinking, it can inspire creativity, the voicing of different points of views. Quite simply, it can be an eye-opening experience, just listening to each other **– not listening to the usual people.**

Opening up the process opens up space for a diversity of stories from a variety of points of view, not just what management thinks would be a good story, written from an angle that management thinks is best.

Media can bridge gaps by fostering communication and dialogue like nothing else can. And at a time in our world, where we seek to restore dignity, to honour and celebrate all our journeys (in our institutional practices and our content), media in all their forms have the opportunity to be a part of bridging this gap.

Commercial media and student media are quite different. Nevertheless, lessons can be learnt from student media. Lessons about building

inclusivity, participation, ownership,

changing and challenging old ways of doing things; ways that do not necessarily work for a new reality.

In the Sanef Skills Audit, newsroom management styles came up for critical scrutiny. **South Africa is a different country to what it was 10 years ago.** And newsrooms need to reflect that – not simply by how many black and female faces make up our teams and are sourced in our media, but also in how we work together.

OPENING UP THE PROCESS OPENS UP SPACE FOR A DIVERSITY OF STORIES FROM A VARIETY OF POINTS OF VIEW, NOT JUST WHAT MANAGEMENT THINKS WOULD BE A GOOD STORY, WRITTEN FROM AN ANGLE THAT MANAGEMENT THINKS IS BEST.

Newsgathering is an opportunity to foster participation, inclusion, ownership and diversity of views. Try to involve everybody. Just once. See what happens!

What makes us unique in this bland world? Our localness, not our McDonalds-ness. The only way to compete in this global world is to be the best of what we are, not to ape the developed world. Our needs and realities are different, and our media serve a very different audience and reality. The complexity of our South African-ness, the multiplicity of the identities that every one of us walks around with and occupies in every moment of our being, our hybridity – that is what makes us unique.

What is the role of media in the African Century?

Celebration – to open up spaces for conversation/dialogue between people who have historically not spoken to each other. To create our own history by communicating with each other, listening to each other, recording our stories, reading each other. And what better tool to foster that dialogue than media?

Telling our stories, from our point of view – we have been the object of study for long enough. African stories through African eyes that place us at the centre of our stories, our histories, our future.

Opportunity – we have an opportunity to create something new – to be both architects and builders of new African media, that critically engage with a complex local and global reality. That value their locality, give voice to a multiplicity of voices – rich/poor, woman/man, educated/illiterate. Media that reflect the creativity of peoples, a continent. Not a clone of a foreign reality. A home brew – through African eyes, hearts, minds.

Sarita Ranchod spends her time thinking and writing about the relationships between media, power, globalisation, race, culture, heritage and identity. She reached on sranchod@worldonline.co.za

by Mondli Makhanya

normality
the South African story

It started off somewhat accidentally. Two of the country's English language news paper giants, Johnnic and Nail, decided to launch **an upmarket newspaper** to take on Naspers' City Press.

Research showed there was a market for **a serious broadsheet** aimed at black readers. The owners recognised that the **revolution** that everybody could see – the phenomenal post-1994 rise in black spending **power** – was not being properly **exploited** by any one newspaper.

But as history has proven over and over, the newspaper reader is **a very cruel being** and often follows rules that not even the most adept researchers and market fundis will ever understand. It is now common cause that the market roundly rejected the broadsheet Sunday World, **a bitter pill to swallow** for many like myself who had invested a lot of faith and energy in that project.

A combination of warlike aggressive marketing on the part of Naspers and **insufficient firepower** on the part of Sunday World's owners saw to it that **the concept was short-lived.** Traditional black market readers remained loyal to City Press while many of the black bourgeoisie readers the new publication was targeting, stuck to a Sunday Times that had lost the white newspaper tag and whose appeal mirrored the blurred racial/class interest of a post-apartheid South Africa.

The Johnnic/Nail consortium responded to the setback by **taking the newspaper down-market, offering a tits, bums and salacious gossip medium that was an immediate hit with the readership. The re-launched Sowetan Sunday World was nothing like its parent, according politics the same passing importance that its predecessor would have accorded showbiz. The formula worked and thus was born South Africa's tabloid industry.**

The success of this retreat position spawned a whole new market that has shaken up newspapering in a way not seen since the emergence of the alternative press in the 1980s. Today the tabloid market, which has now at least four vibrant titles, has taken root and forced even the highbrow newspapers to adjust their appeal downwards.

What worked for this industry was that it coincided with another major societal revolution: the **boom** in celebrity culture and a growing disdain among the working classes (those who felt left behind by the black empowerment and employment equity train) for those who had left the ghetto and were living "white lives". So for them titbits about celebrity divorces, politicians with child maintenance problems and **flashy** tycoons who have properties repossessed, touch a chord. **There is a great appetite for this,** as evidenced by the tabloid circulation figures.

So what does this tell us about South African journalism and the role it is playing in this society? **Does it tell us that our society is so dumbed-down that the best way to grab its attention is with pictures of semi-naked women and stories about which superstar is sleeping with which wannabe superstar?** Does it maybe tell us that serious journalism is boring readers to the point of making them uninterested in the issues that really affect their daily lives?

Many would indeed argue that it is an indictment on South Africa that a society undergoing such fundamental transformation is **so obsessed with things that have no relevance to the fiscus** and which do not touch their daily lives in any significant way.

This, however, would be a simplistic understanding of the changes in the South African psyche and the relevance and role of tabloids in the re-organisation of our society.

The tabloids are telling a critical part of the great South African story. The story they tell is that of a nation that no longer feels the need to be **bludgeoned with trauma and gore,** that no longer needs to be constantly reminded of **its tortuous journey** to normalcy. This nation, the story of the tabloids tells, wants to be entertained and titillated while being informed. It is also the story of a nation that is capable of producing instant celebrities and dumping them as soon as the next one is found. And a nation that is keeping close tabs on whether those who **preach moral rectitude** are themselves keeping to their teachings.

As far as fulfilling that mandate is concerned, it would be hard to argue that the tabloids have been remiss.

Fingers should rather be pointed at those who are playing in the higher leagues. While the tabloid boom has been good for South Africa and its media industry, it has also has had the unfortunate effect of **dragging the rest of the press to a level they should not want to be at.**

During a brief spring in the late 1990s, there was visible effort on the part of South African newspapers to strive for greater quality and substance. Following a period of post-1994 adjustment, the South African press seemed to be moving towards adapting to a normal society and reporting that society in exciting ways.

Politics was being taken seriously, economic news was making it onto the front pages of generalist newspapers and often leading editions. Social issues were beginning to be reported in more in-depth

ways. There was innovative editorial experimentation and one could feel in the air that the outcome would be a media that would **rival** the best in the world. We did, after all, have a great story to tell.

That brief renaissance has now been **brought to a screeching halt.** Upmarket newspapers, wary of declining and static circulations in this age of hectic lives and all-day television, now also have the tabloids to fear. But instead of consolidating their own spheres of operation and strengthening their markets, **the broadsheets have chosen to fight the tabloids** down at the bottom end. Hence the return of the sensational court trials and British royalty to our front pages and the preponderance of Big Brother and Idols coverage.

Not that these should have been shoved aside in favour of grey, so-called quality journalism. The issue is that politics and the reporting of the business of government has been relegated to the backburner in many of our newspapers. In fact, the only political story that seems to excite the news desks is that of the inexplicable antics of Manto Tshabalala-Msimang.

The result is that South African journalism is not able to move forward. Advertisers shun the tabloids because they are working class and black. They are increasingly unenthusiastic about broadsheet newspapers because the platform is showing little innovation and the industry is not insisting and proving that it is special. Readers too, are asking for something extra and all they are offered is more of the same showbiz that the tabloids do so much more effectively.

This scramble for the bottom end of the market, combined with the lack of in-depth reporting, makes the media vulnerable to all sorts of (often) unsubstantiated **attacks that we are missing the great South African story.**

At the Sun City Indaba between government and the South African National Editors' Forum in 2001, the recurrent criticism was that the media were not covering government properly – that all we in **the Fourth Estate** were doing was projecting as negative a picture of the country as possible. Cabinet ministers contended that what passed as news to the media were **the triplets of crime, corruption and failed government projects.**

There were the usual accusations of the media being untransformed and unable to grapple with the realities of a transformed South Africa. Accusations were that the media were still grounded in a white South Africa that couldn't bring itself to accepting changed power relations in the country and still wanted to prove black ineptitude.

These accusations were of course **fallacious.** The media have undergone significant transformation since 1994, a transformation that is probably matched only by the transformation in the public sector itself. It has not been an easy transformation and has often involved **uncomfortable battles within the industry** itself, as well as confrontations between the industry and the new establishment. The process is by no means complete and will, like the ongoing transformation of other sectors of society, take time to consolidate.

What is totally unhelpful however, is **the blanket denial by the new establishment** that any transformation has taken place at all. **Like the legendary soldier who for years refused to come out of the bush and accept that the war was over,** many within the ANC still speak of "white-controlled" media and disregard the change in ownership and demographic change that has happened. They disregard the fundamental altering of power structures in media industries and the ideological reorientation that has taken place in many newsrooms around the country.

In many ways the governing elite refuses to recognise its own effects on media, particularly the fact that most media institutions broadly reflect the ruling party's ideological standpoint. There may be differences in analysis around the pace of delivery and implementation of policy goals but one can hardly accuse the South African media of being among the forces opposed to the transformation of our society.

But convincing the government and the ruling elite seems futile, since defeatism and the constant need to feel under attack seems incurable in **the higher echelons of power.** The only way then for media to defend themselves from these types is to raise their own game. The only reason that those in power are able to make accusations stick is because we are found wanting in many respects.

The first stop on this journey of doing the South African story properly is for us in the media to learn to cover the basics of government. Away from the dramatic launch of the electrification project and far from the dishonest civil servant, is the story of a country that continues to grind forward. It is the story of public service machinery that wakes up every day and originates debates, refines and implements policy. This machine, peopled by hundreds of thousands of individuals, spends billions of our rands every week as it keeps the country going forward. **In its bowels** – in all three tiers of government – reside countless tales waiting to be told by us in the media. These are tales of success and near success, tales of every day challenges and tales of incompetence and failure. On the surface the notion of a civil service conjures up images of dullness and sameness. This need not be, as many media practitioners have found.

It is for us in the media to turn that machinery into a story that excites, informs and infuriates our readers. They want to know what is going on in the bowels of the national government, in their city councils and in the provincial governments.

That is where the mainstream press needs to re-invent itself. That the tabloid market satisfies a certain appetite in many ways shows that we are a normal people. But in the entrenchment of our democracy there is another story that needs to be told. We as a society will get things **horribly wrong if we do not begin to report the story of normality.** In the same way that the tabloids saw a market that nobody believed existed and began to feed it what it wanted, so the middle to upper income publications need to find creative ways of interesting South Africans in **non-conflictual politics.**

That is the next wave of transformation that should be taking place in South Africa – the creation of the informed journalist whose words and expertise can turn a public works official into a colourful being.

If those in the broadsheet market **fail to turn this corner** and do for serious journalism what the tabloids did for their segment of the industry, we would be complicit in the crime of turning South Africa into an ignorant nation. And there is no better present to give to demagogues and would-be dictators than a nation that does not know.

Mondli Makhanya is editor of the Mail & Guardian.
mondlim@mg.co.za

Mundo Real is fond of saying: "Yes, I know you've been taught that at university/technikon but that's not the way it works in the real world." Only he has a grip on the realities of high finance, institutional organisation and the vagaries of human nature.

POW

Old Joe Scoop just can't get with the times. He calls Di "girlie" and thinks her purpose in the newsroom is to make him coffee and pretty up the place. He last had a front page lead just before 27 April 1994. Since then he's been subbing. He mutters into his empty ashtray about the new faces in the newsroom who just can't get the grammar right. They'd fire him but he keeps the equity quota balanced.

The media transformation debate currently underway in South Africa is, in the main, concerned with power – who has it, who should get it, and to what use it should be put. And it's not surprising that the debate is vigorous. One reason for this is, of course, the assumption that the mass media wield a great deal of power in society. A recent study I conducted suggests that the media's own grip on that power is slipping. Instead, the findings imply that control is shifting to those who are better equipped, better resourced, better trained, and more motivated – the professional information sources, usually managed by public relations practitioners or publicists.

Some of the identified reasons for this shift are that **many journalists are, essentially, bored with news** as it is currently defined, and that they are uninspired by managers who talk more about how activities impact the bottom line than about society at large.These are worth considering further, along with some of the possible consequences of newspapers produced – albeit it indirectly – by publicists.

First, though, some background. The impetus for the exploratory study was the observation that the transformation debate had touched on media ownership, media laws and regulations, newsroom staff make up, media output and audiences, advertising expenditure and, most recently, journalism education and training. But there had been a significant omission: media sources.

As anyone familiar with the operations in a newsroom knows, a substantial part of the editorial staff's activities – and ultimately every news product's content – revolves around the information supplied by official sources, principally through news releases, events (news conferences, briefings, visits, and the like) and officials' responses to enquiries (most often managed, if not dealt with, by spokespeople). And while the relationship between the media and **the country's single biggest newsmaker – the head of state** – had indeed come under scrutiny, there was little attention to the role played by commercial content providers like public relations practitioners not employed by government or non-government organisations.

The study, which was intended to inform more extensive research into shifts in media power, consisted of in-depth interviews with senior editorial staff (at the rank of deputy editor or above) at each of Cape Town's daily newspapers as well as with senior public relations practitioners. All those interviewed had been involved in the news-making process since before the 1994 elections and could, therefore, **provide some insight into how things had changed since then.** The interviews were transcribed and analysed with specific reference to the four themes of organisation-public relationships (OPRs) commonly identified in academic

by Francois Nel

ER who has it, who should get it?

literature. They are:
- trust, defined by researchers as a party's level of confidence in, and willingness to, open themselves up to fair and above-board dealings;
- control mutuality, considered to be the extent to which partners agree about which of them should decide on relational goals and how to go about achieving them;
- relational commitment, or the extent to which a party feels and believes that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote; and,
- relational satisfaction, which is the extent to which both organisations and their public were satisfied with their relationship.

Media coverage generated by publicity efforts can generally be considered to fall in the area where the interests of the source and the interests of the media, and by extension their perceptions of the interests of their audience, intersect. Typically then the four key elements of OPRs are evident in the extent that publicists continued to operate (commitment, control mutuality), press releases published (trust), and both parties benefited from the exchange (relational satisfaction). By all accounts, the relationships between the daily newspapers and the publicists in Cape Town were very strong. The principal reason for this was because **under-prepared, time-starved and poorly-motivated journalists – newcomers and veterans alike – rely heavily on publicists to get their jobs done, which is exactly what the publicists want.** Instead of continuing to describe the findings of the current situation (answers to the What? question), I'll keep to the information directly relevant to the current discussions about journalism education and training, and particularly some of the responses to the Why? question.

The respondents pointed out that while the socio-political and socio-economic transformation processes in South Africa had significantly affected the relational elements, broader environmental factors had also played a role. Among them were changes in the media options, especially as a result of re-regulations of broadcast media and other technological advances, such as the web. All interviewees agreed on one thing: the most important factor that had affected media-publicists' relations since 1994 was the changes in the performance of practitioners – on both sides.

Journalism standards and skills were said to have declined and, inversely, those of publicists had increased. A range of reasons for this shift was offered. In addition to the factors already identified by others – general lack of resources, career paths that lead reporters out of the newsroom and into management, and poaching of staff by corporations and government – interviewees noted the migration of journalists into public service for ideological reasons. Key among these factors were the definition and content of news stories, and the role of journalism in society, as articulated by managers.

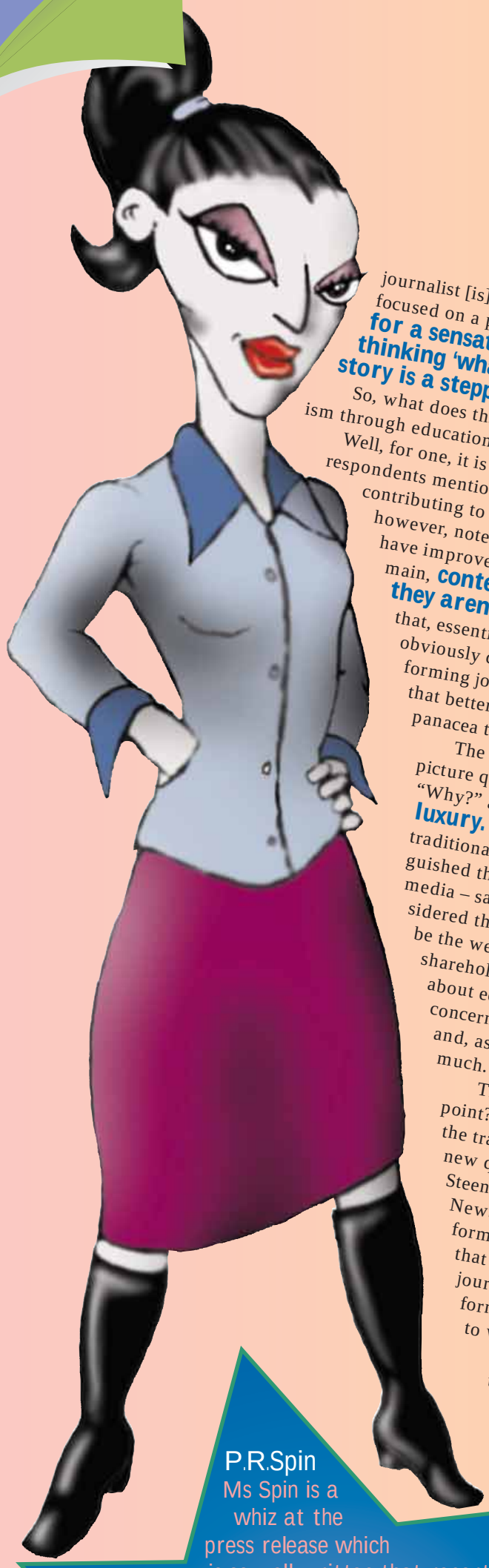
Changes in the "big news story" in South Africa. During the period leading up to the demise of apartheid, many journalists joined the profession as a way of participating in the fight for democratic change, commonly referred to in South Africa as the struggle. The advent of a constitutional democracy meant the demise of their reason for being journalists – both for those to the left and to the right of the political spectrum.

Others, it was noted, left journalism because, for them, the new, big news story was no longer exciting enough. This may be explained because news of the struggle, which had dominated all other stories for several decades, had all the elements generally considered to be newsworthy: scale, intensity, clarity, significant consequence, continuity and visual appeal. By contrast, what followed was a more complex (the good guys and bad guys were more difficult to tell apart) – and less obviously dramatic – story of the implementation of the new democracy, which was dominated by parliamentary debate and policy formulation, and relatively unexciting activities such as the building of houses and teaching people new skills.

Changes in the articulated goals of media organisations and journalists. Whether the shift in emphasis from communication goals toward economic goals was because of the normalisation of the society, changes in ownership, or wider economic pressures, all respondents agreed that the emphasis by media managers on the economic bottom line had resulted in **the rise of the "what's in it for me" attitude** among journalists. This attitude was said to be prevalent among experienced journalist who, after years of working for a cause had decided that it was payback time; it was also common amongst new journalists.

One respondent noted that this was especially commonplace among those who want to move from the relative anonymity of newspapers, to higher-profile careers in radio and television, which provided greater social and economic benefits: "[This] new breed of

Turn over for more...



journalist [is] less of a newshound, more of a free agent focused on a personal agenda… **they're looking for a sensationalist approach. They're always thinking 'what do I get out of the story?'…the story is a stepping stone."**

So, what does this mean for efforts to enhance the quality of journalism through education and training?

Well, for one, it is significant to note that in this study none of the respondents mentioned the quality of journalism training as a factor contributing to the shift in the skills of practitioners. (They did, however, note that that public relations training seemed to have improved.) Instead, the responses imply that, in the main, **contemporary newsrooms suffer because they aren't very inspiring places to work** – and that, essentially, is a matter of leadership. That observation obviously challenges the logic that suggests under-performing journalists are poorly trained and, therefore, that better (or more) education and training is the panacea to the problems in the newsroom.

The findings also imply that addressing the big picture questions about journalism practice – "Why?" and **"What's the point?" – is not a luxury.** It might also be a reminder that what has traditionally motivated journalists and distinguished them from their counterparts in other media – say film and music – is that they have considered their prime responsibility (the "Why?") to be the well-being of society, not themselves or shareholders. Indeed, when managers talk more about economic concerns, rather than social concerns, they tend to get what they pay for – and, as we well know, they don't pay that much.

The other big question – "What's the point?" – seems to be asked in reference to the transformation process itself. It's not a new question, of course. Lynette Steenveld, the former Independent Newspapers Chair of Media Transformation at Rhodes University asked that question in Issue 16 of this journal in a piece titled: "The transformation of the media: from what, to what?"

Of course, if answers to these questions aren't clearly articulated, and if they fail to inspire, and if the bottom line isn't the well being of society as a whole, then the current shortage of newsroom talent is unlikely to be alleviated. Not only will citizens – not consumers – **stop paying attention** (and paying for newspapers), but talented people will continue to look elsewhere for opportunities to use their skills. And, in that situation, more and better journalism education and training won't make much difference to newsrooms at all. But it might just help further strengthen the already-powerful public relations profession.

> THE OTHER BIG QUESTION – "WHAT'S THE POINT?" – SEEMS TO BE ASKED IN REFERENCE TO THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS ITSELF. IT'S NOT A NEW QUESTION, OF COURSE.

Finally, what are publicists – and the companies that employ them – doing with the power gained from not having to contend with strong media gatekeepers? **The short answer is: they're being forced to be responsible – not by journalists, but by other activist groups who, thanks to the communication revolution, have greater access to information, and louder voices.**

New information networks have strengthened activist groups – consumer, labour, government and other watchdogs – and their demand that business share responsibility for the general wellbeing of the societies from which they draw their wealth can no longer be ignored. This has forced a re-examination of economist Milton Friedman's (modification of former US president Calvin Coolidge's) adage that "the business of business is business". Short-term profit motives are being moderated by longer-term consequences. I suggest that increasingly there's the recognition that "the business of business is sustainable business". Not surprisingly then, corporate social responsibility programmes and the like are increasingly seen less as corporate largesse than as a business imperative, a cost of doing business, as it were. That responsibility, in the main, also extends to the information that corporate publicists put out. **And when they don't tell the truth, or spin the facts,** they're less likely to be confronted by enterprising investigative reporters than by hawkish activist groups, inside and outside the corporation. The Treatment Action Campaign's impact on the pharmaceutical industry (and government policy) is one local example of this.

Therefore, **formal sources that control the information** may, I contend, have less impact on the truth of the information than on the type of information conveyed. Given their desire to control volatility, the mainstay of information provided by corporate publicists is typically conflict-free, resulting in pretty bland newspapers. (Of course, an option for a newsroom faced with this predicament is to (over?) emphasise those stories that do contain conflict – an essential element of information traditionally considered to be newsworthy – and are within the easy grasp of lower-skilled or motivated staff: stories of the **crime and "he-said, she-said" political mud-slinging variety.)** Taken together – weakened gate-keeping by the news media, better-prepared corporate communicators, more and new information channels, increased emphasis on corporate responsibility, and greater transparency all around – may mean that, ultimately, the skills shortage in newsrooms will probably be of relatively little consequence to society. **Newspapers have long since lost their monopolistic grip on information distribution channels.** Their only power, therefore, is derived from their content. And that power, like any, is ultimately given by those on whom the power is exerted. Of course, for the vast majority of South African news audiences, daily newspapers aren't the preferred content show in town. So, by the time newspapers do regroup – if they do – they may just find there aren't many left who actually care.

P.R.Spin
Ms Spin is a whiz at the press release which is so well written that reporters simply pop on their own byline and run it whole. She's good at gifts – knowing exactly what goodies will get the attention of her favourite contacts. She also lays on a good lunch. She works the phones hourly, setting the agenda for coverage in her field of expertise.

This article draws on the paper: Relationships between media organisations and their commercial content providers in a society in transition: a discussion of a South African experience, presented at the European Public Relations Research and Education Association's ninth annual conference in Bled, Slovenia. For details see www.bledcom.com. *François Nel is a part-time lecturer at the Graduate Centre for Management at Cape Technikon and course leader of the Master's Programme in Strategic Communication at the Lancashire Business School at the University of Central Lancashire, UK, at fpn@iafrica.com.*

Brave new world

by Justice Malala

The best of the stories came at the beginning of July. I was in Lagos, Nigeria, to meet members of our parent newspaper and to make final preparations for the launch of ThisDay in South Africa.

In sizzling hot weather, after a lazy lunch washed down with refreshing Star beer – the national fuel strike was on and I could not get any business done – I called a friend in Johannesburg from my hotel in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria.

"Is it true?" he asked, fear in his voice. I did not know what he was talking about and asked him to give me details.

"Well, the story in Johannesburg media circles is that you are over in Lagos to **pick up money in suitcases** and bring it over here.

"Apparently that is the only way you guys can get money into SA otherwise your newspaper will not get off the ground," he replied, rather **sheepishly.**

I sighed. I had, after all, thought I had heard it all before. But this took the cake. Could any right-thinking person send the head of their organisation on a mission to illegally bring money into a country? Could any proprietor ask an editor to take part in such a **deplorable and illegal** act?

Since I accepted the job of founding editor of ThisDay and started working in February, we have had every manner of rumour and gossip circulated about us. We have been called names, have been derided as a Nigerian **money-laundering** operation and been promised that we would fold before we have even hit the streets. In Cape Town, where I went to interview prospective staff, my team and I were openly referred to as members of a 419 scam (the notorious Nigerian con scheme where victims hand over hundreds of thousands of rand). Ditto at the conference of the SA National Editors' Forum, at dinner parties, on the Marketingweb site and at bars across the land.

The first question I was asked by one of the most senior members of our government when we went visiting recently, was: **"How clean is your money?"** All because the man who had the dream to build a transcontinental newspaper, the first African newspaper to straddle the continent, is Nigerian. I was at The Star when Tony O'Reilly bought Independent Newspapers in the early 1990s. I am still waiting for the xenophobic comments about that deal.

My proprietor, Nduka Obaigbena, is a charismatic, energetic dynamo of a man who started work on a newspaper in Nigeria as a cartoonist. **He rose through the ranks** until he worked for Time magazine in New York, dabbled with Newsweek for a while and rejoined Time in London, Paris and back on the continent as an advertising and marketing man.

Ink has always pumped through his veins. In the mid-1980s he started a news magazine called ThisWeek in Nigeria. In a market where all news magazines were printed in black and white, where there was no capability in the country's presses to print in colour, he vowed that he would deliver to Nigeria a magazine that was of the standard of Time.

He hired journalists who wrote the stories in Nigeria, flew the laid-out pages to Kent, England, where the production work and printing was done, and flew the magazine back to Nigeria. **It was a revolution in Nigerian magazine publishing.** A magazine that was world-class, produced by a group of young men (Obaigbena was in his 20s) who wanted to deliver a product not yet seen in the market at that time.

The magazine folded when **repression** by the Babangida regime increased and the economic situation in Nigeria deteriorated to such an extent that profits made from the product – which were in Naira – could not keep up with sterling costs of printing in England.

But Obaigbena was undaunted. In the mid-90s he started a weekly newspaper from a two-bedroomed flat in Lagos. It, too, was revolutionary at many levels. It was an independent voice in a market where most players were government-owned or cowed into submission by a succession of military dictatorships. It became the first newspaper to be printed in colour while the rest of the field was still in black and white. The paper was an unqualified success.

Obaigbena took it daily, and it proved to be unstoppable. He installed the best technology in the country – everything from Apple computers to the latest editorial systems from the United States and Europe. He bought an old warehouse building in Lagos' dockside area and built his own presses on the premises.

Today that small newspaper is the most influential voice in Nigeria. It is the largest-circulation, serious newspaper in the country. It is known for the excellence of its journalism, the bravery of its reporters and editors, and the independence and authoritativeness of its columnists. It has won the country's newspaper of the year award three times in a row from the year of its inception, and its editors and reporters dominate journalism awards ceremonies every year. It is a perfect example for all of us on this continent of how a **brave and exciting** press can contribute significantly to the building of a country. Obaigbena has himself been detained by Babangida and had to flee Sani Abacha's soldiers. He fled to London and was exiled there until Abacha died and his regime crumbled.

I got the call to speak to ThisDay in November last year. I came to Johannesburg on the 22nd of that month and had extensive talks with Obaigbena and several other members of our management team. I knew then that there was absolutely no question of my turning down an opportunity to work for ThisDay. Here was an African, full of dreams and passion and energy, offering me a dream. **He was unequivocal**: "I am here to build a newspaper. It will be authoritative, it will be daily, it will be strong on politics, business and society. Its coverage of Africa will be comprehensive. It will be a partner to our newspaper in Nigeria, and yet it will be uniquely South African," he said.

I have always wanted to start a newspaper. I should, rightly, be inspired by Sol Plaatje and John Tengo Jabavu, African men who started newspapers in our distant past. But I am a child of the 1980s, and it is Irwin Manoim and Anton Harber who got my groove going when they launched the Weekly Mail and later, the Daily Mail. Post-1994, nothing as exciting as this has happened in SA newspapers. **I threw my hat in,** and I have not regretted a single moment since.

We are starting a newspaper for a maturing, democratic South Africa that embraces the African continent and the world. Our readers are young and old alike who are enthusiastic about the future of this country and yet have not lost their critical faculties. They are engaged with the issues that confront us: they want the facts on HIV/Aids before they become activists, they are engaged with the unravelling of Zimbabwe, they read Tolstoy and confront Chomsky, they make love and read Neruda in the nude, they own big cars and Beetles. They are the WaBenzi and know

The Gate Keeper's job is to keep out the riff-raff. He runs a tight gate: if it's not new – "Forget it!", doesn't have promixity – "Not coming through my gate!", isn't unusual – "Whoa!", isn't bleeding – "Who cares?", won't make good visuals – "Push off", it's a follow-up – "Been there, done that". He keeps strict hours for the gate and will only let you through if you come with Adva Tizing.

they will come under the firing line from us if they dare forget that this country is built on **the promise of a better life for all.**

They share one thing above all else: they are **damn intelligent** and know that there is no daily publication in South Africa today that captures the national debate. That is why they will come to the pages of ThisDay **to duel and laugh** and look at their contemporaries. They know that ours is a country of many shades and hues and intricacies: **they are tired of predictable reporting and writing.**

I could dwell on what we are going to do for journalism in this country, but I will not. Let me count, instead, the ways in which we have improved journalism in South Africa since the announcement that we would be launching a new newspaper.

The major media houses in this country have – except perhaps for Johnnic – paid journalists atrocious salaries. Many highly talented writers and editors have found themselves **with no option but to leave** reporting and join advertising agencies and the plethora of communications companies that have mushroomed in the past 10 years.

But since we came in and offered journalists decent salaries – as opposed to exorbitant, as claimed by our competitors – many journalists have had their salaries increased. **Anywhere in the world, show me a well-paid journalist and I will show you a journalist who displays initiative, works hard and delivers excellent copy.**

Is paying journalists decent salaries unsustainable in SA's media environment? This is what our competitors are saying. I beg to differ, and have one strong example: Johnnic pays most of its journalists reasonably well, and it continues to power ahead. Since we said we are coming out, they have increased their salaries substantially. **And look at their bottom line – glowing as ever.**

We will be a national newspaper, printed in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and probably one other centre to begin with. We have made no secret of the fact that we believe South Africa is a country that has for long wanted a daily newspaper that speaks with one voice, a newspaper that transcends the divides that apartheid sought to make us believe existed among us. A few months into 2003, Business Day announced that they would begin printing in Durban. I say good luck to them, and if they are truly a national newspaper **then all the better for all thinking South Africans.** Now, the public will have two national dailies.

We have made no bones about the fact that we expect our journalism to be of the highest quality and standards possible. Our journalists have received training from some of the best writers and trainers in this country and abroad, **and more training will take place.**

Now look at the rest of the newspapers in this country. Independent Newspapers has held weekend bosberaads and introduced various new elements to their titles. In KwaZulu-Natal The Independent on Saturday has various new features and so has The Mercury. The Cape papers are working **frantically to jazz themselves up.**

In Gauteng, The Star and Pretoria News are refining their positioning and adding new elements which they hope will secure their readership.

A rash of inspiration among the editors of Independent titles? No. It is the kind of preparation that we saw in the old Argus when Harber and Manoim were about to launch the Daily Mail.

Business Day has launched at least four new sections in the past few months. It has added motoring, small and medium enterprises, books, law and exporting to its repertoire. **Who wins when all this happens? It is you, dear reader.** Do the current crop of newspaper owners love you so much that they would have added all these new features anyway? I wouldn't put any money on it.

One last thing. We have taken a long time to launch. Many have called us SomeDay and all sorts of other names in a bid to force us to launch when we are patently not ready. So. When are we launching? As Obaigbena says: "Does George W. Bush tell Iraq when he is going to attack?"

We make no excuses for not having launched in the past months. Our management and journalists are sure that we will launch this newspaper. Of that there is no doubt.

Justice Malala is editor of ThisDay. He has been a foreign correspondent for the Sunday Times and is a past winner of the Foreign Press Association Award for Courageous Journalism.
justice.malala@thisdaysa.co.za

The paralysis of politics

by Fern Greenbank

When it comes to the issue of journalism education, there are dozens of important, relevant and interesting topics to explore as we struggle to identify our place in higher education, defend ourselves against critics and keep pace with a fast-changing world. I would argue, however, that the greatest challenge to journalism educators is not outside pressure, but inside politics.

I recently spent two years in South Africa at Rhodes University pursuing my doctorate in journalism education. At the time of this writing, mountains of paper are piled in my living room in rural Tennessee. Journal articles, conference papers, books and interview notes from around the world have taken over my home. Although I am investigating the potential uses of the documentary tradition for journalism training, all this research and immersion in the general issue of journalism education have **led to this one very clear conclusion:** no amount of discussion about theory vs. practice, teaching qualifications, professional partnerships, liberal arts balance or pedagogy, will lead to a stable framework as long as reflection is considered only a collective effort, not an individual effort.

For starters, there is no credible evidence that journalism education is even largely responsible for the state of the media in South Africa or the United States. If such evidence surfaces, that will be another story.

Neither a Sanef-directed skills audit nor the training needs assessment commissioned by the NSJ and NiZA "prove" that journalism education is largely responsible for a perceived poor-quality journalism in South Africa. Both studies were performed under **unreasonable** timeframes and were limited by inadequate co-operation and sampling groups.

Some fair comparisons can be made between American and South African journalism education curricular issues. In both countries, programmes are "evaluated" based on editors' perceptions and those perceptions are based on the skill and knowledge base of specific employees. Programmes are rated based on criteria that assume quality is the end result of a universal set of practices. The research does not address the variables such as hiring practices, specific educational experiences and newsroom conditions. It does not explore the student intake profile at different institutions. The research does not address the individual nature of journalism programmes based on the individuals within the programme. Quantitative research, though it has merits, cannot address nuance and politics.

Thomas Kunkel, president of American Journalism Review and the dean of the University of Maryland journalism school, said it best when he reminded us that **"there's no monolithic entity called journalism education".**

Even the mammoth study of journalism education, Winds of Change by American consultant Betty Medsger in 1996, failed to provide a grassroots look at journalism education. **Without proper research to link weaknesses in specific journalism programmes to poor performance in the newsroom, the debate will continue unabated with no resolution.** Until the issue of implementation is addressed, we'll continue to be engaged in what Everette Dennis has called a "dialogue of the deaf".

Implementation is affected by institutional policy; however, change is predominantly a people problem. There's an entire body of literature on change theory, which can be applied easily to curriculum development. If we stop generalising for a moment, we'll see that there are highly skilled, critical thinking, intelligent young people graduating from all types of programmes every year in every country.

Last year at Rhodes, the fourth year students were, in my view, a truly remarkable group. **In the midst of a renewed, hostile debate** on the quality of journalism education in South Africa, here were 12 young, skilled, passionate, talented journalism students available for employment.

In other words, reality on the ground didn't match the public, generalised debate. Sure, the Rhodes journalism programme has its own issues, but at the end of the day, at Rhodes, and all across South Africa in tertiary institutions, brilliant graduates can be found. There is no proof that an adequate pool of excellent journalism candidates does not exist. Observation will show you that there are also highly qualified, critical thinking, passionate, committed, intelligent teachers in every country. Tiny programmes with few resources can produce great journalists. Large programmes with every bell and whistle can produce great journalists. The one thing all programmes have in common is teachers.

Journalism education, and the media industry, need more than a cause-and-effect mentality. They need honesty and courage. I'm not naïve enough to think this will ever happen on a wide scale. But, it needs to be said nonetheless. There is simply a reality that the public conversation and research do not acknowledge. And that reality is that few people have the courage to do what is in the best interest of stakeholders (students/public) because it often means it is not in the best interest of the educators, programme or institution. This does not mean that educators are evil in some way, **conspiring to skew public information** or deny students skills to sabotage news organisations. It does mean that educators are as human as editors.

With no formal accreditation system in South Africa, there is confusion regarding which schools offer **bona fide** journalism education, which are general communication programmes, which are staffed by quality instructors, (quality meaning excellent teachers), which require liberal arts supplements, etc. The type of accreditation system used in the United States would be inappropriate for South Africa for a variety of reasons. Even accreditation does not guarantee quality. A

simple (yet difficult to compile) comprehensive and centrally-located listing of all programmes in South Africa purporting to train journalists and communication specialists with published curricula would be useful for the industry, which must be held accountable for hiring practices. At the moment, every listing available in South Africa differs depending on who compiles the data.

To set strict accreditation standards now in South Africa would be **a highly political act** considering the state of inequality and access to higher education and, I believe, would lead to a homogenous pool of available journalists. What is needed is the development of evaluative tools to combat the inherently political nature of implementation.

Dave Berkman, an American journalism professor with more than **20** years experience, had the courage to say aloud what many of us think privately. "The result [of what I've described] is an excessively large academic journalism establishment designed primarily to meet the needs of those who staff it rather than those it's supposed to train," wrote Berkman in the 6 April 2000 edition of Milwaukee's Weekly News.

Berkman's answer to the self-serving nature of journalism education is to call upon outside professional associations and the industry to exert pressure on journalism schools to force a student-centred curriculum.

Does this bring me back to square one? I don't necessarily agree with Berkman's solution, because when professional organisations and the industry do not base their suggestions on hard facts, and the realities of academic life, then we are back at square one. When journalism programmes are unable to work through their own political obstacles, even when effective evaluation tools are available, we see programmes that either stagnate or reflect the needs of a few. At the very least, Berkman did get to the heart of the matter. That is, what do we do if our programme's obstacle to curriculum development is ourselves, the teachers?

In response to the recently renewed debate inspired by Columbia University, Betty Medsger summed up the issue this way: journalism education needs to get out of the way of journalism education.

We all have a good general idea about what is needed to perform as a journalist. We know what the curriculum should include. We all generally agree that the media play a crucial role globally, nationally and locally. We can agree on these things, but there will never be, and shouldn't be, a singular formula for a programme.

The reality, again, is that there are many ways to achieve a particular goal. Even though we know what factors should be considered when building a curriculum, **the one factor that matters to most people, if they are truly honest, is "where do I fit into this picture?", instead of asking "how effective is this course of action?"**

South Africa may be a newly developing democracy, but it has a sophisticated higher education environment. If the media industry wants quality new hires, will only accept quality new hires, treats them well, provides them with a quality work environment and opportunities to produce quality work, you'll see the closing of dozens of programmes and the restructuring of others.

I say this with great confidence, believing it is true, but also believing that consistency and doing the right thing, again leads to politics.

A journalism programme designed to satisfy the staff may or may not be successful, depending on the staff. If you have a programme heavy with practitioners and light on research or theory, how do you increase expertise in one area without threatening the domain of the other? **If your job is in jeopardy** because enrolment numbers fall, do you agree to an intake of students not truly prepared for the rigours of journalism education? If a group of staff lean in one direction, but industry or societal needs require a curriculum bend in another direction, who is going to advocate for the students and society? Even though we know students need broad general knowledge, are you going to give up journalism time to political studies, languages and history? **Some staff have outlived their roles** in a programme, but there is no way institutionally to remove them or force them to "change".

When strong but fair and empathetic leadership is in place, it is possible to put personal fears on the table and create a curriculum that draws on the strengths of the staff, recognises weak areas, while also serving the needs of the students, university and – hopefully – the industry. And, leadership does not have to come from the top.

Two recent studies offer sound recommendations for educational institutions. Implementation of these recommendations, however, depends again on personal courage and integrity. The Southern Africa Media Training Needs Assessment commissioned by the Nordic and SADC Journalism Centre (NSJ) and the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa (NiZA) in 2001, provided a good snapshot of the journalism education environment in Southern Africa. Researchers Colleen Lowe Morna and Zohra Khan admitted the limitations of the study, just as the research team, commissioned by the SA National Editors' Forum (Sanef), found co-operation and sampling lacking.

Turn over for more...

The Amazing General Knowledge Backpack is the one piece of equipment you cannot be without as a Superjournalist. Snuggly within its perfect back-fitting dimensions it contains a world atlas and timeline (self-updating as the boundaries and political leaders change); a concise history of the world from multiple viewpoints; a definition dictionary and thesaurus; an acronym organiser; the incredible calculator with instant link-up to share prices and add-on economic trend interpreter; a quick guide to current theories with a special postmodernism attachment; a who's who of not only the mainstream but also the fringe; and all this comes with optional add-your-own-special-field-knowledge-builder whenever you change beat or need depth to your reporting.

"Each training institution, whether tertiary or in-service, appears to be trying to provide a little of everything to everyone, without succeeding in providing a good quality service to anyone," concluded the NSJ/NiZA study.

Among Morna and Khan's recommendations is that universities should focus on producing specialised media practitioners, analysts and researchers. Morna and Kahn recommended that tertiary institutions should focus on what they can do best, creating niche programmes striving for quality, not quantity.

However reasonable that sounds, implementation of recommendations from any study is going to require change, compromise and shuffling of teaching duties and responsibilities. **And we're right back where we started.**

Rhodes University commissioned a study in 2002 to look at its curriculum development process with an eye toward relocating into a new, centralised building. A non-journalist researcher was engaged to perform the study. The result of the quasi-qualitative research is a fascinating glimpse into the personal nature of curriculum development. At the top of the list of recommendations based on hours of interviews and questionnaires? Urgent institution of an open communication process. It would be interesting to see this type of painful but honest study performed in all journalism programmes. I venture to bet the results would be similar in all cases.

One way to encourage programmes to engage in constructive dialogue is to seek outside assistance, and not from the industry. It isn't enough to say that we all should become reflective, action researchers because we are dealing with many personalities in differing stages of pedagogical and personal enlightenment. Politics prohibit all programmes from having dynamic leadership.

Do we want to follow Berkman's recommendation for forced change from outside entities with agendas, or can we find a few brave programmes willing to engage in a little postmodern curriculum deconstruction.

Great, or even good leadership is hard to come by. Department heads and chairs are often the ones with the most to lose and are under intense pressure institutionally. If you buy into the theory of personal responsibility, such as the one espoused by American education activist Parker Palmer, you'll agree that leadership does not necessarily have to come from the top. People have to decide for themselves whether they are going to build walls that keep them safe or build a curriculum that serves students. In Palmer's philosophical treatise, The Courage to Teach, he calls it the moment when a teacher decides to "live divided no more".

During my stay in South Africa, one instructor used a phrase to describe the feeling of working within certain environments, not just educational. **He called it the "violence of institutions".** How many of us have been part of organisations at one time or another that felt oppressive enough to be called "violent", even if only on an emotional level? For many, it is this environment in which curriculum development occurs. For others, the process takes place in a safe setting where all voices are valued and the result is not only educated students, but also energised staff. This same instructor went to great pains to explain the way South Africa's history plays itself out with regard to authority and group dynamics. For this very reason, good mediated evaluation is all the more needed. **Just as we should admit self-censorship occurs in the newsroom, we should admit it is not always possible for teachers to look at themselves as part of the problem.**

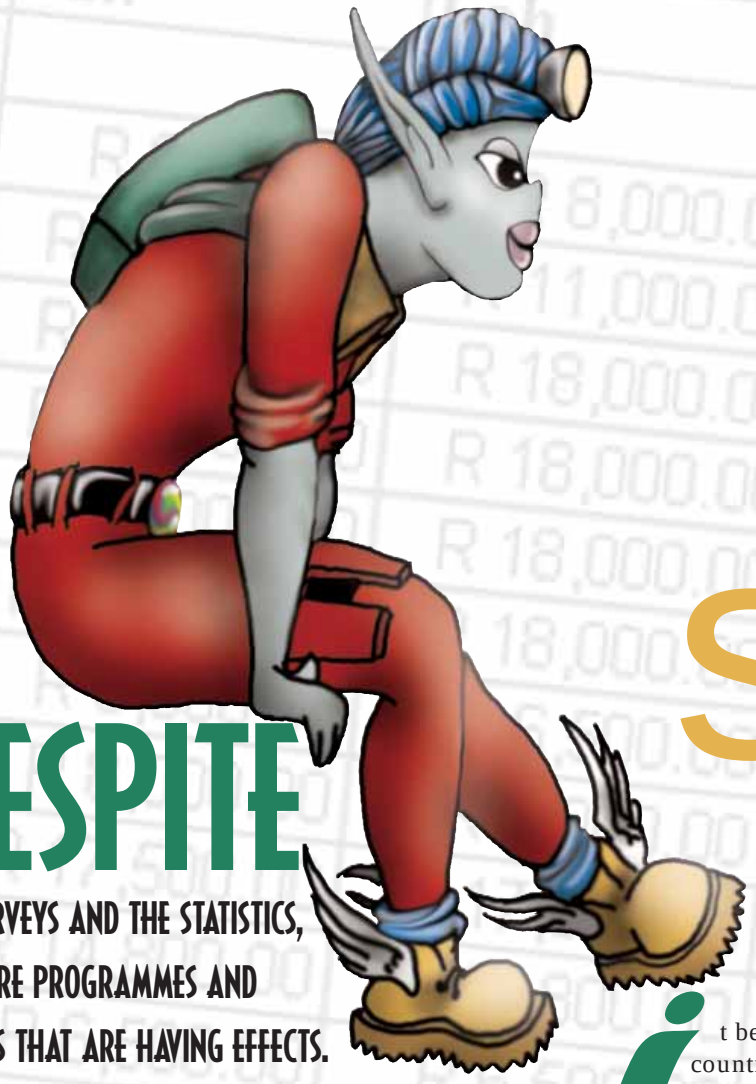
If South Africa's tertiary institutions could do just one thing, the tone and substance of the debate would most likely change and **inertia would be disrupted –** seek out a process of mediated evaluation. An evaluation by a "neutral" person or body could provide programmes with invaluable perspective based on fair criteria such as location, size, tradition, staff qualifications, scheduling, resources, facilities, curricular offerings and most important, personalities. Even those programmes that feel comfortable with their structure and results can use continued input and new perspectives.

For example: at Rhodes University, the Academic Development Centre offers a two-year programme for lecturers leading to a certificate in professional teaching in higher education. At the present time, the programme is voluntary, but I believe it should be mandatory. I don't think an entire programme staff could engage in the reflective programme together, as that would diminish the safety of the speaking space.

In short, the Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education programme could serve as a model for a journalism curriculum reform movement. **It facilitates a transformation from defence to personal responsibility via a simple awareness process.** Teachers explore their own histories, develop teaching philosophies, investigate philosophical viewpoints and engage with teachers in all disciplines. It is hard to imagine a teacher completing the programme without a deep appreciation for the connection between the pedagogical and the personal and equally important, a new respect for the views of others.

In 20-plus years, the journalism education debate has barely changed. It's usually an argument fought by a few based on anecdotal evidence for us all. An honest and courageous effort on the part of media programmes to open themselves up to independent scrutiny using a variety of evaluative tools would certainly decrease the "violence" of institutional life and lead to a curriculum that serves the students as well as those who teach them.

Fern Greenbank is a doctoral student in the Department of Education at Rhodes University. She holds a master's degree in cross-cultural education and is a former newspaper editor and journalism instructor in America. She can be reached at mgreenbankf@aol.com.



DESPITE a solution community

by Peter du Toit

DESPITE THE SURVEYS AND THE STATISTICS, THERE ARE PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS THAT ARE HAVING EFFECTS. THERE ARE MANY SAVVY SOLUTIONS ALREADY BEING USED ALL OVER THE REGION WHICH, THOUGH LONG-TERM, ARE GRADUALLY MAKING THEIR IMPACT ON JOURNALISM.

IN THIS SECTION – WAYS THAT WORK – PETER DU TOIT OUTLINES INTERVENTIONS FOR MID-CAREER MEDIA MANAGERS; LOUISE FLANAGAN TALKS ABOUT HOW TO MAKE COACHING AND MENTORING REALLY USEFUL; AMINA FRENSE SHOWS HOW THE PUBLIC BROADCASTER SHOULDERS ITS RESPONSIBILITY; SALLY SHACKLETON FOCUSES ON THE PARTICULAR USES THE INTERNET CAN BE PUT TO FOR TRAINING; FANIE GROENEWALD, ANTHEA GARMAN AND ROD AMNER FOCUS ON STRATEGIES THEY USE TO TRAIN STUDENT JOURNALISTS.

It begins in the Southern African country of Zambotswa in a place called Anytown. Population: 540 000. The owner-editor of the Anytown Farmers' Weekly (AFW) has died and the Big Media Company, with its substantial assets across the country, has bought out his struggling paper.

Now the new management team must develop a strategic plan to **turn the company around and win over a readership** that has long been reliant on competing papers from neighbouring cities.

The four-person team huddles around a table covered with maps and demographic data about the town, bar graphs showing the paper's ailing fortunes in graphic detail and reports dealing with staffing and management structure.

"No! This will never work," one member of the team exclaims. "We're excluding most of the market. **This paper needs a new title, a new editorial approach and a new image.** It will never make money unless we reposition ourselves. We must make big changes."

This outburst starts a debate among the group as they grapple with the difficulties of targeting a new market, while continuing to enjoy the support of existing subscribers.

Each team member has a story to tell about the consequences of repositioning an existing brand. Examples come from Swaziland, Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa. **Some tell of success stories** where radical change has seen circulations skyrocket; others talk about papers that have barely survived.

The debate shifts to more thoughtful discussion as the group considers the reasons for failures and successes and apply these lessons to their planning for the AFW.

The team has **a wealth of diverse experience to draw on.** They are part of a group of 14 senior journalists taking part in a Print Media Management Course sponsored by the Nordic-SADC Journalism Centre (NSJ) and facilitated by Rhodes University's Sol Plaatje Media Leadership Institute (SPI).

This course, which is now in its sixth year and has a parallel programme for broadcast managers, is probably the **longest running media management training initiative in the region.** The courses have attracted participants from 12 of 14 SADC countries.

Over this time it has become abundantly clear that despite the participants' different backgrounds, the problems confronting media managers **across the region are remarkably similar, often differing only in degree.**

Almost everyone tells the same story, encapsulated in this comment made by one editor of a private paper during the course introductions: "They promoted me because I was a good writer, not because I knew anything about management. **Now I'm dealing with staff problems, budgets and legal issues.** I must oversee everything that goes into our newspaper. Until now **I've had no training in any of these areas.** I have learned from my mistakes, but it's taken me a long time."

There is, without a doubt, a desperate need for more in-depth research into the training required by editorial managers, but, based on the observations of almost 200 editors, station managers and producers who have attended these courses, the Sol Plaatje Institute has identified the following common management issues which need to be addressed:

- In many instances media managers in Southern Africa **do not have a clear idea of their audiences,** who they are trying to target and why. Managers need to enhance their understanding of their markets and marketing principles.

- Editors are expected to draw up financial plans and departmental budgets, but **few have any prior financial management experience.** Few editors have even a basic knowledge of spreadsheets.
- Human resource management functions are left to the human resources departments with editors making little input into key issues of recruitment, performance management and discipline. This often **results in the wrong people being hired** and in organisations struggling to keep talented staff.
- Editors need to learn skills that equip them to develop their staff. Few have been exposed to concepts of coaching and mentoring and editors tend to **spend their time fixing mistakes** instead of building capacity.
- Editors need guidance in developing editorial policies and ensuring that these are realised in the daily practice of the newsroom. This includes questions of ethics and law.

Other issues that relate to structural problems within media organisations include:

- The lack of strategic planning and co-ordination that takes place in many organisations. Few of the participants have ever taken part in **strategic planning processes** and there is a need for managers to be exposed to processes that will assist them in setting and achieving long-term objectives.
- The fact that **women continue to be massively under-represented in management structures across the region.** Women have never made up more than a third of the participants attending any one of the management courses.

News managers recognise these needs and the impact training can have in preparing them to address some of these problems. However, while the majority of them **want to study further and enhance their knowledge of management theories and practices, few can afford the time** to participate in formal academic courses. Instead they must look for opportunities where they can acquire these skills on short courses where they can receive intensive training.

When participants are able to get onto short courses **they are impatient to learn.** They are not just looking to gain knowledge for its own sake, but want answers to specific questions impacting on them in their places of work. They value theory, but need to see its direct relevance in terms of explaining issues they are dealing with in their industries. For many the courses also provide a vital opportunity to escape from the daily pressures of the workplace, **to look for fresh ideas and to reflect** on what they have been doing.

In response to these needs, the Sol Plaatje Institute has developed a range of approaches, including the case study outlined above, designed specifically to ensure that participants are able to gain as much as possible from the short course experience. These approaches take into account principles of active learning to ensure that participants are given a chance to apply the theory in practical situations.

In these exercises participants are encouraged to **construct meaning for themselves and to make the connections** between the materials used and their own contexts.

The value of these techniques is evident in the comments of one participant after the Zambotswa case study: "It's a great exercise. While the example was fictional, the situation was real. I was able to thoroughly analyse the situation as the theoretical issues we discussed kept on coming through my mind. Without the theoretical issues I could have found this exercise confusing, but without the exercise I would not have understood the theory."

Training methodologies are also designed to ensure that participants share responsibility for their learning with the trainers and their colleagues. Participants are continually and actively involved in the learning process and encouraged to contribute ideas from their own workplaces. Each participant's prior experiences, understandings and values are viewed as **important resources in driving the training process** forward.

This was evident during the AFW case study, where participants brought their own experiences to the table, sharing examples from four different countries.

"My organisation is more or less going through the same scenario as the AFW. The exercise will definitely help me, as I'm applying the same procedures so as to increase my readership. I enjoyed hearing from other people in the group and finding out how they have approached similar problems."

This dialogue is an integral part of the process and people are given as much time as possible to put their own problems on the table and to share success stories with colleagues.

Courses create a space where participants can benefit from being part of the **community of people looking for solutions** to similar problems. This process is ongoing and mechanisms are set in place to ensure participants continue to support each other long after the formal training course has ended.

The Zambotswa case study is only one example of how exercises involving active learning can contribute to effective media management training. Other techniques such as role-plays, simulations and debates are also being developed to address issues such as content generation, conflict management, and the application of HR principles in issues of discipline, performance management and recruitment.

The key to all of these exercises is to **create intellectual meeting places where theory and practice converge and where experience and innovative ideas blend** into innovative strategies participants can apply when they return to their workplaces.

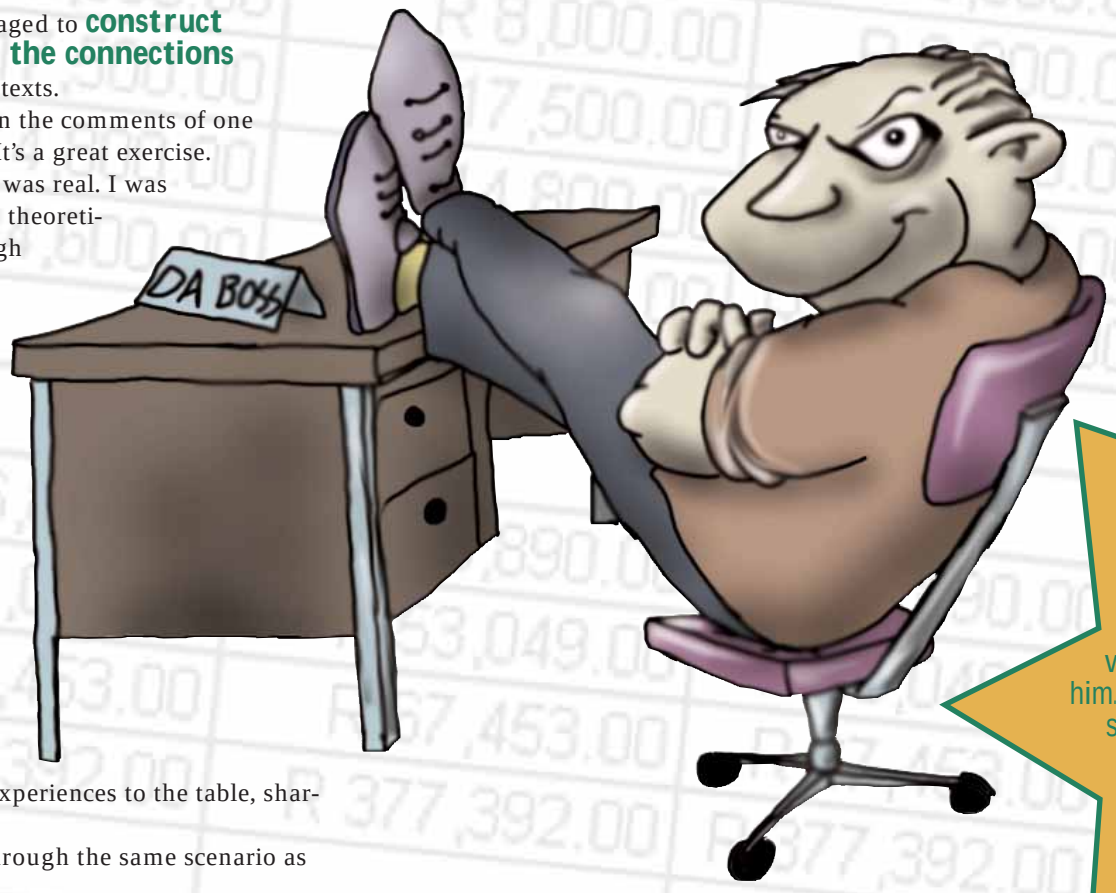
Finally the group makes a decision. They will reposition the paper, but they will do so slowly. The paper will be re-launched as the Anytown Weekly and over the next six months it will shift from targeting local farmers to serving the broader Anytown population.

The group is satisfied with their efforts and eager to report back on their strategic planning to their board of directors, made up of fellow participants.

The team delivers its report and board members pepper them with questions, comments and feedback. Some are sceptical; **others think the plan might work.** Nobody is overly concerned about the results; it is the process that counts.

Peter du Toit is Deputy Director at the Sol Plaatje Media Leadership Institute. He has been involved in journalism training for the past eight years, running courses in journalism and conflict, media and democracy and election reporting across Africa and in South East Asia. He can be contacted on p.dutoit@ru.ac.za

Attached to the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, the Sol Plaatje Media Leadership Institute was established in mid-2002 with funding from Atlantic Philanthropies. Headed by former SABC Deputy Group Chief Executive and Mail & Guardian Chief Executive, Prof Govin Reddy, the Institute provides entry level and mid-career training to media managers across the region. Prior to the SPI's launch, the Department of Journalism and Media Studies facilitated the NSJ courses.



Da Boss believes in the school of hard knocks. He struggled his way up the ladder and so should you – without any help from him. That's the way to separate the real journalists from the rest. It's osmosis or nothing.

NOTHING AND

by Louise Flanagan

COACHING HAD A HEYDAY MOMENT – BACK THERE IN THE 80S WHEN POYNTER INSTITUTE COURSES HAD AN IMPACT ON SOUTH AFRICAN NEWSROOMS. THEN IT BECOME A TECHNIQUE THAT WENT OUT OF FASHION, IT WAS COSTLY, TIME-CONSUMING AND IF IT DIDN'T INVOLVE THE RIGHT KIND OF MENTOR, IT COULD HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON MORALE. BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN AN ORGANISATION STICKS IT OUT BY PUTTING ENERGY INTO COACHING AND DEDICATING TIME AND RESOURCES TO IT?

So what does a coaching editor do? Nothing and everything, that's what.

It's the job that can involve anything that nobody else has time to do, that fits into odd corners of the day, that is defined by constant interruption and which is ideally invisible.

It's the job that's the first to disappear when those financial guys start **frowning at editorial expenses** and it's the job that's often the most difficult for editors to justify keeping. It doesn't work at all if you don't have ferocious support from your editor.

It's also an enormously rewarding job.

I've been coaching editor at the Daily Dispatch in East London for four years now. Most newsrooms have someone who does **at least some of the work** that goes with this job but probably under a different title – like deputy news editor or general dog's body. The difference in being called a coaching editor is that it makes staff development – rather than tomorrow's newspaper – the cornerstone of the job.

This is the way it works at the Dispatch. We have a newsdesk run between three people: the news editor, who is in charge of the reporting staff, assigning the news and running the daily diary; the night news editor, who is in charge of collecting our reporters' copy and doing the first rough cut on it; and the coaching editor, who's supposed to help **make life easier for everyone else**.

In a small organisation, one person could do all three jobs, mostly because they have no choice. In a bigger organisation, these three people have to work together as though they're all the same person. It's better if these three people don't report to each other (our three all report directly to the editor) so they can't pull rank on each other and have to co-operate and compromise with each other instead. This only works if these three people and their team **share a passion for getting the best stories** and pushing everyone in that team to their limits.

These are some of the things the coaching editor does (or tries to do, when there isn't a crisis relating to getting tomorrow's paper out):

- Get in at the planning stages of hiring new newsroom staff. The coach often ends up helping them do their jobs so it's a good idea to have some input on who's being hired in the first place and why. This means being involved in planning which jobs need to be filled or cut up and reassigned to existing staff; what skills and qualifications are needed to do the job and getting these written into the letter of appointment; what can and can't be taught to new employees within the newsroom; **what sort of journalists will fit into your newsroom team**; interviewing and selecting applicants, and shuffling work among existing staff until the staff gap is filled.
- Help orientate new staff. With junior staff, this usually means spending several hours over a few days showing them the basics of their new jobs, **finding them a newsroom buddy for quick help,** doing a fast check on their skills and abilities, arranging – or doing – some basic assessment of their work over a few weeks, and giving them feedback on their work. With senior staff, or **people hired to do a job you don't know how to do yourself, at least make sure they know where the coffee is kept,** exactly what their job involves, who they report to and who they should ask for help. And just be available to network on their behalf for a while.
- Find out what people want to do in their jobs and find them the training to help them do it.
- Get newsroom people to talk to each other. That often means setting up teams who may work together on a particular story for a couple of hours or a couple of weeks (maybe a reporter, a photographer, a librarian, a page designer and the news editor), **make sure the brief and deadlines are clear, then get out of their way** unless they ask for help. Lots of troubleshooting can be done on the spot by getting the right people to talk to each other immediately (that means before it's too late to get the story out of the paper). One of my colleagues calls this MBWA – Management By Walking Around. It works. Tea and muffins with it help even more.
- Listen to staff who are miserable. And don't gossip about it. **Minor misery that's ignored can turn into huge newsroom problems,** but different people's problems looked at together can be turned into useful solutions, like swapping two staffers who're getting bored with their jobs. If you know who wants to move across the room or learn a new skill, you can fill urgent staffing gaps fast.
- Think like a company accountant when it comes to looking after newsroom resources. The best trick I learnt here was from working for years in NGOs and the public sector – **if you spend a bit of time imagining what it would be like to have to explain losses and inefficiencies** to international funders or parliamentary standing committees, then it's really easy to get into the habit of guarding organisational assets.
- Think like a unionist when it comes to looking after staff interests. **Have a good working knowledge of labour law, company policy and media ethics,** be able to apply them and

EVERYTHING

share that information with anyone who needs it.

- **Think like a frontline reporter out on a job 200km from home, wet, tired and battling to meet deadline,** when it comes to backing up the news team. Find them the resources to do their jobs, find the right space in the newspaper for their stories and make sure they get home again.
- Listen to the complaints from the public and use those to help direct training and resources needed.
- Find resources for your team and teach them to use them. Network, network, network.
- Move around. Change the times of your shifts, move from newsgatherers to subs, visit the out-of-town bureaus. If you don't know what everyone's working conditions, skills and job requirements are, then you can't help them.
- Fill in for other jobs when necessary. This gives you **a really good idea why some people need a break from their jobs** and often gives you ideas on how to streamline the work flow.
- **Everyone hates criticism** and the coaching editor is frequently appointed to pass on the bad news. Don't lie about the bad news but find some good news to go with it – there's usually something good to rescue from every story.
- Find stuff to praise. Look for the best thing in the newspaper every day and tell that writer/photographer/sub that you noticed it. We try to run a newsdesk-reporters-photographers meeting once a month where we put all the best and the worst stories and photos up on the walls – it's astonishing how fast everyone gets motivated to **make sure that they get something up there with the good stuff.**
- Institutionalise ways of assessing work. For us, that means trying to set up a performance development system. We battle to do this, but in some areas we're getting there. This is the best way to give fair, ongoing feedback.
- Daily newspapers and stress go hand-in-hand. **The daily newspaper demands of endless creativity and initiative against the grind of daily deadlines can be shattering.** Expect that staff will have both great days and off days. In times of severe stress, if you can't do anything else for them, then organise them coffee and biscuits.
- Be available as a writing coach. This is down at the end of this list because it's often lost in the rush of newsroom work, but it's really the most important part of the job and you have to fight hard to get it back to the top of the list. Get into the habit of regarding writing coaching as priority work – let it be known that anyone needing help on a story can talk to you at any time, and respect their need by stopping whatever you're doing to listen and help. Listening is usually all that's needed – **what most writers need more than anything is someone who will listen to them thinking through their stories out loud.** By the time they've told it all to you, re-told it in different ways until they can see that you understand it, they usually know exactly how to write it. Read the story tomorrow morning and you can see that quote the writer was so excited about made it into the second paragraph, which in turn made that story the page lead.
- Never turn your cellphone off. You never know who will need you.

The coaching editor doesn't have to do all of these things and can often just make sure that the tasks are being done by someone in the newsroom. But if there is one task that's worth spending as much time as possible doing yourself, it's listening to the writers and being available to read and edit their work. The best calls I get are the ones after hours from reporters who say, **"I'm sorry to bother you but I really wanted to ask you what you thought of this intro..."** When you get those calls, consider your salary well earned.

Louise Flanagan has been working as a journalist and researcher in East London for the past 17 years. The only common thread in all her jobs has been getting information out and helping others do that too. She worked for the alternative press in the 1980s, as a freelancer during the 1994 elections, as a reporter for the Daily Dispatch and as an information manager and researcher for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Since 1999 she's been back at the Daily Dispatch as the coaching editor. She can be contacted at louisef@dispatch.co.za

...THAT'S WHAT

the (S) of news

Building a new and diverse media requires that the national public broadcaster, which is mainly commercially-funded and which broadcasts locally, regionally and internationally, takes training very seriously. **The SABC is a complex media organisation delivering news** on cell phones, via WAP and the Internet, through international radio and external radio services and on terrestrial and satellite television channels. In addition, special news services provide a service to several million viewers in the US.

What and how we broadcast – how we portray our reality – through the various vehicles and formats at our disposal plays a key role as far as our international image and standing is concerned.

Inside the country we are developing additional news and current affairs programming to cater for as many broadcast language needs as possible for television viewers. Provincial television programming is confined to one of the provinces, in seven languages. Radio certainly has the largest reach, nationally, and in addition to the 11 official languages, broadcasts in **two of our First Languages,** !Xhun and Khwê happen in the Northern Cape. A small team produces seven news bulletins and one current affairs programme daily. Come elections (once every five years) there is also special television programming to reach and inform as many voters as possible.

Who gets trained? Full-time staff and fixed-term contract staff have access to training. Journalism, production and operational and managerial training are the requirements of the day. Journalists, on-air presenters, camerapersons, sound recordists, technical editors, vision controllers, vision mixers and other disciplines enjoy short courses and other appropriate training. Internships are supported and **the demand for in-service training is growing** in a very popular and sought after profession.

Every department within each division of the SABC should have its Workplace Skills Plan, which lists the training requirements/interventions in line with its specific key objectives. The range of training includes **short courses, mentoring, shadowing and coaching,** which can be regarded as standard or generic training. There is also special skills training confined mainly to the use of specialised equipment. Much of this happens abroad where the stronger currencies play havoc with budgets.

Given the deadline-based nature of our profession, staff training is designed to fit in with staff schedules and takes a modular form. This is also designed to assess impact and outcomes of training interventions. A multi-skilled approach is desirable as far as television journalism is concerned, but this is mostly an ideal due to staffing considerations. Timeous training and **exposure to the latest technology** is also important. This should not be neglected because we need to be a step or two ahead of the rapid convergence of technology that we will soon be deploying.

"The national interest" is defined and redefined in the newsrooms daily. Radio programming has many advantages, including language spread, which enables wider participation. The medium of television perhaps needs more current affairs programming slots to adequately analyse all the merits on particular issues of national public importance. **Personally I would like to hear the "Why" question being asked more vigorously**, without fear or favour, but then we are very polite.

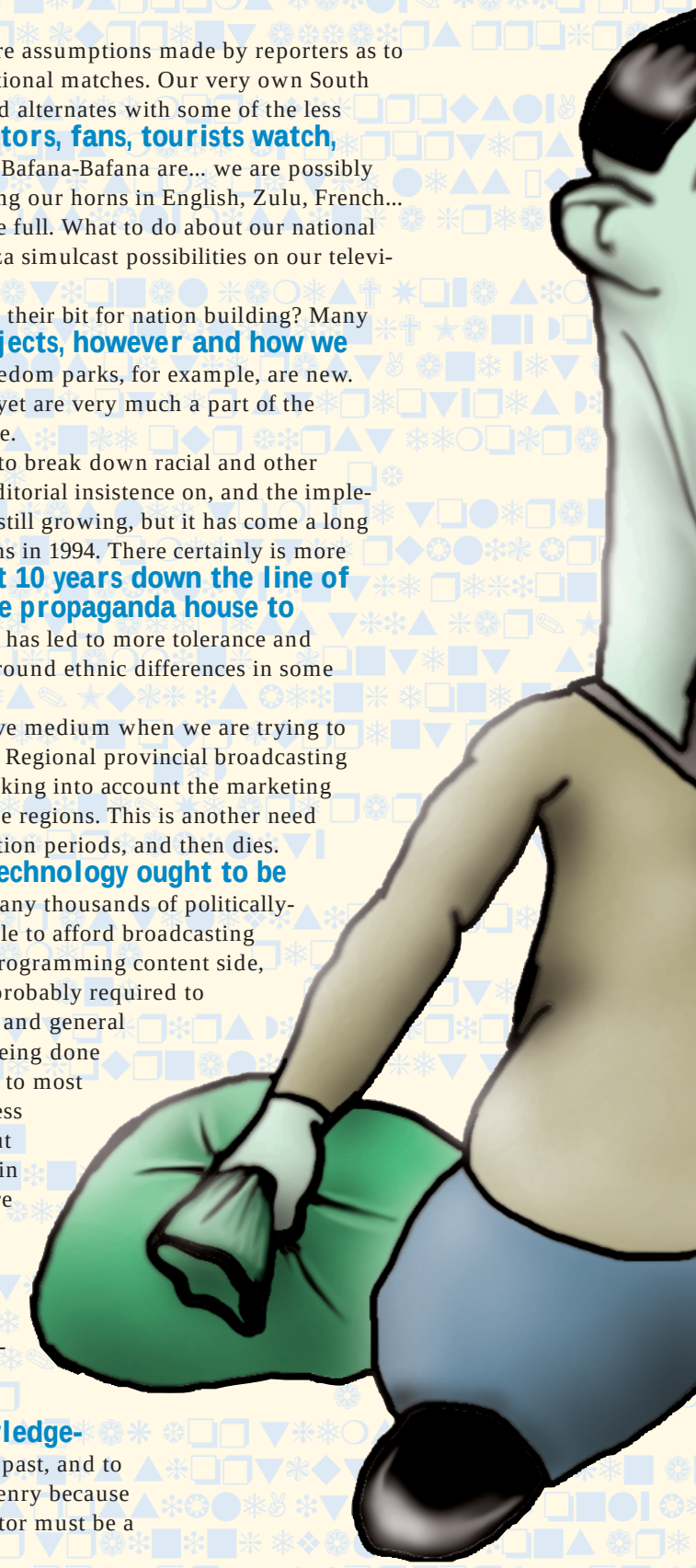
Sport is a national interest and there are assumptions made by reporters as to loyalties, especially when covering international matches. Our very own South African commentary is done in English and alternates with some of the less universal of our 11 official languages. **Visitors, fans, tourists watch, applaud** and miss out on how good our Bafana-Bafana are... we are possibly missing a great opportunity by not blowing our horns in English, Zulu, French... exploring the simulcast possibilities to the full. What to do about our national interest during international games? Woza simulcast possibilities on our television screens!

Is it the function of journalists to do their bit for nation building? Many would argue not. **Our choice of subjects, however and how we report these, speak volumes.** Freedom parks, for example, are new. They recognise the ills of the past, and yet are very much a part of the current reality of moving into the future.

Concerted efforts are being made to break down racial and other stereotypes within the organisation. Editorial insistence on, and the implementation of, language equitability is still growing, but it has come a long way since our first democratic elections in 1994. There certainly is more sensitivity in the newsrooms, **almost 10 years down the line of transformation – from a state propaganda house to public broadcaster.** This in turn has led to more tolerance and even allows for a sense of humour around ethnic differences in some quarters.

Broadcasting is still an expensive medium when we are trying to meet the public broadcast mandate. Regional provincial broadcasting needs to be seriously considered, taking into account the marketing and commercial sustainability in the regions. This is another need that is only recognised during election periods, and then dies.

Making use of affordable technology ought to be explored to address this gap. Many thousands of politically-free South Africans are still not able to afford broadcasting (televisions and radios). On the programming content side, the restructuring of resources is probably required to cover Aids awareness, education and general developmental issues. Much is being done nationally – there is accessibility to most of our politicians and the business and other sectors of society – but this is not adequately reflected in our current programming. More resources for public interest programming might alleviate the lack of adequate coverage. A new development plan that spells out information accessibility to all ought to be in the pipeline. **We are rapidly becoming a more knowledge-based society** than in the past, and to now exclude the entire citizenry because of a cost or affordability factor must be a



ABC training

by Amina Frense

Bottom Line, the left-brained accountant whose news sense is damaged by his Rands and Cents. Spreads gloom and despair by constant reference to a recurring rash in his nether regions known as "being in the red".

dangerous development for any nation, regardless of how progressive its constitution.

What works? A multi-disciplinary approach is good as far as television production, scripting and journalism training is concerned. The training courses, for example, include reporters, producers, camera people, technical editors and courses are designed in a multi-disciplinary way. The producers and reporters get to understand basic camera and editing principles and practice. Camera people and editors get to grips with scripting and story-telling, by doing scripting and stand-uppers or pieces to camera (where they would normally be behind the camera). The producers and journalists get to appreciate the basics of camera operations and best framing for editing purposes. The list of benefits is long with this approach.

They also gain respect for every aspect of what it takes to put together a good story. This training is followed up with **additional mentoring** over a period. Monitoring of a person's work progress and general improvement in the stories is done as part of the feedback and final course evaluation. This has been very well received and there is support for the continuation of this approach.

Workloads and staffing considerations get in the way, though. On-the-job mentoring is excellent and should be encouraged more in future. The !Xhun and Khwê radio services in the Northern Cape are such a good example – radio journalists from Gauteng and elsewhere went to train and mentor new journalists who speak a language that will die unless it is used.

The medium of communication including training, is Afrikaans. For all radio and television programming, **it would be good to hear more real South African people speak for themselves.**

Refresher courses are always good. Because of news deadlines shortcuts are taken and not much time can be spent on being creative with technical equipment. But at the SABC this is possible and should be encouraged. Exposure to other journalists does not happen enough within the organisation. The country is big, but whenever training evaluations are done, they reflect that the same people are meeting with, and talking to, the people they already know. Training evaluations are good for the corporation and the industry in terms of peer review. Putting the theoretical side of training together with newsroom experience in the form of custom-made certificate courses (SABC/Wits Public and Development Management and Rhodes) was tried two years ago and all the feedback from senior editors has been excellent. Programme review sessions of our stories will keep everyone sharp and on their toes!

Changing society and issues impacting on training: what is required here is decisive management – focused but not narrowly focused – evaluation and re-evaluation as to the relevance of training and programming. Multi-disciplinary approaches, differentiation in training methods, varying from basic, classroom, and on-the-job-coaching-and-mentoring, to modular half days or block release are necessary. Effective learnerships and retraining the trainers for refreshers and subject relevance are all required. It is important to resist taking shortcuts to preserve editorial fairness and integrity. We need to invest in appropriate technology and the training required to service and maintain the systems, as well as identifying and training good trainers. Exposure to **good international best practice has its values** and should be encouraged and explored in the best practical form.

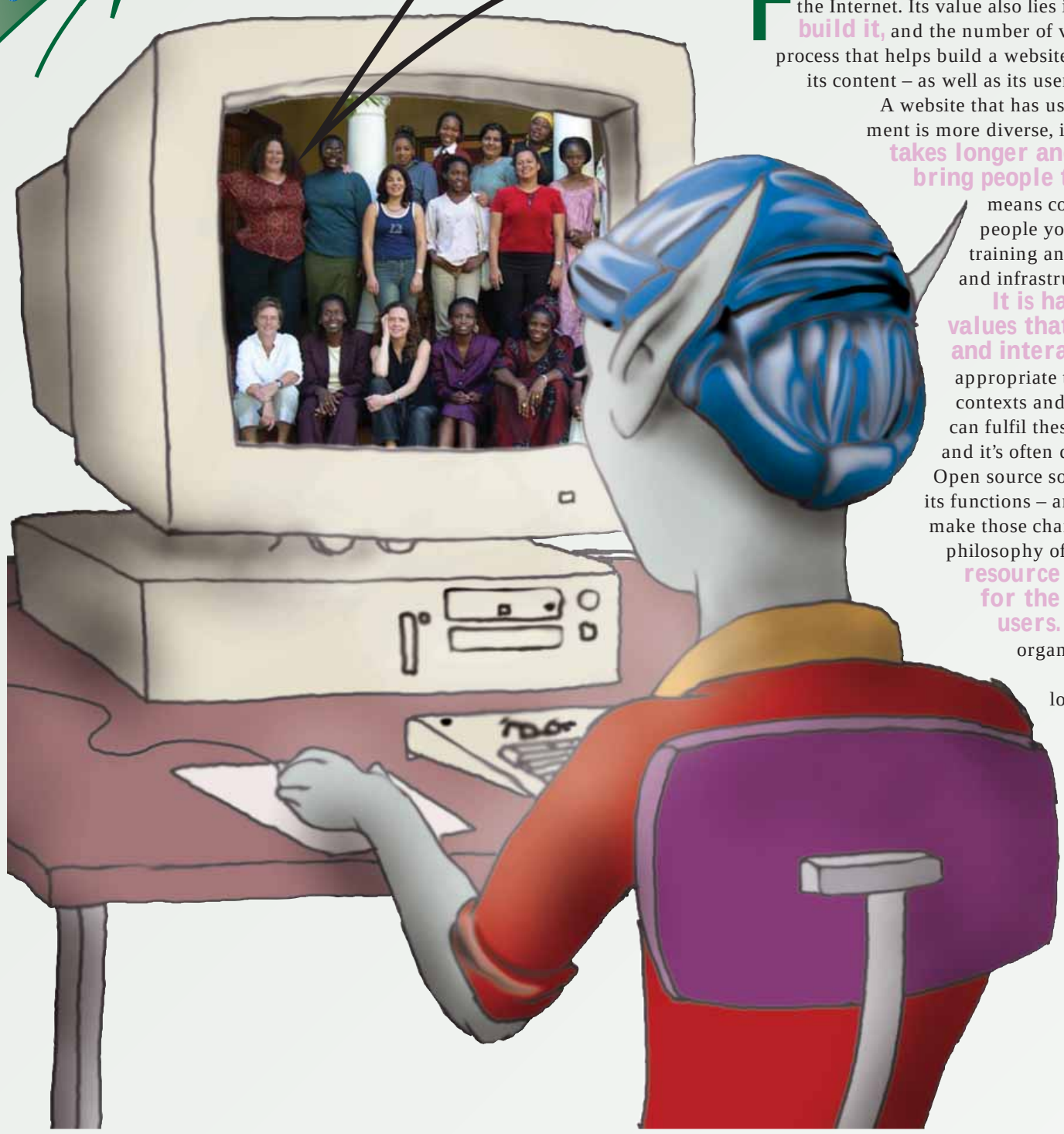
In brief, we need our staff to be able to identify news stories, and to assign them timeously. We need to budget appropriately and avoid conflict – editorial, ethical, managerial, commercial – at all times. These are some basic ingredients for getting the story told and for effective newsroom management.

It is almost 10 years down the line since our transformation from a state to public broadcaster, and we face complex commercial imperatives but our latest leadership seems to have many of the answers.

Amina Frense is the SABC's Editor of Training and Development and can be contacted on frensea@sabc.co.za

do all shout at once

by Sally Shackleton



For non-governmental organisations and institutions concerned with social change, the value of a website starts way before it joins the billions of websites on the Internet. Its value also lies in the **collaborative process that helps build it,** and the number of voices that are reflected in its content. While the process that helps build a website is not visible, it does affect the tone and scope of its content – as well as its usership.

A website that has used **many voices** in its planning and development is more diverse, interesting and engaging. However, it is harder, **takes longer and requires a more concerted effort to bring people together** to build a collaborative website. It also means confronting exclusion and building the skills of the people you would like to engage with, through appropriate training and education and through other activities in policy and infrastructure development.

It is hard to find tools that facilitate the values that non-commercial, information-driven and interactive websites demand – tools that offer appropriate technology for our needs, that are relevant to our contexts and that we can appropriate. Open source software can fulfil these needs – because it's affordable and adaptable, and it's often designed with a collaborative process in mind. Open source software gives users access to the code that controls its functions – and, if you make changes to the code, you also make those changes available to other users at no cost. The philosophy of the open source movement is that **the resource is shared, that it is built collectively for the benefit of other users and potential users.** This philosophy suits many NGOs, civic organisations and alternative news producers.

One example of open source software for development initiatives is the Association for Progressive Communications' ActionApps. The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) is an international network of civil society organisations **dedicated to empowering and supporting groups** and individuals working for peace, human rights, development and protection of the environment, through the strategic use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), including the Internet.

ActionApps was developed for the use of NGOs or non-profit organisations, as a content management tool that accommodates collaborative web publishing. The complaints that many alternative website managers have is that they do not have control over their websites because they have had to outsource its development and

updating. They also have to juggle many tasks – the time it takes to keep a website up-to-date is challenging, as well as the time and investment it takes to develop new content. A tool like ActionApps assists organisations because it allows:

- a site to be updated using only a browser from any computer
- updating without a knowledge of html
- updating in a few minutes
- adaptation of the tool to suit the look and feel of a site
- the sharing of content with partners without any extra work
- more people in an organisation or field to add information to one website (with a username and a password)
- for the inclusion of features such as a comments page or a calendar to a website.

For Women'sNet, the **most important feature of any tool is the control it allows the user over their content,** and whether it allows for a collaborative approach to website building. In 2001, for the World Conference Against Racism, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Women'sNet, as a member of an African network, APC-Africa-Women, and the global Women's Networking Support programme of the APC, set up a website on which to publish a bulletin on gender at the conference. The process required that more than one person be able access the website in order to add their articles, and that more than one editor have access to new articles. We also needed to be able to update the site from the Women'sNet cyber café at the conference, and we needed to update the site daily.

The first time Women'sNet used ActionApps in this way was for the Intersections Bulletin. Since this experience we have used the tool in working with other organisations and for managing content on our own website. The tool has proved **particularly useful when we have developed news sites that require constant updating and where collaborative content is essential.**

At the end of March this year, women from across Africa working for gender equality using technology came together to increase their skills. The African Women's Electronic Networking Training (Went) was organised by the Association for Progressive Communication's Women's Networking Programme's regional Africa Women Programme (AAW). Working with women in Africa and all over the world, APC-Africa-Women focuses on African women's empowerment through information facilitation, regional support, lobbying and advocating around gender and ICTs, delivering ICT training, conducting research into gender and ICTs and participating in regional and global events.

The Went Africa 2003 training workshop aimed to build the capacities of women and their organisations to utilise new information and communication technologies in social development work and policy advocacy.

Women'sNet spent two and a half days training participants on using ActionApps in their work. All women at the training, although not technical experts, were able to use the tool by the end of our session. And while many still would experience additional infrastructural problems, the tool offered a solution to many of the obstacles they experienced with their websites and content management.

Open Source Software like ActionApps **allows us to all shout at once – and be heard.** It allows for more voices to make content and for the smoother implementation of the collaborative web building essential for a more diverse website. And, while it may require more effort and take longer to build content in this way, it is the start of **changing the Internet into a place of diversity rather than exclusion.**

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- **ActionApps: http://www.apc.org/actionapps/**

Sally Shackleton is the Information Co-ordinator at Women'sNet, an NGO which works to enable South African women to use the Internet to find the people, issues, resources and tools they need for women's social activism.
sallys@womensnet.org.za

capital E for eventS

by Anthea Garman

You would think being located in a small town in one of the most impoverished provinces in South Africa would be a drawback for making media. But a small town is a reachable, convenient laboratory environment for student journalists – **and never more so than when** the National Arts Festival comes to Grahamstown during the winter vacation.

For 15 years Rhodes University's Department of Journalism and Media Studies has produced Cue newspaper to complement the experience of attending the arts festival, then seven years ago CueTV was started to allow broadcast students to put their craft on display. This year – with funding from the Ford Foundation – the department ran CueWire (an agency supplying copy nationally through East Cape News and African Eye News Agency); CuePix (a picture agency servicing both media and theatre companies) **and various collaborations were spawned** – radio students doing packages for SAfm, other students joining local media like East Cape News to produce the WordFest publication, WordStock.

Although we have had the festival on our doorstep for years it wasn't until we as a department started experimenting with the value of special events reporting, and the opportunities it opened up, that we began to really take advantage of the festival.

Let me backtrack: When South Africa was declared host of the World Conference Against Racism (2001 in Durban) we felt it was a chance to involve students in international processes and world debates. We took a small group (15 fourth year writers and two staff members) to go and **experience the crush and pressure** of being there. Prior to the conference we studied the issues, swotted up on the political positions, did research on the key subjects for media coverage. Once there we attended press conferences, talked to as many journalists running as many shades of media operations as we could, and generally soaked it all up. Our own media production was modest. **We had a wall back home in the department** waiting vacant for us to file stories by email and cellphone. Students in Grahamstown received the messages, printed out the pieces and put them up daily to inform whoever was interested enough to read.

The experience emboldened us. Having imbibed the atmosphere **we felt braver about actually producing our own media** should we get another opportunity like this.

So last year when the World Summit on Sustainable Development came to Johannesburg we partnered with Prof Anton Harber, head of the Journalism School at Wits University, and the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) to run a news agency for the duration of the main summit.

We took about 40 students (writing, photojournalism and new media, plus masters students) **to Johannesburg for nearly three weeks.** The agency was run by Darryl Accone, with help from Wits part-time lecturers Jo-Anne Richardson, Hugh Lewin and Franz Kruger, and Gwen Ansell and Nicole Johnstone from the IAJ. In addition Nai'em Dollie from the Business Report joined us as a sub and mentor.

The agency mainly supplied the special edition Summit Star – inserted into The Star daily – but also supplied a variety of websites, including the official summit site and the Johannesburg City site.

Our students grew in leaps and bounds. They rubbed shoulders with world figures, they got their heads around complex and brain-wrenching issues. Their confidence soared, they negotiated a big and scary city all on their own. They moved into territory that challenged and stretched them. Many of them made contacts in Johannesburg that led to job offers.

We took them home exhausted and altered for the better. We could **see the effects powerfully** in all the courses that followed.

So when the arts festival rolled round again we decided to take a more aggressive approach to using this event for curriculum development purposes. **We no longer assume that just working on something real is good for student journalists,** we plan harder, seek out the funding to support the creation of nurturing newsrooms with mentors and evaluate better just what is working in these environments, so that we can build on this when we return to the classroom.

What we've learned from events reporting:

- While working on anything real has a benefit, truly great benefits come from setting up a newsroom in which teacher-practitioners create an environment in which all those issues discussed in theory (gender- and race-sensitivity, multi-sourcing, awareness of self interest, reflexivity about the product produced) are made obvious. **"Real" newsrooms certainly expose students to the "real" world in all its harsh realities, but newsrooms in which best practice is set as a standard and talked about often, is a superior environment** in which to begin a career in journalism.
- The space created by these kinds of environments (especially if they are funded) also means that one can practise **more than just bog-standard journalism.** Experiments with WED (writing-editing-design); literary journalism; taking time to craft stories with more depth and perception by going back and doing better and more intense news-gathering and interviewing.
- Use the special event to **immerse the students in knowledge** they would usually bypass. Show them how to efficiently, and within a short space of time, seek out useful information and figure out how to use research for the purposes of journalism.
- Add mentors: seek out practising journalists and people with a wealth of experience who believe in training and its value and expose students to them. The World Summit newsroom was such a powerhouse because **the combination of young energy and talent with wisdom and guidance** was so strong and so effective. It's also very good for students to be exposed to people who are not their teachers and to hear different points of view, or have important things re-affirmed by someone else.
- Evaluate the results. When an experience has been heady, it's tempting to not go down the track of asking where the negative bits were. **Scrutiny is very good for improvement.**
- Use the practice to fuel research. Practioners in academic environments are not good at the translation into research product, preferring for the media product to stand by itself and not take the further step of turning that into reflection on what it means and what impacts it's having (and there are always impacts). **Research allows the information to be put into an environment where others can comment on and use the information.**
- And thus craft a curriculum that is a combination of teaching and experiencing, **safety and risk.**

The amazing thing about our experiments in event reporting over a period of time is that the students seem to get better and better at it. Yet they are not the same students as we work with new groups every year. Somehow the general atmosphere we have created as a staff seems to **engender an enabling context and the next group of students seems to stand on the shoulders of those before** making it possible not just to repeat but to build on the previous experience.

Anthea Garman is deputy head of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University. She can be contacted at a.garman@ru.ac.za

Cue-ing up

Thirty-one students worked on **Cue**, the daily newspaper that runs over the 10-day period of the National Arts Festival. The newspaper is the oldest CueMedia project and has been operational since 1988. They reported, took photographs, did the layout, sold the advertising and organised the distribution under the direction of editor Gillian Rennie, arts editor Darryl Accone, production editor Jeanne Louise Moys and managing editor Patrick Cairns. "Cue is an excellent training ground," said Rennie. "For most students, it is their first experience working with a real live paper, that is produced under extraordinary pressure (which is more than they would ever experience.) To use a cliché, it is a baptism of fire. A student's impulse to be a journalist will be tempered by this experience."

Students in the television stream of the Rhodes Department of Journalism and Media Studies form the core of **CueTV's** crew. This year they were joined by eight students and three teachers from Evelyn Hone College in Lusaka, Zambia and 10 students and three lecturers from Linköping University in Sweden. In total CueTV 2003 trained 60 students and two post-matriculation youth from Grahamstown's township. Professional mentors who joined the team were Roger Lucey, Tim Chevallier, Joanne Levitan, David Newton and Kyle O'Donoghue. This year they produced 15 minutes a day for SABC Africa's flagship show Today in Africa broadcast daily at 8.30pm, and they provided filler material for the top of the hours. Two inserts were also produced for SABC1's Take Five. Then groups combining South Africans, Zambians and Swedes joined together to create two 26-minute documentaries (called "Isithunzi" – shadow or presence in Xhosa) which entailed multi-camera, multiple perspective shooting all day in a place or with a particular person related to the festival.

Cuewire – a brand new addition to the Cue media family – was formed to supply saturation coverage of the National Arts Festival for national and possibly even international media outlets. Fourteen senior students staffed the enterprise. The student-training agency forged a close partnership with East Cape News (ECN) and African Eye News Agency, two independent news agencies with a number of established regional and national clients. Cuewire material was published online at the Mail&Guardian special arts festival site; Artslink.co.za and the official festival site nafest.co.za; on News24.com; SABCnews.com and BuaNews. Stories appeared in The Herald; the Daily Dispatch; on Radio Algoa; in the Star Tonight; the Sunday Tribune; the Weekend Argus; the Natal Witness; and of course in Cue itself and Grocott's Mail.

The photography students formed the **CuePix** agency in 1999 primarily to provide Cue with images for printing. Since then the service has grown into a full-blown agency serving other media and various theatre companies who want pictures. This year the 15 photographers provided images for The Natal Witness; the Mail&Guardian; the Daily Dispatch; The Herald; Beeld and SL. They also supplied pictures for Cape Town City Ballet and the Cape Town Company and for the productions of Thuthula; Train Stops at Alicedale; Holy Walk and Home. Lisa Skinner from Beeld and Antonie Robertson from Die Burger joined the students as professional mentors.

The Fulbright Interactive multiMedia Project is the product of a relationship between Rhodes and the journalism school at the University of North Carolina in the United States. Ten journalism students who are majoring in design and new media, as well as computer science students and three lecturers were joined by a class of 11 from the University of North Carolina and two students from Universidad Los Andes in Chile. Two matric learners from townships schools also joined the team (and are now firmly convinced that journalism is the career for them). The resulting website (www.tenyearson.org) focuses on the effects of 10 years of democracy on ordinary South Africans by using Grahamstown as a story-telling site. Rich Beckman from UNC is the executive producer for the project and he was joined by MA student Paige West, Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Pat Davison and producer/photographer Phaedra Singelis from washingtonpost.com.

This year a collaboration with SAfm saw **radio** students doing five-minute reports which were aired every day on the Vuyo Mbuli Show at 9.33am. Seven students from second, third and fourth year were mentored by journalists Gary Oberholzer and Dennis O'Donnell and radio lecturer Eitan Prince. In addition they produced two special packages for Michelle Constant's programme Art on the Edge and a feature on street theatre and wrap-up piece on the funny side of the festival for Alan Swerdlow's weekend show. "We are giving these students valuable experience in actual field reporting. In return we are hoping that their local knowledge and information networks will give the reports a distinct flavour that people relate to and tune in for," said Dennis O'Donnell, SAfm programme manager.

Reported by Thando Koti, Marita Kritzinger, Pontsho Ramontsha, Lucy Siebert and Theresa Swinton.

by Rod Amner

When I proposed to 26 third-year journalism students that our writing class take **inspiration from an idea** pioneered in places as unfashionable and inhospitable as the former Soviet Union and Nepal, I should have expected the **icy stares.** But happily, within five weeks, this winter of classroom discontent, had begun to thaw into a tentative **spring of journalistic and pedagogical innovation.**

In retrospect there were many sound reasons for insisting on a "wall newspaper" (and I will elaborate on these later). But, in truth, the main impetus for the project was the simple fact that my department didn't have the money to produce a "proper" newspaper. **Newspapers are expensive** – the basic costs of printing a modest 1000 copies of a 16-page tabloid were prohibitive.

The act of reading a newspaper has been compared with **immersing oneself in a soothing tub of hot water** – an enveloping, private pleasure. But, just as a deep bath is wasteful in semi-arid South Africa, the privately-owned copies of our newspaper reach precious few readers. **Worse, the newspaper enterprise demands the cultivation and processing of millions of alien, water-guzzling trees** and the endless use of energy-inefficient processes of production and distribution. In places like Grahamstown, the writing has always been on the wall for newspapers – they are a luxury most cannot afford. A cover price – any cover price – puts the newspaper out of the reach of the 70 to 80% of citizens who are unemployed.

In contrast to a conventional newspaper, 25 copies of our 18-page wall newspaper – potentially reaching thousands of eyeballs in strategically-placed schools, libraries, clinics, taxi ranks, spaza shops and other public spaces all over the city – cost just R200 to print and distribute.

Our wallpaper, which carried the trilingual title of Mamelani/ Listen Up/ Hoor, was simply the latest incarnation of a concept that has a long pedigree. In post-1917 Russia newspapers were seen as an important part of promoting literacy, but were too expensive to produce. So the practice grew of "publishing" the newspaper on an exterior wall where anyone could go to read the news. Since the 1990s, in the remote Himalayan country of Nepal, wall newspapers have been posted in areas where local villagers gather. The objective is to **provide locally relevant news to areas with poor media penetration and literacy.**

For us, the willful placing of a wall newspaper in parts of Grahamstown where other newspapers fear to tread was **a political act** because it uprooted economic logic and disrupted cultural assumptions about who constitutes an appropriate media audience. This willfulness stemmed from the belief that journalists are people with a mission to **stimulate public discourse and serve the public interest.** All literate citizens are necessarily a part of the target audience of such an enterprise.

But, having conquered the economic problem, we were still **uneasy about our public role.** "But, I only want to write about things I am interested in," opined one of my students. As temporary sojourners in Grahamstown and cloistered in the relative privilege of a green lawn university, many of my middle class Rhodes students feel a profound cultural, social and economic alienation from most potential news sources and news audiences in the city.

How could we claim to stimulate discourse for a public we barely know, understand or even empathise with? One of the wallpaper

Rod Amner is a lecturer in writing and editing in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University. He can be contacted at r.amner@ru.ac.za

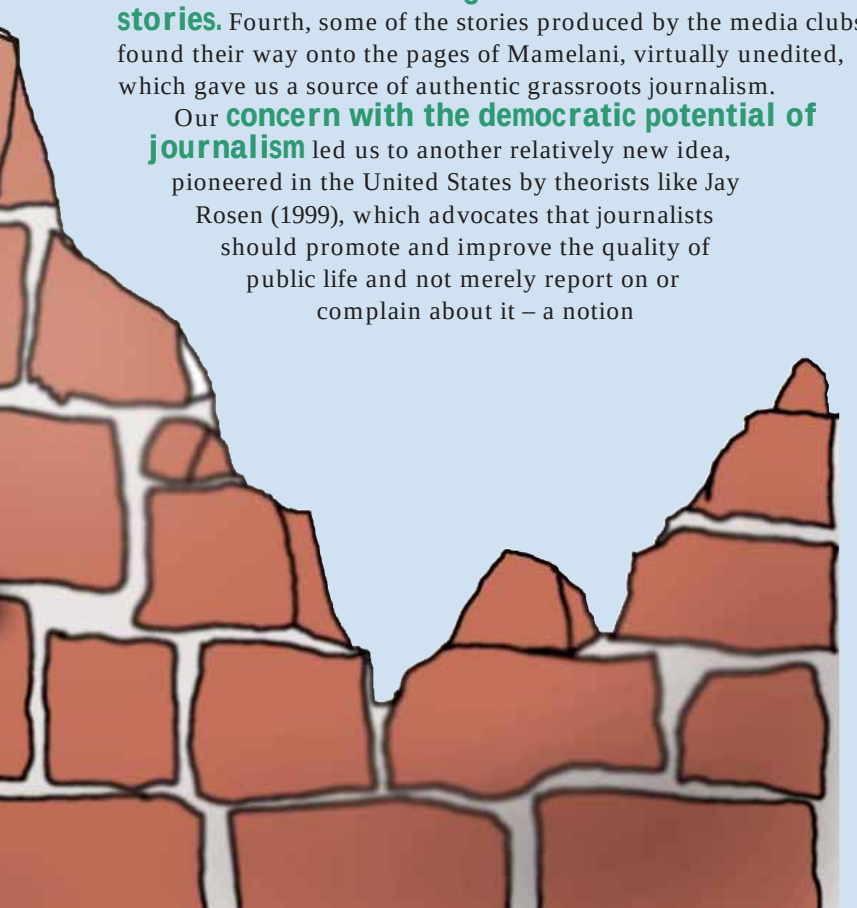
project's answers to this problem was to plug into the department's seven-year-old media training project, called Grab. Every year fledgling youth-based media clubs approach us for training. And in 2003 the 26 third-year writing students broke themselves into five sub-groups, with four working with media clubs at local high schools, and the fifth serving the Eluxolweni Children's Shelter.

I asked my students to write journalistic profiles on these high school learners in an attempt to get to know them better. In addition, guided by poet and co-lecturer Robert Berold, they wrote **"creative non-fiction"** about their attempts to provide ongoing support and training to the media clubs. This exercise, written in the first person, gave students the opportunity to express anxieties and problems, but mostly served to affirm their commitment to this developmental approach to their journalism work. This work, which we labelled **communication for development, aimed to empower these young people to speak for themselves.** And indeed, all of the media clubs went on to either publish local stories in their own newsletters, explore youth-related issues by using airtime on community radio stations or set up public meetings in their schools using a hybrid public announcement outside broadcasting technology called a "streetcaster".

According to Stuart and Bery (in Servaes et al, 1997) in participatory communication **community members should control the tools of communication, not outsiders (like journalists)** who do a "poor job" of mediating information and representing public discourse. "Participatory communication focuses on who is communicating, because who creates the message shapes its content, perspective and impact." They argue that the main goal of this project may not be the finished media product, but instead the process of possibly mobilising an audience or building awareness or confidence among the producers. Participatory communication thus echoes Paulo Freire's notions of "dialogical communication" and "problem solving education" (Freire, 1996).

This approach had a number of benefits for the wallpaper project. First, **it literally shook my students out of their comfort zones** by translocating them into unknown territory, thereby expanding their ability to imagine a more inclusive, diverse audience for their journalism. Second, their immersion in media clubs allowed the wallpaper journalists to build close, mutually beneficial relationships with potential sources of news – they used these media club members as a fount of story ideas and sourcing possibilities. Third, **they went beyond mainstream journalism by simultaneously empowering these "sources" with the ability to define their own news agenda and write their own stories.** Fourth, some of the stories produced by the media clubs found their way onto the pages of Mamelani, virtually unedited, which gave us a source of authentic grassroots journalism.

Our **concern with the democratic potential of journalism** led us to another relatively new idea, pioneered in the United States by theorists like Jay Rosen (1999), which advocates that journalists should promote and improve the quality of public life and not merely report on or complain about it – a notion described as "public journalism".



"[Media] should create the capacity for a community to discover itself, including its problems and the ways to solve them. I don't believe journalists should be solving problems. I think they should be creating the capacity within a community for solving problems." (1999; 41)

To this end the Rhodes students helped the media clubs set up a number of school-based participatory discussions, called "streetcasts". For example, over 500 learners, parents and teachers at Nombulelo and Mahlasela high schools had often-heated discussions about key issues affecting young people at the school (followed by wildly-popular dance and singing competitions). As Nancy Fraser (cited in Glasser, 2000) points out, effective participation happens through the "development of distinct groups organised around affinity and interest". School-based groups at the streetcasts had the opportunity to express themselves on topics and in ways that might not have been welcomed elsewhere – they became, in effect, training grounds for agitational activities which could later be directed toward powerful wider publics (for example, toward other better-resourced schools in Grahamstown or toward the Eastern Cape Department of Education in Bisho).

Meanwhile, the Rhodes students **used the grassroots material gathered at the streetcasts as the basis for some of the public journalism** that appeared in Mamelani, which aimed to further the process of communication and exchange of meanings on these topics.

In summary, the Mamelani project did not prepare students to slot comfortably into pre-existing jobs in "the industry". Instead, it was predicated on the belief that **journalistic education should involve attempts to pioneer new journalistic approaches** – like communication for development, literary journalism and public journalism – which could be more appropriate to the needs of South African audiences and hence more likely to contribute to social transformation.

I have come to the view that the best way to teach newspaper journalism is to insist that **students take full responsibility for producing their own newspapers.** But, in order for students to take "ownership" over the wall newspaper I, as the lecturer "responsible", had to give up some – if not all – of my power to define:

- what the publication would be called;
- what stories would be covered;
- what pictures and graphics would illustrate stories;
- how stories would be framed, researched and structured;
- how stories, headlines, captions, fact boxes and other design elements would be written, sub-edited and proofread;
- how the publication would be designed and laid-out on the page;
- where the finished product would be distributed.

Now, this is certainly not how "the industry" operates. There are **complex hierarchies and divisions of labour in "real newspapers"** – editors either tell reporters what to write or, in more progressive newsrooms, they "coach" them on what to write. What they don't do is leave it up to writers to have final control over the whole newspaper.

This anomaly might not have mattered if Mamelani had simply been a training exercise for my eyes only. The problem for me was that we were planning to stick the wall newspaper up all over Grahamstown (under the proud banner of my department) for all to see – and criticise. **A risky business,** particularly since my students had chosen to specialise in writing. They had limited conceptual knowledge of newspaper design, almost no experience in the computer program they were relying on to do the layout work, and little concept of the skills and principles of photo-journalism. **Were my third year students up to it? Would we be a laughing stock?**

Feeling rather insecure, I explained to my colleagues that my unorthodox approach to a writing class nonetheless re-enforced the department's commitment to a holistic approach to teaching writing-editing-design (WED) production skills, and spouted the idea that the main goal of the project was not the finished media product, but the process.

I needn't have been so defensive – the wall newspaper was well received on campus. More importantly, it went some way in challenging conventional boundaries of democracy and journalistic practice in the classroom/newsroom. Above all, I believe my students built a genuinely developmental relationship with members of their target audiences. They appeared to care about the ability of their newspaper to meet at least some of the complex information and knowledge needs of the Grahamstown community. In the end, the journalistic enterprise, not the marks, was the driving force behind the project.

For each edition of Mamelani three tabloid pages were reserved for audience feedback. We were surprised by the number of readers who took the trouble to scribble down story ideas, opinions and feedback on these blank sheets. Appropriately, for what was designed as a transformative media project, it was our readers who had the final word.

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Ignor Rinse is as dumb as a bag of hammers and proud of it. He is determined not to be sucked in by that "PC-nonsense". His favourite saying is: "Thaz waaaaay too intellectual bru." Despite Di's attempts to get him to read a book Ignor remains an immoveable force.

Power packing partnership

by Fanie Groenewald

At the Department of Journalism, Technikon Pretoria, Rekord West News, the training/community newspaper published by the department in partnership with Capital Media, plays a key role in the training of students.

In 2002 the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) commissioned a **skills audit.** As a very impressionistic evaluation of what Steyn and De Beer found in their interviews with the editors and news editors regarding the question: "From which tertiary institutions do you get your best beginner-reporters?" They state that one technikon department and two university departments stood out nationally: Technikon Pretoria, Rhodes University and the University of Stellenbosch. According to the report (available at www.scribe.co.za), most have at least one of the following aspects in common: **regular interaction with the media; internship plans; advisory boards and students who can "fall in and start producing right away"** or at least find their feet within a month or three.

The partnership between our department and Capital Media is now in its sixth year. The weekly community newspaper, Rekord West News, serves the dual purpose, also being a training newspaper for the department's students. Capital Media, as proprietor, is responsible for all the running costs, including advertising, printing and distribution. The department is responsible for the editorial content and layout.

journalism schools traditionally have a very hands-on, practice-orientated approach. Journalism education in most countries around the world covers the ground of practical skills and standards training on the one hand and general contextual education and liberal courses on the other hand. **The delicate balance between practical and contextual knowledge** has always been the main area of attention within journalism programmes worldwide.

The Department of Journalism started with West News in August 1994 as a fortnightly knock-and-drop training/community newspaper, distributed in the western suburbs of Pretoria, including the township of Atteridgeville. This was to further enhance the practical training of the journalism students in the print media field.

Prior to West News, the department's students were involved with the campus newspaper, The Student, distributed only on campus.

While the academic benefits of West News were obvious, the department **struggled to make it financially viable.** The advertising income seldom covered the running of the fortnightly editions. The department spent thousands of rands from their reserve funds and received special grants from the technikon to keep West News running.

In 1997 the department approached Capital Media, the publishers of Rekord, the knock-and-drop community newspapers in Pretoria. In 1997 they had launched their seventh newspaper, Rekord West, distributing in approximately the same area as West News.

After successful discussions, an agreement was reached. From February 1998

West News would merge with Rekord West to become Rekord West News, with a circulation of 18 000. The department would have **the benefit of a community newspaper as a training newspaper, without the burden of any of the direct costs.** (In 2002 the printing and distribution costs of Rekord West News amounted to approximately R800 000.)

It has always been the policy of technikons to have close links with industry. However, the partnership between the Technikon Pretoria's Department of Journalism and Capital Media is unique.

Reporters should be trained with life skills equipping them with the mindset of being credible, fair, responsible and committed.

It is important for the department that the students, from diverse backgrounds, be exposed to all sections of our society. Rekord West News' target readership is a good cross-section of society in the new South Africa.

The news content of Rekord West News is closely monitored, aiming for balance between English and Afrikaans stories, campus news and stories from Atteridgeville. This often leads to lively debate between students working on the newspaper. Discussions between the department's editorial manager and Rekord's editor and news editor in this regard, are also relayed to the students. **This is a valuable input into their practical training.**

In their report, Steyn and De Beer state that editors and news editors expressed the need that **students should also be taught the role of media within society, and especially issues such as media policy.** Serious concern should be given to those subjects that reporters now obviously lack knowledge about. These would include language skills, general knowledge skills, media law and media ethics. It is important that reporters should not be taught these skills in a vacuum but within the context of news policy and news management. South Africa has a unique role to play as a developing country with a free market media. This inevitably causes **tension between different factions on what news is and what type of journalism tertiary institutions should teach.** This would include insight into the problems related to typical/traditional Western knowledge for journalism training vis-à-vis indigenous knowledge.

They mention that news editors and editors alike expressed a strong view that reporters should be trained with life skills equipping them with the mindset of being credible, fair, responsible and committed in reporting not only major, but all news issues.

The need for typical journalism skills not necessarily being taught in content-based courses was also emphasised. **This would include reaching deadlines on time, basic courtesy, arriving at appointments on time, adhering to a dress code, having respect for others and conducting oneself professionally.**

The whole purpose of having Rekord West News as a training/community newspaper is to address exactly these issues. The students, working in editorial teams, are expected to utilise all their knowledge gained from their formal journalism classes.

The timetable of the second-year students makes ample provision for hands-on training. They are divided into two groups, working for two periods of eight weeks each in the radio studio and at Rekord West News. The production schedule is arranged in such a way that the students' work is monitored by the full-time staff members of Rekord West News – the editorial manager and the editorial co-ordinator who is a Capital Media journalist appointed to do only this – and two third-year students doing their experiential training as student editor and student news editor. The language lecturers (English and Afrikaans) are also involved with the final editing.

This is indeed **"a process of mentoring, guidance and osmosis".** It prepares the students to take full advantage of the period of experiential training during their third year of study.

Fanie Groenewald is a lecturer in the Department of Journalism at Technikon Pretoria and editorial manager of Rekord West News. Groenewald lectures news reporting and sports journalism and can be contacted on spgroen@techpta.ac.za

The third side

SPECIAL

CHALLENGES: INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM (EVELYN GROENINK); ARTS AND CULTURE REPORTING (GWEN ANSELL); GETTING IT RIGHT ON GENDER (LIZETTE RABE) AND RACE (CAROLINE HOOPER-BOX); MAKING POVERTY EVIDENT (GUY BERGER) AND KEEPING IT ON THE NEWS AGENDA. THESE ARE THE THINGS THAT STILL NEED ENERGY, THOUGHT AND ATTENTION FROM EDITORS AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS. IN ADDITION WE FOCUS ON THE REWARDS FOR GOOD JOURNALISM: DO AWARDS AND CASH PRIZES REALLY ENHANCE THE OVERALL QUALITY? THE QUESTION WAS POSED TO A VARIETY OF WINNERS AND OBSERVERS BY LUCY SIEBERT, MARITA KRITZINGER AND HOWARD DRAKES.

by Evelyn Groenink

I became an investigative journalist in 1988. On the 30th of March 1988, to be exact: the day after ANC representative Dulcie September was murdered in Paris, France, 500km away from Amsterdam, where I lived. Until then I had been a reporter, quite an ordinary sort of reporter. Interviewing people, going somewhere, writing up what I saw. Now, from the moment I heard the news on the radio, the morning after the murder, I had to find out something. Something really difficult. Who killed Dulcie September?

No, I am lying. I did not become an investigative journalist on that day. Because I, like the anti-apartheid movement in Holland and the ANC, thought I already knew who killed Dulcie. It had to be apartheid death squads – who else? There was nothing much to investigate, I thought. I planned on writing a story about death squads in Western Europe and the lax, permissive attitude of the Western governments, which did not protect South African exiles from racist killers. For a year or two I tried to write that story, **running around in circles, desperately grasping at every bit of gossip** printed and stated elsewhere, anything, anything containing the words "apartheid death squad".

I only became an investigative journalist much later, after editor after editor had rejected my carefully constructed stories, pointing out that a list of rumours and whispers attached to an assumption did not amount to evidence of murder. And why, they asked, why would apartheid death squads have killed this woman? Why would they have come all the way to France to do that? Well, that's easy, I would say. **Because they are evil, that's why.** And every time I said that, yet another editor started to smile and **told me to come back when I had grown up.**

It took me years, numerous flat falls on my face, and an intercontinental move to become an investigative journalist – that is, if I am really one now. To learn that: there are no easy answers; nothing is simple; assumptions are deadly; rumours are often mongered to deviate the press on purpose (why, there are entire state agencies dedicated to doing just that); **one rarely benefits much from deep throat-type sources** and that there is a lot more, and more real, information out there, ready to be grabbed, from statistics, budgets and tender documents. Numbers are of course not nearly as exciting as a meeting in a dark alley with one's own Deep Throat, but often a lot more revealing, let alone reliable. My biggest discovery in the Dulcie September investigation was the Registrar of Companies in Pretoria; it was there that I found the arms dealers she, Dulcie, had been on the trail of shortly before she died. If only I had had a proper investigative journalism course back then, in 1988….

But my own lack of skill and training was not the only reason why this investigation took 12 years. There was also the problem that archives and record systems were often in disarray; **police dockets vanished**; government departments seemed to be run on the instruction that **"under no circumstances is the taxpayer to know what is going on here"** and no institution or well-resourced

...ARCHIVES AND RECORD SYSTEMS IN DISARRAY; POLICE DOCKETS VANISHED; GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS ON THE INSTRUCTION THAT 'UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES IS THE TAXPAYER TO KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON HERE' AND NO NEWSPAPER KEEPING AN EYE ON POWERFUL ELITES PLUNDERING TAX COFFERS...

newspaper had ever bothered to keep an eye on powerful elites who had been plundering tax coffers, and/or were involved with international interests ranging from mildly exploitative to **decidedly shady.** Many journalists competed with each other, each with their own Deep Throat, too much racing against time to actually bother about the truth. And that was Paris. Pretoria was, I found when I arrived in 1990, much the same.

Over the years I also discovered some great investigative journalists. They were quite used to coping with all those obstacles, and did so on a daily basis. They were here in South Africa, and also further north: there was Carlos Cardoso in Mozambique, the Angolagate investigators in Luanda, the "Namibian" crowd in Windhoek, Nigerian journalists publishing in the face of pressure from both army and oil companies. They were journalists who faced **murder, crime, corruption** and other abuses of the public interest all the time. When I visited some of them last year, in the context of the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) project on investigative journalism, the skill and dedication of many of them took my breath away. As did the obstacles and pressures they encountered every day. There was the guy who lived with daily personal, often hurtful, attacks from a democratically-elected government he had always supported, and still, **politely but stubbornly**, continued to inform the public every time public money was wasted. There was the woman who relentlessly brought fraudsters, with evidence presented and gift wrapped, to the attention of police and courts, often to see the same fraudsters back at work the next day, free to laugh at her. Another was sentenced to death by a druglord (and saved by a government official who was so close to the druglord that he knew about the latter's plans), and continued investigating. A fourth worked a day job so he could do investigations in his spare time. **A broadcaster spent much unpaid time to dig behind what people said, to find out where the truth was behind the words, against the wishes of her bosses,** who kept pressurising her to merely present what was called "both sides of the story": what one party said, and what another. A sixth regularly exercised the legal right to information provided for in his country, approaching government departments and parastatals in the appropriate manner, using all the correct forms, only to be told, time and time again, "sorry we don't have this type of information, go try elsewhere". The law said you can go to court if this happens, but where does one get the money to do that? Still, he continues. Number seven broke the story when a rural landlord took away land from her village to sell to a foreign company; the radio broadcasted her programme and the government stopped the sale. The reporter still does not have a proper job; she is only a woman in a rural area who knows a bit about radio.

Then there were the journalists caught up in the struggle between state and independent media. Just as much as the pro-government journalist working for the independent newspaper, there were countless journalists in state radio stations and other government media who did their best to work in the public interest and were not at all happy to be seen as the enemy by the independents. "Why must I feel guilty to work for public radio?" asked one. "Granted, the government does not always welcome investigations, but we try to do them all the same. And some of the independent newspapers' owners also don't like prying into their affairs. They are not neutral entities either."

"I don't know to which camp I

Turn over for more...

belong," said one investigative journalist.

"I found that there was a government department that was actually cleaning up its act and fighting corruption with good results. To me it was news. The public has come to expect corruption, nobody blinks an eye at another corruption story. A clean up is surprising, that is why I thought this was news and a great story. But the independent newspapers were not interested, and in a government newspaper it would look like propaganda. I could not publish it."

It is a miracle that there are still so many investigative journalists in Africa.

Of course there are not enough. In a continent where foreign powers, unmonitored and unaccountable, freely sell arms and take out mineral resources as barter; where international donors contract their own companies to be – often quite in-transparently – in charge of "development", where "privatisation" often means a clean flow of finance into a Swiss bank account; where international organised crime plays to its heart's content, laughing at weak state structures; where records of tenders, transactions and expenditure are hard to come by; where many areas are not even reached by any media channel; one would think there would be a need for as many investigative journalists as for medical doctors.

Alas, because of all the obstacles, many aspiring and professional journalists know that it is really not advisable to do too much investigating; as opposed to writing scandal. **Scandal is nice, scandal sells.** Allegations of this and that, corruption, child abuse, rape, whatever, are easy to print as long as one source makes the claim and the accused party is given space to deny it. It is cheap and quick and for that reason, some editors like it. As long as it gives "one side and the other side", it can be called proper journalism.

When the subject matter is scandalous enough, especially when it involves the word corruption, it can even be called investigative journalism.

Scandal journalism is of course very far from being investigative. It doesn't assist the public to make up its mind (even though the reader is often exhorted to do precisely that), because it doesn't give reliable information. On the contrary: it gives anybody with a grudge or an agenda a chance to manipulate the public by phoning a journalist. It clouds, rather than clarifies, issues. Investigative journalists in Mozambique complained, when I visited them, bitterly about the daily avalanche of scandalous corruption stories in their newspapers. There was so much of it that it would make any reader dizzy. It left a monumental question mark on all news reporting. It might all as well be fiction, for all the good that it did in matters of transparency and good governance.

"There are three sides to every story," someone (I forgot who) said. "One party's side, the other party's side and what actually happened." Investigative journalism is about that third side. It is costly, both in time, in energy, in resources and often costly to one's mental and physical wellbeing too. And sometimes so dangerous to print that editors won't even buy it for the R800 you were initially promised for what was going to amount to three months' work.

But **there is hope** for investigative journalism. Increasingly, editors seem to be willing to dedicate a bit more time and resources to those who show promise in this regard. Training institutions such as IAJ and Nordic SADC Journalism Centre in Mozambique, are focusing on investigative journalism, giving tailored courses. Internationally, global investigative journalism networks are being set up. With all of this happening it becomes feasible to think of more initiatives assisting investigative journalists, or those who want to become "IJs", with practical skills and other support. What we need now is more sophisticated Internet search training, so that we can learn where to find what in the least possible time. In the US, IJs are taught to work with balance sheets and spreadsheets, so that they can discover more than isolated events: they now discover **trends.** This is important for Africa, too: we don't know, for example, which sectors of our economies are increasingly drained and unprofitably so for the public. New analysing tools and IT skills can help us to deepen our skills in this regard. We need to learn to analyse society in a way that will help us seek out stories that affect the public interest. Where is something rotten likely to occur? We want to learn to dig out the stories with the least possible dependency on eager rumour-mongers. If we could be taught to be more effective and proactive; to use tip sheet formats and manuals, and to use legislation such as the Freedom of Information Act, maybe we could do better stories in less time.

And then maybe there could be more of us. Maybe the growth of investigative journalism as a profession can be assisted even outside urban areas. Maybe it could become less male, less white, less national capital-centred. Donors, NGOs and training institutions could support the spread of IJ skills, including Internet technology, training and resources in countries, areas and social sectors where people up to now have no means to question events affecting them. Gender sensitivity is not only right in theory: in the light of the regularity of attacks on the public interest in areas where mainly women live, it is a must. **Where training is difficult to give, maybe promising individuals could be assisted to find placements. And childcare.**

The more of us there are, and the more connected we are, the more we can work to publish and broadcast stories which will assist the public to find out what is going on around them, and what the powers-that-be in their areas and countries are up to. Networking will help us, here in Africa, to break bigger stories: after all, the oil company that bribes government leaders in one country in the sub-Saharan region, will most likely do that in another country too. Instead of having one story about one corrupt local official, we could have a much bigger, more complete one to publish simultaneously in several countries.

Networking on the internet will assist us to link to professional skills and other support worldwide. Which is what we hope to achieve through the recently formed Foundation of African Investigative Reporters (Fair). Through Fair – and its website to be – investigative journalists will be able to contact each other, mentor each other and even co-ordinate cross-border investigative projects. Hopefully, Fair will put an end to **the despondent isolation** in which many investigative journalists, especially in countries and areas lacking in infrastructure, operate. It aims to assist the establishment of investigative journalism as a profession in all areas in Africa, including rural areas.

Of course there is still competition among us. It would be silly to ask a journalist to share a scoop before s/he has published it. It is not going to work like that easily, or without hiccups, but **one thing I know for sure: there are more than enough stories out there.** And, if Africans are to know what is really happening around them so that they can vote and act wisely, these stories desperately need to be recorded.

The book Murder in Paris, on the murder of Dulcie September, was published in the Netherlands in 2001 and will be published by Jacana in SA later this year.

The Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) in Johannesburg contracted Evelyn Groenink to do a survey on the situation and needs of investigative journalists in Southern Africa last year, and has recently assisted an inter-regional group of investigative journalists to form the Fair network.

Evelyn Groenink is a journalist and researcher, having published several books on South Africa in the Netherlands. She currently functions as the facilitator of Foundation of African Investigative Reporters, a professional association of working journalists committed to improving pan-African reporting standards and access to information. Groenink can be contacted on pinkie@intekom.co.za

by Gwen Ansell

In August 1999, the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) advertised a Reporting Arts and Culture course. Over five days, and with co-operation from the Johannesburg Arts Alive Festival, participants would hear background lectures on South African visual art and theatre, African popular music and jazz, cinema and dance. They'd learn reviewing techniques, and explore the range of arts stories beyond reviews and previews. Attending performances and rehearsals alongside experienced professional writers and with privileged interview access to a selection of practitioners, they'd write, review their own work, and write more and better. Many journalists phoned to inquire, but only six South African publications applied for places for staffers — although two more editors grudgingly said they "might send someone if you can cover all this stuff in just a couple of days". On such small numbers, the IAJ could not afford to run the course. It was cancelled.

In February 2003, the IAJ advertised a similar course (with a narrower genre focus) linked with the Cape Town North Sea Jazz Festival and the Columbia University National Arts Journalism Programme (NAJP), who provided a visiting lecturer. The advertisement contained the magic word "scholarships", although funding had been donated for only five. Thirty-two South African arts writers applied, ranging from students and interns to an arts editor. Only three titles were prepared to send fee-paying participants.

An inspired and desperate combination of subsidy, barter deals and penny-pinching ensured that the course did run, with a full 16 participants. Of its outcome, more later. But why does all this matter?

Arts journalism is in crisis in South Africa, and no one seems to care.

But We are not alone. Media coverage of arts and culture has three main categories: consumer guidance, documentation and analysis. The major 1999 Columbia NAJP study Reporting the Arts demonstrated that across America the first category (events listings, lifestyle and showbiz reporting) dominated pages and channels. In-house staffing and resources had failed to keep pace with a nationwide explosion of arts-related activities. Arts and living sections lagged behind other sections of the newspaper in terms of status, page-space and resources.

Sharing this fate is no comfort. In South Africa, a rich literary tradition was established by arts commentators in the historic black press. The example often cited is Todd Matshikiza in Drum, but the tradition predates him, extending back to the debates in the mission-based periodicals of the 19th Century. The Afrikaans press was similarly intent on establishing its own coherent cultural discourse. In the struggle era, radical papers risked banning through these debates, and specialist magazines like Staffrider took them further.

All focused in various ways on identity and how it might be shaped, symbolised, mediated or distorted by forms of cultural expression. Along the way, they provided informative and mightily entertaining writing.

In those days the words of songs, the forms of dances, who played where and to what audience, the 'purity' of a particular discourse and the status accorded to different categories of cultural creators were woven into the walls of oppression and forged into the weapons of struggle. Identities were annihilated: symbolically and literally with lies.

And now here we are, liberated. Striving to shape the democracy that can best grow on that distorted history. Negotiating power and gender identities that can handle a legacy of patriarchy and a present of Aids. Untangling what post-apartheid, race and ethnicity might really mean, and simultaneously co-architects of something called the New Plan for Africa's Development. In that context, anything that illuminates who we are, how we got there and who we might become, is surely news.

Add the tsunami of global culture now washing over a free-trade South Africa subject to neither censorship nor boycotts. Add the hard news that we have almost as many people out of formal employment as in it (current figures stand at 41.6%), and that dumped culture destroys jobs as surely as dumped takkies.

Yet the space (and budget) for thoughtful arts coverage in the mainstream media continues to shrink. Part of the reason here and elsewhere is commercial pressures.

Readers may enjoy extended reviews, but publicists and their friends in newspaper advertising departments do not. A preview can deal in optimism; a review may notice that the performer was a) out of tune, b) drunk or c) lip-synching. The bean counters ensconced on the upper floors have always preferred ad ratios that leave little page-space for stories, and with cinema chains and restaurants to court, where better to find these ratios than on the arts pages?

The hard truth, however, is that arts writing here has made itself more vulnerable to these pressures through shoddy standards. A popular daily captions photographs of the country's best-known musicians with the wrong names. An up-market weekly runs a story on Winston Mankunku Ngozi containing half a dozen factual errors. A Sunday paper tops a serious story on a woman trumpeter with a headline about blow-jobs. A reviewer for a big city daily tries to offer praise to a delicate drum solo with the verb "thumping". Competing newspapers regularly bore readers with near-identical stories because the journalists are either copying out the same press release or were satisfied to sit passively in the same press conference. Praise singing and a fondness for free lunches characterise popular perceptions of the beat's ethical character. Is it any wonder readers don't care when our space gets cut?

At the same time, very little specialist training is available for the arts writer who aspires to do better. Rhodes University grasps the opportunity offered by the National Arts Festival on its doorstep to produce Cue, an arts daily, for 10 days each year. Wits plans an arts journalism option. **But many higher education courses treat arts writing simply as a variety of feature writing to be dealt with in passing.** Commercial colleges offer a slick, one-size-fits-all formula, where they touch the topic at all. As for in-service training, see above.

Yet there is a body of knowledge and skills to be learned. Good arts writing starts with passion for its subject, which cannot be trained-in. But that is true of quality performance in any profession, and does not negate the usefulness of training. And arts writing rests on — but also develops — strong general and specialist knowledge; specialist knowledge for obvious reasons, and general knowledge because **criticism without context is hollow.**

Some other skills are generic to journalism: interviewing in particular. Some of the stories that come an arts writer's way need conceptual frameworks from business, politics, economics or labour reporting. The skill lies in seeing behind the paintings, performances and poems to spot these issues.

Arts writing is framed by a specific body of cultural and critical theory, and offers a specific ethical terrain to be explored: in particular, how to handle relationships with sponsors and those frequently offered free lunches (or tickets, or books). The 2003 IAJ Cape Town course could not have run without sponsorship from Standard Bank, who was also a sponsor of the North Sea Jazz Festival. Their attitude was scrupulously hands-off. Nevertheless, it made a useful introductory ethics debate for participants — and it will be surprising if it does not **raise a few cynical eyebrows** among readers of this piece.

And then there is the non-generic skill: the very special and sensitive kind of looking and listening that arts writers need both to do, and to translate into the right words, if their work is ever to say more than "buy a ticket to this show". To discuss that, the words of my 2003 course participants in their feedback and course diaries are the most eloquent. When young arts writers are drawing conclusions like this, I don't regret taking the free lunch. **Regrets should belong to the media houses that felt such learning was not worth paying for.**

★ "You can observe and listen to the voice of an artist in a press conference or interview, and then see if you can hear that same voice in the music. I'm going to try and do that in future."

A tale of two courses

- "Realising that the music that comes out of someone is a by-product of who they are. They're saying: this is how I want to show you my world."
- "When you're in an audience, you need to watch the stage and the interactions there as well as listen."
- "Appreciating the music is what can lead you to a style of writing that avoids **clichés,** because you are really listening, beyond the clichés."
- "I realise you have to consider when you're ready to write a review: straight after, or **do you need to cook it longer?"**
- "I realise how important it is to have a good stock of words and terms to do this kind of writing."
- "I'm becoming aware of this battle between commercial pressures and purity; how it's everywhere in radio programming, recording and so on."
- "I've been thinking about why there is no South African music journalism archive. In a few years we'll be looking around and asking where the documentation is."
- "You can appreciate music much better through understanding where it comes from and how it's constructed."
- "I've learned that it's **OK** to raise debate about artworks, so long as you have some basis for your arguments. There are minimum requirements: **you can't just write anything!"**
- "Taking notes is just a journalist tuning her guitar."

Gwen Ansell has been an educator, writer and journalist in both the UK and Southern Africa since the early 1970s. She is the author of several training texts for writers, most recently Basic Journalism (M&G Books 2002). Her work as an arts journalist appears regularly in South Africa and elsewhere. She has just left her post as Executive Director of Johannesburg's Institute for the Advancement of Journalism in order to complete a book on the history of South African jazz for international publishers, Continuum. sisgwen@iafrica.com

by Lizette Rabe

The craven co-joined twins, Jen and Duh Bias share a body but this is no androgynous synergy. They alternate between hating women and berating men. Di Versity has to work hard to avoid their stereo-traps.

Once beginner-journalists enter newsrooms, time for reflection on the challenges of their profession is a **luxury** due to the pressures of deadlines and delivering to those deadlines.

Thus a beginner-journalist needs to enter the newsroom with basic skills – both practical and conceptual – in place. Some of those skills adhere to the way we construct gender in our daily lives – and which flows over in the way we construct the news reports that become part of our daily lives.

All individuals – and therefore all journalists – have certain preconceived, programmed ideas as to how they perceive and experience the world around them. Journalists especially should challenge themselves constantly about these perceptions.

Why? Because the media has such an important role in modern society. It reflects – and influences – every single aspect of modern life. Women are stereotyped according to certain constructions "glued" to them and their roles in society since the earliest civilisations. And instead of questioning these stereotypes, our modern media perpetuate them in every possible way, in every possible medium. As Margaret Gallagher (1995) wrote:

"In a world seen through the lens of the media, social and occupational roles are almost completely divided along gender lines. When women appear at all – and numerous studies around the world document their dramatic under-representation in almost all kind of media content – they tend to be depicted within the home and are rarely portrayed as rational, active or decisive."

The gender researcher Colleen Lowe Morna puts it in a nutshell: the media are **"one of the most powerful forces on earth** for shaping the way we think", yet "the media are all too often part of the problem, instead of part of the solution" (2002:10).

It needs to be stressed that in the discourses around gender, and the phrases used – such as mainstreaming gender, engendering the media, and gendersetting – we should remind ourselves that although the discussion is centred around the topic of gender, there are more categories that need to be treated with sensitivity – such as diversity, ethnicity, race, class and age.

Back to gender.

In SADC countries only one in five journalists is a woman, and less than 5% of SADC media managers are women. In Southern Africa women constitute less than 20% of news sources. While men are portrayed in diverse roles, **women are "either victims of violence or fashion models", not human beings "with hopes, aspirations, ambitions and potential"** (Lowe Morna, 2002:10).

What are our challenges?

In a time of media conglomerates, media integration and media convergence, and given the complexities of our age, it is already a challenge to be a **"super-journalist".** Add to this our proven lack of basic skills – as shown by the Sanef Skills Audit of 2002 – it seems impossible to also expect journalists to understand and act upon various other challenges – such as engendered reporting or sensitivity to race or age.

Yet, if we as journalists truly want a free and fair society, and want to comply with the Constitution in the daily execution of our profession, we must think according to a new mindset and apply our newly-discovered knowledge accordingly.

Why should gender be mainstreamed – in other words, taken into account in every report and not only in certain women-orientated stories?

Many – also media role-players – think that gender equals women. Yet gender and gender stereotypes also concern men. One of the best examples of the stereotypical portrayal of gender was the coverage earlier this year of Michael Schumacher upon the death of his mother. The typical headline read how **the "hero" was "victorious over his grief".** In other words: **real men do not cry.** This is gender stereotyping.

Newsroom management and journalists should constantly remind themselves of the way these subconscious stereotypes are constructed and de-constructed in the media.

In this discussion one should also ask the question: where did our consciousness of human rights begin? The histories of various societies are well known. But then, as in the French Revolution, human rights excluded women's rights. They were meant for those who deserved freedom, equality and brotherhood.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) dates back to 1948. Subsequently many others have been proclaimed. The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Cedaw) was adopted by the UN in 1979. In 1995 the Beijing Declaration highlighted the issue and called for governments and civil society to act. Two strategic objectives for the media were set:

- To increase women's participation and access to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication; and
- To promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women and girls in the media, encourage gender-sensitive training for media

GENDER-SETTING

Turn over for more...

professionals, and to take effective measures against pornography (Gender, 2002: 7).

In our region and country we also have various acts and bodies ensuring and enshrining rights, among which are the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development and the Gender Commission.

On paper it seems we have everything needed to enshrine human rights. But it will take more than our constitution and various acts and bodies to entrench rights. What is needed is a conscious mind-shift. In the media's case: application of these rights in boardrooms and newsrooms in order to mainstream gender.

This new thinking needs to be applied on various levels to restore/rectify gender blind imbalances/human rights violations. It does not mean training only – there should also be re-training – and then application to re-store imbalances and injustices.

From the management side it is necessary that codes of ethics need to be re-thought. Most media laws and codes of ethics are gender blind (Lowe Morna, 2002:61). In fact: "Patriarchal views permeate decisions about what makes news, where to place it, and when to present it" (Lowe Morna, 2002:61).

This is why a conscious decision by media and news management is needed about mainstreaming gender, and why the various role-players – on various levels – need training and refresher courses to continuously sensitise themselves to apply their newly-found news principles.

The (re)training of journalists to recognise their own gender blindness, and to recognise the gender blind spots in their reporting can and must be done on various levels. The two most obvious levels are for beginner journalists during tertiary training, and for practising journalists in special training courses. And of course: there must be training and re-training for both sexes.

Special attention must be given to media and news managers, because "engendered thinking" on a media management and news management level is a prerequisite for engendering the media through the newsrooms.

It is accepted that editorial independence is at the core of press freedom – from government, political and commercial interests (Gender, 2002:16). Press freedom is also dependent upon journalists' freedom from prejudices and biases against many issues – in this case gender. Through "gender training, journalists and editors become more aware of how their own internal biases and prejudices influence their coverage just as much as external factors such as government censorships" (Gender, 2002:17).

In many cases the media has by now worked through simplistic and archaic thinking around "objectivity".

Instead of objectivity, journalists should strive for balanced, fair and accurate reporting. Yet, it is clear that gender biases "creep into the way they gather information, interview sources and report on news and issues" (Gender, 2002: 19).

To mainstream gender, journalists need to understand what gender is, and that there is a difference between **sex** (the biological differences between men and women) **and gender** (the socially-constructed roles assigned to women and men). This understanding is the critical starting point in gender training (Lowe Morna, 2002:39). It should also be understood that gender does not equal "women's issues".

Therefore re-training (Gender, 2002:19) should include making journalists aware of gender biases "inherent in their work and in the final media product", and that they should strive for the objective of being "balanced" in media coverage.

Training "engendered journalism" must be done on various levels, starting at classroom training for beginner-journalists through to mid-career courses for practising journalists. But ongoing, everyday sensitisation of gender awareness together with the application of "engendered" thinking and writing in the newsroom is the answer.

As a prerequisite we need a new definition of news. Women add substance, not just a touch of flavour, to the daily mix of news (Mills, 1990:xiv). Why then should news at the beginning of the 21st Century be determined by a predominantly Western, patriarchal society?

Why, for example, is there a distinction between hard and soft news? Hard news is foreign policy, government matters and economics: historically men's matters. **This is real news.** Soft news is the four Fs: "family, food, fashion and furnishings". Hard news/soft news distinctions still regulate how newspapers look at news – and what is important and who must cover it (Mills, 1990:110).

If we turn to doing gender in the journalism classroom: gender should be mainstreamed in journalism curricula. It should not only be a theoretical approach, but models and theories must be used to teach "engendered" journalism writing to beginner-journalists. It must be applied in everything they write, whatever the daily assignments are in terms of news or features, so that they are almost forced to find themselves in positions where they can question their own internal biases and prejudices.

Students are bound to make mistakes, which the study leader can use as examples in class from which the whole class can learn, and which can form the basis of classroom discussion and debate. In the process they should not only question themselves, but also be critical of and recognise stereotypes in colleagues' work and thus contribute to engendering the newsroom.

Or, at least, get temperatures/blood pressures raised – depending on the situation – of challenging stereotypical writing and newsroom treatment of gender when they start their careers.

Lizette Rabe is professor and chair of the Stellenbosch University Department of Journalism. lrabe@sun.ac.za

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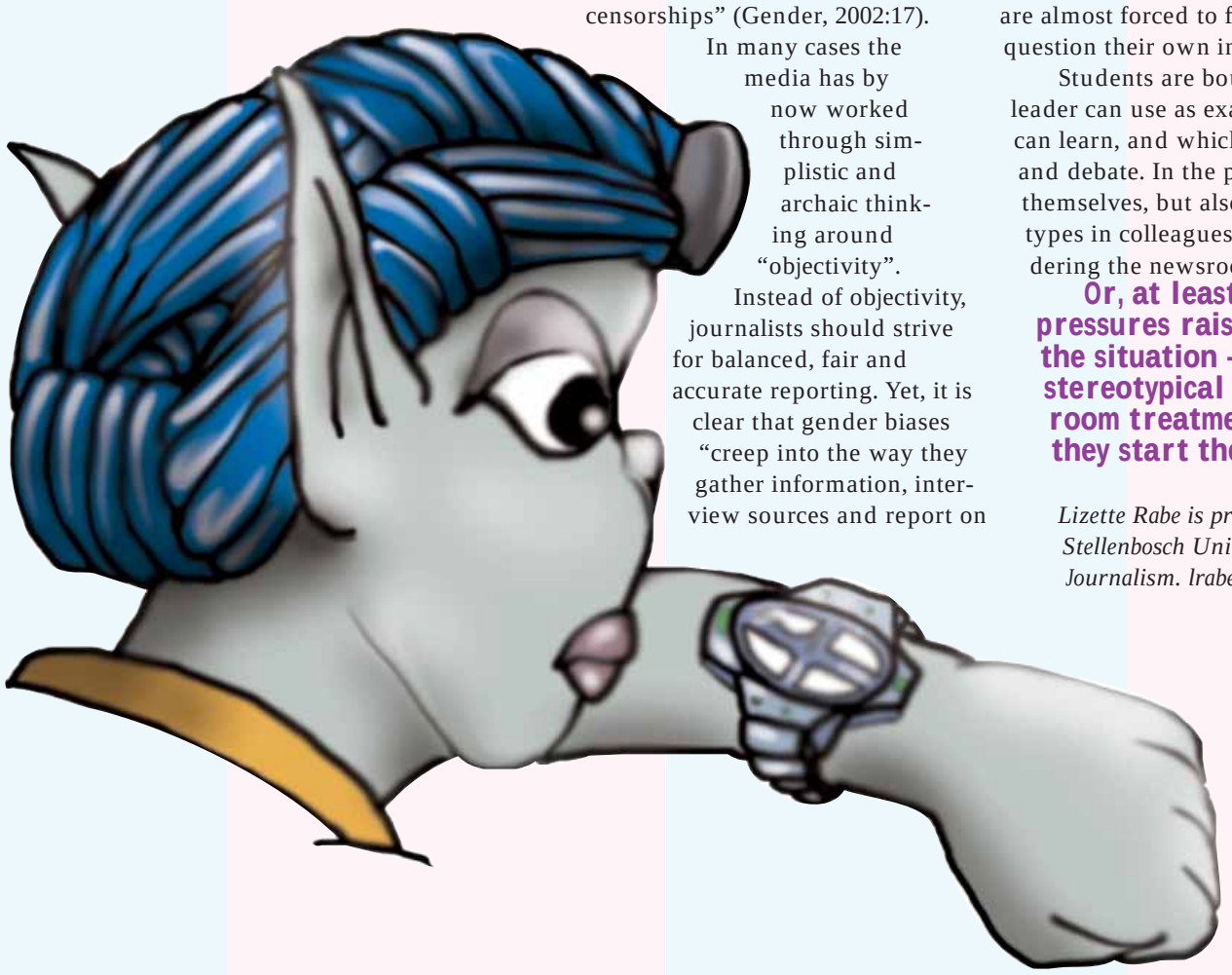


The Accuracy Gauge beeps loudly when a source is telling a lie; when statistics are being given a spin; or when Di is seriously in danger of committing defamation without a public interest defence.

by Guy Berger

Press vs. public enemy

Our journalism about poverty is pitiful. It's a story about the poverty of our journalism. But let's start with the not-so-bad news: unlike many other countries, we do report poverty. Also, unlike many other places, we don't blame the victims – rather, we tend to be sympathetic.

In the US, researchers say, poor people are invisible in the news. India's press, according to one observer, "consistently panders to the consumerism and lifestyles of the elite and rarely carries news of the reality of poverty".

And in both countries, even when there is some coverage, it's said that the tone often elicits sympathy for the stressed-out journalist – rather than for the poor themselves.

Yet international journalism also has a history, encompassing fiction, that includes Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath, Orwell's Road to Wigan Pier, McCourt's Angela's Ashes. The US classic Let Us Now Praise Famous Men by James Agee is top-rate documentary.

Measured in this context, how fares South African coverage? **We do report poverty, but a lot is missing,** and not only Steinbeck-style stories.

Our race history affects the way we communicate, and conceal, poverty. **We often miss the class angle because we see the news through racial spectacles only.** Only recently has coverage of black economic empowerment noticed that not all black people benefit. On the other hand, when we do cover poverty (and wealth) issues, we sometimes forget the race differentials – not to mention the variations in how poverty affects men and women, urban and rural. How many stories about child support grants are linked to African rural households being women-headed and the impact of a grant on their lives?

How conscientised are we about poverty? Too often, we middle class journalists don't see things from **the vantage point of the poor.** Most evident is the uncritical parroting of the cliché that "the economic fundamentals are sound". Many reports lack compassionate consideration of life at the bottom of the heap. Yet such stories could well have included – and indeed ought to have – a poverty angle. The obvious one is reporting on cold weather and leaving out what it means for homeless people. Then, there is trotting out tourism figures sans any scrutiny of trickle down effects.

Paradoxically, therefore, though the South African news media – perhaps uniquely – do report poverty, there are glaring gaps as well. Going further, even as regards the existing coverage, all is not well.

We are often guilty of ghetto-ised coverage. According to the World Bank: **"poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not being able to go to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom. Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place and across time..."**

Yet, our reporting of this inte-grated reality is frequently fragmented. We cover crime without considering the poverty context (or lack thereof). We cover unemployment and hunger as separate stories. Stories on strikes are done as self-contained and insulated units – such as describing a wage dispute in isolation of how many dependents a worker has to support.

There is poor analysis of poverty's causes and solutions. We report starvation in the Eastern Cape as if it were a calamity from the blue. Hunger is presented as a human interest story, without political or policy angles (in contrast to land and housing coverage. **Why?)**

Poverty's solution is sometimes presented as civil society charity. Accordingly, agency on the part of the poor is under-played; they are projected as **objects to be pitied and uplifted.**

Many stories put the agency on government. The resulting and simplistic stereotype is of a callous and/or incompetent government failing in its duty to "deliver". Alternatively, it is one of caring authorities doing their best against anti-transformation forces. Let off the hook are business, employers, civil society and

Poverty reporting think list

By Sarita Ranchod

Think class – of your sources and subjects. How does your class position impact on your perspective? Are there realities that you ignore, or are blinded to? Think gender: Does this issue impact on women and men differently? How does your gendered experience inform your view? Are you using stereotypes or challenging them? Think race: who is privileged in the story? How does your racial experience inform your storytelling ability? If your subjects have a different cultural or religious background from yours, are you making value judgements based on stereotypical notions of 'others'? (eg the oppressed Muslim woman) Ask: whose agenda? Who benefits? Poverty is big business. Every stakeholder has a vested interest in having you tell the story from their point of view. Ask who will benefit. Even bilateral aid agreements can be structured to benefit the donor country in the sourcing of expertise, and granting of contracts. Whose voices are privileged in stories – do you give more space to certain kinds of interest groups, genders, political persuasions – without necessarily meaning to? Do poor people have voices in your stories, or do experts speak on their behalf? Who knows what the poor need and want? Make sense of the whole. Don't just cover the launch of a project (with a newsmaker present). Follow up: Did the project get off the ground? How many jobs were created vs. the envisaged number? What kinds of jobs? What was the overall developmental impact? What have been the cultural and environmental impacts? What were unintended consequences and benefits? Build relationships. Monitor and track your story. Poverty is not a circus act or a photo opportunity. More than half of the people living in the SADC region live in poverty. And yet, we/they survive. Communities sustain themselves with dignity and ingenuity – where are the stories of the wealth of the poor?

poor people themselves. Solving poverty is seldom presented as something where all stakeholders play a part.

Of course, our poverty coverage is partly related to **the markets in which the various media play,** our owners and advertisers, as well as the class character, outlook and poverty sensitisation of ourselves, the journalists. These are constraints, but we can do a lot better. And we can go further too, because there are also deeper problems whose resolution **requires changes to journalism as we know it:** we are hamstrung by our tendency to reduce things to singular stories. We don't treat poverty and its manifestations as all-round experience that adds up to a general condition and which is directly linked to policies and practices.

Our reductionism also blinds us to poverty angles present in a range of stories, such as human rights, justice, criminality and corruption, finance and banking, party politics and civil protests, refugees, children and the elderly, gender, disability.

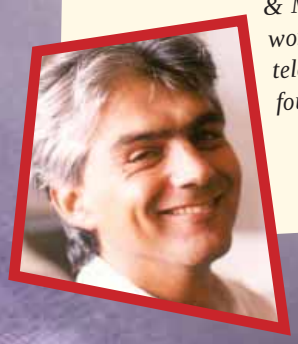
We struggle to cover the subject because poverty is a process. Traditionally, we're geared to covering events rather than unfolding trends or states-of-being. "Process" also means history, and our news is over-focused on what's new and recent. **We also don't follow up.** Has any mainstream medium ever updated the Poverty Hearings? Such **short term-ism in our journalism seriously impoverishes coverage** of poverty and much else.

Most of all, our journalism is reactive – we are suckers for materials fed to us by media manipulators. In contrast, there aren't (m)any faxes or emails pouring in from poor people. Occasionally we (correctly) carry a success story about an individual who has come to our attention. But absent are accounts based on enterprise journalism, proactively gathered from the people who succeed, somehow, in surviving.

Poverty is public enemy number one. Our media trainers must take the topic on board. **Editors should develop an active agenda for systematic and strategised coverage.** If leadership lags, reporters need to follow the advice of a US journalist: "Demand more time, agitate for more space, and revisit the subject frequently."

We chronicle race, politics, even gender issues to an extent. Now **the agenda needs to expand.** It is time to tackle, seriously, the journalism of poverty. It is also time to transform the poverty of journalism. In fact, it is time to enrich our role.

Since 1994, Prof Guy Berger has headed the Department of Journalism & Media Studies at Rhodes University. He has worked in newspapers, magazines and television. This article is based on research found at: http://journ.ru.ac.za/staff/guy



Klaus Bias, a fifth-generation South African, can trace his roots back several centuries in the old country. He has perfected the technique of appearing invisible but when he does join a conversation his subtle influence immediately has an effect on the participants' minds and they find themselves agreeing that the poor have only themselves to blame. He can be overcome by wearing the brain-embalming turban which imparts clarity of thought to the wearer.

Push boundaries

by Caroline Hooper-Box

Am I, as a white South African journalist, racist? My instinctive answer is "No". (My instinctive adjunct to this: "And now please bugger off.") But am I bound and piloted by my race, class, gender and personal experience? As a product of the postmodern academic discourse of the 1990s, my answer is "Of course. **How could anyone not be?**"

It's inconceivable to me that anyone anywhere – especially anyone who has lived through a sizeable chunk of apartheid and beyond – would have the naiveté or the temerity to claim "objectivity" as one of their virtues.

As a journalist, fairness, balance, and integrity are my aim. How I am circumscribed and defined by that old darling of students of social science: "multiple identities", where I am located in this country, and how any or all of this shapes my journalistic output ... these things are hard to disentangle.

Most of the time, I don't much bother to try to extricate the race-specific components in this inventory from the rest. I do my job. Reporting on pretty much everything – public policy, economics, culture, luminaries and fools.

But sometimes, **over the incessant thunder of the deadline train, comes the grumble of awareness** about race in a story. My race, the race of my story's subjects, and race in the story process.

I heard that grumble most recently when I wrote a story about an orphanage. What made the orphanage different from most others in this country was that it is situated in an affluent, largely white neighbourhood, in a series of suburban homes.

The orphanage founders are white South Africans who leverage considerable financial and human resources for the project. My story described how many volunteers care for and love the children, forming deep bonds, and committing to seeing them through to university. I reported that these white women find it easy to drop by to help.

The children – abandoned, orphaned, and mostly HIV-positive – are black.

On the job, I was not introduced to the black women who work there as full-time caregivers. They did not look at me, and the managers I interviewed did not mention their role in any part of the place. As is so often the case in this country, they were silent, background.

I did not interview these women. I kept things simple, short, used few quotes, focused on the children.

So I deliberately and consciously pushed race to the background in this story, but at the same time, so much of the story was about race – explicitly and implicitly.

There are many orphanages, much less well-resourced, which could benefit from a newspaper profile. I do those stories too, and will again in the future, after all this is not PR. **So that part is a bit uncomfortable, but not very difficult for me to live with.**

I've not made my mind up about whether I handled this story the best way possible, though.

Every journalist would have written the story differently. But would a black journalist have handled the story particularly differently? Probably.

Was the situation I wrote about a racist one? Maybe, maybe not. Was I racist in my reporting? **I don't think so.**

I certainly took an easy way out, however. I did not push boundaries, or challenge the way things had been set up. Newsgathering and reporting is never a one-way process, but my story reflected a particular reality.

When I first started reporting, I was disconcerted to find that black men in rural areas would often not speak to me directly, but address answers to my questions to whatever male was in close proximity.

Negotiating barriers of language and gender in this country are an everyday part of my job. And of course, my own race (and gender) counts in my favour in some circumstances, and against me in others.

Tradition-bound white men are generally a breeze.

The politics of reporting in this country, and through our very particular transition, is unavoidable.

If I write about our economy within the post-September 11th global slump, and economic experts in this country are still by and large white men, do I spend an extra day hunting for other sources to get a more diverse information base? **The story itself is not all that matters. As a media professional I'm creating as much as I'm reflecting.**

But how important, exactly, it is to operate at this type of heightened consciousness in my work, and whether it is important all the time, I'm not sure.

I negotiate my space as a journalist in all of this daily, not always consciously.

Perhaps as a means of working my way through it, I am attracted to stories that raise interesting questions about where we are as a nation, culturally, in the broadest sense of the term.

Blurring divisions on our traditionally racially divided dance floors; artist Stephen Cohen's representation of "colonialism" through his performances in a squatter camp; **emotions running high around changing the names of towns across the country**; small communities dealing with political and social changes in their conservative towns – inevitably, my position and identity in South Africa moulds, if not determines, the type of information that I will get access to, who gives it to me, and the form in which it is conveyed.

The way that I select and interpret the information – how I choose stories and how I get them down on paper – is also yoked to my identity, or place, race and otherwise.

I have never been trained or educated on non-racist reporting. **It wouldn't hurt, I guess.**

But I believe it's my responsibility to think about my assumptions, the language I use, the stories I pick. It is important to avoid getting too comfortable, to work hard and sometimes not to do what comes easiest or most naturally.

My work and my self are situated in my race, even rooted in it, but I don't believe my reporting is racist. **For now, that's as far as I'll go.**

Caroline Hooper-Box is a senior journalist with The Sunday Independent.
chb@sunday.independent.co.za

Rating the rewards

1st

by Lucy Siebert, Marita Kritzinger and Howard Drakes

A range of awards for journalists in South Africa and the rest of the continent have appeared in recent years.

Whether the emergence of these awards, many of which are sponsored by corporate companies, have raised the standards of reporting in Africa is not clear.

Media professionals and journalists appear to be somewhat divided on the merit of awards for journalists.

Prof Guy Berger of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University said the purpose of most awards is to honour and encourage journalists, not to train or influence specific stories. Award winners appreciate the recognition of their work, especially considering **African journalists' salaries often do not reflect their intellectual capital.**

The nature of the prizes is also a contentious issue. Most awards recognise individual journalists by awarding a cash prize.

However, there are some awards, such as the John Manyara Award for Investigative Journalism, which awards winners with study grants and travel opportunities.

The kind of prize and the usefulness of cash depends on what level the winning journalist is at. Journalist Jeremy Maggs commented: **"A travel or training grant is first prize to me** as a mid-career journalist who makes a tidy living."

However, Susan Purén, the 2002 winner of the CNN Journalist of the Year Award, said the cash award was very helpful to her. Purén said as a freelance journalist, she had many personal expenses to cover, which she used the US$7000 prize for. She noted that the laptop she won, has been hugely beneficial to her work and has possibly been the most valuable part of the prize.

The 2002 Natali prize overall winner, Ghanaian journalist, Raymond Archer believes that **prize money** can be used for different ends. "I thought that my colleagues in Ghana needed training so instead of using the money for myself or for my education, I used the

Turn over for more...

award money for the benefit of practitioners of the entire profession in Ghana. I wouldn't have been able to make an impact on my fellow Ghanaian journalists without this award." The 10 000 prize money was used to establish the Ghana Centre for Public Integrity (GCPI), an NGO that focuses on investigative journalism and training in the media.

The International Federation of Journalists' (IFJ) Ann-Christina Hansen echoed Archer's sentiments: "I believe that the benefits of awards such as the Natali Prize are manifold. Apart from rewarding and hopefully promoting journalistic excellence, one of the keystones of democracy, the prize money can have very positive effects not only for the individual winners but also for other journalists."

Purén said prizes for journalism are expected to be cash. **"In Africa cash means everything,"** she said. Berger agreed and said cash awards are incentives for African journalists. "Journalists are paid very little in general, so it is helpful to get a cash bonus."

The winner of the 2000 South African Award for Courageous Journalism, Lynne Altenroxel from The Star, said that winning an award is meaningful to journalists who struggle with stories on a daily basis. **"The biggest thing is that it encourages and uplifts you.** Some aspects of my work are emotionally draining and very trying, so this helps to make up for it."

Like Purén, Altenroxel, spent her R10 000 prize money on "day-to-day expenses".

However, Chris Moerdyk, media analyst and consultant, pointed out that although cash is an incentive, it does not necessarily improve the standard of journalism. "Cash is only an incentive to enter awards, not an incentive to become good journalists," he said. Moerdyk felt that journalists are seeking **"peer recognition, bylines and prestige",** rather than an improvement in standards across the board. Moerdyk stressed that cash is not the most useful way to recognise individual work. "If I could have my way there would be no cash prizes at all, rather opportunities like travel grants and training."

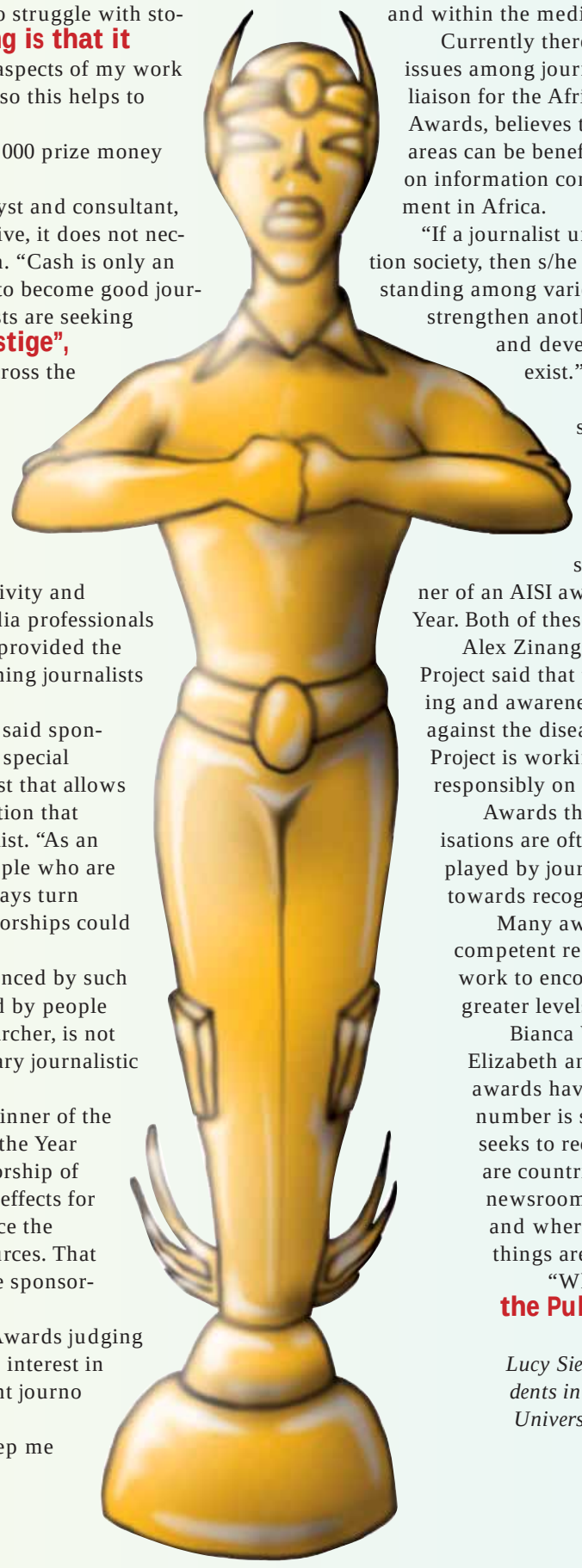
The corporate sponsorship of journalism awards could also be problematic for a profession that upholds independence, objectivity and diversity as some of its core values. Most media professionals feel that corporate sponsorship is acceptable, provided the sponsor is a reputable company and that winning journalists continue to work and act independently.

"I hope sponsorship is noble and that the said sponsors also know that association does not mean special favours," Maggs said. For Archer, any journalist that allows him/herself to be compromised by an organisation that sponsors an award is not a professional journalist. "As an investigative journalist I come across many people who are willing to **bribe me to drop a story,** I always turn down such offers and I can see why such sponsorships could compromise me."

Archer said that if a journalist can be influenced by such an organisation then s/he could be compromised by people who might offer bribes. Such a journalist, says Archer, is not corrupted by awards but rather lacks the necessary journalistic integrity.

Editor of the Zimbabwe Independent and winner of the 2002 World Press Review International Editor of the Year Award, Iden Wetherell, believes corporate sponsorship of media awards is beneficial and can have positive effects for all the parties involved. "The media constantly face the threat of ethical compromise from a variety of sources. That doesn't mean we have to shy away from corporate sponsorship. Professional considerations must apply."

Denis Beckett, chair of the Mondi Magazine Awards judging panel, is very much in favour of awards. "My own interest in awards is because when I was a young independent journo with **a maverick magazine** and mighty money problems, the various awards I won did a lot to keep me at it. Awards provide an additional target to aim for, and stimulated effort. I'd much rather have a society with all the numerous activities that companies sponsor as promotional expenses than a society without them."



Individual journalists who win awards can, however, feel some sort of responsibility to the sponsor, particularly if the award is highly recognised and valuable. Purén said winning the CNN award has affected her work and the way in which she approaches her stories. **"I have felt much more responsible for the work I do** and what kind of stories I keep myself busy with. I almost feel like I can't let CNN down by doing a bad story. I don't know why, but the award hasn't exactly helped my career, it is hard to find work after winning the award," she said.

Being connected to a corporate sponsor, such as CNN, is problematic for some journalists. Matthew Krouse, arts editor of the Mail&Guardian, said there is a real concern among some journalists about being linked to a corporate sponsor, and for this reason, some journalists steer away from awards.

Ann-Christina Hansen believes that awards can have other spin-off effects. "Awarding a prestigious prize to a controversial journalist can raise awareness of specific human rights abuses and **send a strong political signal** to those who commit them."

Awards can be aimed at improving journalism, particularly in specialised reporting, as well as creating networks among journa-lists and within the media.

Currently there is not sufficient understanding of certain issues among journalists in Africa. Aida Opoku-Mensah, media liaison for the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) Media Awards, believes that better-informed reporting in specialised areas can be beneficial to African countries. The AISI awards focus on information communication technologies (ICTs) and development in Africa.

"If a journalist understands the issues surrounding the information society, then s/he in turn can promote greater and better understanding among various publics. In the long run these awards will strengthen another area of specialisation; more coverage of ICTs and development issues that currently does not really exist."

Financial Mail assistant editor Marina Bidoli says much of the recognition of journalists and the media is done in broad categories that tend to exclude "less exciting" reporting. Business reporting is one of these areas that lack recognition. "I think it's important to be recognised in the sector in which you write." Bidoli has been the winner of an AISI award and been made Telkom ICT Journalist of the Year. Both of these awards focus on ICT reporting.

Alex Zinanga of the Zimbabwe HIV/Aids Policy and Advocacy Project said that the Auxillia Chimusoro Award for HIV/Aids reporting and awareness work has gone a long way in helping the fight against the disease. "The Zimbabwe Aids Policy and Advocacy Project is working with journalists to build their capacity to report responsibly on HIV/Aids issues and also to increase coverage."

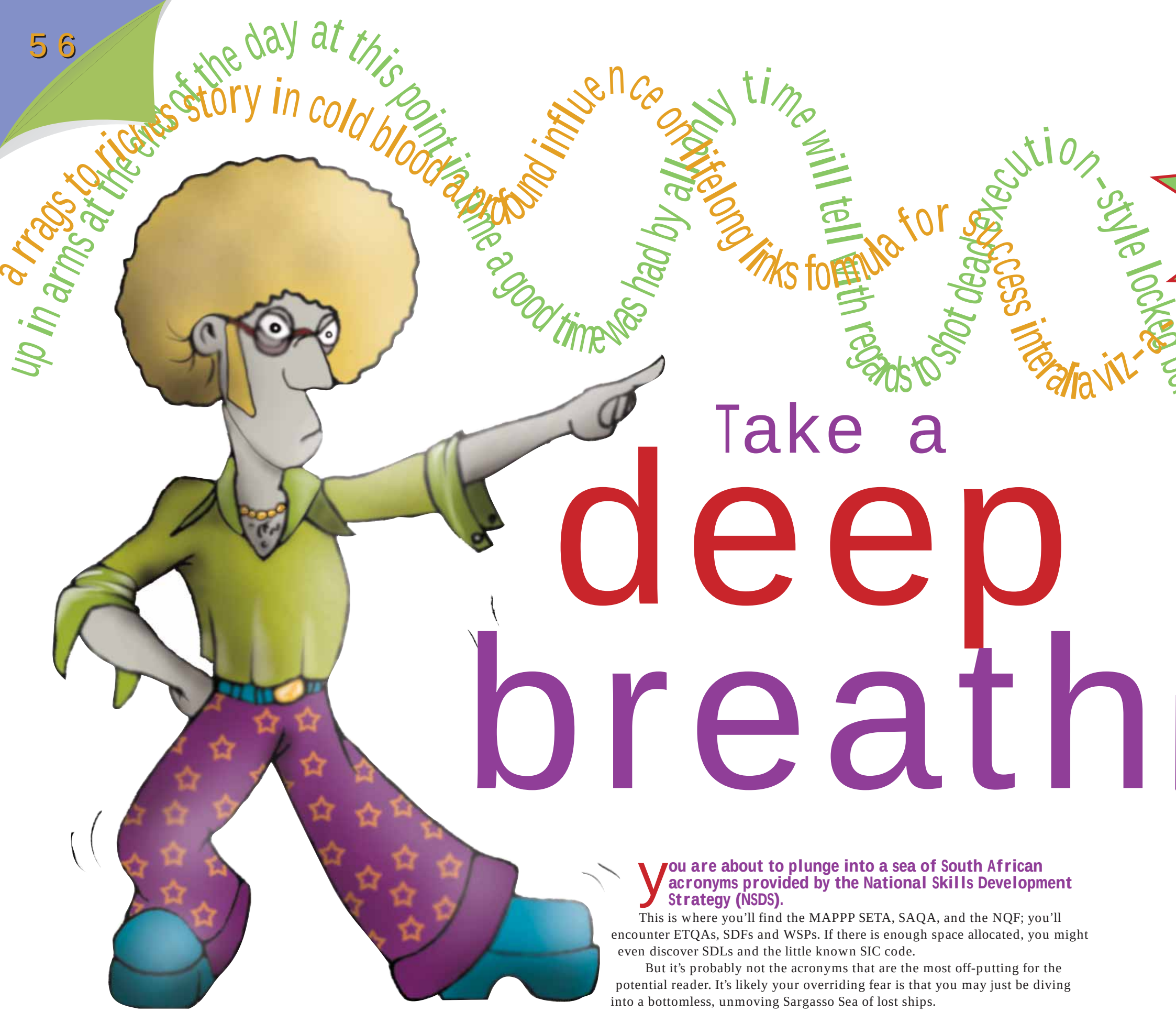
Awards that are set up and sponsored by companies and organisations are often the result of awareness about the watchdog role played by journalism and the media and an accompanying drive towards recognising and rewarding this.

Many awards seek to **recognise courage under fire,** competent reporting on broad and specialised subjects and they work to encourage and inspire the recipients and their colleagues to greater levels of quality.

Bianca Wright, a media lecturer at the University of Port Elizabeth and recipient of Telkom and AISI awards, says that awards have an important place in society but that their reach and number is still not sufficient in Africa. While a surplus of awards seeks to recognise many journalists in any number of areas, "There are countries in Africa where press freedom is a myth, where newsrooms have too few journalists to cover anything worthwhile and where criticising the government is forbidden. Until those things are combated there will never be 'enough'."

"What I'd ultimately like to see is **an African version of the Pulitzer Prize,"** Maggs said.

Lucy Siebert, Marita Kritzinger and Howard Drakes are fourth-year students in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University.



OKAY. WE'VE GOT THE POINT. TRAINING IS IMPORTANT, SPEND MONEY ON TRAINING. BUT DOES TRAINING WORK? DOES IT FIX WHAT'S AILING? IN THIS SECTION PADDI CLAY ASSESSES THE BIG OVERARCHING NATIONAL STRUCTURES PUT IN PLACE TO PERSUADE COMPANIES TO PUT MONEY INTO TRAINING; COLLEEN LOWE-MORNA TAKES STOCK OF THE EFFECTS OF GENDER TRAINING ON HUNDREDS OF SADC JOURNALISTS; AND STEVE WROTTESLEY, GWEN ANSELL AND CAROL CHRISTIE REVISIT "THE BASICS".

You are about to plunge into a sea of South African acronyms provided by the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS).

This is where you'll find the MAPPP SETA, SAQA, and the NQF; you'll encounter ETQAs, SDFs and WSPs. If there is enough space allocated, you might even discover SDLs and the little known SIC code.

But it's probably not the acronyms that are the most off-putting for the potential reader. It's likely your overriding fear is that you may just be diving into a bottomless, unmoving Sargasso Sea of lost ships.

On 23 June 2003, at a workshop for the MAPPP Sector Education and Training Authority's Advisory Committees, it certainly seemed as though we had even slipped back three years. The workshop was to help us understand what our imminent transformation from a committee to a chamber would mean. As the new responsibilities of the chamber's members were enumerated, with no indication of what support would come from the SETA, the volunteer representatives grew angry and gave vent to their frustrations. This has been happening fairly frequently recently at meetings hosted by the MAPPP SETA and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). It's also been happening at other SETAs and where red tape has outmanoeuvred efforts to deliver, improve and expand skills straining.

But is the situation bleak enough for us to give up on the process?

Has journalism gained nothing from the NSDS and the three laws; the SAQA Act of 1995, the Skills Development Act (1998) and the Skills Development Levies Act (1999), that enable it?

Three years ago we were optimistic but confused about the new legislation that would see companies having to pay over 1% of their salary bills to the newly formed SETAs. **We were excited but ignorant** about the National Qualifications Framework and the hope it held out for so many who had never had the chance to get the full education they wanted or needed.

Today we're not so confused or ignorant, nor are we so optimistic or excited. The **overwhelming emotion is frustration** and the only thing keeping education and training people going are the original visions held up by the

Jah Gon and Jerna Leighs deal in obfuscation; low-priced words for every occasion guaranteed to wrap the truth in mind-numbing cliché. Continued use of their stock in trade lends greater credibility to their product. Favoured customers are officials of all stripes, government media liaison officers and marketeers.

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by Paddi Clay

Department of Education and the Department of Labour.

There's no doubt they're great visions.

Companies would pay a levy that would go towards education and training in their sector; the quality of the training being delivered in their sector would be checked and assured, they'd even get money back for training and retraining people through new types of apprenticeships; and if they were prepared to be a bit more organised and forward thinking on their training they'd be able to claim back most of the levy.

In the parallel NQF vision, people would be able to earn credits for what they had learned on the job; if they could meet certain standards of competence they would get credits that would go towards qualifications, and they could enter the education stream at almost any stage of their life without having to check out of their jobs and into full-time study. These standards would be agreed by groups of academic and industry experts and they would dovetail so well with industry's needs and wants that the "learners" would have no trouble finding a job once they qualified.

Many journalism educators and trainers thought the monetary incentives had great potential in the face of editorial staff cutbacks and continual raids on training budgets. Inspired by these visions we accepted nomination to the SETA Full Authority, to Advisory Committees, the National Standards Body 04 for Communication Studies and Language (NSB04) and last, but not least, the Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) for Journalism and Audio-Visual Production. **But scores of meetings and workshops and reams of reports, minutes and memos later we find ourselves almost where we started.**

It's time to take stock of what, if anything, we've gained through all this expenditure of time and effort and to try to calculate the return on our sector's investment of approximately R10 million per month in skills development through its levies (SDLs).

The government is also beginning its own review of the NSDS before **formulating its next five-year plan.**

On the positive side, the Standards Generating Bodies brought training providers and practitioners together to hammer out a common view on what makes a journalist or broadcaster competent. This view may not have been completely captured but we do now have some objective, shared criteria with which to assess people and curricula and to manage performance. Five Unit Standards have been produced by the Journalism SGB and in the registration pipeline, 49 have already been registered by the Audio-Visual SGB covering film, television, radio and new media.

Another plus is that media companies have begun to pay attention to training once again. Even if their motivation is entirely pecuniary, it does mean that education and training has moved up the agenda. And companies are also co-operating in the skills development arena.

Journalism's method of "proving" entry-level journalists with internships has been recognised sufficiently to qualify for two years of grants from our notoriously tight-fisted SETA.

The companies who pay levies, submit workplace skills plans and quarterly reports on training to the MAPPP SETA, have been getting what amounts to 52% of their levy back for the past couple of years.

But surely there should be more to the NSDS than mechanistic levy collection, rebates and reimbursements? And the South African National Editors Forum could probably have done the job of bringing journalism practitioners and trainers as well as the SAQA together with a little help from funders.

The almost negligible delivery in the skills development sphere is not necessarily the fault of the SETA itself, bound as tightly as any government department with regulations and in fearful thrall to the Public Finance Management Act.

The blame lies more squarely with the unwieldy nature of the system itself and the current funding model and with its almost total dependence on industry employers and employees to give it shape and substance in a labour of love.

Many companies already regard the Skills Development Levy as just another tax to be paid over and forgotten.

But some are paying levies, putting in the extra administrative work required to make claims for the mandatory grants and "donating" vast chunks of employee time to try to make it workable.

Having painted such a negative picture, how can people concerned with journalism be persuaded to stay in the process; how can newcomers to the process be expected to dive in?

Theoretically, the SETA and SAQA Quality Assurance processes present a way of eradicating rip-off training providers, and useless training. Research for the Sector Skills Plans required by the SETA could provide us with invaluable information that would help us **make more informed, cost-effective decisions** about who to train, in what and when, and even for the first time, give us a national picture of how many people are working as journalists in South Africa.

Careful identification and design of Learnerships and work skills programmes and accreditation of short courses could help us overcome skills shortages and reassign rather than retrench employees in the sector.

The Print Media Chamber could be a vital forum for partnerships between providers and industry, for the exchange of information relating to the development of journalists.

Assessment skills and Unit Standards could be put to use to improve the quality of entry-level journalists, to manage the performance of employed journalists and by giving us objective means of assessment, assess the way we cope with diversity in our newsrooms.

In my opinion we have no choice but to push on through the red tape and ever changing demands of the system. There are some important tasks ahead.

We need to look closely at the issue of Learnerships for journalists. The SETA has promised the government it will deliver 700 of these by 2005. It's up to us to decide how many, if any, will come from journalism and the media.

These much-vaunted Learnerships could be as simple as the combination of substantial chunks of a three-year technikon course provided by the technikon, some additional in-house training and a substantial internship period at the contracting workplace. But the

Turn over for more...

process of organising and registering all this is complex and difficult **and may be more effort than it is worth.**

It is particularly important for us to agree that we will in practice recognise these Learnerships or the new qualifications that emerge from the SGB and that is only going to be possible if we have all had a hand in their creation and management.

Unit Standards should become functional tools and be put to use in whatever way we can in order to assess their usefulness. Assessment skills themselves **are worth acquiring** for operational use even if they will never be used in formal assessments as envisaged by the SETA and SAQA.

But perhaps most challenging and urgent of all the tasks that needs doing, is the formulation of a skills plan for the sector.

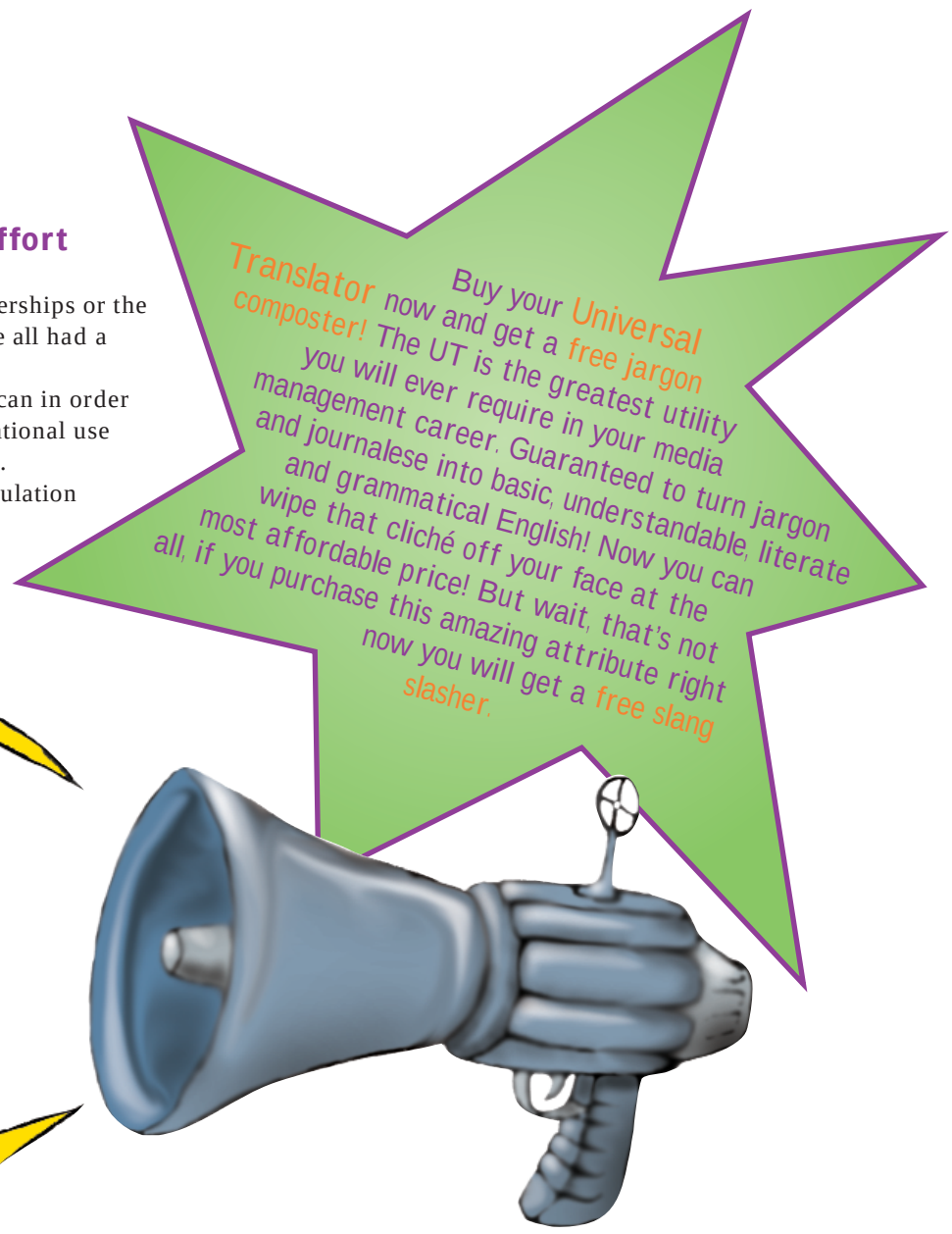
It will focus on the skills needed by the core areas of media businesses over the next five years, 2005 to 2009, and will provide the motivation for the release of the millions in the SETA coffers.

The SETA has to deliver this plan in September 2004 and this time round, it is imperative that stakeholders take an active role in drawing it up. The one we are working under currently had little or poor input from media.

We were ignorant of what was needed, we didn't have much information to draw on and we were still trying to find out what a Work Skills Plan was all about.

If we let this new opportunity to shape the process go by again, we have little hope of escaping the current skills development doldrums.

Paddi Clay is the Head of Programme, Johnnic Pearson Journalism Training. She is also convenor of the Sanef Education and Training Committee and chair of the SGB Journalism and member of the SGB Audio Visual Production. Clay began working as a journalist in 1976. clayp@jpl.co.za



A simple guide to skills development

The MAPPP SETA covers media, both print and electronic, advertising publishing, printing and packaging. It was established by the Department of Labour, and is governed, it is intended, by a Full Authority comprising representatives of employers and employees and professional bodies. These stakeholders are grouped in six sub-sector specific Advisory Committees, soon to become Chambers. The Chambers' functions, powers, resources and budget are still a work in progress.

Companies pay a 1% levy on the salaries they pay to employees. They pay this over to the South African Revenue Service, which pays it over to the SETA.

20% of the total levy goes into the National Skills Fund to train South Africans generally.

10% is to cover SETA administration costs. 10% goes into a Discretionary Fund and the remaining 60% can be claimed back by employers provided they've submitted a Work Skills Plan and quarterly reports of training.

At present there is no quality assurance involved in the process and no way of matching training plans with actual training.

If a company falls into the SME category and has fewer than 50 employees it must also pay a levy but can claim 60% of it back if it submits a copy of an external training provider's invoice.

The SETA acts as the facilitator and governing body for learnerships that must be registered with the Department of Labour. No learnerships in journalism have as yet been registered.

Learnerships are structured learning programmes that combine compulsory workplace learning and assessment with theoretical learning and assessment and lead to a qualification registered on the National Qualifications Framework where all Unit Standards and Qualifications are registered.

To be party to a learnership, both the training provider and the workplace provider must be accredited with a SETA.

Apprenticeships that currently exist are being phased out in favour of learnerships.

Internships equate to only one part of a learnership and cannot be used as a synonym for learnership.

The SETA will pay companies grants of set amounts for learnerships offered and completed but it is unlikely they will cover the entire cost of a learnership.

For instance, it has only budgeted R285 000 for 30 proposed learnerships in sub-editing. Companies providing learnerships would have to pay training costs and stipends to the contracted learners up front. Companies will also get tax rebates for learnerships registered and successfully completed.

Joint Implementation Plans (JIPs) have been agreed between the SETA and SAQA to fund some of the work of the Electronic Media Production SGB and Journalism SGB. This is because a) SAQA which governs SGBs does not have any money to fund them in their work of writing Unit Standards and Qualifications and b) Learnerships, work skills programmes and short courses and the education and training Quality Assurance bodies that fall under the SETA all need Unit Standards and Qualifications.

SAQA's role is to ensure the Unit Standards and Qualifications are up to the national standard required.

ETQAs established under the SETA will vet training provided to the sector by external providers and workplace providers. They will accredit assessors and providers and require that stakeholders use only accredited people and institutions.

PS: If you are still curious – the SIC code 32420 identifies companies publishing newspapers, journals and magazines, while the SIC code 96200 identifies those engaged in news agency or distribution activity. What SIC stands for has not yet been revealed.

the official version issued by the MAPPP SETA is contained in a booklet called "Skills Development: How it benefits your business".

Understanding the acronyms

DoL – Department of Labour
ETQA – Education and Training Qualifications Assurance body
ICTs – Information Communication Technologies
IT – Information Technology
JIP – Joint Implementation Plan
MAPPP SETA – Media Advertising Publishing Printing and Packaging Sector Education and Training Authority
NiZA – Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa
NSDS – National Skills Development Strategy
NSJ – Nordic-SADC Journalism Centre
NQF – National Qualifications Framework
NSB – National Standards Body
SAMTRAN – Southern African Media Trainers Network
SANEF – South African National Editors Forum
SAQA – South African Qualifications Authority
SDL – Skills Development Levies
SETA – Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB – Standards Generating Body
SIC Code – Standard Industrial Classification
WAP – Wireless Application Protocol
WSP – Workplace Skills Plan

Southern Africa Media Training Needs Assessment

Key findings

- There are about 15 000 journalists in the SADC region – a rapid increase following the 90s wave of democratisation.
- More than half have no formal qualifications.
- There is a great demand for media skills development.
- At least 48 institutions in the SADC region offer journalism training.
- The demand, however, is for more and better quality training.
- Journalism schools are gradually increasing their entry levels and there is also a gradual increase in the number of journalists holding university degrees.
- Existing media standards are perceived to be low.
- Courses on offer are variable in quality and impact. They are often short, once-off courses without any accreditation or effective follow-up.
- While some larger media organisations offer on-site training that is cost effective, this approach can limit interaction with journalists from different contexts and experiences, critical to stimulating debate and thinking.
- There appears to be more of a demand for skills training than knowledge-based (issue-based, contextual) training. But what industry demands is not necessarily what it needs.
- A general lack of focus was found in training institutions, most of whom are trying to do "a little of everything".

Gaps identified

- In-service training focuses on junior reporters and ignores managers, editors, photojournalists and community media.
- Training in new media skills and use is in its infancy.
- Men are the majority of recipients of training.
- While a number of training institutions offer specific courses on covering gender issues, few have grasped the importance of mainstreaming gender in all training.
- Training remains a high cost area, often depending on donor funding. Donor agendas change, and this dependence could impact negatively.
- Media training in the region is highly fragmented and could benefit from greater co-operation.

Recommendations

- Centres of excellence should emerge rather than every institution trying to do everything.
- Entry-level training needs to be focused on solid skills training.
- The dearth of relevant media analysis and research is a major gap universities should be filling.
- Regional-level training is expensive and should focus on advanced skills and knowledge areas.
- Media management courses need co-ordination, sharing of resources and development.
- Human resource management is a critical lack and the environment within newsrooms does not encourage trainees to implement their newly-gained skills.
- Coaching and mentoring training is offered by only one institution.
- Community media training is an important new challenge.
- New media training needs to move from single courses to building country capacities.
- More attention should be given to using the Internet for training.
- Mainstreaming a human rights perspective into all training is critical.

Targets

- Women.
- Managers – both editorial and business.
- Trainers – to achieve greater multiplier effects.

Effectiveness

- Training must be linked to an overall HR development strategy.
- Courses should have selection criteria.
- Donor- and NGO-funded courses should be channelled through local institutions.
- Courses should be structured as modules – many courses are too short and one-off to have long-term impact.
- Innovative uses of information technology need to be explored.
- Assessment and standard-setting is important.
- Monitoring and evaluation must take place.

Areas for collaboration

- Building a database of training opportunities; trainers; training materials; documented best practices; electronic discussion groups.
- Study materials – not many texts are produced locally.
- Curriculum development.
- Standards and accreditation.

www.genderlinks.org.za/pubs.htm

by Colleen Lowe Morna and Zohra Khan commissioned by the NSJ Trust, supported by NiZA

South African National Journalism Skills Audit

The audit focused on determining the level of reporting, writing and accuracy skills among reporters with two to five years' experience working in the mainstream media.

Issues to be addressed by tertiary education

- Basic reporting and writing skills: accuracy, interviewing, research, spelling and punctuation
- Language skills plus the acquisition of African languages
- Conceptual skills: analytical and critical skills, creativity, general knowledge, a culture of reading
- Life skills: communication, motivation, professionalism and a work ethic
- Media ethics and media law knowledge
- Regular interaction with industry: internships, advisory boards

Issues to be addressed by media management

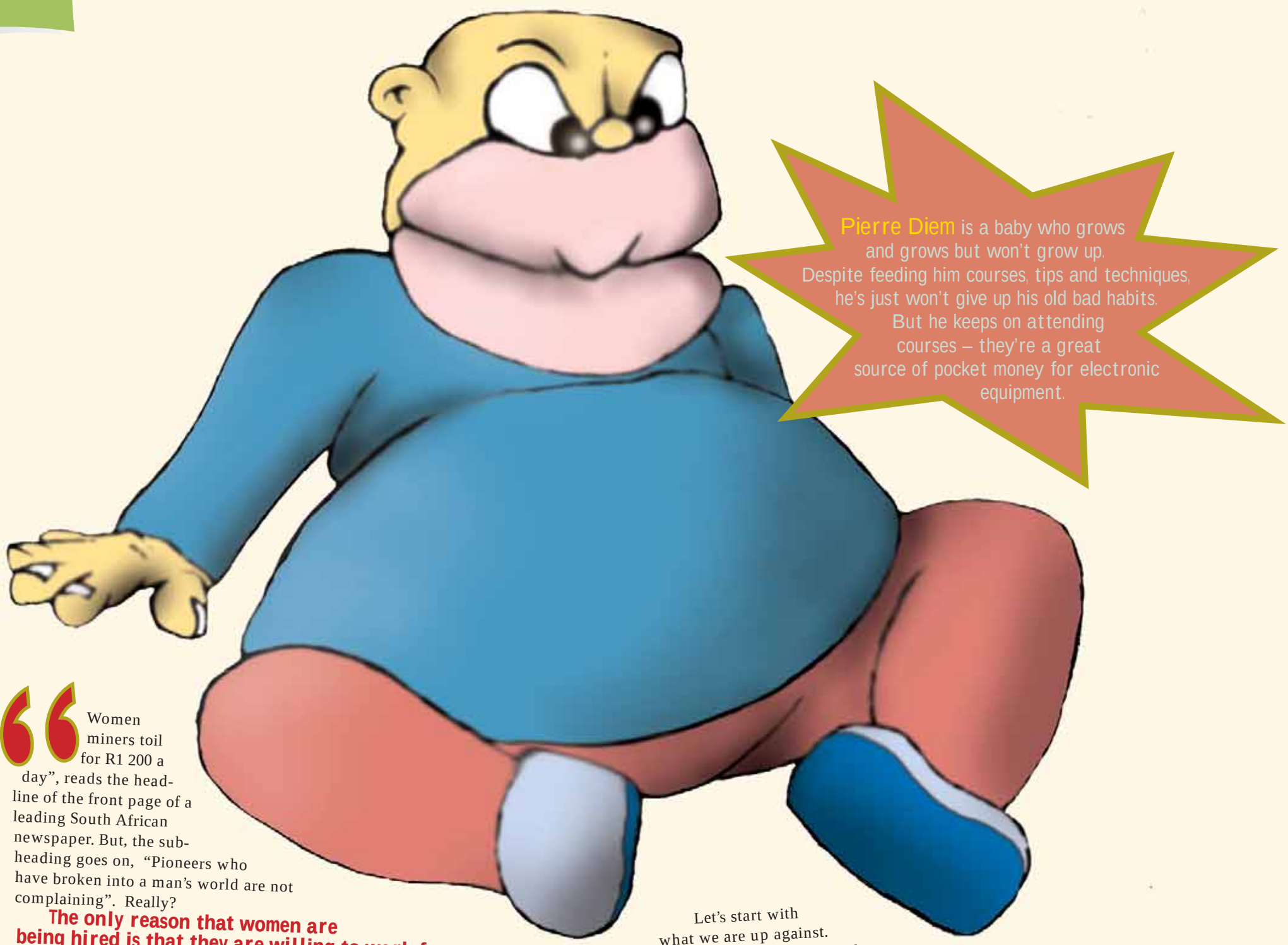
- Top-down management styles do not motivate staff
- News management: defining news within a developing democracy, and developing news policies
- Human resource management: affirmative action, mentoring and support structures
- Personal development: training and courses to enrich abilities

Recommendations

- There needs to be structured and improved interaction between the media industry and tertiary institutions.
- A well-regulated system of internships should be put in place.
- Trainers need training – working in media environments.
- Curricula need attention to close the gap between what is taught and what is expected in newsrooms (reporting, writing, accuracy, language, general knowledge, media law and ethics).
- Development of a new style of management – life skills, interpersonal and intercultural communication, this should be taught in tertiary institutions as well.
- A proper national accreditation system.
- Centres of excellence, co-ordination of who teaches what.
- Attention to training for community radio and newspapers.
- Mid-career training needs attention.
- Sub-editing is a key area needing intervention.
- The role of Mappp Seta, SAQA/ETA not well enough known and understood.

www.scribe.co.za

by Arrie de Beer and Elanie Steyn commissioned by Sanef



Pierre Diem is a baby who grows and grows but won't grow up. Despite feeding him courses, tips and techniques, he's just won't give up his old bad habits. But he keeps on attending courses – they're a great source of pocket money for electronic equipment.

"Women miners toil for R1 200 a day", reads the headline of the front page of a leading South African newspaper. But, the subheading goes on, "Pioneers who have broken into a man's world are not complaining". Really?

The only reason that women are being hired is that they are willing to work for lower wages than men. The story is told mainly from the perspective of the male employer and union official who see nothing wrong with violating minimum wage regulations. The one woman interviewed is identified by name, at her work place. The several bodies in South Africa set up to protect human rights are not consulted.

When 16 journalists from mainstream media attending a course on investigative journalism at the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) stopped to think about it, they agreed that the real story here is not about women happy to pick up any crumbs from the table but about **blatant sex discrimination** in the new South Africa – both a more accurate and more interesting angle. Yet without the gender blinders being lifted, none of them would have seen this; after all a star female reporter and all who make up the editorial cast of a leading newspaper had similarly missed the point.

Since the advent of the media, trainers have struggled to understand how to go about training in such a hands-on field, leaving aside how to undo the years of socialisation and prejudices that we bring to the business of news making. And that still leaves us reeling with how to measure whether it is really the training that makes a difference; to quote Rhodes University's Prof Guy Berger, how can we point with certainty and say: **"It's the training that did it!"**

After running some 39 training workshops in 12 Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries involving 600 media practitioners and trainers over the last two years, Gender Links is convinced that there is no shortcut to training in our quest to rid the media of its sexist baggage. Anecdotal evidence suggests that training can make a difference. But we are constantly finding new ways of making these interventions more effective, as well as new tools for measuring progress.

Let's start with what we are up against. Last September, Gender Links and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa) conducted the first-ever gender and media baseline study of the region. Involving 12 countries and over 25 000 news items spanning one month, the study is also the largest ever to have been conducted globally. Findings include the fact that:

- on average, women in the region constitute 17% of news sources (compared to 18% globally);
- women are not even heard in proportion to their strength in occupational categories. For example, although women in the region constitute 18% of members of parliament, they only constituted 8% of news sources in this category;
- women's voices are especially under-represented in the hard news categories of economics, politics, disaster and war and – of course – sport;
- the only news category in which women's voices predominated was that of gender equality; but this – one of the major social revolutions of our time – only constituted 2% of all the news items.

The issue is not just one of the under-representation of women, but the way they are portrayed. The study confirmed global findings that to the extent women are heard and seen in the media, they are invariably either victims of violence or fashion models; blamed for their fate and lacking in any attributes beyond their physical looks. Women are, in any case, much more likely to be seen than heard.

Not surprisingly, the only category in which women predominate as media practitioners is as news presenters. They are least well represented in the print media (22%). Other studies show that women in Southern Africa constitute less than 5% of media managers in the region.

No media manager is likely to deny these facts, even if they are invariably met with a myriad of excuses. Stepping back for a moment, the demise of apartheid and advent of multiparty democracy across the region over the last decade has led to an unshackling of the media and a new crusade around freedom of expression as well as the financial viability

Is it the training that did it?

by Colleen Lowe Morna

of the media. **In one breath, media managers will tell you that not having women's voices heard in proportion to their strength in the population is an insidious form of censorship, while justifying the male bias of the news and objectification of women as essential to the bottom line.**

The increasing sophistication of the media, especially technologically, is leading to greater store being placed on media training. But the only training for which the cash-strapped media industry is likely to put up even a portion of the resources, is for skills or technical-related training. Few of these courses seem able to integrate skills and knowledge (computer-aided research for example, is a key tool of investigative reporting) let alone tackle a subject as vast and cross-cutting as gender that runs far deeper than any knowledge or skills training because it requires us to challenge not just what we know, but who we are and how we behave.

Against this background, Gender Links has sought to identify key strategic entry points including:

- Pilot projects to mainstream gender into media training. This began with the IAJ project that involved building a gender component into all aspects of the in-service courses offered – from the beat-related training like human rights, race and ethnicity, sustainable development, etc to the skills-based training such as subediting and information technology. GL is currently involved in a similar project with the Polytechnic of Namibia, which offers entry-level training. This approach has the advantage that it reaches those who would scoff at the idea of coming to a gender and media course, yet who find that their eyes are opened to new possibilities in the middle of a course on say investigative reporting. Entry-level training has the huge advantage that it reaches young reporters before they are too set in their ways.
- Thematic training. Each year we pick a particular theme on gender and the media and work in partnership with training institutions around the region to run intensive training courses for media practitioners. These themes have included gender violence; gender, HIV/Aids and the media; and – coming next year, when there will be six elections in the region – gender and democracy. Through prior arrangement, mainstream media houses carry supplements and programmes produced as part of the training. Participants have to produce two pieces after the training and before they receive their certificates. The courses include a two-hour briefing with editors on course content. Training is followed by six weeks of online follow-up. Participants are encouraged to form or join the Southern African Gender and Media Network. This approach has several advantages. Co-facilitating with local media trainers is a means of on-the-job training. The training methodology is process and outcome-driven rather than event-driven. Taking different themes each year is a constant reminder that gender cuts across every topic and is a way of reinforcing training. The engagement with editors seeks to ensure a more responsive environment for the practitioners to return to. **And, despite the enormous difficulties that Internet connectivity still poses, we believe that this is a tool that we must harness to our advantage.**
- Developing training tools. In all our training, we develop, with other trainers, tools for ongoing use. The IAJ pilot project led to Gender in Media Training: a Southern African Tool Kit; the Polytechnic of Namibia is developing a manual on basic journalism in which gender is well integrated; and our thematic training has yielded manuals on covering gender violence, gender and HIV/Aids, etc. We are also developing tools in different functional areas of media, including gender and images, a video on how electronic news is constructed and (in the future) gender and subediting.
- Training of trainers. Gender Links is a member of the Southern African Media Trainers Network (Samtran). We have used this forum to disseminate our research and training materials, as well as conduct three training-of-trainer workshops in the belief that our best hope of a long term multiplier effect is to work in and through media training institutions.

Among our successes we count:

- The feedback from participants in training which suggests that gender training is a true eye-opener and improved quality of coverage in the articles that are submitted after training.
- New columns and programmes that have started as a direct result of the training. For example, in Mauritius a participant has started a weekly TV programme called Her portrait that tracks the lives of women who are challenging stereotypes, like a woman diver, ranger in a crocodile ranch, etc. In Zambia, a radio manager has started a "gender dialogue" every Sunday morning. Both of these examples are males.
- Feedback from trainers who are regularly using our training tools and are integrating gender into their courses, including many universities (such as Stellenbosch, Rhodes, the National University of Science and Technology in Zimbabwe, University of Swaziland, University of Botswana) that are integrating gender into media studies, or making links with their gender studies departments.
- Feedback from mainstream media houses that we have engaged with, for example, through developing supplements together, which suggests that the awareness raised has made a difference (for example, the Voice newspaper in Botswana).

Five years from now, Gender Links and Misa plan to repeat the baseline study and this will be a good empirical measure of whether our efforts are bearing fruit. In the meanwhile, our experiences are leading us into some exciting new approaches to training.

On 28 June 2003, Gender Links and a number of NGO partners made an input into the annual general meeting of the Southern African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) devoted (for the first time in Sanef's history) to gender and the media. This in itself is a measure of progress. It also yielded practical ideas on training. One of the difficulties we have experienced is getting busy journalists off the beat long enough for training, and the related problem of how to keep track of them thereafter. The editors suggested that trainers come into newsrooms and start at the stage of the diary meeting, helping to shape and critique ideas, content and the packaging of actual stories. This on-the-job training has much to commend it, especially when it has the backing of senior management as it **removes all ivory towers** and ensures transformation where we need it – in the newsroom.

Indeed, as one of our follow-up initiatives to the Gender Media Baseline Study, with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, we have started gender mainstreaming pilot projects with two media houses – the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation and Times of Zambia. These involve a thorough analysis of gender both in the institutional make-up of the organisation and in the editorial content; in-house workshops to devise gender policies; gender awareness training; implementation of the policies and evaluations of the outcome.

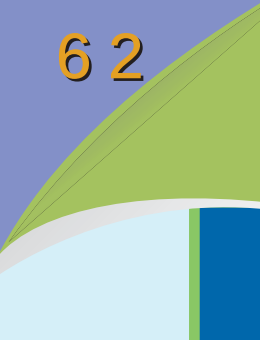
The comprehensive approach aims to ensure that gender is – to borrow the latest media phrase **– "embedded"** in every facet of media businesses. We believe this is ultimately the best way of ensuring transformation that is long term and not dependent on individuals, even though **champions** for the cause will always be necessary.

Colleen Lowe Morna is director of Gender Links, a Southern African NGO that promotes gender equality in and through the media. She is co-author of the Media Training Needs Assessment of the SADC region commissioned by the NSJ Trust with support from the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa (NiZA).

www.genderlinks.org.za

Basics first

by Steve Wrottesley



Over a quarter of a century ago, I arrived in Johannesburg as a drop-out engineering student to attempt to pursue a career as a journalist. On 27 January 1977 I walked into the South African Associated Newspapers building in Main Street to learn my trade – or profession, depending on who is talking.

Those early days are a blur in my mind but there are two people I remember.

One was Harland Bohler. He was head of the cadet school and, on the first day, he said: **"You will be jumped on for many things by your newseditor. But one thing he will not jump on you for is reading the newspaper while on the job"** (designated groups in management positions were not an imperative then).

The other was Lyn Menge (if your name is spelt wrong, Lyn, blame Mervyn Rees, Wessel De Kock and Archie Henderson). I don't recall her designation on the Rand Daily Mail's newsdesk but her stock comment was: "Stick to the basics".

It took me close to 25 years to cement in my own mind what those basics were. And that was only after reading Bob Giles' book, Newsroom Management: a Guide to Theory and Practice.

My distillation of his views has brought the basics down to accuracy, grammar, context and use of best source.

We will get nowhere in transforming journalism training and education unless we deal with those basics first. But, as with so many things, for any treatment to succeed, there needs to be an acceptance that the treatment is required.

In our attempt to attract the best applicants for internships and entry-level jobs we use multiple criteria for selection and one of these is a general knowledge test we have developed. Applicants also do a grammar test, a writing test and are interviewed. But the general knowledge test does go some way towards showing us whether they have what we require – an abiding interest in news. **And it shows them that they still have a lot to learn if they wish to become journalists.**

There is no fail or pass mark, merely averages and trends. The tests do not end on appointment. They are ongoing and at the time of writing, five have been completed by our five subediting learners and six interns – who have now completed their internships. Seven new interns have written two of the tests.

The first test was the same as that given to applicants seeking places on Stellenbosch University's post-graduate journalism course. The questions in the other four were drawn from topics dealt with in our titles over the previous month and included such elements as people in the news, countries in the news and acronyms.

The tests are linked to a request that the participants devote at least half an hour a day to reading the newspaper. In the case of the subeditors, there is an enforced reading period. With the interns, it was left to them to set aside the time.

It is my view that reading the paper goes a major way towards dealing with the training issues of accuracy, grammar, context and use of best source. Language has to improve if a person is reading (we have a great problem with the correct use of reported speech), an awareness of what is happening in the world must help with contextualisation and what better place to find sources than in the newspaper.

What the tests have shown is that there is a serious lack of basic knowledge among the trainees and that reading does help develop that knowledge.

In April, President Thabo Mbeki said to editors at the All Africa Editors' conference: "I believe that you should answer the question, honestly, whether you yourselves know Africa."

In May, the learners were given a map of Africa and asked to identify **10** Southern African countries and name their capitals. The sub-editing learners had an average of 92% correct, and the interns 47%. Among the incorrect answers were:

- Namibia identified as the Northern Cape and Botswana; and
- Zimbabwe identified as Angola, Gauteng and Namibia.

In June, after the meeting of **the G8 leaders,** the learners were asked to identify the G8 countries by marking them on a map. They were also asked to name their capitals. The subediting learners had an average of 96% correct, the outgoing interns had an average of 45% and the incoming interns had an average score of 35%.

Among the incorrect answers were:

- Russia identified as France
- Japan's capital identified as Beijing
- The US identified as Mexico, and
- France identified as Iraq

By identifying this grave lack of very basic general knowledge, it is hoped that the interns will confront the problem head on and deal with it.

The enforced reading of the newspaper has certainly helped the subediting learners. When they wrote the first general knowledge test in February, their average score was 26%. By June, this had risen to 79%. However the interns, who had not been forced to read the paper on a daily basis, had an average of 34% in February that rose to 48% in June.

There has been critique of the relevance of some of the topics in the test. Because of this, all applicants for internships were asked during their interviews **why their general knowledge was so bad** and what questions they would put in a test if they had a chance to set one.

As far as the geography element of the test was concerned, the applicants, almost to a person, said there were no maps in their classrooms and this was why they did not know where countries were situated. It is a problem we have to recognise and deal with.

One applicant for an internship said the information asked for in the test was not the sort of information "the man in the street would know". It had to be pointed out to her that she wanted to be a journalist, not a "man in the street".

And, when they were asked to give their five questions, these questions largely ended up being similar to those asked in the initial test.

Steve Wrottesley is the editorial chief of staff of Independent Newspapers Cape.
stevew@ctn.independent.co.za

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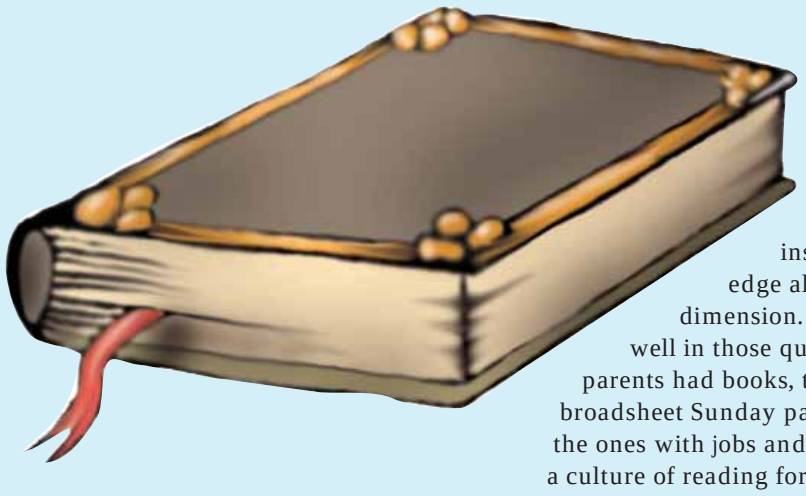
what basics?



Before the media industry plunges headlong into teaching "general knowledge", we'd do well to examine both the concept and its history as a recognised subject area. Anyone who schooled in the 1950s, 60s or 70s in an English-language institution, whether here or overseas, may well have experienced a class or activity dubbed "general knowledge" or "general studies".

The form this took ranged from quizzes, through planned series of lessons or educational films or radio programmes, to odd hours devoted to a teacher's or lecturer's hobby (or hobby-horse). Idealistically planned as a " broadening" or "balancing" activity in a narrowly-focused curriculum, "general studies" too often ended up as time that must be filled, **a burden to teachers and at best a diversion for students,** with a very tenuous relationship to any coherent educational approach. Even slowly-changing curricula like those of the City and Guilds certificates are now abandoning "general studies" in favour of what ought to be the more relevant "life skills".

In the secondary and tertiary sectors, teaching "general knowledge" simply didn't work: it was hard to discern its purpose and even if it had one it was even harder to discern whether it achieved it. That is one reason why it has fallen out of favour. It isn't, however, the only reason.

Over past years, the amount of "general" knowledge swilling around in the world and accessible through broadcast and electronic media has increased exponentially. It's a media truism that the average US Sunday paper today contains more information than the average citizen of the 16th Century world could have accumulated in a lifetime. And while that doesn't diminish the value of acquiring knowledge – knowledge is, after all, still power – it makes the potential benefit of a general knowledge class look even more comically puny.

What's more, the shape and boundaries of "general knowledge" are not definable by academic or logical means. The concept is ideological, often context-dependent and, at worst, the subject of an editor or researcher's whim. To take one example, as a cultural writer I'd personally support everyone knowing that Brenda Fassie's first band was called the Big Dudes (that was one of the questions in the Sanef Skills Audit). But, hey, that was a quarter of a century ago; pop music information is ephemeral and, frankly, what's the point of insisting that all reporters stuff that bit of information into their brains when most of them are never going to use it?

We should not trivialise the problem the Sanef survey uncovered. But nor should we be surprised that the products of an examination system like Matric, which prioritises narrow rote learning, have limited knowledge outside the parameters of **what the exam requires.** It will take more than a few general know-ledge classes or even certificates in general studies to counteract that. It will take what is actually happening – although far too slowly – the reform of secondary and then higher education.

When I was a school kid and again when I was a teacher in tertiary-level UK institutions, general knowledge also had a powerful class dimension. The kids who performed well in those quizzes were the ones whose parents had books, took them to the theatre, left broadsheet Sunday papers lying about the home; the ones with jobs and some disposable income. If a culture of reading for interest outside the classroom has not developed, the South African reasons why for the majority of our people should not be **hard to spy.**

But even if Matric were a better exam, rooted in a better system, if more than three-quarters of our population was functionally literate, if everyone had a job and money to spend on theatre tickets and books it would be wonderful, but it wouldn't solve the 21st Century general knowledge problem.

There are some solutions. The first is a decent HR, mentorship and discipline system in newsrooms. If reporters can't be bothered finding out how to spell the names of important role-players on their beat, discipline them. **If they still can't be bothered, send them warning letters and eventually fire them. Sorry, but if they want to take the salary, they must be prepared to do the work.** But don't forget the other side of that moral equation. Newsrooms have a labour-law duty to help staffers develop and acquire the knowledge they need. That involves mentorship and formal training on reporting, which will allow them to see what readers (and therefore they) need to know to make sense of events. For the press barons, it involves spending on training and development activities.

Former Mail&Guardian newseditor Rehana Rossouw used to run context quizzes for colleagues (senior as well as junior) on topics in the news. It wasn't only juniors who didn't know the answers. But the quizzes were part of a structure of research assignments and reading lists so that reporters did, gradually, build up context-relevant knowledge. It had the added advantage of making sure that nobody was allowed to forget the history from which today's South African news has sprung. And where it worked (which was not universally, because you can lead a horse to water), **it worked precisely because it was not "general" knowledge that was taught, but useful, relevant, news-linked knowledge.**

But to cope with today's knowledge environment, the real education needs to be not in how to work harder ("learn more facts") **but how to work smarter.**

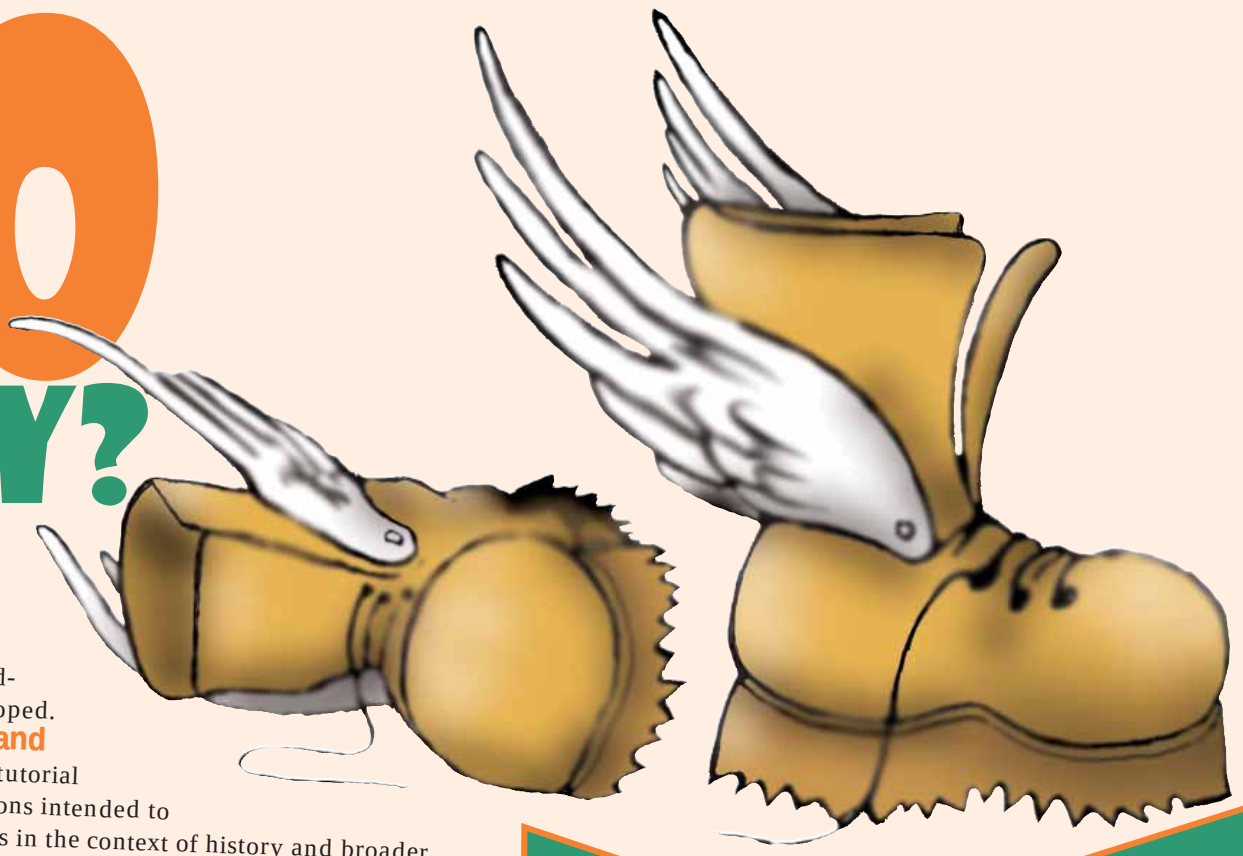
If reporters can identify the gaps in a story and know how to research to fill those gaps, it really doesn't matter that they don't have the name of the Big Dudes or the capital of Paraguay lined up in a dolorous queue of unemployed facts in their brain, waiting to be called for that tiny piece-job. Decent research skills and the motivation to use them are the modern way to solve the general knowledge problem.

There's a gap in my general knowledge here, because **I can't remember the name of the person who said:** Give a journalist a fact and you feed her for one story; teach her how to discover facts and you set up her career for life. But don't worry, I have an Internet link-up, and that name will be there somewhere…

Gwen Ansell has been an educator, writer and journalist in both the UK and Southern Africa since the early 1970s. sisgwen@iafrica.com

by Gwen Ansell

WHO ARE THEY?



The first term of first-year Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes this year included a section on the "Social history of the media". This involved thinking about the history of literacy, print and broadcast media in the social contexts in which they developed.

In order to **encourage a sense of society and history,** students were at one point given an informal tutorial exercise in the form of a questionnaire that asked questions intended to encourage them to locate their own experiences and lives in the context of history and broader society. It asked what they remember about events and people who (for those of us who set the questionnaire at least) are recent history – the fall of the **Berlin Wall,** the release from prison of **Nelson Mandela,** the 1991 **Gulf War,** the 19**94 election,** Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and PW Botha.

It posed questions related to their use of media and technology: when did they first use a computer? The Internet? Have they ever used a typewriter? Sent or received a telegram? Used a thesaurus? **Do they own a dictionary? An atlas?** Do they remember dialling telephones? Telephone party lines? Cassette tapes? Long-playing records? Floppy discs? When did they get their cellphones? Did they belong to libraries as children? What do they read?

The responses encouraged us to think about who our students are. We knew that our undergraduates are likely to be in their late teens or early 20s but **we hadn't entirely thought through the implications of our average first-year journalism student having been born in 1984.** They've never known a South Africa without television or ATM cards. They don't really remember apartheid. They were in pre-school when the Berlin Wall came down and in grade one when Mandela was released from prison. They vaguely remember the 1994 election and were too young to vote in 1999. They were 10 years old when cellphones first appeared in this country.

What do they remember? The Hansie Cronje trial. Princess Diana's death. Nkosi Johnson. Monica Lewinsky. Mad Cow Disease. Mark Shuttleworth's space trip. The 1999 Cricket World Cup. **Interestingly, a number mention Chris Hani's assassination in 1993.**

Some responses on PW Botha: "Studied him in high school history, don't actually remember him." "Was it his wife who was murdered?" "Key player in apartheid." "I don't know much about him." "Who is he?" "Internal Affairs Minister?" "Once a president of SA." "Was he the one called Pik?" "Don't know who he is." "One of Pieter-Dirk Uys' characters." "Racist." "He has a house near Wilderness." "I know he was big, bald and had affairs." **"Seem to remember him being part of the apartheid thing."** "Matric history." "Didn't he wag his finger a lot?" "I remember that my family opposed him." "Vaguely. I was young." "A man my mother called names." "He refused to go to the TRC." "An old Afrikaans guy." "On the old R1 coins."

And on Ronald Reagan: **"Watergate? Or was that someone else?"** "Vietnam in the 1970s." "Not at all." "I remember he was shot but not killed." "Has Alzheimer's Disease." "Sounds familiar." "Sorry, politics isn't my favourite subject." "Big cars." "No idea."

And Margaret Thatcher: "An old lady on TV." "The iron lady." "She looked like a man, sort of." "The first lady of Britain." "Big hair." "British something?" "An old lady with **a really bad hair-do."** "Looked like my gran." "Remember her from Adrian Mole." "She's in Austin Powers."

These responses are not, of course, an adequate reflection of who our students are or what they do and do not know. Also, the memories of a person born in 1984 about the release of the Rivonia trialists, for example, are going to be as vague as those of someone born in 1958 of the actual trial.

Older people have always been concerned about what "young people today" do not know but the impressions we gained from this exercise do relate to some of Steve Wrottesley's concerns about the **inadequate "general knowledge" of trainee journalists.** It is clear that aspirant journalists need a grounding in fields such as history, sociology, economics and literature. The few students who were able to make notes of some substance on our (arguably arbitrary) questions relating to late 20th Century events and people, had school history as their source. Only three students (out of more than 200) **referred to their reading of books** other than school textbooks as a source of knowledge.

This is where debates about the value of reading more than prescribed textbooks become relevant. Jonathan Franzen, in his essay The Reader in Exile, considers the limitations of a generation who have been socialised by electronic media and are **"estranged from spoken and written language".**

It appears that most of our first-year students were introduced to computers and the Internet at primary school. Almost all have cellular phones. Less than half belonged to libraries as children. Some theorists, such as Nicholas Negroponte, who is the director of the Media Lab at MIT, have suggested that **we are too concerned about the demise of reading.** In Being Digital, a collection of his monthly columns in Wired, he says that we now live in a world in which young people can compete in a space where "the pursuit of intellectual achievement will not be tilted so much in favour of the bookworm".

However, while wary of elitism and over-generalisations about "today's young people", I remain persuaded that **literature is a source of knowledge, insight, self-consciousness and an ability to interpret the past and the present.** And the question from the professor to the perplexed student in JM Coetzee's novel Disgrace remains important: "Do you have any literary passions?"

Carol Christie teaches media studies in the Journalism and Media Studies Department at Rhodes. c.l.christie@ru.ac.za

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by Carol Christie

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General knowledge

1 What, according to Greek mythology, is Nike the Goddess of?
a) Victory
b) Lightness
c) Power
d) Fleet-footedness

2 Which of the following is true of all animals?
a) They eat other living things
b) They are less intelligent than humans
c) They are mobile
d) All of the above

3 Which of the following is most closely related evolutionarily to the primitive "living fossil" fish known as the coelacanth?
a) Hagfish
b) Shark
c) Tuna
d) You
e) Treefrogs

4 If your geographical position was 0° latitude, 0° longitude, where in the world would you be?
a) At the Greenwich Observatory in England
b) In the Atlantic Ocean
c) In the West African country of Ghana
d) At the centre of the Earth

5 A "draconian" law is one for which the penalty is excessively severe. The word "draconian" comes from:
a) Drac, a medieval Romanian prince who tyrannised his people
b) A French phrase, "de racon", meaning "to be reckoned with"
c) Draco, an Athenian who wanted to punish even minor crimes with death
d) For Draco, the wicked boy in Harry Potter

Economic affairs

1 What are the kina, the kuna, the kwacha and the kyat?
a) Indicators on the FTSE
b) Levels of voodoo priesthood
c) African economic scales
d) Units of currency

2 What is meant by the term frictional unemployment?

3 What is capitalism?

4 What does the Latin term *ceteris paribus* mean?
a) A pot of gold
b) Other things being equal
c) All's fair in love and war
d) Home is where the heart is

5 What is deregulation?

Politics

1 Which country is the oldest surviving republic in the world?

History

1 Which African country was the first to gain independence?

2 Who is Bessie Head?

3 What is Goree Island famous for?

4 Where is Timbuktu?
a) An imaginary place far away
b) Senegal
c) Mali
d) Gabon
e) India

5 Who is known as the "Mother of the Nation"?
a) PJ Powers
b) Miriam Makeba
c) Winnie Mandela
d) Sarah Baartman
e) Brenda Fassie

Philosophy

1 Who was Frantz Fanon?

2 What does Ubuntu mean?

3 African first, or journalist first?

4 What is Uhuru?

5 Who wrote The Famished Road?
a) Antjie Krog
b) Salman Rushdie
c) Ben Okri
d) Bessie Head

Economic affairs

1 What, according to Greek mythology, is Nike the Goddess of?
a) Victory
b) Lightness
c) Power
d) Fleet-footedness

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3 What is democracy?

4 What does Nepad stand for?

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2 Many countries have eccentric leaders, but the president of North Korea is probably the strangest of all. Oddly enough, he:
a) Is dead
b) Believes he is a parrot
c) Owns a herd of specially-bred pygmy elephants
d) Is a chimpanzee

3 What is democracy?

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Cheat sheet

General Knowledge
1. a) Victory

2. a) They eat other living things
Not all animals are mobile: sponges and a few other creatures stay rooted to one spot for their entire adult lives. Most animals are less intelligent than humans, but there is one exception: humans themselves. All known animals do subsist on some form of life – plants, animals, fungi, or micro-organisms.

3. d) You
Scientists lump together the coelacanth with lungfish, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and mammals (including yourself and all other humans) into the class "Sarcopterygii". This unlikely group exists because it is believed that all these diverse creatures are descended from a single species which lived hundreds of millions of years ago, while tuna, hagfish, and sharks come from different evolutionary lines.

4. b) In the Atlantic Ocean
If your latitude is 0°, you must be somewhere on the equator, the line separating the northern and southern hemispheres. If your longitude is 0°, you are standing on a line that connects the North and South Poles, and passes through Greenwich, England. The two lines meet in the Atlantic Ocean, a few hundred kilometres south of Ghana and west of Gabon.

5. c) Draco, an Athenian who wanted to punish even minor crimes with death. Draco created his infamous legal code in 621 BC. It was repealed less than 30 years later by Solon, who retained the death penalty only for murder.

Economic Affairs
1. d) Units of currency
The kina is the currency of Papua New Guinea; the kuna that of Croatia; the kwacha that of Malawi and Zambia; and the kyat that of Burma.

2. Unemployment caused by the loss of jobs due to technological change, the entry of new participants into a labour market, or other "normal" labour market adjustments.

3. A system of economic organisation characterised by the private ownership of the means of production, private property, and largely market-based control over the production and distribution of goods and services.

4. b) Other things being equal

5. Reducing or eliminating government intervention to control particular market activities, especially of private firms. For example, removing price controls or monopoly privileges.

Politics
1. San Marino, said by local lore to have been founded, as a republic, in the fourth century AD, and while this has not been proven, it is certainly very ancient. It is the last of the old Italian independent states, having remained unconquered when Garibaldi unified the rest. The nation today is a minuscule enclave completely surrounded by Italy, but its inhabitants retain a strong national pride.

2. a) Is dead
North Korea is still officially led by Kim Il-Sung, its founder, who died in 1994. A few years after his death, he was proclaimed the nation's "eternal president" by his son, Kim Jong-Il, who effectively rules the nation. The younger Kim is widely believed by international observers to be mentally ill.

3. Democracy is government by the people in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system.

4. New Partnership for Africa's Development

5. Colonialism is a policy/system by which a nation maintains or extends its control over foreign countries, so creating dependencies.

Philosophy
1. Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist and revolutionary writer whose writings had profound influence on the radical movements in the 1960s – Fanon analysed the impact of colonialism and its deforming effects. His first major work, Black Skin, White Masks (1952), had a major influence on civil rights, anti-colonial, and black consciousness movements around the world.

2. Ubuntu is a Zulu word meaning "a person is a person through other persons". It articulates a worldview, or vision of humanity. Ubuntu regards humanity as an integral part of eco-systems that lead to a communal responsibility to sustain life. Human value is based on social, cultural and spiritual criteria. Natural resources are shared on principle of equity among and between generations. "The principle of caring for each other's well-being... and a spirit of mutual support... Each individual's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through a recognition of the individual's humanity. Ubuntu means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being" (Government Gazette, 02/02/1996, No.16943, p.18, paragraph 18).

3. See note at end.

4. Uhuru is a Swahili word meaning freedom.

5. c) Ben Okri. The Famished Road was awarded the Booker Prize in 1991.

History
1. Ghana is the first black African country to gain independence from colonialism. Under British colonial rule Ghana was known as the Gold Coast.

2. Prominent South African writer, born in 1937. Some of her major novels include When Rain Clouds Gather, Maru and A Question of Power. She wrote on issues of discrimination, refugees, racialism, African history, poverty, and interpersonal relationships.

3. Goree Island is a 45-acre land mass located off the coast of Senegal. It was developed as a centre of the European slave trade. An estimated 20 million Africans passed through the island between the mid-1500s and the mid-1800s. The island is now considered a memorial to the black diaspora, a former slave house there is now a museum.

4. c) Mali (also spelled Tombouctou)

5. c) Winnie Mandela

Scoring
For every correct answer, score 5 points.
For every incorrect answer, score 2.
You score –5 for any of these as answers:
General Knowledge 1d, 2b, 3e, 4d, 5d
Economic Affairs 1b, 4a, 4c, 4d
Politics 2a
Philosophy 5a
History 4a, 4e, 5a, 5e

Note: Critical question: Philosophy 3. If you did not smile at this one, you score 0 and will shortly be asked to take a long holiday, no expenses paid.

The scoring system has been set, as appropriate, on a top-down triangular system. The largest margin has been left for the sheep.

What does this all mean?
125 – SUPERJOURNO!
110-125 – Wow! Superjourno in training. Side-kick level
80-110 – Get a trainer
1-80 – You may soon be asked to make space for someone else
0 – See note at critical question.

Disclaimer:
This is not an easy test. Do not feel badly if you feel your life experience, race group, ethnic minority, gender quota, sexual identity or whatever framework you are using, was not somehow represented. It is not your fault. You are a sufferer of post-colonial stress disorder. A cure has not been found. RJR hereby absolves itself of any possibility of paying legal and/or therapy bills.

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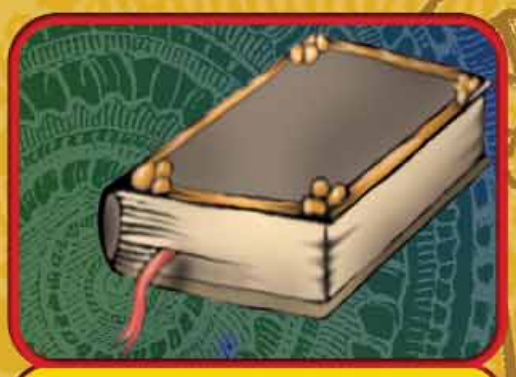

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