

Contextualising journalism education and training in Southern Africa

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Abstract

In this article it is argued that journalism education in Southern Africa must contend with defining a new academic identity for itself, extricating itself from dependency on Western oriented models of journalism education and training, as this has been a perennial challenge in most of Africa.

Keywords

Botswana, colonialism, identity, journalism education, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, World Journalism Education Conference, Zambia, Zimbabwe

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The context of journalism education in Southern Africa

In order to understand journalism education in Southern Africa, as elsewhere in Africa, one has to recognize that it is a product of larger social and political conditions. The challenge for the future is to integrate these contextual conditions more and more into the very epistemological assumptions upon which theories of journalism and curricula for journalism education are based.

The challenge to develop curricula and do research based on the realities of African journalism and steeped in contextualised theory is one that is acknowledged by several Southern African journalism educators. In the Zimbabwean context, for example, Stanford Matenda (cited in Mukundu, 2007), Chairman of Department of Journalism, Academic: National University of Science and Technology (NUST), laments the dearth of African intellectual material that can be used in media studies:

I would say that, right now, curriculum development in itself is a key component of our business. While the current training curriculum has weaknesses (which we are trying to close), by and large I think we are satisfied with it, as are our students. However, there is a challenge in building African textbooks and resources into the curriculum, so that when we train we are not just using materials informed by Western experience. The lecturers themselves also need to be aware of the African perspective.

Journalism education in Southern Africa must contend with defining a new academic identity for itself, extricating itself from dependency on Western oriented models of journalism education and training. This has been a perennial challenge in most of Africa (cf. Murphy & Scotton, 1987). A less instrumentalist approach and a more critical-paradigmatic approach towards journalism education (Hochheimer, 2001) is needed. Writing in the South African context, Megwa (2001, p. 284) reinforces this point by urging journalism educators and practitioners to use their “hands” and “minds”. In the Zambian context, Hochheimer (2001, p. 109) asks: Can such “alternative media” be imagined in a country like Zambia, where “the lack of pluralism and concentration of power in the hands of the state and vested interests leads to undemocratic practices in Zambian broadcasting”?

This leads to yet another challenge: the introduction of curricula that focus on providing critical community-media literacy at universities and colleges. Some African countries witnessed an increase in the number of community radio stations, posing a challenge for media educators to appropriate within their curricula this evolution of a communitarian model of broadcasting from a critical, development-communicational perspective (Banda, 2003).

Hochheimer (2001, pp. 110-111) poses further challenges for his “journalism of meaning” approach, such as:

- Implementing gender courses in university journalism curricula, along with training for women in media management; and
- Embedding journalism curricula within the students’ own historical, cultural and social experiences.

The latter point would agree with Ali Mazrui’s concern that Western-based curricula, based on rationalist-scientific detachment, tend to uproot African students from their history and culture, making it difficult for them to engage in reflexivity and critique their own governments from the vantage point of engaged and constructive citizenry (in Murphy & Scotton, 1987, pp. 18-20).

In Zimbabwe for instance, the challenges for the future of journalism and journalism education seem to be primarily about finding ways to deal with the repressive legal environment. In the period 2000-2005, several legal measures were introduced in Zimbabwe which had the effect of limiting media freedom and freedom of expression. These are summarised by Mukundu (2007) when he points out that several print outlets have closed down since 2000 because of state action taken in terms of the new repressive legal instruments and the insult laws that still exist in statutes, which have been used to arrest journalists and ordinary members of society for allegedly insulting the head of state or other government representatives. Other crucial points include the lack of provisions for the media regulatory bodies to operate independently from the state; they both fall directly under the control of the Ministry of Information and Publicity. Lastly, there is need for the ZBH, the state broadcaster, to follow a public-service remit so that its radio and TV services serve all Zimbabweans.

The future challenges for Botswana’s journalism and education also relate to its relationship with government. It is threatened by the possibility of its government adopting the Mass Media Communication Bill (1997) in its original form, which, it is feared, will deprive journalists of even the limited rights they currently have, especially by giving the government the power to register or deregister all newspapers, search media premises if and when the Minister deems it necessary, and appoint a chairperson for a press council that would draw up a code of ethics and be responsible for ensuring compliance with it. In addition, members of the press council would preside over any disciplinary measures against the media and their personnel, and proceedings would be filmed (Sechele, 2007).

However, journalists in Botswana vigorously opposed the 1997 draft and, in 2004, established their own voluntary press council (the Press Council of Botswana). More attempts have been made to engage the government on this new legislation, which might be the route to take in future as well. In Botswana, the “biggest priority” is audience research and media monitoring (Sechele,

2007, p. 69). Other key issues include raising training and professional standards: it was felt that if standards remain low, government and other interests might want to intervene with various forms of legislation and regulations. The development of self-regulatory mechanisms for the local media and the need for community-based broadcasting and print media were listed among challenges that could affect the future of the media in Botswana.

Problems with journalism training in Lesotho and Swaziland (and often in the rest of the region) occur with regard to the trainees, the trainers and the training content. While there is no shortage of potential journalism students, finding trainers with academic and practical expertise have been difficult and train-the-trainer courses are needed (Gerdes, 1983).

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Information and communication technologies

Although access to new technologies is limited as a result of poor communication network infrastructure, the diffusion of ICTs in Lesotho newsrooms is growing (Berger, 2005). While the use of internet and email was rarely used for work purposes, and most journalists were not aware of online journalism networks, Basotho journalists were confident that ICTs would improve the quality of the journalism profession in Africa. While the internet is used by only 1% of the population in Lesotho (Afro barometer), this includes students, media practitioners and consultants.

In Swaziland, most journalists first come into contact with ICTs on the job; the internet and email are widely used by journalists for research, side by side with more traditional technologies such as landline telephones and fax machines. Journalists were also found to use electronic networks and mailings from training organisations such as the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ), Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa), et cetera (Berger, 2005).

As more people turn to the internet for news and information, the importance of training media practitioners in online journalism is increasingly important (Berger, 2005). Online journalism is defined as that produced exclusively for the World Wide Web. With relatively lower running costs than traditional media, coupled with a gradual improvement in communication networks, journalism education in Lesotho and Swaziland must take the growing field of online journalism into account.

Gender

A study conducted by the Media Institute of Southern Africa, Swaziland, found that only 15% of journalists in the Swazi print media are women, and that women constituted less than 10% of the news sources in economics and sports and only 9% of the sources accessed in political stories (Lindiwe, 2004). A journalism graduate student is cited as saying, “journalism is not really considered a profession in Swaziland, so the working conditions are not conducive. I believe that if you have acquired tertiary education you deserve to be accorded your status, but if that does not happen, you lose interest. In the case of women the situation is even worse” (Lindiwe, 2004).

Today there are women working in the media in Lesotho and Swaziland, but few have reached decision-making levels. A *Misa Media Monitoring Project Report*, “What makes the news and is the news professionally reported?”, found that news stories in Swaziland poorly reflected gender diversity, coverage was limited to the capital and even political stories centred on gossip about local personalities. Fifty-one per cent of stories had only one source, and many were deemed to be “unfit reporting” (IRIN, 2006). Similarly, *Misa-Lesotho (2007)* reports that media still have not grasped the most basic principles of gender equality, with their blatant reinforcement of gender stereotypes and gender roles.

In Namibia, journalism education continues to operate on two levels: (1) single skills building workshops (e.g., HIV/AIDS reporting) and (2) through one of two tertiary educational institutions in the country that offer a Bachelor’s degree and a three-year national diploma in media studies/journalism. It is clear that supply can easily outstrip demand even within a growing media environment in the country. The question remains whether the institutions are preparing students for careers in journalism, which only a few will attain, or whether to be media savvy in an increasingly global media environment. It is probably the latter where the greatest contribution lies, as the new generation of leaders becomes more aware of the public’s right to be informed, to access information and thus to be more active when press freedom is threatened.

Namibian journalism still carries the baggage of being a profession that is learned on the job with the workshop model supplementing formal training. In ten years, the two institutions (UNAM in 1997 and the Polytechnic of Namibia in 2002) of higher learning in Namibia have taken on the responsibility to provide formal education for the training of journalists and other media professionals. This is not an easy task, as the departments have to gain the confidence and respect of the journalists and editors currently in power. The Polytechnic of Namibia (PoN) seems to be much more aggressive in outreach to the profession through workshops, applied research endeavours and tackling critical news subjects (e.g., violence in the media, HIV/AIDS).

Another challenge for journalism is the tension between the two institutions that form the foundation of journalism education in Namibia. First, there is competition for students in a small market where over-supply of graduates is becoming the norm. While the PoN fares better in faculty to student ratio, the journalism faculty to student ratio at UNAM is abysmal. The accrediting body, the Higher Education Qualifications Council, will undoubtedly have to resolve some of these issues.

In the next section the emphasis falls on specific countries in the Southern African region.

Botswana

Issues of quality also mark journalism education and training in Botswana, where the “low standard of journalistic practice is compounded by the limited number of training institutions” (Sechele, 2007, p. 25). The only school of journalism, at the University of Botswana, was established four years ago (2003) and its first crop of undergraduates will have qualified in May 2006 (Sechele, 2007, p. 25). As is the case in Malawi and Zambia mentioned above, the issue of theory imported from other contexts and imposed on the local one has also been a factor in Botswana. Prior to the establishment of this department, most journalists in Botswana were trained abroad, mainly in Australia, the UK, Canada, the US, South Africa and various other African countries. South Africa’s proximity to Botswana makes it easy for Botswana students to study at South Africa’s long-established journalism schools.

The reliance on academic material derived from elsewhere is acknowledged as a challenge. The country’s media educators advocate the development of homebred professional media standards and increased attention to the local context in journalism training. The establishment of the Department of Media Studies at the University of Botswana is seen by its lecturers as very significant for the training of journalists.

Lesotho

Vocational training in Lesotho is done by means of short courses organised by groups such as the Media Institute of Lesotho, whereas formal journalism education is offered at tertiary level. The National University of Lesotho offers a Diploma in Mass Communication. This two-year diploma programme was launched on October 11, 1996, at which point the Minister of Information and Broadcasting pledged full government support (Free Press).

The Southern African Media Training Trust (NSJ) presents courses on range of topics, from business reporting to reporting HIV/AIDS, for which SADC journalists are eligible. Training courses are also offered by Misa, the

Transformation Resource Centre, the Nordic-SADC Journalism Training Centre and the Ministry of Communications.

Malawi

Journalism education and training programmes are relatively young in Malawi. The mushrooming of a great deal of non-tertiary media training institutions is attributable to the policies of political, economic and educational liberalisation, particularly evident from the 1990s onwards.

In Malawi, there are two recognised media education/training institutions – the University of Malawi’s Polytechnic’s Department of Journalism and Media Studies and the Malawi Institute of Journalism (MIJ). As the names suggest, the Polytechnic and MIJ seem to privilege vocation over theory, similar to what increasingly seems to be the case in South Africa. Both institutions are situated in Blantyre, the business capital of Malawi, demonstrating the ‘business’ approach most such institutions assume towards media training. The Polytechnic offers a four-year BA degree in journalism and a three-year diploma, each of which has an annual average intake of 25 to 30 students (Chitsulo, Chimwaga & Kaombe, 2006, p. 43). It also conducts evening classes to accommodate as many Malawians as possible.

Namibia

Tertiary journalism education in Namibia became increasingly important as the new government attempted to create an educational infrastructure where none had existed before. In 1992, an Act of Parliament established the University of Namibia (UNAM). Five years later, the Department of Information and Communication was created. Similarly, a 1994 Act of Parliament called for the establishment of the Polytechnic of Namibia following the gradual phasing out of vocational training courses inherited from a merger with the College for Out-of-School Training. In 1996, the PoN became an independent, autonomous, degree granting institution. Four years later, in 2000, the PoN began to offer a three-year national diploma in Journalism and Communication Technology through the School of Communication, Legal and Secretarial Studies – Department of Media Technology Studies.

Although these two institutions, located just a few kilometres from each other, developed a journalism programme along separate pathways and without consultation with each other, both institutions, surprisingly, looked toward US faculty or US-trained faculty for their initial direction. The media studies programme at UNAM first received assistance from a US journalism professor, followed by a Fulbright scholar in 1999 and 2000. The journalism diploma programme at the PoN was initiated through a joint project with a faculty

member at the Department of Communication at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania in 2000 and subsequently through a consultancy with a US-trained faculty member at a sister Polytechnic in South Africa and a number of partnering and training efforts with US colleges (Utah Valley State College) and schools in Finland, The Netherlands and South Africa (E. Brown, personal communication, April 24, 2007).

The curriculum profile for both the UNAM and the PoN includes courses on theory, communication law and ethics, media writing and reporting, public relations, advertising, desktop publishing and web page design.

The Bachelor's degree in media studies at UNAM requires students to double major in any number of sub-specialisations (e.g., psychology, religious studies, music, philosophy, and English, French, German or computer science). As a programme within the Department of Information and Communication Studies (library science and information technology), media studies students also must take courses within this specialisation.

There has been no rigorous academic research conducted into the teaching of journalism in Malawi and Zambia. One can cite remote examples, such as Wimmer and Wolf (2005), who sought to establish the significance of development journalism at African universities. These authors, whose study also extends to Malawi and Zambia, note the need to define more precisely the influence of education on journalistic everyday life. The mere teaching of certain contents, they argue, does not necessarily mean that the journalists act accordingly, a circumstance also suggested by many journalist interview surveys conducted so far.

Journalism pedagogy has not yet emerged as an area of specialisation among Namibian educators. The media studies emphasis at UNAM was introduced into a department with a library and information science focus. Therefore, research efforts in the department are not journalism-centred, but rather mirror some of the other emerging needs of the nation, as well as the priorities articulated by the international community through Unesco and the UN Millennium Development Goals. Hence, research in the department at UNAM focuses on information and communication technology (ICT) (Beukes-Amiss, 2007; Mwilima, 2006; Nengomasha, 2003), as well as on library and information science as a means of accelerating national development (Mchombu, 2004; 2007). Research conducted in the department at the PoN is applied and geared towards newsroom practices and policies. The faculty are also involved with a number of baseline studies on readership/audiences conducted within SADC. These baseline studies lie within the parameters of the national interests and regional and international imperatives. As a result, the studies explore gender mainstreaming (Morna & Shilongo, 2002; Brown, 2006) and media coverage of HIV/AIDS and gender (Rama & Morna, 2005).

South Africa

Changes in both the state and the media landscape in South Africa after apartheid have impacted on the discourses about journalism education. Two discourses were influential in this regard: transformation and private-public partnerships. A key concern amongst the business community was how they would be treated by the new ANC-led government. Having been castigated for their role in the apartheid era, media companies were only too willing to show their commitment to 'the new South Africa'. One way they did this was by pledging their commitment to 'training' – not least so they could 'fast-track' black journalists,¹ and thus signal the transformation of their companies.

In the 1970s (after the foundation of the first journalism programme at Potchefstroom University, now Northwest University) a number of communication departments were founded at South African universities which included, to a lesser or greater extent, courses in journalism within a three-year BA programme: Rand Afrikaans; Free State; Zululand; and University of South Africa. A department offering a one-year postgraduate programme in journalism was founded at Stellenbosch University, as well as a number of journalism courses at technikons (now universities of technology). Graduate degrees on Master's and doctoral level are offered at most of these institutions (for an historical overview and analysis of degree programmes, see De Beer & Tomaselli, 2000, as well as the article by Botha & De Beer in this edition of *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* for a recent overview).

The development of journalism education in the 1980s was stifled by the declaration of two States of Emergency and by the apartheid state, which was at its most forceful. The Employment Equity and the Skills Development Acts of 1998 helped to consolidate the industry's dominance, as both were mechanisms by which the government could enlist the financial support of industry in upgrading industrial skills through training programmes.

¹ Tsedu (1996, p. 33) comments on independent newspapers' "fast-tracking" programme: "It is quite clear that there are no editors' jobs waiting out there in those papers. Many of us understood that the rhetoric of the selling of the programme had much to do with the public relations exercise and as such had not sufficiently emphasised what this programme was really about: training. And for those of us who saw this, we felt it was as situation that should be understood for what it was: a group of white executives trying to salve their consciences and take off the load of accusations of no black advancement in the company by spending R1 million. Blacks in the programme had to also understand that they sorely needed the skills that the programme gave them, skills that they could use as editors if they were appointed, or as senior editorial executives which many if not all of us were."

Companies are required to commit 0.5% of their turnover to a Skills Development Fund to which they can apply for a rebate for any training they offer. This encouraged the participation of industry in training – not only as training providers, but also as key members of the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) that set the requirements and standards of professional competency. Industrial training was thus integrated into a broad National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that sought to locate different kinds of learning on the same education grid.²

Professional education has largely become driven by industrial and commercial imperatives, rather than by the more civic-minded and critical approach of a university-based education, resulting in a functionalist approach to learning – as ‘training’. This is evident in the different kinds of training courses³ available to mid-career journalists and in the discourses evident at three of the most recent conferences convened to address the problems of journalism and journalism training/education. Post-1994 discourses have in effect transformed ‘journalism education’ into journalism training’. Critical analysis of the industry has become a scarce item on the journalistic academic agenda, nor indeed of what an appropriate relationship between members of the industry (journalists, editors, managers, owners) and tertiary media educators should be. There has also been little discussion of what a critical pedagogy might be.

Swaziland

Few training opportunities exist for journalists or potential media practitioners. The highest qualification is from Swaziland University, which offers a three-year Diploma in Journalism and Mass Communication, with a required minor in economics, law or sociology. However, the department is severely under-

² The Skills Development Act states its intentions thus follows: “To provide an institutional framework to devise and implement national, sector and workplace strategies to develop and improve the skills of the South African workforce; to integrate those strategies within the National Qualifications Framework contemplated in the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995; to provide for learnerships that lead to recognised occupational qualifications; to provide for the financing of skills development by means of a levy-grant scheme and a National Skills Fund; to provide for and regulate employment services; and to provide for matters connected therewith. [<http://www.labour.gov.za/download/8478/Act%20%20skills%20Development%20Act.doc>]

³ For an overview of the kinds of training courses offered within the Southern African region, see the report by Morna and Khan (2001), titled “Southern Africa media training needs assessment”, which was commissioned by the Nordic Institute of Southern Africa (NIZA).

resourced, and the majority of trained journalists do not enter the profession, but work in areas related to publicity and public relations (Misa, 2007). As a result, both the profession and the practice of journalism are affected.

Swaziland has also been selected as one of five countries into which South Africa's Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) is launching a regional media development project. Working together with Misa-Swaziland and the Swaziland National Association of Journalists, the IAJ will provide training targeted to increase the standard of journalism and reporting. This will bring training into the country, as opposed to having local journalists travel overseas to participate in training programmes for African journalists, such as those run by the Radio Netherlands Training Centre.

Furthermore, in Swaziland the Swaziland Distance Learning Project in Public Journalism was a pilot project delivered through a combination of interactive internet video and a two-week field experience. Initiated through a grant from the US Information Agency's Distance Learning Initiative and a grant from the Elizabethtown College President's Fund for Distinction, mid-career journalists from print and broadcast organisations in Swaziland developed an understanding and appreciation for civic/community journalism (Gillis & Moore, 1999).

Zambia

In Zambia, journalism courses are offered at different levels. The University of Zambia (UNZA) runs a four-year degree course in mass communication and two Master's degree courses in mass communication and development communication.

There is an assumption that journalism education/training prepares students to be watchdogs over their governments. This is a particularly American libertarian influence, perpetuated through grants and scholarship schemes provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), especially at the height of political transformation in the early 1990s. Right from the start, then, media training assumes an antagonistic relationship with those in political power.

There is also an epistemological accent on orienting journalism students to practice their skills from the vantage point of specific, established academic disciplines. As such, the UNZA courses are structured in such a way that students at undergraduate level can minor in such other subjects as philosophy, linguistics, economics, development studies, public administration, et cetera. In a sense, this is designed to elevate the academic profile of journalism as drawing upon multiple disciplinary models, methods and modus operandi. This seems to reflect the multidisciplinary nature of the *field* of communication and media studies generally (McQuail, 2004).

Journalism curricula are split between theory and practice. The theory component would consist of such core compulsory courses as history of mass communication; theories of mass communication, mostly focusing on media effects traditions; media law and ethics; and media management.

The theory-practice split is never clear cut. In an environment where training institutions are ill equipped and where there are too few media companies to facilitate ‘industry attachments’, practical courses rarely achieve their objectives. It is conceivable that the practical component may not be realised in ways that can truly equip the students for the job market. Students are exposed only to the textbook knowledge of the skills they are supposed to cultivate.

Zimbabwe

In 1987, Zimbabwe had two institutions offering diplomas in journalism, media studies or mass communication at the Harare Polytechnic and the Christian College of Southern Africa (CCOSA). But by 2005, there were three universities (Midlands State University, National University of Science and Technology and the Zimbabwe Open University) offering undergraduate degrees, one university offering a postgraduate diploma and a Master’s degree (University of Zimbabwe) and three more colleges (CCOSA, BES, Career Management Centre, Umaa Institute) offering diploma programmes country wide. In 2007, Zimbabwe had four vocational journalism schools in the country and four university departments offering journalism programmes.

Mukundu (2007, p. 58) quotes Stanford Matenda, a lecturer at NUST, as saying that journalism training is affected by the post-2000 repressive environment:

From a training perspective, we have seen the closure of newspapers and other developments which affect opportunities for our students. The closures have limited the choice for student internships, whether in the broadcasting sector, the print media sector or in online media organisations; we are aware that online media organisations are based outside of the country and there is virtually none which is gathering and disseminating information locally ... These developments have affected our work; we therefore continue to monitor developments on the ground closely, looking at how our operations are affected and potential roles we can play.

Since 1993, the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) has offered a one-year full-time graduate Diploma in Media and Communication Studies. Entry is open to first degree-holders with at least a 2.1 overall pass. The programme introduced a two-year part-time MA degree in Media and Communication from 1998. It is

sponsored by the Norwegian Agency for Rural Development (NORAD) and has received teaching, curriculum and other material support from the Department of Media and Communication in Norway. Other new programmes are modelled after the UZ programme and have also used UZ graduates as teachers for their courses.

The Department of Journalism and Media Studies in the Faculty of Communication and Information Science at the National University of Science and Technology (Zimbabwe) runs a three-year Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism and Media Studies. The BSc. programme offers its students 16 courses, a unique mixture of practical and theoretical elements of journalism. Subjects include media law, media ethics, media economics and management, research methods and modules on broadcasting, print and advertising. The practical courses are currently weakened by a serious lack of equipment, as funds for books and technical equipment provided by the NUST are inadequate.

In Zimbabwe, journalism teaching is also largely done along professional lines at the four vocational journalism schools in the country and four university departments offering journalism programmes.

Concluding remarks

Journalism education in Africa is on its way, but the road ahead is steep. The strongest base is in South Africa, but the lack of capacity and infrastructure, the impact of problematic political systems and an over-reliance on Western aid and influence might hamper this growth in the foreseeable future.

Nyamnjoh (2005, p. 95), though reflecting on the generality of training and professionalism in Africa, argues that it is important to distinguish between the formally trained journalists who have not had the opportunity to implement what they learnt at school and those who join the profession without any training at all. While the latter need to be introduced to the techniques and principles of news gathering, news writing and news presentation, the former need refresher courses to keep them abreast of technological developments and with cases of journalistic excellence in Africa. In sum, African journalists all need to be conversant with new technologies in information gathering, processing and distribution, and to understand the ethical implications of using these technologies.

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