

The Journalism Dialogues

Transcript of recording of 6th frayintermedia Mail&Guardian Journalism Dialogue, 22 July 2008, Ikhaya Lodge, Cape Town

South Africa prides itself on its constitutionally-protected freedom of speech - a key right which buttresses the freedom of the press - but the internecine warfare in the ANC over the presidential succession has seen harsh public statements being made by the ANC Youth League's Julius Malema and Cosatu's Zwelinzima Vavi. At the same time, the Sunday Times' David Bullard was fired for a controversial column in which he suggested colonial occupation uplifted black South Africans. At what point does free speech become hate speech, and how can the media guard against being used as a platform for bigotry?



Vanessa Ludwig, Director of the Triangle Project, Brendan Boyle, Business Times Associate Editor, and Dr. Yvette Abrahams, Commissioner with the Commission on Gender Equality

MICHAEL SCHMIDT (Civil Society Manager frayintermedia)

We began the series of Journalism Dialogues at the beginning of the year in partnership with the Mail&Guardian, who helps sponsor our community journalists in attending the events and our advertising.

We felt there was a lack of reflection in the media upon our own craft and this sense of responsibility was strengthened by our conversations with Press Ombudsman Joe Thloloe.

We really felt that we needed to hold a series of debates – put them out there and get journalists talking about their profession and really thinking about what role we play in our democracy. This is our sixth dialogue. So far, we discussed

a wide range of topics. We are heading into election, the political campaigns are going to get hot and probably pretty nasty.

Newsdesks are going to start growing with complaints about all sorts of political slamming matches and other incidents of pretty wild and untamed speech that crosses from time to time over into the territory of hate speech. We've had a lot of debates about the statements made by ANC Youth league President Julius Malema.

We've also seen a lot of news paper space dedicated to debating the fait of John Qwelane and David Bullard because of their opinions expressed in newspapers. This is a free flow discussion and Joe [Thloloe] is here to keep the conversation flowing and make sure that we have an informal debate.

JOE THLOLOE (Press Ombudsman and Journalism Dialogues facilitator)

When frayintermedia asked me to participate in these dialogues, I was a little bit worried because I'm supposed to be neutral. I can't participate in any of these debates but in the end, I said to myself, these dialogues are particularly important, because we bring together people from the media and role players in our society to debate issues in our society. Participating in this gives me some insight into what is happening, both in journalism as well as in society. It is a particular pleasure to be part of these dialogues. The interesting thing about the present subject is that it emanates from events in the media, while in the

past we have debated issues that came from outside and we asked ourselves, what role is the media playing in those debates? This time it's things that are happening inside the media, that John Bullard issue and I'm sure Brendan will make some insight into that too.

JOHN QWELANE:

We had a very interesting three or four weeks talking about my desk being piled with paperwork.

I have received hundreds of complaints from the gay community about John Qwelane, saying he was spewing hate speech. But ultimately, we are trying then to say other media are allowing hate speech into their pages. What do people outside the media see happening here?

We've got a very interesting panel; we've got Yvette who is the Gender Commissioner for the Western Cape. I had a very interesting exchange with her when she wrote a letter to the Sunday Sun and she was referred to as the Gender Commissioner when in fact she had been writing in her personal capacity.

She was right in the thick of that particular debate. Brendan, who is the Associate Editor of Business Times, who would know what they are allowing into their paper and what they are not allowing. He will give us a media perspective of what is happening within our journalism industry and finally, we have Vanessa who is a director of The Triangle Project. First we will get very brief statements from the three, but what we are hoping to have tonight is a very vigorous debate from the floor. But first, lets hear from Yvette.

YVETTE ABRAHAMS (Gender Commissioner)

I'm not going to address the Qwelane issue for the simple reason that a complaint has been laid with the Commission for Equality around that article and so the matter is sub judice. I sent the letter to the newspaper two days before we received the complaint.

Clearly, now that we have the complaint, I have been prevented from expressing opinion either in my personal capacity or as Gender Commissioner for

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Vanessa Ludwig, Brendan Boyle and Dr. Yvette Abrahams

Equality. Instead, I am going to speak on two issues. The first – the freedom of expression and second – the issues around hate speech.

The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) is fully committed to freedom of expression and considers the media in particular as one of an independent media.

A free press is a foundation stone of democracy along with three other foundation stones, so I think that is beyond question. That said, I'm going to draw analogy because I used to be an academic before I was a Commissioner and I can remember in the late 90's, having long debates around academic freedom, which is the second of those corner stones of our democracy.

Finding a very sharp difference between academics coming out of the pre-1994 tradition and my own generation because although my generation were equally passionately committed to the notion of academic freedom and for very good reasons, often in postcolonial Africa we ended up being

one of the few places where freedom of expression manages to survive. But, we also have very strong ideas around socially responsible research and I spent

many years, and some of you know me, in those days I was known as a historian. I spent many years discussing, what does a socially responsible researcher do? Things around, putting back in the community. Things around, when you are getting information from a research subject, making a point of taking that information back to the research subject., and clearly issues, around practicing a form of research, which was neither sexist, racist or xenophobic.

I think there is analogy to be made with freedom of expression in the press because the press has a lot to say about freedom of expression. But surely freedom has to be earned and with every right comes a responsibility. I would prefer the press to regulate itself. But as a Gender Commissioner I would like to see a lot more responsibility coming out of the press.

A lot more conversations around, how are we taking responsibility to earn that right, because from my generation, the 80's generation freedom was something we earned the hard way.

We took nothing for granted. I get very concerned when issues of freedom of expression get discussed in a social vacuum. Moving briskly to the question of hate speech, clearly we live in a post conflict society. It is Women's Month this month, so I want to talk a little bit about this.

We have the highest rate of femine suicide in the world, of the nations who measure, who keep statistics. We have extraordinary high rates of child abuse, of child murders and in both

cases, the Western Cape happens to be the province with the highest rate, this is quite frightening, that we are simply the most violent province in the world when it comes female suicide. We have extraordinary high rates of gender based violence and may I add to this discussion?

Women buy newspapers, they watch television, and yet when you look at the complete disfunction between the reality of being a woman and particularly a black woman and particularly a black woman of bisexual or intersexual nature in South Africa and what gets reported in the press?

Then you need to ask yourself, what is this journalism really about and people should not use freedom of expression as an excuse to re-inscribe norms and I say this frankly.

These are not ideas, these are facts and we have the Triangle Project, which has been monitoring and reporting on violence against lesbian and gay people over the past seven months.

There is no correlation, these people as a market - if you want to say journalism is driven by that notion - and these people as they appear in the media is unacceptable. I think something, woman appear in less than 7% percent of the articles. If that is all that you are going to do with your freedom of expression, then please, move over and let some socially conscious journalists do it.

The last thing - when you look at the state of South African democracy generally, there are, like I said the four cornerstones - freedom of the media, academic freedom, freedom of the judiciary and all those sectors, the status pursued since 1994, a largely non-interfering policy and for very good reasons around the continuation of democracy.

The problem is some of these sectors have remained fundamentally untransformed and clear from reports released by the Employment Equity Commission every year.

If we are going to talk the percentage of woman and particularly black woman in the newsrooms, woman and senior management, woman on the bench and so on and so forth, this is exactly the same at Universities, women who become professors - the figures are frankly embarrassing.

Again when we argue for freedom of expression, it is a democratic right, but I'm getting a bit concerned about the responsibility of transformation, and that is not being taken seriously

THLOLOE

You are raising a number of issues. Let me tell you what the Press Codes says: "The press should avoid discriminatory

"Freedom is a right, it doesn't have to be earned, it has to be protected, but our constitutions, Freedom of expressions says, everyone has the right to freedom of expression"

references to people's race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or preference, physical or mental disability or illness, or age." Brendan, are we in fact socially responsible? Are we untransformed as the media? What is this journalism all about?

BRENDAN BOYLE
(Assistant Editor Business Times)

Two quick no's Joe. We come from a history, if you are my age and Joe's, that was very authoritarian. So the media did work in very tightly constrained spaces. We had 99 laws or 109, I think it was.

The older journalists at least, came from a very constrained base where things like your freedom of expression was quite tightly defined and we had that famous little book, 'The journalists Guide to the Law', where you could look everything up. After 1994, we moved into open space where those definitions have not been laid down yet and hopefully will not be to any great degree. Journalists working today, work in a very open space and on your question, are we transformed and are we using social responsibility well, I'm in that group that is concerned about how well we use that space. Yvette, you said freedom has to be earned and I would

like to differ on that. Freedom is a right, it doesn't have to be earned, it has to be protected, but our Constitution guarantees freedom of expression and says everyone has the right to freedom of expression which includes the media. It is not something you have earned or fight for anymore. That fight was fought for by a lot of brave people and that is why we are where we are today.

To exercise freedom of expression, or therefore freedom of the press, does not necessarily, in my view, have to have a purpose. The freedom exists because it is the freedom you have, just as you have the freedom to walk outside in the sun. You don't have to say, I'm going out there because my Vitamin D levels are low, you can just walk in the sun because you want to walk in the sun. There is of course and the important point Yvette raised, and that for me is the big one of this whole debate is the responsibility that comes with that.

I think in this undefined space that we've been given, post 1994, we are having a lot of fun with the freedom of expression, freedom of the press, but we still have to develop the responsibility side that goes with that freedom. I think it is very important that we as media develop that ourselves. That we internally talk about this and look at what we are doing and work out how to make ourselves responsible custodians of these freedoms that we have, as a right, so that we do not require anybody to go out there and legislate that and

start putting us back into boxes. If we are going to look at the freedom of press, of freedom of the expression, we would use them together unless we necessarily break them apart.

These freedoms exist in a context of course. They consist in a context of the age that we live in, of the time that we are writing in, the political moment, it is just before an election.

These freedoms exist in a community that has certain expectations, so if you live in a very morally conservative or politically



Audience member at the 6th Journalism Dialogues

conservative community, the freedom that you can responsibly exercise may be quite different to the freedom you might have if you live in a very liberal progressive community.

Freedom of expression, whatever you might say, is not absolute. There was a very interesting article published today which picked up on this whole issue with the Broadcasting Complaints Commission about this comedian who I had not heard about before, who apparently used the word "Nigger" very freely in his shows. In the context in which he uses it, it has a context with the audience, a context with the time he is in and according to the article the context actually moves quite fast and that something that is okay today, might not be okay even next year. It underlines for me that even words what we won't use or should not use, are an absolute no and never to be used.

As we look at how we use this, it needs to be done in a context and the context of where you are. If we are ever going to find what is okay and what isn't at a moment in time, if the media is not in touch with this community and of course it should be journalists they who should be out there, they should be very much feeling the pulse of the community they write for and live in.

It is they, or we in a sense, who should be defining what is okay today and that is the definition that you should use responsibly rather than necessarily go for the extreme.

You are not always pushing the envelope. There has to be a reason to push the envelope. At the moment I think we are so experimental with the freedom that we are probably going to have Joe call us to order a few times on the responsibility side that goes with territory.

And I hope that it is left up to Joe and our internal organisations to do that.

The issue of the Bullard column - he wrote his column for years in a specific context, the context of the community that is the Sunday Times audience. In the time that David Bullard wrote that column, and it was a long time, the Sunday Times audience changed fundamentally. That is seen from our subscription base - 64% of our subscribers have what we traditionally

call, township addresses. The readership is about 70% African.

When David Bullard started writing of course, that wasn't the readership and nor were we writing in the age or the time that we are writing now. Personally and certainly not officially at all, he lost touch with the real community that he was writing for and at the time that he was called to halt, he was way out of any bounds.

What he wrote in that column would never have been okay anyway, but I think he confined himself to a community that told him, it was okay to think and write the way he was thinking and the



Vanessa Ludwig

way he was writing. How it happened within the Sunday Times ranks, I think it is now something that can be very freely spoken about. If anybody wants to know more about what exactly happened, I'm very happy to talk about that. Freedom of expression is a right, it is the right that carries the responsibility and I think we got a lot of work to do on how we use that responsibility at this time.

"I think the whole thing around the debate about freedom of expression and freedom of speech needs to be carefully looked at within that context because nothing is historical"

having fun and deteriorating into hate speech?

VANESSA LUDWIG
(Triangle Project)

I also come out of that struggle we used to have. I remember the first

struggle for free newspapers and our young students. We use to ditch them out on what it meant for us because when we spoke about freedom of expression, it was about ensuring that we had the right to speak up against polices and practices. It was certainly not to protect the right of others to generate into dehumanising people as what seems to be happening. I think the whole thing around the debate about freedom of expression and freedom of speech needs to be carefully looked at within that context because nothing is historical.

Second issue - I think is important, the media, like to call themselves a fourth estate. Should they plan that they should be the fourth estate? Should they understand exactly the role they play in shaping peoples attitudes and behaviours? I don't think they are ignorant of it, I think they are very aware of what power they have because they determine what stays in and what stays out. What gets reported, what doesn't get reported within the media. For example, if something great is happening, they say it. It is not going to be sensational enough, it is not going to be news or don't think the market will buy it, they are not going report it.

On what bases do they for example, actually really want to see what people want to read? They also determine what people read, so that is where responsibility comes in. When we are talking of writing for an audience, I always think that the media is there to shift bound. It is to shift people's thinking.

If you going to reinforce peoples prejudices, if you are going to reinforce peoples attitudes and behavior that are in fact negative towards others, then how is that actually shifting our social conscience? And yet I think that is exactly what the media should be doing. We are not there to reinforce peoples prejudices because that is precisely what the apartheid media did. And when people stick outside of that, they were banned, they were closed down and that is why we fought for the right to be able to criticise the way we do. It does not mean the right to criticise and the right to express ourselves in a way we want to because we are writing for a particular audience. That now, it is okay for us to write certain things.

Around the David Bullard issue, yes it was writing for a particular audience, but was it right that even at that time that he was writing for that audience

that he was saying certain things? I haven't been reading David's column for years because we always got the Sunday Times in our home. At the time we had the Sunday Times Extra.

What that said to me, when I was reading those columns, maybe we weren't the majority of the readership at the time but he was still writing with a particular group in mind which will enforce their power and reinforce their sense of Superiority of the other groups. Those are the kinds of things, the privilege and the power that actually gets reinforced through what is printed within the media.

On page three for example, what are you saying out there, what are you reinforcing? You are reinforcing sexism, you reinforcing the gaze onto a woman's body. How responsible is that? How is that actually shifting consciousness and particularly in the light of our transition, we are supposedly shifting our consciousness away from all these things.

We look at the human rights, and we say no discrimination based on all these things, but semi-naked women are depicted there as objects to be observed and looked at on our page three "babe". That is not journalism as far as I'm concerned. That is trash. That is reinforcing sexist stereotypes. Who do we write for? I don't think we just write for an audience if it is about reinforcing prejudice and reinforcing power and privilege of other groups. The other thing that we must understand is the media is not value-free.

There are interests and there are agenda's that are being pushed through the media who owns the newspapers, who owns the TV stations, who advertises. All those things matter when people decided what they going to write and what they are going to publish. It pretends that it is not there, I think.

Sometimes very often it's what shifts the debate away from actually interrogating the media because if we only writing things that are the truth, we don't have a agenda, we don't have an interest group that we are protecting, and this is not the case. And i don't think that there is socially responsible media on the whole. I think that in fact, on the whole, the media is reinforcing sexism, it is reinforcing to a large extent racism, it is reinforcing homophobic or heterosexism.

In some instances, it reinforces the xenophobia attitudes that people have, because of how it depicts people

– whether it is in the news or whether it is in dramas, the sitcoms etc. that we are presented. Because now we make fun of these characters and we try to laugh at it, but it is all stereo typical stuff. It is not a matter of shifting consciousness. I do believe the media has a role to play in shifting consciousness and taking us out of that past. They may discriminate actively against various groups based on the colour of the skin, or historical background, or social origin, whether it is on your sexual orientation or your agenda. We've not done that, I do agree



Brendan Boyle

with you, the media is untransformed and in fact it is in the name of freedom of expression, playing in to the hands of those who seek to retain the privilege and their power.

THLOLOE:

I think the panel has raised very serious issues. Any question and comments from the floor? But in the mean time I would be asking Brendan. We might

“One does not have a right to say whatever polemical extremeness thing, one wants to say in the Sunday Times”

agree that Bullard was catering for a very small audience that then represented the country, but did he have the rights to express that opinion? If we are saying, he shouldn't have said it, are we against his feeling of expression. Or perhaps to Vanessa: If you say the role of the media is to shift peoples thinking, aren't we prescribing to the media.

Aren't we getting to the point where

we are limiting freedom of expression in same way?

Like I say, these are things you are probably want to come back to to.

BOYLE:

You asked a specific question, did Bullard have the right to say what he said? The one thing for me and many of us, was that every so often a child goes missing from the village, eaten up by a hungry lion or crocodile, the family mourn for a week or so, and then they have another child. That is why Bullard lost his job.

Did he had the right to say that? Yes, supposingly he did. He could go out in the square and say that, not been taken to jail. Did he have the right to space in the Sunday Times in the country's most influential newspaper to say that? No, certainly not. Those who sort to defend Bullard said by denying him a platform in the Sunday Times, the newspaper was silencing him, was taking away his freedom of expression, his right to freedom of expression. No, they were not.

One does not have a right to say whatever polemical extremest thing, one wants to say in the Sunday Times. I think that is the part of that debate which is sort of abused by those who seek to defend him. On the earlier thing of how he use to write, he said himself in that apology thing he wrote in Business Day, that he kind-of bought his own PR. He said himself that he lost track and in the beginning, when he came into your family, he was on the edge, and of a lot of people didn't like him. I only read about him when somebody was talking about him because I didn't enjoy reading about him.

But for many years he spoke to people who stirred it up. But he did lose the plot and at that point, lost his space in the Sunday Times. That last stage where he is writing to this tiny little audience of people he drank whiskey with.

**DENNIS CRUYWAGEN
(Managing Director of
District 7 Communications):**

Brendan – on David Bullard, if I can refer to the person who also was dismissed by Rapport also for writing something which offended people – the impression that I got, was that some of these columnists are employed basically to shock and create controversy. Now if that is the reason for employing them, where does social responsibility come

into? And where does freedom of speech come into?

BOYLE:

To employ to shock? No. Employed to stir debate. Yes, of course. All newspapers want to do that. How we assess when we do it, is by letters, sms's, email's and all that sort of thing.

Obviously you couldn't fill a newspaper with politically correct people saying, sort of what we all know in another way. Every newspaper is going to have each version of something like Bullard, where you are pushing boundaries and you are doing it, to get people talking. Obviously what you want is on Monday morning at the coffee machine, is for people to say: "Did you see in the Sunday Times yesterday about etc". And that is our bread and butter. But that doesn't mean to offend, to shock. It often offend somebody because in this room anyway, it's hard to come up with something interesting which is not going to offend somebody, but not employed to be offences, employed to get people talking.

To have people around the coffee machine and saying, what are you thinking of what you've seen, the sport result, the photographs etc. Yes, we certainly do help a paper. You do want the balance of some people do like it and other don't.

LUDWIG:

I want to talk about steady control, I don't think we obviously want bland journalism, but I think there is a difference between steady control and deliberately provoking an outcry from people because you want to see how much reaction you can get. I think the whole thing is that we want a steady debate and contesting ideas.

I think that is the important thing that journalism has to in fact provoke debate within the country and hopefully around the globe. That is what I mean by shifting consciousness. Because when we contests ideas, when we debate with one another, we have to shift ideas. But I'm engaging with something different here. It is how I express myself that matters. If I am going to call someone a "faggot", is that shifting debate? Is that actually creating contestation?

If I'm going to compare a gay man with a goat, is that actually contesting ideas? I'm not talking about if being homosexual is in the light of different ideologist right and can we discuss that. But I'm going out there and I'm deliberately saying



Dr. Yvette Abrahams

that this is actually what I believe and I'm actually going out there to offend, in order to stir controversy. That is not good. That is not engaging me in debating, in order to shift my consciousness. That is what I mean. I don't think it is limiting of freedom of expression, I'm not limiting your ideas or your right to have you ideas or to write to debate those ideas. I'm saying, how you express yourself, the intention behind what you are saying and how you are say it.

SCHMIDT:

There are two assessments here. There is one that relates to the quality of the debate in the first place, in that in a lot of the sort of the statements, we've seen people tripping over their own tongues. I have in fact seen real cruelties, that have not been well argued. Sentiments that have not been well thought out. They have not been engaging with the

“The notion that we can enjoy constitutional rights in some unlimited form of fashion, is a notion that can only belong to you when you are privileged”.

intellect all. On the other hand there's that sliding scale between the person who says something stupid in a bar and somebody who is saying something stupid as a public figure whether as a journalist public figure or whether somebody else in the position of public

trust. Perhaps we can look at those two avenues as well.

ABRAHAMS

For me the bottom line is that constitutional freedoms in 2008 are enjoyed largely by white male, middle class, heterosexuals.

The constitutional right is particularly important and we need to talk about this, because the constitutional right for Irene Grootboom to have a house, was established in the constitutional court and she did not enjoyed that right. In the second clear decision for me, I think the critical post 1994 decision by the constitutional court ruling that yes, the Department of Health has a constitutional obligation to provide health care, but only in relation to the Department of Health's budget. We need to understand it.

The notion that we can enjoy constitutional rights in some unlimited form of fashion, is a notion that can only belong to you when you are privileged. With those woman who lived twenty years in the squatter camp, they know for a fact they do not enjoy their full constitutional rights but their constitutional rights are just as important as the rights of the editor of the Sunday Times.

I get very concerned when we fight for the rights of the one citizen and not the other, and discuss it as if these two rights are not contextual or that they do not exist within the same society because I think we need to see both. I'm gonna give you one example. The Commissioner of Gender Equality together with Triangle (project) and a Collision of Lesbian,

Gay and woman's organisations in the Western Cape, that we are monitoring the Zoliswa Nkonyane trial. It is coming to trial next week, Friday the 22nd of August.

Only one newspaper has been carrying that. Thank you Cape Times. But why is that? Is the life of a black lesbian in Khayelitsha of less value than what David Bullard says or does? It is less important? Is it less news worthy?

Who makes those judgments? Are those judgments being made by the millions of black women, editors who controls what goes into the newspapers? [Laughs] Or are they being made by people who have even the privilege of thinking of constitutional rights as something that they can enjoy? That will be my question to you.

BOYLE:

Our editor is Mondli Makhanya. If you sit in conference where the stories are allocated, the national news editors, Heather Robertson, a black woman, the news editor is Jessica Bezuidenhout, a black woman. Lee-Ann Alfreds who is a black woman. These are people who decide what goes into the paper. Before we run with this notion, there is kind of a perception out there, that the newspapers are filled with white males or even that only males decide what goes in. Of course Mondli has the final word, but conferences is vigorous debate where there are majority of woman at the table.



Brendan Boyle

LUDWIG:

Your middle and junior management, what is your percentage of black women?

BOYLE:

The management is not our concern, we keep management at bay as much as we possible can.

THLOLOE:

There is one thing we shouldn't forget, that the newspapers and television and radio in this country are a reflection of the problems of society as a whole. That we must always keep in mind when we debate these issues.

MARTHA, QUESTION FROM TRIANGLE:

A number of things are being raised by the panel and I'm sitting here and kind of confused as a person who has experience within these newsrooms. The question whether the media is being transformed? I think the media hasn't transformed, and for me the media is going to take a number of years to do that. My friend sent me an email where she raised a question for the reporters about whether there was anything good that came out of apartheid? And you ask a person who was heavily affected by apartheid. Can you begin to ask that kind of question because I don't know if we are undoing the healing we healed, or if we are in the process of healing. But what I'm saying is that, I understand black people I understand that black people are kind of involved in the decision making, but are they influential in terms of changing the media? For me, it's no, because we are talking about ownership. There can be decision making but who owns the media? It is still white. We are talking about the majority, we are not talking about a particular person, who is not going to take us anywhere. We are talking about the whole media here. And the majority ownership is white. It is true what she is saying that the black people, their race and class issues are still visible when you report about a black person. You stereo type those people.

If it's Khayelitsha township, you mention township. Do the media need to do that? The reason why I moved out of the media as a person who was trained those years is I couldn't see myself

“There is a myth out there that journalism standards has collapsed and that the journalist newsrooms don't have skills, that is not nonsense. Journalism standards have not collapsed, they've never been higher.”

fitting in because of the kind of shift now the media being corporate. And it has kind of lost, that kind of responsibility. You're in an age of change and when you go into the newsroom you don't have that and you don't feel that. You are told what

to do, there is no space to discuss and you feel very disempowered, especially as a black woman, a black person.

I think Joe, we still have a long way to go. We are not even near there. There are so many things that we need to tackle. The freedom of speech here, every one here can say whatever, but I think there should be limits around the freedom speech.

You can not say whatever you want, I mean Bullard got questioned. Why did Europeans bring civilianisation to this country? I know people have been saying we have the freedom to write about whatever, but there should be limits and it is a responsibility as the media as well to kind of see what is good for the community, because we cannot, at this stage, reinforce the stereo-type and those negative things about our own people. What role does the media need to play? I think the media is not doing that at all.

VANESSA:

It is not just about which people own the media or not. I think it is also about the culture that is within journalism and I think that is what we tend to forget. The structure in the systems are still there and the values to a large extent might be changing over time but they are still there.

It's about pushing the boundaries. We must stop being historical about these things and pretend that post 1994, all of a sudden we wake up in this magical new South Africa, where everything will set right and we all are equal now. Because then we wouldn't have issues around service delivery, we wouldn't have issues around racist attacks. People being fed to lions, if things just suddenly change in 1994, and the media is no exception. It is another structure, another institution within society, it is also within a particular culture with particular values, a particular system and that is what we must understand.

It doesn't matter in this time, who is ahead of that. If I go into organisations and education institutions for example, and post 1994, academic freedom, we want all these new things, we want to write our real history etc, etc, etc, there are still rules and regulations that are coming out of the system, who was essentially setup in Europe for Europeans.

The same thing with our law, Roman Dutch Law. It is heterosexist, it's racist, but it is the system and we are slowly transforming those things. We are not here to transform and the thing is we don't interrogate enough. It's the culture that drives journalism. When we go to journalism school we do ethics, but what is this ethics all about? What are we really learning? Just around the rights of people, one right is not less than another right.

I mean if you believe in human rights, they are invisible and they are all equal. I think rights have limitations at the point where they impact on another's rights or another's human dignity. That is the limitation of one's rights and that is when we talk about responsible journalism. When do I do what I'm doing and saying it's on another person's right or another person's dignity.

THOLOLOE:

Let me try and pick up on a couple of things in the press code.

First we have the press council that says that one of its aims and objectives is to promote and to develop excellence in journalistic practice and ethics. That is what more than 600 publications have committed themselves to do. It is all in here in black and white.

The preamble to the code says the primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion, "is to serve society by informing citizens and enabling them to make informed judgments on the issues of the time." And of course it continues to say "the freedom of the press allows foreign independents to bare on the forces that shape society". As I said at least, it is much more than just 640, who have committed themselves to this basic thing. I think there is a humanity about that. Now why is it that the media are not getting it right? Brendan.

BOYLE:

Who says we are not getting it right? Let's us not just assume.

There is a myth out there that journalism standards have collapsed and

that the journalist newsrooms don't have skills, that is all nonsense. Journalism standards have not collapsed, they've never been higher. I worked pre 94 and I



Dr. Yvette Abrahams,

worked in the 70s.

Journalism standards weren't great then. I don't go along and say we are not getting it right. You raised a host of issues which each one of which could be a topic for a long debate. You said 640-odd newspapers actually signed up, but we've have 5000 publications or something like that, with all the magazines and people buy a particular one.

They have a favorite thing and many of the people who get involved with these debates would say, my favourite publication is this one and the circulation is twelve hundred and twenty a month.

"The journalism industry is not a babysitting industry and I really think that we need to have a thicker skin as members of the public in what's been written"

The Sunday Times is read by three and half million people every Sunday.

We can't make nor should we be expected to make the Sunday Times. The preferred paper of somebody who's preferred paper is one of five thousand that gets sold once a month or something like that. We can't make it fit everybody's particular personal preferences.

This issue of media not being transformed; obviously the media is not transformed it is probably never going to be transformed. Being transformed doesn't end state, we never going to get there. To say the media is not

transforming is fundamentally not true. You just have to look at the newspapers you buy now versa the newspapers you bought in 1994, you can't tell me they are the same newspapers. They are not close to the same newspapers. They are massively different and much improved.

It is a process, this process is going to take a long time and they are all social instruments and structures that evolve over time.

And we continue to enslave. There won't be an end state where we can say the media is now transformed and if we were going to say that, whose decision will it be. Who would be the one to decide whether the media is transformed? We need to look at it as the media is several thousand publications, 600 odd serious ones, lets look at all of them and see how they are changing. Who decides what goes into newspapers?

Yes, of course there are a European constructs. We inherited or imported, or whatever, our newspapers from foreign society but are they really that different to the sort of story telling that might have been a more ingenious way of passing news?

Given that we now have so much bigger stories. I mean it isn't just a version of the person who moved from place to place telling the same stories. And what we do is tell the stories about our society. We don't get to tell all the stories and of course we don't tell all the stories that we would like to tell, but in terms of who sets that agenda. It is a frustrating concept that this is dictated to us from outside. You've asked, where are the women? I really think that the women in the Sunday Times newsroom would tell you that they feel pretty powerful. The debate is vigorous, it is loud. People are shouting at each other all the time and out of these, come decisions. It is not that somebody walked in and says "it will be thus." Somebody gets assigned to get a story, they come back, there's a discussion, they go back, get something else. A sub editor says that he didn't like what you did, back it goes. It is a process there's no kind of structure up there that is keeping it. It is something that lives in a society. The people that write for it, all go home to their communities and come to work with the ideas of the community last night, this morning, on the bus and on the train or taxi. It is process.

BENITA ENOCH (From frayintermedia):

With all due respect, the journalism industry is not a baby sitting industry

and I really think that we need to have a thicker skin as members of the public in what's been written. I really think that the societal defects have been outsourced to the media, onto the media's shoulders. We also just report on the fact of the matter. Should the media be blamed for our country's homophobic attitudes and if that is the case, then we can go into every single industry and we can say, at FNB you make us wear high heels, we can go on and on about it. We really need to just stop being so sensitive.

We need to bear in mind and report responsibly, but we need to stop being so fragile about things. John Qwelane's editor said in his defense that he now knows how John feels. He now knows how the public feels, lets talk about it. Is that not what we are trying to facilitate and have we not been partially successful in doing it?

ABRAHAMS:

How many people in this room have read the two Genderlinks reports. You may google it. I think the one is December 2005 and the second is December 2006.

During that year of survey, 7% of sources quoted in their newspapers were women. 64% were men and the rest are identified. Now, the commission will stand up for your constitutional freedom of expression, but gosh I wish you were a little bit easier to defend. Because in your choice of sources you are clearly violating the constitutional provisions for gender equality. Now how can I stand up for your right, when you are not standing up for women's rights? Now what are you going to say?

64% that are men, simply have more important opinions, they more quote worthy? You are giving a number of messages around gender discrimination that are just not constitutional. The South African Media and Gender Institute, is right here in Cape Town. I am really disturbed that nobody has read these reports. It has been out since January 2007.

THLOLOE:

Let try and detangle some of the issues. All I'm saying is that the media is a reflection of the ills of society. If more men than women, it is because our society is structured in that way, not because the media themselves are deliberately prejudiced. If you look at the staff situation inside the newsrooms, they reflect the problems that are in society generally. The skills, all the other problems that are in society are reflected

in the newsrooms. That's the argument I tried to raise earlier which you are not responding to it at this point.

ABRAHAMS:

What I'm trying to say is, in as much as we have a duty to uphold the constitution, and that includes your freedom of expression, so do you. And in as much you are falling short of fulfilling that, then do we not also have an excuse to fall short?

And this worries me. I mean nearly say the word, "Zimbabwe" for you to think off how worrying it is when things like freedom of the media becomes limited. If you are calling for excellence, I cannot say I have not read a research report on poverty because that is my field. You are quite happy to sit in this room and we are not even aware that this research is going on.

Do you have the right to merely reflect this society that you are in? What is your duty as citizens to move the society forward? It is not good enough to say, we just like everybody else, everybody else has to move on, it's a new millennium.

LUDWIG:

Story-telling is my passion but unfortunately story telling in an African tradition normally has a moral at the end of the day that needs to be thought about and discussed and debated by those who is listening to it.

And if you look at the rock art and if you listen to the other traditions as well, there is always a model to it. And there is always a weighing up of the principles and the values of our society. Sometimes the media does not pose that question at the end of the article.

Around the issue of sensitivity - I don't think that is necessarily it. A lot of times when one laughs at these things, you just think, I want to scream. But I think it is not about that I am at a particular level where I can say that we have consciousness, we have time to deconstruct the way society behaves. I looked at John Qwelane's article and the first time I read it, I actually laughed, I thought this guy can't be serious, it

must be one of those hysterical pieces and then a re-read it and I thought he is actually really serious. I also remembered that he wrote for the Soweton.

It is not about sensitivity, I think for me coming from the history that we do of 400 years of colonialism, almost 15 years of apartheid, and systemic structural institutional discrimination. And we are trying desperately, as a society, to move away from that. We do have responsibilities: It is not about sensibility because we do have sensitivity, humor.

Around this "Nigger" thing - the whole debate is about if we say it's okay. It happens in all communities, if we say its okay, if I say "bushy" and you say, "I'll kill you." that is the attitude with a lot of people. It is not just about that, it's about upholding human dignity and within a particular context that is just not upholding human dignity. We fought very hard in this country to uphold human dignity.

For me the issue of journalism or the media as an institution of society, like any other institution in society, with the state, whether there are religious institutions, whether they are the family, on which is the corner-stone of most of our institutions. They a institutional society that also needs to transform, that needs to be aware of what we are doing.

It says in the Bill of Rights and states that these rights must be upheld by the state. And it also says that, for every institutional state, for every individual. Our constitution is unique and it does not only bind the state to uphold our

"I'm talking about, every institution and every citizen. It is not about sensitivity, I don't think people lack a sense of humor about it, what are we teaching? What is the message we are getting out there? We all have our issues, we all have things we have to move on about and change"

human rights and our human dignity, which is another nice thing about our constitution. It also binds every citizen to uphold that. I think that is what I'm talking about, every institution and every citizen. It is not about sensitivity, I don't think people lack a sense of humor.

What are we teaching? What is the message we are getting out there?

We all have our issues, we all have things we have to move on about and change. We talk about internalising very often, but how often have we thought what it has really done to all of us and

that we also need to transform our own consciousness and that I think is what the debating is. Because we are debating the media as an institution and not the church as an institution. What we are talking about is that the media needs to transform.

SCHMIDT:

I think that is absolutely right, it is entirely insufficient for the media to merely reflect society. Yes we are a mirror to society and yes as Brendan said, we live within those communities and we go home and we ride to work taxis' etc, or however we get to work and we arrive there in the morning with the attitudes with our communities, and yet at the same time we are not merely a mirror.

When we say the media is meant to be reflective, we mean reflective in the analytical sense. We have not only this special privileges of being able to address large group of people and to have great access to interesting people and to go to wonderful places, but we have huge responsibilities lying on our shoulders that ordinary citizens actually don't have and we do need to go further.

If that is telling us is correct, and I'm sure it is accordingly to the journaling for search in that is really worrying in the light of the fact that most of our newsrooms actually dominated by woman. What it requires obviously is a change of mindset at a editorial decision making level.

We've at least seen this in The Star newspaper in Johannesburg, which has taken a deliberate policy decision to seek out women's voices. A part of that is in fact driven entirely by a market sensibility, realising that this is the growth root for the newspaper but it is also driven by a sensibility that recognises that there is a constitutional obligation and that there are a lot of great stories out there resting within the minds of women. I don't think that newspapers are microcosms of our society, certainly newsrooms have shifted dramatically.

They are completely differently complexed to the way they were a few years ago. I'm thinking back about five years ago about a very interesting research done by a couple of Rhodes University journalism students, into homophobia and mis representation of homosexuals and homosexual relationships in the Sunday Times.

Interestingly, they sort of scanned through many years of copies and selected, what they said was this trend that indicated that The Times had



Brendan Boyle, Business Times Associate Editor,

quite a distinct homophobia strain to it. Of what was interesting about that is that researcher unfortunately did not interview the deputy editor of the Sunday Times who was a gay man, or the national news editor of the Sunday Times, who is a gay woman.

But that in itself means, what was their influence? If there was this homophobic strain within the Sunday Times institutionally, why was it that the very high place of powerful decision makers, who were homosexual or lesbian within the Sunday Times.

Why wasn't it reflected in copy? On the one hand we are not entirely reflective of our society and I don't think we're exact microcosm of our society.

“We are talking about lives of the people. I don't see where the sensitivity comes in when the question is really about degrading us ourselves”

But on the other hand we've got special responsibilities and yet again I don't think that even having transformation to agree within our newsroom and I agree with Vanessa that the media necessary reflects what actually appears in the paper or on the air waves because we are talking about certain power structures.

THLOLOE:

I'm worried that we have not sufficient input from the floor.

FROM THE AUDIENCE:

Brendan, yes the newspaper are not what they use to be but we must be careful, transformation shouldn't benefit a few people.

I think that most people must benefit from that transformation. If we are transforming our transforming must be getting better always. We must be very careful in which direction stories are taken, is taken because now for me it is not doing anything better. It's transformation but to a better position or into a worse position, that is the question we must ask ourselves. The question of sensitivity – it reminds me of when Steve Biko was gathering black students and one student did about militarism. You remind me when people kind of object to that kind of thing, we kind of give the names about sensitivity and stuff.

What do you say when Zoliswa, a 19 year old was brutally murdered? And here the media says, “a township lesbian was brutally murdered.” Is that been sensitive or is it about degrading? I think we must be very careful, because we talk about degrading people here. We are talking about lives of the people. I don't see where the sensitivity comes in when the question is really about degrading us, ourselves.

IAUMBA FROM UCT RADIO:

The thing that worries me is the fact that we are heading towards elections, yet I don't think the media is doing enough to inform and also to inform and empower the community in getting

involved within the election process and making their vote or whatever is needed. We don't pay enough attention to tabloids such as The Daily Voice with 230 000 readers a day and what is being said to them. How is their consciousness being shifted then with what they are exposed to and the stories that are told? Also they sort of ignore the politics of our society. Not much is being said about what is happening with Zuma or this and that within parliament.

So when elections are coming up, is the coloured community then empowered to make their stand and go and vote or being informed of what is happening exactly? We are always talking about The Sunday Times, Cape Times and the Cape August but The Daily Voice has a massive readership. Also they have influence and even if its in relation to one particular community, that still matters because I mean it is 230 000 people and surely that has some effect.

ABRAHAMS:

In all fairness at the launch of the In-depth Campaign in February the only newspaper that attended and reported was actually The Daily Voice, so yes we can say a lot about The Daily Voice, but occasionally they show a flash of redeeming themselves.

BOYLE:

I wish we could have raised that earlier because something that I wanted to look at is the role of the tabloids. Because that is a completely different world and it scares the living daylights out of me and all these things of what messages we are sending. I mean those posters they put up are just dreadful. That is a different kind of issue. Michael - you cited The Star. That of course is the newspaper which is owned by an elderly white foreign man 100 percent. A comment - right at the beginning I said that I'm one of those journalist's who is concerned we are not using our responsibility well, but I ended up back to the corner of defending the media, which I'm happening to do because I broadly believe in what we do. But the issue of our role is to facilitate change. It does worry me.

Who gives us the mandate? Who says where we the media would take society? It is a group in this room, is it a group at rugby on Saturday afternoon at Ellispark, or the group at rugby in Pretoria, or is the sailors at Royal Cape Yacht Club, or is it in the shebeen?

So we've got to be careful about just saying we.

"Whatever group is having the conversation,

I think the media should take society where we want to be. If you look at the Herald in Zimbabwe, they have decided that their job is to take the nation there and we really don't want something like that. It is just an area that worries me in all ways in these conversations. Should take the country somewhere.

When I became a journalist, it was an easier time because you knew what was good or bad broadly. But no it's not like that today. I don't think the media has any mandate or any right to pick society up and carry it anywhere other than what's described in this Constitution and, that, we are not doing adequately but broadly and in a way that defines what most of the series of media are trying to honour.

LUDWIG:

But what is interesting about the Herald, is they had these posters and they became like The Daily Voice and I wonder how insensitive that was to the family that was washed away? So maybe this is the beginning to pick from the tabloids and in competition of the tabloids because The Leadership is falling because the tabloids actually costless. I think it is really important that we talk about tabloid media to the reflect on what is happening to society, but it is also to question of what is happening in society. I think if we don't discuss the whole point around, I like the story-telling issue, but at the end of that story there is a question posed, make a choice, what do you think is right? I don't think we do this in the media, we say it as a story. When you say this is nice, they report on the hate crime killings, but if they say "Moffie killed".

Now what are you doing there? You are reinforcing the degrading of a person. So, yes, you are reporting on the hate

crime, but you are also pushing people by continuing using the stereotype. It is this kind of balance that I think is not been struck by the media.

Yes, we've have taken on The Daily Voice, who tells us to go and leave a complaint and the Ombudsman. Then there is this thing of "freedom of speech" and we have a right to print what we like and it's also the whole thing, About reflecting what society says.

I think at some point, going back again to the 70s and 80s, when we actually criticise the media that was reflecting what society says. Just because someone said that black people are not human enough and therefore it is okay to kill them, was justification to shoot down kids because in fact they were throwing stones.

A lot of people in media said, they were just not going to reflect that. "We are going to question that." It meets about the values and the principles that you uphold and that is not that easy anymore. I think we all understand that there are certain values and principle that uphold human dignity and those are ones we must stick by.

THLOLOE:

I've got a Canadian friend who teaches journalism and his theory is that journalists are tellers of "morality tales." And I always find this a wonderful way of describing our craft and I think it reflects what was been said here today.

SCHMIDT:

We've definitely cleared it out that it is not a simple equation: What is perhaps thought up in the heads of the journalists and what appears in the newspaper and what in fact happens on our streets, may not be that clear. We are doing this is to promote quality journalism through an understanding of our press and broadcasting codes. you've got them, please read them and get acquainted with them.

These are codes that are a substantial portion of the serious media. We also are promoting a new structure, the foundation of a new Professional Journalism Association in South Africa. We been putting it out for the first six months of this year. It has the endorsement of the South African National Editors Forum, it also has the endorsement of the South African Journalism Association.

Sadly enough we are the only country who doesn't have a functional national journalism association in the country.