

# TOWARDS AN AFRICAN AGENDA FOR JOURNALISM EDUCATION

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## Introduction

Let me take this opportunity to welcome you all to Grahamstown, and to Rhodes University. We are privileged to have you here, especially because your coming demonstrates an abiding interest in what journalism, when it is properly taught, can achieve for our continent. Like all human practices, journalism needs to be 'learned', which is why journalism education is an important part of human development. So, we hold this colloquium on the assumption that journalism can imbue citizens with the civic agency required to become more competent members of our African societies.

We also hold this colloquium because we realise that the teaching of journalism is a shared experience. Our teaching and learning experiences can be shared across the different sub-regions of our continent, and our gathering today is emblematic of the fact that, although we represent a diversity of educational cultures, we are united in our geo-political positioning and what that entails for our journalism-educational experience. It is this realisation of our African rootedness, and its implications for how we teach and practise journalism, that prompted the School of Journalism and Media Studies here at Rhodes to hold this colloquium. The opportunity to articulate a vision, and a related agenda, for African journalism education is, of course, the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC) currently being planned. We shall say more about the WJEC during our second plenary in the afternoon.

The aim of this particular preparatory colloquium, then, is three-fold, namely to:

- Affirm and strengthen pan-African intellectual contributions in articulating a shared agenda for African journalism education in the global educational public sphere;
- Validate and accentuate, through rigorous African peer review, individual and collective scholarly analyses and evaluations of African journalistic traditions and cultures and how these imbricate and implicate journalism education and research across sub-Saharan Africa; and thus
- Outline and propagate a shared agenda or identity for African journalism education within and without Africa.

While all the three objectives of this colloquium represent a long-term process of critical enquiry of the normativity and practicality of journalism education in Africa, there are several specific activities that we think can contribute towards the realisation of all three objectives.

Holding this very colloquium, for example, can help us to attain our first objective – affirming and strengthening our individual and collective intellectual contributions to the field of African journalism education. Through this colloquium, we are setting a firm foundation for playing an active role during the forthcoming WJEC, by helping to frame the agenda for conceptualising, researching, teaching, and practicing journalism in Africa. This is an important contribution to the growth and development of African journalism education.

This particular colloquium can also be used as a scholarly platform for achieving our second objective – validating and accentuating our work as journalism educators. Our continuing dependence on Western centres of learning and publishing has meant that our scholarly works are often subjected to an inorganic peer review process that is often informed by Western epistemic-ontological biases. This is not to suggest that such Western centres of educational publishing have not realised the need for truly internationalising their academic peer review systems. They have, and there is evidence of an African scholarly presence on some of the Western-based journals, for example.

As part of validating and accentuating our scholarly works, our parallel sessions during this colloquium are so organised that each presenter is also expected to act as a peer reviewer of at least one paper being presented during the session. We hope that such cross-pollination of ideas can stimulate further collaborative scholarly and experiential enquiry. Such a *sighted* communitarian – and not necessarily a *blind* peer-review mechanism – is what we hope to nurture as part of our self-conscious critique and fortification of our endogenous understandings of the philosophy and practice of journalism.

Another specific effort aimed at helping us to validate and accentuate our individual and collective scholarly outputs is the general agreement we have secured with two journals – *Journal of African Media Studies* and *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* – to publish some of the papers that will be presented here. I am very grateful to their respective editorial boards for this commitment. I see this collaboration as a proactive step in encouraging more African journalism teachers and scholars to become a part of a growing community of African knowledge constructors and disseminators.

With regard to achieving the third objective – outlining and propagating a shared identity for African journalism education – all the activities I have outlined above take us a step closer towards that objective.

### **Outlining a pan-African agenda for journalism education**

More importantly, however, the papers that we have assembled at this colloquium are a testament of our search for a shared definition of a pan-African agenda for journalism education. My preliminary and crude review of the papers suggests that there are four items for inclusion in our pan-African agenda for journalism education, namely: (i) interrogating the epistemic-ontological foundations of African journalism education; (ii) analysing the complexities of national educational policies and their implications for quality assessment of journalism education; (iii) experimenting with new teaching and learning innovations in journalism education; and (iv) making sense of the impact of African journalism education on journalistic practices and socio-political change. I discuss each one in turn.

#### *Onto-epistemic foundations of African journalism education*

Interrogating the epistemic-ontological foundations of African journalism education begs for a critical analysis of the following sub-items: (a) the historical context of African journalism education; (b) the discourse of de-Westernisation as an emancipatory project; and (c) the legitimating of African philosophies as valid knowledge systems that our pedagogy can draw upon.

It goes without saying that the historical *context* of many African countries colours the *content* of much that we say about African journalism education. As part of contextualising our *African* media experiences, we must remember that what we term “African” is not a singularity of experiences. “Africa” is a rich media-cultural heterogeneity. It is clear also that, this diversity notwithstanding, there are enduring similarities, many of them rooted in the shared experiences of the legacy of colonial rule, the unsettled politics of the postcolonial era, and the interpenetration of global influences. African overdependence on Western journalism educational and training centres – a legacy of colonialism – cannot be over-emphasised. Needless to say, African journalism educators walk a tight rope in negotiating the delicate balance between reliance on Western systems of journalistic philosophy and practice *and* allegiance to their geo-cultural locations and locutions.

As part of historicising, and thereby de-colonising, African journalism studies, Winston Mano (2009) looks to the discipline of African history to, as he puts it, citing Zeleza (2009: 4), ‘undress the emperor’. This debate is taken up by Jeanne du Toit (2009) who reminds us how South African media history demonstrates that the construction of journalism education has been profoundly shaped by struggles around the production of knowledge within the institutions of journalism and the university. This suggests the need for a continuing historico-intellectual struggle in redefining journalism education to speak to our particular contexts in ways that promote greater, and not less, democracy, citizenship, development, etc.

Many other papers stress the need for placing journalism education within the particular histories in which it has emerged, both here in Africa and elsewhere, as part of a wider intellectual effort to reclaim the place of African journalism and journalism education. It is such a historical contextualisation of journalism education in Africa that gives an epistemological justification for Gilbert Motsaathebe’s (2009) call to align South Africa’s journalism curricula with the discourse of “African renaissance”, for example.

But our search for onto-epistemological justification is tinged with many difficulties, causing Terje S. Skerdal (2009: 3) to ask: “Should we teach journalism or should we teach African journalism”? To Bevelyn Dube (2009: 9), insisting on “Africanising” journalism education runs the risk of essentialism. She pleads that our attempts at Africanising journalism curricula must take into account the fact that African culture is and has never been static, that there is no authentic past to return to – in a word, there is no such thing as an authentic African journalism.

It is important to observe, however, that teaching journalism, even without any qualifying adjectives, such as “Western”, “liberal”, “African”, etc., still invokes in our minds the fact that such journalism has embedded within it values peculiar to a particular cultural context. So, no journalisms can be taught, as it were, in an “unadulterated” environment or context. Values – wherever one is – play a key role in influencing the nature of journalistic input and output. It is important, if only for purposes of systematic scholarly exposition, to tease out the cultural sub-texts of any piece of journalism in order to address the larger questions about what type of journalism education can effectively enhance citizenship, democracy, development, transformation, etc.

This does not negate the critical-analytical process of what Tarik Sabry (2009: 201) calls “de-de-Westernization”, by which he means that our discourse of de-Westernisation must operate through a “‘double-critique’ structure ... that is able to oscillate between de-Westernization and de-de-Westernization, authentication and de-authentication.” Thankfully, however, Sabry is quick to point out that “the discourse of de-Westernization, as it stands, is still in its infancy, at a stage where more intellectual effort is channelled towards authentication than to questioning and subverting of the claims that come with such a process” (Sabry, 2009: 201).

It is also such a historico-epistemological foundation that emboldens Mabweazara (2009) to challenge Zimbabwean journalism educators to ground their teaching and research in Zimbabwean journalists’ epistemologies of journalistic practice, echoing Robert White’s (2009) analysis of the human-motivational basis of journalistic practice in Africa.

But, as already stated, the process of “Africansing” journalism curricula is not going to be without major difficulties. Dube (2009), already cited above, points to the conceptual difficulties associated with defining what the adjective and noun “African” really means, proposing that we should be thinking more about a hybridised African reality, reflecting the many influences that have shaped, and continue to shape, the practicing, the teaching, and the researching of journalism. There are more problems, as Lugalambi and Chibita remind us (2009). These include the following:

- The witting or unwitting inability by Western-educated African journalism educators to critically rethink Western journalism concepts, theories, and practices;
- The continuing reliance on Western new media technologies, donors and expertise;
- The highly marketised higher education system and its implications for critical research;
- The paucity of journalism textbooks researched and authored by Africans; and
- The subliminal resistance by some Western journalism educators to accept as valid African postcolonial critiques of the universalistic assumptions underpinning many Western journalism concepts, theories and practices.

### *National educational policies and quality control in journalism education*

The problems associated with Africanising African journalism lead me to the second item on our pan-African agenda for journalism education, namely that journalism education in Africa is implicated in even wider socio-political processes, including the complexities of national educational policies and their implications for quality assessment and control in journalism education. Here, three sub-items are evident: (a) the political context of educational policy formulation, implementation and evaluation; (b) the differentiated access to and accessibility of journalism education among different sub-populations; and (c) the aspect of quality assessment and control.

Analysing the political context of educational policies in Africa will certainly make us more sympathetic to African countries whose political regimes have made it impossible to develop media education policies that are friendly both to the practice of journalism and to the teaching and researching of journalism. Here, Mugari (2009) reminds us how Zimbabwean-based media educators are constrained in their efforts to influence media education policies, appealing to “Zimbabwe’s media professionals and academics in the Diaspora ... to seize the opportunity to make a positive contribution to shaping the future of the media of the country they love so much”.

Although in countries like South Africa, national educational policy clearly calls for racial equity in accessing learning opportunities, there is still a disjuncture between this policy goal and the institutional student-selection practices. In this regard, Botma (2009) reminds us that black and coloured South African students still find it more difficult than white students to access postgraduate journalism education because of their inability to perform successfully in a tertiary education context that is still rigidly defined in terms of Afrikaans and English. Such linguistic discrimination makes it difficult for such students to acquire the cultural capital they need to live successful lives as South African citizens.

But if the continuing use of colonial languages compromises the performance of some of our students, questions must necessarily be raised about how we can validly assess the quality of our journalism education programmes. What factors affect such assessments, anyway? As part of assessing the quality of journalism education, the types of entry-level requirements are cardinal. Matenda (2009) helpfully outlines the four basic types of recruitment practices across the continent, ranging from considerations for academic results at secondary level,

professional aptitude, personality tests, to equity assessments. Clearly, these measures can act both as enablers and disablers of a vibrant education system that cuts across the social restrictions of race, gender, status, etc.

Another layer in the onion of quality assessment, in addition to entry-level requirements, is the extent to which the industry, the government and the market are implicated in the politics of quality control. Here, Guy Berger (2009) reviews the Media Council of Kenya's (MCK) proposal for a statutory licensing or accreditation regime for journalism educators, concluding that such an approach represents "regulating for control", and not for "critical public speech". Berger reminds us that journalism education cannot be called to account or atone for all the sins that are committed by journalists in society. He brings us down to earth by suggesting that there are other variables that play a part in unethical journalism: the individual character of journalists and their educational background; individual media houses and the business models therein; reporter-source relationships; and government controls. By way of solution, Berger recommends a view that allows for competition to decide which journalism educator wins, based on the UNESCO criteria for determining educational excellence – the internal capacity of a school; its external orientation; and its forward-orientation.

#### *The impact of journalism education on journalistic practices and socio-political change*

However, even as Berger (2009) himself concedes, the fundamental concern by the MCK that there might be a causal relationship between journalism education and unethical journalistic practices must not be glossed over. It leads us to the third item on the pan-African agenda for journalism education, namely the extent to which journalism education exerts an impact on journalistic practices in the newsroom and socio-political change in the wider society. Can journalistic practice, shaped by a particular teaching style, contribute towards enhancing democratic citizenship, prevention of conflict and other societal vices, obliteration of gender inequities, eradication of poverty, etc.? These socio-political questions constitute many assumptions that underpin our pedagogy. But there are three sub-items to consider here: (a) the nature of the *evidence* correlating journalism education to industry and other societal practices; (b) the type of *resistance* that industry conventions and practices present for the transformative or emancipatory agenda envisioned by some critical journalism educators; and

(c) a coherent and comprehensive theoretical framework that can be used to relate journalism education to a range of societal variables – newsroom practices, socio-political change, etc.

The first sub-item – correlational evidence between journalism education and industry practices – is the subject-matter of Muyiwa Popoola’s (2009) paper which seeks, through quantitative content analysis, to establish the nature of “correlation” and “disparity” between journalism education and the journalism industry. Although his study does not offer a clear qualitative or quantitative method for establishing the purported correlation or disparity between pedagogy and practice, it is clear that this is an area that requires much more research. How do we, as journalism educators in Africa, know that our pedagogical styles are bearing the intended fruits?

If Popoola’s content analysis seems to lack an analytical schema for making the correlational – not causal – links between journalism education and newsroom practices, this problem is partly remedied by Manka E. Tabuwe and Enoch Tanjong’s study of the “impact of journalism training on editorials and news writing in Cameroon. Here, they supplement content analysis with a survey of media managers, editors and reporters to establish how they correlate their practices to journalism training.

In terms of industry resistance to the transformative tendencies of emancipatory journalism education, Anthea Garman’s (2009) case study of the “news-papering” practices of a more than century-old newspaper – *The Grocott’s Mail* – demonstrates how such practices have become so naturalised, so congealed, as to resist some of the transformative ideas proposed by staff in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes. This can be generalised to the totality of the media industries in Africa and the struggles that journalism educators must necessarily confront in their critical-transformative agendas.

Here, it is perhaps fitting to refer to Neo Simutanyi’s (2009) paper, focusing on the privately-owned, commercial *The Post* newspaper in Zambia, which he argues tends to exhibit anti-democratic tendencies by squeezing out news and views that seem to oppose its editorial commentaries on socio-political issues and events. He calls on journalism educators to avoid a bifurcation of media into “public” and “private”. Such a binary opposition seems to associate public media with negative, anti-democratic attributes, and private media with positive, pro-democratic attributes. Such an approach fails to account for the narrow, exclusive, partisan reportage associated with some private media, he argues.

The demands placed on journalism, and by implication journalism education, are even heavier than contemplating the educator-industry dichotomy. For example, the reporting of conflict is raising challenging questions for all of us, as Sibanda (2009) reminds us. The emergence of alternative media forms, including the so-called citizen journalism mania, are challenging pedagogical orthodoxies, as Gibbs Dube (2009) and Dumisani Moyo (2009) remind us. The unpredictable uses to which new media technologies can be deployed push the very boundaries of our contemplative and practical work as journalism educators.

But if we are alarmed at the extent to which industry conventions and practices have a way of resisting change or transformation, we must ask whether or not journalism education is up to the task of transforming itself. Is journalism education itself perhaps incapable of easily transforming, and therefore of being transformative and transformational? After all, aren't we struggling to reconceptualise Western media concepts and practices in a critical project of indigenisation?

In this regard, a more elaborate theoretical framework for connecting African journalism with the citizenry is synthesised by Marietjie Myburg (2009), who proposes a hybrid theoretical framework that encapsulates democratic professionalism, public journalism and deliberative democracy. She asks:

- What is the current situation?
- Do academic institutions prepare journalism students to engage with citizens in an effort to broaden and deepen an understanding for the challenges of democratic work?
- Or do they continue to follow an academic model which reinforces a role of detachment and passivity where journalists are neutral players offering competing views which often translate in reflecting only the views of those who are able to voice their arguments most effectively?

#### *Teaching and learning innovations in journalism education*

These questions call for innovation in the way we teach and learn about journalism. But to be innovative, we must engage with the following questions:

- (a) How do our students experience our teaching and their learning?

(b) What cultural resources can we take advantage of in order to be innovative in our approaches to teaching journalism? Is it technology? Is it language?

Partly in answer to the first question, Rabe (2009) helps us to understand how entry-level journalists have experienced their training. She concludes that such journalists emphasise the need for journalism to take on specific African issues – democracy, media freedom, the lack of investigative journalism, government interference, localisation, HIV and Aids, conflict, etc. She also reports how entry-level journalists appreciate a blend between practice and critical thinking. As a process of summative evaluation, then, this is a useful way of recalibrating our journalism curricula to relate to the felt needs of our students.

Reinforcing Rabe's findings, but in an East-African context, is Nassanga Goretti Linda's (2009) review of communication training in Uganda. Her review showed a "heavy bias towards skills-oriented training modules". Her conclusion is that there is need for more communication-support modules that should enable journalists put issues related to democratisation into context. Linda's conclusions are reflective of the general trend across Africa.

The answer to the second question – finding the raw cultural resources that can be used to innovate our teaching – is partly provided by three papers. The first paper posits the adoption of indigenous African languages as an innovative point of entry into curriculum review. Abiodun Salawu, writing in the Nigerian context, calls for the use and teaching of indigenous languages in tertiary-level journalism education. He argues that "what is important for us now is not to allow the legacy of colonialism to continue to threaten the integrity of our culture, our language."

In this vein, let me brag a little: the Department of Journalism and Media Studies here at Rhodes is in discussion with the School of Languages to establish the best way possible of incorporating journalism and media studies into the orthography of isiXhosa and thus offer all our students a grounding in using the language in their journalistic careers.

The second and third papers look to new media technologies as fertile ground for innovative approaches to journalism teaching. Anton Harber and Indra de Lanerolle (2009) advocate for a rethink of how journalism is taught, basing their argument on two-years worth of experience on a new media course which has experimented with some of the most advanced

technologies available worldwide including Bluetooth broadcasting, direct video uploading to web or mobile internet sites and DVB-H mobile broadcasting. They conclude that the future of journalism teaching lies in a shift from a print-centric to a media-independent model of teaching and in using new media in the classroom in ways that strengthen students' ability to adapt their journalistic understanding to *any* medium.

The question of how new media technologies are impacting on journalism education is also the subject-matter of Gilbert Mubangi Bet' ukany's (2009) paper, which draws on his experiences in the context of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

## **Conclusion**

These, then, are the issues that mark out a pan-African agenda for journalism education. They centre on (i) interrogating the epistemic-ontological foundations of African journalism education; (ii) making sense of the impact of African journalism education on journalistic practices and socio-political change; (iii) experimenting with new teaching and learning innovations in journalism education; and (iv) analysing the complexities of national educational policies and their implications for quality assessment in journalism education.

This colloquium provides an opportunity to confront these issues and, by so doing, to enable us to:

- Affirm and strengthen our pan-African intellectual contributions in articulating a shared agenda for African journalism education in the global educational public sphere;
- Validate and accentuate our individual and collective research projects on African journalistic traditions and cultures and their implications for journalism education and research across sub-Saharan Africa; and
- Outline and propagate a shared agenda or identity for African journalism education within and without Africa.

## **References**

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