

2010

Riding on the cup: dreams, ambitions, long-term benefits and a massive opportunity for African journalists

Dissecting the global financial crisis

The latest in digital developments

Journalists on journalism

Books and writing

**THE
FINAL**

**THE CUP OF DREAMS
DREAM**

**KAIZER
CHIEFS**

**ABSA
CUP
OF DREAMS**

**ORLANDO
PIRATES**

**RHODES 29 JOURNALISM
Review**

RHODES JOURNALISM Review

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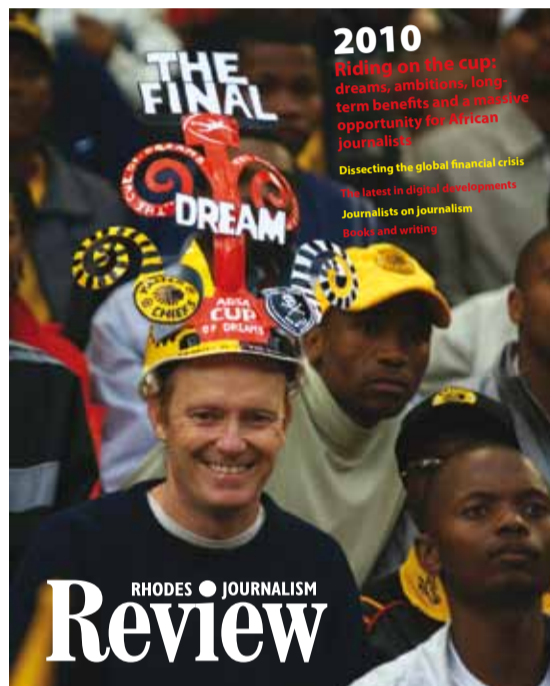
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THE BOTH-AND EDITION

I was driving down the N2 from Cape Town towards the airport recently and scanning the turn-offs for Vanguard Drive, when suddenly I noticed among the shacks that line the road some really interesting buildings. These were not the pale pink matchboxes that periodically spring up in rows alongside the derelict housing that millions of South Africans call home. They were multi-levelled, had large windows and looked like an architect might have had something to do with them. I was heartened at the sight of housing – at last – with humanity in mind. But as I reread the 2010 pieces in this edition, I'm reminded by Jane Duncan in particular ("Whose World Cup?" page 23) that prettifying the ghastly spaces in our world cup cities that will be visible to those international tourists is high on the agenda for our government. But then, I reason, at least someone will benefit from living along the noisy and congested airport route!



Africa Media Online's ambitious 2010 training programme will involve 100 journalists from all over the continent and a smaller team of 18 who will actually cover the cup.

Cover photo by Rajesh Jantilal/Africa Media Online.

other is the rapidly unfolding global financial crisis and yet another the dramatic shifts in digital and mobile technologies which are making audiences into producers and changing the boundaries of journalism and its long-accepted usefulness in the world.

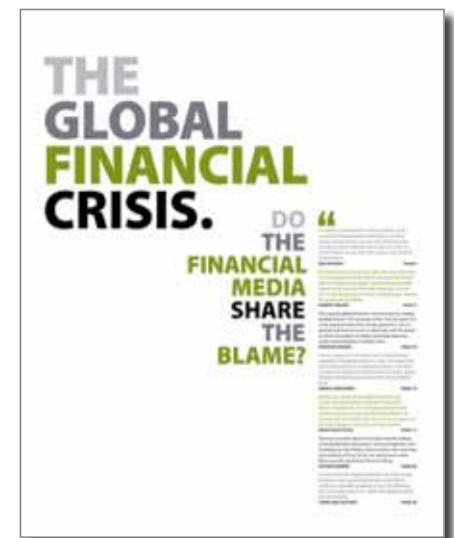
Recently the journal *Journalism* (2009 10(3)) hosted a debate about the future of the profession. Adrienne Russell from the University of Denver, contributed this thought: "The future of journalism is here. It is characterised by increasingly distributed profits and distributed reporting. It is more opinionated and more fair, more varied in form and content, more local and more national, more global and more personal. It is more horizontal and collaborative and open ended. The future of journalism, like news, is being forged by the boom in innovation and expansion we are living through today" (367).

I find her "both-and" mindset very interesting. We are often tempted to conclude some development (the cup, the economic crunch, the digital upset for institutional media power) is all bad and therefore to be contained. But we've found contributors for this edition of *Review* who see through the anxiety of just what the future will bring and who are cleverly crafting the spaces in which opportunities grow. There are a host of watchful and hopeful voices in this edition – see pages 29 to 50 for a bumper batch of stories on how digital is reshaping journalism and how journalists are responding; and see pages 7 to 22 for some very sharp analysis of the financial crisis and the role journalists played and should be playing.

And in this edition we also focus on investigative journalism (56-57), science journalism (58-59), war journalism (66-67) and ask just what China is doing in Africa (52-53).

Finally we wrap it up with books you really should know about, and some thoughts from journalists who've become authors and how they made the transition.

Anthea Garman, Editor



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Seen from soccer fields in Greenpoint, construction cranes rise above the site of the new Greenpoint Stadium in Cape Town. The all-weather stadium is designed to seat 70 000 people. It is one of 10 that will be used in the 2010 Fifa World Cup.

Photo by David Larsen/Africa Media Online

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"The true development value of mega-events has become a sore issue in many host countries. The crowding in of investments around stadiums can lead to the crowding out of investments in more distant areas. Jobs that are created may be temporary, casual and low-paid."

"Whose world cup?" Page 23

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WORLD JOURNALISM CONFERENCE COMES TO AFRICA



By Erik Hersman

Alfred Sirleaf is an analog blogger. He runs the “Daily News”, a news outlet by the side of a major road in the middle of Monrovia. He started it a number of years ago, stating that he wanted to get news into the hands of those who couldn’t afford newspapers, in the language that they could understand.

Sirleaf serves as a reminder that simple is often better, just because it works. The lack of electricity never throws him off. The lack of funding means he’s creative in unusual ways; he recruits people from around the city and country to report news to him. He uses his cellphone as the major point of connection between him and the 10 000 (he says) that read his blackboard daily.

Not all Liberians who read his news are literate, so he makes use of symbols. Whether it’s a UN or military helmet, a



THE BLACKBOARD BLOGGER

poster of a soccer player or a bottle of coloured water to denote gas prices, he is determined to get the message out in any way that he can.

Advertising works here too. It’s \$5 to be on the bottom level, \$10 to be on the sideboard and \$25 on the main section.

He doesn’t get a lot of advertising, but he manages to scrape by.

His plans for the future include decentralising his work by opening up identical locations in other parts of Monrovia, and in a few of the larger cities around the country.



The School of Journalism and Media Studies (JMS) at Rhodes University in South Africa will host the 2nd World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC 2) in 2010 from 5 to 7 July.

For international journalism educators

this is a chance to take forward the momentum of WJEC 1 Singapore 2007, and to network with African colleagues. For African and South African journalism educators this is an opportunity to network on a pan-African scale, and to gain from – and contribute to – global journalism education discussions.

For all participants, the conference will be a time to: network with the world’s biggest annual gathering of African journalists (at the parallel Highway Africa conference), and give close-range attention to global issues (from finance to football) relevant to journalism education worldwide. Alongside the second WJEC are three Africa-based events:

- The Fifa matches in nearby Port Elizabeth. Grahamstown itself will have spectator parks.
- The National Arts Festival, which showcases a full range of cultural activity and entertainment. Participants could arrive a day or two earlier to absorb some of this experience (see www.nafest.co.za/).
- The Highway Africa conference, celebrating its 14th year in 2010, and drawing hundreds of working journalists from more than 40 of Africa’s 54 countries (see www.highwayafrica.com).

The 2nd WJEC is supported by Unesco, the World Association of Newspapers and the World Editors Forum.

The conference will offer opportunities to present peer-reviewed research papers on journalism education issues. There will be joint sessions with Highway Africa, master classes in new media technologies, and debates and exhibitions.

The first-ever global gathering of journalism educators took place in Singapore in July 2007. WJEC 1 was the first comprehensive international attempt to compare a vast range of different national experiences, and to find consensus on common principles.

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Guy Berger g.berger@ru.ac.za

WJEC: <http://wjec.ou.edu/congress.html>.

AN EDITOR’S WORST NIGHTMARE

By Brett Lock

Well, it must be a magazine editor’s worst nightmare... The latest issue of Q magazine dropped through my door today. It had a full page front cover of Michael Jackson. Well, at first I didn’t give it a second glance because Jackson’s picture has been everywhere. But then it occurred to me that it was impossible that the magazine could have been printed and posted so quickly. Then the horrible truth dawned on me as I ripped open the plastic cover ...

The cover story is billed as “Michael Jackson Unmasked”.

On the masthead page, the editorial declares in large type: “It’s the month of Jacko”. Well, I suppose he wasn’t wrong. Indeed, Editor Paul Rees peers into his crystal ball and editorialises thus:

“At the time of going to press, the self-styled king of pop was due to play the first shows of his proposed 50-night stand at London’s O2 arena within a matter of days. But, as Q has learned in the process of putting this issue together, there are no certainties in Michael Jackson’s world – besides the one that suggests that anything that can go madly, will go madly.”

This is the prelude to a 16-page full colour extravaganza on Michael Jackson billed as “The tale of the biggest comeback in history!”

“On 13 July 2009 Michael Jackson is set to play the first of 50 dates at London’s O2 Arena. It is the most ambitious comeback in the history of popular music, but several questions still hang in the air. Will he turn up? Will he sing more than a few lines? Can Michael Jackson really survive 50 shows or will his body and mind, both seemingly so fragile, disintegrate under the pressure of it all?”

And then the article goes on to talk about the man “gambling his reputation on Jackson turning up for the shows”. Ouch!

As a footnote, the writing on the magazine spine says:



“Michael Jackson | The Enemy | The Dead Weather | Spinal Tap | The Horrors | Dead Rock Stars”

Alas, the “dead rock stars” story has a CSI-style forensic investigator re-examining famous rock star deaths, including Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Buckley and Bob Marley. It couldn’t be more ghoulish following the 16-page Jackson extravaganza.

Oh, and it’s dated August 2009. So now bizarrely, Michael Jackson must be the first rock star to have a front page story in a music paper of record announcing a new concert series dated a month after his death.



→ **CEJA** → **1 + 1**

The goal of the Centre for Economics Journalism in Africa (CEJA) is simple:

To bring about continuous improvement of the media coverage of economics, business and development in Africa.

The centre hopes to achieve this through:

- . research,
- . education and training, and
- . engagement with media, business, government and society.

The centre bases all its actions on the vision of an inclusive journalism that aims to support the sustainable economic development of the continent within the context of democratic principles.

Research into the financial news media underpins our teaching and engagement with a range of stakeholders.

The centre's teaching focuses mainly on working journalists, and running short courses for organisations is an important part of what we do.

Topping the list of our educational initiatives, however, is the creation of a Post-Graduate Diploma in Economics Journalism.

CEJA also administers donor-funded bursaries for post-graduate study.

Visit our website: www.ceja.co.za to learn more about us.

THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS.

DO THE FINANCIAL MEDIA SHARE THE BLAME?



Journalists, particularly financial journalists, stand accused of helping bubbles develop by not being critical enough of their sources, and of not knowing enough to ask the right questions. But they were no more to blame for the crisis than anyone else involved in the markets.

REG RUMNEY

PAGE 8

The financial press has always reflected and interpreted not mass opinion but the values and views of a narrow elite, including businessmen, economists and political agents. In this way, the financial media play a crucial role in spreading economic ideas and ideologies, setting the parameters of debate.

ROBERT BRAND

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The ongoing global financial crisis has become a highly mediated event. The coverage of the crisis has given rise to the question about how media represents crises in general and financial crises in particular, and the extent to which the pattern of media ownership influences media representations of global crises.

FACKSON BANDA

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One can argue that the mainstream media has been complicit in the global economic crisis. The media have been cheerleaders for unregulated finance. They have cheered and supported inflating financial assets market bubbles and have been shocked when those bubbles burst.

SEERAJ MOHAMED

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Blaming the media for the global financial crisis is rather like blaming the iceberg for sinking the Titanic. It ignores the role of Captain Edward Smith and the decisions he took ahead of the collision, the management of the Whitestar line and the arrogance of the ship's designers who decreed it unsinkable.

BRUCE WHITFIELD

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There are certainly those who believe that the failings of the global financial systems were accompanied, even facilitated, by the failings of those tasked with reporting and analysing this sector for our mainstream media. Where was the watchdog? They are asking.

ANTON HARBUR

PAGE 20

In South Africa the debate about the role of the media has been muted, partly because the South African media are, generally speaking, far less self-reflecting and critical than America's, where the debate has been the most heated.

CAROLINE SOUTHEY

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CAUGHT IN A BLAMESTORM

Brands need careful analysis, but the *Economist* brand clearly rests on its reputation not only for a stylish and witty explanation of topical

by Reg Rumney

The outpouring of negativity towards financial journalists has been surprising, symbolised by TV satirist Jon Stewart's excoriation of CNBC financial commentator Jim Cramer on the *Daily Show*.

Journalists were no more to blame for the crisis than anyone else involved in the markets. In the subsequent "blamestorm", however, fingers have also been pointed at economists, analysts, bankers, quants, credit rating agencies, regulators, governments, and Alan Greenspan, to name a few.

The bubble credibility of economics itself has been somewhat deflated.

Yet journalists, particularly financial journalists, stand accused of helping bubbles develop by not being critical enough of their sources, and of not knowing enough to ask the right questions.

My journalist friends are prickly about negative assessments. As a former business journalist, I understand this. When you are in the trenches you tend to resent anyone pointing out you might not be following strict military procedure in hand-to-hand combat.

Yet surely criticism should prompt some self-examination? Perhaps popular dissatisfaction points to some deeper malaise. Could that discontent give us a clue about why audiences are deserting traditional news outlets in the developed world?

The unfolding of the global credit crisis and attendant recession has been accompanied in the West by job losses in the industry as newspapers close or shrink, and TV broadcasting may also be vulnerable.

So while journalists cannot be held entirely or even substantially responsible for the crisis, it should serve to show up weaknesses in the profession.

The sage of Omaha, Warren Buffett, once remarked – albeit in relation to business risk: "It's only when the tide goes out that you learn who's been swimming naked."

There is some evidence in the developed world that traditional news outlets are losing audience because of the disruptive technology of the internet, offering free content.

But why have newspapers, magazines and broadcasters not better armoured themselves through their brands?

A clue lies, for instance, in the relative success of the *Economist* magazine, which is thriving where other global news magazines fail, despite the explosion of digital media. Michael Hirschorn, writing in the *Atlantic*, in a sometimes sarcastic evaluation of the *Economist*, notes:

"True, the *Economist* virtually never gets scoops, and the information it does provide is available elsewhere... if you care to spend 20 hours Googling. But now that information is infinitely replicable and pervasive, original reporting will never again receive its due. The real value of the *Economist* lies in its smart analysis of everything it deems worth knowing – and smart packaging, which may be the last truly unique attribute in the digital age."

events. The *Economist* is perceived to add significant value with its globe-trotting reporting.

Surely this is what is missing from financial journalism? Reporters cannot be expected to be experts. Experts, in any case, write for other experts. And there is a point in doing a beat where, I can attest from experience, one passes over a line from simply reporting to pontificating.

Yet journalists can be experts in journalism. And they can have expertise in certain areas. Those who had educated themselves in the purpose of journalism might not be seduced into being so uncritical.

Journalists who had some deeper understanding of finance might have been better able to sniff out clues to the impending disaster.

Andrew Palmer, a US correspondent for the *Economist* put it succinctly on the *Listening Post*, a programme on the Al Jazeera channel: "If the media did anything wrong and it's a fault that lies with regulators, with bankers, with investors themselves, it is in not being sceptical enough during the boom, so at the time when these risks were building, banks were writing cheap credit, when we were all getting drunk on debt, no one was asking really difficult questions about the dangers that that posed."

At the least journalists could have exposed some of the crooks swimming naked before the tide went out.

It's not that few journalists had ever heard of CDOs and CDSs, it is that too few took on the obvious excesses of the increasingly financialised economy, or probed in ways that might begin to puncture the bubble mentality of the firms and people doing so well for so long.

In South Africa, we take our cues from overseas. If overseas news media believe glorifying chief executives, or anodyne chatter about where the market is headed, or stock-picking, is financial journalism, why shouldn't we?

The global credit crisis underlines then why we should have journalism education, and why we should have such education specifically designed for business journalists.

The Centre for Economics Journalism in Africa (CEJA) was set up for that very purpose, before the crisis broke, but elements of the crisis vindicate the decision of Rhodes University's School of Journalism and Media Studies to initiate the process of creating it.

Importantly, CEJA is located within a university, and its activities are designed to create effective and thoughtful business journalists, not merely praise-singers of industry, or regurgitators of indices and financial jargon. CEJA runs intensive short courses in various business journalism subject areas, but more importantly it has created a post-graduate diploma in economics journalism, the aim of which is to educate working journalists who do not have a financial or commercial education or business journalism experience to become business journalists.

If the crisis has underlined one thing it is that journalists had better equip themselves to better understand the complexities of the 21st century as well as age-old human fallibility. CEJA hopes to contribute to that education.

THE LESSON THAT JOURNALISTS, ESPECIALLY BUSINESS JOURNALISTS, CAN TAKE AWAY FROM THE CREDIT CRISIS IS THAT THEY HAVE TO UP THEIR GAME

THE RAPID UNRAVELLING

A timeline of how what seemed to be a very clever scheme in the US to provide housing for those who really couldn't afford credit, became a gathering storm that brought down banks across the world, provoked governments into unprecedented attempts to bail out major industries, dented trade, affected employment rates and decimated confidence in the global financial system.

2004 – 2006

Between 2004 and 2006 US interest rates rose from 1% to 5.35%, triggering a slowdown in the US housing market. Homeowners, many of whom could only barely afford their mortgage payments when interest rates were low, began to default on their mortgages. Default rates on sub-prime loans – high risk loans to clients with poor or no credit histories – rose to record levels. The impact of these defaults were felt across the financial system as many of the mortgages had been bundled up and sold on to banks and investors.

April 2007

New Century Financial, which specialises in sub-prime mortgages, files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection and cuts half of its workforce. As it sells on many of its debts to other banks, the collapse in the sub-prime market begins to have an impact at banks around the world.



July 2007



Investment bank Bear Stearns tells investors they will get little, if any, of the money invested in two of its hedge funds after rival banks refuse to help it bail them out. Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke follows the news with a warning that the US sub-prime crisis could cost up to \$100bn (£50bn).

August 2007

9 August 2007
Investment bank BNP Paribas tells investors they will not be able to take money out of two of its funds because it cannot value the assets in them, owing to a "complete evaporation of liquidity" in the market. It is the clearest sign yet that banks are refusing to do business with each other. The European Central Bank pumps €95bn (£63bn) into the banking market to try to improve liquidity. It adds a further €108.7bn over the next few days. The US Federal Reserve, the Bank of Canada and the Bank of

What is the role of the financial media in society? Are they simply providers of information for the business and investment sectors, or do they also have a broader political role? Answering these questions requires a historical approach.

Journalism, scholar James Carey has argued, was “invented” in the 19th century in response to “a particularly modern hunger for experience – for the new rather than the old, the surprising and original rather than the unexpected and unpredictable, the novel and original rather than the reproduction of the past” (2007: 6). Most in need of this information was the emerging class of merchants, bankers and traders, whose fortunes were tied to conditions in the markets and political developments. The earliest newspapers were therefore purveyors of business intelligence; or, it could be argued, business newspapers.

This was certainly true of the earliest South African newspapers. The *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser*, established in 1800 and printed on a government-owned press under strict control, published the kind of information the port city’s merchants and agricultural producers needed to make business decisions. The first non-government newspaper, the *South African Commercial Advertiser*, edited by Thomas Pringle and John Fairbairn, initially also concentrated on “topics... particularly such as are interesting to the commercial and agricultural parts of the community”.

The South African press subsequently became more focused on general and political news aimed at mass audiences. Nevertheless, the ties between South Africa’s English-language press and mining capital remained. In the late 19th and early 20th century, Bozzoli (1981) argues, newspapers aligned with mining capital, such as the *South African Mining Journal*, not only reflected the views and ideas of the audience, but created and articulated the ideology underpinning the development of mining capital. The major 20th century newspapers such as the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Star* carried business sections that focused mainly on covering the burgeoning and sophisticated mining industry. The business and finance pages of the country’s largest Sunday newspaper, the *Sunday Times*, retained the title *Mining Page* as late as 1966.

The *Financial Mail*, South Africa’s first free-standing financial newspaper, was launched by South African Associated Newspapers in 1959, to be followed in the ensuing decade by a spate of new titles including *Business Times*, the *Financial Gazette* and *Finance Week*. *Business Times*, the brainchild of Stephen Mulholland, who became its first editor, rapidly became the *Sunday Times*’s most profitable section and, with the *Financial Times*, came to define business and financial journalism in South Africa.

The two newspapers ran a mix of “current affairs”, company and industry news with a focus, at least initially, on the mining industry, and economic news. Both avowedly steered clear of political news, except insofar as this, in their view, affected the economy or business.

Since 1980, there has been almost explosive growth in the volume of financial news available to consumers in South Africa, as in other parts of the world.

In South Africa, this expansion has seen the establish-

SOUTH AFRICA’S FINANCIAL PRESS AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS

ROBERT BRAND TAKES AN HISTORICAL APPROACH TO SHOW THAT THE FINANCIAL PRESS HAS ALWAYS REFLECTED AND INTERPRETED NOT MASS OPINION BUT THE VALUES AND VIEWS OF A NARROW ELITE, INCLUDING BUSINESSMEN, ECONOMISTS AND POLITICAL AGENTS. IN THIS WAY, THE FINANCIAL MEDIA PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN SPREADING ECONOMIC IDEAS AND IDEOLOGIES, SETTING THE PARAMETERS OF DEBATE

ment of new print media titles – including a business daily, *Business Day*, launched in 1985 by Times Media Ltd – radio and television broadcasts and online media.

In addition, mass circulation newspapers have strengthened their business coverage, and economics and financial news has become increasingly central to the news agenda.

Business journalism has also developed as a distinct genre, with its own narrative conventions, unwritten rules and practices.

Just as the privately owned news media are relied on to communicate information between government, politicians and the public, so the financial media are relied upon to disseminate information between corporations, market participants and policy makers.

The financial media are a vital cog in the market mechanism; the price system and market economy cannot function without an information network. As the early newspapers were about selling information to businessmen, the development of the financial press was a vital stage in the construction of the communications network that underlies the price system.

In South Africa, the financial press has throughout its history been sponsored and subsidised by the markets and corporations it covers. Financial news organisations draw their advertising from the corporate world. One factor that has contributed more than any other to the financial viability of the financial press was a stock exchange regulation compelling listed companies to publish any company report or notice in a newspaper. The majority of print advertising in the financial press is drawn from this source.

Moreover, until the mid-1990s the financial press was owned, via subsidiaries, by Anglo American Corporation, the country’s largest mining conglomerate, and this connection was evident both in the management and editorial policy of the newspapers.

Newspaper companies shared directors with mining groups, and their content reflected the interests of the industry. An editor of the *Cape Argus*, HL Smit, commented: “It has been the policy of the daily press... that *ipso facto* whatever is best for the gold mines is best for South Africa as a whole, and that end is kept ever foremost in mind” (cited in Hachten and Giffard 1984: 41).

Scrutiny of Anglo American’s executive committee minutes provides an insight into this relationship. The proposal for an “investment journal”, which would later become the *Financial Mail*, was first submitted to Anglo American, which supported it in principle but rejected it after consideration because of potential conflicts of interest.

When the board of the *Rand Daily Mail* took up the idea, the decision was recorded in the executive committee minutes of Anglo American on 17 October 1957, a sign that the company continued to take a close interest in the proposed financial journal even though it had declined to be a parent. On December 10, the executive committee recorded that the *Rand Daily Mail* had proposed to publish the first issue of the new journal in March 1958, and instructed a board member to “report on the extent to which we should supplement or divert advertising”.

For the next four years, Anglo American diverted advertising to the new journal on what the company itself

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August 2007



Japan also begin to intervene.

17 August

The Fed cuts the rate at which it lends to banks by half of a percentage point to 5.75%, warning the credit crunch could be a risk to economic growth.

September 2007

4 September

The rate at which banks lend to each other rises to its highest level since December 1998. The so-called Libor rate is 6.7975%, way above the Bank of England’s 5.75% base rate; banks either worry whether other banks will survive, or urgently need the money themselves.

13 September

The BBC reveals Northern Rock has asked for and been granted emergency financial support from the Bank of England, in the latter’s role as lender of last resort. Northern



Rock relied heavily on the markets, rather than savers’ deposits, to fund its mortgage lending. The onset of the credit crunch has dried up its funding. A day later depositors withdraw £1bn in what is the biggest run on a British bank for more than a century. They continue to take out

their money until the government steps in to guarantee their savings.

18 September

The US Federal Reserve cuts its main interest rate by half a percentage point to 4.75%.

October 2007

1 October

Swiss bank UBS is the world’s first top-flight bank to announce losses – \$3.4bn – from sub-prime related investments. The chairman and chief executive step down. Later, banking giant Citigroup unveils a sub-prime related loss of \$3.1bn. A fortnight on, Citigroup is forced to write down a further \$5.9bn. Within six months, its stated losses amount to \$40bn.

30 October

Merrill Lynch’s chief resigns after the investment bank unveils a \$7.9bn exposure to bad debt.

SA'S FINANCIAL PRESS AND THE THE POLITICAL PROCESS

continued from page 10

described as "a subsidy basis", ensuring its survival until it reached profitability.

The relationship did not end there. The content of *Financial Mail* was discussed at executive committee meetings on a regular basis, and the minutes provide evidence of editorial interference by Anglo American.

In one instance, the minutes note "yet another attack on the mining industry" in the pages of the *Financial Mail*. A committee member was delegated to "speak to [Financial Mail editor George] Palmer about attacks on the mining industry in the *Financial Mail*". Two days later, the minutes record: "MWR [board member MW Rush] spoke to Palmer about the article in the *Financial Mail* ... Palmer conceded that the article was inaccurate and apologised."

With its dependence on advertising from Anglo American, which at that stage controlled a quarter of the market capitalisation of the stock exchange, the *Financial Mail* could hardly be expected not to reflect the interests of the mining industry.

The *Financial Mail* in its early years steered clear of politics, except when it considered that a political issue would affect business. "It is the *Financial Mail's* aim to give impartial and objective comment on South Africa's business life," the journal noted in an editorial comment in its edition of March 20 1959, its second. "It has no political affiliation, but it has a public duty – to interpret and record policies which impinge on industry and commerce."

Given the *Financial Mail's* self-conception as a "non-political" journal – which was shared by other financial publications of the time – as well as the fact that the financial media have never catered for mass audiences, the question arises whether the financial press could play a role in the political process?

Political communication is often described as a flow of information between political agents, the news media and the public. The process operates vertically, from politicians to the public and back. This bi-directional model of political communication, which is rooted in what Nimmo and Swanson (1990) have called the "voter persuasion paradigm", is based on the assumption that the media exercise power only via public opinion: information flows from political agents to the public, which responds, thereby influencing policy-makers and policy.

Obviously, this model only holds true in the context of mass media; media which cater for niche audiences, such as the financial media, cannot exercise this effect on public opinion.

This model, however, is flawed because it fails to take into account that political actors also get their information from the

media and use the media as a forum to debate and discuss policies. The media therefore influence elite opinion as much as they influence public opinion. Schudson (2002) goes as far as to assert that the news media "have always been a more important forum for communication among elites ... than with the general population" (263).

In South Africa, particularly in the period 1990 – 1996, when the African National Congress developed its economic policy, the financial press played at least a contributory role in influencing the opinions of policy-making elites.

The adoption of the fiscally responsible Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy – a dramatic departure from the more statist Redistribution and Development Policy that preceded it – was a turning point in South Africa's economic history, and came about without the support of the ANC's labour and communist allies. By providing a forum for debate among elites about the future shape of the economy, the financial press helped influence policy without necessarily having an effect on broader public opinion.

The financial press throughout its history has reflected and interpreted not mass opinion but the values and views of a narrow elite, including businessmen, economists and political agents. In this way, the financial media have played – and still play – play a crucial role in spreading economic ideas and ideologies and setting the parameters of debate about economic issues.

The ideas of Milton Friedman, and before him John Maynard Keynes, for example, gained currency and legitimacy through their use of the news media rather than debate within academic journals (Parsons 1990). The financial media therefore play an important role in legitimating economic ideas and opinions that are adopted by policy-makers.

In particular, Parsons argues, the financial news media in the 20th century played a key role in propagating the values, myths and discourses of the "free market". They "purvey[ed] and reinforce[d] the values and ideas, language and culture, which underpin the existence of the market economy" and are "a crucial mediator between the price system and the political system".

Through this process of legitimising a particular economic system and culture the financial press in South Africa helped cement consensus among political elites (but not the broader public) about the shape of the economy, and provided the context and justification for the excesses that lead to the financial crisis and the current global recession.

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WHEN

By Fackson Banda

The ongoing global financial crisis has become a highly mediated event. The coverage of the crisis has given rise to questions about how media represent financial crises. And a more specific question is the extent to which the pattern of media ownership influences media representations.

Media institutions are part of the socio-political process and, as such, they are implicated in the relationships of power in which global capitalism operates. And media, as businesses, are embedded within the capitalist free market economy to such an extent that the dominant media discourses surrounding the global financial crisis reflect that structured relationship between the market and the media.

To demonstrate this symbiosis I did a critical analysis of discourses of the global financial crisis using the *Financial Times* as a sample of Northern media representations and *Business Day* as a sample of Southern media representations. My analytical framework is critical political economy which, in its simplest form, posits that power – in its economic, symbolic, coercive and political guises (Thompson, 1995) – structures media representations. Critical political economy is also concerned with the very real possibility of journalistic agency in the form of the executive autonomy of media practitioners. Even so, I believe that the media, as an institution, is so wedded to the free-market system of economics that its overall operational logic reflects that of the free market. However, I also believe that there is a possibility for media executives and journalists to assert independence of judgement.

I have used discourse analysis primarily to do this study because it enables one to "research questions concerning the construction of accounts, the performance of social acts through language, and the identification of the discourses and interpretative repertoires which we draw upon in our interactions and which also may have identity implications" (Burr, 1995: 164).

For my analysis, I selected editorial comments, opinion and analytical pieces, news reports, and letters to the editor. These would

December 2007

6 December

US President George W Bush outlines plans to help more than a million homeowners facing foreclosure. The Bank of England cuts interest rates by a quarter of one percentage point to 5.5%.

13 December

The US Federal Reserve co-ordinates an unprecedented action by five leading central banks around the world to offer billions of dollars in loans to banks. The Bank of England calls it an attempt to "forestall any prospective sharp tightening

of credit conditions". The move succeeds in temporarily lowering the rate at which banks lend to each other.

17 December

The central banks continue to make more funding available. There is a \$20bn auction from the US Federal Reserve and, the following day, \$500bn from the European Central Bank to help commercial banks over the Christmas period.

January 2008

21 January

Global stock markets, including London's FTSE 100 index, suffer their biggest falls since 11 September 2001.

22 January

The US Fed cuts rates by three quarters of a percentage point to 3.5% – its biggest cut in 25 years – to try and prevent the economy from slumping into recession. It is the first emergency cut in rates since 2001. Stock markets around the world recover the previous day's heavy losses.

7 February

US Federal Reserve boss Ben Bernanke adds his voice to concerns about monoline insurers, saying he is closely monitoring developments "given the adverse effects that problems of financial guarantors can have on financial markets and the economy". The Bank of England cuts interest rates by a quarter of 1% to 5.25%.

17 February

After considering a number of private sector rescue proposals, including one from Richard Branson's



Virgin Group, the government announces that struggling Northern Rock is to be nationalised.

JOURNALISM IS A BLUNT KNIFE

represent, in my view:

- the ideological-institutional voice of the newspapers, through editorial comments;
- the establishment thinking about the crisis, through opinion and analytical features; and
- the generality of public opinion, through news reports and letters to the editor.

The material deals with the period from September to November 2008.

Business Day, a publication in the Avusa stable and with business connections to Pearson PLC, offers coverage of business, politics, labour and other current affairs. With a daily readership of over 120 000, *Business Day* has a circulation of 41 591 copies. It is clearly a good example of a newspaper that targets a 7-10 LSM bracket. Largely to reflect this class demographic, it is likely to use sources of news and information who are locked into the capitalist structures of South African society. Indeed, it is clear, from the sources cited for most analyses of the global economic crisis, that the newspaper foregrounds the voices of the elite capitalist establishment sources. These include: the Ministry of Finance, the Reserve Bank, experts (Stanlib, Cadiz African Harvest, Nedbank, Investec, etc), investors and academics.

Many of the representative voices for marginal discourses are not given agency. They are not referred to by name, rendering them amorphous and invisible. For example, the leftist agenda is represented in terms of "the ANC's left-wing allies". It would appear that the ANC – as a representative of business capital – is accredited with agency much more than its "allies".

The *Financial Times*, a newspaper also owned by Pearson PLC, is a typical example of a media product embedded in the rarefied environs of finance capital. With an international circulation of over 448 241, and facing

competition from the *Wall Street Journal*, it is not immune to the ravages of the global financial crisis. Although the newspaper's political allegiance is arguably economic liberalism/social liberalism, it still remains avowedly married to the capitalist free-market system.

In general, the press is constituted by and constitutive of the capitalist business system. When money markets go haywire, media businesses go haywire. As a result of the ongoing market volatility and credit crisis, newspapers across the US have been reducing staff through attrition, buyouts or layoffs. In South Africa, newspapers and magazines have registered lower circulation figures as a result of the credit crunch which has forced the target "middle market" to cut down on "luxuries" ("Newspaper, magazine circulations fall on tough times", *Business Day* 14 November 2008: 5).

Framing the discourse

A useful analytical framework for analysing these media representations is the political-economic propaganda model expounded by Chomsky and Herman. The model focuses on the inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass media interests and choices. It traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalise dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across.

Although the model can be criticised as to the extent to which it can be applied across time and space, it does resonate within the context of a free-market capitalist economic system embraced by the ANC. The ANC's

shift to market fundamentalism is evident in the way it morphed from the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to the World Bank-inspired Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) development agenda.

There is some evidence, based upon the analysis of *Business Day*, to indicate a measure of commensurability between the newspaper's institutional-production context and some aspects of the propaganda model. Clearly, the discourse of poverty alleviation, as championed by the South African Communist Party (SACP), for instance, is almost always juxtaposed by the discourse of macro-economic stability epitomised by Trevor Manuel's "fiscal discipline". One analysis actually equates Trevor Manuel with market stabilisation. According to an edition of *Business Day*: "The market response to Manuel's brief period of unemployment before President Kgalema reappointed him to the cabinet told the ruling party in no uncertain terms that it messed with the economy at its own peril, and Manuel's medium-term budget made clear that he will not compromise on his principles, and judging from its most recent statements it appears the pragmatists will prevail, despite calls from within the alliance for 'a jump to the left'" (*Business Day* 25 October 2008). This reification of the free market typifies the dominant discourse of the newspaper.

Discourses of the financial crisis

In analysing how the *Financial Times* and *Business Day* frame the global financial crisis, three discourses are discernible in their representations. These are:

- the consecration of the free market;
- a triumphalist nationalist economic conservatism; and
- a critical attitude towards the "irrational" transformationalist agenda

The consecration of the free-market system

In both the *Financial Times* and *Business Day*, it is evident that the dominant discourse remains one of the sanctification, consecration and glorification of the free-market system. Both papers take it for granted that the free market is here to stay and that discussions can only centre around how it can be restructured for greater systemic and operational transparency. The foregrounding of this dominant discourse is accomplished through

a range of rhetorical devices, such as shared responsibility for the global financial crisis. In other words, Wall Street, Main Street, the government, regulators, "corrupt" fat cats, media, etc. are *all* responsible for the collapse of the financial sector and therefore resolving the crisis must be everyone's responsibility. A second rhetorical strategy involves the constant thematising of "less government intervention". With this reasoning, the US credit crunch, for example, was because the "government intervened in financial markets by monetary policy, subsidies, state-owned companies and regulations" ("World needs less government intervention" *Financial Times* 27 October 2008: 8).

A third strategy is to ratchet up the so-called "feelgood factor". Typical of the "feelgood factor" is the following *Business Day* representation of South Africa's economic performance in the wake of the global credit crisis: "SA's banking sector is... in relatively good shape considering it is mostly domestically owned, well capitalised and well managed with relatively low levels of bad debt, albeit on the rise" ("Slowdown puts global markets on defensive", *Business Day* 24 October 2008).

It is clear that media businesses, as interested parties, are eager to portray a more positive economic outlook as a way of managing public or investor perceptions. This is likely to result in less investor panic, thereby guaranteeing the share prices of those companies in which the proprietors and managers of *Business Day* might have a stake.

Triumphalist economic conservatism

This second dominant discourse is more closely associated with *Business Day*. This emanates from the idea of respect for a self-regulated banking sector encased within a conservative banking policy framework that constrains what Manuel called "unviable financial institutions" ("State to protect SA banks if hit by crisis – Phosa", *Business Day* 15 October 2008). The newspaper thus foregrounded the theme of government's so-called "recognisably prudent, economically conservative" policies with which businesses had become comfortable over the past 14 years. Put differently, *Business Day* represented South Africa as having "a strong financial position, with a budget surplus, low government debt, low debt-servicing costs and an extremely low risk of default" ("Slowdown

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March 2008

17 March



Wall Street's fifth-largest bank, Bear Stearns, is acquired by larger rival JP Morgan Chase for \$240m in a deal backed by \$30bn of central bank loans. A year earlier, Bear Stearns had been worth £18bn.

April 2008

8 April

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), which oversees the global economy, warns that potential losses from the credit crunch could reach \$1 trillion and may be even higher. It says the effects are spreading from sub-prime mortgage assets to other sectors, such as commercial property, consumer credit, and company debt.

10 April

The Bank of England cuts interest rates by a quarter of 1% to 5%.

21 April

The Bank of England announces details of an ambitious £50bn plan designed to help credit-squeezed banks by allowing them to swap potentially risky mortgage debts for secure government bonds.

22 April

Royal Bank of Scotland announces a plan to raise money from its shareholders with a £12bn rights issue – the biggest in UK corporate history. The firm also announces a write-down of £5.9bn on the value of its investments between April and

June – the largest write-off yet for a British bank.

30 April

The first annual fall in house prices for 12 years is recorded by Nationwide. Prices were 1% lower in April compared to a year earlier after a "steep decline" in home buying over the previous six months. Later in the week, figures from the UK's biggest lender Halifax, show a 0.9% annual fall for April.

May 2008

22 May

Swiss bank UBS, one of the worst affected by the credit crunch, launches a \$15.5bn rights issue to cover some of the \$37bn it lost on assets linked to US mortgage debt.



WHEN JOURNALISM IS A BLUNT KNIFE

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puts global markets on defensive", *Business Day* 24 October 2008).

It is clear that this is all part of the ANC's strategy of managing the possible flight of capital from South Africa. In this way, the discourse assumes a nationalist macroeconomic regulatory triumphalism. The representative figure of this financial stability is Trevor Manuel. He was the personification of the voice of reason and pragmatism, and not of populist ideology. All other positions on the economic questions that face South Africa are expurgated or dissimulated at best as "ideology" and at worst as unworkable. Take, for example, the vocalised agency credited to Manuel: "When we chose to budget for a surplus, it was not because of any ideological position. It was the right thing to do in the economic circumstances... If our economic policies were designed for their populist appeal, if we tried to finance everything at once, for everybody, then short-term gains would quickly give way to long-term misery ("Crisis will push SA into deficit next year", *Business Day* 22 October 2008).

What the newspaper does not say is which segment of the population finds Manuel's macroeconomic policy appealing. Neither does the paper give agency and voice to the propagators of a budget deficit, such as SACP which would rather the budget surplus was used for legitimate social causes, such as poverty alleviation. The fact that these voices are backgrounded and rendered agent-less, reduces them to the margins of media discourse about the global financial crisis and its implications for South Africa.

The "irrational" transformationalist agenda

For both newspapers the transformation of the neo-liberal financial and economic architecture is a marginal issue. Gordon Brown's call for globalising the regulation of global finance is represented as one of the "grand claims, but only tired ideas" (headline in *Financial Times* 17 October 2008). This particular editorial comment comes out in explicit support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), arguing that: "IMF staff might also

point out that, despite repeated attempts by Mr Brown's Treasury to influence their public pronouncements on the UK economy, they did repeatedly warn him about the threats from the build-up of credit and the housing boom – and were ignored. Transparency begins at home."

This expurgation of the transformationalist agenda is embraced by the newspaper in many other interesting ways. While the newspaper does feature the clamouring for regulatory change, largely because it must adhere to a degree of objectivity (see, for example, Lawrence Summers' comment "The pendulum swings towards regulation", *Financial Times* 27 October 2008: 9), it represents such clamouring in less radical terms than those suggested by Brown and France's Nicolas Sarkozy. To cite Summers: "All of these considerations suggest that the pendulum will swing – and should swing – towards an enhanced role for government in saving the market system from its excesses and inadequacies. Policymakers need to be attentive to potential government flaws as well. For example, they need to recognise that, even as events compel larger deficits in the short run, they reinforce the need for longer-term measures to keep government finances on a sound footing."

The *Financial Times*, in apportioning blame for the problems facing the free-market economic system, argues: "The current crisis, while undoubtedly global in nature, did not arise from a failure of co-ordination. It arose because regulators and policymakers in a variety of countries... made similar mistakes. They allowed credit growth and housing booms to spin out of hand and they failed to understand the risk from toxic derivatives."

This is reiterated by *Business Day's* attempt to suggest in a headline that "Too much faith in regulation can be bad" (*Business Day* 31 October 2008). In other words, by foregrounding state intervention as anathema through an editorial comment and an analytical piece respectively, the

Financial Times and *Business Day* are hoping to highlight the need for greater self-regulation of the banking and financial sector. *Business Day*, by foregrounding an analytical piece on the subject, makes this case more pointedly: "Free markets, like free societies, may sometimes throw up terrible things. Not too many people suggested abandoning democratic elections because they once brought Adolf Hitler to power. Nor should one abandon the immensely creative force of capitalism because it sometimes wreaks havoc. The trick is to put in place the right regulatory safeguards, constitutional and political as well as economic and financial."

Disengaging media from market

It is evident that the media, when structurally and operationally locked into the

McLean which delved into the sources of the company's profits. Her piece "Is Enron Overpriced?" went largely unread (Cornwell 2002). It was not until the unexpected resignation of a top Enron official that the tone of the coverage became critical. That collective blindness on the part of the business press was largely because market forces drive the business media to behave that way (Dyck and Zingales 2003). Companies use their power to turn on or off journalists' access to privileged information. In turn, journalists make a cost-benefit analysis about the price of that access in terms of what it takes to remain in the good graces of corporate insiders. As a consequence, a structured collusion emerges.

This has implications for journalists. Firstly, there is need to be conscious of how

THE REPRESENTATIVE FIGURE OF THIS FINANCIAL SOLIDITY AND STABILITY IS TREVOR MANUEL. HE IS THE VOICE OF REASON AND PRAGMATISM, AND NOT OF POPULIST IDEOLOGY. ALL OTHER POSITIONS ON THE ECONOMIC QUESTIONS THAT FACE SOUTH AFRICA ARE IDEOLOGY OR UNWORKABLE

market, compromise their independence of judgement. For example, the reporting surrounding the rise and fall of Enron demonstrates how capitalist media can become so locked into the inner recesses of capital as to lose their watchdog role. A breakdown in checks and balances encompassed not only Enron's auditors, lawyers and directors but also groups monitoring Enron like regulators, financial analysts, credit-rating agencies, the media and Congress (Irvine and Kincaid, 2002). While the press took note of Enron's high political profile and ties to the Bush campaign in 2000, the company's financial profile in the media was largely flattering. An exception was the *Fortune* article by Bethany

the structured relationship between media and markets can blunt the sharp edge of the journalistic knife. This consciousness is a step in the right direction. Only then can journalists attempt to disengage strategically.

Secondly, there is a need for journalists to hone their investigative skills, particularly in basic accounting and in asking questions about how money is actually made, how staff are managed, what environmental practices are in place, what the relationship between board and management is and how regulations are adhered to.

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June 2008

June 1

South Africa's National Credit Act, an example of the kind of regulation that might have prevented the sub-prime crisis in the US had something similar been in force, comes into effect.



July 2008

14 July

Financial authorities step in to assist America's two largest lenders, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. As owners or guarantors of \$5 trillion worth of home loans, they are crucial to the US housing market and authorities agree they could not be allowed to fail. The previous week, there had been a panic amongst investors that they might collapse, causing their share prices to plummet.

September 2008

2 September

In an effort to kick-start the UK housing market the Treasury announces a one year rise in stamp duty exemption, from £125,000 to £175,000.

7 September

Mortgage lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac – which account for nearly half of the outstanding mortgages in the US – are rescued by the US government in one of the largest bailouts in US history. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson says the two firms' debt levels



posed a "systemic risk" to financial stability and that, without action, the situation would get worse.

10 September

Wall Street bank Lehman Brothers posts a loss of \$3.9bn for the three months to August.

15 September

After days of searching frantically for a buyer, Lehman Brothers files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, becoming the first major bank to collapse since the start of the credit crisis. Former Federal Reserve chief Alan Greenspan dubs the situation as "probably a once in a century type of event" and warns that other major firms will also go bust. Meanwhile, another US bank Merrill Lynch, also stung by the credit crunch, agrees to be taken over by Bank of America for \$50bn.

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A

HARD PLACE

**GAVIN KEETON
TAKES AN
ECONOMIST'S
TOUR OF THE
CURRENT CRISIS:
HOW DID IT
HAPPEN AND
WHAT DOES IT
MEAN?**

An economist inspecting current economic data without any knowledge of recent events could be forgiven for concluding that the world is either in the midst of a major global war or is suffering the consequences of an extraordinary global natural disaster. Industrial production in a wide range of countries is down by 10 to 25% compared to a year ago. Volumes of trade between countries have plunged, and global economic growth in 2009 is likely to be the worst since the end of World War 2.

That same economist would further discover that the economic crisis was, in fact, self-inflicted; even more extraordinarily, that it originated in the astonishingly risky actions of the banking sector, a sector for so long considered to be the epitome of caution and sound business practices.

The banking sector is the oil that keeps the engines of modern economies running. In addition to processing our daily payments, banks provide us – and, importantly, businesses – with the credit on which modern economies operate. Businesses borrow money to buy stock, which they then sell to build new factories and production facilities. Households borrow via credit cards to buy houses and cars as well as everyday items. Remove that credit and large parts of the economy grind to a halt.

In recognition of their importance, banks are treated differently from other sectors of the economy. Special banking rules and regulators are supposed to prevent precisely the events we have witnessed. But these regulations have now been exposed as inadequate for an increasingly sophisticated and global financial system.

The trigger of the current crisis was the sub-prime debacle in the United States. Sub-prime is lending to people not normally considered creditworthy. How was it possible that more than \$1-trillion could have been lent to people who could not pay it back?

The popular media is quick to point fingers at greedy bankers as the cause. From some of the commentary, one would think that innocent poor people were forced to borrow money they did not want. But, of course, the truth is rather more complicated.

The first cause of the explosion in sub-prime lending was well-intentioned government legislation which attempted to force banks to lend more to the poor. This coincided with rising prices and a (foolish) belief by many in the banking sector that house prices would never fall. It followed that mortgage lending to borrowers with poor credit rating was no longer risky as the houses of defaulters could always be repossessed and the bank's money recovered. Packages of US mortgages – now deemed low-risk – were then on-sold to banks and pension funds around the world. Thus it was that when the sub-prime crisis burst, its earliest manifestations were in such unlikely places as Australian pension funds and German regional banks rather than the US.

Sub-prime loans were granted at historically very low interest rates in the

US following the bursting of the dotcom stock market bubble and the 9/11. As interest rates rose back to more normal levels so an increasing proportion of subprime borrowers defaulted on their loans. House prices began to fall and banks discovered what their predecessors already knew – that when there are no buyers a repossessed house actually has no value. As a result an increasing number of banks around the world found themselves in financial trouble. Central banks quickly came to their rescue, pumping billions of dollars into national banks to prevent them from collapsing. In extreme cases banks were nationalised to prevent them from closing. But even rescued banks no longer had the means or desire to lend to households or firms and the credit stream, which had supported almost a decade of rapid global economic expansion, was switched off almost overnight. The global economy was suddenly in the worst recession since the Great Depression of 1929.

In South Africa it was initially believed that high commodity prices would sustain domestic economic growth and export levels. In addition, the fact that domestic banks – thanks to prudent banking regulation, tight lending conditions imposed by the National Credit Act and exchange controls – had almost entirely escaped the sub-prime woes was expected to shield the domestic economy from global woes. Finally, the massive public-sector infrastructure rollout was expected to underpin domestic investment. Subsequent events have shown that this view was unrealistically optimistic. South Africa's GDP contracted by 6.4% on a seasonally-adjusted annualised basis in the first quarter of this year, confirming that the economy is now officially in recession.

Moreover, the pace of the decline is much more dramatic than could ever have been previously imagined. Manufacturing production plunged -22% annualised in the first quarter and mining output declined a staggering -33%, confirming the extent to which the slowdown is driven by the collapse in demand for exports. But consumer spending is also very weak as a consequence of previously high interest rates and rapidly falling employment levels.

Fortunately there is light at the end of the tunnel. There are signs that the huge amounts of liquidity injected by the global central banks is starting to flow through into renewed lending. Governments also sought to underpin domestic spending through increased spending themselves and by tax cuts. While economic activity remains very weak in most countries there are signs that if economic activity has not yet started to improve it has at least stopped contracting. In South Africa, economic activity has been underpinned by a larger government deficit, infrastructural spending and significant cuts in interest rates. But consumer spending remains very weak as heavily indebted households continue to feel the impact of previous interest rate hikes and job losses.

The extent of the policy response globally (support for banks and fiscal stimuli) has been such that a repeat of the Great Depression seems unlikely. Most commentators see a pickup in the global economy in the second half of this year or the first half of 2010. Such a recovery will be important to South Africa as exports will recover only when the global economy strengthens.

Importantly, however, the global policy response has been financed by incurring huge increases in government debt. These will need to be repaid if future generations are not to be burdened with paying for the folly of the current generation and this repayment will be a damper on economic activity for years to come. In South Africa, the budget deficit has already risen sharply, mainly as a result of weakening tax revenue, even before any of the spending promises of the new ANC government could be implemented. The room for manoeuvre on the fiscal front has therefore already been significantly reduced.

September 2008

16 September

The US Federal Reserve announces an \$85bn rescue package for AIG, the country's biggest insurance company, to save it from bankruptcy. AIG gets the loan in return for an 80% stake in the firm.



17 September

Lloyds TSB announces it is to take over Britain's biggest mortgage lender HBOS in a £12bn deal creating a banking giant holding close to one-third of the UK's savings and mortgage market. The deal follows a run on HBOS shares.

25 September

In the largest bank failure yet in the United States, Washington Mutual, the giant mortgage lender, which had assets valued at \$307bn, is closed down by regulators and sold to JPMorgan Chase.



28 September

The credit crunch hits Europe's banking sector as the European banking and insurance giant Fortis is partly nationalised to ensure its survival. In the US, lawmakers announce they have reached a bipartisan agreement on a rescue

plan for the American financial system. The package, to be approved by Congress, allows the Treasury to spend up to \$700bn buying bad debts from ailing banks. It will be the biggest intervention in the markets since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

29 September

In Britain, the mortgage lender Bradford & Bingley is nationalised. The British government takes control of the bank's £50bn mortgages and loans, while its savings operations and branches are sold

to Spain's Santander. The Icelandic government takes control of the country's third-largest bank, Glitnir, after the company faces short-term funding problems. The US House of Representatives rejects a \$700bn rescue plan for the US financial system – sending shockwaves around the world. It opens up new uncertainties about how banks will deal with their exposure to toxic loans and how credit markets can begin to operate more normally. Wall Street shares plunge, with the Dow Jones index slumping 7% or 770 points, a record one-day point fall.

CHEERLEADERS TO A CRISIS

One cannot blame the mainstream media for the current global financial crisis – which has now transformed into a full-blown global economic crisis – but one can argue that the media were an accomplice.

The mainstream media have been cheerleaders for unregulated finance. They have cheered and supported inflating financial assets market bubbles and have been shocked when those bubbles burst. They have failed to adequately investigate and report on huge excesses in financial institutions and governments' failures to deal with these problems.

They are currently cheering on what they believe is a recovery in financial markets. They are not questioning whether the little change in financial institution leadership and absence of reregulation of finance will cause another financial crisis in the near future. The media should be much more introspective about their reporting on financial markets and economics in general.

There has been widespread liberalisation of financial markets and global capital flows since the late 1970s. An important consequence of this liberalisation has been increased freedom for people in the financial sector to increase their leverage (the amount of debt they hold relative to the assets they own) and to take on more risk. In fact, the liberalisation has allowed people working in financial markets to increase the level of systemic risk not only in domestic financial markets but also in global financial markets.

The episodes of increased leverage and risk-taking have been associated with bubbles in financial and real estate asset markets. The deregulation and bubbles have allowed many people working in financial markets to use the system to unfairly enrich themselves. Many of these bubbles deflated slowly but some have burst. We are living through the fallout of a burst financial bubble.

The mainstream business media – as cheerleaders for the financial sector – have probably helped to inflate most of the bubbles formed since the 1980s. They have spent very little effort on exposing the greed and profligacy in financial markets. To make matters worse, their views have become aligned with those of the financial sector.

The mainstream media have changed as a result of the growth of financial markets. The term "financialisation" has become popular among non-mainstream economists. It refers to the growth in the size of financial markets and the influence of financial actors in the functioning of domestic and global economies.

THE MEDIA HAS FAILED TO TAKE NOTE OF THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE STATE IN REGULATING FINANCIAL MARKETS BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN BLINDED BY THEIR FREE-MARKET IDEOLOGICAL BLINKERS, WRITES SEERAJ MOHAMED

The process of financialisation is the result of the widespread deregulation of financial markets over the past few decades. Financialisation has affected our cultures and become a much more important part of our daily lives. One could argue that there has been financialisation of the media. Financial motives have become more important in running globalised media companies. At the same time, media content has reflected the growing importance of finance in our economies and societies.

This change is most obvious in what is reported in news programmes. Huge chunks of radio and television news is taken up with announcing daily movements of financial variables. Whether we want to know or care about the Nasdaq, FTSE, and Wall Street does not matter. We are force-fed the numbers in almost every news show we watch.

There is also a proliferation of business news television shows and channels that constantly repeat changes in financial indicators and provide continuous advice about which financial assets to buy and sell.

Of course, these developments are seen as progress and economic development. The positive impact of these changes on people's lives is taken for granted.

The growth of the business media industry has changed the role of the media and what they do. Much of the business media do not report on economic and financial changes; they have become the marketing agents for these changes. They have become a space for investment broking firms and bank economists to peddle their wares and to give the public stock tips. They have allowed large banks' investment analysts to

"talk-up" stocks being promoted by the bank.

The business media have not adequately questioned the conflict of interests of the industry commentators they regularly invite to their shows. The experiences of the late 1990s and the dotcom bubble have not had much influence on governance of the business media.

The growth of the business media industry has led to an increasingly ideological role for the business media. Most of the business media do not question whether the growth in influence and power of financial institutions is good or bad for society. In fact, they hardly report on these changes. Instead, they have become the mouthpieces of the financial institutions.

The business news channels, in particular, have provided a voice for people in financial markets. They have provided the space for financial speculators to make decrees about the credibility of economic policies. They have provided the public political platform for the promotion of free market ideas.

The business media and business news have had a profound impact on media content and news programming.

They have influenced the ideological perspective in the media as a whole because their reporting has been so strongly biased by the views of people working in financial markets. As a result, the main commentators on the economy in the media today are bank economists or representatives of investment companies. Therefore, it is not surprising that the mainstream media have not only reported financial deregulation as positive societal progress but have also advocated financial liberalisation.

The dominant ideology favoured by people working in finance has seeped into the everyday discussion and overall conventional wisdom of the business media.

This conventional wisdom espoused day after day in the business media has affected how we think. For example, we now think of the markets as forces for disciplining inefficiency in businesses. Markets are also supposed to discipline governments if they implement the wrong economic policies. The media have led us to believe that markets work better than the public sector.

Their beliefs that markets are efficient and that they allocate financial resources efficiently within countries and the global economy has spread through society. As a result,

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September 2008



30 September

Dexia becomes the latest European bank to be bailed out as the deepening credit crisis continues to shake the banking sector. In Ireland, the government says it will guarantee all deposits in the country's main banks for two years.

October 2008

3 October

The US House of Representatives passes a \$700bn (£394bn) government plan to rescue the US financial sector. The 263-171 vote is the second in a week, following its shock rejection of an earlier version on Monday.

6 October

Germany announces a €50bn (\$68bn; £38.7bn) plan to save one of the country's biggest banks. The deal to save Hypo Real Estate, reached with private banks, is worth €15bn more than the first rescue attempt,

which fell apart a day earlier. Iceland announces part of a plan to shore up its troubled banking sector. The country's largest banks agree to sell some of their foreign assets.

7 October

The Icelandic government takes control of Landsbanki, the country's second largest bank, which owns Icesave in the UK.

8 October

The UK government announces details of a rescue package for the banking system worth at least £50bn

(\$88bn). The US Federal Reserve, European Central Bank (ECB), Bank



of England, and the central banks of Canada, Sweden and Switzerland make emergency interest rate cuts of half a percentage point. The Fed cuts its base lending rate to 1.5%, the ECB to 3.75%, and the Bank of England to 4.5%.

13 October

The UK government announces plans to pump billions of pounds of taxpayers' money into three UK banks in one of the UK's biggest nationalisations. Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), Lloyds TSB and HBOS will have a total of £37bn injected

SHOOTING THE MESSENGER

ASSUMING THE MESSENGER UNDERSTOOD THE MESSAGE IN THE FIRST PLACE

By Bruce Whitfield

Blaming the media for the global financial crisis is rather like blaming the iceberg for sinking *Titanic*. It ignores the role of Captain Edward Smith and the decisions he took ahead of the collision, the management of the Whitestar line and the arrogance of the ship's designers who decreed it unsinkable.

The behaviour of the financial sector and its ancillary industries in the run up to the crisis was akin to Captain Smith shouting something like: "Full speed ahead and damn the iceberg!" He was a salty seadog who should have known better. The leaders of some of the world's most venerable financial institutions should also have known better but they let it happen anyway. Their shareholders lost perspective, and critical thought went out the window. None wanted to question too hard for fear that the bubble would burst and the party would end.

Outgoing Reserve Bank governor Tito Mboweni tells how he and his esteemed global peers were at one of their regular get-togethers at a posh resort in the early part of the decade where they were berated by former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan's predecessor Paul Volcker on their lack of knowledge of complex financial instruments. Mboweni recalls how they sniggered behind Volcker's back and suggested privately that his views were antiquated and not rooted in the world of progress and innovation. "We told ourselves that the old man should go off into retirement," quipped Mboweni.

Regulators too did not want to be seen to be impeding progress and certainly did not want to be exposed as not understanding the system that was developing under their noses. It turns out that many chairs and chief executives of the financial institutions themselves were also too embarrassed to question too closely what was happening for fear of being revealed as ignorant of new ideas. Most were ignorant of the consequences of unfettered financial innovation that very nearly derailed the global financial system.

Popular targets have been vilified in the media: overpaid executives, ratings agencies that continued to give AAA ratings to bits of paper that were technically worthless and, of course, the global financial services industry that stopped thinking for itself and simply accepted whatever was coming its way. Few wanted to draw attention to the fallacy that money could be made from money in perpetuity and without consequence.

Why did the media not wave a red flag? To be fair, many did. But few, if any, comprehended the extent of the problem. They simply were not technically equipped to do so. Pointing out the risk of asset bubble is one thing; joining the dots that would have pointed to a global financial calamity is quite another.

US house prices (and domestically too) were rising at an unsustainable rate, consumers were using their properties as ATMs to fund their increasingly lavish lifestyles. It could not

have continued. Those doing the borrowing were led to believe that their property values would continue to rise and in the unlikely event of finding themselves in a tight spot, they had an asset against which they could offset their liabilities.

However, the complex financial engineering in the background of the crisis was not something that mere mortals could comprehend. Financial institutions wanted to get the debt their customers owed them off their own balance sheets. They decided to spread the risk. They securitised the debt and sold bits of paper promising generous returns around the globe and, suddenly, disparate entities such as Scandinavian pension funds were buying things called "mortgage-backed securities" that had AAA ratings and were thus top-quality investments.

The bubble burst when borrowers failed to pay their mortgages and the apparent security underlying the piece of paper was shown to be worthless.

Should journalists have been able to map the connection between a mortgage bond granted to a person incapable of making interest payments once the honeymoon of low fixed rates wore off and understand how when they defaulted that its consequences would be felt on the other side of the world?

Ideally, yes. Regrettably however, the vast majority are not equipped to comprehend the complexities of financial markets and their numerous permutations. Journalists are storytellers, not sages. We are trained to report and, on rare occasions, comment on the possible outcome of events. We rely, often too heavily, on the views of others and their understanding of the environment to inform our own opinions.

A couple of economists warned calamity was coming. Nouriel Roubini at New York University and Robert Shiller at Yale are rare examples in a discipline where most either missed or ignored the concepts of counterparty risk and illiquidity in markets. It simply didn't fit into their narrow way of thinking about macro-economics.

Should the prophets of doom have been given greater coverage? In retrospect, their messages should have been shouted from the rooftops, because they were right. However, in the context of the time, the media might then have been accused of being complicit in the collapse of the financial system through ignorance. It would have been a call few editors would have been bold enough to make.

Did the media's coverage of the financial crisis once it was in full swing exacerbate its impact? Invariably, critics will argue that it did. But once financial institutions began failing and the media began their serious coverage of the crisis, the damage had been done. No amount of coverage or lack thereof would have changed the outcome of a crisis whose seeds had been sown for years preceding the crunch.

Not that the media should be let off scot-free.

Journalists have to be on their guard constantly. In an era of spin, no journalist can afford to take the first answer they are given as gospel. In the search of truth and the pursuit of excellence all versions of the truth need to be constantly interrogated. There is much at stake. Journalists need to be constantly aware of the agendas presented to them. That takes courage and reporters run the risk of exposed as being ignorant to the complexities of many of the issues they are expected to interpret on a daily basis.

Did the media fail to critically analyse the brewing storm? Yes, it did. Did it cause the storm? No, it did not. Should it have more vigorously questioned the status quo? Absolutely.

October 2008

into them. The takeover of troubled US bank Wachovia by Wells Fargo is approved by regulators. Banking giant Citigroup had tried to block the move after it launched rival bid.

14 October

The US government unveils a \$250bn (£143bn) plan to purchase stakes in a wide variety of banks in an effort to restore confidence in the sector.

15 October

Figures for US retail sales in September show a fall of 1.2%, the biggest monthly decline in

more than three years, as hard-up consumers avoid the shops. The figures underscore fears that the wider US economy is now being hit by the financial crisis. The Dow Jones index falls 733 points or 7.87% – its biggest percentage fall since 26 October 1987.



30 October



The Federal Reserve cuts its key interest rate from 1.5% to 1%. The Commerce Department issues figures showing the US economy shrank at an annualised rate of 0.3% between July and September.

November 2008

6 November

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approves a \$16.4bn loan to Ukraine to bolster its economy, shaken by global financial turmoil. The Bank of England slashes interest rates from 4.5% to 3% – the lowest level since 1955. The European Central Bank lowers eurozone rates to 3.25% from 3.75%.

9 November

China sets out a two-year \$586bn economic stimulus package to help boost the economy by investing in infrastructure and social projects,



and by cutting corporate taxes.

12 November

US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson says the government has abandoned

CHEERLEADERS TO A CRISIS

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there is an inadequate public discussion about the nature of markets and the role markets should play in society. Instead, society is left with a myth of the market where the metaphor of the market is that markets are gods: they discipline us when we are bad and reward us when we are good. Markets are always correct and have perfect insight into matters that ordinary people, even financiers, cannot have. According to their myth, markets always price assets correctly.

Of course, after the financial crisis we realise that markets are not god-like and that it is the behaviour of people operating in the markets that shape the role of markets. Markets are social institutions that are shaped by societal forces.

If the main market actors operating in those markets choose to buy off politicians with campaign contributions and jobs for wives and friends then markets can be left inadequately regulated. The main actors can make up rules as they go to suit themselves. They can enrich themselves at the expense of others and can create global systemic risks.

Therefore, an important consequence of the global financial crisis is that the business media have to reconsider the role of the state and regulation of financial markets. Before the crisis, most mainstream business journalists would have argued that state involvement in financial markets and regulation are undesirable. They would have agreed with most mainstream economists that society should pursue free markets. They would have written against regulation that would impede free movement of goods and capital across borders. They would have advocated a limited role for the state.

However, most of them quickly jumped on the bailout bandwagon when the financial crisis started. They were comfortable with a large role for the state if it would save the very financial institutions that were involved in causing the crisis.

The cost of deregulation of financial markets to individual countries and the global economy has been huge. The rhetoric of the mainstream media has been that markets should be left free to operate without state interference. They have perpetuated the myth that markets have god-like qualities. They have also perpetuated the myth that markets achieve equilibrium and that state interference causes problems because it disrupts this equilibrium. Unfortunately, the current crisis has not shattered these myths. They remain very much part of the discourse in the business media.

A very important lesson from the series of financial crises that the world has experienced since the start of financial liberalisation in the late 1970s is that liberalisation does not mean less interference or involvement by the state in financial markets. In fact, the role of the state in financial markets has increased since liberalisation.

The role of the state after World War 2, which drew on the lessons from the Great Depression, was that the state should control and regulate financial markets to ensure stability in countries and stability of the global economy.

With liberalisation of financial markets, states have withdrawn from providing oversight and regulation of financial institutions and markets to prevent financial crises. The role of the state has changed to mopping up the damage and pouring in public money to bailout financial institutions after crises.

Unfortunately, most of the media have not reported on these changes in the role of the state and regulation of financial markets because their free-market ideological blinkers blind them to these historic changes. If these ideological blinkers are not removed, the role of the media will largely remain that of cheerleaders when financial markets are doing well because of bubble dynamics and advocates of bailouts after financial crashes.

ECONOMICS BY NUMBERS

Berkeley economics professor Brad DeLong teams up with journalism professor Susan Rasky on a quick guide for journalists who talk to economists and want to be in the information – rather than disinformation – business.

Everybody's got an angle. The initials "PhD" don't guarantee impartiality. Ask your experts what their ideological opponents would say on the issue. Take what your experts say and advocate only as seriously as they can make a strong case for the other side – the side they oppose. Talking to "experts" who are interested not in educating but in confusing you is at best a waste of your time. Journalists are valuable and useful only to the extent that they are in the information rather than in the disinformation business.

Never write "economists disagree". No matter how limited your space or time, never write "economists disagree." Write WHY economists disagree. An expert who cannot explain why other experts think differently isn't much of an expert. A reporter who can't fit an explanation of where the disagreement lies into the assigned space isn't much of a journalist. A journalist who cannot figure out the source of the disagreement is a journalist who is working for whoever has the best-funded public relations firm – and is working for them for free.

No naked numbers. Don't report numbers by themselves. Numbers have meaning only in context. And context is almost always impossible without explicit comparisons to other numbers. How does this number compare to other cities, other states, other countries, other eras? How does this number compare to total spending, spending on necessities, spending on luxuries, spending on other kinds of goods?

No meaningless numbers. Do not report budget, trade, tax, or other numbers in billions or trillions or even millions. Use per capita or per worker or per household or per share terms to make them meaningful. It's not a \$70-billion tax cut – it's \$43 000 per recipient millionaire per year. It's not a \$300-billion deficit – it's an extra \$4 000 per family of four per year that the government has charged and is expecting you to pay through additional taxes sometime in the future.

No fake trends, three anecdotes do not a trend make. No matter what they told you on the features desk, three anecdotes do not a trend make. Make sure anecdotes that "fit just perfectly" are not grossly unrepresentative.

No invisible people. Don't tell half the story. Make sure you find all the players at the table, all the stakeholders in the outcome, all the participants in the market. Everywhere there are consumers and producers, bosses and workers, locals and foreigners. An immediate corollary: Make sure you find all the moving economic parts – demand and supply, wages and profits, costs and prices.

Follow the real-life incentives. Economists will tell you people respond to incentives. Journalists know that people are not quite so predictable – they respond to the incentives they see. The best stories are about unintended consequences. Always ask what incentives people see, how they react to them, and why they often don't see what economists think they should.

Consider other perspectives. People make bargains or choices or contracts because they think they are good deals. Whenever people make what look to you like bad choices, ask what they see that you do not (and what you see that they do not).

Consider the alternatives. People make lousy bargains or choices or contracts because they think their other options are even worse. Remember, always, to ask "compared to what?"

It's all just transactions. Your calling as a journalist is to give the public the tools to evaluate government policies and actions. Government is not a glamorous gathering of celebrities. Government is not a sports cage match. Journalism is not a gossip circle. Report on government as you would report to your siblings on the rental agent your mother hired to handle her holiday home.

Know your sources. Don't ask international economists about the minimum wage; don't ask labour economists about global reserve demand.

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November 2008

plans to use some of the \$700bn bail-out money to buy up banks' bad debts and decided instead to concentrate on improving the flow of credit for the US consumer.

20 November

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approves a \$2.1bn (£1.4bn) loan for Iceland, after the country's banking system collapsed in October. It is the first IMF loan for a Western European nation since 1976.

23 November

The US government announces a



\$20bn (£13.4bn) rescue plan for troubled banking giant Citigroup after its shares plunge by more than 60% in a week.

25 November

The US Federal Reserve announces

it will inject another \$800bn into the economy in a further effort to stabilise the financial system and encourage lending. About \$600bn will be used to buy up mortgage-backed securities while \$200bn is being targeted at unfreezing the consumer credit market.

26 November

The European Commission unveils an economic recovery plan worth €200bn which it hopes will save millions of European jobs. The scheme aims to stimulate spending and boost consumer confidence.

December 2008

1 December

The US recession is officially declared by the National Bureau of Economic Research, a leading panel including economists from Stanford, Harvard and MIT. The committee concludes that the US economy started to contract in December 2007.

4 December

French President Nicolas Sarkozy unveils a €26bn stimulus plan to help France fend off financial crisis, with money to be spent on public sector investments and loans for the country's troubled carmakers.

11 December



Bank of America announces up to 35,000 job losses over three years following its takeover of Merrill Lynch. It says the cuts will be spread across both businesses. The European Central Bank, as well as central banks in the UK, Sweden and

AS SAFE AS HOUSES, NOT

PROPERTY JOURNALISM HELPED FOSTER AN UNSHAKEABLE, IRRATIONAL AND ULTIMATELY INCORRECT FAITH IN THE EVER-INCREASING VALUE OF HOMES, UNDOUBTEDLY ONE OF THE PRECIPITATORS OF THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS, WRITES REG RUMNEY

At the centre of the credit crunch was an implosion in the housing market, the one thing that most people consider to be the safest of investments, safe as houses perhaps. And the role of the news media in creating what could be called a global housing price bubble is worth a long, hard look.

Most of the spotlight just after the failure of Lehman Brothers intensified the crisis fell on the problems with so-called subprime loans, a form of risky lending that led to widespread home loan defaults.

But behind the collapse of that particular unwise practice of lending money to people who should not have qualified for a home was a more general irrationality. This is described at length by economist Robert Shiller in the 2005 edition of a book that came closer, perhaps, than anyone else to anticipating the crisis, *Irrational Exuberance*.

Shiller presciently included in that edition an examination of the at-the-time unpricked housing bubble, as well as the bubble in the stock market. He makes the point that in the US, general public attention to housing as an investment is a recent phenomenon, beginning in the last decades of the 20th century, part of "our increasing public commitment to market solutions to economic problems, rather than interventions and controls".

The same could be said about South Africa, where rent control was also more in the news before the 1970s than house prices.

Shiller does not blame the news media, arguing that news stories "rarely have a simple, predictable effect on the market. Indeed, in some respects they have less impact than is commonly believed." He adds that the news media actively shape "public attention and categories of thought", and create the environment within which speculative market events are played out.

To be sure, there is something in Shiller's observations. Yet his views almost absolve bad journalism, because he does not seem to allow that there could be a role for critical journalism in changing the cultural context.

By contrast, David Manning in an article in November 2008 in the unashamedly left-wing *Coldtype Reader*, sees poor reporting in the local print and online news media as a relentless propaganda war waged on behalf of the real estate industry.

"The fraudulent mythology of never-ending property

value increase has been perpetuated by the media for over a decade, with few notable exceptions."

He finds a powerful symbiosis between the Irish news media and property values: "a relationship that put newspapers and media outlets at the virtual helm of the property boom Titanic".

US investigative journalist Danny Schechter is just as condemnatory of vested interest in the news media leading to a failure to warn about predatory lending in the US housing market. Quoted on editorsweblog.org in November last year, he noted: "The newspaper industry is the marketing arm of the real estate industry. In some cities you actually had newspapers getting a piece of the action of sales through the ads they generated." The result, he says, is that there was little real scrutiny of corrupt practices in neighbourhoods.

The role that property journalists play in our own housing market cannot be said to be that dramatic. I draw here on my examination in the past two years of local and national newspapers, since there seems to be little reporting of house prices in the broadcast media.

The South African housing boom itself has been less of a bubble. High interest rates in the late 1990s deflated the rising post-apartheid middle-class housing market for a while, and the lower end of the property market has been distorted, as a market, by apartheid's legacy of racial separation and a steady supply of state-supplied homes.

Yet even in South Africa housing prices have been rising at a rate that, in retrospect, has been out of kilter with the earnings abilities of even better-off South Africans. I remember my own shock at the statement in a financial magazine blithely stating that if you did not own a house worth at least R1-million you were living in the wrong suburb.

What role have our news media, specifically newspapers and magazines, played? According to Shiller, the news media propagate "speculative price movements through their efforts to make news interesting to their audience".

Some property reporting in South Africa apparently strives to do the opposite, sometimes straying from the dull into the ridiculous. An example is an article in a property supplement highlighting the qualities of Benoni as "the city of lakes" and suggests investors snap up value-for-money properties there. Benoni must have its charms but, in popular culture, to come from there is to be previously disadvantaged. Investment potential or not, it could be said that

Benoni is the place actress Charlize Theron escaped from, a place synonymous with unsophistication.

The aim of property supplements is to book-end property advertising and supply revenue to the main body of the newspaper or the newspaper group. Articles are often a form of advertorial, sometimes directly quoting estate agents "talking to their book". They need not be so, but my own experience leads me to believe that resourcing the writing of material for property supplements is not a priority for editors or management.

In the main body of newspaper and magazines, a search of the database of Independent Online for reports mentioning housing shows the focus is mainly on house price movements. This entails the regular reporting of the house price indices of two major banks. Sometimes the results of auctions or the experience of auction houses is used to illustrate trends in the property market. Rarely are articles owned by reporters, that is originated and researched by them. Too often they are reactive. Also rare is the human angle: who are these people who are losing their houses in auctions? Why did it happen?

The coverage all feeds into a one-dimensional view of the residential property market, as simply an area of investment. And, until fairly recently, that view took in only the formerly white areas, whose inhabitants are middle to upper class. Only recently has there been, to my knowledge, any focus on price movements in the poorer areas. In both the main body and advertorial or near-advertorial articles the fall in property prices is presented as a temporary phenomenon. Moreover, price falls are presented in an entirely negative manner – except by estate agents, who remind that it is "never a better time to buy property".

The focus, in other words, is almost always on existing owners, rather than those frozen out of the market by rising prices. Some concern may be expressed about new entrants, but when house prices fall it is rarely mentioned that this is good news for those wanting to get into the market – or simply find a home.

As Shiller comments: "Life was simpler once; one saved, and bought a home when the time was right. One expected to buy a home as part of normal living, and didn't think to worry about what would happen to the price of homes. The

continued on page 18

December 2008

Denmark, slash interest rates again. The Reserve Bank cuts its influential repo rate by half a percentage point to 11.5%, the first of several decreases, as it starts to consider the effects of the global economy on inflation. The rate will drop to 7.5% by the end of May 2009.

16 December

The US Federal Reserve slashes its key interest rate from 1% to a range of zero to 0.25% – the lowest since records began.

19 December

President George W Bush says the US government will use up to \$17.4bn of the \$700bn meant for the banking sector to help the Big Three US carmakers, General Motors, Ford and Chrysler.



29 December

The US Treasury unveils a \$6bn bailout for GMAC, the car-loan arm of General Motors.

31 December

The FTSE 100 closes down 31.3% since the beginning of 2008 – the biggest annual fall in the 24 years since the index was started. The Dax in Frankfurt lost 40.4% over the year while the Cac 40 in Paris dropped 42.7%.

January 2009

5 January

US President-elect Barack Obama describes America's economy as "very sick" and says that the situation is worsening.

8 January

The Bank of England cuts interest rates to 1.5%, the lowest level in its 315-year history, as it continues efforts to aid an economic recovery in the UK.

9 January

Official figures show the US jobless rate rose to 7.2% in December, the

highest in 16 years. The figures also indicate that more US workers lost jobs in 2008 than in any year since World War II.



13 January

China's exports register their biggest decline in a decade.

AS SAFE AS HOUSES, NOT

continued from page 17

increasingly large role of speculative markets for homes, as well as of other markets, has fundamentally changed our lives... The changing behaviour of home prices is a sign of changing public impressions of the value of property, a heightening of attention to speculative price movements."

Shiller argues the news media were responsible for rising property prices in the US spreading to other markets in the world. This is not necessarily true. Sophisticated South Africans, with an eye on emigration and in an era of increasing internationalisation in many fields, have a shrewd idea of how property markets are performing elsewhere, despite a lack of news media coverage.

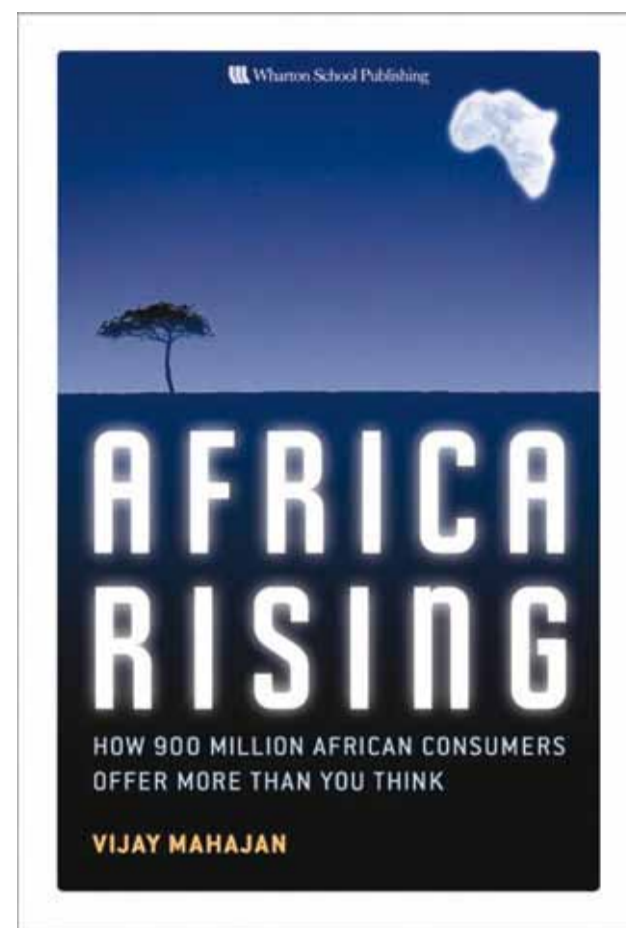
It is true that the global property bubble helped fuel our own boom. It seemed more persuasive that our market had some steam in it when the money a mansion in Sandton could command hardly bought a flat in Sydney.

What will happen to markets now in this unfolding global recession will determine whether we continue to think about housing as a market, and one in which falls in prices are merely a pause. Is there not time for more nuanced reporting on property, from a business point of view (let alone socially or politically)?

A place to start would be to examine the idea of housing as an investment, and set this against rental. It may be that some people may never be able to afford a house, and that renting will be the only option. Another is to find out what rental levels landlords can demand in this recession, and what this may tell us about the present level of home prices. And are interest rates the only factor in determining the direction of house prices? And what about the human face of booms and busts? What is happening to the character of suburbs where prices are plunging? Are people still losing their houses? Which kind of people? What happens if you do find yourself on the street? How many people are distressed sellers? Could the government be asked to intervene in some way?

I am not saying that I have the answers to these questions, or that they are all answerable, but trying to answer them has to be more interesting – and useful to an audience – than titbits about fashionable suburbs or the monthly regurgitation of a bank's release of its house price index. And perhaps they may help us avoid the unquestioning belief in new era wealth that accompanies bubbles.

SHINING LIGHT ON THE SHADOW ECONOMY



GROWTH ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT WILL EXCEED THE GLOBAL AVERAGE THIS YEAR FOR ONE OF THE VERY FEW TIMES IN HISTORY. BUT, WHILE THIS STORY IS LITTLE KNOWN AT A POPULAR LEVEL, THERE ARE SIGNS THAT THE CONSEQUENCES ARE BEGINNING TO PENETRATE POPULAR WISDOM, SHOWING UP IN ODD AND INTERESTING PLACES. ONE SUCH EXAMPLE, WRITES TIM COHEN, IS INDIAN BUSINESS ACADEMIC VIJAY MAHAJAN'S BOOK *AFRICA RISING*

In 2003, the *Economist* magazine famously described Africa as "the hopeless continent", pointing out that almost every country in sub-Saharan Africa was involved in a war or a conflict. Almost on cue, that moment became a pivot point, and the continent started turning around, almost as if to prove wrong the acerbic assessment of a publication emanating from a former colonial power.

As economic growth underpinned by manufacturing prowess started taking off in the East, commodities started to win the kinds of prices in the global supply chain that they have long deserved. The increase in commodity prices since 2003, and also the increased quantity of demand, has provided the ballast to underpin African economies, allowing them to diversify somewhat and improve governance.

Economists close to Africa have been aware of this trend for years, and it has occasionally made its way into the analytical sections of the Western media. De Beers chairman Nicky Oppenheimer wrote in an editorial that appeared in the *New York Times* in 2007 that two years previously, at the Group of 8 summit meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland, the Commission for Africa had described Africa as "a scar on the conscience of the world" and repeated the *Economist's* dreary categorisation.

But since then, Oppenheimer noted, economic growth in Africa had averaged over 5% annually – a development that he said had little to do with aid flows. This growth rate was a step up from the dismal 1980s and 1990s when it managed little over 2%. "And the number of conflicts is an exact corollary of the continent's better economics – down by two-thirds from a peak of 12 in the late 1990s. Today, for every African failure, there is a steady stream of successes, and for every African autocrat, many more democrats.

January 2009

German Chancellor Angela Merkel unveils an economic stimulus package worth about €50bn (\$67bn; £45bn) to kick-start Europe's largest economy.



14 January

The UK government unveils a plan to guarantee up to £20bn of loans to small and medium-sized firms, to help them survive the downturn. US Commerce Department figures show retail sales fell by more than expected in December, as shoppers cut back on spending over the Christmas period. The news prompts big falls in share prices in the US and Europe.

15 January

The European Central Bank (ECB) cuts eurozone interest rates by half a

percentage point to 2%. The ECB has now reduced rates four times from 4.25% in September as it continues efforts to bolster the eurozone economy.

16 January

The US government reaches an agreement to provide Bank of America with another \$20bn in fresh aid from its \$700bn financial rescue fund. The emergency funding will help the troubled bank absorb the losses it incurred when it bought Merrill Lynch. Struggling US banking giant Citigroup announces plans to

split the firm in two, as it reports a quarterly loss of \$8.29bn (£5.6bn).

24 January

President Obama pledges that his economic recovery package will be at the centrepiece of his administration. Obama says that 80% of the spending will take place within 18 months.

28 January

World economic growth is set to fall to just 0.5% this year, its lowest rate since World War II, warns the International Monetary Fund (IMF).



It now projects the UK will see its economy shrink by 2.8% next year, the worst contraction among advanced nations. The International Labour Organization said that as many as 51 million jobs worldwide could be lost this year because of the global economic crisis.

Sound domestic policy always counts more than external assistance in creating the conditions for growth, stability and prosperity. More and more, that is the African norm. Failure is the deviation."

After Oppenheimer spoke, economic growth actually grew even higher in many Africa countries, reaching really eye-popping rates of over 20% a year in Angola, for example, before swooning in 2009 as their customers in other parts of the developed world started paring back during the economic crisis and commodity prices came off. Yet growth on the African continent will exceed the global average this year for one of the very few times in history.

Despite the dramatic turnaround these developments have brought, this story seems little told at a popular level. Partly, the world is consumed with more pressing issues. Yet, there are signs that the consequences are beginning to penetrate popular wisdom and they are beginning to show up in odd and interesting places. One example is Indian business academic Vijay Mahajan's book *Africa Rising*.

Mahajan's perspective is interesting for all kinds of reasons. First, he comes at Africa not from a political perspective but from a business perspective. In three years of travelling around the continent, he says he did not speak to a single politician. Neither is he particularly enamoured of aid agencies, which, he says, are run by people with big hearts but no accountability.

Second, he sees Africa from an Indian perspective. In the introduction to the book, he notes that he was very conscious of the fact that the very same negative things people used to say about India, they now say about Africa. Yet his experience of travelling around Africa on what he calls a "consumer safari" showed him something entirely different.

Third, his area of expertise in business education is marketing. There is obviously something about the way Africa is marketed which irritates him as inadequate and ham-fisted. At a function talking about the book in Johannesburg, he kept repeating: "It's celebration time in Africa. If you don't tell this story, shame on you."

His basic argument is that Africa has reached some kind of unnoticed inflection point. It is much larger, much more populous, much richer and much more profitable than most international companies recognise – apart from a handful of extraordinary international operators who actually do operate very successfully on the continent.

A good example is the sales growth of Coke for example, which has steadily increased volumes on the continent without fail since 1985, rising from 400-million cases to 1.4-billion cases in 2006.

The most contentious part of Mahajan's approach is his determination to see Africa as a place. He announces with fanfare, for example, that if there was a United States of Africa, it would be the world's tenth largest economy with 900-million consumers. That's a bit like saying, South America is a big economy; so what?

The characterisation of Africa as a place seems to play

into the particularly irritating habit that outsiders have of generalising African problems. Hence, problems in Zimbabwe, for example are typical in an African context, where no one would say Burma's problems are typical of Asia, even though autocracy is generally more evident in Asia than it is in Africa.

Mahajan himself is amazed at the sheer size of Africa, as foreigners often are, which seems to run counter to the argument that it is a place, although you do have to wonder how many Africans actually know that Europe, the US, China and India could all quite easily fit into Africa with masses of room to spare.

Yet Mahajan raises these issues because he wants to surprise people. "Africa is full of surprises," he keeps saying in his book. He also acknowledges that it would be difficult to get Americans particularly to sit up and take notice without making the comparison with China and India.

But there is a more substantive part of his argument too. He meets the pessimistic argument that Africa is filled with problem regimes, disease, cultural and religious tensions with what is happening on the ground.

Take the argument that Africa is made up of small, complex, disparate and discrete markets. On the ground, cellphone companies roam across borders, there is the growing emergence of regional groupings, and the increasing gravitation toward English as the one African language.

But the best parts of his book are those parts derived from his own experience of how India emerged. Africa is richer than people think, he says. Although about 20 of the 25 poorest countries in the world are on the continent, 13 Africa countries have a higher per capita GDP than China and 22 are higher than India.

But the important thing is that most of the wealth is tucked away in the shadow economy which he estimates constitutes between 40 and 60% of the economy as a whole. Nigerians often pay for their cars with cash. This was nothing new to Mahajan, who recalls that in India, there was for years the same kind of undercurrent economy.

The "sick states" argument is another example. Mahajan says this is not so different from India; five or six states in India are called "bamaru" or "sick" states. "Every economy has its trouble spots, and the entire opportunity cannot be judged by the outliers." The "problem" of diversity and linguistic difference should also, says Mahajan, be turned on its head. Africa's differences in language culture and religion can be troublesome but they also force cultural mingling, mutual understanding and mutual respect. Likewise, the Africa diaspora might be a depressing fact, but it is infusing Africa with money and new ideas.

Mahajan says he was amazed by the "inexplicable optimism" across the continent. Yet this optimism is an odd thing, and does not necessarily have to do with concrete life experiences, and many African countries remain some of the toughest places in the world to live. This optimism has to do with self-belief and taking charge of your life, he says.



Vijay Mahajan

The crux of this argument lies in a phrase that Mahajan picked up from Ghanaian economist George Ayittey, who distinguished between the "cheetah generation" and the "hippo generation". The hippo generation is slow moving and mired in the past, while the cheetah generation is fast moving, modern, democratically-minded, anti-corruption and pro-transparency. The hippos are fixated on colonialism and imperialism, but the cheetahs are "not only a force that is changing political and driving economics, it is also redefining the future of the African consumer market".

The demographics, and the consequences of the demographics, are really astounding. A little over 40% of Africans are younger than 15, compared to 33% in India, 28% in Brazil and 20% in China. What this means is that by 2050, five African countries will be among the world's most populous 15 countries in the world – Russia, Japan and Germany will drop out of that list.

At root, Mahajan is engaged in a process of marketing Africa, lowlighting the problems, highlighting the opportunities. But what a refreshing take. It's a view that, for all its marketing puff, has more of a ring of truth about it for the people who actually live on the continent than "hopeless continent" characterisations.

February 2009

5 February

The Bank of England cuts interest rates to a record low of 1% from 1.5% – the fifth interest rate cut since October. South Africa's Reserve Bank cuts its influential repo rate by a full percentage point to 10.5%.

17 February

US President Barack Obama signs his \$787bn (£548bn) economic stimulus plan into law, calling it "the most sweeping recovery package in our history". The plan is aimed at saving or creating 3.5 million jobs and boosting



consumer spending and rebuilding infrastructure.

11 February

Finance Minister Trevor Manuel sounds a sombre note about the effect of the global crisis on South Africa, despite reassuring the country that a sound banking system and good regulation has insulated the country, and announces a Budget deficit to fund the country's infrastructure programme, a counter-cyclical move to cushion the blow of recession, and predicts low growth in 2009 but a recovery in 2010.



February 20

Anglo American Corporation announces 19,000 job cuts, most of them likely in South Africa. Around

10,000 of those would be cut from subsidiary Anglo Platinum, the world's largest platinum producer.

February 24

The global economic crisis has resulted in declining demand for South Africa's

commodity exports, putting the country's mining and motor manufacturing sectors, in particular, under increasing pressure.

WHEN A WATCHDOG DOESN'T BARK

HERE'S A PITHY QUESTION: DO FINANCIAL JOURNALISTS HAVE NAVELS?

By Anton Harber

In the wake of a global financial crunch, and questions about the role of financial reporters, it would help to know that they do indeed have these bits of anatomy. For one thing, it would prove natural birth, and therefore confirm that even financial journalists are human. For another, it would mean there might still be opportunity for contemplation of said navels.

In short, self-examination is in order.

There are certainly those who believe that the failings of the global financial systems was accompanied, even facilitated, by the failings of those tasked with reporting and analysing this sector for our mainstream media. Where was the watchdog? They are asking.

Veteran US media critic Danny Shechter charges that the media were complicit in the dubious Wall Street practices, and the failure of regulators, which led to the crisis. This, he argues, was because of vested interests. "The newspaper industry became, in some communities, the marketing arm of the real-estate industry. In some cities you actually had newspapers getting a piece of the action of sales through the ads they generated – they were actually part of the corruption. So of course there was little real scrutiny of what was actually happening in the neighbourhoods where mortgage fraud was pervasive," he wrote in the *British Journalism Review*.

Shechter made a film in 2007, *In Debt We Trust*, warning of the severity of the collapse if nothing was done, and published *Plunder*, a book which rips apart the greed of the financial industry, just days before Lehman Brothers collapsed. So he is someone worth listening to.

He is right that the financial sector is particularly vulnerable to the pressure of advertising and the onslaught of teams of professional public relations people trying to spin a line.

Shechter quotes Will Hutton, former editor of the *Observer* and now head of The Work Foundation: "General journalists, as well as business journalists, are really guilty in this. They have indulged madness in the last five years – we should have been better at whistleblowing than we were. Journalists for the most part missed the build-up to the crisis and did not warn the public. We all kind of believed that we had fallen upon some kind of alchemy, that capitalism had changed, and I think everyone got carried away. We lost our senses, all of us journalists."

Others have accused the financial media of being too close to Wall Street and the City in London, of being embedded in the business community. Reporters usually treat the big names of business with deference, and seldom know enough to ask tough questions or probe what is being claimed. "Buy, buy, buy," was the message right up until the

markets crashed.

Journalists, they are suggesting, suffered from a form of Stockholm Syndrome.

Howard Kurtz, media reporter for the *Washington Post*, talked of the "cheerleading" which often characterises financial reporting, and said "most news organisations fell short in reporting the lax federal regulations that everyone – even the Bush administration – now admits was at the root of the problem".

As is often the case nowadays, it was Jon Stewart of Comedy Central's *Daily Show*, who delivered the most cutting critique. He strung together snippets of business channel CNBC's reports to show how wrong their advice had been. It included a CNBC person telling viewers not to sell their Bear Stearns shares, how good Lehman Brothers management was, and how Meryl Lynch had plenty of capital, in all cases just weeks before they had to be bailed out, sold or closed.

"If I listened to what they said, I could have a million dollars if I had started with \$100million," Stewart said.

Financial Times editor Lionel Barber, delivering a Poynter Fellowship Lecture, conceded that we should have done better: "In the final resort, there can be little debate that the financial media could have done a better job, just as it could have done a better job ahead of the dotcom crash in the early part of this decade. Then, as now, many in the profession have taken the solemn vow: never again."

Of course, one cannot miss the irony of saying "never again", again.

Barber admits that it can be hard to be a pessimist in a bull market. But "it is also fair to say there was an alarming suspension of critical faculties among financial and business journalists during the credit bubble".

Interestingly, there have been conflicting views in two of the leading professional journals in the US, the *American Journalism Review* and the *Columbia Journalism Review*.

In the AJR, Chris Roush, a former business journalist and now Distinguished Scholar in Business Journalism at the University of North Carolina, challenged the general view that there had been a failure of journalism: "The business media have done yeoman's work during the past decade-plus to expose wrongdoing in corporate America. In fact, a review of the top business publications in the country shows that they blanketed the major issues, from subprime loans to adjustable-rate mortgages to credit derivatives, that caused so much economic pain."

He lists reporting, analysis and warnings by leading opinion-makers, such as the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post* and *Fortune* magazine.

The problem, he says, was not that they did not cover this stuff but that no-one was paying any attention.

He quotes Andrew Leckey, director of the Donald W Reynolds National Centre for Business Journalism at Arizona State University, comparing the situation to an unwanted Christmas present wrapped in shiny paper and a bow: nobody wants to open it up to see what's inside. The reading public wants to read only what it wants to believe.

Washington Post executive editor Marcus Brauchli concurred: "The notion that the business press wasn't paying attention is wrong, and the assertion that we were asleep at the switch is wrong. We were attentive. We were aggressive. We were aware. We wrote abundantly. But it is very hard to get the public's attention for stories warning of complex financial risks in the middle of a roaring, populist bull market."

But in the rival *Columbia Journalism Review*, Dean Starchman, a Fellow at Columbia, describes this approach as inadequate. Of course, he says, some media did some things. You can always pick out the plums in the reporting, he says.

He led a research project which looked in detail at business coverage since 2000 and asked if they provided fair warning of looming dangers. His answer: a flat No. "The record shows that the press published its hardest-hitting investigations of lenders and Wall Street between 2000-2003 then lapsed into useful-but-not-sufficient consumer- and investor-oriented stories during the critical years of 2004-2006. Missing are investigative stories that confront directly powerful institutions about basic business practices while those institutions were still powerful."

"This is not a detail," he says. "This is the watchdog that didn't bark."

We need to understand, he writes, that the interests of major financial media may not coincide with public interest. "The business press exists within the Wall Street and corporate subculture and understandably must adopt its idioms and customs, the better to translate them for the rest of us. Still, it relies on those institutions for its stories."

"Burning a bridge is hard. It is far easier for news bureaucracies to accept ever-narrowing frames of discourse, frames forcefully pushed by industry, even if those frames marginalize and eventually exclude the business press' own great investigative traditions."

Crucially, there is a big difference between reporting from an investor's perspective and from a citizen's. For the former, you want to talk up the markets, for the latter you want more realism; for the former, you might want to tell them were the herd is headed, for the latter, you might want to warn of the dangers of a herd mentality; for the former, you might want to advocate light-touch regulation, for the latter a firmer oversight of their activities.

This is a point taken further in a useful analysis provided by Damian Tambini of the Polis Institute at LSE titled "What

March 2009

2 March

Insurance giant AIG reports the largest quarterly loss in US corporate history of \$61.7bn (£43bn) in the final three months of 2008. The firm is also to receive an extra \$30bn from the US government as part of a revamped rescue package.

14 March

Finance ministers from the G20 group of rich and emerging nations have pledged to make a "sustained effort" to pull the world economy out of recession. The main summit takes place in London in April.



18 March

The US Federal Reserve says it will buy almost \$1.2 trillion (£843bn) worth of debt to help boost lending and promote economic recovery.

April 2009

2 April

Leaders of the world's largest economies reach an agreement at the G20 summit in London to tackle the global financial crisis with measures worth \$1.1 trillion (£681bn).

22 April

The UK reveals its most pessimistic Budget forecast yet. Chancellor Alistair Darling says the UK economy will shrink by 3.5% in 2009 and predicts a £175bn budget deficit amounting to more than 10% of GDP.

May 2009

1 May

One of the "big three" US carmakers, Chrysler, enters bankruptcy protection after pressure from the US government. The majority of its assets are to be sold to Fiat.



4 May

EU economies will shrink by 4% in 2009, the European Commission has forecast in its bleakest forecast to date. It also says unemployment will rise to 10.9%.

8 May

Ten of the biggest US banks have failed their stress tests and need fresh capital, the US Treasury has said. It says they need to raise an additional \$74.6bn, with the Bank of America the most exposed.

is financial journalism for?" He highlighted how journalists saw different roles for themselves, some seeing their job as providing information for investors, while others refer to a wider public interest remit, including holding of corporations to account.

"These self-definitions of role are crucial," he says. "If journalists see themselves mainly or merely as serving the market or investors, they may be less effective in their watchdog role."

The problem precedes the recent crisis, he says. "Financial journalism faces a number of challenges currently; including pressure of speed due to the 24-hour news cycle; increasing complexity; PR strategies; sustainability; and the challenges of globalisation. Journalists have begun to respond, but the profession lacks a clear sense of purpose.

"In this context financial journalists and other stakeholders should urgently seek to reassess their roles and responsibilities," he argues.

A lot of these problems go further than business and financial reporting – they are endemic to all journalism: reporters too dependant on and too close to their sources, too caught up in the thrill of running stories, not wanting to run against a positive tide, and not knowing enough or being brave enough to ask the tough questions.

But we have to be realistic about what we can expect. We cannot expect journalists always to be prescient, or at least to be more so than the many economists and other experts who failed to foresee where we were headed. To blame journalists is to blame the messenger, and there are much deeper causes at play here.

And we have to acknowledge that, amidst the mass of poor reporting, there were some excellent examples of knowledgeable, spunky financial reporters who tackled bad policies and practices and who showed real insight, fearlessness and independence.

There was just not enough of those, and the rest of us did not pay enough attention to them. They were swamped by the bull-market enthusiasm and drowned out by the cheerleaders.

The message which comes screaming through all of this is the importance of those journalists who are willing to swim against the tide, those who will be pessimists in a sea of optimism, who are prepared to ask the tough questions and who will deliver the hard answers. That takes courage, bravery, knowledge and skill.

And, of course, it helps to have a navel.

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MEASURING UP

CAROLINE SOUTHEY EXTRACTS LESSONS FROM THE FLAWS AND INADEQUACIES OF THE MEDIA'S ROLE IN RELATION TO THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

The biggest financial story since the market crash of 1929 has provoked passionate debate in some countries on the role of the media and whether journalists were villains or victims in an economic drama that began in the US and then enveloped the world.

In the one camp are those who believe that business and financial journalists failed to read the signs of the impending financial meltdown. This view holds that journalists were "asleep at the wheel", in the words of *Financial Times* editor Lionel Barber. In the opposing camp are those who argue that journalists did what they were supposed to do and raised the red flag consistently before events reached crisis point.

Chris Roush, writing in *American Journalism Review*, argued that "the business media in 2008 serve as a welcome scapegoat for those who simply want to ignore their own culpability in the financial meltdown. But it's a bad rap. The problem isn't that the business media were dazzled by soaring real-estate prices and Wall Street profits and failed to see rot beneath the surface. Rather, it was that government regulators and the general public weren't paying attention."

Allan Sloan, a *Fortune* columnist and one of America's top journalists is of the same view. Quoted in the *Review* article, he said: "The fact that housing was a bubble was printed millions of times. This is one time that we did what we were supposed to do."

In South Africa the debate about the role of the media has been much more muted. This is partly because the South African media is, generally speaking, far less self-reflecting and critical than America's. It is also true that South Africa, along with other developing economies, was an observer rather than a participant in the lead up to the final meltdown and a global recession.

The absence of a debate is a pity because some of the issues pertinent to an analysis of the media's role in countries at the centre of the crisis are also relevant to economies that felt only the aftershocks.

A cursory look at the main criticisms leveled against the American and British media confirms this. Stories warning of the pending crisis were often driven off the front page or knocked off television news bulletins either because they were considered too technical or because the stock market was booming and euphoria was sexier than

bad news. Journalists didn't pursue negative stories because they feared they would offend their sources. Journalists believed banking executives and regulators who kept assuring them that risks were dispersed and therefore under control. "We didn't do a good enough job going against the grain," the FT's Barber said in a lecture at Yale University.

This is undoubtedly true of the media in South Africa too. Months into the crisis, the South African media were largely uncritical in their reporting of the official government view that the crisis would have minimal effect on this economy. It was only after data began to show that this was not the case that the

truth emerged.

Similarly, the media remained tight-lipped about the distress felt by South Africa's banks in the aftermath of the dramatic events precipitated by the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September last year. It is true that neither the Reserve Bank nor the banks themselves wanted the public to know the extent of the distress in the market. Nevertheless, the role of journalists goes beyond what those in authority might or might not want published.

The South African media also fell into the trap of opting to lead with a sexier story (Jacob Zuma's battle for the presidency), rather than the more technical stories about collateralised debt obligations and the liquidity crunch. The uncomfortable truth is that the liquidity crunch has had a much more dramatic effect on the lives of ordinary South Africans than Zuma's eventual ascendancy to power.

But to extract any lessons from this it is necessary to cast the analysis wider and to look at the role of the media, in general. Michael Schudson in his book, *Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press*, argues that the media should: inform, act as a watchdog, provide analysis, engender social empathy, serve as a public forum and mobilise public opinion.

It could be argued that it is unfair to expect the media to have fulfilled all these roles given the technical nature of the causes and the consequences of the financial crisis. But it is precisely because of the complexities of the issues that journalists had a particularly important role to play in explaining difficult concepts.

As the *Washington Post* media reporter Howard Kurtz put it: "These were really difficult issues to convey to the popular public."

In addition, the crisis highlighted how important it is for the media to provide analysis, adequate public platforms for debate and the mobilization of public opinion.

Judging the performance of the media against Schudson's list it would be fair to conclude that their coverage of the financial crisis fell short on a number of scores. The journalists who did shine were those that cut through the clutter, abandoned the jargon and the sham of their sources and wrote about the unfolding events with empathy and insight.

May 2009



May 26

Statistics South Africa reveals that South Africa's economy contracted by 6.4%, confirming that South Africa has joined many other countries in being in recession, the first for South Africa since 1992.

June 2009

1 June

The world's largest carmaker, GM, enters bankruptcy protection after bondholders agree to a deal that means they lose 90% of their money. The US government loans the company an additional \$50bn.

9 June

UK unemployment rate rises to 7.1% with 2.22 million people out of work in the first three months of 2009, the ONS says.

10 June

Global oil consumption fell for



the first time since 1993 in 2008, according to BP's global energy outlook, in another sign of the depth of the recession. Ten of the largest US banks say they will be able to repay the US Treasury the money they were lent under the TARP bail-out in October. The banks would have faced restrictions on executive pay.

11 June

Japan's economy contracted at an annualised rate of 14.2% in the first three months of 2009, a record rate of decline.

July 2009

July 29

Statistics South Africa reports the South African economy shed 267,000 jobs in the second quarter, bringing cumulative job losses in the first half to almost half a million. The official jobless rate rose only slightly to 23.6%, but the labour market itself has shrunk to 17.5-million from 17.8-million in the first quarter, as more people became "economically inactive".

THE TETT OFFENSIVE

Review by Reg Rumney

Financial journalist Gillian Tett observes in her book – *Fool's Gold, How Unrestrained Greed Corrupted a Dream, Shattered Global Markets, and Unleashed a Catastrophe* – that the complexity of finance serves the purpose of the financiers well. “When bankers talk about derivatives, they delight in swathing the concept in complex jargon,” she points out. The resulting opacity “reduces scrutiny and confers power on the few with the ability to pierce the veil”.

Stressing that derivatives are as old as finance itself, she notes: “As the name implies, a derivative is, on the most basic level, nothing more than a contract whose value derives from some other asset – a bond, a stock, a quantity of gold.”

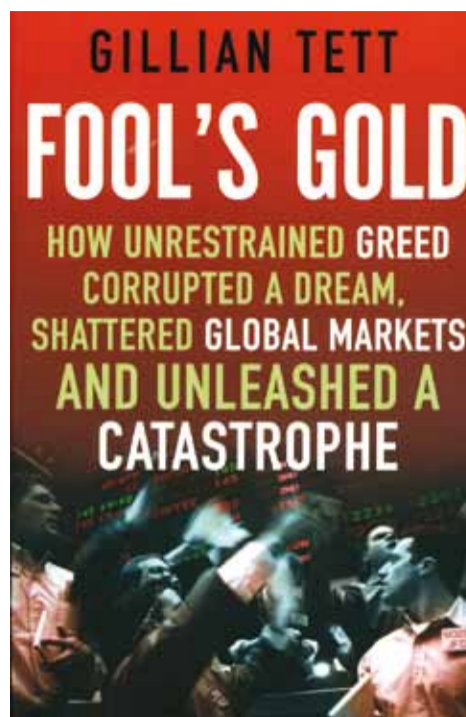
Fool's Gold does an admirable job of lifting the veil so that we can look at the derivatives that led to the crisis. This is the strength of the book. It is also the reason that people who know Tett's writing in the *Financial Times* will want to read it.

I suspect the subtitle is an attempt to latch on to the loathing for financiers now prevalent, but it is also misleading. It could have been called, *Financial code: Everything you ever wanted to know about CDOs and other derivatives but were afraid to ask.*

Tett does point out that a lack of holistic thought in financial circles, a detachment from the real world, had devastating consequences. She is angry, along with millions of families, most of whom never knew derivatives existed, and who have suffered “shattering financial blows”.

Tett does not sit in judgment of those who created the complicated financial engineering. She writes: “The story of the great credit boom and bust is not a saga that can be neatly blamed on a few greedy or evil individuals. It tells how an entire financial system went wrong, as a result of flawed incentives within banks and investment funds, as well as the ratings agencies; warped regulatory structures; and a lack of oversight. It is a tale best understood through the observation of human foibles, as much as through economic or financial analysis. And while plenty of greedy bankers play crucial parts in the drama – and perhaps a few mad, or evil, ones too – the real tragedy of this story is that so many of those swept up in the lunacy were not acting out of deliberately bad motives.”

What Tett goes on to tell is the story of how a small group of clever and inventive bankers at the venerable JP Morgan came up with ideas that were gradually transmuted into the monsters that broke not only JP



Morgan, but several large banks and financial institutions. Those who invented these innovative products were certain, not only that they had a money-making proposition, but also that they would benefit banks and ultimately business in general. But, these derivatives did turn out to be, in Warren Buffet's prescient words, “weapons of mass destruction”.

Several times Tett refers to journalists not being particularly interested in report-

ing on the areas of finance that feature in the book. No wonder.

Tett does a fine job of explaining how derivatives worked – and subsequently didn't work. Her writing epitomises the journalistic tradition of the *Financial Times* where she runs global market coverage, which is not assuming that her audience wants or needs obfuscatory, number-intensive jargon. Clarity and simplicity are the watchwords, yet even her journalistic explanatory skills at times creak under the strain of explaining the inexplicable.

Also, without at least just a little prior knowledge of the world of finance the reader may find this book heavy going. You have to have at least regularly read the Alex column that appears in South Africa in *Business Day* to get an idea of how perverse the incentive structures of modern finance have become.

Though the content is not as sensationalistic as the title pretends, the book reads like a thriller. This is no mean feat for a volume whose real villains are Synthetic Collateralised Debt Obligations and Credit Default Swaps. How does she manage this? The clue is in her awareness of the humanity of those who dealt in these arcane and cerebral financial products, of the mundane realities of their lives, of the personalities involved. The book is both a vindication of the kind of journalism that is not satisfied with the exclusionary jargon of insiders, and an example of good journalism's ability to explain the apparently arcane without oversimplification.

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WHOSE WORLD CUP?



Rajesh Jantilal/African Media Online

JOURNALISM AND THE MEDIA-SPORT-CULTURAL COMPLEX

THE INTERLOCKING OF SPORT AND THE MEDIA – FORMERLY TWO VERY SEPARATE INSTITUTIONS – HAS HAD COMPLEX CONSEQUENCES FOR BOTH INDUSTRIES, SOME OF WHICH ARE POTENTIALLY DAMAGING, WRITES **JANE DUNCAN**

WHOSE WORLD CUP?

Next year, South Africa will host the Fifa World Cup. Promises abound about the development benefits for South Africa. According to the Department of Home Affairs, between 450 000 and 500 000 visitors are expected, although the global recession may result in fewer people attending than expected (Webb 2008).

In view of the anticipated visitor influx and the global media coverage of the event, the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) has declared the World Cup “a communication opportunity of a lifetime”, and identified as its key communication objectives “African solidarity, national development and improved international image” (GCIS 2009). The government has also stated its commitment to use the event to turn several South African cities into world-class cities in the eyes of the global community, which should have tangible long-term benefits.

These ambitious objectives are not surprising: mega-events such as World Cups have long been recognised as spectacular opportunities for global image enhancement of the host cities and countries (Newton 2009: 95). Global sporting events attract huge media attention, but what are the consequences for sport and journalism, of the mediatisation of sport? And are national development and global image enhancement actually compatible objectives?

The interlocking of two formerly separate institutions – namely media and sport – has had complex consequences for both industries. David Rowe has used the term media-sport-cultural complex to describe the integration of industries that were able to supply each other synergistically with important benefits (Rowe 2006: 2-3).

The danger of these developments is that the media, sporting associations, sporting businesses and even governments may become interlocked in a web of interests that may damage the integrity of sport and journalism. Some sports organisations even own their own public relations companies and their own media, and media organisations and sports organisations may even share owners, which may marginalise traditional journalism as teams and organisations succumb to the temptation to control what is said about them.

Controversially, some sports organisations have also attempted to restrict the flow of information about major games.

Investigative journalism on controversies involving powerful figures in sport may become a difficult undertaking, and a fear of risk taking and even self censorship may set in. Nigerian sports journalist Olukayode Thomas, who has investigated stories such as drug scandals, the misappropriation of athletes’ allowances and bonuses, controversies around the appointment of coaches and age cheats among athletes, knows these pressures all too well; he has been subjected to many forms of pressure, and even threats (Thomas 2002).

Close associations with official sources may lead to sweetheart journalism, especially if such journalism is rewarded with financial incentives. Sports journal-



ism also runs the risk of evolving towards entertainment and away from news.

Universal access to sport is also an increasingly controversial information society issue. Some of the more popular sporting codes and major global events are being moved onto conditional access systems, and sports rights are becoming increasingly unaffordable for smaller commercial and public broadcasters. In fact, sports rights have become one of the biggest drivers of inflation in programming. As a result, public broadcasters are struggling to offer sport as part of their full-spectrum programming.

The mediatisation of sport may also reinforce a masculine sporting culture, with codes involving women receiving scant media attention. An international survey on sports press coverage across 10 countries revealed that the print media cover a narrow range of mainly male sports (Schultz-Jorgensen cited in Rowe 2006: 12-13). Sports that build a range of socially important skills and that do not lend themselves easily to commercialisation – like martial arts, volleyball and table tennis – can all too easily fall below the radar of media coverage.

Another consequence of sport mediatisation is that a host country’s need to project a positive global



image may trump national development priorities, with the possible contradictions between the two objectives receiving scant attention in government and media discourse. The standard line is that mega-events will generate benefits that will have long-term positive impacts on host countries.

According to John Nauright, there has been a tendency on the part of the government and the media to present the nation and the world “in union”, in an attempt to gloss over troubling questions about spending priorities (Nauright 187). For example, in an interview with Deutsche Welle, Ndivhuwo Mabaya, a spokesman from South Africa’s Ministry of Housing



David Larsen/African Media Online



Rajesh Jantilal/African Media Online



Rajesh Jantilal/African Media Online

and Human Settlement stated that the new infrastructure will boost the economy and improve the lives of the poor as well (Hauschild 2009).

Yet the true development value of mega-events has become a sore issue in many host countries. The crowding in of investments around stadiums can lead to the crowding out of investments in more distant areas. Jobs that are created may be temporary, casual and low-paid.

Huge investments may be made in facilities that are barely used afterwards (Newton 2009: 94-98). When global sporting events come to town, they can lead to gentrification, as well as forced removals of

poor and homeless people, many of whom may be criminalised through the promulgation of loitering and begging by-laws and the creation of vagrant-free zones.

In preparation for Atlanta's hosting of the Olympic Games, 68 000 people were evicted. People residing in public housing were gradually displaced by private developments, with insufficient compensation.

Some journalists, especially those in the non-credentialed press, however, decided to look beyond the hype and cover the real stories of communities affected by Olympic developments. As Olympic scholar

Helen Lenskyj has argued, "the Olympic Games have always been a bad thing for the region that hosts them. They involve massive long-term changes to regional infrastructure to accommodate a two-week influx of tourists and athletes... the whole agenda is dominated by multinationals" (Lenskyj in Beaty 2007: 18). Yet these stories were few and far between as the overall trend in media coverage was towards the promotion of the games, which became projected as a patriotic duty (Beaty 2007: 17).

Such contradictions are becoming evident in

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WHOSE WORLD CUP?

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South Africa in the build-up to 2010. Shack-dwellers in Durban's Kennedy Road have been resisting a Slums Bill that they say will be used to "cleanse" the area of slums ahead of 2010 (Dardagan 2007). In September 2008, hundreds of Nelspruit schoolchildren toyi-toyi'd outside the 2010 stadium in protest against being evicted from their school, which was earmarked for demolition to make way for a stadium parking lot, and be replaced by makeshift sheds. Pupils became ill from the oppressive learning conditions (Khoza and Mogakane 2008).

In Cape Town, plans to fight the housing backlog by developing a flagship project along the N2 gateway, which links the airport to the city, have been criticised as a strategy to hide the visibly obvious poverty along this route during the World Cup (Newton 2009: 93-108). The project involves massive slum eradication and the construction of more attractive housing, which in the first phase of development has been unaffordable for Joe Slovo informal settlement residents.

Shack-dwellers have been forcibly removed to transit camps far away from the city centre, leading to additional hardships and the erosion of social networks (Chance, Huchzermeyer and Hunter 2009): a measure that has now unfortunately been given a respectable face by the Constitutional Court in their judgement on the latest evictions. In view of these development, assurances by Tokyo Sexwale, the Minister of Housing and Human Settlement, that no evictions will take place in the build-up to 2010, ring hollow.

As Garry Whannel has argued, mega-sports events can become a media vortex, or a focal point around which many issues converge (Berger 2008). Journalists will need to be sensitive to these story opportunities, especially stories that explore the tensions between the promises and the reality in light of experiences with global mega-events.

For instance, the World Cup could be used to confront Africa's peripheral status in world football (Desai 2008: 329). The promise of new media is that it can provide a voice for sporting codes that do not receive much coverage in traditional media. The fandom attached to sport is one of its greatest potential strengths, as fans can be engaged easily through social networking tools. There is scope for fans to become citizen journalists, creating blogs, podcasts and tweets about sporting codes that do not receive much mainstream media attention. Controversial issues can find their way into the public domain more easily.

Sport brings nations together in ways that no other activity does: to this extent, it has an amazing galvanising effect. This is especially so with soccer in South

Africa, which enjoys popularity as the sport of choice of the working class. It can lead to far more genuine reconstructions of national identity than those achieved by post-1994 rugby or cricket.

Yet it is also important to bear in mind Eusebius McKaiser's recent warning that celebrations around sport (including soccer) risk creating a false impression about the state of wellbeing of the South African nation, and an unsustainable definition of national unity (McKaiser 2009). Evictions, warped spending priorities, and the like are the other side the coin of the national miracle that is the 2010 World Cup; they are the realities that tend to jar with celebrations of national unity so readily apparent at these events. Disparities within and between sporting codes, that tend to map over onto race, class and gender divisions, are national questions too in that they raise questions about the depth of our national unity.

Rowe has argued that "contemporary sport is in urgent need not of more public relations, but of greater public and professional scrutiny" (Rowe 2006: 16). Yet it is precisely this form of journalism that is increasingly endangered in the media-sport-culture nexus. The main challenge for professional journalists – irrespective of their medium – is to tell the story of the world cup with integrity.

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WEIGHING UP THE MEGA-EVENT

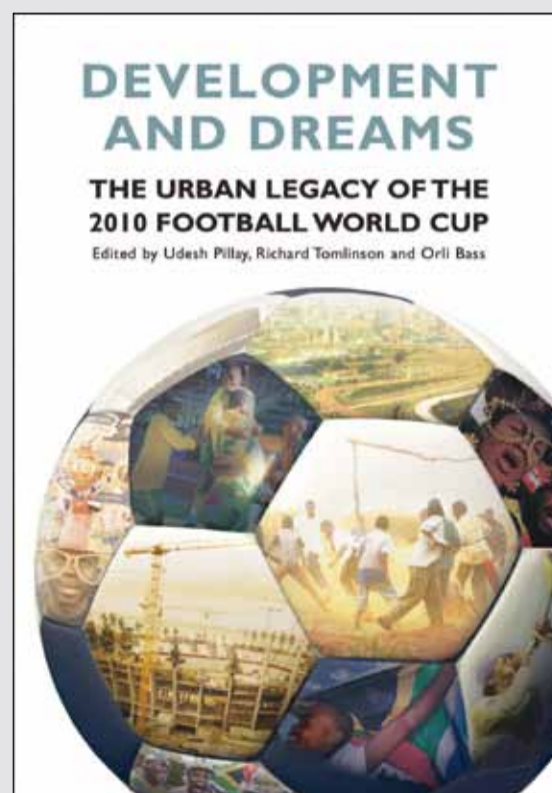
With less than a year to go before the start of the 2010 Fifa World Cup, is it too late or too soon to talk about what legacy the mega-event will leave behind?

The Human Sciences Research Council thinks the time is just right to get the conversation going.

The HSRC has undertaken "comprehensive" research on the urban impacts of the 2010 mega-event and has compiled the findings in the book *Development and Dreams: the Urban Legacy of the 2010 World Cup*.

The Fifa world cups are the world's largest sporting and media events. They are mega-events at the summit of a hierarchy of sporting events, and there is considerable pressure from governments to not only win the host bid, but to then deliver the stadiums, support infrastructure and other necessary facilities. Often, traditional participatory planning processes are by-passed by an aggressive corporate sports-media-business focus and alliance. The competition within a country between cities lobbying vigorously for host city status also puts governments under intense political pressure.

Mega-sporting events held in developing countries come to be seen as symbolic representations of prestige and power. Undoubtedly, the 2010 World Cup has



provided South Africans with a wonderful opportunity to air a range of views, some directly related to the event and others

peripherally but no less connected. With its research-driven approach, *Development and Dreams*, (edited by Udesch Pillay, Richard Tomlinson and Orli Bass) focuses on many of the topics inspired by these debates.

The first section of the book, "The build-up", describes football world cups in the context of mega-events. It outlines the evolution of football in South Africa, reflects on past racial divisions as a basis for the ultimate unification of football in the country, and maps the winning bid for the 2010 World Cup. It also explains the institutional arrangements for managing the event, and provides a framework in which to situate the key themes of the book: the material and intangible consequences of the World Cup on South Africa's cities.

The second section, "Development", explains and questions the more tangible development impacts. It includes a comparison between South Africa and Germany (which hosted the previous World Cup), and includes essays expressing concern about uncertain economic benefits and the poten-

tial for poverty reduction. The displacement of people (by stadiums), the urban-rural divide and sports tourism are also considered.

The third section, "Dreams", explores the less tangible hopes and aspirations associated with the 2010 World Cup. Approaching the subject from social and cultural perspectives, the chapters consider expectations of benefit, African identity and gender.

Four main viewpoints emerge. The first is that the contribution of the World Cup to economic development and the reduction of unemployment in South Africa has been overstated. The second is that host cities and the economy may benefit from the investment in transport and information and communication technology. The third viewpoint expresses doubt about the financial sustainability of the new stadiums. The fourth viewpoint suggests that the event could significantly contribute to reducing Afro-pessimism.

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Rajesh Jantilal/African Media Online



David Larsen/African Media Online

AMPLIFYING AFRICA'S VOICE

IN AN AMBITIOUS €2.2-MILLION PROJECT, MORE THAN 100 JOURNALISTS FROM 34 AFRICAN COUNTRIES WILL WORK TOGETHER TO HELP THE REST OF THE WORLD SEE THROUGH AFRICAN EYES: TO LOVE WHAT WE LOVE AND HATE WHAT WE HATE. DAVID LARSEN LOOKS TO 2010 AND BEYOND

It was early July 2008. I had just published a new post on one of Africa Media Online's blogs, when I received a phone call from Maarten Koets, the deputy managing director of World Press Photo.

For years, I had been trying to find some common ground between Maarten and myself around the training of African photojournalists. World Press Photo not only runs the world's largest annual photojournalism competition, but has also executed innovative training programmes for photojournalists in Africa.

My posting was about our upcoming African Photo Entrepreneur Programme that we were about to launch. Maarten believed what we were doing was in line with a project conceived by World Press Photo and FreeVoice, another Dutch-based organisation, to empower African journalists ahead of the 2010 Fifa World Cup in South Africa.

At last we had found some common ground!

The parameters of that common ground were mapped out in late-night sessions by Maarten, myself and Dominique le Roux, Africa Media Online's media manager.

By the time we were done, Maarten looked across the table and laughed: "When I share this with everyone in Holland, people are going to fall off their chairs. It is so huge!"

What we had all recognised was that the 2010 Fifa World Cup is a massive opportunity, not just for South Africa, but for all of Africa.

Our plan was to make sure that we, as Africans, get to tell Africa's 2010 story.

The plan includes the recruitment and training of more than 100 journalists from all over the continent including reporters, photographers and radio journalists. These will be known as the All Stars, who will report on the lead-up to the event itself from their home nations. This content will be distributed to African and global media markets.

Participants, or their employer media organisations, get 50% of all revenue from sales. From these All Stars, a dream team of 18 journalists will be selected to travel to South Africa during the World Cup and to report on the event. The other members of the All Stars will continue to report from their home nations.

The partner organisations are working to their strengths: World Press Photo will train photojournalists, FreeVoice will train radio journalists and reporters, while Africa Media Online will provide the technological backbone to recruit the journalists, market and sell the content through its global distribution network and provide the logistical support for the Dream Team while in South Africa.

Lokaalmondiaal, another Dutch organisation, will represent the content to the Dutch public through their website www.roadto2010.nl and will write a book about the project, to be published by the Tropenmuseum press in Amsterdam.

The Tropenmuseum itself (www.tropenmuseum.nl) will produce an exhibition about the World Cup in South Africa, allowing the Dutch public to engage with the event.

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AMPLIFYING AFRICA'S VOICE

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All of this, of course, was dependent on funding.

At a glittering award ceremony in Amsterdam in February, "Twenty Ten: African media on the road to 2010 (and beyond)" was presented with a cheque for €2.2 million from the Dutch Postcode Lottery.

We got the message out, built the application system, selected the 108 journalists and are in the process of running online refresher courses, developing curricula and building a new online media management marketing and sales system.

From September to November, we will run training programmes around World Cup qualifying events in Ghana, Egypt, Nigeria and Burkina Faso. From these workshops, and from commissions given to journalists in the months leading up to the World Cup and during the event itself, there will be a constant stream of content.

The challenge for Africa Media Online is to ensure that the content gets to the market, both in Africa and around the world. To do this, we have built and improved a multimedia web-based media management and sales system for the distribution of print and broadcast quality files.

Delivering to a multilingual audience is also a challenge. Content will be produced in French and English, but for it to have global appeal it has to be re-purposed for markets in Korea, Latin America, India, Sweden, China and other African countries. For the international market, this problem is largely solved as we have worked hard to set up relationships with more than 20 distribution partners in many regions around the world.

For the African market we have been working on a unique solution with funding from the European Union through Gijima KZN. The funding has provided for the translation of our African Archival Thesaurus (AAT) into the major trade languages of Africa – Swahili, Arabic, French, Portuguese and English. Content can now be tagged in English or French, but searched for in any of the languages.

So why are we doing all of this? We're not trying to compete with the wire services. It is not so much the blow-by-blow account of what happens on the field that we are interested in; it is what impact the soccer and all that surrounds it will have on African society, African creativity, African entrepreneurship, African sport, African pride.

We want to bring the story to the world from an authentically African perspective. So not only are the 108 journalists from 34 African countries Africans, so too will the editor-in-chief, editors and team leaders be Africans.

A representative of the Dutch Postcode Lottery admitted to me that what really caught their attention was the element of sustainability. Not only are we helping to skill-up journalists and their organisations, but we are also supporting the development of systems for the ongoing distribution of African media content to African and global markets.

This is what excites me about the project. It is not just the event of the 2010 Fifa World Cup, but the potential of the event to act as a catalyst for African voices to compete in the global information order.

During the World Cup, the 18 journalists will be divided into three teams: two of these will be based in Gauteng and the third will take a road trip from Gauteng to Cape Town in time for the semi-finals. So not only will we be reporting from the big cities, we will also be looking for the behind-the-scenes story: the trip home with a star player, the impact of the competition in Hluhluwe or Knysna, the affect on the aspirations of children in the Klein Karoo.

At a time when the world is galvanised to focus on Africa, we want to help them see through African eyes to love what we love and hate what we hate. If we can do that, then perhaps they will not just join us on the road to 2010, but also on the road beyond.

Africa Media Online is actively looking to partner with media organisations in this project. Should you be interested contact David Larsen on editor@africamediaonline.com.



Rajesh Jantil/African Media Online



Tsangirayi Mukwazi/African Media Online

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Steven McCurrach/African Media Online

DIGITAL DEVELOPMENTS IN AFRICA.



The basis of iindaba Ziyafika is to facilitate citizen reporting and opinion-sharing through cellphones, which are now ubiquitous in South Africa. The big idea is that if ordinary people can receive better information about the issues and then also have a say, this would be a great boon for local democracy.

HARRY DUGMORE PAGE 30

In an age of MXit, cheap mobile phones in almost all pockets, tabloids and a culture of entertainment and pleasure (rather than civic engagement and activism), how do you involve young people 'where they are at' and through the media they use?

KHAYA THONJENI AND HARRY DUGMORE PAGE 32

What's distinctive about journalism is that it informs people. It delivers the substance for significant public conversations. When journalism replaces this with only facilitating dialogue, then it's no longer journalism.

GUY BERGER PAGE 33

There doesn't seem to be much evidence to suggest that we'll pay for newspapers online in the same way that we used to pay for the print version. Someone will pay, but it may be advertisers or premium customers, for advertising, press offices or networking.

HEATHER FORD PAGE 35

Revolutions create a curious inversion of perception. In ordinary times, people who do no more than describe the world around them are seen as pragmatists, while those who imagine fabulous alternative futures are viewed as radicals.

CLAY SHIRKY PAGE 36

Twitter is fast becoming an essential tool in a reporter's kitbag but there are also significant pitfalls and ethical dilemmas that professional journalists need to navigate in the space.

JULIE POSETTI PAGE 38

The next generation of journalists come pre-equipped with much of the technology and internet skills that it took my generation years to learn.

TOBY SHAPSHAK PAGE 41

The impact of the shift to desktop publishing in the early 1990s was minor next to what the internet is going to do to the journalism profession in the next decade. The journalism and publishing business 10 years from now will have changed radically.

DUNCAN MCLEOD PAGE 42

Despite the emergence of internet radio streaming, the international takeover has not happened. It's largely the locality itself that has kept radio strong.

DIANE MACPHERSON PAGE 43

While the government was able to deal with "unpatriotic" reporters working in the print industry because they could be easily located, to locate those posting stories on the internet proved a daunting task and, at this point, user generated content is no doubt a threat to mainstream media and the government.

NOTHANDO NDHLOVU PAGE 43

African newsrooms have additional challenges: limited or non-existent internet access with low bandwidth, tight budgets as well as restricted technical equipment demand a more nuanced solution than found internationally.

ELVIRA VAN NOORT PAGE 44

One of the most important challenges for publishers is figuring out how to begin selling and delivering advertising that is location-relevant.

VINCENT MAHER PAGE 44

Even under the best conditions, Ethiopia is tough for tasks such as convergence that rely heavily on technology.

ALICE KLEMENT PAGE 46

The Open Net Initiative (ONI), an internet monitoring and surveillance project, recently identified Ethiopia as one of two countries in sub-Saharan Africa to carry out widespread internet blocking.

SILESHI YILMA PAGE 46

The *Daily Dispatch* is in the fortunate position of having a converged newsroom – as well as the support of an editor who believes journalists in the 21st century need to be multiskilled.

THANDUXOLO JIKA PAGE 48

Even if the story of migration is the one which will decide someone's future, they should not be limited to telling only that story.

CLODAGH MISKELLY PAGE 50

Paul Greenway

MEETING DEMOCRACY'S CHALLENGE

Constructing scenarios – stories about the future – has an impressive legacy in South Africa's recent political history. The idea is that by positing two or three or four plausible alternative futures, carefully worked out and well researched, citizens and planners can see more vividly what *could* happen, and can thus plan to achieve the best possible outcome.

Indeed, having also seen, at least in the collective mind's eye, how bad it could be, governments can also plan more actively to avoid the worst plausible outcomes. Large-scale scenario-making exercises were undertaken by the South African Presidency in 2003 and 2008 and by various private-sector groupings over the years, including the recent Dinokeng Scenarios released earlier this year (www.dinokengscenarios.co.za).

Despite their different methodologies and core participants, all these recent scenarios have come to some strikingly similar conclusions in one area in particular: there is an urgent and compelling need for ordinary people to get more involved in decision-making processes in South Africa. Starkly put, if South Africans leave the running of the country only to professional politicians, the futures posited are bleak.

South Africa 2025 – The Future We Chose?, published by the Presidency in 2008, examined the basis on which future social partnerships could be formed. There was a focus on what it would take to create more social solidarity. In one of the scenarios, people in a future South Africa get together in various ways – “from convention halls, retreats, summits and on the airways of talk radio and TV”. They agreed that short-term sacrifice was needed from *all* parties; it could not just be the “workers and poor that were always required to compromise” and that social partnerships could not be “speculated about and wished for: they needed to be forged in action”.

Taking this theme even further, the private sector-led scenario exercise Dinokeng built all its scenarios around the

IN A CONTEXT OF DECLINING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, CAN MOBILE PHONE TECHNOLOGY AND 'NEW MEDIA' BE USED TO INVOLVE MORE PEOPLE IN LOCAL DECISION-MAKING, ASKS HARRY DUGMORE IN THIS EXPLORATION OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF MOBILE COMMUNICATION ON JOURNALISM IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

quantity and quality of future public participation in the inner-workings of governance.

The preface to the Dinokeng scenarios uses strong language to convey concern: “The heart of our challenges is that we have failed to appreciate or understand the imperatives of running a modern democratic state. Leadership across all sectors lacks clarity of purpose and is increasingly self-interested, unethical and unaccountable. We have a weak state with declining capacity to address our critical challenges.

“In addition, our citizenry has been largely disengaged or co-opted into government or party structures since 1994, and has demonstrated a growing dependence on the state to provide everything.”

Further dramatising their theme, the three Dinokeng scenarios are called “Walk Apart”, “Walk Behind” and “Walk Together”, all of which describe different kinds of state/citizen relationships.

Are these scenarios correct in their common concern about the paucity of citizen involvement in South Africa? Why should greater involvement by ordinary people make such a big difference to the future of South Africa? Surely ordinary people don't have the skills or the time to get more involved in complex matters such as municipal budgets, or planning train routes – or else they would? Or, perhaps, they just don't think they can make much difference?

Disengaged, disinterested or both?

Recent research by the Presidency does support the contention that South Africans, 15 years after the heroic levels of participation that led to the overthrow of apartheid, are becoming less engaged: membership of religious groups, trade unions, political parties, and even of sporting associations are all decreasing, sometimes sharply, in the 21st century.

Pundits scratch their heads too. What has caused this South African equivalent of “bowling alone”? In Robert D Putnam's 2000 book, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, the author rails against the how social capital in the US, which he describes as “the very fabric of our connections with each other”, has plummeted in just one generation.

Putnam came to his conclusions about declining levels of social capital from studies of membership of organisations of all kinds, interest in politics (even the signing of petitions has fallen, his study found) and, surprisingly, the amount of time spent with family and friends. Putnam's bogeymen in terms of this mass disengagement of the social are urban sprawl, television, and the rise of the internet.

Is it the same in South Africa? Is our stock of social capital declining? Is fear of crime, for example, contributing to the individualisation of South African life and the atomisation of the public sphere? And what about the internet – all that MXit and Facebooking going on? Is that increasing social isolation, or building social capital like nothing before?

Where has civil society gone?

In post-apartheid South Africa, various elements of scenario-making and forecasting seem to suggest that we are facing critical shortages of the “bridging” kind of social capital. Distinct from the “bonding” sort of social capital that keeps groups together, such as families, this is the cross-boundary type of capital that reaches out to other groups, i.e. creates bridges between people.

Politically, there is of course a critical link between the creation of social capital and the role of what is often called civil society, the coming together of people in some kind of organised way to debate and discuss issues of common interest.

Of course, what is the common interest, and common to whom, are the huge issues in post-apartheid South Africa.

And that seems to be precisely the problem – both social capital and civil society are held to be in decline, with people participating and connecting less and less, to the great determinant of social life. South Africans are not even connecting to decide what is common.

For many, this has dire consequences. As the Dinokeng Scenarios ominously put it: “If citizens do not organise to engage government constructively, we will experience rapid disintegration and decline.”

All this serves to inform the Iindaba Ziyafika (isiXhosa for “the news is coming”) project, run out of the School for Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. The core proposition of Iindaba Ziyafika is that information and communication technology can enlarge the public sphere by providing the tools that encourage participation and facilitate that participation.

Embedded in the Iindaba Ziyafika project is the idea that cellphone-based technologies can be used to create both social capital and help civic society get together and engage better with government.



Cellphones and civic life

The basis of Iindaba Ziyafika is to facilitate citizen reporting and opinion-sharing through cellphones, which are now ubiquitous in South Africa. The big idea is that if ordinary people can better receive information about the issues and then also have a say, this would be a great boon for local democracy.

To achieve this, step one has to be to build a content management system, known as Nika, which allows people to send in news and information about what is happening in their communities through SMS. This information is published on the website and in the newspaper of *Grocott's Mail*, South Africa's oldest independent newspaper (see sidebar).

Nika's ability to receive messages from citizens directly into a newspaper's news feed gives ordinary people a voice they might not have had. For example, when teachers at a Grahamstown school went on strike and threatened the life of the school principal, a learner at that school sent *Grocott's* a message, alerting them to this crisis. *Grocott's* was able to send a reporter to investigate more deeply, bringing a dire situation to public notice.

Now that we know, what do we do?

Having got the technology in place, the next step is to link the issues to a sense of what can be done and citizen involvement.

This is much more difficult – and precisely the challenge identified by recent scenario studies. While there is no lack of issues in South Africa and many channels available to people to participate, or at least make a noise, levels of participation are low and falling.

For Iindaba Ziyafika, this raises a raft of questions about the limits of conventional journalism, the nature of developmental journalism (or journalism for development) and, indeed, about the very paradigms in which journalism is practised. What is becoming clear is that there is a strong case to be made that South African media have to find ways to go beyond just raising the issues, towards framing issues and challenging people to make choices.

Part of the answer to increased participation may lie in more vigorous journalism that is committed to exposing and explaining issues in ways that make more sense to ordinary people and which invite reaction and participation. Too much reporting, at every level of our media, is about what government did (or did not do), not about what government is thinking about doing in future and how that might impact on us, and what our choices might be.

It is arguable that there is nothing wrong with national levels of participation when people have a choice – voting rates, for example, are still high. But voting is easy – you choose people and parties who work hard to explain your

WHAT IS NIKA?

Nika (isiXhosa for “to give”) is a breakthrough. Built as an extension of Drupal open-source content management system, it allows any community newspaper to receive SMS messages directly into the newspaper's workflow. By translating SMSs through a special modem and some clever coding, the messages appear as text in the editor's inbox. This means story tips or even fuller news stories can be sent by people who do not have access to email or the internet.

Nika can also incorporate contributions sent via Facebook, MXit or email, enabling small papers to have many more eyes and ears on the ground. Many previously ignored issues and concerns are starting to see the light of day through Nika's SMS channels.

The system has been tested at *Grocott's Mail* for a year, and is currently being tested at three other community newspapers. It will be available to any community newspaper that wants to try it out by September 2009. Contact Harry Dugmore on h.dugmore@ru.ac.za for more details.

WHEN MEDIA AND MOBILE COLLIDE

Iindaba Ziyafika (isiXhosa for “the news is coming”) is a US\$620 000, three-year initiative, funded by the US-based Knight Foundation and run out of the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University.

Headed by Harry Dugmore, MTN chair of media and mobile communication, the Iindaba Ziyafika set of projects explores the interface between mobile phones and media, and citizen journalism in particular.

The insights gleaned through Iindaba Ziyafika will initiate a series of research projects, some of which will be developed with MTN.

choice and convince you. Getting involved in local government issues, joining a community police forum, standing for the school board, and indeed working at any level of government is much more complex than voting. But it is still about choices – only they can be more difficult.

This is where media can play a much more active role, and where Iindaba Ziyafika is going to succeed or fail.

The media as motivator

What are the main issues in local government? What decisions have to be made and when? Where can people participate and what choices are there? Can we enlarge the set of options we need to choose from? And how can people stay in the loop and see that decisions are implemented well?

If local media are not going help answer these questions, who will do it? Political parties and organs of participation – such as ratepayers associations and community crime forums – don't generally do a good job of this, for various reasons. Indeed, they very often rely on the media to help them make sense of these very issues.

A good example of this was a report in *Grocott's Mail* that the municipality had decided to spend R800 000 on new traffic lights at a critical road junction. This sparked debate in the newspaper's letters page, with some contributions coming through the Nika SMS line, about alternative plans the council may not have considered, including the creation of a pedestrian-only area in the centre of town. *Grocott's Mail* provided a venue and facilitated a live discussion among

citizens that examined various proposals. It ran stories about a previous (disastrous) attempt to do erect traffic lights in the same place, years ago, something the council did not seem aware of.

Underlying much of this is a clash between generally poor pedestrians and their needs and wealthier car drivers. This seemingly simple debate raised issues around creating a common interest as well as a solution that would be to the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

But despite its new level of involvement, the newspaper's coverage highlighted what is generally lacking in civic news in South Africa: the news was about a decision already made. In addition to being about a *fait accompli*, the news itself was presented neutrally: it was left entirely up to citizens to write in with the new idea of the pedestrian mall.

The paper and the website could have possibly been more proactive and run, for example, a poll on people's views, or framed alternative choices. In an area where unemployment is above the 50% mark, surely the R800 000 could be put to better use creating jobs: having real people direct traffic is a venerable African tradition.

At a local level, there is a strong case that the job of newspapers and their websites should be to alert people in advance about choices to be made, to help frame issues and explain what is at stake. Or is that an abrogation of conventional journalism's neutral “we'll just report on it, and call it the way we see it, and nothing more” approach?

This is a valid and urgent debate. But the strong case for newspapers and other media to play a much more activist role in society is not, many feel, being made coherently and publicly enough.

Without the media making initial sense of what is at issue, of where and when interventions could be made and what the possible choices are, the feared decline in popular participation in decision-making is more likely to come true.

To make a difference, *Grocott's*, particularly in its most recent online incarnation at www.grocotts.co.za, is going to work much more actively to identify upcoming issues of importance to citizens and create forums, through cellphones, that alert people not just to issues, but to their options.

This will require a great effort by journalists and citizen journalists to interpret and explain issues. And there will be a related greater effort to reflect on opinions and even gather those opinions using cellphone-based technology. *Grocott's* will run more online polls and SMS voting lines, and, as importantly, will work on ways to ensure that decision makers know what the results are.

It will also be important to work more closely with other media channels, such as community radio, and it may even be necessary to create spaces for meetings, call those meetings and see what happens.

By doing all of this, *Grocott's* and Iindaba Ziyafika want to demonstrate that new technology and a fresh approach to framing issues and motivating public response and participation, can demonstrate better ways for the public to get involved in local democracy.

If successful, this civic journalism plus inexpensive but powerful mobile phone and internet technology model might be replicated all over South Africa and further afield. It may, over time, be able to make a contribution to better governance in South Africa and Africa. Then the rosier scenarios, based on increased public participation envisaged for this country may just have a chance of coming true.



CALLS ACROSS THE DIVIDE

Grahamstown is named after Colonel Graham who, in 1812, cleared the area where the town is now located of the local population, the amaXhosa, through a campaign that he personally described as deploying a “proper degree of terror”.

A hero to some, a proto-terrorist and one of the most vicious of colonial oppressors to others, a debate about renaming Grahamstown had been simmering. Even Thabo Mbeki, then the state president, got involved, coming out in favour of changing the name – and fierce debate ensued.

When local school children were asked what they thought about this emerging debate and the proposed new naming options, most replied, “What debate?”

Something so fundamental as the naming of the place where you live is something young people should be interested in. Indeed, once apprised of the issues, they were very interested and wanted to be involved and have their views heard.

Why were they so unaware of this naming controversy? For young people who are poor, and even those who are not, traditional media no longer play the same role as they might have in decades past.

In an age of Mxit, cheap mobile phones in almost all pockets, tabloids and a culture of entertainment and pleasure (rather than civic engagement and activism), how do you involve young people where they are at and through the media they use?

And how do you bridge the divides of wealth, geography, race and technology – even in a small town?

For Lindaba Ziyafika, the answer to a lot of these questions is mobile phones, known as cellphones in South Africa. Using

phones as a way to stimulate debate, to get learners and young people involved, and as a way to get

USING MOBILE PHONES AS A WAY TO STIMULATE DEBATE, SHARE NEWS AND INFORMATION – AND INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE AS WELL – IS AN IDEA FILLED WITH PROMISE. AND THE IINDABA ZIYAFIKA PROJECT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO REALISE THIS, WRITE KHAYA THONJENI AND HARRY DUGMORE

news and information from and to users, seems filled with promise and potential.

To kickstart the project, 40 or so learners from four Grahamstown schools participated in day-long training courses last year, covering the basics of mobile journalism.

This produced a flurry of learner journalism, at least in terms of short news tips and expressions of interest – a lot of promise, but also a lot of learning about the next step to offering deeper educational opportunities for young people to become more involved in citizen journalism and civic activism.

This year, the core idea has been to develop and involve more learners and more schools, evolving the project to allow higher levels of training, interaction and citizen news production.

Learners at the participating schools were invited to become members of newly formed mobile media clubs. Some of these will be based at schools, while others will be part of the overall club based at *Grocott's Mail's* new citizen journalism newsroom. Training, outings, membership cards, free airtime and fun are all core to the mobile media clubs.

Just over 100 students began their training in earnest earlier this year with participants attending day-long training sessions. Headed up by Rhodes University writing and editing lecturer Rod Amner, and photography lecturer Paul Greenway, the workshops covered the following topics:

- Introduction to news and citizen-centric news as well as news genres, such as hard news, school news, reviews and opinion.

- How to gather school-related news.
- Identifying school stakeholders and creating school mind maps.
- Explanation of *Grocott's Mail's* online plans and how the news generated by the learners and other citizens would fit into the plan.

Learners were taught, in fun and interactive ways, how to research a story, write and improve it, and then text it in mobile phone-friendly lingo. In practical exercises, the learners created three sets of messages, all while working to deadlines.

The participants also took part in an interactive photography workshop, which focused on taking pictures with mobile phones.

Further training – including interviewing skills, ethics and telling the differences between gossip and news – will be undertaken at the individual schools, allowing a more tailored and individual approach to training.

New more modular courses in citizen journalism are now offered three afternoons a week at the *Grocott's* citizen journalism newsroom. On completion, these short courses are acknowledged with a certificate of participation which, although informal, might be the first such recognition of citizen journalism training in the world. An advanced course in citizen journalism will be also be offered in 2010.

It is hoped that through their participation in this project, learners will understand the difference between citizen journalism and journalism as well as their role and responsibilities as citizen journalists. They will be

given the skills to identify potential news sources as well as use different news genres – especially as they will be expected to use their mobile phones to send stories and take photographs.

Observable outcomes

Although this project is still in its initial stages, interesting elements have started to emerge:

Language – while the text used by the learners is predominantly English, we are likely to have a new language, a kind of digital Creole, emanating from our three local languages, isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans.

We are also creating new language syntax, which we've termed “cellphone lingo”. This allows the development of a new language writing style, the short form.

Community news – the type of news coming through from the learners is based on their experiences in Grahamstown East, the poorest parts of Grahamstown that have previously been largely ignored by news outlets. In dominant news items, such as crime stories, we are likely to have stories from victims and survivors of crime as secondary sources, making a change from the usual single-source official police report story.

The project also offers the opportunity to include issues that are important to people outside the town's urban perimeters, creating new kinds of classifieds, for example. So, instead of listing pets such as dogs and cats, animals for sale could also include donkeys, which are among the most sold livestock in the poorer parts of Grahamstown.

The news produced by the learners has tended to be more human and personal, with most of it a first-person account or opinion. With this shift from traditional news reporting to personal narrative, there is honesty, less distortion and free expression. There is also less negative reporting and elements of constructive criticism are starting to emerge.



A kind of bird flu is back, albeit in different guise. It's afflicting millions with addiction and dizziness. It's converting otherwise sane people into an ever-expanding flock of Twitterers whizzing around like the swallows of an eve at Durban's new airport.

Maybe now, as swine flu gains ground, we'll start to see the media piggies heaving into the air, leaving their pokes to be prodded on Facebook.

Today, the public sky is clouded with communicators of every colour, shape, size and source. Their cheeps and whistles come from every conceivable direction – sometimes in harmony, often competing.

Many of these communicators are individuals, numerous others are institutions. Some are machines. No matter, all these newcomers to mass communication have something to profess or a networking platform to provide.

Many are champing for a cut of the advertising cake. But more than a few – unlike the media companies – are happy to chip in their content free of charge because they make their livelihoods in other ways.

It's the "internet-isation" of societies that is causing this ever-widening "mediat-isation".

By comparison to developed countries, South Africa is still in the Stone Age; compared with much of Africa, we're still on the American trajectory towards ubiquitous broadband (albeit by mobile connection).

And, while our newspapers' sales are still growing, non-media players are assembling audiences and advertising – such as through sponsored please-call-me messages or tapping into the estimated 7-million South Africans using the mobile internet.

So media complacency here is not what the doctor is tweeting.

Amid the amazing spectacle of information exploding all around us, and with more and more people's lives and identities invested in the internet cloud, it's fair to ask where's the journalism, and how is it being paid for?

To answer this, you first have to figure out what counts as journalism within this communications clutter.

It's often forgotten that the idea of journalism as independent reportage and comment in the public interest is a modern invention. It is often overlooked that there are different iterations – for instance, Anglo-Saxon vs European journalisms. There are variations between commentary, news, Q&As, narratives, imagery, national-local-hyperlocal, etc.

So, you would be like those who say the ANC will rule for eternity if you thought that journalism was one thing, and fixed forever. It is in motion, and that is because its context and basis are also changing.

Yet the differences are not, at root, what some major pundits believe:

Dan Gilmor coined the notion that journalism is transforming from a lecture to a conversation. Sure, there is increasing interaction in communications. But important as that is, it doesn't change the core character of journalism.

This is because what's distinctive about journalism is that it informs people. It delivers the substance for significant public conversations. When journalism replaces this with only facilitating dialogue, then it's no longer journalism.

Merely moderating discussion means journalism losing its historical strength of setting the agenda for debate, and of helping people make decisions on the issues at stake. This is not to ignore the valuable rise of audience participation, but rather to say that journalists need to manage it, rather than be overwhelmed by it.

Jay Rosen evangelises about how the whole canon of professional journalism is being overthrown. He's right that nowadays there is journalism without journalists. There can even be forms of news generated by software programmes.

But let's get real: the mere fact that people with access to the new means of mass communication can "commit" journalism does not make fulltime

DESPITE THE PRETENSIONS OF THE PROFESSION, BETTER ETHICS AND GREATER CREDIBILITY ARE NOT A MAJOR REQUIREMENT FOR MEDIA SUCCESS

practitioners redundant – anywhere, and especially not in South Africa. This is because journalists carry a meaningful identity that shapes their practice. And it is because they generally generate more and better journalism than incidental contributors.

On the whole, very little user-generated content (such as SMSs carried by the media) is journalism. Even people acting as citizen journalists tend to produce opinion and personal news – journalism with a small j. And, notwithstanding their nomenclature, their content is often of little relevance to citizenship.

We should not romanticise or inflate the role of the professionals in journalism, but their continued existence, sustained within media institutions, remains significant – especially for democracy. Journalists, as we know (and, sometimes, love) them, are complemented, not undermined by, the communications contributions that emanate from outside their ranks.

However, what is now very clear, both despite and because of the crowded communications sky, is that journalists today cannot take their existence for granted. To even survive as unique and distinctive communicators means upping the level of their game.

For a start, that requires reinforcing old-fashioned journalistic skills – which, in turn, depends on improved research, verification, timeliness and quality of expression.

What about better ethics and greater credibility? Despite the pretensions of the profession, these are not a major requirement for media success. You can do well with infotainment, as the tabloid press has shown us. Furthermore, as things stand, not too many South Africans seem to see the press as credible. Online articles about the challenges facing newspaper journalism tend to elicit angry comments along the lines of "good riddance to bad rubbish". So, ethics and credibility are nice-to-have – rather than necessities for the survival of journalism.

The specific value-adds that need boosting are:

First, in the information offering. Journalists can no longer regurgitate press conferences and press releases that are increasingly available direct from source. If it is news, it needs to be exclusive. Alternatively, if it is opinion, analysis or review, it has to be able to compete with the blogosphere in terms of quality of argument and expression.

Second, to stay different from other communication, journalism needs to assert its critical and independent *raison d'être*. On this foundation, it should also do more to contextualise and to curate its output – for instance, making stories available via parameters of geography and interest. It further has to deal with the fact that news consumption is increasingly located in the ecology of a much wider news network, and consciously link into that.

Third, news in its traditional subject matter can no longer assume automatic self-importance. Journalists have to become more responsive to the interests of active audiences. Jarvis correctly observes that "one man's noise is another man's news", and he's spot-on that journalists need to recognise there's not one story to fit all tastes (as was the case in the era of mass-production). Instead, it is now necessary for journo's to acknowledge the longtail of diverse micro-interests.

Fourth, different ways of telling stories are also needed – for example, by drawing on networks to 'mash up' content from various sources, and by making use of crowd-sourcing energies.

Journalists also need to take on board the skills of distribution in the emerging search-engine-driven consumption of news. That means learning the importance of tags, metadata and search-engine optimisation, and customising stories to play across several platforms. It also means taking steps to get presence in social networks and people to link or re-tweet in the mode of trusted personal recommendations.

Fifth, embracing dialogue and participation (but without losing information value-add), is another area to be underlined. Martin Langeveld has expanded on this by portraying journalists as potential convenors and leaders of a conversation around a story – and as people who can ensure that the conversation is solutions-oriented.

In these five ways, journalism can stay journalism – retaining its defined general features – and, at the same time, it can be reinvented in a way that responds to the potentials of the new technology and new information environment.

So far, so good. But the question still arises whether meeting such historic challenges will be enough to save journalism. We may breed birds in new and flashy flocks, but who is going to feed them?

JOURNALISM
TAKES
FLIGHT

WHAT IS NOW VERY CLEAR, BOTH DESPITE
AND BECAUSE OF THE CROWDED COMMUNICATIONS
SKY, IS THAT JOURNALISTS TODAY CANNOT TAKE THEIR
THEIR EXISTENCE FOR GRANTED, WARNS GUY BERGER

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JOURNALISM TAKES FLIGHT

continued from page 33

There is, sadly, no guarantee that a new, improved journalism will bring with it a sustainable mechanism to underwrite its practice by institutions that focus on this service.

In developed countries, old media institutions are collapsing. The carnage in the US newspaper industry is partly a function of over-gearred financing and the recession. But these factors have only hastened the fact that the primary business model that supported journalism is coming to an end. A Spanish blogger has a website titled 233grados.com – named for the temperature at which paper burns. That's a powerful statement about the heat on the press in developed countries to the newspaper industries.

The problem in the US's crisis is not lack of audience. Media institutions, whether on paper/airwaves/online or all three, attract ample audiences (although online they come via search engines and social recommendations, not via brands and home page editorial selections).

The real trouble is that these news ventures have not been able to compete with online ways of matching purveyors and possible purchasers – for instance, with online search-based advertising. This means that even if journalism can still manage to compete to secure scarce attention from people, a lot of advertising increasingly intercepts them en route, rather than at destination. Much other advertising is finding audiences at the watering holes of pure-play conversation and personal news locations like Facebook. The media, in short, is being dis-intermediated from this historic relationship.

Some people see what's happening to old media businesses in terms of natural evolution. There's wishful thinking that a means will be found to support something that society needs, that a bright new journalism can arise from the ashes of the old.

The answer is: Not necessarily. Having undercut the old media, the new media itself could yet come crashing down.

Mega-sites like Facebook and Twitter are not financially secure. YouTube could go down the tubes if it doesn't find a viable business model. Google is a part-parasite on news media content, but runs the risk of having the hosts disappear and thence a diminution of journalism it can link to.

"Journalism will survive because it fulfils an important social need," claims researcher Jane B Singer. But there's no social imperative or invisible hand to decree that journalism will be sustained on the internet (even if it is reincarnated in novel form).

Instead, the future depends on what strategies work in trying to secure the institutional resources to sustain journalism as a powerful and specialist form of communication.

An historic quote by Antonio Gramsci applies to this historic period: "The old is dying, the new is not yet born, and in this interregnum all kinds of morbid symptoms arise."

One such symptom is the industry's new-found enthusiasm about protectionism – such as blocking companies like Google from profiting from news searches. As Jarvis writes, this is a sure-fire way to reduce journalistic influence as well as revenues.

Another morbid symptom is a second wind for the misguided belief that consumers can be made to pay for online journalism. It didn't work before. Even in old media, modern audiences seldom paid the full price for journalism. It's typically been free or indirectly subsidi-

sed by advertisements and/or broadcast licence fees.

Instead of dead-end floundering in mindsets of the past, the current moment also allows for creative responses. It's the responsibility of media owners and managers to find new models that will ensure institutional sustainability. But journalists can play a part – even help lead and shape the process.

Many journalists may understandably object to agreeing to cuts, accepting corporate mergers, or compromising integrity and focus to generate revenues through advertorial. There's also not much point in anyone trying to save a singular business model that is relentlessly winding down (albeit unevenly internationally).

But much else could be cause for (common) action:

It is futile to try and monetise content hitherto offered free online to consumers (from a range of options), although there is still potential in the business model described by Chris Anderson as "freemium". And bundled as audiences, consumers can still be delivered to advertisers if the service is reinvented (for example, linked to content tags a la Google) – without, that is, compromising editorial integrity.

All actors in the industry could co-operate in exploring the potential in supply-side resourcing of journalism. For instance, these are mechanisms like public subsidies (like tax breaks for media companies), and donor-underwritten journalism (foundations or sponsors for coverage like courts, councils or environmental issues).

There's potential in incorporating a level of volunteer correspondents on the model of community radio. The *Huffington Post's* "Off The Bus" coverage of the US elections involved 12 000 people in generating grassroots copy. Other professional-amateur collaborations could help save money as well as enrich journalism, rationalising coverage areas through pruning where there's little unique value-add, and exploiting niche and other strengths. Jarvis advises media institutions to "do what you do best, and link to the rest".

The bottom line of all this is two-fold if journalism is to survive and thrive in the next decade:

Firstly, journalists must focus on high value-added (beneficiated) information and new forms of story-telling. If we also recognise the value of public interaction and responsiveness, this could help to construct a new credibility and public support for journalism.

Secondly, on the institutional side, journalists can contribute appropriately to new business models, such as alternative services to advertisers, supply-side resourcing, pro-am collaborations and ditching areas of journalism where others can do better.

All that's a lot to do, and it's hard to envisage current media cultures taking these steps. Don't expect much from risk-averse managers or defensive nose-to-the-grindstone reporters and editors.

Instead, initiative will fall to individuals across the board who are passionate about journalism ... and, crucially, people who are also open to encouraging its evolution. That in turn means people who are open to experimenting.

One venture might be a nimble and niched multi-platform news operation, perhaps in isiXhosa, with only a handful of staff to pay. Could this kind of animal, akin to what happened in historical extinction events, be part of the creatures who get through into the next era, in contrast to lumbering larger entities that require too many resources for their reproduction?

Experiments can also have valuable unforeseen results, as with Twitter. The service's 140-character limit was initially designed to accord with content being sent or received by SMS. Today, most Twitter use is online rather than SMS, but it's the very truncation of the messages that has made the service the centre where busy people can scan their information sources.

According to the network's co-founder Jack Dempsey, the name of the service comes from one dictionary definition of twitter: "a short burst of inconsequential information". Instead, for its users, Twitter serves up what's relevant (that is, what's consequential) to them. It's a far easier reference (often with

high-value hyperlinks) than having to religiously visit scores of favoured web destinations or continuously emailing friends and family.

The point is that Twitter's success as the most useful gateway network on the internet is through unintended outcomes. Maybe in South Africa, someone should experiment with a novel partnership with a cellphone company to cover a particular event across various platforms. Maybe this could end up with a dues-contributing fan club with longer-term duration, or perhaps it could generate a phone app that people pay to download just as they do with ringtones.

Who are the people who can do these things to take journalism forward? They're the folk who are currently tweeting their journalism and listening carefully to other songs on the network. They're the ones who are ready to make institutional pigs airborne if that's what it's going to take to keep telling stories in the public interest.

They're also people like you, interested enough to read a long-form article about a critical topic, and who want to see new and better journalism emerge from media transition. They don't want "bird flu" to kill off journalism, and they see ways in which it could even strengthen this special kind of communication.

THE FUTURE DEPENDS ON WHAT STRATEGIES WORK IN TRYING TO SECURE THE INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES TO SUSTAIN JOURNALISM AS A POWERFUL AND SPECIALIST FORM OF COMMUNICATION

FREEING THE FUTURE

WHAT EXACTLY ARE WE TRYING TO SAVE HERE, WONDERS HEATHER FORD

Chris Anderson's new book, *Free: The Future of a Radical Price*, has stoked the fire of a debate that seems to be never-ending in media circles. Anderson talks about how in the digital world, the most effective price is "zero" and that those who have recognised this are generating revenue from models like cross-subsidies (giving away a DVR to sell cable service) and freemiums (offering Flickr for free while selling the superior FlickrPro to serious users).

Anderson's book has angered (mostly traditional) media professionals whose business model seems to be threatened by such claims. In a post on Twitter (11 July 2009), *Mail&Guardian* publisher Trevor Ncube wrote: "We need to collectively recover from the cardinal sin of giving content for free and move to sustainable biz models."

Ncube's reaction is endemic to the traditional media sector around the world. Unlike Anderson, he does not equate a system where content is given away for free with a sustainable business model. People need to once again value the credible information that the media produces, he believes. *That is the future.*

How do we navigate through the clearly emotional defensiveness of big media and the utopian ideals of technologists to understand an age in which the media have, according to Anderson, "lost their monopoly on consumer attention" and are now flailing about trying to re-assert their value proposition in the midst of all the new competition?

What's the business model?

Anderson predicts that there will be a new role for professional journalists in the age of Free: "There may be more of them, not fewer, as the ability to participate in journalism extends beyond the credentialed halls of traditional media. But they may be paid far less, and for many it won't be a full-time job at all. Journalism as a profession will share the stage with journalism as an avocation. Meanwhile, others may use their skills to teach and organize amateurs to do a better job covering their own communities, becoming more editor/coach than writer. If so, leveraging the Free – paying people to get other people to write for non-monetary rewards – may not be the enemy of professional journalists. Instead, it may be their salvation."

Malcolm Gladwell, in a cutting review of Anderson's book (*New Yorker*, 6 July 2009) says: "His advice is pithy, his tone uncompromising, and his subject matter perfectly timed for a moment when old-line content providers are desperate for answers. That said, it is not entirely clear what distinction is being marked between 'paying people to get other people to write' and paying people to write. If you can afford to pay someone to get other people to write, why can't you pay people to write? It would be nice to know, as well, just how a business goes about reorganizing itself around getting people to work for 'non-monetary rewards'."

Anderson responds with a model from his own experience with a parenting blog called Geekdad which soon became too popular for him to manage on his own. "Wired.com makes good money selling ads on GeekDad (it's very popular with advertisers); Ken (the community manager) gets a nominal retainer, but has also managed to parlay GeekDad into a book deal and a life-long dream of being a writer; The other contributors largely write for free, although if one of their posts becomes insanely popular they'll get a few bucks. None of them are doing it for the money, but instead for the fun, audience and satisfaction of writing about something they love and getting read by a lot of people."

This, says Anderson, is "the difference between paying people to write' and paying people to get other people to write. Somewhere down the chain, the incentives go from monetary to non-monetary (attention, reputation, expression, etc)."

Anderson admits that this may not be the answer for every media business. He's right. The more plausible scenarios for tradi-

tional media are models that employ both free and paid services (not always in the article format), where the media recognises the value in providing information as a service, rather than believing that it has value in itself.

Intellectual property sharing

One scenario is where the business decides which content should be shared freely, and which should be bundled into a unique service offering that customers will be willing to pay for (also called the "freemium" model). Here, it makes sense for the free component to be free as in gratis as well as free as in liberty so that users are licensed to share the content with others on their own social media channels using open copyright licenses such as Creative Commons. By making the content free, the business can leverage the power of the network to advertise the site, thus building the value of the paid-for service.

Business diversification

Companies like ITWeb are doing well financially because they have an incredibly diversified business. Apart from reporting on their news site and various magazines, they also offer a digital press office service to IT companies, as well as running conferences and workshops around technology themes. In this way, companies like ITWeb are able to give away content for free on their websites, while cross-subsidising media products by being seen as the portal for all things IT-related in South Africa.

Hardware bundling

Gladwell begins his critique of *Free* by telling a story of how the *Dallas Morning News* approached Amazon with a licensing proposition for the Kindle. The publisher was shocked when he learned that Amazon wanted to take 70% of the subscription fee, declaring that this was not the business model that could save the beleaguered newspaper industry.

If devices like the Kindle gain more ground, making printed titles obsolete, then papers like the *Dallas Morning News* will either have to accept such revenue share, or else build their own hardware with which to ship their products.

What exactly are we trying to save here?

There doesn't seem to be much evidence to suggest that we'll pay for newspapers online in the same way that we used to pay for the print version. Someone will pay, but it may be advertisers or premium customers, for advertising, press offices or networking.

As for iron laws about the business models of future media, Gladwell is perhaps the most accurate here: "The only iron law here is the one too obvious to write a book about, which is that the digital age has so transformed the ways in which things are made and sold that there are no iron laws."

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THE MEDIA HAVE LOST THEIR MONOPOLY ON CONSUMER ATTENTION AND ARE NOW FLAILING ABOUT TRYING TO RE-ASSERT THEIR VALUE IN THE MIDST OF ALL THE NEW COMPETITION

Back in 1993, the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain began investigating piracy of Dave Barry's popular column, which was published by the *Miami Herald* and syndicated widely. In the course of tracking down the sources of unlicensed distribution, they found many things, including the copying of his column to alt.fan.dave_barry on usenet; a 2 000-person strong mailing list also reading pirated versions; and a teenager in the midwest who was doing some of the copying himself, because he loved Barry's work so much he wanted everybody to be able to read it.

One of the people I was hanging around with online back then was Gordy Thompson, who managed internet services at the *New York Times*. I remember Thompson saying something to the effect of, "When a 14-year-old kid can blow up your business in his spare time, not because he hates you but because he loves you, then you got a problem." I think about that conversation a lot these days.

The problem newspapers face isn't that they didn't see the internet coming. They not only saw it miles off, they figured out early on that they needed a plan to deal with it, and during the early 90s they came up with not just one plan but several. One was to partner with companies like America Online, a fast-growing subscription service that was less chaotic than the open internet. Another plan was to educate the public about the behaviours required of them by copyright law. New payment models such as micropayments were proposed. Alternatively, they could pursue the profit margins enjoyed by radio and TV, if they became purely ad-supported. Still another plan was to convince tech firms to make their hardware and software less capable of sharing, or to partner with the businesses running data networks to achieve the same goal. Then there was the nuclear option:

sue copyright infringers directly, making an example of them.

As these ideas were articulated, there was intense debate about the merits of various scenarios. Would digital right management (DRM) or walled gardens work better? Shouldn't we try a carrot-and-stick approach, with education and prosecution? And so on. In all this conversation, there was one scenario that was widely regarded as unthinkable, a scenario that didn't get much discussion in the nation's newsrooms, for the obvious reason.

The unthinkable scenario unfolded something like this: The ability to share content wouldn't shrink, it would grow. Walled gardens would prove unpopular. Digital advertising would reduce inefficiencies, and therefore profits. Dislike of micropayments would prevent widespread use. People would resist being educated to act against their own desires. Old habits of advertisers and readers would not transfer online. Even ferocious litigation would be inadequate to constrain massive, sustained law-breaking. (Prohibition redux.) Hardware and software vendors would not regard copyright holders as allies, nor would they regard customers as enemies. DRM's requirement that the attacker be allowed to decode the content would be an insuperable flaw. And, per Thompson, suing people who love something so much they want to share it would piss them off.

Revolutions create a curious inversion of perception. In

WHEN SOMEONE DEMANDS TO KNOW HOW WE ARE GOING TO REPLACE NEWSPAPERS, THEY ARE REALLY DEMANDING TO BE TOLD THAT WE ARE NOT LIVING THROUGH A REVOLUTION. THEY ARE DEMANDING TO BE LIED TO. AND THERE ARE FEWER AND FEWER PEOPLE WHO CAN CONVINCINGLY TELL SUCH A LIE, WRITES CLAY SHIRKY

ordinary times, people who do no more than describe the world around them are seen as pragmatists, while those who imagine fabulous alternative futures are viewed as radicals. The last couple of decades haven't been ordinary, however. Inside the papers, the pragmatists were the ones simply looking out the window and noticing that the real world was increasingly resembling the unthinkable scenario. These people were treated as if they were barking mad. Meanwhile the people spinning visions of popular walled gardens and enthusiastic micropayment adoption, visions unsupported by reality, were regarded not as charlatans but saviours.

When reality is labelled unthinkable, it creates a kind of sickness in an industry. Leadership becomes faith-based, while employees who have the temerity to suggest that what seems to be happening is in fact happening are herded into Innovation Departments, where they can be ignored en masse. This shunting aside of the realists in favour of the fabulists has different effects on different industries at different times. One of the effects on the newspapers is that many of their most passionate defenders are unable, even now, to plan for a world in which the industry they knew is visibly going away.

The curious thing about the various plans hatched in the '90s is that they were, at base, all the same plan: "Here's how we're going to preserve the old forms of organisation in a world of cheap perfect copies!" The details differed, but the core assumption behind all imagined outcomes (save the unthinkable one) was that the organisational form of the newspaper, as a general-purpose vehicle for publishing a variety of news and opinion, was basically sound, and only needed a digital facelift. As a result, the conversation has degenerated into the enthusiastic grasping at straws, pursued by sceptical responses.

"The *Wall Street Journal* has a paywall, so we can too!" (Financial information is one of the few kinds of information its recipients don't want to share.) "Micropayments work for iTunes, so they will work for us!" (Micropayments work only where the provider can avoid competitive business models.) "The *New York Times* should charge for content!" (They've tried, with QPass and later TimesSelect.) "Cook's Illustrated and Consumer Reports are doing fine on subscriptions!" (Those publications forgo ad revenues; users are paying not just for content but for unimpeachability.) "We'll form a cartel!" (...and hand a competitive advantage to every ad-supported media firm in the world.)

Round and round this goes, with the people committed to saving newspapers demanding to know "If the old model is broken, what will work in its place?" To which the answer is: Nothing. Nothing will work. There is no general model for newspapers to replace the one the internet just broke.

With the old economics destroyed, organisational forms

NEWSPAPERS AND THINKING THE UNTHINKABLE

perfected for industrial production have to be replaced with structures optimised for digital data. It makes increasingly less sense even to talk about a publishing industry, because the core problem publishing solves — the incredible difficulty, complexity, and expense of making something available to the public — has stopped being a problem.

Elizabeth Eisenstein's magisterial treatment of Gutenberg's invention, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, opens with a recounting of her research into the early history of the printing press. She was able to find many descriptions of life in the early 1400s, the era before movable type. Literacy was limited, the Catholic Church was the pan-European political force, Mass was in Latin, and the average book was the Bible. She was also able to find endless descriptions of life in the late 1500s, after Gutenberg's invention had started to spread. Literacy was on the rise, as were books written in contemporary languages, Copernicus had published his epochal work on astronomy, and Martin Luther's use of the press to reform the Church was upending both religious and political stability.

What Eisenstein focused on, though, was how many historians ignored the transition from one era to the other. To describe the world before or after the spread of print was child's play; those dates were safely distanced from upheaval. But what was happening in 1500? The hard question Eisenstein's book asks is "How did we get from the world before the printing press to the world after it? What was the revolution itself like?"

Chaotic, as it turns out. The Bible was translated into local languages; was this an educational boon or the work of the devil? Erotic novels appeared, prompting the same set of questions. Copies of Aristotle and Galen circulated widely, but direct encounter with the relevant texts revealed that the two sources clashed, tarnishing faith in the Ancients. As novelty spread, old institutions seemed exhausted while new ones seemed untrustworthy; as a result, people almost literally didn't know what to think. If you can't trust Aristotle, who can you trust?

During the wrenching transition to print, experiments were only revealed in retrospect to be turning points. Aldus Manutius, the Venetian printer and publisher, invented the smaller octavo volume along with italic type. What seemed like a minor change — take a book and shrink it — was in retrospect a key innovation in the democratisation of the printed word. As books became cheaper, more portable, and therefore more desirable, they expanded the market for all publishers, heightening the value of literacy still further.

That is what real revolutions are like. The old stuff gets broken faster than the new stuff is put in its place. The importance of any given experiment isn't apparent at the moment it appears; big changes stall, small changes spread. Even the revolutionaries can't predict what will happen. Agreements on all sides that core institutions must be protected are rendered meaningless by the very people doing the agreeing. (Luther and the Church both insisted, for years, that whatever else happened, no one was talking about a schism.) Ancient social bargains, once disrupted, can neither be mended nor quickly replaced, since any such bargain takes decades to solidify.

And so it is today. When someone demands to know how we are going to replace newspapers, they are really demanding to be told that we are not living through a revolution. They are demanding to be told that old systems won't break before new systems are in place. They are demanding to be told that ancient social bargains aren't in peril, that core institutions will be spared, that new methods of spreading information will improve previous practice rather than upending it. They are demanding to be lied to.

There are fewer and fewer people who can convincingly tell such a lie.

"YOU'RE GONNA MISS US WHEN WE'RE GONE!" HAS NEVER BEEN MUCH OF A BUSINESS MODEL

If you want to know why newspapers are in such trouble, the most salient fact is this: Printing presses are terrifically expensive to set up and to run. This bit of economics, normal since Gutenberg, limits competition while creating positive returns to scale for the press owner, a happy pair of economic effects that feed on each other. In a notional town with two perfectly balanced newspapers, one paper would eventually generate some small advantage — a breaking story, a key interview — at which point both advertisers and readers would come to prefer it, however slightly.

That paper would, in turn, find it easier to capture the next dollar of advertising, at lower expense, than the competition. This would increase its dominance, which would further deepen those preferences, repeat chorus. The end result is either geographic or demographic segmentation among papers, or one paper holding a monopoly on the local mainstream audience.

For a long time, longer than anyone in the newspaper business has been alive in fact, print journalism has been intertwined with these economics. The expense of printing created an environment where Wal-Mart was willing to subsidise the Baghdad bureau. This wasn't because of any deep link between advertising and reporting, nor was it about any real desire on the part of Wal-Mart to have their marketing budget go to international correspondents. It was just an accident. Advertisers had little choice other than to have their money used that way, since they didn't really have any other vehicle for display ads.

The old difficulties and costs of printing forced everyone doing it into a similar set of organisational models; it was this similarity that made us regard *Daily Racing Form* and *L'Osservatore Romano* as being in the same business. That the relationship between advertisers, publishers, and journalists has been ratified by a century of cultural practice doesn't make it any less accidental.

The competition-deflecting effects of printing cost got destroyed by the internet, where everyone pays for the infrastructure, and then everyone gets to use it. And when Wal-Mart, and the local Maytag dealer, and the law firm hiring a secretary, and that kid down the block selling his bike, were all able to use that infrastructure to get out of their old relationship with the publisher, they did. They'd never really signed up to fund the Baghdad bureau anyway.

Print media does much of society's heavy journalistic lifting, from flooding the zone — covering every angle of a huge story — to the daily grind of attending the city council meeting, just in case. This coverage creates benefits even for people who aren't newspaper readers, because the work of print journalists is used by everyone from politicians to district attorneys to talk radio hosts to bloggers. The newspaper people often note that newspapers benefit society as a whole. This is true, but irrelevant to the problem at hand; "You're gonna miss us when we're gone!" has never been much of a business model. So who covers all that news if some significant fraction of the currently employed newspaper people lose their jobs?

I don't know. Nobody knows. We're collectively living through 1500, when it's easier to see what's broken than what will replace it. The internet turns 40 this year. Access by the general public is less than half that age. Web use, as a normal part of life for a majority of the developed world, is less than

half that age. We just got here. Even the revolutionaries can't predict what will happen.

Imagine, in 1996, asking some net-savvy soul to expound on the potential of craigslist, then a year old and not yet incorporated. The answer you'd almost certainly have gotten would be extrapolation: "Mailing lists can be powerful tools", "Social effects are intertwining with digital networks", blah blah blah. What no one would have told you, could have told you, was what actually happened: craigslist became a critical piece of infrastructure. Not the idea of craigslist, or the business model, or even the software driving it. Craigslist itself spread to cover hundreds of cities and has become a part of public consciousness about what is now possible. Experiments are only revealed in retrospect to be turning points.

In craigslist's gradual shift from 'interesting if minor' to 'essential and transformative', there is one possible answer to the question "If the old model is broken, what will work in its place?" The answer is: Nothing will work, but everything might. Now is the time for experiments, lots and lots of experiments, each of which will seem as minor at launch as craigslist did, as Wikipedia did, as octavo volumes did.

Journalism has always been subsidised. Sometimes it's been Wal-Mart and the kid with the bike. Sometimes it's been Richard Mellon Scaife. Increasingly, it's you and me, donating our time. The list of models that are obviously working today, like Consumer Reports and NPR, like ProPublica and WikiLeaks, can't be expanded to cover any general case, but then nothing is going to cover the general case.

Society doesn't need newspapers. What we need is journalism. For a century, the imperatives to strengthen journalism and to strengthen newspapers have been so tightly wound as to be indistinguishable. That's been a fine accident to have, but when that accident stops, as it is stopping before our eyes, we're going to need lots of other ways to strengthen journalism instead.

When we shift our attention from "save newspapers" to "save society", the imperative changes from "preserve the current institutions" to "do whatever works". And what works today isn't the same as what used to work.

We don't know who the Aldus Manutius of the current age is. It could be Craig Newmark, or Caterina Fake. It could be Martin Nisenholtz, or Emily Bell. It could be some 19-year-old kid few of us have heard of, working on something we won't recognise as vital until a decade hence. Any experiment, though, designed to provide new models for journalism is going to be an improvement over hiding from the real, especially in a year when, for many papers, the unthinkable future is already in the past.

For the next few decades, journalism will be made up of overlapping special cases. Many of these models will rely on amateurs as researchers and writers. Many of these models will rely on sponsorship or grants or endowments instead of revenues. Many of these models will rely on excitable 14-year-olds distributing the results. Many of these models will fail. No one experiment is going to replace what we are now losing with the demise of news on paper, but over time, the collection of new experiments that do work might give us the journalism we need.

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TRANSFORMING JOURNALISM ... 140 CHARACTERS AT A TIME

TWITTER IS BECOMING AN ESSENTIAL REPORTING TOOL AND AUDIENCE INTERACTION ZONE FOR MEDIA OUTLETS. BUT THE MICROBLOGGING PLATFORM BRINGS WITH IT PROFESSIONAL PITFALLS AND HIGHLIGHTS ETHICAL DILEMMAS CENTRAL TO 21ST CENTURY JOURNALISM, ARGUES JULIE POSETTI

Barack Obama put Twitter (www.twitter.com) on the media map when he made it part of his successful digital election strategy in 2007. But the phenomenally popular microblogging platform, which now has more than 10-million users worldwide, became big news once the media realised its power as a tool for covering breaking news during the Mumbai massacre in 2008, after which there was an explosion of professional journalists in the Twittersphere.

This growth has been fuelled by increasing mainstream awareness of the importance of social media to the future of a crisis-ridden industry and the elevation of Twitter as a platform for reporting, news dissemination, citizen journalism and audience interaction. The latter being a strategy which aims to break down the barriers between news producers and consumers that silo “legacy media” and threaten to undermine the future of journalism in the Social Media Age.

But as much as Twitter is fast becoming an essential tool in a reporter’s kitbag, there are also significant pitfalls and ethical dilemmas that professional journalists need to navigate in the space. The value of Twitter to professional media outlets and the challenges it poses for journalism were in glaring view as it hit the headlines again during the Iranian uprising in June.

Twitter’s role in the Iranian election aftermath is clearly worthy of closer analysis – it leaves no doubt about the power of the medium as a global, real-time, citizen-journalism style news wire service that countered mainstream media priorities and temporarily circumvented official censorship.

But the role of Twitter as a professional reporter’s tool in the coverage was as problematic as it was compelling. Twitter propelled much false information amidst valuable insights into the suffering of the Iranian people, highlighting the importance of verification for professional journalists operating in the twittersphere.

Ahead of the Iranian election, I began researching the ways in which journalists and traditional media outlets are using Twitter (see www.pbs.org/mediashift/julie-posetti) and exploring the ethical dilemmas raised by the clash of the personal and the professional for journalists in the sphere, while considering the rules of engagement for tweeting reporters. As part of this research, I surveyed 25 professional journalists on Twitter from Australia, South Africa and the US and analysed their responses.

My key conclusion: reporters need to be space-invaders in the twittersphere that has three main media functions: firstly, breaking and disseminating news; secondly, crowdsourcing news and contacts; and, thirdly, audience engagement.

And while I don’t regard Twitter as the salvation of professional journalism, neither do I see it as a threat. Rather, I view tweeting as one of the skills journalists need to extend their professional practice and I believe Twitter is an essential venue for media outlets seeking to build new audiences and remain relevant as traditional audiences tune out.

How and why do journalists use Twitter?

In Australia, where journalists are in a twittering frenzy, the platform was incorporated into mainstream news coverage of the “Black Saturday” bushfires that devastated the southern state of Victoria in February, claiming 173 lives. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) pioneered the use of Twitter in coverage of the disaster with impressive results.

In the months that followed, Twitter became an embedded component of the ABC’s breaking news coverage, being used to report violent storms and a state election in the



country’s east. The ABC began breaking stories via tweets faster than the network’s own website could publish them while using Twitter to crowdsource witness accounts and augment radio talkback coverage.

Reporters from remote regions through to network stars and even the corporation’s managing director tweeted their way into unprecedented public engagement. At last count, the ABC was operating 92 official Twitter accounts while dozens of other staff maintain personal accounts. As Leigh Sales, the network’s most prominent tweeter and presenter of the TV news analysis programme *Lateline*, told me, “I’m giving Twitter a red hot go!”

In addition to disseminating their stories, covering and tracking breaking news via Twitter, journalists are using it to crowd-source case studies and sources, subvert the modern PR machine, develop global professional networks, find jobs and market their own journalistic brand, while aiming to build potential new audiences through engagement with followers.

Heroic weapon or symptom of demise?

Some Twitter advocates believe the platform is a crucial feature of the defensive strategy in the struggle to preserve professional journalism. But there are still barriers to journalists’

TWITTER: A WORKING DEFINITION

Founded in 2006 by geeks and originally intended just for geeks, it’s an interactive microblogging platform based on the open publication of messages 140 characters long. Instead of finding ‘friends’, you accumulate ‘followers’. Twitter identifies itself as ‘a service for friends, family, and co-workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing?’ It could also be described as a public-sphere form of instant messaging, a global open chat room or Facebook status updates on steroids.

The language of Twitter describes users as “twits” or “tweeters” and the updates as “tweets” – appropriately evocative of chirping birds. Tweets can include links to other online material, such as relevant articles, pictures and videos.

When fellow twits re-disseminate one of your tweets, the practice is called retweeting (flagged in the message with a RT).

You can access Twitter via the web or your mobile by using one of myriad applications developed to enhance the platform.

SOME TWITTER ADVOCATES BELIEVE THE PLATFORM IS A CRUCIAL FEATURE OF THE DEFENSIVE STRATEGY IN THE STRUGGLE TO PRESERVE PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM, WHILE OTHERS VIEW IT AS THREATENING AND DANGEROUS – ANOTHER WEAPON IN THE ONGOING WAR AGAINST PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

active participation in the twitterverse. There are the practical realities, such as limited online access in developing countries, of course, but other impediments are a product of resistant mindsets among journalists and their employers.

Some resisters view Twitter as threatening and dangerous. Detractors have argued that it is either another weapon in the ongoing war against professional journalism which threatens to sink the fourth estate, or a symptom of its demise. In echoes of the great blogging vs journalism debate you may hear them say “Twitter isn’t journalism”. No, of course it’s not, it’s a platform like radio or TV – with unfettered interactivity. But the act of tweeting can be as journalistic as the act of headline writing. Similarly, Twitter can be used for real-time reporting by professional journalists in a manner as kosher as a broadcast news live report.

John Bergin, Sky News Australia’s deputy digital editor, says professional journalists resistant to Twitter and other social media platforms simply need to get over it and get on board. “Replace the word ‘Tweet’ with ‘talking to people’ and see if your argument still sticks,” he challenged. “The act of journalism is dialogue... We test points of view, explore a friction of ideas, or get an understanding of the thinking of the ‘man on the Clapham omnibus’... Twitter is but one more tool to use in the information age – and it has an immensely empowering and social dynamic to it if it is done right.”

Your attempt to access porn has been denied

While some media outlets are making tweeting close to compulsory for their reporters, the most resistant are either so afraid of Twitter, or so disdainful about its journalistic potential, that they’ve tried to bar their journalists from even accessing it in the workplace. The *Sydney Star Observer’s* (SSO) Harley Dennett said he has been denied access to Twitter at work via web filters on office computers.

“The publishing editor said staff can make those contacts in their own time,” he explained. “But I get around that by using the Tweetie desktop and iPhone applications. I do so openly and unashamedly.” And the SSO frequently publishes stories he’s sourced via Twitter.

The SSO’s policy may be a short-sighted and narrow-minded approach to managing the issues raised by journalists’ interactions with social networking sites but it’s not an isolated example. Australia’s Pacific Magazines has also barred its journalists from accessing social networking sites, including Twitter, from their desks and while Rupert Murdoch’s News Limited group allows its reporters access, senior editorial management generally takes a dim view of Twitter.

Jonathan Ancer, from South Africa’s Independent Newspapers group, said he planned to use Twitter to help trainee journalists write with brevity and clarity, but he was also barred from access at work.

“When I tried to log onto Twitter a few days ago, I was surprised to find myself blocked with a note saying my attempt to access porn had been recorded,” he said. “I think media companies should open up access to Twitter, Facebook and other social networking platforms because this is where people – readers, eyeballs, etc. – are going.”

However, while individual journalists with the Independent group may have difficulty

TOP 20 TAKE-AWAY TIPS FOR TWEETING JOURNOS



1. Think before you tweet: you can’t delete an indiscreet tweet.
2. Think carefully about what you’re retweeting and acknowledge if it is unsubstantiated.
3. Be an active twit: tweet daily if you want your followers to stick.
4. Determine your Twitter identity.
5. Be human. Be honest. Be open. Be active.
6. Don’t lock your account if you want to use Twitter for reporting purposes – this fosters distrust.
7. Twitter is a community, not a one-way conversation or broadcast channel: actively engage.
8. Check if your employer has a social media policy. Follow it if they do.
9. Be cautious when tweeting about your employer/ workplace/colleagues.
10. Be a judicious follower – don’t be stingy, but avoid following everyone as your list grows.
11. If you quote a tweet, attribute it.
12. Expect your competitors to steal your leads if you tweet about them.
13. Don’t tweet while angry or drunk.
14. Avoid racist, sexist, bigoted and otherwise offensive tweets and never abuse a follower.
15. Scrutinise crowdsourced stories closely.
16. Find people to follow and foster followers by pilfering the lists of other twits.
17. Twitter is a time vampire – you don’t need to keep track of all tweets. Dip in and out through the day.
18. Prevent information overload by using an application such as TweetDeck.
19. Set up your internet-enabled mobile device so you can live-tweet on the road.
20. Value-add your tweets with links, Twitpic and other applications for audio and video.

accessing Twitter, the company’s online publication has a moderately active Twitter account, and an editor who tweets too.

South Africa’s media certainly need to make active use of Twitter ahead of the 2010 Soccer World Cup when they’ll be seeking the world’s eyeballs.

Rules of engagement for tweeting journos

US media outlets such as the *Wall Street Journal* the *New York Times*, Associated Press and Bloomberg have (in some cases controversially) recently instituted social media policies with specific application to Twitter. Some of these policies have been criticised for missing the point of social media – humanised interaction – and too rigidly regulating journalists’ tweeting.

But Australian and South African journalists interviewed indicated no such policies existed in their workplaces (although the ABC was preparing one at the time of writing). All of them were self-regulating their tweeting and some were still grappling with the process. When asked why he thought his Australian employer didn’t have a Twitter policy, one journalist responded, “They just don’t get it.”

As Twitter becomes entrenched in daily reporting practice, it would seem appropriate for media organisations to update existing editorial guidelines to make them relevant to social media platforms like Twitter. But if they want to bank on the significant benefits that can flow from their participation in the twittersphere (such as developing new audiences and enhancing traffic to their websites), they will need to ensure their journalists have unfettered access to the site and also be flexible about interactions in the space.

Many of the interviewees underlined the importance of journalists actively interacting with their followers rather than just eavesdropping on conversations. “To dig any deeper than 140 characters ... requires engagement,” said Dave Earley from Murdoch’s *Courier Mail*. “This requires you to be a real person, start building real relationships, gradually trust, and then contacts. Twitter can start being more helpful to journalists specifically when those contacts

start passing on news tips to you directly.”

Social media, journalists and objectivity

One of the key contemporary journalistic dilemmas – how to define or redefine objectivity in the Social Media Age – is being played out live on Twitter. Why is Twitter central to this dilemma? Because it merges the professional and the personal – challenging professional norms and blurring the lines between private and public actions for journalists trained to be didactic observers and commentators rather than participants in debates and characters within stories.

Reporters’ use of the platform to express feelings and opinions on a range of issues has raised red flags about professional conduct and bias. Paradoxically, this exposure humanises journalists in the eyes of the people they need to consume their journalism, potentially making them and their work more appealing. *Wotnews.com* editor, Gen Robey, says keeping the personal and professional separate is increasingly difficult when you’re trying to maximise the benefits of communities like Twitter. “The overlapping of the personal and professional, and thus emphasis on trust and meaningful relationships, is often what makes Twitter so powerful.”

Some of the journalists I interviewed tackled this dilemma by choosing to separate the personal and professional spheres of their lives – tweeting only on-the-job or off-the-clock, for example. Others included a disclaimer in the brief bibliography that appears on their Twitter home page indicating the views they expressed via Twitter were their own. Some didn’t mention their employers and a couple tweeted anonymously, but most openly identified themselves and their professional status and only two locked their accounts for privacy. This reflects a broad understanding of the importance of openness and transparency within social media communities and the professional requirements of information-gathering for reporting purposes which demand identification.

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TRANSFORMING JOURNALISM

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You can't delete an indiscreet tweet

Twitter also exposes society's scrutineers to the same scrutiny they're used to reserving for the subjects of their stories. And, as some journalists have discovered, that can be a chastening experience.

One reporter who's been forced to reassess his use of Twitter as a public platform for his personal views is the *Sydney Morning Herald's* technology writer, Asher Moses. Moses was caught up in a Twitter scandal after making sexist comments about a woman who levelled sexual assault allegations against a group of professional footballers.

"Although I wrote the tweet in my own time on a personal Twitter account... I used two words ('slutty groupy') that in hindsight were inappropriate, particularly considering I mainly used Twitter for work-related messages. I quickly deleted the post, but by then it was too late," he said. "It's sad in a way, but you really have to assume that whatever you write is going to be viewed by the whole world and you have to be prepared for people to link your personal views to your employer."

But, while not endorsing his views, Australian Consolidated Press' Jason Whittaker, defended Moses' right as a journalist to tweet his opinions and indulge in news commentary in the aftermath of the controversy. He maintains a Twitter account that showcases his opinions, blending the personal and the professional and asked: "Do journalists who use Twitter have to be mindful of being in the public domain and project the same perception of objectivity as they do on the clock as a journalist? Even if they're commenting on matters they have nothing to do with as a journalist? Are readers capable of making the distinction; can't they accept journo's are not mindless drones and DO have opinions, but this doesn't mean they can't do the job as an objective observer when on the clock?"

But other journalists interviewed preferred to avoid commenting on sensitive issues altogether, to escape perceptions of bias. Sky News' John Bergin had this advice for balancing the personal and the professional: "Think carefully about what hat you're wearing when you share personal opinions and political views – is it clear to others that you are speaking on behalf of yourself, or your employer? If you express an opinion on a news story, think about how this will be construed if you are then required to report on the facts of the same issue at a later date."

He also spoke of the need to apply basic media law training to tweeting and to display respect for colleagues.

So, what information on Twitter is fair game for a journalist to report? My preliminary views go like this: Although social media etiquette may not recognise a journalist's right to report any material published openly, the reality is that open Twitter accounts are a matter of permanent public record and fair game for journalists. While attribution is vital and it might be polite (but not necessary) to seek the approval of a tweeter to quote them, I don't see anything unethical about using tweets in mainstream news coverage. However, the locked Twitter account is a more delicate matter. I'd suggest that a locked account amounts to an off-the-record comment that requires permission from the tweeter before re-publishing.

Lessons via Iran

Twitter's impact on traditional news services was demonstrated during the Iranian uprising. But, as reporters relied on Twitter as a means of crowdsourcing coverage in a zone from which most Western journalists had been banished, it also highlighted some of the key

**MY CONCERN IS THE WAY
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TO BE FALSE, PARTICULARLY IN
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dilemmas faced by professional reporters in the twittersphere. At the centre of these struggles is the core journalistic value of truth.

When I raised concerns on Twitter about the practice of tweeters who openly identify as professional journalists re-tweeting (or RT) – re-publishing someone else's tweet – without verification, in the context of the flood of tweets supposedly emanating from Iran, I found myself engaged in a lively discussion. I asserted that when Patrick LaForge, an editor at the *New York Times*, re-tweeted (without acknowledgement of verification or absence thereof) a third-hand list of Iranian tweeters, it amounted to an acknowledgement of the authenticity of that list. But LaForge disagreed. NYU's Jay Rosen then reminded me not to expect open systems like Twitter to behave in the same manner expected of editorial systems.

However, while I agree with Rosen, my concern was not directed at the unmediated twittersphere. Rather, it was directed at the way journalists approach this flood of information. I'm of the view that professional journalists will be judged more harshly if they retweet content that later proves to be false – particularly in the context of a crisis. This goes to their professional credibility and their employer's.

Therefore, while I wouldn't suggest journalists step back from reporting on social media contributions flowing from zones like Iran, I do think they need to critically assess information to the best of their capacity before republishing it and, if there's no way to do so, flag it as being unconfirmed or unsubstantiated.

The issues at stake here partly evolve from Twitter's speed imperative that encourages us to file instantly, sometimes without enough thought for the public nature of the platform. It's very easy to get Twitter-happy and post without fear of the consequences.

There remain significant outstanding questions that need to be considered as Twitter becomes a feature of everyday reporting in many newsrooms. For example, how much of an additional burden is daily tweeting and audience engagement on already overloaded journalists? And what's the impact of constant tweeting on their capacity to produce original, quality journalism?

There needs to be further discussion between media professionals, their employers, journalism academics and social media experts to help navigate this complex territory. But journalists and media outlets can no longer afford to simply ignore Twitter; it's no fleeting trend.

USEFUL LINKS

The US-based PBS website Mediashift has published a guide to Twitter at www.pbs.org/mediashift/2007/05/your-guide-to-micro-blogging-and-twitter135.html

Mashable recently launched an online guidebook at <http://mashable.com/2009/06/26/twitter-guidebook/>.

NEW SKILLS FOR OLD JOURNOS OR...

By Toby Shapshak

When I started out as a journalist last century, the two essential skills you needed were shorthand and touch typing. I never learnt the former, and the latter is now a pre-requisite life skill you learn in primary school.

I can't remember the last time I actually wrote down what someone said to me. I was typing notes before I had a laptop (on a Palm with a clever foldout keyboard) and for a long time was the only journo at press conferences or events who used a laptop. It made such sense: why transcribe your notes when you can just type them in the first place?

Journalism has evolved since last millennium when it was all about print and print skills, with a healthy dose of surviving anti-apartheid police thrown in. Now it's internet skills first, followed by social media networking skills, Google search skills, then maybe news-gathering and, if you're lucky, a sense of newsworthiness.

You might even, as a young journalist, get to work on the antiquated beast known as a newspaper. It's unlikely that you'll only write one story for the print edition, having taken pictures and written an online piece and perhaps updated your blog too.

Or so the theory goes

Ray Hartley, the brave editor of both the print *The Times* and its very multimedia-driven website, says they have returned to using a journalist and photographer on stories because – as everyone suspected – the jack of many trades is a master of few – especially when on a tight deadline. (Disclaimer: I am a columnist for *The Times*.)

"I think that the new generation of journalists – we have some of them in our newsroom already – is capable of working across platforms without breaking a sweat," Hartley says. "But it would be a mistake to have the same expectations of old school print journalists. They are hired for their contacts and their ability to provide cutting edge news. They should be expected to write for the web as this is an extension of their existing skills, but you must accept that they are not going to shoot video and edit it while doing this. Such stories do need to be enriched with multimedia so you need specialist skills to back up the print journalists."

The next generation of journalists come pre-equipped with much of the technology and internet skills that it took my generation years to learn.

Writer Douglas Rushkoff, the internet visionary who wrote for the technology section I edited for the *Mail&Guardian* way back in the 1990s, coined the concept of the "digital native" – youngsters who use technology with greater ease than us old folk. I call them the digital born frees.

However, what I've realised is that while these kids have great technology skills, they lack other essential life skills. They can find things easier on Google but they lack the resourcefulness to pick up a phone and just call someone. I've watched young reporters spend half an hour searching for a phone number online, instead of taking two minutes to look through the phone book.

Senior producers at the SABC and e.News have lamented about another habit that can drive older journos nuts: Sending emails to make contact with people not picking up the phone. Or, worse still, waiting for a reply.

As the great Peta Thornycroft told me when I was a young reporter at the *Mail&Guardian*, journalists never wait for someone to call them back. I was taught to call repeatedly until I get hold of them. It's simple logic: it's important to me to contact them, not necessarily important for them to call me back.

These are some of the simple skills of journalism that youngsters don't observe.

When I went to Sapa, Peter Wellman, the first journalist to be imprisoned under Section 205 of the Criminal Procedures Act, taught me simple, pragmatic writing skills: always re-read your copy. Overnight if you can, or after making a cup of tea and taking a break if you can't.

I'm always amazed that young journalists don't do this. Over the years copy has been filed to me that contains the most basic typos and grammatical errors. One re-read would've picked them up.

Sapa, in those days had cruddy offices in the Carlton Centre, had a mainframe-driven copy system that had no spell checker. You had to know how to spell. We're not talking big words in English essays, we're talking hard news story language. You had to read your own copy and make sure the obvious errors weren't there. It taught you to pay attention to your own copy, because there was no backstop.

I'm horrified at how many young journalists don't see these in their own copy. A part of the reason, I suspect, is the over-reliance on technology – in this case Microsoft Word, which underlines misspelt words, but doesn't know how to tell "there" from "their".

New technology always changes the way any industry works, it's a given of the process that started with the industrial revolution.

But while the means of production are improved, the quality of its output – the tenets of journalism, the fact-checking, the accountability, the dogmatic attempt to be impartial, objective and balanced – should never be lost.

INTVU BY TWITTER

The Times editor Ray Hartley once commissioned me to write an article via Facebook and I was asked by Anne Taylor to write this via Twitter. To try it out, Hartley suggested I interview him by Twitter. This is the result:

@shapshak: How has internet changed print media in SA? Is it really more interactive? Do you break stories online?

@hartley: The default switch has been reset to online. You set up to break all stories online unless there's an intervention.

@shapshak: With such poor bandwidth and so few users, when do you think SA will adopt online news culture like States? How will it differ? ie less video.

@hartley: South Africans are quick tech adopters if its affordable – just look at cellphones. The push could come from cellphones. At present we get more hits out of podcasts and slideshows than video because of bandwidth.

@shapshak: How does something like Twitter change the online news space? Is it really the Holy Grail/CNN of new media? See #IranElections

@hartley: Twitter is a very powerful hybrid of social interaction and news. It answers the question: Who do you trust? The stronger the torrent of information becomes, the more important navigation becomes. Twitter offers navigation.

OLD SKILLS FOR NEW JOURNOS

THE SHOCK OF THE NEW

I remember the incident like it was yesterday. It was February 1991. I was a fresh-faced student in the journalism department at then Technikon Natal. In one of my first lectures, the lecturer had begun talking about the importance of understanding modern publishing technologies, such as offset lithography.

Graeme Addison, the newly appointed head of the department at the time, happened to be sitting in on the lecture. He immediately jumped up and interrupted the lecturer, admonishing him for teaching old, outdated and irrelevant material. The lecturer may have been flustered, but Addison was right to put a stop to what was, in effect, a history lesson not a lecture in modern technology used in the newspaper industry.

The world of publishing and journalism was moving on. The printing and publishing systems of old were being replaced by desktop publishing. Computers, though still far from the powerful, multimedia systems of today, were already making their impact felt.

To his credit, Addison secured funding to build a computer lab for the department. He kitted it out with a dozen PCs running software such as Aldus PageMaker and CorelDraw. He also bought scanners and laser printers. It was an expensive exercise. A colour flatbed scanner from Hewlett-Packard cost more than R10 000 at the time, and laser printers were not the commodity items they are today.

Compared to today's systems, those lab computers couldn't do very much. Remember, this was when the latest and greatest from Microsoft was Windows 3.0 running on top of DOS and Intel's long-dead 80386 chip was still state of the art. No one had even heard of the world wide web back then. But those old systems were up to the task of teaching journalism students the basics of computer-based publishing. Addison used the computers to create mock-ups of magazines and newspapers. It was a great success.

I learnt one very important lesson from Addison in my three years in his department: that it is crucial for journalists to keep up with developments in modern technology if they don't want to be left behind as the world moves on. That applies more now than ever, as the internet tsunami tears through the industry, upending old business models and creating new ones.

When computers were introduced into newsrooms, and desktop publishing took off, many people lost their jobs. Printers and lithographers who were unable to reskill themselves were made redundant. Journalists felt the impact of technological change less: all they had to do was master a word processor and, a bit later, learn how to send and receive electronic mail.

But the impact of the shift to desktop publishing in the early 1990s was minor next to what the internet is going to do to the journalism profession in the next decade. The journalism and publishing business 10 years from now will have changed radically.

Yet I am constantly amazed at the Luddite mentality one

JOURNALISTS SHOULD PLUG IN TO NEW TECHNOLOGIES IF THEY DON'T WANT TO BE LEFT BEHIND AS THE WORLD MOVES ON, INSISTS DUNCAN MCLEOD

finds in most South African newsrooms. Too many journalists are scared of technology. They avoid learning about new systems. I fear they will be the modern-day equivalent of the stone plate makers in lithographic printing.

But this time around it's different. The web revolution is going to affect everybody in the news business, including journalists. That's because the nature of the entire industry is changing. Print media, like the music industry before it, has had the rug pulled out from under it by the internet.

Newspapers are in trouble and, as Microsoft chief executive Steve Ballmer recently predicted, it's unlikely we'll see a return to the levels of advertising that publishers enjoyed before the current economic crisis. They've already lost much of their classified advertising. Readership is falling. Many newspapers will not survive.

Though South Africa's print media is still doing relatively well compared to developed markets, once broadband is available ubiquitously and cheaply even *Daily Sun* readers will switch to reading their daily gossip fix on the mobile phones. I'd be surprised if smartphone functionality – web access, email and the like – isn't available in even the most basic handsets five years from now.

Print will become an elitist product. Buying a newspaper will cost a small fortune to cover the costs of printing a

While bad for publishers, the web is fantastic news for entrepreneurially minded journalists. It allows them, for the first time, to "disintermediate" publishers. They can build their own businesses, without incurring the huge expenses involved in producing a printed product. And they can collaborate in loose-knit groups to build alternative news outlets.

I recently resigned as technology editor of the *Financial Mail* after 12 years at the magazine. I have registered a company, NewsCentral Media, designed a website, TechCentral, and am striking out on my own, using my reputation in the technology and telecommunications fields to sign up advertisers. I will launch the website on 1 September and will be turning a profit within a matter of months.

Not everyone can do this, of course. I wouldn't have been able to sign up advertisers without a reputation I built while working for a dead-tree product. But I'm proving it can be done, and I expect other experienced journalists will do the same, and soon.

My message to journalists in the print media – those who are worried that they're going to become the plate makers of the web era – is simple: stay abreast of technology changes at all times, especially technologies that affect media. If you're not on Twitter, for example, sign up. And start a blog. It's not as hard as you think.

Don't be afraid of new technology, but rather embrace it, and think about how you can use it to set your career on an exciting new path. Print publishers are desperate for good digital skills as they move online. Be part of that change. It's where the money is, after all.

Journalism schools also have a big role to play. Some level of computer studies should be mandatory for journalism students. Any journalism graduate worth their salt should be able to install software on a server, for example, or use an FTP program. These are the tools of the trade.

I'm not saying you need to do mathematics or advanced coding, but a solid understanding of web tools is also a must. Any journalism school that is graduating its students without first giving them a solid grounding in HTML, CSS and JavaScript, content management systems, and some degree of understanding of web-based programming tools, is failing them – and failing the media industry.

ANY JOURNALISM SCHOOL THAT IS GRADUATING ITS STUDENTS WITHOUT FIRST GIVING THEM A SOLID GROUNDING IN HTML, CSS AND JAVASCRIPT, CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS, AND SOME DEGREE OF UNDERSTANDING OF WEB-BASED PROGRAMMING TOOLS, IS FAILING THEM – AND FAILING THE MEDIA INDUSTRY

product with little advertising. The vast bulk of people will get their news online – on their PCs, on their mobile phones, or on electronic gadgets not even conceived of yet – and most of that content will be free.

The changes are bad news for print publishers. Growth in online advertising has not been sufficient to offset the decline in print advertising. In fact, web-based advertising may never generate the same revenues for the media industry that print did at its peak. And perhaps it doesn't need to: hosting a website on a computer server is a lot cheaper than printing a newspaper. Advertising may simply get reset at a lower level.

TUNING IN TO CHANGE

RADIO AS A MEDIUM HOLDS HANDS BEAUTIFULLY WITH NEW DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES: IT'S A WAY OF STRADDLING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN MASS COMMUNICATION AND PERSONAL INTERACTION, SAYS EAST COAST RADIO NEWS EDITOR DIANE MACPHERSON

We're living in a time when the so-called traditional media is doing everything it can to cling on to its own survival. Newspapers, especially, are being increasingly overshadowed by the internet; they're worried about their place in society in the next decade, and it's not without justification.

Data from the US Audit Bureau of Circulations earlier this year revealed that newspaper circulation figures in the US had declined, overall, by 74 percent, compared to the same period in 2007-08.

The global financial meltdown has not helped. The good news was that the newspapers' online audiences were growing, meaning that at least the thirst for news has not waned. It's the way it's being consumed that has rapidly shifted, and when you think about the younger generation who seem to be genetically wired into the computer mainframe – it's not surprising. So, where does this leave other forms of traditional media, such as radio? Is it in the same precarious position? Not to the same extent, that's for sure.

Radio as a medium is still going strong in South Africa, although results from the SAARF RAMS June 2009 survey reveal that South African radio audiences are down slightly year-on-year, from 93.8 percent to 91 percent. Daily time spent listening (TSL) is 4 hours 9 minutes, up two minutes on the previous survey. So, while audiences have shrunk a little, there's no life-threatening haemorrhage.

African language station Ukhozi FM remains the South African giant with 6.4-million listeners. And, in a sub-Saharan context, radio remains the main source of news, as it's cheap, accessible and crosses literacy barriers.

I recall that more than 10 years ago, the general manager at the company I work for, Durban-based East Coast Radio (1.83-million listeners), warned staff that radio was under threat from the scourge of internet radio. "One day," he said, "and not too far off, people will be tuning in to overseas radio stations on their satellite radios in their cars."

We quivered in our seats and chewed on our fingernails out of concern, dreading the time when local radio was forsaken for global radio. But despite the emergence of internet radio streaming, the international takeover has not happened. It's largely the locality itself that has kept radio strong. A London-based station isn't likely to be able to tell you whether you should wear a T-shirt or a jersey out that day, or which roads to avoid on the drive in to work, or what's caused those massive black plumes of smoke over the city.

But this doesn't mean radio stakeholders can rest on their laurels. Just like their print counterparts, they need to be engaging with the new media. If your media house isn't playing in this arena, you should start to worry. Perhaps "playing" is the wrong word. Radio, in particular, as a medium holds hands beautifully with the digital technologies. It's a way of straddling the divide between mass communication and personal interaction. Give your listeners an

WE QUIVERED IN OUR SEATS AND CHEWED ON OUR FINGERNAILS OUT OF CONCERN, DREADING THE TIME WHEN LOCAL RADIO WAS FORSAKEN FOR GLOBAL RADIO. BUT DESPITE THE EMERGENCE OF INTERNET RADIO STREAMING, THE INTERNATIONAL TAKEOVER HAS NOT HAPPENED

online platform – a solid, respectable and fun one – and watch them engage with your brand in an entirely new way.

In March 2007, for example, East Coast Radio launched a news blog on the Word Press platform to coincide with the weather phenomenon that saw massive waves devastate the KwaZulu-Natal coastline. On its launch morning, a Monday, the site received more than 10 000 unique visitors. By the Wednesday, 35 000 unique visitors had gone to the blog. In technical terms, this amounted to some 25 gigabytes of data being served. Users wanted updates on local weather and to view the photographs sent in by listeners.

The movie line, "build it, and they will come", springs to mind. Except the difference here was knowing what was needed to be built. Key to the success of the site was the technical team's ability to load listener photos quickly, as well as the commitment from the news team to take on the extra work. We were able to talk about something on air, and then point listeners directly to the site to see what we were talking about. The many comments from site users help to add several layers of depth to the breaking story.

We managed to establish a trust relationship from day one, and knew we had to live up to the expectations we'd created from then on.

And when our listeners aren't looking at photos or downloading podcasts or adding their comments, they're accessing information via the more traditional method: over the airwaves.

That's the beauty of radio – it's not an either/or medium. In fact it is one of the few mediums, if not the only one, that can be accessed while driving through driving rain or standing at the sink, washing dishes.

Ultimately, I believe radio should not be threatened by new media. It should be reinventing itself so that it evolves as part of the new media stable. This should not be done without a proper strategy or competent new media-literate staff.

It's not a sideline, and it's not a hobby that you assign to your intern. The web consumer is too sophisticated to be insulted in this manner. If you're a radio or print journalist you should also be honing your new media skills and adopting a new mindset towards the rapidly changing industry.

Resistance is futile and will only make you redundant.

THE CONVERGENCE CONUNDRUM

ELVIRA VAN NOORT VISITED SIX NEWSROOMS IN FOUR DIFFERENT SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES TO FIND ANSWERS TO THE SPECIFIC CHALLENGES OF CONVERGENCE IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

The current trend towards converged or integrated newsrooms and multiple-platform publishing has found its way to Africa. Originally conceived first in American and later in European newsrooms at the turn of the century, it has proven to be a challenging change to the way newsrooms produce and disseminate content.

For many traditional media, convergence is a possible answer to the upsurge in online and mobile platforms. But not all media organisations or platforms benefit from the long-term processes and outcomes. It is essential that each media organisation analyses its structures and future plans to see if convergence would indeed be beneficial.

Challenges that were found in earlier convergence research in American and European newsrooms include clashes between the routines (deadlines and demands) of the different mediums; resistance to change from both staff and management; staff capacity; changing job descriptions; training; and creating a budget.

These problems are also reflected in African newsrooms as they seem to be essential components in the convergence process. But African newsrooms have additional challenges: limited or non-existent internet access with low bandwidth, tight budgets as well as restricted technical equipment demand a more nuanced solution than found internationally.

A quick audit of a Botswanan newsroom gives a good picture of these challenges: the nine or 10 journalists can only access the internet via dial-up on a select number of computers. There is one fixed-line telephone in the newsroom, with journalists required to use their private mobile phones to make calls. There are no laptops available, meaning reporters outside of Gaborone must use facilities at an internet cafe or write the story in longhand and fax it back to the newsroom.

Integration is not convergence

During research in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Mozambique for both a thesis and report into newsroom convergence, I found that the definition of the word "convergence" was often unclear for most editors, journalists and

media management.

As Stephen Quinn pointed out to me, there is a marked difference between the "integration" of newsrooms and "convergence": *integration* is what occurs when a media company merges two or more existing platforms within a media house into one newsroom. There is *convergence* when one newsroom provides content for a range of media, such as broadcast, print, online and mobile.

While convergence sounds attractive and is the latest trend in the media world, it is not necessarily the best option for African media houses. Quinn emphasises that one can only speak of a truly converged newsroom when it "provides content for a range of media". This means that a single newsroom works on one story for several different media, not just two, such as radio and online.

So for Gabz FM or Yarona FM radio stations in Gaborone, Botswana, convergence would mean a complete overhaul as they currently only provide content for one platform. Both radio stations would either have to merge with an existing television station or newspaper or find the funds to create their own.

When a company wants to add to its existing platform, the first choice is often a website. This is because online journalism has the advantage of offering endless capacity, multimedia, immediacy, permanence and interactivity (Stoval, 2004). To this list you can add hypertextuality, nonlinearity, customisation and personalisation (Kawamoto, 2003). So creating a website as an additional platform adds sustainability, brand power and citizen contribution.

But for this to happen successfully, media organisations such as Gabz FM and Yarona FM, One Africa Television in Windhoek, Namibia, and the *Mail&Guardian* in Johannesburg, South Africa, need to go through a process of change.

And, for this process to work, management needs to be committed and accept that the newsroom will produce content for two platforms that are equal to each other. This means that for every piece of content created, the editor or

journalists have to ask themselves: "Would this be more effective on radio or online, or should I combine the two platforms?"

This is a fundamental difference in a journalist's work routine as well as in job conception, for which additional staff members, such as a multimedia editor, may have to be appointed. The multimedia editor would work closely with the editor from the traditional platform to both assign stories and decide where the story would be published. They would also identify stories that could become cross-media projects.

Changing work routines

Willing reporters play a vital role in accepting a changed work routine. Management can make the strategic decision to first change the work routines of willing staff as a pilot project to erase start-up problems and work on formalising policies and structures.

Since the editors and journalists will have to become "content producers" who are "trained to choose the most effective, entertaining storytelling techniques from a vast menu of multimedia options" (Harrower, 2007:102) they will have to choose the right platform(s) and decide on the right multimedia. An often-heard complaint by journalists and editors is that their workload doubles, since they have to produce for two or more platforms instead of one.

The challenge for management is to convince staff that their changing routines are for the better.

SOICO media house in Mozambique adopted a firm approach in making journalists and editors realise that if they didn't change, they would be out. Once the journalists changed their routines and became accustomed to it, it was found that they were often satisfied with the changes. Journalists said they were now more knowledgeable, giving them a better position in the job market.

This article comes out of a larger research project into convergence in Namibia, Botswana and Mozambique in 2008 in co-operation with FreeVoice, Southern African Media Development Fund and Highway Africa.

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THE FUTURE OF LOCAL

THE IMPLICATIONS OF LOCATION-BASED ADVERTISING ARE REVOLUTIONARY FOR THE AILING WEB ADVERTISING INDUSTRY, ARGUES VINCENT MAHER.

Mobile consumer applications using location-based services are set to double their user-base in 2009, according to the Gartner Group's latest report, but the backroom conversations at mobile industry conferences tend to disparage the hyping of the technology as something for the frequent flyer. The most common use-case: you arrive in a new city and need to find a good Indian restaurant.

What most industry critics have missed so far is that the implications of location-based advertising are revolutionary for the ailing web advertising industry. The problem most websites with large volumes of web advertising inventory are facing is that they cannot sell local advertising unless users have profiled themselves on their site.

There is no compelling reason for the pastry shop on the corner to advertise on a national newspaper site because the owners really only want to reach people within a 15km radius of their shop. For this type of advertiser Google AdSense and the Yellow Pages make much more sense than the New York Times Online.

Regardless of whether the content on a news story has location, a user always has location and one of the most important challenges for publishers over the coming year is figuring out how to get access to that location and begin selling and delivering advertising that is location-relevant. This is where the difficulty comes in.

Technologically there are several ways of getting a user's location. Many mobile

operators already have the systems in place to triangulate the position of a mobile phone based on the relative strength of the signals from the surrounding masts and access to these systems is made available to application developers for a fee. Generally speaking location information can be inaccurate by one to two kilometres depending on the density of cellular masts in the area.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, GPS systems are increasingly being incorporated into mobile phones and other devices. In the United States, where the bulk of mobile internet access has been driven by Apple's iPhone, access to the phone's location information is easier than in developing countries which have massive volumes of users but low-specification handsets. The other problem with GPS is that it doesn't work that well in buildings.

There are several other ways to determine location, for example the geo co-ordinates of Wifi base stations, the hybrid model that Google uses that combines the location

of your IP address with a patchwork of other data from different sources. The most recent and interesting development is that Firefox, the popular Open Source web browser recently introduced location information into the type of data a page can access via the browser.

But the technology is only a small part of the picture, and as location-based services continue to grow, the intensity of the debate about the privacy and safety of users is going to grow too. Many users seem to think that there is something subtly dangerous about revealing your location over the internet but, as always, it depends what gets done with this information. The potential to have your movements tracked simply by surfing the web has an ominous feeling about it, even if it helps make advertising more relevant and this is the crux of the matter: simply improving the quality of advertising is not enough of a value-proposition for the general public to agree to reveal their location.

BLOGGERS THE NEW WATCHDOGS ON THE ZIMBABWE BLOCK

Citizen blogging in Zimbabwe took a wild and vibrant turn during the country's recent presidential and parliamentary elections. Diverse articles randomly posted from different corners of the country flooded the internet leaving the government in dismay. On 29 March 2008 the voting exercise in Zimbabwe attracted huge coverage across the globe for various reasons. However, all excitement was drained when Zimbabwe Electoral Commission took a month to announce the much-awaited results and issued unsatisfactory explanations for the delay. Zanu-PF deliberately remained tight-lipped while mainstream media presented a country at ease yet, in actual fact there, was an irate, information-hungry society demanding answers. Meanwhile ordinary citizens were at work, blogging and filling in the information gap. Bloggers mobilised other citizens and the world to demand the election results. A new communication era had dawned in Zimbabwe.

By Nothando Ndhlovu

Information dissemination in Zimbabwe has always been centralised by the government with mainstream news sources being the politicians themselves. The government is in charge of most of the media operating in the country. In fact, to practise journalism in Zimbabwe, one has to be registered with the Media Information Council (MIC). Established under the infamous Access to Information Protection of Privacy Act of 2000, the council often bars the country's private and foreign media organisations from covering any events in the country because they find them to be biased and therefore branding Zimbabwe negatively. In the conclusion of its Article 19 paper, the Media Institute of Southern Africa – Zimbabwe (MISA-Zimbabwe) stated that such a law was “undermining freedom of expression in Zimbabwe, promoting government control over even the independent media and giving repressive elements tools of intimidation”. Because of its undemocratic behaviour, Zimbabwe has been at the bottom in press freedom rankings for the past four years.

A struggle for information dissemination was actively raging between the state and other media. While the government accused the private press of not being patriotic by working in cahoots with the West, its former colonisers, the press accused the government of failing to deliver the promises it had made since 1980. The *Daily News*, an independent national daily, was bombed in April of 2000 and again in 2001 and then banned in 2004. According to Hill (2005:92) the *Daily News* is to be credited with the MDC's success in the 2002 elections. A string of other papers such as the *Weekly Times* have also been banned. Campbell (2003: 25) states that at this stage, the government-press relationship was at a critical point and “intimidation of the press was a clear indication that the government had lost the battle in relation to information warfare because the opposition had been able to successfully establish websites to counter government information”. While the government was able to deal with “unpatriotic” reporters working in the print industry because they could be easily located, to locate those posting stories on the internet proved a daunting task and at this point, user generated content is no doubt a threat to mainstream media and the government.

Alternative media

According to Castells (2001: 184) it's often the case that the government and its citizens do not trust each other and, “the internet as a space of freedom, would epitomise this cleavage with advocates of liberty trying to preserve this new land of opportunity while government mobilises their considerable resources to close this leak in their control systems”.

Blogs are a good example of how new technologies have engaged people more directly with media consumption and production. In a traditional media set-up, the citizen is a receiver of information and has little participation in news production. However, new media allows for the citizen to be not only a consumer but a producer as well. Anybody with the means can access the internet as a sender, receiver or participant to whatever website they log on to and that explains

ZIM BLOGS

- Letters – written by Cathy Buckle <http://cathybuckle.com>
- Denford Magora's Zimbabwe blog <http://denfordmagora.blogspot.com>
- Eddie Cross' website www.eddiecross.africanherd.com
- The Bearded Man by Robb WJ Ellis aka Mandebvu <http://thebeardedman.blogspot.com/>
- The Zimbabwean Pundit <http://zimpundit.blogspot.com>

Other Zimbabwean blogs

- Kubatana.net – an online community of Zimbabwean activists www.kubatanablogs.net/kubatana/
- Sokwanele by Zimbabwe Action Civic Support Group www.sokwanele.com/
- Zimbabweblog.com “Many Zimbabweans, One Blog” brings together a number of Zimbabwean bloggers around the world to write and comment on issues Zimbabwean.
- Human rights in Zimbabwe – blog by Amnesty International www.amnesty.ca/blog2.php?blog=human_rights_zimbabwe
- Townshipvibes.com for all the latest news from Zimbabwe and updates on the Zimbabwe situation.
- Petina's Blog by Petina Gappah, Zimbabwean writer and lawyer, living in Switzerland www.petinagappah.com/
- For links to other top-rated blogs in Zimbabwe, visit Afrigator's blog stats at <http://afrigator.com/blogstats/countryblogs/Zimbabwe>

why ordinary citizens such as Cathy Buckle, Eddie Cross and Cont Mhlanga, to name a few, are blogging, reporting on contested topics.

Zimbabwe's mainstream media has always shied away from such brazen reporting. While it is argued that the internet carries democratic potential as it empowers citizens to discuss topical issues, McNair (2006: 2) points out that easy access to the internet has resulted in “unplanned outcomes in media content that are sometimes different or opposite from the official. The wide ranges of news coverage have led to ideological competition and an increased volatility of news agendas”.

While blogs seemed to lack any reserve towards the government, consumers also develop a disregard for traditional media dismissing it as propaganda in Zimbabwe. A conflict between bloggers and the government was therefore inevitable. Reports claimed the Zimbabwean government was carrying out a witch-hunt to sniff out bloggers. It openly discouraged government unsanctioned online news provision by threatening people with the Interception of Communications Act (ICA). The act demands that operators of telecommunications services are compelled to install software and hardware to enable them to intercept and store information as directed by the state. In spite of these seemingly harsh laws, the flow of information out of the country is made easy by pervasive technology. The internet is self-governed and has resulted in a number of Zimbabwean citizens independently using it as a means of communication. One would find it intriguing that with a law such as the ICA in place, personal narrators still post stories knowing they could be convicted.

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BLOGGERS: THE NEW WATCHDOGS ON THE ZIMBABWE BLOCK

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Content

According to Burnett and Marshall (2003:165) the advantage of news provision from blogs is that individuals provide “tremendous insights for users to understand how major events have affected people close to the event, unmediated by the gate-keeping structures of contemporary television networks and news magazines”. When mainstream media failed to operate at their maximum in an eventful period such as the 2008 presidential elections, blogs proved themselves ideal for sharing information in the complex political situation. Immediately after political rallies took place posts on the events would be made available to the public. Through blogs, Zimbabwe’s recent elections have been discussed in detail to the government’s ire.

A browse through most blogs indicates that both mainstream media and bloggers use each other as news sources. The relationship between bloggers and journalists is symbiotic but the credibility of blogs is often questioned because most bloggers are not professionals. How credible is an article posted by a farmer or a high school child with access to internet at home? Are they even aware of media ethics and laws? Such questions have come up in debates. But there is no doubt that blogging is providing diverse fresh voices and contributing significant observations on the political front.

Bloggers have enthusiastically taken on such media roles such as monitoring, expanded people’s access to information and opened up public debate in a manner that traditional media have failed to do because of government interference.

The internet has opened up the media to new voices which provide people with different interpretations of events. They have managed to draw interest to a range of issues that required political attention in Zimbabwe.

New watchdogs on the block

In addition to being watchdogs of the state blogs are also policing mainstream media, pointing out their misrepresentations and omissions. According to Banda (2006: 1) it is no coincidence that alternative media “emerge to deal with specific ideological projects and as such must be viewed as satisfying a specific need at a specific point in time”. Zimbabwean blogging is an outlet for those whose voices have not been heard in the past. It is a form of emancipation for the marginalised whose opinions are not in line with mainstream editorial policies. What was never considered newsworthy in mainstream news is now of priority concern to citizens and the effect is that mainstream media is now tagging along.

Blogs across the globe have been observed as transforming politics, and shifting ideologies. Hackett and Carroll (2006: 20) define ideology as the power to shape the very perceptions and desires of subordinate groups so they do not think to challenge existing social relations. The dominant Zanu-PF ideology is being challenged constantly. Forms of resistance towards policies seen as unfair or promoting inequality have been built by citizens challenging them through their blogs.

One may conclude that despite still being for the elite, technological culture has taken centre stage in the politics of news production and dissemination in Zimbabwe. Blogs have not only broadened the means of discussing national matters but they have also changed the way mainstream media organisations report stories.

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COMMENTARY WRONG OF THE DIVIDE

Ethiopia’s technology challenges often start with electricity, or its lack. If “belg”, moderate little rains from February to May, fail as they did last year, government rationing of power is likely until the heavy winter rains arrive between July and September. Without this rain, public officials say, the country’s hydroelectric dams controlling the main source of the Nile cannot power the capital, let alone the country’s rural areas.

Others complain, however, that blackouts are induced, with the government selling rationed power to its neighbour, Sudan.

A blackout is a blackout, whatever the reason. Sometimes on schedule, more often not, lights go out in patches of Addis Ababa, with desktop computers stopping immediately and video cameras, audio recorders and mobile phones stopping eventually. Last year, such power shedding lasted roughly 12 hours, usually between 7am to 7pm, once a week. Now, blackouts routinely stretch 24 hours, sometimes two or three times a week. Institutions such as hospitals – and sometimes universities – are exempt.

In 2007, when the government opened 13 regional universities and announced more to come, Addis Ababa University quickly became the premier trainer of faculty and successfully negotiated to keep electricity flowing on campus. This year’s policy for AAU, also site of the country’s only graduate journalism programme, is not yet clear.

Even under the best conditions, Ethiopia is tough for tasks such as convergence that rely heavily on technology. Consider the country’s small base: approximately 1.9-million mobile phone subscribers and 30 000 internet subscribers, plus those who frequent internet cafes in urban areas, in an estimated population of 80 million. They are often frustrated by poor or non-existent service. Yet the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation (www.ethionet.et/), a state-run monopoly, appears immune to complaints.

Of course, some online trouble is unpredictable and uncontrollable. In February, for example, internet and telephone service was drastically cut throughout Europe, Asia, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa when three fibre-optic cables were simultaneously severed in the Mediterranean. While French engineers worked to restore connectivity, many internet users noted only a blip for a day or two, but Ethiopians had no alternative routing and lost online access for a week.

How did, and do, media cope here? By and large, government media – ETV, the nation’s one television station, and Radio Ethiopia, its largest radio station – are powered by generators so that production, if not reception, is not greatly impaired. Three privately licensed FM stations and most newspapers may not be so fortunate. Any teaching of journalism, and specifically media convergence, has to address such physical challenges.

Even with electricity flowing, however, the daily effort of education, and any real attempt at media convergence, is difficult. Limited bandwidth and high demand prevents all but glimpses of websites, let alone intelligent searching. Documents usually have to be downloaded painstakingly for hours in the middle of the night.

Censorship compounds problems. The Ethiopian government, for example, cut text messaging during the country’s 2005 post-election violence and did not allow service to restart until millennium celebrations in 2007. As laid out in last year’s US State Department Human Rights Report:

The government restricted access to the internet and blocked opposition websites, including the sites of the OLF, ONLF, Ginbot 7 and several news blogs and sites run by opposition diaspora groups, such as Ethiopian Review, CyberEthiopia.com, Quatero Amharic Magazine, Tensae Ethiopia, and the Ethiopian Media Forum.

FROM THE SIDE DIGITAL

ERRATIC ELECTRICITY SUPPLY, LIMITED BANDWIDTH, HIGH DEMAND AND CENSORSHIP MAKE THE DAILY EFFORT OF EDUCATION AND ANY REAL ATTEMPT AT MEDIA CONVERGENCE DIFFICULT, WRITES ALICE KLEMENT

THE 'IMPRISONED' INTERNET OF ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

By Sileshi Yilma

Student A, who requested anonymity because the issue of access to the internet is sensitive, recently joined the Graduate School of Development Studies at Addis Ababa University. He often prays that his teachers will not give him an assignment that requires online research.

The reason is not because of the shortage of computers at the university, or because Student A, who recently joined the Graduate School of Development Studies, hates visiting computer laboratories; rather it is due to the reported blockage of websites related to his field of study. "The field I am studying is related to variety of disciplines such as politics. However, it is very difficult to conduct online research on sensitive local political issues." The student blames the government for censoring some websites.

Student B, who also requested anonymity, is a post-graduate student at AAU's Institute of Language Studies. He echoes Student A's concern: "Our teachers always give us assignments which require thorough online research. For instance, if the issue is about literary criticism of the Ethiopian government, it is difficult to have an access to such topic on the internet."

The Open Net Initiative (ONI), an internet monitoring and surveillance project, recently identified Ethiopia as one of two countries in sub-Saharan Africa to carry out widespread internet blocking. The other is Zimbabwe, according to *Fortune*, a local weekly English newspaper. In a 2006 report on the region, ONI condemned Ethiopia's internet censorship: "The government blocks websites of opposition parties, sites representing ethnic minorities,

sites for independent news organisations, and sites promoting human rights in Ethiopia."

The Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation (ETC), however, does not acknowledge any censorship. Such silence does not satisfy some students. Says Student B: "ETC monopolises the telecom industry in the country. Since it is the only operator of telecom pipes in and out of the country, ETC has the capacity to block access to websites linked to opposition blogs."

Andrew Heavens, journalist and blogger based in Khartoum, Sudan, doubts Student B's explanations. On his blog www.meskelsquare.com, Heavens (2007) writes: "It is never certain that a site has been blocked because – given the state of ETC's overloaded circuits – who knows, it might still be a technical glitch."

AAU's Information and Communication Technology Development office says it is responsible for computer and internet-related services at the university. The office, with 36 employees, administers and provides information technology support for the five AAU campuses.

Sources at the ICTD office, who also requested anonymity because they are not authorised to discuss such issues, say the office does filter some websites. However, they say the office does not have the authority or personnel to block political websites. "We have special software that is an open source for academic institutions. The software filters dating and pornographic sites we think are not appropriate for our students," says one ICTD source.

According to this person, if AAU students encounter censorship of crucial websites for their online research, the ICTD office swiftly entertains such complaints and is collaborative in granting access.

Many AAU students say conditions prior to the nation's controversial 2005 general election were relatively better for browsing. However, as Student A notes, after the election ended in bloodshed, internet censorship triumphed all over the country. "Some sites started to appear either as 'the page cannot be displayed' or 'this site is blocked,'" recalls Student A.

According to ICTD sources, prior to the 2005 election, AAU students could browse websites critical of the Ethiopian government. Examples included organisations such as the Committee to Protect Journalists, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International. These organisations now say their sites are blocked or difficult to access inside Ethiopia.

At AAU, even students conducting online research about internet censorship face challenges. The irony, as Student B says, is that it is difficult to access websites that provide information on internet censorship.

Despite his prayer, Student A's teachers continue to give him assignments that require online research. This student and others do not know for sure when they are going to be freed from such censorship. As Student A observes: "Only God knows."

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On August 29, a statement by the New York-based NGO Center Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) stated that reliable sources reported that its servers were inaccessible to users, and that emails were not coming through to CPJ. These reports emerged at the same time CPJ was investigating the detention of *The Reporter* editor Amare Aregawi. The *Reporter* also alleged blocking of its website for four days during this time. CPJ's website was also inaccessible at other times during the year.

AAU's graduate programme, funded from the start by Norwegian aid, may have experienced its first real challenge to theoretical convergence with its fifth batch of students selected for the academic year 2007-2008. In August, after the governments of Norway and Ethiopia squabbled, Ethiopia asked some Norwegian diplomats to leave. They took with them almost the programme's entire faculty and funding. So the journalism programme's only hope for immediate survival was to converge 33 broadcast and print students into one class on reporting and writing for print, broadcast and online.

Oddly enough, under circumstances perhaps unacceptable in more rigid academic circles in Europe or the United States, students came to understand and practise the broad range of skills necessary for successful media convergence.

The benefits became obvious during internships, when broadcast students traditionally assigned to ETV crossed media to print at the daily newspaper *Addis Neger*, for example.

Africans understand the battles they face in practising and teaching even the least technologically complex journalism. Earlier this year, Emevwo Biakolo, dean of the School of Media and Communication at Pan-African University in Lagos, Nigeria, announced a conference on Journalism and New Media Technologies in Africa: New Technologies, New Practices and the Renewal of Media Training in Africa.

While the professor observed what he says is "a paradigm shift in the global practice of journalism," he suggested that "in Africa, the changes are less noticed".

Yet Biakolo identified the key theme of the August conference as the transforming role of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies at www.eictda.gov.et/) in journalism practice: problems of funding, capacity, and inadequate infrastructure.

And, he insisted: "No less germane are questions of policy as governments struggle to come to terms with the aspirations of industry in virtually all African countries. From the point of view of the academy, inadequate training facilities conspire with inadequately prepared faculty and out-of-date curriculum to keep the continent playing catch-up."

This originally appeared in the Convergence Newsletter of the Center for Mass Communications Research at the University of South Carolina, College of Mass Communications and Information Studies in June 2009.

DYING TO TELL A STORY

DAILY DISPATCH JOURNALIST THANDUXOLO JIKA AND PHOTOGRAPHER THEO JEPHTHA SPENT MONTHS TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHY SOMALIS LIVING IN EAST LONDON WERE CONSTANTLY BEING TARGETED, ABUSED AND ATTACKED. THE RESULT WAS DYING TO LIVE, A POWERFUL PRINT AND MULTIMEDIA PACKAGE



When South Africa suddenly turned into a battle-zone with waves of xenophobic attacks in May last year, many journalists tried to answer the questions of what lay behind the violence and why was it happening.

In the *Daily Dispatch* newsroom, we began talking about a special investigation into why South Africans were killing fellow Africans. Soon photographer Theo Jephtha and I were roped in by Editor Andrew Trench to be part of the investigation. I was especially keen to participate, having already established an anti-xenophobic group on Facebook which has about 2 000 members.

It was decided that this investigation would not simply be about print supplying content to online platforms, but rather a “print-online project”. As a journalist recently graduated from Rhodes University, I was excited as I knew this project would test my multimedia skills. The *Dispatch* is in the fortunate position of having a converged newsroom – as well as the support of an editor who believes journalists need to be multiskilled in the 21st century.

Attacks on Somalis in the Eastern Cape began in 2005 but, with time, the murders have become more brutal and frequent.

Our entry point into the investigation was Andile Tunzana, a self-confessed Somali multiple murderer in the East London area, who had since converted to Islam and adopted the name Ismal Junaid while awaiting

trial. In 2006, he was sentenced to double-life imprisonment in the East London High Court after he confessed to killing Somalis in Duncan Village, a low-income residential area.

Trench said if we wanted to know why foreigners were being killed, we had to ask the killer. In a series of interviews conducted in jail with Junaid, I began to understand that South Africans do not care about the refugees in their communities. Instead, there was prejudice and hate – even in our institutions as South African government policy makes refugees vulnerable by not giving them any real rights.

As the interviews took shape, and through the constant feedback I had from Andrew, I began to realise that only by living with Somalis in East London would I begin to understand the reality in which they lived. I had to find a place to live with Somalis in this vulnerable community.

I was armed with a notebook, pen, voice recorder, small video camera and a laptop with an internet connection to file material to the custom-built website, powered by the open-source tools such as WordPress, YouTube and Dippity.

This was an opportunity for me, as a journalist, to document the lives of those living in fear, the lives of their attackers, and the lives of their sympathisers.

Theo and I went to live in Mdantsane’s NU 1 with two Somali “brothers” who were working as shopkeepers in this hostile environment. We were welcomed at a

THE REACTION

The Dying to Live project enabled the *Dispatch* to engage readers way beyond their traditional audience, including Somalis living in the Eastern Cape as well as South Africans overseas. Here is a selection of comments off the website:

For all is worth I'm truly sorry for all the suffering my people have caused to our brothers and sisters who ascend our shores under the auspices of refugees. If it means anything at all “You are all welcome here. It is as much your home as it is mine.” – Prince Legodi

I personally im tired of them coz we expected to respect them while bona are doing the direct opposite. No its unfair, come to King Williams Town and you will see what im talking abt ... these journalists must also interview us the citizenz of this country and hear how we feel abt the matter. – Zukie

One of the things that we often forget is the fact that we do not know what tomorrow brings. If tomorrow I find myself in the townships of Somali how will I expect them to treat me? Just

house surrounded by burglar proofing and a place we could not leave at night for fear of attack.

In the three weeks we spent living with Abdirizak Mahdi and Adam Malow, I kept a daily diary which I filed for the site. Theo’s photographs accompanied the daily diary. This became a routine that helped me when



yesterday our freedom fighters took refuge from other African Countries and we seem to have forgotten all about this. Let us be good and show compassion to our fellow brothers remembering that they did not ask to be in this situation that they are in. – Apiwe

i m very, very sorry what happening on my country fallow (somali people) we helped s'afrika at the time of colony period, and stood along them but but now the situation is inverse, we dying in s.africa, and every day i hear horrendous number of somali death, you s.african people that is not fair. – Ahmed

I'm Somali. I don't live in South Africa. I'm so appreciative of the country that has afforded me sanctuary and prosperity. Here in America, we really dont face remotely close to the same hardship my fellow brethrens do. Now I know and already knew not to take things for granted. What I actually dont understand is the same people that we helped at their time of need are right now slaughtering us in our time of need. This proves how much the black SA is ignorant of their past history. – *Abdifatah*

Well done Guys for bringing this story to our society, I must say It brings sadness in my heart and tears to my eyes, to see how cruel we have become as humans. Whatever happened to the spirit of Ubuntu to our Brothers and Sisters? – Sibulele

it came to writing for print. It was a totally different way of note-taking for me, but an excellent way to tell a story both for print and online. Each day, I wrote two to three diary entries about my observations and interviews I had had during the course of the day.

The video camera became my extended notepad too, as

I used it to capture some moving moments that could not be captured by using only a pen, camera or a voice recorder. Like the story of wheelchair-bound 17-year-old Abdulahi Haji Gaan, who was paralysed by a bullet after being shot at by armed robbers at a spaza shop in Mdantsane's NU 11. I wrote about this story in print, but also captured it on video to show viewers the pain Gaan suffers as he exercises every day, hoping his legs will be strong so that he can walk again.

While this could be described in print, the video was more powerful as it shows people the reality faced by the young man.

Another emotionally moving video interview was with Abdulahi Abdi Sheikh, whose life was shattered when his younger brother and only family member in South Africa was gunned down by Tunzana during an armed robbery in Duncan Village in 2005. Sheikh became very emotional during the interview when he spoke about his brother's death and his anger. I believe the video gave audiences an idea of the extent of the pain felt by a refugee who had escaped his war-torn country to start a new life, but landed up losing a sibling.

As a journalist, I had to use these tools to tell a complete story in a modern news environment. I could not only rely on pen and paper and still visuals. I was conscious of the fact that I had to take the audience to where I was, into people's lives and minds.

The more I got to use these tools, the more convinced I became that this was the key to telling a story in a different and unconventional way in our constantly changing environ-

ment – and to our constantly changing audiences.

After completing our stay in Mdantsane, it came down to writing. With Trench's guidance and the help of my daily diary, the processes became simple. But what was more exciting was how well the project was coming together, with the online team interacting more and more with us as the final product was put together.

The team did not simply lift print content and place it online, but created a unique online entity to go beyond the age-old print story telling.

Over a period of four months, the *Dispatch* team put together a package which included a blog, an online diary, news stories, photographs, video, audio, interactive maps and a timeline. The website recorded more than 35 000 unique users.

In the end, the amount of feedback generated online was amazing as audiences – including those living overseas – had the space to give their views on xenophobia. The website became a ground for debate, with some intolerant South Africans raising anti-foreign views while others who care about humanity argued strongly against the killings. Also Somalis across the country and internationally gave their views about the killings against other Africans.

The online Dying to Live project also made it easy for the newspaper to attract media attention throughout the world and showed that an investigative piece could be done online with different elements added to it.

The Dying to Live project can be viewed at <http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/dying/>

A SNAPSHOT OF LIFE

MIGRANTS WHO TELL THEIR OWN STORIES DEFY THE COMMON LABELS OF VICTIM OR SCROUNGER AND PROVIDE A POWERFUL COUNTERPOINT TO MAINSTREAM REPORTING, SAYS CLODAGH MISKELLY

Through telling stories about our lives we can make sense of experiences, draw on the past to start to plan the future and enable others to understand how we see the world.

Through hearing stories we learn about how others think, feel and act. We can hear about how they are treated, examine their motives, and can develop shared meanings. We can even be persuaded to act. Sharing stories of people who have experienced migration, for example, can help develop dialogue about the topic and promote social change.

When migrants and refugees arrive or wish to stay their life story can become their lifeline. It is formalised, documented, authenticated (or fails to be authenticated) and judged in order to decide whether an individual can stay or must go.

Tales of migration

In the UK, there are familiar stories about migration. At times of economic crisis it has been evoked as a threat to jobs and at other times we hear stories of asylum seekers as a drain on the public purse. Less often do we hear migrants' life stories told on their own terms. But there are projects working to collect the stories of migrants by migrants, be these to celebrate or reflect on and come to terms with experience, have their voices heard in the media or to influence attitudes and work for social change.

A growing number of these projects are making use of digital stories including a recent project where Panos London worked with the African HIV Policy Network (AHPN).

The project was with a group of African migrants who are living with HIV and were at risk of being removed to their country of origin where treatment is not necessarily accessible, affordable or available. They wanted to make digital stories to help people understand their contribution to life in the UK as well as the impact of threatened removal on their health and families. These stories are being used by the Destination Unknown campaign (www.ahpn.org/campaigns/destinationunknown) to give an insight into these people's lives.

Story-circles and individual narratives

Digital stories are short digital videos (2 to 5 minutes) with a personal scripted narrative soundtrack and still images which are produced using a method developed by the Center for Digital Storytelling (www.storycenter.org). Participants script, record, photograph and edit their own stories during a workshop. At the heart of this process is the story-circle where participants tell their stories, listen to other participants' reactions to them, and can develop and refine the narrative in a mutually supportive environment.

These are crafted, scripted stories. Their brevity requires an economy of language and image and focuses on a few aspects of a life story, or perhaps one important period in their lives. Photos of loved ones, or an important occasion, or objects like a diary or memento can also be a starting point or an organising device for a story. The stories are narrated by the author and sometimes as much can be conveyed by the tone of voice as by the words that are spoken.

The resulting stories are always to some extent a collaboration, they are shaped by the process and facilitation, the format and what is happening in people's lives at the time. However, the intention is for participants to have control

over the content, form and also how and where the story is published and viewed. This can lead to stories that challenge preconceptions or provide a different insight into how an "issue" is lived.

The stories produced with AHPN communicate the impact of the threat of removal on people's lives, health and families. But these are also everyday stories of lives involving volunteering, caring for one's family, being frustrated at not being able to work and wanting to live a productive life.

A digital storytelling workshop is an opportunity to be able to reflect on a story and communicate it to others. Having some control over content, form and distribution are important in contexts where opportunities to tell the story are rare or usually controlled by someone else's agenda. In this case the storyteller can set the terms of reference.

The story allows the participant to escape their labels

Even if the story of migration is the one which will decide someone's future, they should not be limited to telling only that story. They might well want to represent other aspects of their lives beyond their country of origin and legal status. Nor should they be pushed to tell what a well meaning workshop facilitator thinks is the story of their life.

When given the opportunity people have created digital stories which free them from the narrow labels of migrant or asylum seeker, scrounger or victim and instead allow them to be seen as mothers, dance teachers and committed volunteers; stories that convey passion and achievement.

The purpose of telling has implications for what gets told and what gets left out of a digital story, just as it does with journalism and legal cases. Digital stories are subjective and usually heartfelt. They don't make claims to be balanced arguments but this does not diminish their value as ways of helping to understand issues of social justice or change.

A digital story cannot provide the richness and breadth of an oral testimony, nor the facts and detail of a legal testimony. But digital stories do provide carefully crafted glimpses of people's lives and thoughts and experiences as they see them at a certain point in time. As such they can be a powerful counterpoint to other mainstream, or political, narratives and so act as an important means of stimulating dialogue and influencing change.

The migrants' stories from the Destination Unknown campaign can be watched on Panos London website at www.panos.org.uk/?lid=27158



WHEN GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY PEOPLE HAVE CREATED DIGITAL STORIES WHICH FREE THEM FROM THE NARROW LABELS OF MIGRANT OR ASYLUM SEEKER, SCROUNGER OR VICTIM AND INSTEAD ALLOW THEM TO BE SEEN AS MOTHERS, DANCE TEACHERS AND COMMITTED VOLUNTEERS



Chris de Bode Panos Pictures

DOING BETTER JOURNALISM.



Victor de la Fuente

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CHINA IN THE AFRICAN MEDIASCAPE

CHINESE ASSISTANCE TO AFRICAN MEDIA IS NOT NEW. WHAT IS DIFFERENT NOW IS THAT IT IS BEING ADMINISTERED IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA WITH A GREATER DEGREE OF OPENNESS, SAYS FACKSON BANDA

In 2006 China and 48 African countries drew up the Beijing Action Plan (2007-2009) under the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (Focac). The plan outlines key milestones for China's intervention in the African mediascape. In the Focac framework, "news media" falls in the area of "social development". The framework lists five points of intervention, including an undertaking by China to "explore ways of conducting effective co-operation".

In August 2007, the Commonwealth Press Union (CPU)'s quarterly magazine had a cover story on China's penetration into the African mediascape. The story, "Enter the dragon: how the emergence of China is impacting on the Commonwealth", was a medley of opinion pieces by several Commonwealth media executives, including *The Post's* Fred M'Membe in Zambia, *The Monitor's* Angelo Izama in Uganda and *The Concord Times's* Ibrahim Seibure in Sierra Leone. It laid out a variety of key themes:

- "Welcome China but keep a wary eye"
- "Resentment of the Chinese echoes Amin years"
- "Murmurs of discontent but China a true friend" (CPQ 2007: 12-18).

Much research has concentrated upon aspects of Chinese foreign trade and aid policy (Davies, Edinger, Tay and Naidu 2008; Taylor 1998); the role and impact of Chinese economic operations in Africa (Keet 2008); China's influence in Africa and its implications for the West (Brookes and Shin 2006; Sachs 2007; Wild 2006); and Africans' perceptions of China in Africa (Alden 2006). Pehnelt's study (2007) views Chinese aid policy in terms of political and economic goals which include: gaining support in international organisations, establishing itself as a new super power and securing access to energy resources and commodities. Many analysts ask what China's real economic intentions in Africa are and how they differ from those of the imperialist West (Keet 2008: 78; Cheng 2007: 1).

Some scholarly work is emerging, albeit slowly and incoherently, to explain how media are caught up in China's insertion into Africa. For example, Alden (2006: 7) argues that there are three basic portrayals of China within Africa: China as development partner; as competitor; and as hegemon. As a development partner, Africans appreciate China's "no conditionality" policy, anti-colonial solidarity and model of economic development. As a competitor, China is seen as displacing local businesses with its mass-produced, cheap exports. As hegemon, China is seen as harbouring grand designs of an imperialist nature on the African continent.

But these studies beg the question about what the enduring,

cultural influence of China might be on African media institutions, on the practice of journalism, and on African journalists.

Chinese intervention in African media

Chinese assistance to African media is not new. What is different now is that it is being administered in the post-Cold War era with a greater degree of openness. But even before the Cold War China was involved in some level of media engagement in Africa. By early 1958 China had opened a New China News Agency office in Cairo (Ismael 1971: 507). Such ideological support was then extended to the liberation movements and support given to their radio stations. In 1967 Radio Peking was transmitting 21 hours weekly in English to East Africa, with transmissions occurring daily at prime local time – between six and nine o'clock in the evening (Yu 1968: 1023). Chinese publications – the *China Pictorial*, *Peking Review*, *Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, Mao's selected works, Swahili translations of Chinese poems for children, etc – were readily available in East Africa (Yu 1968: 1024), demonstrating China's interest in countering the West's imperialist designs.

In the post-Cold War era, China made use of "Chinese nationalism", and not necessarily communism, to undergird the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) engagement with the rest of the world, including Africa. The launch in 2006 of the state-run China Radio International in Kenya can be seen in this light (Brookes and Shin 2006: 6). China's engagement with African media must thus be contextualised in terms of China's wider agenda for Africa. Gao Jinyuan, in his talk at a joint meeting of the Royal African Society and the Africa Centre on 7 September 1982, outlined what he saw as China's policy towards Africa:

- Support Africans in their struggle to win independence and safeguard their national sovereignty against colonialism, imperialism and hegemonism;
 - Establish and enhance friendly relations on the basis of equality, mutual benefit and co-operation, providing material and technical assistance;
 - Support African governments' pursuance of a policy of peace, neutrality and non-alignment;
 - Advocate peaceful negotiations to solve disputes between African countries, the upholding of African solidarity, and opposition to aggression and interference by alien forces; and
 - Support African countries in their efforts to develop national economies and seek a new economic world order (1983: 248).
- All of the above reflect China's own insecurities in a unipolar world, where the United States is the singular super power.

Contemporary Chinese assistance to African media

The Focac action plan lists five points of intervention:

1. Increased contact between news media and encouraging journalists to play a role in enhancing mutual understanding and friendship;
2. Multi-level exchanges and co-operation, visits between media groups;
3. Reporting and coverage by their news media of the other side, facilitating news agencies in sending resident and non-resident correspondents to report;
4. Workshops for African correspondents in China;

CHINA IS ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN
EXPUNGING THOSE EURO-AMERICAN VIEWS
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5. Expanding co-operation in radio and television broadcasting (Focac 2006a: 12-13).

Within this framework, it is possible to pinpoint three key areas of Chinese intervention in African media: infrastructural alignment; ideological expurgation; and cultural reproduction. The relationship between these three factors can be set out as follows: while *infrastructural alignment* represents the “hardware” of Chinese penetration into African media, *ideological expurgation* and *cultural reproduction* refer to the “software” of China’s interventions.

Infrastructural alignment

Technical assistance to media has consisted of media and communications infrastructure. Media support has been mainly towards state-owned broadcasting houses, such as the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC), the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings (ZBH) and the National Radio of Equatorial Guinea. Such technical support has included:

- Transmitters, towers, generators and antennae (Journalism.co.za 2007).
- Nigeria’s purchase of Chinese satellite technology, which included a Chinese training package and a ground station to be built in the Nigerian capital Abuja.
- In Malawi, a fibre-optic communication project to the tune of US\$22.94 million.
- In 2002, Zambia received FM transmitters for seven provinces. In 2006, it received more transmitters for further extension of radio services (Davies, Edinger, Tay and Naidu 2008: 49-55).

Such an infrastructural realignment – presumably *away from* Western technology and expertise – is likely to make African countries become more dependent on China than the West and such technological dependence is almost always linked to other forms of dependencies – economic, social, educational, etc.

In some instances infrastructural support has been implicitly linked to political ends. For example, the provision of FM transmitters to the State-owned media in Zambia has almost always occurred in an election year, timed to support the pro-Beijing ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) in its electoral campaign effort, especially in rural Zambia.

This can be viewed as China’s first step in a process designed to integrate Chinese state capital into the economies of African countries. In almost all cases where China has supplied technology, it has been accompanied by Chinese training packages.

Ideological expurgation

A careful analysis of Chinese involvement in African media demonstrates that China is actively engaged in expurgating or expunging those Euro-American views of it which it considers inimical to its foreign policy in Africa. The context of such Chinese ideological commitment in Africa is both its anti-colonial or anti-imperial history in Africa and its continued rejection of the equally ideological commitment of Western countries in Africa. For example, China is opposed to linking aid to the kinds of liberal-democratic values that Western nations and multilateral financial institutions insist upon: free markets; human rights; good governance; environmental protection; etc.

As an attempt at asserting its nationalism and internationalism, China is involved in an international campaign to de-legitimise Taiwan’s and Tibet’s separatist ambitions (Meidan 2006: 73, 90; Wild 2006). When Beijing launched Focac in October 2000, the first summit was astutely held from 9-11 October to coincide with Taiwan’s national day held on 10 October. A related aspect is its ideological justification of what it sees as its democratic reforms in Tibet. For example, Malawi’s *Daily Times* newspaper ran a 12-page supplement on 6 April 2009 entitled “50 years of democratic reform in Tibet”.

China’s ideological influence is in fact a double-edged

sword. On a negative note, China equips despotic African regimes with media-communication infrastructure to perpetuate their hold on political power. Brookes and Shin (2006: 4) say: “China provided a military-strength radio jamming device, which the Harare government used to block broadcasts of anti-government reports from independent media outlets during the 2005 parliamentary election campaign.” And Reporters without Borders contends that China’s involvement in Africa is “toxic for democracy”.

Cultural reproduction

China sees its anti-colonialist and pro-liberation movement history as a point of cultural harmony between Chinese and African peoples, providing a historically-grounded framework for carrying out China’s contemporary Africa policy on a more “complex” and “higher plane” (Gill, Huang and Morrison 2007: 5).

Cultural experiences are often mediated through education. King (2006: 8) notes of student exchanges between Africa and China that “students are not just seen as a one-

way act of generosity by China, since, according to the China Scholarship Council, Africans bring to China ‘their unique experiences and colourful cultures’”. Through such cultural exchanges, China reproduces itself in Africa, complete with ‘China towns’ beginning to emerge across sub-Saharan Africa. Wenping (2007: 28) says: “Africa is perhaps the most important testing ground for the promotion of Chinese soft power.”

These cultural exchanges have included African journalists and other media workers, mostly those in the employ of state-owned media, although there is

CHINA IS OPPOSED TO LINKING AID TO THE KINDS OF LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC VALUES THAT WESTERN NATIONS AND MULTILATERAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS INSIST UPON

evidence of editors from privately-owned media participating (according to the Chinese Embassy in South Africa). As Cheng Min, Johannesburg bureau chief for Xinhua, informed Journalism.co.za: “We invite journalists from African countries to China and train them on journalism, news gathering and writing.”

“Training” is not value-neutral; it also carries with it the cultural and political values associated with those skills. This is deducible from the content of the Third Workshop for African Journalists held under the auspices of Focac in 2006 which was attended by 42 journalists from 23 English-speaking African countries and included discussions on such topics as:

- China-Africa relations and China’s Africa Policy;
- China’s experience and achievements on economic reform and national development;
- The Taiwan Question; and
- China’s journalistic view and the operation of the Chinese press.

In addition, the journalists visited Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television (CCTV), China Radio International (CRI) and the Beijing Organising Committee for Olympic Games. A particularly telling aspect of the workshop was an introduction to China’s view of journalism and journalistic practice.

Another important arena of China’s influence is the setting up in African countries of the so-called Confucius Institutes. These are patterned after the British Council and other similar institutes. The setting up of such centres has significant implications: it provides opportunities for a possible paradigm shift from the “West to the East” in interrogating the relationship between mass media and society. At the very least, it signals the possibility of a more pluralistic media education, incorporating not only Occidental theo-

ries and practices of journalism but also Chinese and Africa philosophies and practices.

A critical cultural analysis

While a political-economic approach to understanding the role of China in African media is necessary, it needs to be complemented with a *critical* culturalist perspective. Analysing China in Africa requires a perspective which understands both China and Africa as *agents*, actively engaged in constructing a new cultural milieu. In other words, the question should not be only about what the so-called Chinese dragon is doing to Africa, but what China and Africa are doing together.

Firstly, it would be useful to understand how Chinese perspectives of journalism are being taken up in African media institutions. How are the workshops for African journalists enabling African journalists to negotiate their often Western-oriented understandings and practices of journalism? And, with the establishment of Confucius Institutes in several African countries is there a possibility, for example, of Chinese philosophical thought becoming enmeshed with African political thought? As Kezar (2004: 120) observes, Confucianism offers an alternative language and philosophical system to that offered by Platonic/Aristotelean, Western thought. Given the conjoined histories of Sino-African anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, it is likely that Chinese and African media scholars will begin to examine the philosophical principles common to Confucianism and Ubuntuism and how these could inform media production.

Secondly, will Chinese infrastructural and technical support become a new impetus for state control of media in Africa? Given the fact that many of the state broadcasters in Africa are not accountable to the public this renders the support less than transparent and accountable.

Thirdly, any analysis would have to untangle how Chinese media support to Africa promotes certain kinds of positive representations of China in Africa and the implications for the identity politics of Africans. It is clear that, given the Western modes of media education into which most of Africa is socialised, Chinese support for African media might engender new ways of imagining what modernity and progress mean.

Finally, how do African audiences receive and interpret African media’s representations of China?

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TERRENO OCUPADO

By Jo Ractliffe

Five centuries of Portuguese rule ended in November 1975 when Agostinho Neto, leader of MPLA, proclaimed the People's Republic of Angola. It also marked the beginning of Africa's longest and most convoluted civil war. Divisions between the liberation movements, fuelled by Cold War politics and the interests of other African countries (notably South Africa), laid the foundations for the violent conflict that subsequently consumed Angola for nearly 30 years. It was only after the death of rebel Unita leader Jonas Savimbi in 2002 that military leaders on both sides agreed to a ceasefire, paving the way for a final political settlement and peace.

Ironically, the civil war strengthened a sense of national identity and common purpose. But it left a devastation in its wake and its toll is measured in the millions: of lives lost, of refugees and people separated from their families and displaced from their homes and of landmines left scattered across the country. Most citizens are without access to land, adequate housing, basic services, health care, education or jobs. And although the country has embarked upon the monumental task of reconstruction, it is one that despite Angola's natural wealth and burgeoning economy is beset with problems.

I first read about Angola in *Another Day of Life*, Ryszard Kapuściński's book about events leading up to independence. It was during the mid-eighties, a time when South Africa was experiencing intense resistance and increasing mobilisation against the apartheid government, which was also waging war in Angola against what it viewed as the "total onslaught" of African nationalism and communism.

I was photographing in the townships around Cape Town – images for a series of apocalyptic photomontages of urban wastelands, resettlement camps and feral dogs (*Nadir*). In my readings on landscape, dispossession and war, Angola increasingly absorbed my attention. Until then, in my imagination, Angola had been an abstract place. In the seventies and early eighties, it was simply "The Border", a secret, unspoken location where brothers and boy-friends were sent as part of their military service. And although tales about Russians and Cubans and the Cold War began to filter back – all of which conjured up a distinctly different image from the one portrayed by the South African state – it remained, for me, largely a place of myth.

In 2007 I went to Luanda for the first time. Five years had passed since the war had ended and I wasn't sure what I would find there. I was not seeking to produce a commentary on the "state of things" in Luanda now. My impulse

was to go in search of something else. The emblematic. Traces of the imaginary Angola.

What I found was a landscape that appeared both medieval and post-apocalyptic simultaneously – as if *Mad Max* had collided head-on with the *Canterbury Tales*. It is topography of extremes; at once a ruined desolation, yet full with the aliveness of human endeavour and enterprise. Two sites in particular arrested my attention: Roque Santeiro and the adjacent squatter settlement, Boa Vista.

Named after a Brazilian soap opera, Roque Santeiro is Luanda's biggest market. It sprawls across the edge of a hilltop overlooking the sea. Here you can buy everything – fresh produce, livestock, ice, clothing, appliances, furniture, building materials, coffins, medicines and herbal remedies. You can have your car or motorbike serviced, your watch or cell phone repaired, your hair cut, nails painted and clothes tailored. You can also eat and drink at the many food stalls, or watch *Senhor e Senhora Smith* in the video clubs – military-style tents where action movies are presented on large television screens powered by generators. But Roque Santeiro is also a place that thrives on myth. Some call it the home of Luanda's "Reserve Bank"; others proclaim it Africa's biggest black-market, a place where anything can be sourced, even a Mig jet.

Boa Vista is one of Luanda's oldest and largest *musséques*. Situated on a steep bluff overlooking the harbour – its name means "good view" – it is a precarious home to the growing number of people who have been driven to the urban centre as a consequence of the war. Here they live in makeshift shacks without electricity, running water, sanitation and refuse removal. Layers upon layers of garbage and waste have come to form the substrate of this human settlement. Its unstable terrain is easily eroded, giving way to landslides during heavy rains. Some years ago several people died when their homes were engulfed by water and mud. This prompted the government to evacuate residents, although given the large number of evictions, many believed that plans to develop the harbour and build luxury residential and leisure complexes were the real reason behind this.

Stories about relocating Roque Santeiro and Boa Vista continue to circulate. But at the moment, across the city, it is the "petroleum towers", the headquarters of international oil corporations that are rising up to reshape the city skyline.

This is an extract from Jo Ractliffe's book Terreno Ocupado, which is available at the Boekhuis in Johannesburg, Exclusive Books in Hyde Park and Clarkes in Cape Town.



	1		2
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	5		

1. View of Boa Vista from Roque Santeiro market.
2. Women minding pigs, Roque Santeiro market.
3. Video club, Roque Santeiro market.
4. Roadside stall on the way to Viana.
5. Woman and her baby, Roque Santeiro market

LIVING IN FEAR OF REPORTING THE TRUTH

THE CHALLENGES ARE STEEP
BUT NOT INSURMOUNTABLE
TO DEVELOP AN AFRICAN
MEDIA THAT TRULY SERVES
THE AFRICAN PUBLIC IN
ITS NEED FOR RELEVANT
INFORMATION AND, ABOVE
ALL, TRUTH, ARGUES FAIR'S
SECRETARY-GENERAL
GERARD GUEDEGBE

In a previous *Rhodes Journalism Review* article, "Journalism in Africa: Modernity, Africanity", Francis Nyamnjoh calls African journalism a "journalism of bandwagonism, where mimicry is the order of the day, as emphasis is less on thinking than on doing, less on leading than on being led."

He observes that "African journalism lacks both the power of self-definition and the power to shape the universals" and blames this on the fact that journalism, perceived as an attribute of so-called modern societies or of superior others, is taught in Africa, to Africans by [outsiders] who know what it means to be civilised and to be relevant to civilisation.

"Aspiring journalists in Africa must, like containers, be dewatered of the mud and dirt of culture as tradition and custom, and filled afresh with the tested sparkles of culture as modernity and civilisation," he writes. "African journalists are thus called upon to operate in a world where everything has been predefined for them by others, where they are meant to implement and hardly ever to think or rethink, where what is expected of them is respect for canons, not to question how or why canons are forged, or the extent to which canons are inclusive of the creative diversity of the universe that is purportedly of interest to the journalism of the One-Best-Way."

As Africans we have not, or have only in a limited way, developed our own media even as an addition to the amount of information from outside Africa that is bombarding Africans. I feel that it is now critical for Africa to define itself in terms of its media and its image. Africa cannot be passive in the current global environment.

Media everywhere should define its own space, one that is empowered and self-sufficient, and able to face the world on its own terms, and there is no reason why African media should be an exception.

Defining African journalism cannot be done outside of parameters such as:

- the socio-economic and political environment;
- armed conflicts and political tensions; and
- famine, droughts and other natural disasters.

The challenges of African journalism today within this context are as follows:

The citizen journalism trend

The ICT boom has dramatically changed the relationship between journalists and their audiences. Citizen journalism means that everybody can now report, record and publish. The problem arises precisely out of the word "everyone". Who is checking for news authenticity? Who verifies? In a situation where the work of trained journalists is often still considered wanting, the citizen journalist who has received no journalism skills, practice or ethics training at all is suddenly fashionable.

As African journalists whose mission it is to redefine and improve African journalism and African media, in the interest of the African audiences whose right it is to receive proper, tested and verified information of relevance, we need to ask ourselves "why this fashion?" Is citizen journalism a threat to 'real' journalism at a time when we need journalism standards to improve, or can it be converted into an asset? Can we incorporate citizen reporting in the journalism profession so that it enhances the quest of African media and African journalists to develop a functional, skilled, interesting and ethical journalism in Africa?

Lack of investigation

A second challenge lies precisely in the lack of quality that is common in established African journalism. Our journalism is mostly reporting: it is the journalism of speeches and press conferences. If it is revealing, it is often of the kind that reveals only incidents of petty bureaucratic corruption. We need investigative reporting that questions society in all its aspects on a continuous basis.

Low quality of technical skill

A third challenge lies in low quality of the technical aspects of journalism.

In the past five years, Africa has seen massive proliferation of media, especially in radio and print. But despite this growth, the media sector still faces, besides challenges of professional quality, also technical challenges.

The late Zakeus Chibaya, the secretary-general of the Cross-border Association of Journalists (CAJ), and a member of Forum for African Investigative Reporters (FAIR), identified the lack of equipment and infrastructure (computers, adequate newsrooms, landlines, fax machines, internet connections) and technical skills (IT illiteracy) as major obstacles. I concur with this. In certain African countries, some journalists not only lack computer skills – because there are no computers – but also still rely on old typing machines to build up their stories.

Bad management

Low management standards are arguably even a more pressing problem. Some people entrusted to run newsrooms are not at all qualified to do that job. They lack leadership skills and often do not even have media backgrounds, having been appointed only because they happened to fill a certain racial quota, or because they have powerful friends in the right places. Such a newsroom editor does not care about the quality of the journalism generated in his newsroom, so why should the journalists who work there? The lack of inspiration, pride and aspiration, and the sad reality that one often gets ahead in the media environment by pleasing powerful friends, rather than through truthful and investigative reporting, has been identified by FAIR as perhaps the most heavy obstacle weighing down on journalism potential in Africa.

Censorship and self-censorship

Connected to the above is the persistent lack of press freedom in many parts of the continent. With our nepotistic appointments and powerful interests reigning in newsrooms, journalism output is not created to serve the truth, but often to suppress it. Where there is no outright censorship, self-censorship suffices. We live in fear of reporting the truth.

A FAIR member recently reported that an article of his was rejected by his editor with the words: "There is WAY too much truth in this!"

Journalists paid as glorified typists

Again connected to the low management and low quality standards in journalism, is the fact that journalists are not valued as much more than as simple conveyors of messages

from above. Of course, media bosses don't see why they should pay such glorified typists a good salary and, consequently, nobody who aspires to a rewarding professional career wants to be, or remain, a journalist.

In order to attract the right potential, it is important that the journalism profession is seen to be a career that *could* be rewarding, if one is good enough. Improving journalists' living and working conditions on the basis of good performance is therefore paramount.

On this note, allow me to quote once again Zakeus Chibaya: the most worrying problem is low pay. It is increasingly becoming a major cause of frustration for reporters. In many parts of Africa, hungry, underpaid and demoralised journalists cover their stories in quite hostile conditions. They often use only a motorbike for transport on the different reporting fields. This state of poverty and low morale leaves them vulnerable to corruption and ready to do whatever it takes to survive.

The ethics of the hungry stomach

This, then, brings the (almost) last, but not least, question of ethics into the picture. A hungry stomach does not care much about ethics. The choice for many of us is either to stick with ethics and die a poor chap or girl, or side with the powers that be – be they government, private sector or international institutions. In all cases, the temptation to write what they want to hear in order to survive, drowns out any hope Africa might have of at one stage systematically producing home-bred, real journalism of quality.

Access to information: the challenge for 2009

Having the right to access to information is routinely defined as the ability of the citizen to obtain information that concerns him or her, whether it is in the possession of the state or the private sector. Some states provide for access in their constitutions and laws; many, especially in Africa, do not. Even where access to information is nominally recognised in law, it is invariably subject to limitations: it often takes months for a simple request even to be merited with a response. In addition, states may impose fees, and require the payment of administrative costs before they start to process the request – if they process it at all.

As long as this is the case, and information is routinely refused to anyone seeking it, including journalists, the African public will not see its information needs met. One particular case I studied, of a South African-based journalist requesting information on the basis of PAIA, clearly shows what an arduous process it is to obtain it, even in the country with arguably the best access to information law on the African continent.

The access to information challenge, and the other challenges mentioned above, together cry out for sustainable and consistent funding for media in Africa, and innovative strategies to be employed by media-conscious professionals – journalists, editors and publishers – to develop an African media that truly serves the African public in its need for relevant information and, above all, truth.

This was the keynote address at the FAIR Pan-African Investigative Journalism Summit.



The articles on these pages are from *From statistics on abandoned babies to tenders that topple governments: Investigative journalism in Africa* which include the keynote speech, lectures and case study presentations by Africa's foremost investigative journalists meeting at the pan-African Investigative Journalism Summit last year. See http://www.fairreporters.org/portal/fairnew/docs/FAIR_Summit_2008_proof5.pdf



TRAFFICKING INVESTIGATION

From 2000 about eight million African men, women and children have been trafficked to Europe, America and the Middle East. They have ended up as unpaid labourers in construction sites, in food processing plants, in brothels, as household slaves, on plantations, in the criminal underworld, in prisons, dead, or simply on the streets. Many have paid large amounts of money for this "privilege". Last year between May and December 2008, FAIR conducted an investigation into human trafficking involving eight African investigative journalists from seven countries, led by Ghana-based investigative editor Edem Djokotoe. The team concluded that the combination of victims' despair, criminal intent, trickery and official collusion are the reasons why human trafficking is the third most lucrative criminal enterprise in the world today. *A better life elsewhere: human traffic in and from Africa* is available at www.fairreporters.org/portal/fairnew/UserFiles/SysDocs/bb_content/1063/FAIR_2008_proof4.pdf

RADIO ECCLESIA TO THE RESCUE

By Manuel Vieira

Angola has almost 15 million inhabitants, but since many years have passed without a population census, it may be much more than that. According to some studies, six million people, hailing from a total of 18 provinces, live in our capital, Luanda. Angola is poor: 70% of my compatriots live on less than US\$1 per day.

The media, at least the private media, are poor too. The sector receives no state support and depends on the sale of publications as well as the sale of space and (in the case of broadcast media) airtime to advertisers. Foreign donors assist some of these private media institutions. This is also the case with Radio Ecclesia.

State-funded official media do not provide for the information needs of Angolan citizens. People in areas that are far from the capital do not even get to know what the state policies, in relation to the needs of these areas, are. When the Cabinet approves a plan for a certain community, no one broadcasts the news in an intelligent manner: asking what is being done, what is planned and what is needed.

This is why alternative media, like Radio Ecclesia, work hard to investigate policies, compare them with needs, and look for manners to pressurise the authorities to ensure that needs are addressed and plans are properly implemented in the communities.

Often, however, it is difficult for us to cross-check the information. The big problem here is that, as a rule, our leaders do not speak to the private media. It is only occasionally that we receive responses to our questions.

This is not the only difficulty. Often, authorities get really upset with the activities of the alternative media, and as a result many investigations are left unfinished. Some journalists are pressured psychologically, are threatened or lose their jobs. The unsolved murder of Ricardo de Melo, editor of *Imparcial Fax*, in 1995, is still fresh in our memories.

Journalistic investigation is still an uncertain adventure here in Angola. Corporate interests of media houses, prescribed political editorial lines, interference by political power, lack of press freedom, lack of money, the nonexistence of freelancers, lack of training and a culture of fear stop journalists from looking for truth.

In the face of these challenges, Radio Ecclesia particularly focuses on the following three areas, that represent three principal aspects of present day Angolan society:

1. National reconstruction: investments in civil construction is important, since Angola is at a stage of accelerated reconstruction and many tenders, projects and contracts materialise as a result. After the war ended five years ago, the president of our country promised the construction of 20 houses per day. The public was elated when the news was broadcast in the state media, but the reconstruction did not happen.
2. The HIV/Aids epidemic: This is a national emergency.
3. Police violence: Recently, there have been

THE 'AFRICAN PULITZER'

By the time you read this, the advisory council of the Forum for African Investigative Reporters, consisting of eminent journalism professionals with impressive track records in investigative journalism themselves, will be considering the submissions of their peers for the first-ever African Investigative Journalism Awards.

The main award, nicknamed the "African Pulitzer", will go to the African journalist who has published or broadcast the best investigative story on this continent in the past year. Submissions will be judged on investigative quality and newsworthiness, relevance and importance of the subject.

A second award, the Editors' Courage Award, will go to the editor who, despite the risks to themselves or their positions, resisted pressure to kill a good story or programme and broadcast or published it anyway. This award has been initiated as a response to the very real pressure editors in Africa face from powerful forces in society to censor information.

The awards ceremony will be held as part of the African Investigative Journalism Conference, to be held from 25 and 28 October in Johannesburg by FAIR and the University of the Witwatersrand. – Evelyn Groenink

For more on FAIR and the awards, visit www.fairreporters.org

many unexplained murders of young men in Sambizanga, considered Luanda's most violent area. These are attributed to a police death squad. Groups of national policemen are accused of "fighting crime" (mostly muggings and armed robberies) by simply and randomly shooting young men.

The following community radio work by Radio Ecclesia in these three areas can be reported.

National reconstruction

We found that house construction programmes continued at the same slow pace as before, with no acceleration. In the electoral campaign in 2006, our leaders promised that one million houses would be built during the next four years. Again, until today, this has remained an empty promise. Building is slow and all the enterprises that got contracts belong to people who are connected to those in power, and to army generals in particular. Even the Minister of Housing is a general. This very fact makes it difficult for us to investigate the contracts and the implementation. Suspicions of corruption abound, but as yet we have been unable to find evidence.

HIV/Aids and antiretroviral roll-out

A few months ago we discovered that about a hundred children, in the biggest paediatrics hospital in Luanda, were in need of second-line antiretroviral medicine, but were not receiving it. We went to the hospital and listened to doctors, parents and children; we reported on their trauma, their dreams, their agony and much more. We contacted the government but, as usual, they didn't want to talk to us. We published the

recordings in a series, broadcasting our findings: that the Angolan state spent US\$5-million per month buying the needed drugs, but that the principal hospital of reference in the capital did not receive any. Finally we succeeded in contacting the minister of the sector, who had been the vice-minister in the same health portfolio for the past five years, and he said that he didn't know. He only announced an enquiry, which is still underway. During this investigation, the national director for the fight against poverty verbally attacked one of our reporters, accusing her of "poking her nose in his business". Radio Ecclesia continues to investigate its suspicions that there is large-scale embezzlement of medicines for the purpose of fraudulent sales to private clinics.

The killings in Sambizanga

The Sambizanga area is one of the poorest, and most crime- and violence-ridden in Luanda. According to inhabitants of Sambizanga, for the past few months, groups of men in civilian clothing have entered the area in the evening, looking for "criminals". They then shoot young men they seem to suspect of being criminals, often close to their homes. In one incident, an armed group in civilian clothes, which had arrived in a civilian car, murdered some actors who had been in Sambizanga to film a scene for an action film about juvenile robbery. Clearly, this death squad was not aware that these were actors working for a film, or that the making of the film even had received permission from the authorities. Some time before that, a musician called Amizade, who was a member of the group Os Lambas, was shot by armed men, who had confused him with someone else. Another supposed "delinquent" was killed near his home. In the same municipality, near the Roque Santeiro market, excessive police shooting caused the death of a youngster and a woman who had been selling her wares.

Our investigation of these incidents accelerated when, on 23 July 2008, four armed men ambushed eight young men at a meeting. They shot them at point blank, many times. Witnesses said they referred to their actions as "a frescura" – a breath of fresh air. The witnesses identified the men as policemen of the Sambizanga division. Though police for a long time refused to entertain the issue, or to answer any questions, eventually the social pressure through Radio Ecclesia led to the arrest and the prosecution of seven men thought to be involved in the massacre. What we did was the following. Our reporter went to the terrain, and gathered and counted the bullet casings. There were 57 bullet casings of the same calibre as used by the men, proving that this had really been a massacre. We then approached some witnesses, and with their help, were able to produce a reconstruction of the crime. A specialist also assisted us and, in the end, we were able to prove that this had been an organised group, and an organised and premeditated action. We then opened the microphones to the public. Many people demanded the death sentence for those responsible.

It is a difficult investigation, since we are dealing with the police here and we ourselves are not safe. In spite of all the evidence, and the concern of many experts and academics about the goings-on in Sambizanga, police still refuse to admit that a death squad with police links is operating in the area. However, we have established, through many chronological reports and statements, that about 25 policemen have been involved in these events. So far none have been brought to justice.

The investigation continues.

JOURNALISTS WHO CHANGE THE WORLD

SCIENCE, LIKE DEMOCRACY, WORKS BEST
IN THE CLEAR LIGHT OF ACCOUNTABILITY,
WRITES DEBORAH BLUM



USEFUL LINK

Nature's special issue of 25 June 2009 dedicated to science journalism can be found online at www.tinyurl.com/sciencejournalism

We talk these days about the future of science journalism, by which we usually mean its migration from traditional habitats – printed words on paper, radio stations on the dial, television networks – into the 21st century landscape. Most of us see that landscape as a technological one, transformed by blogging and webcasting, Twitter and Facebook, and possibilities to be yet invented.

But as journalism evolves into a product of new media, it's important to also consider not only what will change – also what we should keep. Lovers of

language, who can turn an ordinary event into a compelling story, are still needed. Talented science writers who make a complex experiment accessible to those without science training remain invaluable. And investigative reporters provide an essential service that, I hope, will never disappear.

I was reminded of the last point during the World Conference of Science Journalists in London in June, where I moderated a panel, "Four Journalists Who Changed the World". It's an ambitious concept, don't you think? Yet, the journalists on the panel – from Nigeria, Canada, Japan and the United States – lived up to the billing.

Alex Abutu Augustine, science correspondent for the News Agency of Nigeria, conducted several meticulous investigations of scientists who had made exaggerated claims about their research. He looked into others who had concealed the risks of pharmaceuticals. He continued doing so even though the subjects of his stories repeatedly tried to scare him off, using tactics that ranged from lawsuits to death threats. His stories kept unqualified candidates out of government positions and stopped the distribution of unsafe products.

Andre Picard wrote a series exposing tainted blood supplies in Canada and government attempts to cover up the risks. He was also vilified in public and threatened with legal action. But, again, the stories were published and they led to a complete overhaul in management of his country's medical blood supply

system, undoubtedly saving many lives.

Yukiko Motomura of Japan explored the status, training and career paths of scientists in her country. She startled her readers with the realisation that far from embracing those with science training, the country's culture often made it

difficult for them to advance. Her newspaper series led to a bestselling book and prompted the Japanese government to begin seeking reforms to better support its researchers.

And **Shannon Brownlee**, a freelance writer based in the Washington DC area, spent years investigating the costly and risky operation of the American medical system, exposing flawed treatments based, in some cases, on shoddy science.

I have other examples beyond the panel. Here's one from my country, the United States. In mid-July, the *Los Angeles Times* published a detailed report on the board that oversees nurses in the state. The board had ignored problems and allowed incompetent or even criminally behaved nurses – some had lost their tempers and injured patients – to continue working. Within the week, the governor fired a majority of the lax board members and replaced them with people determined to improve the situation.

One of the interesting aspects of the California story is that the investigation was done in tandem with a non-profit investigative reporting centre, ProPublica. The centre was funded to ensure that investigative journalism remains a priority in the United States.

At the University of Wisconsin where I teach investigative reporting, we host another such centre, the Wisconsin Centre for Investigative Journalism. Later this year, one of my classes will collaborate with the centre in investigating access to health care.

Ask any committed journalist about this emphasis on investigative journalism and he or she will tell you that there is no democracy without a watchdog media, that governments cannot be held accountable without journalists dogging their actions. But the same principle holds true for science. It works best in a clear light of accountability.

Science is, after all, a human enterprise, which means that it is subject to the usual human failings. Researchers are not always honest. Money can skew the process. So can politics. We need good, well-trained, curious and sceptical journalists to explore science in all its dimensions. We need coverage not only of the exciting and innovative aspects but the troubled ones. Such scrutiny not only keeps our readers, viewers and listeners intelligently informed, it protects them. It's only by finding and highlighting flaws in the system, that they are corrected.

We need more, many more reporters, exactly like those who participated in the London conference panel. They remind us about what's best in what we do. We all hope they'll keep doing it. And I'd like to take this moment to salute my London panellists but, also, all of you out there who are chasing a story that will help change the world.

This was originally published on the World Federation of Science Journalists blog at www.wfsj.org

SURGE OF SCIENCE

WHILE THE FUTURE OF SCIENCE JOURNALISM IS
INCREASINGLY UNCERTAIN IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES,
THERE IS AN INCREASING THIRST FOR SCIENTIFIC NEWS IN
AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST, WRITES AISLING IRWIN

Science journalism is thriving in parts of the developing world while coming under severe pressure in some developed countries. In Africa and the Middle East, journalists are reporting a greater demand for stories about science from both the public and newspaper editors.

But in the United States, the number of science journalists on the staff of newspapers has dropped sharply and some respected outlets have axed their science departments.

"We seem to be regarded as the luxury item," Pallab Ghosh, president of the World Federation

of Science Journalists, told the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Chicago, United States, earlier this year.

The US television network CNN closed its entire environmental, science and technology unit this year and the *Boston Globe's* once distinguished science section is gradually being eliminated.

The number of dedicated science sections in newspapers fell from about 95 to 34 between 1989 and 2005, according to the US National Association of Science Writers.

In contrast, speakers from Africa, the Middle East and Latin America were optimistic about a surge of interest in science and science journalism in their countries.

"The loss in this part of the world is more or less a gain in our own part of the world," said Akin Jimoh, programme director of the Development Communications Network in Lagos, Nigeria.

"Science journalism is growing [in Africa]. Associations of science journalists are being formed

in quite a number of countries. They have organised conferences in their countries to influence science policy."

An informal survey of 40 African and Arab science journalists completed in February found that many perceived an increase in space allocated to science stories in the past five years, said Nadia El-Awady, past president of the Arab Science Journalists Association.

Journalists reported a growing interest in science and an increasing desire from editors to publish science articles. Paradoxically, efforts by the developed world to train and mentor developing world journalists have paid off, many said.

Other reasons cited were a new interest on behalf of media organisations in promoting science as a means of development and more international attention on issues such as global warming.

This article was originally published on SciDev.net, the website of the Science and Development Network.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

By Nadine Böke

On the first day of the sixth world conference of science journalists, held in June in London, *Wired* magazine's Ben Hammersley expressed the controversial opinion that there are simply too many science journalists.

Hammersley believes there will be a process of natural selection in the next few years, which only a few of the best science journalists will survive. Other participants were more optimistic, pointing out that even though journalism in general is in crisis, science journalism is still extremely important.

But the future of science journalism wasn't just a hot topic at the conference. Some leading scientific journals also joined in. A month before the conference, the journal *Nature Biotechnology* reported on a workshop, organised by the Health Law Centre at the University of Alberta, on the future of science journalism, titled "Science communication reconsidered", which was attended by leading science communicators from the US, Britain, Canada, Germany and Australia.

These experts drafted a list of eight recommendations, carried by *Nature Biotechnology*, aimed at evolving science communication, including a call for journalism schools to teach students about science policy making, and the call for alternative funding (for example, by foundations, universities or governments) to ensure quality science journalism in a perishing media environment. (See <http://tinyurl.com/8recommendations>.)

The authors also see possibilities for science journalism in the form of web portals offering both professionally produced content and user-generated content, thereby stimulating public participation.

In its June editorial on science journalism, *Nature* calls for scientists and scientific institutions to help proper science journalism survive. For example, through learning how to best talk to journalists; by helping them gain access to information; and by helping them find the right people to comment on the subject they're reporting on.

Toby Murcott, a former science correspondent for the BBC, argues in *Nature* that science journalists today can be compared to priests. For the most part they just take information from a source of authority and communicate it to the congregation. But, to best serve our audiences, we, as science journalists, should also provide depth, context and criticism. But

this isn't easy when you are working under constant time pressure.

Murcott believes one way in which this priesthood model of science journalism can be toppled without too much effort is to report more on the process through which science is produced and reviewed. Also, Murcott asks for press officers at universities and research journals to help journalists by providing them with more background information and context on new findings than they do at the moment.

Probably having witnessed some of the changes himself, Boyce Rensberger, who has been a science reporter for 32 years, writes about the way science journalists have changed "from cheerleaders to watchdogs" during the past century. In the first half of the 20th century science journalists hailed everything scientists did. When, in the 1970s and 1980s, it became clear that science and technology also sometimes have adverse effects and could be controversial, science reporting became increasingly critical. Rensberger believes we are again facing changes in the role of science journalism. These are mostly due to digitalisation. It is, for instance, hard for the public to judge which of the numerous online sources are reliable and which aren't. So, if science journalists are to regain relevance to society, they should learn how to master new media.

Nature also carries an opinion article by Nadia El-Awady, the newly elected president of the WFSJ, who writes about science journalism in Arabic countries. In the past few decades, the Arab world has seen a vast growth in the amount of scientific research being done as well as increased interest in science.

Although science journalists have gained a fairly stable position in Arab countries, El-Awady also sees some challenges. Quantity is not necessarily the same as quality. Science journalists are not always able to provide critical coverage of claims made by the institutions that pay them. Also, science journalists in the Arab world often have deep reverence for scientists or are working as a part-time scientist themselves. This can make it hard for them to maintain a critical perspective in their journalistic work.

El-Awady argues that we should pay attention to these weaknesses; or the rise of science journalism in the Arab world may be the harbinger of its downfall.

This is an edited version of an article which originally appeared on the World Federation of Science Journalists blog at www.wfsj.org



Futureatlas.com

MOBILE MONITORS

PROTECTING THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

THE USE OF MOBILE PHONE TECHNOLOGY IN RECENT AFRICAN ELECTIONS HAS EMPOWERED CITIZENS, ALLOWING THEM TO PUT IN PLACE THE CHECKS AND BALANCES NEEDED TO MAKE ELECTIONS FREER AND FAIRER IN AFRICA – AND ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD, WRITES HARRY DUGMORE



Ken Banks/Kiwanya.net

Recent elections in Africa have shown just how powerful new media can be in improving transparency – and indeed the overall legitimacy – of election results. In particular, the humble short message service is playing a powerful role in connecting political parties to voters and in enabling citizens to be surer of the election results.

Africa has seen an explosion of democracy. According to Freedom House, a US-based think-tank, Africa now has 35 democracies (out of 53 countries in total), up from just 10 democracies in 1990. And the Bertelsmann Transformation Index suggests that the quality of democracy is deepening beyond mere elections: overall, there is now more freedom of the press, more anti-corruption measures and a greater depth to civil liberties.

But core to democracy is choice, as expressed by voters through elections. Mobile phones allow people to share ideas more easily and quickly. In many countries they provide a way for politicians to connect with their voters in a more intimate way. These qualities mean that voice calls and sms messages are now an integral part of elections up and down Africa.

Mobile phone and web-based technology also allows more eyes and ears on the ground, to monitor elections. This is a significant development given Africa's previous lack of development in terms of information and communication technology. Thus, while on average only about 5% of Africans have Internet access via computer, almost 50% of Africans now have access to mobile phones.

Increasingly many Africans have mobile phones that can connect to the Internet and many Africa countries are crossing the critical point where the number of people accessing the Internet through their phones surpasses those going online through a computer.

More recently, social media such as Facebook and Twitter – on mobile phones – have joined this mix. For example in Ghana's successful December 2008 presidential campaigns both main candidates – John Atta Mills and Nana Akufo-Addo – had Facebook pages and used them to keep supporters up-to-date with campaigns, and to solicit funds. Many of these pages were accessed via mobile phones.

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MOBILE MONITORS – PROTECTING THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

continued from page 59

As sophisticated as some of these digital new media technologies are, the bedrock technology for Africa will be the sms for the foreseeable future. In the latest Ghanaian elections, for example, political parties used sms extensively to try and raise funds. Sms was also used to let supporters know where election rallies were being held.

This reflects the reality that, although Ghana does not have much broadband connectivity, or even fixed phone lines, the use of mobile phones has caught on in a big way. Ghana had fewer than 400 000 fixed lines in 2008. But mobile phone users rose from 215 000 in 2001 to 7.6 million in 2007 – out of a population of around 18 million.

What was particularly interesting in terms of the election campaign in Ghana was that, like many countries, there is a ban on campaigning in the period immediately before the actual election date. In Ghana's case, this time period was 48 hours, and indeed all TV, radio and print campaigning ceased. But how do you stop sms', official or unofficial, or internet blogging, or Facebook or Twitter posting?

The short answer is that you don't: in the final 48 hours, the number of sms' in circulation exploded as parties made the final push to sway voters in what shaping to the closest election in Ghana's history. The same use of smsing has been evident in many other recent elections in Africa recently, including Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Of course technology and sms use is not just benign. There were many mischievous and even malicious uses of mobile phones and other ICTs in recent elections. In Ghana and Zimbabwe's elections, jokes and other messages mocking and demeaning candidates flew from all sides. In Kenya's case, mobile phones were central to both stoking post-election violence, and the efforts to stop the violence.

An even more profound use of sms, in Africa's recent past, has been in election monitoring. In many countries, election laws require the initial counting of votes at each polling booth, before votes are sent to central counting venues. Capturing this immediate voting data provides parties, NGOs and the citizenry in general with a powerful tool in preventing and detecting vote rigging.

For example, in both Ghana and Zimbabwe's presidential elections in 2008, NGOs and parties made extensive use of sms to send polling station initial tallies to central command centres that aggregated the vote. For that reason, all of Zimbabwe knew within a few hours that incumbent President Robert Mugabe had lost the vote, and lost badly.

Indeed, these initial sms tabulations indicated that Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai got close to 50%, and probably exceeded this threshold needed to avoid a run-off. However,



the election authorities delayed official results for weeks before announcing their official results of 47.9% to Tsvangirai and 43.2% to Mugabe.

This result, widely seen as fraudulent, forced a run-off election. The Mugabe regime unleashed a campaign of terror that saw thousands detained, and more than 100 MDC supporters killed.

Also banned was the publication of preliminary results at polling stations.

During the run-off, there was so much violence that Tsvangirai and his MDC party pulled out of the run-off election a week before the elections. Mugabe won the second round with 85.5% of the vote. Needless to say, without any independent verification, or even the previous mobile phone-based vote tabulation, the result had no credibility inside or outside of Zimbabwe.

In Ghana, the 2009 presidential elections also saw a new level of independent monitoring using mobile phones



Cabrèrel Etelier

and sms' to do parallel vote tabulation. A coalition of NGOs called Codeo put 4 000 trained election monitors in place to check on the election using mobile phones – and particularly sms messages – on election day. Within this bigger group, a 1 000 special monitors went further: they conducted parallel vote tabulation sending in results from a representative sample of polling stations.

After the election, Codeo did not publish their result. But they did put out an interim statement saying by their count, the voting was very close.

After the official results were released, Codeo released their results, which were almost identical to the national results, despite being based on one in 23 randomly selected sample of polling booths.

Based on their mobile phone-based sample, Codeo scored the vote 49.81% for candidate Nana Akufo-Addo; officially he got 49.87%. Codeo scored the vote at 50.19% for John Atta Mills; officially he got 50.13%.

In a first for Africa, the results of parallel vote tabulation were used to verify official tallies. By not pre-empting the official tallies, Codeo was able to add to the legitimacy of the election, without undermining the authority and independence of the electoral commission.

Despite the closeness of the results, there was no violence, and both sides accepted the verdict of the electorate, partly due to the verification provided by Codeo. This mobile phone-based system "added a level of protection of the people's will", Kojo Asante, Codeo's project manager, told international media.

There is no doubt that the examples of Ghana and Zimbabwe show the way forward for a more empowered citizenry to put in place the checks and balances needed to make elections freer and fairer in Africa – and elsewhere in the world.

SEEN AND HEARD

INVOLVING CHILDREN IN RESPONSES TO HIV AND AIDS



By Robin Vincent

One in seven people dying of HIV-related illness worldwide is a child under 15. In the context of HIV, children have distinct experiences and needs. They have particular treatment needs, and require appropriate and accessible information and services. Yet their needs are often ignored.

Seen and Heard, a special report by Panos London, looks at the involvement of children, including young children, in responses to HIV and Aids and examines issues around children's participation.

Children need to be able to express their views and priorities effectively and they can be supported through a range of appropriate media and communication approaches. The report (and related video and radio programmes) draws on the experiences of people living in communities affected by poverty and HIV and Aids, and



Chris de Bode Panos Pictures

REPORTING DIVORCE

Media reports can give children a voice and encourage respect of children's rights. Media can also, however, violate children's rights in the way they report stories. Over the past nine years, Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) has been working to improve the way children are portrayed in news media in South Africa. In April this year, MMA and the Centre for Child Law celebrated a small but significant victory in our efforts to ensure that not only are children's rights protected but that media have to be more ethical in the way they report on divorce stories.

DIVORCE CAN HAVE A TRAUMATIC EFFECT ON CHILDREN THAT IS BOTH PROFOUND AND LASTING – AND PRIVATE DETAILS MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH THE MEDIA MAY EXACERBATE THIS. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE LAW IN PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN, ASKS WILLIAM BIRD

Previously, when media wanted to report on a divorce case, they were in the peculiar situation of being able to report on who was getting divorced and naming the children involved, but they were not permitted to provide the details of the divorce, such as settlement or custody of children.

In 2007, the *Sunday Times* was prevented from publishing a "paternity fraud" story in which they named all the parties – including the children. In this case, they had used the more personal details included in the court papers. The parties involved sought to prevent the *Sunday Times* from publishing the story by relying on Section 12 of the Divorce Act. The newspaper was forced to pull the story after a late-night gagging order.

Then, in February last year, the Johannesburg High Court declared Section 12 to be overbroad and inconsistent with the right to freedom of expression enshrined in the Constitution. As a result, Section 12 was declared unconstitutional – and the *Sunday Times* went ahead and published the story.

The matter was referred to the Constitutional Court, which heard an application to confirm the constitutional invalidity of Section 12 in May. MMA, represented by the Centre for Child Law, was admitted as an amicus curiae. MMA raised the vital issue of the importance of protecting children's rights to dignity and privacy in divorce matters.

In our heads of argument we argued:

"Divorce can have a traumatic effect on children which is both profound and lasting. This is even more so in cases where the conflict and acrimony between the parties escalates to matrimonial warfare where the child is used as a weapon. The effects of divorce on various age groups range from acute depressive reactions to sadness, fears of abandonment and anger. It is clear that the effects of divorce will inevitably be exacerbated should all the private details of the divorce, including disputed paternity, become public knowledge."

Acting Constitutional Court Judge Jafta, said: "... another way to protect children... would, in my view, be to prohibit publication of the identity of the parties and of the children. If that were to be done, the publication of the evidence would not

harm the privacy and dignity interests of the parties or the children, provided that the publication of any evidence that would tend to reveal the identity of any of the parties or any of the children is also prohibited.

The purpose could be better achieved by less restrictive means."

The Constitutional Court then confirmed the High Court's ruling that Section 12 was unconstitutional and ordered that, unless authorised by a court in exceptional circumstances, "the publication of the identity of, and any information that may reveal the identity of, any party or child in any divorce proceeding before any court is prohibited. The order made by the Constitutional Court does not unduly favour either the media or the litigant and its impact is that media can now freely report on divorce matters and reveal as much detail as necessary for their stories."

The limitation placed on the media is around naming or identifying the people involved. The effect of the judgement is that in all cases children's names and identities, as well as those of their parents and any other people involved cannot be revealed to the public.

While on the surface this appears to be in line

with what MMA had sought, the ruling went much further than expected.

The ruling, in fact, may have gone too far. Unless there are exceptional circumstances and the media successfully applies for an order to publish the names and identities of those involved, any story on divorce proceedings that does so will amount to contempt of court.

The order of the court has resulted in a situation which is the reverse of Section 12 – the media can now report all the detail they wish, as a means of informing and educating the public about divorce matters, but unless there are exceptional circumstances, they may not name or identify the people involved.

Where there is a clear public interest in a particular case, the media could apply for an order enabling them to name the parties involved. Such cases may include, for example, public figures or public officials. The key would be to ensure that there is a clear and genuine public interest in naming and or identifying the people involved.

Not only does the ruling highlight the importance of media freedom and children's rights, but it also has the effect of requiring greater legal and ethical adherence to reporting not only on children but also, more broadly, on areas that are normally private and personal by nature.

Given recent debates around the right to privacy versus public right to know, it seems clear that the court has ruled that in personal matters of divorce there is a greater emphasis on the right to privacy.

It is important to note that the protection afforded to children in future divorce actions through this Constitutional Court judgement is consistent with the special protection afforded to children under the Constitution, the Children's Act and the Criminal Procedure Act, to name but a few.

While the victory addresses a relatively small area of media coverage of children, it serves to emphasise the importance of children's rights, especially to dignity and privacy.

For the media, the challenge is to find creative ways of reporting divorce matters, and adhering to higher ethical standards in reporting on matters in which children are involved.

Two guides have been compiled to help journalists negotiate the terrain of children and the law: *A Media Guide to the Children's Act 38 of 2005* and *A Media Guide to the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act 32 of 2007)*. They can be found at www.childlawsa.com

highlights examples of initiatives that successfully involve children.

Key points

The specific needs and communication styles of children of different ages need to be recognised and accommodated in responses to HIV and Aids. Methods that support children to express themselves and communicate effectively need to be documented and more widely shared.

There is a need to build on the documented success in involving children in decisions that affect their lives, to give them the tools and space to participate effectively in responses to HIV and Aids. The different 'childhoods' and experiences of HIV and Aids, poverty, and of participation for girls and boys of different ages need to be better understood as the starting point for interventions with children.

Meaningful involvement of children in responses to HIV and Aids requires significant

investment of time and resources over the long term.

There is a need to address barriers preventing children's involvement, such as scarce time and resources and differences of confidence and power between children. Efforts to involve children also need to be sensitive to the household and community context, and engage communities in addressing harmful local cultural norms and practices.

To assess its effectiveness, the scope and quality of children's participation in HIV and Aids initiatives need to be clearly defined – including in relation to differences of age, gender and diversity.

Child- and youth-led organisations and networks need to be supported, both to further children's ability to secure their rights and to support children's public engagement and social awareness.

You can download a free copy or buy a copy from www.panos.org.uk



Chris de Bode Panos Pictures



Chris de Bode Panos Pictures



LET'S NOT WASTE THIS CRISIS

More and more information is coming to light about the financial and governance meltdown at the SABC. Parliament's enquiry into the operations of the previous board has revealed serious lapses of governance – particularly as regards its attempts at firing group chief executive, Dali Mpofu. Proper procedures were not followed.

But the enquiry has also revealed Parliament's complicity in the problems. Parliament did not stand up to political interference in the board's appointment processes. The board thus lacked legitimacy from the start and was in the invidious position of having limited ability to hold management to account.

And management? Again the enquiry (and SABC annual reports) point clearly to the fact that, over the past few years, costs have escalated dramatically at the broadcaster, far in excess of the modest growth in revenue. It was an inevitability that the SABC would fall into serious debt. Management, it seems, spent wastefully and irresponsibly, stubbornly resisting all the board's austerity plans.

Many people have thrown up their hands in horror, given this level of crisis, and the complicity of all actors. Articles in the *Financial Mail* and the *Media* magazine have called for the privatisation of the SABC, especially of its television assets "with future programming subject only to the law and an independent regulator".

However, although the debates in the Save our SABC Coalition are a long way from conclusion, our thinking is very different. There is a strong sense that we need to reinvigorate our public broadcaster – not sell it off!

The coalition is a large grouping of organisations and individuals working together to address the crisis in public broadcasting in South Africa. It includes non-governmental and civil society organisations, such as the Freedom of Expression Institute, Cosatu-affiliated trade unions, including the Broadcast, Electronic Media and Allied Workers Union, as well as a number of academics and independent experts.

Members have looked back to the optimistic days of the early 1990s with the Campaigns for Independent Broadcasting and Open Media. Activists then called for a broadcaster that could deliver full-spectrum services to all South Africans, in all parts of the country, and in all official languages. They also called for programme content that protected and nurtured "South African culture and creativity and reflected the reality of South Africa to itself and the world" (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli 2001).

The Save our SABC Coalition has been re-assessing that original thinking. We have been examining the charter (that is, the SABC's vision and mission), the SABC's legal structure and its finances. We have called for a thorough review of present outdated policy and legislation and we are lobbying hard for government to launch a Green Paper/White Paper policy process leading to the promulgation of a new SABC Act.

First, we have called for a revamp of the charter. At present, it is made up of sections scattered throughout the Broadcasting Act, 1999. It is hard to distinguish where the charter starts and ends. In fact, a number of sections in the Act that are not labelled "charter" include a number of strong charter-like principles. Taking all these sections together, the coalition has distilled four broad principles that



THE SABC MAY BE MIRED IN DEBT AND DIFFICULTY, BUT WE SHOULDN'T GIVE UP ON DEMANDING THAT SOUTH AFRICA RECEIVES THE PUBLIC BROADCASTER IT DESERVES, ARGUES KATE SKINNER, CO-ORDINATOR OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY COALITION, SAVE OUR SABC

could be included in a new, concise, clearly bounded charter. These principles include:

- nation building;
- a commitment to excellent, up-to-date, informative programming;
- a commitment to programming that contributes to the development of South Africa's culture, languages and local cultural industries; and
- a commitment to providing broadcasting services of the highest technical standards.

Under each principle, we have included a number of sub-points to ensure that the SABC can be better held to account. But this document is just the starting point – we have advised the government to launch a public roadshow to get public buy in and input to the new charter. Our document, hopefully, would be just one contribution to this more mass-based process.

Second, we have called for a revamp of the SABC's legal structure. The SABC became a public company only after the implementation of the Broadcasting Act 1999. Before that it operated as a statutory body governed by the provisions of the Broadcasting Act, 1976.

Although there is some clear public interest benefit to the SABC operating as a public company (such as good access to information provisions) there are also some serious drawbacks – chief among these being the fact that the state is the SABC's sole shareholder.

This allows the Minister of Communications, as representative of the state, to, for instance, play a direct role in the appointment of executive management. This is highly inappropriate as regards an independent broadcaster, particularly when the group chief executive is also editor-in-chief.

Further, the SABC's corporate structure has encouraged the corporation's management to be overly concerned about the attitudes of government – as its sole shareholder – rather than being driven by broader public interest concerns.

The coalition has thus suggested that the SABC be de-corporatised and that it revert to being a statutory body. Further to this it has been suggested that Chapter 9 of the Constitution be amended to ensure that the SABC becomes a Chapter 9 body. Chapter 9 of the Constitution ensures special protections for state institutions "supporting Constitutional democracy". The coalition has argued that the SABC's role in providing ordinary citizens with quality news and pro-

gramming is essential to the wellbeing of our Constitutional democracy and that ultimately only an informed citizenry is fully able to engage in democratic processes.

It is for this reason that the coalition has argued that the SABC should be transformed into a constitutional body that is both protected by the Constitution and protects the Constitution.

Finally, the coalition has been looking at the very vexed issue of SABC finances. Firstly, the immediate financial crises need to be solved. A forensic audit needs to be implemented and, where necessary, criminal charges pressed. New financial controls urgently need to be put in place and a very targeted government bail-out negotiated so that workers and independent producers are paid.

In the longer term, it is critical to examine the SABC's funding model. In many ways the model is unworkable: it splits the SABC into commercial and public stations with the commercial stations supposedly cross-subsidising the public channels. In practice this does not happen. In fact, commercial stations such as SABC 3 have made losses while the public TV channel SABC 1 makes healthy profits.

Further, the SABC is overly reliant on advertising – almost 80% of the latter's funding is derived from this source despite its major public service mandate including local content requirements and language programming in 11 official languages.

The coalition is therefore looking at a mixed funding model including license fees, advertising and direct public grants. Direct public grants could be used for specific public-mandate related budget item lines including specific types of cultural, news and current affairs programming, certain key salaries and infrastructure costs.

Crises can often concentrate the mind. The hope is that the SABC's governance and financial meltdown will force some creative thinking and, ultimately through legislation and other measures, a recommitment to a new and reinvigorated public service vision.

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A CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

ROD AMNER LOOKS AT HOW A SMALL SOUTH AFRICAN NEWSPAPER IS MANAGING TO PUNCH WELL ABOVE ITS WEIGHT

When the public parks in Southernwood, a central area of East London, were given a makeover by the Buffalo City Council in mid-July, the *Daily Dispatch* splashed this merry sliver of sunshine news on its front page.

As *Dispatch* editor Andrew Trench asked in his editorial the following day, “Why glorify this seemingly mundane obligation of the authorities to taxpayers?”

One answer is that this modest example had helped to illuminate new pathways for the newspaper’s journalism.

Earlier in the year, the *Dispatch* had launched a series of community-based meetings and discussions. Through these “town hall” (more like church and borrowed classroom) meetings, Trench says he was trying to find a way to connect his newspaper into the heart of its neighbourhoods and to “try and move from describing problems to try and help solve some of them”.

At a lively, well-attended meeting in Southernwood, a fusillade of complaints over the appalling state of the local parks – which had become a haven for criminals and drunks – were unearthed. The forum was initiated, organised, sponsored and facilitated by the *Dispatch*. The newspaper published

reports on its own meeting – thus destabilising the journalistic canon of “objective reporting”. It subsequently gave over many column inches to investigative reports on the state of open areas in the area. Soon after, the municipality paved parks, installed new lights, cut the grass and instituted visible police patrols.

What made Southernwood’s “extreme makeover” so remarkable, says Trench, was that “it was the direct result of our readers speaking their minds. For once our readers’ voices were heard and something was done ... That surely counts as a success, as small as it may be, in our contemporary times of indifference.”

Municipal spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya con-

firmed the swift action in the parks had followed concerns raised by the *Dispatch*’s Community Dialogues.

The *Dispatch* is a small newspaper serving one of South Africa’s poorest regions, but it inspires unusual levels of brand loyalty and consistently punches above its weight, winning national awards for its investigative and online journalism. It is now pioneering South Africa’s first full-scale experiment with civic – as distinct from citizens’ – journalism.

To paraphrase American academic Jay Rosen, the two-decade-old “civic journalism” movement has thousands of adherents in all corners of the globe who subscribe to the simple but apparently controversial premise that the press should promote and improve – not merely report on and complain about – the quality of civic life.

In convening its Community Dialogues, the *Dispatch* is helping to “form” as much as “inform” the

public around issues of mutual concern. This process of community formation is tentative and fragile and Trench concedes that “much more than cosmetic amendments are necessary to restore the community fabric of Southernwood”. But, for now, he is happy to celebrate this as “a victory for the people by the people”.

The Dialogues have certainly helped the newspaper share its agenda-setting function by surfacing a “citizens’ agenda”. But, to help sustain a public sphere to which all citizens have access, and in which all topics of concern to citizens can be articulated, deliberated, and critiqued, *Dispatch* journalists will need to engage citizens in an ongoing way as active partners in the news-making process.

One example of how this can be done is Mexico’s *Grupo Reforma*, which has developed a network of “editorial councils” that offers citizens opportunities to formally discuss with journalists topics they would like to see covered, how they would like to see those topics reported, and to evaluate the coverage. Newsrooms have been reconstructed to include multiple teams focusing on topics of concern to citizens.

But, what if citizens are narrow-minded, or worse, racist and sexist? Public journalism scholar Tanni Haas insists journalists should not give up all their editorial power. Journalists need an intelligible and defensible political agenda separate and distinguishable from those of communities (and community values, which are not always the same as “good values”). Without this, journalists would find it difficult to maintain a critical editorial stance in relation to those communities, avoid glossing over community conflicts for fear of upsetting certain community segments, and not succumb to dominant community values.

In South Africa, the most defensible political agenda for journalists is surely to help ensure that the concerns of marginalised social groups are articulated and heard to the same extent as those of dominant social groups?

This implies that news organisations should help organise public deliberations that focus on their particular concerns, advance those concerns through their reporting, and partner with political actors and institutions to ensure that those concerns are promoted in practise. It is possible that citizens themselves could accomplish such goals, but there is ample evidence that this is not happening. By waiting for citizens themselves to organise public deliberation, news organisations risk allowing social groups with the resources necessary to organise such deliberation in the first place to set their news agenda while ignoring those groups arguably in need of public attention.

But, why is so little public deliberation going on in a country that once had an almost hyperactive civil society? Why have we become so disengaged from public life? The truth is that in many surveys citizens say they do want to participate in public life but feel excluded from it by a closed (one-party-dominant) political system. They may be inclined to get involved in civic affairs, but only when they believe that such involvement can bring genuine change.

If this is so, journalists should reorient their news reporting from a focus on elite deliberations and actions to a focus on the problems of concern to citizens while, at the same time, helping to create spaces where citizens can deliberate and act upon those problems.

But, as the *Dispatch* has discovered, this is difficult to achieve in a country with such profound problems and so few opportunities for citizens to express them.

Trench describes a Community Dialogue in a crammed classroom in Nompumelelo, a poor settlement in the heart of East London’s suburban belt, as “popping the cork on a shaken bottle”.

The meeting was explosive from the start, with everyone having something to say. The complaints were endless – from concern about the clinic with only one nurse to rubbish not being collected to the lack of sports fields for children to play in.

“They’d lost all faith in the city to deliver services for them,” says Trench. “It was an incredible process to watch, almost a cathartic release by people who appear to have seldom been asked to talk about such things publicly. I wondered to myself what this says about local leadership. Why were people so eager to talk? Had their leaders never asked them about this stuff before?”

But it was when the meeting turned to gathering possible solutions to these problems that things became extremely heated, descending into chaos as battles between neighbours began to play out. The meeting was closed soon after.

One of the lessons from that meeting, says Trench, is that it is not the forum to get into ideas for solutions. “There is so much people want to get off their chests, that it’s impossible.”

It is clear from this example that while participation in news media-sponsored community forums can be both educational and symbolically satisfying, they cannot necessarily offer a genuine substitute for sustained public engagement with problems.

As Jeremy Iggers suggests, “citizens brought together for news media-sponsored encounters do not constitute a genuine public – they represent a collection of strangers ... who may not see each other again ... and who have not had the opportunity to develop the relationships of trust and understanding that are essential to democratic co-operation”.

Journalists should encourage citizens to continue their deliberations – and act upon their outcomes – within the institutions of the wider civil society (the civic organisations through which citizens can organise themselves for political deliberation and action).

Haas suggest that for problems potentially resolvable by citizens – journalists should support and promote citizens’ own efforts to formulate and enact concrete solutions. For example, they could report on what citizens in other localities have done to address similar problems. They could encourage citizens to join existing or create new civic organisations, and publicise citizens’ applications for resources.

For problems requiring more deep-seated, systemic intervention, journalists should encourage citizens, in consultation with experts, to formulate possible solutions and then to lobby relevant government officials to enact those solutions.

Trench says he has been energised by his newspaper’s fledgling civic journalism experiment. “I am amazed to witness the common purpose that exists ... the incredible goodwill that, if harnessed, would make such an enormous difference to people. We’ll make sure the voices raised at these meetings are heard loud and clear by those in authority. We will also look to these meetings for ideas on how the paper can back community-based campaigns which will result in change for the better. My vision is that the *Dispatch* has a role as a builder of bridges in our community and as a catalyst for constructive discussion about our world.”

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IN SOUTH AFRICA, GIVEN OUR CONDITIONS OF PROFOUND SOCIAL INEQUALITY, THE MOST DEFENSIBLE POLITICAL AGENDA FOR JOURNALISTS IS SURELY TO HELP ENSURE THAT THE CONCERNS OF THE MOST MARGINALISED SOCIAL GROUPS ARE ARTICULATED AND HEARD TO THE SAME EXTENT AS THOSE OF DOMINANT SOCIAL GROUPS



MAKING FAMILIAR THE UNFAMILIAR

By Harold Gess

Photographic souvenir books of towns and cities around the world were very popular during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

These volumes, printed to a high standard and bound in a superior quality binding, showed off commercial and civic buildings, churches, schools and views of the surrounding natural environment.

Grocott and Sherry, a firm of Grahamstown printers and publishers, published a number of these souvenirs of Grahamstown, the last one appearing in 1898.

Earlier this year an exhibition was mounted in Grahamstown's Albany Museum to celebrate 140 years since the founding of the *Grocott's Mail*, a newspaper published until 2003 by the firm of Grocott and Sherry and since then owned and operated by the Rhodes University School of Journalism and Media Studies.

As part of this celebration, photojournalism students from the School were challenged to produce two series of photographs for the exhibition.

Firstly they set about reproducing, as closely as possible, the images from the 1898 Souvenir, showing how much (or little) things have changed but also the extent to which Grahamstown's historical architecture has remained intact.

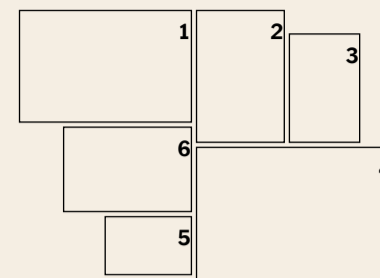
The second series of photographs that the students produced was a current view of Grahamstown, moving away from the "traditional" look at a city and seeking new ways to represent it.

Rising to the challenge, students found themselves on rooftops, around the back of well-known buildings, exploring the towers around the city, using telephoto lenses to juxtapose different areas, and rendering the familiar unfamiliar with the aid of a microlight aircraft.

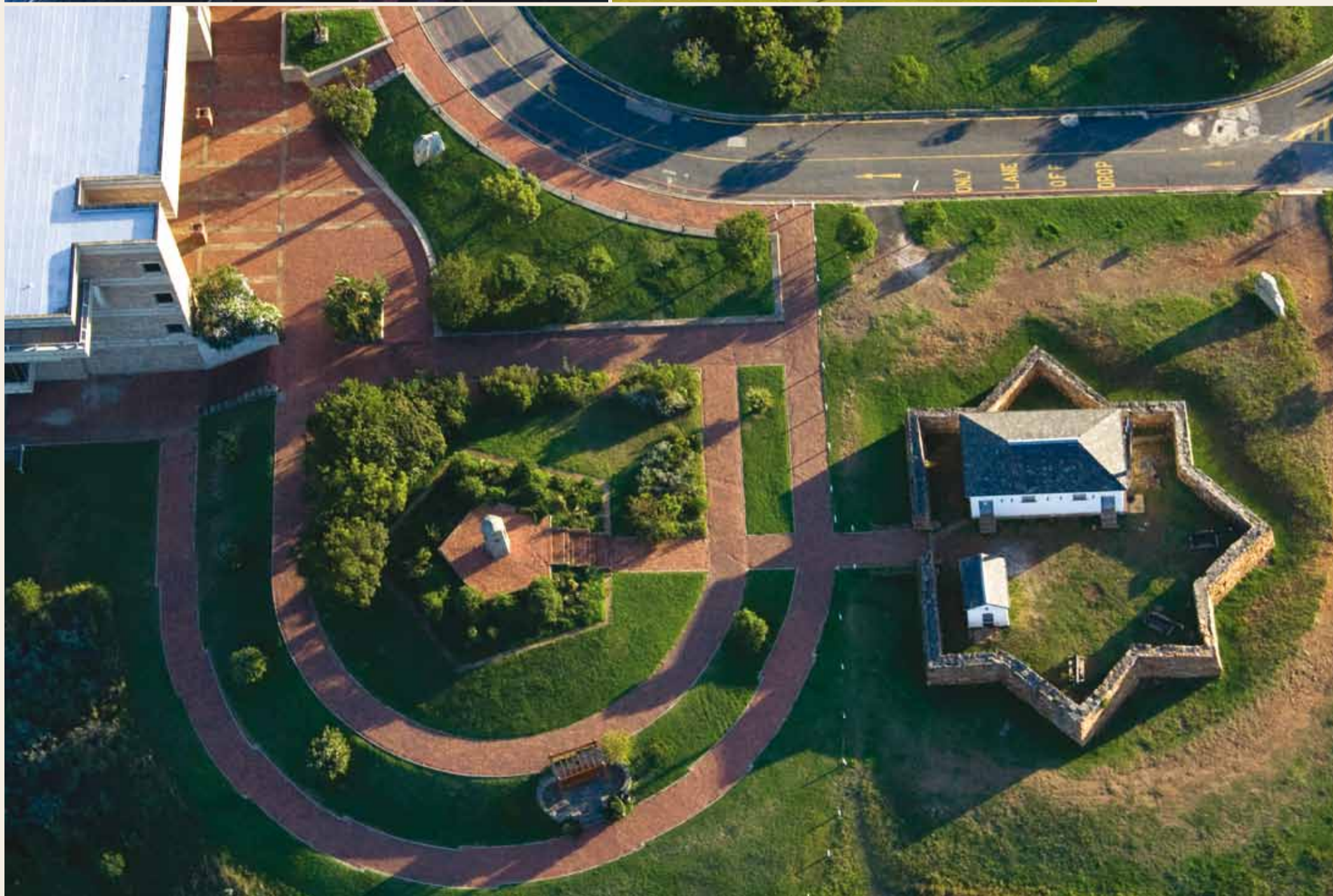
This second series of images resulted in the display of 56 views of Grahamstown at the exhibition, many of them startling in the way in which they shed a different light on the otherwise very familiar forms of the city.

The editors of RJR have chosen six of these images to reproduce here.





1. A view from the Grahamstown commonage (Karen Crouch).
2. Moses Dlamini views Grahamstown through the camera obscura at the Observatory Museum (Karen Crouch).
3. A view from the Kingswood College Astro turf to Makana's Kop (Kelly Rae du Plooy).
4. Looking down on Fort Selwyn at the 1820 Settlers' Monument (Amy Attenborough).
5. The old graveyard from Roberts Street (Sarah Pickering).
6. Makana's Kop from above (Amy Attenborough).



FOG OF WAR

The war in Afghanistan – and the accompanying escalation of conflict in the border areas of Pakistan – has journalists grappling with the basics of how to cover the story, particularly in instances of American airstrikes in remote villages or villages situated in insurgent/Taliban-controlled areas.

The challenge has been twofold: getting the basic facts right; and giving meaning to an unfolding story.

A controversial attack in a remote Afghan province of Farah in May this year perfectly illustrates the challenges (and victories) of reporting from a conflict zone. After a firefight between insurgents and local Afghan security forces, international occupation forces were called in as backup. They subsequently launched a series of seven airstrikes on the villages.

When reports started filtering out, the media quoted local authorities as saying about 100 people were thought to have been killed, a significant number of those being children, women and the elderly. (The Farah attack has one of the highest death tolls for a single incident in the post-2001 Afghan war.)

The response from the US Army was immediate. Firstly, it denied the high death toll, saying there had been a firefight with the Taliban. Then it responded that there was a minimum of civilian casualties – and that the fatalities were Taliban fighters. Then came the statement that, in fact, it was the Taliban who had killed the civilians. This was followed by the standard, military-issue statement, accusing the Taliban of using villagers as human shields, deliberately hiding in homes with women and children so as to discredit efforts of the coalition forces.

To an outsider, this looks like the classic “fog of war”. Farah is a very remote province in the Western part of the country, with a strong insurgent presence – factors that mitigate against journalists being able to cover the area effectively. And, with the insurgent Taliban made up of local people, with their stronghold in the country’s outlying districts, the Afghan police and authorities view villagers with mistrust.

With two seemingly opposing versions of the truth, it was up to journalists using the basics of reporting to bring to light the facts, and help establish one incontrovertible record.

The work of journalists also renewed the debate and pressure to stop using certain forms of warfare – especially airstrikes and unmanned drones – in Afghanistan.

Local reporters were first to air the stories, gathering testimony from local villagers. This was followed by broadcast and print reporters, who



Manoocher Deghati/IRIN

FOR JOURNALISTS, THERE IS SOMETIMES A BELIEF THAT EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES REQUIRE US TO ADOPT EXTRAORDINARY PRACTICES. BUT IT'S THE BASIC TOOLS OF THE TRADE – FAIRNESS, ACCURACY AND TRUTH – THAT WILL ALWAYS DELIVER WHAT GOOD JOURNALISM IS SUPPOSED TO BE, WRITES KAREN WILLIAMS FROM KABUL

interviewed locals and took photographs and video footage of the dead and the bombed homes.

Investigators were sourced from international organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Crescent (ICRC) and United Nations, as well as local medics and provincial authorities.

Despite the mounting evidence, the US military stuck to its version of events. And, without the attention from reporters, the story would have been buried. Instead, the sustained effort by reporters meant the story kept its focus and fuelled international responses, protests in Afghanistan as well as calls for an official investigation.

IRIN, the United Nations news agency, said an Afghan government investigation found that about 140 civilians, most of them children, had died in the airstrikes. Afghanistan Rights Monitor, a local human rights organisation, put civilian casualties at 117.

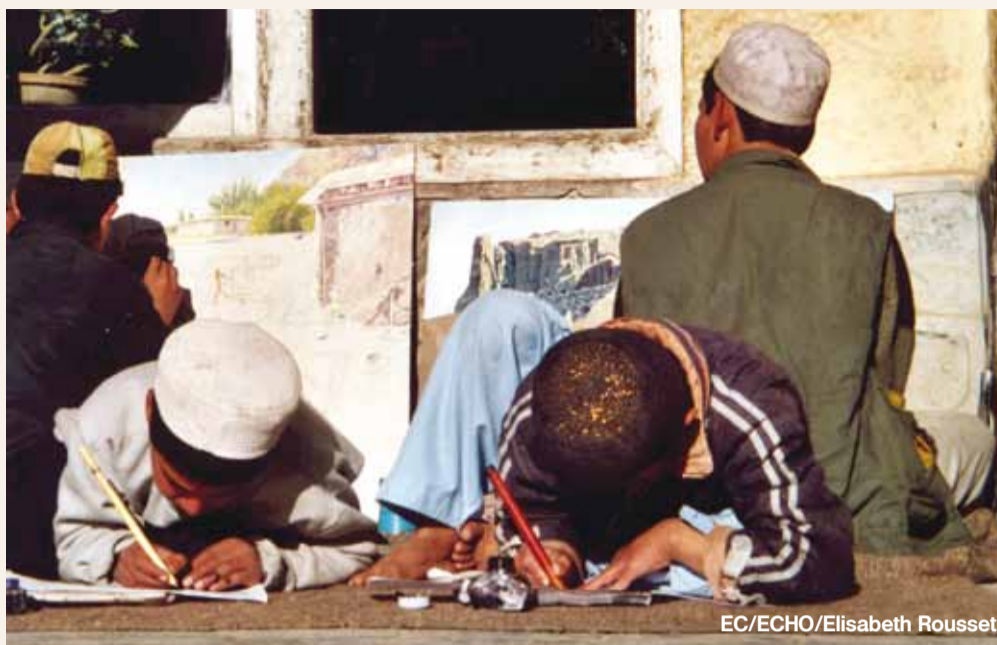
Finally, after pressure created by consistent news reporting, the US carried out an investigation and, a month after the attack, conceded that civilians had been killed in the operation. The US military said 26 civilians had died and its investigations had shown that American personnel had made “significant errors” in carrying out the airstrikes.

In instances such as this, the work of journalists serves a number of purposes:

- It brings facts and events to light – particularly in remote areas and areas where the Taliban are opposed to journalists.
- It establishes a public record, especially where there are human rights violations.
- Sustained reporting puts the story in context. In the case of the Farah attacks, investigations by the international media revealed that the airstrikes had been carried out by a special unit formed by US Secretary of Defence Donald



EC/ECHO/Yvan Hildebrand



EC/ECHO/Elisabeth Rousset



EC/ECHO/Yvan Hildebrand

this year at 800. It said that at least 55% of recorded deaths were attributed to insurgents; 33% were caused by international and Afghan forces; while 12% could not be attributed to any of the warring parties.

Civilian deaths resulting from armed hostilities had increased by 24% when compared to the same period last year, according to the report.

Even though shocking, statistics and percentages do not portray the grim realities on the ground, nor do they

raise the issue of greater state responsibility for action. The statistics do not talk about the daily reality of air strikes, gun battles, suicide bombings, Taliban beheadings and murders, as well as the general climate of fear in the country. And the credibility of the government is also tested when it – along with the international forces – is unable to protect civilians. Statistics cannot answer the question of whether the authorities are a dynamic in the violence.

Context, in this instance, is everything.

The legal black hole of the war on terror – supported and abetted from countries across the globe – has extended to an information black hole.

While the American war on terror has resulted in trying to put a legal face on illegal global actions, it has also resulted in the almost complete absence of information of the extent of atrocities and abuses committed. This is not coincidental. The absence of information provides a cloak for repression and abuses to thrive, become institutionalised and to continue.

The value of reporting can never be underestimated: it exposes atrocities, provides facts and context to events as well as narratives that challenge official-speak and humanises victims.

In this and most other conflicts, news reports have, in the most basic sense, brought information to light. Whether these reports have been on secret prisons or global torture regimes, they have humanised issues by giving campaigners, readers and families specific faces and case histories to relate to. They have also framed the debate – by explaining the legalities of governments' actions and also how they relate to international law.

Similarly, the work of reporters has brought the implications of the war on terror to citizens around the globe, with the media driving the debates around the implications of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, as well as the history of human rights abuses associated with it (including detention camps,

THE STATISTICS DO NOT TALK ABOUT THE DAILY REALITY OF AIR STRIKES, GUN BATTLES, SUICIDE BOMBINGS, TALIBAN BEHEADINGS AND MURDERS, AS WELL AS THE GENERAL CLIMATE OF FEAR IN THE COUNTRY

“black hole” secret prisons and the international co-operation of developing countries in the torture).

The result of reporters' work on the Farah killings meant Lt General Stanley McChrystal, the new US commander in Afghanistan, ordered a review of airstrikes and instituted new guidelines as his first action in taking over his post. This debate has now extended to the use of airstrikes and drones in Pakistan.

This is a small step, but one of the ways in which reporting events and atrocities shines a light on them, informs public debate and pressure – which often results in policy change. The work of local reporters, in turn, fuelled national coverage – which extended to international pick-up of the story.

Reporting also contributes to an irrefutable public record. The Vietnam war is a good case in point, with reports on the My Lai massacre creating a permanent, pivotal public record – one which even naysayers cannot refute.

The reporting of individual stories can also establish a pattern of systematic abuse. In Afghanistan, this is of particular importance. After three decades of war, there are many public figures with blood on their hands who still wield considerable power. Sustained conflict has meant that warlords and people who have been responsible for violence and atrocities exist in an environment in which they can be continually reinvented as the new circumstances demand.

The sustained violence has also meant that the fear and threats have been renewed across at least two generations and instilled in public life and debate. All levels of public accountability have been destroyed.

For journalists, there is sometimes a belief that extraordinary circumstances require us to adopt extraordinary practices. But it's the basic tools of the trade (fairness, accuracy and truth) that will always deliver what good journalism is supposed to be.

Extraordinary circumstances may force journalists to be more circumspect, or be more rigorous in verifying information and pursuing facts, but journalism is a profession made to tell the story of historical events – often awful events.

The international “war on terror” presents new challenges to journalists to tell a good, accurate and fair story. And it is our commitment to telling the truth – and telling the truth about all sides – that is being challenged in new ways.

Rumsfeld – and that they had been implicated in a series of previous violations.

- It focuses debate on the types of warfare used by the international forces.

The fall of the Taliban in 2001 has seen a return of local media to Afghanistan. But under the current occupation and anti-insurgent war, the challenges for Afghan reporters are many:

- Gaining access to or building relationships with both sides is hard, if not impossible. It is difficult, for example, for Afghans to make meaningful contacts within international military forces. At the same time, local journalists are under threat from being killed by the Taliban.
- In remote areas, numbers are hard to verify.
- Unless journalists travel to the areas, the events themselves are hard to verify. But the country is remote and conflict areas are sometimes too dangerous to access. Local reporters and radio stations in the provinces can go some way to getting information, but they are often not well trained, leading to unreliable and patchy information. The majority of the pressure groups and NGOs work in Kabul, the capital – but conditions are extremely difficult, and these organisations are under threat from the Taliban. The UN has some access, as does the ICRC – but insecurity is a constant threat.
- An insurgency means it is not a formal war, with the insurgent side made up of combatants who live among the civilian population. Anti-insurgent operations and anti-insurgent rhetoric run the risk of criminalising civilians.

Independent reports have consistently shown that the majority of conflict-related fatalities and casualties in Afghanistan can be attributed to the Taliban. A recent report from the UN sets the number of civilian deaths in Afghanistan between January and May

DIGITAL MEDIA AND SOCIETY

A useful and enriching tool

Review by Robert Brand

A number of excellent texts in recent years have addressed the issue of ethics in digital media¹. These works have tended to focus on the news media, but in *Digital Media Ethics*, author Charles Ess casts his net wider. The book, the second in the *Digital Media and Society* series, examines ethical issues in digital media ranging from social networking to video games.

Ess, a Distinguished Research Professor of Interdisciplinary Study at Drury University in Springfield, Missouri, takes a multidisciplinary approach to his subject. *Digital Media Ethics*, the author states in the preface, is intended for use primarily in philosophy and applied ethics classes, but also in a range of other disciplines, including media, communication, computer science and library science. "The goal," he writes, "is to provide students and instructors in a wide range of disciplines with a first introduction to important ethical issues associated with digital media." In this, the book certainly succeeds.

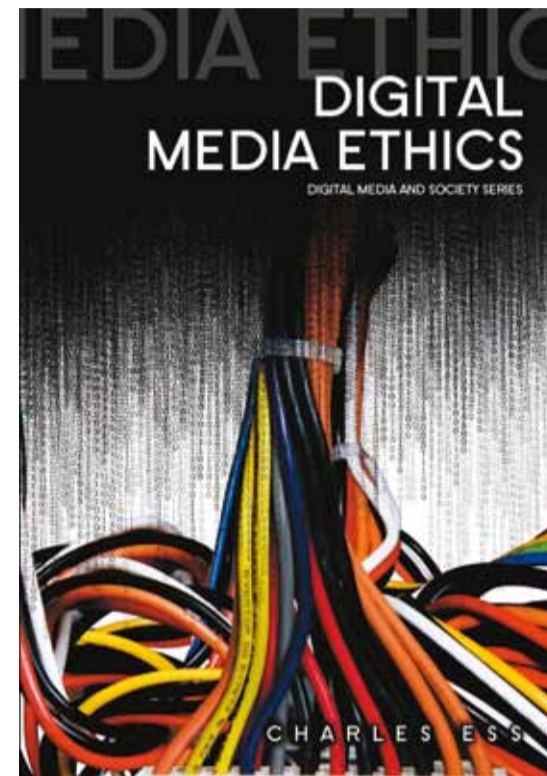
The first five chapters introduce readers to the charac-

teristics of digital media and the ethical challenges arising out of those; privacy in the "electronic global metropolis"; copyright; freedom of expression; and pornography. The final chapter is a useful outline of the meta-ethical and normative frameworks that are commonly used in applied ethics, including journalism ethics. The last chapter alone would make *Digital Media Ethics* a worthy addition to shelf of any journalism ethics teacher.

While the book is intended as a primer, or first introduction to ethical issues, it makes copious use of case studies, accompanied by questions for discussion, reflection and writing exercises which invite and encourage further research. This, again, makes it a useful tool for the teacher of journalism or media ethics, even though the majority of case studies are not from the news media. The media or journalism scholar may gripe with Ess' failure to distinguish between communication media and communication tools – he refers, for example, to "digital media such as cell phones and video games."

Nevertheless, he succeeds in providing conceptual frameworks that could be applied to a diverse range of media making. As such, the book is a useful addition to the literature on applied ethics in general and media ethics in particular, and teachers of journalism and media ethics are sure to find much in it to enrich their own understanding and teaching.

1. See, for example, Berkman, R. and Shumway, C. 2003. *Digital dilemmas: ethical issues for online media professionals*. Ames: Iowa State Press; and Friend, C. and Singer, J. 2007. *Online journalism ethics: traditions and transitions*. Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe.

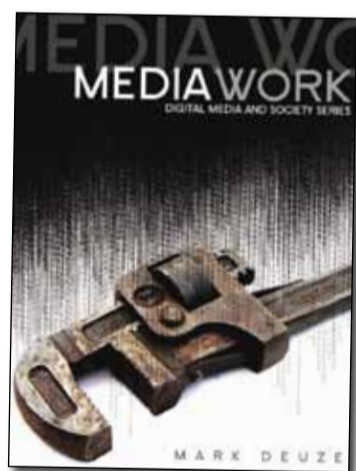


Digital Media Ethics

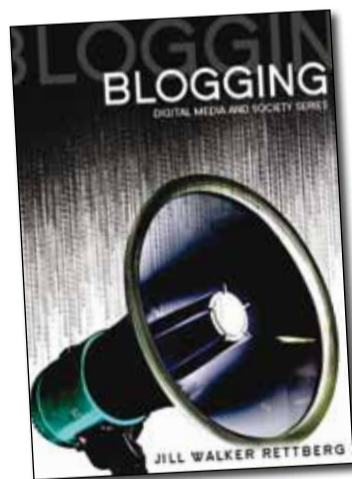
by Charles Ess

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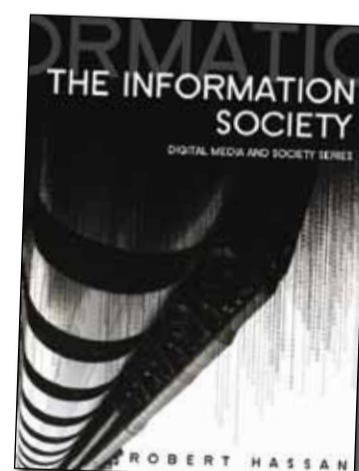
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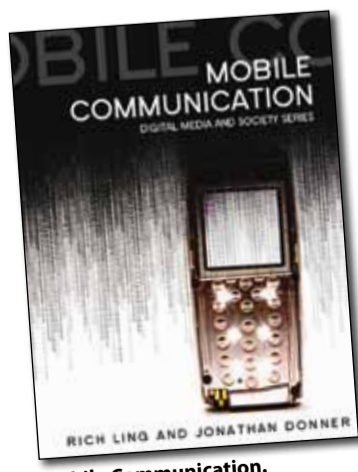
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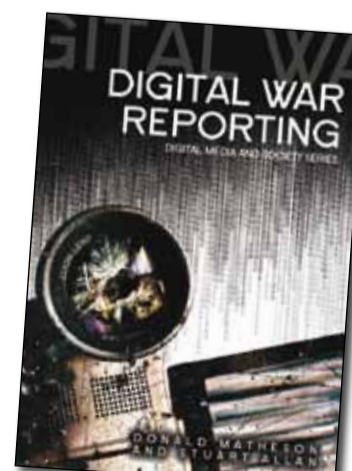
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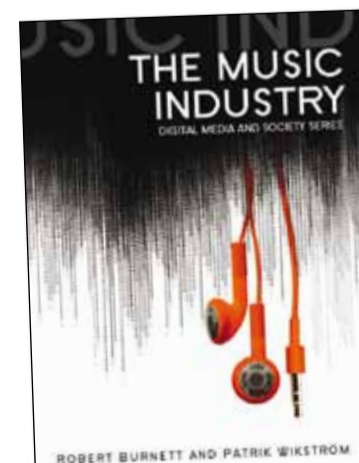
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Review by Fackson Banda

Debates about the structures and processes of globalisation – along with those of localisation – have important implications for the discipline (or is it still a *field*?) of media studies. The first implication, framed as a counter-hegemonic resistance to what some might consider to be the totalising tradition of Western media studies scholarship, is that we can no longer continue to look only to Western centres of academe for intellectual edification. The need for a critical deconstruction of Euro-American intellectual centrism, and the need for recognising and thus reconstructing a truly transcultural onto-epistemological agenda for media studies, has become more urgent than ever before.

Secondly, the rise of China as an economic and cultural unit of analysis in media studies – regardless of all the complexities and uncertainties engendered by China's rise as a soft power – calls for a different set of analytical tools to understand the interpenetration of China with almost all parts of the developed and the developing world. China's unfolding global economic – and political – domi-

RECONFIGURING THE CONTOURS OF MEDIA STUDIES

nance is particularly implicated in the economics, politics and cultures of the developing countries. This makes it all the more scholastically urgent to comprehend the structures and processes through which China is asserting its nationalistic and internationalist agendas – both of which are a reflection of China's ideological engagement with the world (Banda forthcoming).

Understood against the background of the changing faces of globalisation, *Internationalizing Media Studies*, a book edited by Daya Kishan Thussu, assumes both a scholarly and political resonance. Scholarly, because it brings to the fore the intellectual realignment that must necessarily take place in order for us to better and more comprehensively understand the influences of the cataclysmic changes that the world is undergoing, not least the apparent dismantling of a unipolar world in which Western knowledge sources had come to dominate our intellectual milieu. It also invites us to think critically about the very discourse of *internationalising* media studies as functioning, to use Tarik Sabry's characterisation in this volume, "through a 'double-critique' structure... one which is mechanized through a dual intellectual exercise that is able to oscillate between de-Westernisation and de-Westernisation, authentication and de-authentication." Thankfully, however, Sabry is quick to point out that "the discourse of de-Westernisation, as it stands, is still in its infancy, at a stage where



more intellectual effort is channelled towards authentication than to questioning and subverting of the claims that come with such a process" (201).

The political resonance of the book lies in the fact that it is published in the immediate aftermath of the global financial and economic crisis, engendering a rupture in the neo-liberal orthodoxies that have shaped the practice of economics and scholarship both in the developed and developing world. Although it is too early – and possibly too presumptuous – to agree with Yuezhi Zhao who suggests that "neo-liberalism has suffered a fatal blow" (188), it is evident that the seemingly unassailable (neo)-liberal, Western shackles of much media studies scholarship have come loose. It means that we must tie them back together by using different – or at least more internationalised – theoretical moorings. In and of itself, this should engender a greater sense of intellectual pluralism and empowerment.

The book sets about its project of internationalising media studies through four parts. Part 1 deals with internationalising media research. The analysis is underpinned by several theoretical treatises of globalisation and their implications for media internationalisation, and therefore for internationalising media studies. The debates are by no means new – they principally focus on the enmeshing of global and local influences and how the resultant hybrid identities can inform the analytical trajectories of media studies. The authors make a strong case for the need to understand the empirical dimensions of a hybrid media studies tradition for, as Tristan Mattelart in this volume argues, "These new approaches apprehend moreover the cultural consequences of globalisation in speculative terms. The sophistication of their theoretical analyses contrasts strongly with the poverty of their empirical analyses" (59).

Part 2 is thus appropriately about broadening the field of media studies. Given the now – I believe – trite conclusion that media is a cultural product, it makes sense to study it in relation to the totality of the extant cultural systems. As such, many of us have taken it for granted that our analyses of media are informed by something of the "circuit of culture" (DuGay, Hall, Janes, Mackay and Negus 1997). The circuit-of-culture analytical framework highlights how the different but interconnected cultural moments of production, identity, representation, consumption and regulation articulate in the lived experiences of the people.

Therefore, it is *expected* that the thematic con-

Internationalizing media studies.

Thussu, Daya Kishan (ed.)

London and New York: Routledge.

tent of media studies would include, as this book does, media law and policy (Chapter 6), globalisation and terror (Chapter 7), comparative media law and policy (Chapter 8), and the labouring of international communication (Chapter 9) (cf. Zelizer and Allan 2002). These topics do not necessarily point to a *broadening* of the field, as they are not new to media studies, at least as some of us have taught this in developing-country universities. It is simply *affirming* that such themes are already an integral part of the subject matter of the field of media studies.

Part 3 of the book is a presentation of regional perspectives on internationalisation. I find these perspectives fascinating, largely because they represent what this book is really about. If we are to internationalise media studies, then we must internationalise it *from* the peripheries *to* the centres. It is a moot point that efforts at internationalisation have tended to confirm the dominance of Western centres of scholarship across a variety of disciplines. All the regional perspectives – ranging from Asian, Arab, Russian, to Latin American – are united in lamenting the Euro-American moorings of media studies and in celebrating efforts at making intellectual inroads into the international media studies arena. I am not sure, though, why the chapter on reconceptualising media studies in Africa is placed in Part 4 dealing with what appear to be more country-specific examples of how media syllabi are becoming more and more internationalised. But this does not detract from the very significant contributions this chapter makes towards elucidating how African media studies scholarship is internationalising – from one African country to another, for example. The movement of academics from several African countries to South Africa, for example, is helping to reconfigure the contours of media studies in South Africa, where the field has largely been Euro-American.

Part 4 deals with the challenges of internationalising media syllabi. There are interesting observations here. For example, John Downing seems to throw cold water on the internationalisation project when he notes that the US exhibits a tendency towards "insularity rather than internationalism" (274). There is need for cross-cultural or trans-cultural dialogue, among media studies scholars, if the project of internationalising media studies is to succeed.

In conclusion, the importance of this book lies in the fact that it has harnessed many of the old debates – and some new ones – to explicate a clear case for seeing media studies as truly international in scope and in subject. By setting out some compelling regional empirical case studies, and by buttressing these with critical, postcolonial reasoning, it is clear that the field of media studies can no longer be territorially balkanised. However, it is not clear what the exact direction and process of internationalising media studies will be, but that is beyond the scope of a 320-page book!

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A local design vernacular

Review by Brian Garman

When I first saw that this book was out, I looked across at my bookshelf, and wondered if I didn't already have too many design books. If I was going to get this one, it needed to be something different.

If you look through the contents page, it does seem a little "same old, same old" but there is something which makes this book quite distinct: it is entirely South African. Every featured designer, case study, interview and beautifully displayed example is local, is lekker – and by doing this, it clearly demonstrates a "local design vernacular distinct from the design languages of Europe and the United States". But what's more, it shows that South African graphic designers can hold their own in an international design arena.

Graphic Design, written (and designed and illustrated) by Michael MacGarry is the first of the new Skill Set series of books on South African design which aims to respond to a need for material that features local design, but that also "celebrates the work of the many talented creatives" who work in this country.

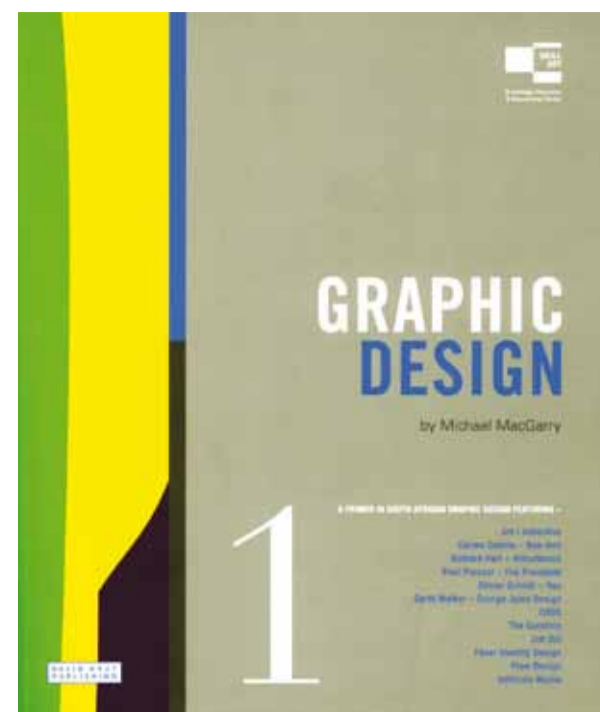
The book is essentially divided into three sections. The first is an essay by Garth Walker on the South African context. The essay is illustrated by examples of the often transient "street design" Walker has collected in his travels around the country, and which he uses to inform much of his own work.

The second section of the book gives an overview of the principles and concepts of good design. MacGarry doesn't stray far from the beaten track of the universal fundamentals that you need to apply to achieve good design, but what is refreshing is the illustration of this somewhat generic information with local images. In this section, he makes use of the work of designers like Peet Pienaar, Scott Robertson, Garth

Walker, Jason Bronkhorst, Richard Hart, Oliver Schildt, am i collective, Carina Comrie, Joh Del and others. He also uses examples from across the spectrum of print design – exhibition, editorial, corporate identity, posters, packaging and illustration.

In the third and perhaps most interesting section of the book MacGarry interviews a number of local designers. The interviews – although set out as Q&A – are more of a series of discussions than a standard set of questions that he poses to his interviewees. They talk a lot about their own work, what makes them tick, things that influence them, choices they've made, the local design industry, etc. And like all good iconoclasts, none of them is slavishly complimentary of the local design industry. Peet Pienaar, creative director of The President is quite critical of the fact that local design is not very effective in exercising social influence or affecting political or social change. Ruan Vermeulen from the am i collective expresses his frustration at the treatment of young designers in the larger advertising agencies, "where they end up scanning stuff for three months" and "do not learn anything".

What's also interesting about MacGarry's choice of subjects to interview is the variety of mediums and techniques which are investigated. Vermeulen and Mark van Niekerk from am i collective make a lot of use of hands-on illustration work, while Richard Hart, creative director of disturbance sees their work as photography-orientated design. Carina



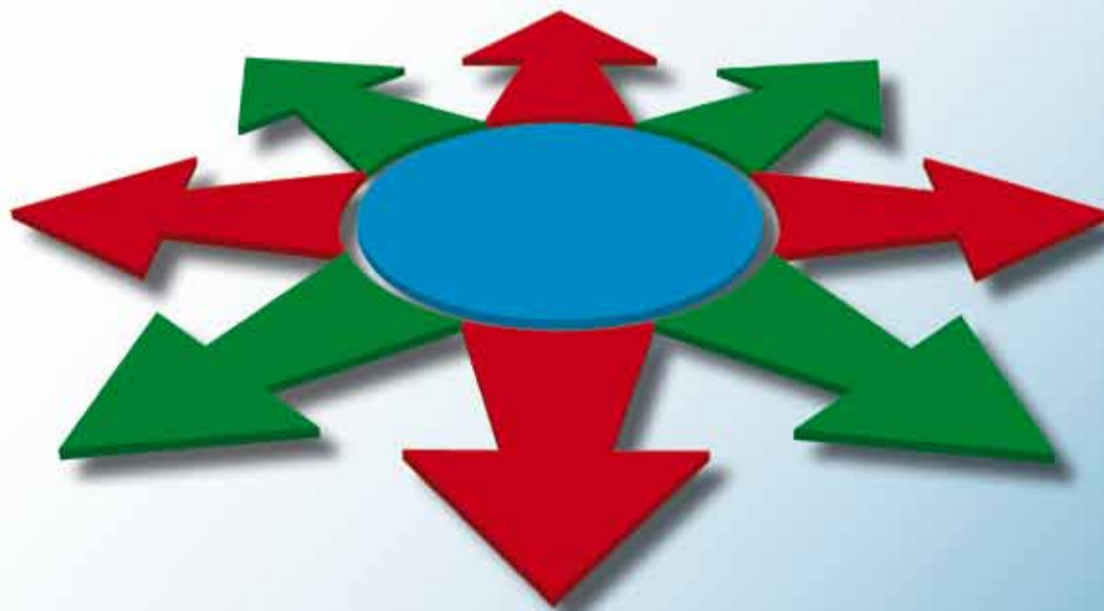
Graphic design
By Michael MacGarry
David Krut Publishing

Comrie from Bon-Bon works a lot with exhibition (and its related material) and book design. What these interviews illustrate is the extraordinary breadth and depth in the South African design industry. At the same time though, they acknowledge that locally the design industry is quite fragmented.

Graphic Design is a beautiful book which will add value to the bookshelves of design students through to seasoned, practising designers. Unlike many design books which are simply vehicles for pretty images, this book has something to read as well as look at.

Oh – by the way, if I were honest with myself, I guess that I would have to confess that you can never have too many design books.

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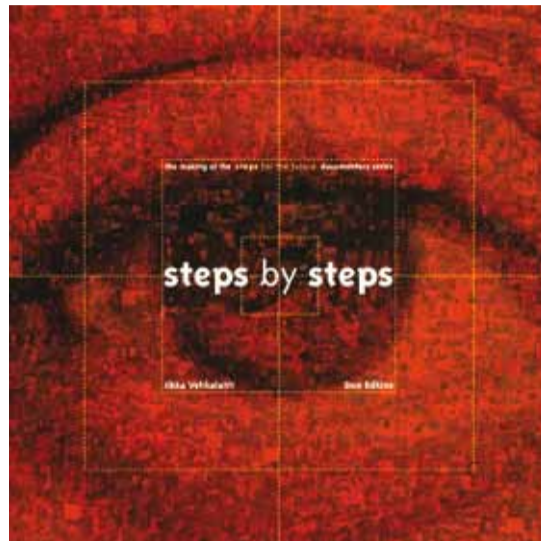
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IN A FRANK, OFFBEAT MEMOIR, FINNISH FILMMAKER IIKKA VEHKALAHTI AND HIS SOUTH AFRICAN PARTNER DON EDKINS, TELL THEIR STORY OF HOW THEY DEVELOPED AN INFECTIOUS CONCEPT, CHARMED BIG BROADCASTERS – AND NEARLY DIDN'T GET THE FILMS MADE. ALETTE SCHOON GETS TAKEN ALONG FOR THE RIDE



Steps by steps: The Making of the Steps for the Future Documentary Series

By Iikka Vehkalahti and Don Edkins

Published by Fanele, an imprint of Jacana Media

In 2000, Finnish documentary producer Iikka Vehkalahti flew in for a quick visit and was struck by the raw talent of our filmmakers and their silence about Aids. In a moment of frustration and inspiration, he had a crazy idea. Why not raise millions of rands and produce a whole series of documentary films about Aids in Southern Africa? But he didn't want, as he bluntly puts it, "fucking Unicef educational films". No, his dream was real documentary films that were about characters and life as it happens. Films that would nurture talent here and put struggling township filmmakers on the map. In a frank, offbeat memoir, Vehkalahti and his South African partner Don Edkins, tell the cliff-hanger story of how they developed an infectious concept, charmed their way into the boardrooms of the big broadcasters – and nearly didn't get the films made.

The book chronicles an important moment in the history of South African documentary film-making. The Steps for the Future project provided a chance for local filmmakers to work with some of the best international documentary makers to tell the Aids story. It was about the regional tragedy of Aids in seven countries, but it was also about love, sex and desire, about family and fear, death and hope. The list of film producers who worked on the Steps project reads like a Who's Who of Southern African documentary filmmakers. Many of them made a name for themselves through these films. Through the Steps project they were able to sidestep the usual SABC sausage-factory budgets that force producers to shoot in four days and edit in five, and find out what our stories would look like if we had the luxury of time that international producers have.

The resulting 36 Steps films were good films that greatly moved international audiences in Europe, the UK, Canada and Australia. More importantly for South Africans, they allowed the SABC to create its first-ever documentary prime time slot, and beat audience ratings on all the other channels over the next few weeks. The Steps team went on to create one of the most successful film outreach projects ever, training more than 300 facilitators to screen the films on to strung-up sheets at small town sports fields and school halls all over Southern Africa.

This book is much more than a dry history of the project. *Steps by steps* airs all the linen from this project's two-year fling with the region. Vehkalahti

and Edkins take turns to share all the secrets of how to leap head-first into the funding world and make it up as you go along. And how not to lose your mind – and your overdraft facility – in the process. It's all here: the long, flirtatious meetings reeling in the funders, the bitter emails of rejection, the thrill of discovering others who share your dreams. We eavesdrop as Vehkalahti and Edkins panelbeat late-night discussions with filmmakers into sexy titles and blurbs for films – all without ripping out the heart and principles of the project, of course.

In the spirit of the documentary, they decide to show, not just tell with this book. Instead of just describing some of the highs and lows of running a project of this ambition, they give us access to large sections of their email exchange, showing how they fed the bait to broadcasters and played them off against one another. A heart-wrenching email from a Mozambican filmmaker shares his desire to kill someone or kill himself after receiving feedback from the commissioning editors. In fact, so many little emails are part of the text that they actually become a feature. One gets a real sense of an international community of filmmakers suddenly discovering their Southern African counterparts, and the journey they walk together to bring these films to life.

The book includes guidelines on why funders fund certain projects, advice on how to mentor filmmakers and how to conduct community screenings, as well as the ethics of making films about Aids under extremely stressful conditions. These are all interspersed in a highly readable story that reads like an epic adventure. The design may look a bit like an annual report, but once you get stuck in the narrative, it's a very good read.

As a documentary filmmaker myself, I have to confess there have been times when I've been a bit snotty about the high-flying, big-budget schmoozing world of executive producers. This book helped me remember: it's about the magical feat of pulling a project that you've only imagined, into the real world, kicking and screaming.

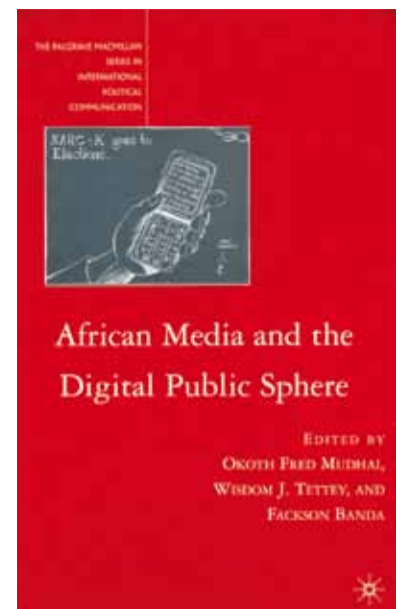
Included with the book is a DVD of five Steps for the Future documentary films about HIV/Aids in Southern Africa.

ANALYSING ICTS AND POLITICS

This book examines, from theoretical and empirical perspectives, the claims that new information and communication technologies (ICTs) are catalysts of democratic change in Africa.

Contributors do so from optimistic, pragmatist-realist, and pessimist stances by analysing the words and deeds of various political actors, organisations and institutions, from government units to political parties and party leaders to civil society organisations and minority groups.

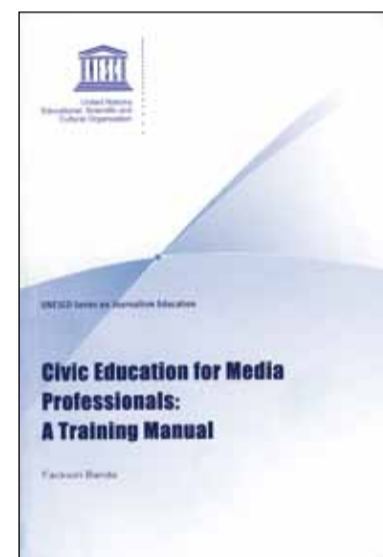
Contributors are African and Africanist scholars, based in Africa and around the world, whose research and/or practice focus on the relationship between the new digital media and democracy on the continent.



African Media and the Digital Public Sphere

Edited by Okoth Fred Mudhai, Wisdom J Tetey and Fackson Banda

Published by Palgrave Macmillan



Civic Education for Media Professionals: A training manual

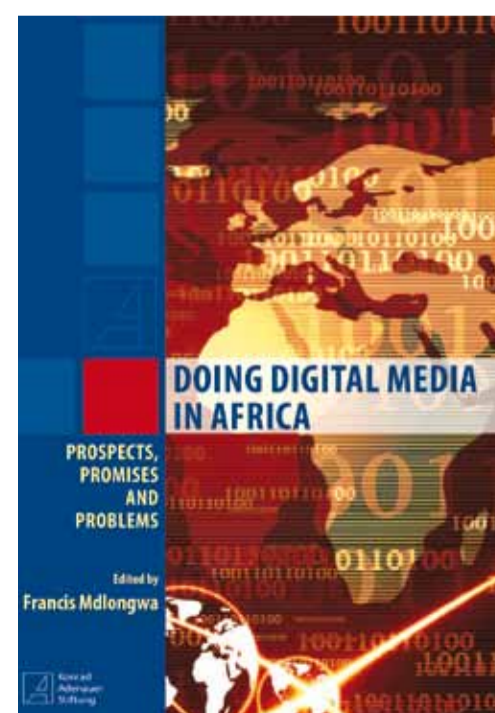
By Fackson Banda

Published by Unesco

THE MEDIA AND THE PROMOTION OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Published by Unesco as part of its series on journalism education, this training manual is aimed at journalism students and media professionals in developing countries, providing them with essential knowledge for the analysis of the relationship between media functions and active citizenship, and the underlying nexus of democracy, development and the media.

NEW PLATFORMS NEW POSSIBILITIES



The Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung run regular Africa media leadership conferences in which attention is paid to the unique situations media companies face on this continent. Last year the conference in Uganda focused on the digital challenges. The most useful of those discussions and ideas are brought together in this book.

Available from www.kas.de/rofi/doc/kas_17062-544-2-30.pdf

Doing digital media in Africa

Edited by Francis Mdlongwa

Published by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

The book that would eventually become known as *Ways of Staying* took formal shape on a gray afternoon in mid-December 2006. I use the modifier “formal” because up until that afternoon – an afternoon passed, beer in hand, on the balcony of a colonial-era hotel in the impossibly strange Namibian town of Swakopmund – the book had existed as an urgent but largely shapeless series of images, sensations and events. Chief amongst these had been the murder eight months before of my first cousin Richard Bloom; while I knew that Richard’s violent death had altered something fundamental about my relationship to my country, what I didn’t yet know (as an aspiring non-fiction writer) was how to uncover and express what that something was.

So the Swakopmund setting, *fin de siècle* German architecture sandwiched between a vast African desert and a cold dark sea, helped me to discover the book’s latent shape. The incongruity of the setting suggested to me that perhaps I should write about the bizarreness of my own country, about the *strangeness* of life in post-apartheid (postcolonial) South Africa, and from there the next step followed naturally: I ought to tell the stories of how people confront such strangeness – the stories, ultimately, of how people stay in this indefinite construct called the “New South Africa”, which are of course also the stories of how people leave.

Paradox and dislocation

Standing at (or very near) the top of the list of contemporary world literature that deals with dislocation and the movement of peoples is the oeuvre of VS Naipaul. A Trinidadian-born, British writer of Indian descent, Naipaul has throughout his career returned to the theme of Empire as a primary shaper of modern consciousness. In works such as *A House for Mr Biswas* (first published in 1961), *In a Free State* (1971) and *A Bend in the River* (1979), Naipaul casts the post-colony as the site of a globally momentous struggle – the place where compassion and ruthlessness, ambition and lethargy, self and other clash in brutal and often irreconcilable ways. These three novels, which with the possible exception of *The Enigma of Arrival* (first published in 1987) are easily Naipaul’s finest, cut between scenes in London or Washington DC, former and current capitals of Empire, and dirty backstreets in Trinidad or India or Africa. They are novels where oppressor meets oppressed, where power meets subjugation, where an unjust past meets an awkward and barely reconstructed present. But they are by no means novels whose sole purpose is to rage against the barbarity of the coloniser. This is because the post-colony, in Naipaul’s cosmology, is also a veritable prison: a place that (if one has any desire to better one’s self at all) one must do everything in one’s power to escape.

The severity of this paradox can perhaps be more fully articulated by reference to an observation made by literary critic James Wood in an essay published in the *New Yorker* magazine (December 2008): “In his writing,” remarks Wood, “Naipaul is simultaneously the colonised and the colonist, in part because he never seriously imagines that the colonised would ever want to be anything but the colonist, even as he uses each category to judge the other.”

It’s in the phrase “to judge the other” that one begins to get an understanding of the complexities, the endless interplays and correlatives, that face a writer who is determined to represent the postcolonial experience without cliché or apology. The Mother Country, to simplify Naipaul, may be so compromised as to be beyond redemption, but it is nonetheless She who holds the promises of freedom and progress: which is why it’s still better to be part of the faceless/foreign class in London or Washington, his protagonists often feel, than to waste a life in the atrophying alleyways of home. As Wood comments further on in his *New Yorker* piece: “Naipaul is enraging and puzzling, especially to those who themselves come from postcolonial societies, because his radicalism and his conservatism are so close to each other – each response is descended from the same productive shame.”

Shame at being the colonist; shame at being the colonised. It’s this double truth, the inherent and inviolable double-truth of life in post-apartheid South Africa, that I instinctively knew would be the narrative engine driving *Ways*

of Staying. It was here that I saw the strangeness of our situation, the source of our bewilderment, the reason for our dislocation and self-hatred and capacity for violence and desire to flee. But these responses, I knew, would all be incredibly difficult to capture on the page without sinking into cant or didacticism. In rereading Naipaul, I knew I needed a narrative vehicle that was equal to the task; I knew too that my vehicle could not and would not be similar to his.

Fear, race and identity

Coetzee offers an insight into the driving emotion behind *Cry, the Beloved Country*, the most successful book (in sales terms) ever written on or about the South African situation. “Not all readers of *Cry, the Beloved Country* may remember where the strange title comes from... Here is the relevant passage: “Cry, the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear. Let him not love the earth too deeply... For fear will rob him of all if he gives too much.”

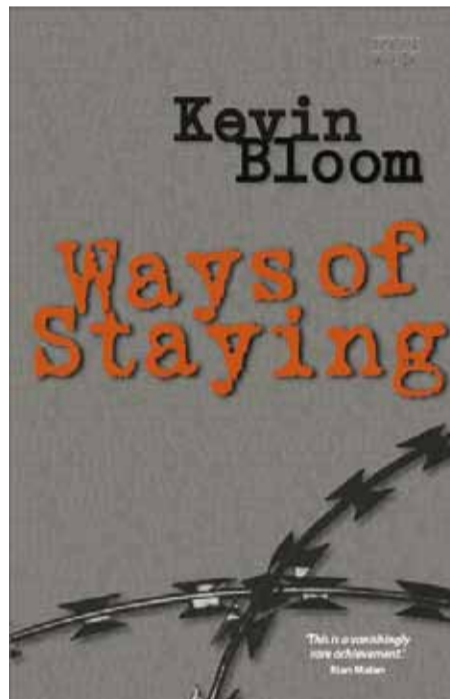
Coetzee then continues: “Though overtly the novel takes up a confident liberal stance, calling for greater idealism and commitment to Christian and democratic values, the experience it deals with beneath the surface is, as Paton’s best critic, Tony Morphet, suggests, more troubling. The “powerful emotion” out of which Paton’s novel emerged was fear for himself and his humanity, fear for the future of South Africa and its people. Fear was the emotion that had held Paton in its grip in the hotel rooms in Sweden and England and the United States where he did his writing; and the book that emerged, with its anxious ending, cannot be said to have settled this fear” (2002: 319-320).

It may be an obvious point to make, but *Ways of Staying* – starting as it does with a funeral scene, held together in its “personal” aspect by the murder of my cousin Richard at the hands of two men from the Cape Flats, and ending on the same “anxious” note that Coetzee ascribes to Paton’s novel – is also a book written from a position of fear. Given this subtext of fear, *Ways of Staying* is influenced by a long and entrenched tradition within South African literature. The case can hopefully be made by citing another two famous examples of white South African writing: Rian Malan’s *My Traitor’s Heart* (1991) and one more work by Coetzee, *Disgrace* (2000).

Malan’s book – part memoir, part history, part swirling and remorseless tale of how South Africans go about murdering one another – comes after 400 or so pages to the following passage: “And so I wind up back where I began, a white man in the white suburbs of white South Africa, bobbing up and down on the cross of my ambiguities and pondering the only meaningful choice that is mine to make: to stay here or go away. I could board a plane and leave, I suppose, but I’ve done that too often before... A tombstone is still waiting for me in Los Angeles, reading “He Ran Away.”

WAYS OF WRITING

JOURNALIST KEVIN BLOOM RECENTLY CELEBRATED THE PUBLICATION OF HIS FIRST BOOK, *WAYS OF STAYING*. IN THIS EXTRACT FROM HIS REFLEXIVE ESSAY PRODUCED AS PART OF HIS MASTERS DEGREE IN CREATIVE WRITING, HE REFLECTS ON THE TWO YEARS SPENT WRITING HIS OWN STORY



I don’t want to be buried under such an epitaph...” (421).

Malan may ultimately decide to remain in the country of his birth, but it’s patently evident from these words that he arrives at this decision *despite* his fear. To leave, in the minds of many white South Africans – as it is here in the mind of Malan – is to “run away”... and this is an action one can only perform if there is something to run away from; something, as it were, of which one is afraid.

The penultimate chapters of *Ways of Staying*, a two-part narrative journey called “Ways of Leaving”, were initially written as an attempt to explore simply and honestly what that “thing” was (or indeed is).

If one had to pick a single overriding theme that informs *Ways of Staying*, that theme – for lack of a less hackneyed, over-used phrase – would be “post-apartheid white South African identity”. In addition to *Disgrace* and *My Traitor’s Heart* there are countless works that cover such territory, but for me one of the few authors that can be placed on a level with Malan and Coetzee is Antjie Krog; specifically, as regards the identity question, her major works of non-fiction *Country of My Skull* (2002) and *A Change of Tongue* (2003). Both these books sat on the desk beside me as I wrote *Ways of Staying* (the former is in fact quoted in the text) and both served as sources of narrative and thematic

inspiration when I felt myself flagging.

In effect, the identity issue – which in South Africa, as everywhere, is necessarily subsumed by the question of “the other” – is foregrounded in Krog’s non-fiction from the very start, and is to a large extent a function of the subjects she takes on: *Country of My Skull* being her painfully poetic account of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and *A Change of Tongue* being her uncompromisingly candid reaction to the Conference on Racism held in Johannesburg in 2001. As Krog writes of the latter in the abovementioned *River Teeth* article (2007: 38): “The refrain right through the conference was: whites hadn’t changed, whites were in denial. And I wanted with *A Change of Tongue* to say it was not true. Things had changed. Racism that previously had been the odious job of the state was suddenly wielded by individuals; whites for the first time really talked about blacks. ‘Fuck the kaffirs’ had changed into ‘these fucking kaffirs’.”

The irony in these words is astounding, and they capture from another angle the paradox leitmotif to which I keep returning: yes, Krog says, the most illuminating voice for her as a white writer is the black voice (2007: 38); yes, we are defined as white South Africans by the voices we have for all these centuries tried to keep silent; and yes, many of us are still hopelessly and incorrigibly racist.

WHEN DEADLINES DON'T LOOM

Every story starts with a blank page – and a good idea. It's true for 300 words of hard news hammered out on deadline. Same goes for a whimsical magazine feature, a rapid-fire blast on Twitter, the first draft of a television script or last chapter of a book. Come to think of it, the same principles of writing apply throughout, they just have to be bent to the will of the medium.

There's no better place to get over fear of the blank page than in a newsroom – because there's no time to indulge a creative block, or to wait around for the muse to appear.

Journalism's probably the best training ground for long-form non-fiction. You learn to follow an idea through the various strata of research, from initial telephone queries and Google searches, to picking through archival press clippings and deep background stuff. You get a handle on interviewing, and suffer the labour pangs of transcribing them (forward and back, forward and back, until you've picked the exact quote out from the background noise).

Then you learn to weave all that into a compelling storyline. There are the mind maps and brain storms, the frenzied writing, the cigarettes in a gusty doorway, more writing, the panicked coffee with a colleague to talk a flabby story back into shape. Most of all, journalism teaches you to get through all that toil fast, with the hot breath of a news editor on your neck.

For some journalists, writing a book is as inevitable as swinging one foot ahead of the other. "It comes so easy to us," says veteran reporter and six-book author, Max du Preez. "I've spent my entire adult life writing and reporting. Writing is a part of me like eating and drinking."

Journalist and agony-aunt columnist Caroline Hurry says, after two books, that the best way to write "is to plonk yourself down in front of the PC, and stay off the web".

When children's novelist Helen Brain starts a new manuscript, she writes 1 000 words a day, re-

WRITING A BOOK IN TANDEM WITH PRACTISING JOURNALISM IS A BIT LIKE TRAINING FOR AN ULTRA-MARATHON IN 100M BURSTS, WRITES LEONIE JOUBERT

ardless. No excuses, no whining, just get that bum on the seat and the words on the page.

My first book happened by accident. I'd outgrown one job and the local newsroom wasn't hiring, so I stumbled into a juggling act of freelance writing (mostly low-profile features and columns), studying and travelling. It was low-budget stuff, but out of that came the first long-hand scrawls that became *Scorched: South Africa's changing climate*.

The deadline is a peculiar animal – it's terrifying, up close, but it's the beast that makes us most productive. "Much as I hate deadlines, there's nothing like a stick to get you to produce the goods," says Hurry.

After 23 years in a newsroom, Jeanne Viall is writing her first book. "For the first six months I did both (journalism and the book) – and soon realised that it wouldn't work. It's easier to get working on a 2 000-word article that has a deadline, than research a book which has a wide-open brief and a deadline a year ahead. I couldn't get my teeth into it. So I've stopped journalism for now."

Scorched wasn't written to deadline. But the regular journalism that paid the rent while I cobbled the manuscript together, was. I wrote enough journalism to live off, a bursary paid for the Masters, and I toiled over individual book chapters the rest of the time. I'm not sure what kept me at my desk late on those Friday nights or through the odd weekend, but I got the book out. I think it was the whiff of a great story that itched in my nose like a delicious allergy. Everything I've done since then (two other books, a text for school kids, an early foray into TV script writing, monthly journalism) has happened to the sweet angst of deadlines.

Journalism is about finding ideas, researching them and then laying them out in story form. Whether it's in 150 words or 80 000, the process isn't that different – except that long-form writing allows

much greater depth to the story. When you do journalism and a book in tandem, the two inevitably feed off each other like one of those Celtic animal-bite-animal motifs, meaning that the journalism reflects the book, reflects the journalism.

But when it comes to getting those words down on paper, long-form writing demands large blocks of time, which is where daily journalism becomes disruptive. Book writing is a hobby, until the deadline starts looming, says Du Preez, "then journalism becomes a nuisance just to pay the bills and book writing becomes a priority".

Just about every writer you'll speak to will tell you this: when the big push starts, everything else gets put to one side. Du Preez finishes off a manuscript with 14-hour days. Liza Lazarus, who wrote *The Book of Jacob* with her husband Greg Fried after eight years of magazine writing, said it was "a mammoth undertaking, with multiple edits and agonising over every word".

Once the first manuscript draft is down, then the editing starts – first, the DIY edits (I must have reworked some chapters in *Scorched* at least 15 times, sometimes more); followed by the tweaks asked for by the proofreader and the publisher's editor. Helen Brain will do "a minimum of six drafts and often double that before the manuscript finally gets sent to the printers". It's a long, long haul getting from concept to neatly bound title.

In the end, book writing in South Africa is for the love of it, and for building the journalist's brand. Because God knows, it doesn't pay. Most book deals are royalties-based, meaning the author gets a percentage of sales. In this country, in spite of a 47-million-strong population, book sales are so low that a bestseller in fiction is a miniscule 3 000 copies sold, non-fiction is 5 000. Unless the extraordinary happens (as in Jake White or John van de Ruit), royalties on sales is small change. Journalism pays much better, rand-for-word.

Moan and gripe as we might about the economics of book writing, it's not enough to put authors off, so the rewards are clearly beyond the hard currency. It's got something to do with the thrill of the chase, the satisfaction of chewing over a three-course issue rather than hurrying down a fast food meal, and the utter joy of what happens when the words flow freely, and read well.

It's a long-haul run, book writing, but ultimately there's no substitute for the view along the way, or the thrill of making it to the end.

ACCIDENTAL JOURNALIST

BEFORE SHE BEGAN WRITING BOOKS AND TV SHOWS, LAUREN BEUKES DALLIED WITH LUXURY, SEX, ADVENTURE AND CRIME – ALL IN THE NAME OF JOURNALISM.

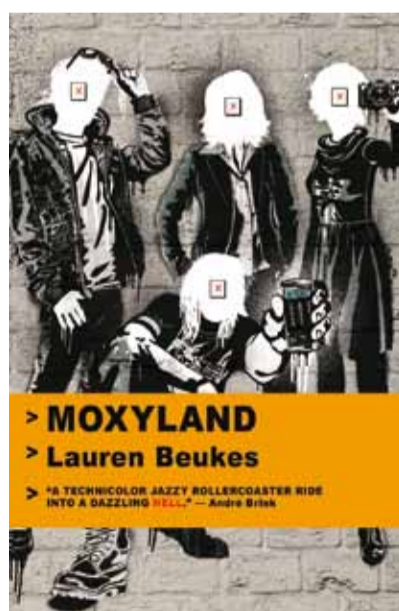
I never intended to be a journalist. As a teenager, I craved the indolent glamour of being a novelist, you know, lying around making stuff up all day. Journalism seemed too much like hard graft.

At the time, I didn't realise that research makes writing richer and real-er and more readable. Or that transcribing hours and hours and hours of interviews can teach you more about dialogue than university writing courses. Or that the profession comes with a built-in All Access Pass.

People will tell you that money opens doors, but those doors tend to lead onto the kind of plush places featured on *Top Billing*. Once you get over the gooey adjectives, all that "sumptuously appointed"-ness, they blend into a blandly samey blur of luxury.

If, on the other hand, you're looking to crack open the portals that will take you somewhere interesting, somewhere with the potential to jar you from your inhibitions and suppositions and surprise you, drop whatever it is that you're doing and take up a career in journalism.

It might not be a VIP pass (it's usually more about sneaking in the maintenance door than pulling up in a limo out front), but



it'll still get you backstage. And in 12 years of freelancing, I've been backstage in some bizarre and wonderful and terrifying places.

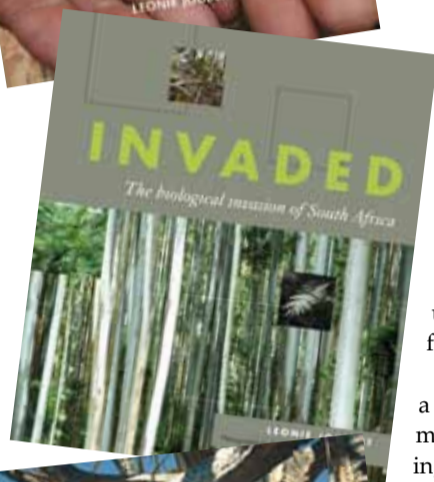
In pursuit of a story, I've jumped out of a plane and into howling sky, crashed a wedding in Langa, learned how to pole dance and make mqombothi, hung out with nuclear physicists and homeless sex workers, high court judges, rehab tourists and teen vampires and lunched with the owner of the Cape's

self-proclaimed finest brothel, whose eyes were more cold and dead than the snaggle-toothed prehistoric monster fish I'd scuba dived with the week before.

And, here's the ridiculous bit: been paid

for the privilege. Journalism gives you a licence to intrude, to get backstage in people's heads. You're actually required to ask the queasily uncomfortable questions that polite society would dictate as strictly off limits. You learn to unpick the truths from the subtext, in the way people say things, like the Aids activist couple who explained their love as a temporary infection. Or the electricity cable thieves who assured me that the catcalls of "iz'nyoka" trailing them as we walked through Nyanga weren't referring to the vilified human snakes from the Eskom ads, but rather the perils of electricity, how it can bite you like a snake. Or the paramilitary township vigilante group, all Sopranos-pantsula behind oversized Raybans and gleaming teeth, who described themselves as lions guarding the sheep.

Journalism opened up my head as well as doors, recalibrating the way I understand the way the world works, and, more importantly, how people do. What my imperious novelist-wannabe teen self didn't realise all those years ago is that you can't make this stuff up. I've become a better writer for it.





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