

# **‘Making Public Life Work’: Can Public Journalism Be Used as a Tool to Further Development in South Africa?**

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# **Abstract**

This master of journalism thesis outlines how public journalism can be used as a development tool in South Africa. The thesis explains how the concept of public journalism, which allows journalists to get involved in their communities rather than being neutral observers in order to contribute to a better democratic society, can be used in South Africa to foster democratic and social development from a “bottom-up” approach. The thesis includes a discussion about the role of the media in a democratic society, as well as notions of democracy and development, to argue that journalists must be participants in debates about their society. This is even more important in the context of developing countries, such as South Africa, which is undergoing a significant transition from years of struggle under apartheid to an emerging developed democracy.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a movement took place in American journalism in response to a decline in newspaper readership which some attributed to a disconnect between the newspaper and its readers (Eksterowicz & Roberts, 2000; Haas, 2007; Rosen 1999a). The movement, coined as public journalism by New York University professor Jay Rosen, called on journalists to get involved in their communities in an effort to know the readers and contribute to making improvements in their society. In his book, *What Are Journalists For?*, Rosen (1999a) called for a movement toward public journalism at a time when citizens were not really interested in the collective greater good. During this time in cities across the United States, race relations were causing problems, the recession and rise of globalization was affecting small towns with unemployment and business leaving for international destinations, election coverage was producing apathetic voters, and media were more concerned about their bottom line rather than the people in the community it served (Rosen, 1999a).

From this, Rosen (1999a) saw an opportunity for journalists to perform their societal role to make “public life work” (p. 11). He and others (Coleman, 1997; Shepard, 1994; Altschull, 1996; Haas, 2007; Glasser, 1999; Glasser & Craft, 1996; Merritt, 1995; Charity, 1995; Carey, 1999) believed that simply reporting what was happening in their societies was not enough and called on journalists to step into the public sphere themselves and advocate for changes by organizing forums to stimulate debate and discussion, and foregoing the simple “observer” role to become significant players in

initiating transformations of society by exerting “their influence in politics and to use it on behalf of a ‘genuine democracy’” (Rosen, 1999a, p. 54). In answering his question, “What does it take to make democracy work and what should be asked of the press?” Rosen (1999a) stated that “the newspaper of the future will have to rethink its relationship to all the institutions that nourish public life, from libraries to universities to cafes” (p. 20). The media “will have to do more than ‘cover’ these institutions when they happen to make news” (Rosen, 1999a, p. 20) because “thoughtful journalists [find] it hard to deny their roles as players in the system” (Rosen, 1999a, p. 36). As Haas (2007) states, “Instead of perceiving themselves as disinterested (or neutral) observers who occupy a privileged position above or detached from citizens and their particular concerns, journalists should perceive themselves as ‘political actors’ or ‘fair minded participants’ who care about whether public life goes well” (pg. 5).

Some news outlets took up the cause. For example, in Columbus, Georgia, *Ledger-Enquirer* editor Jack Swift decided to do something about the problems in his community, which included racial inequality and an economic downturn negatively affecting the city (Rosen, 1999a). Reporters from the paper ended up writing an eight-part series of articles called “Columbus Beyond 2000” which talked about the future of the city. Reporters talked to local residents and asked what they wanted for their future, spoke to politicians, academics and youth and found that the residents liked their city and wanted to stay there, but saw that there were significant local problems that needed to be addressed. The paper urged the community to address them. When the series was published, however, there was very little response from the public on the problems or



discussion on how to make improvements. Rosen (1999a) wrote, “The community lacked organization, leadership, lively debate. It had a government but a weak public sphere, a politics not enough people were willing to join” (p. 29). When the editors saw that nothing was being done, they overtly intervened by organizing a public meeting to address the issues. Three hundred people showed up and talked for six hours about the problems in their community. After that, Swift organized a barbecue at his house for 75 of the people who had gone to the previous meeting. After talking again, participants organized a group called United Beyond 2000 and created task forces to address city recreational needs, childcare, race relations and youth. The task forces later sponsored other public forums and this caught the attention of local politicians who finally jumped into the fray to direct the city’s future (Rosen, 1999a). In the end, a higher level of participatory democracy rose out of a once apathetic community that did very little until the press took up the cause.

Rosen (1999a) commented that the newspaper could have looked at the first outcome, when there was no response, and said that it tried but no one cared to do anything. The *Ledger-Enquirer* could have given up, but it chose to be disturbed that there was so much apathy and worked harder to have that discussion instead. This is an example of “how journalism affects the way public life goes” (Merritt & McMasters, 1996). This kind of journalism, however, forces reporters to leave their “objective” ideals aside to get involved in a story, to the dismay of several critics (Merritt & McMasters, 1996; Altschull, 1996; Barney, 1996). Issues such as conflicts of interest, credibility and a lack of independence arise (Coleman, 1997) when journalists start preaching to the

masses and “confound the profession’s normal view of itself” (Rosen, 1999, p. 54). Some critics (Woo, 2000; Merritt & McMasters, 1996; Altschull, 1996; Barney, 1996) say journalists cannot be both chroniclers of news and makers of news while others believe that the essence of public journalism is what “first-rate newspapers have been doing all along” (Shepard, 1994, p. 30) but without the overt advocacy. Other critics, such as former *Newsday* editor Howard Schneider argued against public journalism because he believed that if the newspapers, television and radio news step into this new advocacy role and get “identified as a particular advocate for a position, the dangers are self-evident. Once you lose your credibility and your ability to speak with authoritativeness, you’re losing everything” (in Shepard, 1994, p. 34).

This may be a moot point, however, as some critics such as Jack Shafer (2003), argue that public journalism is dead. In a 2003 commentary in the online magazine *Slate*, Shafer declared:

The public journalism movement exhorted reporters, editors, and producers to make journalism part of a new “civic exploration” and report the news in a fashion that would “serve democracy” and “improve citizenship.” The crusade collapsed because public journalism—like other allegedly healthful diets—wasn’t so patently good for you that it justified the awful taste going down. But it also bombed because few reporters—even the opinionated ones who season their work with ideology or vote a straight ticket—view themselves as catalysts of change, social engineers, or builders of political cadre. They care most about discovering new information and beating the competition. Plus, on the demand side, readers tend to cringe if preached to from a pulpit, no matter how well-meaning the sermon might be. Who wants to have an agenda spooned down his throat with his Wheaties (para. 2)?

Despite the criticism, however, organizations dedicated to public journalism have sustained themselves and the movement. For instance, the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, whose mission is to “enable news organizations to create and refine better

ways of reporting the news to re-engage people in public life” (Pew Center for Civic Journalism, n.d.a, Mission section, para. 1), still believes in the notion that journalists “are willing to declare an end to their neutrality on certain questions—for example: whether people participate, whether a genuine debate takes place when needed, whether a community comes to grips with its problems” (Rosen, 1999a, p. 11). Another organization emerged in 2003 after a meeting at the Kennesaw State University in Georgia to discuss the future of public journalism. Almost a decade after the movement took hold, many felt it could “be on the verge of extinction” (Witt, 2004a), but the Public Journalism Network was created and still has a presence. On its one-year anniversary in 2004 and in response to Shafer, Kennesaw professor Leonard Witt wrote on the PJN website that public journalism is not dead, but rather has evolved. With the rise in Internet users and access to information online, bloggers and citizen journalists are becoming the “public journalists,” but mainstream journalists can also use the World Wide Web to their own advantages (Witt, 2004a).

Power has been shifted, Witt (2004a) claims. In fact, he says that the arguments about public journalism used to take place between people like himself and Rosen with editors of the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*, but now “the voices of a wide range of citizens are being heard loud and clear on the Internet, mostly through weblogs” (Witt, 2004a). Witt (2004a) declared: “public journalism, civic journalism, participatory journalism, the public’s journalism: It’s all part of an evolution that has taken public journalism theory to practice, which must make all of us—citizens, researchers, teachers and journalists—reappraise what we do and how we do it” (also Haas, 2007). Further to

this, in his book, *SuperMedia: Saving Journalism So It Can Save the World*, Beckett (2008) acknowledges that the digital media, in particular the Internet and Web 2.0 tools such as Twitter, Facebook, and instantaneous blogging, have changed the way traditional media (print, radio and TV) operate. He believes, however, that instead of just withering away, journalists in “old media” outlets need to transform themselves to not only embrace the new technology, but to also develop what he calls “networked journalism” which he argues “offers the chance for the news media to enhance its social role. It is a recognition that mainstream professional journalists must share the very process of production” (Beckett, 2008, p. 4). “Networked journalism,” although a different name, has the same tenets and goals of public journalism in that it’s focused on journalists engaging with their communities. This is one way public journalism has “evolved” and continues today, as new media tools force journalists to interact with their communities more often and not simply report the sound bites.

While there have been numerous critics of public journalism throughout the years, I believe that it has had its successes and is still a valid form of journalism in today’s media and social environment. This thesis answers Rosen’s question, “What are journalists for?” as well as rebuts critics’ argument that public journalism is dead by proposing a new purpose for it. It argues that journalists are an important part to any democracy, in not only helping to develop it, but to sustain it and foster it with an active and participatory citizenry. In this way, Rosen’s concept of public journalism as outlined above can also work as a development tool in Global South countries to encourage democracy and contribute to locally developed solutions to a wide array of issues in light

of the failures of a top-down, neo-colonialist economic approach. That is what journalists are for.

In this thesis, I will be examining the media in post-apartheid South Africa. The thesis will look at how public journalism can be used to help citizens and communities in South Africa as they cope with an uneasy transition to democracy and political, social and economic development after more than 50 years of institutionalized racism. I argue that public journalism can play a great role in a country like South Africa, an emerging democracy which is, 16 years after the end of apartheid, still struggling for social, economic and political development. Because South Africa transitioned to a democratic system in 1994, it will be difficult to show the direct correlation of public journalism and positive social, economic and/or political development in South Africa, however, the thesis will focus on what is already being done with public journalism and show the beginnings of a culture of journalistic involvement in creating a better society using this type of journalism.

As Easterly (2006) and Beckett (2008) point out, there have been billions of dollars in foreign aid poured into the Global South, and it has not helped lift Global South countries out of poverty and democratic changes have been slow to take place. Purely economic development models such as modernization theory and dependency theory have failed to address development issues in South Africa because they have been led by Western, or outsider notions of development (Easterly, 2006; Okolie, 2003; Edigheji, 2007). This is where public journalism can play a crucial role in getting local communities in South Africa involved in their own development success, as it did from

Columbus, Georgia, in a bottom-up approach. In the process, it can help to build a democratic dialogue leading to a more engaged public sphere.

## **Methodology**

The bulk of my research will be in the form of secondary sources such as books and journal articles that deal with the topic of journalism's role in society, public journalism, international development and development communication. The thesis will focus on several reports released by a variety of commissions looking into the media and its role in society, such as the 1947 Hutchins Commission report in the U.S., the Canadian Senate's Transport and Communications Committee 2006 report on Canadian News Media, the 1981 Kent Commission report in Canada and the 1980 MacBride Commission report from the UNESCO hearings on media's role in developing countries.

The thesis will also include some primary research in the form of interviews with those involved in public journalism both in the West and in South Africa, such as Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reporter David McKie; South African lecturer Rod Amner who teaches public journalism at Rhodes University and South African media trainer and independent consultant Brett Davidson as well as former East London *Daily Dispatch* editor Andrew Trench, who led a team of public journalists.

While the thesis will be using Jay Rosen's conception of public journalism as the main definition of the model to be used in developing countries, it will also be looking at notions of journalism's social responsibility to its community as discussed by authors

such as G. Stuart Adam, John Dewey, Fred Seaton Siebert et al, and James Carey. The thesis will also delve into a discussion of international development, focussing on dependency theory's notion that development must come from within and must be organic to the community participating in development programs, from a local, grassroots perspective rather than from "developed" countries or strictly at the national level from the developing country's government (Okolie, 2003; Edigheji, 2007; Easterly, 2006; Reusse, 2002). It will connect the two notions to argue that public journalism is one way to achieve a bottom up development approach because of its principle that the media are powerful and have a responsibility to not only provide a forum for local citizens to make a contribution in creating a better society but get involved themselves in creating a better society.

## **Research questions**

Journalism, "at its heart," the Pew Center, an American organization dedicated to journalism excellence, says on its website, "has an obligation to public life—an obligation that goes beyond just telling the news or unloading lots of facts. The way we do our journalism affects the way public life goes. Journalism can help empower a community or it can help disable it" (n.d.b., Doing Civic Journalism section, para. 1). *Because this notion of public journalism is generally an American concept, can it be applied in a completely different environment such as the Global South?* I believe that it

can be, as evidenced by Haas's (2007) research on public journalism around the world (also Romano, 2010).

Public journalism evolved in the U.S., but it is also taking place now outside of the U.S. in various forms. Haas (2007) found that in both "developed" and "developing" countries such as Australia, Japan, Finland, Sweden, Argentina, Columbia, Mexico, Malawi, Senegal and Swaziland, public journalism is being used. For example, in Swaziland four news outlets came together to combat issues of rural health care, rape, incest and other forms of sexual violence by investigating them from citizen perspectives, reporting what citizens could to address the issues, and

describing grassroots efforts already underway. Since the projects ended [in 1998], two of the media partners, the *Observer* and the Swaziland Broadcasting Corporation, have made efforts to routinize the practice of public journalism by, respectively, instituting a weekly section that reports back on the outcomes of newspaper-sponsored community forums in which local residents discuss particular problems of concern to them and by producing a weekly program that focuses on the specific problems facing rural communities (Haas, 2007, p. 125).

Although some critics believe public journalism may be a dated notion in North America, it is still relevant in the context of development in today's emerging democracies, such as South Africa. Public journalism is necessary to stir discussion, improve debate and advocate for changes in places where the community is failing to do so either because of a growing apathetic society due to the failure of other civic institutions to engage members of the community, or due to a limited public sphere in developing countries.

*Even if public journalism is being used in the countries mentioned above, can journalists adopt it in a young democracy such as South Africa? Does South Africa actually need a public journalism infrastructure in its media outlets? If so, are the*



*political and media environments conducive for public journalism? If so, how will it help development in the emerging democracy?* These are some of the questions that this thesis attempts to answer.

## **The South African context**

Between 1948 and 1991, South Africa was an apartheid state where the white, Afrikaans-speaking minority dominated and discriminated against blacks and other minorities (Horwitz, 2001). Whites and blacks were separated and segregated in all aspects of life from the education system, labour relations and political rights, with blacks being restricted from certain areas of the country, not being allowed to vote, and having an inferior social system in health and education (Horwitz, 2001). In addition, blacks lived in poverty with a very limited education and training system, and mass communications were dominated by white Afrikaners (Horwitz, 2001; Thompson, 2000).

In apartheid South Africa, it was the government's policy to repress media freedom (Wasserman & de Beer, 2005; Horwitz, 2001). In fact, for the majority of apartheid rule, censorship was put in place often times indirectly, but powerfully, Horwitz (2001) notes. For example, the government passed legislation which barred journalists from reporting on defense issues, prisons, atomic energy and information about strategic resources such as petroleum (Horwitz, 2001). In addition, the government prevented "undesirable people and groups" from disseminating their ideas; for example, quoting anti-apartheid leaders was forbidden, as was publishing pictures of those anti-

apartheid leaders, such as Nelson Mandela (Wasserman & de Beer, 2005). The apartheid government also banned publication of “abhorrent” ideas such as communism, race-mixing and pornography (Horwitz, 2001). In addition, the apartheid government enacted laws which intimidated editors and journalists into self-censorship (Horwitz, 2001). Wasserman and de Beer (2005) note that “under threat of censorship, banishment, or imprisonment, these measures were taken ‘in the national interest’” which resulted in a mainly “white public sphere, polarized along ethnic lines” (p. 197). For the most part, Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli (2001) argue that the media were important in both creating and sustaining apartheid structures in South Africa prior to 1991.

Despite this, however, there was a growing resistance in the country among blacks, coupled with international media attention on the gross human rights abuses which led to the first democratic elections in April 1994 (Wasserman & de Beer, 2005) when Mandela was elected as the first black president of South Africa. Wasserman and de Beer (2005) note that “the anti-apartheid press also played an important role in bringing about democratization and the media in general contributed to a political climate susceptible to change” (p. 197) which led to a written constitution and a guarantee for freedom of expression enshrined in law. While Wasserman and de Beer (2005) admit that “although credit should be given to the media for contributing to the first democratic elections being largely peaceful, this does not mean that the full range of political options available for the first time to South Africans in 1994 were represented in the media. The majority of journalists were still white, male and middle class” (p. 197).

Since 1994, the media in South Africa have made significant transformations in reform which have resulted in more private-sector media outlets and a reorientation for the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation in both television and radio to become a truly public service broadcaster, rather than an instrument of the state (Barnett, 2001; Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 2001; Horwitz, 2001; Berger, 2001). In 2003, there were 40 SABC radio stations across the country, more than 68 community radio stations, 16 commercial radio stations, two private television broadcasters, and six national newspapers in a country which only seven years earlier enacted a bill of rights guaranteeing that “everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom of the press and other media, freedom to receive or impart information or ideas, freedom of artistic creativity, academic freedom and freedom of scientific research” (Zegeye & Harris, 2003, p. 10).

South Africa has come out of a long history of violence, racism, and poverty since the 1994 elections; however, while the tenets of democracy are now in place, “in the [16] years since the demise of the parochial nationalisms of the apartheid era, South Africa’s democracy has become increasingly uncertain” (Kagwanja, 2009, p. xv). Despite creating a country that has “one of the world’s reputedly most liberal constitutions and a vibrant pluralist democracy characterized by regular free and fair elections ... and an economy that has grown faster in the last [16] years than it did in the 1980s” (Kagwanja, 2009, p. xvi), South Africa is “far from producing one united and equitable nation” (Kagwanja, 2009, p. xvi). In fact, “post-apartheid development strategies have created what analysts have dubbed ‘two different countries’: one Lockean, largely white, wealthy and secure;

the other Hobbesian, overwhelmingly black, poverty-stricken and crime-ridden” (Kagwanja, 2009, p. xvi; also see Zegeye & Harris, 2003). According to Zegeye and Harris (2003), South Africa has 40 per cent unemployment, the income gap between rich and poor and black and white are growing, 7.5 million people don’t have access to running water, three million people still need housing, and 3.6 million people have HIV/AIDS. Zegeye and Harris (2003) argue that “since the elections of 1994, the country has a new liberal democratic regime, but this new regime is confronted by serious social, economic and political problems” (p. 4). In addition, as Kivikuru (2006) points out, South Africans “exhibit a low sense of citizen efficacy. They are distressed about the slowness of change, perhaps even in the direction their government have chosen to take. Accordingly, they rank quite poorly in terms of interest and participation in democratic politics. ... [South Africa] seems to be in danger of developing a ‘democracy without the people’” (p. 9). Similar to the citizens of Columbus, Georgia, as mentioned earlier, South Africans have become apathetic to politics, even though they’re aware that changes need to be made (Kivikuru, 2006).

The history of South Africa lends itself at first glance to a political and media state that would not adopt public journalism easily. However, as can be seen above, governments are now democratically and universally elected and the media has made transformations to serving the public rather than the state, showing that journalists are at least free to choose a public journalism model. The social context in today’s South Africa also shows a need for a deliberative approach to development as years of international aid and an economic approach to solving social problems has not helped to lift the country

out of Global South status. As Easterly (2006) points out, there have been billions of dollars in foreign aid poured into the developing world, and it has not helped lift these countries out of poverty and democratic changes have been slow to take place.

Development models that rely only on economic indicators as well as dependency theory have failed to address development issues in South Africa because of its top-down nature (Okolie, 2003; Edigheji, 2007). This is where public journalism can play a crucial role in getting local communities in South Africa involved in their own development process because the people in the community know what is best for their communities.

Nixon Kariithi (2005) points out that “Africa is still faltering under the weight of abject poverty, widespread underdevelopment, mounting foreign debt, and rising economic dependency” and that “if Africa’s solutions lie within itself, then African people and institutions possess the necessary wherewithal—ideas, manpower, goodwill and commitment—to change the deplorable conditions rampaging on the continent” (p. 10). Kariithi (2005) calls for African journalists to embrace a “journalism of meaning,” something that will “secure for us a social connection with communities that are currently feeling underserved and tuning out. ... Indeed, African journalists must demonstrate trust in their societies and their people as the key to transformation and use their profession to create societies that celebrate and promote democracy” (p. 10).

Although public journalism is a “western” notion, if implemented in a developing context where there are so many real issues that people need to deal with on a daily basis, it could make a difference in how governments view development, as Gunaratne (1996), Shah (1996), Sosale (2003) and Berger (2002) argue. Berger (2000) asks, “Can third

world media play a role in encouraging democratic participation of people marginalized from traditional journalism there?” (p. 94). His answer is that “it has to” (p. 94) and he notes that “progress is conditional upon journalists forging alliances with other sectors of society (including journalism teachers and students) and upon them being part of a broader thrust for democratization” (p. 94). Because of this, Berger (2000) correctly argues that “journalism needs to encourage participation in a broader struggle” (p. 94).

As discussed by Okolie (2003), Easterly (2006), Kivikuru (2006) and Servaes (1999), development and overcoming the issues previously discussed needs to come from within, in a bottom-up approach that takes into account local communities’ concerns. This is why public journalism could be used to deal with the social, political and developmental issues of concern to South Africans. The conditions which prevented South African journalists from participating in public journalism projects have been removed, and there is clear interest in moving toward using the media in a development context (Horwitz, 2001; Hadland, Louw, Sesanti & Wasserman, 2008; Tomaselli & Dunn, 2001; Zegeye & Harris, 2003; Wasserman & de Beer, 2005).

Public journalism is already being practiced in a variety of ways in South Africa. For example, in 1998, Democracy Radio started a program to teach local citizens to produce half-hour programs dedicated to social issues of concern to them such as HIV/AIDS, women’s issues, nutrition, government policies, violence, race-relations and human rights among others (Kivikuru, 2006). Each program would have had a description of the problem, a narrative of citizen action which linked it to a news aspect, and then overt advice on how the community could actively get involved in making

changes, lobbying those in power or advocating for a better society and proactively influencing policy outcomes (Kivikuru, 2006). These programs “had the unique possibility due to their geographic closeness to local government bodies, to check, to criticize and to analyse the activities of local governments and to encourage citizens to participate” (Kivikuru, 2006, p. 13).

Another example is the rise of the *Daily Sun* tabloid paper, as outlined by Jones, Vanderhaeghen and Viney (2008). Publishers launched the *Daily Sun* in June 2002 with the goal of being an easy-to-read, not boring but entertaining, informative and relevant paper for local citizens with “louder headlines and a more activist tone on occasion” (Jones, Vanderhaeghen & Viney, 2008). The *Daily Sun* differentiated itself from the more in-depth and “serious” mainstream broadsheets which covered politics and social issues from a national perspective, rather than a local one (Jones, Vanderhaeghen & Viney, 2008). Jones, Vanderhaeghen and Viney (2008) say “this goal was explicitly set within the framework of a developing democracy in which people needed to be empowered to become part of the new citizenry” (p. 167). It spoke to the non-elite sector of society, with shorter stories, more local news and less formal language which critics believed was bad journalism because it appealed to the lowest common denominator (Jones, Vanderhaeghen & Viney, 2008). Jones, Vanderhaeghen and Viney (2008) argue however that the “majority of readers want[ed] to see themselves as they are, as they wish to be or as a complex blend of both” (p. 172). The *Daily Sun* dealt with issues such as violence, corruption, gender power struggles and provided opportunities for “conversations” among its readers that created “possibilities for alternative public spheres

to exist and thrive ... promoting democratic participation and open public debate” (Jones, Vanderhaeghen & Viney, 2008, p. 175).

While Jones, Vanderhaeghen and Viney (2008) believe that “in deliberately giving the readers what they want, and allowing them to contribute substantially to the content of the news section of the paper, the *Daily Sun* is giving the audience content that they can relate to and which they are able to interpret in terms of their own lives,” (2008, p. 179) this can be said of a variety of public journalism projects in South Africa, as discussed above.

Berger (2001) believes that while the media in South Africa “served as a positive factor in adopting a role as a force independent of government, providing a forum, promoting an informed citizenry and a common public sphere ... the extent to which media promoted an active citizenry and civil society is unclear” (p. 173). South Africa is still an emerging social democracy struggling to rid itself of its troubled past, which makes it difficult to make a clear correlation between public journalism and concrete social and political changes, but the above examples show that there is an interest in trying out the concept. Berger (2001) explains it best:

The wider picture is that racism still exists in South Africa, but it no longer rules. The old draconian political dispensation is gone, and democracy is part of daily public practice and discourse. Development has proved the hardest nut to crack, with transformation in terms of black economic empowerment proceeding erratically, unevenly and slowly. The transforming media reflects all these changes and contributes to them. If its evolution continues to make a difference, that in turn may help bring a transformation in emphasis. Thus, as South Africa is increasingly able to leave behind the issues of racial and democratic transformation, so media’s role in development can gain greater urgency and attention (p. 175).



Rosen's (1999a) concept of journalists as participants in the democratic debate is a prime example of how the media can work to foster a democratic environment in South Africa, which is undergoing a significant transition from years of struggle under apartheid to an emerging developed democracy.

## **Outline**

While the thesis will also bring in elements of the role of the media in society, it will focus mainly on public journalism, its practice, and how it can be used positively for development purposes in South Africa. Chapter 2 will therefore set up the premise that public journalism is still in use, even if there are different names for it, such as Beckett's (2008) "networked journalism" or Rosenberry and St. John's (2010) "public journalism 2.0." The chapter begins with a discussion of "objectivity" and traditional notions of what journalism should look like. It will then delve in depth into the history of public journalism as well as its precursors, for example, the principles espoused by John Dewey, the 1947 Hutchins Commission in the U.S., and cemented in ideas put forth by Jay Rosen and James Carey and the Canadian Senate Committee on Transport and Communications' 2006 report on the Canadian media to form the tenets of public journalism today. This will be followed by a discussion of what democracy truly means and why public journalism is an important means to achieving a democratic public sphere. Media effects on democracy will also be discussed in order to ascertain whether public journalism can make a difference in society. The last part of this chapter will focus

on American public journalism projects such as the well documented *Charlotte Observer*. The chapter ends by noting that public journalism is still alive, despite its critics, not only in western democracies but also in emerging democratic states.

Chapter 3 will include an in-depth discussion about international development, including the somewhat unsuccessful historical attempts for economic, social and political development in the Global South. Concepts of development and the Global South will first be defined followed by a discussion of why, after 60 years of international development practices, many of the world's countries remain members of the Global South. There will be a focus on dependency theory's notion that development must come from within and must be organic to the community participating in development programs (Okolie, 2003). The idea of "development communication" and "development journalism," as put forward by the 1980 MacBride Commission Report from UNESCO's hearings on the media's role in developing countries, will also be discussed, showing a difference between development communication's goals and public journalism's. The main difference is that development journalism is top-down while public journalism requires direct participation from all members of society. The conditions for which public journalism will most likely thrive will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Chapter 4 will be an overview of South Africa's social and political history, including the history of the media's role in the South African public sphere, pre- and during apartheid. This chapter will discuss how the media helped to bring about democracy in South Africa, culminating in the April 1994 elections in which blacks were able to vote for the first time and in which a black president was elected. There will also

be an overview of the current state of mass communication and journalism in South Africa focusing on the tremendous transformations the media industry has gone through in order to foster a more democratic society. The chapter will also note that although South Africa is more democratic today, the social and economic realities are still divisive. It will also show South Africa's long history of using the media to empower its people, for example in the alternative press during the apartheid years which helped usher in the democratic elections in 1994. South Africa today has a growing media environment and this chapter will argue that it has the right conditions for journalists to foster a public journalism movement of its own.

Chapter 5 will focus solely on the attempts at public journalism in South Africa and the possibilities for the movement in a development context, such as the previously mentioned community radio stations, tabloids and a significant public journalism project at East London's *Daily Dispatch*. Since there has been a short period in modern history of press freedom in the country, admittedly, it will be difficult to show directly how the media have played a role in sustaining positive social, economic and/or political development in South Africa through public journalism efforts. Because of this reality, this chapter will focus on possibilities for the use of public journalism in South Africa to create a better society with some examples of small changes resulting from the *Daily Dispatch*'s public journalism. It will also show that South African journalists are indeed embracing this type of journalism and the future for it in sustained practice is possible.

The concluding Chapter 6 will reiterate and connect the notions of development and public journalism as one way to achieve a bottom-up development approach in South

Africa, because the media are powerful and have a responsibility to not only provide a forum for local citizens to make a contribution in creating a better society but get involved themselves in 'making public life work.'

## **Chapter 2: What are journalists for?**

The goal of this chapter is to establish that public journalism is still being used in today's newsrooms, both in the U.S. where it evolved and around the world. It begins with a discussion about "traditional" journalism, that of objective watchdog observer, and why it's important for journalists to do more than simply report the news. It argues that public journalism—engaging the community in dialogue—is one way to make democracy work when current "traditional" journalism methods are discouraging people from public participation. The chapter outlines the historical roots of public journalism and the important role that journalism plays in democracies, followed by examples of successful public journalism movements in the U.S. It will also discuss some of the criticism public journalism has received and how the concept has prevailed—not only because of the rise of the Internet and technology, but also as can be seen in its continued usage both in the U.S. and throughout the world. The chapter concludes by establishing that public journalism is not only a North American concept that can be exported, but is also a concept that is being used in developing countries, such as South Africa to help make public life work.

### **Introduction: Journalism's objectivity**

Journalists are trained to be detached from their story subjects in an effort to get a true, unbiased story. Many in the profession will likely say that the ideal concept of objectivity—that is, giving equal time to all sides of the story, stating just the facts and

being a neutral observer of the day's news—is one of the most important parts of being a journalist (Altschull, 1996; Rosen, 1999a). For example, in a chapter entitled “Fundamentals of Reporting,” McKercher and Cumming (1998) note that “journalistic patterns are commonly linked with objectivity” (p. 23) and that in recent times, the industry moved to a kind of journalism where “it didn't matter whether one side was right and the other wrong, or whether ‘reality’ was something different from either version. Just reporting both sides was efficient” (p. 22). In addition, McKercher and Cumming (1998) point out that objectivity includes: “professional detachment in manner, in which reporters at news conferences, interviews or public meetings are careful not to seem partisan; and detachment from causes, in which reporters in their private lives are urged (or required) not to identify themselves publicly with controversial views, since readers might assume the reporter or publication is biased” (p. 23), which are essential characteristics of being a good journalist. In its guideline for its reporters, the Canadian Press (CP) newswire states that objectivity and impartiality are basic tenets to writing a good story rather than inserting one's opinion (The Canadian Press, 2002). In its *Stylebook*, CP (2002) says that “everything that we do must be honest, unbiased and unflinchingly fair. We deal with facts that are demonstrable, supported by sources that are reliable and responsible. We pursue with equal vigour all sides of a story” (p. 13). As a result, in “traditional” journalism, often there is a separation of news stories and editorial opinions within newspapers as well as news shows on TV and radio so that reporters and news organizations are seen as more credible (Rosen, 1999a). Jones (2009) argues that objectivity is not necessarily an attempt for journalists to be completely

neutral but rather it's "an effort to discern a practical truth" (p. 88). He says that "reporters seeking genuine objectivity search out the best truth possible from the evidence that the reporter, in good faith, can find. To discredit objectivity because it is impossible to arrive at perfect truth is akin to dismissing trial by jury because it isn't perfect in its judgments" (2009, p. 88).

While objectivity is a strong measure of good journalism, is it the only criterion to being a good journalist? There is a debate among journalists and media observers about the merits of objectivity and whether it can truly be achieved (McKercher & Cumming, 1998; Rosen, 1999a; Altschull, 1996). Some would argue that objectivity is impossible to achieve (McKercher & Cumming, 1998; Altschull, 1996; see also Jones, 2009) but it's still desirable to attempt it in journalistic work (McKercher & Cumming, 1998; Jones 2009). While some journalists tend to believe that their profession is a high calling and their jobs are to get the facts and present them objectively so that readers and viewers are able to judge their own truth, Altschull (1996) argues that objectivity should not be a barometer for journalists and in fact goes against what journalists traditionally see as their role in society: watchdogs against government. He notes:

Objectivity simply does not exist. Even if it did exist, it would be wrong because objectivity always works on behalf of the status quo. ... It is an instrument to guarantee the preservation of institutions and the social order. It permits criticism of individuals but not of the fundamental system, political, economic, or social. The state of impartiality, is in fact, defensive of the system. That in this model the press retains the potential to challenge the social order is the element that poses a threat to those who exercise power. Inasmuch as the press fails to live up to its potential, it is carrying out the political role that is desired of it by those in power. To the extent that the press endorses the idea that it is above politics it is serving the needs of power. Isn't it the business of journalism to help the public understand (1996, p. 169)?

Hackett and Zhao (1998) share this sentiment. They argue that “the regime of journalistic objectivity provides a legitimization for established ideological optics and power relations. It systematically produces partial representations of the world, skewed towards dominant institutions and values, while at the same time it disguises that ideological role from its audiences” (1998, p. 161). Hackett and Zhao (1998) attribute this to a movement toward a “conservative, right-wing” view of market-liberalism on the journalism industry which uses the media to further that agenda. They note that in a study of Canadian Press stories over a one-year period, the “right-wing” Fraser Institute was quoted in 140 stories, while the “left-wing” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives was quoted in 16. In this context, they ask, is “objectivity” at play, or is “balance” really being sought and achieved? Rosen (1999a) notes that

the maligned but still influential doctrine of objectivity, the related emphasis on fairness and balance, the separation between the news columns and the editorial page, the treasured watchdog role, the adversarial stance, the injunction to ‘let the chips fall where they may’ ... [does not] offer guidance to the people [journalist David] Broder tried to address: professionals willing to acknowledge their influence in politics and to use it on behalf of ‘genuine democracy’ (p. 54).

According to the Canadian Association of Journalists, journalism is about more than objectivity and reporting facts. The CAJ’s Statement of Principles notes that not only is it a journalist’s “privilege and duty to seek and report the truth” (CAJ, 2002, Preamble section, para. 1) journalists are also responsible for “captur[ing] the diversity of human experience, speak[ing] for the voiceless and encourag[ing] civic debate to build our communities and serve the public interest” (CAJ, 2002, Preamble section, para. 1). Encouraging public debate and giving voice to those who have none can be just as important as objectivity, which is what the Pew Center for Civic Journalism believes. The



Pew Center, whose mission is to “enable news organizations to create and refine better ways of reporting the news to re-engage people in public life” (Pew Center, n.d.a, Mission section, para. 1), believes that public engagement is more important than giving equal time and space to two opposing sides of a story in the search for truth. “At its heart,” the Pew Center says on its website, “journalism has an obligation to public life—an obligation that goes beyond just telling the news or unloading lots of facts. The way we do our journalism affects the way public life goes. Journalism can help empower a community or it can help disable it” (Pew Center, n.d.b, Doing Civic Journalism section, para. 1). Mike O’Neill, former editor of *New York Daily News*, summed up journalism’s purpose well: “No longer are we just the messengers, observers on the sidelines, which’s mirrors faithfully telling society how it looks. Now we are deeply embedded in the democratic process itself, as principal actors rather than bit players or mere audience” (in Rosen, 1999a, p. 35). As will be seen in the next section, authors such as Carey (2008), Haas (2007), Rosen (1999a), Charity (1995) and several others argue that journalists have a public service role to play in society. Those authors also believe that the media should not only observe public life and report what happens, but cover it in a way that’s meaningful and actually includes a dialogue between all members of society. This does not necessarily mean the end of the traditional “objective” role of the journalist, as Merritt (in Merritt & McMasters, 1996), Glasser (1999) and Rosen (1999) argue. As Glasser (1999) points out, “the press as a fair-minded participant thus rests on the proposition that an activist role for the press must be nonpartisan and apolitical” (p. 8). In fact, “journalism should advocate democracy without advocating particular solutions,”

argues Charity (in Glasser, 1999, p. 146). In this way, the media can play a role in democracy, while remaining neutral on specific outcomes. This type of journalism is called “civic” or “public” journalism.<sup>1</sup>

## **Public journalism: A definition, and its historical roots**

In short, public journalism can be defined as journalists being involved in their communities as democratic participants rather than the “neutral observers” so enshrined in traditional views of journalism (Glasser & Craft, 1996; Rosen, 1999a; Charity, 1995; Eksterowicz & Roberts, 2000). According to Glasser and Craft (1996), public journalism recognizes that reporters have a role in facilitating public debate and “expects the press to acknowledge the decay of democracy, usually measured as a decline in voter turnout, and requires a commitment from the press to improve conditions for self-governance. It expects the press to abandon the traditional and still dominant view of journalism, which holds the newsroom must stand detached from, and disinterested in, community affairs” (p. 153).

New York University professor Jay Rosen coined the term in the early 1990s and was one of the first to spearhead this concept into a movement in the United States. He described public journalism as essential if democracy was to work properly (Rosen, 1999a) and explained that this type of journalism did not

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<sup>1</sup> While there are differences in meaning between “civic” and “public” journalism depending on which author is speaking about the term, both “civic” and “public” will be interchangeably used to mean the same, in this thesis as a type of journalism which helps to create a public debate about society’s top issues in order to make a positive change.

deny the important differences between journalists and other actors, including political leaders, interest groups and citizens themselves. What is denied is any essential difference between the standards and practice that make responsible journalism and the habits and expectations that make for a well-functioning public realm, a productive dialogue, a politics we can all respect. In a word, public journalists want public life to work (in Glasser & Craft, 1996, pg. 153).

Rosen (1999a) explained that public journalism's manifesto included causing the public to see the 'public' as theirs, rather than "the playground of insiders or political professionals" (p. 74) who journalists often looked to tell the public's story.

While Rosen coined the term (Glasser & Craft, 1996), the roots of the movement for journalists to really engage the public, play an active role in society and intervene as a force for positive change can be seen as early as the 1920s (Coleman, 1997; Rosen, 1999a; Carey, 1999). John Dewey was an American political philosopher who wrote about various aspect of democracy. One work, called *The Public and Its Problems*, is seen to be a forerunner for public journalism, as Dewey argued that individuals were incomplete without a community (Coleman, 1997; Rosen, 1999a; Haas, 2007). He believed that democracy was a social idea rather than a system of governance (Coleman, 1997) and saw the proper role of the mass media in society as sustaining a democratic community. He said for true democracy to be realized, "it must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion. And even as far as political arrangements are concerned, governmental institutions are but a mechanism for securing to an idea channels of effective operation" (in Coleman, 1997, p. 63).

When Dewey was writing in the 1920s, he was concerned with the problems surrounding the public because of the new technologies that were being developed. He believed that society was deteriorating and citizens were becoming detached from their

communities, which was what he saw as the “problem” with the public (Coleman, 1997; Rosen, 1999a). In order to address this “problem,” Dewey argued that there needed to be more communication among those in the community. He said, “The essential need, in other words, is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion” (in Coleman, 1997, p. 63). During the same time, American author Walter Lippmann, however, believed that the public and the media were in fact the problem for democracy as society was too complex and problems should be left to the elite classes, or “experts” to develop solutions and a journalist’s role was to translate the “technical deliberations” of government for the public that could not govern themselves (Carey, 2009; Haas, 2007). Carey (2009) explains Lippmann’s view as one where “rational knowledge could not be gained of human values or purposes” (p. 58) because people judged truth by their own desires and biases. Truth could only be discerned by how information was determined, Lippmann argued (Carey 2009), and if citizens had “perfect information,” they could make better decisions and as a result, “the social good” would prevail. Carey (2009) explained that Lippmann believed that “the mass media could operate as representatives of the public by correctly informing public opinion [by] ... employ[ing] cadres of scientists to secure exact representations” (p. 59, 60) of the truth.

In response to Lippman’s work, *Public Opinion*, Dewey argued that “every individual has something to contribute, that people are capable of making their own decisions, that given the chance they can understand their predicament well enough to puzzle through it, that the world is knowable if we teach ourselves how to study and discuss it” (Rosen, 1999a, p. 65; see also Carey, 2009). Further, Dewey says that truth

can only be understood by “personal intercourse in the local community” (in Carey, 2009, p. 60) through extensive discussions with everyone in the public. Dewey argues, in opposition to Lippman “that and that only gives reality to public opinion. We lie, as Emerson said, in the lap of an immense intelligence. But that intelligence is dormant and its communications are broken, inarticulate and faint until it possesses the local community as its medium” (in Carey, 2009, p. 61).

Rosen (1999a) also questioned Lippman, asking how perceived “experts” can truly know what the rest of the community wants. For Rosen (1999a), truth and democracy flowed from “the participatory medium of public talk [because] people learn what they have in common and take ownership of the problems they share” (p. 66). This is where the press could play a role in democracy: organizing public talks, mediating discussions and covering the community’s response to the problems they face. Coleman (1997) argues that “an active and informed public was the ultimate solution” (p. 64) to fix society’s ills. This was because of Dewey’s “belief in the problem-solving powers of groups” (Coleman, 1997, p. 63) and the notion that communication was essential to “getting people to participate in the public life of a community, which parallels one of the stated goals of today’s public journalism” (Coleman, 1997, p. 64).

As can be seen above, the ideas rooted in public journalism are not new. Another precursor to public journalism can be found in the Hutchins Commission of 1947 in the United States. *Time* magazine publisher Henry R. Luce financed a \$200,000 study on the freedom of the press in 1943, a time when the public began criticizing corporate ownership of media. For example, new labour laws were introduced in the U.S. to protect

employees from being exploited. This meant that with the passage of the *National Industrial Recovery Act*, employers had to increase wages, decrease working hours and eliminate child labour. Owners of news organizations saw their profits dropping and used the excuse that these measures were infringing on their first amendment constitutional rights to freedom of speech to speak out against the new laws (Dornan, 1991). Critics quickly saw this as journalists representing commercial interests rather than the public's. Journalists were labeled as "out of step with the general population's wishes for society while reflecting the biases of its owners in its presentation of the news" (Dornan, 1991, p. 160). The commission was created to address these issues and was headed by then-University of Chicago chancellor Robert Hutchins.

The commission had 17 meetings over two years, seeking to find the answers to questions such as was press freedom in jeopardy? What was the role of the mass media in a modern, democratic society? If press freedom were in peril, what could be done to bring the media back to a democratic public sphere? The commission published its findings in 1947. It concluded not only that freedom of the press was in danger<sup>2</sup> but also that journalists and media owners had the duty to be responsible to the public (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947; Peterson, 1963). It also found that the press had lost its sense of purpose because

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<sup>2</sup> The Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947) found that freedom of the press was in danger for three reasons: "First the importance of the press to the people has greatly increased with the development of the press as an instrument of mass communication. At the same time the development of the press as an instrument of mass communication has greatly decreased the proportion of the people who can express their opinions and ideas through the press. Second, the few who are able to use the machinery of the press as an instrument of mass communication have not provided a service adequate to the needs of society. Third, those who direct the machinery of the press have engaged from time to time in practices which the society condemns and which, if continued, it will inevitably undertake to regulate or control" (p. 1).

too much of the regular output of the press consists of a miscellaneous succession of stories and images, which have no relation to the typical lives of real people anywhere. The result is a meaningless flatness, distortion, and the perpetuation of misunderstanding. ... The press emphasizes the exceptional rather than the representative; the sensational rather than the significant. The press is preoccupied with these incidents to such an extent that the citizen is not supplied the information and discussion he needs to discharge his responsibilities to the community (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947, p. 68).

The 13-member panel made five recommendations as a guideline for a responsible press in a free society. These recommendations were that the media should provide “a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day’s events in a context which gives them meaning” while fostering “a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism” on matters of public importance (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947, p. 102). The media should also present “a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society” (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947, p. 102). In addition, it reinforced the notion that the media are crucial in the “presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society” and therefore must provide to the public “full access to the day’s intelligence” (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947, p. 102). In this way, the Hutchins Commission can be seen as a predecessor to public journalism because of its belief that “freedom of expression [was] a social imperative, one rooted in individual rights and duties. It was not simply that individuals had a right to have access to the most widespread exchange of ideas and argument, but that the most widespread exchange of ideas and argument depended on the duty of individuals to contribute to public discourse” (Dornan, 1991, p. 161).

The ideas brought forth from Dewey and the Hutchins Commission did not disappear as time went on. Almost 40 years after the commission reported its findings,

the same questions remained in the U.S. as well as Canada, as readership levels fell, as public trust in the profession declined, and as media concentration and convergence was on the rise (Rosen, 1999a; Kent, 2002; Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006; Dornan, 2003; Skinner & Gasher, 2005). Similar to the Hutchins Commission, the Canadian government struck a Royal Commission in 1980 in order to assess the state of the Canadian media landscape in the wake of growing media concentration in the hands of a few owners when two major dailies closed on the same day. The *Winnipeg Tribune* and the *Ottawa Journal* both closed their doors on Aug. 27, 1980. Within a week, the Canadian Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau called the commission and appointed Tom Kent, a former *Winnipeg Free Press* editor, founding editor of *Policy Options*, and fellow at the Institute for Research on Public Policy at Queen's University, as the chair. The commission was tasked with looking at the industry and making recommendations on its future. The commission resulted in a nine-volume report negatively detailing the potential effects of a growing concentration in media ownership. In 1911 there were 143 daily newspapers in Canada (Jackson, 1999) with perhaps as many owners in local communities across the country. In 2001, there were less than 20 owners for 104 daily newspapers (Dornan, 2003), with several of these owners also owning local television and radio stations as well. By 2003, that number fell even more to 14 owners for 102 daily newspapers (Skinner & Gasher, 2005). Kent reported in 1981 that "in a country has allowed so many newspaper to be owned by a few conglomerates, freedom of the press means, in itself, only that enormous influence without responsibility is conferred on a handful of people. For the heads of such



organizations to justify their position by appealing to the principle of freedom of press is offensive to intellectual honesty” (in Jackson, 1999). One of the key recommendations from the Kent report was the prohibition of expansion for newspaper chains which already owned or controlled five or more daily papers and prohibition of future acquisitions for companies to own more than five papers among several hundred, but no recommendations were meaningfully implemented (Jackson, 1999, Kent, 2002). Despite the Kent Commission’s call that concentrating ownership would limit freedom of the press, Canadian governments have been reluctant to regulate ownership, especially when it comes to cross-ownership of media (Dornan, 2003; Kent, 2002).

It is important to note this concentration and convergence of media ownership because of the lack of voices that can now be seen in today’s media landscape, not only in Canada but across the world, as media empires get larger and larger (Dornan, 2003; Kent, 2002; Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006). As Skinner and Gasher (2005) note, fewer owners for fewer news outlets means that owners can “aggregate audiences across media and thus increase their market power; reuse programming and editorial content in a number of platforms to increase efficiency, increase their potential ideological clout to decrease diversity and inhibit dissent; and build significant barriers to entry for new enterprises or competitors” (p. 53). This takes away from engagement with local communities because there is less local news, which Kent (2002) argued is a problem. He said in a 2002 article in *Policy Options* that those who do not believe concentration and convergence harm democratic freedom make the

argument that society doesn't care anymore for traditional news outlets. Kent (2002)

refutes the argument that

concentration doesn't matter much because newspapers no longer matter much; people have other sources for all the information and opinion they want. Some, with enough time and resources do. Most do not. Most people depend on the media for the information on public affairs and the diverse views about those affairs needed by the citizens of a democracy. And among those sources, neither the fleeting images and words of broadcasts, nor the massive bites of undigested information that can be downloaded through computers are substitutes for daily newsprint. Concentration has narrowed the range and lowered the quality of information that most of the press makes readily available. Everywhere, from St. John's to Victoria, it has diminished press concern with local affairs. For the country as a whole, it cramps the expression of diverse opinions (p. 28).

Similarly, the Canadian Senate Transport and Communications Committee 2006 report, *Final Report on the Canadian News Media, Volume 1 of 2*, noted that "there is a public interest in having a diversity of ownership in the Canadian news media to increase the potential for diversity of sources of news, information and analysis in particular markets or regions. While many cities in Canada support a large number of owners, the public policy goal of encouraging a diversity of ownership and sources of news is important" (p. 23). This is also important in the context of media's role in society. Newspapers, television and radio stations should simply not be in the business of solely making profits. As Dornan (2003) suggests, "the civic value of a newspaper (not to mention its commercial viability) lies in it being a compendium not only of reportage, but of competing interpretation—a daily almanac of argument, contention and debate. ... Newspapers [should] remain intact as a forum for the national conversation on which democracy depends" (p. 115). In this vein it could be said that Kent was also calling for a

type of public journalism where ideas mattered and people engaged in debate through a plurality of newspapers and other media outlets.

Dewey noted in the 1920s that cohesive communities were continuing to disband for a more personalized, individualistic lifestyle as the decades wore on (Rosen, 1999a). As news became as “objective” as possible and as political coverage became more about the “horse race” and personalities rather than policies and debate, Rosen (1999a) asked in his book *What are Journalists For?*, “What does it take to make democracy work and what should be asked of the press” (p. 23)? His answer to both was the use of public journalism and rightly so, because, as Merritt (in Merritt & McMasters, 1996) states, while journalism doesn’t cause the decline of public life, it is a factor because the media have “systematically discouraged people’s involvement in public life by the way [they] report the news” (p. 174). Merritt (in Merritt & McMasters, 1996) and others (Jones, 2009; Rosen, 1999a; Carey, 1999; Haas, 2007 and Miller, 1994) have contended that in an effort to be “balanced” or “objective,” journalists merely report facts or what people say rather than analyse news. For example, during election campaigns, journalists often report poll numbers, scandals, fashion choices and political gaffes rather than focus on policy and explain to readers, listeners and watchers why candidates for elected office deserve their vote (Merritt, 1996; Rosen, 1999a, 1999b; Carey, 1999; and Miller, 1994). In essence, news was reduced to sexy images, sensational sound bites and opinion from top line experts who opposed each other, framed in an adversarial way, which left no room for thoughtful deliberation between politicians and the public they were supposed to serve (Merritt and McMasters, 1996; Rosen, 1999a; Carey, 1999; and Miller, 1994).

Furthermore, Merritt argues that Lippmann's view of the public was upheld for so long that

the information developed and possessed by the experts became confused in their minds as superior knowledge and superior knowledge became misunderstood to be wisdom. A huge disconnect developed between the governing elite and ordinary citizens. ... Many journalists, particularly on the national scene, soon saw themselves as part of the elite which inevitably disconnected them from ordinary citizens (in Rosen, 1999b, p. 41).

This, public journalism advocates such as Merritt (1996), Rosen (1999a), Haas (2007) and Carey (1999) argue, is how the media drove a disconnect between themselves and the public. As Carey (1999) notes, "The public became a passive observer in the theatre state of politics. ... The public was an observer of the press rather [than] 'participants in the government of affairs' and the dialogue of democracy" (p. 57). Merritt (in Merritt & McMasters, 1996) also points out that while journalism cannot make public life perfect, the two are "inextricably tied together" (pg. 175), which is why public journalism is important to any democratic society.

## **Media and society: Theories for a democratic connection**

As discussed earlier in the context of public journalism, the connection between the press and democracy is not new (McQuail, 2005; Handelman, 2000; Altschull, 1984). While democracy can be defined in simple terms as majority rule and representative governments, some authors such as Handelman (2000), Altschull (1984) and Servaes (1999) believe it is more than this. For Handelman (2000), a "full democracy" includes:

a political system in which most of the country's leading government officials are elected, there is nearly universal suffrage, elections are largely free of fraud and outside manipulation, opposition candidates have a real chance of being elected to

important national offices and minority rights as well as civil liberties generally are respected, including free speech and free “press.” All of these conditions help guarantee that democratic governments are accountable to their citizens in a way that authoritarian regimes are not (p. 253).

The role that the media play in democracy is so strong that Philips Cutright argues “when other factors are held constant, there is a strong correlation between a country’s level of mass communications and its degree of democracy, stronger even than the correlation between economic development and democracy. A free and active mass media and opportunities for citizens to exchange ideas promote a free society” (in Handelman, 2000, p. 253). Public journalism is rooted in this idea that the media and democracy go hand in hand. As Gans (2004) notes, journalists do not only inform society, but is one means for citizens to participate fully in their communities because the more they are informed, the more they will take part in political discourse. This is why the correlation between true democracies and a free press exists (Handelman, 2000). Adam pointed this out in 1976 in *Journalism, Communication and the Law*. Adam’s (1976) argument that press freedom and the function of the press is an “essential condition for democratic life” (p. 20) is still relevant today. He explains:

It is impossible to conceive of a modern democratic society without at the same time conceiving of the journalist enmeshed in its political events. Equally, the city has been the creative centre of journalism. The newspaper has been the domain within which public discourse ... [is] designed to stimulate a civic response such as a vote or a petition, political journalism is manifestly instrumental. Accordingly, it matters less that the writing is insightful or elevated. It is functional or instrumental even where it is pedestrian. Cumulatively, it delivers news and analysis to the citizen who in our tradition is the source of whatever legitimacy individual governments have. That the citizen is informed even in bits and pieces is so fundamental disciples of the democratic tradition can do nothing but applaud when the journalist writes political news (p. 20).

The correlation between a free press and a democratic society dates back to the 1600s (McQuail, 2005; Altschull, 1984). Prior to the invention of moveable type, the only printed matter were religious texts and historical works available only to those in power. As the printing press gained traction, ideas spread quickly and gave rise to the Enlightenment era when people such as Thomas Paine, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and David Hume challenged the social order through their use of the printed word (Altschull, 1984). The public was able to easily gather information, to become educated and a new middle class of people developed that could question those in power through the exchange of ideas. Although it is true that the ideas of free speech and a free press in the early days of the Enlightenment were only afforded to white, educated, rich males in the higher rungs of society, it helped to establish a more democratic society in states where monarchies were overthrown and replaced by a government elected by the people. Furthermore, according to Dornan (1991), “the printing press made possible a public discourse on human affairs that would provide the foundation for democratic political systems” (p. 151). In this context, it can be said that democracy exists because of a free press. In fact, “Democracy does not exist merely in a universal franchise exercised periodically at the polls; it requires also the right to contribute to the welter of public argument and opinion on the issues of the day,” Dornan (1991, p. 152) argues, correctly noting that “without such a right, the franchise alone is empty and illusory.” This is because democracy is rooted in public discourse which is not constrained or controlled “since control over public debate would amount to control over the political process itself” (Dornan, 1991, p. 152). Altschull (1984) also makes a point of this, arguing that

“an independent press stands as a protection for the people against abuses of power and above all, as the centrepiece of the democratic assumption” (p. 146).

Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1963) put forward these concepts in their influential book, *Four Theories of the Press*, which helps to shape an understanding of the media's role in society and furthers the intellectual basis for public journalism. The four theories included “authoritarian theory,” “libertarian theory,” “social responsibility theory,” and “Soviet-totalitarian theory.”<sup>3</sup> Libertarian theory, which had its roots in post-Enlightenment Europe and the U.S., can be considered a “traditional” journalism model which aimed to inform citizens and act as a watchdog against government. This is also similar to Lippmann's view of society, where Enlightenment ideals played a role, for example rational human beings were able to discern truth from fiction by having the information available to them if they were espoused by “experts.” Social responsibility has its roots in the U.S. post-Second World War and incorporates much of the Hutchins Commission's theories on the role of the press. It differed from libertarian theory and is similar to the ideals of public journalism in that the media, and journalists, had the duty to service “the political system by providing information, discussion and debate on public affairs” (Peterson, 1963, p. 74). Peterson (1963) notes, however, that the media failed that task and outlines that while the media were busy trying to be “objective” and presenting two sides to a story (which is similar to libertarian theory), the media didn't bother “to

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<sup>3</sup> Authoritarian theory was developed in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in England and focused on private or public ownership of the press in support of the government in power. Soviet-totalitarian theory was based on a media that was publicly owned and operated to further the socialist ideals of the Soviet government (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1963).

evaluate for the reader the trustworthiness of conflicting sources, nor have they supplied the perspective essential to a complete understanding of a given situation. Instead of assuming that two half-truths make a truth, the [Hutchins] Commission says in effect, the press should seek ‘the whole truth’” (p. 88). In essence, “merely reporting the news is insufficient” (Peterson, 1963, p. 89); rather, journalists “should see that ‘all ideas deserving a public hearing shall have a public hearing.’ The public as well as the editors and owners should decide what ideas deserve a public hearing” (Peterson, 1963, p. 101), which is what public journalism is all about.

McQuail (2005) updated Peterson’s theory and argued that “there has always been an intimate connection between mass communication and the conduct of politics, in whatever kind of regime” (p. 523). He also said that the media’s role in the public sphere was an important one because “a condition of civil society is one of openness and plurality” (p. 181). He defined the public sphere as an “autonomous and open area or forum of [mediated] public debate” whose access is free and where “freedoms of assembly, association and expression are guaranteed” (p. 181). The 20<sup>th</sup> century was the first age of both mass communication and mass democratic politics, but the two have been tied together closely for years (McQuail, 2005). While this is true, McQuail (2005) suggests that it’s still the responsibility of all citizens (politicians and journalists alike) to uphold their civic duties. He argued that “active participation in political life, where it survives is still strongly associated with the use of mass media for informative purposes. ... The implication, briefly, is that for the foreseeable future, democratic politics without the mass media would not be possible or would simply not be very democratic” (p. 542).



It is clear, to McQuail and other media scholars, that the media and democracy go hand in hand, and it's journalism's role to make democracy work.

### **Effects on democracy: Do the media make a difference?**

While the relationship between democracy and the media is apparent, the effects of media on society are less clear (McQuail, 2005; Severin & Tankard Jr., 2001; Croteau & Hoynes, 2000). There are several theories regarding how the media do and do not affect society (McQuail, 2005, Severin & Tankard Jr., 2001; Croteau & Hoynes, 2000), but there is no consensus among scholars on how media actually change, improve or negatively affect behaviour. McQuail (2005) notes that although there are some minor types of effects, for example, people buying products because of a certain type of advertising, it's almost impossible to know whether the media are the main cause. This is because "the media are rarely likely to be the only necessary or sufficient cause of an effect, and their relative contribution is extremely hard to assess" (McQuail, 2005, p. 457).

A number of factors play a role in people's responses to media images and messages, for example, culture, pre-conceived notions and prior knowledge of an issue, time period in history and the amount and type of exposure (McQuail, 2005; Severin & Tankard Jr., 2001; Croteau & Hoynes, 2000). Contrary to what some advertising executives, politicians or media experts believe, Croteau and Hoynes (2000) argue that people are not simply receptacles for media messages; they are "active readers rather than

passive recipients” (p. 262). According to Croteau and Hoynes (2000), the “active audience” interprets media messages differently and this is not necessarily positive or negative. People experience media as part of their daily lives, argue Croteau and Hoynes (2000), “not separate from it, and our lives unfold in specific social locations. Our age, occupation, marital and parental status, race, gender, neighbourhood, educational background, and the like help structure our daily lives and our media experiences” (p. 268). There is evidence, however, that the media do affect opinions and shape audiences’ perceptions of people, issues and consumer products when “framing” is used (McQuail, 2005; Severin & Tankard Jr., 2001).

Framing involves applying values and angles to news coverage by journalists and media outlets which are then projected to the viewer or reader (McQuail, 2005).

Journalists will use certain words or images to describe an event or person or issue depending on their own frame of reference, ie: gender, experience, social background, culture, age, etc. In doing so, there is an unintended bias, as well as unintended consequences, which research shows can affect audiences’ opinions (McQuail, 2005; Severin & Tankard Jr., 2001; Croteau & Hoynes, 2000). For example, McQuail (2005) notes:

There is sufficient evidence, especially from political communication research, to demonstrate the occurrence of effects on audiences that are in line with news frames. Iyengar (1991) showed that the way in which news about social problems was framed affected whether audiences were more or less likely to ‘blame the victim’ for their troubles. Research into the 1991 Gulf War showed that framing of news encouraged audiences to endorse military rather than diplomatic solutions (p. 511-512).

Similarly, Severin and Tankard Jr. (2001) cite McLeod’s (1995) work on the correlation between the public’s perception of violence in their communities with how much

television coverage there was of violence and the frames surrounding it. Severin and Tankard Jr. (2001) said that McLeod's study found that surveys have indicated that the public believed crime was increasing when statistics showed crime was actually decreasing because "exposure to local news content might have a strong influence on perceptions of issues such as crime because of the high perceived reality of the message (particularly on television) and the 'closeness to home' of the content" (p. 271).

McQuail (2005) notes that the media do have an effect on audiences, but it's difficult to establish to what degree the effect is. This is an important point to make when it comes to the use of public journalism against some of its critics who say that public journalism doesn't work. As McQuail (2005) argues: "Effects, when they do occur, involve not only the actions of communicators, but the orientations and actions of the audience. Most effects are in some degree interactions between senders and receivers. Many longer-term effects of mass media do not involve the initial or immediate audience at all but are the secondary responses of others" (p. 478). In this context, public journalism in most cases is not the direct cause of changes, but rather, it is the seed that plants the community's willingness or desire to make changes because of the exposure that public journalism puts on that society's problems. McQuail (2005) makes this point in his explanation of audiences:

Today, the most common example of a media audience which is also in some sense a social group is probably the readership of a local newspaper or the listener group of a community radio station. Here the audience shares at least one significant social/cultural identifying characteristic—that of shared space and membership of a residential community. Local media can contribute significantly to local awareness and sense of belonging (p. 408).

Furthermore, McQuail (2005) explains, “more effects from media occur as a result of defining situations and framing reality, provision of information or the differential direction of attention (including the amplification of certain images and ideas) than from persuasion or stimulation to action” (p. 464). This offers an explanation of how public journalism can have an effect on changes in society.

### **Taking action: Public journalism projects in the U.S.**

The *Ledger-Enquirer* project in Columbus, Georgia, discussed in Chapter 1, was one of several public journalism projects in the 1990s throughout the United States. Another significant and successful one was in Charlotte, North Carolina, at the Charlotte *Observer* which began in 1991. Journalists at the *Observer* continued the project for three years with some positive results.

In 1991, citizens in Charlotte “had become disenchanted with ‘big-ticket, world-class city projects’ and wanted to begin to rebuild the foundations of the community” (Friedland, 2000, p. 128). Then-*Observer* editor Rich Oppel began the project by asking his journalists to get out and talk to community members about what they wanted city council candidates to discuss and later teamed up with the Poynter Institute, a journalism-teaching foundation in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1992 to extend the project to that year’s national election campaign. One thousand residents were asked what issues were most important to them during the election year, and the paper developed a “Citizen’s Agenda” which included issues such as the economy, crime, health care, education, the

environment and family life. A panel in which journalists could consult and converse with made up of 500 citizens from the community was formed as a result and the *Observer* continued to have these conversations (Miller, 1994; see also Friedland, 2000 and Rosen, 1999a) for the duration of the election campaign. In several cases, “volunteers from the Citizens Panel were often substituted for the usual cast of ‘experts’ when comments on the news were being solicited ... [and] ‘horse-race’ polling almost disappeared” (Miller, 1994, p. 30) from the election coverage. Instead, the *Observer* personalized complex issues and solutions by repeatedly highlighting three families who “were used over and over as a context for other families to relate more personally to the issues and the available alternatives” (Miller, 1994, p. 30). This continued for the duration of the election campaign in which the *Observer* focused on solutions to problems of concern to residents in Charlotte, rather than political posturing. As Miller (1994) notes, “Candidate records and positions were important but only insofar as they were helpful in identifying available ‘solutions.’ Citizens and their issues had taken over center stage in The Charlotte *Observer*” (p. 29). Miller (1994) and Friedland (2000) note that the election coverage was so successful that it resulted in two more feature series involving the public.

The first was a five-week series on education and the second was a five-year discussion regarding racial tension at a park called Freedom Park. The education series affected the paper’s coverage of education, resulting in a 20-member committee linked to the newspaper which would regularly provide feedback and information to the paper on education issues. When it came to Freedom Park, (a park situated in a mostly-white

neighbourhood but frequented by mostly young black people for cruising) rather than just reporting on what was happening with the racial tension, the paper decided to dedicate time and effort into helping the community develop solutions (Austin, 1994; Friedland, 2000; McKie, 2000). The project became known as “Taking Back Our Neighbourhoods,” which Friedland (2000) calls a “watershed” moment in the public journalism movement.

The “Taking Back Our Neighbourhoods” project specifically set out to find potential solutions rather than simply listing a set of problems and waiting for others to do something about it. Jennie Buckner, then-editor of the *Observer* in 1995, said, “Nobody had ever properly reported on the causes of crime in Charlotte, certainly not through talking with citizens in the neighbourhoods most affected” (in Friedland, 2000, p. 129). The *Observer* partnered with other local TV and radio stations and set out to “take back” Charlotte. Ten neighbourhoods were identified to be covered intensively, and an advisory group was established in each consisting of business representatives, long time residents, school leaders and others. A larger “citizen’s panel” was then created to discuss the impact of crime in their neighbourhoods. One of these neighbourhoods, Seversville, was perhaps Charlotte’s poorest and “suffered from years of neglect by both city-county government; by quasi-governmental bodies, including the school and park districts” (Friedland, 2000, p. 131). Some of the problems that Seversville faced included:

[N]o gutters in the area, causing flooding during severe rains. A German immersion school in Seversville did not serve the neighbourhood, and its facilities were closed to residents after school hours. There were no other neighbourhood recreational or meeting facilities. The area was also one of the highest crime areas in Charlotte, primarily because of drug dealing. Citizens themselves linked drug dealing to housing problems, particularly code enforcement, which allowed pockets of neglected housing to bring down the entire neighbourhood. And housing was neglected because of a

pattern of absentee ownership that had built up over more than 40 years, as local cotton mills closed and sold off company-owned housing (Friedland, 2000, p. 131).

There were a lot of issues to tackle, and, despite the backlash from public officials, the *Observer* continued to encourage citizens to speak out and debate the issues for more than six weeks, which resulted in some significant changes. For example, a case study of Charlotte's project produced jointly by the Pew Center for Civic Journalism and the Poynter Institute for Media Studies (1995) noted that "in many cases, the media scrutiny of the individual neighbourhoods drew action where earlier citizen complaints had received only shrugs" (Making a Difference section, para. 4). The Pew Center for Civic Journalism and the Poynter Institute for Media Studies (1995) found that prior to the "Taking Back Our Neighbourhoods" project, Michelle Tidwell, a 38-year-old mother of two, "had repeatedly asked city officials to clear an overgrown lot where a neighbour's daughter was raped but was told nothing could be done. The victim's mother saw the North Charlotte town meeting as a chance to try again. The next day WSOC-TV examined the complaints in a news report. Five days later the lot was cleared" (Making a Difference section, para. 4).

In response to the community's concerns and the paper's coverage of them, the police worked with the city to cite landlords for code violations, the German school was opened as a recreational centre for children after school, street gutters were built, and 18 local law firms successfully shut down crack houses around the city by filing public nuisance suits, reducing crime (Pew Center for Civic Journalism and the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, 1995; Friedland, 2000). Public journalism helped Charlotte residents

to recognize the problems they faced in their community and forced them to come together to determine a solution that was right for them. While “no one treated the series as a magical beginning that would quickly solve deep-seated community problems ... almost everyone spoke of it as a necessary beginning that had sparked a civic dialogue that might otherwise never have taken place, certainly not across such wide-ranging racial and class boundaries” (Friedland, 2000, p. 134).

The *Observer*’s experience with public journalism was not an isolated case. Haas (2007) noted that more than 300 daily papers in the U.S. participated in some form of public journalism in more than 650 projects between 1988 and 2002. These projects have “been linked to positive effects on citizens’ civic knowledge, attitudes and behaviours” (Haas, 2007). Public journalism news coverage has enhanced concern and knowledge for policy issues during an election year, trust in others and a willingness to take part in public problem-solving activities (Haas, 2007). As a result, public journalism led to citizens regularly

engag[ing] in interpersonal discussion of election-year topics and local community problems; volunteer[ing] for and/or donat[ing] money to local civic organizations; establish[ing] new civic organizations; contact[ing] public officials about local community problems; register[ing] to vote; and vot[ing] in elections. Aside from these positive effects on citizens’ civic behaviours, a couple of studies by Friedland and colleagues ... have found public journalism’s news coverage to have an actual political impact, notably by prompting local government officials to make more public funds available for existing efforts to address given problems or even to change their public policies toward these problems (Haas, 2007, p. 55; see also Friedland, 2000).

As can be seen in the Charlotte *Observer* example, and evidence cited by Haas (2007) as well as others (Rosen, 1999a; Friedland, 2000; Eksterowicz, 2000; Charity, 1995 and Merritt, 1995), public journalism is one means to forcing change in communities. This is



because, as Carey states, citizens of a community must be “addressed as conversational partners” (in Haas, 2007, p. 5) rather than passive audiences in society (also Carey, 2009) who leave problem solving to the experts. This thesis also argues for a renewed public journalism effort in order to strengthen the public sphere in South Africa.

### **Doubt: Public journalism faces its critics, and prevails**

Despite the literature on the success of public journalism, there were and still are critics of the movement. When the public journalism movement began, journalists who supported the notion of engaging with their communities as citizens in a democratic society were often criticized for blurring the lines of objectivity (Rosen, 1999a; Merritt & McMasters, 1996; Eksterowicz & Roberts, 2000). Critics took issue with “public journalism violat[ing] the concepts of objectivity and fairness that ensure a journalist’s separation from people and institutions that are rightfully the ‘objects’ of press reports” (Eksterowicz & Roberts, 2000, p. 4) and argued that “the moral philosophy of objectivity has a rich history and thus should not be discarded lightly” (Eksterowicz & Roberts, 2000, p. 4) because media outlets could lose their credibility. Rosen (1999a) noted that critics often spoke about journalists’ credibility when it came to using public journalism, many stating that taking a stand for something should be on editorial pages. For example, Marvin Kalb, a 30-year veteran of broadcast journalism for CBS and NBC news, said he was leery of public journalism because journalists overstep their role (Shepard, 1994). “When the journalist literally organizes the change and then covers it, I’m uncertain

about such traditional qualities as detachment, objectivity, toughness,” Kalb said (in Shepard, 1994, p. 34), adding, “the whole point of journalism has always been detachment from authority so that critical analysis is possible.”

Similarly, McMasters (Merritt & McMasters, 1996) argued that detachment from the community is not negative, but rather a good thing when it comes to citizenship. McMasters declared in a debate with Buzz Merritt in 1996 that “If you want to get passionate, or be a good citizen, or make connections, do it on the editorial pages, do it with the publisher going out there and making those connections. But don’t compromise your editor and reporter by putting them in a public meeting that you’ve convened to decide on an agenda that everybody should adopt” (p. 176). For Michael Gartner, former page one editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, journalism is not about a greater mission to make democracy work and bring the public sphere into a fuller existence. He once quipped: “I saw references to journalists who wanted to change the world. That is not the role of newsroom journalists. If you want to change the world, become a teacher or a politician or a missionary or an editorial writer. If you want to explore the world, to explain the world, to expose the world, become a reporter” (in Rosen, 1999a, p. 189). Political cartoonist Mike Peters, a Pulitzer Prize winner, shares these sentiments, saying the press should maintain its traditional status as a watchdog over government, not “a pipe organ for government and politicians. And we certainly don’t need public journalism to save newspapers” (Corrigan, 2000a, p. 1). Peters likened public journalism to propaganda, asking “Are we teaching kids how to work for *Pravda*? *Pravda* was into

community building. When you get away from being a watchdog, you're going to go in the direction of public relations" (Corrigan, 2000a, p. 9).

Author and retired University of Missouri journalism professor John Merrill also didn't mince words in his dislike of public journalism. Before retiring, he told the *St. Louis Journalism Review* that teaching public journalism to college and university students "burns" him (Corrigan, 2000b, p. 12). Merrill (in Corrigan, 2000b) said that having the public set the agenda is what bothered him most: "All of this is supposed to make public life go well. It's an abdication of professional responsibility in favour of convening and being part of the parade. A journalist's role should be to stand apart and just give a picture of what is going on in society" (p. 12). He also noted that "there's less and less journalism going on. How does conflict-resolution belong in a journalism curriculum? When did journalists become resolvers of conflict? I thought their real role was to stir up conflict—afflict the comfortable" (in Corrigan, 2000b, p. 12).

One of the reasons that supporters cited for a need for public journalism was the decline in readership and newspaper sales. While public journalists argued that people were turning away from newspapers and news in general because they no longer connected with the communities they served, Barney (1996) argued that there were several other factors that could have contributed to the perceived social decline. Barney (1996) notes that only 45 per cent of Americans said they read a newspaper daily in March 1995, compared to 71 per cent in 1965. In addition, Barney (1996) notes that "households that watch news from any source (network, magazines, local) dropped from 74 per cent in 1994 to 64 per cent in 1995 and to 58 per cent in 1996 (Feinsilber, 1996).

These losses may not all be attributable to journalistic misdeeds, but it is possible that journalists, by their actions, are not making themselves competitive in the drive to attract audiences” (p. 141). Barney (1996) also notes that it is not communitarianism, but rather individualism, that will make democracy work. Barney (1996) notes that “it is those rights of self-determination that breed creativity and risk-taking to meet the challenges of competition and shrinking audiences” (p. 143), against those who believed that looking to the community was the answer to society’s problems. He argued that the media’s role is to stimulate participation, not organize it or force it, otherwise journalists “provide what they think is wanted and the result is, at best trivia. At worst, it is pandering. This communitarianism is far more responsible for social problems than is individualism” (Barney, 1996, p. 143).

Clearly there was a strong reaction against public journalism, when it first started as a movement, and to this day. Several people say it was a failed experiment and that its time has come to an end (Nip, 2008; Shafer 2003; Walper, in Witt, 2004a; Grimes, 1999). And, as Grimes (1999) argues, after almost 20 years since the movement started, the journalism profession still faces some of the same problems that spurred the movement on. Grimes (1999) argues that at the end of the 20th century, newspapers were a dying breed and that journalists in every news medium continue to

wrestle with the depressingly familiar list of woes: Our audiences are fragmented, elusive and shrinking. Our credibility is in tatters. Media mergers and Wall Street put pressure on news organizations to pursue short-term profits at the expense of long-term quality in coverage and conscientious public service. The 24-hour news cycle and frantic competition generate a seemingly endless stream of trivia, breathless sensationalism, speculation and chatter. Old demands for accuracy, verification, context and fact are increasingly seen as expendable, afterthoughts are merely quaint (p. 16).

This begs the question, if Grimes is correct, did public journalism have a point? This thesis argues it in fact did, and continues to have an impact in various ways.

Contrary to critics' claims that public journalism is dead, Haas (2007), Witt (2004a) and Hunter (2001) argue the concept that the media must be engaged with its community is still alive. For Witt (2004b), technology has helped public journalism flourish online. He notes that "we are in the midst of a citizen-driven media revolution, the outcome of which no one can predict. But one thing is fairly certain: public journalism has morphed into the public's journalism" (2004b, p. 55). Witt is referring to the rise of the Internet as a media outlet, and the rise of web communications tools, such as blogs, and social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace where information is able to spread virally and citizens globally are able to have the public policy conversations with each other and engage in the public sphere online. While Witt (2004b) emphasizes the use of citizens in this "revolution," public journalism is still different from the concept of "citizen journalism," in which non-professional journalists for mainstream media outlets are not the ones driving the media agenda. Not only is this "new media" the "new public journalism" (Witt, 2004b; Beckett, 2008), but it can also aid "old media" journalists in fostering a public journalism culture. In fact, Beckett (2008) says that "journalism has never been more necessary to the functioning of our lives as individuals and societies and for the healthy functioning of global social, economic and political relationships" (p. 3) and that "there is the technological,

educational and economic potential for a vast expansion of journalism's impact and for that impact to be beneficial" (p. 3).

In his book, *SuperMedia: Saving Journalism So It Can Save the World*, Beckett (2008) acknowledges that the digital media, in particular the Internet and Web 2.0 tools such as Twitter, Facebook, and instantaneous blogging, has changed the way traditional media (print, radio and TV) operate. He believes, however, that instead of just withering away, journalists in "old media" outlets need to transform themselves to not only embrace the new technology, but to also develop what he calls "networked journalism" which he argues "offers the chance for the news media to enhance its social role. It is a recognition that mainstream professional journalists must share the very process of production" (Beckett, 2008, p. 4). While Beckett calls this "networked journalism," it can be argued that this is 2010's new name for public journalism, or simply old wine in a new bottle. Beckett (2008)—like public journalism proponents such as Rosen (1999a), Haas (2007) and Merritt (1995)—declares that journalism needs saving and it can be saved by moving to a type of journalism which "is about the journalist becoming the facilitator rather than the gatekeeper" (p. 52). Similar to public journalism advocates, Beckett (2008) argues that networked journalism "is a return to some of the oldest virtues of journalism: connecting with the world beyond the newsroom; listening to people; giving people a voice in the media; responding to what the public tells you in a dialogue. But it has the potential to go further than that in transforming the power relationship between media and the public and reformulating the means of journalistic production" (p. 43). Furthermore, Beckett (2008) says, in the face of declining readership and advertising

revenue, “the continuous relationship between the journalist and the public is what is going to sustain networked journalism as a community and, therefore, as a business model” (p. 58). In addition to perhaps being a better business model, like public journalism, networked journalism will also serve democracy better (Beckett, 2008).

Beckett (2008) states: “There is a deep democratic deficit across much of the world. In the past 30 years, we have seen the expansion of representative democratic systems across much of the globe, yet politics is seen to be in crisis. The legitimacy of politicians and the engagement of citizens are deeply in question” (p. 89).

Rosenberry and St. John (2010) take Beckett’s point further and note that the Internet and Web 2.0 tools

offer a practical and efficient way for interactive communication to occur among citizens of a community grappling with a public issue. In fact, such communication was a central element of many traditional public journalism projects, though the movement generally employed ‘off-line’ settings such as public meetings or discussion forums. Today, ‘cyber-democracy’ holds the potential for greater deliberative efficacy, even if beneficial outcomes are not as automatic as its more utopian advocates believed they would be (p. 5).

Rosenberry and St. John (2010) also say that overall, an engaged public sphere still needs professional journalists to lead and mediate the conversations, even if citizen journalists are out front with news. Rosenberry and St. John (2010) point out that “the reality is that citizen media production doesn’t contribute much toward improving public life at present. The promise is that it could, if informed and guided by aspirations of public journalism and bolstered by professional journalists unafraid to engage more closely with their audiences using online tools” (p. 5).

When it comes to South Africa, given that only 4.187 million people use the Internet (CIA, n.d.), web communication tools are not a strong way to practice public journalism. In fact, Rod Amner, a Rhodes University professor in South Africa who also specializes in the study of public journalism, says that the debate about online tools is abstract at the moment for South Africans (personal communication Feb. 15, 2010). Amner says that the high connection costs for the Internet prevent “the vast majority” from being able to access the Internet and therefore the debate about “public journalism 2.0” is a Western one which does not affect South Africa’s current public journalism environment which will be seen later in this thesis.

Like Grimes (1999), Friedland (in Rosenberry and St. John, 2009) has little faith in the future of local newspapers and therefore the future of public journalism, but as Schaffer (in Rosenberry and St. John, 2009) notes, those involved in the “heyday” of public journalism are continuing the movement, albeit if not in “traditional” media, online. In this way, Schaffer (in Rosenberry and St. John, 2009) points out that public journalism has not completely withered and is still being practiced today:

Take Kate Marymont, managing editor and one of the key drivers behind the Springfield *News-Leader*’s “The Good Community” initiative in 1995. She went on to make major strides in dispatching mojos or mobile journalists in Fort Myers, Fla., then broke a major municipal story there using crowdsourcing. Now she’s replacing retiring Phil Currie as vice president for Gannett’s U.S. Community Publishing Division.

Or take Wendy Warren and Ellen Foley, both drivers behind the “Rethinking Philadelphia” initiative in the late ‘90s at the Philadelphia *Daily News*. Foley went on to become editor of the Wisconsin *State Journal* and open up her front pages to reader suggestions for stories. Warren is now vice-president and editor of Philly.com and the leader of one of the most recent quintessentially civic journalism projects: TheNextMayor.com, which involved citizens in the 2007 mayor elections. The project used a textbook civic journalism template and it’s unfortunate that it was not archived online.



Or Steve Smith, one of Buzz Merritt's protégés at the Wichita *Eagle*, who went on to webcast the Spokane *Spokesman-Review*'s daily news meetings and engage citizens in the paper's journalism with a raft of transparency initiatives and editor blogs.

Or Mark Briggs, a Batten Award winner for the Everett *Herald*'s Waterfront Renaissance clickable map that engaged 2,500 residents in redevelopment. He went on to write the best-selling *Journalism 2.0* (which J-Lab commissioned and published).

Or Chris Satullo, renowned in Philadelphia for bringing "Citizen Voices" and other initiatives to the editorial page, who just moved to WHYY-TV to launch a new initiative. Or Lew Friedland, who has not only authored books about civic journalism but launched one of the first citizen driving community news initiatives in 2005, MadisonCommons.org. Just to name a few (Jan Schaffer Question 6 section, para. 3).

Contrary to critics' assessment that public journalism is dead, it's clear that the notion that the press is responsible for making democracy work well in a collaborative and participatory way is still alive. It's simply adapting to the times. As Shaffer notes, "yesterday's civic journalists are today's new media innovators" (in Rosenberry & St. John, 2009). As will be seen in the next section, public journalism is not only still being practiced in the U.S., but also globally, in an attempt to enhance society's public spheres, which is why it can be used in South Africa as a development tool.

## **Going global: What's next for public journalism?**

Public journalism is not only adapting with the times in terms of new ways to engage citizens using technology, but it's also proven to be a fundamental aspect of a truly functioning democracy (see above). While it is an American-led concept, Haas (2007) has pointed out that public journalism can and is being used not only in the U.S., but globally. He notes that "there can be little doubt that the U.S. journalistic reform movement known as 'public' (or 'civic') journalism has become a worldwide phenomenon" (Haas, 2007a). In fact, in the last 10 years, public journalism has made

“considerable inroads” (Haas, 2007) in newsrooms around the world, including Malawi, Senegal, Swaziland, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Finland, Spain, Sweden, Argentina, Colombia and Mexico (Romano, 2010).

In Senegal, for example, Radio Oxy-Jeunes took up public journalism in the country’s capital, Dakar. In an effort to focus programming on what local residents wanted, and to discuss problems the community was concerned about, Radio Oxy-Jeunes created a “Dialogue Council” which brought constituents together with a local mayor each week. The segment is broadcast live, and listeners are encouraged to call in with their own concerns and follow-up questions. After three broadcasts, mayors refused to participate because journalists and the community asked tough questions and criticized them often, but Radio Oxy-Jeunes continued the format even in the mayors’ absence. Haas (2007) says, however, that “following public outcry, no mayor has subsequently refused an invitation to appear” (p. 126). The station also developed a weekly program to reach citizens in rural parts of the country. The program was called “The Bus,” and journalists travelled to different parts of the country to do in-depth interviews in order to identify problems the community members were concerned about. The program then offered residents “opportunities to discuss those concerns among themselves during the live broadcasting of the program” (Haas, 2007, p. 126). Despite critics’ concerns, it’s clear that public journalism has survived and evolved from being only an American movement, but also one that has taken place globally. It’s also taken place germanely to the country it’s being practiced in. While the projects in Senegal, for example, are not completely the same as the projects that occurred in the United States, it’s clear that

journalists are using the media to further the public good. This is because media serving democracy is not germane only to western democracies. The public interest is relevant to journalists everywhere. As will be seen in future chapters, this is also true of South Africa.

Although public journalism is a “western” notion, if implemented in a development context where there are so many real issues that people need to deal with on a daily basis, it could make a difference in how governments view development, as Gunaratne (1996), Shah (1996), Sosale (2003) and Berger (2002) argue. In addition, Beckett’s (2008) assessment of “networked journalism,” which is simply a new name for public journalism in 2010, aptly points out that developing countries can benefit from a more involved media because

citizen input does not just contribute to the volume of political journalism. It changes its very nature. It makes it stronger and more connected. It is cheaper and more flexible. And because it is working with local communities, it is more reflective of particular circumstances. But it is not a free for all. It can be sensitive to the needs of fragile states or exceptional circumstances because it is still mediated through journalists. It will spring from the initiative of African citizens who want to be part of their media, just as citizens have jumped at the chance in the West. But that does not mean that media for development cannot help the process along (p. 119).

Berger (2000), a Rhodes University professor, also says it’s important for the media to take a leadership role in making democracy work by engaging local communities, especially in the developing world. He asks, “Can third world media play a role in encouraging democratic participation of people marginalized from traditional journalism there? The answer, in short, is that it has to” (p. 94). He also points out that “progress is conditional upon journalists forging alliances with other sectors of society (including journalism teachers and students) and upon them being part of a broader thrust for

democratization. ... Journalism needs to encourage participation in a broader struggle” (p. 94).

Similarly, Kariithi (2005) points out that “Africa is still faltering under the weight of abject poverty, widespread underdevelopment, mounting foreign debt, and rising economic dependency” and that “if Africa’s solutions lie within itself, then African people and institutions possess the necessary wherewithal—ideas, manpower, goodwill and commitment—to change the deplorable conditions rampaging on the continent” (p. 10). Kariithi (2005) calls for African journalists to embrace a “journalism of meaning,” something that will “secure for us a social connection with communities that are currently feeling underserved and tuning out. ... Indeed, African journalists must demonstrate trust in their societies and their people as the key to transformation and use their profession to create societies that celebrate and promote democracy” (p. 10).

As stated in Chapter 1, public journalism is already occurring in South Africa. The development of 90 community radio stations currently in South Africa, “created new zones of public discourse never before experienced in South Africa” (Froneman, 2008, p. 154). One of those stations was Radio Suid-Afrika/Afrikaans Stereo, which, during the apartheid era was a conservative radio station that had a difficult time getting rid of its pro-apartheid image. It had to reinvent itself and therefore cut staff from 105 people down to 29 because of a smaller post-apartheid budget. The program formats also changed to include more live shows, interactive phone lines and less music during the day. Froneman (2008) says this allowed all Afrikaans speakers, whites and coloured, to share “a zone of public discourse cheek by jowl. More importantly, controversial topics

are now addressed freely. Programs such as *Praat Sann* (Join the Conservation) and particularly *Se wie?* (Says Who?) have become institutions allowing ordinary people to air their diverse views via telephone—thus offering interactive radio in the democratic participatory mould” (p. 156).

In addition to this initiative, South Africans are also using new technologies such as cell phones and blogging to create an engaged public sphere (Beckett, 2008). Journalists are now connecting to citizens via text message and online communities (Beckett, 2008) which is allowing for a grassroots response to problems affecting citizens. G. Pascal Zachary, an African media development commentator argues that “citizen movements against government incompetence and corruption arise from political mobilization of the grassroots—and in turn ignite media aggressiveness. New media tools, such as text messaging, also highlight the way in which ordinary people—rather than professional journalists—can more effectively counter the propaganda of rogue governments” (in Beckett, 2008, p. 119). Beckett (2008) argues however that the rise in citizens becoming engaged and using technology to speak out against their governments does not mean the end of “traditional” or “professional” journalism. “Quite the opposite,” he says, arguing the more media platforms, and the more engaged public, the better. This will not only “save journalism” but also help in development efforts (Beckett, 2008). This type of connection “is giving Africans a voice that is creating online communities both locally and across borders. This rapidly developing use of the mobile phone and Internet shows remarkable innovation and flexibility,” Beckett (2008, p. 124) argues, which shows there’s a “huge demand” for a “networked” or public type of journalism. The use

of mobile phones, the blogosphere and Web 2.0 tools “suggest there are vast resources of citizen creativity waiting to be exploited” (Beckett, 2008, p. 124).

Rosen’s first book on public journalism was called *What Are Journalists For?* In it, he wrote, “The title of this book is a question we need to ask for every age: what are journalists for? It can be read in at least two ways. First, why do we need journalists? What do they do for us and what could they be doing, if they wanted to do more? Second, what do they stand for? And what are they willing to stand up for, as public-spirited professionals” (p. 281)? He surmised that “different times call for different journalisms—different replies to the standing question, what are journalists for” (p. 283)? Eleven years later the question is still relevant. While there have been numerous critics of public journalism throughout the years, it has had its successes and is still a valid form of journalism in today’s media and social environment. In this thesis, I contend that public journalism is not dead. Moreover, I argue that journalists are an important part to any democracy, in not only helping to develop it, but to sustain it and foster it with an active and participatory citizenry. In response to Rosen’s question, I argue that public journalism and its evolution as outlined above can also work as a tool to help development strategies in South Africa to encourage democracy and locally developed solutions to a wide array of issues.

## **Chapter 3: Towards a new development path**

The previous chapter established not only that public journalism is still in use in the United States, where it began, but also in several countries around the world. Given the role that public journalism plays in a society, the goal of this chapter is to show that it can be used as a tool for development, in conjunction with other tools, which citizens of the Global South can employ in order to find internal and grassroots solutions to the social, economic and political problems many face. The chapter begins with a discussion on concepts of development and a broad history of the Global South. Like the traditional type of “watchdog, observer” journalism, which has failed the public in meaningful reporting, this third chapter will show that traditional development models have failed Global South countries for the last 60 years because they have not been focused and implemented in a community-oriented method. The chapter emphasizes that development is unique to every country and therefore there is no one type of development model that will work for all countries. This chapter also focuses on the idea that while communications is a key component to development, it must also take into account local deliberation as opposed to the top-down approach taken by development communication theorists. While the MacBride Commission Report of 1980 was an important work for communications, its recommendations can also be seen as a development journalism approach, which is different from public journalism. This chapter argues that journalists in Global South countries can use public journalism to help their communities find their unique path to solutions to political, social and

economic issues faced by the members of that community. As journalists in the West must get involved in their communities in order to help build better societies, so do journalists in the Global South. This chapter will argue that while there are several paths that a country can take to help its citizens prosper economically, socially and politically, a key component to a development path is a strong civil society (Agunga, 1997) fostered by public journalists. The chapter also discusses some of the limitations to its uses, but outlines the conditions for which public journalism can survive in the Global South. It concludes with a discussion on the conditions in South Africa which make it an ideal Global South country to use public journalism to further its development goals.

## **Introduction: Concepts of “development” in the “Global South”**

To better understand the Global South and why development models have failed, it's important to understand how they came to be. At the end of the Second World War, a significant number of countries gained independence from European colonial states such as Britain, France, Spain and Portugal, creating a bloc of countries collectively known as the “third world” (Rapley, 2002; Servaes, 1999; Smith, 2009; Handelman, 2000; and Agunga, 1997). The term was developed by scholars who deemed these newly-independent states as not fitting into the “first world,” which were economic capitalists, for example, Europe and North America, or the “second world,” which were the communist countries such as Russia and China (Rapley, 2002; Servaes, 1999; Smith, 2009; Handelman, 2000; and Agunga, 1997). Since the end of the 1980s, however, with



the fall of the Soviet Union and a less polarized capitalist-communist world, scholars have sought to define the Global South in more meaningful terms. Some of these new terms included developing countries, less developed countries, underdeveloped countries, newly industrialized countries and non-aligned nations (Melkote & Merriam, 1998; Handelman, 2009) but all are considered to have “pejorative connotations and implied inferiority” (Handelman, 2009), which this thesis wants to avoid. Handelman (2009) and Melkote and Merriam (1998) both note that it’s difficult to define the approximately 150 countries which fall into the collective Global South (primarily in Africa, Latin America and Asia), but for the purposes of this thesis, the Global South will be used to reflect countries with underdevelopment of social, economic and political environments. For example, low per capita income, poverty, shorter life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality, low education levels and a high-proportion of people in agriculture-based jobs are common characteristics which appear in Global South countries (Rapley, 2002; Handelman, 2000). Although Handelman (2009) refers to these countries as third world countries still because “it makes no value judgment or predictions” (p. 2), this thesis will use the term Global South, precisely to avoid making any value judgment on them.<sup>1</sup>

Rapley (2002) notes that another commonality among the Global South is that virtually of all them began their modern histories as a colony of imperial European or

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<sup>1</sup> When referring to what was traditionally called “developed” or “first world” countries, the thesis will use the term “West” as a general identifier of countries that are economically, politically and socially stable in which a majority of citizens do not live in poverty, have access to social services such as public education and healthcare, and in which governments are democratically elected.

Asian states. During the post-Second World War time of decolonization and the emergence of new political powers, representatives from 44 of the world's "allied"<sup>2</sup> governments met at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, to discuss the economic order. Out of the three-week conference emerged two new international economic institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Also emerging from the conference was the U.S.'s agreement to fix the U.S. dollar to its gold reserve, making it the world's new gold standard.

Economist John Maynard Keynes played an important role in the Bretton Woods conference by advancing his theory on fiscal policy (Rapley, 2002). Keynes argued during the 1930s Depression that governments should be involved in helping to lift a country out of an economic downturn by stimulating the economy and spending money, even if it's through a deficit, in order to help those affected by the downturn. He was not against a capitalist economic system, but rather wanted the government to step in when the capitalist system was failing (Rapley, 2002). Whereas neoclassical thinkers believed that it was not the state's role to intervene in society, Keynes' "vision of a smoothly running capitalist economy involved a much greater role for the state than had been tolerated in classical and neoclassical models of development, which had been more concerned with the free market" (Rapley, 2002, p. 7). In essence, Keynes argued that governments should save its capital in "good times" and spend money in times where citizens need public help (Rapley, 2002, p. 8). This idea played a crucial role in the post-

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<sup>2</sup> "Allied" governments refers to the allied countries during the Second World War, for example Britain, the U.S. and France, who were fighting against Germany, Italy and Japan.

Second World War economic order when the gap between the rich countries and the newly independent states became more obvious. Western Europe took up Keynes' suggestion and moved to more socialist governments, while the U.S. dumped billions of dollars into post-war Europe with its Marshall Plan to rebuild the affected countries. Rapley (2002) notes that "what emerged in the politics of Western Europe and indeed in virtually all the developed capitalist countries, has come to be known as the 'postwar Keynesian consensus'" (p. 9) which was a success in Western democracies. As a result, full employment became a top priority in addition to improving social welfare, public education, health care and housing (Rapley, 2002).

It was during this time that development literature and theory began to emerge and to be debated. A traditional and dominant development model in the Global South over the last 60 years has been centred on modernization theory and neoclassical economic theory whereby it was believed that the economic prosperity of the country would bring about democratic practices and social development (Okolie, 2003; Servaes, 1999; Rapley, 2002; Smith, 2009). This development route was mostly drawn up by Western economic "experts" who thought they knew the best plan for the Global South to become "developed" like Europe and North America. International organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund got involved in Global South development to "modernize" states they believed were "backwards" (Servaes, 1999; Rapley, 2002; Smith, 2009; Handelman, 2000).

The root of modernization theory comes from the belief that development is linear. For modernization theorists, development was inevitable over time as the right

conditions were placed on the state (Smith, 2009; Rapley, 2002). This theory can be characterized by the idea that “societies were seen as not merely moving from one condition to another, but from being traditional to being developed, implying improvement and progress in the way that societies are governed” (Smith, 2009, p. 31). Rapley (2002) notes that modernization theorists essentially believed that “underdevelopment was an initial state” (p. 15). Servaes (1999) correctly notes, however, that this theory is a “paternalistic” and ethnocentric view of development which right-wing scholars, such as Milton Friedman, used to implement a capitalist agenda. For this reason, as will be argued later in the thesis, modernization theory failed to deliver for the Global South.

While modernization theory was developed, refined and implemented in several developing countries between 1945 and 1965 to some mixed results (Servaes, 1999), a body of development literature emerged in opposition to it between 1960 and 1980. Critics of modernization theory argued that underdevelopment in Global South countries was a result of colonialism and the capitalist world economy was doing very little to help alleviate poverty or increase social and political development (Handelman, 2000; Servaes, 1999; Rapley, 2002; Smith, 2009; Okolie, 2003). This became known as dependency theory, which challenged the neoclassical view that Adam Smith’s “invisible hand of the free market” would bring the Global South’s economies up to that of the West. As Smith (2009) notes, however, “modernization theory can be charged with ideological bias in the way it blames backwardness on the traditions of a people rather than on internal conflicts or external interventions, such as imperialism and war.

Modernization theory is striking for what it leaves out in its attempt to produce an explanation of change, notably class conflict, colonialism and revolution” (p. 43).

Dependency theorists pointed out that modernization theory ignores “a very fundamental difference: that the history of the advanced societies does not include colonization by more powerful countries” (Smith, 2009, p. 49). In fact, “the West’s development was built, some would say, on the active underdevelopment of weaker societies and economies. ... Thus, modernization theory can be accused of denying underdeveloped countries their own histories, ignoring the connections between these histories and the histories of developed countries” (Smith, 2009, pp. 49, 50).

In essence, modernization theory was simply a form of “neo-colonialism” and even though Global South states were independent, they were still being economically dominated by the West, or their former imperial colonists (Smith, 2009; Rapley, 2002). As a solution, dependency theorists called on states from the Global South to separate themselves from these imperial, external, forces to concentrate on protectionism and development from inside the country through socialism rather than through a purely capitalist model (Smith, 2009; Rapley, 2002; Servaes, 1999; Handelman, 2000). As Rapley (2002) notes, “the broad thrust of all dependency theorists remained the same: as long as [Global South] economies were linked to the first world, they could never break free of their dependence and poverty. What they needed were autonomous nation-development strategies. They had to sever their ties to the world economy and become more self-sufficient” (p. 18). This depended on state governments to “crush the domination of the parasitic local bourgeoisie and stand up to the might of foreign capital,

so as to engineer a development strategy that was in the national interest rather than in the interest of a single class” (Rapley, 2002, p. 18).

Several Latin American and African governments in the 1970s took up the dependency theory model. They moved away from exporting all of their raw materials only to import finished products. They introduced import substitution policies to generate successful domestic industries and to avoid importing more products than they exported. In the 1980s, however, with the rise of the neo-conservatism with the governments of Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. and Ronald Reagan in the U.S., neoclassical theories of the free market became dominant in development and international trade both in discourse and practice with donor countries forcing “structural adjustment programs” on recipient countries (Rapley, 2002; Smith, 2009). An initiative led by the World Bank which “virtually forced third-world countries into accepting neoclassical policies in return for funding” (Rapley, 2002, p. 64), structural adjustment programs meant that most countries in the developing world which received monetary aid from the West privatized national industries, cut public sector jobs and dramatically reduced social services such as health care and education (Rapley, 2002; Smith, 2009). For dependency theorists, giving in to Western demands for “tied aid” meant that neocolonialism was alive and well, and for neoclassical theorists, this was an effort to show that by allowing capitalism to do its job, development would flourish (Rapley, 2002). Although Smith (2009) notes that “privatization has meant massive price increases unrestrained by regulatory bodies, forcing poor families to reduce spending on food and put school-aged children out to work” (p. 63), Rapley (2002) says it was not all

bad news for the Global South, as several countries were able to eliminate famine, and improve not only nutrition but also access to health care, leading to lower infant mortality rates and increased literacy rates. In these same countries, however, Rapley (2002) notes that “economic growth barely kept pace with population growth and inflation and progress was much slower than had been hoped. In real per capita terms, a significant portion of humanity ended the twentieth century poorer than when it welcomed political independence” (p. 45). As will be seen in more detail in the next section, it’s clear that, as authors Rapley (2002), Easterly (2006) and Servaes (1999) argue, “traditional” development models have failed to lift the Global South out of poverty because they have been dominated by top-down and foreign concepts of what’s best for the local community. Any model used to further development goals must come from a citizen-centred approach and include a communications component that embraces public journalism.

### **Sixty years of aid: Economic development’s failure**

According to the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals 2009 Report, 72 million children are denied the right to an education, half of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, one billion people live in extreme poverty making less than \$1.25 a day. More than 17 per cent of the world is undernourished, leaving almost 25 per cent of children in developing regions underweight, resulting in one-third of child deaths worldwide. In sub-Saharan Africa, one in seven children will die before they turn five

years old. The UN's health statistics in developing countries is not any more positive—more than 2.7 million people were newly infected with HIV in 2007 worldwide, one-third of which occurred in Southern Africa. Malaria, which has been eradicated in the West through clean water systems, still killed a million people in 2006, 95 per cent of which lived in sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, clean drinking water still eludes more than 884 million people worldwide. While the same 2009 UN report states that there has been some progress since 2000 when world leaders pledged to eradicate poverty, improve literacy, and bring down the prevalence of preventable diseases by 2015<sup>3</sup>, authors such as Easterly (2006) and Reusse (2002) correctly note that in the last 60 years since concerted efforts were made to help the Global South, success has not only been mixed, but very limited. This is why this thesis argues for a different development path, which includes not only communications as a key tool, but the use of public journalism because of its grassroots and inclusive nature to discussing and debating both problems and solutions.

Both the modernization and dependency theory models of development have been predominantly ineffective for sustainable development, especially in Africa, because they have concentrated on economic approaches to development which have

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<sup>3</sup> World leaders signed an agreement at a UN meeting in New York in 2000 to tackle development issues, resulting in the Millennium Development Goals. There are eight specific goals which governments promised to achieve by 2015. They are: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary-school enrolment, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development (Easterly, 2006). Easterly also notes that “the West has a bad track record of previous beautiful goals. A UN Summit in 1990, for example, set as a goal for the year 2000 universal primary-school enrolment. (That is now planned for 2015.) A previous summit, in 1977, set 1990 as the deadline for realizing the goal of universal access to water and sanitation. (Under the Millennium Development Goals, that target is now 2015)” (p. 9).



been dominated by foreigners who think they know which policies and programs are best (Easterly, 2006; Rapley, 2002; Smith, 2006; Servaes, 1999). As Easterly (2006), Reusse (2002) and Okolie (2003) note, there is more to development than pure capitalist or socialist economics. The fact is that “local people can only benefit in a meaningful way if they actually participate in the generation of knowledge that inform those policies and programs” (Okolie, 2003, p. 235). Easterly (2006) points this out in his book, *The White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*. He points out that

the West spent \$2.3 trillion on foreign aid over the last five decades and still had not managed to get twelve-cent medicines to children to prevent half of all malaria deaths. The West spent \$2.3 trillion and still had not managed to get four-dollar bed nets to poor families. The West spent \$2.3 trillion, and [children are] still carrying firewood and not going to school. It’s a tragedy that so much well-meaning compassion did not bring these results for needy people (p. 4).

Moreover, Easterly (2006) notes, development projects and goals have been tried and recycled so many times that dates and deadlines just keep getting pushed further into the future with no accountability. He argues that “planners” (for example, aid agencies, governments who give foreign monetary aid, non-governmental organizations and international institutions) set “a beautiful goal such as making poverty history” and go about designing the ideal project to make it happen (Easterly, 2006, p. 11). However, “60 years of countless reform schemes to aid agencies and dozens of different plans and \$2.3 trillion later, the aid industry is still failing to reach the beautiful goal. The evidence points to an unpopular conclusion: Big Plans will always fail to reach the beautiful goal” (Easterly, 2006, p. 11). Similarly, Reusse (2002) argues that “voices calling for scaling down and even phasing out development aid are gaining strength” (p. 1) because the

Global South is “realizing that aid imports dependency and crowds out the development of sustainable government structures” (p. 1). In fact, Reusse (2002) says that some Global South states “are gaining the courage to refuse further ‘development’ loans, which in the past too often have produced little lasting effect other than long-term indebtedness” (p. 1).

Evidently, development goals have consistently failed because the approach has been to go into Global South countries with an outsider, superior perspective focused on economic issues that did not take into account the local environment, culture and political history. Easterly’s (2006) “planners” in the West failed to recognize that “developing countries are responsible for solving their own problems. It is the price of nationhood” (Agunga, 1997, p. 4). Although foreign aid agencies and international donor countries are able to assist in development projects, solutions must come from and be generated from within (Easterly, 2006). Easterly (2006) argues that “searchers” (as opposed to “planners”), are the local people who are best equipped and most knowledgeable to offer successful solutions to problems facing their community or country. For example, Easterly (2006) says that local details are important and illustrates the lack of local “searchers” in an unsuccessful development project in Lesotho. The Canadian International Development Agency and the World Bank sponsored a program to teach farmers in Lesotho some agricultural techniques, but when implemented, the techniques conflicted with local law and the farming plans were ruined by the bad weather in the region. But Easterly (2006) says the locals knew that the area was not a good farming region and this was dismissed by “planners” who complained that the

locals were “defeatist” and did not consider themselves farmers. This is just one example of well-meaning aid agencies attempting to provide solutions, but Easterly (2006) is correct when he argues:

The Planners have dominated the past generation of efforts of the West to help the Rest. The utopian Planners cannot transform the Rest—at least, not for the better. While the Rest is transforming itself, the Planners’ global social engineering has failed to help the poor and it will always so fail. ... With this historical record, perhaps 60 years of Planners is enough. Maybe it is now time to give the Searchers a chance. ... The biggest payoff comes from local Searchers who solve their own problems. ... Let the Searchers try their hands at ways for the medicines, bed nets and aid money to finally reach the poor (p. 383).

Stohr and Taylor (in Servaes, 1999) also make this point and argue that “in the ultimate sense, development is a reflection of personal values, conditioned by the societal framework in which one lives” (p. 14). They state that the local society’s values, which over time do change, “are the ultimate standard by which development or lack of it will be judged. It is perhaps obvious but worth restating that an outside view of a society’s ‘development’ may be very different from an assessment made by that society itself” (in Servaes, 1999, p. 14).

In this vein, Servaes (1999) argues that there needs to be a “multiplicity paradigm” view of development because “there is no universal path to development” (p. 6). Development is multidimensional, Servaes (1999) says, because the social, economic and political culture in any country is different from the next one; therefore, “every society must define development for itself and find its own strategy” (p. 6). This is similar to the goals of public journalism in which each community is able to develop its own solutions germane to it.

While Servaes (1999) argues that a certain type of development itself is not universal, there are basic principles of development that need to be addressed, which is missing from traditional economic development models. These principles include:

(1) meeting basic human needs both material and nonmaterial in order to gain the “ability to understand and master their own identity”;

(2) defining values and future vision for each individual community;

(3) exercising self-reliance at the local level;

(4) allowing equitable access to resources and technology by all in the community;

(5) considering the sustainability and interdependency of the resources in time and space;

(6) implementing participatory democracy (“it is not merely government of the people and for the people but also, and more fundamentally, ‘by the people’ at all levels of society”); and

(7) sustainable structural changes are needed in not only social relations, but also in economic and power structures in order to truly create an inclusive and participatory decision making process within the community by all those affected (pp. 78-79). Servaes (1999) notes that the last criterion is important for the first five “because without the demand for social change, the other priorities can be interpreted in various ways” (p. 79).

These principles can also be seen in the context of public journalism, which also hold similar beliefs and can frame the way in which communications can be used for development in the Global South. For example, public journalism focuses on people in

their communities defining each individual community's values and future vision for itself in an inclusive, participatory and democratic way.

For development to work well, the people in any community must want it and actively participate in it. This can be fostered through community media, and more specifically, through media that espouse public journalism's connections to the community. Agunga (1997) argues that while most development goals are expressed economically, for example higher employment and per capita income, development should be seen as a communications activity. It is through "effective communication [that] leaders of a country mobilize the nation's human, financial and material resources to attain development," Agunga (1997, p. 11) asserts. He believes that successful development begins at the "village level" in a grassroots effort, as is the premise for public journalism. The people who are affected should be the ones to decide which development path to take (Agunga, 1997). He also believes that because of unstable governments, civil society must be built up to hold governments to account in developing countries and the key to achieving this is also through communication because it is able to empower people (Agunga, 1997). In turn, he also argues that communications professionals are critical actors when it comes to making change (Agunga, 1997). This is why it's important for the local media and journalists to play a role in shaping development from a cooperative approach that focuses on the community they serve.

## **Communication for development: Journalism's role in the development of the Global South**

As will be seen in this section, communication for development has been debated at length among and between both the West and Global South countries. I argue that there is a difference between traditional “development journalism” and using journalism to further development goals and the two should not be confused for the other. The next section will outline the differences and show why “development journalism,” while also important for national development, is an instructional approach to using journalism for development rather than an interactive one such as public journalism as this thesis proposes as a means to an effective development tool.

Using communication as a development tool emerged in the 1970s when the Global South became “a new player on the international stage” (Mastrini & de Charras, 2005, p. 274) with the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement made up of the Global South. The UN became a forum for the movement to express its ideas because it was where the Global South could participate more equally with their Western counterparts (Mastrini and de Charras, 2005). As a result, the UN’s Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) became the base for looking at the flow of information and communication between the West and the Global South (Mastrini & de Charras, 2005). It held the New World Information and Communication Order conferences in 1974 in Bogotá, in 1975 in Quito, Ecuador, and in San Jose, Costa Rica, and Nairobi in 1976 (Ogan, 1982), which led to the creation of the MacBride Commission in 1977. The commission, chaired by Irish diplomat Sean MacBride with representatives from 15

countries, had a mandate to “define the role which communication might play in making public opinion aware of the major problems besetting the world, in sensitizing it to these problems and helping gradually to solve them by concerted action at the national and international levels” (in Servaes, 1999, p. 125).

Although there was a strong divide between Global South countries and the West in terms of the debate surrounding the MacBride Commission—Latin American representatives recommended that “national communication policies should be the exclusive concern of the state, acting as it does on behalf of the national community” (Ogan, 1982, p. 4) while Western journalists opposed any attempt to nationalize communication systems and media outlets and saw this as going against the fundamental right to choose and the right to information (Sosale, 2003; Ogan, 1982)—the final report was important to the discussion surrounding communication for development and was “the seminal international document establishing the essential elements of any process aimed at democratizing communications” (Mastrini and de Charras, 2005 p. 274; see also Sosale, 2003).

The final report, *Many Voices, One World* provides some key and important recommendations to the study and history of communication, or journalism, in meeting development goals. For instance, using communication for development was defined as using the mass media to help further national development policy (Servaes, 1999). Then-UNESCO director-general Amadou-Mahtar M’Bow wrote in the report’s foreword that communication was fundamental to development and because of new technologies, it would be easier to accomplish (MacBride, 1980). In addition, M’Bow said that the media

“can also foster uninterrupted dialogue between communities, cultures and individuals, in a bid to promote equality of opportunities and two-way exchanges” (MacBride, 1980, p. xiv). To make this point, the commission recommended that

development strategies should incorporate communication policies as an integral part in the diagnosis of needs and in the design and implementation of selected priorities. In this respect, communication should be considered a major development resource, a vehicle to ensure real political participation in decision-making, a central information base for defining policy options, and an instrument for creating awareness of national priorities (MacBride, 1980, p. 258).

The commission also recommended in its report that the media should be used to fight oppression and promote democracy, free speech and human rights (MacBride, 1980).

While the ideas in the MacBride report are accurate and significant to development and communication discourse, one must keep in mind how the ideas are implemented.

The MacBride report is an example of “development journalism” in which the media most often report governments’ national development priorities rather than interact with citizens to develop real solutions that affect them at a local level. For example, the MacBride report states that problems affecting countries internationally (the environment, employment, social inequalities, human rights abuses, terrorism) need “urgent” (MacBride, 1980, p. 175) solutions. However, the report also acknowledges that the commission’s “ambition is not to seek solutions to the major issues over-shadowing the final decades of this century” (p. 175). Instead, the recommendations in the report were meant “to highlight the contributions which communication in general, and the media in particular, can and should make by encouraging critical awareness of these problems, or at least some of them, and of their implications for men and women the



world over” (p. 175). Furthermore, the report emphasizes the need for media to act as information conduits rather than specific actors for change:

The primary function of the media is always to inform the public of significant facts, however unpleasant or disturbing they may be. At times of tension, the news consists largely of military moves and statements by political leaders which give rise to anxiety. But it should not be impossible to reconcile full and truthful reporting with a presentation that reminds readers of the possibility—indeed, the necessity—of peaceful solutions to disputes. ... Ordinary men and women in every country—and this includes a country depicted as “the enemy”—share a yearning to live out their lives in peace. That desire, if it is mobilized and expressed, can have an effect on the actions of governments. These statements may appear obvious, but if they appeared more consistently in the media, peace would be safer (p. 177).

The MacBride report is correct in stating the media must do more to report social and political development problems, but they must go further. The media need to not only inform, but also engage.

While governments define national development priorities and the media have a role to play in disseminating information about them, implementation should fall to the local level. This is an idea that Everett M. Rogers (1974; 1976) discusses in his work *Communication in Development* about the importance of media in Global South development. For example, he notes that

Naturally, self-development implies a completely different role for communication than in the usual top-down development approach of the past. Technical information about development problems and possibilities and about appropriate innovations is sought by local systems from the central government, so that the role of government development agencies is mainly to communicate in answer to these locally initiated requests rather than to design and conduct top-down communication campaigns (1976, p. 28).

Furthermore, Rogers (1976) points out that in a non-“development journalism” environment, communication “is more permissive and supportive than in the usual top-down development approach, where local citizens are told what their problems are and persuaded to follow certain specific lines of action to solve them, usually involving a

good deal of dependence on government” (p. 29). He argues that, albeit, slowly, the mass media could spark a change in less developed countries if media engaged audiences through discussion forums. Rogers (1974) argues that “the media alone have played a disappointing role in diffusing innovations in less developed nations” (p. 50) but the potential for it is significant when coupled with local discussion of various development issues. He describes these forums as groups of people who got together to listen to radio broadcasts and discuss them in public spaces. These broadcasts included news, agricultural programming and lessons in civics (Rogers, 1974).

Rogers’ (1974) research on communication and development showed that if people came together in these types of forums, there would be greater acceptance of the message being driven. Media forums would “introduce new ideas to vast audiences, audiences which could not be reached for decades if development campaigns relied entirely upon the interpersonal activities of change agents, such as extension agents and community development workers” (p. 51). Moreover, Rogers (1974) argued, exposure to media would produce a climate for development by activating an information seeking mentality and “a favourable attitude toward change” (p. 49). One example is radio forums in Tanzania between 1974 and 1975, when a health campaign led to a “great deal of village-level self-development” (p. 28). The health campaign led to latrines being built, streets getting cleaned, wells being dug, and preventative measures being adhered to. Rogers (1976) notes that

although the radio programs (and related print materials) focused national attention on health problems and provided information about certain ways of solving them, each of the approximately 100,000 radio forums discussed these mass media

messages, applied them to local conditions, decided what health activities they wished to conduct (if any), and then did so with little direct assistance from the Ministry of Public Health (p. 29).

This is one example of how “the role of mass communication in self-development is more permissive and supportive than in the usual top-down development approach, where local citizens are told what their problems are and persuaded to follow certain specific lines of action to solve them, usually involving a good deal of dependence on government” (Rogers, 1976, p. 29). As Rogers (1974) shows, interaction through media leads to an “awareness of information and innovations” (p. 49). This method “holds a potential profit for reaching development goals,” Rogers (1974, p. 45) argues. Obviously national governments play the major role in their countries’ development process, but more attention needs to be paid to local solutions. Because there is no one development model which applies to every Global South country, local communities have to use communication in their own way to help solve their own unique problems—hence the need for public journalism as a development tool.

As stated earlier, democracy does not work without the mass media to inform and engage citizens. In emerging democracies, journalism can be used to meet development goals, however, it’s important that it is a grassroots approach (like public journalism in Columbus, Ohio or Charlotte, North Carolina, or East London’s *Daily Dispatch* in South Africa). This is the difference between development journalism and public journalism. The next section will provide in greater detail the importance of a bottom-up approach to communication being used for development policies in the Global South.

## **Public journalism: Locally-developed solutions to local problems**

While there are similarities between development journalism and public journalism, there is a distinct difference that many authors such as Shah (1996), Sosale (2003), Servaes (1999) and Agunga (1997) have written about. The similarities lie in the fact that both strive for the public good grounded in the social responsibility theory of the press (Gunaratne, 1996). This means that both development and public journalism acknowledge that the media, and mass communications, play a large role in any society, but the difference is in how each is delivered. Since the perceived failure of the NWICO debates and the MacBride report in the early 1980s (Sosale, 2003)<sup>4</sup> communication development scholars have been striving to redefine how exactly the media can play a significant role in development (Servaes, 1999; Sosale, 2003; Shah, 1996). Although there are several means to producing a more engaged civil society, public journalism is one such meaningful role for the media in the Global South.

As Agunga (1997) notes, media in the Global South must play a more significant role than simply telling audiences and readers how to do something (Rogers, 1974, 1976). Literacy, health and economic campaigns were launched through the mass media, but the exposure to the information heard on radio and read in newspapers “were neither as dramatic nor as clear-cut as had been anticipated” (Agunga, 1997, p. 229). Moreover, Agunga (1997) argues, media campaigns in the 1960s and 1970s “had virtually no

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<sup>4</sup> Sosale (2003) notes that “after the withdrawal of the U.S. and Britain from [UNESCO] in 1984 and 1985 respectively, the debate lost the momentum that it had achieved in the decade of 1976-1985” (p. 377).

impact” (p. 229) on the Global South because they were not participatory. This is why public journalism is important, because there is a need for local grassroots interaction in order for development to succeed meaningfully (Agunga, 1997). Media outlets simply cannot broadcast or rewrite the development goals and policies of national governments and hope to instruct citizens in communities on how to make their lives better. Agunga (1997) argues instead that the community must be involved, which is also a main tenet of public journalism. While information technologies and media outlets, including the Internet, have an important role to play in development, it’s how they’re used that’s key, not whether they are used (Agunga, 1997). For example, Agunga (1997) says although television cameras can capture what’s happening, “it is professional human communicators who can go to the villages, find out the needs of local people, and mobilize them for participatory decision-making. Combined effectively, human and mass communication can speed up development” (p. 230).

Another example of a more “participatory” approach to development is Servaes’ (1999) argument for a new “multiplicity paradigm” in development communication. Servaes (1999) argued that “development for society means development of the collective personality of society” (p. 78) and that communication must involve access and participation. Similarly, Sosale (2003) noted that there needed to be a “new world order” which modified “gate-keeping practices” (p. 386) of the media industry when it came to development; “Re-imagining a new world order based on communication thus requires going beyond institutions and professionals and into the perception and opinions of the average citizen in everyday life” Sosale (2003, p. 388) argues.

This is why Shah (1996) calls for an “emancipatory journalism” in which journalists become “participants in a process of progressive social change” (p. 144). This is closest to the public journalism definition in this thesis. Shah (1996) explains that while social responsibility theory and development journalism “supplements neutral reporting with an interpretive and analytical approach, the emancipatory journalism model requires not only provision of socially relevant information but also journalistic activism in challenging and changing the oppressive structures” (p. 145). More specifically,

in the emancipatory journalism model, individuals in communities marginalized by modernization also are given a means of voicing critique and articulating alternative visions of society. But then, professional communicators (who are themselves marginalized in the democratic-participant model) disseminate the voices from the grassroots in forms and formats that can mobilize action to force policy makers to institute reform” (Shah, 1996, p. 145).

Just as Rosen (1999a) argued that public journalism was the best way to make public life work well, Shah (1996) argues that emancipatory journalism is the most “complete and complex” theory to explain the relationship between mass media and Global South development. He declared that

it is more complete because the new model provides a theoretical link between citizen access to mass media and social change because it articulates a specific mechanism by which journalists can participate in social change. It is more complex because it incorporates principles of diversity and fluidity in the process of building cultural identities and communities because it challenges journalistic practice by abandoning the idea of objectivity (pg. 146).

More importantly, emancipatory journalism “emphasizes democratic communication involving two-way and horizontal exchange of information and meaning [and] gives voice to people at the grassroots level” (Shah, 1996, p. 150), which this thesis argues is a

form of public journalism, as both are strongly committed to using the media to engage communities from within.

Shah (1996) and Agunga (1997) contend that development journalism has failed in the past because the idea that journalists, or professional communicators, should get involved in a participatory development approach has not been implemented. Shah (1996) maintains that “news about national development came from the top down, emphasizing official views and pronouncements and glorifying national leaders while dismissing the interests, priorities and aspirations of the poorest and most marginalized” (p. 150). This is also one reason why “traditional” development models have failed the Global South—because the solutions have not been germane to the local community affected. This is why public journalism needs to be incorporated into any development plan. As Agunga (1997) notes, communicators need to “promote participation by shifting emphasis from a top-down to a bottom-up communication approach wherein government decisions are discussed with local people and amended if need be before they are implemented” (p. 258). The people at the local level need to come first. Luis Remiro Beltran (in Agunga, 1997) says that while a communications component is vital to a country’s development plans, it is not what delivers development. People, local members of communities affected by the policies are what make the difference, Agunga (1997) says. This is precisely why public journalism can and should be used as part of a development path. As previously stated, although public journalism originated as a Western concept, it’s clear it is not exclusive to the West. It’s possible in other societies (Haas, 2007) because it focuses on bringing the local residents of a community into the

discussion on issues pertaining to them. This is how development, in light of its past failures, should proceed.

### **Limitations: How free is the press in the Global South and how likely can public journalism be implemented?**

Stiglitz and Islam (2002) argue that “a free press is crucial in overcoming global poverty” and that “access to information is an essential component of a successful development strategy.” Unfortunately, not all countries are equal when it comes to press freedom. As outlined above, public journalism can be adopted in *almost* any society, because there are some countries whose political and social system would not allow public journalism to flourish. As Agunga (1997) notes, any strategy to implement communication for development or, in this case, public journalism, “is predicated upon the existence of favourable political and economic climates in developing countries” (p. 4). Reasonably, public journalism cannot take root and sustain itself if there is civil war or fighting taking place rampantly in the country where, arguably, people’s first instinct is simply to survive.

Public journalism could also probably not be cultivated in a country whose government restricts press freedom or does not respect it, despite lofty words in constitutions which guarantee it. For example, Article 24 of Iran’s constitution states that the press is free, except when what’s published is “detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public” (in Human Rights Watch, 2009).



Meanwhile, in its annual press freedom index, Reporters Without Borders states that in 2009,

journalists have suffered more than ever this year in Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Iran. The president's disputed reelection plunged the country into a major crisis and fostered regime paranoia about journalists and bloggers. Automatic prior censorship, state surveillance of journalists, mistreatment, journalists forced to flee the country, illegal arrests and imprisonment—such is the state of press freedom this year in Iran. Already at the lower end of the rankings in previous years, Iran has now reached the gates of the infernal trio at the very bottom—Turkmenistan (173rd), North Korea (174th) and Eritrea (175th)—where the media are so suppressed they are non-existent (Iran at gates of infernal trio section, para. 3).

In contrast, Colombia is an example of a country that is not necessarily 'stable,' but has a democratically elected government where public journalism can thrive. Human Rights Watch (2008) described Colombia's paramilitary violence as subverting democracy in the South American country, explaining that "too often, killings and threats—not free elections or democratic dialogue—are what has determined who holds power, wealth, and influence in the country" (1. Summary and Recommendations section, para. 1). Reporters Without Borders (2002) also notes that while governments in Colombia and Bangladesh are democratically elected, their index ranking for press freedom decreased that year. In 2002, Colombia stood at 114<sup>5</sup> and Bangladesh was ranked 118. The 2002 Reporters Without Borders report states that "in these countries, armed rebel movements, militias or political parties constantly endanger the lives of journalists. The state fails to do all it could to protect them and fight the immunity very often enjoyed by those responsible for such violence" (para. 7). Haas (2006; 2007) notes,

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<sup>5</sup> According to Reporters Without Borders, Colombia's 2009 press freedom ranking is 126.

however, that public journalism projects still occurred in Colombia in 1997 which continued until at least 2004, despite a potentially unstable political situation.

Colombia's national newspaper *El Tiempo* started a project during the 1997 municipal elections when it commissioned a telephone survey to identify issues of concern to voters and then organized several community forums for citizens to discuss and debate their concerns. Following the forums, the paper reported the survey results as well as the discussion that took place in addition to summarizing candidates' positions on the various topics explored (Haas, 2006). A year later, a consortium of media in Colombia, including newspapers, radio and TV, launched a project called "Citizen Voices" which created a forum for local residents to debate issues important to them. The media created the community forums to hear from readers, listeners and viewers rather than simply telling them what was wrong with their communities. "Citizen Voices" continued until 2004 and community forums were held to discuss topics such as security, soccer-related violence and poverty (Haas, 2006). Colombia is one example where, although the government is democratically elected, the social environment is still unstable and a public journalism-type approach was used to address some of the problems. Although these are isolated cases, it's clear that public journalism can be used in a different political, social and economic society than that of the West. The public journalism project in Colombia did not solve all of the country's problems, but it's important to note that it still occurred in an unstable political environment. As will be seen in the next chapter, after 40 years of institutionalized racism and current political uprisings, this can also be said of South Africa.

Of the 49 countries on the UN's least developed countries list, 28 of them fall in the bottom half of Reporters Without Borders' 175-country press freedom index for 2009. Six of them are not ranked, and only 15 are in the upper half. Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Norway and Sweden make up the top five, all tied for first place. Ghana, which according to the UN is a developing country, ranks the highest of African states at number 27, followed by Mali, at number 30. In comparison, South Africa has a press freedom ranking of 33, which Reporters Without Borders says is a "young democracy" increasing its ranking slowly. Compared to South Africa, Canada ranks 19th and the United States ranks 20th. The seemingly high ranking for South Africa, which also has democratically elected governments but not such a strong civil society, suggests that it is a country with a relatively high degree of press freedom and, as will be seen in the next chapter, has the right conditions to allow public journalism to flourish. As Haas (2006, 2007) has found, public journalism is not unique only to the U.S. In fact, "experiments with public journalism worldwide show that those practices are flexible enough to be of use to news organizations situated in countries with vastly different political systems and journalistic traditions than those of the U.S." (Haas, 2006, p. 16). As seen in Chapter 1, public journalism is already in use in South Africa. This thesis argues that it can be taken further to be used in a context that assists development in a community and citizen-based framework. With its high level of press freedom, democratically elected governments and a media environment open to engaging in its communities, public journalism can work well in South Africa in this way.

As previously mentioned, traditional development models have failed in the Global South and a new approach is needed. There is a need for a communications component to any development model, and more specifically calls for the use of public journalism. Now that public journalism and development concepts have both been defined and the limits to both have been addressed, the next chapter will look at South Africa specifically as a developing country with a need for a public journalism movement.

## **Chapter 4: Why South Africa could benefit from public journalism**

Chapter 3 discussed the failures of development throughout the last 60 years because of a focus on economic approaches rather than communication approaches. The economic approaches of modernization and dependency theory failed to recognize the bottom-up approach needed for a sustainable development model. Chapter 4 will focus the discussion of development specifically on South Africa. The chapter will discuss South Africa's colonial history and establish it as a member of the Global South which has the right conditions for use of public journalism as one means to development.

### **Introduction: A short political history of South Africa**

When Nelson Mandela was elected as South Africa's first black president in 1994, he ushered in an era of hope to millions of people who suffered under an apartheid system for more than 40 years. During his inaugural speech, he proclaimed that South Africans had finally achieved political emancipation and that his government would "liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other discrimination" (Mandela, 2003, p. 69). He proudly said, "We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of the millions of our people. We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity—a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world"

(Mandela, 2003, p. 69). That moment was a long time coming for South Africa, which, since the mid-1600s had been plagued with racism, discrimination and poverty (Horwitz, 2001).

South Africa's modern colonial history began in 1652 when Dutch merchants arrived along the Cape peninsula and settled it. The English arrived in 1806, causing hostility between the two but both had a commonality in dominating blacks, especially for labour, in the country. The tensions between the Dutch, (who by then considered themselves Afrikaners, or native to South Africa), and the English culminated in the second Anglo-Boer war from 1899 to 1902<sup>1</sup>. The English won the war and set up South Africa as a full British colony. As Horwitz (2001) notes, "British colonial hegemony fashioned economic, social and cultural relations in such ways as effectively to exclude Afrikaans-speaking whites from ownership in all sectors but agriculture, and left them with a deep sense of economic deprivation and cultural oppression. At the same time, the Union entailed the supremacy of the white coalition against blacks" (p. 27). Under a British colonial system for the first half of the 1900s, South Africa was built on a society where the economy and culture benefited whites only, excluding Afrikaans-speaking people and blacks (Horwitz, 2001; Lapierre, 2009; Thompson, 2000). Afrikaans-speaking people, although white, were not allowed to own property or businesses, and blacks at the time did not have the right to vote, while membership in the Westminster-style Parliament was restricted to Europeans (Horwitz, 2001). Horwitz (2001) notes that

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<sup>1</sup> The first Anglo-Boer war was short lived and took place in 1880 to 1881, won by the Afrikaners. Boer is the Dutch word for farmer.

“power, except for some marginal delegated capacities, was explicitly the monopoly of the white minority. South Africa would come to function as a democracy for [English] whites” (p. 27) until 1948, when the Afrikaner National Party gained power (Thompson, 2000).

The National Party campaigned on a policy of anticolonialism and anticapitalism and when it took over the reins of government, began to nationalize industry, commerce, resources and the education system to Afrikaner benefit (Horwitz, 2001). The National Party started by “Afrikanerizing” state institutions and closing “the economic gap between themselves and English-speaking white South Africans” (Thompson, 2000, p. 188). The party then slowly began to implement apartheid, where for almost 40 years institutionalized racism took hold of South Africa, following the British lead in the early 1900s<sup>2</sup> to segregate people along ethnic lines (Thompson, 2000; Horwitz, 2001; Wasserman & de Beer, 2005). This would define South Africa for almost 50 years and explain much of the reasons the country was so divided and why the majority of its citizens were under-educated and lived in poverty.

Thompson (2000) notes that apartheid had four main ideas which drove the ideology:

First, the population of South Africa comprised four ‘racial groups’—white, coloured, Indian and African—each with its own inherent culture. Second, whites, as the civilized race, were entitled to have absolute control over the state. Third, white interests should prevail over black interests; the state was not obliged to provide equal facilities for the subordinate races. Fourth, the white racial group formed a single

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<sup>2</sup> In 1913, the British instituted the *Natives Land Act* which prohibited Africans from owning land and created reserves to segregate Africans from the British rulers. This led to the creation of “pass” laws, whereby passes were given to slaves and non-whites so that they could travel from city to city with permission in areas they were not normally supposed to be in (Thompson, 2001).

nation, with several (eventually 10) distinct nations or potential nations—a formula that made the white nation the largest in the country (p. 190).

This led to the racial classification of every South African, the prohibition of mixed race marriages, the creation of eight (and later 10) geographic areas “home” to the various “nations” within the country (Thompson, 2000; Horwitz, 2001; Lapierre, 20009). These “homelands,” however, became ghettos which deteriorated because of the lack of funds and subsidies from the central government, forcing the people who lived there to become migrant workers (Thompson, 2000; Switzer & Adhikari, 2000). Horwitz (2001) explains that “as the policy evolved, apartheid required racial groups by law to live in the particular geographic areas set aside for them. Indeed, after the National Party’s ascent to power, the stated goal of the total segregationists was to secure a South Africa with no black citizens” (p. 33).

The education system was also overhauled to reinforce apartheid in South Africa. While whites were separated into Afrikaans and English speaking schools, blacks were separated into mission schools until the *Bantu Education Act* was implemented in 1953. The South African government “considered that the mission schools were transmitting dangerous, alien ideas to their African students and turning them ... into Black Englishmen” (Thompson, 2000, p. 196) and so it took control of the public education for blacks. Although the government implemented this, white schools received 10 times more funding per capita than black schools and black classes were twice as large as white ones. Former South African president Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd showed complete disregard for blacks when he said, “If the native in South Africa today in any kind of



school in existence is being taught to expect that he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake. ... There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour” (in Thompson, 2000, p. 196).

Politically, non-white citizens of South Africa were legally not allowed to vote and the government banned almost all opposition to itself, for example the African National Congress, led by Nelson Mandela. The government prohibited the ANC and 31 other resistance groups such as the Pan-Africanist Congress and student organizations from meeting in public, from receiving funds from overseas, and from protesting publicly. They were forced underground as guerilla groups while mass arrests, police raids and violent quelling of opposition demonstrations took place because of laws that allowed police to arrest people without trial and keep them in solitary confinement indefinitely without telling anyone and without giving them access to anyone except for other government officials. Most of the leadership of resistance and opposition groups were arrested and jailed in 1963, including Mandela, who received a life sentence in prison in 1964 for standing up against apartheid. Uprisings continued throughout this period, as well as an increase in arrests and detentions designed to eliminate the black political opposition (Switzer & Adhikari, 2000). In the end, the apartheid governments of South Africa implemented more than 1,750 pieces of legislation to increase white power and diminish blacks (Lapierre, 2009). These laws created a very divided society, the legacy of which is still being felt today.

## **A government tool: The media's role during apartheid in South Africa**

This section deals with how the media were used by the apartheid government in South Africa and their role in helping to bring democracy to the country. It will also deal with how the media landscape changed after democracy was implemented and conclude by noting that their role in a post-apartheid state had disappointing outcomes.

Between 1948 and 1994, the media played a large role in sustaining the apparatuses of apartheid (Thompson, 2000, Horwitz, 2001, Wasserman & de Beer, 2005), especially since the government severely limited press freedom in South Africa during this time. While the National Party government's strategy was to "intimidate the press into exercising self-censorship" (Horwitz, 2001, p. 46), it also passed laws to limit what journalists could and could not do. For example, stories on defence, prisons, atomic energy and information about natural resources such as petroleum were no longer allowed to be reported. The government also banned the publication and dissemination of opposition groups' ideas as a means of preventing incitement of "racial friction in South Africa or destroy the image of South Africa abroad or which endanger state security" (Horwitz, 2001, p. 47; see also Wasserman & de Beer, 2005). The government went as far as implementing the *Suppression of Communism Act* in 1950 and the *Riotous Assemblies Act* in 1956 which forced journalists to give up sources and hand over information they discovered about crime or state security. A Press Commission of Inquiry was also created in the 1950s to keep an eye on foreign journalists and laws later emerged to restrict journalists from going into certain areas of the country as well as from

making comments that would negatively reflect government officials and incite unlawful strikes and protests. As a response, the government confiscated entire runs of newspapers at will and “offending journalists were detained by the police or occasionally expelled if they were foreign correspondents” (Horwitz, 2001, p. 55). In 1977, 1,246 publications, 41 periodicals, and 44 films were banned, most of which belonged to the opposition movement which made it “difficult for South Africans to find out what opposition movements were doing and thinking” (Thompson, 2000, p. 198).

The government not only suppressed the media, but also used it to further its own apartheid goals. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) became a propaganda tool for the National Party (Thompson, 2000; Horwitz, 2001; Switzer, 2000). When the National Party took over in 1948, it slowly used the state radio broadcaster (and later television) to further Afrikaner nationalism, first as a means to take over English as the broadcasting language, and then to separate black broadcasting from the national service. In 1961, the SABC’s annual report noted that “Radio South Africa should by means of positive contributions in its own sphere, promote the survival and bounteous heritage of the white people of the RSA whilst at the same time encouraging the development and self-realisation of the non-white population groups in their own spheres” (in Horwitz, 2001, p. 63). This led to the creation of separate radio stations for different linguistic groups in the black community—in 1964, there were seven different African language radio services. As Horwitz (2001) notes, “SABC’s role was seen as defender of the apartheid state and propagator of its separate development policies. In line with Verwoerdian [former South African president Hendrik Verwoerd] doctrine, this

meant the maintenance of racial discrimination presented as ‘ethnic self-determination’” (p. 63).

The SABC carried this out in practice. For example, Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, surveyed the 1977 and 1981 election campaigns and found that more than 80 per cent of the broadcaster’s election coverage was on government or National Party positions (in Horwitz, 2001). In addition, in 1981, the National Party received 1,200 per cent more air time than opposition parties, which received less than one minute each during the first two weeks of the election campaign. Horwitz (2001) notes that the opposition were rarely covered in any context and when blacks were reported on, they

were typically portrayed as leaderless, rudderless groups, whose only aim was to destroy civil order and legitimate government. Opposition figures such as Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu were demonized in SABC reports. New commentary in the black languages was patronizing and formulated to coopt dissent. News and public affairs programs would go black at times because a government minister would call at the last minute and demand that a clip, a statement, an interview not be aired (p. 71).

As noted earlier, the government’s aim was to scare the media into self-censorship, and it was successful (Horwitz, 2001; Wasserman & de Beer, 2005). While South Africa had some elements of a democratic state, for example an elected government, it was not truly a democracy for all because of its discriminating apartheid structures. However, there was a strong resistance and alternative press which helped contribute to the end of apartheid (Thompson, 2000; Horwitz, 2001; Switzer, 2000; Wasserman and de Beer, 2005), showing that the media are a powerful and essential means to democracy.

There were many factors which led to the dismantling of the National Party and apartheid, including the 1960 Sharpeville protests, the 1976 Soweto uprisings, and

international pressure and economic sanctions from trading partners, but the media also played a large part in helping democracy grow in South Africa (Wasserman and de Beer, 2005; Horwitz, 2001; Switzer & Adhikari, 2000). Despite the threats to press freedom, intimidation and limits to an inclusive public sphere, as noted above, “the anti-apartheid press also played an important role in bringing about democratization, and the media in general contributed to a political climate susceptible to change” (Wasserman and de Beer, 2005, p. 197; see also Switzer & Adhikari, 2000).

The alternative media emerged in the 1970s when the majority of the commercial media were owned by four companies—two English language ones with 14 dailies, and two Afrikaans-language ones which owned five dailies (Horwitz, 2001; Switzer, 2000). The alternative media included academic journals, student publications, music and literature which actively went against apartheid and in “favour of the black liberation struggle” (Horwitz, 2001, p. 53; see also Switzer, 2000). Most of the alternative press had a change motivator rather than a profit motivator which left several of them with very few staff, even fewer resources and supported by foreign anti-apartheid organizations and donor agencies such as Holland, Sweden, Germany and Canada (Horwitz, 2001, p. 54; see also Wasserman & de Beer, 2005). Because of the largely restricted press, the alternative media were crucial in bringing to light the events and conditions that the government did not want to be known publicly. Switzer (2000) points out that the alternative and resistance press’s impact was not measured in terms of the number of copies sold or the dollars raised from advertising, but rather “these journalists rendered personalities, events and issues visible that were too often invisible and provided a voice

to alienate communities that were too often voiceless” (Switzer, 2000, p. 39). Switzer (2000) argues that the alternative press “contributed immeasurably to broadening the concept of a free press in South Africa. In no small way, the guardians of the new South Africa owe these publications a debt of gratitude that cannot be repaid” (p. 39). Even in light of a state of emergency called by the government in 1985 which aimed to confront the United Democratic Front’s (which was the main anti-apartheid opposition political party) rebellious uprisings at the time by putting in even more strict limits to press freedom (Horwitz, 2001, Switzer, 2000), the alternative press continued. Because they refused to simply give up their fight, the resistance and alternative press helped “to build a level of defiance in town and countryside that sustained and broadened the resistance movement” (Switzer, 2000, p. 45). The growing resistance coupled with international media attention on the gross human rights abuses and a mounting divide in the National Party to uphold apartheid led the government to remove bans on opposition groups such as the ANC, the South African Communist Party and the Pan-Africanist Congress as well as to lift restrictions on the UDF and 31 other organizations which were previously repressed by the state. ANC leader Nelson Mandela was released from prison after serving 27 years on February 11, 1990. Negotiations took place to finally democratize South Africa, including a new constitution which included all South Africans as well as a guarantee for freedom of expression and a free press, culminating in the first truly universally free elections in 1994 where millions, black and white, voted for Mandela as the country’s first black president.

While Wasserman and de Beer (2005) admit that “although credit should be given to the media for contributing to the first democratic elections being largely peaceful, this does not mean that the full range of political options available for the first time to South Africans in 1994 were represented in the media. The majority of journalists were still white, male and middle class” (p. 197). To address this, in addition to repealing all repressive media laws, the new ANC government undertook a massive media transformation, starting with the SABC. Broadcasting was a state monopoly prior to 1994 and served the government’s interests. The new SABC, both television and radio, sought to serve the public’s interest instead as well as the government’s development goals. Whereas prior to democratization, the SABC television broadcast on three signals to serve the white, middle class, it now had a mandate “aimed at protecting and nurturing South African culture and creativity and reflecting the reality of South Africa was to be viewed from a distinctly South African perspective” (in Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 2001, p. 125). By 1996, SABC radio broadcast 22 regional and national services, 11 of which were offered in 11 of South Africa’s official languages—a major change from when the stations served Afrikaans-language and culture only. The government also licensed more than 82 private community radio stations which helped to further diversify the media landscape.

The print media also made significant transformations, both in ownership and content. Berger (2001) notes that newspapers were the first to have ownership changes when Irish businessman Tony O’Reilly bought significant shares in the main dailies which opened up competition in the country’s media. Blacks also started owning papers

and editorially, journalists were free to truthfully report the news. Berger (2001) notes that “under apartheid there was little distinction between [ownership and editorial control]. However, since then, the new owners have brought with them far more enlightened views as regards respect for editorial independence. From the point of view of democratic transformation, this can be seen as a significant advance” (p. 161). This was tested in the 1999 elections when the ANC-aligned *Financial Mail* editors endorsed the opposition party but the editor kept his job, unlike others during the apartheid period (Berger, 2001). Because the “media provide essential platforms for debate, information and education around issues shaping the kind of society we are and the kind of society we wish to become” (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 2001, p. 124), the transformations in South Africa’s media landscape were very important to the country’s transition to democracy. Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli (2001) properly note that “the media are thus crucial sites of contestation in the ‘circuit of culture’ in which the production, presentation, regulation, consumption, and creation of meaning are all intimately implicated in the creation of identity, at both the personal and the national levels” (p. 24). As the above shows, the media in South Africa have played a large role in shaping the country into the democratic state it is today. As will be seen in the next section, however, the political and media transformations, while very important, did not translate into significant social transformations, showing the need for a public journalism environment to be fostered in South Africa.



## **The democratic South Africa: 1994 to present**

When Nelson Mandela became president in 1994 as the leader of the African National Congress Party, he promised to “build a better life for all South Africans. This means creating jobs, building houses, providing education and bringing peace and security for all” (Mandela, 2003, p. 64). Those were lofty goals for a country which, “after decades of exploitation and repression, and after two decades of creeping poverty and rising unemployment, the poorer segment of the population (almost exclusively black) was living in abject poverty and destitution” (Terreblanche, 2009, p. 107). The economy was in a “state of depression,” and a “deep-seated structural crisis” (Terreblanche, 2009, p. 107) leaving the ANC with a lot of restructuring to do upon taking power. Although South Africa, both its people and its economy, have come a long way since democracy, the country’s development path has been mixed. This is precisely why public journalism is needed in South Africa.

Today, South Africa is made up of more than 49 million people. Its gross domestic product per capita was 48979.59 Rand at the end of 2009 (\$7239.96 Canadian<sup>3</sup>) with an unemployment rate of 24.3 per cent, according to Statistics South Africa. In 1993, GDP per capita was approximately 3,093 Rand (\$457.19 Canadian<sup>4</sup>) and the unemployment rate was at 46 per cent. In 2007, the United Nations estimated that 20 per cent of the population lived on less than \$155.35 Canadian per year (1051 Rand) and 43.2

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<sup>3</sup> All monetary conversions from Rand to Canadian dollars made using 1 South African Rand = \$0.147816 CAD in 2010 figures (taken from xe.com on Oct. 9, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> According to Statistics South Africa, the GDP at the end of the fourth quarter of 1993 was 118,428,000,000R and the country had a population of 38,283,220 people.

per cent lived on less than \$443.44 (3000 Rand) per year, which is the poverty line for South Africa. In 2005, the UN noted that 30,082 children under five years old were severely malnourished. In 2007, 28 per cent of the population was HIV positive. This is compared to 1993 statistics in which the UN found that the poorest 20 per cent of South Africa's population lived on less than \$108 per year while 50.1 per cent lived below the poverty line. Malnutrition statistics have also declined, from 88,971 children under five in 2001. Unfortunately, instances of HIV increased over the last few years, from 24.8 per cent to 30.2 per cent in 2005. When it comes to education, illiteracy remains around 23 per cent, according to the CIA World Factbook's 2003 estimates. In addition, 65 per cent of white South Africans older than 20 years and 40 per cent of Indians have a high school diploma or higher qualification, compared to 14 per cent among black South Africans (SouthAfrica.info, n.d.). This has increased since 1991 figures when illiteracy was around 28 per cent (South Africa Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, n.d.).

Clearly the ANC, which has been in power since 1994, has made progress in alleviating some poverty, health and education issues, but as Terreblanche (2009), Evans (2007), Kagwanja (2009) and Bodibe (2007) correctly note, the government chose a prominent neo-liberal approach to development which was administered from a national perspective rather than a local one; as a result, the policies did not make major inroads with local communities and address issues that affected the poor majority of South Africans. The ANC came to power on a left-leaning platform with policies outlined in its Reconstruction and Development Programme. The RDP consisted of five pillars in order to reduce poverty and inequality. These included: macroeconomic stability, meeting basic

needs, providing social safety nets, human resource development and job creation.

According to South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation, the government's method was to create development-friendly legislation and policy. The government, however, was "aware that social development cannot take place without the full partnership of civil society. These aspects of our commitment will accelerate change and growth on the ground" (South Africa Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2004).

In 1996, however, under international and local pressure to engage in the global economy, the ANC under Mandela introduced the market-friendly Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. Gone was the "people-centric" rhetoric the ANC espoused during its fight against apartheid, and in came the private sector and foreign direct investments as a saviour to South Africa's problems. The strategy called for rapid liberalization in the form of relaxed exchange controls, free trade, 'regulated' flexibility in labour markets, deep deficit reduction targets, stabilization of the rand through low inflation rates and the privatization of state assets. The strategy also estimated that by 2000, the economy would grow six per cent and 400,000 new jobs would be created annually through significant private sector investments, especially foreign direct investments. Policymakers hoped that investment would lead to job creation which would lead to more government revenue which would then lead to the expansion of social services and better infrastructure which would then raise the standard of living for South Africans (Heintz, 2003; Terreblanche, 2009). Heintz (2003) notes however, that the growth rate never came close to the projections the government made and while the

economy did grow by an average of three per cent between 1994 and 2002, it was “jobless growth” which did not have any trickle-down effect.

While six million blacks were able to enter the “middle class” of society, Terreblanche (2009) notes that the ANC’s belief that wealth would be trickled down to poor South Africans if a strong economic development order was followed, only “intensified the systemic exclusion of the poor and brought about a much more unequal distribution of income” (p. 108). In fact, 20 per cent of the population which makes up the poorest 10 million people in South Africa (of which are mostly black) received only 1.7 per cent of the total income in 2006 while the wealthiest 20 per cent (also approximately 20 million people of which are mostly white) received 72.5 per cent of the total income (Terreblanche, 2009). Heintz (2003) also notes that the extent of inequality has been increasing. For example, South Africa’s Gini coefficient, a measurement of inequality ranging from zero (representing perfect equality throughout society) and one (representing perfect inequality) increased from 0.56 in 1995 to 0.57 in 2000. Kagwanja (2009) notes in 2008 the Gini coefficient increased again to 0.6, “making it, along with Brazil, the most unequal society in the world” (p. xxxv). Although the changes in Gini coefficient are small, “it clearly reveals that South Africa is not moving in the direction of mitigating the inequalities left behind by the apartheid regime” (Heintz, 2003, p. 4). Sixteen years after democracy, blacks and whites in South Africa are still “living as if in two worlds—the poor in a highly underdeveloped and stagnant environment, and the rich in a highly developed and prosperous environment” (Terreblanche, 2009, p. 108; see also Evans, 2007; Kagwanja, 2009; and Bodibe, 2007).

Given all of the above, it's not surprising that South Africans face increasing violent crime, rising food prices, a high cost of living, poor service delivery from government, and an "uncertain" democracy (Kagwanja, 2009; Edigheji, 2007). South Africans believed that democracy would finally be "synonymous with freedom from hunger, want, disease ... [and] substantially reduce inequalities along racial and gender lines, decrease poverty, increase access to basic social services and physical infrastructure" (Edigheji, 2007, p. 11), but that optimism from 1994 has turned into pessimism (Kagwanja, 2009). A scan of international news headlines about South Africa shows that the country is still reeling from racial problems:

- "Tensions rise over killing of South African white supremacist" and "South Africa appeals for calm after white supremacist leader killed" by Associated Press reporter Michelle Faul published on April 4 and 6, 2010;
- "Jacob Zuma warns ANC to halt racial anger" by London *Sunday Times* reporter Dan McDougall, published on April 11, 2010;
- "Why colour still defines everything in South Africa," by BBC News reporter Karen Allen, aired on April 10, 2010;
- "Racism: Alive and Well in South Africa," by CNN reporter Rick Sanchez, aired on April 14, 2010;
- "South Africa: ANC orders 'Kill the Boer' ban," published in the *London Telegraph*, April 7, 2010;

- “Race still dogs SA students,” by South Africa Broadcasting Corporation reporter Frank Nxumalo, aired on March 25, 2010;
- “Racism in the Rainbow Nation,” by *Globe and Mail* reporter Geoffrey York, published on Aug. 30, 2009.

Over the years since 1994, there have been “spates of popular protests in poor townships over service delivery which rocked the country from 2004, ... which took on an increasingly violent streak” (Kagwanja, 2009, p. xxi). In May 2008, a mass of xenophobic uprisings took place as South Africans responded to the unstable social and economic environment in their country.

Mandela and his successor, Thabo Mbeki, implemented an aggressive neo-liberal agenda which “failed ... to reverse the entrenched racial and economic injustice and inequalities and to create access to services, jobs and other means of livelihood for an increasingly impoverished and disillusioned black majority” (Kagwanja, 2009, p. xviii) from 1996 to 2008. Current president Jacob Zuma was elected in 2008 under a banner of being a “friend of the poor, friend of the left, and a man of the people... [which won] the hearts and minds of the ANC rank and file” (Kagwanja, 2009, p. xxv). Zuma’s victory underpinned a struggle within the ANC, however, which has threatened South Africa’s democracy, as Kagwanja (2009) and Gumede (2009) point out. Under Mbeki’s leadership, the ANC’s organizational structure was centralized and local branches of the party were eliminated, leaving grassroots members without a significant voice to influence policy (Gumede, 2009). Furthermore, the president of the party received more

powers “to construct, implement and co-ordinate new policies” (Gumede, 2009, p. 41). The ANC aimed to be more efficient, but in the process, removed a vital system for ordinary members to have a voice within the party and by extension, public life in general. As a result, the ANC became insular and not open to new ideas. In fact, “Thabo Mbeki pushed his reforms by marginalising critics and was often accused of using state resources to do so. ... Sadly, Mbeki’s penchant for suspending democracy to push unpopular reforms through and to isolate critics as enemies helped to foster an undemocratic political culture, both in the ANC and in broader South African society” (Gumede, 2009, p. 52). Mbeki did this by dismissing criticism as “foreign,” “racist,” or “colonial” and attacking the person’s character, reputation and credibility. He was not willing to consult widely and alienated many people. His defeat in 2008 was a reflection of this (Gumede, 2009; Kagwanja, 2009). The lack of internal democracy in the ANC, and its centralized style of governing also reflected South Africans’ broader discontent with their society. As Gumede (2009) notes:

Mbeki’s ousting reflected a wider dissatisfaction among the ANC’s rank-and-file membership over the ANC’s delivery record, responsiveness and internal democracy. But Polokwane [an ANC conference held in 2007 in the city] was also an expression of disillusionment over the quality of South Africa’s broader democracy and its institutions. There is a widespread perception that public officials can get away with corruption if they have good political connections. There is also a deep worry about democratic institutions’ ability to protect the country’s citizens, deliver basic services, share growth equitably and work with accountability and inclusivity (p. 55).

This is significant because South Africa’s opposition parties are weak and unable to hold the government accountable (Gumede, 2009). If the ANC itself doesn’t practice democracy, “it will put a brake on future economic growth and reduce the quality of South Africa’s democracy” (Gumede, 2009, p. 54) by continuing to look out for itself,

rather than the people who elected them. This top-down structure has been a major obstacle in preventing South Africa from moving forward with closing the gap between rich and poor and lifting itself out of the Global South. A people-centred process which includes all sectors of society is needed in light of this otherwise only the elites making the decisions at the top benefit.

As the previous section shows, South Africa is still a part of the Global South. The UN considers it a “middle income” country, but as the 2006 UNDP Human Development Report states, “politics, not finance, technology and economics, still holds the key to progress.” When it comes to development, it’s not only about investments and economic growth. Social justice and a robust democracy are also important to sustain any type of development. Terreblanche (2009) makes this argument, noting that while there has been growth, wealth has not been transferred to those who need it most. The South African government not only implemented a neo-liberal economic agenda, but also instituted the Black Economic Empowerment policy. It helped to create a black middle class, Terreblanche (2009) says, but “it is, however, very much a top-down policy that co-opted privileged and well-connected black people into the economic circles of the white elite and white middle class” (p. 108). Terreblanche (2009) says the program “did not change [the government’s] pro-rich orientation into a pro-poor orientation” and while the top 20 per cent of blacks gained their opportunities through this program as well as affirmative action policies, it only helped a small number of people. It in fact helped to create an even bigger gap in inequality (Terreblanche, 2009). What the ANC forgot was what it had outlined in its policy documents: “people acting collectively in the spirit of



human solidarity must shape the contours of economic development” (in Evans, 2007).

Evans (2007) builds on this using Amartya Sen’s beliefs to say that “democratic deliberation to economic goal-setting” (p. 60) is very important and that “enabling communities to decide which services are most crucial to their priorities for capability expansion” (p. 60) is one way to do it. This thesis builds on Evans’ point further by arguing that public journalism is a key way to “enable communities” to better democratically deliberate its economic and social development goals.

As previously stated, South Africa has come a long way from its years of apartheid—it has democratically elected governments, its media have been transformed in content and ownership, and its economy is growing slowly—but it is still a developing country. One reason massive and significant changes occurred after decades of oppression was because people gathered at the grassroots around a cause, and they fought to overcome the injustices they saw. Communities saw a problem and organized around it to make changes. In its rush to address inequality, the South African ANC government relied on a traditional economic, neo-liberal development model which, while there has been some economic growth, have for the most part failed to address poverty and racial issues which still haunt the country. The government believed that its policies would have a trickle-down effect, but they failed to do so. This is one reason why it’s time for the development to be refocused on people at the community level, rather than corporations and foreign investments at the macroeconomic level. It’s time for the citizens to be involved in their own development. A bigger emphasis should be put on public journalism in development planning in order to facilitate deliberation between members

of different communities, stakeholders, public officials and elected representatives. As shown in this chapter, South Africa has a long history of media empowerment. Even during apartheid when resistance and alternative media were banned or harassed, journalists persisted in using the power of the media to make changes. South Africa today has a burgeoning media environment which is protected constitutionally with guaranteed freedoms of expression including freedom of the press and freedom to receive or impart information. Most importantly, the freedoms can be seen both in theory and in practice, unlike in Iran, as stated in the previous chapter. This makes South Africa a prime country in which journalists can foster a public journalism environment.

As previously stated, public journalism projects have already been carried out in South Africa. The next chapter will focus on two public journalism projects in South Africa (one in radio, and one in newsprint) and the growth of tabloids, one medium that has the potential to inherently be a public journalism model. As will be seen in the next chapter, these projects have made a small difference to the communities affected which adds to the important role that media can play in development. This is why it is crucial that more media outlets take up the public journalism cause.

## **Chapter 5: Public journalism projects in South Africa**

After defining concepts of public journalism and development in previous chapters, the fourth chapter outlined South Africa's colonial history as well as the events leading to its establishment as an emerging democracy. While the country has successfully come out of decades of a divided social and political system epitomized by apartheid apparatuses within the country's social and political fabric, in some respects very little has changed. Millions of black South Africans still live in squalid poverty, HIV/AIDS runs rampant, and illiteracy stands at 23 per cent. Part of the reason that South Africa has not come as far as the leaders of the ANC had hoped when Nelson Mandela took over as president in 1994 is because the South African government focused too much on economic development without taking into account its citizens' views. Although South Africa has many tenets of democracy embedded in its political culture, for example universal suffrage where it had none previously, it's still an emerging democracy which needs a revised development path. This development path must include deliberation between the public and the government, and one key way to implement it is through public journalism. This chapter focuses on some of the attempts that journalists are making to implement a public journalism model in their media environment. It also critically looks at the outcomes of the public journalism projects, and although it's still early to make sweeping conclusions on their impacts on development in the long term, the chapter finds

that despite South Africa's limited civil society and public discourse arena, public journalism is a positive measure for the country's development future.

## **Introduction: South Africa's current media environment**

South Africa's constitution guarantees freedom of expression in section 16, subsection one, which states that citizens have the right to freedom of the press, freedom to receive and impart information or ideas, freedom of artistic creativity and academic freedom (Hadland & Thorne, 2004), which, as noted in the previous chapter was a major change from the hundreds of restrictions that the apartheid government put on the media prior to democracy. Like South Africa's political transformations, the media have transformed and today are robust in quantity and quality (Hadland & Thorne, 2004; Horwitz, 2001), but, as authors such as Geertsema (2007) and Wasserman and de Beer (2005) note, there has been a debate about journalism's role in post-apartheid South Africa.

In the early days of democracy, the South African government pursued a development journalism media strategy in which the public broadcaster, the SABC, would be used to promote the government's development goals. Geertsema (2007) notes that the government also encouraged the print media and private radio to support the government's moves and abandon some of its traditional watchdog position. In fact, "some senior government officials have made public appeals to journalists to write positive accounts of policies to promote national unity. In one instance, former president Nelson Mandela lashed out against black journalists for criticizing government efforts to

promote reconciliation,” Geertsema (2007) says. As stated in the previous chapter, development journalism was a top-down, instructional approach whereby the government dictated what was important. Rather than using the media to engage the public and communities across the country in a dialogue in order to deal with the development issues at hand, the government delivered its own solutions to the people. As Chapters 3 and 4 showed, however, top-down approaches to solving problems is not effective. After years of being excluded in the public policy and decision-making process, the people of South Africa should be engaged with its government and working together to develop solutions to the issues such as crime, poverty and low education which face South Africans every day. South African journalists could become the means to facilitate the ongoing discussion between the public and government officials. Although there have, admittedly, been very few examples of public journalism use in South African newsrooms, over the years, some media outlets have actively participated and implemented public journalism models in their newsrooms. The next section will outline how community radio stations in South Africa have done just that.

### **Community radio: How call-in programs serve as centres for discussion**

For Brett Davidson, a South African media consultant and trainer, having media freedoms is not enough if journalists don’t help to foster democracy (personal communication, Feb. 17, 2010). He believes that the media play “a vital role” in any democracy and that given South Africa’s emerging democracy state, “it’s crucial that we

connect people and reflect ordinary people's interests." As a former South African Broadcasting Corporation radio journalist, Davidson says that community radio is an important public journalism medium.

In light of newer technologies such as television and the Internet, Davidson says that radio is still popular in South Africa for several reasons. For one, it's one of the most accessible mediums not only financially but linguistically as well. As Davidson notes, "You have to have money to go out and buy a newspaper everyday—if you have a radio, you can listen to it every day. It's accessible, it's available to people in their own language." As mandated by the South African government, there is a public radio station in each of the country's 11 official languages, and because community radio is owned locally, often listeners are able to receive programming in their local language. In addition, given that six to eight million South Africans are illiterate, only 60 per cent have televisions and even less have access to newspapers, computers and the Internet,<sup>1</sup> radio—which 90 per cent of the population owns—can reach the greatest number of people and have a significant effect "in strengthening civil society by hosting other forms of public talk" (Fisher, in Davidson, 2002, p. 1).

Megwa (2007b) notes that community radio rose out of the resistance movement during apartheid to empower those disadvantaged in the country. Today, it's moved from a mandate of "resistance to reconstruction and development at the local level" (Megwa, 2007b, p. 338). There are currently anywhere from 80 to 100 community radio stations in

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<sup>1</sup> According to the CIA World Factbook, there are 1.73 million Internet hosts and 4.187 million Internet users in a country with more than 49 million people. This is compared to Canadian statistics in which of the 33 million people, 7.193 million Internet hosts, and 25.086 million Internet users, based on 2008 statistics.

South Africa, which are licensed to “reflect the cultural, religious, language, and demographic needs of the community and must highlight grassroots community issues such as development, health care, general education and local culture” (Davidson, 2002, p. 8). Although the community radio stations also take on an entertaining role and broadcast music, a significant amount of programming is news based on issues of local concern (Davidson, 2002; Kivikuru, 2006). Hadland and Thorne (2004) see community radio as “serving a valuable community service [because] the majority are operated by and for historically disadvantaged communities” (p. 55). Because of this structure, Megwa (2007b) notes that community radio stations gain legitimacy from listeners and in this way makes them “not just a powerful social and cultural institution but also a veritable vehicle for influencing opinions and attitudes in the community” (p. 339).

This is not to say that there are not still some challenges for community radio stations in South Africa. Although they are licensed to broadcast with the aim of delivering an educational and participatory democratic service in a non-profit capacity, they are often not supported financially. Hadland and Thorne (2004) note that in many cases, a skills shortage prevents stations from marketing, budgeting and fundraising successfully and thereby the stations aren’t able to acquire the proper equipment or hire the appropriate people to maintain the station. Furthermore, Davidson (personal communication, Feb. 17, 2010) notes that some stations also try to emulate commercial radio and become sensational in their news reporting, in order to get more advertisers to the station, leaving their “community” mandate behind. Hadland and Thorne (2004) attribute this to failing to make connections with the community, including NGOs, local

government officials and businesses. Making these connections “would have brought them closer to the communities they serve and enabled them to produce programming of a more participatory and developmental nature” (Hadland & Thorne, 2004, p. 56).

Admittedly, Davidson (2010) and Hadland and Thorne (2004) say that there are not a lot of examples of community radio reporters facilitating participation within their communities between members of the community, but there are pockets of community radio outlets which strive to do so. These reporters have taken up the public journalism cause and are using radio as “a platform to encourage and promote dialogue, social change and development” (Hadland & Thorne, 2004, p. 56).

As previously mentioned in the first chapter, Democracy Radio was one of those outlets (Kivikuru, 2006). Another is the work of the Institute for Democracy in Africa (Idasa), an independent nonprofit NGO which Davidson had been closely involved with as its manager and trainer between 2000 and 2007. During his time at Idasa, Davidson also served as a fellow at the Kettering Foundation, in Dayton, Ohio, where he learned about the concept of public journalism. In an effort to move away from the expert-oriented and conflict-filled news gathering techniques in community radio, Davidson helped develop a workshop for South African journalists to employ public journalism in their newsrooms. This workshop has been presented since 2003 at a number of community radio stations and small newspapers in South Africa (Davidson, 2010).

The workshop begins by asking participants to draw maps of their community using only their own knowledge of that community and then are asked to discuss “various layers and dimensions of community” (Davidson, 2010). Participants are then challenged



to think outside of their usual box of where to find sources for stories and write down different meeting areas such as libraries, coffee shops, public bars, schools, hair salons, and then identify the leaders in those communities, including officials as well as the ordinary people who are seen as leaders in the community but don't necessarily have an official title. Davidson (2010) notes that "the point of these exercises is to point out that news, as well as news sources, can be found in all sorts of places within the community—not merely within the official realm, which often tends to be overrepresented in standard coverage" (p. 38). After identifying these news sources, journalists then go on a "field excursion" to various neighbourhoods to talk to the people in the community. This facilitated the public journalism criterion to engage with the community, as the excursions served "to unearth information about the issues people find important, the places where people gather and where story and program ideas can be found, and the various leaders who can be important contacts for journalists" (Davidson, 2010, p. 38). Once the "excursions" are conducted, journalists then organize forums and focus groups and invite community members to discuss issues of concern to them. Journalists then produce a "community map" which "is intended to be a reference tool for the radio station or newspaper's personnel and ideally will help guide them to a wide range of community members, voices and stories for inclusion in their news and programming" (Davidson, 2010, p. 39).

One radio station which went beyond just the workshop to actually implement a public journalism model in its newsroom was the Valley FM station. Instead of opening up its phone lines during its call-in radio show for listeners to simply call in and

complain, the journalists there decided to create a more deliberative show in which they invited members of the community to discuss issues and offer solutions to problems affecting them. One issue listeners said was an important issue to them was education. In conjunction with the community, journalists identified three issues that they wanted to deal with in terms of education in the Breede Valley. They asked: “How do we improve parent participation in children’s education? How do we create a safe learning environment for our children, conducive to learning and teaching? [And,] how do we support teachers and principals to do a better job of teaching and managing schools to ensure quality education?” (Davidson, 2010). Each of the questions were addressed in different programs over several weeks with significant audience participation.

Journalists first assembled a panel of community members including parents, teachers, students, principals, unions, government officials and even school bus drivers to discuss the issues in a forum which was pre-recorded and then aired on the night of the program. There would then be in-studio guests who commented on the forum, and then listeners were invited to call in and “continue the conversation” (Davidson, 2010)—which they did. In Davidson’s (2010) assessment, the series was successful as “a more deliberative type of conversation ... [where] the issues were constructed in public terms, with a discussion of rights, duties and obligations and participants did reflect on possible courses of public action” (p. 43). For example, some people called for reading programs at schools, reforming the curriculum to add “democratic values ... so that the child can be a democratic citizen of the country” (Davidson, 2010, p. 45) and taking ownership of the schools by opening them up and allowing the community to use it as a community hub.

For both journalists and the community, the project was a success, Davidson (2010)

notes. He argues that

in many cases, once they had been exposed to a new way of doing things, those involved expressed excitement and a new sense of commitment. Often participants would exclaim that this was what they had been looking for, or wanting to do, but did not know how to or where to begin. Despite the pressures of competition too, it soon became clear that the practices described were an asset to these media organizations as they enabled them to carve out a distinctive space—to become vitally relevant to their audiences by dealing with the issues that people were really concerned about, in a way people could relate to (Davidson, 2010, p. 47).

While it's clear that the community got involved in the public policy discussion which included a variety of people, it's not clear that changes to the extent of the *Charlotte Observer's* impact occurred in Breede Valley. In an interview, Davidson (personal communication, Feb. 17, 2010) says that it was "very difficult" to see an immediate impact or social change factor. Additionally, he said, "You probably could find instances of concrete changes happening, but I mean, that's something that actually very little research has been done on. It would actually be great to have that research done." Although Davidson is correct in that there is little research to be found on the direct impact or influence of community radio using a public journalism model on social change or development, Kivikuru (2006) notes that this type of programming "no doubt expand[s] the communication sphere. So-called common people, local activists perhaps, but not public figures, have learned to articulate and defend their opinions in public without fear and simultaneously to reinforce the traditional African oral culture, respecting debate and narration" (p. 27). Kivikuru (2006) explains that this type of deliberation could have incremental influence. For example, "with its continuous bombardment on, say, the run up to elections, it is able to cause the administration some

unease” (p. 27) and politicians could react a certain way. This explains how public journalism, if sustained over time in a country such as South Africa, can have an effect on changes in its society. The next section will focus on tabloids as an empowerment tool.

### **Tabloids: South Africa’s medium for empowerment**

This section explores the potential for public journalism in South African tabloids. The medium has been vilified in Canada as a ‘dumbing down’ of news by the public and by other Canadian media. The ‘elite’ media in South Africa has done the same, as will be seen further in this section, but tabloids do have a meaningful place in South African society because of its ease in speaking to and for the general population that does not necessarily read other ‘mainstream’ newspapers.

At a time when newspaper circulation is declining, South Africa’s tabloids have taken off successfully (Wasserman, 2009; Jones, Vanderhaeghen & Viney, 2008). Jones, Vanderhaeghen and Viney (2008) point out that part of the reason newspaper circulation declined post-democracy was because the South African broadsheets being published were aimed at an elite few and did not represent the ordinary South African. As Diederichs (in Jones, Vanderhaeghen & Viney, 2008) quotes then-editor of the *Sunday Times*, Ken Owen, in 2005, readers “wanted to see their own views and emotions reflected in newspapers. They wanted a ‘user-friendly product’ that was quite different from the existing ‘serious broadsheet newspaper’” (p. 168). This gave rise to a different newspaper format in South Africa—the tabloid.

Wasserman (2010) describes the tabloids as sensational with a no-holds-barred approach to journalism which “changed the media landscape in post-apartheid South Africa irrevocably” (p. 80). Several emerged within the first 10 years of democracy to significant opposition. Many in the established media who observed “traditional” journalistic principles such as objectivity and neutrality criticized the tabloids for “contravening the professional and ethical standards of the country’s journalistic establishment” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 80). This is because several viewed the new tabloid dailies as “bad journalism, pandering to the lowest common denominator” (Jones, Vanderhaeghen & Viney, 2008, p. 170) for their use of sensational headlines, simple language, shorter stories with less analysis, more photographs of scantily clad women, a focus on entertainment and sports, and significant use of opinions in news stories (Wasserman, 2010; Jones, Vanderhaeghen & Viney, 2008).

The biggest tabloid in South Africa is the *Daily Sun*, which is aimed at the majority black population. According to 2007 figures, since its launch in 2002, the *Daily Sun* has grown to a circulation of just under 500,000 copies and 3.8 million regular readers (Wasserman, 2009). Since the success of the *Daily Sun*, other tabloids have emerged, such as *Kaapse Son*, an Afrikaans-language weekly tabloid and the *Daily Voice*. There are several smaller tabloids all over regions in South Africa which have been successful in the commercial market. Wasserman (2009) attributes this to the change in media landscape post-apartheid which included a “vacuum” left by the anti-

apartheid alternative media catering to the black majority<sup>2</sup>; the mainstream news ignoring this black majority for commercial reasons (advertisers' audiences were the white populations with financial mobility); the lack of mainstream news covering issues such as poverty, unemployment, crime and health and therefore a lack of platform for people affected by these issues; and as democracy grew, a black middle class slowly developed which created a new marketing demographic for advertisers.

Tabloids continue to emerge, such as the recent launch of the *Kasi Times*, with the explicit goal of being involved in the community and capturing readers by being relevant to them instead of elites in the capital or intellectuals at universities. The *Kasi Times*' slogan is "the future is ours" and according to its website, it's a "tabloid that aims to inspire, educate, motivate and empower the youth in townships in Gauteng." Furthermore, the *Kasi Times* intends to "become an information platform for young people to broaden their horizons by providing access to information so they are better able to develop themselves and achieve their goals." In an interview with BizCommunity.com, a "daily media, marketing and advertising news" website, *Kasi Times*' founding editor Nonhlanhla Nxumalo noted that the tabloid would include news on everything from health, entertainment, business and lifestyle and "that political parties will be engaged on various issues, including crime, health and education" (Da Silva, 2010). In addition, "Nxumalo urged businesses, NGOs, government and community-based organizations to get involved in this project." She told the website: "It is current

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<sup>2</sup> Post-apartheid, most of the alternative media which fought for democracy were left without a strong purpose to continue publishing as the fight for democracy had been won. Several of the papers were bought by larger news outlets, or simply closed down (Jones, Vanderhaeghen & Viney, 2008).

and is a fresh approach to engaging with the youth” (Da Silva, 2010). Although its mission is not explicitly public journalism, it is just one example of tabloids in South Africa attempting to be more than news chroniclers.

Because the *Kasi Times* just launched its first issue in May, 2010, it remains to be seen if it will follow through on its goals. However, in his book *Tabloid Journalism in South Africa*, Wasserman (2010) notes that tabloid journalists do have a connection with not only their readers, but with their communities as well. In several interviews with tabloid journalists, Wasserman (2010) found that “South African tabloid journalists made clear that [they] consciously reflected on their professional roles and identities and had strong views of how their work related to their readers, to wider society and to the journalistic profession in the country” (p. 172). Wasserman (2010) compares the description of their role to Martin Bell’s 1998 term “journalism of attachment” (p. 172). This thesis argues, however, that while tabloid journalists do not explicitly call themselves public journalists, they are. For example, compared to “mainstream journalists” in South Africa,

tabloid journalists emphasized their closer involvement with the community, the different perspectives they brought to stories and their greater freedom in approach and style of reporting. Perhaps most importantly, tabloid journalists often reported having been personally transformed by their experience of working for a tabloid. Instead of invoking the conventional journalistic positions of neutrality, objectivity, and detachment, tabloid journalists readily admitted to being touched by the news they reported on. They allowed themselves an emotional reaction to stories and entered into an emotional engagement with the people who form the subjects of tabloid news. This engagement sometimes extended beyond sympathetic reporting to a direct, material intervention in the situations of the victims of crime, poverty or disaster” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 172).

Wasserman (2010) notes that whether this type of journalism is practiced consistently by all South African tabloid journalists or whether it shows in the actual reporting of the

issues they cover, “the important finding from these interviews is that tabloid journalists saw this attachment as a core part of their professional self-identity and as a characteristic that set them apart from their mainstream counterparts” (p. 172-173). The following are some examples of what this thesis, while not overtly expressed as public journalism by the newspapers, argues are signs of a public journalism culture among South African tabloids.

The tabloid *Daily Voice*, also emphasizes the engagement of its community on its pages. Karl Brophy, editor of the *Daily Voice* (in Wasserman, 2010), believes his newspaper’s role is to ensure that the media is providing a space for working class members of the community which they cannot find in other media or elsewhere in society. Wasserman (2010) says that Brophy “sees the paper as ‘embedded’ in the community and refers to stories aimed at preventing child abuse as examples of their orientation toward issues of interest to the community. For him, the key difference between his tabloid and the mainstream press is the perspective from which stories are covered” (p. 88). For Brophy and the *Daily Voice* team, “events in the townships and working class suburbs are not distance conflicts that only enter the news discourse when there are spikes of conflict, tragedy or disaster, but their readers’ everyday lived reality demanding an ongoing engagement” (Wasserman, 2010, pg. 88). One example of the *Daily Voice*’s efforts to address community issues was a campaign the paper ventured into with the “Bush of Evil.” There was a thicket in Delft, a township near Cape Town, in which women and children were being raped and murdered. The newspaper “accused the then-mayor of Cape Town, Nomaindia Mfeketo, of having ‘blood on her hands’ until she



agreed to have the bush cut down” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 88). This is just one example of how tabloids in South Africa have “provided ordinary people with the opportunity to tell their stories and bring the struggles of their everyday lives into the public arena” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 87). Another example is that of the *Daily Sun*, which has become not only the most successful tabloid in South Africa, but the biggest newspaper in the country. The *Daily Sun*’s experience with potential public journalism projects will be the focus of the rest of this section.

Jones, Vanderhaeghen and Viney (2008) describe the *Daily Sun* as an “alternative public sphere” which has managed to “widen the reader demographic, giving news access to groups that previously were not targeted and to effect social change by redefining previously undebatable issues in need of debate” (p. 180). As previously stated in the introduction to this thesis, the *Daily Sun* has been contributing to public debate and engaging a variety of actors throughout society; and while it hasn’t claimed its efforts as public journalism, they can be seen as attempts to address issues in the community from a bottom-up perspective, which is what public journalism is.

Publishers launched the *Daily Sun* in June 2002 with the goal of being easy-to-read, entertaining, informative and relevant to the black majority. In the post-apartheid era, the *Daily Sun*’s goal was “explicitly set within the framework of a developing democracy in which people needed to be empowered to become part of the new citizenry” (Jones, Vanderhaeghen & Viney, 2008, p. 167). The paper has become one of the largest in South Africa because it deals with issues from a perspective that other mainstream, national and daily news previously did not (Wasserman, 2009). Jones,

Vanderhaeghen and Viney (2008) note that “issues dealt with in the *Daily Sun*, such as violence, corruption, gender power struggles and so on, provide opportunities for ‘conversations’ which lead towards specific discourses that help empower readers” (p. 168). Jones, Vanderhaeghen and Viney (2008) go as far as to say that “the *Daily Sun* serves democracy by contributing to a sense of empowerment” (pg. 168) through representing its readership not only at an abstract level, but also through “direct representation, thereby creating its own public space” (p. 168) in which readers can take part. In this way, the *Daily Sun* views its readership as “equals” and allows them to “speak in the newspaper through vox populi-type articles and introducing issues that would previously not have been raised in public discourse” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 87).

Wasserman (2009; 2010) describes two projects that the *Daily Sun* took up which could be seen as potential public journalism groundwork. The first was in 2007 during the run up to the national election campaign which saw the defeat of longtime ANC leader Thabo Mbeki and the success of Jacob Zuma. At the time, South Africans were frustrated by the problems in social services delivery, increasing poverty, unemployment, crime and health issues such as HIV/AIDS and drug abuse. While mainstream large media outlets, including the state-owned South African Broadcasting Corporation, focused on high level national issues and personalities, the *Daily Sun* “seized the opportunity” (Wasserman, 2009, p. 787) to give readers, and voters in their community a chance to air their frustrations. As Wasserman (2009) notes, the *Daily Sun* began conducting a campaign to show what the community believed were the “failings of local government, and reported on the eruption of community protests against lack of social

delivery” (p. 788). In addition, “in the run-up to the election of Jacob Zuma as ANC president, the *Daily Sun* ran commentary on its front page explaining how Zuma’s popularity related to Thabo Mbeki’s lack of leadership on social issues such as HIV/AIDS, public service inefficiency, crime and reconstruction and development” (Wasserman, 2009, p. 788). Again, while not overtly public journalism, it’s clear that tabloids such as the *Daily Sun* are conscious of the community and deliver the news in such a way that directly engages people within its community.

Another example from the *Daily Sun* is the “Home Affairs Horrors” campaign, which took place because the South African Department of Home Affairs had become “notorious” for not providing applicants with identity documents in an efficient manner. Wasserman (2010) notes that “the struggles its readers experience in this regard have become a daily feature in the *Daily Sun*” (p. 100). Furthermore, a *Daily Sun* “reader participating in a focus group in the rural town of Makhado in Limpopo saw these stories in terms of the tabloids’ civic mediation role: ‘The *Daily Sun* addresses issues like the Home Affairs Department struggles to get ID books. The *Daily Sun* mediates between people and the government” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 100). According to Jones, Vanderhaeghen and Viney (2008), the *Daily Sun* receives more than 10,000 letters to the editor a month, and of the 36-page average paper, only six of those pages contain “sensational or ordinary news” (p. 176) and the rest is “social-skilling initiatives” and community news. Jones, Vanderhaeghen and Viney (2008) also emphasize that the *Daily Sun* is “deliberately giving the readers what they want, and allowing them to contribute substantially to the content of the news section of the paper [which] is giving the

audience content that they can relate to and which they are able to interpret in terms of their own lives” (p. 179).

While tabloids do have their faults (Wasserman, 2010; Jones, Vanderhaeghen and Viney, 2008), South Africans are turning to them in strong numbers because several of them are published from a grassroots, ground-up perspective in which the local community can participate in shaping. As Jones, Vanderhaeghen and Viney (2008) note, the “majority of readers want to see themselves as they are, as they wish to be or as a complex blend of both” (p. 172). Tabloids in South Africa have tapped into this growing need, and it’s through them that public journalism can truly be successful. While Jones, Vanderhaeghen and Viney (2008) speak specifically about the *Daily Sun* when they say it “provides for ‘societal dialogues’ and a ‘marketplace of ideas’ on common concerns essential for a working democracy” (p. 176), it can be said of other tabloids in South Africa as well. As previously mentioned, although not explicitly practicing public journalism, tabloids in the South African post-apartheid context seem to be by their nature practicing the idea of public journalism. The next section will detail one newspaper’s explicit attempt to practice public journalism.

### ***The Daily Dispatch: Public journalism in practice***

The *Daily Dispatch* is a 138-year-old newspaper which serves the city of East London in South Africa’s eastern cape. For former editor Andrew Trench, newspapers in the democratic era of South Africa have to find new ways to be relevant to their communities

in light of media changes worldwide, new technology, and specifically in South Africa, a decline in “advocacy” journalism<sup>3</sup> during apartheid (personal communication, May 14, 2010). Trench says that the “seismic shifts” in the current media environment requires newspapers to reinvent themselves and the advantage that local papers have is “their long-standing relationship with their audiences.” This is one reason Trench decided to venture into the realm of public journalism, a first in South African print media, according to him. In addition, Trench says he also felt that the media needed to continue to cement democracy in the post-apartheid era. The role of the media from 1994 onwards became a more traditional “watchdog” role but Trench says the media have a greater role to play in a democratic South Africa. He says a powerful way of doing this is through public journalism, as does Rhodes University journalism professor Rod Amner.

Amner believes that public journalism is a powerful tool in South Africa, even though it has been 20 years late in coming to the country (personal communication, Feb. 15, 2010). However, Amner, who teaches public journalism at the university to third-year students, says that the concept of public journalism has been “well developed” over the last two decades and can greatly serve South Africa’s democracy. For instance, he notes that democracy has only been functioning in South Africa for 16 years and while there

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<sup>3</sup> “Advocacy” journalism is a term that Trench uses to have similar traits to public journalism. In this context, during apartheid, there were several media outlets that employed “advocacy” journalism, for example the main mission or purpose of the paper was to fight for democracy. These types of “advocacy” journalism can be found in the alternative media during apartheid. Post-apartheid, the media also turned to democratizing itself and covered news in a more “traditional” manner, whereby reporters were “neutral,” and “objective” in its reporting, taking on the “watchdog” role. While “advocacy” journalism can be similar to public journalism, the thesis argues that they are different, as public journalism explicitly tries to engage the community to find what the problems are in the community and then work with the community to find solutions to those problems, rather than being the ones to come up with the solutions and advocating them. There is a very narrow line between the two, but the thesis argues they are still different.

are other forms of development media, “the beauty of public journalism as a concept is that it’s a reform movement from within the mainstream press.” This allows the movement to be taken seriously, Amner says, noting that it’s not being led by “alternative journalists or community activist types, or volunteer types. This is sort of professional journalists beginning to step over the lines.” Furthermore, Amner says that South Africa has an “underdeveloped civil society” and a “democratic deepening hasn’t happened” yet, which is why public journalism is useful there. He states that

while our democracy works very well, in sort of a representative sense, the more deliberative stuff, the facilitative stuff that public journalism speaks to is really very underdeveloped in this country, so you’ve got a very strong political society, but a very weak civil society, and I think that’s why public journalism potentially can play an interesting catalytic role in actually getting different kinds of conversations happening, linking civics and people on the ground to the authorities, getting things done. There’s really a kind of bizarre, alarming lack of accountability. The political channels are all controlled by the dominant party, and that has some really negative effects on people’s ability to get things done, to voice their concerns to really effectively operate as citizens. For those reasons, I think that public journalism has a future in South Africa.

As Trench states in personal communication (May 14, 2010), it’s important “for the media to act as a bridge between communities in South Africa and also as a platform to apply the voices of the citizenry to ensure that its concerns are heard by those who make policy—and are acted upon.” Trench also notes that it was important to him that *Daily Dispatch* readers played a role in shaping the news agenda. This, and at Amner’s urging, gave birth to the Community Dialogues project at the *Daily Dispatch*, a concerted effort to employ public journalism.

When Trench became editor of the *Daily Dispatch* on Dec. 1, 2008, Amner presented ideas to the staff there about how public journalism could be used during the

2009 elections. In February, 2009, Trench announced the Community Dialogues project in which the paper would invite readers to “air your views on the pressing challenges of your neighbourhoods and share your thoughts on how some of these things can be solved” (Amner, 2010, p. 60). The project started in March 2009 in a middle class suburb called Beacon Bay and an “informal African settlement” called Nompumelelo (Amner, 2010, p. 75). The first meeting the *Daily Dispatch* organized was in Beacon Bay, which attracted 70 people, from ANC and opposition members to members of the Nompumelelo community and local town councilors, who spoke about issues of concern to them in a church hall (see *Figure 1* for the advertisement announcing the meeting). On his blog, Trench (2009b) states that this series of “town halls” was attempting “to find a way to connect our newspaper right into the heart of our neighbourhoods and to try and move from describing problems to try and help solve some of them” (2009b, para. 2). He says that “in the run-up to the elections we are trying to find a way to give a platform and voice to ordinary citizens and voters so that their concerns are taken seriously by politicians” (Trench, 2009b, para. 3). Many spoke about crime, broken street lights, untrimmed curbs, domestic worker issues, improving the local school and health clinic, and some offered solutions. For example, “one woman from Beacon Bay suggested that the community establish a Community Integration Committee where they can all work together to improve the lot of everybody, and to extend these community discussions

Figure 1: Daily Dispatch Community Dialogues Advertisement


Dialogues » Blog Archive » Dispatch dialogues: Your voices (video)

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**Daily Dispatch Community Dialogues BEACON BAY RESIDENTS**  
 THIS IS YOUR CHANCE TO BE HEARD. WHAT DO YOU WANT THE POLITICIANS TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR HOPES AND NEEDS BEFORE THE 2009 VOTE? TELL THIS NEWSPAPER ABOUT IT.  
 DATE: MARCH 17  
 TIME: 6:00PM  
 VENUE: NG KERK, BONZA BAY RD  
 CALL HEARD AT THE DISPATCH ON 010-750 2080

**Daily Dispatch Community Dialogues NOMPUMELELO RESIDENTS**  
 THIS IS YOUR CHANCE TO BE HEARD. WHAT DO YOU WANT THE POLITICIANS TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR HOPES AND NEEDS BEFORE THE 2009 VOTE? TELL THIS NEWSPAPER ABOUT IT.  
 DATE: MARCH 18  
 TIME: 6:00PM  
 VENUE: SINEMPUMELELO PRIMARY SCHOOL HALL  
 CALL HEARD AT THE DISPATCH ON 010-750 2080

The day of the first Daily Dispatch Community Dialogues finally dawned on Tuesday. This is what happened at the first meeting... (See video at the bottom of the story)

Crime and how to fight it came under the spotlight at the first Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue last night in Beacon Bay, writes **Vuyolwethu Sangotsha**.

Residents from across the economic and demographic spectrum agreed that crime was a major issue.

The dialogue was introduced by Daily Dispatch editor Andrew Trench, who said the community debates were aimed at giving ordinary people a platform to voice concerns.


The initiative was part of the newspaper's commitment civic journalism.

"We've come to listen to what you've got to say," he said, adding it was the first time the Dispatch had launched such an initiative and he was not aware of any other newspaper in the country doing the same thing.

Residents agreed that crime was the major issue, but also expressed concern on such issues as service delivery quality of education, street lighting, traffic and bad road conditions, including potholes.

Some residents pointed to the need to help the underdeveloped area of neighbouring Nompumelelo.

ANC member Pumla Nazo complained about ward meetings, saying they were held separately in Beacon Bay and Nompumelelo. She argued there should be joint meetings as residents lived in one ward.



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Figure 1 continued

Dialogues » Blog Archive » Dispatch dialogues: Your voices (video)

"We need to assist to improve Nompumelelo and integrate both areas, Nazo added.

Most speakers acknowledged imbalances between schools in Beacon Bay and Nompumelelo, and called for action to uplift schools from Nompumelelo.

Others said that the community policing forums (CPFs) could do more to combat crime, suggesting the establishment of street committees.

Local ward councillor John Cupido insisted that with the support of the community, the CPF could do more to become involved.

The dialogue was well received with speakers praising the Dispatch for providing a platform for the discussions.

A second round of talks will be held in Nompumelelo at 6pm on Wednesday night.

**See the Dispatch Dialogues video:**


**Editorial:**

*My own personal experience of last night's discussions is that there is still a lot of goodwill out there.*

*But there is also a cry for help from Nompumelelo residents -- one of the poorest parts of our city -- to residents in Beacon Bay, one of the wealthiest. I think as South Africans we have become so tangled in our own lives that we have forgotten that spirit of Ubuntu and looking after each other.*

*Many residents from Beacon Bay said they would like to help their neighbours, but were not sure how to do it.*

*Hopefully, Tuesday night's discussion will serve as a catalyst -- the first of many -- in getting this city's communities talking to each other, standing together and working together to make the whole of Buffalo City a better place to live. I left the meeting feeling more optimistic about the future than I have in years. - Online News Ed*

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<http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/dialogues/2009/03/18/dispatch-dialogues-your-voices-video/> [19/10/2010 10:40:54 PM]

beyond the Community Policing Forums” (Trench, 2009b, para. 8; see also *Figure 2* for a picture from the meeting as well as a story on the meeting turned out).

The next night after the Beacon Bay meeting, the *Daily Dispatch* organized a second meeting in nearby Nompumelelo at a school. Trench (2009c) says this meeting was like “popping the cork on a shaken bottle” (para. 7) because of the large number of people involved, the issues raised and the emotions which overtook the meeting. Again, both politicians and community members of all stripes showed up to air their feelings on a diverse set of issues. Unlike the upper middle class of Beacon Bay, Nompumelelo was a “poor neighbourhood, part shanty town, part state housing” (Trench, 2009c, para. 3) which was eager to let out their frustrations. Trench chronicled the meeting on his blog:

Everyone has something to say: they’re concerned about the clinic with only one nurse, there’s no community hall and the elderly have to stand in the rain to get their pensions, the rubbish isn’t being collected, people are being forced to buy water for R4 a bottle, there are big problems with a project intended to build a new high school and the existing one has a class with a 130 kids and no desks.

The complaints are endless: why can’t we get sports fields, they ask, so our kids can play there instead of turning to drugs and crime? Why are businesses investing next door to the community and not hiring locals, they’ve lost all faith in the city to deliver services for them.

It’s an incredible process to watch, almost a cathartic release by people who appear to have seldom been asked to talk about such things publicly. I wonder to myself what this says about local leadership. Why are people so eager to talk tonight? Have their leaders never asked them about this stuff before? With an election only weeks away, I find this hard to imagine (Trench, 2009c, para. 8).

The second part of that meeting focused on solutions to many of the issues, which created a heated discussion which turned into personal attacks at which point the meeting was cut short. Despite that however, Trench (2009) says that both meetings were successful (Amner, 2010) because of what resulted.

Figure 2: Beacon Bay Community Dialogues

Dialogues » Blog Archive » Crime fight tops B Bay agenda

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 Beacon Bay Community Dialogues. Picture: NIGEL LOUW

CRIME and how to fight it came under the spotlight at the first Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue last night in Beacon Bay.

Residents from across the economic and demographic spectrum agreed that crime was a major issue.

The dialogue was introduced by Daily Dispatch editor Andrew Trench, who said the community debates were aimed at giving ordinary people a platform to voice concerns.

The initiative was part of the newspaper's civic journalism.

"We've come to listen to what you've got to say," he said, adding it was the first time the Dispatch had launched such an initiative, and he was not aware of any other newspaper in the country doing it.

Residents agreed that crime was the major issue, but also expressed concern on such issues as slow service delivery, quality of education, street lighting, traffic and bad road conditions, including potholes.

Some residents pointed to the need to help the under- developed area of neighbouring Nompumelelo.

Pumla Nazo, a member of the ANC, complained about ward meetings, saying they were held separately in Beacon Bay and Nompumelelo. She argued there should be joint meetings as residents lived in one ward.

"We need to assist to improve Nompumelelo and integrate both areas," Pumla added.

Most speakers acknowledged imbalances between schools in Beacon Bay and Nompumelelo, and called for action to uplift schools from Nompumelelo.

<http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/dialogues/2009/03/18/crime-fight-tops-b-bay-agenda/>[19/10/2010 10:42:07 PM]

Figure 2 continued


Dialogues » Blog Archive » Crime fight tops B Bay agenda

Others said that community policing forums (CPF) could do more to combat crime, suggesting the establishment of street committees to help .

Local ward councillor John Cupido insisted that with the support of the community, the CPF could fight crime properly, but that locals needed to become more involved.

The dialogue was well received with speakers praising the Dispatch for providing such a platform. – By VUYOLWETHU SANGOTSHA

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<http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/dialogues/2009/03/18/crime-fight-tops-b-bay-agenda/>[19/10/2010 10:42:07 PM]

After the meetings, the *Daily Dispatch* published stories based on what they heard and the community reacted. For example, Trench (personal communication, May 14, 2010) says that the *Daily Dispatch* was “able to expose some of the worst slumlords in our community as a result of these civic meetings following an investigation we conducted thanks to information which emerged” (see *Figure 3* of follow up stories on slumlords, which appeared both in the paper and online). In addition, the city responded to problems of urban decay by cleaning up parks which attracted crime, while in a different neighbourhood, domestic workers came together to establish a neighbourhood watch to deter criminal activity. There were other smaller outcomes. For instance, ward councilors began to diligently attend subsequent meetings, as did other local politicians because “they started to realize that they were a powerful way for them to be seen to respond to community concerns. In fact, at one point, the premier of our province was also dispatching special advisers to attend and to listen to what people had to say and for that information to be taken back into their policy making” (see *Figure 4* for the *Daily Dispatch*’s note that “as a result of [the] slumlord exposé,” the Buffalo City Municipality would “tackle the landlord issue”).

Since the original Community Dialogues project, Trench notes that maintaining public journalism at the *Daily Dispatch* has been difficult but he feels it’s an important part of a strong participatory democracy in South Africa. He says that public journalism “shows ordinary people that through working together, building a consensus and acting with a common purpose can bring about change and understanding and that not everything in our lives needs to be driven through institutionalized political processes. It


Figure 3: Slumlords Exposé

Slumlords: Home

# Slumlords

Special report by **Dispatchonline**


HOME THE STORIES SOUTHERNWOOD EXPLORE A SLUM SLUM ALBUM MY SLUM SLUMS MAP TIP US OFF



This is the face of **NOMPILISO YEKELA**, a low-level official in the Eastern Cape Premier's office. But in her other life Yekela is one of King William's Town's major slumlords. She makes over R80 000 each month packing dozens of people into her six suburban properties, breaking scores of local by-laws - and in the process destroying the fabric of entire neighbourhoods. When she leaves her formal employment in Bhisho every afternoon, Yekela sets up her "other" office, pretending to be a street vendor outside a clothing store in King William's Town where she does her deals with tenants. She crams up to 20 tenants into homes designed for single families charging them up to R2000 a month for a squalid room. For two months, reporter **GCINA NTSALUBA** went undercover and lived in one of these homes.

He lived and spoke to tenants and interviewed distressed neighbours who have seen their property prices plummet. Ntsaluba also spoke to authorities about the illegal practice - and finally, he confronted Yekela herself. This story shows the damage **ONE** slumlord can make as they turn our once-respectable neighbourhoods into ghettos.

**CLICK HERE: [Southernwood Slumlords](#)**

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<http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/slumlords/>[2009/12/14 11:46:34 AM]



Figure 3 continued

Four students share small outside room

# Slumlords

Special report by **Dispatchonline**

[HOME](#) [THE STORIES](#) [SOUTHERNWOOD](#) [EXPLORE A SLUM](#) [SLUM ALBUM](#) [MY SLUM](#) [SLUMS MAP](#) [TIP US OFF](#)

[« Bathroom shared by 23 at 48 Queens Road »](#) [Queen of the slums »](#)

## Four students share small outside room

November 17th, 2009 | Author: [tegan](#)



**Reporting**  
Gcina Ntsaluba

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### What you are saying

**Oyisa:** This is disgusting... thinking that this woman is doing this to her own Black People. What a shame. Our...

**bukic:** Well done. Nice work you done there. Keep up the good work.

**james:** What is the SOLUTION? Do these people go back to the townships and suburbs where it is apparently acceptable to...

**L:** I wonder if these bastards that treat our fellow human beings like trash pay their municipal/property rates and...

**VEE:** I am totally horrified to read these articles every day!

**Sonia:** I have tried for 2 years to sell a house in Southernwood, when people hear the word "Southernwood"...

**dinah groep:** THANK YOU!!! BMC FOR CLEANING UP OUR BEAUTIFUL CITY. A VERY BIG THANK YOU TO THE DAILY DISPATCH FOR GOOD...

### Pages

[Southernwood Map](#)  
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Four students pay R1500 a month to slum queen Nompiliso Yekela to share this small room. Picture: Theo Jephtha

Unable to pay residence fees at Lovedale College, student Bongani Qwele did what so many of his peers have been forced to do and moved into an illegal lodging house.

Qwele, 20, who is originally from Dutywa, moved to King William's Town at the beginning of the year to study Information Technology (IT) at Lovedale, but he soon realised his mother had no means of paying R17 000 a year for residence fees.

So barely a month after he had moved into "res", he found himself without accommodation and ended up squatting with friends until he was able to get a room at one of slumlord Nompiliso Yekela's boarding hostels in town.

"There were many of us who moved out of res because it was too expensive but at least it's better (cheaper) here," said Qwele.

He said he first stayed in an outside room resembling a maid's living quarters at 6 Pottinger Street.

In February he moved into the main house and acquired a "bedroom" converted out of the kitchen.

"It was basically a bigger room than the one I had but the only problem was that it was in the kitchen. I shared it with three guys and it was R1 300 per month (in total)," he said.

Qwele said he stayed in the kitchen "bedroom" until June when he moved with his current roommates into another outside room on the Pottinger Street property.

The four of them pay a total of R1 500 a month for a space barely big enough for two.

Their room is taken up by three beds, a cupboard and a two plate stove with a few pots and dishes.

In between the beds is an aisle that allows you walk from the door to the other end of the room. There is no sign of food or groceries.

Because the only bathroom is inside the main house Qwele and his friends boil water in a kettle and wash in a small round basin.

It's a very confined lifestyle because washing, studying, cooking and sleeping all takes place in one room.

Qwele said surviving under these conditions as students is difficult and sometimes boring because there is no room for activity.

He said the ground rules for all the tenants are simple – if you don't like the conditions, either shut up or leave. – **By GCINA NTSALUBA**

Posted in [The Stories](#) | Tags: [Bongani Qwele](#), [Dutywa](#), [King William's Town](#), [Lovedale College](#), [Nompiliso Yekela](#), [Pottinger Street](#)

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<http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/slumlords/2009/11/17/making-ends-meet/> [2009/12/14 11:44:05 AM]

Figure 3 continued

Slumlords exposé

# Slumlords

Special report by **Dispatchonline**

HOME THE STORIES SOUTHERNWOOD EXPLORE A SLUM SLUM ALBUM MY SLUM SLUMS MAP TIP US OFF

« Queen of the slums » Communes cause streets of despair »

## Slumlords exposé

November 18th, 2009 | Author: legaa

Today we break the first installment in a months-long investigation into slumlords in our area. You will read elsewhere in our paper how our intrepid young reporter Gcina Ntsaluba spent months living in a house in King William's Town along with scores of other people, recording the experiences of life in one of these houses and reporting the impact of these slums on their immediate environment.

Our first in the series deals with King William's Town and it quite remarkable to see how one person's slum empire can so damage an area. The villain of this piece is not alone, and clearly there are many other unscrupulous individuals who are happy to tear apart the fabric of our neighbourhoods in return for fast and easy cash.

The spark for this investigation came from one of our community dialogue meetings in Southernwood earlier this year. At that meeting residents told us how the slums in the area were one of the primary causes of social decay and other problems in their area.

At that meeting, I made a promise to those attending that the Dispatch would investigate this and would name the culprits. Police officers at that meeting also told me privately that they agreed that these slums and the explosion of taverns in Southernwood were major contributors to crime there.

I like to believe I am a man of my word and do not make idle promises. The stories that you will read over the coming days will show you that we meant what we said at that meeting – even if pulling it all together took a little longer than we expected.

We are investigating the Southernwood aspect to this problem and plan to publish the results of that investigation next week.

I hope these stories will make a difference.

There is no reason for the authorities to look the other way when it comes to slumlords. The city is well armed with by-laws to root out these people and to stop their cynical exploitation of those desperate for a place to live.

Turning a blind eye to the activities of slumlords has the same impact on our city as not caring about the rubbish that litters our streets.

This newspaper has campaigned hard to ensure our city is cleaned up and we are heartened to see the positive responses emerging from City Hall on this issue. We hope they will respond with similar vigour to the slumlord issue. – **By ANDREW TRENCH**

**VIDEO: Investigative reporter Gcina Ntsaluba invites you to share his journey into the murky world of Buffalo City's slum queens.**

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**Reporting Gcina Ntsaluba**

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<http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/slumlords/2009/11/18/slumlords-expose/> [2009/12/14 11:38:54 AM]



Figure 4: Slumlords Exposé Results

Municipality to tackle the landlord issue

# Slumlords

Special report by **Dispatchonline**

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**Municipality to tackle the landlord issue**

November 21st, 2009 | Author: [legato](#)

**Reporting**  
Gcina Ntsaluba  
**CONTACT**

**What you are saying**

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Picture: Theo Jephtha

AS A result of this week's Slumlord exposé, Buffalo City Municipality (BCM) issued a statement saying the heads of the relevant departments had called a meeting to formulate a plan of action to deal with this problem.

BCM spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said they planned to take action against all perpetrators involved with unauthorised land use activities. "A meeting between the stakeholder departments (Legal and City Planning) is to be held to map the process plan."

BCM's primary responsibility was to ensure that the accommodation needs of the people were met in a safe, healthy and sustainable environment.

**- By GCINA NTSALUBA**

Posted in [The Stories](#) | Tags: [Buffalo City Municipality](#) [Samkelo Ngwenya](#) [slums](#)

**Rod Amner:**  
[November 24, 2009 at 11:07 am](#)

It's really encouraging to see that the BCM has been embarrassed into action on this issue. Will you report on the follow-up meetings between the Legal and City Planning departments and keep the pressure on them?

**Sivuyisiwe Galada:**  
[November 24, 2009 at 11:36 am](#)

I'm all go for people being caught after breaking the law.What saddens me is the fact that BCM does not clean our beautiful City. If they are so concerned about the safety, health of the people & environment why do we have so many rats in the City especially the Quigney & Southernwood area?.Cant wait for the report on Southernwood keep up the goog work Gcina

**Andrew Trench:**  
[November 24, 2009 at 1:34 pm](#)

Thanks Rod, we'll definitely be keeping the pressure up and following all future developments

**TJ:**  
[November 24, 2009 at 2:44 pm](#)

Hey, when is the Southernwood report coming out? I can't wait to see that. Please make sure there are plenty of pictures as well.

Keep up the great work and the pressure you guys. DD is still the best!

**admin:**

<http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/slumlords/2009/11/21/municipality-to-tackle-the-landlord-issue/> [2009/12/14 11:41:32 AM]

allows people to claim an ownership of democracy that goes beyond paying tax[es] and voting every five years.” For these reasons, he reorganized the entire newsroom and as of June 1, 2010, created a “dedicated Dispatch Civic team” to continue public journalism practices at the *Daily Dispatch* (see *Figure 5* for Trench’s ‘Editor’s Dispatch’ explaining the new team). According to Trench’s blog (2010), there will be four dedicated reporters who will pursue public journalism and “work with readers to make our city, our province, our society and our democracy work better.” Trench says he hopes the public journalism reporters “will produce a wonderful range of stories that truly reflects the texture of life” (para. 5) in East London.

The new Civic Dispatch team started on June 3 (see *Figure 6*). Trench (2010a) notes on the blog that he wants “our readers to play a central role in setting the news agenda of their paper, and the only way that can happen is if we work with our readers using the many tools and techniques of civic journalism” (para. 10). In addition, he says, “Dispatch Civic is an attempt to move the *Dispatch* away from being a yapping watchdog on the sidelines, to getting our hands dirty and getting involved in trying to find solutions which will make things better for everyone. Dispatch Civic is about building bridges and about working together” (para. 11). And, that’s what the team set out to do. It began organizing meetings in the community in town halls, schools, churches, and coffee shops (see *Figure 7*) and learned that manholes were a dangerous problem in the city as several people had fallen into them. The team started a campaign called Cover ‘Em Up to identify where the manholes were and why they needed to be covered (see *Figure 8*). Within a week of the stories running in the *Daily Dispatch*, the municipality announced

Figure 5: Andrew Trench's 'Editor's Dispatch'

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## Editor's Dispatch

2010/06/02

WE'VE had a couple of things bubbling away on the Dispatch stove for a while and this week they're finally ready to be served up. First is the launch of Dispatch Civic which has developed from our Dispatch Community Dialogues and will bring the techniques of civic journalism to the heart of our reporting.

The central idea behind civic journalism is that the media can do more than simply yapping from the sidelines and that it can, and should, get involved in life. I agree with this.

As far as I know, the Dispatch will be the first newspaper in South Africa to make a formal investment in civic journalism and I am committing four reporters to the Dispatch Civic desk to ensure that it is a success.

We hope this investment will help us develop a fresh style of journalism which is unique in South Africa, which is relevant to our readers - and also rewarding to society more generally.

The Dispatch Civic team will work with readers to make our city, our province, our society, and our democracy work better.

That, at least, is our hope. We also hope, of course, that this desk will produce a wonderful range of stories that truly reflects the texture of life in our part of South Africa.

The first issue to be tackled by our team is that of the safety of students in East London, where there have been a number of violent attacks recently. The Dispatch Civic team is inviting anyone with experiences or ideas on how this crime wave can be stopped to join them at the Guild Theatre in East London on Friday at noon.

Another new project and one that launches on Sunday is a new publication called DispatchBest. It's a 32-page tabloid collection of the week's news, opinions, cartoons and analysis from the Dispatch team. DispatchBest is about us offering our Eastern Cape content to a wider audience and it will be carried in over 40 000 copies of the Sunday Times and Sunday World across the Eastern Cape for the next while. We hope, through DispatchBest, to reach readers outside our traditional footprint and to even extend into some parts of KwaZulu-Natal.

I think DispatchBest is a snappy read which neatly brings together the Eastern Cape week which has passed, so keep an eye out for it, and let us know what you think.

And finally, I must congratulate the DispatchOnline team which won the digital journalism award at the CNN Multichoice African Journalist Awards in Kampala, Uganda over the weekend. Dispatch assistant news editor Thanduxolo Jika was also highly commended. Not bad for a little paper in the Eastern Cape, hey?

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Figure 6: Dispatch Civic Team Begins

Dispatch Civic » Blog Archive » Dispatch Civic: Be involved!


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**Dispatch Civic: Be involved!**  
Filed Under (Civic) by taralyn on 03-06-2010 and tagged Civic, Dispatch, reporters

**Jun 03**



Reporters at the ready. Picture: MLONDOLOZI MBOLO

**Taralyn Bro.**

We will be coming to your communities, hearing what you have to say, reporting on issues important to you and working with you to bring resolutions.

While the Dispatch will continue with traditional reporting and investigation, the Dispatch Civic team will be following a slightly different course.

Civic reporting is "new" to us here in South Africa, although it is a movement that has gained momentum in other parts of the world. It is a departure from the traditional form of reporting, and aims to help bring change to communities – through the participation of community members.

Some of you may remember the Community Dialogues hosted by the Dispatch in East London's suburbs last year. Here, ordinary folk told us what issues they faced in their suburbs.

Where there were success stories, we brought the good news to the rest of the Dispatch readers.

Where there were concerns and issues, we wrote stories that brought this to the attention of those with the means to provide solutions.

"Since the success of our Community Dialogues experiment last year we have been looking for ways of bringing this style of journalism into the

**Tags**


alcohol beachfront Beacon Bay Belgravia Buffalo City Further Education Training College (FET) Buffalo City Municipality deaf Dr Sizwe Mxenge dumpsite Eastern Cape Liquor Board Gonubie Graham Cowley Guild Theatre Isabel Thompson Kholekile Tapile **King William's Town** Lieutenant-Colonel Mtabi Tana Linda Mbewana Llewellyn Thatcher Lower Ridge Road Lwandile Sicwetsha manhole Mdantsane meeting Morvite **Nahoon** Nompumelelo potholes Princess Alice Drive Queenstown Quigney RDP houses Reeston Rowan Thiele rubbish **Samkelo Ngwenya** Scenery Park shebeen southernwood st George's Park students Torquay Road University of Fort Hare Walter Sisulu University **Zwelitsha**

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<http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/civic/2010/06/03/dispatch-civic-be-involved/> [19/10/2010 10:53:53 PM]

Figure 6 continued

Dispatch Civic » Blog Archive » Dispatch Civic: Be involved!



heart of the paper.  
Dispatch Civic is our  
answer to this and will  
bring civic journalism to  
the heart of our  
newsroom," Dispatch  
editor Andrew Trench said.

"I want our readers to play a central role in setting the news agenda of their paper, and the only way that can happen is if we work with our readers using the many tools and techniques of civic journalism.

"Dispatch Civic is an attempt to move the Dispatch away from being a yapping watchdog on the sidelines, to getting our hands dirty and getting involved in trying to find solutions which will make things better for everyone. Dispatch Civic is about building bridges and about working together."

Please join us as we start this journey. We will be starting forums and group discussions over the next few days, and we welcome feedback and input from you, the reader.

- Contact us on 0437022017 or e-mail [civic@dispatch.co.za](mailto:civic@dispatch.co.za)

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Figure 7: Dispatch Civic Team at Mugg &amp; Bean Coffee Shop

Dispatch Civic » Blog Archive » EL citizens chat, share their stories over coffee

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*More talk, more action...*



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08

### EL citizens chat, share their stories over coffee

Filed Under (meeting) by tegan on 08-07-2010 and tagged Coffee shop journalism, Kokstad, Louise Hansen, Mugg & Bean, Neville Purdon

Tags

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COMMUNITY FOCUS: Dispatch Civic team members Xolisa Mgwatyu and Lois Moodley chat to Saxilby resident Neville Purdon at the first coffee shop journalism meeting yesterday. Picture: MLONDOLOZI MBOLO

East Londoners from all parts of the city came out to share their stories with the Dispatch Civic team at its first coffee shop journalism meeting yesterday, report **Lois Moodley** and **Xolisa Mgwatyu**.

The team met at Mugg & Bean in Vincent Park shopping centre, and close to 20 enthusiastic citizens came to share their views with the reporters.

Vincent resident Louise Hansen said: "This is a great initiative that brings the Dispatch closer to the community."

Coffee shop journalism is a Dispatch Civic initiative in which the reporting unit focuses on issues affecting communities throughout the city.

Many expressed a need for community forums within their specific suburbs, which the Dispatch Civic team will look into over the next few months. Readers who popped in for a cup of coffee came from different suburbs, some from as far as Kokstad.

Issues ranged from potholes, environment, recreational facilities for children, public disturbance, maintaining respect for different cultures in the city, crime, and even positive stories about active citizens who had taken the initiative to change their communities for the better.

Most individuals who took the time to sit down with the reporters said they had high expectations for the city and felt it had a lot to offer, but needed to address issues such as getting the beaches cleaned and fixing the roads.

Neville Purdon said: "East London has a great atmosphere and the people are friendly."

Purdon added that Dispatch Civic was doing a brilliant job by going out to the communities as it brought the newspaper and people together.

"The concept is brilliant and this should be done more often, and the public meeting in my area should be organised soon," he said.

The Dispatch Civic team will be following up and tackling the concerns raised in the days to come.

<http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/civic/2010/07/08/el-citizens-chat-share-their-stories-over-coffee/> [19/10/2010 10:50:22 PM]

Figure 8: Dispatch Civic Cover 'Em Up Manhole Campaign

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**Putting an end to dangerous manholes**

Filed Under (Campaign) by tegan on 15-09-2010 and tagged Buffalo Flats, Cover 'em Up, Eastern Beach, manhole, Peggy Boma, Samkelo Ngwenya, Sinazo Jekwa, Sonwabo Ndlanzi, Weavers

Manholes that are open or only partly covered are a hazard to pedestrians walking the streets of Buffalo City, reports **Taralyn McLean**.

Today, Dispatch Civic is re-launching a Daily Dispatch initiative of a couple of years ago called "Cover 'em Up".

The plan is to rid East London and its suburbs of open and dangerous manholes.

The original campaign was started on the back of the dramatic rescue of young Sonwabo Ndlanzi, who fell down an open manhole on Buffalo Park Drive – and was then trapped in a sewer five metres underground.

Recently, the Dispatch reported a number of cases where people had fallen into open manholes – like Peggy Boma, who fell into a manhole on Eastern Beach last week and fractured her foot.

There have also been reports of open manholes outside Quigney's retirement centre Weavers, and in July a man who fell into a manhole in Buffalo Flats was preparing to sue the municipality for damages to his leg because of the accident.

And just like last time when, thanks to reports from communities, over 100 manholes were covered by the municipality, BCM is once again on board with "Cover 'em Up".

"Yes, we are keen on working together to do more for our communities," municipal spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya confirmed.

"(The people of the city) are the ears and eyes on the ground when it comes to manholes," he added.

As such, Ngwenya has called on anyone who spots an open manhole to give Sinazo Jekwa of the municipal communications unit a call on 0437051788.

- Residents can also call the Dispatch Civic team on **0437022017**, or e-mail [civic@dispatch.co.za](mailto:civic@dispatch.co.za)

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<http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/civic/2010/09/15/putting-an-end-to-dangerous-manholes/> [19/10/2010 10:44:28 PM]

that 24 manholes would be covered up (see *Figure 9*). While it's too early to definitively say what the long term outcomes of the *Daily Dispatch's* public journalism projects are, there have clearly been some small effects (see *Figure 10*). This is not to say that there were no problems either, which is what the next section will focus on.

### **Public journalism and development: Problems, lessons learned, its future in South Africa**

While there have been few examples of public journalism in use in South Africa, it's clear that it's possible to be implemented in a transitioning democracy faced with several development issues. The examples outlined above illustrate that the media in South Africa are conscious of the need for a deeper democracy, a need to connect with their audiences and a view that the media can do more for society where other top-down, high-level government bureaucracies have failed to recognize citizens' voices. For Brett Davidson, because South Africa's democracy is still young, "the media have a vital role to play in supporting that democracy" (personal communication, Feb. 17, 2010). He says democracy is more than having the freedom to produce news but that "it's crucial that we connect people and reflect ordinary people's interests. I think the danger in South Africa is that the media being owned by the rich and sold often to the rich, forgets about reflecting the interests of ordinary people in South Africa, and I think public journalism can be a way of getting back to that." Obviously there is only the beginnings of a public journalism environment in South Africa and therefore problems cannot be discounted in its implementation.



Figure 9: Cover 'Em Up Manhole Campaign Results

Dispatch Civic » Blog Archive » BCM closes 24 manholes around East London

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 Filed Under (Environment) by tegan on 21-09-2010 and tagged Cover 'em Up campaign, manhole, Samkelo Ngwenya, Tutton Terrace

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**SAFE:** A manhole on Union Avenue is just one of 24 to be covered since the launch of the 'Cover 'em Up' campaign last week. Picture: THEO JEPHTA

An open manhole that would have caused a pedestrian to plunge over 2m down a drain is just one of 24 to be covered since the Dispatch Civic "Cover 'em Up" campaign launched last week, reports **Taralyn McLean**. The manhole on Union Avenue was featured on Friday, one of many reported by readers to Dispatch Civic or Buffalo City Municipality (BCM).

The breakdown of the manholes covered is as follows:

- West Bank: Two;
- Selborne: Two;
- Haven Hills: Four;
- Bunker's Hill: Two;
- Vincent: Three;
- CBD: Four;
- Buffalo Flats: Three;
- Southernwood: Two; and
- Amalinda: Two.

A number of reports of uncovered manholes have been received via the Civic e-mail and these have been logged and sent on to BCM.

Readers can also continue to call the dedicated municipal hotline on 043-705-1788.

If you have reported an open manhole and it is still uncovered – such as the manhole on Marine Terrace and another on Tutton Terrace, featured last week – please notify Dispatch Civic.

The "Cover 'em Up" campaign will continue as long as there are open manholes that pose a danger to the people who live and work in East London and its suburbs.

As municipal spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said last week, Dispatch readers really are the "eyes and ears" of their neighbourhoods.

<http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/civic/2010/09/21/bcm-closes-24-manholes-around-east-london/> [23/10/2010 1:59:47 PM]

Figure 10: Results of *Daily Dispatch*'s Public Journalism Projects

Dispatch Civic » Blog Archive » Dispatch gets community results

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 Filed Under (Civic) by tegan on 06-09-2010

**Dispatch CIVIC**

Three months ago, this newspaper decided to do what no other in the country would when four reporters were taken off their committed beats and dedicated to a new unit within the newsroom – Dispatch Civic, writes **Taralyn Bro.** With great ideas and much enthusiasm, we started reporting with a civic twist, building on ideas and stories told to us at a series of community meetings.

This, then, is an update on some of the stories to have come out of Dispatch Civic:

**SOUTHERNWOOD:**

The June 4 meeting in Southernwood with students in the area was the first Civic Meeting. Here students talked of their lives – how they felt unsafe in their residences and nervous walking about at night.

Out of this dialogue came the idea for a Whistle Campaign.

Dispatch reporter Lois Moodley canvassed local businesses and spoke to the universities themselves.

Over the next month she collected about 3900 whistles and a meeting was later held to hand out the whistles.

Unfortunately, despite advertising and providing transport, students failed to pitch.

However, some of the whistles were later given out at a community meeting in Buffalo Flats, and the remainder will be handed out in due course.

- Outstanding Issues: Litter and illegal dumping on the streets of Southernwood continues to be a problem, and St James' Park is still considered unsafe by many students and residents.

**NAHOON**

Our second meeting was in Nahoon, one of the oldest suburbs in East London, and to date it has been the most successful, both in terms of turnout and results.

Nahoon folk took to heart the message that community upliftment starts from within, and have been instrumental in initiating their own projects – like a recycling venture and, this week, community action at Nahoon Beach to protest against the state of the Nahoon River.

Other successes directly related to our Dispatch Civic meeting were the

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Figure 10 continued

Dispatch Civic » Blog Archive » Dispatch gets community results

replacement of broken or missing street signs by Buffalo City Municipality, the clearing of bushes in areas where vagrants had made their homes, and the start of a campaign to compel dog owners to pick up pooch poo.

- Outstanding issues: Sewage flowing into the Nahoon River is perhaps the biggest issue to plague the suburb, and is at the centre of a community campaign.

A memorandum – signed by 300 concerned locals – was handed over to the municipality this week, it has been given a month to draw up an action plan to tackle this issue.

### QUEENSTOWN

In July the Dispatch Civic team headed to Queenstown where, in collaboration with our sister newspaper The Rep, we met with the community and chatted about various issues.

Paramount among the concerns was a feeling among longtime residents that the town, once lauded for being one of the prettiest in the Border region, had fallen into disrepair. The civic team reported on this change from "city of roses" to, as one resident put it, "a tip".

The team also found a gem of a story in the "trolley men" – unemployed men who wait outside shops and charge a fee to transport groceries to taxis that may be a couple of kilometres away.

Another feature that came out of the Queenstown Civic meeting was that just outside the town, towards Cathcart, was a village where children had to trek over a mountain to get to school every day, a daunting challenge that impacted on their education.

- Outstanding issues: Queenstown's poor roads and signage, and the state of disrepair of the famous old Hexagon. These were covered by the civic team, but our reporters struggled to get answers on these issues from officials.

The mayor has requested a meeting to discuss these issues with the team.

### QUIGNEY

Back in East London, the Dispatch Civic meeting in the Quigney was well attended by a crowd that included longtime residents, businesspeople, students and police.

Chief among Quigney concerns was rampant crime in the area, fuelled by drugs and prostitution.

Car washers on the beachfront, a need for speedbumps and a concern about a lack of development were all raised in the meeting – and these concerns were duly written about by the Dispatch Civic team.

While none of the issues have a quick-fix solution, we also reported on positive developments, such as the establishment of a satellite police station in the area.

We also trailed a man who single-handedly patrols the suburb at night, deterring would-be criminals and shining a light on nefarious night-time activities.

Recently, the Dispatch reported on a bid by Quigney hoteliers Sam Nassimov and The Osner Trust to try and secure a gambling licence currently held by Hemingways Casino, which expires in September next year. If successful, they plan to build a casino on the beachfront, to bring development to the area.

- Outstanding issues: Car washers, prostitution and drug dealing are of concern to residents and business owners.

### KING WILLIAM'S TOWN and ZWELITSHA

Our latest Civic venture was a double bill of meetings in King William's Town and Zwelitsha where concerns ranged from a lack of development in Zwelitsha

<http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/civic/2010/09/06/dispatch-gets-community-results/> [19/10/2010 10:46:23 PM]

Figure 10 continued

Dispatch Civic » Blog Archive » Dispatch gets community results

to the lack of availability, accessibility and visibility of councillors.

A story that came out of Zwelitsha was the reality of a deadly alcoholic concoction called "Morvite" being sold in the town's shebeens.

Civic reporter Lindile Sifile reported on this issue extensively , and even accompanied liquor board officials and police when they raided shebeens – much to the disgust of drunken patrons.

- Outstanding issues: As these were our most recent meetings, there are many issues – such as the need for recreational facilities, neglected monuments and bushy areas that need to be cleared – that we will cover in the weeks to come.

**WHAT DISPATCH CIVIC IS ALL ABOUT:**

The Dispatch Civic team is made up of four reporters – Taralyn McLean, Lois Moodley, Lindile Sifile and Xolisa Mgwatyu.

Over the past three months, we have been coming to your communities, hearing what you have to say, reporting on issues important to you and working with you to bring resolutions.

The Dispatch Civic team has followed a slightly different course to "traditional reporting"; civic stories tend to come straight out of the communities themselves.

We have the platform to raise issues and concerns in the newspaper, and we follow up on reports until action is taken to resolve problems.

As former Dispatch editor Andrew Trench said at the launch of the unit: "Dispatch Civic is an attempt to move the Dispatch away from being a yapping watchdog on the sidelines, to getting our hands dirty and getting involved in trying to find solutions which will make things better for everyone."

"Dispatch Civic is about building bridges and about working together."

To the communities we have already visited – thank you for your support and feedback.

To the communities we have not yet visited – we will get to you soon.

Dispatch Civic isn't going anywhere – this is an initiative that will continue as long as there are stories that need to be told and action that needs to be taken.

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One of the major problems to implementing a sustainable public journalism environment in South Africa's media is a weak civil society which Amner (personal communication, Feb. 15, 2010) attributes to the country's apartheid history and the fact that the majority of the citizens were opposed to and mistrusted the state. Amner says that South Africa's "democracy in theory is in crisis" because "the people really aren't part of the system, they're being excluded by a social contract between elites, and it's I think for that reason that it's important for journalism to try to broker a better deal and to actually bring those people into the conversation. It's very hard though." Trench (personal communication, May 14, 2010) agrees that ordinary South Africans are still trying to find their voices in a newly democratic country, "but there are definitely signs of a strong movement from civil society to start to own this space again and for there to be more diverse voices heard above the chatter of mainstream politics and political parties." This is why journalists need to get involved to help facilitate the public to 'own' the public space through civic journalism in more newsrooms across South Africa.

The economics of implementing public journalism can also be a problem, however, as many news outlets are for profit and currently cutting back on newsroom resources. Even at a place like the *Daily Dispatch*, which serves a city of more than one million people and a province of about four million with no other daily newspaper, it's difficult to make public journalism a priority (Amner, personal communication, Feb. 15, 2010). Amner says that the commercial media in South Africa have structural problems which inhibit any goals of serving the interests of the majority of people rather than the top five or 10 per cent who are able to afford to buy newspapers and those people who

are able to buy the products advertised in those papers. As Amner notes, while the *Daily Dispatch* sells 30,000 copies and has a readership of 300,000 there are still 3.7 million people who don't have access to the paper:

Those other 3.7 million people don't have access to a newspaper at all, can't buy one, often can't read in the first place etc. It's really difficult for a newspaper trying to survive economically and obviously target the most attractive audiences so they can attract advertising and so on, it's very difficult for that newspaper to then prioritize those 3.7 million who actually don't read their product. There's a real structural problem with mainstream commercial newspapers serving the needs and interests of the mass of people in society. Ultimately it ought to be the public broadcaster that's doing that, but the broadcaster here is incredibly weak and is in the pocket of the state really. It's not a state broadcaster, it's a public broadcaster, but it's very compliant so it's not a critical voice and it's really quite weak.

Davidson (personal communication, Feb. 17, 2010) also believes the economy of news also prevents media outlets from prioritizing public journalism. He said while theoretically public journalism shouldn't be difficult to implement,

there's been a dramatic cutting down of staff in newsrooms etc., and so you do find news media reflecting more and more authorities of powerful interest groups, like government and like big business because they're relying on press releases, PR releases, statements from officials, etc. ... I think economically it becomes a problem because the media haven't really invested in reporters. And so you find reporters not going out on the streets, sitting in newsrooms covering eight stories a day very badly because there's not enough reporters, not enough money to let them actually go out and do a proper job of talking to people.

The *Daily Dispatch* has proven, however, that if committed to public journalism, it's possible to do despite the challenges.

Trench's commitment to and leadership in introducing a public journalism environment to the *Daily Dispatch* newsroom is testament to the fact that not only do journalists want to get out to their communities to speak to people, people have many things to say. In fact, in Trench's experience, "all the reporters who experienced this were blown away by the depth and breadth of stories that this process produced" (personal



communication, May 14, 2010) and “the process was enthusiastically embraced from the beginning.” As for the public reaction, Trench says one of the major problems in conducting the meetings was the passionate community members who had so much they wanted to discuss. In fact, Trench says, although at some meetings the reporters were looked upon with suspicion or hostility, the meetings were “very difficult to build a conversation around any particular issue as people had so many things they wished to speak [about] and wanted to get so much off their chests. It seemed like for many people it was the first time anyone had come to them and asked what they cared about and what they thought needed to be done.” In the post-apartheid era, this is something that needs to be happening more often. A bottom-up approach to development with a public journalism component is needed in today’s South Africa. From the above examples and a commitment at the *Daily Dispatch* to have four permanent reporters on a new civic journalism project, it’s clear this is an important path for the future of not only South Africa’s democratic development but also for social and political development in communities that have been ignored by a top-down development policy.

According to Davidson (personal communication, Feb. 17, 2010), South African journalists have been having a debate on the media’s development role, but it has been from a developmental journalism perspective which is top-down and led by the government rather than citizens. For Davidson, however, development journalism, “reflects the priorities of the government and it’s really not what journalism should be doing. But I think there is an argument to be made that journalism should be focusing on the development issues that are essential to a developing country. I think public

journalism offers a way of doing that that doesn't then fall into the trap of becoming a mouth piece of the state." He says there needs to be a debate on the future of public journalism in a country which is still one of the most unequal societies in the world.

Trench agrees: "There are many lessons still to be learned in how to practice this style of journalism in South Africa, but I think that our initial experiment with public journalism shows it has huge potential" (personal communication, May 14, 2010).

It's clear that public journalism can and does work in South Africa. From radio call-in shows to tabloids and the *Daily Dispatch's* experience with explicit public journalism, there is a direct connection between media and what Rosen (1999a) calls 'making public life work' from a grassroots perspective. This is why journalists should get involved in their communities by fostering a public journalism environment in order to help solve the problems of the day. As this thesis argues, public journalism is a powerful tool for the development of any society because it is a local means to solving local problems—the *Daily Dispatch's* small victories on slumlords and manholes are just two examples of what can be achieved. The next chapter will reiterate how the concept of public journalism is important to development and conclude that journalists are not only news chroniclers, but are also mediators and facilitators of public life. Therefore, they must get involved to engage their communities, and help to create a better society along with governments, business leaders, teachers, NGOs, and most importantly the public.



## Chapter 6: ‘Making public life work’

Although there has been significant criticism of the public journalism movement in North America, this thesis has shown that although it is 20 years old, it is still a relevant and up-to-date notion, especially in a country like South Africa because of its inclusive and deliberative approach to developing solutions to local problems. The premise of public journalism is to help make democracy work (Rosen, 1999a; Haas, 2007; Carey, 1999; Glasser, 1999; Amner, 2010). This thesis has outlined the historical roots of public journalism from John Dewey to the Hutchins Commission in the U.S. and to New York University professor Jay Rosen’s concept of how the movement began in the late 1980s as a reaction to a disconnect between the media and its readers, listeners and viewers. Critics have said that public journalism crosses the line from objective journalism into advocacy work and is an effort to create news rather than report it (see McMasters in Merritt & McMasters, 1996; Woo, 2000; Barney 1996). More than 20 years after its North American reform movement, some critics also say it is no longer relevant in today’s media landscape (Shafer, 2003). As previously stated, however, it indeed is still relevant not only in North America, but also across the globe (Rosenberry & St. John, 2010; Haas, 2007; Romano, 2010; Amner, 2010).

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation TV reporter David McKie, who wrote a master’s thesis on the potential use of public journalism at Canada’s public broadcaster in 2000, notes that public journalism has survived over the years as journalists have continued to “look for ways to engage the citizenry in discussion, get them involved, to

do stories that are more relevant to people, to look for ways to reinvent yourself—I think you’ll find elements of public journalism in all of that” (personal communication, Feb. 12, 2010). Similarly, as authors such as Rosenberry and St. John (2010), Witt (2004b) and Beckett (2008) note, public journalism has been reinvented as the journalism industry strives to remain relevant at a time of transformation in the face of new technology and new needs from citizens. When Rosen wrote his 1999 book and asked the question ‘what are journalists for?’, he answered that it was to “make public life work.” This is not a notion that’s only relevant at certain times or in certain countries, but is something that is fundamental to journalists. Public journalism—journalists getting involved in their communities and giving voice to people’s concerns rather than only reporting on what officials say—is the best way to “make public life work.”

Amner (personal communication, Feb. 15, 2010) notes that journalists are not the be all and end all to fixing democracy but they play a major role because of their relation to the public sphere. He says journalists are not able to replace civil society, or the government: “obviously we wouldn’t want to do that anyway, but one of the things that we’re supposed to be doing is nurturing a public sphere, or maybe a whole bunch of public spheres actually and public spheres for people who don’t access the unitary general public sphere very easily.” In this vein, journalists have a significant role to play in the development of countries making up the Global South, using public journalism to engage in a debate of problems and solutions from a grassroots perspective. In light of the failures of top-down approaches to development (Easterly, 2006; Rapley, 2002; Smith, 2009; Servaes, 1999) over the last 60 years, journalists should get involved in

their communities to help not only deepen democracy and improve the public sphere, but also to help implement a grassroots approach to development. Obviously public journalism is not the sole means of implementing development strategies, but it could help in bringing to light development issues from a grassroots perspective, in conjunction with whatever national priorities the government has.

Haas (2007) showed that public journalism is already being practiced worldwide in a variety of different political environments, which means that public journalism is not only a “Western notion” but is applicable to various societies, given the right conditions. As outlined in Chapter 3, the right conditions for any country to practice public journalism is dependent on “the existence of favourable political and economic climates” (Agunga, 1997, p. 4). This means that at times of extreme war and conflict, public journalism could not thrive because, arguably, the citizens’ primary concern is to simply to survive. Along the lines of the “existence of favourable political and economic climates” is also the need for there to be true press freedom so that journalists are able to carry out public journalism projects without fear of being prosecuted or fear of their media outlet being shut down. For example, even though Iran’s constitution has a “free press” clause, it’s limited to those views that are not “detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam” (in Human Rights Watch, 2009). As is the case with Colombia and South Africa, public journalism can flourish in less than “stable” political environments, given a willingness from reporters.

This thesis has argued that South Africa, as a case study, is one country where the political and media environments are conducive to public journalism being implemented

with the goal of addressing development issues that citizens face on a daily basis in the post-apartheid era. As shown in Chapter 4, South Africa's 16 years of democracy have produced less than promised in terms of reducing poverty, raising employment, lowering health problems such as HIV/AIDS and curbing violence among several other issues. This is because the South African government has not consulted its own people—the ones affected by the development policies put in place—but rather has prescribed its own national agenda with little regard to local differences. As Easterly (2006) notes, attracting foreign investment or aid dollars to a country like South Africa or implementing strategies developed by foreign organizations have little trickle-down effect because development must come from within. Solutions to local problems must be developed by local South Africans. This is why South Africa needs a public journalism infrastructure in its media outlets—because grassroots participation is an important part of any development plan.

South Africa has emerged from years of apartheid, state-sanctioned racism, and 16 years after democracy many of the inequality issues remain. As outlined in Chapter 5, public journalism is already in use in South Africa with the aim of dealing with these issues. Because of the media transformations made in 1994, community radio has risen to a natural platform for public journalism and public deliberation of community concerns as well as solutions. As Davidson points out (personal communication, Feb. 17, 2010), there are radio stations that serve almost every community in South Africa, and more importantly in the local language. Because of this, community radio is accessible to the majority of South Africans and each station is often run by locals rather than

government officials or elites from large media conglomerates. Davidson says that there is a “very large community radio base in almost every small community and supposedly run by members of that community. To me, that’s kind of a built-in model of public journalism, that people in the community are creating the news for themselves and for each other and reporting the news and reflecting on the news.” More importantly, Davidson says because radio is very interactive, call-in radio “is seen as a very good forum for people to exchange views, reflect views, share opinions.”

Similarly, there has been a rise in the success of tabloids in South Africa, which aim to focus on issues that broadsheets fail to take notice of. Newspapers like the *Daily Sun* and *Daily Voice* are creating “alternative public spheres” for the majority of South Africans who don’t see themselves in the national daily papers run by international media conglomerates. While tabloid journalism, with its loud headlines, simple language and saturation of photos of scantily clad women, may have some faults, its popularity among previously marginalized South Africans is important in the creation of an engaged community in which local, relevant stories are reflected in the news. Jones, Vanderhaeghen and Viney (2008) consider this move on the part of tabloids to engage its readership and community as an important part of serving democracy.

While tabloids such as the *Daily Sun* and *Daily Voice* have not explicitly practiced public journalism, they are contributing to developing an engaged public sphere in which local people’s voices can be heard. Amner (personal communication, Feb. 15, 2010) notes that there are many “marginalized people who are living on the margins of society in many ways who really do need to be brought into the

conversation.” One South African news outlet that is doing this currently is East London’s *Daily Dispatch*, which led a pilot project in 2009 to hold several “community dialogues” and ascertain what the suburb of Beacon Bay and the informal settlement of Nompumelelo felt were the top issues facing them. After reporters organized these meetings and reported on them, some minor changes were made in the communities, which former *Daily Dispatch* editor Andrew Trench (2009c) describes as “an incredible process to watch” (para. 10). The *Daily Dispatch* is evidence that journalists in a young democracy such as South Africa can adopt public journalism. It’s continued to this day, with a small civic journalism team that makes a point to go out in East London, to organize meetings and to talk to their readership and community members so that the collective public is able to set the news agenda with what they believe are the important issues of the day. It’s even resulted in some public policy and development changes, as shown in Chapter 5, with its exposé of slumlords and uncovered manholes.

These are just some examples of what is possible in South Africa today with the use of public journalism to address social, political and democratic development issues. Because South Africa’s democracy is still young, Amner (personal communication, Feb. 15, 2010) says this kind of process can be “messy” but certainly necessary for the future. He describes today’s South Africa well:

What I’m saying is there’s so much work to be done on the ground in South Africa. The political discourse is very immature and it’s often very fractious and very kind of you know, people pointing fingers at each other and we haven’t gotten beyond the very sore kind of scabs and divisions that are obviously there. You don’t want to pick at those sores and exacerbate them and make them worse, but you can’t pretend that they aren’t there either so it’s a very tricky process to try to do justice to the fact that we have conflicting interests at the same time. Obviously at some point, we do have to come together and solve our problems jointly.

This is a major role for South African journalists: to help the community re-engage with business partners, government officials, students, and all stakeholders in that community who can contribute to 'making public life work' through public journalism, as Rosen (1999a) notes. Can public journalism be used as a tool to help development in South Africa? The only answer is that the media already have and can continue to play a key role in South Africa's future through the use of public journalism.

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