



THE POWER OF CONNECTION

STELLENBOSCH MEDIA FORUM 2023



The SMF editorial team identified four stories from 2023 that they felt served as a thread of connection that runs between journalists, the public sphere, and government.

MARCH

ESKOM UPDATES

Kgosientsho “Sputla” Ramokgopa was handed the newly established role of electricity minister following a cabinet reshuffle on 6 March. The provision of electricity remains an ongoing crisis for South Africans and South African businesses. The media play a crucial role in informing the public of developments around power provision.

PHOTOS: Supplied *Rapport*/Deon Raath

APRIL

THE CURIOUS CASE OF THABO BESTER

Two journalists from *GroundUp* won the 2023 Nat Nakasa Award on 16 September for their coverage of the so-called ‘Facebook Rapist’ Thabo Bester’s prison escape. Ongoing media coverage of the escape led to the arrest of Bester and his partner, Dr Nandipha Magudumana in Tanzania on 7 April, sparking collaboration between media and the public.

PHOTO: Supplied *Netwerk24*/Mlungisi Louw

MAY

#LADYRUSSIAGATE

An independent inquiry launched on 11 May in response to allegations suggesting that weapons were located on the Russian cargo ship, Lady R, after it docked at Simons Town’s Naval base in 2022. Media scrutiny, in collaboration with rising public concern, pressured the South African government to clarify its stance on the Russian-Ukraine war.

PHOTO: Supplied *Netwerk24*/Jaco Marais

AUGUST

THE BLAZING TRAIL TO SECURE HOUSING

A deadly fire in an abandoned building in Johannesburg’s city centre claimed at least 73 lives and left over 50 injured on 31 August. The incident garnered international attention, leading to criticism of the South African government’s failure to address the housing crisis.

PHOTO: Supplied *Netwerk24*/Deaan Vivier



“SONDER”

The word “sonder” is the realisation that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own. The people who walk around you are filled with their own dreams, ambitions, social circles, stress, love stories and personal quirks.

You could be an extra in the life story of someone you will possibly never converse with, sipping coffee in the background of one of their most life-changing decisions, a blurred figure walking across their intersecting route to class, or a random compliment in passing.

Their story, although sometimes separate from your own, continuously unfolds, day after day, creating elaborate plots that weave webs through many more people, constantly adding faces and voices to one’s own story until it’s finally complete.

This word gives essence to the theme of this year’s *Stellenbosch*

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Media Forum (SMF), themed ‘The Power of Connection’. Although you might not be acutely aware, our lives are much more connected than we think.

People connect in various ways and in this year’s *SMF*, we aim to show you, dear reader, the various ways that we are connected and disconnected through the media.

Thank you to the *SMF* journalists who built this year’s magazine. As we build our careers in this field, I hope that we remain attuned to the power of connection.

With love,
Editor-in-chief

Thameerah Daniels

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PHOTOS: Jess Holing

FINDING CONNECTION IN A DISCONNECTED WORLD

By Emma Solomon & Thameenah Daniels

The disconnect in South Africa is evident – physically and socially. On our very first day as Stellenbosch University journalism students, we were exposed to the reality of a physical disconnect.

The luxury of central Stellenbosch, with its high-end restaurants and lavish cars lined outside, is surrounded by various lower to middle-income neighbourhoods. These include Kayamandi, Idasvalley and Cloetesville.

The physical disconnect and class divide cemented by the apartheid regime's imprint on the geographical area is undeniable. This disconnect has the ability to sweep into the way that we communicate with one another both as neighbours, and as citizens.

We find comfort when we agree and are in agreement with those in closest proximity to us. But, when we limit ourselves to these comfortable spaces, are we still seeking the truth?

When confronted with an opinion that differs from our own, society often and increasingly seems unable to engage in open and vigorous rhetoric. Instead, the aim appears to be to try and outsmart and usurp the 'other' without a willingness to concede and consider that our views may be challenged.

As cancel culture finds increasing popularity within our society, our ability to converse and have different views has been thwarted. Instead of entering into conversations where we can

learn from one another, we might smother our own views out of fear that our opinion might be different or wrong.

This, combined with the lack of willingness to learn from others, and to facilitate opportunities to learn for others, could result in the individual's retreat from society.

This threat to the way we communicate creates a further divide, where apathy – and, dare we say, hatred – might become the easier choice.

BREAKING SILENCE, BUILDING EMPATHY

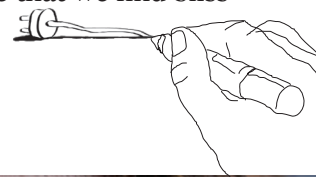
There is a saying that those who do not follow and care about current affairs stand on a tall pillar of privilege.

For many privileged South Africans, we risk becoming so disconnected from our humanity, that it is more common for people to turn a blind eye to suffering than confront it. This concept is explored in our article "Beyond the lens" (see page 74).

This magazine touches on a potential solution: the media. As journalists-in-training, we have a responsibility to share the stories of all South Africans.

To not be blind to the suffering around us, but to highlight these issues and gather momentum in the direction of awareness and change. To keep South Africans connected and knowledgeable about their neighbour's narratives.

They say ignorance is bliss, but it is time that we find bliss in the power of connection and knowing.



AGENTS OF CHANGE

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THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

The relationship between South Africa's media and civil society organisations is in constant evolution dating back to the apartheid resistance era, says Angie Richardson, a media relations specialist. The collaboration between the two is essential to amplify the voices of the vulnerable.

By Emma Solomon

Amidst a migrating media landscape, where digital media consumption shifts the standard mode of news coverage, civil society organisations find their role within this landscape disrupted, says Estelle Ellis, journalist for *Maverick Citizen*.

Maverick Citizen is a division at *Daily Maverick* that focuses on social justice issues and provides a platform for voices of civil society movements, according to its website.

The positive stories of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as a part of civil society, "on a meta level, [are] also the story of journalism", says Ellis.

Expanding into all facets of the media landscape, and pushing for collaborative work between the media, civil society organisations and NGOs is the most effective way to enact change, says Esme Erasmus, a journalist for *TygerBurger* in Durbanville, a Media24-owned community newspaper that is distributed to Cape Town's northern suburbs.

This form of "good journalism" and positive reporting is not as simple as telling a story about when an NGO solves a

problem, says Ellis. Rather, journalists must "tell the story of how", as these stories have the potential to bring about change in a community, she adds.

In order to ground this form of reporting, the media have to work with NGOs to uncover stories that are unintentionally overlooked, but are of interest to the public, says Ellis. NGOs "often highlight things that none of us get to", she says.

PIVOTING REPORTING

The media landscape has experienced a fundamental shift to online spaces over the last three decades, says Angie Richardson, a media relations specialist who works with various civil society organisations across South Africa.

The frequency at which breaking news enters the digital sphere increases the pressure on news organisations to produce "newsworthy" content, in turn leading to a neglect of civil society reportage, Richardson adds.

While the advancement of digital communications tech-

nologies, such as WhatsApp, has made reporting on those outside of one's immediate communities far more accessible, younger and inexperienced journalists often use these tools to adopt a sanitised approach to reporting, says Ellis.

While it is efficient to interview someone over WhatsApp or email, the best way to truly connect with people is to "sit with them on the ground [...] because otherwise you're failing in your job as the truth seeker", she says. As journalists, it is your duty to acknowledge the existence of those whose stories you report, because "there is dignity for that person in being heard, not because you as a journalist can change anything, but because dignity lies in that your existence is acknowledged", she says.

An example of this could be seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, says Chevano Frans, founder of Chev's Kitchen, a community organisation that was established in Athlone in 2020 with the intention of providing families experiencing food insecurity with daily meals.

Although the media helped to expose the food shortages faced by South Africans during the pandemic, "I would have liked them to go a bit deeper and explore the societal issues within the community as well", says Frans.

Chev's Kitchen's first interaction with the media occurred after the community organisation reached out to them in its own capacity, says Frans. "The media reached out to me thereafter", and the subsequent coverage helped the kitchen to raise awareness for the organisation's efforts, adds Frans.

It is because of the lack of coverage that it is essential for NGOs to "invite [journalists] to our space[s]", and provide them with all the relevant information about what the civil society organisation is involved in, says Zacharia Mashele, communications and media officer for Ndifuna Ukwazi, a Cape Town organisation that supports civil society movements such as Reclaim the City.

"In that way you actually help yourself because you are in control of the narrative", and have the power to ensure journalists are aware of the context in which they are reporting, says Mashele.

A further issue that is prevalent in South Africa's news reporting is that it tends to "give more credibility to organisations as opposed to social movements", claims Mashele.

"[The media] treat protests like 'agh, it's one of those'"

without exploring the deeply rooted social reasons behind the protest, says Mashele.

Ndifuna Ukwazi has had to adjust their approach to the media in order to gain their attention, and when writing press statements to consider "if I was an editor, would I want to cover this", says Mashele.

While collaboration between the media and civil society organisations has the potential to be viewed as promotional coverage, journalists should cover these stories with the intention of bringing awareness to the ways in which civil society organisations are assisting communities in need, says Erasmus.

A COLLABORATIVE IMPACT

"NGOs connect [the media] with people who might be able to give you some real understanding about what we're seeing on the ground," says Richardson.

Richardson works with Black Sash, a non-violent resistance organisation that was established during apartheid. Currently, the organisation is engaged in the Hands Off Our Grant's campaign, which calls for tighter "regulations around child grants in particular".

It is the duty of civil society to determine "okay, what's in the news cycle, [and] package their information in a way that's easily digestible for a journalist or an editor to decide if it's something they want to cover", says Richardson. Organisations that have their own media teams are able to produce content that speaks directly to the media and their needs, she says.

Packaging information helps the media do its job, but "you're not influencing what they're reporting on", rather you are providing them with the relevant information to write a thorough story, she says.

For example, "if you want your issue covered, you've got to provide [the media] with your court papers, [and] the opposition's court papers", says Richardson.

NGOs, such as those that Richardson works with, have the ability to guide journalists "as [truth] seekers" to report on problematic tenets of society, says Ellis. By doing so, the media are able to provide civil society organisations with "publicity for what they do", says Erasmus. This collaboration makes it easier to raise funds for their projects, she says.

SHRINKING NEWSROOMS

In an era of shrinking newsrooms, reporting on civil society organisations exhausts time and resources that many journalists do not have, says Ellis. This difficulty is amplified as newsrooms struggle to keep up with the fast moving news agenda, she says.

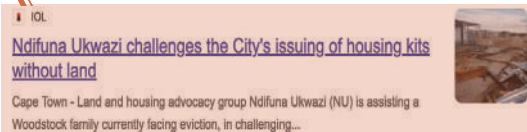
It is because of this that it has become increasingly difficult for NGOs to achieve their much deserved media attention because, “when harder breaking news [comes] along, the soft news does stay behind, just because there is no space or time for [it] all”, says Erasmus.

Thorough reporting on civil society organisations, the work that they do and the people they reach “doesn’t like daily deadlines”, says Ellis. Breaking news does not allow time to “investigate and see how big the problem really is”, claims Ellis.

Additionally, the media appear to



IOL
Gift of the Givers to intervene and assist Libya with aid



IOL
Ndifuna Ukwazi challenges the City's issuing of housing kits without land
Cape Town - Land and housing advocacy group Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU) is assisting a Woodstock family currently facing eviction, in challenging...



Daily Maverick
Desperately poor Eastern Cape mom kills herself and three of her four children

GRAPHICS: Emma Solomon

chase disaster and sensationalism in pursuit of a newsworthy angle, says Erasmus, who believes that the media landscape needs to reshape its commercial model.

“Profit makes it difficult to be a truth seeker,” says Ellis. This is because seeking out the truth takes time and dedication, she adds.

Ellis uses the example of a story that she covered for *Maverick Citizen*, where an Eastern Cape mother murdered her children before dying by suicide in August this year.

Extreme poverty and food insecurity prompted that mother to do what she did, says Ellis. “People are drawn to stories like that.” However, she warns against exploiting such stories, as it is tempting for this coverage to be published as breaking news in pursuit of profit and “engagement”. Rather, the journalist should investigate the real issue – poverty, says Ellis.

THE POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE

Sharing resources between the media and civil society organisations is another mutually beneficial step to enact change, says Ellis. “There’s no harm in connecting my contacts to somebody who actually wants to help.”

An eight-year-old child was “killed in a derelict house by a drug addict”, in the Marikana community in the Eastern Cape on 24 July, says Ellis. The first thing *Maverick Citizen* set out to do was to uncover the truth, she says.

“We do that independent of other organisations,” says Ellis. But in the aftermath of covering the story Ellis had to consider “who do I talk to”, and reached out to NGOs such as Save The Children,

to address the obvious need for a safe house in the area, she explains.

“That’s a connection where I think NGOs sometimes need to just watch what’s unfolding in the news” in order to know where they can best enact positive change, says Richardson. But in the same breath, NGOs should provide a lot of data to the media, “because journalists can’t be everywhere”, Ellis adds.

“ I FEEL THERE’S AN INCREDIBLE DIGNITY FOR SOMEONE TO TELL THEIR STORY.”

Richardson believes that non-profit organisations, such as Gift of the Givers, founded by Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, are dependent on the media to conduct their work.

“Dr Sooliman, for instance, will share his data on food parcels [that Gift of the Givers has] given out, which is an indicator of hunger,” says Ellis. Other organisations, such as Oxfam, share their own data on hunger and malnutrition, which steers the media in the direction of stories about vulnerable people that may otherwise have been ignored, she adds.

“I feel there’s an incredible dignity for someone to tell their story,” says Ellis.

PHOTO: Joseph Bracken

**YOUNG VOICES:
RESHAPING THE MEDIA**

By Joseph Bracken

South Africa’s youth demographic form a large part of the population. However, their influence and representation is often lacking, says experts who spoke to SMF. Media companies and organisations are searching for ways to fill these gaps.

The youth are the new generation of news consumers and producers, eager and willing to fill the gaps in newsrooms across the country, says Carl Thomas, a journalist at *Netwerk24*, who has worked there since 2021.

Despite the advances from South Africa's media industry to hire younger employees, there is still a lot of work to be done in terms of further developing newsrooms, says Tshepiso Motloutg, a former intern at *News24*, who was there from February to July 2023.

"As a fresh-off graduate, I was lucky to be employed sooner compared to my other peers," says Motloutg, who studied a bachelor of journalism at Rhodes University from 2019 to 2022. However, companies often expect the youth to have extensive experience before they are considered employable, "and that is often at times impossible for the person applying because they just graduated", she says.

Mainstream media houses in particular need to do their part to offer more platforms to include young people in the industry, says Thomas.

SEEN BUT NOT HEARD

Often young journalists feel as though their voices are not being heard once they start out in the media industry, says Janet Heard, the managing editor at *Daily Maverick*.

Heard oversees a team of young journalists who work for the *Maverick News* section, she says.

Generally, younger journalists can find themselves drowned out by more senior reporters in the newsroom, she says. "[In] this way it [can be] a lot harder for the youth voice to get heard in media companies."

It is because of this that young journalists are often intimidated by those with more experience, says Heard,

who explains that "at *Daily Maverick* in particular [...] we have a number of experienced rock star journalists, and opinions and banter flow fast, unfiltered and furiously".

Junior-level journalists, who are new to the industry, can struggle to find their footing in the newsroom, says Shaun Jacobs, a junior business journalist at *Daily Investor*.

"[This] 'sink or swim' approach is still used by many newsrooms," claims Pheladi Sethusa, the coordinator of the career-entry honours programme at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and editor of *Wits Vuvuzela*.

However, this approach is often used because media companies lack the resources to assign numerous journalists to a single story, says Heard. Young journalists are required to learn quickly in order to adapt to the industry, she says.

Young journalists are starting out and becoming senior within five years, when that would have been a much longer process many years ago, says Heard.

News24's managing editor, Mpho Raborife, is an example that proves that there are gaps for the youth to thrive in the media industry. "I'm 35-years-old and I'm a managing editor of the leading news site in the country," says Raborife.

Organisations want talented people to work for them regardless of age, says Raborife.

Because of this, it is imperative that media organisations nurture and train young journalists "because you also want young people to stick around so that your brand stays innovative", states Raborife.

BOOSTING CONFIDENCE

Media companies are hiring younger employees at "acceptable rates", but "many young graduates who walk into internships receive little to

no mentorship or further training, which can be detrimental to their growth", says Sethusa.

At one point, there were cadet schools that offered an additional foundational layer for young journalists, says Raborife.

These schools would recruit 12 graduates from across disciplines to educate young journalists in the basics of reporting, writing skills and various other media essentials, says Jonathan Ancer, a sub-editor and journalist at *News24* who ran cadet schools for Independent Media between 2010 and 2013.

"The cadets were then sent back to the regions where they were assigned to newspapers and spent the rest of the year working on the titles under [mentor] supervision," says Ancer, who believes that there are no more cadet schools currently operating in the country. "Independent's last intake was in 2013," he says.

Many of the graduates from those four groups positively impacted newsrooms across the country as they went on to produce excellent work, says Ancer. One of these graduates is Bongekile Macupe. "She's in fact, the deputy political editor at *News24*, so in a way more senior to me."

"I do think it would go a long way in buffing up the confidence as well as the foundational skills that young journalists need in order to survive," says Raborife, who suggests that every South African newsroom and media house reinstall cadet schools to ensure that young journalists receive proper mentorship.

NO CLEAR PATH

"Newsrooms are already thinly stretched and can't always accommodate or afford special projects such as dedicated youth platforms," says Thomas.

However, media houses such as

Daily Maverick and *Media24* are examples of organisations that are emphasising the importance of the youth in newsrooms, according to Heard.

Daily Maverick invests heavily in its interns to provide them with the training they need to excel wherever they end up, she says. "[*Daily Maverick*] adjusted [its] programmes to focus on retention so that we don't lose young staff members," Heard adds.

Media24 offers a one-month job shadowing and a two-year *Grad24* programme, which provides selected students with a bursary to complete their studies, says Raborife. This is followed by one year of working in one of *Media24's* publications, she says.

The system is beneficial in that *Grad24* recipients are able to work through the system together, explains Raborife. "You've got a group of people that entered the year [at] the same time as you that you can lean on as you're forming friendships. You also get people to bounce ideas off of."

However, South Africa's younger workforce is still reeling with structural inequalities that see a lack of equity of opportunity, says Heard. Many young people cannot afford to move to the city and take up an internship due to lack of funds, she says.

To assist in internships, the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) offers government funding for educational training purposes, explains Heard.

"SETA partners with employers who wish to run various learning programmes [...] and bursary programmes," says Nkosinathi Gabuza, an advisor at Media Information and Communication Technologies for SETA.

"[These learning] programmes target unemployed youth, women, people living with disabilities, people from previously disadvantaged backgrounds and

THE VOICE OF THE YOUTH:



"It has been a hands-on, challenging experience in journalism. Since I joined *Daily Maverick*, I've been living for the enormous pressure that comes with coverage."

Samane Junior, intern at *Daily Maverick* since 2023.

PHOTO: Joseph Bracken



"A lot of my colleagues are also in their 20s at *Netwerk24* and *News24* [...] The halls of *Media24* in general are bursting with young blood."

Carl Thomas, journalist at *Netwerk24* since 2021.

PHOTO: Supplied/ Carl Thomas



"My experience at *Daily Maverick* has been quite a rollercoaster ride. Besides learning more about the journalism world, I have learned so much about myself and my capabilities."

Chuma Nontsele, intern at *Daily Maverick* since 2023.

PHOTO: Supplied/ Lisakhanya Nontsele



"I had to hit the ground running [...] it takes one byline then you eventually get used to everything. Now [...] I write about everything and it's been a great experience for me."

Jim Mohlala, intern at *Daily Maverick* since 2023.

PHOTO: Supplied/ Yoneliseka Nombinja



"My time as a young journalist so far has been challenging – there's a steep learning curve [...] However, [...] I have learnt more in the past eight months than I thought possible."

Shaun Jacobs, business journalist at *Daily Investor* since 2023.

PHOTO: Supplied/ Marius Hollenbach

rural communities,” says Gabuza.

Media companies then work closely with SETA to try to advance the level of training and development that their staff will receive, says Raborife.

The problem is really rooted in South Africa’s high unemployment figures, coupled with the fact that young people are in desperate need of permanent employment, Raborife adds.

The total number of unemployed youth, who are measured between the ages of 15 and 34, sat at 4.9 million people, equating to 46.5% of the population, in the first quarter of 2023, according to Statistics South Africa’s Quarterly Labour Force Survey.

THE SHIFT TO MEDIA

The youth are looking at forms of news content other than traditional media outlets, says Sethusa.

“By nature, because [*Daily Maverick* is] long-form in-depth journalism, it tends to be read by more older readers,” says Alet Law, audience development manager at *Daily Maverick*.

“**THE YOUTH HAVE THEIR OWN VOICE, THEY HAVE AGENCY. [ORGANISATIONS] CERTAINLY DON’T GIVE THEM THEIR VOICE.**”

Social media is the second largest platform, where *Daily Maverick*’s audiences between the ages of 18 and 34 consume content, she says.

Daily Maverick defines their youth demographic as any readers below the age of 34, according to Law.

This makes up 19.08% of the audience within this particular category and is beaten only by Google search referrals, which account for 25%, says Law.

Younger news consumers opt to follow content creators who repackage the news with commentary, says Sethusa. Her students prefer this form of content delivery system.

“Some media houses are more suited to shorter form content,” says Law. *Daily Maverick* is aimed towards more long investigations and deeper reads so, “we don’t want to water down what we offer,” she says.

“[However] we are at a point now where we are looking at strategies to engage younger audiences on platforms that are appropriate for those specific audience segments.”

FINDING A VOICE

“The youth have their own voice, they have agency. [Organisations] certainly don’t give them their voice,” says Lea-Anne Moses, the executive director and trustee at the FunDza Literacy Trust, a trust that runs several programmes that aim to promote “reading, writing and learning” amongst teens and young adults across South Africa, according its website.

The lab writing section of the FunDza Mobi website enables young people to submit their own stories in an “authentic voice”, says Moses. The stories are published with the tagline “what’s your story”, he says.

The website published over 10 000 stories last year that were submitted by teenagers and young adults, says Moses.

When young people publish work

that they feel is largely their own,

“[they are] saying ‘I matter, my story matters, and it was published’”, says Moses.

Platforms that give the youth a space to express their voices are “important because they provide young people with practical experience and an opportunity to learn what they enjoy writing”, says Aph-elele Mbokotho, a journalism honours student at Wits.

Mbokotho writes for *Wits Vuvuzela*, a publication that is produced solely by career-entry students studying at the Wits journalism department, according to Sethusa.

“[*Wits Vuvuzela*] remains a vital training tool for our honours in journalism students at the Wits Centre for Journalism,” says Sethusa. The publication provides a platform to give a voice to the community it serves, which includes the broader Wits community, as well as Braamfontein, Parktown and the Johannesburg central business district, she adds.

“[*Wits Vuvuzela*’s readership] ebbs and flows, but on average it [garners] between 18 000 to 24 000 page views per month during term time/production time,” says Sethusa.

Analytics show that the average reader of *Wits Vuvuzela* is not in the youth demographic “even though our work is produced by young people for young people”, says Sethusa.

Yet the publication’s social media platforms’ analytics show engagement from a much younger audience, says Sethusa. “This is why I think it is so important to be platform agnostic, it allows us to reach multiple audiences and meet them where they are.”

It is only through practical experience and training in newsrooms, that the media industry is able to “teach the fundamentals of ethical and innovative journalism practice to the next generation of storytellers”, says Sethusa.



OPLOSSINGS- JOERNALISTIEK: BOUSTENE VAN 'N GEMEENSKAP

Een van *Die Hoëvelder*, 'n gemeenskapskoerant in Ermelo, se doelwitte is om mense binne gemeenskappe saam te snoer deur gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid by probleme aan te moedig. So 'n benadering tot artikels word oplossingsjoernalistiek genoem. SMF ondersoek tot watter mate joernalistiek 'n verskil in gemeenskappe kan maak.

Deur Jan-Hendrik de Villiers

Verlede jaar het 'n gemeenskapskoerant in Ermelo besluit om 'n projek van stapel te stuur om die dorp op te kikker. *Die Hoëvelder* het in 'n artikel op 30 Maart 2022 inwoners genooi om letterlik voor hul eie deure te vee.

Verskeie organisasies en individue het aan die “Maak Ermelo Weer Mooi”-inisiatief deelgeneem, sê Wayne van der Walt, die redakteur van *Die Hoëvelder*. Mense het ook foto’s

ingestuur om te wys hoe hulle voor hulle eie deure skoonmaak.

Dié gebaar is 'n voorbeeld van oplossingsjoernalistiek – 'n tipe joernalistiek wat lig werp op verskillende oplossings by sosiale probleme in gemeenskappe, sê Rod Amner, senior lektor vir skryf en redigering by Rhodes-universiteit, en opleiding-redakteur vir *Grocott’s Mail*, in Makhanda.

In 'n akademiese artikel oor

konstruktiewe- en oplossingsjoernalistiek verduidelik Kyser Lough en Karen McIntyre dat oplossingsjoernalistiek ook sekere kenmerke met konstruktiewe joernalistiek deel.

Oplossings- én konstruktiewe joernalistiek moedig kontekstuele en tematiese verslaggewing aan en het ten doel om vertroue tussen die leser en die media te bevorder. Sulke artikels dek ook gereeld die werk wat deur instansies soos die regering,

nieregteringsorganisasies (NRO's), en ingenieurs gedoen word om probleme op te los, verduidelik Amner.

Verlede jaar het die National Arts Festival (NAF) byvoorbeeld die regeringsagentskap die Nywerheidsontwikkelingskorporasie (NOK), genader om befondsing wat dit moontlik sou maak om 2 000 jongmense in diens te neem wat openbare dienslewering kan verrig. Dié storie is op 17 November 2022 deur *Grocott's Mail* gepubliseer.

Die NAF was bekommerd oor die toestand van die infrastruktuur in Makhanda, aangesien die dorp se paaie vol slaggate was. Die gebied het óók 150 onwettige stortingsterreine gehad, vertel Amner. Die NAF was bekommerd dat die infrastruktuur in Makhanda mense daarvan sou afsit om die kunstefees by te woon.

DIE 'WHOLE STORY'

Die Engelse geheuebrug "WHOLE story" help om oplossingsjoernalistiek verder te definieer, volgens Rod Amner, senior lektor vir skryf en redigering by Rhodes-universiteit, en opleiding-redakteur vir *Grocott's Mail*, in Makhanda. Die afkorting 'WHOLE' verwys na:

- W** - Watter reaksie word as fokus ingespan?
- H** - Hoe werk dit? – die "howdunnit"
- O** - Insigte word gelewer [*Offers insights*]
- L** - Beperkings [*Limitations*] word ingesluit
- E** - Bewyse van impak [*Evidence of impact*]

'N HUPSTOOT

Artikels wat oplossings bied, versprei vinnig omdat lesers die artikels geniet en dit gevolglik op sosiale media deel en meer daarvan wil lees, sê Amner. 'n Voorbeeld hiervan is toe *Grocott's Mail* op 1 Februarie 2023 in 'n artikel 'n beroep op die gemeenskap gedoen het vir die skenking van gereedskap en ander materiale, volgens Amner. Die materiale was vir die Social Employment Fund (SEF)-werkers wat dit benodig het om die stad se infrastruktuur te herstel, sê hy.

Die reaksies op die storie was baie positief en die aanlynstatistiek was "heelwat bo gemiddeld", volgens Amner.

Die storie, getiteld "Help us get this done", het 8 000 mense op *Grocott's Mail* se Facebook-blad bereik, vertel Amner.

DEEL VAN DIE GEMEENSAP

Oplossingsjoernalistiek is "van uiterste belang, veral in die konteks van Suid-Afrikaanse nuus", volgens Van der Walt.

In die Suid-Afrikaanse media is die betekenis en uitvoer van oplossingsjoernalistiek nog "in die beginfase", meen Adriaan Basson, hoofredakteur van *News24*.

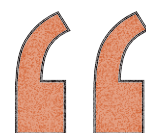
Daar is "baie gesprekke" in *News24* se nuuskantoor oor wat met oplossingsjoernalistiek bedoel word, aangesien mense verskillende persepsies daaroor het, sê Basson.

"Enige storie wat bietjie dieper kyk na die probleem op hande – dis op 'n manier oplossingsjoernalistiek," voeg hy by.

Só 'n benadering tot joernalistiek het ook die potensiaal om gemeenskappe saam te snoer, sê Van der Walt.

Die *Hoëvelder* doen byvoorbeeld ook soms verslag oor insamelingsprojekte wat daarop gemik is om iemand in die gemeenskap te help, sê hy.

"Deur die fokus te verskuif na



**DIT VERSTERK
DIE GEVOEL
VAN
SAMEHORIGHEID
EN
BETROKKEHEID
IN DIE
GEMEENSAP.**

oplossings en positiewe inisiatiewe, skep dit 'n platform waar mense saamwerk om gemeenskaplike uitdagings aan te spreek. Dit versterk die gevoel van samehorigheid en betrokkenheid in die gemeenskap," sê Van der Walt.

Sulke artikels verskil van *Die Hoëvelder* se gewone artikels aangesien dit "in dieper insig in die langtermynuitwerking van gebeure bied en fokus op die evolusie van sake oor tyd". Van der Walt vertel verder dat gewone artikels neig om probleme of gebeure bloot te lê, terwyl artikels wat op oplossings fokus, 'n dieper insig bied met betrekking tot uitdagings wat 'n gemeenskap ervaar. Dit soek ook na maniere om dié uitdagings die hoof te bied.

Die besluit oor hoe om sulke artikels by *Die Hoëvelder* aan te pak, hang af van die impak daarvan op die gemeenskap.

"Soms kan dit 'n bewustelike

keuse wees, veral wanneer ons doelbewus besluit om 'n kwelpunt in die gemeenskap te identifiseer en moontlike oplossings te verken," sê Van der Walt.

Nuuspublikasies verwelkom joernaliste wat spesialiseer in oplossingsjoernalistiek, aangesien sulke artikels ook betrokkenheid tussen lesers en burgers skep. Dit is volgens Anton Harber, Caxton-professor by die Universiteit van die Witwatersrand, vir die Wits-sentrum vir Joernalistiek.

Terwyl oplossingsjoernalistiek egter net een aspek en een tak van joernalistiek is, bied dit 'n regstelling aan van die natuurlike persepsie dat nuus negatief is, volgens Harber.

VERENIG DEUR OPLOSSINGS

Oplossingsjoernalistiek verskaf 'n alternatiewe perspektief omdat dit die stories vertel van mense wat probeer om probleme op te los.

Dit is volgens Uyapo Majahana, multimedia- en vryskutjoernalis en Suid-Afrikaanse verteenwoordiger vir die Solutions Journalism Network (SJN)-mentorskapprogram van 2021.

Dié program het "joernaliste van verskillende dele van die wêreld bymekaar gebring", en vir hulle 'n platform gegee om "in wisselwerking met mekaar te kom, idees te deel [en] van mekaar te leer", sê Majahana.

Deur die loop van die program het deelnemers van die program aanlyn ontmoet – in klein tematiese groepe van tussen vyf tot agt mense, volgens Majahana.

Die mentorskapprogram het daarop gefokus om vaardighede vir "oplossingsverslaggewing te ontwikkel", sê Majahana. Sy groep joernaliste was in Afrika gesetel, en was passievol oor verslaggewing van stories wat klimaat- en sosiale geregtigheid bevorder het, sê hy.

Oplossingsjoernalistiek bemagtig ook gemeenskappe deur hulle te betrek by die soeke na oplossings vir probleme in hul persoonlike lewens, sê Majahana.

"Toe ek in die program aangekom het, het ek 'n beperkte begrip gehad van oplossingsjoernalistiek," sê hy.

Majahana vertel dat hy aan die begin vermy het om te skryf oor "konsepte wat nie perfek is nie", maar later verstaan het dat hierdie konsepte "selfs in hul onvolmaaktheid", aan die wêreld blootgestel moet word.

Majahana het artikels vir *Jam-lab*, *Africa Solutions Hub Media* en *Footprint Magazine* geskryf, wat "sommige" oplossingsjoernalistiekbenaderinge ingesluit het, verduidelik hy.

"Ek sê [sommiges], want daar is 'n streng keuringsproses oor wat kwalifiseer as 'n oplossingsjoernalistieke storie," sê Majahana.

Die kwalifikasies sluit in dat artikels fokus op 'n reaksie op 'n probleem, 'n insig wat aangebied word wat die reaksie relevant maak tot ander

Werk deur instansies soos die regering, nieregteringsorganisasies (NRO's), en ingenieurs wat probleme oplos, word gereeld deur joernaliste gedek, volgens Rod Amner, senior lektor vir skryf en redigering by Rhodes-universiteit, en opleiding-redakteur vir *Grocott's Mail*.

FOTO: Jess Holing
GRAFIKA: Jan-Hendrik de Villiers

bewyse wat aangebied word van die benadering se suksesse of mislukings, sowel as die tekortkominge of beperkings, volgens die SJN-webtuiste.

'SONSKYN-JOERNALISTIEK'

Volgens Majahana is daar 'n stigma dat oplossingsjoernalistiek nie "regte joernalistiek" is nie omdat sommige oplossingsgebaseerde joernalistiek individue ophemel sonder om die kwessie voor hande aan te takel, vertel hy.


Daar word ook soms na oplossingsjoernalistiek verwys as "sonskyn-joernalistiek" omdat daar gedink word dat die funksie daarvan is om "mense op te beur" en almal gelukkig te laat voel, sê Amner.

Volgens dr. Enoch Sithole, 'n dosent in joernalistiek vir kommunikeerders en langvorm-joernalistiek, by die Wits Sentrum vir Joernalistiek, het lesers "eenvoudig gewoon geraak" aan die idee dat joernalistiek op kontroversiële sake fokus.

As gevolg daarvan, sal verslaggewing oor kwessies wat oor gemeenskapsontwikkeling handel, dalk nie as opwindend genoeg vir lesers voorkom nie, sê Sithole.

Nuuswaardes soos konflik is dominant in die media. En aangesien dit belangrik is vir media-organisasies om 'n wins te kan maak, help dit om stories te dra wat "baie koerante verkoop", volgens Amner.

Dit plaas ekonomiese druk op nuusorganisasies, aangesien stories geproduseer moet word wat die leserskap en aanlyn-statistiek sal laat styg, volgens Amner. Daar word dus druk geplaas op nuusorganisasies om stories te produseer wat die leser se oog sal vang, sê hy.

"Oplossingsjoernalistiek benodig toewyding van hulpbronne oor tyd en moet terugvoering van lesers en belanggroepe in toekomstige stories insluit," sê Amner. 

A FREE PRESS

South Africa's media history is rich in alternative press, although it currently lacks the same nuance practised by heavyweight anti-apartheid activists, says Mzwandile Khathi, Johannesburg-based journalist and editor.

By Tapiwanashe Zarangika

The freedom imbued in South Africa's media landscape is owed to a "rich history of resistance and advocacy writing", says Monty Roodt, anti-apartheid activist and former journalist for *Daily News*, *Herald* and *Sunday Tribune*.

This legacy, steeped in an alternate press' fight for liberation, can be attributed to the role of the media in "challenging apartheid, promoting social justice and advocating for change", says Roodt.

The alternative press acted in contravention of the apartheid government's media regulations, says Shirley Govender, publishing editor for the *Southern Globe* and *Orange Farm News* in Johannesburg. By providing a space for those who, under apartheid's repressive regime, were not afforded the platforms to advocate for their own rights, the alternative press used activism to educate and inform repressed audiences, she says.

“**THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS ENTIRELY OBJECTIVE JOURNALISM.**

PRESS VIBRANCY

"Prior to 1994, there was a more determined and vibrant resistance and advocacy media because the enemy - the apartheid state- was blatantly discriminatory and racist," says Roodt.

The state often used excessive force and unethical legislation to undermine

the media publications that opposed their agenda, Roodt claims.

These mechanisms of force included detention, assassination, burglary, and arson, says Roodt.

Following the first democratic elections in 1994, the implementation of South Africa's Constitution was an attempt to rectify these injustices while promoting a free and autonomous press, he adds.

FOSTERING A SPACE FOR INCLUSIVITY

South Africa's resistance writing has its foundations rooted in black newspapers, says Max du Preez, founder and current editor of *Vrye Weekblad*. Over a century ago black newspapers took a disruptive approach to practising resistance writing, he says.

"The [struggle] newspapers brought news and perspectives not reflected elsewhere in the media," says Du Preez. "They pierced the smoke and mirrors

of the apartheid propaganda machine and put events and statements on record that might otherwise have been missed."

By envisioning a post-apartheid society free of racist and sexist policies, these newspapers used their content to advocate against the blatantly discriminatory racial divisions apparent during apartheid, says Dr Kate Skinner, executive director of The Association for Independent Publishers.

The radical media at the time of apartheid forfeited journalistic objectivity by using their platforms to expose and end the apartheid government's crimes against humanity, says Du Preez.

DIRECTIVE PURPOSE

"There is no such thing as entirely objective journalism," says Roodt.

The media was established by someone for a specific purpose, to promote a particular viewpoint or ideology, he adds. Skinner reckons that this could be illustrated by South Africa's alternative press in the 1980s.

Publications such as *South*, *Vrye Weekblad*, and *Weekly Mail* "took a direct stance against [the] apartheid government", says Skinner. This stance was hardly objective as it targeted a particular audience, adds du Preez.

By shedding light on the political and

governmental instability at the time, the alternate press pressured the state into reconsidering their oppressive policies, says Du Preez. This put the apartheid state in the position where it had to explain its actions to international audiences, he adds.

"[More] importantly, these newspapers redefined the news agenda of other media," says Du Preez. Mainstream media could no longer afford to turn a blind eye to what was really happening, he claims.

FINANCIAL OBJECTIVE

"During apartheid, every media house or publication was clear on where they stood in terms of their support of the liberation movement," says Mzwandile Khathi, the editor of *Soweto Urban*, a division of Caxton Local Media. Newspapers like the *World Newspaper* and *Rand Daily Mail* were forced to shut down in 1977 and 1985, respectively, when they took an anti-apartheid stance, he says.

However, advocacy journalism now falls in the shadows of commercial media organisations who use profits to drive the content that they produce, says Khathi. This in spite of the similarities that the journalists of today share with those of the 1980s, says Skinner, referring to the existing socio-economic divisions that stand as

a direct result of apartheid's legacy.

There are, however, exceptions that are attempting to change the narrative around using advocacy to inform and educate, says Govender, who uses *Southern Globe* and *Orange Farm News* as examples of this. "My entire ethos in my [*Southern Globe* and *Orange Farm News*] newsrooms is all about making a difference, and that's advocacy."

A DEFIANT STANCE

Resistance or advocacy journalism largely differs from traditional journalism because it caters towards a very specific audience, says Monty Roodt, anti-apartheid activist and former journalist for *Daily News*, *Herald* and *Sunday Tribune*. *Drum magazine*, who ran stories of the Defiance Campaign and Can Themba, is an example of a publication that covered stories with an anti-apartheid agenda, says Mzwandile Khathi, the editor of *Soweto Urban*, a division of Caxton Local Media.

Govender says that the publications want their readers to make informed decisions because "we've always been watchdogs, [the] small community newspapers and independent community media [that is]".

It does not help that the increasingly fast-paced transition to digital media content has altered the media landscape, says Khathi. This has changed the way that audiences consume media, and largely shifted advocacy journalism to social media platforms, he says.

“Issues like climate change, health and food security affect the poor in the periphery who don’t have a voice,” says Khathi. He believes that through advocacy journalism, journalists can use their skills to provide a platform where underrepresented issues can be expressed.

However, the impact of this is two-fold, says Roodt. Firstly, the mainstream media cannot retain audience attention when they delve into in-depth coverage of serious issues.

Additionally, the mainstream media are funded by advertisers who often stipulate that their adverts cannot be run on programming centred around sensitive or contested issues, claims Roodt.

“Stories that sell are the ones which are more interesting to many people than those which are in the public interest in general,” says Khathi. The stories that tend to make headlines focus on crime and corruption, but not on advocacy against crime and corruption, he explains. More sensitive issues, such as the climate crisis or impoverishment, are underserved, claims Khathi. “Unless the publication focuses on agriculture, you won’t read anything about climate change or food securi-

ty on the front page of a mainstream newspaper,” he claims.

Khathi uses *Health-e News* and the Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism as examples of underrepresented media platforms that push advocacy for public health. “Very few people know about [examples Khathi highlighted] compared to other mainstream publications.”

THE ALTERNATIVE STREAM

“I think the most important thing about writing about any issue is getting the voice,” says Matthew Hirsch, a qualified communications specialist and freelancer for *GroundUp*. This means “getting the views of ordinary people and communities about a story”, he explains. Voicing community concerns from the grassroots level “is something that can get lost in the media today”, says Hirsch, who emphasises the importance of maintaining contact with journalistic sources, even if it is not for a story that they are currently working on.

The only way to talk about policy changes is to speak to the people who will be the most affected by them, says Hirsch. As a journalist, you have to “build relationships so that [people] will come to you when something happens in their communities”, he says.


Hirsch uses the journalistic work around homelessness in Cape Town as a recent example where the media contextualised homelessness as a

societal issue. In doing so, the media subverted governmental narratives that played on stereotypes that negatively shaped public attitudes towards homelessness, Hirsch explains.

Journalists such as Marvin Charles and Sandisiwe Shoba, both from *News24*, really made it a point to speak to people who are sleeping on the streets, says Hirsch. “You realise that people end up homeless for a variety of complex reasons. One can’t paint everyone with the same brush.”

Advocacy journalism, enforced through the media and civil society organisations, has reshaped the language and policies around Cape Town’s homeless population, says Hirsch. The city has opened up more shelters and safe spaces as a result of pressure from the media and other civil society organisations, he says.

“Media can play a vital role in shaping public opinion and influencing change.” However, Hirsch warns against journalists setting out with the intention of “writing for a cause”, because this could influence their judgement of the matters and issues which affect people’s lives. Rather, they should be encouraged to highlight an issue that otherwise might have been swept under a carpet, he says.

Therefore, it is vital that journalists employ ethical principles to their work, protect their sources and make sure that they do all the relevant fact-checking before publishing a story, says Hirsch. 

SOUTH AFRICA'S SILENT CLIMATE CRISIS

When the South African media reports on climate change, the focus is usually on climate disasters, says experts who spoke to *SMF*. But the daily experiences of the communities affected by climate change seldom make it to the media.

By Liam Voorma

South African farmers have already begun to feel the effects of the changing climate, says Charel Wilke, a farmer from Jacobsdal, in the Free State. Over the last five years, the Free State has experienced “three times more hail” in comparison to previous years, he says.

“The last three years it rained much more. We were 600mm above our normal rainfall which [ranges] between 200mm to 250mm. Now, we have between 800mm to 1 000mm of rainfall.”

Wilke’s soil quality has experienced a deterioration after higher levels of

erosion which followed as a result of the floods that plagued the country in 2022, he explains.

AGRICULTURAL VULNERABILITY

Food security in South Africa is a “heavily agriculture-dependent economy”, says Leonie Joubert, a science journalist currently working for the *National Geographic*, and author specialising in climate and environmental collapse. This is supported by the fact that 80% of the country’s food is produced by large-scale commercial farming, according to a study conduct-

ed by the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) in 2022.

South Africa’s agricultural sector and natural environment is largely vulnerable under conditions of climate variability, according to a World Bank Group report detailing the country’s climate risks. The report was released in 2021.

This vulnerability stems from our nation’s overreliance on rain-fed agriculture and natural resources which often exploit the natural environment, according to the report. Numerous crop failures and reduced agricultural productivity across the country are



South Africa currently enjoys a free press that is spared from governmental censorship, says Monty Roodt, anti-apartheid activist and former journalist for *Daily News*, *Herald* and *Sunday Tribune*.

PHOTO/GRAPHIC: Tapiwanashe Zaranyika

examples of the effects of this overreliance, according to the report.

Joubert explains that issues of environmental concern are often underreported by South Africa's media landscape. This contributes to a lack of awareness at a citizen level.

Over 50% of South Africans have not heard of climate change, according to a survey conducted by Afrobarometer in 2022.

Afrobarometer is an independent non-partisan research network that measures public attitudes on economic, political, and social matters in Africa, according to its website.

'NOT ON THE RADAR'

"Climate change stories are still treated as kind of these nice-to-have environmental stories, if you've got a little bit of budget left over," says Joubert. This is despite the fact that South Africa houses some of the best climate scientists on

the continent, she says.

Thus, a lack of quality environmental journalism cannot be attributed to a shortage of information or expert sources, says Joubert. "It's just that

“

IT'S PORTRAYED AS A SORT OF DISTANT THEME, STILL TEN OR TWENTY YEARS AWAY.

journalists don't really give it enough attention," claims Joubert.

The problem additionally lies with news editors who don't see the value in

environmental reporting, so they fail to prioritise the story, claims Joubert.

Alternatively, it could be that the media doesn't relate to people when it comes to expressing how much of an impact climate change will have on their lives, says Yolandi Groenewald, an environmental reporter for *Mail & Guardian*.

"It's portrayed as a sort of distant theme, still 10 or 20 years away," says Groenewald. "If it's an article about load shedding, or an extreme heat wave hitting this week, then [journalists are] on it. Otherwise, climate change is not an issue that's on people's radar enough."

NOT SO DISTANT FUTURE

Underprivileged communities situated in cities, with poorer resources and infrastructure, tend to be more vulnerable and exposed to climate impacts, says Professor Guy Midgley, a climate change researcher at Stellenbosch University. "This makes them vulnerable to flooding, pollution, heat stress and disease," he says.

Creating awareness of this is especially important given that South Africa's environmental landscape is facing significant challenges due to an increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels, according to Midgley.

"There are vast regions of savannas that are transforming their structure from open woodlands and grasslands, into closed woodlands because of the fertilising effect of CO₂," says Midgley.

These changes have occurred since the 1990s, possibly as early as the 1970s, and are affecting the biodiversity of these regions and jeopardising the livelihoods of farmers, adds Midgley.

Examples of this can be illustrated when cattle grazing becomes more difficult due to a lack of grass, or cattle get lost in the bush, says Midgley. "[This is] already happening in the Eastern Cape, in KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga."

Environmental changes are often characterised by deforestation, says Midgley, however South Africa is experiencing an increase in afforestation, which is due to an increase in CO₂ fertilisation. This is disrupting ecosystems, he explains.

"[An increase in CO₂] plays a role in the increase in the intensity of rainfall events. So, [the] flood risk has gone up," says Midgley. This has an impact on many livelihoods, cities, urban dwellings and particularly rural dwellings, where housing structures may be damaged or washed away, he adds.

The last El Niño drought hit South African farmers in the Northern and Eastern Cape over the course of 2015 and 2016, decimating wildlife and livestock, says Joubert. This led to a decrease in food production by approximately 66%, according to a

study conducted by AgEcon that was released in 2018.

The damages of this received little coverage because many of the effects played out in remote and rural areas, "so it just didn't make the headline[s]," Joubert claims.

EDUCATING JOURNALISTS

It is the media's duty to keep the public informed, while keeping policy makers and governments accountable for the policies that they implement, says Joubert. Yet, many journalists either do not have science training, or they do not have good mentoring within newsrooms, she claims.

While newsrooms are increasingly having to cut back on resources, junior-level staff who do not have the expertise, are often tasked with covering the climate change crisis, says Joubert.

While the environmental crisis may not pique readers' interests, it is up to media organisations to change their perspectives, says Julia Evans, a climate and biodiversity journalist at *Daily Maverick*.

Evans' sentiments are echoed by Enock Sithole, a lecturer at the Wits department of journalism. Sithole holds a PhD in climate change communication. "Leaders of newsrooms do not find climate change stories to be important, therefore, they don't allocate adequate resources," says Sithole.

In order for climate reporters to become well-seasoned in their ability to cover the climate crisis, they need years of exposure to the beat, says Joubert. This will enable the reporters to "build up a good body of knowledge in your

head, understand what the issues are, [and] have good connections and networks and sources", she says.


CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

An additional problem facing South Africa's media industry is that a large majority of the country's media houses' messaging is often centred around individual efforts to combat climate change, says Joubert. "This includes recycling household waste, or not flying as often internationally [and], although well-meaning, in reality we need a massive system-level change."

There are many ways individuals can creatively campaign for climate change awareness and advocacy, says Joubert. This largely requires finding accurate information and packaging it in informative ways, which is where the media is largely failing, she adds.

After the Cape Town water crisis, which occurred between 2017 and 2018, *Daily Maverick* realised that it needed to expand its climate desk, says Evans. "We used to have two full-time environmental journalists," says Evans. However, the water shortage prompted *Daily Maverick* to hire "nine full time environmental reporters", she says.

The decrease in the percentage rate of carbon emissions that South Africa needs to adhere to, in order to combat climate change, is an example of an issue that does not receive significant news coverage, says Joubert.

It is up to the media to pressure decision makers such as Gwede Mantashe, South Africa's minister of energy, says Groenewald. "If we don't write about [climate change], we don't put it in the public domain [and because of this] people won't change, public policy makers will not change. We have to keep up that pressure." 

WHAT IS EL NIÑO?

El Niño is a climate pattern that describes the unusual warming of surface waters, specifically in the Eastern Pacific ocean. The climate effect is historically associated with record droughts and high temperatures in the summer rainfall regions of South Africa, which refers to most of the country north of coastal areas. Source: Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

BEHIND THE BYLINE

South Africa has a strong history of investigative reporting. *SMF* spoke with some of the country's top investigative reporters. Here is what they have to share about how their work holds those in power to account.

By Mia van der Merwe

“When we started *Carte Blanche* [in 1988], it was not done with the idea of investigative journalism in mind. There were stories to be covered and usually it was about people that were trying to hide something.”

This is according to Ruda Landman, a veteran South African journalist who co-anchored the show from 1988 to 2007.

While storytelling comprises numerous formats, it is especially essential

to the core of investigative reporting, says Devi Sankaree Govender, an investigative journalist and television presenter for *The Devi Show*.

Govender hosts *The Devi Show*, an investigative journalism programme that tackles current affairs and exposes societal injustices, according to e.TV's website. Govender worked for *Carte Blanche* from 2002 to 2020, according to DSTV's website.

Crucial to investigative reporting is a journalist's ability to link together missing pieces of information to expose corrupt forces, says Govender.

TIME AND MONEY

Investigative reporting requires the investment of time and financial resources, says Landman. A journalist has to ensure that their work is

grounded by a solid base of contextual understanding before an investigation can be completed, she says.

Media outlets such as *Daily Maverick* and *AmaBhungane* play a crucial role in the production of news content that aligns with South Africa's democratic values, says Dr Piet Croucamp, a senior lecturer in political studies and international relations at North-West University.

Pieter-Louis Myburgh, a senior investigative journalist for *Daily Maverick*, worked tirelessly to expose the corruption that occurred during the state capture period under former President Jacob Zuma's rule, says Croucamp.

“The state capture would have likely not, if ever, been exposed with the same intensity was it not for investi-

gative journalists.”

Additionally, Pauli van Wyk, a senior investigative journalist for *Daily Maverick*, worked to expose the role that the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) played in the Venda Building Society (VBS) Mutual Bank scandal, Croucamp adds.

The scandal followed allegations that members and leaders of the EFF had received funding from the corrupt VBS Mutual Bank. However, the EFF denied wrongdoing, according to Croucamp.

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

The Gupta case differed from the other investigative work that Myburgh had previously pursued, he says. This was because the operation required the collaboration of over 20 journalists from different publications, says Myburgh, who played a key role in the reporting of the scandal.

The collaborative effort on the part of these journalists pushed for the end of Zuma's reign, says Myburgh. Consequently, this work saw the end of their state capture-era by shining a spotlight on the hold that the Guptas had on South Africa's democracy, says Myburgh.

This calibre of journalism requires dedication and commitment from journalists to do the ‘leg work’, says Govender. “We [as journalists] put our lives on the line every single day.”

Investigative journalism has found prominence in South African history, says Pieter du Toit, assistant editor for investigations at *News24*.

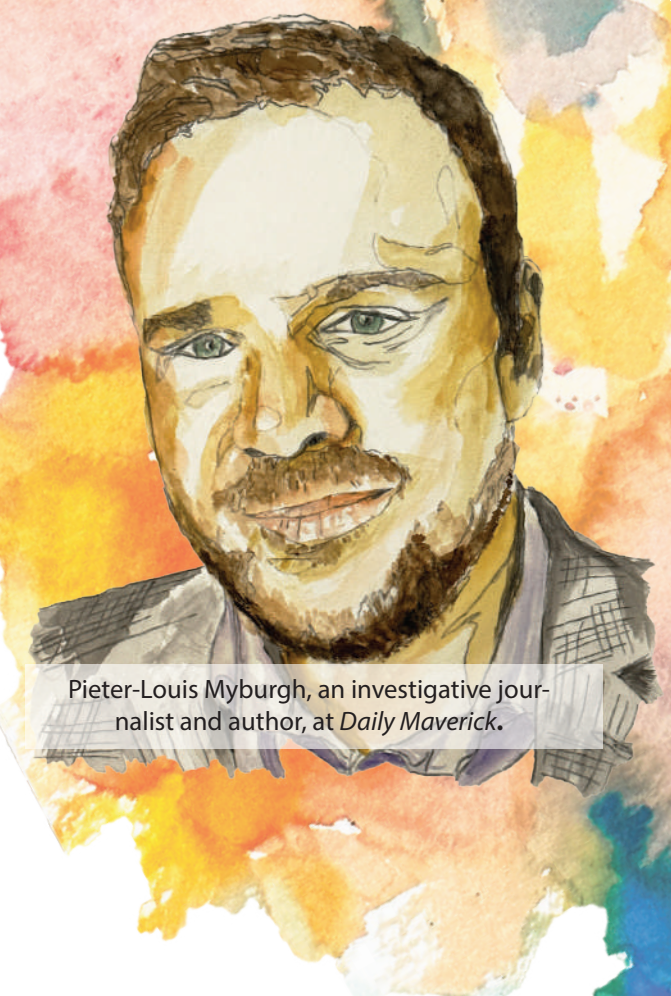
The emergence of an alternative press between the 1970s and 1990s, that worked to expose the apartheid agenda, set the precedent for current investigative reporting standards, says Croucamp.

Vrye Weekblad is an example of a publication that worked to dissect the apartheid regime from a grassroots level, says Max du Preez, founder and editor of *Vrye Weekblad*.

While *Vrye Weekblad* was not as well funded as publications currently positioned within the mainstream South African media, it has always played a crucial role in ensuring the “survival” of South Africa's democracy by exposing state secrets and corrupt officials, says Croucamp.

South Africa saw a lot of political tension during apartheid when freedom-seeking parties and political movements rebelled against the National Party's (NP) regime, says Croucamp. South Africa's media landscape underwent continuous transformations as governmental policy changed, he says.

At the time the NP had control over its state broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation, says Govender. This largely differs from the pro-



Pieter-Louis Myburgh, an investigative journalist and author, at *Daily Maverick*.

tections afforded to journalists by the South African Constitution, according to Reporters Without Borders' website.

WHAT ABOUT THE ‘SMALL PLAYERS’?

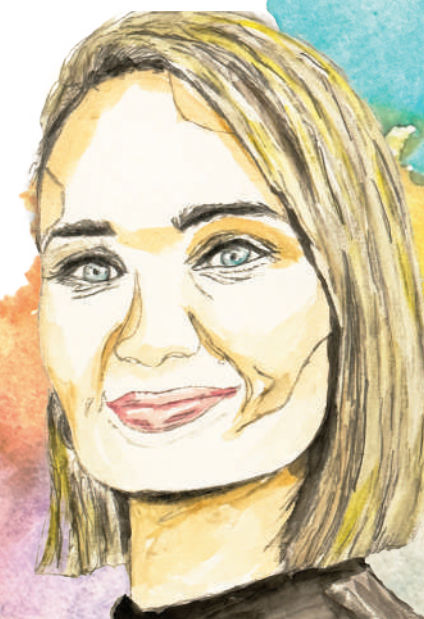
South Africans tend to associate fraud with prominent political figures, often neglecting to “think about the small guy selling matric certificates or the guy who's selling drivers licences”, says Govender.

It is important that journalists work to expose and report on those smaller players on a local level, too, she says.

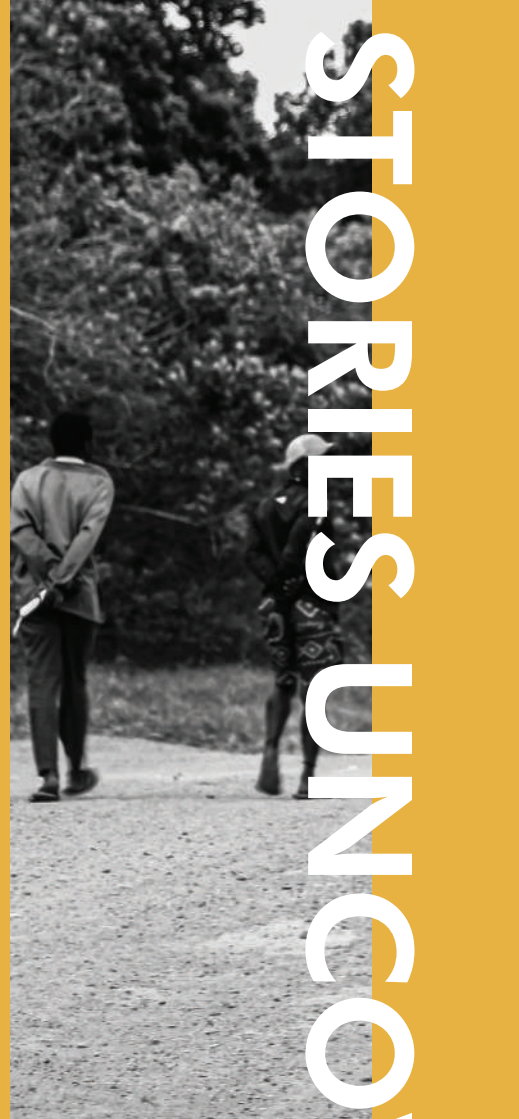
However, as the media landscape shifts amidst closing newsrooms facing budgetary concerns, many



Devi Sankaree Govender, investigative journalist and TV-presenter for *The Devi Show*.



Mia Spies, a multimedia journalist for *Netwerk24* and TV-presenter of ‘*Wie's Nuus?*’.



Digital media has changed news irrevocably, says Mia Spies, a multimedia journalist for *Netwerk24* and TV-presenter of *Wie's Nuus?*

Netwerk24 is an Afrikaans subscription-based online news platform owned by Media24. 'Wie's Nuus?' is aired on kykNET and compiled by *Netwerk24*, according to *Netwerk24's* website. Although news on social media platforms is "more available, accessible and attractive than before", it is often riddled with malicious fake news, she says.

Today, news consumers tend to consult online sources, claims Myburgh.

WE PUT OUR LIVES ON THE LINE EVERY SINGLE DAY.

Social media platforms have evolved into spaces where individuals in society can criticise journalists and disseminate theories regarding the reasons behind the coverage of specific stories and the attention given to certain institutions, which has impacted journalists negatively, he says.

While there are positive sides to social media, stories get much more traction online, says Myburgh. This is because "a lot of people" are on social media, he says.

Online publications, such as *Daily Maverick* and *News24* currently deliver the strongest investigative pieces, according to Myburgh.

UPHOLDING DEMOCRACY
 "[Journalists] are central to the progress of an entire nation," says Govender.

The media have a voice, says Govender. When investigative journalists tell a story and relay it well, they hold the potential to foster connections between citizens, civic organisations, and the government, she says.

A journalist's connections is what makes them responsible for using their power and influence to uphold the values enshrined in South Africa's democracy and to keep officials accountable for their actions, says Spies.

The media have access to sources and people in ways that average citizens do not, she says.

A "free and independent media" is a fundamental element to South Africa's democracy, says Govender.

"My goal as [an investigative and news] journalist is to inform people, highlight injustice in communities and hold those in positions of authority accountable," says Spies.

However, news should be digestible to everyday citizens, according to Spies. "[This is] so that they don't just want to bury their heads in the sand, but can be active citizens and participants in democracy, because what happens in the news has a direct impact on each of our lives."

ILLUSTRATIONS: Mia van der Merwe



Pieter du Toit, assistant editor for investigations at *News24*.

local organisations cannot afford to house investigative departments, says Myburgh.

Myburgh uses *Free State Times* as an example of a local newspaper whose journalists used investigative reporting to expose corrupt officials in the Free State.

Free State Times' journalists were just as good as their counterparts on a national level, says Myburgh.

The publication closed down in 2014, according to Mike Leahly, managing director of Media Manager Africa. At the time of its closure, the weekly publication had sold 15 000 printed copies for that particular week, he says.

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM IN A NEW AGE

Investigative journalism will always be a niche and specialised field, says Du Toit. This is due to the nature of the field and the type of journalist it requires, he adds.



Ruda Landman, journalist and former *Carte Blanche* co-anchor.

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DIE BAL IS IN DIE MEDIA SE HANDE

Deur Sebastian Paulus

2019

Springbokke se triomf in die 2019 Wêreldbeker-rugby.



2021

Tatjana Schoenmaker se goue medalje.



2012

Chad le Clos wen 'n goue medalje tydens die Olimpiese Spele in 2012.

1995

Bokke wen die Wêreldbeker-rugby in 1995.

2016

Van Niekerk en Semenya bring Olimpiese goud huis toe.

Gebalanseerde en regverdigediemediadekking is noodsaaklik indien publikasies 'n wyer lesersmark wil bereik. Maar volgens Lloyd Burnard, sportredakteur van *News24*, behoort sportgebeure op gemeenskapsvlak net soveel blootstelling te kry as groot sportgeleenthede.

FOTO'S: Sebastian Paulus
Foto's ter illustrasie

Dit is geen geheim dat sport 'n baie belangrike rol speel in die Suid-Afrikaanse kultuur en geskiedenis nie. Die drie gewildste hoofstroom-sportsoorte in die land – krieket, sokker en rugby – bly egter die sportsoorte wat die meeste aandag in die hoofstroommedia geniet. Dit is volgens dr. Shaundre Jacobs, sportwetenskap-lektor aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch (US).

Jacobs meen dat tradisionele media nie genoegsame aandag aan alle Suid-Afrikaanse sportsoorte skenk nie. “Die dekking van rugby, sokker en krieket bly steeds prominent in die hoofstroommedia,” sê Jacobs. “Sportsoorte soos netbal, hokkie, atletiek en gimnastiek trek steeds aan die kortste ent,” sê sy.

Volgens Jacobs veroorsaak hierdie soort mediadekking 'n gaping in toegang tot hulpbronne en geleenthede vir sommige atlete.

“Nie alle Suid-Afrikaanse atlete het dieselfde soort toegang tot die nodige sporthulpbronne nie en dus verhoed dit soms dat atlete deelneem aan sport,” sê Jacobs. Sy meen dat dit 'n impak het op atlete se fisieke gereedheid én hul sielkundige voorbereiding vir hul sportloopbane. Maar, wanneer die media wel berig oor hierdie sportsoorte, kan dit tot moontlike publisiteit en borgskappe vir atlete lei, verduidelik sy.

As 'n sportsoort nie genoeg aandag in die media kry nie, kan dit 'n “domino-effek” op alles hê – van borgskappe tot finansiële bystand, sê Schalk Brits, 'n voormalige Springbok-rugbyspeler.

Brits meen dat die media nie net die fokus op spelers se prestasies moet vestig nie, maar ook op diegene wat agter die skerms werk. Hy glo dat om stories van atlete te deel – ongeag hul agtergrond of sport wat hulle speel – van kardinale belang is.

Met elke berig, elke foto en elke uitsending, word die krag van die media as baken van hoop gebruik, en word geleenthede vir atlete versterk, sê Brits.

SKADUWEE VAN ONSIGBAARHEID

Minder gewilde sportsoorte en die atlete wat daaraan deelneem, bly dikwels in die skaduwee van die meer gewilde sportsoorte, meen Jamie Fraser, 'n gimnastiek-afrigter by die US.

Sy glo dat gimnastiek as 'n sport byvoorbeeld dikwels min aandag in die media kry, ten spyte van die intense toewyding en harde werk van gimnaste. “Die gebrek aan blootstelling beperk nie net die groter erkenning van individuele prestasies nie, maar kan ook die ontwikkeling van die sportsoort as geheel belemmer,” sê Fraser.

Volgens Fraser lê die uitdaging daarin om die media se aandag na 'n breër spektrum van sportsoorte te verskuif, sodat almal wat bydra tot die Suid-Afrikaanse sportbedryf, die erkenning en ondersteuning kan ontvang wat hulle verdien.

DIE SPORTAGENDA

“In terme van watter [sport] ons dek en hoe ons dit dek, sal ons altyd gelei word deur wat ons glo die meeste nuuswaarde dra,” sê Lloyd Burnard, sportredakteur van *News24*.

Burnard reken ook dat, binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks en ook onder dié van hul lesers, die “groot drie” – sokker, rugby en krieket – die gewildste sportsoorte bly. Hulle vorm daarom 'n aansienlike persentasie van die nuus wat aan die publiek bekendgemaak word.

“Ons neem egter die verantwoordelikheid om alle [sportsoorte] te dek waarin Suid-Afrikaners presteer, veral wanneer dit op 'n internasionale verhoog gebeur,” sê hy.

Volgens Burnard het *News24* besonderse vordering gemaak deur in hulpbronne te belê om Suid-Afrikaanse vrouesport te dek. Burnard verwys na hul onlangse mediadekking oor die sukses van Banyana Banyana, die Protea-vrouekrieketspan en die Protea-netbalspan wat, volgens hom, groot trots vir die land gebring het.

Hy meen dat *News24* sal voortgaan om stories te vertel wat Suid-Afrikaanse sportprestasies vier en dat hulle die lig wil skyn op sportsoorte wat nie die nodige aandag in die media geniet nie.

“

SPORT EN DIE MEDIA LOOP HAND AAN HAND.

DIE DIGITALE DILEMMA

Gary Rathbone, wat vanaf 2006 tot 2012 hoof van Afrika-sport by SuperSport was, glo dat dié uitsaaidiens die vermoë het om mense blootstelling te gee aan kleiner sportsoorte. Rathbone was ook tussen 2020 en 2022 die hoof van sport by die Suid-Afrikaanse Uitsaaiorporasie (SAUK), en is die stigter van Sportscape Media, 'n organisasie wat konsultasie- en ondersteuningsdienste aan spelers in die sportmedia-landskap bied.

Die SuperSport-netwerk is 'n digitale uitsaaidiens waarop verskeie kanale gelyktydig uitgesaai kan word. Die netwerk bied 'n wye verskeidenheid sportkanale en sportsoorte aan sy intekenare. Ou-styl analoogdienste, soos SAUK en eTV, kan nie dit verskaf nie, verduidelik Rothbone.

Hy meen dat SuperSport nie net moet fokus op gewilde sportsoorte wat hulle weet hoër intekenaargetalle gaan meebring nie. “Baie intekenare van SuperSport betaal vir die diens om toegang te kry tot rugby, krieket en sokker. SuperSport is dus bewus daarvan en fokus al hul hulpbronne op dekking van

hierdie sportsoorte en gee dus nie genoeg aandag aan minder gewilde sportsoorte nie,” sê hy.

Statistieke vanaf SuperSport se webtuiste ondersteun Rathbone se stelling. In Augustus 2022 het SuperSport op hul webtuiste bevestig dat ongeveer 34 miljoen mense ingeskaal het tydens die Vodacom United-rugbykampioenskap. Die hokkie-toep het egter net 100 000 intekenare gekry.

Die probleem met SuperSport en hul huidige sakemodel is die feit dat die uitsaaidiens baie geld aan bemerking en sportorganisasies soos SA Rugby, Atletiek SA, en die Premier-sokkerliga bestee om eksklusief toegang tot sportgebeure te verkry, verduidelik Rathbone. “Gewone Suid-Afrikaners kan nie ’n SuperSport-intekening bekostig nie, wat beteken dat hulle nie toegang het tot [hierdie] sportkanale nie,” verduidelik hy.

’N MEDIA-SUKSEVERHAAL

Siya Kolisi, die eerste swart Springbok-rugbykaptein, se loopbaan is nie net op die rugbyveld gevorm nie, maar ook in die media, vertel JJ Harmse, digitale en publikasie-bestuurder vir Springbok Sewes-rugby.

Die suksesverhaal van Kolisi se ontwikkeling as rugbyspeler het plaaslik en internasionaal tot sportliefhebbers gespreek, verduidelik Harmse.

Harmse vertel dat Kolisi se rugbyloopbaan “nie net ’n rugbyverhaal is nie, maar [ook] ’n mensverhaal”. Die media-dekking van Kolisi se tydperk as Springbok-kaptein het vir hom deure oopgemaak en bygedra tot sy sukses, sê Harmse.

Burnard onthou egter dat, toe Kolisi as nasionale kaptein aangewys is, “sommige mediadekking oor Kolisi se aanstelling as kaptein” baie skepties was.

“Tydens Kolisi se aanstelling as Springbok-kaptein in 2018, het baie nuuspublikasies op sy ras gefokus en nie op sy vermoë om die rol as Springbok-kaptein te vervul nie,” sê Burnard.

Adam van Harte, ’n professionele padelspeler – ’n mengsel van tennis en muurbal – meen dat die media beslis ’n rol speel in die sukses van ’n atleet se loopbaan.

Hy verwys na die verskyning van ’n berig oor sy deelname aan die A1Padel-PaySpace-meestertoernooi wat in Februarie 2023 in *Rapport* verskyn het. As gevolg van dié berig, het Van Harte die oog van talentsoekers gevang en die geleentheid gekry om aan professionele toernooie deel te neem. “Sport en die media loop hand aan hand,” sê hy.

Van Harte, wat in 2022 begin padel speel het,

glo nie dat hy so vinnig ’n naam vir homself kon gemaak het as dit nie vir die hulp van die media was nie.

DIE BEPERKTE KRAG VAN SOSIALE MEDIA

Die krag van sosiale media het ook die landskap van Suid-Afrikaanse sport verander, meen Harmse.

Hy glo dat dit deure oopgemaak het vir atlete om hulself te bemerk en hul persoonlike verhale direk met die publiek te deel.

“Terwyl sosiale media ’n platform bied vir atlete om hulself te bevorder, kan dit ook ’n skadelike uitwerking hê,” sê Harmse.

Hy meen dat negatiewe kommentaar en die druk om altyd suksesvol te lyk, ’n ernstige tol op atlete se geestesgesondheid kan plaas.

“Ons het baie jeug-inisiatiewe, soos Cravenweek, en maak dus gereeld gebruik van sosiale media-platforms soos Instagram en TikTok om ons inisiatiewe te bemerk en ’n jonger gehoor te lok,” sê hy.

Brits, wat ook tans ’n sportbeurs vir skoliere bied om by Paul Roos Gimnasium (PRG) in Stellenbosch skool te gaan, meen dat atlete sosiale media as ’n hulpbron kan gebruik om hulself te bemerk en moontlike borge te lok.

“Die media het baie verander sedert my [tyd] as rugbyspeler,” sê hy. Volgens Brits het spelers nou baie meer geleentheid om hulself aan talentsoekers bloot te stel en om moontlike borge deur middel van sosiale media te vind.


Caydin Spandonie, eerstespan-hokkiespeler vir Noordwes-Universiteit (NWU), meen ook dat sosiale media ’n wapen is wat atlete kan gebruik om hulle talente ten toon te stel.

Volgens Spandonie het hy in sy matriekjaar, 2018, ’n video van homself waar hy hokkie speel, op Facebook geplaas. “Weens die aandag wat die video op sosiale media geniet het, het Y1 Hockey na my uitgereik en aangebeid om my te begin borg. Dit is ook een van die redes hoekom die NWU my ’n hokkiebeurs aangebied het,” vertel Spandonie.

DIE PAD VORENTOE

Terwyl die rol van die media in die Suid-Afrikaanse sportbedryf ’n beduidende invloed het, is daar steeds ’n pad wat gestaf moet word om insluiting en geleentheid vir alle atlete te verseker, meen Harmse.

Volgens Brits is dit die gemeenskaplike verantwoordelikheid van sportorganisasies, die media, en ondersteuners om saam te werk om ’n inklusiewe en gelyke speelveld vir almal te skep.

“Dit is nie genoeg om net finansiële bystand aan atlete te bied nie. Daar moet op skoolvlak [genoegsame] aandag gegee word aan atlete, sodat hulle met die regte vaardighede toegerus word om nie net ’n sukses van hul sportloopbane te maak nie, maar ook goed [toegerus] is vir die lewe ná rugby,” sê Brits. 

RESHAPING THE GAME

By Anri van Helsdingen



Cato Louw
PHOTO: Anri van Helsdingen

Kate Nokwe
PHOTO: Supplied/Kate Nokwe

Layla Arrison
PHOTO: Supplied/Layla Arrison

Lesego Poole
PHOTO: Supplied/Lesego Poole

Female sports journalists face formidable challenges within the media industry, according to Cato Louw, a sports broadcaster for *SuperSport*. By fighting for self-representation, they can pave the way for women in both sports and sports journalism, says Louw.

Female sports journalists and broadcasters are altering the media landscape at an unprecedented pace, says Kate Nokwe, former broadcaster for *SuperSport* and current sports journalist for *Sports Live* on *SABC Sport*.

In a scene once populated by male voices and perspectives, women in sports media are diversifying newsrooms across the country, says Nokwe.

While female sports broadcasters are still faced with exclusion from their colleagues and older audiences,

an unwillingness to step down in the face of misogyny has paved the way for sportswomen to find relatability in those who report on their achievements, says Nokwe.

A MATTER OF REPRESENTATION

“The lack of representation that we have seen [in sports journalism] is a thing of the past,” claims Nokwe. Audiences are increasingly tuning in to women’s sports and unlocking doors of opportunity for aspiring female

sports journalists, she says.

“[Media organisations now] understand that there is power in recognition and power in visibility,” says Lesego Poole, a cricket broadcaster for *SuperSport*. Finding representation and support in other female sports journalists and broadcasters has inspired Poole to take the lead in pursuing her own career, she says.

“[Seeing other women thrive in the industry] made me realise that I have a stake in the pie as well,” says Poole. “Representation tells a story of

inclusivity, and inclusivity is important in storytelling and audience engagement.”

Women in these roles, such as Kass Naidoo, South Africa’s first female cricket broadcaster, award winning sports journalist and founder of *gsports4girls*, have had an impact on her career, says Pooe. “I believe I’m where I am because of such women that have opened up the industry for us.”

gsport4girls is an online news publication that produces content relating to female athletes and sports women, according to its website. The site aims to not only bridge the gender workforce gap, but to empower women in sport, both on and off the field, says Pooe.

REJECTING GENDER BIAS

Female journalists still face barriers of entry into the realm of sports journalism, says Cato Louw, one of South Africa’s youngest female sports broadcasters, and a rugby anchor for *SuperSport*. Louw additionally broadcasts sports bulletins for *EyeWitness News* on KFM and Cape Talk.

“Sometimes the older [audiences are] still a little resistant to the fact that there is a woman on the field,” Louw says.

The weight of the audience’s expectations can at times be overwhelming, says Louw.

“You feel [like] you always have to prove yourself [to your

audience],” says Louw.

Louw feels as though her work has to be “three times better” than her male colleagues “to be seen as half as good” at her job. This is an ongoing issue, she says.

Despite improvements in diversifying workplace demographics, gendered stereotypes still prevail, says Layla Arrison, a sports broadcaster for *SuperSport*. “I am constantly surrounded by old men who think they know more than I do.”

Arrison formed part of the Springbok Women’s sevens rugby training squad in Dubai in 2018, she says. The later stages of Arrison’s career saw her play for the Bulls Daisies between 2021 and 2022. It was during this time she started her career at *SuperSport*.

Female sports broadcasters have to stick together to forge connections within their own broadcasting communities, says Arrison. “I have been lucky to have females [in the industry] such as Cato Louw, that I can call when I am unsure [of my own work].”

Women can only succeed in the media industry by fighting for visibility and representation within their field, says Arrison.

It is a common consensus amongst female sports journalists that there is a certain level of gender bias within the


field, claims Pooe. At times, Pooe felt that she was overlooked or not taken seriously by her male colleagues. These moments, although not overt, were indicative of the biases that prevail in the field, she says.

FIT FOR A WOMAN

“I think the future of women who work in sports journalism and broadcasting goes hand in hand with women who are actively playing sports,” says Nokwe, who refers to the Protea cricketer, Dane van Niekerk as an example of a sports star whose story, although currently well-known, was first reported on by female journalists.

It is essential that media companies recognise that women possess value for their organisations, Nokwe says.

SuperSport is making positive strides towards including female sports commentators in the 2023 Rugby World Cup production line. The channel now has an all-female crew based in Cape Town to cover the World Cup, says Nokwe. “That is not something you would have seen a few years ago.”

“I believe that a lot of these female athletes appreciate a female sports journalist in the room, and therefore, they gravitate towards that female journalist,” says Nokwe. As sportswomen find security and fame in their careers, so do the female journalists who cover them, she says. 



ONE WOMAN'S JOURNEY

Cato Louw has always held a love for sport but never knew how to translate this passion into a workable career, she explains.

Louw hails from the small town of Hogsback in the Eastern Cape, where she was homeschooled until grade eight. Thereafter, she attended Grens High School from 2006 to 2010.

Her interest in sports found its intrigue in 2007, following the Spingboks’ win of the Rugby World Cup, she explains.

Louw, who was 15-years-old at the time, saw a female physiotherapist tend to teams on the field. “[I’d] never seen a woman on the field, or so intimately involved with the players,” she recalls.

It was at that moment that she realised that she was headed for a career within the sports industry.

Whilst completing a diploma in sports science at eta College, a tertiary educational institution in Stellenbosch, she embarked on her broadcasting journey at MFM 92.6, also known as MatieFM. Louw says she fully immersed herself within the field of sports broadcasting when she hosted an afternoon sports programme called Halftime on MFM in 2016, she explains.

The radio station is student-run and affiliated with Stellenbosch University.

Louw’s established career found its footing after she caught the attention of *EyeWitness News Sport*. She found employment there as a freelancer and weekend sports anchor at KFM and CapeTalk in 2016 before securing permanent employment with the channel.

In 2016, Louw auditioned for the role of a Varsity Cup presenter for *SuperSport*, “Africa’s biggest sports channel”, according to Louw. She knew that she had to make the best of every opportunity that came her way, she recalls.

Now, as an established sports journalist, Louw is able to inspire other female sports journalists to pursue a career within the media industry, says Marisa Calvert, an award-winning communications professional at Alkemi Collective, a marketing agency based in Cape Town.

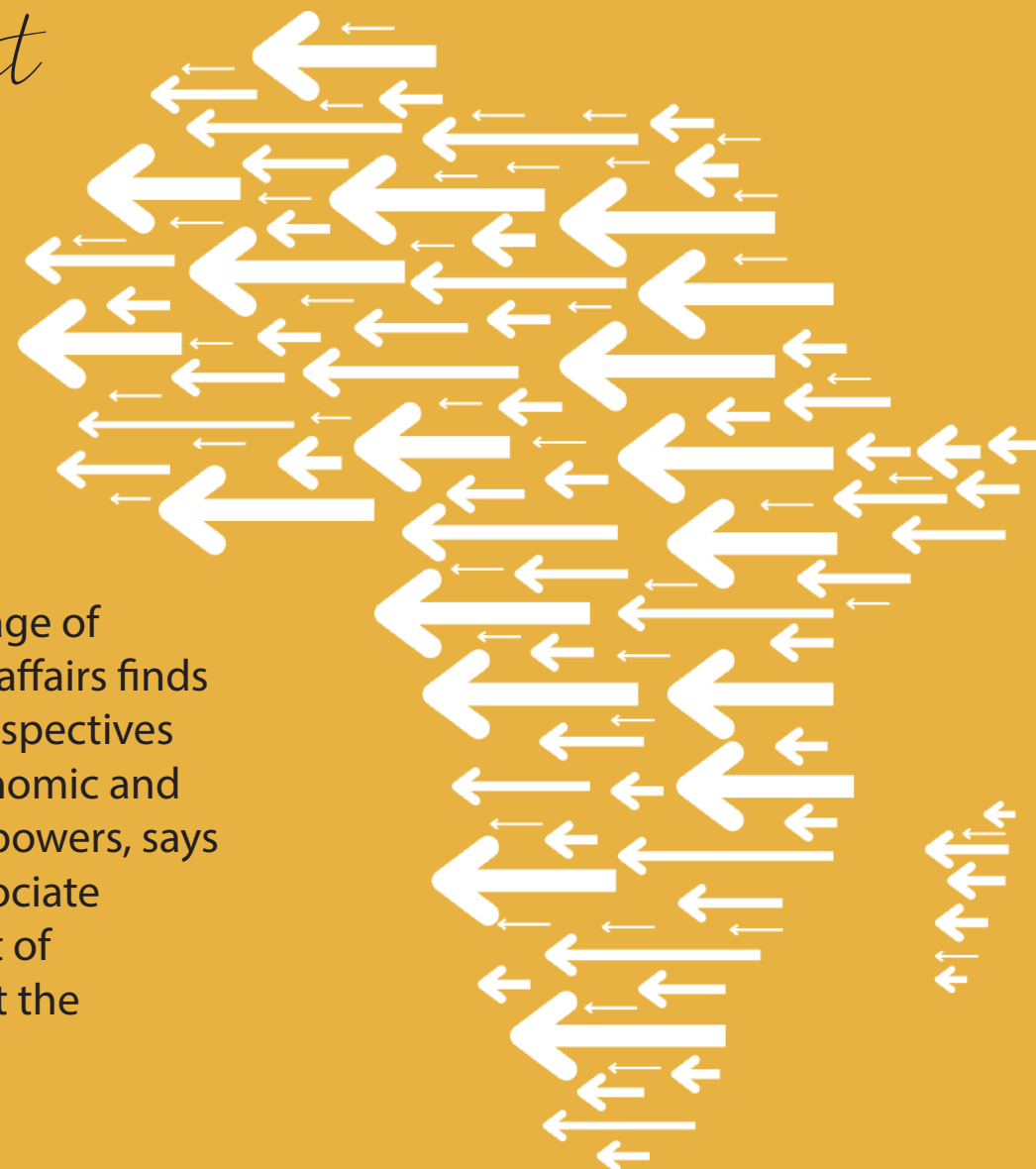
Louw’s presence helps to amplify the importance of diverse perspectives, while highlighting the evolving nature of the industry and contributing to more comprehensive and balanced representation of sports and athletes, says Calvert.



ILLUSTRATIONS: Anri van Helsdingen

LOOKING WESTWARD WHEN REPORTING NORTHWARD

By Daniel Roodt



South Africa's media reportage of Africa's current and cultural affairs finds itself tainted by Western perspectives driven by the country's economic and cultural ties to global superpowers, says Prof Mandla Radebe, an associate professor in the department of strategic communications at the University of Johannesburg.

Foreign bureaus owned by South African media companies once populated the African continent. At their peak, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and Media24 had offices in the likes of Senegal, Nigeria and Kenya.

This is according to Waldimar Pelsler, the former Lagos bureau chief for Media24 in 2007 and 2008, and the current channel director for the Multi-choice Group's premium channels.

However, a lack of funding has seen the extensive closure of African-based foreign offices, which has led to an increased reliance on Western wire services to provide coverage of African stories, says Pelsler.

When South African journalists do cover African stories on the ground, it is often on a fly in and fly out basis, explains Pelsler. This means that they are based in the country for a few days before returning, he says.

Journalists operating in this manner can lack the insight and nuance of journalists based in the area of reportage, says Karen Allen, a former British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) foreign correspondent for the BBC's TV, radio, and digital networks and CEO of Karen Allen International, a global media consultancy firm.

During her 25-year tenure at the BBC, Allen was posted in various parts of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa.

An example of this haphazard media coverage can be illustrated by the coverage of Kenya's post-election violence between 2007 and 2008, says Allen.

"Lots of journalists were flying in and out, calling and referring to it being like the [Rwandan genocide]," says Allen. "It was nothing like Rwanda, which has a very, very different ethnic dynamic. Using that kind of inflammatory language has repercussions for people on the ground."

2023

RELYING ON THE WIRES

The South African media industry has a tendency to source their stories from Western media organisations such as the BBC instead of consulting non-Western channels such as *Al Jazeera*, says Prof Mandla Radebe, an associate professor in the department of strategic communications at the University of Johannesburg.

The South African media landscape is flooded with Western news values, says Radebe.

He believes that this overreliance stems from South Africa's maintenance of its historic economic and cultural ties to Western power structures as a result of international trading relations.

This replicates and reproduces content steeped in Western perspectives, Radebe claims, using the United States' ties to South Africa's trade market to illustrate this.

The rapid decline in the number of South Africa's foreign correspondents permanently stationed in other African nations can be attributed to a decline in newsroom funding, says Crystal Orderson, a former specialist correspondent for the SABC in Senegal, where she was based for three years. Orderson is also a former news editor at *EyeWitness News*.

While stationed in Senegal, Orderson covered Senegalese stories and those affecting other African nations. She recalls reporting on the fall of Libya's former president Muammar Gaddafi.

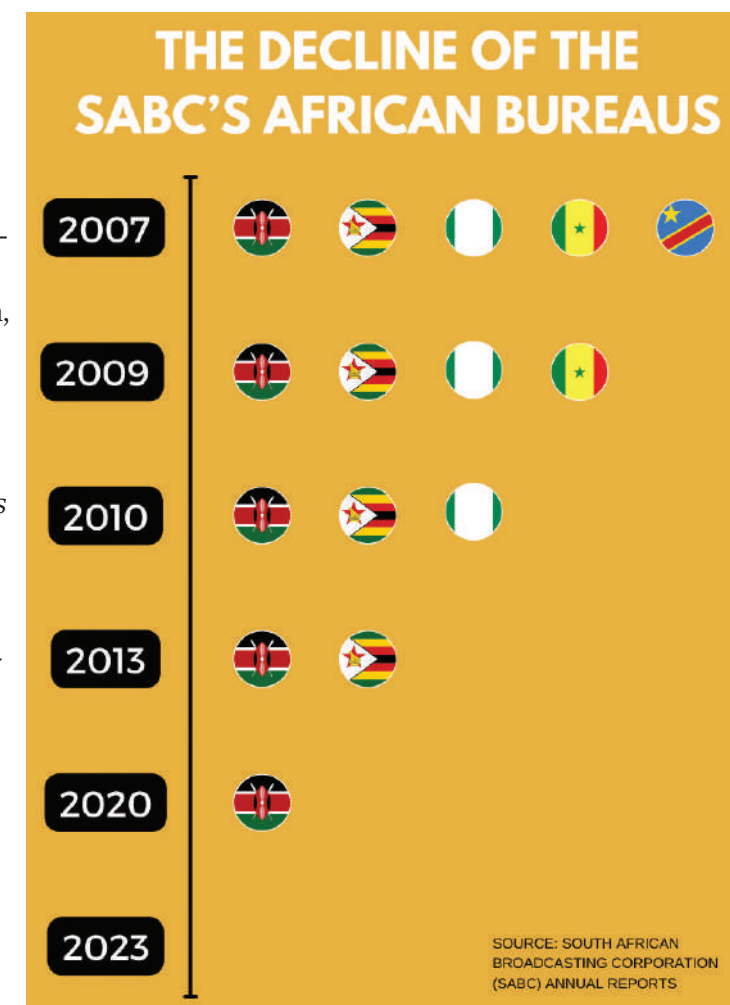
Another contributing factor to this reliance, was the collapse of the South African Press Association (SAPA), a South African news agency

created to provide a local wire service similar to that provided by Reuters.

This is according to Toby Shapshak, a former reporter at SAPA. Shapshak worked at the agency for around a year in the late 1990s, where he covered stories such as the Mandela United Football Club hearings at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings.

"SAPA's daily diary often set the news agenda for the whole country. It was an authoritative list of the major news stories every day," says Shapshak.

However, SAPA's focus was typically on South African stories, states Shapshak. But, it did, on occasion, cover stories on the African continent, such as the handover of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by former president Mobutu Sese Seko, he says.



GRAPHIC: Daniel Roodt

DIE KOERANTMAN VAN DIE HANTAM

WESTERN RELIANCE

Journalists working for wire services that are stationed in Africa, can provide an on the ground perspective, explains Thembisa Fakude, head of the English unit for the *Al Jazeera* Centre for Studies and former chairperson of the board for the Foreign Correspondents Association of South Africa.

This is because reporting about a country that you are permanently based in “gives you credibility and nuance”, states Orderson.

Despite the benefits of relying on Western wire services, such as the internal funding to deploy journalists who are able to provide a reliable on the ground perspective, this coverage often relies on a Western perspective of African stories, says Radebe.

“It’s basically looking at Africa through [Western] eyes,” says Lenin Ndebele, head of *News24*’s Africa Desk.

This reliance enables international publications to wield the narrative, says Fakude. They dictate the agenda regarding how news is covered, and “all of us follow suit”, he says.

“[This] reproduces dominant ideas, and it mutes the voices of the ordinary people,” says Radebe. “It obscures the truth - the bigger truth - while driving a single narrative, almost in a propaganda way.”

A NEW REALITY

South African journalists that cover the continent now often tend to do so from South Africa, says Fakude. This has rendered them “desktop journalists” who report on stories abroad from the newsroom, states Fakude.

Journalists from South African newsrooms are sometimes sent to other African nations to cover a particular story, says Peter Fabricius,

editor of *Daily Maverick*’s Africa Desk.

However, this is not done “often enough” due to a lack of resources, he says.

News24 typically sends journalists across the continent to cover major events, such as elections and large political gatherings, or stories that will appeal to a South African audience, says Ndebele. The length of the assignment typically depends on the event or gathering, he adds.

Once journalists arrive, it is important that they do not make broad assumptions about the country or situation, says Pelser. “You just do your best and steer clear from making sweeping statements that are easily proven wrong.”

When working on stories in unfamiliar areas, it can also be helpful to employ a ‘fixer’ who can provide journalists with local insight and contacts, says Orderson. Fixers will understand what is happening on the ground and who the journalists should speak to, she explains.

WHAT’S IN A SOURCE?

Newsrooms are deadline-driven, says Radebe. Journalists are expected to produce many stories on a daily basis where they rely on sources to obtain or validate information, he adds.

The nature of the mainstream media’s profit-driven existence perpetuates this fast-paced news cycle of never-ending content, says Radebe.

Tight deadlines, in addition to the decline in newsroom funding, often place pressure on journalists to assume numerous roles, says Fakude.

Juggling multiple positions ultimately leads to a loss of the ability to consult a variety of sources, where they risk the reproduction of a particular viewpoint that is not substantiated by additional information, says Allen.

The reproduction of Western values

is particularly evident when, due to a lack of time, journalists often turn to what they perceive to be “expert sources” based in mainstream societal institutions, such as universities, due to their ease of access, says Radebe.


This method of coverage tends to reinforce the Western perspective by perpetuating the viewpoint of those in power, states Radebe.

A SHIFT IN MINDSET

Journalists must be open to learning about the politics and culture of the environment that they are operating in, says Orderson.

On a more practical level, journalists need to set aside their biases when reporting, says Fakude. “The best thing to do is to always leave [the newsroom] with the topic in your head and let the field dictate the story to you.”

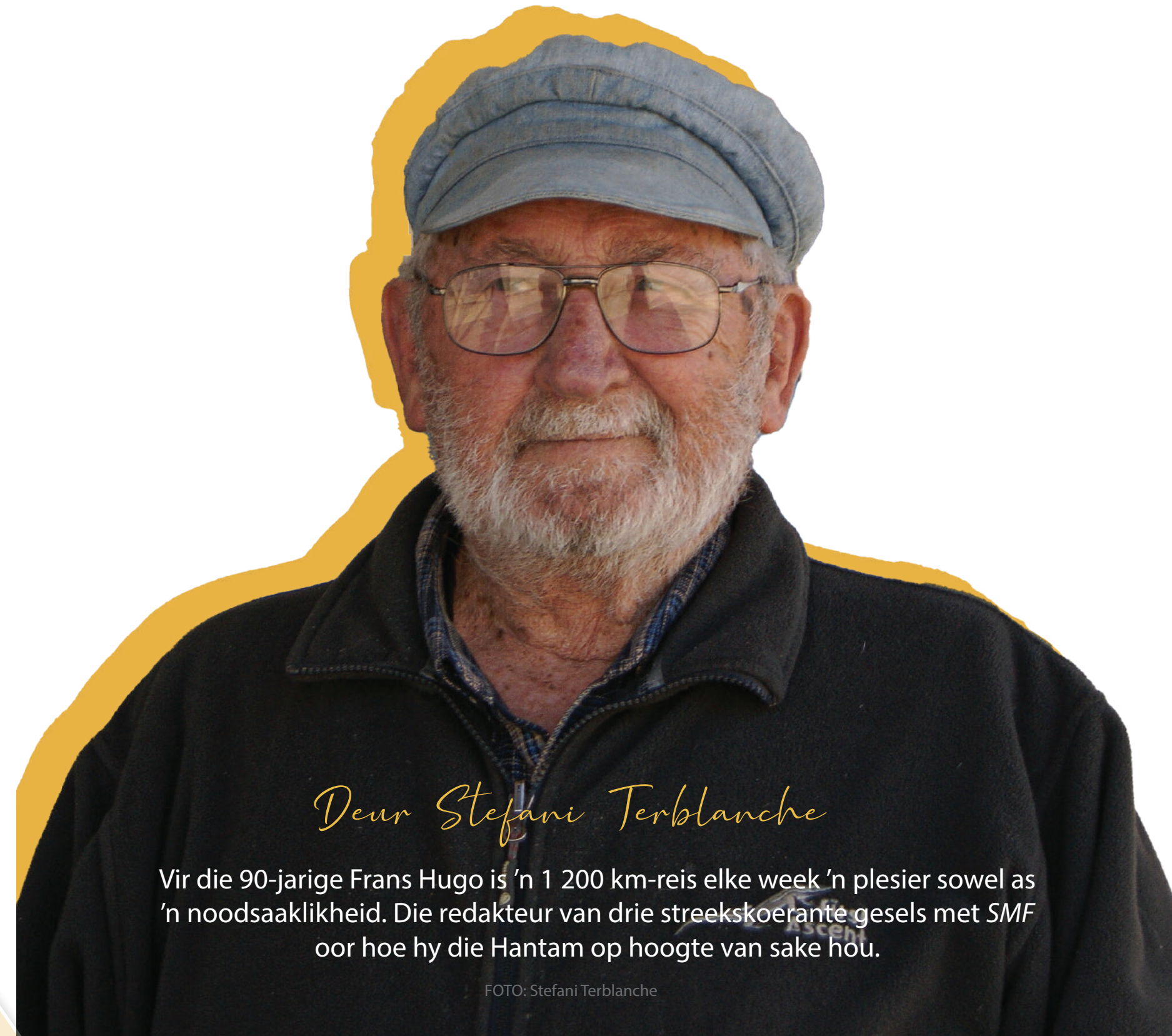
Journalists also need to consult a wider variety of sources when working on a story, states Allen, who emphasises that reporters should consider alternative sources that are less accessible than traditional Western newswires and academic experts. These could include think tanks and policy watchdogs, she says.

“I think increasingly we need to look at local experts to be able to give again important contexts that we might overlook,” says Allen. 

PROBLEMS FACED ABROAD

Foreign bureaus in Africa can typically become very expensive to operate as costs are paid in Euros or other foreign currencies, says Crystal Orderson, former specialist correspondent for the South African Broadcasting Corporation, based in Senegal.

Journalists also face issues such as threats of harassment or assault, she adds.



Deur Stefani Terblanche

Vir die 90-jarige Frans Hugo is ’n 1 200 km-reis elke week ’n plesier sowel as ’n noodsaaklikheid. Die redakteur van drie streekskoerante gesels met *SMF* oor hoe hy die Hantam op hoogte van sake hou.

FOTO: Stefani Terblanche

Dis 'n stil Saterdagoggend in Calvinia. Oorkant die dorp se ikoniese rooi posbus staan Charles Francois Hugo, oftewel Frans, glimlaggend met 'n kiere in sy hand.

Frans het verlede jaar sy goste verjaarsdag gevier. Maar ondanks sy ouderdom, klim hy steeds elke Donderdagoggend in sy koper Fiat Multipla met 'n trommel kos en begin sy 1 200 km-koerantroete.

Hy vertrek tussen 01:30 en 02:00 van Calvinia af. Hy stop by Williston, Carnarvon, Vosburg en Britstown om koerante af te lewer. Van daar af ry hy “noord na Prieska toe”, sê Frans.

Mense skop 'n groot bohaai op omdat hy elke week so ver ry, maar hulle besef nie hoeveel werk dit is om elke week 'n koerant bymekaar te sit nie, verduidelik hy.

“[Die koerant is] baie meer werk as om êrens heen te ry met die kar,” sê hy. Die rit is vir hom 'n vorm van ontspanning “elke dag, elke week”.

Frans is die redakteur en eienaar van die *Noordwester* in Calvinia, *Oewernuus* in Prieska asook *The Victoria West Messenger* in Victoria-Wes.

Die drie streke se koerante bevat almal dieselfde artikels, maar elkeen het 'n ander voorblad, spesifiek tot die streek, sê hy. Hulle druk weekliks 1 500 koerante.

Frans kry dit reg om die gemeenskappe in die streke almal saam te bring aangesien hy al die streke se nuus in een koerant sit en net elke streek se voorblad aanpas, vertel Koos du Pisanie, 'n joernalis by *Oewernuus* en Plaasmedia.

ALS PER TOEVAL

Hoe het Frans in die joernalistiek beland? Dit was danksy sy pa se jongste broer se buurman, verduidelik hy.

Frans het die koerante en drukkerie 40 jaar gelede gekoop. Hy bieg dat alles nie noodwendig altyd volgens plan verloop het nie. Nietemin is hy “nou nog nie spyt daarvoor nie”.

In 1948 het die staat verskeie ambagsposte beskikbaar gemaak, en alhoewel Frans nie oorspronklik vir iets in die media aansoek gedoen het nie, het dié buurman, wat toe die drukkeriebestuurder van *Die Burger* was, Frans vinnig oortuig.

Hy het vir my gesê dat ek liewers na die drukkersbesigheid toe moet gaan omdat daar meer geld is, sê Frans.

Na afloop van sy skoolloopbaan, het

Frans toe 'n vakleerlingskap by *Die Burger* aanvaar.

Sowat 18 jaar later is hy Windhoek toe om die pos van drukkeriebestuurder by *Die Suidwester* in Namibië te vervul. Nog 'n dekade later het hy egter teruggekeer na Suid-Afrika om saam met sy gesin in die Karoo te begin boer.

Dit was vir hom “heerlik” om saam met sy twee seuns te boer en tyd saam met hulle deur te bring.

“Want ek het altyd dag en nag gewerk. Soos nou ook maar – ek is 'n *workaholic*,” sê Frans.

Benewens die boerdery, het Frans in die 1980's óók by koöperasies in Vredenburg en Williston gewerk. In Williston het Karel Antonis, toe die eienaar van *Die Noordwester*, hom genader en gevra of hy die koerant wou koop.

Frans het eers nie belanggestel nie. Maar sy dogter – wat in daardie stadium nog in Windhoek gewoon het – was ook lief “vir woorde en skrywe”. Hy dink toe dat dit die moeite werd sou wees om die koerant te koop as sy dogter en haar man ook daar aansluit. “Toe koop ek die bleddie plek,” sê Frans.

Sy dogter en skoonseun het aanvanklik by hom aangesluit. “Maar hulle was net so 'n ruk hier, en toe sê hulle: Nee, o jirre... hulle sal vrek van die honger hierso. En toe gaan hulle terug Windhoek toe,” onthou Frans. “En toe sit ek met die besigheid. En ek het hom nou nog. Dit is 40 jaar later.”

“ EN TOE SIT EK MET DIE BESIGHEID. EN EK HET HOM NOU NOG. DIT IS 40 JAAR LATER.



Frans Hugo se weeklikse 1 200 km-reis begin in Calvinia en dan stop hy in Williston, Carnarvon, Vosburg, Britstown en Prieska voordat hy weer na Calvinia terugkeer. FOTO & KAART: Stefani Terblanche

DIE RADIO HET SY GRENSE

Aangesien die treine intussen opgehou werk het, en Frans die poskantore onbetroubaar gevind het, het hy “voor die 2000's” reeds noodgedwonge self die koerante begin aflewer.

“Daar is nie 'n ander manier nie,” vertel Frans.

As Frans in die vroeë oggendure wegtrek, luister hy na Radio Sonder Grense (RSG), maar wanneer die sein swak raak en die draadloos ophou speel, speel daar vir ure nie “een donnerse woord” nie.

Wanneer hy na 19:00 die aand by die huis “instrompel”, is sy vrou, Maxie Hugo, dankbaar dat als veilig verloop het. Maxie word hierdie jaar 80 en is ook steeds werksaam by die koerant. Sy doen enige iets – van vertaalwerk tot die skryf van onderskrifte. Maxie sien haar rol egter hoofsaaklik as dié van 'n persoonlike assistent.

“[Die reis is] werklik uitputtend,” vertel Maxie. “Ek weet nie hoe Frans dit handhaaf nie. Hy moet 'n geweldige bron van energie iewers hê.”

“Ek het nou die dag vir [iemand] gesê: ‘Jy weet daai storie van die feniks-voël. In die aand dan stort hy in duie en dan brand hy uit. Môreoggend dan staan hy weer op uit die asse.’ Nou dis hy.”

VAN OOS TOT WES

“Joernalistiek is nie 'n werk nie,” vertel Koos. “Dis 'n leefwyse. Dit raak so deel van jou DNA dat jy nie meer daarsonder kan nie.”

Dis juis Frans se passie wat die koerant aan die gang hou, vertel Donnowin Ruiters, 'n joernalis by die *Noordwester*.

Donnowin se reis by die *Noordwester* het in 2012 begin nadat hy vir Frans gesê het dat die *Noordwester* nie genoeg op Calvinia-Wes se nuus gefokus het nie en dat mense daarvoor ongelukkig was.

“Vir my was dit belangrik dat die héle Calvinia gecover word. Ook dat mense bewus moet [wees van] wat in die buurt gebeur, hetsy goedvoel-stories of misdaad,” sê Donnowin.

“[Frans] het my reguit gevra of ek belangstel om te help om stories of berigte te doen. En soos hulle sê: ‘Die res is geskiedenis,’” vertel hy.

Toe Frans in Windhoek gebly het, het iets soortgelyks met hóm gebeur. Die politiek van die 1960's en 1970's in die destydse Suidwes-Afrika, nou Namibië, het veroorsaak dat die Afrikaanse koerant nie oor alle rasse-groepe geskryf het nie. Hy het die direksie by *Die Suidwester* oortuig om 'n koerant, genaamd *Die Joernaal*, te skep sodat daar 'n publikasie met meer diversiteit kon wees.

“En ná ek [die direksie] toe daar ingeppraat het, toe sê hulle vir my: ‘Dan moet jy dan sommer nou die koerant uitgee,’” vertel hy. En hy het.

'N REUSAGTIGE VERSKIL

“Ek glo dat ons elkeen 'n verpligting het om iets in – en vir – ons gemeenskappe te doen,” sê Willem van der Colff, 'n sendeling wat in Oekraïne gebaseer is en weekliks vir die *Noordwester* 'n Christelike “Uit die Woord”-gedagte skryf.

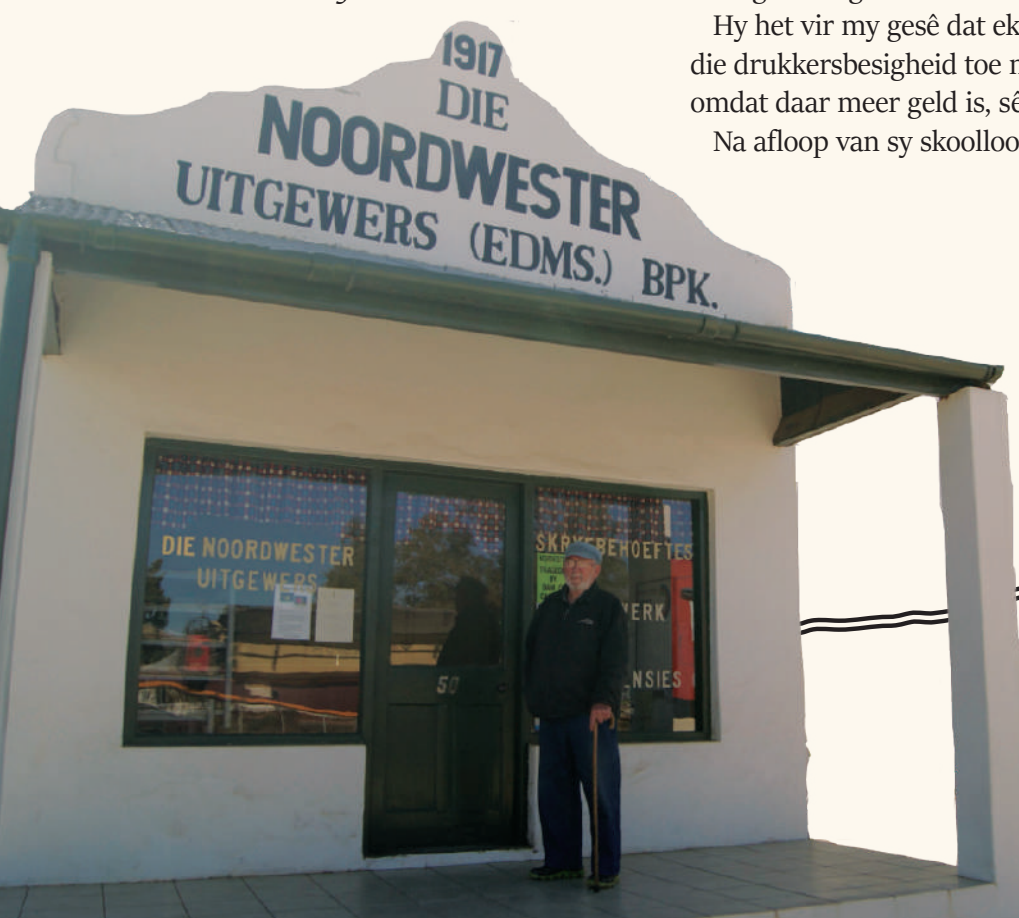
Willem glo dat die *Noordwester* dit regkry om “op 'n baie eenvoudige manier 'n reusagtige verskil [te] maak deur mense ingelig te hou”.

Dit is 'n “vreeslike belangrike taak” om mense in te lig en op te voed, vertel Koos.

“*Oewernuus* het 'n groot impak op die hele gemeenskap [en] die hele verspreidingsgebied,” sê Koos.

Hy verduidelik dat mense wat 'n streekskoerant koop die koerant van die eerste letter tot die laaste een lees – selfs die veilings, advertensies en doodsberrigte.

Frans het nogals 'n groot impak,



Gomez Bakwene's family originated from the Democratic Republic of the Congo but were forced to relocate to South Africa in 2003 after his father was caught illegally mining diamonds in Angola, he says. Bakwene was three-years-old at the time and "it was a life or death situation".

The South African media often fails to portray that "people are forced to move and be displaced. It's not like people want to come [to South Africa] and be racially abused", states Bakwene. "No one decides to put their kid in a boat."

While too young to remember much about his arrival in South Africa, Bakwene recalls facing judgement and discrimination throughout his life. "When I was in primary school I remember not knowing that I was from another country until one of my teachers said 'that black boy from Congo'."

"There are moments when I have felt welcome, but regardless of how many years I live in South Africa I don't think I will ever consider it my home country," says Bakwene. "I always feel like there's something missing."

However, "anywhere is a safer choice when you [are] running for your life", he says.

The media play a "huge role" in how people understand and perceive immigrants and asylum seekers, says Bakwene. An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking refuge or protection, he explains.

Asylum seekers form part of one such group that feel the effects of negative coverage in the media play out in their day-to-day lives, states Bakwene.

The media do not exist to sway societal climates but instead exist to reflect the issues plaguing them while facilitating debates around them, says Dr Franz Krüger, research associate at the department of journalism at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Ultimately the media play a critical role in ensuring that society is sufficiently educated on current affairs to make well-informed decisions, says Krüger.

It is the journalist's role to identify harmful narratives, and to challenge problematic attitudes that could inflame societal attitudes towards particular groups, says Krüger.

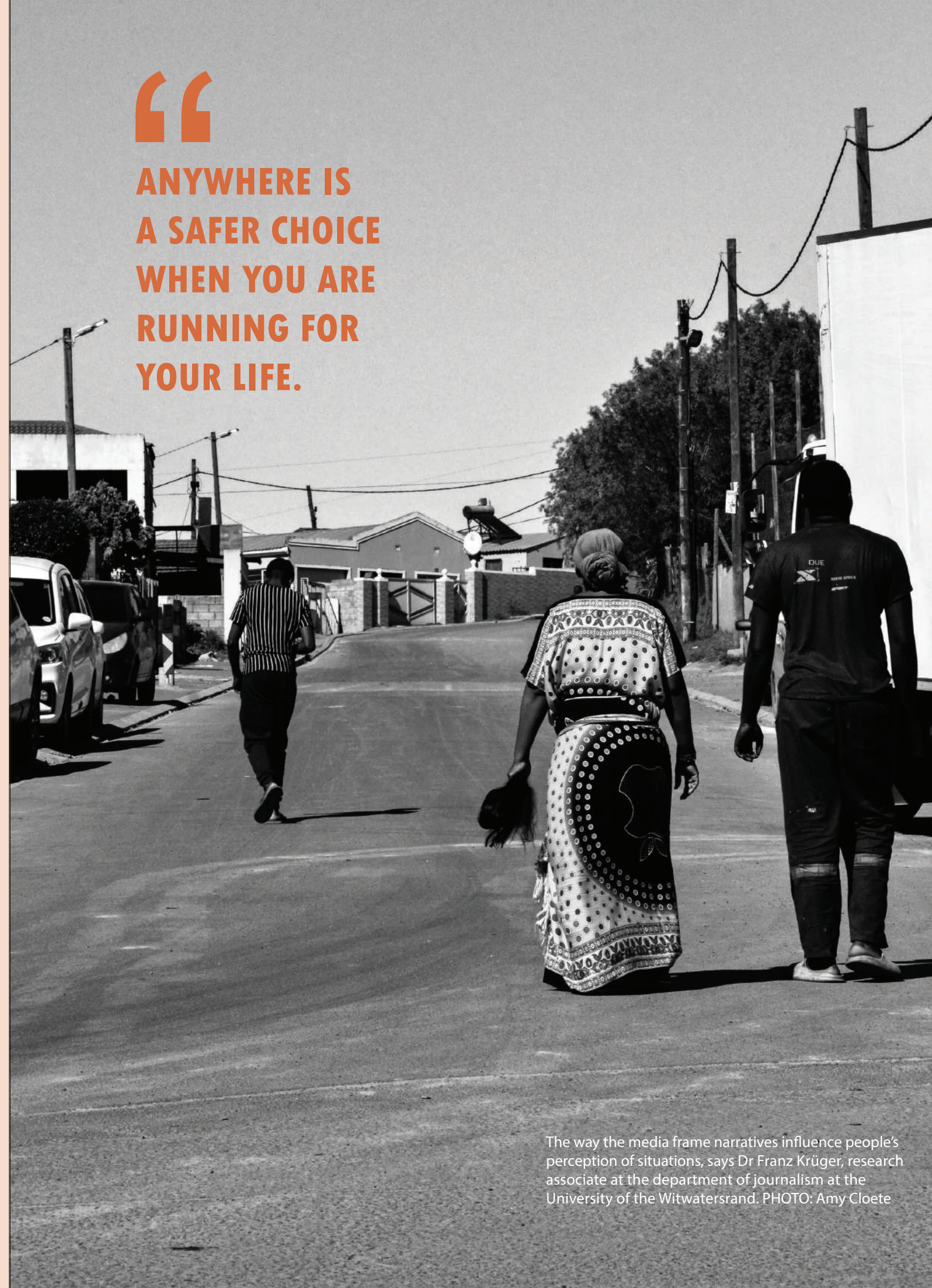
PUSHING AN AGENDA

"The media doesn't tell you *what* to think, but they do tell you what to think *about*," says William Bird, director of Media Monitoring Africa, a non-governmental organisation that acts as a "watchdog of the media".

The organisation does policy work, strategic litigation, and research and monitoring into how the media portrays a range of groups and topics, says Bird.

The media exist in part to control and uphold dominant narratives and decide how to frame a situation and determine

“
ANYWHERE IS
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The way the media frame narratives influence people's perception of situations, says Dr Franz Krüger, research associate at the department of journalism at the University of the Witwatersrand. PHOTO: Amy Cloete

what its key issues are, states Bird. Because of this, it pushes deliberate public perceptions that are influenced heavily by language, says Bird. Language works very strategically to portray a topic in a specific way, he adds. For Bakwene, the word "refugee" has negative and "disgusting" connotations. "No one wants the title of 'refugee', it's degrading," says Bakwene. The word "migrant" is a preferable alternative, he states. "There are nicer words to use but I don't think people are ready to use those words."

People will often use the word as an insult or react with pity, Bakwene claims. "We don't want to be treated like we need help all the time or [be rejected]."

LANGUAGE HAS POWER

"The words [the media] use are critically important," says Glenn Bownes, chief sub-editor at *News24*.

"We're all very much aware that the vocabulary and linguistic devices used can change people's perceptions," states Krash King, production editor at *Daily Maverick*. Language holds power and some believe that it can be weaponised as well, he says.

The language used in the media has the power to persuade people and alter the connotations of the topic being discussed, says King. The media have to be more sensitive about using language that promotes inclusivity, especially when referring to people, he states.

The media need to improve at not only using sensitive language but using factual language because it has the power to eliminate social cultural dynamics, says King.

PERPETUATING STEREOTYPES

The manipulation of language is not always overt, says Bird. Sometimes the negative stereotypes present subtly through the ways that stories are reported, he says.

An example of this is when a crime is reported on and the nationality of the criminal is mentioned, says Bownes. "It is not relevant at all what nationality an alleged perpetrator is. And [it is] certainly, hardly ever centrally important to whatever crimes they are accused of."

This kind of reporting reinforces stereotypes because it shapes perceptions of immigrant behaviour, says Bird. It could lead people to believe that immigrants relocate to South Africa to commit that specific crime, he explains.

This ultimately creates an opportunity for South Africans to justify the crime by blaming it on nationality, according to Bird.

Rather, reporters and editors should be vigilantly aware that their reporting could provoke instead of explain a situation, says Bownes.

"When reporting about such cases there is a chance of fueling the attacks if not handled with sensitivity.

In this case, journalists must use their judgement and ethics to report the incidents accurately and correctly,” says Everson Luhanga, a South African journalist who covered various xenophobic attacks in 2022.

THE POWER OF FRAMING

“Like all marginalised groups, refugees are too often homogenised, with their individual stories and struggles treated as statistics, or part of larger societal crises and conflicts,” says Bownes.

Rather, journalists should challenge the individuals who use specific words that evoke feelings of alienation when describing people from other countries, says King.

“Are they seen as people who are driven across borders by circumstances that killed their control? Or are they rapacious invaders who only want to undermine our culture and take away our jobs?” asks Krüger.

This misunderstanding should prompt the South African media to do a lot of “myth busting” regarding the reporting of people who come here from other countries, says King. “There definitely is a bias and a prejudice, and the discrimination is definitely there.”

Rather, the media need to reflect on why there are these angry and hateful narratives circulating with regards to asylum seekers and migrants, says King.

SHAPING PERCEPTIONS

Journalists can’t just ignore their role in shaping problematic narratives, states Krüger.

When something is portrayed over a period of time, people’s perceptions are bound to be influenced, says Krüger. This is why the media’s awareness of their reporting is so critical, he adds.

“It’s less a question of writing a story and people will immediately go out on the streets and murder someone. I mean that’s kind of naive and I don’t think that happens very often,” says Krüger.

While the media did not create the climate that South African citizens have towards refugees or immigrants, the way they choose to cover stories pertaining to this topic may

perpetuate xenophobia, states Krüger.

Furthermore, the media need to find a way to ensure that the issue of refugee reporting is not ignored, but rather, that the most damaging forms are counteracted through the manner of reporting, he says.

“The media’s role in fighting [or encouraging] xenophobia is critical. It can easily feed into racist anti-foreigner sentiments, if not reported sensitively,” says Bownes.

ON THE GROUND REPORTING

Reporting in a hostile environment, such as the one created during the xenophobic attacks in 2008, is a difficult task, says Felix Dlangamandla, photo editor at *Daily Maverick*, who documented the xenophobic attacks which occurred around Johannesburg in 2008.

“[You need to] give [the protestors] confirmation that you are a journalist and you will report freely and fairly,” he states. However, the journalist will never be sure how they will be received in these situations, he explains.

Despite the challenges that documenting these situations presents, “[it’s] very crucial that [the media] covers these xenophobic attacks. It’s still crucial that we inform the world”, says Dlangamandla.

THE NOTION OF OBJECTIVITY

The notion of objectivity does not exist, says King. Nobody can help but be a by-product of their backgrounds and what they have been exposed to, he says.

Though this is not necessarily a problem, the media should approach situations like politics, culture and race dynamics with consciousness, says King.

“You can’t not be biased. What you have to be clear and open about is your assumptions and the basis on which you’re approaching,” says Bird.

The majority of credible South African media organisations subscribe to the Press Council’s Code of Ethics. These publications are taking a stance and stating that there is a specific manner in which they will report because there are guidelines they will adhere to, according to Bird.

“There’s a very deliberate bias in [the Press Code] that says ‘the way we report will be accurate,’” says Bird. Journalists have an obligation to highlight when an individual or institution actively undermines the publication’s right to report freely, he states.

Union européenne République française

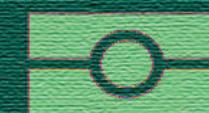


SOUTH AFRICA

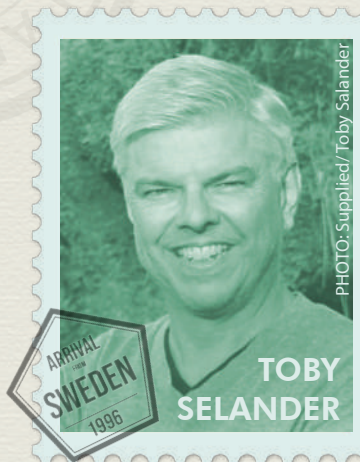
INSIGHTS FROM FOREIGN JOURNALISTS WORKING IN SOUTH AFRICA

SMF spoke to six foreign journalists about their experiences forging connections in a new and unfamiliar country while maintaining established ones back home.

PASSEPORT



By Nicolas Adamy



In 1996, Toby Selander, at the time a Swedish photographer and journalist for *Expressen*, a Swedish newspaper, arrived in South Africa.

He previously worked as a correspondent in New York, but wanted to go to Hong Kong. There he would be based as a foreign correspondent. Or so he thought.

While booking his ticket to Hong Kong, Selander saw a brochure about South Africa. It was at this moment that he told the booking agent to “cancel that reservation”, he recalls. “I want to go to South Africa instead,” he told the agent.

Selander initially intended to stay for a month, but soon decided to move to South Africa and take a sabbatical year, he states. “I really fell in love with South Africa, the people [...] and also a very interesting job,” he says.

When *Expressen* asked him to return to Sweden after the first year, Selander decided to resign, rather choosing to freelance from South Africa. At the time, South Africa’s democracy was in its first years, prompting him to stay to experience the shift in history.

He has since been based in South Africa for over 27 years, working as an investigative freelance journalist. As with the majority of foreign journalists in South Africa, Selander mainly works for international media like *Expressen*, and therefore rarely collaborates with local media.

“ I DON’T FEEL VERY LEGITIMATE WRITING ABOUT SOUTH AFRICA FOR SOUTH AFRICANS.

A NATURAL DECISION

For French-South African journalist Julie Bourdin, working as a journalist in South Africa is a matter of logic. “As a French-South African journalist, I thought I had a well-suited [work] profile for working for French and other international media here,” she says.

Although Bourdin holds a French and South African nationality, she only started working in South Africa as a freelancer in December 2022 when the opportunity presented itself.

After completing a degree in journalism at Sciences Po Paris in 2019, she interned at the Agence France-Presse’s (AFP) desk in Johannesburg. Thereafter she worked for human rights advocating non-governmental organisations in Europe before starting her freelance career there, she says.

When she heard that AFP didn’t have a text stringer - a journalist employed part-time by a media organisation to report on a specific area - in Cape Town, she thought this was a “good time and opportunity”. AFP agreed to work with her, she says. Thereafter she made her way to South Africa.



Bourdin now works mainly for media organisations in her home country such as *GEO* magazine or English newspapers like *The Guardian*. “South African media pay much less than international media,” she explains.

However, having grown up elsewhere, she also does not feel

“very legitimate writing about South Africa for South Africans”.

“There are amazing South African journalists who do it very well, and much better than I could,” she says. “They know the context so much better.”

Bourdin says that South Africans are much more welcoming of journalists than French people. “In France, an anti-journalist sentiment is growing,” she says. “Many French people have become wary of journalists, and in some cases it has become quite difficult to access sources and convince them to speak to you.”

BUILDING NEW NETWORKS

In order to work as a journalist in a foreign country, you “spend a lot of time looking for story ideas that could interest an international audience”, says Bourdin. “[I choose] which media might be interested in the article and send a proposal to the media. If the article is commissioned, I report on it and write it.”

Foreign journalists have to be a “sponge”, they have to work



A LOCAL HOME FOR FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS

Administrative issues like obtaining visas remain a challenge for foreign journalists coming to South Africa, according to Steven Brimelow, a freelance TV news producer and secretary of the Foreign Correspondents’ Association (FCA).

The FCA is based in South Africa and was formed in 1976 by different international news agencies, explains Brimelow. It was initially formed “to protect the interests of foreign journalists covering apartheid South Africa”, says Brimelow.

Today, the association still protects the interests of foreign journalists by “speaking out against issues that affect freedom of the media”. It has 285 members, mostly journalists who are in South Africa on three to five year rotations while others are based permanently here, says Brimelow.



on building connections within governments, the police and in all of the cultural spheres, says Selander. Certain European publications like *Le Monde* - a French newspaper - already have correspondents in South Africa working for them, says Bourdin.

She therefore tries to find multiple and diverse publications to write for. “I work more on feature stories rather than news, which tend to be a bit better paid,” she claims.

International media have some specific interests, according to Gianluigi Guercia, an Italian documentary photographer and videographer, who has been based in South Africa since 2005. “[They] are normally interested in stories with a human side to it [...] probably because [those] are the ones their readers feel more close to,” explains Guercia.

WITNESSES TO CHANGE

Bourdin finds that stories in South Africa often have more layers than in France. “[There are] racial, socio-economic, historical, political layers,” she says. “These need to be understood and considered when reporting.”

Mathilde Hulot, also a French journalist, who has worked in South Africa occasionally since 1997, agrees that the legacy of apartheid is still deeply rooted in South African society.

Yet, she’s also seen some significant changes. “When I came

[to South Africa] in 1997, I could really feel apartheid still being active. I [could sense] a feeling of fear and tension [between] the people,” she recalls.

Hulot writes mostly for French media specialising in wine journalism like *La Vigne* or *En Magnum*, and found that local winemakers at the time often questioned her decision to stay in Pniel, a coloured area in the Stellenbosch district.

Today, 26 years after her first visit, she thinks that South Africa is a very different country. She also finds that the South African wine industry - which initially was a mostly “white industry” is much more diverse now.



WRITING ON VIOLENCE

Apart from working to understand the local context, foreign journalists also have to be mindful that their own prejudices have the potential to influence their writing, says Selander.

He noticed, for example, that many foreign journalists often came to South Africa “with a very negative view of the continent”. “They want to find the negative stories,” according to Selander.

It is problematic when journalists project statistics relating to South Africa’s crimes and murders onto tourists or foreigners without providing context, he says.

However, for Guercia, coming from a different culture and having a different outlook isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Being a foreign journalist in South Africa allows you to “look at things from a slightly different point of view”, he says.

Safety is, however, still an issue for foreign journalists in South Africa, says Guercia, especially when covering violent protests. “[But] safety is an issue for all the journalists in South Africa,” he adds.

Jack Dutton, a British journalist, worked in South Africa between 2021 and 2023, and wrote for publications such as *Al Jazeera* and *Newsweek*.

For him, accessing particular communities within South Africa remains a challenge as the country remains extremely divided economically and racially. Finding the right contacts to connect to specific communities, or to report on certain stories, could therefore be hard, he says.



KAAPPS OPPIE LIPPE

It is natural for people to want to see themselves in the media that they consume, says Grant Jefthas, an Afrikaans poet and writer. Afrikaans is widely spoken by the Cape coloured community, yet the media lack the capacity to fully represent them, says Nathan Trantraal, a South African poet and columnist for *Rapport*. SMF gathered the perspectives of various journalists and writers within the Afrikaans media space who are actively filling this gap.

By Cheyenne Haas

The media as storytellers “feel the need to tell stories that will sit well with the viewer and listener”, says Keagan Bailey, author and former screenwriter for *Suidooster*, an Afrikaans soap opera that is produced by kykNET.

While there is a whole contingent of people who speak Afrikaans and identify as Afrikaans, “there is nothing [in the media] that really reflects their lives”, says Nathan Trantraal, a South African poet and columnist for *Rapport*, an Afrikaans language weekly newspaper owned by Media24.

Afrikaans speaks to a very specific community of which the majority of South Africans do not form part, says Bailey.

AFRIKAANS IN THE MEDIA

“[Media] organisations often produce content based on the language that is spoken by a majority to reach larger audiences,” explains Bailey.

However, most South African TV shows that make use of Afrikaans struggle to find authentic speakers of the language as there is a lack of Afrikaans speaking actors within the entertainment industry, he says.

But when kykNET launched *Suidooster* in 2015, “[it] saw the buying power of the Afrikaans and coloured community”, says Grant Jefthas, poet and writer whose work has been featured in publications like *You*, *Huisgenoot* and *Die Son*, amongst others, in an interview with SMF’s Mia van der Merwe.

Jefthas currently works for Stellenbosch University as an alumni liaison and data coordinator.

Suidooster shifted the Afrikaans TV landscape by creating a space for Afrikaans-speakers to see themselves represented on screen, says Jefthas. This was because it was one of the first South African Afrikaans shows to use Afrikaans in its scriptwriting, according to Bailey.

“For years the only Afrikaans programmes that there were on [screen] were *7de Laan*, and people of colour were forced to speak a standard form of Afrikaans,” says Jefthas.

Suidooster’s storytelling team believes that by including Afrikaans in their script writing, they forge their viewers’ emotional connections to the content that they consume, he says. Some of the show’s actors make use of the word “djy”, for example, instead of the standard Afrikaans word “jy”, says Jefthas.

However, Bailey acknowledges that Afrikaans is a difficult language to use in mainstream television as it might not be understood by all.

WRITTEN REPRESENTATION

One of the “only newspaper[s] that speaks to the vernacular and the lived experience of those who speak Afrikaans is *Die Son* newspaper and sometimes *Kuier* magazine,” says Jefthas.

Print media publications, such as *Die Son* – an Afrikaans tabloid newspaper – make a point to use Afrikaans, because creating connections to a publication’s audiences through language is really important, says Joline van der Merwe, regional editor for *Die Son*.

Readers want to see their stories represented when this connection has already been established, says Van der Merwe.

By incorporating the everyday use of Afrikaans into its columns, namely “Kyk Hoorie”, “Moerig die uwe” and “Lekke-Djy”, *Die Son* targets multi-racial Afrikaans speaking audiences, says Van der Merwe.

“The idea is to write our stories the same way people speak,” says Van der Merwe. “People have that sense of *die is my mense, hulle verstaan my*.” [These are my people, they understand me.]

Afrikaans poet and playwright, Ashwin Arendse, echoes a similar viewpoint, where the media should “normalise people speaking like I speak, to normalise people writing like I write”.

“It’s important for people to be able to turn on their radio, turn on their television, to open a newspaper, to open the book and you see some form of representation,” Arendse says.

Arendse is known for his poetry collection titled *Swatland*, written in Afrikaans and published by Kwela in 2021, according to NB Publishers’ website.

Using words in their colloquial form helps

AFRIKAANS

a community express their identity, says Dr Karien van den Berg, a senior lecturer in English linguistics at North-West University.

This is especially true in South Africa’s linguistically diverse society, says Marizanne Kok, senior specialist feature writer for *Rapport*. “We all need to hear each other’s voices.”

Trantraal writes an Afrikaans column called “Sypaad-jies” [Pavements] for *Rapport*. During one of the first conversations that Trantraal had with *Rapport’s* editor, he was given the complete creative freedom to write in Afrikaans, he says.

This was really impactful because the language is not typically used in mainstream media houses, Trantraal explains.

The use of Afrikaans positively impacts *Rapport’s* audience-share as it allows the publication to reach more diverse Afrikaans-speaking communities, says Pieter Malan, editor of *Rapport Weekliks*, a supplement to *Rapport*.

“I remember once I spoke to a white magistrate and he told me that he’s never understood the people that appeared before him in court – coloured people especially – until he started reading my column,” says Trantraal. “It gave him a better understanding of the people.”

THE EVOLUTION OF AFRIKAANS

Linguists and language experts have debated the classification of Afrikaans as an unofficial language, or a dialect within the Afrikaans language, says Earl Basson, an Afrikaans linguistics and literature lecturer at the University of Cape Town.

As a “phonetic language”, Afrikaans is mainly associated with the coloured community, although it is spoken by a diverse group of people which includes black and white communities, says Nathan Trantraal, a South African poet and columnist for *Rapport*.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

“The politics of Afrikaans has a lot to do with race,” says Basson. Afrikaners had a need to create a standard language but in written form, says Basson. “[Afrikaners] knew that Afrikaans was already written but they didn’t want to use it because they viewed the speakers of that language as

uncivilised, primitive or backwards.”

There is a general consensus that Afrikaans was established in the Cape in the late 1600s following linguistic contributions from the coloured slaves at the time, says Earl Basson, an Afrikaans linguistics and literature lecturer at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

While Afrikaans was officially standardised in 1917, with this version still being used in the public domain and South African schooling system, the Cape coloured community has raised concerns that Afrikaans had been used in writing prior to 1917, says Basson.

This was before standard Afrikaans was rendered the ‘official’ Afrikaans, says Basson, adding that many Cape coloureds have argued that Afrikaans was the first form of Afrikaans.

Thus, there is a call for the acknowledgment of people of colour’s contribution to the language, says Basson.


TAKING BACK CONTROL

Afrikaans is often viewed as a form of “skollie taal” by South African society in that there is “this narrative being pushed that [the] Kaaps and coloured character [...] goes hand in hand with gangsterism”, claims Arendse.

He suggests that the Afrikaans-speaking community rather “take control” of their identities so that there is representation within the media and Afrikaans literature. This could entail “[what Afrikaans communities] are putting on stage, putting on the screen or putting out in writing”, says Arendse.

“Representation is one thing but ownership is a completely different thing,” says Arendse. “I feel like we should stop seeing Kaaps as a variation of the standardised language and start treating it as an equal.”

Media representation of Afrikaans-speaking communities “is important so that the people on the Cape Flats, the people on the farms, the people in the normal working class, feel included when it comes to their experiences”, says Arendse. He suggests that mainstream media organisations could do this by “telling the real stories from the [Afrikaans] community”.

“[Afrikaans speakers] need to claim their state within language. They need to claim their state within the media,” says Jeffthas. 



DIGITAL DISCONNECT

ERROR!

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THE SABC: STILL CONNECTING THE NATION?

By Thameenah Daniels

The cancellation of a show like *7de Laan*, which is viewed by millions of South Africans, has prompted the SABC to re-evaluate its financial allocations toward content aimed at connecting South African audiences. *SMF* spoke to former SABC employees to gauge how they would approach re-positioning the public broadcaster.

For 23 years, the South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) *7de Laan*, South Africa's most-watched Afrikaans television programme, has connected millions of viewers through its diverse representation of authentically South African characters. This is according to Kayleen Basset,

public relations manager for *7de Laan*. The show, which first aired on SABC 2 in April 2000, according to the SABC's website, is "multi-faceted" in that it represents a multitude of races, languages and ages that reflect the nation's diverse demographic makeup, she says. "[*7de Laan*] is instrumental to a united

South Africa," says Basset, adding that this is because the diversity of its content represents the majorities and minorities of the country. "Every South African at some point has encountered *7de Laan*."

The show is set to air its final season this year, shutting down production following financial struggles within the SABC, says Basset. But, "fans of the show have started a petition [on change.org] for its continuation", she says.

This petition has garnered 40 000 signatures to date, says Basset.

"Part of [the SABC's] value proposition is to bring content that unifies, that's diverse [...] so it's counterintuitive for a show like *7de Laan* to be leaving the screen," she adds.

AN ALL-ENCOMPASSING NATIONAL BROADCASTER

Once recognised for its role in propagating the division of South Africa's population during apartheid, the SABC now serves as the nation's public service broadcaster (PSB), says Bongumusa Makhathini, ex-chairperson of the SABC's board of directors.

The SABC is tasked with providing essential communicative services to South Africa's masses while unifying diverse audiences, says Makhathini.

"[The SABC provides content for people] from all walks of life, speaking all the official languages and more," says Natano Brache, head of programming and innovation for all of SABC's 18 radio stations.

The SABC unifies audiences by producing content in the form of news and drama that caters towards all of South Africa's indigenous languages, says Pro-

fessor Anton Harber, Caxton professor at the University of Witwaterstrand's (Wits) Centre for Journalism.

For example, if a community is majority Sotho, the SABC has a radio station that is dedicated towards SeSotho-speaking audiences, says Brache. In this case, the station is called LesediFM.

The programme content for each radio will then specifically speak about relevant issues and accomplishments that affect those particular audiences, adds Brache.

A LACK OF DRIVE

But while the SABC boasts an impressive audience reach, it lacks the initiative to address a decline in its audience engagement, says Gary Rathbone, founder of Sportscape Media. Rathbone served as the SABC's general sports manager between 2020 and 2022. Sportscape Media is an advisory service for athletes.

The SABC's TV channels SABC 1, SABC 2 and SABC 3 collectively attract approximately 24.6 million South African viewers per month, according to the broadcaster's annual report for 2022.

This makes it the broadcasting service with the largest weekly audience reach within South Africa, according to

research conducted by Statista between January and February of 2023.

There is potential to expand this reach, says Rathbone, who believes that it requires a shift in mindset around sports content programming.

This poses a major opportunity for revenue growth if harnessed correctly, he says. "Maybe sport is the way that we can actually save the SABC."

The SABC's prime time viewership percentage dipped by 4.8% across all of its television channels in 2022, according to the SABC's annual report for 2022.

The SABC has put the sports section of its programming on the back burner, says Rathbone. This not only culminates in a loss of potential advertising revenue, but has also bereaved millions of viewers from watching sports.

"The feeling [amongst my former colleagues] is that sports loses money and doesn't make money [...] whereas, I believe that [this] isn't true," says Rathbone.

During his tenure at the SABC, Rathbone observed that the broadcaster lacked the appointment of a sales team dedicated to selling airtime and marketing sports programmes.



ILLUSTRATIONS: Thameenah Daniels

THE EVOLUTION OF THE SABC

The SABC has undergone significant policy shifts since its inception as a state broadcaster in 1936, according to Harber.

During apartheid, the corporation's policies of separation and exclusion heavily influenced its broadcasting, says Harber. "[The SABC] was the expression of white supremacy and it was tightly controlled to serve that purpose," says Harber. "It did the opposite of trying to create a national identity."

It was during South Africa's democratic transitory period that the SABC shifted its focus from a state to an independent PSB, Harber explains. This was one of South African democracy's greatest triumphs, he adds.

Following its mandate shift post-1994, the broadcasting service sought to build a common set of democratic values, whilst promoting diversity and inclusion within its content, according to Harber.

However, this unifying role has proved precarious under financial and political pressures that have often jeopardised the SABC's independence, says Harber. "There will always be political pressure. The key thing is how [the] SABC deals with this political pressure," says Makhathini.

"There are instances where the SABC has allowed themselves to be influenced [politically and financially]," claims Dr Piet Croucamp, a political analyst and senior lecturer in political studies and international relations at the North-West University.

Croucamp uses the case of the so-called SABC 8 as an example that prompted the re-evaluation of the SABC's independence.

The 'SABC 8' consisted of a group of eight journalists who collectively stood up against the SABC's policies set out by Hlaudi Motsoeneng – the former chief operating officer of the SABC,

says Foeta Krige, veteran journalist, and one of the 'SABC 8'. Krige received the Nat Nakasa award for courage and bravery as a result of his action against the SABC.

One of these policies halted the broadcasting of protest action ahead of the local government elections that were to be held in August of 2016, says Krige. The SABC was concerned that protest coverage would paint the ANC in a negative light, he explains.

The events surrounding the 'SABC 8' were not necessarily about the restriction of coverage but rather, "the hijacking of the SABC's editorial code and content by Hlaudi Motsoeneng, [who] I believe was very parallel with Jacob Zuma", claims Krige.

Further allegations into the SABC's editorial independence can be illustrated by an incident where a former employee claimed that the broadcaster had censored her reporting, according to Makhathini in an affidavit filed on 16 March 2022.

The employee, who was later identified as Phathiswa Magopeni, was the former editor-in-chief and group executive for news and current affairs at the SABC, Makhathini says in his affidavit.

Magopeni accused the SABC board of interfering with her editorial independence after she claimed that she was persuaded to air an interview with President Cyril Ramaphosa ahead of the local government elections in 2021.

FINANCING MODEL

The SABC is funded predominantly from advertising revenue and TV licensing sales, but is additionally subsidised by the government, says Jannie Rossouw, former economics lecturer at Wits, and now-retired economist.

The corporation has recently struggled to break even without the addition of government bailouts, says Makhathini. The corporation only receives around 3% of its funding

from the government, he says. TV licence sales equated to R815.1 million and advertising sales yielded a total of just over R3 billion for the 2021/2022 financial year, according to the SABC's annual report for 2022.


"Now we have a shareholder in the form of a government that does not capitalise this business and they continue demanding and expecting revenue to be created, but they're not putting [in] anything as a form of investment," says Makhathini.

A possible solution could come in the form of the monetisation of its commercial clientele, says Makhathini.

To combat its financial insecurity, "[the corporation needs] to recognise solid, stable, sustainable funding for the SABC as a national imperative, given its public service, educational and informational roles", says Harber.

The SABC is expected to set the standard in areas such as news and public service journalism, says Harber.

However, it simply does not yield enough revenue to address these concerns, says Rathbone.

"Where the SABC needed financial support, it got political interference, and this meant it served narrow interests rather than the broad public interest," claims Harber. 

BURSTING THE BUBBLE

By Jodi-Mari Adams

Digital platforms have the ability to bring people together. However, the formation of echo chambers within these spaces can also isolate them, according to Hannelie Otto, communications and journalism lecturer at North-West University.

Social media is one of the fastest and easiest ways to connect with people, says Jean Citto, a digital marketing manager and social media specialist.

At the forefront of this is the ease and accessibility through which social media allows people to communicate, he says.

Despite this ease, social media plays a crucial role in the formation of echo chambers, says Citto.

Echo chambers are online communities where people come together to share information and ideas with one another, says Hannelie Otto (she/they), a communications and journalism lecturer at North-West University.

"Usually, when you find yourself in an echo chamber, it's really a situation of 'birds of a feather flock together'," explains Otto.

Once a person is immersed within these spaces, their viewpoints are generally shared and reaffirmed by

those located within these communities, they say.

The danger in this lies within the perpetuation of very specific narratives that could become convoluted with negative information.

This is according to Jean le Roux, a research associate at the digital forensic research lab at Atlantic Council, a non-partisan organisation that works closely with the leaders of the United States of America to solve global issues, according to its website.

SHAPING PERCEPTIONS

Online activity, spurred by algorithmic influence, plays a pivotal role in the formation of these echo chambers, says Professor Carol Sutcliffe, a corporate communications lecturer at Helderberg College of Higher Education.

Algorithms find and use certain keywords, terms and subjects that individuals have searched or responded to online, to curate the content that they

see, explains Sutcliffe.

Because algorithms track a user's online activity to gauge individual beliefs and attitudes, they have the ability to shape societal perceptions and amplify existing narratives, says Citto.

This happens when an algorithm pulls an online user towards an overabundance of similar content, explains Robert Sam-Kputu, a media manager at 99c, an advertising and marketing agency based in Cape Town. This in turn shapes a user's digital feed, where users with similar interests will view the same or similar content, says Sam-Kputu. But this is not necessarily a bad thing, he says.

Acting as safe spaces, echo chambers provide refuge for people to share their views on specific topics, says Le Roux.

This is certainly true for information within the political sphere of digital media, says Rebecca Davis, author

“ SAMENESS DOESN'T ADVANCE ANYTHING.”

such as the need for financial assistance with regards to university or legal fees, on the page in hopes that they will receive help from other group members. Those who are willing to help are able to message Engelbrecht to find the relevant information to make donations, offers, and contributions to those in need, she says.

“I’m one of those people who is lucky enough and blessed enough to have a situation where, if there’s a problem, or no matter who has a problem [on the page], I can put it out and somebody will come up with the solution,” says Engelbrecht.

Additionally, as a media manager, Sam-Kputu is expected to work with the technologies available on various media platforms to connect marketers and companies with their target audiences, he explains.

In this context, an echo chamber acts as a target audience, says Sam-Kputu. “You’re essentially trying to get people together who share similar traits that your message will resonate with.”

SOCIAL MEDIA-SPURRED VIOLENCE

South Africa experienced violent civil unrest between 8 and 17 July 2021. This unrest mainly affected KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, according to a report that was produced by the South African government in 2021 in response to the unrest, says Davis.

“The unrest was characterised by social media mobilisation leading to looting, destruction of property and the disruption of economic activity,” according to the report. It led to damages of approximately R50 billion, left thousands injured and an estimated 354 dead, according to the report.

Social media played a major role in instigating the violent action; it was a

handful of social media accounts that were found to be responsible for a disproportionate number of tweets in support of the unrest, says Davis. The government’s report confirms this. This bolstered the sense of a co-ordinated campaign when in reality, the online movement itself can be accredited to very few people, she says.

“In my own reporting [of the violence], I stressed the fact that not one person [...] mentioned Jacob Zuma to me as a catalytic factor for the unrest,” says Davis. They all described themselves as simply caught up in the violence and chaos in a not particularly political way, she adds.

Davis felt that this was necessary to highlight in order to counter the narrative that Zuma is an “all-powerful political being, capable of invoking massively strong feelings among ordinary South Africans”.

Following the unrest, it was however evident that Zuma’s imprisonment was used to instigate the destabilisation of the nation, she says.

New Frame, an inoperative and left-wing media outlet, that gained popularity for its reporting on labour and social justice, had a policy of referring to the unrest as the “Food Riots”, says Davis.

This made a point of stressing that unequal socio-economic circumstances drove people to participate in looting shops and so forth, she adds.

While Zuma’s arrest was one of the triggers for the unrest, it was not the only one, says Davis. Instigators of the unrest exploited the legitimate desperation and anger of many impoverished South Africans, she adds.

“It is no secret that many people in South Africa are poor and desperate. In such circumstances, basically anything can be the match to the tinder box to create conditions under which people will riot and loot

shops,” she says.

The danger of echo chambers is that it stops individuals from being exposed to new thoughts and to different ideas, says William Bird, director for Media Monitoring Africa told *SMF*’s Amy Cloete.

Media Monitoring Africa is a non-governmental organisation, that acts as a “watchdog” for journalism, according to its website.

Highlighting the issue of online echo chambers silencing women and obstructing their right to freedom of expression, Eileen Carter, provincial manager for the South African Human Rights Commission in the Eastern Cape, points out that in digital spaces, the possibility of self-censorship is high, says Carter.

Online echo chambers are primarily composed of male voices, claims Carter. This allows men to amplify their viewpoints while excluding others, says Carter. This presents a problem, because while online discourse is common, in reality, the voices are “not authentic” and “not a true reflection of what the views of the bigger community, inclusive of all vulnerable groups, are reflecting”, says Carter.

In this way, echo chambers have the potential to polarise people based on their online consumption habits, says Sam-Kputu.

Le Roux uses the example of online debates spurred by the use of Covid-19 vaccinations.

Interactions between groups who

conformed as “vaxxer” or “anti-vaxxer” were often antagonistic, he says.

Additionally, individuals belonging to these echo chambers had the power to influence their choices and assumptions about getting vaccinated, says Dewald Snyman, a doctor of philosophy in pharmaceuticals and drug design.

Individuals within these echo chamber communities are not being challenged in their way of thinking, says Otto. Within echo chambers there is very little room for critical and nuanced thinking and proper democratic debate, says Otto. The way that these individuals think needs to be challenged, they say.

“My aunt sent me messages [about Covid-19 theories] she received every day or two. The rubbish out there was mind-boggling,” Snyman adds. This experience was not unique to South Africa, as “all countries had these groups sowing doubt”, he says.

Misinformation was experienced in numerous other countries as well, according to Snyman. “I received messages on WhatsApp from the US, Poland and India [and] had long discussions with a colleague of mine who didn’t trust mainstream media anymore,” says Snyman.

Harmful messaging and misinformation are further and more widely shared on social media platforms, due to the nature of the digital age, echo chambers reinforce this, he adds.

FINGER ON THE PULSE

It is important to ensure that there are safeguards in place to mitigate the negative effects of the spread of harmful information online, says Carter.


Media literacy is fundamental to address this, says Bird. If you are sceptical of the content you are receiving and have media literacy skills, you should know to be suspicious of that before automatically sending or sharing the information or content, says Bird.

As a collective, media outlets should attempt to change outdated and destructive narratives, according to Sutcliffe.

The media should also try to publish “fresh, new, positive narratives of unity, constructive solutions and healthy governance practices”, says Sutcliffe.

It is important for media outlets to respond to misinformation being spread via the curation of their content, production and distribution, says Otto. Only factual and accurate information should be distributed to the public, Otto adds.

Alternatively, the media can ensure that false and inaccurate information is openly labelled as misinformation, they say.

A heightened online moderation is needed to address this problem, says Carter. Responsive mechanisms should be implemented to tailor to specific needs and movements, she says. 

FIGHTING DIGITAL ILLITERACY

In a society where urban spaces are afflicted by spatially segregated infrastructural gaps, civil society organisations, in collaboration with the media, are tackling South Africa's inequitable access to virtual spaces and digital technologies, says Siobhan Thatcher, head of education for Project Isizwe.

By Talia Kincaid

While Covid-19 accelerated the shift to an increasingly digitally interactive social sphere, it also exacerbated the physical and digital inequities faced by low-income communities, says Rowan Spazzoli, adjunct lecturer of business strategy at the department of commerce at the University of Cape Town.

These low-income communities are still reeling from structural inequities, particularly in the education sector, says Siobhan Thatcher, head of education for Project Isizwe, a non-profit organisation (NPO) that aims to transform South Africa's disadvantaged communities by providing them with access to free or affordable uncapped internet.

UNIVERSAL ACCESS

"Internet is actually getting cheaper," says Thatcher. This claim is supported by a comparative data pricing report

published by Broadband in 2022.

Despite the decrease in costs, low-income communities and schools lack the digital infrastructures and training necessary to benefit from this price decrease, says Spazzoli.

Increasing connectivity is essential because individuals operating businesses with access to artificial intelligence hold an advantage over businesses that lack this access, he states.

"It's actually an accelerating problem." These gaps in connectivity are growing larger each day, says Spazzoli.

Though governmental and corporate spheres are making strides towards improving equitable internet access across South Africa, "there is not enough capacity to focus on bridging the digital divide", says Thatcher, referring to a lack of digital and physical infrastructure, as well as quality educational training.

This highlights a gap for NPOs,

corporates and individuals to step up alongside the government, she says.

Project Isizwe launched its flagship initiative Tshwane Free WiFi in 2013, says Thatcher. It formed part of the department of communications and digital technologies' (DCDT) first phase of its countrywide broadband programme, South Africa Connect, she states. The initiative was an operation to construct approximately 1 050 free public internet access points in and around Tshwane's city centre, explains Thatcher.

"We looked at how the digital divide materialised in South Africa, and the ways in which underserved communities, initially within Pretoria, experienced that disconnect," she says. To date, Statistics South Africa has recorded that 14.3% of the City of Tshwane's households have access to the internet, leaving approximately 508 500 people without connectivity.

"We mainly provide free uncapped wifi [to] learners and educators," Thatcher says. "The [actual] cost of internet is covered by our capital investments from our funders." These funders include listed companies such as Sibanye Stillwater, Glencore, Investec, and Astron Energy, says Thatcher.

Project Isizwe has connected over 80 schools to free wifi so far equating to 2 000 educators and 62 000 learners, according to Thatcher. Though it is incredibly difficult to gauge just how many schools in South Africa "have internet that meets the school's needs for quality internet-enabled teaching and learning", states Thatcher.

The DCDT launched the second phase of South Africa Connect in 2022, according to Tlangelani Manganyi, the national spokesperson for the minister of the DCDT.

While Manganyi told *SMF* that the DCDT's programme aims to provide all South Africans with access to the internet by 2024, some of their rollout plans are scheduled to be implemented over the next 36 months, according to Manganyi.

The rollout includes the deployment of over 33 000 community wifi spots that are expected to benefit over 5.8 million people, she says.

It is anticipated that this initiative will cost telecommunications mobile operators approximately R25 billion. This figure forms part of an additional financial allocation as stipulated within

the national budget for the 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 financial years, according to Manganyi.

"The deployment of these hotspots [across Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Western Cape] will be done through small and medium enterprises (SMMEs) as part of expanding economic participation in this sector," says Manganyi.

While these plans are theoretically in place, the speed at which they are carried out will delay the digital development of SMMEs, states Spazzoli, who suggests that the DCDT take a systematic approach to its implementation.

BUILDING DIGITAL LITERACY

The digital divide was originally set up infrastructurally, according to Spazzoli.

"One of the greatest difficulties is getting fibre lines in townships [because there is] no existing infrastructure," says Spazzoli. This is largely due to historically segregational practices that have economically isolated these township communities, he says.

This economic isolation drives the digital divide, as high costs of accessing fibre networks further exacerbate inequitable access to necessary digital resources, he explains.

The solution to address this challenge is to collaborate with civil society organisations, social enterprises, and media organisations, according to Spazzoli.

However, this divide is not true for

all South African townships, as NPOs such as Project Isizwe, in collaboration with the DCDT, have connected numerous township communities across South Africa, including Lamontville, Mpopophomeni, Tzaneen, Dunoon, Ram-buda, Burgersfort and Dumphries, says Thatcher.

Social enterprises are fundamental because they can operate from within the communities who struggle with receiving access to digital infrastructure and grassroots level technological training, he explains.

“

81% OF SOUTH AFRICA'S GRADE FOUR LEARNERS CANNOT READ FOR MEANING.

As the media becomes increasingly digitised, it is important that it uses its platforms to "share educational content, conduct workshops, and organise [digital literacy] training sessions", says Petrus Malherbe, former tech reporter for *Netwerk24*.

By doing so, the media can provide

a space to “bridge the gap in digital knowledge [to] empower marginalised groups to access and effectively use digital infrastructures”, says Malherbe. “If [these groups] don’t have the knowledge on how to use the technology, having access to it becomes meaningless.”

The promotion of statistics and data pertaining to the digital divide is not enough to reduce it, states Malherbe. “The media also need to tell powerful stories that bring the issue to life [by sharing] real life experiences and challenges faced by individuals and communities who don’t have access to digital infrastructure.”

Digital literacy is additionally a fundamental element to foster an interest in digital news content, according to Malherbe.

However, traditional forms of media consumption are still thriving in communities that are subject to a digital divide, such as Soweto, says Mzwandile Khathi, the editor of *Soweto Urban*, a division of Caxton Local Media.

Soweto Urban distributes approximately 110 000 copies directly to houses within Soweto, says Khathi. He believes that the digital divide does

not necessarily impact the publication’s audiences due to its distribution methods. *Soweto Urban* is, however, able to reach broader audiences by utilising social media and emailing a version of its weekly newsletter to its audiences, explains Khathi.

EDUCATIONAL GAPS

Nationally, approximately 4% of educational facilities can provide users with internet access, according to Statistics South Africa’s annual General Household Survey report for 2022.

Quality digital education and digital training plays a fundamental role in addressing educational gaps such as the literacy gap, says Thatcher.

Countries with higher levels of digital literacy at a schooling level channel increased levels of economic growth as a direct result of improved skills-related employment, according to The United Nations Children’s Fund, in a report compiled in 2021 by Ericsson, a Swedish networking and communications firm.

This does not bode well for South Africa’s reading proficiency rating, which is ranked lowest worldwide, says Thatcher. Approximately 81% of South Africa’s grade four learners

cannot read for meaning, claims Thatcher. These claims are supported by a report released by the Western Cape Education Department in 2021.

“By working closely with schools and shifting their relationship and association [to] technology, we’re trying to provide the [educational] foundation for generations to come,” says Thatcher.

The youth are often unaware of the opportunities that exist for self-development and education via online platforms, says Chanel Oldfield, chief operating officer for CapaCiTi, a Cape Town-based NPO working to increase internet inclusivity across the Western Cape’s educational landscape.

CapaCiTi was formally established in 1999 as an NPO that facilitates the development of partnerships within the technological skills development sector, according to Oldfield.

The organisation offers “generally marginalised users access to a learning pathway and development [programme] that would have [otherwise] been out of reach”, says Oldfield. “If we don’t make good inroads into decreasing the digital divide, then we won’t make an impact in decreasing inequality and equity in the country.”

IMPACT IN PRACTICE

KwaZamokuhle Special School, a rural school situated in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands that provides education to children with physical and intellectual disabilities, benefits from Project Isizwe.

“Our learners with disabilities also want to be independent,” says Qaphela Dlamini, departmental head for intermediate phase teaching at KwaZamokuhle.

“[Through Project Isizwe’s] wifi, we are able to download visual keyboards that use eye tracking,” says Dlamini. Learners with articulation struggles can utilise speech recognition, he says, adding that these tools boost the morale of learners because they are not depending on anyone.



GRAPHIC: Talla Kincaid

THE DISCONNECTED YOUTH

As social media transitions every society into a digitised state, it is vital to understand the psychological impact that technology holds over the youth of today, according to experts who spoke to SMF.

By Kara van der Merwe

In an era marked by the rapid advancement of technology, today's youth find themselves navigating a digital landscape that both empowers and challenges them in unprecedented ways.

This is according to Kate Farina, co-founder of Be In Touch, an online educational platform based in Johannesburg that caters to parents and children navigating the online world.

As a mother of two, Farina has first-handedly experienced the challenges of educating, connecting and protecting families in a digital world, she says.

"Everybody talks about the positives of 'connection' but, I think the default is then often towards it being a wider connection," says Farina. However, this connection is not always rooted in tangible truths, she adds.

COMBATTING DISINFORMATION

Technological usage has increased among the youth, says Meagan de Jager, a social worker at the Papilio Counselling Centre, based in Paarl. This increase can be illustrated by the fact that 8.6% of South Africa's social media users are children between the ages of 13 and 17, according to a study conducted by Statista in 2023.

The result of this is the perceived technological dependency that users often feel they need in order to navigate their lives, says De Jager.

"Social interaction and connections are getting lost due to excessive screen time in families," says De Jager, adding that this often results in the perceived sense of technological dependency felt by adolescents as they navigate their daily lives.

While digital interaction has become a necessity for children and adolescents, it comes with both positive opportunities and potential dangers,



SOUTH AFRICANS HAVE A DAILY SCREEN TIME AVERAGE OF NINE HOURS AND 38 MINUTES.

says Toby Fricker, chief of communication and partnerships for the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) South Africa.

"It is critical to provide digital and media literacy skills for children and adolescents to empower and equip them with the skills to identify mis-and-disinformation and to take a more analytical look at the information they consume," says Fricker.

EDUCATION AT THE CORE

Readily available digital devices and social media platforms have transformed information access and revolutionised communication and learning, says De Jager.

While technology offers people unique access to information and educational resources, it also presents challenges to attention spans, critical thinking and content engagement, De Jager adds.

Educators must find innovative ways to leverage technology while also fostering skills that transcend the digital world, such as analytical thinking, problem-solving and creativity, says De Jager.

The impact of technology on cogni-

tive development and learning cannot be understated, says Farina. This is because rapid scrolling prompted by technological interfaces, constant notifications and the fragmentation of content consumption, often hinder the development of sustained focus and reflective thinking, she adds.

"The growth in educational technologies glimmers hope that access to quality education will level the playing field in a country plagued by loadshedding, limited internet connectivity and a gloomy future forecast in the formal education spaces," says Anchen Wobbe-du Plessis, a personal development coach and facilitator at Greyton House Village school, a high school that utilises blended learning in Greyton.

Blended learning refers to the combined use of digital technology and in-person teaching, which Wobbe-du Plessis believes fosters a sense of belonging within the youth of today. This is because it allows for a more personalised and learner-focused approach to education, she says.

"We need to provide financially viable, and ethically sustainable opportunities that create access and best practice for quality education to all our children," explains Wobbe-du Plessis.

This is especially crucial given that South Africa's digital divide limits children in lower socio-economic class' access to online learning opportunities, notes Fricker. "[Worldwide] 1.3 billion children, aged 3-to-17-years-old, do not have internet connection in their homes," he says. His claims are supported by a report released by UNICEF and International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) in 2020.

UNICEF and ITU launched Giga, a global initiative that is mapping schools across international borders to gather information on society's connection gaps, says Fricker.



Through Giga they use the data that it obtains to collaborate with governments, industrial sectors, civil sectors and private sectors to craft compelling investment cases for blended public-private funding, says Fricker. They do this in order to build the adequate technological infrastructure needed to combat the digital learning divide, he adds.

A VICIOUS CYCLE

The link between digital connectivity and mental health among the youth is a significant concern, according to De Jager.

So-called connectivity through digital spaces has become the new norm, Farina claims. But the lines between online and offline experiences are becoming increasingly blurred, resulting in a generation that may struggle with face-to-face communication, emotional regulation and authentic social connections, explains Farina.

The implications of this digital dependency raise profound questions about its impact on children's psychological well-being, social development and cognitive growth, she adds.

The excessive use of technology interferes with the foundational aspects of mental health, including exercise, nutrition, sleep, connection and purpose, explains Farina. "Sleep disruption, often caused by late-night screen time and notifications, has particularly detrimental effects on mental health."

Children are spending a lot of time on screens which leads to them missing out on valuable developmental milestones that they should be meeting in order to become fully functional adults, says Farina.

The comparative nature of social media, fuels a pervasive sense of inadequacy and social pressure amongst the youth, says De Jager. This comparative element of social media,

combined with the fact that "teenagers spend, [on] average, more than two to three hours per day on technology", ultimately leads to an unhealthy mental state, explains De Jager.

South Africans have a daily screen time average of nine hours and 38 minutes, which means that 58.2% of their day is spent in front of a screen. This is according to research conducted by ElectronicHub in April 2023.

"Excessive screen time, especially on social media platforms, leads to social disconnection, heightened anxiety and feelings of loneliness," says De Jager.

De Jager adds that the majority of the teenagers she comes across in her line of work are exposed to harmful content, such as violence, sexual images and hate speech on social media platforms, which can be classified as distressing.

This exposure contributes to feelings of pressure, inadequacy and negatively influences their mental health, De Jager adds.

This is why "excessive screen time can lead to physical, as well as psychological challenges, such as anxiety, depression, lack of sleep and increased risk of self-harming behaviour", says De Jager.

WHAT ABOUT THE NEWS?

Digital dependency has shifted the way in which the youth interact with the world around them, says Fricker. "It's challenging to predict exactly what news will look like in the future, but unquestionably, a digital presence is becoming a necessity [for news publications]."

UNICEF South Africa, in partnership with Media Monitoring Africa, in a report titled 'How Do Children Engage with News on Social Media', revealed that children access news through their social media engagement, while consuming online entertainment and connecting with friends, Fricker explains.

THE ART OF CONNECTION



The UNICEF study highlights that while children primarily use social media for entertainment and social connective purposes, they frequently encounter hard news while catching up on celebrity updates or scrolling through social media platforms, Fricker adds.

Study participants noted that additional audio-visual content, concise text, and the addition of younger voices presenting news stories, could make news content more appealing.

This study contributes to a growing body of research examining the broader impact of social media on children's lives, similar to UNICEF's 'Disrupting Harm' study, which was released in 2022, says Fricker.

'Disrupting Harm' illustrates that children's access to factual, credible and engaging information is important to combat the excessive amounts of misinformation and disinformation that are particularly apparent across social media platforms, Fricker adds.

FACT FROM FICTION

"With Artificial Intelligence (AI) moving into the frame, there's going to be an increasing move towards [a media landscape] where quantity rules and quality goes out the window."

This is according to Sven Hugo, a freelance journalist who has written for publications such as *Johannesburg Stock Exchange Magazine*, and the now defunct *RiskAfrica Magazine*, among others.

The need for in-depth reporting and long-form journalism is still prevalent in today's age, says Hugo.

This is because the increase in platforms for consumption, highlights the need for in-depth journalistic contact in combination with the way children consume media, says Hugo.

Wired, *The New Yorker magazine* and *Semafor* are examples of the news world's adaptability to the digital norm

because they are "packaging" news in interactive ways such as videos and podcasts, says Hugo. "This is the future of [news] reporting", not only for the youth but for every media user to engage with, he adds.

The impact of comedy news shows should not be underrated, says Hugo. These shows will continue blending entertainment with insightful commentary while still engaging in journalism, Hugo adds. "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, is a good example of this."

Traditional media should not be discounted as an important source of news, says Fricker. "In South Africa, UNICEF works closely with community radio stations who provide a vital source of information at a hyper-local level."

Following the July 2021 unrest, UNICEF provided direct support to community radio stations such as IntokozoFM in Durban and AlexFM in Johannesburg, says Fricker.

NAVIGATING ONLINE SPACES

Educating the youth about the potential consequences of excessive screen time and social media engagement can help them develop self-regulation skills, says De Jager. Coupling this education

with the encouragement to reflect on their emotional responses to online content can contribute to better mental well-being, says De Jager.

The need for fostering authentic connections and purpose beyond the digital realm is the way forward, says Farina, who notes that encouraging participation in offline activities can provide kids with a sense of purpose, belonging and a better self-esteem.

Mental health and personal safety are the main concerns of parents when it comes to their children being over-exposed to digital spheres, says Katherine Hugo, a mother of two young girls.

"I worry that the essence of being human will be lost in the future digital world that my children are likely to live in, and interact with more and more," says Hugo.

While the need for stronger regulations around content control is needed, it is still the parents' or caregivers' responsibility to monitor what children consume online, says Hugo.

Striking a balance between digital connectivity and offline experiences is essential for fostering a space for well-rounded individuals to thrive in both the digital world and real world, says Farina. 🎨



"Teenagers spend, [on] average, more than two to three hours per day on technology," which ultimately leads to an unhealthy mental state, says Meagan de Jager, a social worker at the

Papilio Counselling Centre, based in Paarl.

GRAPHIC: Mia van der Merwe

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KUNSSJOERNALISTIEK WAT MENSE 'WAKKER' HOU

Kuns bied 'n openbare podium vir mense om in gesprek te tree oor kunswerke, en om dié wêreld vir lesers te ontsluit, volgens Johan Myburg, 'n skrywer, digter en joernalis wat vanaf 2010 tot 2014 *Beeld* se kunsredakteur was. *SMF* gesels met verskeie kunstenaars en kunsjoernaliste oor die rol van kunsjoernalistiek in die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing.

Deur Keziah Bailey

Rodney Goliath, beter bekend as Rotas die Rapper, het in 2021 aan kykNET se talentkompetisie *Maak my Famous* deelgeneem. Baie van sy musiek handel oor hedendaagse sosio-ekonomiese kwessies in Suid-Afrika; dinge waarmee hy homself kan vereenselwig.

Goliath onthou dat sy naam in 2021 in *Die Son* se middelblad langs "groot name" verskyn het. Dié blootstelling het hom "baie hoop" gegee, vertel hy. Hy meen dat die blootstelling wat hy intussen gekry het, ook ander jongmense wat hulself met hom kan vereenselwig, inspireer. "As ek dit kan doen, kan hulle ook," sê hy.

Mense vind aanklank by kuns wanneer hulle deur die kuns raakgesien voel, sê Leandra Engelbrecht, die kunsredakteur by *News24*.

"Ek het grootgeword in 'n tyd toe daar nie veel bruin vroue met krulhare op die televisie was nie. Deur die jare het dit verander, en ek weet dat dit 'n groot hupstoot vir my selfvertroue sou wees as ek verteenwoordig gevoel het toe ek grootgeword het. Mense wil 'gesien' voel wanneer hulle televisie kyk," sê sy.

DIE 'WERKLIKE BOODSKAP' WORD TEN TOON GESTEL

"Deur middel van kuns ervaar jy die lewe," sê AJ Opperman, 'n kunsjoernalis by *Netwerk24* wat sedert 2015 voltyds in dié veld is. Die kunste bied boeiende gesprekke oor onderwerpe wat die samelewing herken, vertel hy.

Kunsjoernalistiek het die vermoë om belangrike gesprekke oor kuns uit te lig en om die werklike boodskap van kunstenaars se werke ten toon te stel, sê Joel Ontong, 'n kunsjoernalis vir *News24* sedert 2023. Dit kan die kollig laat val op die verskillende soorte kunste in Suid-Afrika. Dit is nie net berigte wat geskryf word vir vermaaklikheidsredes nie, meen hy.

Victor Nwangwu, 'n grafiese ontwerper en visuele kunstenaar wat gewoonlik van artistieke style soos surrealisme en konseptuele kuns in sy kunswerke gebruik maak, meen dat kunsjoernalistiek 'n belangrike rol speel om die aandag te vestig op temas wat openbare gesprekke kan stimuleer. Dit kan lei tot verhoogde bewustheid en moontlike oplossings vir probleme. Hy verduidelik dat kuns gereeld probleme in die

samelewing weerspieël.

Nwangwu vertel dat hy onlangs met ander kunstenaars gewerk het om verskillende perspektiewe oor geslagsgebaseerde geweld voor te stel. Die kunswerke het op verskeie sosiale media-platforms, soos Instagram en X, gesirkuleer en het sodoende interaksie gestimuleer.

"Die impak van die vinnige toename in geslagsgebaseerde geweld wat die nasie geteister het, en vandag steeds doen, is een noemenswaardige voorbeeld [van hoe] kunsjoernalistiek gesprekke aanvuur," sê Nwangwu.

Opperman het op 14 Augustus 'n resensie oor Elzabé Zietsman se "Femme is fatale" geskryf. Dié kabaret handel óók oor geslagsgebaseerde geweld. "[Zietsman] sê – en sy verwys ook na kenners – die enigste manier om iets aan die saak te doen, is om daaroor te praat. 'Femme is fatale' is beslis 'n voorbeeld van kuns wat 'n aktuele saak aanroer," sê hy.

KUNSSJOERNALISTE BRING BALANS IN 'DEMOGRAFIESE VERTEENWOORDIGING'

Kunsjoernaliste het die mag om balans te bring in die demografiese verteenwoordiging van verskeie stemme en temas, verduidelik Frazer Barry, 'n musikant en akteur wat al vir meer as twintig jaar in die vermaaklikheidsbedryf is.

"Daar is 'n groot skat[kis] van prosesse waardeur kunstenaars werk om uiteindelik by die kuns uit te kom.

Kunsjoernalistiek het die vermoë om hierdie prosesse te dokumenteer en te kan

Visuele kunswerk geïnspireer deur die werk van kunstenaar Ley Mboramwe. Die visuele voorstelling word met Mboramwe se goedkeuring gebruik. FOTO: Keziah Bailey

weergee. Dit is hierdie agtergrond en prosesse wat broodnodig is vir kunstenaars sowel as die publiek,” sê hy.

Een sosio-ekonomiese kwessie wat Suid-Afrikaners in die gesig staar, is bendegeweld. Tribal Echo, die musikgroep waarvan Barry deel is, se liedjie *Grafte Oppie Vlakte* handel oor dié sosio-ekonomiese kwessie. ’n Berig wat op die voorblad van *Die Burger* verskyn het, het die musiek se boodskap geïnspireer, vertel hy. Die berig het gehandel oor ’n leerder wat in die kruisvuur van ’n benedegeveg beland het op pad skool toe.

“[Die] lied en lirieke word tans gebruik om jongmense in gevangnisse te help rehabiliteer. Die musiek en lirieke het reeds [’n] groot impak gemaak in [tronke] soos Pollsmoor en Brandvlei,” meen hy.

KUNS SKEP TOEGANG TOT DIE HELE NASIE

Kunstoernalistiek kan help om lig op verskillende kulture te werp en gevolglik respek vir verskillende kulture te bevorder. Dit kan gedoen word deur die bekendstelling van ’n verskeidenheid artistieke uitdrukkings, volgens Nwangwu.

Engelbrecht het op 1 April 2023 ’n berig gedoen oor Gcobisa Yako, ’n filmmaker wie se storie deel is van ’n reeks genaamd *African Folktales, Reimagined* wat op Netflix te siene is.

Yako se kortfilm is gebaseer op die mistieke rivierwese Mamlambo en is uit Suid-Afrikaanse- en Zoeloe-mitologie afkomstig. Yako se oupa het destyd aan haar die storie van Mamlambo vertel, volgens die artikel op *News24*.

Mamlambo was een van die min stories wat haar oupa aan haar vertel het waar ’n vrou die sentrale karakter was.

Sy het egter nie gehou van die manier hoe die vrou in die storie uitgebeeld word nie en wou deur die kortfilm verander hoe vrou voorgestel word, volgens die artikel. Die storie handel oor die patriargale stelsel in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks.

Kuns verhef ook die stemme van ander gemarginaliseerde groepe. Ontong het op 15 Augustus 2023 ’n berig geskryf oor die sosiale media-persoonlikheid en kunstenaar Yaya Mavundla

nadat sy haar eerste kunssuitstalling op 9 Augustus in Johannesburg gehad het.

Mavundla fokus in haar kuns op die onderdrukking van swart transvroue soos haarself – ’n kwessie wat belangrik is om in die kollig te bring en om ’n stem aan te gee, volgens Ontong.

“As jy dink aan, soos, interseksionele feminisme, bedoel ek swart transvroue [...] hulle ervaar soveel onderdrukking... soos rassisme, vrouehaat en transfobie. Dit is regtig belangrik om die kollig daarop [te plaas], want as jy in staat is om mense so te bevry, bevry jy alle soorte ander identiteite,” vertel hy.

In 2014, toe Suid-Afrika 20 jaar van demokrasie gevier het, het die *Sunday Times* ’n spesiale uitgawe uitgegee waar verskeie skrywers en joernaliste gevra is om te skryf hoe hulle Suid-Afrika in 2034 sien. ’n Tipe futuristiese benadering is geneem.

Dit is volgens Carlos Amato, wat op daardie stadium die kunredakteur van die *Sunday Times* was. Dié uitgawe was ’n bylae tot die koerant.

“Dit het mense aan die praat gehad,” vertel hy. Volgens Amato het dit verskeie debatte veroorsaak waarby selfs politici betrokke geraak het.

“

EK DINK ONS HET DIE KUNSTE NODIG SODAT ONS NIE DOODGAAN VAN DOMHEID NIE.

BEDREIGDE SPESIE IN MEDIABEDRYF?

Die grootste transformasie in die kunstoernalistiekwêreld is dat minder joernaliste deel vorm van kunredaksies en dat almal teen ’n vinniger pas werk as elf jaar gelede. Die verskuiwing na ’n meer digitale wêreld is een van die redes hiervoor, volgens Opperman.

Volgens Johan Myburg, ’n skrywer, digter en joernalis wat vir vier jaar die kunredakteur by *Beeld* was, was daar tien kunstoernaliste en ’n paar vryskutte in die kunredaksie toe hy in 2001 daar begin werk het. Toe hy die publikasie in 2014 verlaat het, was daar slegs twee voltydse kunstoernaliste en minder vryskutte.

“Hoewel dit wonderlik is dat daar soveel kuns aangebied, opgevoer, uitgesaai en uitgestal word, kan dit oorweldigend raak as jy min tyd [...] het. So soms moet ons sif en ’n keuse maak oor wat die belangrikste is. Daarom kan ons deesdae nie meer so deeglik rekord hou van alles wat gebeur nie,” sê Opperman.

DIE VERSKUIWING NA DIGITALE PLATFORMS

Amato sê dat die begroting by die kunsafdeling van die *Sunday Times* destyds jaarliks kleiner gemaak is, wat beteken het dat baie persone afgelê is of vrywilliglik afleggingspakkette geneem het.

“Ek dink dit het ’n bietjie stresvol begin raak op die begrotings- en inkomstekant, want die advertensies het na [digitale platforms verskuif] en ons het nie regtig ’n digitale platform gehad wat inkomste genereer het nie,” vertel Amato.

Hy was een van die joernaliste wat ’n pakket geneem het. Verder is mense nie altyd gretig om in te teken op aanlyn-nuuspublikasies nie, sê Opperman.

“Daar is die alewige vraag oor waarom hulle vir nuus moet betaal, maar terselfdertyd vra hulle nie waarom hulle vir ’n argitek, dokter of haarkapper moet betaal nie,” sê Opperman. “Nuus is gewoon ’n diens – net soos enige ander beroep.”

Engelbrecht stel voor dat kunstoernaliste berigte moet begin




Die oorspronklike kunswerk van Ley Mboramwe pronk teen Amazink, ’n restaurant in Kayamandi, Stellenbosch, se muur. FOTO: Keziah Bailey

skryf wat gemeenskappe ’n stem gee en dat hulle moet weg-bly van stereotipiese uitbeeldings van mense binne dié gemeenskappe.

Opperman beskryf die toekoms van kunstoernalistiek as onvoorspelbaar. Alhoewel hy bewus is dat joernaliste na die teiken-mark moet luister, glo hy nie heeltemal in die “gee die mense wat hulle wil hê”-mentaliteit nie. Die risiko agter dit is egter dat hierdie siening ’n finansiële risiko inhou.

“Ek dink ons het die kunste nodig sodat ons nie doodgaan van domheid nie. In dié opsig dink ek dat kunskritiek of kunstoernalistiek die verantwoordelikheid het om mense ‘wakker’ te hou,” sê Myburg.

Goliath meen dat kunstoernalistiek verandering kan meebring as die materiaal na mense versprei word wat daarby kan aanklank vind.

“Daai artikel kan maar hóé groot wees, dit kan maar op watter platform gelees word, maar as [minderbevoorregte] mense nie eers weet daarvan nie of toegang het tot daai goed nie, hoe regverdig dit dan ’n situasie?” sê Goliath. 

GRAFTE OPPIE VLAKTE

Die lied *Grafte Oppie Vlakte* is deur die Tribal Echo Band vervaardig en handel oor bendegeweld. Hier volg die lirieke:

Nog ’n mamma op haar knieë / Trane in haar oë
Haar *baby-boy* het sy verloor / Dedda wil haar troos
Maar dit help nie baie / Sy huil want sy is kinderloos
Hy was op pad na die skool / Hy wou ’n dokter word
Maar die koeël van ’n gangster / het sy lewe verkort
So help me God / Is dit dan onse lot?
Onse kinders het die *victims* geword van ’n powerstruggle
En my trane vloei...
Hoor die stemme van ons mense wat huil
Onnodige grafte oppie vlakte

Rotas die Rapper is ’n rymkletser wat hedendaagse sosio-ekonomiese kwessies in Suid-Afrika aanspreek. FOTO: Keziah Bailey

SUID-AFRIKA SE HARDEGAT SPOTPRENT- KUNSTENAARS

Deur Liza-May Pieters

Spotprente help mense om hul gedagtes en gevoelens te artikuleer, meen die bekende spotprentkunstenaar Zapiro. SMF het met hom en ander spotprent-kunstenaars gesels oor die krag van spotprente.

Deel van 'n spotprentkunstenaar se werk is om die gedagtes wat mense sukkel om self uit te druk, te help artikuleer. Spotprente maak dadelik 'n impak en is anders as 'n geskrewe artikel waar joernaliste moet baklei vir lesers se aandag.

Dit is volgens Jonathan Shapiro, beter bekend as die Suid-Afrikaanse spotprentkunstenaar Zapiro.

“Spotprente is baie kragtig en daarom gebeur 'n soort toorkuns met 'n tekening en 'n paar woorde,” sê Zapiro.

Hy werk al sedert 1994, sowat drie

dekades, in die mediabedryf en het deur die jare onder meer as redaksionele spotprentkunstenaar by *Mail & Guardian*, *Sunday Times*, *Sowetan* en *Daily Maverick* gewerk.

“Oor die afgelope 200 jaar is spotprente iets wat 'n groot impak gemaak het in die samelewing waarin dit geskep is,” sê Zapiro.

Dit is die humoristiese aspek van 'n spotprent wat dit so suksesvol maak, meen Carl Becker, 'n spotprentkunstenaar wat voorheen by die *Mail & Guardian* gewerk het.

“'n Spotprent bereik die kruks van die saak – en die werklikheid van 'n situasie – vinniger as wat 'n artikel self kan,” verduidelik Carlos Amato, die redaksionele spotprentkunstenaar vir die *Mail & Guardian* en *News24*.

'N NUWE MANIER VAN SIEN

Gedurende 'n krisis help spotprente om 'n situasie op 'n ander manier te verstaan, sê Zapiro.

Zapiro voel sy spotprente dien as kommunikasie wat mense help om hulle gevoelens en emosies oor te dra,



wanneer hy dit op plakkate sien wat betogers tydens optogte aan vashou. As 'n spotprentkunstenaar probeer hy om vir magtelose mense op te staan, verduidelik Zapiro.

Hy verduidelik dat spotprente soms iets sê wat woorde nie kan sê nie. “Dit is een van die maniere hoe spotprente kan help om verandering te bring,” sê Zapiro.

Spotprente dien dikwels as 'n katalisator wat mense laat nadink en dan gesprekke oor sekere onderwerpe stimuleer, verduidelik Alastair Findlay.

Findlay is 'n spotprentkunstenaar en het in die 1980's vir die anti-apartheid publikasie *Vrye Weekblad* spotprente geskets.

Spotprente is veronderstel om mense uit te lok en sodoende debatte te stimuleer, voeg Findlay by.

Die werk van 'n spotprentkunstenaar is om altyd met 'n skeptiese oor te luister wanneer politici of maatskappye kommunikeer, en om 'n mens se ore oop te hou vir “daardie klein dingetjies” wat ironies aangewend kan word, verduidelik Zapiro.

'N SIN VIR HUMOR

Een van Zapiro se mees omstrede spotprente is *Law of the Land*, wat hy in 2000 vir die *Sowetan* geteken het. Die spotprent is steeds baie gewild, sê hy. Volgens Zapiro illustreer hierdie spotprent hoe Suid-Afrika werk.

Die spotprent beeld die hiërargie van die howe uit, met die appèlhof wat onderhewing is aan die Konstitusionele Hof. In die spotprent is die Konstitusionele Hof weer op sy beurt onderhewing aan die taxibestuurder – dit impliseer dat die taxi bo die wet is, verduidelik Zapiro.

Selfs taxi-bestuurders vind die spotprent snaaks, sê hy.

Satire gebruik die element van verassing, verduidelik Zapiro.

“Jy sit twee goed bymekaar wat nie noodwendig saam hoort nie.” Jy sou

byvoorbeeld nie verwag dat die Konstitusionele Hof aan taxibestuurders onderhewing sal wees nie, sê hy.

“In die media het ons 'n tradisie van humor wat spot met gesag, wat baie belangrik is. Ons moet dit lewend hou en die vryheid wat ons het, beskerm,” verduidelik Amato.

“ EK GLO DAARIN OM TE SÊ WAT GESÊ MOET WORD.

ZAPIRO IN DIE WITHUIS

Zapiro verduidelik dat een van sy spotprente in 2001 die *Withuis* gehaal het, nadat dit destyds in die *Sowetan* gepubliseer is. Die spotprent het verwys na Colin Powell wat deur die destydse Amerikaanse president, George W. Bush, verbied is om na die Verenigde Nasies (VN) se teenrassismekonferensie in Suid-Afrika te gaan.

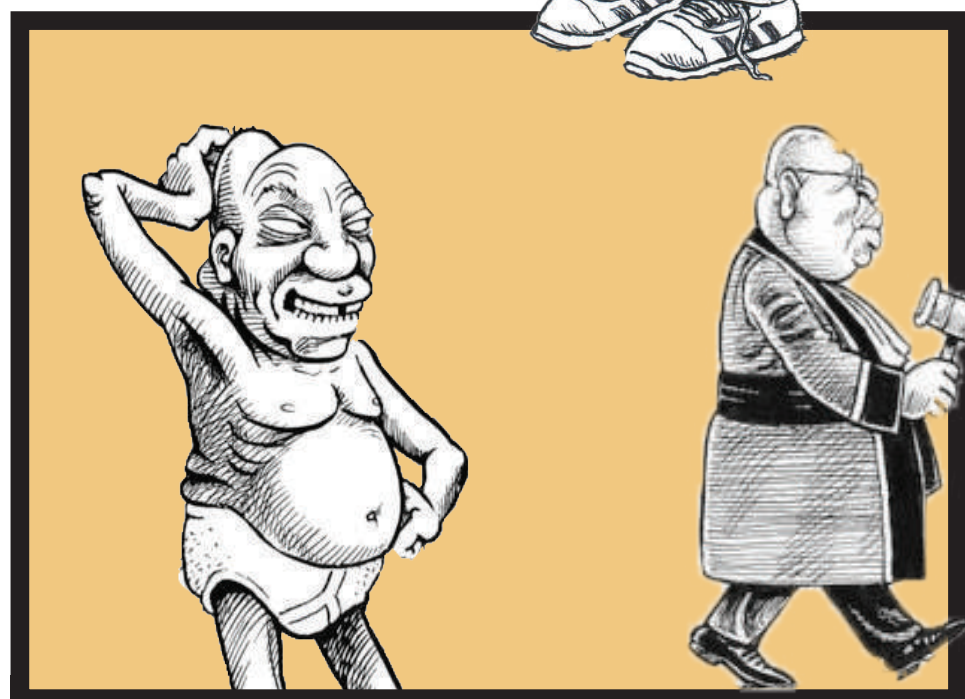
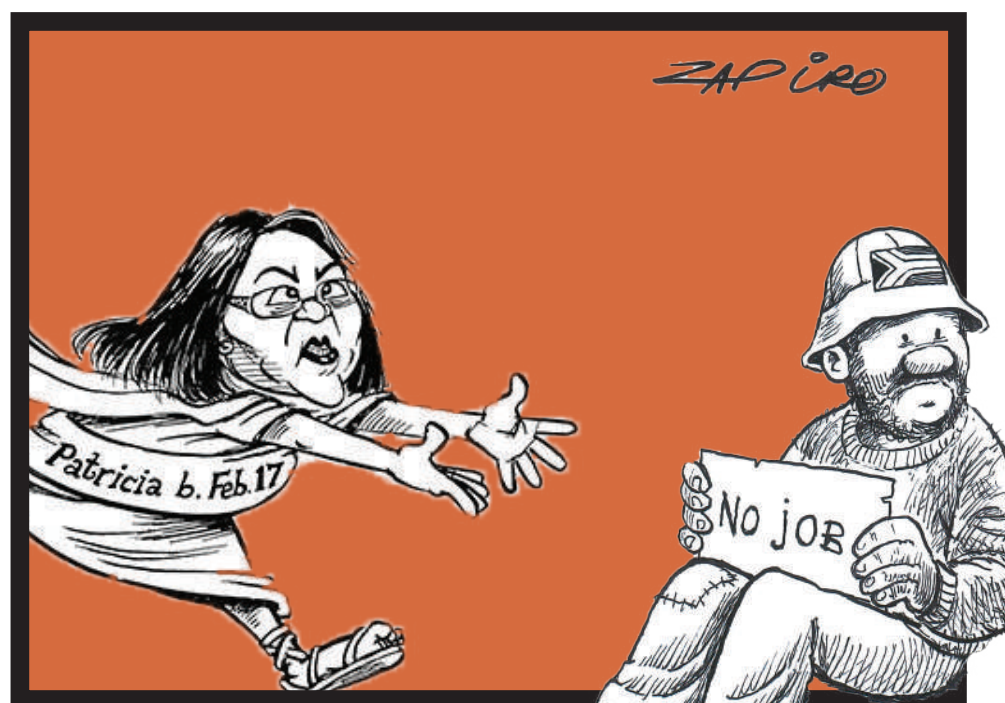
In daardie stadium was dit 'n groot politieke kwessie, aangesien Powell 'n swart man en óók die staats sekretaris van die Verenigde State van Amerika (VSA) was, verduideik Zapiro.

“[Dus kon] die spotprent iemand verneder wat ek wou verneder,” sê hy.

Die spotprent bevat 'n beeld van vrygelate slawe en 'n bevoorregte swart man – Powell, verduidelik Zapiro. Powell word uitgebeeld as “Uncle Tom”, wat verwys na 'n swart man wat gehoorsaam is aan 'n wit man en sy sosiale verantwoordelikheid verraa, verduidelik Zapiro.

Powell was natuurlik nie gelukkig dat dié spotprent die *Withuis* bereik het nie, sê hy. Die spotprent het tot daar

GRAFIEK: Liza-May Pieters SPOTPRENTE: Hierdie spotprente word met die vriendelike goedkeuring van Zapiro gebruik. Hierdie spotprente kan gevind word by www.Zapiro.com.



versprei – selfs voor die dae van sosiale media wat die verspreiding van inligting verspoedig het, verduidelik Zapiro.

“Dit was een van die groot oomblikke waar ek besef het dat spotprente 'n baie groot verskil kan maak.”

Dit is noodsaaklik vir mense soos Zapiro om mense “in die gesig te vat”, sê Waldimar Pelser, joernalis en voormalige redakteur van *Rapport*. Hy is tans die kanaalhoof van kykNET en M-Net.

As joernaliste gaan ophou om mense in die gesig te vat, is die einde op hande, voeg Pelser by.

“ AS ENIGE IEMAND VERDIEN OM GESPOT TE WORD, IS DIT GENOEG REGVERDIGING OM 'N SPOTPRENT TE MAAK.

RAPE OF LADY JUSTICE

Zapiro se spotprent wat die grootste impak gemaak het, was *The Rape of Lady Justice*, wat in 2008 in die *Sunday Times* verskyn het, sê hy. “Dit was die belangrikste spotprent wat ek nog gedoen het,” sê Zapiro.

Die spotprent wys hoe die voormalige president, Jacob Zuma, sy broek oopknoop terwyl vier mans die metaforiese *Lady Justice* teen die grond vasdruk en vir Zuma aanmoedig om haar te verkrag, verduidelik Zapiro.

Die vier mans in die spotprent, was:

- Julius Malema, destyds die leier van

die African National Congress (ANC) se jeugliga;

- Gwede Mantashe, toe die ANC se sekretaris-generaal;
- Blade Nzimande, destyds die sekretaris van die Suid-Afrikaanse Kommunistiese Party (SAKP); en
- Zwelinzima Vavi, toe die algemene sekretaris van Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu).

“Die spotprent het nie verander hoe die mans opgetree het nie, maar dit het wel 'n nasionale debat aangemoedig,” verduidelik hy.

The Rape of Lady Justice is ook in 2013 in *Buzzfeed*, 'n Amerikaanse aanlynpublikasie, se lys van 15 spotprente wat die wêreld verander het, opgeneem. “Ek het gesien hoe spotprente 'n verskil gemaak het wat ek nie eens verwag het nie,” verduidelik hy.

Weens hierdie spotprent het Zuma in 2008 vir Zapiro gedagvaar vir R4 miljoen aan skadevergoeding. Hy het aangevoer dat Zapiro sy reputasie geskend het. Zuma het hom ook gedagvaar vir sowat R1 miljoen vir skade aan sy waardigheid, sê Zapiro.

Zapiro verduidelik dat hy vir Zuma in persoon gekonfronteer het en aan hom gevra het waarom hy hom dagvaar as hy sê dat hy die vryheid van die pers ondersteun.

Zuma het daarop geantwoord: “Ek het jou spotprente gesien en jy tas my waardigheid aan.”

Zapiro gee jaarliks 'n boek met 'n versameling spotprente uit. Hy het Zuma se reaksie agter in sy boeke laat druk.

Zapiro sê dat hy besef dat hy met sy sketse sommige mense sal omkrap, en dat dit sin maak aangesien hy nie tot alle verskillende gehore gelyk kan spreek nie.

“As enige iemand verdien om gespot te word, is dit genoeg regverdiging om 'n spotprent te maak,” verduidelik Amato.

“Almal hoef nie van my te hou nie,” verduidelik Zapiro. “Ek glo daarin om op te staan vir wat reg is. Ek glo daarin om te sê wat gesê moet word.”

BEYOND THE LENS

Visual storytelling is rooted in its ability to elicit emotion in a way that transcends all linguistic mediums, says Jodi Bieber, award-winning South African photographer. However, this intention falters when photographs meant to expose audiences to hardship and suffering, inadvertently push them further away.

By Jess Holing

Photography has the power to move people beyond physical and digital borders. This is amplified by the high levels of visual literacy measured in society today, according to Jodi Bieber, an award-winning South African photographer. However, photography also has the ability to inflict harm, she says.

Bieber is well-known for her photograph of Bibi Aisha, an Afghan woman who survived severe facial mutilation following an attempt to leave her abusive marriage. The photograph first appeared on *TIME* magazine's front cover in 2010, before it went on to win World Press Photo of the year, says Bieber.

After the photograph was widely received, Aisha garnered the attention of financial donors who provided her with the support to cover the cost of medical fees for numerous reconstructive facial surgeries, says Bieber.

Stories such as Aisha's emphasise that "photography is not something you need language for", says Bieber. However, a photograph will never be read in just one way because of the

diversity of people's own histories, personalities and ideas, she says.

But because of the subjectivity of personal experience, "photographs can be misread", Bieber says.

The misinterpretation of photography as a visual storytelling medium is often complicated by the relationship between photography and empathy. This has been argued for in a research article titled 'Our Failure of Empathy', written by Wai Kit Ow Yeong and published by University College London in 2013.

Mass media feeds society a proliferation of images, and the average citizen can now become a photographer just by picking up their smartphone, according to the research article. However, although almost anybody has access to both taking and consuming images, "the tragic irony is that photographs intended to arouse empathy end up resulting in indifference", says Yeong in his research. The impulse to sweep difficult images aside overrides the emotions people are intended to feel while viewing an image, according to Yeong.

FLY ON THE WALL

“The power of good photojournalism is that it can create compassion in a way that isn’t sensational,” says Barry Christianson, a Cape Town-based South African photojournalist and freelance writer.

To create work that is moving to viewers, a photographer really has to speak to people’s emotions, says Christianson. He explains that in order to do so, the photographer needs to look at the context behind their lens. “[Photographers] have to care more about the situations [wherein their subjects are] than just getting their photos,” he says.

“There’s a place for being a fly on the wall,” says Christianson. But good photography is about being present, he explains. “I think amazing photography comes out of connection. Not just the connection you feel when you look at the photograph itself, but the connection with the person being photographed.”

“Nowadays, it’s kind of just [about inserting] yourself, [getting] the photo, and [getting] out,” says Christianson, who advises photographers to take their time and to be intentional with their photography to produce meaningful work.

“People know how to ascribe value to something,” says Emeka Okereke, a Nigerian visual artist based between Lagos and Berlin. Photographers should apply this mindset to their practice by being intentional about their subject matter, he says. This will reinforce that system of value, he adds.

Okereke is the founder and artistic director of the Invisible Border Trans-African Project (IBTAP). The project uses visual storytelling to address gaps in the misconceptions caused by the borders that divide African countries, he explains.

Driven by a collection of photographers, writers, filmmakers and performance artists, IBTAP produces collaborative and educational art as they travel the continent, Okereke explains.

“When I’ve been commissioned to photograph and connect with people, I begin immediately to prepare myself for that moment of encounter,” says Okereke. Part of this process is accepting that good photography is largely owed to a comfortable subject, he says, adding that a subject might say no today, but be open to being photographed at a later stage. By prioritising genuine connection with the people artists work with,

the subject realises their value, says Okereke. It is only at this moment that these subjects “are present and they begin to share their [stories] with you”.

TO HELP WITHOUT HURTING

Photographs of impoverished children have been packaged into their own sort of industry standard, Okereke says.

“It’s no longer about the children [who are dying of hunger],” Okereke explains. “Photographs are a placeholder for a conversation that is happening or is yet to happen. A photograph is not good or bad until it enters a conversation.”

Tragedy is mass produced in such a way that people lose their sensitivity to the problems that plague our world, says Bieber. “If you’re going to give the public photographs illustrating the plight of hunger and drought by alarming [them] with images of starving babies with flies on their face[s], people are not going to be impacted by this.”

This narrative oversimplifies complex issues, taking away the dignity of these individuals and leading to apathy in viewers, says Jaco Marais, photojournalist at *Die Burger*.

This does not mean the reality of suffering and difficult contexts should be denied, but that the focus should shift towards telling a story that “highlight[s] humanity in a way that does real service to that moment”, says Marais.

In Yeong’s article, he critiques the role of the media industry in overexposing viewers to images of suffering and hardship. This, he explains, actually has the ability to limit their capacity for empathy, where people need to see exponentially larger quantities of emotionally triggering images in order to elicit the same response.

On print, a photograph has a greater sense of physical existence to it, says Yeong in his research. However, when images are viewed virtually on devices, “the viewer can register no physical presence”.

The internet allows people to have access to platforms to tell their own stories now, says Bieber. Professional visual storytellers today “should be invested in telling stories that are closer to their own lives with meaning. This allows for originality in a saturated world of photographs”, Bieber says.

“On social media, everything is extremely plastic. It serves itself. It’s not compassion[at]e at all,” says Armand Hough, photojournalist and pictures editor for African News Agency. However, Armand sees the people that follow his work on social media as real people, and not “plastic people”, he says.

Hough worked in the Middle East as a fashion photographer for four years before the rise of the Arab Spring in 2010. The magazine and advertising agencies that he was contracted to work for pulled out of the Middle East at the time, he explains. But he chose to stay.

“I didn’t have a lot of work anymore but I still had my camera,” says Hough, who documented the realities of the movement on Facebook. His work was shared on social media and gathered the attention of South African citizens who realised that one of their own was stuck in Bahrain, he explains.

“Through the power of social media, somebody at the BBC, *Sky News* and CNN contacted [Hough]” with the intention of making him their official correspondent, he says.

DRAWING THE LINE

When a photographer works for a news agency, the picture will exchange numerous hands before it is published, Hough says.

“The biggest consideration when choosing a photo for publishing is the impact it will have on the viewer,” says Marais. This selection is largely dependent on the photograph’s relevance to the news angle of the story, says Hough. This creates an opportunity for a photograph to be used out of context, he explains.

It is the photographer’s duty to sometimes withhold photos that have the potential to be taken out of context - this is to ensure that the truth is accurately reflected, says Hough.

Newsrooms can limit a photographer’s biases by leaving the senior editorial staff to select the photograph to be used for publication, says Hough. This prevents photojournalists from censoring the news based on their experience of the subject that was photographed, he adds.

Photojournalists can only serve their societies by telling people’s stories humanely, says Hough. This means telling stories in the most correct way possible, he adds.

There’s a line that needs to be drawn between

empathy and apathy, says Felix Dlangamandla, a photojournalist and photo editor for *Daily Maverick*.

Dlangamandla witnessed and photographed the tragedy that was the Marikana massacre, which took place on 16 August 2012. The police at the time opened fire on a group of approximately 3 000 striking mine workers at the Lonmin platinum mine at Marikana in the North West. Of these 3 000, 34 were killed, according to the Southern African Peace and Security Studies.

“Marikana inspired me to keep going [with photography],” says Dlangamandla, who allowed the Marikana story to be shared by documenting what was happening in front of him with his camera. This would not have been possible without the power of visual storytelling and photography, he says.

TO SEE, AND THEN, TO FEEL

There is often the temptation to place blame for viewers’ lack of empathy on the shoulders of the media, according to Yeong. This is because the sensationalisation of suffering for the purpose of reaping profits is seen as a driving force of the media, according to the report.

However, “viewers should also critically assess images and news, and be aware of the potential for manipulation in the media”, says Marais, who argues that the failure to do so will encourage apathetic viewing habits.

Whilst photographers are not in control of the events that are documented in the world of photography and journalism, they are active in the representation of other people’s lives and stories. “If [your subjects] decide to let you in, that’s a gift,” says Hough.

As a photographer, one has to recognise that telling another person’s story requires research, says Dlangamandla. “If I don’t go out, I won’t be able to meet people, I won’t be able to tell their story.”

Okereke echoes Dlangamandla’s words, speaking instead to the role of humanising the photojournalist in the process of storytelling.

“[Photography] is not just about having compassion. It’s about becoming someone else – a better you,” he says. “It’s about being willing to let these moments change you.”

PHOTO: Jodi Bieber



PHOTO: Jess Holing

BEATS WITHOUT BORDERS

Music has always played a fundamental role in connecting people across physical divides and cultures, says Danie Marais, a freelance journalist and the media co-ordinator for Woordfees Film Festival. Korean Pop or K-pop is just one example of a music genre doing just that.

By Hannah Theron

Music has the ability to transcend the boundaries of language, culture and race, connecting people across divides that would typically separate them.

This is according to Lalitha Moodley, the social media manager for Official Korea-South Africa (K-SA), a South African fan site dedicated to sharing content about Korea and Korean music.

Korean pop (K-pop) music has gained a global notoriety, increasingly so in South Africa, says Tagseen Samsodien, co-manager of BTSARMYZA, a fanpage on Instagram dedicated to the K-pop group, BTS. The page currently has over 10 000 followers.

At its core, music has universal appeal and relatability, says Samsodien, who believes that BTS is an example of an international music group that illustrates how the expansion of a fanbase can directly influence how the media adapt to popular music trends.

A UNIVERSALITY BEYOND LANGUAGE

“Music is one of the prime ways people form emotional connections to scenes, people and places,” says Danie Marais, a freelance journalist and media co-ordinator for the Woordfees Film Festival, an annual multilingual arts festival held in Stellenbosch.

When listeners hear music that they don’t understand, it serves a function akin to instrumental music, says Marais. “Whether it’s a minor or a major chord, people immediately translate the sounds they hear in the music into emotion.”

This emotional journey is experienced in the absence of context, explains Clorinda Panebianco, a music psychology professor at the University of Pretoria School of Arts.

BTS is an example of a K-pop band that, on a global level, assists the youth with finding their identity, while giving them the tools to learn new things about themselves, says Graeme Sacks, a music therapist whose practice, Graeme Sacks Music Therapy, is based in Johannesburg.

“[K-pop is] the kind of thing that helps inform [the youth] and [is something] that they can latch on to,” says Sacks. Music is intertwined with people’s every being, resonating within every cell and shaping everything that they do, he adds. “We all use [music] every day in ways to help us regulate our emotions.”

While there are many universal responses to music, individual preference significantly influences an individualised emotional response by activating multiple brain regions simultaneously, says Panebianco.

This creates shared networks for tasks such as lyric recall, says

Panebianco. This greatly accounts for music’s ability to welcome sounds and languages that differ from their own, says Samsodien.

K-POP’S RISE

“[With K-pop, it] becomes less about understanding the words straight off the bat, and more about being open to exploring the feeling the music evokes,” says Samsodien. Local radio, which remains the easiest and most affordable way for South Africans to listen to music, was a great platform for K-pop to expand, she says.

“I feel K-pop has gotten to a place where it transcends language, and culture,” says Lunga Singama, a radio presenter at HeartFM, a commercial radio station based in Cape Town.

HeartFM aired a show called The K-pop Sound System between 2017 and 2018 on Saturday afternoons, says Singama, who was the former host for the show.

The show, which had the autonomy to exclusively play K-pop music as it operated sans licensing restrictions, had an estimated audience of 200 000 weekly listeners, says Singama.



K-POP HAS GOTTEN TO A PLACE WHERE IT TRANSCENDS LANGUAGE, AND CULTURE.

“[The K-pop Sound System] was born from a curiosity really about what I saw happening with Korean music,” Singama says. “I saw a couple of bands that were becoming bigger than just the Korean scene.”

However, the show reached its end in 2019 after Singama was placed as a host on The Move with Lunga Singama and iHeart Sundays. He still occasionally plays K-pop on his shows which are also aired on HeartFM, he says.

The K-pop songs that tend to air are songs by the more popular groups, such as BTS, Exo and Black Pink, says Singama.

KFM 94.5, a commercial radio station based in Cape Town, airs K-pop music, particularly music from BTS, says Cecile Basson, the programme manager for the station.

BTS' song "Idol" was popular amongst South Africans when it was released in 2018, says Singama. This was because it had a "gqom" beat which helped it resonate with local audiences, according to Singama.

Gqom is a style of electronic dance music originating from Durban, South Africa, according to LastFM's website.

Despite BTS' popularity, it has still been a challenge to get them onto the regular rotation at radio stations, according to Samsodien.

This is because radio stations cannot accommodate every song request, "then it beats the purpose of real radio" by undermining radio's authenticity, says Lilitha Bodlani, the digital producer for East Coast Radio's breakfast show. East Coast Radio is a commercial radio station based in KwaZulu-Natal.

While music allows people to establish a connection with a radio station without any need for verbal communication, says Bodlani, radio licences dictate how stations select the songs to air, as well as the frequency at which they are played, he explains.

East Coast Radio's licensing agreement restricts the station's language and music to English, says Bodlani.

KFM 94.5 however, does not have licence restrictions based on language, says Basson. Rather, music selection is "informed by continual audience reach".

"As audience tastes and preferences evolve, KFM 94.5 responds by playlisting the most popular songs, artists and genres," he adds.

'IT'S OWN LANGUAGE'

"Music is its own language" that instigates the unification of different cultures, says Joel Ontong, an entertainment journalist for *News24*.

Given that international musicians have successfully amassed global fanbases, despite the language barriers faced by their audiences, music journalism assumes a vital role in informing listeners why the music they hear is relevant, explains Ontong.

However, South African music journalism currently falls short in its efforts to promote linguistically diverse music, according to Kobus Burger, the programme manager for Radio Sonder Grense, an Afrikaans radio station owned by the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

South African music journalists lack the sense to introduce their audiences to music outside of their personal music tastes, claims Burger.

The country's entertainment sector additionally lacks prominent publications that are exclusively dedicated to music, says Marais. *Rolling Stone* in America is an example of this, says Marais.

A possible solution to address this gap could include an increase in the production of music journalism content, says Ontong.

This would in turn, create a greater demand for it, he says. "Having more writers with strong voices who can write about music in an accessible manner will naturally cultivate a demand and an audience for music content in journalism."

PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING

Listening to music in a different language can often spark a cultural curiosity within the listener, says Ontong. "You [listen to the music] for maybe the vibes of the atmosphere, the aesthetics.

But what keeps you there is your curiosity to know what these people are saying and what they mean and what their messages are."

Music can help people gain a better understanding of cultures and places around the world, says Marais. "I think music has always played a role in connecting people across divides."

While this is true, music also has the ability to cause gaps, says Sacks, referring to the possibility of hateful messages being spread through music. In this scenario, understanding the lyrics would be important, he adds.

However, in the majority of cases, people are often unaware of any underlying hateful intentions that may be behind popular songs, says Marais.

A DISCONNECT IN UNDERSTANDING

Amapiano is a genre – originally derived from kwaito – that combines house and jazz music, according to Julie Marinho, a French amapiano artist better-known by her stage name Kazeli.

The genre emerged in the 2010s but its popularity grew during the Covid-19 pandemic, says Kazeli.

Over 85% of Kazeli's audience is based in South Africa, despite the majority of her music being performed in French, she says. Part of Kazeli's audience consists of people who are curious about the European world and communities, she adds.


"I feel connected with people that listen to [amapiano], despite any cultural barrier," says Kazeli.

But while language barriers do not create problems for listeners, they often create difficulties for music journalists, says Ontong. Amapiano, for example, is a difficult genre to review because it is an example of "vibe music", he says. "With amapiano, its strongest quality usually is its ability to create a specific atmosphere [...] and it's difficult to always critique an atmosphere."

Despite the accessibility of online translations, there are in-

stances when a song or album in another language requires an immediate review on the same day of release, and these translations might not be readily accessible, says Ontong.

If the music reviewer does not understand the language, it limits their ability to critique the music on anything other than an aesthetic level, Ontong adds. This means the reviewer can only comment on how the singer's voice sounds, the emotions that they are conveying tonally, and the quality of the music, he says.

"Music is something that touches your soul, it is something that you feel [deep] within your heart," says Moodley. "I think it has nothing to do with language." 

GLOBAL GROOVES: STREAMINGS' IMPACT ON FOREIGN MUSIC

While major record companies used to determine a particular music genre's reach and audience, this role has nearly faded, says Danie du Toit, the lead singer of Spoegwolf, an Afrikaans rock band that has garnered international success. This has left behind a landscape where, due to the internet, anyone can hear one's music, says Du Toit.

"Music does transcend language but the internet transcends everything," says Du Toit. "There's a space [on the Internet] for every little corner of the world and every kind of person, every little culture, and that's actually beautiful."

Spoegwolf recently embarked on a tour of England and Europe, performing in Amsterdam, London and Dublin, according to their website.

England yielded the most surprising audience demographic for the band, says Du Toit.

"We thought it was [going to be] only expats," says Du Toit, but the turnout consisted mainly of English people.

SCAN TO LISTEN TO THE PLAYLIST FOR
THIS ARTICLE



TALKING BACK



PODCASTS CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR INDIVIDUALS TO EXPRESS THEIR OWN OPINIONS AND TRUTH.

can podcast produced and funded by the Stellenbosch University's education faculty, according to Wilnelie Niemand, another host of Staffroom Chatter. The show aims to produce content that sheds light on subjects relating to the education system within South Africa, says Niemand.

These subjects include "controversial" matters that are overlooked within South Africa's education system, says Niemand. These include discussions relating to the mental wellness of educators, violence within the education system, and topics relating to gender and sexuality, she says.

SHIFTING DYNAMICS

Podcasts offer their producers a sense of creative freedom that is often not afforded to journalists operating within the mainstream media, says Engelbrecht. These journalists are often restricted by their editors in terms of the frequency at which a topic can be explored, in addition to content that is covered, she says.

Engelbrecht feels that it is her responsibility to use her platform to raise awareness for social issues such as crime and gender-based violence.

"The more I grow as a creator, the more deeply I understand these issues. I am more than open to bringing others along with me on my journey of understanding and educating," says Engelbrecht.

Storytelling is "a multifaceted concept", says Michaela Chetty, another host of Staffroom Chatter. Niemand agrees, saying that storytelling, "transcends the mere sharing of experiences and knowledge; it's about conveying elements of identity, culture, and existence".

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

As knowledge sharing has become increasingly digitised, podcasts have shifted these traditions to online spaces, says Rebaone Semele, media analyst and former media consultant at QuickPic, a company that specialises in public relations and media monitoring services.

Within these spaces, storytelling takes place in the form of educational and informative content, says Semele.

An example of such a podcast is the Phezulu Podcast, says Toby Fricker, chief of communication and partnerships at the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) South Africa.

The podcast consists of an eight-part series and was released in May this year, says Fricker. It features individual stories that wield together an overarching narrative that contextualises the impact of Covid-19 on children and youth, particularly their mental health, he says.

While storytelling carries the ability to deliver representative accounts of history, it also forms an essential part of African culture, according to Prof Albert Grundlingh, ex-chairman of the department of history at Stellenbosch University.

"In African societies, [storytelling] was also a way of cementing traditions

and notions of history," says Grundlingh. Oral histories have a tradition of being passed down from generation-to-generation, he adds.

"The stories that [South Africans] hold are incredibly diverse," says Chris Jordan, a content creation and podcasting lecturer at Boston Media House in Sandton.

Podcasting has existed in South Africa for over a decade, says Jordan. While it began as a trial-and-error experiment to gauge consumer needs, its popularity surged following the Covid-19 pandemic, he says.

South Africa's podcast listenership in major metros increased by 17% between 2019 and 2021 across all media platforms, according to a report released by Infinite Dial South Africa in 2022. Infinite Dial is a survey that reports on international digital media consumer behaviour.

A HISTORY OF PODCASTS

2004 – Adam Curry and Dave Winer created iPodder, a programme allowed people to download podcasts to their iPod, according to the Journal of Educational Technology.

2009 – Randomradiodotcom was one of the first podcasts launched in South Africa and was hosted by Chris Jordan and Brad O'Reagan, says Jordan, content creation and podcasting lecturer at Boston Media House.

2013 – Apple received more than 1 billion podcast subscriptions on iTunes, according to the Journal of Radio and Audio Media.

2023 – Podcast and Chill with MacG is the number one South African podcast, according to Chartable. The podcast has more than 1 million subscribers on YouTube according to the platform.

Podcasting, although not a novel concept, is emerging as a dynamic and engaging medium for storytelling, according to Hendrick Baird, podcast producer and director of Baird Media.

By Michelle Grobbelaar

Africa, unique in its experiences of exploitation and foreign domination, has seen its people devoid of opportunities to narrate their own stories, says Nicole Engelbrecht, host of the True Crime South Africa podcast. The advent of podcasting has shifted this dynamic, she says.

A NEW FORM OF STORYTELLING

Audio-only storytelling is an extremely powerful force, says Engelbrecht. Podcasting has since revolutionised storytelling by linking human con-

nection and authenticity with immediate accessibility, says Paulo Dias, head of audio innovation at Ultimate Media. Ultimate Media is an audio and radio specialist agency, according to its website.

Before the medium gained popularity, audio stories were told predominantly through radio, he says. The difference between the two platforms is that podcasting offers the listener a chance to return to the podcast of their choice and re-listen to it, says Dias.

Not only does this provide the listener with agency, it creates a sense

of connectivity between the host and their audience, says George Jonker, a co-host of the Staffroom Chatter podcast.

"When it comes to podcasts it is good to have spaces where even though there are microphones set up in front of a person, it feels like the hosts are having a casual conversation," says Jonker.

Some podcasts are produced with the intention of providing listeners with a space where they can safely discuss the serious issues that affect their day-to-day lives, says Jonker.

Staffroom Chatter is a South Afri-

CULTIVATING INCLUSIVITY

Podcasting has contributed to the evolution of media, says Mhlahli Ntsabo, a podcast producer at *News24*.

Dias suggests that this is because podcasting platforms are easily accessible to listeners and producers. Anyone can tell their story to widespread audiences, he says.

An example of this is Podcast and Chill with MacG, a current affairs podcast, hosted by Macgyver Mukwevho and Solomzi Phenduka, Dias says.

South African celebrities use podcasts to discuss the country's latest trends, news and authentic stories with their audiences, says Dias.

Facilitating interactive audience debate forges "a deeper connection with [the podcast's] fans", says Dias. This, in turn, relaxes guests in such a way that they find comfort in sharing their experiences through a medium that is not constrained to certain time limitations and publicists editorial decisions, adds Dias.

UNIQUELY POSITIONED

Podcasters are uniquely positioned to engage in the debates and discussions surrounding the societal issues that affect minority groups, says Ntsabo. They often do so in ways that the mainstream media cannot, says Ntsabo.

Ntsabo has observed from his experience working in both mainstream and community media, that there are certain topics that the media shy away from.

Podcasts, on the other hand, touch freely on these topics, he says.

Conversations around homophobia, for example, are classified by traditional media organisations as "tail ends" of stories, resulting in them being seen as an afterthought, Ntsabo claims. Although he acknowledges that the topic is covered in mainstream media, it is

often not with reference to the issues faced by the LGBTQIA+ community on the ground. This translates to important societal issues being reflected as afterthoughts in news reporting, he says.

This is because the mainstream media prioritise issues concerning majority audiences as their content has to reflect the interests of the largest numbers of potential consumers in order to have commercial value, Ntsabo claims.

When collaborating with news organisations, podcasts can use storytelling as an effective means of releasing news in an audio-format, Ntsabo says. Instead of "waiting for the reporter to [cover] a comprehensive story, I can give you a quick [minute-by-minute] update in real time of what is happening", says Ntsabo.

This was the case for Ntsabo when he covered the Johannesburg gas explosion which occurred on 19 July 2023.

He broke the story in podcast format on *News24 on Air*, he says. The article was thereafter published on *News24's* website, he says. The episode had gathered over 1 000 streams just minutes after the podcast was released, Ntsabo recalls.

CONNECTING AUDIENCES

"Podcasts create a safe space for individuals to express their own opinions and truth," says Qhama Ntlanganiso, host of the *Thick of it all*, a podcast that aims to assist young adults with navigating their 20s.


"As someone who just turned 20 and [is] currently learning how to navigate adulthood, it's easy for me to create content that resonates with my audience," Ntlanganiso says.

Ntlanganiso has found that she resonates with her audiences because of the content that is discussed, she says. "I think what made my listeners spark a connection with my podcast was the fact that I was able to share my truth," says Ntlanganiso.

Podcasts speak directly to audiences, in turn, fostering a sense of trust and relatability, says Hendrick Baird, podcast producer and director of Baird Media.

Listeners are [more] inclined to trust and believe podcast hosts due to factors like established credibility, personal connections, consistency, transparency, shared values, and social proof, he says.

Ntlanganiso's life journey serves as a focal point for her podcasting content, she says.

"My friends and the people around me are going through the same thing, sharing my experiences and what I've learned along the way has helped me tremendously with connecting with my audience and creating content," says Ntlanganiso. 

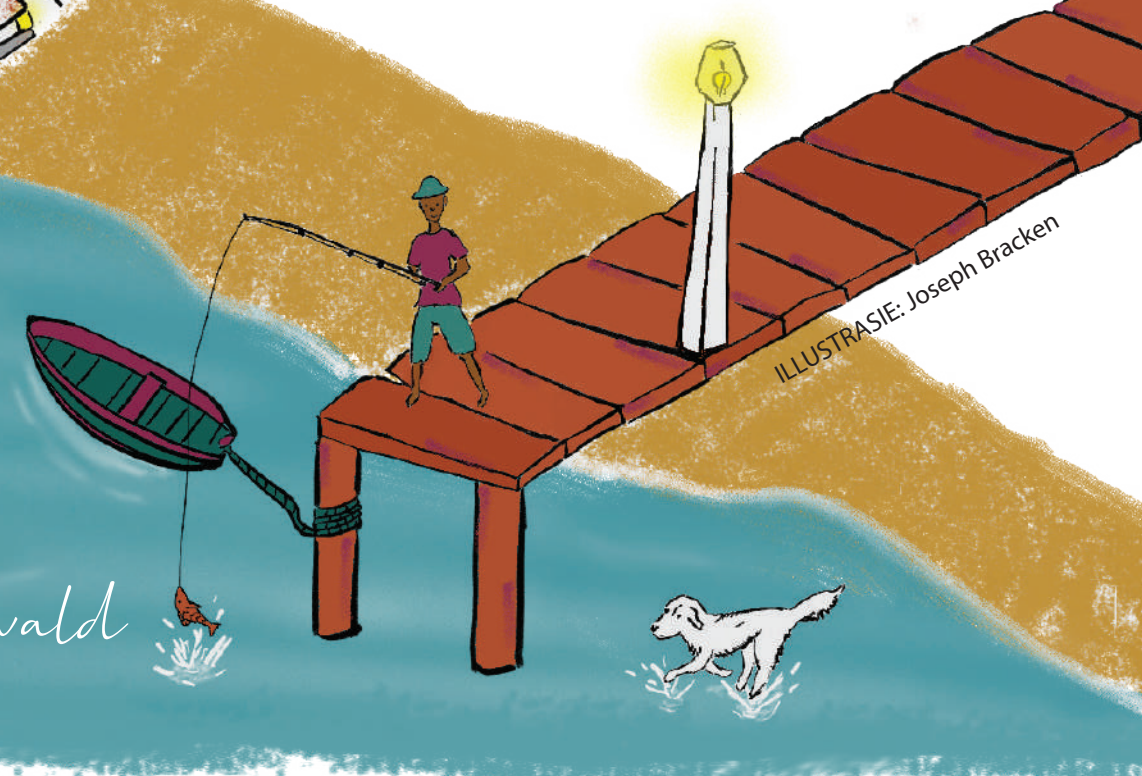


GRAPHIC: Hannah Theron

DIE HOND

'n Kortkortverhaal

Deur Anneli Groenewald



Daar sit 'n man in sy bakkie in die hawe in Struisbaai. Hy tuur en hy tier. Hy sit en drink koffie uit 'n warmfles en kyk na 'n seun en dié se hond wat op die sleepelling langs die kaai staan en visvang.

Dis vroegaand en bewolk. Vroeër vandag het dit gereën.

Die seun gil op die hond en die hond blaf vir die seun. Die hond se blaf is skril.

Die seun probeer visvang, maar sodra hy sy lyn ingooi, dink die hond dit is vir hom. Dan spring die hond in die water agter die lyn aan en moet die seun weer inkatrol.

Die hond geniet die speletjie geweldig.

Sodra die hond sien dat die seun weer begin inkatrol, swenk hy vinnig terug na die seun toe en blaf vir nog 'n gooi.

Die seun wil die hond fnuik. Hy tel 'n klip op en gooi dit so ver as wat hy kan die see in. Hy kan 'n klip verder gooi as wat hy 'n vislyn kan gooi. Die hond plas die water in agter die klip aan.

Maar die hond is slimmer as wat die seun goed is in visvang. Sodra die klip sink, draai hy terug wal toe – die seun het skaars kans om sy stok terug te trek vir die gooi.

Baldadig spat die hond homself droog en die seun nat. Hy spring met sy voorpote in die lug en blaf die fyn, hoë tjankies van 'n hond wat sy geluk nie kan glo nie.

Die seun is raadop. Hy storm weg, al skreeuend op die hond. Hy hardloop tot op die kaai, maar die hond kom agterna. Hy hardloop van die kaai af tot op die sand en probeer van daar sy lyn in die water kry, maar met selfs minder sukses.

'n Boot met die naam Delta word onder die hawe se geel spreiligte in die water gelaat. Nege vissermanne in oliepakke werskaf met hulle lyne. Dis 'n stil aand. Die water klots teen die kante van Delta. Dan word die enjins aangeskakel en draai Delta se neus diepsee toe. Die manne sal met eerste lig eers weer land sien.

Die seun se sussie kom op 'n fiets die hawe in. Hy probeer

haar inspan om die hond te beheer, maar sy stel nie belang nie. Sy is daar met *orders* van die huis af. Hy moet huiswaarts keer vir aandete. Die seun is radeloos van frustrasie. Hy spring op sy fiets en jaag weg. Die hond speel met 'n stuk bamboes op die sand.

Die man in sy bakkie swets binnensmonds, want hy het nie 'n baard waarin hy kan mompel nie. 'n Kwartier gelede het hy self op die kaai probeer visvang. Hy het op 'n wit koelboks gesit en gehoop op 'n silwervis.

Maar die seun en sy hond het alle rus verstoer. Hy het op die seun gegil. "Maak stil jou hond!"

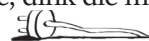
Die seun het hom laat verstaan dat die hond nie wil luister nie. "Kom vang dan hier!" het die man gegil. "Dan kan ek hom bliksem!"

Die man se geduld was te kort. Hy het sy lyn opkatrol, sy aasbak en hoeke opgepak en sy bakkie nader getrek om dinge van daar te betrag.

Die aand begin donkerder raak en die geel van die hawe se spreiligte helderder.

Die hond het nou sy oog op 'n verliefde paartjie op hul aandwandering. Die jong man vind die hond 'n vriendelike dier – en 'n aangename manier om aan die vrou te wys dat hy 'n gemoedelike man is. Hy gooi 'n stuk harde bamboes doer vir die hond. Die hond is ywerig. Hy gaan haal dit en bring dit terug – vasgeknyp in sy breëbekglimlag.

Hierdie man weet hoe om te speel, kom die hond agter. Die hond hardloop wye draaie en sirkel dan terug vir nog 'n sarsie bamboesgooi. Al agter die paartjie aan totdat hulle later net spikkels op die draai is.

Dalk was dit nooit eens die seun se hond nie, dink die man in die bakkie. Hy is sissend van woede. Sissend. 

Anneli Groenewald is 'n dosent aan Universiteit Stellenbosch se Departement Joernalistiek. Hierdie verhaal is gepubliseer op uitnodiging van die klas van 2023.

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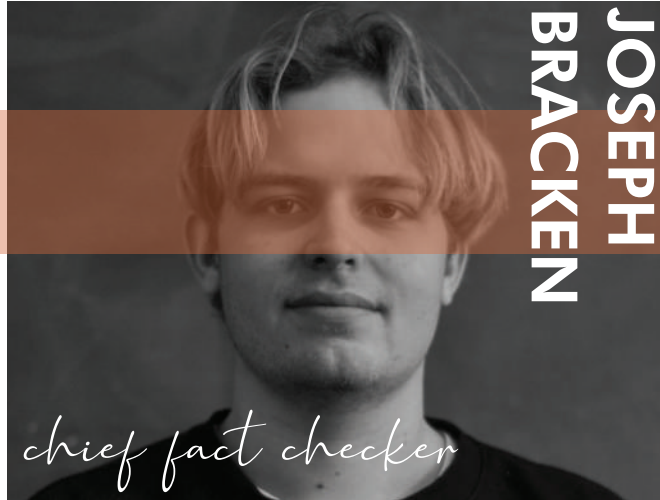
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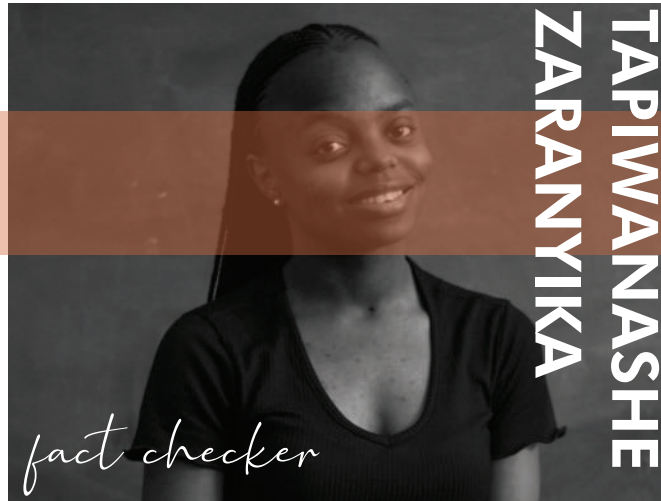
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WHAT MAKES THE CLASS OF

2023 FEEL CONNECTED:

"ALLOWING PEOPLE THE FREEDOM OF AUTHENTIC EXPRESSION"

"LENIE BLOU BY 'N SPOEGWOLF-KONSERT"

"ADDRESSING INEQUALITY"

"MOVING FORWARD, TOGETHER"

"INVISIBLE THREADS ARE THE STRONGEST TIES"
- FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

"THE CARTE BLANCHE THEME SONG"

"ESTABLISHING UNITY THROUGH COMMUNICATION"

"UBUNTU"

"NOT ESKOM"

"DIE SPRINGBOKKE IN 'N RUGBYWÊRELD BEKER-FINAAL"

"EMPATHY THROUGH EDUCATION"

"SUID-AFRIKANERS EN HUL SIN VIR HUMOR"

"EYE-CONTACT"

"MEETING PEOPLE ON THEIR LEVEL"

"HAVING A COMMUNITY AND A SENSE OF BELONGING"

"ALL IS CONNECTED [...] NO ONE THING CAN CHANGE BY ITSELF"
- PAUL HAWKEN

"WITH CONNECTION, WE FIND STRENGTH, PURPOSE AND BELONGING"

"COLLABORATIVE LATE NIGHTS"

"NKOSI SIKELEL' IAFRIKA"





Cc

connection

(noun)

1. *[countable] something that connects two facts, ideas, etc.*
2. *[uncountable] connection (to something) the act of connecting or the state of being connected.*