Citizen journalism in Grahamstown: *Iindaba Ziafika* and the difficulties of instituting citizen journalism in a poor South African country town.

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1. Introduction

In 2009 the *Iindaba Ziafika* Project on Citizen Journalism was launched by Rhodes University's School of Journalism and Media Studies located in Grahamstown, South Africa. The main constituencies the project sought to impact on were "the poorer residents of Grahamstown, whose voices and information sources are currently constrained in terms of newspaper and web access" (Berger, 2007: 5). This project aims, through training, to empower citizens to use cell phones and *Grocott's Online*, the online platform of the local community newspaper, *Grocott's Mail*, to participate in local debates, and in so doing to provide them with opportunities to engage in the practice of citizenship (see Berger 2007: 5).

Although 'citizen journalism' is a contested term (Lasica, 2003, Outing 2005, Deuze 2007, Schaffer 2007), resisting "settled boundaries" (Goode 2009: 1288), amongst European and American theorists, there is agreement that at the most general level it refers to the journalism produced by non-professionals – those who were once audiences (Rosen 2004) – often with 'modern technologies', and includes "practices such as current affairs-based blogging, photo and video sharing, and posting eyewitness commentary on current events" (Goode 2009: 1288). Indeed, Goode notes that activities such as "re-posting, linking, 'tagging'(labelling with keywords), rating, modifying or commenting upon news materials posted by other users or by professional news outlets" are also considered as citizen journalism because "citizens participate in the news process without necessarily acting as 'content creators'" (2009: 1288).

From this perspective, the inclusion of these 'produsers' (Bruns 2007) challenges the authority of mainstream journalists as "the exclusive centre of knowledge on the subject", suggesting that "the audience knows more collectively than the reporter alone" (Glaser 2006: 1). This model presumes a citizenry that is relatively well-educated, has familiarity with, and access to, the new media as a form of social communication, and is confident in their right to participate in the newly developed public spheres. In Grahamstown, however, the recruited citizen journalists come from a community in which there is 70% unemployment, poor schooling, and a lack of basic facilities such as domestically available running water, indoor

sanitation, and electricity. They are primarily English second-language speakers writing for an English language publication for fellow citizens who are also English second-language speakers and do not have easy access to the internet. They are also often not aware of their rights as citizens. Our paper thus explores the difficulties of developing citizen journalism in a context of social, political, and economic under-development. In particular, we focus on the contradictions of using mainstream approaches to the production of journalism, which downplay the cultural aspects of identity and language, for training 'activist' citizen journalists – the stated ideal of the course directors. Given this context, our ethnographic study can be seen as an attempt to deepen our understanding of the impact of specific contexts on media use, thereby, in Press and Livingstone's words, "resisting technological determinism and legitimating, in the main, contingent, qualified, and differentiated claims" (2006: 185).

2. Methods of Research

The '*Iindaba Ziyafika'* project runs a 6-week training course for potential citizen journalists. Data for this research was obtained through observation, interviews, and the textual analysis of selected online texts produced by the trainees and course graduates. We observed classes of the March-April 2010 course, and interviewed the course trainer, Elvira van Noort, the director of the project, Harry Dugmore, the citizen journalism news editor, Kwanele Butane, and the *Grocott's Online* editor, Michael Salzwedel. We also examined selected citizen journalism texts which were published by *Grocott's Online.* It hosts *MyMakana* which has three sites dedicated to citizen journalism: *Ukucoca Emakana* (Makana Cleanup) hosts the stories of citizen journalists who completed the November-December 2009 citizen journalism course which focused on waste management in Grahamstown; *Makana Employed* (focussing on unemployment in Grahamstown) and *Catch the World Cup Fever* (dealing with local soccer world cup issues) host stories by participants who completed the March-April 2010 course. *MyStory* is a composite site but which also includes stories not hosted on the other sites. As this is the largest site, we used purposive sampling to select a thematic cross-section of postings. To date (end of May), the following numbers of stories have been posted on these sites: 200 on *MyStory*; 14 on *Ukucoca Emakana*, 6 on *Makana Employed*, and 16 on the *Catch the World Cup Fever in Grahamstown*.

3. Description of the Iindaba Ziafika Citizens Journalism Project

This project is funded by the James L and John S Knight Foundation, and is run under the auspices of Rhodes University's School of Journalism and Media Studies. The University also owns the community newspaper, *Grocott's Mail* and its online platform, *Grocott's Online*. Part of the funds were used to set up a Citizens' Journalism newsroom on the ground floor of the Grocott's Mail building in the High Street, and to hire a trainer to run a 'Citizens' Journalism' course, and a citizens' journalism news editor to edit their copy prior to its submission to *Grocott's Online.* The Citizen Journalism training facility has 10 computers which are available for people who have completed the Citizen Journalism course.

Calls for participation in the course were advertised in the print edition of *Grocott's Mail* as well as on posters placed at various venues in Grahamstown. The advertisement provided the content of the free 6-week course and asked potential recruits: "Would **you** like to be the eyes, ears and voice of your community by learning how to write stories that matter?" There were 54 applications for the first course and 50 for the second. Forty applicants were accepted onto each course. Of the 104 applicants for the two courses, 60 were unemployed, 7 were students, and 8 listed their occupation as working for Radio Grahamstown, the local community radio station, in which participation is voluntary (unpaid). As Dugmore noted, "I get the sense that many people are unemployed and bored and hopeful. They hope that this will maybe give them some social capital" (Dugmore 2010). Of the 40 people who started the first course, 22 graduated (attended all the classes). Of those, 15 managed to submit stories, and four are still active (interview with Dugmore).

The 6-week course aims to provide students with "valuable knowledge and skills to become a citizen journalist" (Citizen Journalism Course Outline 2010). Issues covered in the course include: what is Citizen Journalism? Who is a Citizen Journalist? What is news? Generating story ideas; facts and opinions; writing a basic news story – the lead, story structure, the 5 W's and an H; finding and working with sources; interviewing; re-writing and editing; media ethics; word processing skills; searching the internet; taking cell-phone photographs and video. The courses structured their work around a particular theme, for example, "waste removal", "unemployment", "world cup fever", and citizen journalists were encouraged to report on these topics. A section of the *Grocott's Online* website was created for each of these themes and posted stories are clearly marked as the work of citizen journalists. This model of citizen journalism thus seems closest to one of Outing's models, described as

"Integrating citizen journalism and projournalism under one roof", in which the content of each is clearly marked (2005: 12).

4. Theoretical frameworks for considering the Iindaba Ziafika project

(a) Citizenship and political involvement

As one of the primary aims of the *Iindaba Ziyafika* citizen journalism project is, according to Dugmore, to help reconnect people to the social and political processes that govern their lives, we next discuss Heller's (2009) work which provides a political framework with which to make sense of the socio-political forces at play in South Africa's new democracy.

Based on his research into the processes of democratisation in post-apartheid South Africa, Heller argues that while the country evidences "democratic consolidation", it faces "critical challenges in deepening democracy" (2009: 123). He foregrounds the notion of 'effective democracy', arguing that subordinate groups have few opportunities for meaningful engagement with the state. In support of this argument Heller distinguishes between political and civil society, each with its own distinct modes of social action:

> Political society is governed by instrumental/strategic action and specifically refers to the set of actors that compete for, and the institutions that regulate (in a democratic system) the right to exercise legitimate political authority. Civil society refers to non-state and non-market forms of voluntary association that are governed by communicative practices. If the telos of politics is power, and its logic the aggregation of interests, the telos of civil society is reaching new understanding through the public use of reason. (2009: 124)

Following Somers (1993), he argues that we should not conflate the *status* of citizenship with the *practice* of citizenship. In post-Apartheid South Africa for example, the new Constitution guarantees citizens an array of rights including freedom of speech and expression, the right to free association and to vote for whom they please, and freedom of the press, amongst others, and the development of the Constitutional Court, and the success of three national elections are evidence of a well-functioning 'consolidated representative democracy' (see Heller 2009: 129). But notwithstanding these factors, Heller believes that civil society in South Africa is "highly constricted, leaving little room for the practice of citizenship" (Heller 2009: 131). But more significantly, he argues that "the more intractable problem has been the vertical dimension of democracy" (Heller 2009:132) — the relationship between civil society and the state – because "political parties not only monopolize the channels of influence but also exert considerable power in setting the agenda…[and] determining which issues, claims and even

identities enter the political domain" (Heller 2009: 132-3). This results he argues, in the public sphere being shaped "largely by forms of influence that flow directly from political or economic power (parties, lobbies and powerful brokers) rather than from the deliberation of reason-bearing citizens" (Heller 2009: 133).

It is arguable that the role of journalism in a democracy is to facilitate the interactions between different civil society groups (what Heller refers to as the horizontal dimension of citizenship), and the between citizens and the state, and in so doing to promote 'the deliberation of reason-bearing citizens'. At a local level, this is what the '*Iindaba Ziyafika'* project for Citizen Journalism is attempting to do with its focus on "the poorer residents of Grahamstown, whose voices and information sources are currently constrained in terms of newspaper and web access" (Berger, 2007: 5). Furthermore, it is these "poorer residents", the majority of whom are from Grahamstown's black townships, who form the backbone of the trainee Citizen Journalists on the project.

Grahamstown is in the Eastern Cape, the province with the highest poverty and unemployment levels in the country, with 65% of Africans qualifying as 'living in poverty' (SAIRR, 2009). In line with this, only 35% of the residents of Grahamstown's black townships receive money from regular employment, while 32% rely on casual jobs (Moller 2007). In 2007, the median household income was R1 100 per month and over half of the surveyed households said they needed twice as much, R2 900 or more, to make ends meet or 'get by' (Moller 2007). Given this, it is not surprising that over half of the 104 applicants for the first two Citizen Journalism training courses were unemployed. Poor education provision for African youth helps perpetuate these social inequalities. In 2007 only 11% of African youth who wrote Grade 12 examinations obtained a pass with endorsement (university entry). The Eastern Cape had the lowest national pass with endorsement at 6,9% (SAIRR, 2009).

(b) Alternative Media

The ideal citizen journalist graduating from the '*Iindaba Ziyafika'* project is, according to both van Noort and Dugmore, an activist, a pro-active agent of change, able not only to highlight problems facing the community, but also to provide solutions (interview Dugmore 2010). In van Noort's words:

> The people I'm trying to equip to become citizen journalists must have an activist approach from a grassroots level, be able to look at a problem, report on it, and at the same time to help the community find a solution… To find out

> where it went wrong, and how it could be done differently the next time. (Interview with van Noort 2010)

This activist vision, perhaps best captured in the long tradition of 'Alternative' media, connects with one strand of citizen journalism which is to develop the 'practice' of citizenship, and to facilitate citizen engagement with the polities that they are part of, thus reinvigorating democratic society (Chipkin 2007). Furthermore, Alternative media are "devoted to providing representations of issues and events which oppose those offered in the mainstream media and to advocating social and political reform" (Haas 2004: 115), functioning as "counter information institutions" and "agents of developmental power" (Downing 2001: 45, qtd. Haas 2004: 115; Atton 2002; Tomaselli and Louw 1990). This view of the Alternative media thus sees journalists playing a key role in what Heller (2009: 126) describes as the 'vertical dimension' of citizenship, facilitating citizens' engagement with the state.

In addition to the above, they also appeal to, and promote, publics marginalised by both mainstream media and mainstream politics, addressing Heller's (2009) call for the development of the horizontal (as opposed to vertical) dimension of citizenship. As Rodriguez writes, "what is most important about [Alternative] media is not what citizens do with them, but how participation in these media experiments affect citizens and their communities" (Rodriguez 2001: 160, qtd. Haas 2004: 116). Or as Haas explains, the importance of the Alternative press is "less in their ability to impact upon governmental institutions and more in their ability to alter individual and group self perception, challenge oppressing social relations, and thereby enhance participants' own access to power" (2004: 116): in short, "their ability to affect the everyday lives of citizens" (Haas 2004: 116). They do this by offering a different news agenda based on "alternative values and frameworks" which "aim[s] to include those often excluded from mainstream coverage by featuring them in news coverage as central actors, or producing content relevant to their everyday lives" (Atton 2002a: 10, 11).

Finally, they often approach their content in *forms* which are different from mainstream approaches. This is another critical way in which they both develop and engage their constituency (Rodriguez 2001: 160). Their approach "depends not on closely argued logic but on their aesthetically conceived and concentrated force" (Downing 2001: 52). In other words they could be said to eschew the Habermasian premises of mainstream media (Haas 2004: 117), and instead adopt approaches that can more easily be conceived within a

Bakhtinian framework, which takes the concerns of culture, language, and the embodied expression of daily life into account (Gardiner 2004). For contrary to Habermas, Bakhtin does not see participation in public discussion as requiring the 'bracketing' of one's social position, and thus the 'anaesthetising' of one's views and language (Gardiner 2004).

(c)Civic/public journalism

The oppositional/activist imperative of the '*Iindaba Ziyafika'* project places it in the Alternative media tradition. But the mainstream journalistic forms the project promotes on its training courses runs, as we will discuss below, counter to the emphasis in this tradition on the different ways that political positioning can be expressed culturally and linguistically. Instead, we would argue, the 'anaesthetising' of language and the repression of political judgements place it within the Civic/Public journalism tradition.

As this movement (developed in the North in the 1990s) is committed to the same ideals of the Alternative media, Atton argues that one could expect them to employ Alternative media practices (2002b: 491). Haas sums up these common ideals as "increasing citizen participation in democratic processes" which are achieved in numerous ways:

> focussing attention on issues of concern to citizens, reporting on those issues from the perspective of citizens rather than politicians, experts and other elite actors, offering citizens opportunities to articulate and debate their opinions on issues, elaborating on what citizens can do to address those issues, organizing sites for citizen deliberation and action such as roundtables, community forums and local civic organisations, and following up on citizen initiatives through ongoing and sustained coverage. (Haas 2004: 118, referring to Charity 1995, Merritt 1998, Rosen 1999)

But there is a key difference between the two approaches. Civic/Public journalism is seen as a reform movement of mainstream media from within, whereas Alternative media are seen as an oppositional media movement (Haas 2004: 118; Schudson 1999: 122). Rosen, for example argues that civic journalism should not promote particular outcomes, but remain 'neutral' (Haas 2004: 118) and draws the distinction between "doing journalism" and "doing politics" (1999: 76). This position roots Civic/Public journalism firmly within the Habermasian ideal that those engaged in public deliberation should bracket their own values in order to facilitate 'rational, critical debate'. But, as we argue below, it is the uneasy straddling of these two approaches that compromises the effectiveness of the *Iindaba Ziafika* Project.

5. Discussion of the Iindaba Ziafika Project

(a) View of citizen journalism and identity of citizen journalist

The course follows what Schaffer (2007: 33) refers to as the "boot camp" model that holds training sessions for potential citizen journalists. Speaking to the content of approach, students are offered New York Times' reporter, Douglas McGill's view that "Citizen Journalism is rooted in the real lives of citizens and serves the interest of citizens" (class 1, power point slide 2). The *form*, however, is seen as little different from mainstream journalism. Central to the course are Galtung and Rouge's news values (class 1, power point slide 13), the 5 W's and an H, and the story forms of mainstream journalistic texts (for example, the inverted pyramid). There is an emphasis on "independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires" [Willis & Bowman 2009] (Class 1, power point slide 1) and trainees are told to "Subordinate your own emotions and beliefs to what you see and hear – record your observations as accurately as you can" (Class 1, power point slide 13), and to separate fact from opinion (class 2, power point slide 1, 5).

However, when discussing media ethics the instructor urges the class "to maintain a high standard of professional behaviour", but notes that "you are a citizen journalist NOT a professional" (class 4, power point slide 5). These unresolved tensions are experienced by the citizen journalism editor, Kwanele Butane:

> My job is to turn them into journalists… I want them to be objective and balance both sides of the story. But you also have to give the citizens an opportunity to package news from their point of view, their perspective. I am contradicting myself but I don't know where to draw the line exactly in terms of Citizen Journalism and professional journalism. Maybe I shouldn't be doing this, but I try to encourage my CJ's to carry out their work in a professional manner. So in that way it means that there is no difference between a Citizen Journalist and an ordinary journalist. (Interview with Kwanele Butane 2010)

So, although the instructor has described the activist citizen journalist as someone who "can give a refreshing perspective on a public problem", who can "give a voice to smaller communities" (class 1, power point slide 4), or, according to Dugmore, "are activists who see journalism as a tool rather than as a form of self-expression", these aspects of citizen journalism are repressed during the "boot camp". Instead one of the "Seven deadly sins" noted is "Bias – taking sides" (class 4, power point 7). It is thus arguable that the form of journalism that Dugmore envisages is a hybrid of 'alternative' and 'civic' journalism. The

activist element is shared with alternative journalism, while its institutional links to a mainstream community newspaper make it more like civic journalism:

> [B]y putting on the mantel of professional journalism, you lose your identity as a community activist, because non-partisanship, objectivity becomes much more important….When you write as a citizen, you can be a little more impassioned. So the standard conventions of professional journalism are still there in the citizen journalism, but it's writing with a cause, and it goes one step further, it tries to resolve the issue. [But] the journalism we want our citizen journalists to do is pro-active, timely or empowering. In contrast to professional journalists, what the citizen journalists are doing is to show that it's no use just raising an issue and leaving it, you have to take it a little bit further. So that's why we don't call them citizen reporters, they are journalists, because that is the finest tradition of civic journalism. (Interview with Dugmore 2010)

Indeed, despite Dugmore's talk of civic journalism, his view of it is certainly at odds with Rosen's position that one should draw a distinction between "doing journalism" and "doing politics" (1999: 76).

(b)What kind of 'news': building the horizontal or vertical aspects of citizenship

The hard news focus and the forms of conventional journalism promoted by the course, and the director's views that the journalism should promote change, suggest that the kind of democratic deepening envisaged by the project is directed towards the vertical aspects of citizenship in which citizens are encouraged to engage with various levels of state power (Heller 2007). For example, in discussing the kind of position that should be taken by the citizen journalists, Dugmore describes a hypothetical scenario:

> Community journalists will say, 'wow, the council wants to spend a million on traffic lights when we don't even have tarred roads in Joza 7. *Maybe I should tell the people at Joza 7 to go to the council meetings* to say don't spend a million rand building traffic lights, that we don't actually need, let's rather tar the roads in Joza 7'. That's what I think a good citizen journalist should do. (Interview with Dugmore 2010)

But as noted above, this form of advocacy journalism is not encouraged by the trainer in the course, where students are exhorted to curb their impulses to express their own views: "You might have a passion for peace, justice and democracy…but you need to remember that it is always your first job to report as opposed to argue or give opinions" (class 1, power point slides 8, 10).

Indeed this training position is exemplified in the actual stories produced by the citizen journalists that mostly used the inverted pyramid form of the conventional 'hard news' story.

i. Ukococa eMakana (Makana clean-up)

These stories give details and pictures of both particular parts of Grahamstown which would not normally be covered in the *Grocotts Mail* (Hoogenoeg, Emaxhekwazini in Joza location, Tantyi location, Phaphamani, Extension 6, Pamlani, KwaThatha), and their residents whose voices would not normally be heard. They follow the form of straight news stories: information is provided and residents express their feelings on the problems being reported on. In line with the Director of the project's discourse about civic (solutions) journalism, some solutions were offered, but these were not framed in the discourse of social 'activism' (although one story did suggest that a residents' meeting be called and that residents and councillors should work together). However, all the stories were one-offs; there were no follow-ups; there were no responses to the stories on the site via ratings or comments.

ii. Makana Employed

Six stories were written between 29 March and 23 April: one listed the 8 local 'emerging contractors' hired by the Municipality to build 218 houses at a cost of about R17m; one reported on a small cherry pepper processing plant that provided 80 permanent and 700 seasonal jobs; another reported on a local NGO that promotes gardening as a means of self-sustainability; another consisted of two-line 'vox pops' with photographs on the high unemployment rate in Makana; another reported on an Employment Equity workshop for Rhodes University staff; and a final one on making a cell phone video on push-starting a car! These stories were mostly single-sourced (the voice of the authorities), adopted the conventional journalistic form, offered limited information, and could hardly be said to add 'the community's voice' on unemployment in Makana—which is one of the most significant contributors to poverty in the area.

iii. World Cup Fever

These stories primarily quote authority figures and cover the following issues: safety in the town and at the Public Viewing Area (PVA) set up for townspeople to watch World Cup soccer matches on a big screen (4); issues related to the PVA, including alcohol control (1), the planned entertainment programme (2); one on Makana's plan for refuse control; another on Makana Municipality's plan for ensuring an adequate water supply for the town; another on hotel bookings; and three which 'probe' whether the World Cup has offered employment benefits to locals. As stories they add nothing to an understanding of the impact of the Soccer

World Cup on Makana residents, but rather give various authorities' perspectives on arrangements that they have made for citizens. There is no evidence of citizen engagement, and it is hard to see how the civic journalism about the issue has contributed to such processes.

iv. MyMakana

On this composite site, we identified the following categories of stories: provincial government, local government, crime, poverty, life-style, local news, advice, and community cultural life. As with the stories on the three other sites, in the main they follow the standard hard news format, but they do interview citizens who are seldom reached by the mainstream media. However, they don't evidence the activist journalism promoted by Dugmore and van Noort which foregrounds the journalist's role as helping the community find solutions to the litany of social problems reported on. It is thus arguable that their value is less in promoting the vertical dimensions of citizenship, than the horizontal aspects—giving ordinary people a sense that their views matter, and are worth sharing with others.

Stories covered included: the lack of relief from the local municipality following tornado damage to homes; the poor quality of pipes bringing water to township homes resulting in their being flooded; unhappiness with the municipal location of outside toilets being placed in front of houses on a main street. In this last story, as in many others, while the issue raised is important, it lacks a sense of indignation, with the final framing being provided by the municipal spokesperson. Life Style stories included an appeal by a local Rhodes student for funds to attend a World Youth Conference in Turkey; a wedding announcement; and profiles of a professional boxer and a Rastafarian leather worker offering free training to locals. 'Social activism' stories included a report on eThembeni squatter camp residents' refusal to vote if promises of brick houses by political leaders were not kept; the opening of a soup kitchen in Fingo Village run by Masincedane Women's; a report on an informal settlement in Fingo Village where citizens continue to live in mud houses built by their grandparents despite the promise of new homes from government; and protests outside the court house at the bail hearing of those arrested for the gang rape of a local school girl. One particularly good story deals with the provision of internet access to a township library. It describes the library's facilities, and how to use them, and includes interviews with a number of people regarding the benefits of internet access including the way it has enabled job seeking, keeping

contact with people outside of Grahamstown, and the its use by scholars for homework purposes.

However, as already noted, these sites obtained fewer hits than any of the other *Grocotts'* sites, and evidence a complete absence of reader rating or comment.

(c) The 'voice' of citizen journalists (language)

Elvira van Noort noted in an interview that the readership of Grocott's is diverse, ranging from professors to those living in poor communities in Grahamstown East. It was this latter voice that was missing from the newspaper. According to van Noort, the project is attempting to give a space to these voices. However, the modality of the 'voice' promoted on the course is rooted in traditional journalese:

> CJs tend to write in essay-style, they use a lot of words to say very simple things, so we spend class time on teaching them journalistic writing and news structures. (Interview with van Noort 2010)

While van Noort notes that the 'natural' voice of the citizen journalist is a positioned one (the alternative journalism impulse), this is not what she wants from her trainees. She wants them to abide by the codes of professional journalism:

> A professional journalist is always trying to be objective, a citizen journalist is not. I tell them, please try and be as objective as possible, be fair in your reporting, get both sides of the story. (Interview with van Noort 2010)

When deciding on the merits of the submitted stories, Michael Salzwedel, *Grocott's Online* editor, also collapses the distinction between citizen and traditional/professional journalism:

> Citizen Journalism stories need to follow the same practices and processes as a conventional journalism story. The journalist needs to try to be as fair and balanced as possible. They mustn't step on anyone's toes too seriously. Any Citizen Journalism story that meets those objectives and has sort of a wide relevance to the community is a good CJ story. (Interview with Salzwedel 2010)

Furthermore, the editing of the submitted pieces by the Citizen Journalist editor helps to remove any vestige of 'voice':

> My job is to turn them into journalists. They don't have the necessary skills so I empower them. In terms of editing their work I use journalistic things like news value…the who and the what…that's important to the reader in terms of each story. As a mentor I have found that it's not easy for them to write

> concisely so I help them with that. I tell them that they need to economical in their use of words, that they need to use as little words as possible but to convey as much meaning as possible. It is sometimes obvious that they are giving their point of view. I advise them that they are not to allow their own opinions to influence the story. I want them to be objective and balance both sides of the story. (Interview with Kwanele Butane 2010)

But as noted above, both Rodriguez (2001: 160) and Downing (2001: 52) see 'voice' as a critical feature differentiating Alternative media from Civic Journalism. Not only do Alternative media workers produce material that is opposed to the status quo in various ways, thereby enlarging the political agenda (Glaser 2006), but they also experiment with form. Because this media is often produced by marginalised groups, their mode of expression is different, and is valorised in the Alternative media, rather than being forced into modes typical of mainstream media which often exemplify the Habermasian ideal of 'rational critical debate'. One aspect of Fraser's critique of Habermas is that this apparently disembodied, naturalised voice is in fact classed, gendered (and one can add 'raced'), as it is based on the modes of speech of (white) middle class, males (Fraser 1990: 59) – expressing their life world. However, if some of the claims of Citizen Journalism are that it is "rooted in the lives of citizens" (Douglas McGill, qtd. Class1, power point slide 2), or that it "can give a voice to smaller communities" (Class1, power point slide 2), then one would expect these claims to be taken into account in the 'training' of citizen journalists – especially when there are huge class and cultural disparities between the trainers and those they are training.

When these issues were discussed with the Director of the project, he conceded that there was a need to select participants who could "bring creativity to their journalism" (Dugmore 2010). But what became apparent from the discussion was that he associated creativity with poetry, rather than a thoughtfulness and ingenuity in the approach to journalism that could bring stories about the everyday to life. If this aspect is not considered creative, then it does not allow the citizen journalists to bring their own forms and mode of expression to bear on the stories they write, which was apparent in the stories described above. Dugmore conceded that this aspect of the Project had not been properly thought through and was "under-theorized" – which is ironic as it is arguable that voice is at the very heart of cultural and political critique. Although he conceded that "it could be a very critical element…to creating a dynamic where we allow people to be selected who bring that creativity to their journalism" (Dugmore

2010), he still seemed to hold onto a view of voice as relating more to the micro aspects of language (lexicon and syntax), rather than discursive expression:

> When it comes to stories that we put on the website, if you want to keep the flavour of the expression, put it in quotes and attribute it to someone. …The citizen journalist can't write 'da council passed da resolution to put da robots up'…I would expect the sub to catch that and fix that even though it might take away the authenticity of the voice…So we want more voices, and we want the community voice, but not necessarily the patois.
>
> I'm not saying it's not an issue that keeps us up at night, as we're not sure what to do with it, especially with the youth. They don't just text in this language, but they often speak to each other in quite a slangy jargonised short-handy way. It's hard to make good journalism flow easily from that, because as much as that's fantastic for those who are 'in', for those who are 'out' it is alienating. (Interview with Dugmore 2010)

Thus, despite Dugmore's sensitivity to the problem, he does not seem to recognise that the middle class voice of mainstream journalism may be as alienating to people whom citizen journalism is supposed be addressing.

A related problem is that most of the citizen journalists are isiXhosa first language speakers, as is the community for whom they are writing. But they have to publish their work on an online English language site which caters for mostly English first language speakers. As Dugmore notes, this begs the question whether "*Grocott's* [should] have isiXhosa pages":

> That's what we haven't grappled with because again then half our audience wouldn't be able to speak Xhosa or be able to read it. But the half that do speak Xhosa and read Xhosa very well, they battle with some of the highfalutin English that we have in our stories – even our news stories, never mind our editorial pages and our letter pages. (Interview with Dugmore 2010)

Dugmore describes the way in which some of the *Iindaba Ziafika* citizen journalists cope with this problem:

> Our own students go out and write the story, do all the interviews in isiXhosa…write their first draft in their own language and then sort of do their own translation because we are just not geared up. (Interview with Dugmore 2010)

Gramsci's view on the importance of language is relevant:

> If it is true that every language contains the elements of a conception of the world and of a culture, it could also be true that from anyone's language one can assess the greater or lesser complexity of his (sic) conception of the world. Someone who only speaks dialect, or understands the standard language incompletely, necessarily has an intuition of the world which is more or less

> limited and provincial, which is fossilised and anachronistic in relation to the major currents of thought which dominate world history. (1971: 325)

Although he is talking about the relationship between dialects and their standard form, it is possible to extend this argument to the kinds of difficulties non-mother tongue speakers must encounter when they have to provide their own translations of complex social issues. Dugmore sees the absence of "people [are] marching on *Grocott's* and saying where are the isiXhosa pages" as a sign of acceptance of the linguistic status quo. However, this simply points to the existing social power relations, and ignores the real impact they may have on the journalism produced by the *Iindaba Ziafika* citizen journalists. In this regard it is not surprising that their stories get the fewest hits of any of the online material (email communication from Salzwedel, 28 May 2010), nor are they commented upon or rated, thus indicating the lack of engagement with their intended readers.

The implications of writing stories in English for a readership whose primary language is isiXhosa, has not, we would argue, been carefully enough considered especially as the citizen journalists are, as van Noort notes, "speaking to their community, to people who are in the same position as they are" (interview with van Noort 2010). In contrast, in accounting for the popularity amongst Bulawayo readers of *uMthunwya*, a Zimbabwean tabloid newspaper, Mabweazara and Strelitz (2009) highlight the importance of it being published in isiNdebele, the primary language of its readership. They quote Kramsch (1998) who argues that for people to identify themselves as members of a community, they have to define themselves jointly as insiders against others whom they define as outsiders. Language – the embodiment of common attitudes, beliefs, and values – plays a critical role in cementing this identity. By their accent, their vocabulary, and their discourse patterns, speakers identify themselves and are identified by others as members of this or that community. From this membership, they draw personal strength and pride, as well as a sense of social importance and historical continuity (Mabweazara and Strelitz 2009). Such considerations, we would argue, should be taken into account in assessing the most appropriate form of language use for the citizen journalism practised under the auspices of the project.

(d) Journalism Education/Training

What informs Rhodes University's Department of Journalism and Media Studies' perspective on journalism education, is its view that formal journalistic skills are not enough, and that as

journalists, students need other disciplinary knowledges and theoretical frameworks to enable them to make sense of the world. This gives students a critical distance that allows them to analyse and locate what they are 'reporting' on. It is for this reason that our vision statement notes that we aim to produce "self-reflexive, critical, graduates and media workers whose practice is probing, imaginative, civic-minded and outspoken". Our view is supported by Adam who argues that,

> The co-ordinates of a good journalism education comprise, like the practice of journalism, a fundamental concern with 'news', and a corresponding concern with the acquisition of complex methods of knowing, representation, and analysis. (Adam 2001: 317)

De Burgh's view is similar. For him, "The objective is to provide opportunities for students to expand their ideas of what journalism is and to reflect upon their own positions, thus extending critical evaluation skills and widening cultural knowledge" (2003: 98). Although both emphasise a good general education which enables social critique and analysis, they also emphasise the importance of language and writing. Adam argues for the centrality of language in such a curriculum as, "Language is the core of our very being, and the inability to speak clearly reflects the inability to think" (2003: 334-335). Quoting Pulitzer, he writes that "To perform adequately, journalists needed to possess rich vocabularies, to be powerfully expressive, and to have a command of the manifold systems of representation and explanation" (Adam 2001: 322). In sum, de Burgh argues that,

> In order to perform their functions, journalists need an education which enables them to put themselves and their society in perspective; find out anything and question everything. Motor skills yes, but also the *intellectual confidence which comes from knowledge.* (2003: 110, our emphasis).

In contrast to this, most of the *Iindaba Ziyafika* citizen journalists have a low-level township education, so they arguably do not have the resources to engage in the kind of critical journalistic activity necessary for the kind of 'activist journalism' ideals espoused by Dugmore and van Noort (2010). As van Noort noted, "the quality of the submitted stories is poor. It's their low education. Some of them don't have matric (grade 12). You really need to pull and push" (interview with van Noort 2010). This educational poverty is also evidenced by the low output of the citizen journalists:

> Our biggest difficulty is getting people over the hump of the first two stories. We have to hold their hands a lot, we have to help them with the fact that they feel very intimidated to interview anyone in power…[To encourage

> production] we've been paying them for their fourth story, but now we're considering paying them for the first story. (Interview with Dugmore 2010)

But what these citizen journalists do have, is their experience of living in the township, under its social and political conditions, and yet as discussed above, it is this perspective and voice that is denied them through the emphasis on mainstream journalism practice offered on the training course.

However, because Dugmore distinguishes between "'accidental journalism', which involves an ordinary person who is in the right place at the right time…recording news on their cell phone or camera" and Citizen Journalism, and because he recognises the potentially low educational level of most of the Grahamstown citizen journalists, he proposes a view of journalism "as an ongoing process, a way of effective civic engagement" that "require[s] training in both civics and journalism" (interview with Dugmore, 2010). Unfortunately, there is no 'training in civics', and the most rudimentary forms of mainstream journalism are taught as a 'universal' model of journalism. Furthermore, the activist approach to journalism rooted in the Alternative Media tradition, combined with the formal requirements of mainstream journalism (neutrality of voice, the need to balance sources, the need for concise writing etc.) requires a high degree of skill and confidence on the part of the practitioner which is, we would argue, beyond the ability of most township trainees (with poor education and writing in English as a second language) that have passed through their course.

Conclusion

(a) Critique of existing programme

As noted in our discussion above, the main difficulties in encouraging Citizen Journalism through the current *Iindaba Ziafika* training project relate to its hybrid conception of Citizen Journalism as encompassing Alternative Media activist approaches with both mainstream and Civic Journalism. The weakness of this hybrid is that it does not focus on the strengths of the potential citizen journalists: their experience of oppression, their mother tongue, and their voice. In addition to this, it does not address their educational poverty. These weaknesses, we would argue, seriously jeopardise the project's aim of using Citizen Journalism as a means of promoting potential public spheres amongst the marginalised citizens of Grahamstown—and indeed, even promoting the practice, as opposed to the status of citizenship.

(b) Suggestions for what's needed

If the project is about activist (citizen) journalism, directed towards strengthening the vertical dimension of citizenship (Heller), that is, civil society engaging with local forms of the state, then we would argue that a number of strategies need to be put in place. Rather than attempting to train 40 potential journalists per course – with the current 50% drop-out – a small cadre of potential citizen journalists should be selected. Based on Heller's distinction between political and civil society, we suggest that these be civil society activists (not citizens who privilege their political affiliation). These might include people engaged in activism around local issues (street committee, unemployed people's movement, hospice, childcare facilities, soup kitchens, HIV/AIDS organisations, sports clubs, etc) – i.e. they already have 'a politics'; a desire to improve the lot of people in their various communities; have a record of involvement; and focused knowledge about their particular sphere of activism (i.e. HIV/AIDS, unemployment, sport etc.)

The Citizen Journalism course should focus on the following:

- 'Journalistic skills': thinking/writing skills: analytical + expressive (Adam, 2001: 334);
- Mother tongue journalism in order to enable the creation of public sphericules, not 'the public sphere' (Gitlin 1998);
- Content specific + civics/civil rights knowledges;
- Broader social and political knowledge to help them locate their own lived experience (i.e. to raise general education levels);
- An intensive writing course;
- Publication, but not limited to the online environment which few have access to, but perhaps as an insert in the print version, *Grocott's Mail*, or indeed any other forms of Alternative media (e.g. wall newspapers, pamphlets etc.).

However, if the project is about citizen journalism more broadly conceived, which is directed towards strengthening the horizontal dimension of citizenship (Heller), that is, civil society engaging with itself to develop local understandings, the practice of citizen deliberation and local participation in debates, then we would adapt the above by making the course open to people who have the desire and ability to develop the social aspects of citizenship through engaging with fellow citizens through writing.

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