

RHODES 32 JOURNALISM

Review



contributors to Review issue 32



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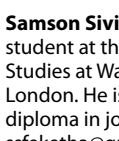
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Cover pictures by Cedric Nunn

from the mid-career retrospective

Call and Response.

As we put this 2012 edition of *Rhodes Journalism Review* to bed, I'm also teaching a class of final-year Bachelor of Journalism students a course in long-form journalism. At the beginning we always face the questions of whether using literary (or narrative or fiction techniques) damages the 'truth'. By this point in their education

our students have been so well inducted into the thought processes of objective-stance, short-form (ie never anything longer than about 800 words,), don't say "I" journalism that they find the vistas opened up by another type and approach to factual story-telling extremely unnerving. But, as my colleague Gillian Rennie pointed out, perhaps the guiding question – when choosing a technique to tell a story – should be: "Does it do the *work* of the truth?" And that's the question our writers in the special section on literary journalism in this issue of *Review* seek to answer: Kevin Bloom travels Africa asking how to represent the new economic and social relationship with China, Billy Kahora engages Kenyan journalists in ways to document the violent aftermath of an election; a host of South African writers ask how the personal illuminates the political in a country still in rapid transition. It's a fitting time to shine a bright light on "the art of fact" (Kerrane and Yagoda's term for this form of journalism). Non-fiction publication is booming all over the world, and is flourishing in South Africa in particular. A host of new documenters/storytellers are expanding the spectrum of what can be said by using the eyes and lenses of the journalist to serve slightly different questions about the world we now live in (not so much "who" and "what" as "how" and "why").

We also bring you some reflections on the changing news media attitude to the once "hopeless" continent. "Africa is rising" is the new mantra and, in tune with the Highway Africa conference taking place at Rhodes University in September which dissects the new economic developments, their relationship to the news media and what they mean, we asked some well-positioned media people to think about that one and consider the implications for Africans.

Digital and social media continue to rock our world, so we take a foray into a post-audience, post-producer scenario

and get a feel for what it's like for media producers of multiple kinds (filmmakers, journalists, teachers, activists, democracy monitors) to cross the borders and work with very ordinary people to produce media of multiple types which speak about their lives and which help them make sense of politics at all levels. Citizenship as a real dimension of actual life, participation and voice are key drivers of the projects you'll read about on these pages.

And then there's the very necessary focus on media freedom, looming regulation and the questions provoked about journalism ethics and practices of accountability. South Africa is not the only country going through a tricky negotiation about how to get mainstream, privatised, commercial news media to lift their eyes from the bottom line (and in some cases untangle themselves from extremely questionable relations with politicians and other bureaucrats). As contributions from the UK situation (by Hugh Greenhalgh) and the Australia situation (by Julie Posetti) also show, figuring out how to regulate with a light, but directive hand, is a complex manoeuvre. The point is not to make the press accountable to the government, but to the people, and as yet we haven't figured that out with the finesse it needs. I like the way editor of the *Mail&Guardian* Nic Dawes understands the situation. He put it like this to a gathering of journalists in Cape Town in May (when the Menell fellows held their conference): the South African Constitution envisages a society of overlapping institutions of accountability and these "fundamentally licence and legitimise journalism and civic work". It is this "complex architecture" of institutions that we put our trust in to safeguard our democracy, our freedom and our right to voice our opinions and decisions. To dismantle this is to undo our democracy. But, Dawes also said, journalism that is not in a close relationship with justice, is a journalism that rapidly becomes irrelevant.

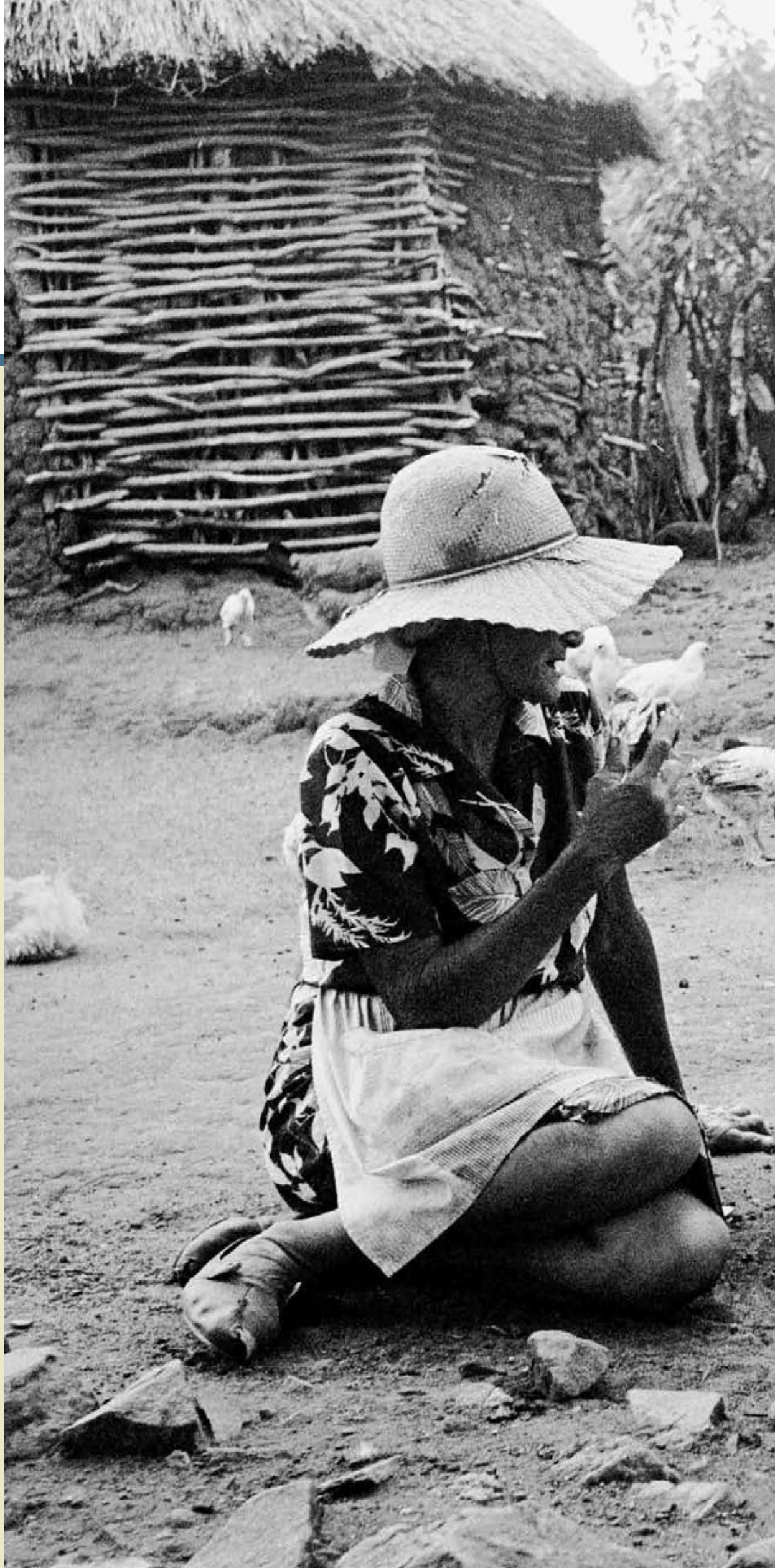
I've had to make some hard decisions to exclude from this 72-page *Review* stories that also deserve to be published. So I'd urge you to visit www.rjr.ru.ac.za for the extra bits that didn't make this edition.

Anthea Garman, Editor

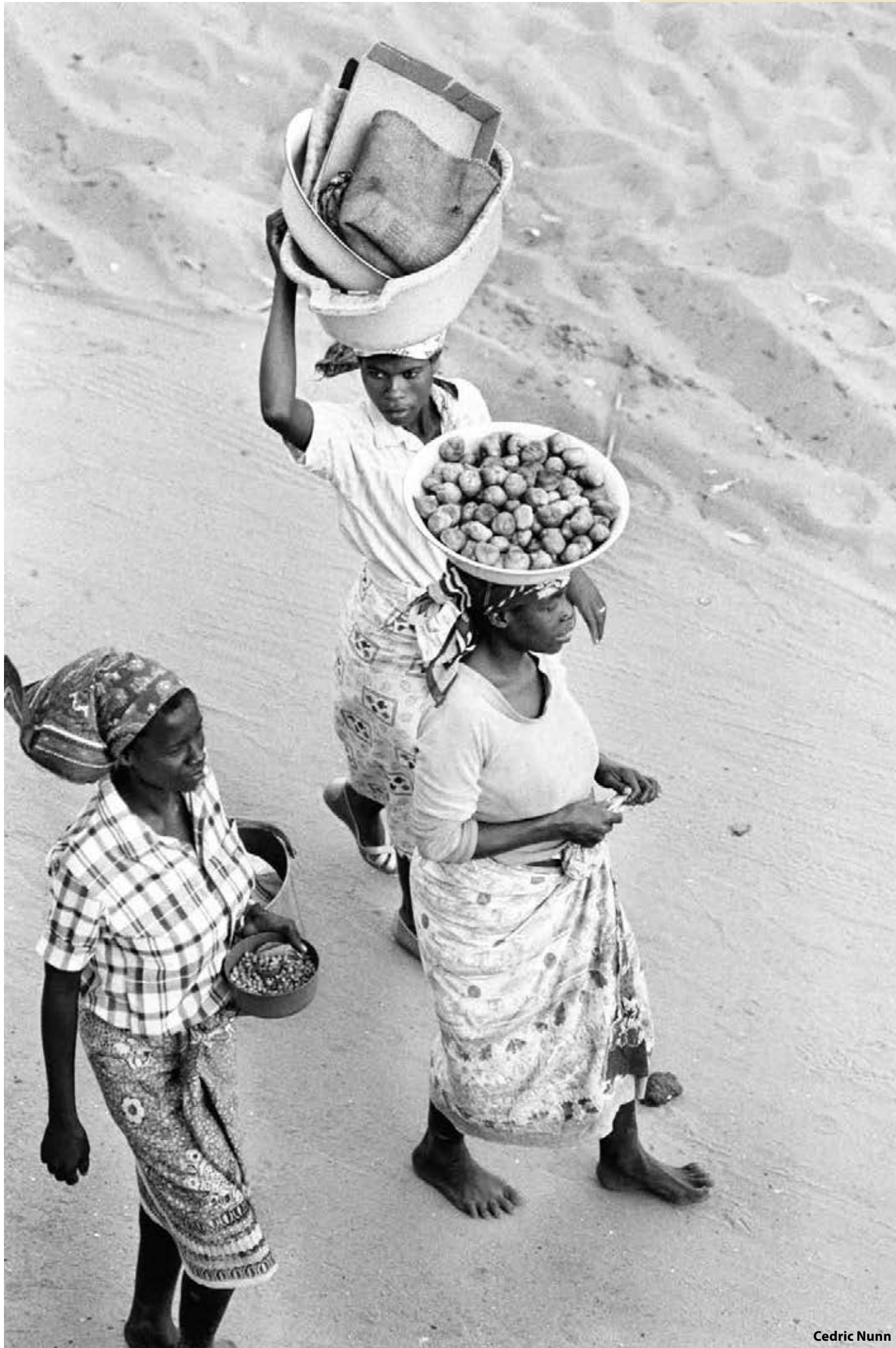
Cedric Nunn



**“NOW,
FOR THE FIRST TIME,
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THAT WE NEED
LESS FREEDOM,
NOT MORE.”**





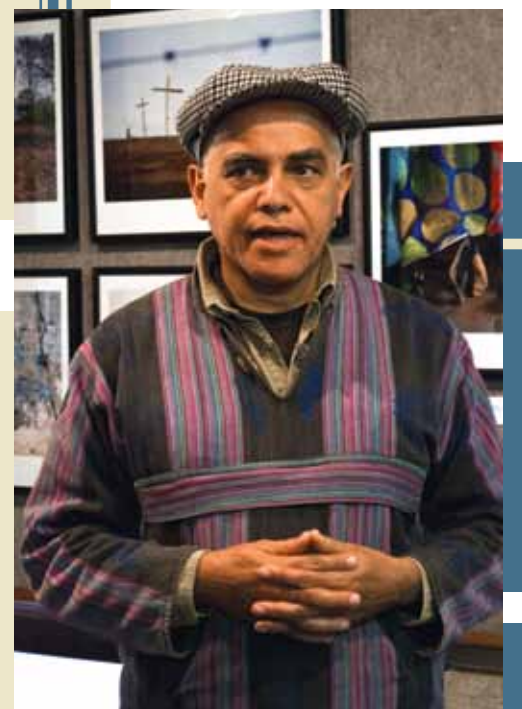


Cedric Nunn

CALL AND RESPONSE

Call and Response is a book (Fourthwall Publishers) and mid-career retrospective of Cedric Nunn's photography. The exhibition has been seen around South Africa and will travel to Germany, New York and Mozambique. Nunn generously allowed *Rhodes Journalism Review* the pick of his photographs for this edition. At the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown he told CueTV reporters Amaal Salie and Kyla Roux: "I used to lament in my 20s that I was forced to be

this political being because I was forced to confront a system that was deleterious to my being. As a documentary photographer in particular you have to face reality and deal with reality on a personal level... most of my images are about very ordinary people... I'm really amazed at most ordinary people I meet how extraordinary they are. Until the day comes that we celebrate that we will not see real transformation." <http://www.fourthwallbooks.com>



LAW AND CONSCIENCE

BY NIC DAWES

Journalists have spent the past two years worrying about, and mobilising against, legislative proposals that represent a threat to our work. We must be careful, however, not to miss the larger scheme of which the Protection of State Information Bill and proposals for more robust regulation of media content and ownership form only one part.

For nearly two decades South Africans have been debating how best to realise the more equitable society set out in the Constitution. We have adopted more conservative approaches – the macro-economic stabilisation strategy of the Gear years, for example, and more classically left strategies such as investment in state-owned companies and industrial policy – but the basic framework has never been up for grabs.

Now, for the first time, we are being pushed into a debate over the Constitution itself, and are being asked to consider the proposition that we need less freedom, not more.

The Protection of State Information Bill chills journalists because its draconian jail sentences and broadly drawn offences will ask us to choose between the demand of our conscience and that of the law, a choice that should not be imposed on us in a rights-based democracy. Conscience, vocation, and simple professional duty dictate that when we obtain credible information that reveals serious wrongdoing, we publish it, notwithstanding any “top secret” stamp on the front page. The Bill, on the other hand, demands that when we obtain such information we march down to the nearest police station and hand it over, or risk years in prison.

Of course conflicts between conscience and law were routine under apartheid, they were structured into our understanding of a criminal system, and our place in resisting it. In the Constitution, however, we have a basic law which aims to bring into harmony the dictates of law and of conscience. To see these duties crudely set up against each other as they are in the Bill is incomprehensible, even traumatic.

ANC proposals for a statutory Media Appeals Tribunal (MAT), which establishes the press complaints process in law, and allows politicians a role in appointing media commissars, is even more disturbing, because its scope extends to ethical regulation broadly, not just classified secrets. While

ANC secretary general Gwede Mantashe has said the party accepts the recommendations of the Press Freedom Commission for a tougher and more independent regime of voluntary regulation, the MAT is far from entirely off the table, and the threat is backed by pressure to deal with the (very real) transformation issues in newspaper ownership through a charter, despite the fact that within the tripartite alliance the charter process is broadly discredited as a machine for replicating a narrow elite, and for buying influence. More creative and perhaps more credible routes to transformation, it seems, are not acceptable to Parliament’s portfolio committee on communication, no doubt because they provide less political leverage.

These moves come as senior alliance figures, from President Jacob Zuma to South African Communist Party general secretary Blade Nzimande and the influential Deputy Correctional Services minister Ngoako Ramatlhodi, launch a broader attack on the constitutional scheme. Zuma and Nzimande question the power of judicial review that is at the heart of the rule of law, while Ramatlhodi describes the Constitution as a failed compromise that entrenches white dominance. To defend the courts, Nzimande tells us, is “anti-majoritarian” and a “liberal assault”.

Nowhere is the refusal to understand the structure of the Constitution more clear than when this approach is being voiced by Nzimande’s reasonable-sounding deputy, Jeremy Cronin, an increasingly vocal critic of the press, and of civil society, which he accuses of being harnessed to a “right-wing liberal” agenda.

In a textbook and ultimately very revealing aside in a recent article in the SACP’s online journal *Umrabulo*, Cronin asks: “Who voted for the *Mail&Guardian*?” He goes on to suggest that it is really through the state, and the majority party, with its large electoral mandate, that accountability should be demanded and democratic development should take place.

The objective of these remarks is clearly to delegitimise those who contest the untrammelled power of the government and the ruling party. They are of a piece with his attack on the union federation Cosatu for collaborating with unelected civil society groups, and they betray a fundamental

misunderstanding of the constitutional architecture.

Pace Cronin, Jimmy Manyi, and others, the Constitution does not ask us to trust the government nor the ANC. Indeed it does not even ask us to trust the state, with its architecture of separate executive, legislative and judicial powers.

On the contrary, our founding law envisages a set of overlapping institutions of accountability functioning in an “open democracy” where ideas can be exchanged, tested, and debated freely.

Special room is carved out within the broad right to free speech for the press for precisely that reason, and space for civil society, for trade unions, for scientists, artists, and academics is similarly guaranteed.

These rights are not ornaments glued onto to basic democratic structure because they look pretty in UN or World Bank surveys – they are part of its foundations. Journalism, activism, creativity, are legitimised not by an electoral mandate, but by the structure of our democracy.

They are classical individual rights, of course, but they are also intimately linked to the “progressive realisation” of socio-economic rights like access to housing and water, connecting the moral autonomy of human beings with their basic conditions of life. It is this insight which underpins the effective activism of organisations like the Right2Know campaign – formed in the aftermath of the Protection of State Information Bill – and the social justice coalition, which put freedom of information and of speech at the heart of the struggle in poor communities for basic services and an accountable government.

The fight to secure the space for journalism then, is part of a much broader battle for rights and for justice.

We can certainly debate how best we make use of the freedom we currently have, improving ethical standards in journalism, committing more resources to training, developing sustainable and appropriate approaches to transformation and diversity in both ownership and newsrooms. If we retreat from the assertion of our fundamental constitutional and democratic role, however, or conceive of it in narrow and sectoral terms, we will find ourselves watching from the sidelines as the extraordinary progress of the past 18 years is rolled back.

MEDDLING WITH THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT

BY RAYMOND LOUW

We are all aware of the loud opposition that has been voiced by many civil society institutions against the Protection of State Information Bill and how the government's determination to have it enacted in law has been severely criticised. This, however, is only one aspect of an environment where government leaders have expressed hostility to the press – which some have labelled “the opposition” – and adopted other practices which obstruct the press and prevent the public from knowing what is going on. The press and many civil society institutions have been highly critical of the misrule, serious shortcomings in service delivery, ever-increasing levels of corruption and other deficiencies in government. As a result the government has resorted to attempts to cloak its activities in secrecy.

Government officials obfuscate or withhold information – including official reports which should be released to the public – and reporters and photographers have been arrested at crime scenes or other events under police control only to have the cases thrown out of court. Not one case has been prosecuted. Fortunately, these attacks on journalists have diminished, probably because of protests by the South African National Editors' Forum. However, there are laws enacted that can hobble the media and others waiting to be processed.

In a similar category to the “Secrecy Bill” are the Protection of Personal Information Bill, introduced to protect people's privacy but which will inhibit publication; the National Key Points Act, which prevents publication of security information at certain institutions and buildings – which are not identified; the Protection from Harassment Act, which will restrict journalists from gathering information by “staking out” the office or home of a person who refuses to answer questions over the telephone; anti-terrorism legislation called the Protection of Constitutional Democracy Against Terrorist and Related Activities Act; the Films and Publications Act, which provides for pre-publication censorship; the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act; and waiting, in the wings, draft laws concerning public broadcasting and the operations of Icas (Independent Communications Authority of SA). We are still to discover how the Traditional Courts Bill and the General Intelligence Laws Amendment Bill will affect the media.

In Parliament, ministers have refused to answer questions from opposition parties on grounds that they are official secrets; Press Gallery correspondents have been removed from the offices close to the debating chamber that they have occupied since 1910 and accommodated in another building presumably to prevent them from having informal access to Members of Parliament for confidential discussions. Another move that angered parliamentary journalists was the compilation by the Presiding Officers of a parliamentary code of conduct for journalists without them being consulted.

That's not the end of it. There is also the African National Congress (ANC) official who tried to encourage supporters to burn down the *Herald* offices in Port Elizabeth – he professed that it was only a copy of the paper he wanted to burn – and another looming danger is the ANC proposal to set up a statutory media appeals tribunal which it is feared will set in motion measures to control the press. Hostility by government towards the press is one of the reasons cited by Freedom House, the New York-based monitor of the freedom of nations and their media, to downgrade South Africa from a “free” country – since 1994 – to “partly free”.

But the really worrying aspect of government-media relations is the threat by government and senior ANC leaders of curbs against the judiciary and the Constitutional Court. These leaders with President Jacob Zuma at the forefront have set the alarm bells ringing among journalists

and lawyers as well as academics because of their stated intention to review the judgments and conduct of the Constitutional Court and their impact on transformation.

Despite the recent publication of the terms of reference for the review of the judiciary which emphasise judicial independence, the separation of powers and the supremacy of the Constitution, there are grave doubts about the government's real motives. In an interview with *The Star*, President Zuma bluntly disclosed that what he wants is a review of the powers of the Constitutional Court. He said, “We don't want to review the Constitutional Court, we want to review its powers.” A few months earlier, on July 8 last year, he complained that the powers conferred on the courts cannot be superior to the powers of a body elected in popular democratic elections – Parliament. He added that the government's political opponents should not be able to subvert the popularly elected government by using the courts “to co-govern the country”.

One interpretation of his view is that he wants to reduce the powers of Constitutional Court judges so that they are subservient to Parliament. If this is what he means and he gets his way, this will be the end of constitutional democracy in South Africa. Indeed, the Black Lawyers' Association read this into his statements. It said they reflected an intention by Zuma to revert to the National Party model of governance where Parliament and not the Constitution is supreme. BLA president Pritzman Mabunda, in referring to what Zuma wants, said, “the only way is to divorce the current constitutional democracy and remarry parliamentary sovereignty.” This means Parliament would be the ultimate arbiter of judicial decisions – in effect that the politicians of the majority party in Parliament would have the power to decide on jurisprudence on political grounds rather than the rule of law.

The published terms of reference for the review suggest this is not intended. Some observers, however, describe this as a tactical retreat by the government because of the massive opposition it has encountered.

But I don't see Zuma climbing down. He cannot interfere with the powers of the judiciary directly because he does not have the required two-thirds majority in Parliament to bring this about by constitutional change. That means he has to turn elsewhere. The most obvious move is to look to the discredited Judicial Service Commission, the body that nominates judges which Zuma appoints. The *Daily Maverick* claims the ANC dominates the commission. It estimates the party has 14 potential votes among the 23 members composed of judges, advocates, attorneys, and members of Parliament and the National Council of Provinces. If the *Daily Maverick's* calculation is accurate, Zuma can use that majority to bring about the nomination of judges who support his views so that he can appoint them.

When American President Roosevelt tried that trick he was thwarted by the new judges promptly jettisoning their support for him and adopting the constitutional court's mantle of independence. There's no guarantee that if Zuma opts for that strategy, he will be similarly balked. However, there is no knowing what means Zuma will resort to in seeking to review the judiciary's powers.

The uncertainty and dangers surrounding Zuma's intentions lead me to make an earnest appeal to South Africans to exercise maximum vigilance over his and the government's actions in relation to the judiciary and the Constitution as well as in regard to secrecy and restrictive legislation. If there is a hint of unconstitutional conduct people must protest loudly and long. The Constitutional Court is the last line of defence to preserve press freedom – indeed all our freedoms. We must prevent South African being rated “not free” – which would mean our descent into an authoritarian state, if not worse.





THE FRACTURED PUBLIC INTEREST

BY KIM GURNEY

“Did you see all those people in there, with their glasses and their fancy vocabulary, sitting around talking about a painting? It’s so bourgeois!”

I slowed down my footsteps to better catch the animated voices of two students dissecting the aftermath of a debate on *The Spear*, hosted at Wits University the same evening that the Goodman Gallery and ANC announced agreement about handling Brett Murray’s contentious artwork.

The provocateur continued: “They think they have the right to be critical but it’s a joke... Do you think people are sitting around the table now in Polokwane discussing art?!” He reckoned artists had the right to make what they wanted but now people were using it as a platform to say what they lacked the guts to say outright. “Why don’t you stop at the traffic lights and just say: ‘Hey man, that’s not cool’.”

A passerby caught my enjoyment. “They’re having a great conversation!” he said. And that was perhaps the take-home point: *The Spear* became a vector for words that needed to be spoken and heard. These were delivered in charged tones, due to the nested issues the painting provoked. It depicted the president in Lenin-like pose with his penis exposed, which ignited a tinderbox mid-May including legal action against the offending gallery and artist as well as *City Press* newspaper, which publicised the work. The conflagration was largely defused a fortnight later with a climb-down regarding publishing digital images of the portrait and removing the painting itself from exhibition.

The fallout from this saga is still manifesting in the social fabric. But an overlooked broader impact concerns notions of the public interest. This has implications for all sectors of society invoked in the freedom of expression clause of the Constitution – specifically the press and other media, artistic creativity, and academic freedom.

In short, *The Spear* has shown the public to be fractured with dissenting ideas of what is in its interest. Yet this same splintered public is regularly invoked by various actors, including journalists, in ethical defence. A new understanding of the public is needed to better grasp the divisive responses to *The Spear* and move forward.

The everyday street is a good place to find shifting notions of the public manifest. Where does truly public space exist? An exploratory group walk into the heart of

Johannesburg inner city on a May Saturday afternoon by artist Donna Kukama revealed a sobering answer: the apparently free pavement is effectively privatised. A linked performance piece by artist Bettina Malcomess, which involved a several-minute impromptu polish of Kukama’s leather shoes, elicited over-bearingly officious responses from security guards. On a pavement adjacent to Bree Street, where anti-loitering laws presumably govern, they descended almost immediately to summarily dismiss the group. This after filing a surreal report over walkie-talkie back to the control room: “They are making art.”

The bristle between public and private extends to loftier spheres too: a recent article in *The Economist* (19 May) spoke about the shrinking public company in the light of growing private equity and other financial structures. *The Spear* deftly brings to light this renegotiation by highlighting two actors with different public agendas: the fourth estate and a private commercial art gallery.

The former, in the shape of *City Press*, decided to pull digital images of the artwork after reconsidering its broader effects. Its decision was largely strategic to better serve a public mandate: editor Ferial Haffajee explained that in a political year her now-targeted journalists needed access to related events and copies of the paper were being burnt, among other factors. It was a move “from care and fear”. The gallery very shortly followed suit and reached agreement with the ANC to remove the offending artwork given “the real distress and hurt that this image has caused some people”, and in time the website image also in a gesture of goodwill.

Political pressure set the public interest agenda, for better or worse. And perhaps that was not surprising, given an increasingly explicit conflation of art and politics. Brett Murray has long used the visual language of political satire but a broader political turn in the art world is a noticeable trend internationally. For instance, the current 7th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art includes the presence of Occupy, 15M and other protestors in the hall of the KW Institute for Contemporary Art. This is part of a broader goal, according to a statement by curator Artur Żmijewski, “to open access to performative and effective politics that would equip we ordinary citizens with the tools of action and

change. Art is one of these tools”.

This increasing symbiosis between art and politics is contentious terrain, for deliberation on another forum. But when such issues play themselves out in the media, including who has the right to represent whom and in what manner in a country with a fresh democracy and lingering wounds, such debates flag broader concerns around public interest. They do so at a time when the regulatory landscape is also morphing. The Press Freedom Commission has recently mooted “independent co-regulation”.

The South African Press Code explicitly states that the work of the press is at all times guided by the public interest, understood to describe “information of legitimate interest or importance to citizens”. Furthermore, it states: “News shall be obtained legally, honestly and fairly in accordance with the laws of the country, unless public interest dictates otherwise.” This public interest rider recurs for subterfuge, right to privacy and defamation, the latter where truth plus public interest or reasonableness may be a defence. These rights are counterbalanced by the obligation not to publish material amounting to hate speech, among other limitations.

A similar tension is evident in the UK’s Leveson Inquiry into the press, following last year’s phone-hacking revelations at *News of the World*. A high-profile media executive is being criminally prosecuted for phone hacking but a related case about email interception is pleading public interest. This increasingly grey line becomes more difficult to draw, particularly by journalists themselves. The UK director of public prosecutions is thus compiling a guidance note for a public interest definition.

Cue a return to “those people with their glasses and fancy vocabulary”. Because speaking to all this flux is a growing global notion of ‘the commons’, cogently articulated in academia. Professor Ash Amin of Cambridge University, in a 2011 blog interview associated with the journal *Theory, Culture and Society*, describes this as “a politics of universal welfare, the urban crowd, the shared commons, the indiscriminating public infrastructure, the porous border, the mixity of things, the surprises of pluralism, and the public arena as field of open and agonistic contest”. This approach would entail a new kind of thinking about a public and a fresh take on its interest.

THE NEED FOR NUANCE

BY HERMAN WASSERMAN

"I think that sometimes the media also positions itself as an opposition to the state. Especially in a situation where you have quite a strong ruling party and a weak and splintered opposition, the media assumes an advocacy role which in some cases is healthy but in some cases that can actually distort progress."

The above comment, made by a journalist interviewed a few years ago as part of a large comparative study on political communication in 'new democracies', reflects an attitude that is not only prevalent in political reporting in South Africa, but also informs broader debates about media-state relations. It goes something like this: South Africa is governed by a big, powerful ruling party. This party is opposed by an array of smaller parties, the biggest of which – the Democratic Alliance (DA) – is seen as the home of white liberals and therefore easily dismissed by the ruling ANC. It is therefore up to the media to act as a *de facto* opposition and keep the government accountable. The media, for all its claims to be a neutral and 'objective' observer, has in other words become a political player in its own right.

This comment, and others like it that emerged in those interviews, are not surprising when one considers that the post-apartheid media has largely fashioned its role as that of a 'watchdog'. (Remember the outcry when SABC Board member Thami Mazwai in 2006 suggested the SABC plays the role of a 'guide dog' rather than a 'lap dog' or 'watchdog'?). That the adversarial – and at times antagonistic – role that the South African media have been playing in the democratic era has already borne fruit is undeniable. From big scandals like the Arms Deal to the weekly reports of corruption, mismanagement and conflicts of interest from municipal to national level, the South African media continues to display a vigilance that should inspire pride and gratitude. It goes without saying that the media plays a vital role in holding government accountable – although whether the government responds adequately to these exposés is another question altogether.

Where an over-eagerness on the part of the media to play the role of an unofficial opposition does become problematic, is when it lapses into a binary discourse that prevents us from having nuanced debates about the media's role in post-apartheid democracy. The ongoing arguments about media freedom that have been raging around the proposed Media Appeals Tribunal (MAT) and the Protection of State Information Bill (PSIB), have unfortunately too often been examples of the latter type of discourse. In the heated, emotionally-charged exchanges, rhetorical points were scored that were not always helpful in developing an understanding of the shifting relationships between media, state, civil society and markets in the current juncture.

Take for instance the comparisons made between the current government's

attempts to regulate media and stifle freedom of expression with the repression of the apartheid state. Nic Dawes, the editor of the *Mail & Guardian*, made an attempt at nuance by tweeting that "the point is not a crude analogy with the criminal apartheid state, it is the recent memory of unfreedom. A resonance, not a comparison". But when the National Press Club called on supporters to wear black clothing on the day that Parliament was to vote on the PSIB, the comparison with apartheid was made explicit. The day of the parliamentary vote was dubbed 'Black Tuesday' in reminiscence of 'Black Wednesday' in 1977 when the apartheid government banned two newspapers and 19 black consciousness movements. The original 'Black Tuesday' was also characterised by mass arrests, detentions and was preceded by the murder of political leader Steve Biko. Critics were quick to point out that the conditions were very different then, to put it mildly.

An optimistic reading of these often highly rhetorical responses could see the public participation in campaigns opposing the PSIB as a hopeful sign that the post-apartheid public can lay claim to the rights as citizens and exercise agency. Protesters against the PSIB were allowed to voice their criticisms vocally and publically, without being harassed or imprisoned. Some observers have noted that the same courtesy has not been extended to public protests around rights to housing, eviction or land, for example. Examples include the overzealous response of Cape Town's city police when mostly working class black residents attempted to meet and protest in a public field in a white suburb in Cape Town. Even worse was the lethal force used by police in social delivery protests like the one in which school teacher Andries Tatane was killed in 2011 in the Free State province.

The already adversarial relationship between the press and the ruling party – which had never been favourable – now degenerated into insult and hyperbole with little room for nuance, partly because of the stakes. During these various debates, the competing normative frameworks for the media became evident. Most common on the one end of the spectrum were political economy critiques (e.g. the trade union Cosatu's submission to the Press Freedom Commission) which saw the media as a vehicle for capitalist elites and therefore in need of outside regulation, while on the other end of the spectrum (the position mostly taken by media institutions themselves) there was an insistence on self-regulation underpinned by liberal pluralism, sometimes

with an attempt at paradigm repair by suggesting ways of improving the complaints mechanism or imposing stricter sanctions.

Journalists clearly felt beleaguered, but because the media constantly repeated the mantra of being under attack, it enforced a stark either/or choice that tended to obscure the nuances in the various positions put forward in response to the proposed MAT and the PSIB. The very fact that these different issues were often conflated in public debates illustrated the highly polarised nature of the arguments. It all started to boil down to a simple dichotomy: you were either for press freedom or against it.

Subsequent incidents consequently became over-determined as always-already being about freedom of expression. When the SABC decided not to screen a mediocre and ideologically dodgy Nando's ad (and commercial channels followed suit), it was quick to be seen as censorship. When the ANC, predictably in an election year (for party leadership), reacted against the depiction of president Jacob Zuma's genitals in Brett Murray's now infamous *Spear of the Nation* artwork, the outcry against the "attack on artistic freedom" tended to drown out the more considered voices of commentators remarking on the recurring postcolonial tropes of the black body as exotic and sexualised or the role of the artist as court jester.

Steven Friedman has argued that the mainstream press's response to real and perceived threats to freedom of expression has revealed a middle-class bias. In analysing the journalistic preoccupations that these responses seek to defend and the phrasing of the press's attempts to oppose state control, Friedman argues that the mainstream media's understanding of freedom is restricted to the liberties of the suburban middle classes. This positioning of the press, in his view, makes it increasingly unlikely that free expression can be effectively defended.

In his reflection on recent South African debates about media freedom, Peter McDonald has argued that the press invoked the spectre of apartheid censorship as a polemical move to resist threats to their freedom. When these historical parallels are analysed critically, the backward look to the apartheid era "fuels cynicism, Afropessimism and a host of other dubious feelings". McDonald expressed doubts that the most recent threats to the freedom of expression constitute a return to apartheid censorship, and argues that there is no moral equivalence between what happened then, and what is happening now.

This is not to say that there is nothing to be concerned about in the current climate regarding freedom of expression. The point is, that we need to debate these issues in a more nuanced way that does not cast suspicion or doubt on those that dare criticise the media, or that are trying to imagine

different configurations for the relationship between media and state.

Debates around press freedom are of course hardly limited to South Africa, and in assessing recent developments in this country it would be instructive to also look further afield to other countries in Africa, but also other new democracies around the world. Such comparisons have been made by, amongst others, Colin Sparks. He questions the paradigm of "transition" for studying the media's relation to political and social change, especially when countries such as contemporary China and Russia are brought into the comparison. Instead, Sparks suggests a model centred on the process of "elite continuity and renewal". Critics like Francis Nyamnjoh, Steven Friedman and Peter McDonald have also pointed out that the debates around press freedom in this context have often been marked by a simplistic binary between media and state, in which commercial media are often seen as inherently independent rather than political and economic role-players that themselves are positioned within an array of power relations. In a debate that has become characterised by rhetorical throwbacks to the struggle against apartheid, making use of simplistic dualities such as "freedom" versus "control", "self-regulation" versus "statutory intervention" actually narrows the space for reflection and debate instead of defending it.

The heated debates surrounding media freedom also emphasise the importance of research-based, scholarly interventions into the often emotional and rhetorical debates about the role of the media in South Africa. These debates provide us with the opportunity to reflect on meta-debates in journalism: how journalists talk about journalism, how they position themselves in relation to other participants in public debates, and how discourses reveal power relations between different political stakeholders. For one, it prompts us to interrogate the media's claims to being a disinterested spectator, the mere 'messenger' who continually pleads not be shot at. The debate about media freedom is a political one, and journalists have shown themselves to be anything but apolitical bystanders.

The above article draws on the introduction to Wasserman's new edited book *Press Freedom in Africa: Comparative Perspectives*, published in June by Routledge, as well as a chapter co-written with Sean Jacobs for the *State of the Nation 2012*, forthcoming at HSRC Press. Results of the comparative study on political communication were published as: "Freedom's just another word? Perspectives on the media freedom and responsibility in South Africa and Namibia". *International Communication Gazette* 72(7): 567-588. For views on the Nando's ad, see <http://africasacountry.com/2012/06/08/fried-chicken-nationalism/#more-51888>



WHERE IS THE INTROSPECTION?

BY CHRIS VICK

Four months ago, I started writing a weekly column for *Business Day* on media and politics in an attempt to shed some light on the dark side of how our media functions, how this affects our democracy, and why South Africans should be worried.

Among other things, I have highlighted an increasing number of ethical lapses. These have resulted in, among other things, more journalists resorting to “churnalism”, more journalists doing PR work on the side, and more people saying they know of journalists who take bribes. All of which has a seriously negative impact on the quality of South African journalism and perceptions of the profession and its products.

I’ve also looked at some of the problems this causes, how it is manifested in structures like the “press clubs”, and tried to get the SA National Editors’ Forum to start taking a more responsible position in speaking out about ethical lapses.

I’m not the only person highlighting these problems. A few more writers, including *Business Day* editor Peter Bruce and a fellow spin doctor, Rams Mabote, have started asking similar questions in recent weeks.

There has also been more published proof of journalists taking bribes – for example, the *Argus* “brown envelope” case and the journalist in Mpumalanga who wrote favourably about politicians after an ANC leader bought him a few beers. More recently, *City Press* published extracts from an SAPS report which, among other things, claimed that journalists had been paid between R50 000 and R100 000 to either write positively about the police, or to “kill” negative stories about the police.

The responses to my columns calling for a clean-up of media ethics can be clustered in two categories:

Congratulations from a range of people in newsrooms (generally mid-

career journalists who witness these problems every day and are frustrated that they aren’t being addressed) and from South Africans who feel the media needs some serious scrutiny due to its power and influence.

Vitriol from editors such as *City Press*’ Ferial Haffajee (who called me a “coward” because I did not name journalists who were said to have taken bribes) and the *Mail&Guardian*’s Nic Dawes (who compared me to the devil because of the reputation management work I do, which he described as “delivering bullshit disguised as bonbons”).

Primedia’s head of news and public affairs, Yusuf Abramjee – who is probably the most conflicted man in the South African media because of all the hats he wears – also didn’t take kindly to exposure of the growing presence of PR people in what he calls the National Press Club.

The key question which came, again and again, from critics was: “What is Vick’s motive?” Haffajee refers to the work I do as “the dark side”. Dawes tags me as some form of stalking horse for a media appeals tribunal, while Abramjee seems incapable of more than indignant letters asking what my “agenda” is.

The key question I keep putting back at them is: “Why do you have such thin skins? Why is it so easy to parade the supposed shortcoming of other members of society, but not hold a mirror up to yourself? Where is the introspection?”

At the same time, I have made my motive clear: As I wrote in *Business Day* in early May, “I seek an end to obvious conflicts of interest, and yearn for more ethical journalism. And a clear distinction between the people who make the news and the people who report it.”

That may sound strange, coming from someone whose profession actually benefits from the ethical lapses. After all, once you’ve got over the fact that it’s completely unprofessional for a journalist to put their byline on your press release,

there’s quite a kick for you and your client in seeing your message conveyed, word for word, as you issued it.

But that’s because I approach this matter on more than one level. Yes, I’m a spin doctor and I’m paid to get things into print or on air in a form that suits the interests of my client. I’m hired precisely because of my ability to promote and protect the interests of my client.

But as a South African, as someone who cares about our democracy and the crucial role our media play in protecting and promoting that democracy, I worry about what these ethical lapses are doing to the quality of our media, and to their ability to accurately reflect what is really going on in South Africa.

After all, I may be one of the few people in the so-called PR profession who calls themselves a “spin doctor”. But I’m certainly not the only one who’s trying to get their clients’ message across, unfiltered and unmediated, across as many media platforms as possible, and who will take advantage of weaknesses in the newsrooms we interact with.

So if I’m able to take advantage of poorly-trained and poorly-resourced journalists, so are people in political parties, in the intelligence community, in business and in the underworld.

That, ultimately, is why I would like to hear a richer conversation about how to get things fixed. I’d like to see more introspection in newsrooms about what editors already know about ethical lapses. I’d like to see a more proactive posture from editors and their collectives (such as Sanef) in acknowledging that there are problems, and in dealing with them.

The irony, of course, is that this process has already begun – quietly. I am aware of discussions taking place in the *Mail&Guardian*, *City Press* and *Avusa* in recent weeks about the contents of some of my columns, and in other newsrooms. These discussions have centred around some of the ethical lapses I’ve identified and have, in some cases, resulted in a

tightening of processes around conflicts of interest, disclosures and codes of conduct.

I don’t want any credit for this, nor do I expect it. That’s not the nature of the people in editorial decision-making positions.

I just hope that the next time someone comes along with criticism of the way our newsrooms work, the editorial decision-makers will treat whistleblowers from their own profession the same way they treat whistleblowers from other sectors of society – in other words, give them a hearing, investigate the allegations, and take an informed and relatively objective assessment. Rather than reaching for the vitriol bucket.



WHAT'S ROTTEN IN THE STATE OF SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALISM?

BY NATASHA JOSEPH

Earlier this year, I was invited to talk about the right to freedom of expression as part of Rhodes University's annual Human Rights Week, which coincides with South Africa's Human Rights Day. It was suggested that I might want to discuss the Protection of State Information Bill, the ominous Media Appeals Tribunal, or both. Perhaps I could have done those things – the bill and the tribunal are harrowing threats to our work as journalists, and to South Africans' freedom of access to information.

Around the same time, though, the man who had suddenly become South Africa's most famous spin doctor and the arch nemesis of indignant journalists, Chris Vick, used column inches everywhere to suggest that we needed to turn the mirror around and look directly at ourselves if we were to properly engage with the bill and tribunal. Although I found Vick's tone galling and wondered about his motives, it was also clear that he was asking important questions and, critically, had hit a massive nerve among South African journalists. Why were we so enraged by his suggestions, insinuations and his systematic pulling back of the veil to reveal some of the practices we know must be scrapped from our industry? Perhaps, I thought, because we knew that in many ways he was right.

Self-reflection is hard, and maybe particularly so for people who spend their professional lives demanding reflection from others. But it felt right, in my head and heart, to use the opportunity at Rhodes to talk more deeply about what we could have done, or what we were still doing, to invite derision and attack – from the ruling party, for starters, but most importantly, from our readers, listeners and viewers

– the people for whom we assess and analyse news.

There are a number of recent examples of South African journalists behaving badly. My professional alma mater, the *Cape Argus*, broke the story that had lurked beneath its own surface for some years – allegations that a former political editor and a senior journalist had been paid to produce stories which painted then-Western Cape Premier Ebrahim Rasool's enemies in a bad light. The journalists in question no longer work for the *Argus* – Joseph Aranes resigned when the story broke, and Ashley Smith had left some years previously, resigning while disciplinary proceedings related to the allegations were underway. Aranes has repeatedly denied the allegations. Smith produced an affidavit in which he described what had happened and named both Aranes and several highly-placed politicians, including Rasool (who is now South Africa's ambassador to the United States). Nobody has been criminally charged, and it has taken a lengthy court battle for the *Argus* to access the findings of an internal ANC report into the "brown envelope saga".

Why were we so enraged by his suggestions, insinuations and his systematic pulling back of the veil to reveal some of the practices we know must be scrapped from our industry? Perhaps, I thought, because we knew that in many ways he was right.

This seemed in some ways to be the catalyst for a spate of attacks on the industry – as though the claims against Smith and Aranes meant we were all on the take. Politicians, and Vick, frequently refer to brown envelopes when taking aim at journalists or threatening us with tribunals. In Mpumalanga, a reporter at a community newspaper admitted to accepting beer and being tempted with government tenders to write stories savaging Premier David Mabuza's political opponents. Again, nobody has been criminally charged, and Mabuza and his allies have repeatedly denied the allegations. *City Press*' correspondent in Mpumalanga, Sizwe Sama Yende, took Mabuza's spin doctor to court after being offered money to drop a story. The case is ongoing. Another of our reporters has been approached by people offering money to write – or not write, in some cases – stories. The ease with which these offers are made suggests that people confidently expect reporters to take the money, which points the finger firmly back at our industry.

There are other examples. In preparing for my lecture, I asked colleagues in the media and those who work in PR to share some stories. I learned of one magazine publisher who kept products for herself: these had been earmarked as giveaways, but she dished them out to friends and family, and was genuinely affronted and shocked when tackled by the brand's PR company. Several people flagged the issue of "freebies" – lunches, outfits, weekends away – and wondered whether some journalists' willingness to accept these without question or disclosure meant they were corrupt or corruptible.

The uncomfortable truth is that we need to talk about our industry honestly, but instead we are largely defensive and try to turn the conversation away from ourselves. It is not good enough for South African journalists to say, "We're not so bad – a look at the politicians!" That said, there is no denying that corruption among politicians and officials is out of control – and in some cases, these same politicians and officials try to muddy the waters by pointing fingers at the media when they're in hot water. Our behaviour must be beyond reproach.

But how do we achieve this? I'd venture that an open, honest, difficult series of conversations is the starting point. We need to ask each other whether accepting freebies is muddling our motives. We need to talk honestly and openly about ethics; about how to train and equip newcomers to the industry so that they are ethically able to do the best job possible, and about how to ensure that those who have been in the industry for many years don't develop bad habits. This is no quick-fix situation. A single day's discussion won't cut it; nor would an entire week. We need to talk constantly, perhaps obsessively, to ensure that we are holding each other, and ourselves, to account. We owe our audiences that much as we tread ever closer to a South African information landscape ruled more than ever before by secrecy and silence.



Cedric Nunn

LEADERSHIP, ETHICS
AND JOURNALISM

BY JAMES A JOSEPH

Alexis de Tocqueville, the Frenchman who was a keen observer of civic life, said almost 200 years ago, "You can't have real newspapers without democracy and you can't have real democracy without newspapers." I am sure that he would extend his observation today to include all forms of media.

As one concerned with leadership and ethics (my primary experience as an academic and a civic activist, as well as teacher and researcher, has been with both these topics), I must begin with the definition of ethics in journalism as "obedience to the unenforceable". This concept, introduced by the British judge, Lord Moulton, includes moral duty, social responsibility, and proper behaviour, but extends beyond them to cover all cases of doing right where there is no one to make you do it but yourself. I spent 14 years running a large membership organisation in Washington who wanted me to tell their story to the public and to protect them from unnecessary government regulation. One of the things I learned especially applicable to journalism is that, while self-regulation is preferable to government regulation, in the absence of visible and viable evidence of self-regulation you invite and increase public demand for government regulation.

Media surveys by organisations like the Pew Centre tell us that the public believes the line between reporting and commentary has become blurred and so has the line between entertainment and news. There is also widespread belief that the news media spends more time serving elites, or attacking elites, than in providing useful information for ordinary citizens. Jim Lehr, a television commentator, has said, "Journalism as practised by some has become something akin to professional wrestling – something to watch rather than believe." Others argue that the contemporary media does a good job of covering the noise, but need to do a better job in covering the silence.

With these comments by some of your colleagues as a backdrop, we return to the question of not simply what is ethics, but how do we apply them. For those of us who see journalism as a profession with noble purpose and committed to responsible practices, the four burning questions are:

The idea of civic duty

Does journalism have a responsibility to contribute to citizenship, that is, to help people figure out what kind of role they can play in a democracy beyond voting? Democracy used to mean a system of government in which the people have the power, but it has come to mean in far too many places a system of government where the people have the vote which is not necessarily the same as having the power.

The idea of civic diplomacy

Why do many in the public see the practice of journalism as more akin to the attack-dog role that creates confusion, rather than the role of an intermediary whose responsibility it is to provide clarity? I discovered a long time ago that it was neither effective nor responsible to simply yell at public officials I wished to influence or even simply to report the diatribes of others who are yelling. From my earliest days in the civil rights movement, I have always believed in trying to bring civility to confrontation – trying to show respect for the humanity of the adversary even while struggling to change their practice.

The idea of civic dialogue

Could it be, as some suggest, that today's press does a better job of holding leaders accountable than in holding citizens

responsible? One advocate of civic journalism argues that if journalists did their job differently, citizens might do their job differently. Others ask: "Are we contributing to conflict or consensus?" Balance is not just presenting opposing viewpoints, but viewpoints that help get at the whole story in ways that enlighten rather than outrage.

The idea of civic definition

Does the practice of ethical journalism now require the shaping of a new definition of what is newsworthy? Market forces have changed the definition of news, with both markets and ratings a critical driver of what is covered and even how it is covered. We may also need to stop defining news as conflict; winners versus losers, good versus bad. The dominant framework for narrative has become the sports analogy where we report not on the game but simply the scores.

We come now to the question of leadership in journalism. Is it appropriate to think of journalists as leaders rather than simply intermediaries? In other words, do journalists have a responsibility to lead or simply to reflect the concerns and conversations they hear? Regardless of how you answer that question, one thing is clear. Responsible journalists must go beyond pre-conceived ideas about an issue or listening only to the loudest voices. All of society benefits when you find ways to listen to those who are silent as much as to those who are shouting.

When I think of leadership in journalism, I think of some of the same qualities that are required for effective leadership in other sectors of a democracy. The first of these is emotional intelligence. The journalists who are most sensitive to their social responsibilities are likely to demonstrate self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy and social skills. There is no contradiction between the ability to be objective and the capacity to feel another's pain or to feel a need to share another's burden. There is no contradiction between the exercise of self-regulation and the need for some form of social regulation by the profession or the public.

The second requirement for being socially responsible is moral intelligence. There is a lot of talk about ethics in public life, but far too many people use the word to offer judgement on someone else's behaviour rather than to scrutinise their own. We have seen the rise of virtuecrats whose primary interest is in transforming the private virtues of their particular faith tradition into the public values of the nation state. Journalists must be able to distinguish between the deliberate use or misuse of ethics to promote a political agenda and its use to unite a community or call a nation to a common purpose. Civil rights activists in the 1960s understood the distinction between the politics of virtue and the practice of virtue, between the parochialism of dogma and the public requirements of democracy.

Why does moral intelligence matter? The first answer is that most of the great issues of the day are moral issues. A second reason is pragmatic. More and more leaders are finding it in their self-interest to be ethical. At least half of the organisational leaders studied for the book *Value Shift* characterised ethics as risk management. They see values not just as a tool for ensuring fairness and preventing misconduct,

but as a way of avoiding the high-profile missteps of government leaders, the great financial losses experienced by some corporations, and the embarrassment brought to some newspapers because of unethical behaviour.

A third reason is that, while ethics has been used to domesticate and humanise power, we live increasingly in a world where ethics *is* power. Many consumers are now making choices on the basis of what they consider to be responsible behaviour: how the company treats its workforce, its gender and race policies, its impact on the environment. Executive recruiters report that boards of directors and CEOs still want key people who can make the company money, make tough decisions, and fit the management team, but now there is an even stronger interest in ethics, values and goals.

Ethics is also power in the nongovernmental sector, where so many of the organisations that populate the space between the market and the state are being forced to re-examine what it means to be accountable to a public. People now see leaders in civil society as custodians of values as well as resources.

Cedric Nunn



Ethics is even power in international relations, where world leaders are discovering that, while military power and economic muscle can prevent or inflict pain, it is diplomacy – acts of generosity, moral messages and respect for local cultures – that can best develop the kind of influence most likely to endure.

The third element required is social intelligence, beginning with understanding and respecting the dignity of difference. What most of the public want was best expressed by Howard Thurman, the African American mystic, theologian and poet who was a mentor of Martin Luther King. Thurman was fond of saying “I want to be me without making it difficult for you to be you”. Can you imagine how different our countries would be if more people were able to say the same thing? Can you imagine how different all our communities would be if more Christians were able to say, “I want to be a Christian without making it difficult for a Jew to be a Jew, a Muslim to be a Muslim, a Buddhist to be a Buddhist or a Hindu to be a Hindu”?

This kind of social intelligence enables us to convey

the message that diversity need not divide; that pluralism rightly understood and rightly practised is a benefit and not a burden; and that the fear of difference is a fear of the future.

The fourth quality required is spiritual intelligence. This may seem like an odd quality to emphasise for ethics in journalism, but here I refer to something that cannot be contained within the walls of religion. By spiritual intelligence, I mean a higher consciousness that not only keeps us grounded, but enables us to probe the inner self of the other, not just the intellect where you locate ideas and insights, but the soul of journalism where you find the capacity for civility in confrontation. It enables one to see journalism as something more meaningful than a job description or a series of assignments. Most importantly, it is the ability to maintain respect for the humanity of those whose lives are examined or whose actions are exposed.

Finally, spiritual intelligence promotes a form of civic journalism that maintains the capacity to provide hope even in the midst of tales of tragedy and broken trust. Here I join those who make a distinction between optimism and hope.

Optimism surveys the evidence and determines that there are reasons to believe that things will get better. Hope, on the other hand, looks at the evidence and at the same time sees alternative possibilities and sets out to write about them. We live in an age that psychologists call a time of free-floating anxiety. People are so anxious that they are anxious about the fact that they are anxious. So when I say that we need journalists who provide hope, I am referring to the kind of hope Vaclav Havel had in mind when he wrote, “I am not an optimist because I do not believe that everything ends well. I am not a pessimist because I do not believe that everything ends badly. But I could not accomplish anything if I did not hope within me, for the gift of hope is as big a gift as the gift of life itself.”

When I use the word hope I don’t mean that you lose your objectivity. I simply mean that you seek to identify and write about stories that are good news as well as bad news. So please remember that when you cover those who provide help you also provide hope, and the gift of hope is as big a gift as the gift of life itself.

THE PRESS FREEDOM COMMISSION – WHAT WAS SAID

Prof Tawana Kupe

Dean of the Humanities Faculty, Wits University

The media should ensure that the regulatory system that governs its practices prevents a situation where the public perceive the media to be part of a system of institutions that they either have deep skepticism about or have no faith in. An independent regulatory body would be constituted from among public representatives with demonstrated commitment to promoting and protecting freedom of expression; academics with knowledge, interest and commitment to freedom of expression, media freedom and media regulation which promotes freedom of expression and the media and judges with an impeccable record of supporting a democratic human rights culture.

Gwede Mantashe

Secretary general of the ANC

Regulation for the media sector is vital to ensure that the press fulfils its potential to act on behalf of citizens, rather than simply to make profit for shareholders. This is a universally accepted premise. The ANC has never proposed a state regulation of print media, instead it proposes strengthening of the existing self-regulatory system and an establishment of an independent appeals mechanism as the best possible print regulatory system suitable and that this must be in conformity with the SA Constitution.

Samantha Perry

General Secretary Professional Journalists' Association of South Africa

In ProJourn's considered view, then, the attempt by the PFC to pre-empt the imposition of a Media Appeals Tribunal must go beyond a mere assessment of our formal processes and take into account whether there has been an erosion of public trust in the media – despite the best efforts of the Press Ombudsman. We believe there has been such an erosion and that warning signs abound...

Moegsien Williams

Independent Newspapers

It is our submission that the damage to our democracy would be many times worse if the current system of self-regulation of the press is tampered with. In our view, the introduction of a statutory Media Appeals Tribunal would sound the death-knell of a free press in South Africa. The mooted MAT would make the current Press Council and Press Ombudsman's office superfluous, unable to co-exist. Ethics is integral to the work our journalists do because it is a crucial aspect of any newspaper title's credibility. It would cause harm to people when journalists do not practise ethical principles and this failure can also serve to undermine our entire industry.

Pansy Tlakula

Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights)

Self-regulation is regarded as the best method of promoting accountability and of protecting and promoting the right to freedom of expression and the press... the regulatory framework that South Africa will ultimately adopt must be in compliance firstly with its Constitution and secondly with the international and regional human rights instruments that it has ratified.

Prof Jane Duncan

Highway Africa

Self-regulation has the advantage of agility, which allows the system to respond rapidly to changes such as technological changes. Self-regulatory systems also lend themselves to a less formal, inquisitorial approach, rather than a formal, adversarial approach which can also hasten the speed of decision-making, while making the system more accessible to ordinary people who cannot afford legal fees. Ethical principles and practices cannot be legislated or compelled; they must be driven by a deeper moral purpose, and arise primarily out of journalistic self-organisation and self-activity.

Thuli Madonsela

Public Protector

From the perspective of the Public Protector's mandate of strengthening and supporting constitutional democracy in South Africa, the need for a free and independent but accountable and responsible media, is not negotiable.

Nic Dawes

Editor-in-chief, Mail&Guardian

In my view, non-statutory self-regulation with strong elements of community participation is a very South African answer to the question of deepening an ethical culture in journalism, and providing for redress when it goes awry.

South African Council of Churches

The question is how to promote creative application of journalism and media developments while holding onto moral and professional aims of journalism. Much of the problem lies with the commercial and consumer identity of contemporary media and press. Consumerism and commerce in the media largely aim at efficiency and profitability. The problem with the consumer mentality is that the former outcome of profitability is also closely linked with entertainment and pleasure. The SACC believes that [there] should be representatives of press organisations [on a statutory media regulation body] and especially those that represent the interest of marginalised communities, civil society organisations, including representatives from the faith community. However, the SACC does not believe that government should [...] be represented on such a body.

Dr Glenda Daniels

Advocacy co-ordinator of Amabhungane

Ultimately the reason why self-regulation wins hands down is that newspapers must be accountable directly to the people and the buyers of the product, which must not be mediated, and arbitrated by "independents".

Mmusi Maimane

National spokesperson, Democratic Alliance

Self-regulation is the best of means of ensuring that the media is held to the professional standards that it sets for itself, and which mirror the values of our Constitution. It is the only system based on the principle of peer review, which recognises that journalists themselves are the best placed to judge other journalists' professional standards. [...] However, it is clear that if self-regulation is to survive in the climate of hostility that now prevails, then it must be a form of self-regulation that works *effectively*. Self-regulation must work to buttress the media from meddling by the state, and it must protect the public at large from declining professional standards of journalistic practice.





Cedric Nunn

WHAT WILL CO-REGULATION MEAN? THE PRESS FREEDOM COMMISSION REPORT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REGULATION OF JOURNALISM BY JULIE REID

On 25 April the Press Freedom Commission (PFC) released its final report, detailing its recommendations for the reform of South Africa's press regulatory system, and in particular its suggested changes to the Press Council of South Africa (PCSA). It was the end of a 10-month process during which the commission examined the written submissions of more than 220 civil society groups, political parties, academics and members of the public, travelled to four different countries and held public hearings in three different cities (Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg). Of course, in the light of the ANC's insistent calls for a media appeals tribunal, it was an important process. The eventual report compiled by commission at the end of all of this, at first glance, suggests relatively sweeping changes to the current system of press self-regulation in South Africa.

Or does it?

The most significant recommendation lies in the change from a system of self-regulation to what the Press Freedom Commission terms independent co-regulation: a system of accountability performed cooperatively by representatives from the press and the public, but independent of government. This is the aspect of the report which has drawn the most criticism and which understandably makes the media folk the most nervous. The African Commission on Human and People's Rights Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa states, "[e]ffective self-regulation is the best system for promoting high standards in the media". A report prepared by a team of researchers from UNISA for the Press Freedom Commission, reveals that out of the top fifty countries in the world which achieve the highest press freedom ratings, 35 of them, or 70%, have a self-regulatory mechanism for the press. Simply, there are

real concerns that to ditch a system of self-regulation will symptomatically result in a decrease of editorial independence, a lessening of journalistic freedom of speech, and the possibility of the practice of self-censorship.

So, is there reason to worry?

In answering that question it is important to realise that the Press Freedom Commission's suggested move from self-regulation to independent co-regulation is not really all that big a change. The truth of the matter is that the Press Council did not constitute a self-regulatory body in the first place, even though it may have (incorrectly) labelled itself as one. Previously, the Press Council was constituted by six representatives from the press and six public representatives: in the truest sense of a definition, that's co-regulation (between the press and the public). A real self-regulatory system would include representatives from the press only, which was not the case at the Press Council of South Africa. Before we begin to mourn the loss of self-regulation we should remember that we are not losing self-regulation at all, because we did not have it to begin with.

The Press Freedom Commission recommends that the number of public representatives on the Press Council be increased to seven and the press representatives be decreased to five, so that the public representation slightly out-weighs the press representation. Previously the press vs public representation was a fifty-fifty scenario, so on the surface this change seems quite significant. But the most important activity of the Press Council body is the adjudication of complaints against publications, and this will be handled by something called the Ombudsman

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Cedric Nunn

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Panel. This is the cog in the Press Council machine that will have the most actual, real, and practical implications on the functioning of the system as a whole, and on newspapers that have a complaint laid against them. The Ombudsman Panel will include three public and three press representatives, meaning that at the site of activity where complaints are adjudicated, the press vs. public representation is back to a fifty-fifty deal. The adjudication of a single complaint will be dealt with by the Ombudsman himself, and two members from the Ombudsman Panel: one press and one public representative. Although the numbers are now downsized, this balance remains the same as the previous Adjudications Panel, on which sat six press and six public representatives. For all practical purposes, the public involvement in the process of adjudicating complaints has not gone an inch beyond what it was in the past.

That is not the case with regard to the Appeals Panel, wherein the new system the public representatives will out-weigh the press representative three to one, and accompanied by a retired judge. For newspapers this may be a cause for concern: it means that if a complainant is unsatisfied with the original Ombudsman's ruling and takes the matter to appeal, the majority of representatives from the Press Council who handle the appeal will not be from the press. But the impact of this move needs to be weighed against what it will mean in practice before press folk get overly nervous. The Press Council has stated that the Ombudsman rules in favour of the complainant two-thirds of the time, meaning that only about 33% of complaints are dismissed in favour of the press. This means that the number of complaints taken to appeal will only emanate from 33% of complaints laid, and we know that very few of those cases ever get taken to appeal. Indeed, as long as the Ombudsman and the adjudication panel do their job well, the appeals process should be utilised only on very rare occasions. Of course the hefty public representation and the measly press representation at this part of the process will concern newspapers, but this situation will become a reality on very few occasions.

On 4 May, *Mail & Guardian Online* reported the

perceived lack of press representation in the new process as such: "... no press employee should serve on either the adjudicating or appeals panels" (Sole 2012). That comment skews the picture slightly because it invokes the impression that the press is left largely out of the process, which is not the case. On page 80 of the Press Freedom Commission Report, you will find this line: "13.1 The Appointments Panel shall appoint an Ombudsman Panel of *three press* and three public members and an Appeals Panel of *three press* and five public members" (Press Freedom Commission Report 2012:80) (my emphasis). Both the adjudicating and appeals panels include representatives from the press, and one press representative will be involved in the adjudication of original individual complaints and during the appeals process.

Another significant change to the complaints procedure is the inclusion of third-party complaints, which means that the Press Council, as a media regulatory body, is now more consistent with other similar bodies such as the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). Prior to the Press Freedom Commission process, the Press Ombudsman really only accepted complaints from parties directly involved in the offending press report, meaning that no matter how offensive an individual reader may have found the content of a particular publication, they could not lay a complaint unless they were directly connected to the report. The Press Freedom Commission recommends that third party complaints now be allowed so long as the complaint can be deemed to be within the public interest. What this means is that the next time a major newspaper publishes explicit images of a sex act on its front page, we can all complain about it, which was not the case before. The denial of third party complaints meant that concerned parents who did not want their children exposed to images of sex on the front page of a newspaper, for example, had no grounds for a complaint to the PCSA, whereas they could lodge a complaint were the offending images screened on television before the watershed.

The absurdity of the Press Council's past refusal to accept third party complaints is perhaps best understood when considering some of the complaints which are

DRINKING AT THE LAST CHANCE SALOON

BY HUGO GREENHALGH

We have been here before – most notably in 1990 when Sir David Calcutt QC was appointed to head a committee to examine journalistic standards amid concerns over privacy.

It was a tense time. In the wake of a series of press-led scandals, David Mellor, who was to become the Conservative minister for National Heritage, warned in 1989: "I do believe the press – the popular press – is drinking in the Last Chance Saloon."

Unfortunately, in the UK, we all remember what happened next: precisely nothing. Behind-the-scenes power broking by the media barons led to the establishment of the Press Complaints Commission, a self-regulatory body that has since proved particularly toothless.

And David Mellor? The "minister for

fun" – as he was soon dubbed – became a tabloid target. *The Sun* took great pleasure in revealing details how he would supposedly wear his beloved Chelsea football strip while romping with Antonia de Sancha, an actress/model most definitely not his wife.

Here you have the seeds for the current mess the press finds itself in: a clutch of powerful owners holding too much sway with government; a regulatory body that simply serves as window-dressing; and a vindictive tabloid press out to crush its enemies.

No wonder actor Hugh Grant, once a tabloid darling, but now most certainly an enemy, was moved to brand the popular press as engendering "a culture of pure evil". Somewhere between the establishment of the PCC and the decision to hack into the phone

of 13-year-old murder victim Milly Dowler, the tabloid press simply lost its way.

Any sense of how journalism should be conducted was placed firmly behind chasing newspaper sales and ever more salacious stories. The Leveson Inquiry, set up by Prime Minister David Cameron in the wake of the broader phone hacking scandal, has become much more far-reaching in its scope, drawing in politicians from both ends of the spectrum as it tries to unpick the confluence of British politics, media and society in the 21st century.

What is clear is that whatever comes out of Leveson, journalism – both for the tabloids and the broadsheets – is set to come under much greater scrutiny; just how onerous has yet to be determined.

The key question is whether it is likely to be statutory – something that has yet to achieve a consensus among the UK's political class. While Nick Clegg, Deputy Prime Minister, told Leveson that the PCC was toothless and backed statutory regulation in some form, the Home Secretary, Theresa May, told the inquiry she felt it might "encroach on freedom".

Lord Justice Leveson, a member of the Court of Appeal, has yet to publish his recommendations as the inquiry, which began formal hearings in November 2011, is still rumbling on. However, in the wake of

testimony given by former Prime Minister, Tony Blair in May, he indicated the potential shape of the new body.

Any regulatory organisation would have to be, he said, "independent of the government, independent of the state, independent of Parliament, but independent of the press". This was a clear dig at the PCC, a body described by Bob Franklin, professor of journalism studies at Cardiff University, as taking self-regulation to "the ultimate caricature. It was funded and staffed by the publishers whose activities it was meant to be regulating".

Leveson went on to say that the new regulatory body must have journalism "expertise on it or available to it" and – in an apparent recognition of the general attitude towards the PCC – that it "must command the respect of the press but equally the respect of the public".

Achieving this balance between the freedom of the press and allowing recourse for the public is critical, says John Tulloch, professor of journalism at the University of Lincoln.

Yet he remains wary of allowing the media free rein: the freedom of the press is not an absolute, he argues. "I would be extremely concerned about the character of any legislation and would be very interested

accepted by other media regulatory bodies. In February 2011 the ASA ordered the withdrawal of a LG cellular phone advertisement which represented a young girl ‘rescuing’ her terrified parents from a large spider by spraying shaving foam on the spider to immobilise it. This happened after the ASA received a complaint from the NSPCA and ten individuals (third parties). No complaint was received from a first party (who in this case, was the foamed-up spider). The complaint stated that “the commercial perpetuates negative conceptions about spiders and promotes the unnecessary and cruel killings of living creatures”. Spider lovers out there have every right to complain, have their complaints taken seriously and have offensive advertisements that discriminate and negatively stereotype spiders taken off air.

Critics have noted that the acceptance of third-party complaints may open the Press Council system to political pressure. That is possible, but it is also important to note that the system is under political pressure anyway, and has been for a long time, to which it has displayed remarkable resilience. Also, citing fears of political pressure as a motivation for excluding a measure which would serve to improve the process of press regulation and monitoring in general, is simply not good enough. The Press Council should not be constructed according to trepidations of the political ramblings of a few, but primarily according to how it best serves the reading public of our country. If the Press Council can do the latter well, then that is its best defence against political pressure. Simply, if the Press Council were to continue to refuse the acceptance of third party complaints, it would be all too easy for the ANC to complain that the Press Council is deaf to the voices of the people, unconcerned with the legitimate complaints of readers, and therefore an exclusionary body of the elite. To refuse the acceptance of third party complaints, especially ones that are in the public interest, in this light is simply not ethically defensible. If we all start talking about a media appeals tribunal in Parliament, the Press Council’s refusal to accept third party complaints would be akin to laying free ammunition and a Kalashnikov on the table in front of the ANC. Now that is political pressure.

Another seemingly significant recommendation made by the Press Freedom Commission is the introduction

of sanctions on publications that are found to have transgressed the press code. To ask newspapers to pay fines after publishing what is deemed offensive material is enough to have editors screaming. But again, on closer inspection of this move we find that very little has actually changed. The sanctions suggested by the Press Freedom Commission amount to space fines, and monetary fines will not be imposed with regard to the content of a publication. A newspaper may be required to publish a small apology of a few column centimetres for minor offences or inaccuracies, or several columns to publish a full statement or report of the adjudication process. The amount of space “fined” will depend on the severity of the infraction. But that is not really any different to how the system worked before. Section 6 of the Press Council’s complaints procedure spells out the same process, only without referring to it as a space fine or a hierarchy of sanctions, and even mentioning that the Ombudsman may order the publication of a complainant’s reply to an article. The Press Council have called this action the “findings of the Ombudsman”, and the Press Freedom Commission have called it a “hierarchy of sanctions” which entails “space fines”: but in practice it boils down to the same thing.

Media people are natural cynics and perpetual critics. We like to criticise, complain and grumble: that is part of our business. It is what we do. But in the case of the Press Freedom Commission perhaps we should pause and reflect on the value of the process, before getting over-excited with our objections. First, we should remember that the Press Council is a fantastically flexible body when compared to most other South African institutions of any kind, largely because it is not a statutory body. Before any of us had heard of the Press Freedom Commission, the Press Council had already conducted its own process of review, which is something that it has committed to do on a regular basis. So, if some of the recommendations contained in the Press Freedom Commission’s report, after trial in practice, prove to be error, they can be changed again quite easily. Second, the Press Freedom Commission managed to attract a much larger number of submissions and oral presentations than the Press Council review a year earlier, and even included participation

from the ANC (who arguably indirectly initiated all of this). The increase of the inclusion of a greater diversity of positions and voices on the platform of the Press Freedom Commission should be regarded as a good thing: high levels of public participation and engagement are, after all, supposed to be what democracies are all about.

But the real value of the Press Freedom Commission report may be measured in how defenders of media freedom intend to use it when entering discussions on a media appeals tribunal. If media freedom activists rubbish the Press Freedom Commission report, discarding it outright as a piece of suggested over-regulation of the press and a cheap political compromise, then the report itself is of no use. But in the grander scheme of things that may be folly.

In its submission to the Press Freedom Commission the ANC stated that an independent mechanism is the most desirable device for press regulation, which should be autonomous from political interests. In effect, by suggesting a system of independent co-regulation, that is what the Press Freedom Commission has delivered. The main difference between the picture of press regulation painted by the ANC and the Press Freedom Commission, is whether or not the regulatory body is established by Parliament. Considering that the Press Freedom Commission has delivered more or less what the ANC has asked for, insisting that this matter runs the gauntlet of Parliament now will only solidify criticisms that the ruling party wishes to bully the press. Other than that sticking point, the Press Freedom Commission report proves to be quite cleverly worded, in that it has actually changed very little in terms of how the Press Council currently functions, while selling the system as if it is fundamentally more independent from the press or any of the centres of power, including government.

How the ANC will be able to logically argue against that remains to be seen, but it will be difficult. The Press Freedom Commission report may smell of a cheap political compromise, but if handled carefully it could be used as a swift tactical move to out-flank the opponent. That is assuming, of course, that the South African National Editors’ Forum (Sanef) and PCSA accept the recommendations made by the PFC.

in the small print, particularly if it involved the state having any more power or influence over what journalists do,” he says.

“But that said, I do not support the fact that the freedom of the press is an absolute over other absolutes in human rights that we wish to defend. It is about balancing the freedom of the press against these fundamental human rights. We all have a right to privacy and it is not axiomatic that the freedom of the press trumps that.”

What the Leveson Inquiry has achieved so far is a recalibration of the focus on regulating content to a broader look at the regulation of media ownership as a whole.

Ed Miliband, leader of the opposition Labour Party, has proposed a cap of between 20 and 30% of overall market share – almost certainly with a nod to the 34% currently held by News International. Making his proposal to the Leveson Inquiry – in a move that one commentator said made the judge “wince” – Miliband suggested that anything up to 20% is fine, and then between 20 and 30% would require greater scrutiny.

In essence, this idea is a good one – anything that reduces the concentration of media power in the UK should be welcomed. But in practice – in this digital age – how exactly would it work? And, more importantly, how would it be enforceable?

Franklin, who is also editor of three journals, *Journalism Studies*, *Journalism Practice* and *Digital Journalism*, would like to see the establishment of a Media Standards Authority.

“Regulation has always referred to regulation of content,” he says, “and this current debacle has come about because of the encouragement of a totally free market when it comes to media ownership – and, with this relaxation, we have seen a growing lack of concern and ability to control and regulate content.

“We need to reconceptualise [the nature of regulation], where concepts like scrutiny and review are more central than saying, ‘This chap’s a bounder’, and other notions of criminality.”

This would place more emphasis on the conduct of the journalists themselves. Questions of journalistic ethics have become a joke in this age of hacking and blagging, and, to an extent, broadsheet journalists have been equally tarred by the tabloid brush.

But even though the Leveson Inquiry has been kick-started by practices emanating from tabloid newsrooms, Franklin is adamant: there should not be one set of regulations for the popular press and another for the broadsheets. “That’s just snobbery,” he says.

What he would like to see instead is

greater stress on the ethics of journalistic behaviour. “There should be an institution of journalism ethics that should receive some sort of public support,” he suggests.

Ultimately, though, once the Leveson Inquiry wends its weary way to an inevitable recommendation of tighter regulation, it is surely incumbent on the individual journalists to take some responsibility for their actions. Claiming the defence of “My news editor told me to do it” has clearly been shown as groundless; individual journalists need to determine their own personal set of ethics – as well as adhere to greater journalistic ones.

Quite simply, the culture of the anything-goes tabloid newsroom has to change. Franklin calls for regulations that empower the journalist to be able to stand up to newsroom bullies if they feel they are being asked to do something unethical. “There should be serious thinking about the culture of the press,” he argues. “This should be supported by a benign system where it might become normal to regard a working journalist as someone who would be able to stand up for themselves [in the newsroom].”

That is critical. Self-regulation may have failed, but it is as much for the media to clean up its act as it will be to adhere to almost certainly tighter regulations. After 23 years, please let’s not prove David Mellor right.

ATTEMPTS TO REGULATE THE PRESS ARE NOTHING NEW

Bob Franklin, professor of journalism studies at Cardiff University, points out that the history of media regulation stretches back as far as the taxes on knowledge imposed in the 19th century and “various restrictions on publication and free discussion”. Closer to the modern day, the 1970s and 1980s saw a “flourish of activity”, he says. “There was a great concern about privacy – partly created by a train crash at the time, where one newspaper had published a picture of dead bodies on the train – and the right of reply. Two private members’ bills were put forward: one demanding a right of reply, if you felt you had been misrepresented by the press; and the other was a privacy bill. Both were turned down on the promise of the Calcutt Committee [into press behaviour and privacy]. This was a mini-Leveson in the early 1990s. Around that time, the Press Council was shut and the Press Complaints Commission was set up.” A move by Calcutt to “sniff in the direction of statutory regulation drew an outcry”, Franklin continues. “It drew on that 19th-century history of state regulation being equivalent to censorship.”

MEDIA REGULATION, MURDOCH AND THE JOURNALISM WARS OF OZ

BY JULIE POSETTI

Rupert Murdoch's toxic phone-hacking legacy has the potential to undermine media freedom in Australia – his country of birth – where the government is considering recommendations for the regulation of **all** 'news' media, including low traffic blogs.

The Australian media has been put on trial by the Federal government and the evidence is in. As the *News of the World* Scandal brewed, Murdoch's most influential Australian titles declared 'war' on the minority Labour government, the Australian Greens and other perceived ideological enemies. At the same time, public trust in professional journalism continued to diminish and many media critics declared self-regulation a failure.

Recommended: Statutory regulation of all Australian news media.

Media ownership concentration is a major cause of disaffection with Australian journalism. Murdoch owns nearly 70% of all print media in Australia, including the only national broadsheet newspaper *The Australian*, and he has a significant stake in the Australian Pay TV market. His ubiquitous brand is arguably a threat to media pluralism and diversity in Australia. It is certainly a threat to local politicians out of step with Murdoch's values and ambitions, along with News Limited (News Corporation's Australian subsidiary) critics who dare to challenge Murdoch's Australian media stranglehold and his journalists' work.

But while Australia's Prime Minister Julia Gillard, backed by Greens politicians and some independent MPs, insisted that News Limited had 'questions to answer' in the aftermath of the phone-hacking fiasco, the government balked at re-examining Australian media ownership laws. Instead, it hastily established the Independent Media Inquiry to examine ethics and regulation, with an emphasis on the print media.

Retired judge Ray Finkelstein oversaw the Inquiry, established in September 2011, with the assistance of journalism professor Matthew Ricketson.¹ After taking public submissions and hearing from invited participants (mostly senior editors, publishers and academics), the Finkelstein Inquiry (as it became known) reported back to government, at speed, in February 2012.

While the final report included important scholarship on the history of Australian media regulation, contemporary challenges to journalism, and professional journalistic standards and ethics, the key recommendation was for the establishment of an 'independent' government-funded, cross-platform regulator covering content defined as news and/or news commentary, to be called the News Media Council.

The NMC would replace the Australian Press Council (self-regulatory body for print media) and subsume some functions of the Australian Communications Media Authority (broadcast and online government regulator). The NMC would capture traditional news media across all platforms – including newspapers and the national public broadcasters ABC and SBS (multicultural broadcaster), which are already separately regulated by acts of Parliament. Foreign online

news publishers with 'more than a tenuous connection to Australia', would also be captured by the NMC.

Low traffic blogs & social media caught in the regulation net

The threshold for print publications would be 3 000 copies per issue. But websites with a paltry 15 000 'hits' per year (and by hits, they mean total page views per annum, not unique visitors), including social media sites, would fall within the NMC's jurisdiction.² Aside from the implications for freedom of expression, can you imagine the bureaucratic nightmare involving a statutory body, funded to the tune of AU\$2million (approx. R18million), being tasked with assessing complaints against the tens of thousands of Twitter feeds, Facebook pages and opinionated blogs caught by the regulator?

As respected Australian business journalist Alan Kohler wrote, at the time the report's recommendations were delivered, "This (15 000 'hits') is a very silly number and suggests that Finkelstein and Ricketson didn't do enough work on understanding online publishing. Even a tiny news blog would get that many page views in a week, or even a day."

Media wars

The recommendation for a News Media Council had an immediately polarising impact when the Finkelstein report was handed down, with much of the mainstream media coverage rich in hyperbole and insults directed at the report's authors and its supporters. In fact, in the wake of the report, *The Australian* newspaper appeared to declare a culture war on the journalism academy in response to the public championing of the Finkelstein recommendations by several journalism academics.

Rather than facilitating much-needed intelligent national debate on media standards and ethics, the effect of this coverage was the re-entrenchment of divides between journalists and audiences, and an anti-intellectual backlash against journalism academics and media studies scholars in general.

In the News Limited press, the report's findings were compared with media regulation in Nazi Germany and North Korea, something Ricketson found repugnant. "The problem was not media regulation, the problem was Hitler's criminality," he wrote on an ABC website. The problem with Ricketson's statement, however, is that it depends on unassailable confidence that Australia will never become beholden to a criminal government, nor a despotic leader.

Nevertheless, it's important to note that the Finkelstein report did not recommend the licensing of newspapers, which the retired judge described at the beginning of the Independent Media Inquiry's public hearings as "...probably as extreme an encroachment on

news dissemination as you could get" and "...as close as going back to the Dark Ages as you could find."

In his report, Finkelstein also noted some of the concepts put to him during the Inquiry designed to support quality journalism in the face of failing business models, such as increasing funding for the ABC's news functions, subsidies for investigative and public interest journalism and incentives for investment in news start-ups to increase media diversity. He also called for a Productivity Commission inquiry into the news media within two years to examine the sustainability of the industry.

Nevertheless, the recommendation for an NMC has significant implications for media freedom in Australia, although it has been difficult to find dispassionate assessments of the threat to freedom of expression amidst the vitriolic coverage of the Finkelstein Inquiry, which has, ironically, reinforced calls for government regulation of the print media.

Jailing journalists

According to the recommendations, the Council would comprise 50% civil society representatives (with no history of media connections) and 50% industry/academic representation. It would have the power to frame and compel apologies, corrections, right of reply and retractions, as well as being able to dictate the placement of apologies within a publication. There would be no right of appeal against an NMC judgement, unless the case was referred to a higher court for the enforcement of NMC adjudications, which could ultimately result in the gaoling of journalists, editors and small-time bloggers for contempt.

To fully appreciate the potential gravity of the NMC recommendation, it's important to note that Australia is the only Western democracy without a Bill of Rights or constitutionally enshrined rights to freedom of expression and/or media freedom.³

Australia's leading journalism-law scholar, Professor of Journalism at Bond University Mark Pearson, is extremely concerned about the prospect of the Australian government endorsing an NMC as recommended by the Finkelstein Inquiry, particularly in the absence media freedom protections. "This means politicians and judges can pass laws censoring the media without constitutional challenge, except in the very limited area of political free speech. Any mechanism thus needs to be self-regulatory until there is such a firm backdrop like they have in the US, the UK, Canada and New Zealand," Pearson said.

Impact of convergence on regulation

The Finkelstein Inquiry was conducted in parallel with the less hastily convened and better-resourced Convergence Review, also commissioned by



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the Australian government, which delivered its recommendations after the Finkelstein report was released.

The Convergence Review rejected Finkelstein's recommendation for government-funded, statutory regulation of all media via a News Media Council. Instead, it called for increased support for self-regulation of news media, via an industry-led body requiring compulsory membership, which would oversee journalistic standards in news and commentary across all platforms. Alongside this oversight body would sit a new cross-platform statutory regulator for large content producers, replacing ACMA (the body currently responsible for the regulation of broadcasting, the internet, radio-communications and telecommunications in Australia). As a result, the licensing of broadcasters would be scrapped.⁴ And news and news commentary would be exempt from statutory regulation on all platforms.

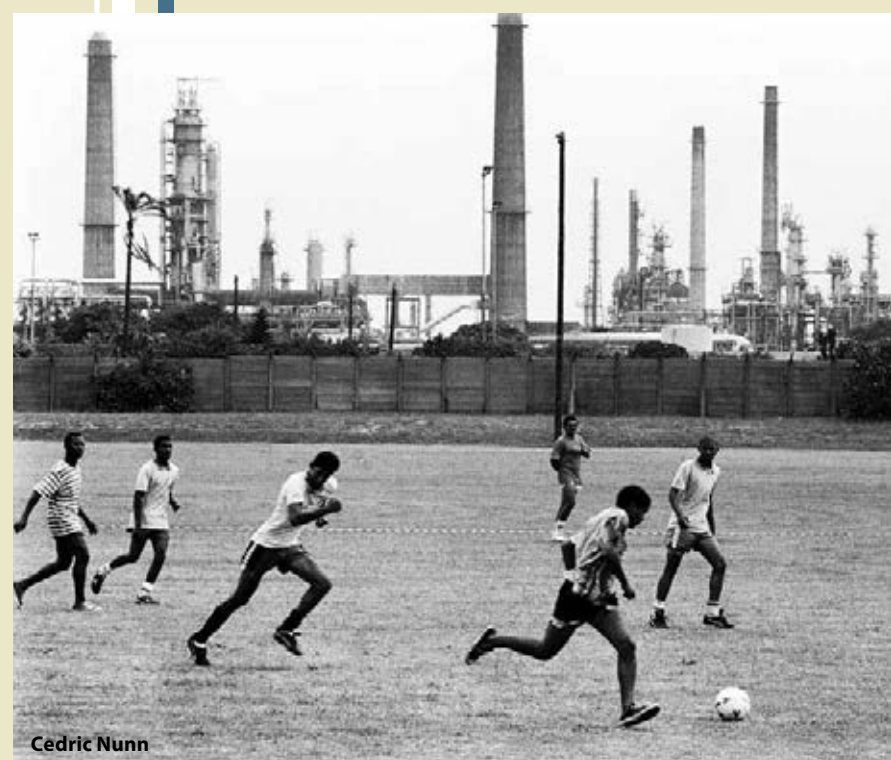
These recommendations recognise the anachronistic legal silos that continue to separate print, broadcasting and online media for regulatory purposes in Australia, in the midst of the mainstreaming of media convergence which has resulted in cross-platform publication by most content producers.

According to the Convergence Report's recommendations to government, a content provider/creator which has more than half a million Australian users a month, and AU\$50 million (approximately R450 million) of revenue per year from Australian-sourced professional content, would be subject to regulation (but the news/commentary they produce would be exempt from regulation).

While the main traditional media outfits would be captured under this regime, it could be extended to telecommunications corporations and internet companies like Google. In a converged media world, it's not just platforms that are melding, but media company identities that are changing.

Convergence Review Committee member Louise McElvogue told the ABC that media regulation needs to be approached differently, as a result. "Rather than deciding how entities are regulated based on the medium on which they deliver, entities would be regulated based on their size and the type of services they are, which means that large content services that have a large audience and have a large revenue from Australia would be subject to certain regulation," she said.

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The review also highlighted the need for media ownership diversity and recommended a public interest test for major ownership changes.

I welcomed the Convergence Review’s findings as a sensible response to the realities of converged media balanced against the importance of media freedom in a democracy. But my University of Canberra colleague Matthew Ricketson did not. Defending the Independent Media Inquiry findings, which he co-authored, he publicly dismissed the Convergence Review’s recommendations ahead of the Federal government’s response to them, saying they could not work because news organisations can’t be forced to join self-regulatory bodies.

According to Ricketson, the time for media self-regulation in Australia had passed and the Finkelstein report sent a clear message to the media. “It says to the industry: you have sound standards of journalistic practice that you say you believe in and you have had 35 years to make a success of the self-regulatory system for dealing with complaints about these standards and you haven’t – and you seem to be content with that situation. So, you’ve had your chance. If you won’t do it you have left us with little choice but to recommend some means of making it work and in your absence that someone will have to be government,” he told a University of Melbourne seminar in May.

But Bond University’s Mark Pearson says Ricketson, and other academic supporters of an NMC, should be careful what they wish for. “The Convergence Review makes the sensible recommendation that regulation be wound back slightly for broadcasters to self-regulation, but that all news media operators would have to be part of a new self-regulator to earn their current exemptions to consumer and privacy laws. That was the basis of my submission to the Finkelstein inquiry⁵ - that the blanket exemptions for ‘prescribed news providers’ to the misleading and deceptive conduct provisions of the consumer laws should be wound back so they needed to demonstrate they were ethical operators.”

Pearson’s recommendations to the Finkelstein Inquiry were rejected, but he maintains that they provided a working solution enabling the preservation of media freedom. “Such an approach would bolster the hundreds of existing laws impinging on media freedoms and minimise the risk of News of the World-style situations. Conduct that is ‘misleading or deceptive’ in news or commentary, or invading privacy, would be actionable UNLESS (Pearson’s emphasis) the outlet was a member of the News Standards Body and complying with its guidelines. This would encourage smaller players into the system, too. It would be self-regulation with the encouragement of some handy defences to existing laws, rather than a big stick approach bringing jail and fines for contempt that we would (see) under the Finkelstein body,” he argues. “And that is not strictly new government regulation, but instead a modification of some existing laws to exclude defences for unethical journalism.”

Against this backdrop, the Australian government is considering a new privacy tort applicable to journalism. Labour politicians who’ve been stung by campaigning News Ltd journalists, and salacious media coverage more broadly, turned up the volume on the media regulation mega-phone as the Federal government contemplated its formal response to the dual Convergence and Finkelstein inquiries.

Bad news

It is important to note News Limited’s campaign against the minority Labour government and their ‘coalition’ partners, The Greens, as a factor relevant to understanding both the impact of over-concentrated media ownership, and significant support within the

journalism academy for an NMC, in spite of the threat it poses to media freedom.

The perceived influence of News Limited on Australian election outcomes and policy formation is well documented. And the News Ltd brand has been increasingly scrutinised and challenged by civil society activists and academics (including this one⁶) in the past two years. The company’s penchant for “vendetta journalism”, which is most evident within the pages of Murdoch’s flagship newspaper *The Australian* under the editorship of Chris Mitchell,⁷ has also made it a thorn in the side of any grass roots campaign to protect Australian media freedom, especially as *The Australian* has been accused by some of Australia’s leading academics and public intellectuals as having a damaging effect on Australian democracy.⁸

Falling public trust in Australian professional journalism, magnified by the phone-hacking scandal that revealed an ethically corrupt and cover-up prone culture within Murdoch’s News International, is a problem that needs addressing in the interests of democracy. And I am convinced that a converged media world requires a review of traditional media regulation structures. Similarly, I believe news publishers and individual journalists need to be more accountable to audiences through an active commitment to more robust self-regulatory processes, transparent practice, and established codes of ethics and professional journalistic conduct.

But even as one who has felt the sting of defamatory, inaccurate, vendetta-driven journalism penned by News Limited’s attack dogs, I am not willing to support a recommendation for a government-funded, all-platform Australian News Media Council that might have the power to compel the “hate media”, as former Australian Greens leader Bob Brown describes the Australia Murdoch press, to act. The risk to media freedom is simply too great. And the signal that would be sent to despots and media freedom opponents the globe over, should Australia head down the path of a statutory, government-funded News Media Council, would, in my view, be far too high a price to pay for increased media accountability.

Endnotes

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FIGHTING UNIVERSITY BULLYING

BY LAUREN INGRAM

When I submitted a Freedom of Information request to my university as part of my studies I never expected that it would result in national media coverage, bullying by academics from my faculty and threats of expulsion from my university.

Earlier in the year, as a final year journalism student at the University of Canberra, I was required to draft and submit a request to a government department or agency as part of my investigative journalism unit. The goal was to teach us about investigative journalism and how you could use Freedom of Information requests to get an investigative story. I decided to submit a request to my own university targeting documents relating to the changes to the bachelor of journalism degree which, despite assurances from the university about openness and transparency, were being kept secret.

I drafted my response and submitted it to the University of Canberra. Then, a week before the date by which the university was legally required to provide me with the documents, I received an email from my lecturer Crispin Hull.

“The FOI office feels swamped and will have to spend a lot of time and enormous cost with your FOI requests ... [the FOI officer] would like to be relieved of the legal burden of having to fulfill the FOI requests according to the FOI Act,” Hull wrote.

He requested I formally drop our FOI requests in exchange for a guest lecture from David Hamilton, the university’s FOI officer: “It would be good if you could officially withdraw your FOI requests as soon as possible and in return we will get [David’s] FOI insights and you will get the opportunity to ask him questions about the FOI process. I think this will go further towards achieving our educational aims than doggedly persisting with the formal FOI process.”

I was astounded that my lecturer, who had been teaching me all semester to pursue stories despite opposition, was requesting for me to drop my request. I sent him a reply email that said I would not drop my request as it “went against everything I’d been taught about journalism”.

Hull then informed Prof Greg Battye, the deputy dean of the faculty, that I had refused to withdraw my request. In response, Battye asked Hull to pass on a message to me: that if I continued with my request and refused to withdraw it I could be in breach of the student conduct rules. If I was found in breach of these rules then I could be suspended or expelled from the university or failed in the investigative journalism unit. Battye claimed that legal advice given to him suggested that because I did not have an academic ethics clearance to write a story for an assignment on the university, I could be determined to be in breach of the conduct rules.

However no student has had to gain an ethics clearance from the university for a journalism assignment before. This claim was just another attempt to scare me into submission, to attempt to force me into dropping the request.

Hull responded to Battye at this point saying that there was no reason why a student would need ethics clearance and that he would not support a warning to students on this. “Such a warning, in my view, would be tantamount to bullying conduct, and I will not be a part of it,” Hull wrote.

Dr Johan Lidberg, an FOI researcher and Monash University journalism academic, says that even asking someone to withdraw an FOI request is out of order.

“It’s completely inappropriate and against the spirit of FOI laws to pressure or even ask applicants to drop requests,” Dr Lidberg said. “FOI is a democratic accountability tool... to pressure someone to withdraw an information request could be seen as undemocratic and would probably not be viewed favourably should the case progress to an appeal.”

It was after I learnt of this threat of a student conduct breach and the further attempts to prevent me from accessing the documents that I decided to go public with my story. I published a piece exposing the university on the Australian news website Crikey.com.au. The story was picked up by national and local media and the university faced scrutiny over what it attempted to do.

After I refused to bow to the pressure from Battye, the university was then forced to complete my request and I received over 400 pages of documents relating to the changes to the journalism degree. These documents proved that the university lied about the changes to the degree, including statements made by the university that there would be extensive student and industry consultation about the changes. Emails I obtained show that the Faculty of Arts and Design decided to cut the number of practical journalism units in order to “provide efficiencies” in the department, and that this decision was made before journalism staff, students or journalists in the industry were consulted.

After I published this information the university administration only became more secretive and more hostile towards me. Requests for interviews for follow up stories were either ignored or refused. Faculty of Arts and Design administrative staff began to follow me on twitter and the Students Association succeeded in preventing me from becoming involved with their student magazine publication.

Despite my successes, I still find irony in the fact that it was my strong journalism education so far – something the University of Canberra gave to me – that made me fight their pressure to drop my freedom of information request. This battle, however, has only strengthened my desire to work in journalism and uncover truth in the world.





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AFRICA IS RISING!

BY DEPROSE MUCHENA

THE WEBSITE OF A CINCINNATI-BASED AFRICA ADVOCACY GROUP, AFRICA FOUNDATION-USA, PROCLAIMS THE WORDS: "AFRICA IS CHANGING. IT'S ON THE MOVE, AND IT'S RISING. BECOME A MEMBER TODAY AND HELP PREPARE FOR THE TAKE OFF!" IN ANOTHER PITCH IN KEEPING WITH THIS POSITIVE SPIN, THE WEBSITE FURTHER PROCLAIMS: "BY ALL INDICATORS, AFRICA IS ON THE MOVE. IT HAS BEEN FOR THE LAST DECADE. THE CONTINENT FACES AN UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITY TO DRAMATICALLY TRANSFORM ITSELF AND THE LIVES OF ITS PEOPLE MUCH LIKE ASIA DID 30 YEARS AGO".

The above, with its slight degree of hyperbole, reflects a growing sentiment towards the continent, seen from outside. They reflect the changed perception of the global community towards the continent. With a population now approaching 900 million, a rising middle class, a rapidly urbanising population, strong investments in infrastructure, education, health, and a strong penetration of ICTs, the narrative of Africa as a dark continent cursed by poverty and conflict, is fast disappearing.

Even allowing for the knock-on effect of the global economic crisis and current Eurozone crisis slowdown, the IMF put a positive growth outlook for both 2011 and 2012, placing 6% growth target for 2011, a percentage less than the actual outcome and projecting nearly 6% in 2012, about the same as Asia.¹ In its latest economic outlook for the Africa region, the IMF outlines that Sub-Saharan Africa continues to record strong economic growth, despite the weaker global economic environment. Regional output rose by 5% in 2011,

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with growth set to increase slightly in 2012, helped by still-strong commodity prices, new resource exploitation, and the improved domestic conditions that have underpinned several years of solid trend growth in the low-income countries. But there is variation in performance across the region, with output in middle-income countries tracking more closely the global slowdown and with some sub-regions adversely affected, at least temporarily, by drought.²

This is the new story. A growing economy and an urbanising Africa, with a growing middle class, has become the new compelling ready market. Economists and investors are now talking of an African economy and there are clearer indicators to describe such. While Africa’s GDP is still less than Brazil’s and still constitutes less than 3% of the world GDP, it is growing significantly.

A new characteristic of the African economy is resilience and fortitude. Throughout 2009 and 2010 Africa stood tall notwithstanding the global financial crisis and its accompanying global economic crisis, and has been spared much of the turbulence seen in Europe in 2012. The much vaunted decline in foreign direct investment, decline in development aid and the decline in remittances from the diaspora touted by economists and other commentators in light of the global economic crisis have been ameliorated by a strong commodity and natural resources backed growth, expanding markets, and an engaged diaspora.

The latest *Africa Progress Panel Report* cites Ghana as the fastest growing economy in the world in 2011, and Ethiopia expanded more quickly than China in the five years to 2009. But there have also been similar cases of positive sustained growth. Mozambique and Malawi (until Bingu waMutharika began to reverse the successes), Tanzania, Angola, Senegal, among others were part of group of fast growing economies. Malawi actually reached food self-sufficiency in 2008 and ceased to be a net food importer.

What is powering Africa’s rise? Improving governance record and a disdain for dictatorship has transformed the image of the continent as the “sick man of the world family of nations”. The bedrock of Africa’s rise has been a significantly changed political outlook, a changed governance record and the dividends of peace. The sad narrative of regimes with suspect governance credentials ruining the image of the continent, implementing ruinous social

and economic policies is disappearing.

Those that come to power through stolen plebiscites, military coups and undermine the rule of law are in the minority. Democratic consolidation in many countries, peaceful elections and change of government have all ushered in fresh air that has paved the way for economic growth and development.

On its part, civil society’s strong demand for good governance has become a permanent fixture of domestic politics and governance. The rise of strong and more organised civil society has increased the demand (as well as the supply of) good governance. Civil society’s role in exposing corruption, demanding open and transparent budgets, greater push for accountability, the monitoring of elections and human rights abuses have all become cornerstones of the new Africa.

Sitting presidents are handing over power without delays or hesitation. A recent example is Senegal and Zambia. Nigeria, once the haven of military dictatorship is now a democracy with disdain for coups. The Arab Spring has transformed the political landscape in North Africa in favour of democratic governance formed on the basis of a free and fair election. These changes inspire confidence within and among investors.

The resource and commodity boom has been an important anchor of the growth project.

Between 2000 and 2008 around a quarter of Africa’s growth came from higher revenues from natural resources.

Let’s look at Angola to illustrate the point. By 2007 the country was producing more than 1, 5 million barrels of oil a day, rising to 2 million barrels a day by 2008. In 2007, its economy rose by a whopping 17% of GDP, largely driven by a booming oil sector! Angola is now the second largest producer of crude oil to China after Saudi Arabia, providing 32% of Chinese crude oil needs, and is now the sixth largest provider of crude oil to the US markets. Angola has in fact now overtaken Nigeria as the ‘Kuwait of Africa’ based not just on high return on oil revenues but also on the volumes of crude oil being produced.

The world’s biggest platinum deposits are shared by South Africa and Zimbabwe. The largest coal reserve in the world is now in Mozambique where Rio Tinto of Australia and Vale of Brazil are hard at work. The copper of Zambia is ruling the roost and has powered Zambia’s growth strategy for the past decade. The cobalt of DRC, the fisheries and uranium deposits of Namibia, the diamond fields of Botswana and Zimbabwe, and the gold, diamonds and platinum of South Africa are all part

Table 1. State of inequality in Southern Africa

Country (year)	Distribution of income or consumption, 2010 World Development		
	Gini index	Percentage share of income or consumption	
		Lowest 10 percent (%)	Highest 10 percent (%)
Botswana (2005-06)	61.0	1.3	51.2
Congo, Dem. Rep (2005-06)	44.4	2.3	34.7
Lesotho (2002-03)	52.5	1.0	39.4
Malawi (2004-05)	39.0	2.9	31.7
Mozambique (2002-03)	47.1	2.1	39.2
Namibia (1993)	74.3	0.6	65.0
South Africa (2000)	57.8	1.3	44.9
Swaziland (2000-01)	50.7	1.8	40.8
Zambia (2004-05)	50.7	1.3	38.9

of a boom story driving growth in the Southern Africa region.

Much of the commodity boom has been driven by the demand in emerging markets whose appetite for African resources has been on the increase. China’s demand for resources has driven up prices, propelling significant GDP gains in many countries. Africa has responded by providing high quality natural resources and buying manufacturing products for an ever expanding urban working class and industry and a modernising agricultural sector.

Favourable demography is another cause. With fertility rates crashing in Asia and Latin America, estimates are that half of the increase in population over the next 40 years will be in Africa. Africa’s population boom is a major stepping stone for growth. Its young population has an appetite for spending, consumption and mobility.

Technology by Japanese electronics manufacturers have a high market, the mobile phone usage is having quantum growth while the internet is growing fast on the continent. Contrast this demographic boom with, for example, the aging population of China and parts of Europe as well as the United States.

But the growth also has a lot to do with **the manufacturing and service economies** that African countries are beginning to develop. The big question is whether Africa can keep that up if demand for commodities drops in high commodity consuming markets such as China and India.

An intervening state in action: Africa is like a construction site – a construction site for a new development project and a new economy. In a number of these countries, the idea of a removed state is no longer in sync with what is going on. A developmental state is in the making, a state committed to a long term developmental agenda and implementing it relentlessly in order to address market

failure and address the deficit in social development.

There is a large scale infrastructure development programme led by states in the region emphasising the importance of public sector led investments to stimulate the economy. Mozambique and Angola are showing the way with large scale constitution projects, South Africa in the run up to the FIFA World Cup in 2010 set an example of development through infrastructure investment, Zambia and Botswana too are putting in place large infrastructure development projects that energises the private sector and the national population.

While we should caution against celebrating the state, and acknowledging that most of the growth of the African economy has been crucially led by the private sector, we must immediately see a theme that runs through the vein of this growth story. This has been a deliberately active role of the state, in particular in the extractive sector, directing the pace of investment, enabling the entry of new players and the rhetoric, rather than genuine policy shift towards “the east” to embrace China for example.

In fact in countries like South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, Namibia and even Zimbabwe there is a growing and vibrant debate on the construction of a *developmental state* as a critical building block to pro-poor and inclusive growth and economic development. The argument about the state’s developmental role in the national economy to address factors of market failure is gaining traction. So, instead of a stimulus response, there has been infrastructure development and investment.

But there is a growth paradox: Southern Africa is a candidate for the paradox of unequal growth phenomenon. With a population of more than a quarter of a billion, the region is now housing the fastest growing economies on the continent. It houses Africa’s largest economy which is South Africa, houses

a growing number of resources rich economies, including copper-rich Zambia, diamond-endowed Botswana, cobalt-blessed DRC among others. In addition, Southern Africa is also now home to a number of middle income economies. Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland are classified as middle income countries while South Africa is classified as an upper middle income country.

The triple burden of unemployment, poverty and inequality challenge: Yet, despite having a remarkable pool of natural resources, relatively high growth rates, and the presence of a high number of middle income economies, statistics glaringly show that unemployment, poverty and inequality in Southern Africa have in fact worsened in the last two decades. In Table 1 (to the left),³ is an illustration of the state of inequality in the past decade during which the region's economy grew significantly.

The paradox of being rich in mineral resources but poor in human development has produced a resource curse in some countries and, overall, the region remains one of the poorest in the world in human development terms. 45% of the population of SADC lives on US\$1 per day. Life expectancy has declined dramatically in many countries of the region, from a previous high of 60 years with the lowest now at 33 years.⁴

There is a clear trend that the current development strategy breeds poverty and inequality. For example, in 2006, SADC had a population of 250 million people and a combined GDP of US\$ 374.2 billion. Contrast this with Belgium, a small European country with approximately 10.2 million inhabitants but generating a GDP of US\$ 467.3 billion. At the start of its growth surge in 1999, Africa accounted for 21% of the world's poverty. By 2008, that share had reached 29%.

Many have cautioned that despite the impressive growth figures, the current trickle-down pattern of economic growth is leaving too many people in destitution. Commenting on this as a continental trend, the *Africa Progress Panel* warned that although seven out of 10 people in the region live in countries that have averaged growth of more than 4% a year for the past decade, almost half of Africans were are still living on incomes below the internationally accepted poverty benchmark of \$1.25 a day. "The deep, persistent and enduring inequalities in evidence across Africa have consequences".⁵

The report further warned that these inequalities weaken the bonds of trust and solidarity that hold societies together. "Over the long run, they will undermine economic growth, productivity and the

development of markets."⁶

Angola, which we cited for its phenomenal growth trajectory, has another side. Massive inequalities afflict its society of whom the majority cannot access clean water, education and energy service. With up to 80% of its population living below the poverty datum line and most of its population crammed into Luanda because of the war, Angola is still to distribute the benefits of its growth story to all. It has over the years had the distinction of being the poster child case of a poor but rich extractive economy, where, as summarised in a 2007 Publish What You Pay op-ed by George Soros:

Significant foreign investment in less developed countries occurs in the extractive industries such as oil, gas, and mining. Revenue from this investment makes its way to governments in the form of taxes, fees and other payments. If this revenue were effectively and transparently managed, it could serve as a basis for successful growth and poverty reduction. However, the state and other institutions that manage these resources are often, in practice, unaccountable to the parliaments and ordinary citizens of their countries. Revenues from resource extraction are disclosed neither by the governments nor the companies involved. This lack of accountability facilitates embezzlement, corruption and revenue misappropriation. In extreme cases, access to resources fuels regional conflict and the resulting disorder is exploited to facilitate further large-scale misappropriation of state assets.⁷

Growth in Africa's productive capacity and its place on the globe has not been matched by a corresponding destruction of poverty and inequality. Upwards of 386 million Africans are still struggling to survive on less than \$1.25 a day and Africa accounts for a rising share of world poverty. The Southern Africa region remains one of the poorest in the world.

The global economic crisis did little to reduce this trend as mass unemployment took root and added to casualisation of labour as well as its accompanying growth in inequality. In 2009, it added more than 50 million people into the poverty bracket, the majority of which were in Africa. Relative to the world, Southern Africa remains unequal in terms of several key indicators, including its share of trade, employment, middle class, human development and social security.

The development model needs to change: Southern Africa is still dealing with the structural legacy of colonial economy. This legacy is based on a grafted capitalist mode of

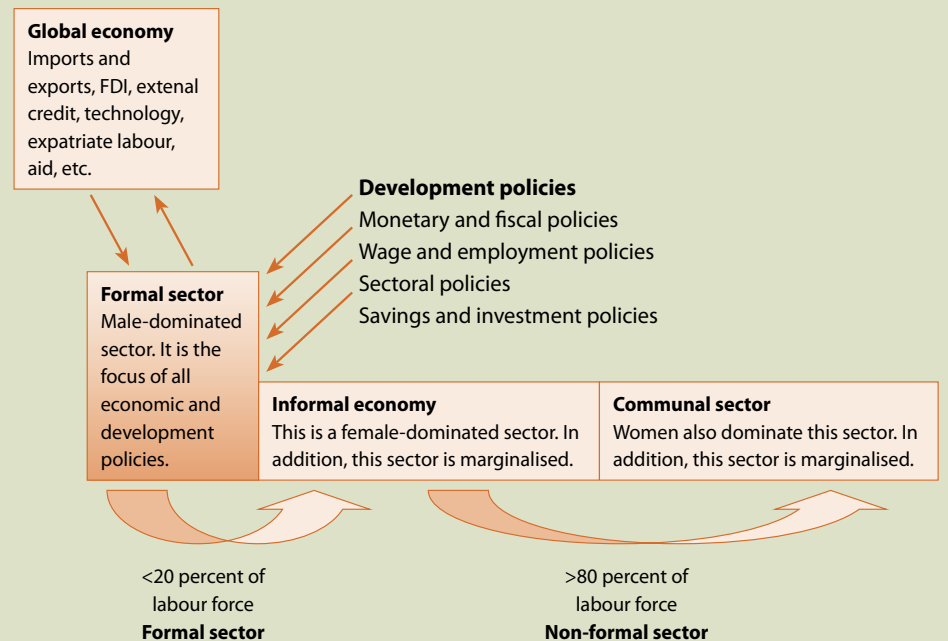


Figure 1. The dual and enclave structure of the economy in SADC

production imposed on hitherto African underdeveloped economic systems in a distorted manner. Consequently upon a grafted capitalism, enclave development followed, in which a small developed and diversified formal economy sits alongside an underdeveloped peasant-based subsistence rural economy.

All development strategies, inputs and policy have been directed onto this small enclave of formal economy. Unfortunately, only 20% of the African labour force exists in the small enclave with the 80 % shared between communal and informal economies.

This is the reason why the development strategies adopted do not address structural unemployment, cannot address inequality and decisively eliminate poverty. Such a system brings growth in the enclave but inequality in the rest of the economy. The legacy of dualism and enclavity is demonstrated in Figure 1, above.

The wild pursuit of economic growth has become, for some countries, an end in itself. What's worse, this growth takes place only in the enclave. No effort is being made to liquidate the communal economy or spread the benefit of growth into the population that needs it. This legacy creates two nations in one defined by poverty and inequality.

Economic growth, however necessary, is not a sufficient condition for human development. The UNDP Human Development report of 1996 already observed that the link between growth and human development is not automatic; that in most cases too much emphasis on economic growth has led to lopsided development and often flawed growth patterns, producing:

- *Jobless growth* (without expanding employment opportunities);
- *Ruthless growth* (associated with increasing inequality and poverty);
- *Voiceless growth* (without extending democracy);
- *Rootless growth* (that withers cultural identity);
- *Futureless growth* (that squanders resources needed by future generations).

The role of the state in directing the proceeds of economic growth into poverty reduction remains critical. State policy must be driven by the desire and conviction of ensuring that this growth is shared, inclusive and pro-poor. The fight to ensure that economic development powered by the phenomenon of the "rising Africa" serves human development is important. It is worth fighting for!

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IN THE MEANTIME IN AFRICA...

CARIEN J TOUWEN

In January 2011 *The Economist* reported that “Africa is now one of the world’s fastest-growing regions.”¹ An analysis of the first decade of the new millennium showed that six of the world’s fastest-growing economies were in sub-Saharan Africa.

Within a couple of days the report triggered almost 50 posts from bloggers all over the world. It gave an interesting impression of the opinions on economic development and Africa in general. A lot of the first-moment posts reflected either joy (“Finally, some good news for Africa”) or cynicism (“I still do not put much hope on this pathetic continent”). They revealed above all the images that first popped up as soon as the word Africa was mentioned.

Africa was bad news’ and ‘incapable of sustainable development, despite positive growth. It was interesting to see that the first reactions by bloggers were based on feelings and impressions; facts and theory only later entered the online discussions. It highlighted the power of existing representations and the flaw in human intelligence to accept existing beliefs rather than exceptions. Swiss novelist and thinker Rolf Dobelli in his 2011 publication *The Art of Thinking Clearly* called this confirmation bias the mother of all errors of judgment.

Media images

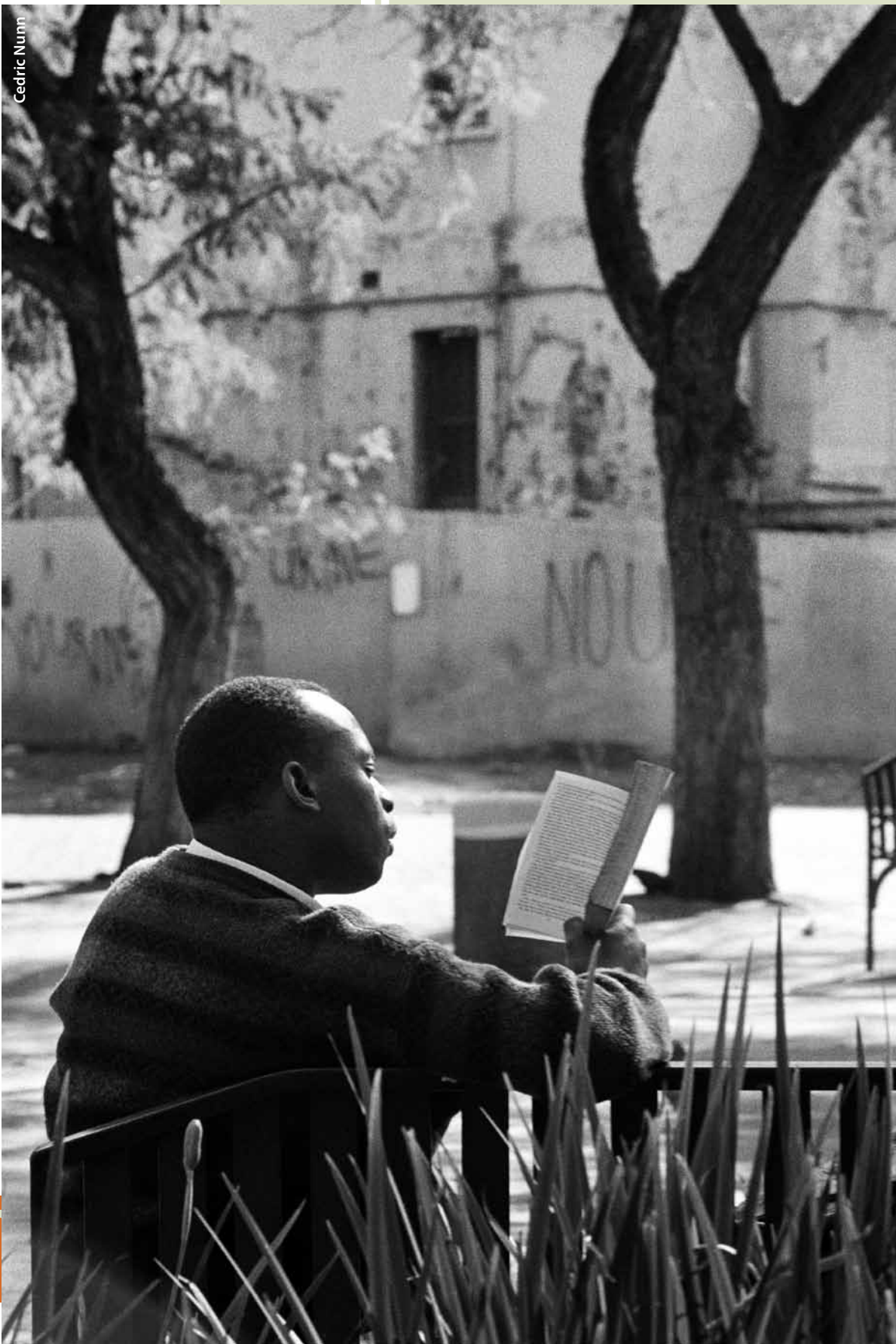
But what about the traditional media? Did they manage to paint new pictures of progress in Africa or did they just follow the GDP-trail of bankers and politicians? Did they tell more than the stories of companies that paid their fieldtrips to new enterprises in the dark heart of Africa where modern leaders were guiding former conflict areas to new horizons? They tried, struggled, achieved some success, but failed overall.

In the first quarter of 2008 the financial crisis was looming but it had not yet hit. Africa had experienced positive growth for over a decade and there was much more going on than dry GDP figures could reveal. For instance, the fact that migrant remittances were starting to exceed donor funding. Or the rapid spread of cell phones offering opportunities for citizens to take development into their own hands. Did media manage to cover these changing socio-economic realities and were they able to do this from a bottom-up perspective? The surprised reactions by bloggers showed that at least their images of Africa had not changed over the past decade. An interesting and recent example is the reporting on piracy in the waters east of Africa. A quick search for articles on the subject revealed one dominant opinion: piracy is a bad thing and pirates are criminals. A whole set of moral values on piracy is at play here and lots of trading interests, the ideal field for a confirmation bias. Indeed, the majority of opinions and facts supported that representation, framed in a nice and clear good guys-bad guys format. A recent study on piracy by the British think-tank Chatham-House, however, “concluded that significant amounts of ransom money were spent in the regional centres, with the benefits being shared out between a large number of people due to the clan structures in place”. This showed a completely different perspective on safety and development connected to piracy. Hardly any media picked it up.

There are basically two ways to cover the changing socio-economic realities in Africa. One is to show a broader perspective on development as is advocated by instruments such as the HDI. This could result in stories on topics other than the ones belonging to the GDP-frame. Instead of the well-known focus on foreign direct investments, commodity prices and natural resources, stories could cover education, skills development and corporate social responsibility. Another way is to change the perspective, away from the financial and political elites and their structures and strategies to other participants in society and their realities. To write about development bottom-up. A research into three of South Africa’s mainstream print media, all with a different focus and audience, revealed that broadening the scope of development is feasible, telling the stories bottom-up is difficult, but combining the two is close to impossible. Smaller budgets and subsequently smaller newsrooms and higher work load are only part of the explanation.

Business Day

As a financial newspaper *Business Day* covered a lot of company news and kept to the old religion that money makes the world go round. A rough analysis of the words they used in articles on African countries in the first quarter of 2008 told the familiar



Cedric Nunn

A map of the countries covered in that first quarter for a large part equaled a map of countries dependent on oil production and mining.

Africa in Beeld

0	<2
2 - 4.9	5 - 9.9
10 - 24.9	>25

Beeld

The argument was that the language barrier made it hard to include news from French press agency AFP. But with easy access to translation services on the net, that should hardly be a problem these days. It probably had more to do with the way Africa was viewed. An analysis into 121 articles covering developments in Africa in the first quarter of 2008 revealed a dominant “fragile states discourse” with themes such as conflict, corruption and political instability.

City Press

Category	Percentage
Politics	48%
Art, music, leisure	2%
Sports	17%
Economy	11%
Environment, tourism	6%
Health, education	16%

But they didn't report a lot on economic development, only 7% of all articles in those first three months of 2008. *City Press*, like *Beeld*, put a strong emphasis on South African companies, but it took a different approach. *City Press* showed how South African investments could benefit Africa and not the other way round. An article on the appointment of Standard Bank's new chief executive Simpiwe Tshabalala presented it as encouragement for new black leadership on the continent⁴. Most articles showed different aspects of development and not the familiar GDP story. In some articles *City Press* managed to cover developments bottom-up, for instance by voicing community members and women directors on theatre productions that uplifted communities⁵.

Endnotes

1. Daily Chart: Africa's Impressive Growth. Africa is now one of the world's fastest-growing regions. The Economist Online, 06-01-2011 http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/01/daily_chart
2. Broadman, Harry G., (2007), Africa's Silk Road, China and India's new frontier, The World Bank, Washington
3. In: Mosambiek gaan aktief meer buitelandse beleggings in mega-projekte lok [Mozambique will actively attract more foreign investments and mega projects], Charles Mangwiro, 17 March 2008
4. Inspired and motivated at Standard Bank, Andile Ntingi, 8 March 2008
5. Female actors still looking on from the curtains of the stage, 23 February 2008



Amadou Mahtar Ba is optimistic – very optimistic – about the changes currently taking shape on the African media landscape. As Chief Executive of the African Media Initiative (AMI), he knows better than most the way in which media throughout Africa are making a difference at the national level and throughout the continent. “Rapid changes and meaningful changes are happening within the media landscape at large,” says Ba, who believes that by embracing these, mostly, technological changes, the media in Africa will continue to flourish, to draw in bigger audiences and to see continued growth.

EMBRACE! INVEST! FLOURISH!

Currently the trend across Africa within the media landscape is growth – compared with its European and American counterparts who are feeling the full weight of the current financial crisis which has seen many newspapers downsize, cut jobs and suffer massive cost cutting strategies. Newspapers like the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The New York Times* and the Tribune Company (which owns the *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Baltimore Sun*) have all felt the effects of the global economic crisis with huge debts and job losses.¹ Generally newspapers in the developed world have suffered in both readership and advertising revenue and seen a decline in their profit margins. While Ba admits that African countries are starting from a “lower point”, it does mean that they have greater space to grow and develop in a difficult market. In developed countries the opposite is true. Santhanam & Rosenstiel (2011)² note that

The problem is greatest, generally, in developed countries where newspapers already are consumed in large percentages of the population and where there are a lot of media providing news and information. Print newspapers are thriving, meanwhile, in countries with untapped and emerging population segments.

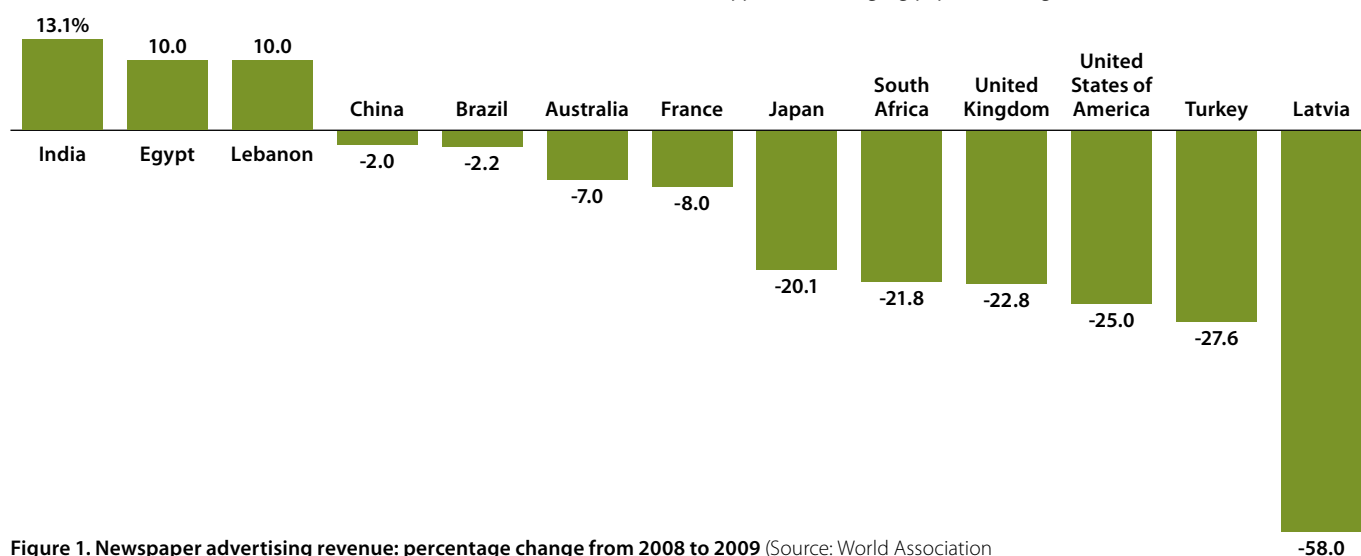


Figure 1. Newspaper advertising revenue: percentage change from 2008 to 2009 (Source: World Association of Newspapers 2012 World Press Trends annual report)

Across Africa newspaper circulation in 2009 rose by 4.8% which would mean an even greater readership figure, while the global figure in 2009 saw a drop in newspaper circulation by 0.8% – Africa is bucking the trend and growing its newspaper figures in a declining market.

The problem in the developed media markets in both Europe and America, according to Ba, is that they invested too heavily in new media and digital platforms to the detriment of the print medium. “If you look at media houses in Europe or the United States, the investment has been so much in trying to adopt new technologies,

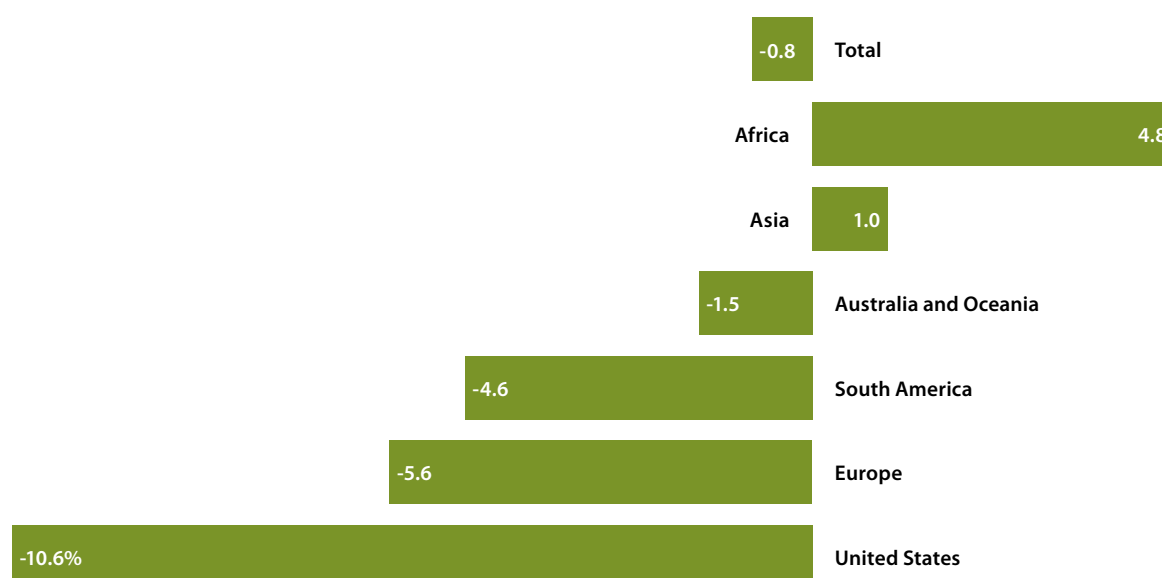


Figure 2. Paid newspaper circulation: percentage change from 2008 to 2009 (Source: World Association of Newspapers 2012 World Press Trends annual report)

Note: Total represents circulation figures by continent. US included for comparison purposes.

BY VANESSA MALILA

and most of them have moved most of their operations to digital, and that radical shift hasn't worked well." Experts have argued that offering free content through their websites has left newspapers vulnerable to declining readers and a lack of online advertising revenue. While many expected the internet to offer a boom in advertising potential, this has not been the case and newspaper companies struggle to find a balance between offering free content and making money.

Ba believes that African media now have the advantage and that it is up to them to make the global downturn an African upsurge. He warns, however, against companies neglecting their print business for the potential of the digital and online platform and believes instead that a balanced approach is the best option. "If you actually invest in digital you enlarge your audiences, not only at home within your national boundaries, but beyond your national boundaries, so however we look at it, my belief is that going digital to *enhance* our operations, our traditional operations, is the way to go. I'm not saying throw away the traditional models, I'm saying using new technologies to *enhance* traditional models." The message is clear, invest in new technological trends, but keep an eye on your core business – newspapers.

The biggest technological revolution in Africa is currently taking place and it is being led by the mobile phone. Mobile phone penetration in Africa has reached 500 million, it is the fastest growing mobile market in the world, and currently has the most mobile phone subscribers after Asia.³ The media in Africa would have to be far removed from reality not to realise the potential this market offers them. "You can simply imagine what can happen if each country's media houses can reach audiences using that kind of technology!"

The plan seems simple – by investing now in new digital technology, media houses will be able to harness the power of mobile phones, and in this way attract more readers, which means growing newspaper circulation, and in doing so growing revenue, so that they are able to invest more in technology. "We have an

unprecedented opportunity using these technologies to reach greater masses and media houses on the continent need to find a way of doing just that, of harnessing these technologies to reach greater audiences, as that will help them in their circulation and help them in sourcing more advertising as they are reaching more people."

The biggest problem is that the media in Africa do not always have access to investment capital to be able to harness the potential of this new technological opportunity. This is part of the work done by the AMI, and that has seen the organisation launch a \$1-million African News Innovation Challenge. The aim of the competition is to find media companies or newsrooms that are using digital media products and technology in an innovative and new way. The challenge is clear and Ba makes no qualms about expressing what this competition means. "My commitment is to say you guys out here don't sit and say you can't do anything because you don't have the money, have your ideas and bring us your ideas, we will evaluate them and make sure that if it is a great idea, that it will succeed."

African media can look at a number of local examples of media companies using digital technologies to try and improve their core business. Ba cites South Africa's *Mail&Guardian* a number of times during our interview as a media house which is growing and adds that "they have obviously invested heavily in new media and on digital platforms, but also that investment was done, not to get rid of traditional options, but to enhance what the *Mail&Guardian* was doing, and that is the way of the future." The *Mail&Guardian* has recently designed and built a new website, which, according to Chris Roper *Mail&Guardian Online* editor was done because "the modern news organisation has to cater for the powerful new tools available to journalists, and indeed to readers. For example, social media has become integral to the dissemination and creation of news, and our new site will make it much easier to share content, and to collaborate on bringing news stories to

light."⁴ It seems the organisation has much the same philosophy as Ba, by making a website that harnesses the advantages of an online platform such as being easily and instantly updated, while still giving their loyal readers the in-depth content they read in the paper version, which does in fact harness a second advantage of an online platform – it allows much greater depth and a longer word count than even the lengthy *Mail&Guardian* investigative pieces. Roper adds to his readers, "We need to make sure that you have a front page that changes with the 24/7 demands of breaking news, but at the same time allow you to easily find the big, heavyweight pieces that are primarily why you come to the *Mail&Guardian*."

Ba's optimism is infectious and it seems that African media are on the same page, technologically speaking, in harnessing the potential of digital and online platforms to enhance their reach. The positive message is underpinned however, by a warning from Ba: while investing in new technology and embracing the mobile market as a space for optimum growth, media houses have to ensure that they remain "true to the core principles of journalism". He has the last word, which balances both caution and optimism. "We must not forget that journalism is changing very fast in the landscape which is more and more dominated by devices which are digital devices and journalists need to adapt, news organisations need to adapt, and newsrooms need to adapt. But while doing that we should always keep in mind that we absolutely as journalists have to stay true to being fair and balanced."

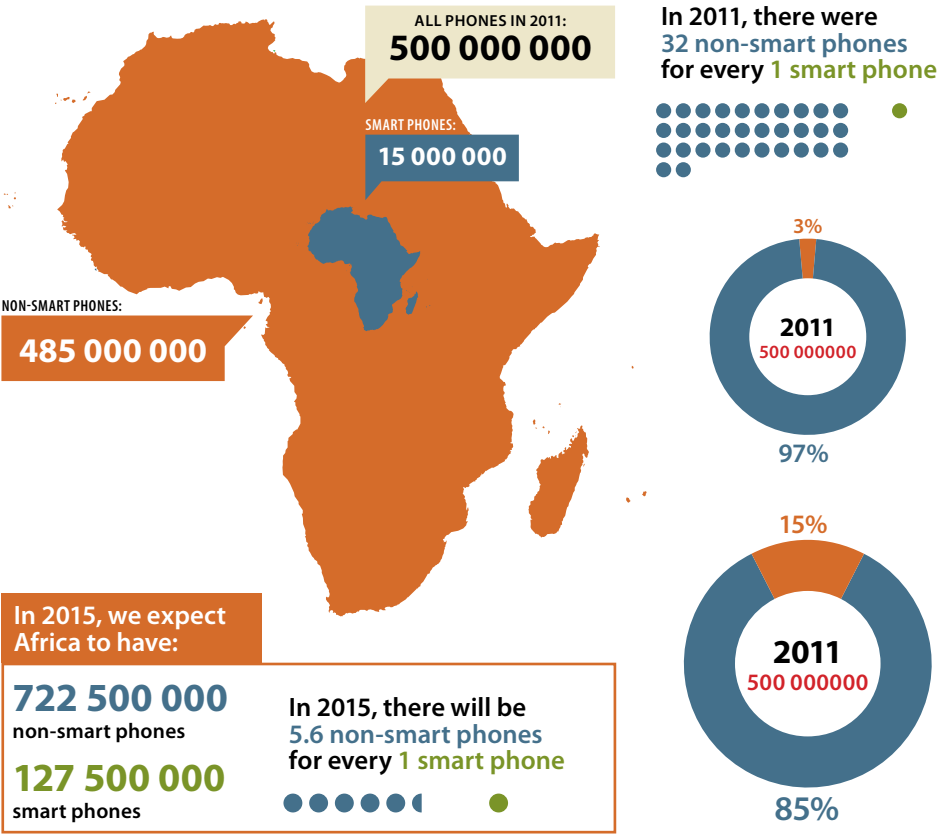


Figure 3. Mobile phones in Africa. (Sources: Informa Telecoms and Media. Infographic designed by @ivanisawesome)

Endnotes

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2. <http://stateofthemediamedia.org/2011/mobile-survey/international-newspaper-economics/>
3. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15659983>
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WHEN COMMITTING JOURNALISM IS A CRIME

BY SHARON HUDSON-DEAN

I was on a date on 3 April 2008. We had just played an exhausting round of evening squash and then took our water bottles and energy bars to a grassy knoll in the middle of the University of Pretoria's athletic fields to watch a pick-up game of soccer. Our conversation could not have been further from the unfolding chaos to the north when my embassy cell phone rang. It was Celia Dugger of *The New York Times* in Johannesburg; her husband and co-Africa bureau chief, Barry Bearak, had just been arrested for working in Harare without media accreditation and the situation was developing badly. Could I help?

That late Southern African autumn night I was in the middle of my time as press attaché at the US Embassy in Pretoria. From my glass office inside the embassy, I had invested a substantial amount of time following events in Zimbabwe in the South African media. That year, I also became a remote member of the Harare Embassy team, assisting Ambassador James McGee and his staff members who came regularly to Pretoria and often found themselves answering questions about Zimbabwe from reporters barred from entering the country themselves.

After speaking to Celia, I called Eric Bost, our outspoken African-American ambassador. Bost stayed on top of events in Zimbabwe. I co-ordinated the writing of numerous opinion pieces and statements for him on the urgency of restoring rule of law and economic sanity to prevent more suffering and to stop the flood of refugees coming over the border into South Africa. When Bearak was arrested, we both knew how high-profile his detention would be in that day's US news cycle. Our colleagues in Harare were already on top of the situation, speaking to Bearak and reaching out to police contacts, but with notoriously poor phone service and erratic electricity, they appreciated a support team in SA.

Later that month, after Bearak was safely back in South Africa, the Pulitzer Prize-winner published a first-hand account of his experience. "I was being charged with the crime of 'committing journalism'," he wrote in *The New York Times*. "One of my captors, Detective

Inspector Dani Rangwani, described the offense to me as something despicable, almost hissing the words: 'You've been gathering, processing and disseminating the news.'"

Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe and his liberation political party, ZANU-PF, have long played cat and mouse with the media, foreign and domestic. The intimidation tactics are both crude and sophisticated, and applied erratically. Many foreign journalists based in Johannesburg have slipped in and out of Zimbabwe for years, conducting interviews without accreditation and publishing widely. But when the security apparatus decides to flex its muscles and go after the media, a weekend detention in Harare's notorious central prison is often their starting point.

On the flip side, the ZANU-PF propaganda machine runs constant, pervasive, political, messaging campaigns through the Information Ministry, the President's spokesman, Zimbabwe's most-widely distributed newspapers from Zimbabwe Newspapers Ltd (Zimpapers), and the only TV and radio in the country (Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation or ZBC). The messages are short, emotional and memorable. Information control and manipulation are two areas where ZANU-PF has excelled in its 32-year history of holding tightly to the levers of power in this beautiful, land-locked country.

But times are rapidly changing in Zimbabwe and the propaganda formula is less and less effective. The balance of power has shifted slightly but importantly due to the disputed 2008 elections that led to the formation of the Government

of National Unity (GNU), giving the opposition MDC-T and MDC-N parties substantial roles in government. They may not have achieved the outright win they deserved according to the polls, but their foot is very firmly in the door with the media shouldering in behind them. And while the MDCs are weak shadows of their rival in the information war, the internet is quietly but steadily breaking ZANU-PF's information stranglehold by touching a growing number of Zimbabwean media consumers – consumers who are 65% under the age of 25, who make cell phone access a top spending priority, and who are the fastest growing users of the internet on their mobile phones in sub-Saharan Africa. (Opera Mini browser statistics show that page view and data transfer grew by 4965% and 3450% respectively in the year prior to June 2011.)



Trevor Ncube (top), Soul Makani (above left) and Hopewell Chin'ono (right)

Barry Bearak’s 2008 arrest along with British journalist Stephen Bevan was a peak in the Zimbabwe government’s near decade-long campaign of harassment against international media coverage, which accompanied a more intensive crack-down on indigenous journalists. The two outsiders had fallen foul of the same draconian legal code that had led to the arrest and detention of almost 100 Zimbabwean media workers since 2002, according to the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA). A slew of laws used to arrest, detain and harass journalists, including the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), have landed Zimbabwe squarely in the “Not Free” category of Freedom House’s well-respected media freedom list.

Throughout the 1980s and 90s, the government squeezed independent investigation and coverage out of the state-controlled media by consolidating its control over the board and editors of the state media: Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings (owners of ZBC) and Zimpapers. ZBC runs the only radio and TV channels in Zimbabwe (five and two respectively), while Zimpapers has a stable of 13 newspapers and magazines around the country. Independent newspapers and magazines were subsequently pushed out of the publishing business through arrests, libel cases and economic pressure, which culminated in the rapid

creation and signing into law of AIPPA in March of 2002. Only three weeklies, the *Zimbabwe Independent*, the *Financial Gazette*, and the *Standard*, survived between 2003 and 2010, and many veteran journalists fled the country.

The Ndebele media tycoon

Journalists were not the only ones affected. Zimbabwe entered an alternate economic universe at the advent of the new millennium. After independence in 1980, the new ZANU-PF government spent massively on public services and gave big payouts to liberation war veterans. These policies created a dangerously unstable economy with large deficits. In order to stay in power and maintain a complicated web of political cronyism, ZANU-PF embarked on an aggressive land redistribution campaign in 2000 that removed, often violently, 90% of the commercial – often white – farmers from the land and gave it to inexperienced and under-resourced black citizens. The “bread basket of Africa” became a net importer of food within a few years and the country’s international reputation was destroyed. Capital, both human and financial, flew out of the country and, by September 2008, inflation was 500 billion% (African Development Bank, Zimbabwe Short-Term Strategy: Concept Note, April 2009).

Trevor Ncube could have easily abandoned his roots as he built a highly successful career as chief executive of South Africa’s leading weekly and online publisher, the *Mail&Guardian* Group, but he never gave up on Zimbabwe. After being fired from the position of editor-in-chief of the *Financial Gazette* in 1996 for being too critical of President Mugabe and his party, Ncube and two partners created Alpha Media Holdings and launched *The Zimbabwe Independent*, a weekly that remains

the cornerstone of his media products. A year later they added *The Standard* Sunday paper and then focused on the business side, purchasing a distribution company and later a printing press. In a country where most businesses were rapidly shutting down or facing severe political pressure, Alpha Media’s long-term success hinged on controlling its own printing and distribution.

Ncube pushed forward with his dream of launching the first daily, independent newspaper since the forced closure of *The Daily News* in 2003. Alpha Media applied for a license to publish *NewsDay* in September 2008 and finally received it in May 2010. Having set up a newsroom and designed the layout of the paper over the previous nine months in preparation, *NewsDay* hit the streets in a month. Ncube purposely priced it at 50 cents a copy, half the price of the state media’s daily *Herald* newspaper. Zimbabwe had adopted the US dollar as its currency in early 2009 but does not use coinage; as part of a clever marketing campaign, consumers paid \$1 and received that day’s newspaper plus a grey token the size of a Kruger Rand to be redeemed the next day for another paper. Two *NewsDays* for the price of one *Herald* put the market into play almost overnight, causing the *Herald* decision-makers to start focusing more on better content and, gradually, less propaganda. Today, the *Herald* covers police corruption stories, missteps by low level ZANU-PF officials and more MDC activities (although high level ZANU-PF leaders are still off limits except for glowing tributes).

Ncube and his team have worked hard to establish *NewsDay* as a national media leader, but they continue to work with a host of market and socio-political factors that make each month a struggle. The last paper mill to produce newsprint in Zimbabwe closed in 2007 and imported newsprint is expensive. The 50 cent *Newsday* price was not sustainable for long and Alpha Media was forced to hike the price up to \$1, the same price as *The Herald*, in the middle of 2011. And two new competitors launched in March 2011, *The Daily News* and *The Mail*, drawing readers, journalists and profit away from *Newsday*. Although *The Mail* lasted less than a year due to a weak business plan, the three remaining national dailies must fight tooth-and-nail for the limited number of readers, who are all on limited budgets. Add to their precarious financial situation the increasing arrests of Alpha Media journalists and editors, thanks to the restrictive legal and political environment, and it is by no means guaranteed that Ncube’s empire is on more stable ground than the rest of the country.

The wizard of Wiztech

Is television the most threatening media form in Zimbabwe? According to Hopewell Chin’ono, it is. “The present government knows TV is powerful because it allows you to really see people’s issues.”

In a country with one unpopular and horribly low-quality television channel, Chin’ono is a star video

journalist. A tall, gentle 39-year-old, he studied journalism against his father’s wishes. But Hopewell pursued his passion, eventually winning the CNN African Journalist of the Year Award in 2008, among other awards. He has been banned twice by the Ministry of Information but continues to work in his native country, both for international television stations and as an independent producer. His documentary *A Violent Response* is his second major film, made during and about the brutal 2008 post-election season. The authorities refused to register him in 2008, preventing him from covering the elections for South African e.tv, so instead, he spent his time collecting footage for a documentary. It is a powerful study of the violence used against MDC supporters in the post-election runoff.

Hopewell is frank about the state of television in Zimbabwe today. “If you want to understand the depth of disillusionment about state TV (ZBC), go to (the Harare township) Mbare and look at the number of satellite dishes. The people there are the poorest of the poor. They cannot even afford a loaf of bread every day but they buy a dish so they don’t have to watch ZBC.”

The internationally-trained producer sees two main lessons in the incongruous scenes of mud rondaval houses in rural areas topped with satellite dishes: that the ZANU-PF propaganda machine has failed in its messaging campaigns and that the party doesn’t understand how to win the game. “For a message to be effective, it needs to have an audience. The Zimbabwean audiences are turning to foreign TV and radio (available free-to-air with a cheap Wiztech satellite dish and decoder). People know there is more out there than what is reported on ZBC, so they invest in other ways to get their information from outside broadcasters.”

ZBC television is for many Zimbabweans a national embarrassment. Often referred to as “DeadBC,” it has been unable to purchase new programming for many years, leaving it reliant on old sitcoms from the 1980s to 90s to fill the time between crude propaganda discussion and news programmes. I visited the studios in February 2011 to be interviewed on a live midday program and was shocked by the emptiness of the newsroom. Unlike the bustling broadcast studios in Johannesburg I had frequently visited in the years just prior to moving to Zimbabwe, the ZBC offices looked abandoned. Broken desks were empty as if unoccupied for months; only two computers seemed to be working;

continued on page 32



Philip Dube (top) and Sharon Hudson-Dean

continued from page 31

and there was no discernible research or story-chasing activity in the building.

As the quality of ZBC declines, sales of Wiztech satellite dishes are up. For only \$70, consumers can buy a dish and decoder that brings in the South African Broadcasting Channel's three stations, Botswana TV, the BBC, France TV and a few others. No monthly subscription fee applies, unlike a subscription to the DSTV satellite service that dominates the upscale African market and is far beyond the average Zimbabwean's affordable price point. Add to the dish an inverter and a battery with solar panels to charge it and, for only \$120 more, you have Zimbabwe's most popular home entertainment system suitable for all locations and most budgets.

The true believer

Soul Makani had never seen the internet until the day his boss at the shopping centre where he worked as a clerk bought a PC and got a dial-up connection. It was 2001 and there were 500 million internet users worldwide – many in the US but few in Africa. Exploring the internet took Makani's life from black and white to colour in an instant. "My first time on the internet was a religious moment," he says, smiling a deep, knowing smile and recalling intimately the experience. "Today, internet uptake in Zimbabwe is still slow but that 'moment' is happening now to a lot of people."

Makani went on to study information technology and in 2009 started TechZim, arguably Zimbabwe's leading technology website featuring product reviews and local IT news. With 3 000 page views per day, TechZim has set its sights on building a culture of start-ups and innovation in Zimbabwe. "A lot of Zimbabweans see the internet as a product, not a platform," he laments. "They think they are just an audience, but they need to see how much they can do and put on the web."

Makani is a true internet devotee and has an unbending faith in Zimbabwean online entrepreneurs and their power to change Zimbabwe. "The internet is so powerful," he repeats, "it is out of sync with offline politics. And it is really pointless to try to block it – there are always ways around to get to what you're trying to find. Because it's the internet – the whole idea is we are all connected on it and you can find anything."

As on the rest of the continent, Zimbabwe's mobile internet access is where the dramatic growth in internet access is coming, and coming fast. In his 2012 budget speech, Finance Minister Tendai Biti noted that the "Information Communication Technology (ICT) sector remains one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy... Concurrently, the voice penetration rate or tele-density has improved, reaching 68% in 2011, of which mobile penetration accounted for 65%, making Zimbabwe one of the countries with the highest rates

alongside South Africa, Botswana, and Mozambique."

He went on to confirm that the three main mobile service providers now have 8.1-million subscribers. What the Minister failed to highlight is that by the end of 2011, all three GSM mobile service providers had affordable mobile broadband data packages available to their subscribers, opening the internet to two thirds of the population.

The scene today

The cat and mouse game goes on today with many diplomats and human rights NGOs taking careful note of the uptick in journalists' arrests and harassment of the media (although it remains significantly lower than in 2008). Election season will soon be here. No one knows exactly when – some say end of 2012, others say first half of 2013 – and anxiety is slowing building. But the fault lines are different this time compared to the disastrous election of 2008, and the new open media space may be a game-changer.

Most symbolic to me of Zimbabwe's changes was my visit in February 2012 to Kutama Marist Brothers Missionary College, Robert Mugabe's alma mater. The all-boys boarding high school sits adjacent to the President's rural home, a little over an hour's drive south of Harare. The boys there are smart, handsome and hard-working; the sons of middle-class Zimbabweans who cannot afford the elite private schools but may be able to afford university in South Africa if they get assistance from other relatives. With the school's church choir practising Catholic hymns in the next hall, I spoke to 120 juniors and seniors about US university scholarships. Near the end, I asked them if they were on Facebook. All hands went up.

Philip Tawanda Dube, a 2011 graduate of Kutama who escorted us, explained the system, "Everyone uses Facebook on their cell phone. Technically, cell phones are not allowed on campus but the boys all have SIM cards, so one boy will be brave enough to sneak in a phone, and the rest will borrow it, just swapping out the SIM card. That way, everyone can get an hour online a day and the risk of getting caught is lower.

"It will take time to change Zim," he concluded. "But you know, my aunt was originally really against Facebook, and she recently sent me a friend request! She's got kids in the UK and now she likes it." On the way home, we stopped the 4x4 to take pictures with my iPhone next to a stone monument marking the Robert Gabriel Mugabe Highway that runs past Kutama. "You must tag me in that when you put it on your Facebook page," Philip pleaded. "I'll friend you now." He was tagged – and we were 'friends' – before we turned off the Mugabe Highway.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the US Department of State or the US Government.

CHINA IN SOUTH AFRICA: A LONG AFFAIR

BY HERMAN WASSERMAN



THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN CHINA
AND AFRICA
GOES BACK A
LONG TIME. THE
FIRST INSTANCE
OF SINO-AFRICAN
CONTACT CAN BE
TRACED TO 1415,
WHEN ADMIRAL
ZHENG VISITED
MORE THAN 30
COUNTRIES IN
AFRICA.

Official relations between Africa and China in contemporary times can be seen to have started in 1955 with the first Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, aimed at promoting economic and cultural co-operation. The development of China-Africa relations gained impetus when it became clear in the 1990s that to maintain the “roaring pace” of its economic growth as a result of economic reforms, China would need to look for new sources of energy and natural resources – which it found in Africa.

By the mid-2000s, over 800 Chinese companies were trading in 49 African countries. In 2010, China became the continent’s largest trade partner, making up 10.4% of Africa’s total trade. This 10-fold increase in the decade between 2000 and 2010 – compared to the eightfold increase in trade with the rest of the world – outperformed the rapid boom in gross domestic product (GDP) in China.

This interest in Africa also extended into the political and military arena as China looked for partners in the developing world that could strengthen its position in the face of economic sanctions and political attacks after crackdowns on pro-democracy protests in the 1990s.

This intensified political-economic relationship in the era of globalisation and within a changing global geo-political landscape started to raise questions as to how China’s renewed interest in Africa should be viewed, whether China should be seen as partner or predator, the consequences of the tension between the US and China over mutual interests in Africa, China’s support for corrupt African leaders in undemocratic regimes, Chinese companies’ harsh labour practices, and the importation of Chinese labour to the exclusion of local workers.

At the same time there is the recognition that Chinese aid usually does not come with as many political and economic strings attached as aid from the US does, due to the Chinese policy of “non-interference in domestic affairs” (Daly 2009: 82). China has ingratiated itself to African countries by cancelling bilateral debt of 31 African states to the value of approximately \$1.27-billion, and continuing to give billions in development assistance.

As far as South Africa is concerned, its current formal relationship with China in the post-apartheid era should be seen as part of larger geopolitical shifts and a changing world order. Both countries form part of a “new geography of international relations” emerging since the end of the Cold War, according to Le Pere and Shelton (2007: 84). They say the

rise of countries such as Brazil, Russia, India and China and their increasing impact on the global political and economic stage, indicate that the “global South of developing countries no longer occupies a peripheral and generally marginal position in international affairs” (2007: 84).

China and South Africa are seen to be part of the vanguard of states in the Global South that seek new strategies to redress the systemic marginalisation of the Global South and reposition the South as a growth engine for the global economy and a strategic political formation.

South Africa, regarded by Beijing as the continent’s mineralogical treasure house, is one of the two leading African countries (next to Angola) with whom China does business.

The dynamic relationship between South Africa and China as emerging powers within the new global geopolitical and geo-economic order was formalised in December 2010 when South Africa received an invitation to become part of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) group of emerging powers.

Although a vibrant and lucrative one, the relationship between China and South Africa has been rocky at times. Resistance against Chinese involvement is led by the trade union federation Cosatu, who has described cheap imported Chinese goods as a tsunami that will damage local industries. Yet South Africa, like other African countries, owes a historical debt of gratitude toward China for its support of anti-colonial and liberation movements.

China’s role in post-apartheid South Africa is therefore not a straightforward one. Whether viewed as a positive engagement or a negative impact, the size and impact of this relationship cannot be ignored. It can therefore be assumed that it would enjoy significant media coverage. The question is how this relationship would be portrayed.

A controversial relationship

China’s presence in Africa is usually viewed as a controversial one, and often portrayed as a Manichean binary – either predator or partner, friend or foe, comrade or coloniser.

Critics frequently highlight China’s support for undemocratic rulers such as Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe, its destructive approach to the environment, disregard for human rights, disrespect for workers’ rights, intolerance of an opposition and free press.

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Jenny Gordon

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Fears have been expressed that African leaders may point to China as an example of economic development without democracy to rationalise their own authoritarian rule. The underlying assumption in these media discourses, as Zeleza (2008) has pointed out, is that Chinese are corrupt and authoritarian themselves, and therefore have no qualms in flouting Western standards of good governance; because Chinese workers are used to poverty they can work cheaply under poor conditions in Africa.

On the other hand, positive views of China's role in Africa include the hope that China can serve as an alternative political-economic framework to the Washington consensus which has put pressure on African countries to adopt structural adjustment marketisation programmes, and point to an influx of modernisation, capacity building, human resources training and scientific exchanges. This view tends to regard Sino-African relationships as South-South solidarity in an era of globalisation.

A previous content analysis of South African media coverage of China found that, contrary to the above assumptions of China's presumed deleterious impact on South Africa, South African media have not been overly negative in their reporting. China received only a little more negative coverage than other foreign powers like the US and the UK, leading to the conclusion that the media image of China's involvement in Africa seems on the whole to be more that of a developmental partner than that of an exploitative colonialist.

In a follow-up study, a total of 1 159 statements were coded in 2010 and 101 statements from the first two months of 2011, covering the major print and broadcast media in the country. These findings again show that China was considered a newsworthy story both in general news as well as in business news (*Business Day* ranked second overall in 2010 and took the lead in the first two months of 2011). China is seen as politically and economically newsworthy, as an emerging economic power and a significant player in the new reconfigured global geopolitical landscape.

The analysis further suggests that coverage of China in South Africa is more balanced than one might have expected. Instead of portraying China either as a saviour or close partner for African states, or as an exploitative neo-colonial predator, coverage seemed fairly balanced. Even after the announcement of South Africa's accession to the BRIC group, both the top two outlets had a majority of neutral statements.

Compared to the other BRIC countries, China in 2010 topped the list of coverage in the South African media with almost double the number of statements in the media than India. In the first two months of 2011, China and India again topped the list of BRIC countries reported on, although India received almost double the number of statements (201) than China did (101). These figures suggest that the "Chindia" region is emerging as a focus point for South African media interest in the BRIC countries, as they are bigger trade partners than Brazil and Russia.

In the first two months of 2011, the economic situation and market position of China received the most coverage, while the rest of the top 10 issues were: mergers and economic co-operation, general economic issues, companies and economic policy, China's situation in the global economy, economic regulations, executives and management, and products and marketing.

The overall picture of China was, again, not an overwhelmingly negative one, nor was it only a positive one. Statements on China from 2009-2010 were on the whole balanced, with 696 positive versus 678 negative and 522 neutral, comparing well to India, which received 333 positive statements, 234 negative and 359 neutral over the same period. In the first two months of 2011, 21% of statements related to China were negative and 27% positive.

Further questions

These analyses of attitudes in the South African media over the past three years suggest that a more balanced view of China is emerging. Individual reports may still take an either/or stance but, when considered on the whole and across a range of media platforms, China is not represented in either a starkly positive or starkly negative light. It would seem that a cautiously optimistic attitude characterises South African media coverage while understanding that China's role in Africa is a complex one, which cannot be pigeonholed as either a bad or good news story.

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走出去

(GO GLOBAL)

BY DAOUDA Cissé

In 2011, trade between China and Africa reached US\$ 160 billion and investments totalled more than US\$ 13 billion. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which aims to solidify economic, political and diplomatic ties between China's central government and Africa, recently outlined recommendations supporting its policy:

- Africa needs to take control of its economic development path. As enshrined in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), transparency, corruption and governance issues need to be addressed to ensure public service delivery to people. This should also be the key agenda for FOCAC. From Africa's side, the cooperation and partnership with China should benefit people who mostly remain disadvantaged in their livelihoods; increased transparency will help ensure the reaching of targeted groups.
- In Sino-African economic co-operation (trade, investments and aid), the lack of transparency, corruption and doubtful governance performance has been denounced by civil society. China should strongly consider these issues in its engagement with African countries.
- For balanced trade, policies should be developed on both sides. With the rising purchasing power among Chinese and a shift towards consumer-driven growth in China, opportunities are presented to move towards a more balanced trade between China and Africa. The establishment of (temporary and targeted) protectionist measures to regulate China-Africa trade can also contribute to "fair trade". This, however, requires a strategic trade policy on the African side.
- To face these challenges, Africa needs to emphasise pragmatism in its partnership with China. Country, as well as regional level policies should be developed to set priorities to achieve through FOCAC V. The African Union Commission – a member of FOCAC in its own right – should also undertake studies and analysis of African countries' needs to better engage the debate with Chinese officials.



Jenny Gordon



Jenny Gordon



IS CHINA CAUSING AFRICA'S FREE PRESS PROBLEM?

BY DEBORAH BRAUTIGAM

On 15 April 2012, the *New York Times* published an op-ed by Mohamed Keita on Africa's free press problem, arguing that press freedom was getting worse in Africa – because of China.

Keita's piece makes a lot of good points. Investigative reporters have a very tough road in many parts of Africa and there are many examples of courage under impossibly tough conditions.

However, his opinion oversteps his evidence in linking increased Chinese economic activity in Africa with increased repression of the media.

Asking "Why this disturbing trend? (of media repression)" Keita points to (inter alia): "the influence of China, which surpassed the West as Africa's largest trading partner in 2009".

To illustrate, Keita wrote: "The volume of trade between Rwanda and China increased fivefold between 2005 and 2009. During the same period, the government has eviscerated virtually all critical press and opposition and has begun filtering Rwandan dissident news web sites based abroad."

Trade and repression may be correlated but, as any student of statistics knows, one has to do far more than this to establish causation.

Keita actually does make a good point in his observation that with growing trade, "China has been deepening technical and media ties with African governments to counter the kind of critical press coverage that both parties demonize as neocolonialist".

Rather than training African reporters to be like *Xinhua* reporters, the Chinese goal in stepping up training and PR activities is to present a different picture of Chinese activities in Africa to counter the negative reporting emanating from "the West". Here's where Keita gets it right:

"More than 200 African government press officers received Chinese training between 2004 and 2011 in order to produce what the Communist Party propaganda chief, Li Changchun, called 'truthful' coverage of development fueled by China's activities."

It is easy to understand why both the Chinese and African governments might want a more balanced picture of their activities. In 2008, Cambridge (UK) academic Emma Mawdsley wrote the classic piece on negative media coverage of China in Africa, juxtaposed with positive reporting on the West's engagement: "Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingston on the Dark Continent? Representing China, Africa, and the West in British Broadsheet newspapers".

A new report on "China's Global Media Image" launched by Renmin University and Sweden's 21st Century Frontiers (and spearheaded by Dennis Pamlin) analysed 100 major media magazine covers featuring China. More than 60% clearly pictured China as a threat, and not open to dialogue.

As for Africa, while Keita rightly emphasises many African governments' reluctance to hear criticism, it is also clear that Africa has long been

presented to outside audiences as the dark continent of chaos, child soldiers, famine, etc.

It's not just the 54 African governments that are tired of outsiders determining their global image. France is also tired of Anglo domination of the TV media, hence they've launched their own English media service: France 24. The launch of Al-Jazeera was underpinned in part by a perception of Western bias in coverage of the Middle East, Islam, etc.

As a Chinese reporter put it, "Although they are geographically far apart, China and Africa have long learned about each other through Western media". Farooq Sulehria, a Pakistani writer, added: "We largely view the world through the media. It is our window on the world. If we see the world through the eyes of the West, we will be siding with Tarzan instead of blacks without asking: what is Tarzan, a white man, doing in African jungles."

This "media balancing" is far more important for the Chinese than any effort to get African reporters to modify or soften their reporting on African governments, as implied by Keita. In fact, with their reluctance to intervene in internal affairs of other countries, I would be surprised if the Chinese training includes anything to do with African journalists vis-a-vis their coverage of African governments.

Instead of these general op-eds that are only, after all, opinions, wouldn't it be better to have some actual investigative reporting on this issue? What about an in-depth study of the Chinese media training programmes, or interviewing a random sample of the press officers and African journalists that have attended them?

For more on this topic, see "Comments on 'Winds from the East', a National Endowment for Democracy study" by Deborah Brautigam.

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“‘WHO IS A JOURNALIST?’

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**FOR NEWS
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AROUND THE
WORLD, THIS
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BEEN DECIDEDLY
MIXED...”**





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SOCIAL JOURNALISM: OUTSIDE-IN AND INSIDE-OUT

BY JANE B SINGER

In the world in which most journalists feel at home, their social interactions with people outside the newsroom are defined by occupational roles – and, by and large, controlled by the news workers who occupy those roles. But networked media, especially participatory journalism options such as comments and social media formats such as Facebook and Twitter, challenge the roles and undermine the controls. The resulting pressures come from two directions.

The “outside-in” pressures reflect a world in which everyone is not merely a potential source – a potential realised only when and if the journalist says so – but can produce unsolicited, unverified information at any time.

The “inside-out” issues involve the journalist’s own participation in social media, requiring a finely tuned ability to separate truth from “truthiness” and the professional from the personal.

Outside-in

“Who is a journalist?” is no longer the simple question it was just a few years ago. The interactivity of an open computer network has been married to the ubiquity, portability, and increasing sophistication of personal mobile technology, enabling anyone, anywhere to capture and publish information.

For news organisations around the world, this blessing has been decidedly mixed.

The intangible benefits are easy to enumerate. The civic good generated by an open marketplace of ideas. The enrichment of engaging with other people in other places. The ability to tell more stories and tell them better – to reach “a better approximation of the truth” by being “more open, more participative, more networked” (Rusbridger, 2012).

Tangible benefits may be even easier to see. Virtually all “user-generated content” is free – freely available on individuals’ social media accounts or freely contributed to the news organisation in the form of comments, announcements, photos, and news tips. It comes from people knowledgeable about topics unfamiliar to journalists and from those living in places far from resource-crunched newsrooms. And, crucially, it generates website traffic.

Indeed, nearly every news organisation around the democratic world now invites user contributions. But those invitations typically come with a startlingly lengthy list of caveats and cautions. A small sample from the English-language cohort:

South Africa: Independent Newspapers list a 14-point set of guidelines for use of forum and chat rooms. Among other things, users must not use the site to post any content that is “threatening, harmful, abusive, defamatory, vulgar, obscene or otherwise objectionable.”

Australia: The 13-point list from *Sydney Morning Herald* publisher Fairfax Media forbids posting content that contains nudity or “excessive” violence, or that is “defamatory, obscene, offensive, threatening, abusive, pornographic, vulgar, profane, (or) indecent,” including material “likely to offend, insult or humiliate others” based on race, religion and so on.

Britain: *The Times*’ prohibition list totals 31 items, including banning any “content or activity” that “promotes racism, terrorism, hatred or physical harm of any kind against any group or individual or links to websites that promote the same.”

India: *The Times of India* warns users not to “host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, update or share” information that is “grossly harmful, harassing, blasphemous, defamatory, obscene, pornographic, paedophilic” and more; nor may users encourage gambling or money laundering.

United States: *USA Today* users may not “engage in personal attacks, harass or threaten, question the motives behind others’ posts or comments, deliberately inflame or disrupt the conversation, or air personal grievances about other users,” among items in another lengthy list of

prohibitions similar to those elsewhere.

You get the idea. News organisations are concerned about legal repercussions caused by harm to others as well as about harm to their own credibility as information providers – all in public view and with any user contribution capable of going viral in an instant.

“Mostly the comments you get on individual stories on the website are not terribly well-thought-through or just vitriolic,” an editor at Canada’s *Globe and Mail* told us during our research for *Participatory Journalism* (Singer et al, 2011: 103). “Very few of them make intelligent comments or have intelligent things to say.”

Nor are people notably more likely to be civil in their contributions to local news outlets, despite writing for and about their neighbors.

One journalist at a local British newspaper, for instance, described “most” user comments as “vulgar, abusive and generally worthless. It cheapens our product and, in some cases, offends our sources” who fear becoming “the subject of human ‘bear baiting’” (Singer, 2010: 134).

Essentially, the issue is one of user ethics – the expectation (or hope) that every person who contributes will treat others with dignity and respect. Many will. Some, inevitably, won’t. The latter can drive away not only sources but also advertisers and other disgusted users, creating economic as well as journalistic problems for the news organisation.

Still, the benefits remain compelling. So while a few outlets have abandoned comments altogether, most have sought solutions. Nearly universal is the requirement that users register in order to comment, providing at least a valid email address and, generally, a real name. Registration creates some accountability to the media outlet, though screen names may continue to mask identity from other users.

Recent technological enhancements have enabled news outlets to go further, shifting responsibility and even considerable editorial control onto users’ shoulders. Community management systems, such as Pluck and Disqus, easily enable users not only to flag problems but also to recommend interesting comments or contributors.

Use of Facebook Comments is another newish trend; newspapers including *The Age* (Melbourne, Australia), the *Daily Telegraph* (UK), and the *Wall Street Journal* (USA) now encourage users to sign in through Facebook to post a comment. Facebook largely removes the anonymity that augments likelihood of abusive posts (Loke, 2012). Put simply, “trolls don’t like their friends to know that they’re trolls,” as a *Los Angeles Times* online editor put it (Sonderman, 2011).

Of course, comments are only one kind of “participatory journalism.” People with smartphones avidly share news as well as views.

In 2005, the BBC jumped on the ability to publish photos taken inside Underground tunnels as people evacuated after the London bombings (Sambrook, 2005). The 2009 Iranian elections and 2011 Arab Spring uprisings drove home the additional value – timely, informational, emotional, communal -- of blogs and microblogs such as Twitter (Papacharissi and Oliveira, 2012). Eyewitness accounts from people on the scene fill the news vacuum that immediately follows a major event, before any reporters arrive, as well as diversifying the coverage (Bruno, 2011; Hermida, 2012).

Andy Carvin of National Public Radio in the United States, who processed 400 to 500 tweets a day (and occasionally well over 1 000) from the Middle East during the upheaval in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, describes researching

and reporting through Twitter as “a combination of real-time news and real-time oral history” (Sims, 2011).

But like comments, tweets and other social media forms come with cautionary flags. Of particular concern is the speed with which misinformation can circle the globe. People tend to retweet what they want to be true, which is sure to be more provocative and engaging than the correction that may or may not follow (Silverman, 2012).

For journalists, then, a crucial decision is when to publish information obtained through social media and when to wait to verify it. Some observers predict the emergence of a new newsroom role, a “curator” whose job is to filter, verify, and edit relevant content circulating online (Bruno, 2011).

In the meantime, as these “outside-in” examples suggest, news organisations are wrestling with how to encourage economically and civically valuable user contributions while discouraging those that are neither.

And user contributions are only half the story of journalistic life in a social media space.

Inside-out

As the consideration of how to handle users’ news tips suggests, the other half involves journalists’ own interactions in these shared spaces, which can be similarly challenging for news workers accustomed to a more sheltered existence within newsroom walls that separate those inside from those outside, literally and metaphorically.

Virtually every major news outlet now has an active social media presence, with websites prominently displaying exhortations to “like us on Facebook” and “follow us on Twitter.”

However, studies in the United States indicate the vast majority of posts and tweets are promotional – teasers highlighting and linking to a published story (Holcomb et al., 2011). Of course, there are exceptions, among both individuals and news organisations. We already met NPR’s Andy Carvin, for instance, who is an active – indeed, hyperactive – curator of information circulating through the Twitterverse. At the *Chicago Tribune*, social media pioneers have created a paper-hat-clad character named Colonel Tribune. The affable Colonel serves as a kind of “goofy front man” for the newspaper (Foster, 2009) on Facebook and Twitter, where he has more than 800,000 followers, answering questions and offering commentary; he even hosts real-life meet-ups between *Tribune* readers and journalists.

But by and large, journalists’ use of social networks to date has been restrained – and, frequently, constrained by employer policies. Though not generally as exhaustive as the policies for user behaviour, which bear an unmistakable legal thumbprint, these ethical guidelines can be restrictive all the same.

One key concern is that journalists will undermine the organisation’s credibility by passing along bogus information. Another is that they will jeopardise their status as neutral observers and reporters.

Social media sourcing policies to help guard against inaccuracy are increasingly common. One implemented by Reuters has been widely cited as a model for helping



Jonathan Jones

journalists take advantage of social media as an information source while maintaining “a posture of open-mindedness and enlightened skepticism” about the credibility of that information.

The *Toronto Star* policy, for example, addresses fears about passing along information that turns out to be premature (as numerous tweeted celebrity deaths have been lately) or just plain wrong. “When reporting breaking news through social media, the source of the information should be included and readers must be told if the information has not yet been verified by the *Star*,” it states. “If such information is subsequently found to be inaccurate, that should be communicated through those same social media tools as soon as possible.”

Lack of editorial oversight in a rapid-fire social network is a related concern. BBC News has a “golden rule” for social media activities carried out in its name: “Whatever is published – on Twitter, Facebook or anywhere else – **MUST HAVE A SECOND PAIR OF EYES PRIOR TO PUBLICATION.**” Yes, the capitalisation is theirs. It’s in bold-face type, too.

The BBC’s main UK competitor, Sky News, generated a flurry of critical commentary last winter with a similar policy advising staffers not to retweet “information posted by other journalists or people on Twitter” in an effort to ensure that “there is sufficient editorial control of stories reported by Sky News journalists and that the news desks remain the central hub for information going out on all our stories.”

News organisations also have issued cautions about the danger of mixing personal and professional roles. South Africa’s *Mail&Guardian*, which posted its social media policy in January 2012, sums up the issue:

“The bedrock of our authority as a publication is our impartiality. Your profiles, retweets, likes and postings can reveal your political and ideological affiliations. Be very sure that your audience either understands that you are professional enough to put those aside in the

workspace, or that those affiliations will not be construed as having an effect on your ability to do objective journalism.”

Similarly, *The New York Times* advises editorial staffers to be circumspect in what they post, even on personal blogs. “Bloggers may write lively commentary on their preferences in food, music, sports or other avocations, but as journalists they must avoid taking stands on divisive public issues,” it states. “A blog that takes a political stand is as far out of bounds as a letter to the editor supporting or opposing a candidate.”

Critics see such policies as restrictive and an indication that overly cautious news organisations are out of touch with the way information travels around social media spaces.

“These kinds of rules seem to be aimed at trying to remove the human being from the process, something that may work in traditional forms of media, but fails miserably when using social tools like Twitter,” blogger and technology journalist Matthew Ingram (2012) wrote in response to the Sky News policy. “The whole point of using them is to be social, and that means expressing human emotions,” he added. “The best social-media policies ... simply ask reporters and editors to be themselves, but to think about what they post before doing so, and to use common sense and ‘don’t be stupid.’”

Yet more broadly, both the “outside-in” policies covering users and the “inside-out” ones covering journalists are experiments. By testing various options, journalists are attempting to understand which ethical guidelines from a well-understood past might remain suitable in, or at least adaptable to, a still-bewildering future.

Will the laws of journalistic nature hold in the uncharted world of social media? So far, journalists seem to believe – or hope – that they will. But like all good experiments, this one is ongoing. An open network is open not just to contributors but also to perpetual change.

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SHOOT, UPLOAD AND CONNECT!

BY NICOLE KLASSEN

It is all about story. The age-old craft and gift of this continent is being rejuvenated through a new platform where it is accessible to all.

I am not a journalist. I am a practitioner in the film, media and creative industries. Mobile is my preferred method of distribution.

It has often occurred to me that in our efforts to survive the creative production-value chain we have forgotten that we are also in fact consumers. We stop paying attention to what people really want when we are so busy struggling, trying with much effort to get our projects financed. Somewhere along the production process we start selling (out). We strip our work of any relevant, cultural expression just for a broadcast deal; pack it up in a hamburger box for distribution and then wait.

Wait and wait and wonder why the people are not coming, why they're not buying, renting or talking about *my* product. Then we decide that the people obviously know nothing.

The glaring reality is that the balance of power has shifted. The power of content creation is now available to the people en masse and the people want to engage, interact and express themselves. They desperately want to connect.

The internet and new devices and technologies provide us with this "connect ability". These new technologies make it permissible for us to explore the restructuring of the value chain and consider a new realm where the consumer is the producer and also the distributor.

A new content creator is emerging, one who has a mobile phone. Shoot, upload and connect!

This new creator lives among her consumers; she is the audience so she creates work that is relevant to her community. She creates work that relies on her own cultural expression and language to convey her message. She is educated, vocal and committed to her community.

A new format is starting to appear, one that is genre-less, opinionated and expressive. This new creator portrays her world as she sees it; nothing is hidden, and she holds to account all members of society. She will compromise on striving for picture perfection if it diminishes the integrity of her story.

It is all about story. The age-old craft and gift of this continent is being rejuvenated through a new platform where it is accessible to all. Accessibility is what consumers want: everywhere and anytime.

This barrier to accessibility, institutionalised by our fear, is the birthing place of piracy. Yes, it is our fault, as practitioners who have forgotten that we wanted to be in this business to make products for people.

We laboriously complain and fund efforts to curb this scourge, this dire problem that is ripping *our* industry apart instead of turning our focus to the inherent opportunity that piracy is in fact presenting: a massive, insatiable appetite for content! This is in fact a very, very good problem.

It's a no-brainer: We absolutely have to get to market faster and we need to get to market at the right price and sometimes, if not always, that price might be free.

We've come to expect that people must pay and

Formed in March 2011, Bozza.mobi is a mobile and technology start-up based in Cape Town, South Africa. The company was founded by Emma Kaye, former co-founder of Triggerfish Animation (AnimationSA.org) and founder of the animation festival for Sithengi, Africa's largest film market. Kaye has also served as CEO of Breakdesign, founder of Gate7 New Media, a mobile media, entertainment and content company and co-founder of Mobfest, Africa's first user-generated mobile content platform.

Aiming to fill the gap for locally generated, contextually relevant content for the African market, Bozza.mobi launched its proof of concept on 24 October 2010 with seven minutes of made-for-mobile video content. Within three days there were 40 000 downloads and within three months this number rose to 170 000 active users. For Kaye, this success proved that users were actively seeking and engaging with local, contextually relevant content.

Aimed at feature phones – with plans to scale to smart phones in the near future – the Bozza application currently features music, videos and poetry from across the African continent. Both the application and the content is free (data charges do apply) and users can enjoy a wide array of comedy, drama, animation, educational, gospel and lifestyle videos, music tracks and written word direct on their mobile phone.

The second version of the application is currently in development and once released (anticipated date November 2012), will offer users the ability to search and discover new products, services and content through friend recommendations, create and join communities based on common interests as well as upload and sell their own goods and services to earn revenue.

Bozza aims to build a mobihood, a mobile neighbourhood, where people can share, connect, trade, learn, engage, exchange, be entertained and belong much the same way as they do in their real world communities.

Download the app at Bozza.mobi.

people must appreciate our work even if we forgot to consider their needs in the process. Regardless of the product we deliver, people must pay and they must show respect.

But we forgot to connect with people during the process. We forgot to share during the process and we definitely didn't communicate or ask for people to contribute. So we deny ourselves the buying power of loyalty.

People will pay, if they feel loyal to you and your work. People know if you are genuinely committed to your craft and they know when you respect them as the people who pay.

The new content creator knows this and exists in her community in a reciprocal enrichment transfer where she is both the creator and the people.

The ship has sailed, so to speak. Mobility and associated technologies are returning us to a place of authenticity, inclusivity and accountability.

A place where we can all be game players and game changers and where Africa has the leading opportunity to be a major player on a frontier that will change our world, forever.





Jonathan Jones

THE ANSWER IS YES. OPEN IS BEST.

BY ALAN RUSBRIDGER

Marketeers can be very cold-eyed people. They deal less in people than in categories of people – whether by income, post code or outlook. And age: it was from a marketer that I recently learned of a new generational category: 35 to death.

That’s me, I thought. In fact I’m quite a way along that particular conveyor belt. And then I felt a little bit aggrieved as the marketer described the supposed characteristics of their generation of people shuffling from young middle age to the exit lounge.

But he had a point. In very rough terms – which, inevitably, is what marketers deal in – he was describing patterns of behaviour in media and the division between those who grew up digital and the rest, who may well acquire digital enthusiasms and habits, but will never quite be natives.

One of the distinctions between these two generations is whom they regard as authority figures. Even the term “authority figure” is probably too portentous for the digital natives. Bluntly: where do they turn for advice on life – which books to read; what to watch, where to eat; what music to listen to; where to go on holiday?

If you’re 35-2-D the chances are that a major influence in such choices would be a newspaper. Newspapers employ knowledgeable people with good judgement and give them the time and resources to research and write about things they think their readers ought to know about.

Younger people do read newspapers, even if they read them on their mobile phones; and they do read critics. But they also turn to their peers and friends and the friends of these friends and peers. For at least 10 years now there have been digital platforms that allow them all to publish, share, respond to and distribute their views. They are the post-Gutenberg generation.

All of this has enormous implications for the business of news (not to mention the vast majority of businesses and public enterprises from government to learning). For a long time journalists were in simple denial about the nature of the change. We were the experts, the authority figures. Sure, there were lots of “bloggers” (a word that lived in inverted comma and was inflected with either irony or contempt) out there. But they were no different from any bore in the pub. People wanted experts. And they would pay for them.

Well, up to a point Lord Copper, to quote one of the great books about the world of print in its rumbustious prime. Let me try and explain what I mean through the figure of the theatre critic.

One of the most revered critics on the *Guardian* is Michael Billington, who has been sitting in the stalls on behalf of the paper for a little over 40 years. He’s written a definitive account of post-war British theatre as well as acclaimed books about Stoppard, Pinter and Ayckbourn. Actors, directors and theatre-lovers alike turn to his reviews knowing they will be informed by a deep knowledge and gentle critical wisdom.

Millions of *Guardian* readers will, over the years, have developed a relationship with Michael’s writing. He will have helped shape their perception and influenced their decisions about what to see and what to avoid. He will have educated and amused countless theatre-lovers – and doubtless occasionally irritated and infuriated quite a few. He is in a long tradition of distinguished *Guardian* drama critics, including James Agate and Philip Hope-Wallace.

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What of the others in the audience for the first night of a play that Michael's reviewing at the Olivier Theatre at the National? The *Guardian* is more than 190 years old, but this is not a question that would have occurred to any arts editor to ask until about 10 years ago. We were there to tell them what we thought. And, coincidentally, we had the printing presses – the means of publishing – and they didn't.

Now, no serious editor in his/her right mind would be without a theatre critic such as Michael. But ask three different questions. The first is this: wouldn't it be interesting know what's in the minds of the 900 people around him as they watch the play unfold?

The answer is obviously, yes, it would be better to have a number of responses. So will a newspaper create the forum for their views, or will we cede that territory to others? The answer is surely obvious. By encouraging a wide variety of responses we will have a richer, more diverse account of a cultural event. If we shun the opportunity others will certainly do it. So, both editorially and economically, it's a risky proposition to want to go it alone.

So that's the first question. The second is, how do we filter the good responses from the bad; the mundane from the perceptive; the Brecht experts from the Broadway devotees? Newspapers are hardly alone in wanting to crack this question: in an age of abundant information it's a question which is preoccupying virtually everyone, from the largest search engine or business toying with social media, virtually every business, to the solitary academic.

The third question is, does this open principle apply to other areas of newspaper life? Can it work for investigative reporting; for sports; for smuggling the truth out of repressive regimes; for better environmental understanding; for more complete scientific expertise; for travel coverage and fashion?

Again, in everything we do on the *Guardian*, we're finding the answer is yes. Open is best. It worked in finding out who killed a news seller in the middle of a protest; in enlisting 23 000 readers to sort through 400 000 documents about MPs' expenses; in building the most comprehensive news site for environmental news; in covering the Arab Spring; in finding a network of fans who knew more than we could about the 32 national football teams in the World Cup. We ask for help in checking facts. We think that a thousand people who know Berlin or Barcelona like the back of their hand will contribute profoundly useful insights alongside the words of a travel writer. We love the fact that, since launching on Facebook, we've acquired four million additional active users, half of whom are under 25.

Now, this rapid growth of audience – up well over 60% overall year on year – doesn't translate into instant cash, any more than it does for Twitter or Facebook itself. But doing things which are editorially better, which build engagement and trust, and for which there is a large, growing and appreciative appetite (only recently we were rated the most viral newspaper site in the world) seem to me essential first steps on the road to sustainability. The news organisations which understand this new context of information and journalism can increase their reach and influence beyond imagining.

Open versus closed is not just a debate about newspapers. It is a fundamental choice in every corner of our public life and business world. In journalism, it's not about displacing or replacing the skills of a reporter or an editor. It is about understanding how the world has changed and how we can harness the revolution we're living through to produce a better account of the world around us. In some ways the jobs of journalist – and the skills required – have changed a great deal.

So, the world is changing very fast and it's as well for the 35-2-D generation to understand these profound changes. An easy first step: sign up to Twitter.

How do we filter the good responses from the bad; the mundane from the perceptive; the Brecht experts from the Broadway devotees?

It's not about displacing or replacing the skills of a reporter or an editor. It is about understanding how the world has changed and how we can harness the revolution we're living through to produce a better account of the world around us.

SAYING THAT TWITTER HAS GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH THE NEWS BUSINESS IS ABOUT AS MISGUIDED AS YOU COULD BE

BY ALAN RUSBRIDGER

1. It's an amazing form of distribution

Don't be distracted by the 140-character limit, a lot of the best tweets are links. It's instantaneous. Its reach can be immensely far and wide. That has profound implications for our economic model, never mind the journalism.

2. It's where things happen first

There are millions of human monitors out there who will pick up on the smallest things and who have the same instincts as the agencies – to be the first with the news.

3. As a search engine, it rivals Google

Google is limited to using algorithms to ferret out information. Twitter harnesses the mass capabilities of human intelligence to the power of millions in order to find information that is new, valuable, relevant or entertaining.

4. It's a formidable aggregation tool

If you are following the most interesting people they will bring you the most interesting information. No news organisation could possibly aim to match, or beat, the combined power of all those worker bees collecting information and disseminating it.

5. It's a great reporting tool

Many of the best reporters are now habitually using Twitter as an aid to find information. The so-called wisdom of crowds comes into play: the 'they know more than we do' theory.

6. It's a fantastic form of marketing

I only have 70 000 followers. But if I get re-tweeted by one of our columnists, Charlie Brooker, I instantly reach a further 478 000. If Guardian Technology pick it up it goes to an audience of 1.6 million. If Stephen Fry notices it, it's global.

7. It's a series of common conversations. Or it can be

It's not transmission, it's communication. It's the ability to share and discuss with scores, or hundreds, or thousands of people in real time. It's a parallel universe of common conversations.

8. It's more diverse

Traditional media allowed a few voices in. Twitter allows anyone.

9. It changes the tone of writing

A good conversation involves listening as well as talking. There is, obviously, more brevity. There's more humour. More mixing of comment with fact. It's more personal.

10. It's a level playing field

The energy in Twitter gathers around people who can say things crisply and entertainingly, even though they may be unknown.

11. It has different news values

What seems obvious to journalists in terms of the choices we make is quite often markedly different from how others see it – both in terms of the things we choose to cover and the things we ignore. The power of tens of thousands of people articulating those different choices can wash back into newsrooms.

12. It has a long attention span

Set your Tweetdeck to follow a particular keyword or issue or subject and you may well find that the attention span of Twitterers puts newspapers to shame. They will be ferreting out and aggregating information on the issues that concern them long after the caravan of professional journalists has moved on.

13. It creates communities

Or, rather communities form themselves around particular issues, people, events, artefacts, cultures, ideas, subjects or geographies. They may be temporary communities, or long-term ones, strong ones or weak ones, but they are recognisably communities.

14. It changes notions of authority

Instead of waiting to receive the 'expert' opinions of others – mostly us, journalists – Twitter shifts the balance to 'peer to peer' authority.

15. It is an agent of change

Companies are already learning to respect, even fear, the power of collaborative media. Increasingly, social media will challenge conventional politics and, for instance, the laws relating to expression and speech.



Jonathan Jones



Jonathan Jones



Jonathan Jones



TURNING TO TWITTER

BY RAYMOND JOSEPH

It was late in the afternoon early in January 2010 and I was at home listening to the radio, when a breaking newsflash interrupted the programme to report a fatal shark attack at Fishhoek, just 20 minutes away from where I was – in ideal conditions.

But conditions were far from ideal: not only was traffic generally slow on the road to Fishhoek because of major road works, but the afternoon peak traffic was already building up and I knew getting to the scene in a hurry was not an option.

So instead I turned to Twitter, which I'd signed up for a few months earlier, but was still grappling to get to grips with. Searching for #sharkattack and then #fishhoek (the hash tag is how Twitter files related information), I found a tweet from IT techie Greg Coppen (@skabenga), who had witnessed the attack from his home perched on the mountainside overlooking the beach – and I knew that I had struck gold.

"Holy shit. We just saw a gigantic shark eat what looked like a person in front of our house..." he tweeted, following up with a second tweet: "That shark was huge. Like dinosaur huge." That second tweet went viral and ended up being quoted in the papers, TV, radio and online across the globe.

Contacting Coppen via Twitter I obtained his contact number and was soon interviewing him by phone, as he described in detail how he had seen the shark take the swimmer while he watched in horror from his mountainside ring-side seat.

Searching again, I tracked down someone who was on the beach as the rescue services rushed to the scene – and with 45 minutes I had enough information to write a story, filled with eye witness details, colour and great quotes, all without ever leaving home.

From that moment on, I was a convert to the blue bird – Twitter's logo – and its power as a game-changing reporting tool.

As an experienced news editor who understands the value of innovative reporters who regularly come to news conferences with great story ideas and the contacts and sources to make them work, I rate Twitter right up there with other great tools that have helped make the job of the reporter easier.

To put it into context, I still remember with absolute clarity standing in the ghostly works of SAAN – home to the *Rand Daily Mail*, the *Sunday Times* and the *Sunday Express* – the day after the Atex computer system went live, marking the switch from hot metal to cold type. Where just the night before banks of typesetting machines clattered in a cacophony of noise and the hot air smelt strongly of molten metal, now it was eerily silent.

I remember working on Atex, driven by huge processors with LP-sized memory discs, all housed in a large air-conditioned room; I remember my first mobile phone, a brick-sized brute with a battery that lasted an hour or two; I remember my first DOS-driven PC with floppy discs and then my first laptop; and now I have a BlackBerry smartphone that has brought

multiple tools together in one slim device.

Twitter is a powerful tool that is a constant source of story ideas; it's great for building contacts and a treasure trove of new sources; it's an excellent medium for crowd sourcing ideas and for keeping track of trends and the latest information; and it beats most other media hands-down when it comes to breaking news.

It's also a powerful aggregation tool, acting as a filter that pushes news and information you want and are interested in, straight to your desktop, tablet or smartphone. I have set up a list of news outlets on my BlackBerry and my day begins with me catching up on the news on my mobile. As an old school journalist – and a creature of habit – I still read several newspapers each day, although I am increasingly finding that a lot of it is old news by then thanks to me having read it via Twitter, sometimes a day or three earlier.

And as if all this were not enough, Twitter is also a powerful search engine that many believe beats Google because, while the giant search engine's algorithms search deep into the furthest corners of the web, Twitter not only gives you links to the usual fare, it also adds the *vox pop* (the voice of the people) into the mix.

Or as Alan Rusbridger, the switched-on editor of *The Guardian* who, with his "open journalism" approach, is taking his publication into uncharted waters, wrote: "The energy in Twitter gathers around people who can say things crisply and entertainingly, even though they may be 'unknown'. They may speak to a small audience, but if they say interesting things they may well be republished numerous times and the exponential pace of those re-transmissions can, in time, dwarf the audience of the so-called big names. Shock news: sometimes the people formerly known as readers can write snappier headlines and copy than we can."

The role that social media, particularly Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, played in the events leading up to – and during – the Arab Spring uprisings are now well known.

And it was as these uprisings unfolded that senior strategist at National Public Radio (NPR) Andy Carvin (@acarvin) "used Twitter to create a kind of crowdsourced newswire... inventing a brand-new kind of journalism on the fly and in full public view," wrote journalist Mathew Ingram recently.

Beginning with Tunisia, then Egypt and now Syria, Carvin curated tweets, from both ordinary people and dissidents on the ground, often from places where few journalists were operating – and then used his large following to stand up, add to or debunk the information.

Carvin told Ingram that he thinks of his kind of reporting as a crowd-sourced newsroom – "with him as the reporter, or the anchor (or 'news DJ' another term he likes to use) pulling in reports from different places, and then relying on his followers to act as editors and sources, fact-checking and verifying and also distributing the news that he was curating."

Along the way he has been able to help his NPR reporting colleagues find exclusive stories

and put them in touch with the sources and contacts he had made through Twitter, and who had grown to trust him.

One of the best displays of the power of Twitter and the role of ordinary people in breaking news is the iconic photo taken by a ferry passenger of a jet that made an emergency landing in New York's Hudson River, the passengers standing on the wings as it slowly sank into the murky depths.

His tweet: "http://twitpic.com/135xa - There's a plane in the Hudson. I'm on the ferry going to pick up the people. Crazy", went viral and is now the stuff of Twitter legend.

In South Africa, switched-on reporters – ironically many of them from radio and TV – are using Twitter to cover unfolding news stories in-between news bulletins and editions. A good example was the recent urgent application by the SAPS to have the lifting of ex-spy boss Richard Mdluli's suspension overturned; filing their tweets under #mdluli, Twitter-savvy journalists reported the hearings blow-by-blow in a flow of 140-character length tweets, hours before the news appeared in print.

Live tweeting press conferences and speeches is also happening more frequently, so people on Twitter were able, for example, to get details of President Jacob Zuma's State of the Nation address as it was delivered by following #sona2012. The same goes for disasters and it was possible to keep up with the latest news from the ground during the earthquakes in New Zealand last year by following #nzeq. This threw up a rich timeline of information from ordinary people on the ground and from the emergency services using it to communicate with people affected.

Yet, inexplicably, there are still some papers in South Africa that discourage their reporters from tweeting about a story before it is printed in ink on the product of a dead tree. There are also many senior journalists who should know better, but still call Twitter a waste of time because they're "not interested in what people had for breakfast".

As someone who uses Twitter as a journalist, I also use it in my teaching: for example, the 140-character restriction is a great tool for teaching tight, clear and concise writing.

It's true that there's lots of inane chatter on Twitter, but the reality is that you get what you ask for. So if you follow rubbish, you get... rubbish spewing back in.

But that doesn't mean avoiding following "civilians", just that you should avoid following people who witter on about nothing, often in difficult to decipher SMS-speak.

In this age of Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, Instagram and lots of other social media tools, it is often these citizen reporters who are first on the scene when news happens, and often the first hint of a breaking story comes from them.

So, what I do know is that next time there's a shark attack or another big breaking story and I can't get there because of traffic, time or tight deadlines, I know I can turn to Twitter to help me get the story.



SOCIAL JOURNALISM AS STORYTELLING IN AFRICA

BY ADMIRE MARE AND
STANLEY TSARWE

One are the days when people need to invest a lot of money to acquire the means of mental production to mass self-communicate and circulate alternative discourses; with the aid of social media platforms, ordinary people have been ushered into the digital agora.

Nowadays, “journalism by the people and for the people” is freely available and circulating public spheres worldwide. Social journalism as a genre is based on the motto, “all news is social”, while questioning the hierarchical and authoritative mode of news production associated with traditional journalism. It signals a shift from a “focus on individual intelligence, where expertise and authority are located in individuals and institutions, to a focus on collective intelligence where expertise and authority are distributed and networked” (Hermida, 2012).

The art of storytelling which consists of sharing ideas, facts and persuading others is intricately linked to traditional journalism where journalists/producers want to reach their audience, persuade their readers, and connect with their followers.

What distinguishes traditional journalism as a form of storytelling from the mediated newer forms, known as social journalism, is the close affinity of social journalism to the African art forms such as oramedia and radio trottoir (pavement radio). In Africa, storytelling has always been at the heart of human communication. Ugboah (1985) defined oramedia as media that “are grounded on indigenous culture produced and consumed by members of a group” (Ugboajah, 1985: 32).

Radio trottoir is French for pavement radio, and was popularised by Stephen



Jonathan Jones

Ellis (1989) as rooted in African oral traditions. They are rumours of the masses, what the masses find both believable and interesting to them, aptly described by others as an attempt at collective conversation by people who wish to enter their wishes in the public sphere (Ellis & Ter Haar 2005). These stories reinforce the values of the group.

Radio trottoir is literally the popular and unofficial discussions of current affairs that take place in towns, on the streets, in bars, at taxi ranks and, while these are mistrusted sources, their existence is acknowledged by journalists and academics.

While these are unofficial stories circulating in oral exchanges as people go about their day to day activities, they may qualitatively not be likened to rumour per se, as they are often representative of issues which are unrepresented in most

news media, such as moral censorship of political figures, or unofficial reports on the whereabouts of the country’s president.

Those who tell the stories that comprise oramedia arrange their texts as they please, often adding new twists to a well-known plot. Storytelling was therefore an art, or a skill for which the storyteller was revered.

From the foregoing, it may be argued that social journalism, notions of radio trottoir and oramedia do indeed bear resonances in their manifestations. Social journalism therefore, is not a new phenomenon in Africa; *per se*. Rather it signals the migration of the human voice from offline to online spaces.

Through its encompassment of a number of oral arts including prose, poetry and drama, where the village conversed as collective community in the cool shade of the sacred baobab or mango trees, oramedia bears parallel traits with how social media brings together a community of like-minded people through live chats or wall postings in virtual communities. Virtual communities also serve as the sounding boards where notices are posted about new developments taking place back home for members of the diasporic community.

Aspects of “community” are evident in virtual communities mushrooming on social network sites where like-minded groups form online communities who share knowledge, companionship and advice in different aspects of life. For example, online groups may be formed around collective rallying points which include discussions and support on health issues, online relationships, diasporic communities attempting to reconnect with their ethnic communities, supporters’ football clubs as well as fundraising clubs, to name but a few.

A cursory view of some popular Zimbabwean virtual communities on Facebook include *Dangamvura Chete*, *True FC Barça Cules Only Zim Edition*, *Ndebele Mthwakazi*, *Wezhira paFacebook* and *Samanyika paFacebook*, where particular cultural features are strictly conventioned, by which social relationships and a world view are maintained and defined.

Of particular importance in these online communities is that storytelling is deeply rooted in shared values and interests of community members. They adopt languages and idioms which speak to the common person and bear association with their everyday life. Identities along ethnic, religious, geographical location, football fandom and political affiliations are reproduced in online communities and are vigorously policed through administrators and fellow group members.

Notions of identity, community and practice, and belonging, however, draw in the problematic concept of “citizenship”

and citizen journalism in Africa. Developments in Web 2.0 where “citizens” are now acclaimed to exercise their status by not only being recipients of news, but creators, has popularised the phrase, “citizen journalism”.

The complexity of citizenship in Africa relates to the dual legacy of colonialism: citizens and subjects. There is a difference between the status and practice of citizenship, where the former is a range of freedoms and rights guaranteed by the constitution and the latter involves active participation in political processes.

Given the insurmountable challenges facing most African countries, the voice of subaltern citizens remain muted in sporadic protests whether offline or online. Because of the lack of a bridging mechanism between the cyberspace and the political sphere, these sporadic protests often fail to bring qualitative change to the lives of ordinary Africans.

Citizenship identities are equally reinforced by race, class, age, gender and ethnicity, which create detours that must to be navigated to have a voice. Most Africans find themselves left behind, being more akin to observers than active participants.

Access, affordability and availability are key variables that explain the popularity of MXit, for example, in South Africa. Journalism has been caught in the media-democracy conundrum which explains why functionalist undertones, especially normative assumptions about its functions and dysfunctions tend to cloud the assessment of journalism as storytelling.

What stories are being told?

Our recent travels around Africa have enlightened us to the use of social media in different African contexts. Stories which are being circulated are varied, including political, economic, social issues and event-based content, and tend to circulate cyclically from the offline to the online and vice versa. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is rich debate circulating on social network sites especially amongst subaltern citizens. As a result the alternative public sphere is filled with a great outpouring of personal stories and experiences.

In Malawi, we learnt that journalists and activists are using social media to circulate alternative views on the country’s political and economic challenges. A case in point was the hype generated on social media platforms by the death of President Bingu wa Mutharika. Ordinary Malawians took to social network sites to vent their anger at the delayed announcement of the death of the head of state.

In Zimbabwe the prophecy of TB Joshua which coincided with the death of President Bingu wa Mutharika triggered massive speculation about the death of President Robert Mugabe at an unknown

hospital in Singapore. Questions such as “Where is the President?”, “Who is next?”, “Is TB Joshua a prophet of doom?” featured prominently on social network sites.

In South Africa, political stories regarding the expulsion of the ANC Youth League president Julius Malema have also generated significant debate on social network sites. Brett Murray’s infamous painting of President Jacob Zuma grabbed the headlines on most social media platforms with hundreds of individuals airing their views.

As far afield as Mali, ordinary people have been discussing the Tuareg and Islamist rebels’ insurgency and military coup orchestrated by Captain Amadou Sanogo.

In Swaziland, the gift of the DC-9 aircraft to King Mswati at a time when the country is on the brink of an economic catastrophe has generated huge debate online among activists and ordinary people.

All these stories are evidence of the productive capacity of erstwhile news consumers grappling with everyday political issues in their different localities across the African continent.

This emergent online storytelling has shaken the foundations of journalistic ethics. Real-time, networked technologies have unbundled the verification process. Although the stories are not told by professional storytellers, there is an activist dimension to them which highlights the desire to act as monitorial citizens in their respective communities.

In order to avoid falling into the trap of diagnosing structural problems with biographical solutions, there is need to ensure that voices articulated online translate into meaningful citizen participation processes.

Storytelling and social journalism can serve as a critical starting point for journalists to become aware of important but unreported issues and events within different communities, and thereby provide a voice to the many hundreds of thousands who struggle in this regard. Perhaps this will do something in facilitating meaningful citizenship within post-colonial Africa.

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THE MAJOR MEDIUM OF THE FUTURE

BY GARY
ALFONSO

The suspected terror-driven explosion in Moi Avenue in late May of 2012 in Nairobi perhaps best illustrated the difference between new and traditional media in Africa, and why social media will be the only media of the future, or at least the major part of every media business.

News reporters were on the scene within an hour. Within the same time, more than 1 000 pictures, clips and messages had been posted on to social pages, websites and in global chat forums. The citizen journalist not only stole the reporter's lunch, but he gave the world multiple unedited versions of events as they were unfolding. In the country's biggest newspaper, the *Daily Nation*, columnist Charles Onyango-Obbo wrote that the internet, the mobile phone and social media have become the new guerrilla weapons of the masses.

At the foothills of Mount Kenya, the second highest peak in Africa and the highest point on earth on the equator, Ernest Waititu is using the same human behaviour to change the way the world views the place where he grew up. He's helping a young health worker from the Masai community send a low-resolution photograph to a computer server run by independent journalists 200 kilometres away. In the Nairobi city centre the picture and the brief but descriptive text,

is converted into a website story of the battle to get proper sanitation and more toilets into rural Kenya, a move that could radically reduce child absenteeism at primary schools.

It's all part of K-HUG, an initiative kick-started by Internews in Kenya, a non-profit organisation that's quietly, but effectively, been going about changing the quality of journalism and media reporting in East Africa for the past 10 years.

"K-HUG brings together two aspects of everyday Kenyan life that really need to be highlighted," says Ernest Waititu, who is also a journalism trainer at Internews.

"Poor health facilities and poor access to information are two realities of Kenya's social fibre and we want to positively influence and change that by establishing a credible 'user generated' network of community journalists all over the country," says Waititu.

K-HUG, which stands for Kenya Health User Generation, is an independent new media initiative kick-started by independent bloggers and freelance journalists, through the Internews office in the Nairobi CBD, to bring everyday health experiences of real people in rural Kenya into the media mainstream.

In a country which boasts the fastest-growing internet usage via mobile phones in the world, the use of cellular technology,

the internet and independent journalists to tell the story of the social challenges brought about by poor development in the health sector makes perfect sense.

"What most people don't realise is that Kenya has almost completely leapfrogged the personal computer generation," says Paul Kubuko, the chief executive officer of the Kenya IT Board.

"There are more than 27 million mobile handsets in Kenya. Internet penetration via mobile phones has grown to almost 15 percent of the population – mostly in the last four years," says Kubuko.

The small group of independent bloggers and freelance journalists involved in running the K-HUG platform in Kenya are not entirely unaware of the pioneering work they're doing in getting the first "crowd sourcing" initiative off the ground in East Africa.

"Imagine the day 47 community reporters, or just members of the public, send you content from rural clinics, schools and small villages from all 47 counties in Kenya. The content highlighting the basic health needs of mothers and their children in small, isolated villages in remote regions such as the drought-ridden Turkana.

"Imagine the day all media organisations in Kenya can download, use or simply reference that content, as gathered and compiled by an independent



Javier Merelo de Barbera Llobet

group of journalists and bloggers, as a true, grassroots reflection of the reality on the ground.

“That day is not far off in Kenya,” says Waititu.

The project involves co-operative agreements and alliances with several media groups, entrepreneurs and information entities in Kenya.

At iHub, a social media design and innovation lab in Nairobi, Jessica Colaco and a young group of designers are working around the clock to design new applications, systems and software to meet the demand in a world becoming obsessed with sharing everything from news, gossip and humour via cell phones and the internet.

The World Bank in Kenya is driving a campaign to make data available for interpretation by media and society and pursuing ways to get the message out through initiatives like the Kenya Open Data Initiative (KODI) and other public and private role players in information gathering and dissemination.

Mobile technology companies like Nokia and Samsung run innovation workshops and projects, aimed at finding young people with the solutions for a generation that leap-frogged the personal computer.

While several social media projects

or initiatives engaging ordinary citizens via mobile phones or social network in Africa can lay claim to the term “pioneering”, the K-HUG initiative is unique because it is engineered to provide the content and the platform for independent journalism and public opinion to grow alongside traditional media models in a fairly mature media industry in Kenya.

“The crowd-sourcing model, or the practice of getting real-life content from people experiencing everyday challenges, or even positive stories of people making a difference and never receiving the recognition, and turning that content into digestible information for the main stream media and the public in Kenya and the rest of the world, is what makes an initiative like K-HUG so inspiring,” says Ida Jooste, the country director for Internews in Kenya.

“The age of only journalists from large media organisations with expensive newspaper businesses or radio and television channels being the only source of independent information is over. Today and tomorrow belongs to the citizen journalist. The man or woman on the street has the power to communicate their own story to the world every minute of every day.

“We are simply helping independent journalists, bloggers and young people passionate about telling the unfolding story of Kenya create a platform and an outlet to do that. Other people will probably focus on the harsh hard news world of explosions and images of riots and destruction. We are engaging with main-stream media to carry more grassroots views in their reporting of the major challenges facing health, one of the major issues facing the future of East Africa, from the perspective of the people directly affected by poor health services,” emphasises Jooste.

The K-HUG project has started training community journalists at rural radio stations and small community newspapers to not only feed the project with interesting content from inaccessible areas, but to also sensitise local community members to the opportunity to send content to a central hub in Nairobi, where their stories can be placed on the website set up by the group of independent reporters and bloggers.

Rose Odengo, one of the independent journalists and bloggers involved in the project, is clear about the path of communication. “Community members will send us everything from

pictures, video and text, even a recorded sound bite – via an application specially designed for our platform and the phones in use. The website will be the main body, but the social platforms will be the blood and oxygen of the platform,” says Odengo.

Charles Onyango-Obbo of the Daily Nation also sums up the social media sentiment sweeping Kenya and how citizen journalism has the potential to be the protest, or celebration, of choice of ordinary Kenyans in their pursuit of justice, truth and recognition.

His column concluded with: “The good, the bad and the ugly, the heroes and the villains, now all fight on a level ground. It is stuff like this that gives digital platforms their democratic and delightfully subversive quality.”

It perhaps illustrates why projects like K-HUG, innovative young people at places iHub and Internews, as well as ordinary citizens with smart phones all over Kenya are not only changing the perspectives about health challenges in the country – they’re perhaps also changing the way the media industry should view information borne out of the joys and sorrows of ordinary people who want their voices heard. They now have the tools to do it.

NEW NEWS, SUPER NEWS

BY GINA LEVY

The media is by far one of the most powerful and influential industries in the world. However, if one looks at mainstream media as a mirror that reflects a bias towards despair and then simultaneously shapes it, one can see that it does not primarily sell news but negative emotion which sells far more papers than news does.

According to author David Bornstein (2004), “There are more people doing good in the world than there are terrorists, but you wouldn’t know it from reading the newspaper or watching the news.”¹ So when we feed on news which portrays violence and corruption as normal – even desirable – human behaviour, we glorify it and become addicted to it, generating a fearful, reactive and disempowered society.

With the advent of 24 hour news, shrinking lead times, cost cutting and an increasing demand for content, media publications increasingly turn to the four major news wires (which contribute 90% of international news) to source content.

Foreign media are also poorly represented in Africa with just a handful of correspondents covering a vast and complex continent, resulting in limited and superficial coverage.

So the *same* (biased) views and opinions can therefore appear in thousands of media publications – including local papers, further perpetuating a negative perception.

Lastly, as technology gains momentum, mainstream

media is starting to lose once loyal audiences to online platforms. There is also a growing demand for more balanced news as more people are becoming increasingly selective about what they read, hear and watch.

Only when we recognise our own insanity, do we become aware of how we can change it. So, what if we created an alternative to the news as we know it? A new idea, a new possibility, a *new* news agenda.

News that helps change the world’s perception of Africa as a war-torn, corrupt, diseased, uneducated and poor continent into a place of innovation, opportunity, and contribution. News that raises our expectations of ourselves and South Africa and gives us *hope*.

Introducing... Supernews (www.supernews.co.za), a “citizen-generated news and idea network”. Supernews is harnessing the power of the crowd as both its source of information and the force behind its organisation.

In other words, it’s democratising the news-making environment by transforming passive recipients of news into active participants in the news.

Supernews is inviting citizens from every corner of South Africa to help change the news agenda by giving them a multi-media megaphone to write or record their own futures, whether they’re CEOs or car-pool moms, because no-one needs to own a TV channel or a newspaper to have their say or share their story – all they need is a cellphone, a digital camera or a keyboard.

This makes it really different from the way

traditional news is made and distributed, giving Supernews a presence where mainstream media lacks one, and making the potential for sourcing and gathering original, user-generated news-content infinite.

Supernews is also crowd-sourcing the next socially-impactful innovations from the collective imagination of the student public (Super Stage) in order to solve South African challenges, thereby helping to shape a new reality by both creating and reporting ideas and solutions that become the news.

The more the public understands that the forces influencing their future are within their control, and the more they see themselves as having a voice, the more inspired they are to get involved.

And the more their involvement gets noticed, the greater their realisation that they can make South Africa work better.

And maybe, just maybe, together, we’ll trigger a news revolution and wake up to headlines that create a South Africa and an Africa the whole world is inspired by. Now that’s Supernews.

See videos: <http://www.supernews.co.za/about/about/>

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WIKILEAKS AND THE NEW NEWS

BY CHARLIE BECKETT

Which media magnate has had the biggest impact on politics in the last couple of years? Rupert Murdoch, Julian Assange or Mark Zuckerberg? And which of that trio has created the most participatory media for the benefit of citizens?

Having just written a book about WikiLeaks¹ I think, you will not be surprised to hear, that, at least during one phase, it has been the most challenging media innovation of the digital era.

Yet if we measure the real world impact, it is probably social networks like Facebook that have played the most extensive part in catalysing significant social and political change in places like the Arab world.

However, while these emergent forms of media provide new channels and platforms for political communications, it is mainstream media – and Rupert Murdoch owns a lot of that – that has networked itself into a position where, economics allowing, it is getting increasingly effective at reinventing the idea of the Fourth Estate. Instead of fortresses of privileged, gate-keeping professionals we are seeing much more innovative professional journalism created in partnership with new organisations like WikiLeaks – and new networks like Facebook. With that comes greater public participation of different kinds.

The task for media researchers interested in public participation will be to map those developing, hybrid media practices and examine their consequences in the political economy. That is why in my book I try to move on from debates about whether WikiLeaks is journalism or not and on to the much more interesting question of what it signifies for the future of news media.

A lot of WikiLeaks is familiar. Leaks, political bias and charismatic editorial leaders have always been part of traditional and alternative journalism. What was new about WikiLeaks was its ability to avoid the restrictions put upon national mainstream media. Despite the onslaught against it from politicians and envious press rivals it managed to publish the biggest leak of confidential information ever.

It may not survive – partly because of its dependence on one person and one major leak – but the conditions that made it so potent and disruptive are still there. The internet still affords the protection of server space spread across the globe and beyond the control of any one government. The lack of a national base for WikiLeaks means it is almost free from the legal, regulatory and commercial sanctions that mainstream media acts within. The abundance of information flowing through corporate and governmental systems will be made more secure but their volume will not decrease so the potential for future leaks is growing. The public scepticism of the communications created by authorities is also increasingly driven by social trends such as increasing education and literacy, suggesting that the appetite for disruptive revelatory disclosure will also grow.

Governments and corporations around the world are trying hard to reassert their control over the internet and it does seem inevitable that it is not going

to get easier for outside or alternative journalism that challenges the consensus.

But in the networked era new hybrid media forms are constantly evolving. It may be that they will be transient and that could be their strength. They will be able to exploit the universality of the internet to avoid institutional capture and censure. However, the most effective will also exploit the networks of mainstream and social media rather than existing in isolation.

This was the big lesson for Julian Assange over the Iraq and Afghan War Logs and the Embassy Cables – it was only when he entered into that tense and difficult relationship with the mainstream media that he affected to despise,² that WikiLeaks' revelation began to have any impact on decision-makers and the general public.

We can see that happening as commercial news media organisations such as Al Jazeera begin to adopt both the whistle-blowing technologies of WikiLeaks and the social networking channels of Facebook, Twitter and the rest. This is partly about a kind of exploitative relationship that seeks the best material (often for free) from citizen or open sources. But it also provides a professionally-managed platform for that material that otherwise might never find a significant audience. Al Jazeera's The Stream is an online platform that combines video, text, stills and audio with conventional programming as well as social networking and external media sources.

There is a lot of churnalism and complacent, duplicating journalism still being produced by mainstream media.³ At their best though, journalists have the editing, filtering and packaging skills to tell stories in a way that gets attention and adds value. In a world of information overload and distortion, that is ever more important. Research shows⁴ they are already effective at becoming networked to supplement their work and to improve its dissemination.

At the same time, for that information to be effective in the real world it has to connect in an interactive way with the networks of organisation, debate and criticism that citizens have created for themselves. The conversation about the way our lives is led is increasingly happening on social forums such as Twitter or websites such as Mumsnet in the UK. As developing economies build their own communications infrastructures distinctive networks are evolving there, too. Mainstream media journalists are increasingly going to have to work with the individual citizens and organisations that are most effective in these spaces.

WikiLeaks was not an open, participatory organisation. Ideologically it is not interested in shared production. Perhaps a whistleblower website has to be secretive by its very nature. But the information that these kinds of sites can reveal allows other networks the data for discussion. The challenge for mainstream media is to ask itself: in the networked era can we provide that kind of journalism? And if not, how do we work with these new news producers and the public to add value?



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Jonathan Jones

THE POWER OF DATA JOURNALISM

BY ANDREW TRENCH

The power of data is its ability to tell many intimate stories even as it describes the greatest of things.

This is the edge that data journalism offers and it's the area that my Media24 investigations team and I have been working to develop in our reporting.

A story we tackled earlier this year may serve as an interesting case study of how public data can be mined to ask some pointed questions about the impact of public policy.

We located an interesting data set from the national Treasury which had details of remuneration and benefit packages for all senior public officials – including executive mayors – of South Africa's 280-odd local councils. We also located another data set which listed South Africa's most financially-delinquent councils.

Using the two sets of information we built a simple database and ran some queries asking, for example, how many of the most expensive municipal teams also featured on the delinquent list.

The answer was surprising – about 20% of the most expensive council management teams were also among the most financially malfeasant.

That query generated an interesting piece of journalism which asked a hard question about what kind of bang

ratepayers were getting for their tax bucks in these areas.

The power of data often lies in the small detail as well as the big picture, so we took our project a step further and built a web application which allowed readers to navigate an interactive map and to also search for their own councils to find out what the top officials were earning.

We pulled into that additional data from the government's latest community survey to provide population data for these areas, which provides another illuminating filter on the spending of these local authorities.

The application – called What's Your Mayor Worth? (<http://www.m24i.co.za/what-mayor-worth/>) – generated a range of responses.

Readers wrote in thanking us for shining a light on their towns and the officials who ran them, while some government spin doctors accused us of potentially fomenting local service delivery protests. They also gave us tips about local officials who may be of interest to us.

We were told that citizens would be so enraged at the pay disclosures when held up against service delivery failures that they would riot.

As far as I know this has not happened. What *has* happened, we hope, is that citizens living in areas of endemic,

service-delivery flops are now armed with some quality information to inform their next voting decision.

In a democracy where officials often pay lip service to transparency, the availability of data – and active scrutiny of it – can lift the mist on government.

Data journalism and the credible knowledge it provides can be a catalyst for meaningful civic activism. It also provides a platform for potential collaboration between society and the state for when the measurables of public policy are laid bare and interrogated new insights can emerge.

Elsewhere, the Kenya Open Data initiative (<https://opendata.go.ke/>) embraces this thinking, providing hundreds of official data sets for citizens to interrogate – and extract insights from – in formats which are easy to use. This initiative leaves South Africa red-faced in its shameful lack of accessible public data.

Yet, through entities like the national Treasury, the Department of Basic Education, Statistics SA, among several others, useful local datasets are emerging, providing more than enough grist for the mill of journalists, hacktivists and ordinary citizens to ask probing and intelligent questions about the society in which we live.

E-DEMOCRACY THROUGH MOBILE MONITORING

BY ROMI REINECKE, DEBBIE COULSON AND HANNAH THINYANE

The councillor promised her ward an end to the humiliation of the bucket system and the building of suitable sanitation facilities. It's why she voted for him. And while it has taken four years, today the building material for 40 toilets, one of which will be hers, has arrived. Of course, Eunice cannot be certain all 40 toilets will be built to the planned specifications and timeline; that's why she's monitoring the municipality's service delivery. Eunice has her phone ready and is counting the bricks and bags of cement that will become toilets for her street under her watchful eye and with the help of a mobile application, MobiSAM, and a local newspaper.

The MobiSAM project, based in Grahamstown, is piloting an innovative and multi-faceted approach to "e-democracy" at the local government level. Grahamstown is situated in Makana Municipality in the Eastern Cape, one of the top five worst-run municipalities in South Africa in recent years. The development challenges faced by the municipality are great, with almost 25% of households living below the poverty line. But despite the poor development indicators in Grahamstown and

South Africa, the rate of mobile phone penetration in the country rates among the highest in the developing world, near to 100%.

Through the use of a mobile polling application, the MobiSAM project promotes active participation from ordinary Grahamstown citizens who depend on critical public services provided by Makana Municipality. With this platform, citizens can generate real-time data on the rate and quality of service delivery that strongly impacts on their daily life.

The use of mobile phones to promote citizen engagement with the public sector has received increasing attention from media researchers since the turn of the century. Today, global events have renewed optimism around the mobile phone and the accessibility of internet connectivity to facilitate citizen participation, deepen democracy and create social change.

But, as Herman Wasserman (2011) states, the use of mobile phones to transmit broad-based e-democracy remains promise rather than reality. While mobile phones have successfully been used to mobilise publics during a brief political campaign or event on the continent, they have been unsuccessful in sustaining increased levels of state accountability to its citizens.

For real deepening of democracy in Africa, citizens' "surveillance of government also has to happen inbetween the 'ritual of elections'... through ongoing social movement and civil society campaigns," Wasserman explains.

It is this sustained citizen engagement in the everyday business of local government that the MobiSAM project encourages. Funded by the Ford Foundation, and with sufficient resources to engage in a thought-through theory of change, MobiSAM has partnered with Grahamstown's mainstream media: the local paper and its online website.

The MobiSAM data produced by participating citizens can be pooled geographically and visualised in the local community media, while keeping communities informed and encouraging active participation in governance processes.

The MobiSAM project uses the social accountability monitoring methodology, developed by South Africa's Centre for Social Accountability. With a successful track record in South Africa and other SADC and East African countries, this approach provides civic actors with a rights-based and evidence-based framework for understanding and participating in government service delivery processes.

The MobiSAM project entails five distinct phases over three years: a preparation phase, the introduction of MobiSAM into the community, the use of MobiSAM to monitor selected local service delivery schemes, the facilitation of

evidence-based citizen participation in enforcing accountability in delivery, and a final analysis of MobiSAM's impact. The initial phase of the project, currently underway, includes an analysis of relevant legislation governing municipal service delivery, a baseline study on the last five years of Makana's service delivery performance and compliance with legislative provisions and a study identifying the 10 most-used mobile devices in the area to ensure optimum access. After analysing current municipal budget and planning documentation, service delivery projects will be identified and a MobiSAM community co-ordinator will recruit and train facilitators in each service delivery area.

The MobiSAM project's partnership with local media expresses some powerful ideas and understandings on the role of journalism in a democratic society, including participatory citizen journalism, public journalism, development journalism and the complex relationship between local government and local media.

The MobiSAM project resonates with the public journalism movement by reporting on major public problems in a way that increases public understanding of issues, and stimulates citizen participation through advancing knowledge of possible solutions in enforcing accountability through broad-based advocacy.

In a developmental state context, journalism can be said to be obligated to provide constructive criticism of government by actively informing readers how the development process is affecting them and promoting citizen participation in social change projects.

Finally, the use of forms of content generated by citizens through digital media platforms allows mobile phones to be leveraged by citizens in order to contribute to news making with real-time, widespread coverage beyond the capabilities of traditional journalistic professionals.

The changing roles of journalism in Africa's contemporary context of new technologies and expanding development provides rich ground for a continued reflexive awareness of ongoing tensions around what journalism is and for whom it is produced.

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CHANNELLING A COMMUNITY'S CORE ISSUES

BY BONGI BOZO AND SAMSON SIVIWE FEKETHA

Social media in the Eastern Cape and in South Africa more generally has developed into a platform that is used to channel voices of ordinary citizens. Social networks such as Twitter and Facebook have become popular communication tools among South Africans, with local independent community media in the Eastern Cape adopting Facebook to increase readership and public participation.

Almost all of the 19 licensed community radio stations and some of the independent community newspapers are using Facebook to communicate with their communities. Despite financial constraints and limited internet access, media houses are using internet cafes, smart phones, 3G cards and telecentres as alternatives in order to encourage different views, opinions and voices.

Skawara News, a small weekly community newspaper in Comfivaba in the rural Transkei has adopted Facebook as a communication strategy to improve its educating, informing and entertaining mandate. More importantly it has done so to improve its services as a platform for diverse voices and to communicate citizens' needs and concerns to government. Access to media products in Comfivaba is limited; *Skawara* is the only local community newspaper available in the area and, as such, readers depend on it to get local news, such as municipal notices and court cases.

Skawara recognises that public participation is important in building

an effective democracy and that in order to participate effectively citizens need to be informed. The newspaper is using its Facebook page to extend discourse on topics that have been covered as news stories in the newspaper or just any topical issue that emerges in the Comfivaba community and its surroundings. The Facebook page is not only used to provide a platform for the voiceless; it is also used to increase readership and public participation in local government.

Community members in Cofimvaba, just like in any other small town, depend on the local municipality for basic service delivery. When municipal transparency and efficiency is at stake with regard to the provision of these services, it becomes the role of the existing media in that area to be the voice of the people who, because of not knowing what to do, may feel hopeless and voiceless. People want continual updates on the issues of local government and service delivery, and these are the types of stories covered by *Skawara*.

According to Wandile Fana, editor of *Skawara*, the Facebook page has been in existence for two years. It has not only attracted patronage from locals who are currently away from home, but has also increased the readership of the paper and made community members more interested in expressing their issues because they see it as a relevant platform to engage with local government.

"*Skawara* has gained advertising revenue, popularity and online patronage

even from Intsika Yethu community members who are currently elsewhere in the world, because even youth who usually shy away from participating in issues are present in the discourse too as they like social networks," said Fana.

The platform has proven to be an effective tool in reflecting the core issues of the daily lives of the people in the area and is being complemented by the willingness of some local leaders who also take time to respond to some of the issues and give direction where necessary.

Although most community radio stations and independent community newspapers in the province are using social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, it is only a few which use these networks innovatively for citizen participation and for holding government accountable. Additionally, internet access still remains a challenge for most community media houses. Most community media houses in the province still do not have consistent internet access. This is one of the challenges that cause local independent community media not to take full advantage of social media.

Internet at *Skawara* offices is accessed through a reciprocal agreement between the editor and owner of *Skawara* and the local telecentre managed by the Universal Service and Access Agency of South Africa. The agreement allows the reporters from *Skawara* to have internet access at the telecentre, and in return the community newspaper provides free advertising for them. To this end, *Skawara* has created

a platform for participatory community engagement in local governance and community development through Facebook.

In order to draw readers to its Facebook page, *Skawara* has a section in its printed newspaper where it publishes some of the comments made by readers on a particular topic each week. This motivates people to join *Skawara* on Facebook and make its Facebook commentator want to buy the hardcopy. This has caused an increase in *Skawara* readership especially among the youth, who remain glued to their mobile phones exchanging views on stories and sharing views with other community members on Facebook.

Municipal officials, teachers and other community leaders are also part of the dialogue, allowing the newspaper to better serve its mandate of community development. The municipal officials joining the Facebook discussion make these debates more robust and balanced. However, challenges arise when *Skawara* is occasionally threatened by local leaders when they are put in the spotlight through comments on the page. "Many leaders only like and appreciate the *Skawara* page and its content when it is not them who are written about, but this shows how powerful the page is," said Fana.

As such, *Skawara* is one of the successful case studies of independent community media in the Eastern Cape which has used social media to its advantage.



Jonathan Jones

VULINDLELA! OPENING THE GATES OF JOURNALISM

BY ALETTE SCHOON



Jonathan Jones



Jonathan Jones

A group of teenagers crowd together in a hall in Fingo Village, Grahamstown. They listen with rapt attention as one of them shares his anger at being short-changed in terms of his own future – teachers are absent for two out of every six school periods, compromising his chances of education.

One girl speaks about spending her homework time fetching water because the municipality does not supply them with water at home, while another criticises the judgemental way government addresses pregnant girls in their campaigns. There is spontaneous applause when a boy describes how corporal punishment makes one lose respect for your teachers.

Is this the generation that has been described as apolitical, as not being able to find their voice?

They did not call a march or a protest; in fact they did not even stand up and simply talk in front of the crowd. This group of young people found their political voice through film. The crowd huddled in the dark at the Fingo Village hall were watching work made by these young people in a participatory video project. They are all members of a local youth organisation called Upstart and collaborated with my television journalism students to share stories of the things in life that really “tick them off”. They may not have used the camera, but they shaped the issues and the stories, and they presented their lives to the camera.

Participatory journalism has become the new buzzword, and both academics and journalists find themselves in the buzz trying to discern what this kind of journalism would look like and how it might be produced. What few seem to refer to is a much older tradition of participatory media production dating from the 1960s called participatory video. It all started in Canada’s Fogo islands where the Canadian Film Board pioneered this method, allowing islanders who were poor and marginalised to define what content would be worthwhile to discuss. They created films not structured around opposing opinions on issues, but around one person’s perspective.

What they found was that this people-focused approach helped audiences to listen, instead of slipping into defensive positions trying to judge who was right and who was wrong. So often what journalistic objectivity seems to mean for audiences is a position of judgement – not one of

understanding.

This revolution in filmmaking resulted from a disastrous misjudgement on the part of the film board in their project on reporting poverty in Canada. Following a conventional approach, a well-intentioned filmmaker highlighted one family’s daily struggle, but made what was for poor people a very patronising film. It shamed and humiliated that family in their community once it was broadcast, making them the brunt of jokes and ridicule, the exact opposite of what the film board wanted to achieve. From then onwards the Canadian Film Board decided to tell stories of poverty *with* communities, instead of reporting from a distance.

Academic Nico Carpentier describes participatory filmmakers as adopting an identity of “gate-openers” who facilitate letting other voices into public discussion. Unlike the gate-keepers – editors and journalists who stop most stories from reaching the public – these gate-openers help those who would not otherwise have entered a space of public deliberation to tell their story. Stories would remain untold, like the one shared by an Upstart teenager who gets angry at litter clean-up projects; empty packets just remind her she can’t afford these snacks. Other things are much more important to her – such as her unemployed family and the lack of resources at her school. This may be a voice environmentalists would seldom hear in the media.

Such gate-opening involves surrendering some control of the story, something journalists are generally not comfortable with. My students worried about whose story this would ultimately end up being. Were they just going to crew for the teenager? How would I mark the work if they were not their stories? They were worried about the kind of stories teenagers without training could produce – and rightly so. As many of us have observed in the practice of citizen media, media produced by ordinary people, no matter from what kind of background, is often fragmented and personal and lacks the storytelling skills journalists have developed through experience. This is why I believe we need participatory media as a way for journalists to work with ordinary people to tell stories that offer new perspectives, but that also work in terms of the journalistic genre.

I told my students that while the teenagers would define the issues and tell the stories, it was



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up to them as journalists to make sure the films did not become personal rants. Journalists are experts at tying individual events to broader public questions, and this became one of the main challenges for the journalism students. For example the teenage girl who initially simply expressed irritation at the tedium of fetching water every afternoon was prompted to think about this in the light of her rights and her future. In another such interaction, girls who were simply irritated with having no playground and no sports field started seeing this as a gender issue. In this way the journalism students helped transform “what ticks me off” into something bigger, something shared, something political.

Shireen Badat, Upstart co-ordinator, saw the potential of the stories, and organised a series of viewings among Upstart clubs in various schools, but also with various decision-makers in town. She arranged a viewing where the mayor and his engineers saw the story of the girl who spends her afternoons fetching water. Unwittingly she was following the Fogo process, where films are first shown in the community, where those who feature in them become more empowered as they see themselves speaking up. Then, like the Fogo filmmakers, the films are taken to decision-makers, often with the participants in tow, who find that they are able to articulate ideas through their films. I believe that the appeal for such diverse audiences emerges from the collaboration – as from its start it mixes authenticity with a well-crafted, publically-focused story.

Crafting a story involves a skill that sounds mundane – a beginning, a middle and an end. Those without experience and training often produce stories with weak beginnings, leaving audiences confused from the start. The middle

may lack a logical thread, and while some stories leave audiences hanging with no end, others end several times with yet another tedious final thought. Our journalism students are still learning this art, but managed to help the teenagers make their own stories stronger by helping them develop the narrative structure. In television, of course, this involves visual narrative as well. In this way the story about the young woman who misses out on doing homework because she needs to fetch water, for example, was structured around a journey to the tap, at the suggestion of the journalism students.

It may seem that this involves the journalist as some kind of mastermind dictating various elements of the story – which is always a tension, of course. Gate-opening at its best, however, involves a reciprocal relationship where ideas come from both partners in a kind of journalistic jamming process. It’s about pushing the boundaries of the genre while still keeping it digestible for audiences. One of the Upstart teenagers, Aviwe, produced a story of the loss of hope that goes with being poor. She intersperses it with her own poetry, creating something that is not quite journalism but also not pure poetry – but somehow talks about hopelessness in just the right tone. It’s a lesson for the journalism students, who stand outside and do not know that hopelessness is the story here, or that poetry is the best way to tell it.

It is thus arguably the journalism students who learn the most, as the collaboration challenges their assumptions about reality, about what it means to be poor. It also challenges their ideas about storytelling and forces them to experiment and to loosen up – and in the jamming process to reinvent journalism. So, let’s open the gates!



Jonathan Jones

IKASI LIFE IN THEIR OWN WORDS IN 15 MINUTES

BY JO MENELL

Street Talk is a 15-minute programme that airs on Cape Town TV (CTV), the only community television station in the city. CTV was started in 2008 and goes out on a terrestrial signal which means that it is accessible and free to anyone with a TV and aerial.

Its footprint runs from Atlantis across to Paarl, Stellenbosch, Gordons Bay, Bellville and reaches all the townships on the Cape Flats. Parts of the city bowl get the signal but it can't reach over the mountain to the Atlantic seaboard.

A recent audience survey showed that, on average, nearly 1 500 000 watch CTV, the vast majority of these being residents of the black and mixed race communities.

Street Talk began with the launch of CTV and has now been running for over four years. We started as a weekly show on Friday evenings and, as of April, are now on nightly at 7pm following ZAnews. We can also be viewed on our website streettalktv.com, YouTube and the new mobile platform Bozza.

Basically, *Street Talk* is a 15-minute edited film of conversations between small groups of people shot in informal surroundings. After more than half a century of making documentaries, it occurred to me that one learned much more by listening to people talk to each other than by interviewing them. People respond to questions with answers, whereas in conversation they tend to say what they feel.

Back in the 60s when I worked on *Panorama*, the BBC's flagship current affairs programme, I made a film about the great American journalist and oral historian, Studs Terkel. Studs used a mike and believed in letting people tell their story with as little prompting as possible. His radio show in Chicago was legendary and he picked up a couple of Pulitzer Prizes along the way.

In 1968 I had made a couple of one-hour documentaries on the war in Vietnam for the BBC that CBS had refused to show on the grounds that they were "tendentious and anti-American", and was invited by Studs to appear on his radio show.

The red recording light in the studio came on, Studs introduced me and asked me one question: "Jo, tell us what the hell

WHAT ORDINARY CITIZENS TALK ABOUT ON STREET TALK:

"My dream is to marry a white guy, own a big SUV, and live in a mansion in Constantia"

(Teenager in Langa)

"Aids is just another fever, and there are so many in the townships"

(Young woman in Gugulethu)

"Women have no culture"

(Somali shopkeeper in Delft)

"The President is just talking bullshit"

(Young Aids activist in Khayelitsha)

"The police? They are a joke, they are corrupt. We must punish the criminals ourselves"

(Middle-aged residents of Lavender Hill)

is going on in Vietnam!" I took a deep breath and was just starting to answer, when Studs flicked a note across the table on which was scrawled "back in a minute". Half an hour later Studs came back to wind up the show. I was only just still talking.

Another inspiration was Spike Lee,



who at a certain moment in all of his films has a group of people sitting around, be it in a barber shop, a bar or under a tree, just chewing the fat. Not scripted, totally ad lib and yet, in many ways, more revealing and compelling than the script.

In 2006, I met Richard Mills, a brilliant editor and cameraman and the co-founder and co-director of *Street Talk*.

Appalled by the conspiracy of silence and stigma that surrounded the Aids pandemic we made the documentary *SHAG – Women on Sex*, which premiered at the Sithengi Film Festival. The idea was to have women talking to each other about sex. The subtext was that as so much of the transmission of Aids had to do with the fact that South Africa was one of the most sexist and patriarchal countries in the world, it would be more than interesting to hear what women really felt and talked about to each other.

We put ads in a lot of the local newspapers asking women to participate and were overwhelmed by the response. We randomly selected about 40 and split them into groups of four or five. The women came from very diverse backgrounds and in one group you might have a 50-year-old *tammie* from Stellenbosch, a 20-something Xhosa sex worker and a mixed race computer programmer.

What amazed me was, after an initial

stage of getting to know one another, how quickly the women got into it and how soon they seemed to quite ignore the presence of the camera and recording equipment. We were like the proverbial fly on the wall.

Getting people to relax and talk to each other in front of the camera is much easier in South Africa than other places I have worked. Try shooting a *Street Talk* in England you would find people more inhibited and self-conscious. Also South Africans are quite individualistic which makes for a livelier exchange of ideas than, I suspect, a group in the US. Most importantly, I think, *Street Talk* has given our viewers a chance to listen to "the other".

In our sadly, still-divided communities it is the myths generated by ignorance that are such obstacles to transformation. We have filmed, for example, two different groups on opposite sides of a street in Bonteheuwel, one coloured Muslim and the other Xhosa. When they heard what their neighbours, with whom they had had almost no social contact, had to say about their disgust at police corruption, their fear of gang violence and their horror at the way tik was ruining people's lives, they realised that it was exactly what they were on about and how much more in common they had than they realised.



From the start, I decided that it would be better if I didn't play the role of facilitator, much less interviewer. This has led to our being criticised for putting on air points of view that are racist, xenophobic, sexist, politically-incorrect or obscene.

I think what one learns about what people really think goes some way in justifying our subjective approach and getting it out in the open is far better than pretending that it doesn't exist. We have almost never edited out something that would certainly not appear on any commercial TV channel, much less the SABC. If *Street Talk* is to have street cred, it must be just that, i.e. street talk.

The role of editing is crucial in making *Street Talk*. Some of the conversations may last over an hour, others 20 minutes and this is where Richard Mills' genius comes into play. No unstructured conversation between people, no matter how intellectual, follows a linear or logical flow. Less so when you are in a 5 x 10 metre shack in the backstreets of Delft filming eight members of two rival teenage gangs: the Vatos Locos and the Italians.

More than an hour and a half of sometimes hilarious, sometimes shocking and mostly downright terrifying conversation provided a challenge in the editing suite. (In a rare intervention I had

to stop filming and insist they sheath their drawn knives they were about to use over a perceived insult from a Vato to an Italian.)

The trick is not to try and come up with the conversation you wanted them to have, but to try and create a 15-minute précis of the essence of what was said, smoothing over the non-sequiturs and limiting any one person from hogging the limelight.

In a recent episode, a group of eight gays, lesbians, transvestites and transsexuals discussed how, although protected under the Constitution, they were constantly subjected to discrimination and violent assault. A transvestite described how, mid act, "her" male client discovered she had a penis. Shocking, hilarious, revealing, certainly, but was it titillating or obscene and therefore censorable?

I would argue that it was totally in context of who the person was and what her life was about, and therefore admissible.

From its inception, we decided that *Street Talk* should, where possible, be in English. The reasoning behind this is that our viewers speak isiXhosa, Zulu, Pedi, Afrikaans, Lingala, Swahili, Shona, Ndebele and more, but have one language in common: English. Also, studies have shown that viewers find



subtitles, especially on TV, hard to follow and tend to change channels. Our concern was whether, given that our filming was almost entirely in the townships, we would inhibit people from expressing themselves by not speaking their mother tongue. I always ask our participants to try in English and if it's too much of a stretch, to then use their own language; 90% chose English and do incredibly well.

After listening for over four years to more than 160 groups of "ordinary" people (by ordinary I mean no experts in their field, no politicians or celebrities) giving vent to their views on a host of topics, certain things stand out: Firstly, the way the "common man" or masses are depicted in the media bears little resemblance to reality. What they talk about and how they talk about it is far more sophisticated and articulate than one might think from the way they are portrayed on TV or in the press. There is far more scepticism bordering on cynicism with regard to politics and the media. The phrases most heard across the board are "the politicians are eating our money" and "they only come here in election time and make promises they never keep".

Racism, as a topic, comes up in almost every conversation. The general view is that it is as bad now as it was under apartheid and that nothing has changed. The degree of animosity between the black and mixed race communities is palpable and everyone has personal stories of some slight, insult, or confrontation.

Xenophobia: Foreigners, according to most of the people we listened to, are disliked and the thing one hears most is "they should go home". Even the older folk with moderate views on other topics are heard saying things like "they are taking our jobs, they steal the RDP houses, they are corrupting our women and dealing drugs."

Sex: A truly disturbing number of young township teenagers and those in their early 20s admit to not liking and not using condoms. The guys brag that it's

like eating a banana with the skin on and they won't do it, while the young women remonstrate with them, bring up the Aids thing and then admit they have no power to negotiate and if they don't let the guys do it without, they will just lose them. Besides, as one hears all too often, "it's only another fever, and if you get it you don't die".

Malema: A lot of support from most age groups especially for his addressing the nationalisation of mines issue and land reform; very little criticism of Malema's lifestyle or entrepreneurship.

Optimism: Some of the most articulate and passionate conversations filmed have involved high school seniors in different township schools. The degree of optimism and determination to succeed in life, get out of the township and make a better life for one's kids predominates. The importance of not relying on others to do it for you and of maintaining high self-esteem is a constant refrain. Alas, when we revisit the same groups a couple of years later we invariably find a different picture. The girls are mostly pregnant or already have a baby, the guys drinking and in all but a very few exceptions they are unemployed. The conversation is about having to know or pay someone to get a job, and how hard life is when you don't have a cent.

In the past year, *Street Talk* has been profiling people who are trying to make a difference in their communities. These range from a couple of old time jazz musicians who have started the Itonga Music School in Gugulethu to Lucinda Evans in Lavender Hill (Philiza Abafazi Wethu) and Maymouna Scholdtz in Vrygrond (Where The Rainbows Meet) who have converted their homes and back yards into safe houses for abused women and provide everything from counselling to computer literacy classes.

The more time one spends in the townships, the more one realises how woefully unreported or misreported *ikasi* life is. Giving a voice to the voiceless both empowers the participants and educates our viewers.

WEST MEETS EAST IN GRAHAMSTOWN

BY SIHLE NYATHI

If one was to write about the great potential of community broadcasting in southern Africa, the story would not be complete if one did not tell the story of how one afternoon in 2010, the small city of Grahamstown stood still in order to debate its proposed name change.

Residents from different sections of the city were packed into the tiny studios of Radio Grahamstown behind the *Grocott's Mail* offices to participate in the live debate on the name change.

There were several organisations actively involved in the name change debate such as the name change committee, headed by Julia Wells, who is also a member of the African National Congress (ANC), the Eastern Cape Geographical Names Committee (ECGNC), represented by Advocate Loyiso Mpumlwana and Keep Grahamstown Grahamstown's (KGG), represented by Jock McConnachie and Sigidla Ndumo.

Some of the organisations involved in the name change debate had serious antagonistic relationships and refused to be in the studio at the same time. It took a lot of cajoling and serious negotiation on the part of the producers to convince them to sit across from each other and discuss the issue.

It was also the first time that residents of both Grahamstown east and west converged to discuss a particular issue. The name change debate was very fierce indeed with several parties involved questioning each others' views and claiming that the opposing organisations were trying to hijack the process.

Those who were pro-name change argued that the name was a colonial relic while those who were anti-name change argued that it would be too costly to change, and that there should rather be a focus on service delivery issues which plague the city. Such is the potential of community media – it can create a space for different sections of a town to come together and discuss issues.

Given the social and economic realities of Grahamstown, community media plays a pivotal role in providing for the information needs of the poorer residents of Grahamstown east. The Iindaba Ziyafika project which was launched by Rhodes University's School of Journalism and Media Studies in 2009 and sought to impact "the poorer residents of Grahamstown, whose voices and information sources are currently constrained in terms of newspaper and web access" (Berger 2007) managed to rejuvenate community

broadcasting and also give a voice to marginalised communities.

The Iindaba Ziyafika project enabled the training of citizen journalists in different aspects of news production. The citizen journalists work alongside professional journalists in the community radio station, Radio Grahamstown. Professionals and amateurs work together to produce the *Lunch Time Live* and *Drive Time Live* news bulletins.

Community radio enables an interesting symbiotic relationship with professional journalists and amateurs. Citizen journalists and professional journalists bring different dimensions to the relationship. Citizen journalism brings knowledge of Grahamstown and relationships and contacts with residents in the townships while professional journalism brings the expertise and techniques of professional practice, which enables effective engagement with those in power in the city.

An interesting outcome of this relationship is that the citizen journalists see their relationship with professionals as a way to learn and to make possible their own stepping stone into formalised, professional journalism. This relationship comes to bear on information dissemination as professionals and amateurs work together to produce good programmes. This relationship is very beneficial for the poorer residents of Grahamstown who get information from the radio station.

In the case of Radio Grahamstown, radio seems to have a great capacity to draw citizens into debates. This is because the use of voice escapes the formalised conventions of print and it allows citizens and citizen journalists to use their own language, isiXhosa, thus providing an element of familiarity and ease with the medium. Radio Grahamstown has also enlarged a local public sphere and created much excitement and expectation among local residents. This is particularly important as there are high illiteracy levels in Grahamstown so the majority of the people listen to radio rather than buying the local paper, *Grocott's Mail*.

Community media is important in Africa as people tell their stories through

radio and print because the majority of the people do not necessarily have access to the internet. In the case of Radio Grahamstown it enables broadcasting in indigenous languages. This is very empowering as it reduces barriers to entry and creates a platform for cultural expression.

Community media gives an opportunity to citizen journalists to integrate communication brokering as part and parcel of their practice. This is because the citizen journalists based at Radio Grahamstown have made it their mandate to enable the flow of information between the residents and the local government authority, a characteristic which benefits not just their reporting but also is a small step towards enabling active citizenship. This happens in cases where the radio station has facilitated communication between the municipal authority and the local residents over service delivery issues.

Citizen journalists also play a public service role and, in one incident, a citizen journalist helped to raise funds for the burial of a Grahamstown teenager who died in Johannesburg, by getting the community to contribute towards the burial. This illustrates that the citizens see themselves as embedded in their community and feel obligated to use their practice to solve their problems whenever they can. The citizen journalists go beyond just covering stories as they closely identify with the community.

Given that Radio Grahamstown is staffed by individuals who come from the community there is a deliberate stance to include those who are not ordinarily given a voice in the mainstream media. Women and the poor appear frequently in stories as sources and this is a different scenario from mainstream journalism which frequently covers the rich and the powerful. In covering ordinary people, citizen journalists make a deliberate effort to place emphasis on highlighting their plight. Community media in this instance embodies alternative news values as the citizen journalists produce news which seeks to speak directly to the people for whom it is produced, for it is produced by citizen journalists who share the same concerns with the generality of the citizens.

The citizen journalists in the Iindaba Ziyafika project do indeed embody the values of alternative media and they identify with the concerns of the community, as they are also resident there. This characteristic of community media enables a bonded sense of community between the listeners and the journalists while facilitating a practice that is valuable.

It cannot be over emphasised that Radio Grahamstown has provided a space for deliberation between different facets of the community and there is need for support of this endeavour taking into account factors such as language and the use of the most accessible media to the people. The composition and constitution of the public sphere created by *Lunch Time Live* does give the community a means for expression and an opportunity to propagate their ideas and opinions.

The producers at Radio Grahamstown say that they go beyond the ordinary story as they want to affect change in their community. They don't simply cover stories but desire to give people a voice. When a fire destroyed the home of a family in Grahamstown, the station tried to assist the family by giving listeners a mobile phone number that they could contact to offer assistance to the victims.

Community radio also gives amateurs a platform to seek new ways of presenting news bulletins in creative, unconventional formats. The citizen journalists are given a platform for creative expression within the news bulletin that they produce as they use the cultural resources from their communities, in the form of music and language.

Presenters use their clan names during the bulletins and also make use of their totems in introducing themselves. The bulletins produced by the citizen journalists are also populist as popular songs are played between segments in the bulletin. The music is drawn from a variety of artists and is sometimes used for advocacy purposes.

Although citizen journalism in Grahamstown is institutionalised with a newspaper and an online version, it is empowering the local community as Radio Grahamstown now broadcasts news and Grahamstown East can witness itself in the news media. Although an unexpected development, this feature has shown what a blend of professional and amateur journalism, which uses different mediums, treats news as a process as well as a series of events, reaches into communities with a concern to hear their voices and raise their issues, can do.

In conclusion, community radio is important as it gives a voice to poverty stricken communities who cannot afford to buy newspapers. This is especially important at this historical juncture when the public sphere is shrinking, as it provides space for communities to deliberate on issues which are of paramount importance to them.



Jonathan Jones

WRONG PLACE, RIGHT TIME

BY SUNDAY DARE

As I worked on my research at Oxford University in 2011 investigating the impact of citizen journalism in expanding freedom of speech, advancing citizenship rights and generally engendering participatory democracy, I discovered that virtually anyone with a mobile phone and access to the internet, and who is at the ‘wrong’ place at the ‘right’ time, is a journalist. I began to realise that no longer can legacy journalism and those that practice it lay claim to being *the* only journalist; not in an era where anyone aided by Web 2.0 technologies can upload or post content of their choice on to the worldwide web, and engage in a technologically-facilitated online communicative experience.

An analysis of citizen journalism in Nigeria suggests that the uptake of this genre, as witnessed in the last five years, is largely due to advancements in technology, mobile phones, affordable mobile internet devices and a growing demand for a more conversational media. Increases in user-generated content and an increasingly active audience have emerged to fill the vacuum of progressive and investigative content which was prevalent during military rule.

Nigerians in their thousands are increasingly migrating to the virtual public sphere,¹ to social networking sites Facebook and Twitter, and anti-corruption and social justice online platforms Sahara Reporters, Nigeria Village Square, Huhu online, Pointblank News and Nairaland, in order to engage in conversations about politics, economics, social justice, culture and social life. Sahara Reporters is at the forefront of online citizen journalism in Nigeria, encouraging citizen journalists to report ongoing corruption and nepotism on the continent. These discursive platforms range in genre from online news sites, discussion forums, blogs, citizen journalism sites and various forms of wholly user generated websites. Their prominence has been on the increase in the past four years, with over 35 such sites operating today. The online editions of major Nigerian newspapers from the traditional news media sector have also joined the changing trends to scramble for a share of the audience by incorporating features of social media and citizen journalism both in their print and online editions.

Aside from the strides made in this regard, there are genuine concerns about the quality of journalism emerging from the plethora of online platforms. Adebayo Onanuga, editor in chief of one of Nigeria’s leading weekly magazines, *The News*, describes citizen journalism as having been popularised by Sahara Reporters: “Sahara Reporters is like Wikileaks; all the news fit and unfit to print.

No inhibitions at all. No consideration for the ethics of the profession, the subtleties expected from the practitioners, the sense of social responsibility and the restraints that trained journalists normally exhibit”.² This position is reinforced by the argument that citizen journalists are not trained to subscribe to the traditional journalistic standards of objectivity, fairness and accuracy found in news organizations.³

Professor Adebayo Williams, of *The Nation* editorial board has welcomed citizen journalism in Nigeria but cautions against reckless journalism. For him, bloggers have stepped up to the plate in areas where the traditional media fell short due to what he describes as “internal contradictions as well as historical developments”⁴ within the journalistic profession and the Nigerian state. Williams celebrates bloggers’ contribution to fighting corruption: “It is not the blogger who will put an end to this elaborate charade, this sustained chicanery and macabre musical chairs, but blogging will help. The defenestration of some important sectors of the Nigerian press as a result of corporate corruption and individual greed has assured the blogger of a great historical platform. Yet if he is to fulfill this historic mission, the blogger must conduct a constant reality check and come up with a profound intellectual interrogation of his own vulnerability in a web of elite deceit and mischief. It is only after this that the blogger can reconnect with the endangered forces of genuine change in the home country.”⁵

Social media is abuzz in Nigeria and around the continent more broadly; direct participation in news gathering and dissemination has brought with it the feeling of greater freedom of speech, with individuals contributing to debates regarding ongoing issues that concern them. They are able to speak to their governments. However, the uncensored nature of content is problematic and risky, and the new form of journalism may ultimately find its demise in the freedom that is responsible for its fame.

Endnotes

1. Farooq Kperogi in “What Virtual Nigeria Says About Real Nigeria”. USA Africa Dialogue Series. October 30, 2010.
2. Author Interview. Lagos. February 2010.
3. Serena Carpenter, “News Quality Differences”. In *Public Journalism 2.0* et al p70-71
4. Ibid
5. Ibid





Jonathan Jones

A CODE OF ETHICS FOR CITIZEN JOURNALISM

BY DENNIS A SMITH AND PHILIP LEE

In the brave new world of digital communications, in which more people than at any time in history can make public their views and opinions, what credible role can be assigned to citizen journalism?

The *Handbook for Citizen Journalists* (Ross and Cormier, 2010) offers the following comment: “The work of citizen journalists may not reach the heights of social or spiritual impact as the great men and women of history, but make no mistake, it is extremely important to the preservation of democracy. The basic principles of journalism – objective reporting, detachment from personal bias, a commitment to the truth and more – are needed today more than ever in history. These principles applied by well-meaning, truth-seeking citizen journalists across the nation and around the world will increase public knowledge, improve public trust and expand public discourse.”

Citizen journalism can provide a useful way for news media to add needed voices to an increasingly fragmented and polarised media landscape by promoting “engaged dialogue” – one that involves a willingness to listen to what other people are saying and how they see the world. In this respect, citizen journalism can challenge the conventional role of mainstream news media.

Adam Kahane (2004) calls this process “deep conversation”. The premise is simple: “The way we talk and listen expresses our relationship with the world. When we fall into the trap of telling and of not listening, we close ourselves off from being changed by the world and we limit ourselves to being able to change the world only by force. But when we talk and listen with an open mind and an open heart and an open spirit, we bring forth our better selves and a better world”.

Engaged dialogue as practised by citizen journalists has profound implications for the creators and shapers of news and opinion. While most newsrooms continue to struggle with questions of diversity – a struggle that certainly must continue – citizen journalists can quickly increase gender, ethnic and social balance. They can offer to a story relevant specialist knowledge as well as valuable lived experience.

That being said, early experience suggests that not every public communicator will abide by professional codes of journalistic practice and most will not benefit from the long-term professional infrastructure of the best media institutions. The problem for their different audiences will be to sift fact from fiction, insight from partisan opinion, truth from falsehood. If they are to win and keep the trust of editors and the public, citizen journalists will need to spend considerable time verifying, interpreting and explaining their stories.

The question is: what kind and to what extent can traditional journalism ethics be applied to citizen media and citizen journalism? Writing in the series “Challenges” published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, John Kelly (2009) observes that citizen journalism’s supporters claim six ways it benefits public communication. It brings experts into the reporting process so that stories can be more accurate and nuanced; it makes possible the coverage of events that the mainstream media might otherwise miss, and it can save money. Through blogs especially, it can influence the news agenda or “resuscitate” stories that mainstream media might have let die; it can demystify the journalistic process and it can build a sense of community, increasing the understanding of,

and participation in, civic life (Kelly 2009).

Citizen journalists equipped with accessible and affordable digital technologies may provide a valuable service to news consumers and to the news media, but only if they reconcile themselves with the ethical standards of professional journalism. At the same time, while some public communicators may feel called to become professional journalists, one might hope that most would not jeopardise the specificity and authenticity of their voices by doing so.

Alan Rusbridger, editor of *The Guardian*, extols what he calls open journalism – “journalism that is fully knitted into the web of information that exists in the world today. It links to it; sifts and filters it; collaborates with it and generally uses the ability of anyone to publish and share material to give a better account of the world” (Rusbridger 2012).

Rusbridger set out 10 principles of open journalism:

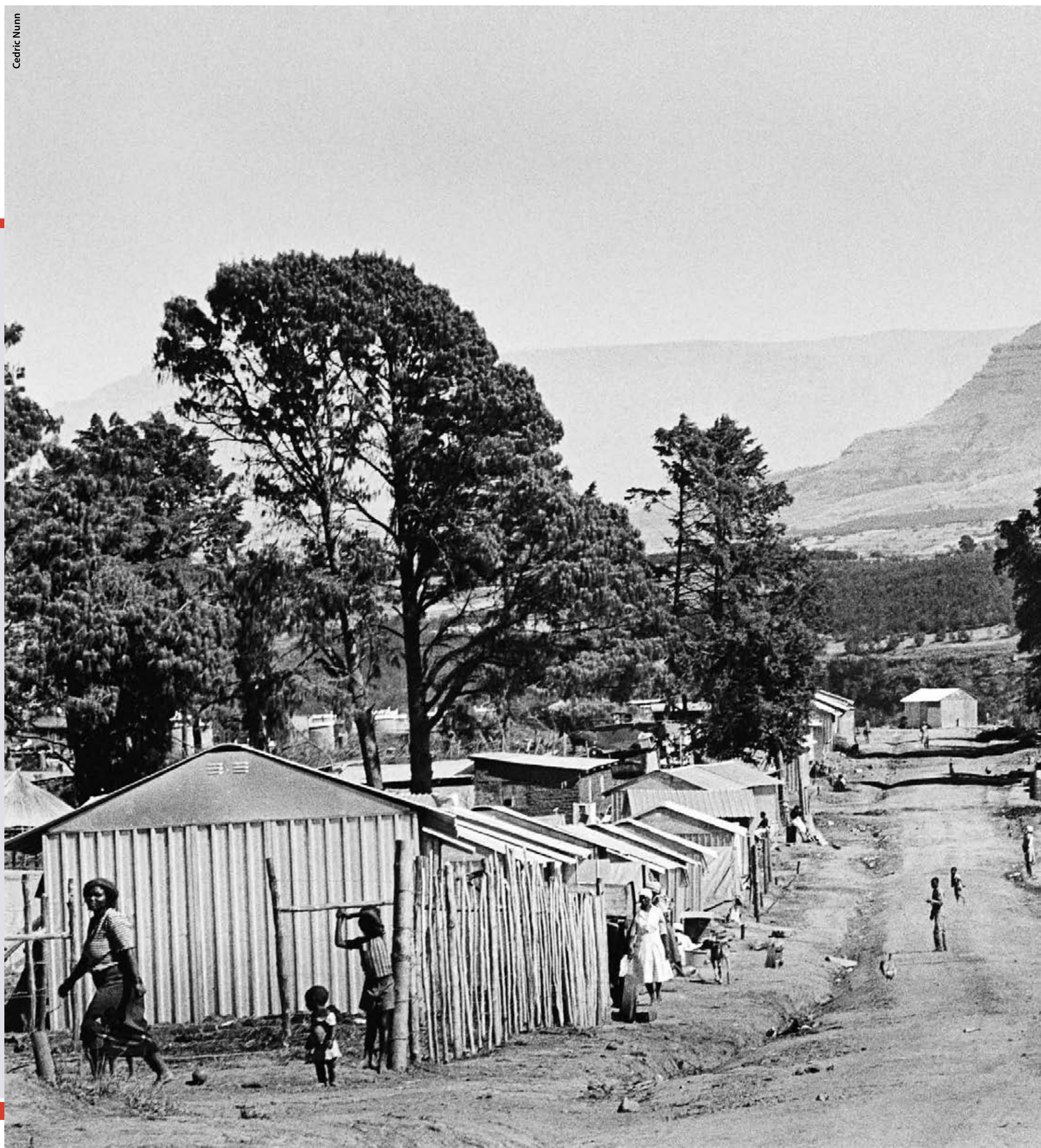
- It encourages participation. It invites and/or allows a response.
- It is not an inert, “us” or “them”, form of publishing.
- It encourages others to initiate debate, publish material or make suggestions.
- It helps form communities of joint interest around subjects, issues or individuals.
- It is open to the web and is part of it.
- It aggregates and/or curates the work of others.
- It recognises that journalists are not the only voices of authority, expertise and interest.
- It aspires to achieve, and reflect, diversity as well as promoting shared values.
- It recognises that publishing can be the beginning of the journalistic process rather than the end.
- It is transparent and open to challenge – including correction, clarification and addition.

It is in this context that on World Press Freedom Day 2012 the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) urged media practitioners – including both professional and citizen journalists – to seek common ground for their joint efforts and to agree principles and practices that are transparent, accountable and ethical (WACC, 2012). A code of ethics for citizen journalism would provide a much needed framework for new voices working to transform societies and establish standards for a multiplicity and diversity of voices that can only advance the cause of communication for all.

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Cedric Nunn





“... EXERCISES
IN CULTURAL
TRANSLATION ON A
**MASSIVE
SCALE:
ENORMOUS**
PROJECTS OF
LISTENING TO,
TRANSCRIBING,
SIFTING,
ARRANGING AND
INTERVENING IN
THE WORDS OF
NON-LITERARY
(AND OFTEN
NON-LITERATE)
NARRATORS.”

Life's tough enough, so the wisdom goes, and it's a useful policy to celebrate your victories where they come. For a writer, a reliably triumphant moment arrives with the signing of a book deal. But when the deal you sign is for a book that promises to explain how the People's Republic of China is altering the African continent, your celebrations aren't fated to last long. For one thing, "Africa" isn't a static entity; it's a geographical agglomeration of 54 evolving countries, each with its own historical subtleties, cultural touchstones, political nuances, and economic markers.

For another, it's a daunting area to navigate, a landmass that's impossibly vast – what yesterday may have seemed like a generous advance against royalties is today, when you start to plan your route, a full-blown assault on your financial resources. Then there's the fact that China's entry into the continent isn't a monolithic concept either; there are levels and grades to the phenomenon, categories that run the gamut from Beijing-backed, state-owned enterprises to independent merchants who have no agenda other than the sending of monthly remittances back to families in Fujian.

Lastly, there's your co-author. How are you going to write this book together? What narrative thread are you going to find that stitches your themes in a way that's immediate, that's personal, that engages the reader via the charms of a compelling story? Because "story," when you're honest with yourself, is the reason you got into this gig in the first place.

In November 2010, my friend Richard Poplak and I embarked on chapter one. There had of course been a prelude, a series of events and choices that had brought us to this juncture, but those would only be appended to the plotline in hindsight. Now, we were on our way to the United States Embassy, headed for a meeting with a representative of the world's supreme superpower, who was waiting for us in what used to be the most impressive building on Pretorius Street.

What we wanted to know was how the Americans viewed the pretenders to their throne, and particularly how they were coping with the symbolic heft of the rival embassy that had just been erected up the road. Because to us, in those early days, if any signifier stood at the kernel of our story, it was this: the larger and more elaborate the embassy, the larger the geopolitical aspirations. In that respect, China appeared to be taking Africa by the throat.

And yet the sign, like its implied message, would turn out to be a frail cliché. That interview in the US embassy, our first formal interview of several hundred to come, was conducted mostly off-the-record – the American bureaucrat was more interested in asking questions than answering them, and we didn't have much to offer, except to reflect back at her what was then our own ignorance of "the Other".

So what if the Chinese had decided to build a structure that resembled the Forbidden Palace in both scale and configuration? The Americans had decided years before to build one that resembled Fort Knox, with bomb-proof walls and multiple security checkpoints, unsmiling Marines standing on guard at the main entrance, and state-of-the-art satellite equipment protruding from the roof. Also, this was Pretoria, only 45 kilometres north of our home base. We still had a lot farther north to go.

Expenses and narrative anxieties aside, nothing beats climbing into the cab of a second-hand Toyota Hilux, provisions and sleeping kit in the back, and pointing the grille at the closest border. It's one of the reasons we took on the assignment; this opportunity to discover, with a close and likeminded friend, a continent in unprecedented flux. As South Africans, as people who'd grown up here, we'd already spent months telling each other what we weren't about to do. We weren't about to go in search of Joseph Conrad's myopic metaphor, providing yet another take on a tired journey into the Heart of Darkness. We weren't about to redo Charlie Boorman and Ewan McGregor's Long Way Down, where the aim was more the distance covered than the insights earned. And we especially weren't about to fall into the trap set by Ernest Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa*, which to us was probably the worst book ever written by a writer who could otherwise (and legitimately) claim to be one of the greats.

As Paul Theroux drove home the point in *Dark Star Safari*: "The Hemingway vision of Africa begins and ends with the killing of large animals, so that their heads may be displayed to impress visitors with your prowess. That kind of safari is easily come by. You pay your money and you are shown elephants and leopards. You talk to servile Africans, who are generic natives, little more than obedient Oompa-Loompas. The human side of Africa is an afternoon visit to a colourful village. This is why, of all the sorts of travel available in Africa, the easiest to find and the most misleading is the Hemingway experience. In some respects the feed-the-people obsession that fuels some charities is related to this, for I seldom saw relief workers that did not in some way remind me of people herding animals and throwing food to them, much as rangers did to the animals in drought-stricken game parks."

What we were about to do was look into the gaps between these various conceptions, and the fact that our lens onto the continent would be provided by a power that stands in contrast to the West – that is in many respects the opposite of the West, the anti-West – made a certain part of our jobs a lot simpler.

After traversing four countries, when the Hilux pulled back into Jo'burg following a 17 000-kilometre roundtrip through Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, we were able to dispense with the most quoted of Western media critiques: China was not Africa's new coloniser, it had not come to complete what the West had begun. To us, the assumption that the People's Republic had imperialist ambitions on the continent was now a predictable sideswipe from the real former colonisers, who'd never truly recognised African agency anyway, and whose feed-the-people schemes (to refer back to Theroux) were no more than a postcolonial attempt to ensure that such agency was kept beyond reach.

Why was China here, then? On this score, Western media seemed to have it about right – China was in Africa for its resources. But given what China was leaving behind in return (highways, dams, power stations, a growing consumer class), the question became a lot more profound. What could Africa encompass, what could she hold?



While conducting research for his forthcoming book about the Chinese industrial advance through Africa, **Kevin Bloom** meditates on the more pragmatic difficulties of writing long-form journalism about an ever-morphing continent.

It's now May 2012, and we've travelled through 11 African countries. We have three more trips still to make, with a fourth and final one scheduled to China itself. If anything, we are less certain of our position than when we started; for every so-called rule, we have unearthed a multitude of exceptions.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we learned that Chinese mining initiatives remain decades behind those of the West, that companies listed in London and Toronto stand to pull more out of the African crust in a day than China does in a month.

In Ethiopia we learned that economic growth rates of 10% per annum could well be based on hot air, that the Chinese model of state capitalism (or growth through massive infrastructure spend) may not be as exportable as previously thought. In Kenya we learned that a Chinese-built highway through the remote northern regions, a highway that opens the key corridor between Nairobi and Addis Ababa, has the supplementary effect of decimating, for ivory, the elephants of the Samburu plain.

But this story was always meant to be told through the eyes of the people we met along the way, and here we have stumbled upon an embarrassment of riches. On the outskirts of Windhoek we met Simeon, a young man who's putting himself through college by hawking Chinese traditional medicines to a township populace that can't afford healthcare.

Chisumbanje in southern Zimbabwe yielded two remarkable days with Graeme, a white farmer whose land was expropriated by Bob "Look East" Mugabe, and who's currently running a green fuel project funded by none other than South African fugitive Billy Rautenbach.

Zanzibar was where we had the privilege of an extended encounter with Yuning, a graduate of China's most prestigious foreign language institute, who for the past six months has been single-handedly building the world's most modern Swahili-Mandarin dictionary. There have been dozens more.

And then there's our own place in the story, a central thread we'd attempted – during a first abortive draft – to avoid. Will the reader care how we've been altered by this journey, how our individual outlooks and collective identities have evolved? Will the reader care if, at some base level, this is a book about a friendship? In the next draft, we're going to lay down the following rule with respect to the subject of caring: if we don't, the reader won't.

DIAGNOSING THE CHIMURENGA CHRONIC

BY NTONE EDJABE

In which ways do people live their lives with joy and creativity and beauty, sometimes amidst suffering and violence, and sometimes perpendicular to it? How do people fashion routines and make sense of the world in the face of the temporariness or volatility that defines so many of the arrangements of social existence here?

These questions loom over contemporary Africa. Yet most knowledge produced on the continent remains heavily reliant on simplistic and rigid categories, the bulk of it unable to capture the complexities and ambivalences that inflect so much of quotidian life here.

This failure illustrates what Achille Mbembe calls “a crisis of language” in writing Africa in the world and writing the world from Africa. Such writing is caught in a gap – a time-lag, even – between what Africa is and what we’re told it ought to be. It presents Africa as a pathological case, a figure of lack – and focuses on what Africa is not (yet) rather than what it is. We find this instrumentalised view of the world not only in official discourse (state, international finance, NGOs) but also among those who oppose their policies. It’s a discourse of relevance.

During 2011, *Chimurenga* proposed a way out of this crisis with the publishing of a once-off, one-day-only edition of a fictional pan African newspaper. Titled the *Chimurenga Chronic*, the project was published in collaboration with Nigeria’s Cassava Republic Press and Kenya’s Kwani Trust, and distributed across several African cities.

An intervention in both time and space, the *Chronic* embraced the newspaper as the medium best capable of inhabiting, reproducing and interpreting political, social and cultural life in places where uncertainty and turbulence, unpredictability and multidirectional shifts are the forms taken, in many instances, by daily experience.

Emblazoned with its date of publication, few contemporary objects are as potent a container of time as the print newspaper. A sign of the times, the newspaper simultaneously announces itself in the present while harkening

back to an analogue era, to the turn of the 20th century and the dawn of the machine age.

We had to rethink the newspaper for this digital era as time-based, not only as part of historical sequence or even as the consequence of procedures that have been animated, literally unfolding in time, but as a producer of time: a time-machine.

We were guided by the words of composer, bandleader and theorist Sun Ra – a long time ago, back when outer space was the place he said: “Equation wise, the first thing to do is consider internal linktime as officially ended...we will work on the other side of time”.

It has become increasingly clear that time, once thought continuous, is actually marked by radical disjunctions between numerous different temporalities, dispersed entanglements and overlapping time-spaces. And the tools at our disposal, particularly in the area of knowledge production, do not help us much to grasp that which is emerging.

So we set our time-machine to 18-24 May 2008. This was an arbitrary date, but also a significant marker: it was during the xenophobic violence that ravaged many of South Africa’s cities during that period. We wanted to place those events within a broader context and challenge the logic of emergencies that characterises media coverage of Africa.

We invited our writers, artists and editors to take the *Chronic* seriously as a time-machine; to re-consider the past as a territory to explore, and the present as a precarious and elusive entry-point through which, hopefully, a radically different future might make its appearance. We asked them to relocate in the middle of a social crisis in order to write Africa outside the crisis of language.

This straddling of the space between fact and fiction, we hoped, would allow for temporal stories and histories – discrete, distinct and possibly incommensurate accounts of the past and present to be told in ways that deny a sense of obligation (relevance) or sensationalism. Learning to read and write outside the prisons of fact and fiction would take time – the process of researching and writing *The Chronic* took over a year.

Employing reportage, memoir, satire and analysis to offer a detailed, vivid and richly textured engagement of everyday life, the *Chronic* told stories of a complicated ordinariness. Featured articles included Somali’s capital in Nairobi, a portrait of Juba, a new African capital city, the story of a border fence,



Cameroon’s bass culture, the adventures of Dr Evil in Dakar, the Kenyan long distance runner, a visual history of *Things Fall Apart* and many more.

The response was testimony to the success of the project. Accolades poured in. South Africa’s *Mail&Guardian* described *The Chronic* as “a cracker. The sort of newspaper you want to open at the end of every week.” Simon Kuper writing in the *Financial Times* described it as “better than *The New Yorker*”.

The congratulations were still ringing in our ears when we realised the irony. The *Chronic* may well have been the newspaper African readers wanted to open every week, but clearly they wouldn’t be doing that. The *Chronic* was a once-off – not a newspaper but an art project, the performance of a newspaper. Here today, gone tomorrow, it appeared as a spectacle that came dangerously close to perpetuating the very thing it sought to critique. It presented Africa as a land of never-ending present and instant, where today and now matter more than tomorrow, let alone the distant future.

This negated the true value of the newspaper, the very thing that drew us to the medium in the first place: its ability to be present, to create the effect of presence in the present while simultaneously moving through different temporal orders, instrumentalising

spatial fragmentation and creating a point of transition from the past to the future.

So why leave it there? We clearly do not lack the talent, the ingenuity or the voices to tell our own story. Nor do we lack the readership – Africa is hungry for intelligent and challenging writing that takes seriously the task of uncovering the stories that underpin our current condition. We have in place the networks of circulation to move ideas and distribute goods in innovative ways.

What is missing is the bravery to challenge prescribed modes of production that favour once-off projects. To do this we must take seriously the rules, regularities, the reproductive logics and the labour involved in making everyday life possible; despite the conditions of precariousness and uncertainty that continue surround us.

We need to draw on the way African societies compose and invent in the present and embrace our capacity to continually produce something new and singular.

We have to write the everyday, every day.



"Is the text set in stone?" The bluish light from my monitor stung my eyes. It was a late evening email from Jonny Steinberg, undoubtedly one of South Africa's most significant contemporary writers of non-fiction. He was worried about my inability to translate a telephonic interview I had conducted with him a month before into intelligible copy.

"As I said to you on the phone, a verbatim transcript of a verbal conversation seldom works in writing; it always has to be 'translated' a little. And this is no exception. I think that in quite a few places, the text simply makes no sense at all. It could be dramatically improved with a little judicious editing. Is it too late for that?"

And so I went back, embarrassed, to my text. It was something I should have expected: Jonny Steinberg, after all, is well known for sharing his manuscripts with his own subjects, and editing or erasing parts of them in accordance with their wishes. By sending my text to him, I was inviting the same.

It's not a usual journalistic habit, but it's never seemed to scupper his ability to release compelling and honest books. Indeed, among his *Sunday Times* columns and numerous monographs, Steinberg is best known for his book-length narrative non-fiction, including the Alan Paton award-winning duo of *Midlands* (2002) and *The Number* (2004), as well as *Three-Letter Plague* (2008) and *Little Liberia* (2010).

His intellectual and narrative agility has allowed him to construct a succession of terse and delicate mappings of shame, tension and mythology in the interiors of seemingly opaque phenomena: HIV stigma in the Eastern Cape, prison gangs in the Western Cape, racially-charged land disputes in KwaZulu-Natal, and many more, all seemingly overlapping and zigzagging together with the myriad lives he documents.

Characterised by an at-times overwhelming narrative presence, Steinberg's narratives are founded on – and driven by – his relationships with his subjects. Over and above the numerous insights that his mix of reportage, biography and ethnography unearths, his books provide an excellent case study of a journalist negotiating and re-negotiating the transactions of intimate emotions and interiors between himself and the people about whom he writes. One step further than merely showing the process of writing the story, Steinberg often chooses to make that process the story itself.

So, in the spirit of one writer's methods, I present this discussion between Jonny Steinberg and myself, an edited discussion about the difficult balance between a writer's promises to his readers and his ethical obligations to his subject; about positionality, empathy and authority, and about the state of non-fiction in South Africa in general.

And, no, he didn't ask me to remove anything.

RUMMAGING IN PRIVATE WORLDS

Nick Mulgrew: In each of your books there is a transaction of interiors between you and your subjects, each one taking place within a fragile web of contracts and obligations between you, your subject and your readers.

For example, when *Little Liberia* was published in 2010, reviewers picked up your admission that you went through your manuscripts with your subjects before they went to print. Some saw those negotiations with your subjects, and others like them in *The Number* and *Three-Letter Plague*, as transgressions of an unspoken contract between you and your readers: you seemingly had a duty to lay your subjects bare for them, but you are instead covering up parts of them, so to speak. How do you balance that conflict between your ethical obligations to your subjects and your readers' expectations?

Jonny Steinberg: I think there's always tension between what a reader expects and what the writer's obligations to his subject are. Whether they know it or not, what most readers of narrative non-fiction demand is that the writer transgress: they want to peer over his shoulder as he rummages through his subject's private world. If your research subject is not somebody who understands that that is the game, that they are giving away things to an audience that might not care much about them, then you have an obligation to tell them that. But you also have an obligation to your reader to write a readable book. There are extreme cases where you need to choose between satisfying your reader and doing right by your subject.

One of the ways I sometimes try to get out of that conundrum is by making a big thing about it in the book itself. I tell the reader and the subject about my unease and it becomes a part of the book; part of the drama, as it were. It's my way of trying to have my cake and eating it: to satisfy my reader and to satisfy my ethical obligations to my subject is to make the problem itself a part of the story.

NM: I think I have noticed a progression in your books with regard to your tendency to discuss that sort of tension. In *Midlands*, your first book, you seem to be quite emotionally detached from your subject, probably because, by your own admission, you didn't like him very much. As you entered into closer, but more difficult, relationships with subjects like Magadien Wentzel in *The Number* and Sizwe Magadla in *Three-Letter Plague*, it became a more prominent feature of your narratives to describe your relationships with your subjects, discussing your differing viewpoints on their lives, showing them your manuscripts, and the like.

You say that you think it is unconscious, but do you think it became more of a necessity to explain that tension as you entered into more proximal relationships in your later narratives?

BY NICK MULGREW

JS: Firstly, I’m not sure those things are any less prevalent in *Midlands*. I think, in a strange sort of way, my relationship with the farmer plays more of a role in the narrative than in the other books. The fact that the story I am writing may condemn him hovers menacingly throughout it.

As for my inner feelings: I think my presence in my work is much more shadowy than the presence of my subjects. The exception is *Three-Letter Plague*, in which I went into my interior, almost as a substitute for my subject’s, because he wouldn’t show me his. The course of the narrative required me to go into somebody’s interior and he wouldn’t give me his, and so I had to offer up my own as a kind of a proxy for him. It was a way of getting to him when he wouldn’t let me in. It was more a moment that was narratively strategic than a moment of progression in my writing career.

NM: Do you think that conducting an investigation of your own interior, based on your own experiences and cultural upbringing, is an honest and effective way of navigating somebody else’s interior, especially when they won’t offer it to you?

JS: I think that any non-fiction book has to deal with the question of authority: how it knows what it knows. That question is heightened when you go into a world that is not your own, or at least one that is very different to your own. If I’m ever going to understand that kind of world with any depth or complexity, it’s through my personal relationship with people who live in it.

I feel that I should show the reader how this relationship evolved and therefore how I know what I know. It is in part a question of earning authority.

I know that other people have written very effective books in which they are invisible; they screen themselves out completely and make no appearance in the book. I respect that way of working, but I don’t know how to do that.

NM: Is an empathetic connection with your subject important to you on a personal level?

JS: Well, it doesn’t have to be empathetic. It can be hostile, even. It’s a route to knowledge, and it’s a route to know more about the world I’m writing about.

NM: That said, have you ever found anything that was irreconcilably other to you, such as the role of witchcraft in the rural Eastern Cape, something you said in *Three-Letter Plague* that was “deeply foreign” to you?

JS: Yes, but in the end it wasn’t witchcraft. I had trouble with witchcraft in the beginning because it was exotic, and that was bad. I needed to try to understand it and describe it, and in

the end I think I did. In spending days and days with Sizwe, I think I got a sense of what it means to have an invisible world shaping your own in such intimate ways.

I think there are other instances, however, where there were dimensions of experience that I never got near to understanding. One of them is, oddly enough, not witchcraft, but Christianity in the Liberia book, where both the protagonists, Jacob and Rufus, are devout Christians. That was something I just wasn’t inquisitive about. They didn’t speak much about it, and I didn’t ask much about it. That was a huge mistake because it was very much a part of them. I look back on it now and wonder why part of me was asleep to it, because it is so obvious that, if someone is a devout Christian, you must know what it means to them. And yet I didn’t go there, and I don’t know why I didn’t go there. It was just this peculiar blind spot.

NM: Is it perhaps easier to be intellectually stimulated by something that’s exotic?

JS: Not necessarily, because I was very interested in Jacob’s secular intellectual development, which is not exotic to me at all. I ended up reading all of these terribly written Liberian tracts from the 1970s in order to understand Jacob’s intellectual environment, and I really enjoyed that reading.

I don’t know. I may have somehow subconsciously doubted my capacity to understand religious experience, and once there was this secular intellectual experience waiting for me, I thought, why not plough into that instead?

NM: Is it perhaps when you find yourself in a relatively close relationship with your subject, and when you’re caught up in their current concerns, that you find you have those kind of intellectual blind spots?

JS: That’s interesting, and I think that this relates to our discussion right in the beginning. I often find that there is a tension evolving in the narrative between me and the person I’m writing about, and often the tension is about our respective understandings of his life. I think a part of me likes the idea that I’m an outsider reflecting upon people from the outside, and perhaps seeing something that they don’t see.

So no, I don’t think I get swept up in them. I think that I always step back and always think differently from them about them. Or so I like to think.

NM: In the preface to *Midlands*, you said that every journalist hurts the person about whom he writes. On the surface, that seems like an axiom of biography, or, at the very least, an axiom of biography written in a context of emotional turbulence. Do you still think that’s true?

JS: No, I think that was hyperbole. It was a very restless statement. I think it’s often true, but I don’t think it’s inevitable.

The writer has purposes to write a particular book and the subject has purposes to co-operate, and where those purposes clash and align is really quite contingent. Sometimes everyone walks away happy.

NM: So it was more of a statement made in order to mitigate any potential misgivings?

JS: Well I think the sort of triangular structure that exists between writer, subject and reader lends itself to the subject being betrayed more often, but I don’t necessarily think it means the subject will be hurt. In the case of *Midlands*, the problem was more acute than in any of my subsequent books. I felt that the farmer Mitchell had handled a situation badly, and the next thing that happened because of his handling of that situation was that his son died. That is a hell of a thing to suggest about anybody’s actions and their repercussions.

NM: But I remember you saying once, in a seminar not too long ago, that narrative reaches shame better than any other device. Is it an ability to map of shame through narrative that makes narrative journalism so effective?

JS: I don’t think it’s only shame. I think that it’s anything deposited deep inside individual people, and shame is one of those things.

What’s really exciting me about the man I’m writing about at the moment, for example, is not shame at all. He feels very little shame. What interests me about him is a paradox. He is a refugee and thus had few choices. And, yet, paradoxically, precisely because he has been ripped out of his context, the choices he does make are much more consequential than the choices you and I make. I have only made a couple of decisions that has radically altered the trajectory of my life. He has made many. In a strange, very paradoxical way, his life has been shaped by his decisions more than my life has been shaped by my decisions. I’m quite fascinated by what it means to be a human being under those circumstances. I suspect that the knowledge that your decisions are so all important begins to shape who and how you love, whether you save money, what you dream about, and so on.

Narrative non-fiction is a wonderful vehicle with which to explore this theme and others, because it homes in on a person in very intense and intimate ways and asks what he’s doing and why. I think that narrative’s just designed to answer important questions like that.

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NM: And through these important personal questions, you're able to map the societal.

JS: That's always the idea, that these stories can resonate far beyond themselves, and that you can close the book and believe you know something important about the world more generally. But that should always be possible: any story about any individual life or set of actions is inevitably also about the world and times it happens in.

NM: Do you think that's the reason behind the recent surge behind this genre in South Africa?

JS: Well, in the first place, it's not just a South African phenomenon. Non-fiction is on a crest globally; it's much more read and much more powerful and influential than fiction in a way that wasn't true in, say, the mid-twentieth century.

I'm not sure what that's about exactly, but I think it's partly about television, and partly about the fact that real people are coming into living rooms in an intimate way for the first time in human history. Because of that, there's

a burning desire to know about real people and an obsession with authenticity in non-fiction.

So it's a global phenomenon, but here it has a South African inflection. Perhaps non-fiction has an extra kind of power in a country like ours. We live in a place that's changing profoundly and there's a great amount of uncertainty in all spheres of life, and if a book comes out that professes to show life beneath the surface, people urgently want to know that. I think that's what happened with *Midlands* and *The Number*. I don't think they sold well because they were especially good books, but because they were very carefully aimed to show a South African readership a very urgent and important part of life that they didn't know about, and I think a lot of people read them because they were useful in that way.

NM: So, is that how you see the purpose of your work? Is it something with which you hope to make a contribution to public knowledge, or is it something more personally fulfilling?

JS: Those things aren't mutually exclusive. I guess that I see myself as primarily a practitioner of a craft, and my main aim is to practice that craft really well, and to have left

an object in the form of a book that is good, in the same way as somebody who designs a building, or paints a painting, or even constructs a business plan does.

I also want people to read my books to learn about the world, and I hope they do. But that's so inextricably linked to craft: if a book isn't well crafted, it isn't a good book, and it won't have much social impact. But yes, one of my ambitions is that people learn something about the world that they didn't know before.

NM: And are you satisfied with how you're accomplishing that aim?

JS: It's hard to know what impact one's work makes. But, for instance, with *Three-Letter Plague*, I know that many medical practitioners read it, and that led to many meaningful discussions about their work. That was enormously satisfying, because when I was writing the book I was absolutely terrified that I was getting the medicine wrong, that it was something I didn't understand. Having a lot of doctors read it and value it was important to me, because that spoke to its authenticity and meant that I wasn't just messing around. That was a real measure of success.

E-LONG FORM ON MAMPOER.CO.ZA

BY ANTON HARBER

A chance remark at a literary event has led to a new e-publishing venture intended to fill a gap in South African journalism.

At a Troyeville Hotel book event late last year, I lamented the absence of an outlet for substantial long-form reporting. There was little, I said, between the 1 500 words you could do for some of our weekly papers, and the 100 000 words of a book. Writers who wanted to do more meaty pieces that justified spending more time on a story, were frustrated.

Author, friend and host of that evening's event, Anthony Altbeker, called me the next day to say that I was right to suggest that this country could not sustain an equivalent of *The New Yorker* magazine, or *Atlantic Monthly*. But surely e-publishing opened up new opportunities?

He was right, of course. We could publish this kind of material electronically without the massive start-up costs of a traditional magazine. And our gut instinct was that this was the length of the future: more than a newspaper article, but less than a book. Something substantial and rich, but which you could read in one sitting, perhaps in an hour or two of an evening. Perfect for those who are pressed for time, but keen to read more about and understand our country.

Over the next few weeks, we got together with my fellow *Mail&Guardian* founder, Irwin Manoim, and decided to give it a try. We pulled in our joint internet publishing company, BIG Media, and its MD, Noko

Makgoba. Between us, we knew about the internet, and we knew about journalism, but very little about books, retailing or e-publishing. So we recruited former Exclusive Books boss Fred Withers to complete our team, and later brought in an e-publishing project manager, Liana Meadon.

We decided to focus on non-fiction and to try a range of different writers and subjects, and see what might work. We commissioned a number of pieces of between 5 000 and 15 000 words and we intend to sell them individually for \$2.99 each. This being the global internet, we had to do it in a global currency.

We went out to talk to writers: we will give you 30% royalties and if this works, you will earn more than you can from almost any other writing in this country, we told them. They loved it – and many of them signed up instantly – including Jonny Steinberg, Justice Malala, Mandy Weiner, Kevin Bloom, Jacob Dlamini, Andrew Feinstein, Fred de Vries, Liz McGregor...

But there is a big if in there. This is a new, untested idea and we would have to create a market and an audience. How many can we

sell? More than most books? As many copies as a weekly paper like the *Mail&Guardian*? What would people be prepared to pay for a single piece? How many might they buy? What kind of work would they buy? What device would they want to read it on?

There are some ventures in America doing similar things, like byliner.com. And of course there are Kindle Singles. Many writers are trying self-publishing on Amazon, but it is easy to get lost among their millions of titles.

We would be different. We would curate only the most interesting material with a South African flavour, and we would create a website that would build a community of people interested in good writing and reporting from this country.

We would make it possible to read it on any device, or print it out.

We would call it MampoerShorts (and the site is www.mampoer.co.za). And what we would offer would be like that local moonshine: a little bit would pack a big punch.

We would be experimental, and try and discover what kind of stuff people wanted, what they would be prepared to pay, how they would want to read it, and what length worked best. This was going to be an adventure, and we have to take risks to find out what would succeed and what would fail.

So by the time you read this, a test site should be up, and the full site will be launched when the glitches have been fixed. We will publish a new piece about once a fortnight.

So here's an invitation to join our e-publishing adventure: come along to mampoer.co.za and sample something. Bring your credit card. Buy one for a friend. Send one to your mother. Sign up for a year. Tell everyone you know about it. Fill your shot glass, raise it and toast South Africa's writers.



BY MARGIE
ORFORD

THE WITNESS AND THE SUFFERER

In McIntosh Polela's memoir, *My Father My Monster*, which deals with the trauma of a childhood shaped by the murder of his mother at the hands of his father, the current Hawks spokesman and former television journalist writes about domestic abuse, familial shame and, eventually, forgiveness. The account of his years of unawareness of his mother's murder, his rebellious adolescence and his creation of a makeshift gun specially designed to kill his father show the confident and articulate public persona as starkly vulnerable. The following conversation is adapted from a Franschhoek Literary Festival panel discussion entitled "The Rise and Rise of True Crime".

Margie Orford: *My Father My Monster* is a deeply intimate account of the ongoing trauma that results from the loss of one life. What was unique to me about your book was how familiarly you write about dealing with perhaps one of the most dramatic events possible: the loss, in effect, of two parents at once because one killed the other. What was the thing that started you on telling that painful story?

McIntosh Polela: What started it was realising that I had spent my entire life running away from myself. When I was growing up, for example, I never expected to go very far in life. I had rebelled in my youth and got shot at several times. I was convinced back then that I was not going to make the age of 18, and even 20 was a bit of a stretch.

But when I came back from England, having completed a Master's degree at the London School of Economics, and had secured a beautiful job as a senior reporter at e.tv, I still wasn't happy, even though I had achieved everything I had wanted to. I started to do a bit of soul searching.

I wanted to face my pain. I had simply run out of room to run to, so I had to become five years old again and grow up and experience all the pain again. By going through that experience, I hoped that I was going to find some release, and that I was going to find closure.

MO: Nobody told you the truth about what happened to your mother until you were 11 years old. What was that silence about?

MP: I only was able to unravel why there was a silence about my mother's murder in 2008 when I started to write my book. When I told my family I was writing the book, my mother's sister said she

wanted to talk to me. When I got to her house she told me that she never said anything to me because she felt it was going to be too painful for me, and that I was not going to be able to deal with it.

I only found out when I was 11 years old when I was with my uncles, who were drinking and talking about my mom in the past tense. For the first time then they said to me, "Your father is a monster. He killed our sister and if we ever encounter him again, we are going to kill him."

It was a very traumatic experience for me to find out the way that I found out, but from then on, there was total silence from my family. The only time I was able to get the information about the murder that I needed was when I spoke to the people who were acquainted with my mom before she died, and that was only while I was writing my book.

MO: You talk so much in your book about your life as a boy, about how you were abused by your unbelievably heartless relatives, and also about how you were made to be complicit in your sister's abuse when she was three years old and you were five. Many people have said to me that your story is also the story of their childhoods. For me as a fiction writer, I think that's where there's no difference between fiction and non-fiction: by reflecting a particularly painful story back to people, especially when it's told with authenticity and feeling, it holds up a mirror to people which they can use to reflect healing to themselves.

What struck me even more than that, however, was that what your father did to your mother – and to you and your sister, by extension – was enabled by the community in which he lived. Everyone seemed to be appalled by his behaviour, and were

traumatised by it, but there seemed to be no sanctions placed on him for, say, beating your stepmother. It is almost as though you and your extended family absorbed his terrible behaviour as your own personal shame, or your own fault. Why do you think that people who are violated absorb the violence as shame and keep that violation as a secret?

MP: I think that, because I wasn't told what had happened by my family while I was growing up, they themselves started to shy away from talking about the violence. As a result of that, they retreated to themselves. And when you retreat to your own thoughts, it becomes a shame that's yours alone.

That is how we were raised. We never spoke to adults in our family other than responding to them when they were telling something to do. As a result of that, we did not develop a habit of asking questions, and when you do not have that habit, you cannot investigate the shame you're seeking to solve inside you.

I think that happens in a lot of communities. They witness and they suffer, because there is no habit of asking questions and sharing information. But what I found when I approached my aunt and my father to gather information about my mother was that they suddenly felt liberated when they talked.

I also remember that when my sister and I went to report to our grandmothers that we were going to see our father, they suddenly told us this story of the pain they felt at losing my mother. For the first time, in 2008, 26 years after this all happened, they told us about every detail.

I just didn't understand why nobody said anything before, because it meant that as young as I was, at five years old, I had to carry the burden of looking after my sister, and of trying to protect her from abuse. When I failed to do so, and when I couldn't talk to anyone, I started to hate myself.

You carry those feelings forever, until you think to yourself: why did it have to take me to talk about this first for anybody to say something, and for this liberation to start?

FOR REAL?
ARGUING WITH
DAVID SHIELDS

BY HEDLEY TWIDLE

'A literary battle cry for the creation of a new genre'.

'Raw and gorgeous'.

'A work of virtuoso banditry'.

The first and most childish reason for me wanting to pick a fight with David Shields's *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (2010) is that it comes swaddled in praise from London and New York. My Vintage edition is loud yellow and fire-engine red, like a dangerous wasp, slathered in quotes, puffs and blurbs: "A sort of bible for the next generation of culture-makers"; "an invigorating shakedown of the literary status quo"; and, most cringe-inducing of all, "This dude's book is the hip-hop album of the year".

Not only do they occupy the back and spill over onto several pages at the front; they also creep onto the cover, over the title typeface itself, where a critic as tough-minded as Tim Parks salutes this "protean polemic". Other undeniably brainy novelists like Jonathan Safran Foer and Zadie Smith also weigh in respectfully, even as Shields inveighed against their chosen medium in interviews: well-wrought literary fictions *à la* Jonathan Franzen and Ian McEwan, were, he told *The Observer* in 2010, "antediluvian texts that are essentially still working in the Flaubertian novel mode. In no way do they convey what it feels like to live in the 21st century. Like most novels, they are essentially works of nostalgic entertainment". What exactly was going on here? Had mass masochism broken out in literary Anglo-America?

When *Reality Hunger* arrived on these shores, it was swiftly taken up as a kind of hip guide to where the literary was, a text that had nailed an emergent writerly *zeitgeist* – in old New York, at least. Shields was duly channelled by the critic Sarah Nuttall, who gave a lecture on his work at the University of Cape Town in April 2011. Putting together a course on Literary non-fiction in (South) Africa at the English Department of the same institution, I found Shields a useful ally against those who felt that such courses properly belonged with the muckrakers in Journalism. His no-holds barred advocacy of genre-blurring memoir, the documentary impulse and the exploratory essay was a timely fillip for arguing that the many non-fictional texts which have distinguished South

African writing in recent decades are compelling forms, worthy of the same critical attention afforded to prize-winning novels.

The book also proved, I might add, a handy tool in the setting of student assignments. One simply plunders it for aphoristic nuggets, much the same as Shields plunders other writers, and then adds a word:

"All great works of literature either dissolve a genre or invent one." Discuss.

"The roominess of the term *non-fiction*: an entire dresser labelled *non-socks*." Discuss.

"The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures daily that are the envy of any novelist." Discuss.

Respectively: Walter Benjamin, Shields, Philip Roth. To which one might add a pithy line from a guest seminar given to us from our own doyen of investigative journalists, Jonny Steinberg: "South African writers don't know this country well enough to write fiction about it." Discuss.

Yet having worked and taught with *Reality Hunger* for a while now, I find myself wanting to argue with Shields more and more, and for all sorts of reasons – first the petty, then the more serious.

Let us take, for starters, his argument about creativity, plagiarism and intellectual property. What Shields has done – and I have no doubt that a reviewer somewhere in the blogosphere has already used this phrase – is to "curate" a series of resonant fragments. The arrival of the word "curate" in popular culture, which I date to the mid-noughties, is surely a late capitalist marker of how matters of logistics, corporate promotion and consumption have been recast as meaningful creative "interventions". One no longer simply organises a music festival, one *curates* it – perhaps just a precious way of passing off events planners as high priests of culture?

At the start of the Appendix, Shields describes how he wished the hundreds of quotations that go unacknowledged in the main text to remain that way, so regaining a freedom taken for granted from Montaigne to Burroughs, but one we have

DAVID SHIELDS IN
REALITY HUNGER

"LIVING AS WE DO IN A MANUFACTURED AND ARTIFICIAL WORLD, WE YEARN FOR THE "REAL", SEMBLANCES OF THE REAL. WE WANT TO POSE SOMETHING NONFICTIONAL AGAINST ALL THE FABRICATION – AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FRISONS OR FRAMED OR FILMED OR CAUGHT MOMENTS THAT, IN THEIR SEEMING UNREHEARSEDNESS, POSSESS AT LEAST THE POSSIBILITY OF BREAKING THROUGH THE CLUTTER. MORE INVENTION, MORE FABRICATION AREN'T GOING TO DO THIS. I DOUBT VERY MUCH THAT I'M THE ONLY PERSON WHO'S FINDING IT MORE AND MORE DIFFICULT TO WRITE NOVELS."

QUOTED BY STEVEN W BEATTIE

lost: "Your uncertainty about whose words you've just read is not a bug but a feature". The lawyers from Random House disagreed, however, and so Shields does provide a very grudging list of citations, one which he urges you not to read. Grab a sharp implement, he tells us, and excise pages 207-221 by cutting along the dotted line: "Reality cannot be copyrighted. Stop; don't read any farther."

What one finds in *Reality Hunger* are fragments of text wrenched out of their original context, with precious little soil clinging to their roots. Geoff Dyer remarked that he often thought "I wish I had said that" when reading the book, and then realised that he had. While also committed to blurring genres and to what Shields calls "the critical intelligence in the imaginative position" (and while similarly and, at times, annoyingly flippant), Dyer excels as an essayist who, for all his anti-scholasticism, does at least bed down any artist that he is considering in a richer sense of context and connection. As such, one leaves his work feeling nourished by a rich and extensive

map of reading that underlies the main text, and that beckons us to enter its networks. What one has in *Reality Hunger*, by contrast, is a cherry-picking of the most eminently and obviously quotable – the (sound)byte-sized and most easily Tweeted – as we are asked to believe that (the curator speaking again) “selection is an important a process as imagination”. For real?

These may be pedantic points – academic in the narrow sense of the word. But they lead to something else that grates about Shields’s whole approach. There is an off-puttingly “granddad at the disco” quality about *Reality Hunger*; a sense of wanting to be “down with the kids” as it awkwardly lays down its dub and hip-hop derived metaphors of sampling and remixing. Undoubtedly, many writers wish they had been MCs or DJs instead. They gaze longingly at the instant feedback afforded the performer in a packed venue, then return to the lonely desk and the lengthy cycles of drafting, editing and publication.

The dazzle of the sonic analogy though – its irresistibility and unverifiability – tends to allow a conceptual sleight of hand. Shields, like many other would-be gurus before him, operates under the assumption that sampling sounds and sampling words are the same thing; that he is simply “remixing” Montaigne, Emerson and James Frey to great effect, or subversively “cross-fading” between Walter Pater and Danger Mouse. But is this the case?

Literary influence, in contrast to musical sampling, works via an anxious and Oedipal process: one where, as Harold Bloom suggests, the wilful misreading, caricaturing and the creative “correction” of a loved or hated forerunner are the signs of a truly productive skirmish between tradition and individual talent. Dollar Brand and Duke Ellington could play together; the youthful acolyte could (and did) even sub for his mentor all across America. But Vargas Llosa’s youthful infatuation with García Marquez ended in fisticuffs, not to mention Paul Theroux and V.S. Naipaul.

A further problem that emerges as Shields attempts to make his book funky is that it seems to be competing with the velocity of the digital world, or wanting to be friends with it at the very least. As Adam Gopnik writes in an essay on “How the Internet Gets Inside Us”, there is an ever-expanding library of books explaining why books no longer matter. These can be broadly categorised into the Never-Betters (we’re on the brink of a new technological utopia), the Better-Nevers (the whole thing should never have happened) and the Ever-Wasers (the arrival of new information technologies has always been a condition of modernity). Shields is part Never-Better and part Ever-Waser, but with a dose of Wannabe-Other. If the flickering digital screen has fundamentally altered concentration spans and changed reading habits, the answer (*Reality Hunger* seems to imply) is to make a book look like hyper-text, or hyper-active text. Live feeds and YouTube mash-ups have rewired your brain? Fine: let’s write books in short numbered paragraphs, as if to win back the digital idiots. Social networking has turned you into a reclusive and narcissistic sociopath? OK: let’s probe how your selfhood might be further promoted via various non-fictional platforms. Perhaps the answer lies in the opposite direction: writers, editors and literary scholars

There is an off-puttingly ‘granddad at the disco’ quality about *Reality Hunger*; a sense of wanting to be ‘down with the kids’ as it awkwardly lays down its dub and hip-hop derived metaphors of sampling and remixing.

should be sent to decompress at Wi-Fi-less rehab centres in the Karoo where they are prescribed frighteningly long books – *The Brothers Karamazov*, Robert Bolano’s *2666*, Marlene van Niekerk’s *Agaat* – as a way of re-learning how to read for long uninterrupted stretches, and to access the meditative space that this gives.

Like the ADD-inducing online platforms with which it is alternately competing and chumming up to – those “crude personal essay machines” of MySpace and Facebook which allow such carefully airbrushed profiles to be sent out into the world – *Reality Hunger* points ultimately, and unremittingly, towards self; not towards other. And it is here that reading this work from South Africa reveals its limits in quite dramatic terms.

If the non-fiction boom in America has largely been in the realms of (misery) memoir, in South Africa (as several contributors to a recent issue of *Safundi* remark) much acclaimed non-fiction has emerged from a very different matrix. In a place where a pressured and traumatic history has created very specific kinds of “reality hunger”, the winners of the Alan Paton award for non-fiction tend to be underwritten by modes of oral and social history “from below”; by TRC testimony and investigative journalism; by the jail diary, microhistory, urban studies and archival reconstruction. If contemporary writers, to repeat Steinberg’s formulation, don’t know South Africa well enough to pen fiction about it, the task of the worker in non-fiction is then to find strategies for breaching the enormous social, economic and linguistic gaps that remain. Jeff Peires’s *The Dead Will Arise* (1990), Charles van Onselen’s *The Seed is Mine* (1997), Antjie Krog’s *Country of My Skull* (1998) or Steinberg’s *Midlands* (2002) and *The Number* (2004) – all are exercises in cultural translation on a massive scale: enormous projects of listening to, transcribing, sifting, arranging and intervening in the words of non-literary (and often non-literate) narrators.

How much do we care, finally, or how surprised are we that people make up things about themselves? The fact that James Frey published his drug-fuelled embroiderings in *A Million Little Pieces* as true memoir is less a philosophical problem than a trade descriptions issue (hence misled readers could tear out a page of the book they had bought and post it to the publishers to receive a refund). But the liberties taken by Truman Capote with living subjects; or Krog’s cutting and pasting of TRC testimony; or

Steinberg’s grappling with the question of how to write the story of a man who will not test for HIV/AIDS in the Eastern Cape remain stubborn ethical conundrums that cannot be wished away by glib assurances that all writing is a form of fictionalisation.

This, it strikes me, is the difficult paradox or double-take that one has to hold in mind when considering all those genres which fall under the “non-socks” category. On the one hand, the fiction/non-fiction divide is entirely inadequate and endlessly porous. Their centuries-long rivalry is best set aside for the idea of a whole spectrum of different writings, each jostling for influence and primacy in the literary marketplace. At the same time, though, it is inescapable. Provoking the complex play of responsibility and irresponsibility that lies at the heart of reading and writing, it reconstitutes itself endlessly: inhibiting and energising, inadequate and indispensable.

Shields’s work is a brilliantly provocative meditation in the first mode. About the second it has precisely nothing to say. It is self-involved in deep and often fascinating ways: consumed with the matter of how we narrate, re-narrate and fictionalise our selves (to ourselves) all the time. But there is barely a word in it about the problematic of telling the stories of *other people*: the millions of people who are “offline” in all kinds of ways. Read from Africa South, this “radical intellectual manifesto” begins to look hopelessly inadequate, even parochial. It shows up the kind of category error that arises (if I may “remix” Wittgenstein for a moment) from a man mistaking the limits of his laptop for the limits of the world.

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MOVING AWAY FROM THE SOUND BITES OF BIG MEN

In November 2007, Kwani Trust invited a group of budding journalists and unpublished writers to a series of creative non-fiction workshops, to discuss and reinforce elements of storytelling in the reporting of the upcoming Kenyan elections. It was attended by a mixed bag: a novelist, a poet, a member of a Nairobi rap group who wrote in Sheng, a sportswriter who worked for a magazine that

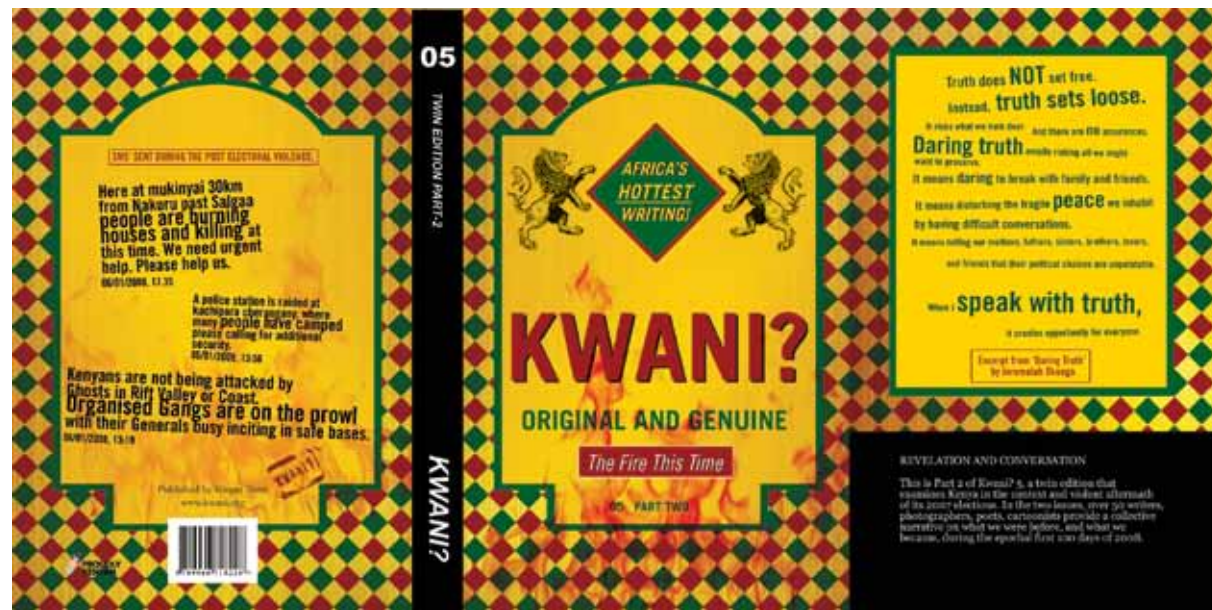
published in Kalenjin, and a broadcast journalist who worked for the government.

Although they were excited at the prospect of using fictive and literary elements in reportage, the journalists present were firmly held in the thrall of the 5 Ws and an H; the mantra of the school of objective journalism. They were skeptical of the whole literary premise: the workshop, if anything, for them was a vacation from police/City Council beat reality; at best, some hoped the workshop would make them better writers for the outlets they were working for. For Kwani, it was an ambitious exercise that would produce at least eight creative non-fiction reports from each of the participants at the workshop.

The premise behind the exercise was that any Kwani reportage and narrative on the upcoming elections would be interested in politics rather than politicians; human affairs, not demagoguery. We hoped to tell the individual's story as a citizen in the space called Kenya, their relationship with *serikali* or state or whatchamacallit, rather than building one-dimensional narratives from the sound bites of Big Men. What was the relationship between Kenyans and government was a question we had perpetually asked ourselves until then; in an election year, we had a chance to answer it.

We brainstormed during the workshops on economics, sociology and anthropology. How citizens' incomes were related to the state practice, and how could we use the story form to illuminate all these issues that had been drowned in the usual mainstream elections speak. Elections, thus, became the catalyst for Kwani's controlled "creative non-fiction" experiment; a lab in which we would judge how Kenyans come to grips with what the government – the state, Kenya – represents for them, be it the Mercedes-Benz convoy or increasing taxation.

My own first foray into creative non-fiction came during one of my final Journalism classes at Rhodes University where, after almost three years of 40-something weekly sessions of standard (read "drudge") journalism, doing anything but joining the 5 Ws and an H brand of journalism was deemed a wonderful escape. Tom Wolfe's mantra of the four devices that made the New Journalism – scene-by-scene construction, third person point of view, (realistic) dialogue in full and details of everyday



life – presented an escape from standard journalism. But in my final days of journalism school, I found it captured more about the rough and tumble ways of the politics of the place I came from than anything else I'd read up to that point.

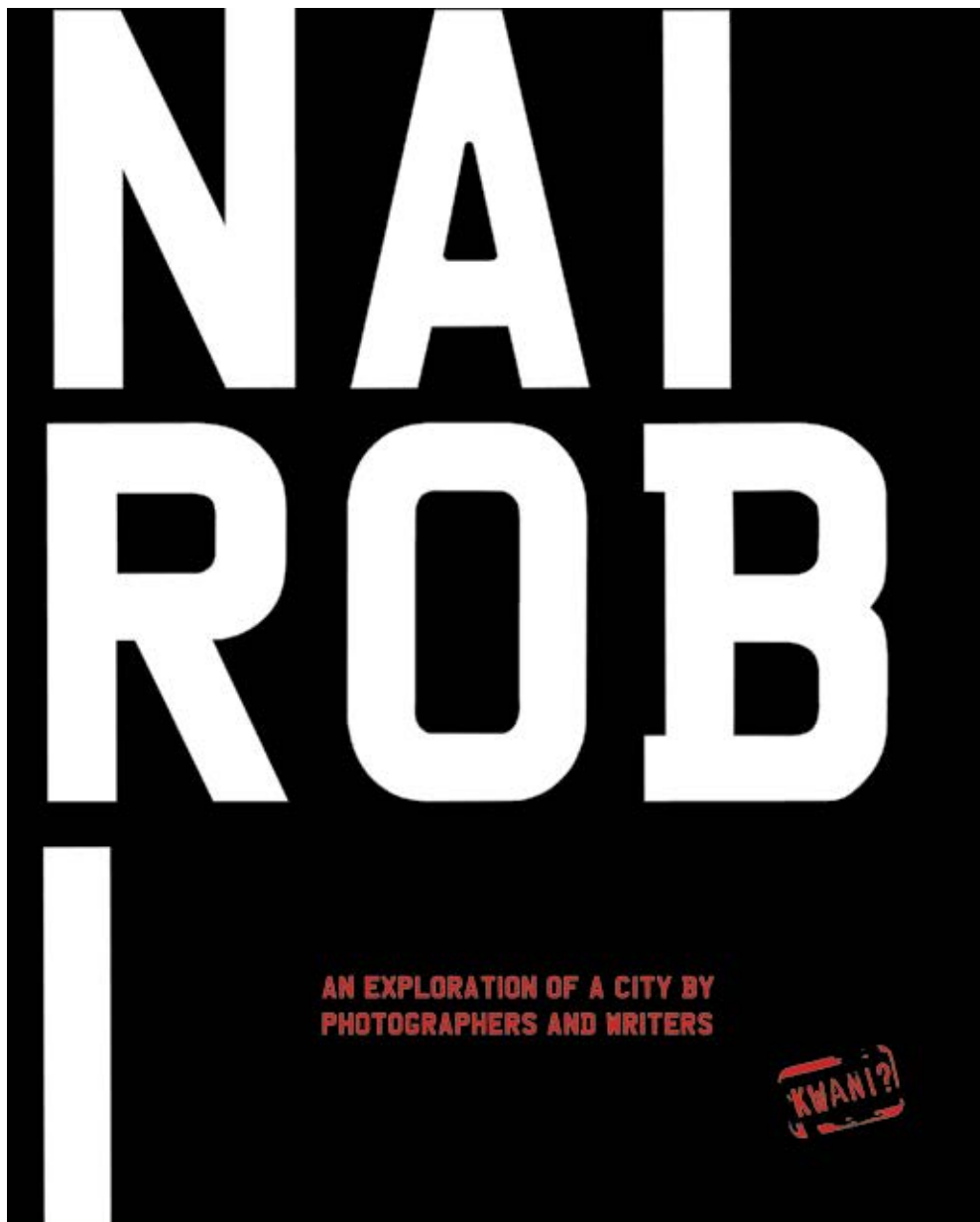
A few journalists working for mainstream media, however, didn't see it that way. They interrupted the workshop with variations on two themes: "Is it not problematic to narrate reality with fictive elements?" and "How do I start thinking through story, when I've been taught that reality takes place within 5 Ws and an H?"

They were pertinent questions, but one month later when the writers were in the field, Kenya did a neck-breaking cartwheel. Stories of the street kid turned councillor – the kind of narratives we were seeking – became, in retrospect, the same kind of prescriptive and normative electoral discourses that we wanted to avoid in the first place. The stories we had commissioned had to be reevaluated. Some of the writers reported that they could only work in friendly zones based on their tribe, caught in the bloody mistakes of their fathers and grandfathers: one Luhya writer had to leave Kangemi, a predominantly-Kikuyu slum in Nairobi where he had lived for all his working life; poet Samuel Munene had to watch where he trod in Mathare and Kariobangi in case he ran into Luos and Luyas who were attacking members of his tribe, the Kikuyu; and in an ironic twist of history, our two Canadian writers, Arno Kopecky and Tim Queresenger, who had been in Kenya for mere months, could roam the breadth of the land just like their forefathers had done at the turn of the last century.

Once we received the material from the field, it became clear that there were other genres of texts that could fill in what we hadn't captured, especially

in geographic ways. We were told of an enterprising young man who had started an SMS service to which those caught up in the conflict could send SMSs to explain what was going on in their part of the country. We also felt that we needed material from the different hotspots to interview individuals about their experiences during the conflict in their own voice. We called these testimonials, and university students and community activists collected dozens of them.

While the violence progressed through January, different groups of artists – writers, poets, photographers, musicians, cartoonists and visual artists – congregated and started collating work, focusing on what was going on in their local communities, offering a counter-narrative to the discourses that were taking root overseas. Writers especially felt that the foreign media and its correspondents had started drawing a picture of the violence that was essentialist, simplistic and lazy. Kenya was immediately seen as the new Somalia, once again an atavistic space; a failed nation that could not hold democratic elections. Others called it Rwanda, declaring that a new genocide was underway. For local artists, consensus on the reasons for and against the conflict was not necessary; countering foreign pre-determined narratives that did not carefully deconstruct the issues and fallout certainly was. Poets held public performances. Cartoonists and photographers held monthly exhibitions. Visual artists held weekend meets.



The premise behind the exercise was that any Kwani reportage and narrative on the upcoming elections would be interested in politics rather than politicians; human affairs, not demagoguery. We hoped to tell the individual's story as a citizen in the space called Kenya, their relationship with *serikali* or state or whatchamacallit, rather than building one-dimensional narratives from the sound bites of Big Men.

All the work that was collated during the first 100 days of 2008 informed the compilation of the double edition of Kwani 05. The new aim, expanding in the original brief of finding new ways to talk about the electoral process, was to collate the most comprehensive collection of diverse texts and narratives on the democratic process's violent denouement. These included photographs that the mainstream media had refused to publish, and cartoons that had not made the newsprint.

Ultimately, however, we found that the reverse occurred: the mainstream media ultimately picked up on the testimonials of ordinary citizens once we had collected them. It still didn't change the fact that the mainstream media tended to solely focus on politicians in the peace process, and concentrated on police on citizen violence, as well as an overwhelming call for peace without investigating the still-valid questions of electoral injustice that was the catalyst for the violence in the first place. Aesthetically, we at Kwani felt challenged on how to make all this into a coherent narrative that showed the positions of all sides involved. We also understood that there were several underlying issues to the violence and that it was key to show that it went beyond the basic vote. And we also had to create a visually exciting text whose form complemented the content.

Some of the work that was developed in the workshops has been said to be the most comprehensive creative non-fiction work carried out

on the state of Kenyan society, especially around the elections. Following in the shoes of veteran journalist, Phillip Ochieng, the quirky 90s journalist in *The People* newspaper, Kwani has always tried to emphasise the dictums of Wolfe's work.

Our attempt in Kwani 05 to explore elections within the relationship between state and subject through the use of non-standard journalism generated a lot of press and excitement. Elections stories in the mainstream media had either been politician sound bites, anaestheticised constituency profiles or columnists' rants. We felt that several of the pieces had entered the heat and dust of the campaign trail, characterised political players in ways we all recognised but had never read, deconstructed electoral and campaign processes that were either taken for granted and summarised in results, captured the language of election battle in all its Kenyan idiom and somewhat collectively underlined what a certain Kenyan-ness on the political scene was: a continuing game that took place every five years played by our political class against the rest of us. For good or bad, we felt that we had told several aspects of the Kenyan electoral story at a human and deeper level.

But there have been failures, and one learns more from those on what the strengths and weaknesses of the creative non-fiction form are. One is that creative non-fiction is very good at hiding biased frames from its practitioner and audience. Detail, realism, dialogue dazzle and disguise predetermined positions that are bad journalistic practice. Creative non-fiction is best actualised with a humble recognition of other narrative forms and research methodologies. It's one thing to have the style but another thing to recognise that social science methods are what get you the information

and help you ask the right questions. A grounding in political theory, sociology and even anthropology are great tools for the form – they help one recognise the context within which reality is happening. Any alternative frame of knowledge or discourse is a plus. There is also always the danger of a zero-sum take when talking about or practising creative non-fiction. That it fits everything. I always tell classes or workshops when I'm presenting on the work we've done that for me the only difference between non-fiction and fiction is that you can be legally sued for the former as long as your characters can prove to have the same identity as those in that kind of narrative. Since I started working in Kenya and at Kwani, I am always blown away by the essential lack of difference between fiction's truths and non-fiction's facts to illustrate concerns and themes of where I come from.

It's knowing when to choose what form that really matters.

For local artists, consensus on the reasons for and against the conflict was not necessary; countering foreign pre-determined narratives that did not carefully deconstruct the issues and fallout certainly was.

HOW DID
WE GET
HERE?

BY NICK MULGREW

The seven gunshots that killed Brett Kebble in his car on a suburban Johannesburg street seven years ago also blew the cover on South Africa's political and criminal underworld. The court case which followed shed light on the intersecting webs of business, crime and politics that define South Africa's networks of power, but it was treated superficially by the press. Until radio journalist Mandy Wiener threaded together the minutiae of the protagonists' dealings and the latter stages of Kebble's life to produce a 400-page account of South Africa's underworld and what led to those gunshots that night in September 2005. Mandy Wiener talks about writing *Killing Kebble*, a howdunnit short-listed for this year's *Sunday Times* Alan Paton award.

Nick Mulgrew: What was the genesis of *Killing Kebble*?

Mandy Wiener: I was sitting in court in the Brett Kebble trial. By some quirk of coincidence, Jackie Selebi and Glenn Agliotti were in court on the same day, one after another. There was this remarkable scenario where the National Police Commissioner was in the dock, his alleged corruptor, Agliotti, in the dock next to him, and Guy Kebble is standing behind Agliotti, heckling him and saying, "Why did you kill my brother?" The man who accused Selebi of corruption is in the public gallery, and the three shooters of Brett Kebble, covered in tattoos, are being held in the other dock. I thought, "How did we get here as a country? How did our police commissioner end up in this gallery of rogues?" This was such an important story: it was the nexus of business, politics and organised crime in South Africa.

NM: Was writing in the first-person a conscious decision?

MW: It was something the publisher asked me to do, mainly because I had covered the story for Eyewitness News and had become associated with it. As a journalist, it's very difficult to write in the first person: you usually do everything in your power to keep yourself out of the story, to stay objective. For me, being a journalist is about being the conduit for the story: I don't pass judgment. I want to put all the versions on the table, and let the reader decide which one they believe is true. This was my transition from journalist to author.

NM: Why do you think more journalists are writing books? Is it a need for creative space to tell the intricacies of stories that daily news may not cover?

MW: For me, at least, it's definitely about the creativity. I certainly didn't do it for the money, and I certainly didn't think I'd sell 50 000 copies. I did it purely because the story I wanted to tell was so remarkable, and so multi-faceted that people had struggled to follow it. And the only way I could fully tell the story I wanted to tell was through writing a book.

NM: How did you find the shift from broadcast journalist to writer?

MW: It was terrifying. When you write for radio you have to write short and punchy reports, in three minutes flat. Now I had to sit at a desk for 12 or 14 hours to get 3 000 words out every day. I was writing under such pressure.

NM: How did you manage the relationships you had to enter to tell the story – with people like Mikey Schultz – who may have been tempted to influence your writing?

MW: The two questions that people always ask me about *Killing Kebble* are, "Were you ever scared?" and, "Are they your friends?" In reality, it was a very fine line between the two. I had to build a relationship with the shooters; they had never spoken to a journalist before and therefore had never trusted a journalist before. It goes completely against their

ethos to speak to journalists, so I had to get to the point where Mikey and I developed a personal relationship so that he could trust me.

I'd always informed my subjects from the beginning that they would not influence me. So, our agreement was that they would get to see the manuscript before it went to print, and they could tell me if there was anything factually inaccurate in it. I wouldn't take anything out simply if they didn't like it, because obviously there was a lot of content that I'd investigated. I would just add in their comments. It was important that the story was completely honest – and Mikey and the rest of them were remarkably honest – but there were some things in the end that they didn't like. Glenn Agliotti certainly didn't like it; in fact, he tweeted recently about how awful he thought the book was. That doesn't matter to me. For me, it was important that the book was as balanced as it could be.

NM: Why do you think the book has had such a strong following?

MW: I think the book has resonated with South Africans for a couple of reasons. The most remarkable one is that everyone I speak to seems to know somebody in the book – they've run into them somewhere, or they've seen them somewhere. I feel overwhelmed by the amount of people who have emailed me or phoned me or seen me and said that they once did business with whoever. It's something that's familiar to a lot of people.

And I think it's because the story takes place in the shopping centres we go to, the nightclubs we frequent, and the highways we drive on every day. What's frightened people about the Kebble story is that they never realised what was going on, even though it happened right in front of them.

NM: Many reviewers commented on your verbatim integration of tweets and text messages into the narrative of the book. What do you think the story gains from those sorts of communications?

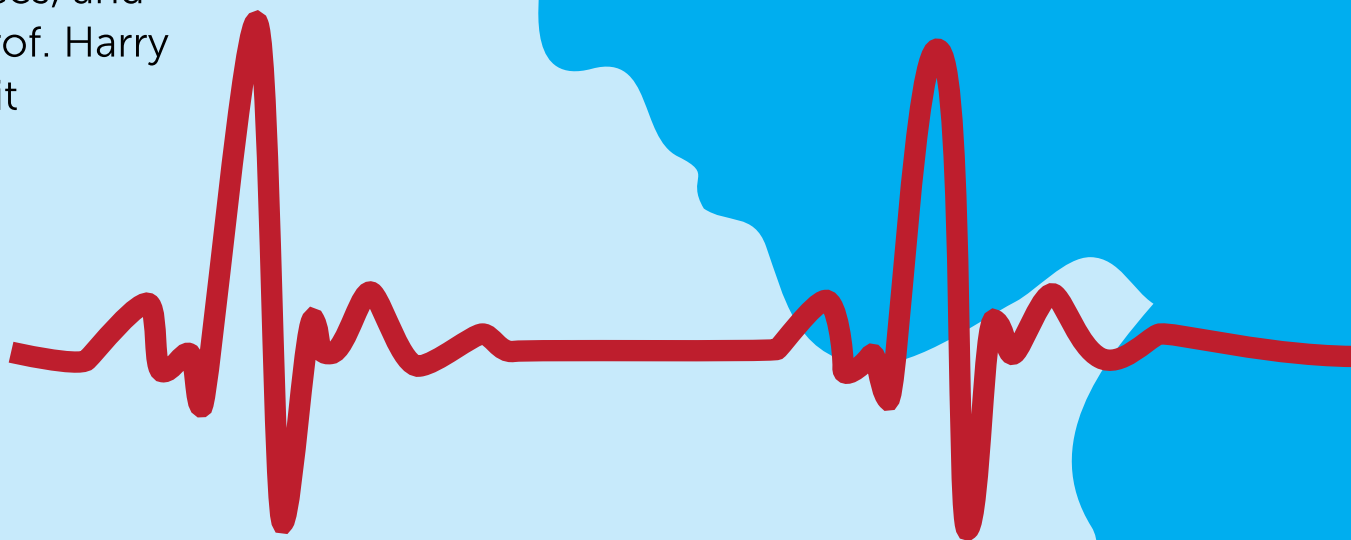
MW: This was the first story of its kind in South Africa, in that the reporting on Twitter from court journalists at the Kebble case every day had never really happened in the country before. As someone who was involved in that, it was important for me to include that. That has been the biggest criticism I have received from readers. They think it's lazy journalism and lazy writing. Usually it's older people who aren't on Twitter who don't get it.

NM: Do you have plans for more writing?

MW: I would very much like to write another book. In fact, I would really like to write a sequel, which is playing itself out right now: it's the same sort of story, but this time with Bheki Cele, Radovan Krejcir and Richard Mdluli. I don't think that story's ripe to be told yet, though. It's also probably a far more dangerous tale to tell. The other difficulty, of course, is that the Kebble story was a once-in-a-career kind of story. It's a humdinger, true crime, political murder mystery – it's got it all, and it's going to be very hard to find another story like that.

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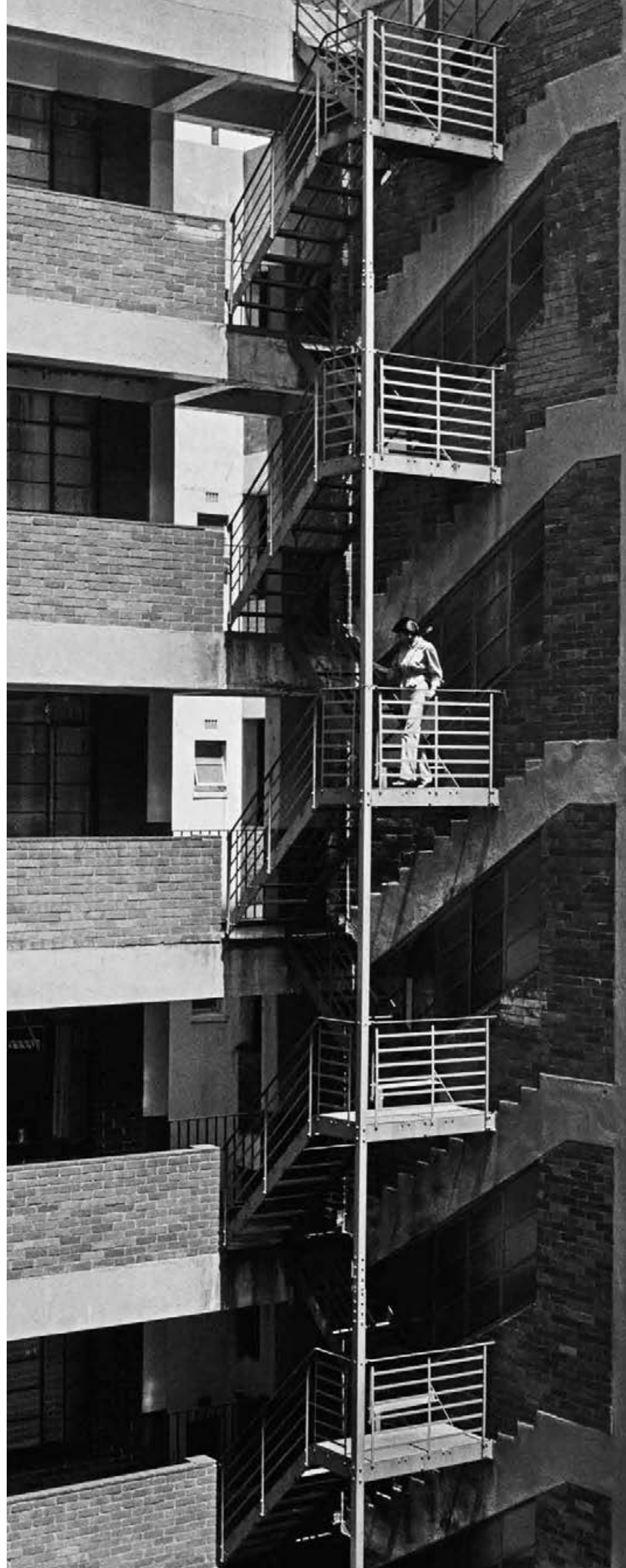
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“I READ RURAL AREAS LIKE A MAP. THE HILLS, THE LANDSCAPES. THINGS THAT OTHER PEOPLE WOULD SEE AS INSIGNIFICANT ARE ETCHED IN ME, WHEREAS IN THE CITY, THE CONCRETE CONFOUNDS ME.”

PHOTOGRAPHER CEDRIC NUNN