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Africa: Stories to Be Told



Words & Reflections: War, Terror and Secrecy

International Journalism:
Foreign Correspondence and Reporting on North Korea

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—Agnes Wahl Nieman, the benefactor of the Nieman Foundation.

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Transparency Benefits the Practice of Journalism

‘The Nieman Watchdog Project . . . is grounded in the belief that probing questions are essential to informed reporting.’

By Bob Giles

It always takes a while for the meanings of the past to take hold. Looking back can offer fresh perspectives, but too often the lessons of earlier times fail to guide our actions today.

Recent reexaminations published in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* that probe into flaws in their coverage during the months leading up to the Iraq War bring to mind the journalism of the cold war era and early days of the fighting in Vietnam. As time passed, it became apparent that the American government used the press to deceive its people. Once the press began to provide a more accurate picture of the fighting in Vietnam, public attitudes began to change.

Disclosures in the Pentagon Papers, first published by *The New York Times*, presented an archive of secret government decisions made by several administrations that led the country into war in Southeast Asia. Implications drawn from this information remind us that those who occupy the White House are often more interested in building public support for its policies than in giving citizens a fully accurate picture.

The experience of being misled about the Vietnam War—most notably the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution—by government officials has weighed heavily on Murrey Marder, who was diplomatic correspondent for *The Washington Post* during that time. “I am convinced that if the American Congress and press had performed their proper constitutional functions of questioning—and counter-balancing—the executive branch, the United States never would have gone to war in Vietnam,” says Marder.

Now, a generation later, some members of the press are experiencing similar regrets about their coverage of another administration and its deceptive claims that led us into another war. Michael Massing of the *New York Review of Books* said on the “NewsHour with Jim Lehrer” that “if you look at how the press performed in the months leading up to the war, we have a case of one of the most serious institutional failures of the American press since, I think, going back to the early days of Vietnam Reporters and editors for the most part went along and . . . did not challenge the administration and its supporters with sufficient skepticism.”

Both internal critiques confirm Massing’s criticism. *The Times*’s report, published in May, and *The Washington Post* media critic Howard Kurtz’s examination of his paper’s coverage in August drew praise for their efforts to examine their work and share their findings with readers. Such self-assessments have been rare events in journalism, though they happen now with greater frequency. A recent example

is the *Lexington Herald Leader*’s front-page examination of its 1960’s civil rights coverage and an apology to readers that it had “neglected” to cover that story.

The significance of these two reports about Iraq reporting is not in their publication but in what they reveal about the practice of journalism and how they reinforce the critical need for a skeptical press to ask probing questions. Within days of the *Times*’s article—which acknowledged the newspaper’s failure to be skeptical enough in its reporting on the Bush administration’s claim that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction and on information obtained from Iraqi informants and defectors who were in support of the administration’s interest in removing Saddam from power—the Nieman Foundation launched a new Web site (www.niemanwatchdog.com).

The Nieman Watchdog Project—funded as part of Marder’s gift to the foundation—is grounded in the belief that probing questions are essential to informed reporting. On this Web site, editors Barry Sussman and Dan Froomkin, both *Washington Post* veterans, track the news and post fresh material, suggesting questions the press should ask. Many items are contributed by scholars and researchers who use their authoritative knowledge to frame questions for the press to consider.

The Bush administration has demonstrated strong discipline in staying on message and controlling information, and this has resulted in fewer leaks to the press. During the past year, however, government insiders concerned about our nation’s struggle to administer Iraq have assisted a more vigilant press in revealing critical new information about intelligence failures, lack of postwar planning, and responsibility at high levels for the cruel treatment of prisoners.

Occasionally the President finds himself in a situation where a skillful reporter can draw out an answer. During the Unity Conference for journalists of color in August, Roland S. Martin of the *Chicago Defender* asked him whether a person’s legacy should be a factor in college admissions. At first, Bush was evasive, but Martin pressed tactfully, and finally the President said he opposed admissions policies that favored children of alumni—an answer that made headlines. Sussman posted the Bush-Martin exchange on the Watchdog Web site and describes it as an excellent example of how to ask good questions. ■

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Africa: Stories to Be Told

Africa is portrayed in the Western media by its extremes, observes Ugandan journalist **Charles Onyango-Obbo**, a managing editor with the Nation Media Group in Nairobi, Kenya. Stories about its civil wars, human rights abuses, government corruption, disease and poverty abound, but these have been joined by Western reporting that, in Onyango-Obbo's opinion, can be too willing to celebrate the promised reforms of emergent leaders for whom greater journalistic scrutiny should be applied. The result: "... the leadership in Africa became not only complacent, but also used the flattering international coverage to muzzle internal critics and vigorous independent reporting ..."

As a BBC special correspondent who has reported on Africa for two decades, **Fergal Keane** says he is "a disenchanted member of the television Africa corps, tired of hearts of darkness coverage that reduces every African problem to questions about tribalism or native corruption and refuses to recognize sprouts of hope where they exist." He argues for a reporting paradigm in which Africans tell their stories and help viewers, listeners and readers "recognize the energy and vitality of this continent." Radio correspondent **Jason Beaubien**, whose African coverage is broadcast on National Public Radio, writes about a reporting trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that began with the hope of telling stories of year-long reconciliation efforts of its power-sharing government and ended as he confronted bribery and fled the country to escape the escalating riots. Photojournalist **Marcus Bleasdale** has worked in the DRC since 1999, and with words and images he explains why he strives to overcome huge obstacles to report stories of people's suffering. When an editor responds to a story proposal with the words, "We have covered Africa this year, so we won't be doing anything for a while," he bristles.

The Boston Globe's Africa correspondent **John Donnelly** explains why many statistics about Africa that reporters rely on can be so wrong and what inaccuracies can mean. His advice: "Just use caution when the numbers come out of Africa. Remain skeptical. Ask tough questions, and find ways to let readers understand the dilemma the numbers pose in their telling." While he was Los Angeles Times bureau chief in Nairobi, **Davan Maharaj** proposed "a story about how Africans live on less than one dollar a day." His idea turned into a six-part series called "Living on Pennies," with photographs by **Francine Orr**. As Maharaj writes, this "was an attempt to pull away the statistical curtain and reveal a close-up view of how these Africans go about their daily lives."

Hilaire Avril, who writes for IRIN, the U.N.'s humanitarian reporting service, examines aspects of reporting relationships among journalists and aid workers. "Humanitarian workers have a growing skepticism towards journalists, especially those who 'parachute' in to do one story and then leave," he writes. **Thierry Cruvellier**, editor of International Justice Tribune, explores some consequences of the absence of adequate local coverage and "close independent scrutiny from the mainstream international media" of Africa's international criminal tribunals and reconciliation commissions. "To fill this information gap, international nongovernmental organizations have assumed the role of independent, private media companies," he writes.

Los Angeles Times photographer **Carolyn Cole** offered readers a way to see the human toll of Liberia's civil war, and images from her series, "Monrovia Under Siege," which won her the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for feature photography, open a series of stories about Liberia. As managing editor

for Liberia's leading independent newspaper during the war's early years, **Gabriel I.H. Williams** went into exile in the United States because of death threats due to his work as a journalist. He writes about a trip he made back to Liberia earlier this year and the difficult circumstances Liberian journalists face despite regaining their freedom. He suggests ways to restore the country's independent media that was once "regarded to be one of the most vibrant in West Africa." Liberian photojournalist **Gregory H. Stemm** recalls grave dangers he faced when he tried to document the government's brutality.

Geoffrey Nyarota, founding editor of The Daily News, Zimbabwe's only independent daily newspaper (which has ceased publication), describes how much better coverage of Africa would be if more African reporters told the stories to Western audiences. **Shyaka Kanuma**, cofounder of Rwandan Newsline, a former independent newspaper, tells why "it is an act of extreme courage for African journalists who are inclined to freedom of thought to keep publishing or broadcasting their opinions and views." **Luckson A. Chipare**, who directs the Media Institute of Southern Africa, writes about attacks against journalists as he details media repression in several African countries. **Pippa Green**, head of radio news at the South African Broadcasting Corporation, explains what her country's transition to democracy means for journalists. "We've tried to establish the obvious journalistic standards of accuracy and fairness, but we need to find ways to combine these standards with the ability to spot and tell a good story," she says. Excerpts from a speech given by **Gwen Lister**, editor of the independent newspaper, The Namibian, address difficulties of managing—financially and editorially—an independent news organization during times of national crisis and offers lessons learned in the struggle to maintain press freedom. **Yvonne van der Heijden**, a freelance journalist in the Netherlands, interviewed Wilf Mbanga, founding chief executive of The Daily News in Zimbabwe, about government harassment of the press. Mbanga is now in Tilburg (The Netherlands) as part of the Cities of Asylum network that van der Heijden describes.

Ethan Zuckerman, a research fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard, writes about using the Internet to document a pattern in which Western news coverage is strongly connected to a nation's wealth. Following Zuckerman's analysis is a sampling of African stories that the United Nations put among its "Ten Stories the World Should Hear More About." **Frank Green**, a reporter with the Richmond (Virginia) Times-Dispatch, teamed up with freelance photographer **Joseph Rodríguez** to report from Africa on AIDS in Zambia. In writing about his reporting trip, he acknowledges that a grant from the Dart Center made this story possible for his mid-sized newspaper. **Rex Smith**, editor of the Times Union in Albany, New York, answers two questions, "Why would our newspaper send a team [reporter **Paul Grondahl** and photographer **Steve Jacobs**] to one of the poorest nations on earth [Malawi], far away from the community we serve? Why would we publish a full-color, 24-page section featuring these journalists' reports and devote countless hours to creating an ambitious presentation of this project on our Web site?" And **Wilson Wanene**, a Kenyan-born freelance journalist based in Boston, reviews "The Zanzibar Chest: A Story of Life, Love, and Death in Foreign Lands," written by journalist Aidan Hartley, who was with Reuters' Nairobi bureau during the 1990's. ■

Seeking Balance in a Continent Portrayed By Its Extremes

‘The patronizing reporting one witnesses today is as bad as the condescending work of the past.’

By Charles Onyango-Obbo

This story begins in the mid-1980’s, some months after President Yoweri Museveni’s rebels swept to power in Uganda in 1986. A visitor arrived at the offices of the *Weekly Topic*, a newspaper in Uganda where I then worked. The receptionist sent a note in that told me the name of the guest who wanted to see me: It was Mr. Mort Rosenblum. I was barely a year out of graduate school, and Rosenblum’s “Coups and Earthquakes” had enthralled me immensely. I could hardly believe the words I was seeing. I asked the receptionist to show him in.

I asked him whether he was *the* Rosenblum, and he said he was. He had stopped in Kampala on his way from the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. The annual summit of the continental body, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union, had just ended in Addis Ababa, where it is headquartered. It was Museveni’s first summit as president, and he had knocked everyone off their feet.

Museveni had blasted the OAU for silence when the government he overthrew was murdering thousands of people in Uganda. He also told Africans to stop going around the world with bowl in hand begging, but get down to work by bringing reforms to their “backward” economies. This was something new in Africa: a young, educated, confident, victorious guerrilla ready to tick off other presidents openly, to acknowledge that Africa was a mess, and the world didn’t owe the continent a

living—and that we, Africa, could no longer continue blaming colonialists for its problems. Rosenblum found the performance refreshing, a ray of hope, and had come to see for himself if Museveni was just shooting his mouth off or if indeed he was doing at home as he was preaching in Addis Ababa.

This happened several years before apartheid ended in South Africa and Nelson Mandela became a worldwide symbol of hope, so everyone was groping for an African icon. The emergence of Museveni was the new black hope that the international media had been looking for in Africa. Shortly after Addis Ababa, Western media began to describe him as a “new breed of African leader.”

What many Western correspondents hoped they could do was ‘nanny’ the African story so that what they reported could become self-fulfilling prophecies.

During the next eight years several supposedly more enlightened guerrilla leaders came to power: Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia, Issayas Afewerki in Eritrea, Paul Kagame in Rwanda and, briefly, Laurent Kabila in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This new breed of leaders now became a “club,” and Western media trumpeted the arrival of a new era in African politics even though there was no wave of African enlightenment sweeping the continent, as these leaders were a tiny minority.

Those who held the view of presenting a “more balanced” coverage of Afri-

ca—stories playing down the failures in the continent—won the argument. Not all Western media changed, but those who did seemed, in part, to be driven by guilt. They became very apologetic. Thus, in Rwanda, the international press was reluctant to cover killings in 1996 that local people blamed on the victorious Rwandan Patriotic Front. Reluctance to do so was related to memories of the world’s failure two years earlier to do enough to halt the genocide that took place in this central African country. And in Uganda, coverage of AIDS has been clouded by the Western media’s general fear of questioning some of the reports about the dramatic fall in the rate of infection.

These tendencies surfaced in reporting around the same time that old hard-nosed Africa hands like the Los Angeles Times’s David Lamb were being replaced by younger report-

ers, who were arriving at their assignments with progressive views about the Third World. In their coverage, these Western correspondents supported causes like debt write-offs and wrote in angered tones about the West’s failure to do anything to stop the 1994 genocide in Rwanda in which an estimated 800,000 people were butchered.

A new development then conspired to further distort Western media reporting on Africa. In the past, rebellions used to drag on forever in Africa. A foreign correspondent would cover it for about five years, then move on

to Asia or the Middle East to sample other conflicts. Now victorious insurgents were walking into capitals much sooner—between one to five years from when they took to the bush to fight the government. This meant that a foreign correspondent could cover the conflict from the outbreak of the rebellion to the seizure of power by these dissidents in one relatively short assignment. The result: Correspondents established a bond with the rebels and then continued to cover them in their first years in government. While some were still able to see shortcomings in those who now governed, most found that the cause of these new leaders became partly theirs, and many correspondents spoke about the need to cover these countries with greater “understanding.”

This approach led to these favored African governments becoming sacred. For example, these leaders enjoyed a level of immunity that British reporters would never give their own government. I confronted a dramatic example of this at the height of the enthusiasm for the “new Africa” in the mid-1990’s. An influential British newspaper came to Uganda to do a long special report about the “economic miracle.” The country was being called the “star pupil” of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund—the “African success story.” Before this team of reporters flew out, perhaps worried their reporting glorified the government too much, they decided to get some critical quotes to bring a little balance to the copy. The journalists came to interview me and asked whether I thought Uganda had put its political nightmares behind it.

I said no. Corruption, I told them, was creeping back. I also thought that the political restrictions that made the country a one-party state were not justified because a nation can only become a democracy by practicing this form of government. I told them there was a need to find a political solution to the rebellion the Museveni government was facing in the northern part of Uganda.

In the 12 full newspaper pages of this special report, my comments were the only critical ones. Even so, the paper still found it necessary to qualify them by referring to me as “editor of the

Africa Web Coverage

Among the strongest Web sites displaying the complexities of the continent and her news are South Africa’s News24.co.za and Africamediaonline.com. There is a relatively new and ambitious site, Africaalmanac.com, which is a fact-filled destination for those in a hurry, along with world-class coverage on Africana.com and Africa IPLC.com. Also available are news and commentary about Africa on Western media Web sites including BBC.com, CNN.com, Alertnet.org, and the Washington, D.C.-based AllAfrica.com, which has specialized in reporting on the continent for more than a decade. ■ —COO

opposition Monitor newspaper.” The Monitor was then owned by the journalists who worked for it and was the most independent newspaper ever published in Uganda. However, it was clear that the point of the article’s characterization of me was done to undermine the criticism of the government. It struck me that an American or British newspaper almost never referred to a newspaper as an “opposition” publication simply because it was critical of the Clinton or Blair governments.

Can Balance Be Restored?

It was in this environment that in May 2000 The Economist published a map of Africa on its cover with the headline, “The Hopeless Continent.” Across Africa, a collective sigh of horror was heard, illustrated best by words Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo wrote for New Internationalist: “What, one wonders, is the source of such malediction? What compels some editor in London or New York to characterize a whole continent of nearly 700 million people, and all of its 300,175,000 square kilometers as ‘hopeless’? What have Africans done to deserve such absolute hexing? ... We suspect that The Economist has got a really dark and sinister aim. Clearly, as our masters’ voice, one of its agendas is to make sure that Africans do not regain any of the self-confidence they may have lost from the ‘Dark Continent’ label.”

At a World Economic Forum summit in Durban, South Africa, I heard South Africa’s president, Thabo Mbeki, make similar criticism of The Economist, though in less strong language. Several speakers agreed. If The Economist had carried that cover in 1989, it wouldn’t have caused a storm. By then, the expectation of “positive” coverage hadn’t become so settled in Africa.

Just as The Economist got its tone (as opposed to the basic reporting) wrong, so have the flood of “miracle” stories on Africa been misleading. Nearly all the members of the “new breed” of African leaders club have blown it. They made some political steps by holding elections, but in neither Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda nor Mozambique have there been free elections that would meet internationally accepted standards. These countries are still largely one party states. Ethiopia and Eritrea fought a bitter border war, and the latter has slid back into a Stalinist state without a free press and where there is no freedom of religious worship. Uganda and Rwanda became embroiled in a war in the DRC, which degenerated in plunder and resulted either directly or indirectly in the death of about 2.5 million people, according to the United Nations.

Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, who in the early 1990’s often was included among the “new breed” of leaders, has turned into a brutal dictator who has bankrupted what was once one of Africa’s most prosperous nations. Pro-government goons are deployed now to break up opposition rallies with axes. The World Bank and the Economic Commission for Africa finally agree that, in spite of all the stories of economic miracles and the African “economic cubs” (the name coined for Africa’s fast growing economies like Uganda, Rwanda and Mozambique), the continent is poorer today than it was 25 years ago. The external debt of countries whose economies were being touted as a model has grown worse, and debt relief initiatives have not helped.

One might ask why, if all was going so well, the situation in Africa is what it is today. In part, some blame must rest with those who project Africa to the world even when they have lost

the ability to cover it accurately. What many Western correspondents hoped they could do was “nanny” the African story so that what they reported could become self-fulfilling prophecies. As this was happening, the leadership in Africa became not only complacent, but also used the flattering international coverage to muzzle internal critics and vigorous independent reporting by labelling it as the work of “disgruntled elements” who were out to make mischief and not willing to acknowledge the good about the government that “all the world sees.” And so the cycle went. Governments that might have been motivated to do well, in part, to stem bad press that might cost them donor aid, expected—and received—instead a forgiving understanding of Africa’s peculiarities from international media. And there was more than enough Western guilt to ensure that the understanding was offered.

In those years, when governments were still struggling to establish their domestic and international acceptance, opportunities existed when they would have been more likely to respond to reporting about their shortcomings and achievements they needed to build on. Once established, they are less responsive. If Western reporting of Africa used to drip with comical and tragic stereotypes, the bulk of the reporting today is condescending coverage that tends to treat the citizens of the continent as children who can’t take a rebuke and need to be bribed with sweet words.

If Western media coverage of Africa failed in decades past because of being steeped in a cynical and, some argue, racist tradition, then today’s “improved” version fails because it also is not a balanced portrayal. Africa, the continent, is a collection of nations that are pretty much like others elsewhere in the world, struggling with successes

and with failures, and there should be no special type of journalism reserved for its coverage. The patronizing reporting one witnesses today is as bad as the condescending work of the past. What the African continent needs is good journalism, one that tells the stories as they are reported and observed. What has happened to coverage of Africa in the Western media today offers the latest proof that there is no alternative to this proven approach. ■

Charles Onyango-Obbo, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, is managing editor for media convergence and syndication with the Nation Media Group in Nairobi, Kenya. He was managing editor for the group’s sister newspaper, The Monitor, in Kampala, which was Uganda’s only independent daily until January 2003.

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Trapped in a Time-Warped Narrative

A BBC foreign correspondent pleads with journalists to move past their relentless focus on Africa’s misery.

By Fergal Keane

During apartheid’s 1986 declared state of emergency, when I was a neophyte foreign correspondent sneaking in and out of South Africa undercover to report for the BBC, I came across a beautiful saying. One afternoon I went to interview a group of children who had been tortured by the security police. All were badly bruised; some had cuts on their backs where they’d been whipped; one child’s leg was stippled with shotgun pellets.

Across Soweto the police were rounding up anybody they suspected of being involved in antiapartheid protests. A lawyer had been appointed to take statements from the children. Hers was a risky job since lawyers weren’t immune from state terror. After recording the children’s stories, I asked this

woman why she risked her own freedom to do this. “We have an expression here,” she told me. “People are people because of other people. It means we are connected. We must look out for each other.”

In two decades of reporting from Africa, I’ve witnessed living proof of this proverb often. From the toughest refugee camp in the deserts of Sudan to the bustling streets of the Johannesburg townships, I’ve been relentlessly overwhelmed by displays of humanity, compassion and generosity.

The Two Stories of Africa

The problem is I don’t see much of this on television. There are exceptions, such as good segments that CNN has

produced and the program, “Africa Direct,” which BBC World aired until recently. But usually the Africa of the international camera is a continent of just two stories. In the first, smiling Africans in white jackets serve ice cold drinks to Western tourists at safari lodges. This is the Africa of spectacular wildlife, wonderful sunsets, and genial locals, seen through windows of air-conditioned minibuses. The Africa in which the majority of Africans live is kept at a safe distance, or glimpsed, again through bus windows, on one of those newly popular “township tours.”

The other predominant vision is the disaster zone or, in the cliché most favored by distant headline writers who coin phrases about Africa, it is about “the Heart of Darkness.” In this continent

the locals exist in a state of perpetual famine, corruption, disease and warfare. It is this vision of the continent that has been providing stories and journalistic awards for people like me since television news was invented.

I am a disenchanted member of the television Africa corps, tired of hearts of darkness coverage that reduces every African problem to questions about tribalism or native corruption and refuses to recognize sprouts of hope where they exist.

Since the end of colonialism, Western correspondents have stood in front of emaciated Africans or piles of African bodies and used the language of the Old Testament to mediate the horrors to their audiences. That practice began four decades ago, and the template hasn't changed all that much. For example, no piece from an African disaster zone is complete without the sound bite from a white angel of mercy from one aid agency or another. In doing this, we convince ourselves this helps folks back home "relate" to the stories we are sending them. Rarely do TV journalists pause to contemplate the consequences of this color-coded compassion. Viewers at home are watching (usually) a white reporter and white aid worker, and beyond them almost as backdrops are the wretched African masses. Just as it's always been and always will be, they think. Thank goodness for our brave reporters and aid workers.

As for the Africans themselves, we hardly think about what it feels like to them, as generation after generation sit on barren, parched ground while well-fed people from faraway dole out charity, take away sound bites and transport your hungry nakedness into sitting rooms thousands of miles away. In this, we are aided and abetted by aid agencies that need our cameras to draw attention to these disasters. It suits both parties to play up the omens of apocalypse. We need the headline; they need the funds.

I have many personal memories of such scenes. Among my least favorite was the sight of the American vice president's wife, Tipper Gore, descending on Goma as an army of press paraded her compassion in front of a backdrop of



Tipper Gore, the former vice president's wife, with members of a CBS News crew in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Photo courtesy of Moncef Bouhafaf.*

Rwandan Hutu refugees. This was after the U.S. government and the American networks for the most part ignored the Rwandan genocide of the previous three months. This complicated story didn't fit the traditional template, and when the genocide was first reported, coverage reduced a complex political situation to the "typical" story of African tribalism, or as the French President François Mitterrand remarked, the kind of thing that happened in that part of Africa.

Let me add here two important caveats.

1. I don't seek to set myself apart from the problem. I've made mistakes in the way I've told African stories. I am waking up late to this problem.
2. I don't for a second believe we shouldn't report the disasters. And yes, most of the time, international aid agencies do remarkable and much-needed work, as do many of my reporter colleagues. Reporting stories like the conflict in Sierra Leone and the Rwandan genocide demanded enormous bravery.

What profoundly concerns me is the real damage to Africans' sense of themselves and of their nations' potential in the midst of journalists' relentless focus on their misery. Spin back through

news tapes—from Congo in the early 1960's through Biafra, Ethiopia and into Sudan today—and we see how little has changed in our reporting of Africa's stories.

This is a pity, because during this time a lot has been transformed in Africa. The ground for positive change has never been so fertile as it is today. This isn't because of anything we've done in the West but because of the rise of a new civil society in places like South Africa, Kenya, Liberia and even in deeply troubled Nigeria. Africans are now holding their leaders to account. Anyone who remembers the messes of the 1970's and 1980's cannot be but inspired by this new scenario. It isn't an African renaissance but an awakening, every bit as powerful as the Pan Africanist movement of the 1960's.

In Kenya, for example, calls to clean up corruption would have had no effect had it not been for a change in government brought about by Kenyans themselves. They voted the crooks out of office. Now the people are dragging their former leaders before a judicial commission of inquiry. Corruption in the new government is being exposed, too. Very little, if any, of this story is found on television in the West. In some very remote parts of the continent, small human rights groups and

independent newspapers are building the foundations for civil society. I'd like to see such struggles acknowledged in the Western narrative of Africa.

Changing the African Paradigm

We can—and should—do this by changing our news agenda. Our tendency to portray life on this continent as an unrelenting series of disasters, if not happening then waiting to happen, is as old as news reporting itself. We thrive on drama, and this habit of ours isn't going to change overnight. But evolving into a different kind of coverage challenges all of us who love Africa and her people and want to see the continent fairly portrayed as a place of hope in this new millennium. To do this, I have a few suggestions.

- **Find African aid workers to speak:** These days when I go with my camera

to report a disaster I try to find an African aid worker to describe what is happening. If I film a food queue, I make sure to state that the people are here because they don't have a choice. It's vital I portray them not as mendicants but farmers, fishermen, people who would be feeding themselves if they could.

- **Have them tell their own stories:** We can't continue with a situation in which most news out of Africa is told almost exclusively through the lenses and voices of Westerners. Someday I hope an African station will stand alongside CNN and BBC World. We can help make this happen by getting our governments to make funding for journalistic training part of their bilateral aid programs to African nations. This training should not be about Westerners lecturing Africans, but should involve diverse groups of journalistic experts from across the globe sharing their skills.

- **Speak to the ingenuity of survival:** For those of us who report frequently from Africa, let's make sure we help our viewers (and listeners and readers) recognize the energy and vitality of this continent. So if there is a story of disaster, let's not forget the ingenuity needed to survive in such circumstances.

Most of all, as journalists, we need to get past the outdated idea of Africa and its people that many of us bring to this assignment—the feeling that somehow Africans are not quite full citizens of our global community because they are not like us. There will be times when it will be good to bear in mind the South African proverb, “People are people because of other people.” ■

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When Reporting a Story Turns Into Running From a Riot

‘This is the thing about covering places like the Congo—things can be incredibly unpredictable.’

By Jason Beaubien

Certain African airports can be terrifying. Or maybe it's not the airports. It's the descent. It's knowing what lies ahead. Once the plane starts to tip towards Monrovia or Lagos or some dirt airstrip in Sudan, my stomach tightens.

At the end of May I flew to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After years of civil war, a power-sharing government in Kinshasa was on the verge of celebrating its first anniversary. I went to write about peace and reconciliation. Two weeks later I fled to Uganda having been stifled by Congo's unique brand of corruption, being chased through the

streets by a mob, narrowly escaping a train wreck, and watching looters burn down the headquarters of the Red Cross. When even the guard at the front gate of the Catholic church in Kisangani was spitting in my face, I knew it was time to get out.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The abandoned planes littering the side of the runway in Kinshasa make it clear that the rules here are different. Hot sticky air and a crowd of men swarm around our South African Airways 737 as it rolls to a stop on the tarmac. At the bottom of the plane's steps hustlers wait for their prey. They

ask where you're from. They promise to “speed” you through immigration. They can't understand why you won't give them your passport. There's plenty of jostling as you try to shuffle towards the faded arrivals terminal and fasten down the straps on your hand luggage at the same time.

I'd been warned about the hazards of the Kinshasa airport, so I'd hired Mukila before I even got there. Mukila is a private “protocol officer.” His job is to shepherd businessmen, aid workers, journalists and anyone else who can afford him through the corrupt bureaucratic maze of Congo's largest

airport. Mukila is mad at me because I'd admitted to an immigration officer that I'm a reporter. "Humanitaire!" he says forcefully in my ear. "Humanitaire!"

The immigration desk looks like a fortified theater ticket booth. The two officials inside the vertical bars are demanding 10 or 20 dollars from everyone coming off the plane. Sometimes it's 10, sometimes it's 20. Passengers who speak absolutely no French or are quite good at playing stupid pass through for free. Apparently they're more trouble than they're worth.

I refuse to pay, and the immigration officers seize my passport. Mukila is alternating between screaming at them in Lingala and screaming at me in French. Finally he announces that we have no time for these fools, and we are going to get my bags before they disappear from the turnstile. I don't think the bluff of abandoning my passport is really helping our cause, but he's the professional.

At the turnstile he curtly reminds me, "Humanitaire!"

I'm opposed to bribes. It's a weird thing to say. After all, who isn't? But in parts of Africa it's an issue reporters face on a regular basis. Some of my colleagues say, "Oh come on! Throw a few greenbacks around. You'll get right through." But I find bribery offensive. Not just because I'm being relieved of my money but also because I see how it destroys a place. I see how it makes almost everything grind to a halt. I see how people who could be spending their days doing something productive instead spend hours shaking victims down. And the victims who get hit hardest tend to be from neighboring African countries. The Ivorians are particularly hard on the Liberians. The Liberians put an extra squeeze on anyone from Sierra Leone. Nigerians get hit up by everybody.

Once, in the Ivory Coast, a "customs" official seized my \$15,000 satellite phone, an ISDN unit that allows me to feed real-time broadcast-quality audio from anywhere in the world back to Washington. [See accompanying box for a radio reporter's tool kit for Africa.] He had been refusing to release it for a day, saying that it wasn't properly "licensed."

I had a flight to Liberia in an hour, and he was demanding the equivalent of two dollars for his "lunch." I threatened to call the U.S. Embassy. He threatened to have me arrested. It was unclear how long I'd have to wait for the next flight to Liberia, but it was at least going to be a couple of days. Eventually I buckled. I paid up. As soon as I got out of his office, his boss showed up and wanted money for *his* lunch. The first guy had disappeared.

And that's one of the other problems with paying bribes—when does it end? How much is ever enough?

That's why in Congo it's useful to have a professional handling the kickbacks. Back at the Kinshasa airport, Mukila is waving a fistful of Congolese francs at the immigration officer who has my passport. It seems to me like the wrong technique. Bribes, I always thought, should be slipped covertly into the extortionist's hand. None of this drama. None of this waving cash around and yelling. But this is Congo, where things are different.

The theatrics worked. Mukila grabbed my passport, hurled a few insults over his shoulder, and rushed me through customs declaring, "Humanitaire! Humanitaire!" He waved his arms furiously to clear a path. He was quite proud that he'd paid the equivalent of just five U.S. dollars to get my passport back. He'd saved me 15 bucks, he beamed.

Reporting Difficulties in Africa

Congo has never had it easy. There was the brutal Belgian colonial period followed by three decades of one of the most corrupt regimes imaginable under Mobutu Sese Seko. When Mobutu fled into exile in 1997, Laurent Kabila seized power. Kabila soon faced an insurrection from the east of the country. Eventually seven different African nations were fighting over parts of the vast Congo. In 2001 Kabila was assassinated by his bodyguards, and his son Joseph took over. Last year, when the 29-year-old Kabila struck a peace deal with the country's largest rebel factions, it was the Congo's first chance at stability in years. But on the ground peace, stability,

normalcy all feel a long way away.

Negotiating the airport in Kinshasa is just the first journalistic challenge of the Congo. My plans to tour an unfinished monument to Patrice Lumumba (Congo's first prime minister who was brutally murdered) were blocked by police who said I needed a permit to visit what's supposed to be a tourist attraction. My interviews in the main market were disrupted by pickpockets burrowing repeatedly into my pockets, and efforts to report at Kinshasa's docks were scuttled by bickering bureaucrats.

The most surprising bit of bribery came when I was trying to arrange a meeting with the general manager of Cobra Tyre, a major rubber producer in Kinshasa. His assistant wanted to know how much they were going to have to pay *me* to run this article about them. If National Public Radio's audience was really as large as I claimed, he figured it would be worth a couple of hundred dollars to them.

Bribery is just one of the issues that make reporting in parts of Africa diffi-

African Radio Reporters' Tool Kit

- Lots of cash in hundred dollar bills, plus some fives to cover the small things. There's no sense carrying twenties. Several thousand dollars in twenties gets bulky.
 - A headlamp flashlight for when the power goes out.
 - A Leatherman or Swiss Army knife to repair electronic equipment, reattach toilet seats, and slice bread.
 - A phone-line splitter and an extra cable to try to connect to the Internet in hotel rooms.
 - Biltong, a South African delicacy similar to beef jerky that withstands all temperatures and the absence of refrigeration.
 - Malarone, a GlaxoSmithKline prophylaxis against malaria.
 - Several packs of Marlboros to soften up twitchy militiamen at checkpoints.
- —J.B.

cult. There's the crumbling infrastructure, the lack of electricity, the rebel roadblocks and, in some of the poorest countries on the continent, incredibly high prices. N'Djamena, the capital of Chad, has only a couple of hotels. The Novotel offers filthy motel-style rooms for \$175 a night.

Plus traveling in Africa can be dangerous. Flying often involves hopping abroad an aging twin-proped Antonov 24 with its Soviet-era interior, depressed Ukrainian pilots, and backfiring engines. Automobiles and dilapidated roads make one of the most deadly combinations on the continent. And during my most recent trip to the Congo, I was stuck for two days deep in the jungle after the train I was traveling on crashed. Fortunately I had gotten off a few minutes earlier to interview people. All of the nine men of the crew of the single-engine train were injured. It took two days to get them airlifted out.

Eventually my trip to the Congo deteriorated into complete chaos with riots in the streets, buildings burning down, and U.N. peacekeepers shooting

into mobs. The problem started after a renegade commander in the Congolese Army launched an attack on the city of Bukavu on the Rwandan border. I'd just arrived in Kisangani, in the heart of the country where the Congo River starts to curve south towards the Atlantic.

I walked out of a restaurant not knowing that Bukavu had fallen and not knowing that the Congolese blamed this turn of events on the United Nations. A crowd of young men surrounded me in the street, which isn't that unusual in Africa. I was about to ask what was going on, but then I saw the man with the stick. The crowd began to constrict, and I knew it was time to run.

Stones started to fly. The security guard at the restaurant where I'd just eaten was waving at me frantically as if ushering me across the finish line. It was only 40 or 50 yards to the gate, but the men were close behind me. As I ran I had visions of a rock hitting the back of my skull and my body collapsing face first into the dusty street.

I stuck around Kisangani for another day but things only got worse. The en-

tire country was erupting in riots. The Congolese were furious at the United Nations for not ordering its peacekeepers to block the renegade troops from taking Bukavu. All the flights out of Kinshasa were cancelled. Most Westerners had been evacuated from Kisangani as soon as the riots began. I finally left with a planeload of aid workers who were flying to neighboring Uganda.

This is the thing about covering places like the Congo—things can be incredibly unpredictable. As a reporter you wander in alone. You may have some contacts, some cell phone numbers, but in the end you're on your own. And so your best-laid intentions of doing an upbeat story on a country rebuilding, reconnecting and moving forward, can unravel incredibly quickly. ■

Jason Beaubien has reported on Africa for National Public Radio since September 2002. When he's not on the road, he lives with his wife and son in Johannesburg, South Africa.

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Weighing the Moral Argument Against the Way Things Work

'We have covered Africa this year, so we won't be doing anything for a while.'

By Marcus Bleasdale

More than three million people have died due to fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo over the past five years. At least another three million people have been forced to flee their homes. This messy conflict at the heart of the continent has often been referred to as Africa's first World War. Most of the deaths come from hunger and disease among a population of 55 million people struggling to scratch out a meager subsistence living in this vast nation covered by dense forests and jungle.

The fighting goes on relentlessly, yet few who live outside this region are being told much about it. There are numerous reasons why Congo has not been adequately covered over the years. The former Zaire is an incredibly difficult and frequently dangerous place for journalists to work, though in ways the barriers to coverage are very different than those encountered in Afghanistan or Iraq.

Enormous distances and inhospitable terrain are only the first obstacles. Costs paid to protect one's safety in con-

flict zones quickly balloon as profiteers and opportunists in power demand hefty taxes, fees or bribes from foreigners, whether they are well-paid U.N. staff or journalists. Soldiers are rarely paid and prey upon journalists as a means of extorting money. Expensive press accreditation is nearly always required, but this turns out to be usually irrelevant on the ground. As a photographer, I know that arrests can occur daily, even when we are breaking no law other than ones fabricated on the spot by meddling petty officials seeking a fast buck.

Journalism's Moral Obligation

What has driven me for the past five years in Congo to overcome obstacles are the images of human suffering that I know I must document. Scenes from this war are forever burned inside of me—children crying over the dead body of their mother; the bound and beaten corpses of young boys lying face down in the wet dirt, stripped of their clothes and their dignity, and the facial expression of a woman watching as her arm was hacked off and eaten in front of her.

At night these images linger in my mind. I carry them with me as I travel from village to village in Congo, where I hope each time not to stumble onto another horrific scene. Too often, I do. And each time I do, anger rises from inside of me as I am reminded of how often newspapers and magazines refuse to publish photographs from this war.

Much ink has been spilled on coverage of Iraq, Afghanistan and the September 11th attacks. Statistics on the number of dead, injured and displaced abound. But one humanitarian emergency should not be allowed to crowd out others or to be deemed geographically more important than any other. Reporting on deaths caused by greed, inhumanity or the hungry quest for political power is crucial no matter the location. Huge news stories of the early 1990's, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Balkan wars, did not eclipse media coverage of brutalities committed under the apartheid regime in South Africa. News coverage of that nation's struggles played a major role in bringing about black majority rule in that country.

Reporters and photographers, photo and word editors, must accept the moral obligation of their profession. Yet, too often, choices of coverage seem based not on the merits of what is happening and its consequences to human life but rather on the perceived appeal to their readers. Many stories I've proposed about the Congo have been rejected due to what editors call "reader apathy" and "Africa fatigue." I even received

one reply from a leading international magazine saying, "We have covered Africa this year, so we won't be doing anything for a while." Yet each time a newspaper or magazine does publish my photo stories from Congo or elsewhere in Africa, I am inundated with

responses and questions from curious readers thirsty for more information. So where is the apathy?

Some contend that lifestyle chasms between those who live in places such as London, New York, Paris and Milan and those who reside in Kinshasa,



A mother of three lost her arm defending her children in Nizi, Eastern Congo. She recounts the story of soldiers eating flesh from the arm after they had amputated it. 2003.



A Lendu soldier, some of whom are responsible for cannibalism, in a makeshift hospital. Captured and beaten by the local population, he now waits for news of his future. 2003.

Photos by © Marcus Bleadsale/IPG.

Kampala, Kigali or Lagos are part of the problem. Who really wants to read about destruction, misery, poverty and death while trying to enjoy a Saturday morning latte and brunch? Weekend readers are a fickle bunch not always drawn to hard-hitting reportage. But shouldn't we at least give them the opportunity?

Instead, even as we have obtained the technological tools enabling us to create a global sense of shared hardships and opportunities, death tolls mount in African nations hit by war and famine. Important stories go untold, and readers are left ignorant of what is happening in places far away from them. I've always been taught that journalists must comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. With our words and pictures, we can trigger a reaction from the general public and from the leaders they elect.

During his Africa tour last year, President George W. Bush made a whistle-stop visit to the airport in Entebbe, Uganda. Greeted by dancing children, he spoke glowingly of the economic progress being made in one of Africa's few bright spots. But Bush made no mention of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a vicious rebel group that has been terrorizing the northern half of the country for 17 years, abducting thousands of children each year to use as child soldiers or sex slaves. The LRA, which murders, rapes and loots with impunity, is on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations. Many Ugandans were shocked at his lack of effort and understanding.

Certainly journalists have a responsibility to report these issues, bringing attention to them and lessening the likelihood they will be ignored. But when world leaders won't highlight issues such as this, responsibility falls on editors who should not demonstrate a similar lack of interest.

With the crisis in Sudan, officials from aid agencies and editors both claimed they were preoccupied with Iraq and did not realize until it was too late the extent of the catastrophe in the Western Darfur region of Sudan. When it was discovered, it still took months to convince many Western publications to

publish stories about what is happening there and then many more months for aid agencies to raise the necessary funds for relief efforts. When potential donors do not see events unfolding on the pages of magazines and newspapers, they are reluctant to commit money. Therefore, when stories like this one are not treated as news, not only do

we fail readers but, more importantly, we fail the people suffering and dying in these distant, forsaken parts of the world.

Africa's problems are not going away. People will keep dying in conflicts in Congo, Central African Republic, Burundi, Sudan, Uganda and Ivory Coast. There's unrest in Sierra Leone,



A soldier demands a vastly deflated price for goods sold along a river. 2002.



Bodies of teenage boys outside the village of Jijira Adi Abbe in Darfur, Sudan after the bombing by government jets. This and 34 other villages in the area were "ethnically cleansed" of "blacks" by the Arab government. Government forces moved in after the bombing and killed 267 people in this village alone. Bodies of young boys lie unburied to send a message to stem further uprising.

Photos by © Marcus Bleadsale/IPG.

Liberia, Nigeria, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. Yet foreign coverage in the West focuses almost entirely on Iraq. Of course, what happens there and in Afghanistan is of global significance, but that doesn't mean places like Africa should be ignored. As we have seen with Afghanistan, failed states present dangers to people beyond the imaginary lines of national borders.

Africa has its fair share of failed states and totalitarian regimes. And while they might not hold the same global strategic value of Afghanistan or Iraq, the value of human life can be no different. The fate of Congolese peasants being hacked to death by militias or dying in the bush from preventable

diseases such as malaria or sleeping sickness should be as newsworthy as others, shouldn't they?

Steady and strong attention by journalists can foment change. Faulty leadership can be exposed. Suffering and injustices can be reported. And when they are, slowly change can come at a political level. But if the circumstances are hidden, the voices of those who are suffering are silenced, and explanations about the crisis aren't provided to the rest of the world, then how can anyone be persuaded to act? ■

Marcus Bleasdale, a photojournalist who has been working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

since 1999, is the author of "One Hundred Years of Darkness: A Journey into the Heart of Congo," published in 2002. His photographs have appeared in British, European and U.S. publications, and his work from Congo was awarded a first prize in the USA Picture of the Year awards in 2003 and first prize from the National Press Photographers Association. He recently received a grant from Photography for Photographers in France to continue his work in the DRC. For further information about Bleasdale's work, contact John@ipgphotographers.com.

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A child soldier rides back to his base in Ituri Province, Eastern Congo. 2003.



Union Patriotic de Congo militias demonstrate against "the French assassins" in Bunia, Eastern Congo. 2003.



Refugees from bombed villages in the Darfur region of western Sudan struggle to raise a collapsed donkey after a 34-day march towards safety in Chad.



A 9-year-old, too afraid to stay in the hospital for fear of being attacked, is taken back to the bush after being treated. She was attacked by Lendu militias who tried to cut off her leg with a machette. She survived, but three members of her family were killed. Fourteen people were killed in their beds in the hospital two weeks previously. 2003.

Photos by © Marcus Bleasdale/IPG.



Renowned for their skills as trackers and hunters, Democratic Republic of the Congo's pygmies have been recruited as military scouts by both rebel and government forces. To avoid being drafted, many crossed the river to neighboring Republic of the Congo. Long isolated in central Africa's dense jungles, the pygmies are highly susceptible to disease in new urban environments. 2002.



Refugees collect water in Chad.

Photos by © Marcus Bleadsale/IPG.



A child's coffin awaits burial as an uncle negotiates payment with the undertaker. The child's father was unable to attend due to "military duties." Infant mortality in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is 128 deaths per 1000, according to the International Red Cross.



Children wait to be registered at a private orphanage in Kisangani, DRC.

Photos by © Marcus Bleasdale/IPG.

The Numbers Game in African Reporting

Statistics don't matter when disease and disaster exact such high human tolls in Africa.

By John Donnelly

Some 26.3 million people in Africa are infected with HIV. More than 11 million children in Africa have become AIDS orphans. More than a million children die each year of malaria. The fighting in Sudan's Darfur region over the past 18 months has displaced nearly two million people.

These numbers, provided by the United Nations (U.N.) and various governments, are horrific and overwhelming. And all of them are wrong—some extraordinarily so.

Reporters who cover Africa feed hungrily off the wealth of statistics offered unflinchingly by various official actors. They are usually labeled as estimates and almost always delivered as close to the truth. We treat them almost as gospel.

The problem in Africa, and much of the developing world, is that few resources are put toward measuring progress, decline, epidemics, refugees, or even counting people in their cities or villages. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, might have 120 million people. Or it might have 160 million. No one knows, because no nationwide census has been done for more than 50 years.

Reassessing the Numbers

What does it mean for journalists when even the most basic figure—how many people live in a country—could be off by tens of millions of people? The problem in handling such inaccurate figures is not a new phenomenon. For many years, government officials, those who work for nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and reporters have used figures,

especially the outrageously large ones, to draw attention to a region that receives so little—whether measured in aid dollars or in column inches—from the outside world.

For a long time, few questioned the numbers. Take a look at HIV figures. The U.N. said last year that 40 million people worldwide are infected with HIV; this year they downgraded the number to 38 million. To arrive at these figures, epidemiologists at UNAIDS and the World Health Organization (WHO) use indicators such as population-based surveys, the percentage of HIV-infected women at antenatal clinics, a country's population, and the percentage of rural and urban dwellers. They mix those and other figures together in a statistical model and arrive at an estimate. The HIV prevalence estimate is then used to arrive at estimates for AIDS deaths, children orphaned by AIDS, the number of people needing antiretroviral drug treatment, and life expectancy in a given country. [See www.who.int/emc-hiv/fact_sheets/All_countries.html for

epidemiological fact sheets.] This is one of the most sophisticated data analyses in Africa. Far more detail is gathered on HIV than for other diseases, including tuberculosis and malaria.

But in the last few years, UNAIDS and WHO statisticians have discovered that their estimates in a number of African countries might have been anywhere from 25 to 400 percent more than the figures arrived at in door-to-door surveys. Their major mistake in the models was the assumption that the percentages of those infected in cities would be somewhat close to the rate in villages. The door-to-door surveys found the rural rates to be far less than the urban ones. Now, quietly, the U.N. is undergoing a dramatic downward revision in their estimates, though in piecemeal fashion, as if to hide the embarrassment of years of being wrong.

Jim Chin, a California-based epidemiologist who helped to devise WHO's model to estimate HIV prevalence, spent hours with me on the phone and through e-mail to explain why he believes today's HIV estimates are 25 to 40 percent inflated. Instead of 40 million infected, he believes the truer number is between 24 million and 30 million. Two other AIDS specialists working for the U.S. government told me they believe the UNAIDS/WHO estimates are inflated by more than 50 percent.

In reporting on HIV prevalence, Chin advises journalists to not quote specific national figures. Instead, he urges them to lump countries into broad categories: very high (more than 10 percent), high (five-



In a refugee camp in Southern Darfur, a woman weaves straw mat covers. *Photo by John Donnelly/The Boston Globe.*

to-10 percent), moderate (one-to-five percent) and low (under one percent). This is a far from satisfactory compromise, especially for reporters—and their editors—who have long been addicted to hard figures.

It now appears there will soon be added pressure to find accurate numbers in a continent where so few credible ones exist. This time the demands aren't coming from editors, but rather from the Bush administration. The U.S. government wants to know if its billions of dollars in aid to fight poverty and AIDS is benefiting the people it's meant to help. It's a fair question. So government officials are demanding measurable results. That, in turn, puts greater pressure on NGO's and U.S. universities that administer these large grants to quickly produce "real" numbers. Soon reporters will have access to even more figures.

Similar concerns will hang over these new numbers, but this time there will be an added dimension: Do they indicate success or failure, or a little bit of both?

Finding and Using Numbers

There are several ways for journalists to proceed with numbers in Africa, and this advice applies to such work in other developing countries. First, maintain some skepticism about any figure. This means doing a close examination of the source of the number, looking for evidence of potential biases from the NGO or government providing the statistical analysis.

An important question to ask is who benefits from what the figure tells us. And by asking this question, important contextual information can emerge. For instance, Chin told me that Vietnam, like many African countries, resisted a downward revision of its HIV prevalence numbers—based on the lower rural figures—because it wanted more money from donors and believed a higher rate would attract more funds. On the other hand, Myanmar, which is more concerned with its international reputation than receiving outside funds, has resisted all attempts to raise its HIV prevalence estimates.

Another consideration is not to extrapolate figures, but to use original data on small groups to follow trends. The figures from the antenatal clinics in Africa, for instance, are a good way to follow the infection rates among the pregnant women. In contrast, the HIV national infection rates for countries are almost useless as a barometer since they can be highly inaccurate. And the national averages do not say much about high-risk populations or regions, nor do they tell us much about areas with low rates of infection.

With population estimates, the best information in many countries might be available through door-to-door polio immunization campaigns that aim to inoculate every child under the age of five. After one of these intensive efforts, demographers possess the treasure of a real number—those children under five who have been vaccinated—and from this number they are able to extrapolate the figure for an estimate of the overall population. Often they discover that 150 percent of the population has been vaccinated. In other words, their original estimate was off by at least 50 percent. Alas, Nigeria can't benefit yet from the polio sweeps because the governor in the northern state of Kano has refused to allow mass polio vaccinations during the past year in his domain, citing distrust of the safety of the vaccine.

There is one final suggestion on how to bring readers closer to the reality that is Africa. It arises out of a project The Boston Globe initiated two years ago to report on people in developing countries who were dying from diseases that the use of known health practices and medical care could have prevented or cured. For more than two weeks, the newspaper sent reporters to four countries—Malawi, Cambodia, Russia and Guatemala. As we spent time side-by-side with people close to death, reporters and photographers from these four teams stayed in close contact by e-mail so we could share our experiences in reporting these stories.

In Cambodia, Russia and Guatemala, journalists had difficulty either in getting access to people who were dying of a preventable disease or had difficulty in finding people. At Lilongwe's central

hospital in Malawi, Globe photographer Dominic Chavez and I were surrounded by needless death. Dozens of people died during the week we were at this urban hospital. In fact, we witnessed so much death that we decided not to profile one person's death but to profile death as we found it in this hospital ward.

It was a telling moment of the difference and opened my eyes to what makes reporting on Africa such a remarkable assignment. From this story, valuable lessons emerged. Numbers no longer mattered. Africa's preventable deaths dwarfed what we were finding in the other regions of the world. In this case, comparative journalism revealed far more than any estimate ever could.

Still, reporters want to use numbers in their stories. Just use caution when the numbers come out of Africa. Remain skeptical. Ask tough questions, and find ways to let readers understand the dilemma the numbers pose in their telling. Journalists should find ways to stop this charade of using ever-escalating estimates of disease and disaster that seem to be little more than desperate attempts for attention. In writing about the human suffering that exists on the continent of Africa, whether it is 13 million or 26.3 million Africans who are infected with HIV or 100,000 or two million people in Darfur who have run from their homes, the toll these disasters exact is dreadful. And in Africa, these troubles can be found on a so much greater scale than anywhere else.

What journalists can do is let Africans speak for themselves about the difficulties they confront and the lives they want to lead without depending on numbers that we know are false to "sell" a story that simply deserves to be told. ■

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Revealing Lives Behind the Statistics

‘We would work to capture and convey the human dignity not often found in stories painting statistical portraits.’

By Davan Maharaj

My first experience of life in Africa came moments after the plane landed in Nairobi in an early morning fog. Sitting in a black London-style taxi as it dodged potholes, we passed a Masai herder in his traditional red robe. His face was pressed against a fence near the airport. As we headed downtown, we saw thousands of men and women walking on unpaved paths. This was the morning commute. Many of them were walking 15 miles to their jobs or in search of work, and they’d make the same journey home. Walking instead of taking the minibus saved them 12 cents. For many, that was enough to eat or pay their children’s school fees.

My first impression of these trudging Kenyans remained with me after my wife, Abby, and I moved to Nairobi with our two small children. About a year into this foreign posting, I proposed a story about how Africans live on less than one dollar a day. Los Angeles Times foreign editor, Marjorie Miller, suggested this story idea be transformed into a series. And so began my journalistic exploration into poor Africans’ daily struggles. As I worked to tell these stories to readers, my family also became embroiled in a fight for survival, and these parallel tracks I traveled lent me a special awareness that my reporting, by itself, could not.

Getting Behind the Statistics

Aid agencies—and reporters—often trot out measures of extreme poverty to describe a country or region’s economy and account for its underdevelopment. The number of people living on less than one dollar a day is one of the more common statistics used. While in many countries some people have no choice but to find ways to survive on a meager



A child plays around caskets being sold by the roadside in Masaka, Uganda. One casket costs about \$20. Casket makers earn more than those living in rural villages, as the high number of people with HIV/AIDS makes this a profitable business. *Photo by Francine Orr/Los Angeles Times.*

income, Africa is the only continent where the proportion of people living in such extreme poverty is increasing. The World Bank estimates that 49 percent of people in sub-Saharan Africa must make do with less than one dollar a day.

The project I proposed was an attempt to pull away the statistical curtain and reveal a close-up view of how these Africans go about their daily lives. We would work to capture and convey the human dignity not often found in stories painting statistical portraits. We certainly did not want to romanticize poverty or portray Africans as one-dimensional objects of pity. As things turned out, we encountered stories of an Africa that is sometimes brutal and dramatic, often painful, but also jubilant.

After a volley of memos with Miller and my editor, Mark Porubcansky, we decided to aim for a series of articles

detailing how—with less than one dollar a day—Africans feed, clothe, shelter, educate and acquire health care for themselves and their children. Staff photographer Francine Orr, based in Los Angeles, was assigned to join me.

Our first story would be about work. How did people earn the money they lived on? To tell this story, I set out for a place I knew from earlier reporting could accurately illustrate the struggle just to find work—Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Several months earlier, I’d been to Eastern DRC to report on the eruption of Mt. Nyiragongo, a volcano that looms eerily over Goma. Nearly half the town was entombed by the volcano, yet people went about their daily routine, trudging to work. When I stopped people in the street to ask them how the volcano was affecting their livelihoods and how

they were going to live after the disaster, more than once the interviewee shrugged and answered: “Je ne sais pas. Se débrouiller.”

“Se débrouiller” is French for eking out a living out of nothing, and soon I discovered that Goma was a town of débrouillards. People rose early in the morning to perform menial labor or peddle food and goods in the streets. Government workers routinely reported to work even though they were never paid. “Having a job that doesn’t pay is better than having no job at all,” the director of the government’s division of work told me.

After the Congo, Francine and I traveled to Nigeria where we hoped to report on clothes and how global economics is altering centuries-old equations in Africa. It had taken me six months to secure a journalist visa but, thanks to contacts I’d made during that quest, Orr’s visa was approved in two days. Here we’d show how used clothes imported from the West are replacing Africa’s flamboyant fabrics and closing hundreds of factories. We also wanted to capture Nigerian ingenuity that surmounts the government’s ban on used clothing. To do so, we chose Yaba market on the outskirts of Lagos, the largest city in sub-Saharan Africa.

After taking a brief break to report a Page One story about religious riots that broke out during the Miss World pageant, we spent a few days navigating Yaba market, trying to capture its vibe. I recorded how the prize item on a vendor’s rack was the bomber jacket worn by Tiffany of Costa Mesa High School, a school in our circulation area. Donated clothes from California ending up in such markets in Africa made me feel that the world of our readers was indissolubly chained to these people in this Nigerian market. But these acts of charity were much more than that: Each has its ripple effect, creating livelihoods for many and killing the jobs of others, and it became our job to show how this works and the affect it has on African families.

To engage readers fully, we had to approach our reporting in the Nigerian way. Before interviewing vendors, we followed a local reporter’s advice and



A young merchant sits next to piles of used clothing under the hot sun at the Yaba Market in Lagos, Nigeria. Clothing merchants sell used clothing illegally imported from the United States. *Photo by Francine Orr/Los Angeles Times.*

visited the head of the vendors’ association. At noon, we joined the drum circle, when the vendors and their customers took a break from the ferocious African sun. We were no longer strangers.

We also traveled to southern Africa where a drought, poor public policy, and AIDS were causing hunger. Though we’d planned to go to parts of rural Zambia to report on people eating roots, leaves, even poison berries to try to survive, we found another compelling story in the country’s capital city, Lusaka, where residents scraped together pennies to buy food. I filled notebooks with stories from families living in the shanties in Lusaka’s so-called Garden District. And despite starvation of many of its people, Zambia refused to accept U.S. produced genetically modified foods.

Personal Struggles Intervene

The day before Francine and I were to make our trip to the countryside outside Lusaka, the call came. Back in Nairobi, my wife, Abby, was being checked into the hospital. Her liver enzyme numbers were soaring at an alarming rate, and doctors were worried. Both Abby and I thought this was a simple case of cur-

able hepatitis and that she’d beat it with the help of the doctors at the well-regarded Aga Khan Hospital in Nairobi. As Francine headed for southern Zambia, I headed straight to the hospital. Abby was not in good shape. Her skin and eyeballs had turned topaz yellow.

Doctors later surmised that drugs prescribed to fend off mighty African amoebas were killing her liver. For the next three weeks, as Abby’s condition worsened, we were moved from the Aga Khan to the best liver transplant hospital in London. We took only a backpack, confident that we would return in a few days. A friend agreed to stay with our children, Armaan, then four, and Maya, two.

“I’m humbled,” Abby told me after the mainly African medical staff left her room at King’s College Hospital in London. “If I were an African without means, I’d be dead.” The doctors in London then suggested we move Abby to Los Angeles because her O+ blood type did not make her a promising candidate for getting a transplant in Europe. In Los Angeles, we were met by paramedics waiting for us with a gurney.

From Abby’s University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) hospital room, and with help from a stringer, I filed

a front-page story about Daniel Arap Moi's ruling Kenya African National Union party being ousted from power after four decades of one-party rule. Our colleagues and friends in Nairobi were ecstatic as Kenya was caught up in a spirit of euphoria and rebirth. But for us, these were tough times. Abby's numbers continued to worsen. On January 8, 2004, she was wheeled into the operating room, given a new liver and a fresh lease on life.

We spent the next four months in a hotel room footsteps from UCLA hospital, joined by our children, who'd been brought there by my sister, who called off her vacation in Italy and traveled to Africa to take them from the care of our friends. I kept in touch with sources and local staff in Africa, and after Abby was well enough, I returned to Africa to finish my reporting on this project.

Returning to Africa

Correspondents who choose to go to Africa believe that they can make a difference by telling the stories from this largely forgotten continent. Often, I find, they also bear much guilt. While reporting on poverty and conflict, they stay in the continent's finest hotels. They know their airfare to any destination could feed those who live in a small village or alleviate some of the needs they write about. Expatriate homes have multiple bathrooms, while not far away slum dwellers use plastic bags and hurl them like slingshots away from the scene of the crime.

I carried much of this guilt, and when I returned to finish reporting these stories in Africa I brought along with me a deeper sense of compassion for the people whose life stories I was borrowing to bring to readers. As Abby had observed early on in her health crisis and I knew, the tens of thousands of dollars that had gone into keeping her alive could have saved hundreds of lives in Africa.

Logistically, too, due to Abby's illness, Francine's and my reporting schedules were now different, and we traveled separately: Some of our trips were made months apart. Even so, it was often as if time had stood still. In a trip I'd made to



A worker in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo by Francine Orr/Los Angeles Times.

South Africa, I met three children who had to drop out of the school located next to their house because their mother couldn't afford the \$10 annual school fee. (Their father had abandoned the family years before.) When Francine went there several months later, these children were in the same predicament—penniless and dependent on

their neighbors for a plate of plain rice. As we approached publication, I kept in touch with the school's principal by phone from Los Angeles to see if anything had changed. It hadn't.

While the food crises in Zambia and elsewhere in Southern Africa subsided somewhat after our visits there, a similar disaster festered in Ethiopia. Members



Homemade wooden scooters called chukudus are used for transportation and carrying goods around Goma. Photo by Francine Orr/Los Angeles Times.



Health workers measure a one and a half-year-old boy's height during a medical evaluation at the Yirba Therapeutic Feeding Center in southern Ethiopia. He is malnourished and, like other children there, is highly susceptible to skin infection, pneumonia and malaria.



Children run barefoot through houses that have holes in the walls in Nairobi, Kenya. Sounds of children laughing and crying and the smell of human excrement and cooking fill the air.

of an Ethiopian family I interviewed four months earlier wore the same clothes—their only set—when Francine showed up six months later. Finding them each time was not easy. Francine made two trips to the remote region in southern Ethiopia before she was able to locate them to take photographs.

And Kassim Issa, an AIDS patient whom I had followed for several months, was still alive when Francine visited him. He was among the lucky Africans to receive antiretroviral drugs. Issa survived despite his poverty and dagger-like missives from his mother-in-law who was upset that he had given her late daughter the disease, then saddled her with their two children. We never met his mother-in-law, but her colorful letters were featured prominently in our story.

'Living on Pennies'

Our "Living On Pennies" six-part series ran across a total of 20 pages in July. The stories were relatively short, with each one ranging from 2,200 to 2,800 words. Expert comment and background were limited so the story could focus tightly on Africans going about their everyday lives. With deliberate intent, Francine's pictures were printed in black and white so that the vibrant color did not detract from the essence of the images.

We've since received more than 600 letters and e-mails. (The readers' comments became the series' epilogue and, on the Web site, I responded by video to their comments and reactions.) Francine and I were both struck by the large number of responses we received from people who read our newspaper's Web edition of this series and saw accompanying images. Readers in Canada, India, Japan and Germany were among those who thanked the editors for devoting the space to give them an inside glimpse into the lives of these African people. Like our U.S. readers, many sent checks to aid groups listed on the paper's Web site.

Just as donated used clothing connects people across the world, our newspaper is no longer a local form of communication. Readers from across the globe said that they were eager

Photos by Francine Orr/Los Angeles Times.

to read our next installments. Many readers asked Francine and me how the series changed us and the way we look at life. Despite all the talk about compassion fatigue, I came away from this reporting experience with a sense that people do care about the plight of others when they connect with stories of human beings engaged in the struggle for survival.

This assignment also reinforced my admiration for the indomitable African

spirit. Long before the idea of doing this project entered my mind, I asked a colleague how Africans lived on less than one dollar a day. "Davan, they don't," he said bluntly.

At the end of my reporting, I realized that he was right. The people we interviewed were winners simply because they survived to go on to the next day and struggle again. Their victories were small, and every day they had to fight the same battles. ■

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Journalists and Humanitarian NGO's

In our 'symbiotic' relationship, aid workers become sources, gatekeepers or eye openers.

By Hilaire Avril

Early on the morning of October 15, 1999, the glass-walled Paris headquarters of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was invaded by a swarm of camera crews. They'd been sent there in the expectation that the medical humanitarian organization would be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

At the time I was a student volunteering with the media relations department. When the news was announced around 11 o'clock, even the most emergency-hardened, leathery-faced humanitarian workers were momentarily speechless as journalists bombarded staff members with a barrage of questions. Even the receptionist made the 1 o'clock news, since she'd been unable to hide behind a desk. Amid all the chaos, an operations manager elbowed his way to our office. He had to duck to avoid cameras. When he finally made it, he told us with a straight face: "Don't tell the press anything before we've discussed whether we'll accept the Nobel or not." I remember the media relations officer standing next to me looking like she'd just swallowed an umbrella.

MSF is one of the most media-savvy

humanitarian nongovernmental organizations (NGO's). Despite this supposedly "symbiotic" relationship between aid agencies and the media, a sense of incomprehension inhabits both sides. Humanitarians rely on journalists to raise awareness of the causes in which they are involved. They also depend on our coverage to attract donor funding. Journalists often rely on aid workers to gain access to tell the story of a disaster or crisis and to decrypt what is going on, although they rarely admit to this aspect of their relationship. Both are wary of the other's agenda, for several reasons.

Aid workers often complain that journalists have no understanding of the intricacies of the humanitarian issues they cover. They also resent the "insufficient coverage of their activities." Most journalists who cover humanitarian crises are generalists; a few are war correspondents. Some are unprepared to grasp the technicalities and exigencies of an aid operation, and most do not appreciate the subtleties of the social, cultural and political implications of humanitarian intervention, although this is where the underlying



A community leader takes Hilaire Avril (second from right) around the market in a Sudanese refugee camp. A young girl who lives in the camp smiles into the camera. June 2004.

story is in most aid operations. The Sphere Project, which outlines standards for aid operations, insists that an aid worker have knowledge of the disaster-affected population's culture and customs. The standard should also apply to journalists.

On the other hand, journalists who deal with NGO's often experience an apparent contradiction. While those who work at NGO headquarters are typically eager to get press coverage for their operations, their field staffs are often

reluctant to talk with journalists once they arrive on site. While preparing for a recent trip to Kakuma camp, the biggest settlement in Kenya for Sudanese refugees fleeing the 20-year-long civil war in South Sudan, I asked a major international NGO's public information department in New York for field contacts. They were more than happy to provide what I needed, making it possible to bypass the camp's administration and talk directly with refugees about their hopes and plans in light of the current peace talks. However, the field staff's approach was very different. The manager told me that the camp staff was not "qualified to speak to the media," but that she would be more than happy to brief me when I returned to the capital.

The truth is that Kakuma camp—which shelters some 90,000 refugees of nine different nationalities—is under-funded and rundown. It's a sad, destitute and violent place. Despite the tremendous work several aid agencies perform in this god-forsaken part of the Kenyan arid lands, tribal feuds, raids from the "hosting" Turkana community, disease and sexual violence have plagued the camp since it was set up 12 years ago. Those who are here as humanitarian workers did not trust that I would cover the "whole" story of the camp and explain the tremendous difference this aid effort makes in the refugees' lives, despite all its shortcomings and lack of resources.

What can journalists expect of aid workers as sources? Most aid workers I know find a source of energy in their healthy indignation at the world surrounding them. This is often combined with a strong antiestablishment stance. On the evening after MSF won the Nobel Prize—and accepted it, since the option of turning it down for the sake of "political neutrality" never stood a chance against the mountain of prime-time exposure—I asked an old-timer who'd worked for years in Afghanistan how he reacted to this worldwide recognition of 30 years of hard work. His answer was sobering: "When I'm back in Paris, strangers in cafés tell me how much they admire us for what we're

doing. But when it comes to renting a flat, people turn me down because I've got no credit history."

Humanitarian workers have a growing skepticism towards journalists, especially those who "parachute" in to do one story and then leave. These aid workers often perceive journalists as being obsessed with finding "good angles" rather than reporting in-depth stories. This is because a few journalists who specialize in covering crises can be ruthless in focusing only on the shortcomings of some aid operations.

But I've found that most aid workers will open up if you take time to display empathy and at least minimal awareness of what their tasks entail. Aid workers should also educate journalists about the boundaries they are obliged not to cross. For example, if an NGO is portrayed in media coverage as taking sides in a conflict, such coverage might put the field personnel in danger.

Recently I heard the manager of a feeding operation in Burundi confess in a hushed tone that her organization had been giving food to rebel forces in an attempt to keep them from looting local civilians' meager resources. To make such a decision must have been very difficult, but this manager told me the approach seemed to be working. However, what journalist covering this story would resist the obvious angle that "aid agencies are feeding the conflict"? Which editor would turn down this angle on the story?

This is why it's important for relief workers to be willing to explain the dilemmas they face every day. Their job, as I have come to understand it, is often to make the "least worst decision." But that has to be explained to journalists and, in turn, journalists need to find ways to convey this subtle but critical dimension of the story to readers, listeners and viewers. Humanitarian work is a complex endeavor, and often a political minefield, but its nuances and challenges should be openly exposed.

In 1994 in Goma, in what was still Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire, aid agencies confronted a similar dilemma. Hutu refugees were crammed into gigantic camps. "Genocidaires"—the Hutu

extremists who had just massacred hundreds of thousands of civilians in the most savage way—were among the civilian refugees. They were actively recruiting and arming young boys in the camp. Should aid agencies have walked away to avoid supporting the mass murderers who were barely hiding among the vulnerable civilians, as some did? Or should they have stayed and fed these killers alongside the innocents?

If those in the West had had a clearer understanding of these circumstances—one that they might have received from well-reported news coverage—it might have triggered an armed intervention that could have separated murderers from civilians. Instead, "genocidaire" militias were never disarmed and still violently destabilize the entire African Great Lakes region.

Broader, deeper and more consistent coverage might also help deflate the "emergency of the season" effect that drains all attention and aid funding to the most widely reported crisis, as has been the case during the past year with Iraq. While the mainstream media extensively cover the plight of the Iraqi people, the fighting in nearby Somalia that still sends refugees fleeing across the Kenyan border—along with several other humanitarian crises—has been off editors' radar screens since the disastrous end of Operation Restore Hope 10 years ago.

For those of us listening to those who work for humanitarian NGO's, and to the ones who try to help, unfortunately what we hear is the never-ending possibility of stories. ■

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WATCHDOG

War Crimes Tribunals in Africa and Sleeping Press Watchdogs

‘... there is an obvious need for independent press scrutiny to hold these tribunals accountable.’

By Thierry Cruvellier

In the past decade, the rise of what is called “transitional justice” has been a significant phenomenon in foreign affairs and human rights. Today there is hardly a conflict situation where the quest for justice and the need to bring those who have committed mass crimes against civilian populations to task for what they did is not being advocated by humanitarian organizations or pushed forward by the United Nations. Setting up international criminal tribunals and stimulating national trials or truth and reconciliation commissions has become a common feature of the international community’s response to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Not surprisingly, Africa has become the main field of experimentation for international justice proponents. Deadly civil wars where civilians have been the main target of murderous armed groups have multiplied on the continent since the end of the cold war, prompting the international community to set up an unprecedented number of peacekeeping missions or humanitarian interventions. Weak and highly dependent states might have also provided “interventionists” with easier options than elsewhere in the Middle East, Asia or Central America. Thus, in the past 10 years, there is almost no transitional justice mechanism that has not been tested in Africa.

Following in the footsteps of post-apartheid South Africa, there have been truth commissions, either national or semi-international, in Ghana and Sierra Leone. Ethiopia’s “Red Terror” and then Rwanda’s genocide have led to mass national trials. It also resulted in the creation of a U.N. International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in 1994, following



The founder of Radio RTLM, Ferdinand Nahimana, was sentenced to life imprisonment by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. *Photo courtesy of Intermedia.*

the one established a year earlier for the former Yugoslavia. Currently Sierra Leone is experimenting with a “mixed” court that has been hastily brandished as the “new model” for international justice. [A mixed court is comprised of both international staff and nationals.] And one can be reassured that the African continent will keep its leading position in this field as the newly created International Criminal Court (ICC) will probably take its first cases from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda.

Filling the Information Gap

Press coverage of these important judicial processes in Africa raise several

concerns. The U.N. International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), which is based in Arusha, Tanzania, provides a particularly interesting case study. It is well known that the pace of justice is largely ill-adapted to that of the mass media. The ICTR’s serious mismanagement, excruciating slowness, and geographical isolation have only heightened this problem. In addition, there has been a constant (and not so hard to explain) diminution of interest in Africa among mainstream Western media. As a consequence, the ICTR has never been under close independent scrutiny from the mainstream international media. At the same time, local media have lacked the skills, the interest, or the means to organize such coverage.

In such a context, a new phenomenon occurred: To fill this information gap, international nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) have assumed the role of independent, private media companies. Three of them, whose headquarters are located in the United States (Internews), Switzerland (Fondation Hirondelle), and France (Intermedia) have provided coverage of the ICTR since the beginning of the trials in 1997. Since 2003, only the Swiss one is still operating on a daily basis in Arusha while the American one has essentially moved to Kigali.

Such a situation, in which NGO's, dependent on donors' financial support, are in charge of reporting on trials with a highly political dimension, raises questions about their independence and the role they are playing as a watchdog. After several years of observing this coverage, it appears that, for the most part, the NGO reporting has proved to be seriously lacking in investigative, analytical and critical approaches. Notwithstanding a commendable effort to turn people's attention to these trials and to transmit information back to the Rwandan population (living hundreds of miles away from Arusha), the reigning editorial policy has been driven more by a "project" mentality, common to NGO's, than a journalistic one.

Yet there doesn't appear to have been any pressure on these NGO's from their Western donors, which are primarily governments. Obviously, these organizations have faced pressure from Rwandan authorities and, more disturbingly, from the tribunal itself. But whenever they gave in, it wasn't due to pressures from those who were funding them. Thus, to a large extent, these organizations are engaging in what borders on self-censorship, deriving either from their principled reluctance to be seen as "troublemakers" (neutrality rather than impartiality is the key word for most NGO's) or their possible interest in developing other projects elsewhere, including in partnership with organiza-

tions or powers that have stakes in these international tribunals.

While it may seem churlish to criticize these NGO's for filling the information vacuum left by mainstream media's withdrawal from these issues and regions, it is important to remember that their agenda is not the same as traditional media companies.

Sierra Leone provides a slightly different situation. Unlike the ICTR, which has enjoyed some specialized

In the absence of a professional and independent press putting these tribunals under constant and consistent scrutiny, there is a lack of necessary democratic control.

journalistic coverage, the Special Court here, whose trials started in June 2004, is only covered, on a permanent basis, by local media. Surprisingly, no information-focused NGO like the one in Arusha has opened any project in Freetown relating to the court's activities. In a country where the local press suffers grave economic and ethical problems, as well as a lack of journalists trained in court reporting, the Special Court—which is principally funded by the United States, The Netherlands, Great Britain, and Canada—lacks any independent international watchdog. Only one international NGO, the International Center for Transitional Justice, has been closely monitoring the Special Court workings from the beginning. But it doesn't aim at providing a public and independent journalistic coverage of the trials. Thus it cannot replace the press as a watchdog.

Lack of Democratic Control

This situation in Sierra Leone highlights a more serious problem facing the development of international justice on African soil. In the absence of a professional and independent press putting these tribunals under constant and consistent scrutiny, there is a lack of necessary democratic control. The

experience of the ICTR and the Special Court for Sierra Leone show that these tribunals, like any bureaucratized and political institution, can become authoritarian, abusive, or corrupt once they realize that they have limited accountability.

Indeed, these courts differ from judicial systems in democratic societies by the fact that judges—not a legislative body—write the rules of procedure and can amend them at will. This has led to some rather unchecked practices that would be seriously questioned in democratic legal systems. With no counterbalancing legislative body, with state donors focused mainly on budgetary issues, and with human rights organizations

reluctant to criticize institutions they helped create, there is an obvious need for independent press scrutiny to hold these tribunals accountable. This is perhaps more likely to come in an efficient manner from a combination of specialized international media and training programs—giving practical tools to investigate the workings of a court—for local journalists covering such institutions that deal with their own history. ■

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Photographing a Nation Under Siege

In Liberia, a photojournalist finds death, despair and destruction.

In 2003, Los Angeles Times photographer Carolyn Cole went to Liberia to document its ongoing civil war. Her photographs appeared in a series, "Monrovia Under Siege," which offered readers an intimate look at what this war had done to the people who live there. In her photographs, Cole paid particular attention to the innocent victims who had been pulled into the conflict. With many of her images, readers were able to come away with a sense of what the street fighting in the nation's capital felt like. For this work she was awarded the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for feature photography. Cole describes below what Liberians were experiencing at the time of her arrival.

“Liberians had long been forgotten by the outside world as a bloody civil war terrorized the civilian population for much of the past decade. For a brief moment in 2003, the world's attention took note as government and rebel militias fought for control and a guarantee of profits from the country's rich resources. The rebels demanded an end to the reign of former President Charles Taylor, while Taylor insisted on staying until peacekeepers arrived. Men, women and children fled the countryside as rebel fighters advanced on the capital, often looting and burning homes in their path. Those displaced by the fighting took refuge in schools, churches and camps, which also came under attack from mortar fire. The final battle was waged in the city center. A forced change of leadership was finally arranged, but not before hundreds had been killed and wounded, leaving a lasting scar on the already tragic history of Liberia.” ■



More than 9,000 people crowded into what was once the Masonic Temple of Monrovia, Liberia. The majority arrived there after fleeing fighting on the outskirts of the capital.



Tehneh Johnson, one of thousands of displaced Liberians, had been living at a former U.S. radio station when she was told to leave as the fighting drew near.

Photos by Carolyn Cole/Los Angeles Times.



Thousands of Liberians died during a decade of civil conflict, including these men buried in a sandy mass grave along with 64 others on the day international peacekeepers finally arrived in the summer of 2003.



Bullet casings carpet a street in Monrovia where fighting was heaviest between government and rebel soldiers.



A soldier cries for his comrade who died in his arms after a frontline offensive, as government soldiers fought to take back territory lost to rebels.

Photos by Carolyn Cole/Los Angeles Times.



A young Liberian fighter defends Monrovia, when a standoff between rebel and government militias holds the city under siege.



A man killed in overnight fighting is left by residents of the area, as they run to avoid being hit by gunfire or shelling.



Unable to find food in government-held areas, thousands of Liberians took back routes through swampland to look for food in rebel-controlled territory.

Photos by Carolyn Cole/Los Angeles Times.

Journalism at a Crossroads in Liberia

War devastated the nation's independent media, and now the job of restoring the foundation for news reporting begins.

By Gabriel I.H. Williams

Following 14 years of devastating civil war and a brutal dictatorship, the media in the West African state of Liberia, like the rest of the country, has begun the tedious process of recovery.

Since the dictatorial regime of Charles Taylor fell from power in August 2003, Liberian journalists have been enjoying a level of freedom inconceivable under the rule of the rebel leader turned-president of Liberia. There is a multiplicity of independent news outlets. According to an official of the Ministry of Information, the primary agency responsible for media affairs, this spring there were 32 radio stations, 31 newspapers, and three television stations. The list has been expanding since then. A notable aspect of this new era is that the media, like the general public, have been free to openly criticize public officials, including the interim head of state of the power-sharing transitional government, without retribution.

A statement made in June by the Press Union of Liberia, the national journalists' organization that advocates for press freedom and democratic governance in Liberia, celebrated this milestone change: "A new day is dawning on the media horizon in Liberia. Since the ushering in of the National Transitional Government ... last year [2003], the media have breathed a sigh of relief; no journalist has been jailed, and we are happy that people whose feelings are ruffled by the newspapers and other media outlets are now taking a recourse to the law, instead of brutalizing journalists."

This statement was made at the convention of the Association of Liberian Journalists in the Americas (ALJA), an organization founded by Liberian journalists living in exile to continue



Philip Wesseh, managing editor of *The Inquirer*, goes through the remains of the newspaper's building after a bombing in 1996. *Photo by Gregory H. Stemm.*

to advocate for press freedom and democracy in Liberia. ALJA members are mostly members of the Press Union of Liberia forced to flee their country due to the war and suppression of press freedom. Both organizations champion the cause of democratic governance in a country long dominated by misrule and dictators.

Along with its statement, the Press Union provided an assessment of the media situation after the cessation of hostilities in August 2003. This assessment "showed that media institutions were massively looted by combatants during the fighting. Computers, vehicles and other equipment were carted away, leaving newspaper houses and radio stations in a deplorable state. At the moment, media institutions have diverted their attention from developing their institutions to concentrate on replacing

what was lost."

Despite these difficulties, the Press Union attributes the large number of functioning news organizations to a relaxation of registration requirements by the transitional government. This reflects of the growing sense of security, freedom and peace within Liberian society—thanks to the presence of the largest U.N. peacekeeping force in the world. As a result, thousands of Liberian refugees in neighboring countries are returning home along with a growing number of others from countries throughout the world.

Journalism in the Aftermath of War

After more than 10 years in exile in the United States, I went back to Liberia on April 21, 2004, less than a week after

U.N. peacekeepers began the disarmament and demobilization of the armed factions. I had been in Liberia during the first four years of the war and served as leader of the Press Union and managing editor of *The Inquirer*, the nation's leading independent daily. I fled the country in late 1993 due to death threats from some factions because of my work as a journalist, and this trip back was meant to help me understand the circumstances the media confronted now that the war was over.

As I stepped off the plane at the ruined Roberts International Airport that hot, sunny afternoon and traveled 35 miles to the capital of Monrovia, I felt depressed and horrified by the sight of such widespread destruction. I was seeing my country broken, but as I settled in I could see signs that Liberia is getting back on course. Monrovia and its environs were peaceful and gun-free, with only the on-duty U.N. peacekeepers armed. I visited offices of media outlets and held meetings with various national leaders, including those in the Press Union and news organizations. I was also received in audience by Liberia's transitional head of state, Gyude Bryant, and some of the representatives of the international community in the country.

From these meetings, it became clear there were widespread concerns regarding what was seen as a serious decline in professional standards in the media. I found this to be true when I saw firsthand some of the conditions under which media offices were then operating. From watching how they operated and reading what they published, it was obvious that most of the news organizations were substandard. This was attributed to two key factors:

1. Like every sector of Liberian society, journalism suffered a massive brain drain due to the exodus of people during this time of war and repression.
2. Most of the current journalists practicing in the country have had little or no training or educational programs available to them during the years of war, leaving them unprepared to perform effectively.

Most media outlets emerging from the ruinous war are operating in cramped and poorly ventilated spaces with few computers and other equipment to work with. Only a few journalists are fortunate to receive regular paychecks. In a country where there is no electricity for general public consumption because the hydroelectric dam and other generating facilities were completely destroyed, businesses (including newspapers and other news outlets) have to purchase electricity from private generator owners. This is expensive, and service can be erratic. Most generator owners, like the single major printing press operating in Liberia, demand payment in U.S. dollars for their services, even though the news organizations' revenues are in Liberian dollars, which is very low in value when compared with the U.S. dollar.

Compounding the precarious financial state of media organizations has been the very limited availability of advertisements. Given that few businesses were able to operate during the years of war, they are not there now to help commercially sustain independent news organizations. The war meant that Liberia's economy virtually collapsed, leaving a massive criminal enterprise in its place and causing unemployment to climb to an estimated 80 percent. Widespread poverty results, too, in a serious decline in circulation of newspapers, since there is a limited number of people who can afford to purchase the publications. Added to these problems is the high cost of printing at the only primary commercial printing house that remained operational through the war.

Restoring Liberia's Media

To restore the Liberian media to its prewar level and to ensure progress, the following recommendations, among others, should be implemented:

- **Training:** Intense short and long-term training programs are needed to improve the professional skills of reporters and editors. Emphasis must be placed on training in computer and information technology.

Information technology development must be an integral part of the rebuilding process of the Liberian media. There must be training programs, too, for those working in the administrative, business and advertising sectors of the media. To improve the working conditions for journalists and the quality of what journalists publish and broadcast, there is a very urgent need for the United Nations and the international community—particularly organizations that support press freedom—to assist the Liberian media through the provision of financial and material resources dedicated to improving training opportunities.

- **Education:** The Mass Communications Department at the University of Liberia must receive adequate support in terms of instructional manpower and resources to ensure that students pursuing a degree are well trained. The department should resume its two-year certificate program that existed before the war but was interrupted.
- **Printing Facilities:** More sophisticated printing facilities are needed to improve the print quality of the newspapers and other publications and reduce the high cost and other burdens of printing.
- **Civil Society:** Mindful that a free, vibrant media is crucial to the existence of a peaceful democratic society, it is important that media safeguards and supports be included in Liberia's two-year reconstruction program under the auspices of the United Nations. And to encourage Liberian professionals and entrepreneurs who fled the civil crises to return at a time the literacy rate in the country is estimated to be a shocking 15 percent, the United Nations should seriously consider implementing a resettlement program. Indications are that most of the trained journalists who fled Liberia would return and get involved in the process of rebuilding when they know they can sustain their families.
- **Government Roles:** The Ministry of Information, the Press Union of Liberia, and independent media

in Liberia need to work together in finding solutions to problems affecting the media. The current Minister of Information, C. William Allen, who is former editor in chief of the independent Footprints Today newspaper and president of the Press Union of Liberia, has demonstrated his commitment to press freedom. Under his leadership, opportunity exists to transform this ministry from an instrument of state repression that enforced antimedia laws to an agency promoting press freedom. Its relaxation of media registration regulations is commendable. However, after Allen or the transitional government leaves office, those who

take over could decide to reinforce the repressive laws and regulations. Accordingly, the Liberian media and international media advocacy groups must work with the current information ministry to change the country's antipress laws and regulations.

Before the war, the independent Liberian media was regarded to be one of the most vibrant in West Africa. As Liberia prepares for presidential and general elections in October 2005, efforts must begin now to enable journalists to report and publish news of these changes in Liberia so people will better appreciate the fragile gift of democracy. ■

Gabriel I.H. Williams is the author of "Liberia: The Heart of Darkness: Accounts of Liberia's Civil War and its Destabilizing Effects in West Africa." He lives in the United States and is an executive member of the Mano River Media Forum (MARIFO), an organization seeking to improve the practice of journalism in the Mano River subregion, which includes Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea.

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When Being a Photojournalist Is About Surviving

'Journalists could never be sure they would be alive to cover the next assignment.'

By Gregory H. Stemn

While I was photographing a rally at the University of Liberia in support of three jailed journalists, then-President Charles Taylor sent armed soldiers and police to disperse the students. On film I'd captured the brutality the security forces used against the students, but then some plainclothes officers demanded that I hand over my camera. When I refused, they knocked my camera to the ground and destroyed it. I was beaten and accused of being an enemy of the government. The pictures of what I'd witnessed were gone.

This wasn't the only incident in which, as a news photographer, I was physically attacked and my equipment confiscated. Sadly, it became a familiar ritual on many of my assignments. Journalists worked like this in Liberia, as each day's assignment presented a fresh challenge of survival. To do our job, we braved death threats by state security officers as we tried to photograph moments and actions that would make real what was happening for those who would see our images. Journalists

could never be sure they would be alive to cover the next assignment.

During the past 15 years, my skills as a photojournalist and commitment to journalism have been tested. These were times in Liberia's history that demanded endurance and courage to pursue the truth. Like a few other Liberians who believed that the war for power, wealth and greed needed to stop, I faced dangers and continued to work until I—and others—reached a limit where we could carry on no more.

We went to places where others dared not go, such as into territory where rebel forces opposed to President Taylor were advancing from the country's northern border with Guinea. Locals were afraid to speak with me or the reporter with whom I traveled, and the government security forces in the area did not trust us. One evening we started to hear sporadic gun sounds and saw villagers leaving, not wanting to get caught in the crossfire. At government checkpoints we'd mingle with the crowd and listen to internally displaced people tell their stories to the soldiers. More

than 5,000 people were huddled at one checkpoint with nowhere to go. They couldn't remain in their villages, but the soldiers were not allowing them to pass through, accusing them of having rebels amongst them.

The soldiers would not allow photographs to be taken, so I moved away from the crowd to document this scene. I passed each finished roll to my reporting colleague, who by then had befriended a villager. By the time the soldiers confiscated my camera, the exposed film was safe, and our new friend led us through trails to the next town.

In time, some of us, including me, fled our country because of serious attempts on our lives by state security. Now we hope for change. Threads of that hope are found in the work we did and what we envisioned we can do once we have freedom. ■

Gregory H. Stemn is a Liberian photojournalist working as a freelancer in the United States.

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Working under bazardous, sometimes life-threatening, conditions, Liberian photographer Gregory Stemm devoted years of his life to documenting the destruction of his country under the rule of Charles Taylor. Some of his photographs appear on this page.



Displaced people at the Samuel K. Doe Sports Complex in Bong County, Liberia, 2003.



A University of Liberia student was beaten by armed soldiers of then-President Charles Taylor at a rally in March 2001 in support of three jailed journalists.



Some of Charles Taylor's armed forces in Bong County.



One of Charles Taylor's soldiers, 2001.

Photos by Gregory H. Stemm.

Africa Through the Eyes of African Reporters

If local journalists reported more of the news to Western audiences, their sources and the story's context would be different.

By Geoffrey Nyarota

A young American journalist about to fly to his first posting abroad as foreign correspondent contacted me early in 2004. He said he had no previous experience, needed to talk to somebody who could possibly help him overcome this handicap, and my name had been recommended. In due course, he traveled by airplane and we had lunch in Cambridge and, on departure, I assumed he felt confident and prepared to face the new challenges ahead as African correspondent based in Johannesburg.

While his approach was certainly beyond reproach, our brief encounter left me with a great sense of misgiving. Was this vast African continent generally receiving the best coverage possible in the Western media? Could African journalists not make a greater contribution towards the coverage of their own continent in the Western media?

Citing certain alleged inadequacies on the part of African journalists, news organizations in Washington, New York, London and Paris routinely assign their own journalists, some with little or no previous experience covering a foreign country, to cover vast tracts of or even the whole of the continent of Africa. In some instances, this tradition effectively denies African journalists the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the coverage of countries they understand better than the average Western journalist. Because of this, they are also, therefore, denied an opportunity to improve their professional competence through association with the world's leading news organizations.

Yet Western correspondents frequently file copy based on the input of local stringers or on what they glean from the output of local journalists in local publications. There must, there-

fore, be advantages in training local journalists to cover Africa directly for Western news organizations, and no evidence has been found that African journalists are impervious to further training or reorientation. Aside from eliminating the costs of relocating correspondents and finding accommodations for them in exclusive suburbs in Africa, there would also possibly be a significant improvement in the reporting because of African journalists' familiarity with the territory covered. When Western correspondents fly in to cover an event at short notice, they can gain only a superficial understanding of the crisis and, also, they might have limited or no access to the most knowledgeable and relevant sources. And in places where dictators are in power, the locals can be suspicious of Western journalists, while government officials are fearful of association with them. Many correspondents are forced to take the line of least resistance into the assignment in hand.

Western Journalists Covering Africa

"Diplomats here say ..." is a phrase sprinkled liberally in accounts sent from Africa by Western journalists. This is, however, a phrase that occasionally invokes a sense of bemusement among discerning African readers living in the West, while they wonder how any diplomat could possibly have become privy to such sensitive information or detail. For information, diplomats often depend on opposition activists given to embellishment to push their own cause.

A classic example of how journalists rely on sources from their own world to cover African affairs is to be found in

the July 12, 2004 issue of Newsweek. An article on Sudan, "The Power of a Word," highlights a certain concern raised by analysts—the appropriateness or value of some of the news sources Western correspondents covering Africa depend on. This article discusses the ongoing crisis in the Darfur region of western Sudan, where government-backed Arab militias have driven thousands of blacks from their homes and their land. In the article, the controversial question of when a massacre is deemed to have become genocide is raised.

This perennial question has been debated in other parts of Africa. At which point did the systematic elimination of hundreds of thousands of members of the Tutsi minority tribe by Hutu extremists in Rwanda in 1994 become genocide? Was the massacre of 20,000 peasants of the minority Ndebele tribe by President Robert Mugabe's North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade in Zimbabwe, which received scant media coverage, genocide or not?

In the Newsweek article, John Kefferman, an investigator for Physicians for Human Rights, was quoted as saying, "This is genocide unfolding," while U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's characterization falls short of such a categorical assertion. "What we are seeing is a disaster, a catastrophe," Powell said after flying to Khartoum to give the Sudan government a last chance to stop the bloodbath. Paula Claycomb, a UNICEF official in Khartoum, was more graphic in her assessment of the situation. "The Sudanese government created a monster," she said, referring to the marauding Arab militias known as the Janjaweed, "and they are having trouble putting it back in the cage."

As an afterthought, passing reference is made in the article's closing paragraph

to the views of the men at the center of the crisis, Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir and his foreign minister, Mustafa Ismail, both of whom have denied that a crisis exists. Even though the situation in Darfur was high on the agenda of the third summit of the African Union (A.U.) held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—and the A.U. has more than 20 observers on the ground in Darfur and is engaged in trying to resolve the crisis—none of these African sources were in evidence in the magazine's reporting.

The predilection to rely on Western-linked sources, as evidenced in this article, is consistent with general practice among foreign correspondents covering Africa. Foreign journalists, especially those correspondents recently posted to the continent or those covering events in one country while based in a different African country, often rely exclusively on sources who are the most easily accessible—the diplomatic corps, NGO's and U.N. agencies—some of whom may not be not fully informed themselves. While few sources can be judged to be "fully informed" on an issue such as genocide, it is a serious oversight that the president of Sudan and his foreign minister are the only African sources quoted and no evidence can be found that other African experts were canvassed for their opinion or analysis. Had African journalists been the ones reporting this story, perhaps they would have at least referenced the ongoing effort by the A.U. or spoken to Africans who are the victims in this horrible crisis.

Curiously, during my many years reporting in Harare, Zimbabwe, I never met a foreign correspondent based there who took the trouble to learn either Shona or Ndebele, the country's two indigenous languages. This includes those who remained in the Zimbabwean capital for many years. Yet political rallies and other meetings in Zimbabwe are invariably addressed in the vernacular. President Mugabe will throw in the occasional English sentence if he is particularly keen that foreign correspondents don't miss a specific point he wants to make. Similarly, he is known to make serious threats against the white community in Shona,

knowing that his comments would not be well received in the West.

This pattern has been followed for many years. I recall in January 1980, Mugabe addressed a massive rally on his return from exile to Salisbury (then the name of the capital city). More than 100,000 supporters turned up to hear the man who had become a legend, an enigma and, at once, a hero and a villain, address his first public meeting as leader of the party that was about to form the first government of an independent Zimbabwe. The foreign correspondents, many of them recently arrived to cover what was the most dramatic story on the African continent, were out in full force.

Even though Mugabe speaks eloquent English, the guerilla leader's electrifying address was delivered in his mother tongue. A bewildered foreign correspondent, new to the capital, followed Mugabe's discourse through the grudging assistance of a local journalist who was divided between the needs of his own important assignment and accommodating the demands of the visiting foreign journalist.

"What did he say?" the visiting journalist asked of this interpreter at one point as the stadium burst into a deafening roar.

"Nothing of importance," the local scribe mumbled, as he wrote furious shorthand in his notebook. Had this local journalist been paid for his services, he might have been more cooperative.

"Journalists are not generally a sharing breed," veteran African correspondent Michela Wrong points out sardonically in her book, "In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz: Living on the Brink of Disaster in Mobutu's Congo."

African Journalists Covering Africa

There might be merit in the assertion that the performance of some African journalists, especially in areas of professional specialization such as the coverage of economic issues, investigative reporting, and coverage of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, sometimes falls short of Western standards. The performance of

Rwandan journalists during the 100-day ethnic purge was, indeed, deplorable. Two of them were jailed for life and a third was sentenced to 35 years for fanning the flames of the genocide that killed an estimated 800,000 people in 1994. This marked the end of a landmark three-year trial during which the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda heard in Tanzania how the media played a major role in inciting extremists from the Hutu majority to carry out the slaughter of ethnic Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus.

Politically partisan coverage and analysis of issues, however, are not the monopoly of the African journalist, as Arab and some embedded American journalists covering the invasion of Iraq by the American-dominated coalition have shown.

Any suggestion that African journalists cannot, as a rule, cover Africa adequately or reliably has no merit. Jeff Koinange, CNN's bureau chief in Lagos, is a citizen of Kenya. He is responsible for covering events throughout Africa. He routinely flies in to cover Africa's many crises—from the inglorious departure last year of Liberian strongman Charles Taylor from Monrovia to the 10-year anniversary commemoration in Kigali of the Rwandese genocide, from Zimbabwe's controversial presidential elections in 2002 and attendant dispossession of white farmers of fertile commercial farmland to the recent bloodbath in strife-torn Darfur.

It is, however, with some bit of trepidation that Koinange approaches every new assignment, since as an African he surely feels a duty to be more knowledgeable than his Western counterparts about the many crises happening across this continent of 53 countries. Just getting from one story to another—as a TV correspondent—can be an overwhelming task. In an article posted on CNN's "Behind the Scenes" series Koinange wrote about being in the Nigerian city, Abuja, when he received a call from CNN headquarters in Atlanta to "Get yourselves to Abidjan [Ivory Coast] as soon as you can. The story's about to blow up!" As Koinange explained, it was "a tall order, indeed. You just don't get anywhere quickly in Africa. But off we

went, stopping by our bureau in Lagos to pick up our gear, all 23 cases of it.”

Koinange has proven beyond doubt that an African journalist can cover Africa for the West. So did Elizabeth Ohini, now Ghana’s Minister of Tertiary Education, when she covered Africa for many years as a correspondent for the BBC World Service. Koinange was educated in the United States, and this poses to some the question of whether this could have influenced his rise at CNN. His Abidjan coverage certainly contained the required American angle as some 101 Americans were trapped in that country in the midst of a military rebellion. The performance of Koinange and Ohini belie the perception in the Western media that news organizations must rely on Western correspondents to file stories, given that they want the story reported through the lens of Western interests. This perception also presupposes there must be a Western angle conveyed in reporting events; otherwise, there might be no coverage.

Zimbabwean journalists filing for Western news organizations soon

learned that in their country’s ongoing political crisis, the story for the Western media was the plight of the 4,000 dispossessed white farmers, while the African journalist might have sought to highlight the plight of the hundreds of thousands of displaced farm workers, as well. When a white farmer was killed, a foreign correspondent filed the picture of his now homeless dog. Some African journalists found this coverage insensitive and argued that a picture of the now homeless workers from this farm might have served as a more graphic depiction of the crisis. And when three journalists from Harare’s only independent paper, *The Daily News*, and a Harare-based foreign correspondent were arrested, as editor of *The Daily News* I received calls from foreign news organizations outside of Africa. They asked me for details of the arrest and welfare only of the foreign correspondent. I had taken food to all four journalists in their cell, and so it was with a lump in my throat that I reminded my overseas callers that three of my own staff were also in custody. ■

Geoffrey Nyarota, a 2004 Nieman Fellow, was founding editor of Zimbabwe’s only independent daily publication, The Daily News, in 1999. He served as its editor until December 2002. He was arrested on six occasions. During an escalating campaign by President Robert Mugabe’s government to quiet criticism from independent newspapers, Nyarota was fired. The police visited his home at midnight two days later in his absence. He escaped to South Africa soon afterwards. Nyarota has received nine international journalism awards, including the 2002 Golden Pen of Press Freedom Award from the World Association of Newspapers, the 2002 UNESCO Press Freedom Award, and the International Press Freedom Award from the Committee to Protect Journalists in 2001.

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WATCHDOG

No Easy Life for Journalists in Africa

Working for an independent press is an act of extreme courage in many of the continent’s countries.

By Shyaka Kanuma

In many parts of Africa, those who set out to become journalists with the independent press better be prepared to work with media organizations whose operations are hobbled in various ways. Problems range from logistical to material, and reporters and editors at these news organizations operate in an environment in which active hostility from government and others is the norm. Government-controlled media have much better funding, and the journalists who work there find better facilities and an easier life. But it seems something of an oxymoron to call the practices of the government-

owned press “journalism,” since what they do is churn out propaganda that serves not the public but the regime that owns and controls them.

With some exceptions, independent media in Africa fail to receive substantial advertising revenue because they write or broadcast in markets where the money needed to support them is not forthcoming and where few people have the disposable incomes to buy news publications. In Rwanda, a person will never become rich by becoming a journalist. The situation there tends to perpetuate a vicious cycle in which poorly paid journalists soon lose their

motivation to do the work they started out doing, and they become susceptible to practices like accepting monetary “inducements” to write stories favorable to those individuals or organizations paying these favors. Soon this lessens a publication’s credibility, which in turn means even fewer people will buy the product. Many of these independent newspapers have closed their offices after only a few years in operation.

However, even problems as difficult as these would be overcome were it not for the antagonism that most African governments have for freethinking journalists and independent media houses.

Many of the continent's regimes are highly undemocratic; a good number of them are led by people who shot their way to power after ruinous rebel wars. Others "inherited" power and, occasionally, a leader might legitimately win an election. What almost all of these leaders have in common is that once they are in power they entrench themselves at the expense of everything else. They rig elections, and they divert the constitution or rewrite it to contain provisions for a lifetime presidency. They deal with political opponents or dissidents by locking them up indefinitely in degrading conditions. They also legislate draconian press laws to muzzle the inquisitive, critical elements of the press.

Journalism Requires Courage

It is an act of extreme courage for African journalists who are inclined to freedom of thought to keep publishing or broadcasting their opinions and views. During my time as a journalist working in Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa, I've had the privilege to interact with incredibly brave journalists from all over the continent who are working under the most adverse circumstances. Onome Osifo-Whiskey, an editor with a Nigerian magazine, *Tell*, recounted the ordeals he and his small team of journalists went through during the regime of Sani Abacha, the notorious late military dictator of Nigeria. Osifo-Whiskey's publication was the constant target of military raids, arrests and physical abuse of its journalists, who lived with constant death threats. During a particularly bad period, the magazine devised a strategy to adopt a "mobile" newsroom, operating from unlikely areas such as motor vehicle service stations and abandoned warehouses.

The plight of the independent press in Zimbabwe under the country's president, Robert Mugabe, has been well chronicled. Journalists have been tortured, harassed and run out of the country, and their offices bombed or vandalized. Geoffrey Nyarota, founding editor of *The Daily News* who now lives in the United States, became the public face of beleaguered Zimbabwe journal-

ism. His paper's offices in Harare were bombed, and he and his journalists were constantly harassed by state agents. Finally he had to flee his country. [See Nyarota's article on page 35.]

In Uganda the country's only independent daily, *The Monitor*, regularly experiences heavy doses of government wrath. Journalists at *The Monitor* are thrown in jail for writing reports deemed "dangerous for national security," and once or twice the publication has been closed down by the state, its computers impounded, and entire issues confiscated. Such is the case in countries like the Congo, Eritrea, Sudan and others that also share a reputation for scant respect for human rights.

Rwanda, too, has shown little inclination to treat the independent press as an important partner for the development of the country and for a better future. When a journalist exposed a scam in which a high-ranking military officer pocketed kickbacks during the purchase of defective choppers for the military, he found himself speedily put behind bars. It wasn't until after three months in jail that he had an initial court hearing. Another journalist, Amiel Nkuriza, who is with the newspaper *Le Partisan*, served an even longer prison term—three years—without ever going to trial. Afterwards, it came to light that he was jailed for writing opinions deemed "dangerous for national unity and reconciliation." These are just a few examples of what happens to dissenting journalists in Rwanda.

Rwandan Government Retribution

I, too, have been in serious trouble with the Rwandan authorities for crossing certain boundaries as a journalist. Not long after a couple of other journalists and I began a small weekly, *Rwanda Newline*, in 1999, we were being regularly hauled to the public prosecutor's offices on charges mainly related to "publishing false news." We intended the *Newline* to be a crusading voice against corruption and misuse of power in high places and public offices; it goes without saying that we trod on too many powerful toes.

Things became truly alarming in 2000, when a general summoned us to military headquarters in Kigali to reveal our sources for a piece I wrote. In this article, I detailed the misery that members of the Rwandan army faced fighting wars in the neighboring Congo, a country Rwanda invaded to flush out bands of *Interahamwe* militias, the main killers during the 1994 genocide. In the article, I also raised questions about the legality of the wealth that high-ranking military officials obtained to build mansions in swanky outskirts of Kigali.

The general was in a rage when another colleague and I arrived with much trepidation at military headquarters. He proceeded to give us a tongue-lashing. Essentially, he told us that what we'd written about the military amounted to treasonous offenses since it could easily encourage the enemy in its battles against our army. We left there feeling very scared and even contemplated fleeing the country but decided against doing so at that point.

Things became worse for us. We came under constant attack in the government-owned media and, at meetings called by government officials, we were castigated for being "negative elements." The few advertisers we had suddenly terminated their relationships with us, expressing the sincere regret that given the situation they could not go on doing business with us. Military men visited our offices regularly, sticking around for hours. And threatening phone calls became routine. Nevertheless, we resolutely went on with our work, and somehow no harm befell us, except when someone decided to shoot a gun near me as I was returning home one evening.

For me, things came to a head when a former president who had turned political dissident invited a couple of other journalists and me to his house to announce he was forming a new opposition party. Pasteur Bizimungu, Rwanda's first president after the genocide, had, by then, fallen out badly with Paul Kagame, the general who had led the forces of the *Rwandan Patriotic Front* (RPF) to victory after a four-year civil war and the genocide. Bizimungu was the country's president, but General

Kagame held the real power. In 2000, Bizimungu resigned in very bitter circumstances, and Kagame became the new president. For a time, Bizimungu was under de facto house arrest, and he remained quiet for a year.

When he called with the invitation, we were excited at receiving what we thought was a scoop. Instead, when we arrived we were placed under arrest by military men who came out of side streets near Bizimungu's house. We were taken to Criminal Investigation Department headquarters for interrogation, and we spent the night in a dark basement. I thought this was it—that we would spend several years in a basement and no one would know where we were. Fortunately, news of what happened at Bizimungu's place filtered out, and major international radio stations like the BBC broadcast the story. The following morning we were out. The stink would have been too much even for Kagame's government had three journalists disappeared

all of a sudden.

I decided not to take any more chances, and a few days later I caught a flight to Kampala, in neighboring Uganda. A number of other colleagues also decided to leave. Not long after, Rwanda Newline went out of business. A few months later I flew to South Africa and sought asylum, and in a while I found work as a freelance writer for the Johannesburg-based Mail & Guardian. Back in Rwanda, Bizimungu was detained in Kigali Central Prison, accused of being a divisive and negative influence in Rwanda. He still languishes in prison.

After a year in South Africa, I was invited to become a Nieman Fellow. When that fellowship ended, I returned to Rwanda, but I have not engaged in full-scale journalism since. Instead, I work as an information and media consultant for the UNHCR, the U.N. agency for refugees. The one independent paper in Rwanda, Umuseso, a sister paper to Newsline that is published in the local

Kinyarwanda language, is now in much trouble. A few months ago, three of its journalists were locked up and charged with publishing a false report. They were released, but now they are running scared. ■

Shyaka Kanuma, a 2003 Nieman Fellow, was cofounder and senior writer with Rwandan Newsline, a former independent newspaper. He has been contributing articles for publications in Eastern Africa and South Africa while working full time as an information and media consultant for UNHCR, the U.N. agency for refugees in Rwanda. In the fall, he will pursue a master's degree in journalism at City University in London as a recipient of a British government scholarship.

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WATCHDOG

When African Governments Stifle Press Freedom

In many countries in southern Africa, journalists face harsh consequences when they try to hold governments accountable.

By Luckson A. Chipare

For his reporting exposing corrupt business practices, journalist Carlos Alberto Cardoso was gunned down by assassins hired by organized business interests in Maputo, Mozambique on the evening of November 22, 2000. Their goal: to silence him.

This was an unusual attack on a journalist in the sense that most of the actions taken against journalists in countries that comprise the Southern African Development Community (SADC)—Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe—involve actions taken by the government. In

the Cardoso case, the businessmen and their hired guns were convicted of this crime and are now serving lengthy prison terms.

The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), based in Windhoek, Namibia, was formed in 1992 with an SADC regional mandate of promoting the provisions of the Windhoek Declaration of May 1991 that declared “independent, pluralistic and free press” essential for democracy and economic development. Since its founding, MISA has monitored, investigated and reported on media freedom violations in 11 of the 14 SADC countries. (MISA does not operate in DRC, Mauritius and Seychelles.)

Death, assault, detentions and im-

prisonment have characterized the difficult situation faced by journalists in these countries during the past 10 years as relationships among media and governments have deteriorated. As journalists work to hold government officials accountable to the people and to democratic norms, these governments have intensified their clampdown on the media through actions meant to stifle and silence their voices. The space for political debate and dissent in the region is being squeezed tightly as governments enact legislation aimed at suppressing the independence of the media and providing avenues by which to punish those who might publish stories of government wrongdoing.

Media Repression

The intensification of media violations takes its greatest toll on journalists who work in countries whose governments exhibit dictatorial and authoritative tendencies. Among the SADC countries, Angola, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Malawi are the more repressive environments in which journalists attempt to work.

Angola: Reporting on activities of the president and government officials whether in caricature, print or broadcast is one of the most dangerous assignments for journalists in Angola. In March 2000, Rafael Marques, a freelance journalist and Aguiar dos Santos, the director of the independent weekly newspaper, *Agora*, were convicted of defaming, injuring and slandering President José Eduardo dos Santos in an article Marques wrote and published in *Agora*, "The Lipstick of Dictatorship." His crime: describing the president as a dictator "responsible for the destruction of the country and the promotion of corruption." Marques was convicted on an additional charge of defaming, injuring and slandering Angolan Attorney General Domingos Culolo. Covering the leader of the opposition party has also posed serious threats to Angolan journalists. Doing this has resulted in many journalists being banned, imprisoned, censored and excluded from official press conferences. In August 1999, journalists working for the church radio station, Radio Ecclesia, were arrested, their materials confiscated, and the radio station was shut down for some hours for broadcasting an interview the BBC had done with UNITA rebel leader Jonas Savimbi.

Zimbabwe: Working here as a journalist has become dangerous. As the government becomes more paranoid about losing power, it has passed repressive legislation that criminalizes the work of journalists, who are required to apply for annual licenses from a government appointed and controlled media commission, which requires that they work for "registered" media houses. Freelance journalists must pro-

vide proof of agreements with those to whom they will be selling stories and supply samples of previous journalistic work to be licensed. Only Zimbabwean nationals who reside in the country are allowed to be "foreign correspondents," which has forced most of those who were working there as foreign correspondents to leave since they are denied licenses to do their job. Some were forcibly made to leave, as was the case with the *Guardian's* Andrew Meldrum in May 2003.

Within a year of passage of these laws, more than 80 journalists were arrested and detained under spurious charges including writing "falsehoods" or "creating a feeling of despondency against the president." In April 2004, the Zimbabwe Minister of Information Jonathan Moyo reportedly said that the country has enough prison space for local journalists who peddle "lies" in the foreign media. To date, no journalist has been convicted, though harassment of the independent media by the government is rampant. [See interview about the Zimbabwean press on page 49.] The new regulations have also left many journalists without jobs.

Not satisfied with harsh treatment of journalists, the government effectively shut down three independent newspapers that have been critical of the government after realizing that bombing their printing presses and offices failed to silence them. The few independent newspapers remaining are not assured of continuing their operations since their two-year registration is up for renewal in December 2004. Moyo has called the Zimbabwe Independent and *The Standard* weekly newspapers "running dogs of imperialism," and in October 2003 he said "we should shut these papers down because they are trash; they injured our national interest." Moyo made this statement just a month after the independent *Daily News* and *Daily News on Sunday* ceased publication.

The justice system has been effectively used in silencing the independent media in Zimbabwe. In the now famous "dirt hands" doctrine saga, the Supreme Court ruled that *The Daily News* must register first before their case could

be considered. When the publishers applied to register, they were told that they could not be registered since they were already operating illegally.

Swaziland: Reporting on the king's private life as well as his many wives and would-be-wives gets journalists in trouble, since such reporting is considered disrespectful of the monarchy, a punishable taboo. Five years ago, then-*Sunday Times* editor, Bheki Makumbu, learned this when he was detained for publishing an article detailing the background of one of the king's fiancées. The intolerance of the monarchy does not only limit itself to independent publications. In March 2000, the state-owned and controlled *Swazi Observer* was shut down ostensibly because of financial difficulties, but it later emerged that the real reason for its closure was its critical reporting about the monarchy, its errant governing, and the paper's refusal to reveal sources of its information. The paper reopened in February 2001, but the editor and senior journalists responsible for these earlier reports were not among the rehired employees. The *Guardian* of Swaziland was also banned in May 2001 and remains closed today because of the newspaper's reporting about the illness of the king and by suggesting that he was poisoned by one of his many wives.

Malawi: Some journalists have been beaten up for reporting about the former president's attempt to change the constitution and rule for another term. His political party organized vigilante groups of youths that assaulted journalists for covering events other than those of the ruling party. Those reporters who dared to write any articles against the ruling party were severely beaten, even in front of police, who did nothing to protect them. Journalists George Ntonya and Chikondi Phikiso were, in fact, beaten by police for attempting to take pictures of a scuffle between the police and a motorist at a police roadblock on October 18, 2003.

Similar attacks on the independent press have also been made in Namibia. In August 2003, President Sam Nujoma

called The Namibian newspaper and its editor, Gwen Lister, “unprofessional and reactionary.” [See excerpts from a speech given by Lister on page 43.] And in May 2001, the Botswana government imposed an advertising ban on The Guardian and Midweek Sun, which were accused of being too critical of the country’s leaders. The intent of this ban was to demonstrate the government’s displeasure about “irresponsible reporting and exceeding of editorial freedom.” That nation’s High Court ruled later that year, however, that the ban violated the papers’ constitutional right to freedom of expression.

Along with monitoring issues involving press freedom, MISA is engaged in an intensive campaign for media law reform in the SADC region to ensure that a supportive legal environment is created for free and independent

media. In 2000, the Promotion of Access to Information Act became law in South Africa, and this remains one of the region’s most important press developments. This act enables the media and ordinary citizens to learn information from the state as well as from private organizations and individuals when such information is considered necessary in the public or individual’s interest.

In 2002, there were positive developments in Zambia, including the enactment of two pieces of legislation, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) and Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) Amendment. However, the Zambian media and a coalition of nongovernmental organizations were not successful in securing passage of a Freedom of Information bill. And in 2003, an All Africa Editors’ Conference was held, and now a com-

mittee representing five African regions oversees a range of common and critical issues related to the success of independent media.

Many challenges remain for journalists working in this region as they try to do their jobs in places where democracy is emergent but still weak. Though some progress has been made, journalists working in independent media in Africa are now focused on finding approaches necessary to changing the oppositional climate in which many of them now must work while also strengthening their ability to report. ■

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Transforming Journalism as Democracy Emerges

‘Ten years into democracy, many journalists are struggling to redefine their relationship to government.’

By Pippa Green

A few months before this spring’s South African elections, a young radio reporter with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) went to Upington, a remote town sandwiched between the Kgalagadi desert and the Orange River in the Northern Cape. She went there to interview Evelina de Bruin, an elderly woman who’d received a brick house from the government through its housing program.

In the 1980’s, de Bruin had been internationally famous as one of the oldest people sentenced to death in South Africa, accused in the “common purpose” murder of a black policeman at the height of the apartheid era violence. Poor and illiterate, she happened to be in the area at the time this policeman was murdered, and for that she was sentenced to death, along with

her husband and 12 others. Three years later, their death sentences were commuted, and eventually the “Upington 14,” as they were known, were freed from jail.

Now de Bruin was getting her first house. It would be the first place she’d ever lived with running water indoors and electricity. Our reporter interviewed her about this and about the huge changes in her life since her lonely, bewildering spell on death row more than a decade ago. When her story was submitted to one of our radio current affairs’ programs, our reporter received a sharply worded note from the show’s producer: “You must wake up! Its election time. Everybody’s getting houses.”

The comment struck me as inappropriately political. Was it the job of radio reporters to focus more extensive

coverage on the local government official tasked with handing out the new house, built as part of the South African government’s ambitious public housing program? Even more striking to me was this producer’s failure to recognize the great human story behind the far more obvious government angle. Here was an elderly domestic worker who was nearly executed by the apartheid government and living in the same township that was the scene of the tumult that led to her trial, being handed the keys to a tiny brick house.

Transforming the SABC

Such editorial decision-making is part of the challenge of operating South Africa’s biggest news medium, the public broadcaster’s radio news service. It evokes the very similar challenges

confronting many South African news organizations and journalists today: the need to search for narratives to portray and explain the enormity of change during the first decade of democracy without being a mouthpiece of the government.

At Radio News and Current Affairs, a division of SABC that I have headed for the past two years, our scope is vast. We broadcast news and current affairs in 11 official languages and in two languages of the indigenous San communities in the Northern Cape. We broadcast some 35 hours of current affairs each day on 13 public broadcast radio stations and about 240 bulletins daily for 16 radio stations. We also manage 10 newsrooms across the country. Our reach is significant both in terms of our reporters dotting every corner of the country and in our vast audience of 15 to 18 million listeners. The biggest newspaper in South Africa, by contrast, has a readership of about three million.

Apart from keeping this ship going, our greatest challenge is to construct a culture of journalism that can break decisively with the broadcaster's past when it was the voice of the state. Efforts to establish high journalistic standards for the SABC remain at the heart of an internal political debate. Allister Sparks is an accomplished South African journalist who wrote in his book, "Beyond the Miracle: Inside the New South Africa," that "transforming the SABC has been one of the most challenging and frustrating tasks in the new South Africa. For 45 years this giant broadcasting monopoly dominated the airwaves as an explicit and unashamed propaganda machine [of the apartheid state]."

When South Africa's political leaders negotiated the transition from apartheid to democracy in the early 1990's, the first and most urgent task was to reform the state broadcast media into a public broadcaster. Without taking this step, the African National Congress (ANC), the party of Nelson Mandela, acknowledged there could be no free or fair elections. Amid great political controversy, a new board of directors of the SABC was appointed in 1993, a year before the first democratic elections. And the news service, encompassing

both television and radio news, was guaranteed certain legal protections ensuring editorial independence.

Pressures Journalists Confront

But the nitty-gritty of that transition has not been easy. The pressures are threefold:

1. How to reconcile the duties of a public broadcaster with commercial imperatives;
2. How to distinguish legitimate political pressure on the broadcaster from abuse of power;
3. How to build a culture of journalism at the public broadcaster to ensure news is credible and interesting.

During the past decade, the SABC has been caught in an uncomfortable contradiction. By law, it carries an onerous public broadcast mandate, yet it relies almost entirely on advertising revenue to cover its costs. The government provides just one percent of the SABC's annual budget. Its remaining operating funds come from advertising on the more commercial television channels. The SABC runs three terrestrial channels, and those bring in 87 percent of its revenue. Gathering and broadcasting news in any language is expensive; to do so in 13 languages for radio and 11 for TV is particularly costly.

Commercial pressures are a reality for many of our news and current affairs shows, and broadcasters are therefore often pressured to endorse commercial products on air. So far we've been able to resist having our broadcasters do straight endorsements, but we've agreed to having them announce "sponsorships," in which they state that the news bulletin or program is being brought to listeners by "such and such a bank," for example.

Political pressure is more subtle, nothing like it was in time of apartheid. More of a nag than coercion, it comes from politicians in the governing party as well as in the opposition parties. In KwaZulu-Natal, for instance, a fiercely contested province on the eastern seaboard during the recent elections, we

fielded complaints daily about coverage or the lack of it. Our news division took over responsibility for the editorial content of a program on our Zulu-language station, Ukhozi FM, in which members of the provincial legislature were interviewed. We did this mainly to ensure that editorial standards of fairness were adhered to in the pre-election period. The politicians were annoyed that journalists, rather than disc jockeys, were now overseeing its content. "Does this mean we can no longer write our own questions?" one asked me.

Perhaps this is progress. In the early 1990's, before the first democratic elections, some 10,000 people died in political violence in the region. The stakes here remain high, and Ukhozi FM has about seven million listeners. Control and influence of the news on Ukhozi thus became a key target in the battle for votes between the ANC and then-Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi's more conservative Inkatha Freedom Party.

Telling a Good Story

The third pressure we face is perhaps the hardest to deal with, but it is key to dealing with the other pressures, commercial and political. It's pressure we put on ourselves to establish common and decent editorial standards across the breadth of Radio News. Our scope is so big and so diverse and runs in so many languages that it is impossible to control the flow and quality of news by dictate. We've tried to establish the obvious journalistic standards of accuracy and fairness, but we need to find ways to combine these standards with the ability to spot and tell a good story.

Why is this so hard? In part, it is because many journalists who work at SABC today once worked for the old state broadcaster. Loyalty to power, wherever it was located, was the key to survival then. So the culture of questioning, of curiosity and wonder that should grip all journalists is often understated, due to a similar phenomenon that grips our print media. Ten years into democracy, many journalists are struggling to redefine their relationship to government. It is not the government of old, easily defined as the enemy. Neither—though

many in the cast of characters are the same—are they comrades of old who were on the same side of the barricades as journalists who covered their fight against apartheid.

To cover a democratic government in a developing country—one that has made huge strides in what it delivers to the people but has also been peppered with its own abuses of power—is a complex task. To appreciate its dynamics involves understanding the enormous social transition in the country. In his book, Sparks quotes Joseph Lelyveld, the former executive editor of *The New York Times* and once a distinguished correspondent in South Africa, asking South African journalists: “You are sitting on one of the truly great stories of our time. What are you doing with it?”

This question remains a central one for today’s public broadcaster journalists. Not only are we the biggest news medium in South Africa, but also we are one of the freer in the subcontinent. If we cannot adhere to high journalistic standards in doing our jobs, we risk being undermined by those in political power who can accuse us of being

inaccurate or shallow or irrelevant, and do so with rationale arguments on their side.

It is partly for these reasons that editors at Radio News, in coverage of the run-up to the country’s third democratic elections, decided to systematically look at changes in the country during the past decade by exploring the country, province by province, until we had compiled a week’s series of each of the nine provinces. Our reporters of various languages set out to the furthest reaches of the country, from rural areas to large cities, to find and tell stories of change in the lives of ordinary people. Then their stories were translated into each of the other languages, so those once considered regional could be heard in every corner of the country.

This assignment meant our reporters had to abandon press conferences and turn their microphones away from politicians and towards ordinary South Africans. They had to grapple with statistics and facts so as to be able to convey the big contextual picture before using narrative skills to tell it through the stories of ordinary people. Among them, these reporters told remarkable

stories. Here are just a few:

- A story of a black entrepreneur in a mining town in the North-West province, who has soared to success on the wave of the worldwide platinum boom;
- A story about how political battles between elected leaders and traditional chiefs in the far north of the country have delayed delivery of piped water;
- A story of the “Karretjie” people—sheepshearers who live on their donkey carts—from the Northern Cape and how they struggle to send their children to school in the post-apartheid era of compulsory education.

And, of course, there was the story about a woman, once on death row, who is now a homeowner. ■

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WATCHDOG

Managing Media in Times of Crisis

Gwen Lister, editor of The Namibian, an independent daily newspaper in Namibia, spoke to delegates at the UNESCO conference on “Freedom of Expression and Conflict Management in Crisis Situations and Countries in Transition,” held in May 2004 in Belgrade, Serbia. She spoke about her experiences and lessons learned in guiding her newspaper through challenging times. Edited excerpts from her speech follow.

“In times of conflict, the media’s responsibility for independent and pluralistic reporting is more important than ever. It can help to prevent the worst atrocities. In the aftermath of conflict, a free and independent press offers a way out of mistrust and fear into

an environment where true dialogue is possible because people can think for themselves and base their opinions on facts.” —United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, August 2000, in the forward to the commemorative magazine marking the 15th anniversary of The Namibian.

Few would argue that it is the independent media that is most often targeted in situations of conflict the world over. Neither would many disagree that “the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation, and for economic development,” as stated on May 3, 1991 in the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an

Independent and Pluralistic Press.

Ironically, much of the independent press has come into being largely as a result of conflict, which by its very nature tends to give rise to the development of alternative media. The concept of independent media, as defined in the Windhoek Declaration, is freedom from governmental, political or economic control. Sadly though, survival of independent media is another question altogether, and the landscape of formerly nondemocratic societies the world over is littered with the skeletons of once-brave media initiatives that were unable to withstand the might of state power during violent conflict or which failed to win the battle for sustainability once peaceful transition had begun.

The Namibian is one of the fortunate

few to have successfully made the transition from being a donor-dependent newspaper started at the height of South African apartheid repression in 1985 to eventual self-sustainability after Namibian independence had been achieved in 1990. Ours is not a new story, but it remains relevant today and while many valiant media initiatives in conflict zones throughout the world continue the fight for survival. And it is useful, perhaps, to draw some lessons from those of us who were fortunate enough to have not only survived the political struggle, but who managed to achieve self-reliance in the process.

Digging The Namibian's Roots

When *The Namibian* started in 1985, few people believed we would make it. Namibia, then South West Africa, was in the grip of apartheid occupation, the former white South African government intent on controlling the hearts and minds of Namibians, most of whom supported the armed struggle waged by the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) for self-determination and independence for what was then-Africa's last colony. The result was a clampdown on SWAPO, and anyone perceived to be supporting—or sympathetic to—the liberation movement, as the then South African government wielded its military might, made use of a host of repressive measures, including draconian legislation, and waged a propaganda war on any adversaries.

At the time, most of the media were, if not under the direct control of the colonial power, then certainly passive in the face of South African domination. A virtual state of military rule was in place in the north of Namibia bordering on Angola, from whence the armed struggle was waged; a dusk-to-dawn curfew was in place; SWAPO supporters were subject to arbitrary arrests, detention without trial, and there were daily cases of torture.

It was in this climate that *The Namibian* started up. The core group of those who founded it were united in the belief that a newspaper with an independent editorial policy, honest and realistic

Priorities in the Struggle for Press Freedom

*There are areas at *The Namibian* that we've possibly failed to address rigorously but that should be made priorities in the struggle for press freedom. These include the following:*

Advocacy: Although *The Namibian* began as an advocacy newspaper—in its consistent call for a democratic constitution and Bill of Rights with enforceable freedoms prior to independence—we have sometimes become so engaged in the battle for pure day-to-day survival that we failed to look forward. When the guarantee of free expression, media freedom, access to information, and media plurality are not advocated for during transitional peace talks and the drafting of constitutions and legislation, then it becomes less likely they will be easily accommodated at a later stage. During such transitions, it is up to media and civil society players to make a concerted effort to engage with the authorities to achieve these ends.

It is the contention of David Lush, a Windhoek-based media consultant, that there is a tendency to sit back and breathe a sigh of relief when, having once endured repression, peace and stability come to a country. He argues that in Namibia, for example, everyone was caught off guard when the government pushed through broadcasting legislation that did not guarantee freedom and diversity to the extent we thought it did. Independence of our national broadcaster and communications commission were therefore not guaranteed in law. Lush argues this is largely due to the failure of the media and the rest of civil society to get involved in discussions about the acts governing these institutions.

In contrast, in South Africa Lush argues there was a concerted campaign by both media and civil society during the transition period to ensure that free expression, access to information, and the independence of the public broadcaster and regulatory institutions were guaranteed. Lush notes that in South Africa the campaigning went on even while the media were still grappling with

the immediate threats against them. The legacy of those actions remains largely intact today. [See Pippa Green's story on page 41.]

Media Unity: Media need to put their own houses in order, which in turn will deny or at least make it difficult for post-conflict regimes to silence and/or condemn them. The unity of the media industry and its ability to draw up and implement effective codes of ethics and self-regulatory mechanisms are as much of a priority as advocating for progressive laws, Lush argues. He maintains, correctly, that in Namibia we allowed divisions among the media during our era of conflict to undermine attempts at unity and thus aborted attempts to build the framework for a responsible and professional media in terms of an agreed-upon binding code of ethics and self-regulatory mechanisms, such as a press council or media ombudsman. Regional and international solidarity, I believe, play major roles, too, in the chances of survival of newly emergent media. In our region, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) has given advocacy as well as entrepreneurial support to struggling initiatives. [See story on MISA on page 39.] Without the regional efforts to try to stop the harassment against it, *The Daily News* in Zimbabwe would not have survived as long as it did.

The Role of Civil Society: Though our efforts are concentrated on the development of independent media, we must also bear in mind that the development of a strong civil society is a vital ingredient in providing an enabling environment for such media to exist in and flourish. In Namibia, we have a weak civil society and, to a large extent, the newspaper continues to be the nation's torchbearer for the maintenance of human rights. This makes us vulnerable and sometimes isolated in our campaigns to secure these ends. Other countries have been more fortunate. South Africa, for example, has a strong civil society that is active in all areas of human rights advocacy.

■ —G.L.

reporting, and a strong set of guiding principles would expose what was happening under the heel of apartheid and contribute to a creation of a free and vigorous media in Namibia. The paper was committed to working towards the implementation of a U.N. settlement plan for Namibia, incorporated in U.N. resolution 435, which provided for free and fair elections and independence from South African rule.

Like most other independent media in repressive circumstances, we had no illusions that it would be an easy task. In the founding editorial of the newspaper in 1985 we stated that “we have no doubt that there will be difficult times ahead, that it will not always be a smooth path which the newspaper has to tread, but we are optimistic that, in the long run, critics of the newspaper will see that we have the interests of Namibians at heart and that our goal is an independent, prosperous country that can take its rightful place among the nations of the world.” We accepted, too, that the success of the newspaper would depend on its acceptance by the population as a whole. Looking back today, we believe that this support base counted very much in our favor in the years that followed.

There were obstacles to our existence from the very beginning, and these were to rise to a crescendo by the end of the 1980's. When the interim proxy government appointed by South Africa learned of our plan to start a newspaper, we faced our first and most immediate threat. They levied a deposit of more than R20,000 (at the time, about \$5,000) under the terms of the Newspaper Imprint and Registration Act, claiming the newspaper and I, as its editor, constituted a threat to the security of the state. As we set out to expose the injustices of apartheid rule, there was some relief for us in the fact that there was, even in such repressive times, a measure of independence in the Namibian judiciary. When we took the matter to court on the grounds that the deposit was unconstitutional, the judge ruled in our favor.

In the following years, we survived harassment, intimidation, direct attacks on our offices and our staff, including

even planned assassination attempts. We were denied passports and travel documents and detained without trial. Arbitrary arrests were day-to-day occurrences. At that time, donor funding ensured our financial survival since the business community was intimidated by the authorities or directly threatened about advertising in the newspaper.

Elections, and finally independence, came to Namibia in 1990 and, with it, a democratic Constitution with an enforceable Bill of Rights, which guaranteed press freedom. This was a watershed time for us, as it is for many other independent media in war-torn and conflict situations when the funding begins to dry up and the race for sustainability begins. Even then, the odds were still against our survival. We had fought for self-determination and independence for Namibia, along with guarantees of human rights, including press freedom and, having won the political battle, we now had to fight for economic self-sufficiency.

Although the war had ended and peace had come to our country, it was still true to say, as South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote in a message on our 15th anniversary, that even “those who come to power, especially in young democracies, easily become hypersensitive to dissent. It is often more convenient,” he added, “to ride roughshod over opposition, to be impatient of questions, to seek to avoid scrutiny, to seek not to be accountable.” This circumstance is not unique to Namibia. Our subcontinent of southern Africa has many examples of liberators who quickly become impatient with a free and democratic media when they themselves ascended to power.

In the period shortly after independence, The Namibian went through very hard times before financial sustainability was finally achieved. There were several occasions when we teetered on the brink of collapse, and we were conscious of similar brave media initiatives in neighboring South Africa, in particular, which experienced sudden deaths, often sparked by the abrupt withdrawal of funding, including *Vrye Weekblad*, South and others.

Several things made the difference

for us. We had a core of committed and dedicated staff members who were prepared to sacrifice, sometimes even their monthly salaries and other benefits, in order to survive the hard times. We had an independent editorial policy that remained true to its principles, a “lean and mean” approach to management, and a creative approach to problem solving. Add to this the fact that the newspaper continued to be run and managed by journalists.

Because The Namibian had, to a large extent, won the “hearts and minds” of the people as it endeavored to be a “voice for the voiceless” people of Namibia during the apartheid occupation, it continued to enjoy this support base even as the former liberators now ensconced in government grew irritated by our watchdog approach to journalism. I am convinced that the support of our readers undoubtedly helped to stave off government excesses against our newspaper.

Established as a nonprofit trust, as our advertising revenues have picked up and we have improved on working conditions and benefits for our staff, we also have reached out through social responsibility projects to give back to the community. We are able to do this because we do not have owners or shareholders who are trying to maximize profit for profit's sake and for their own pockets. We need to be driven by the business motive, but only to ensure our survival, and after that we need to put back into the community that has supported us for so many years.

If we can achieve this in Namibia, which has a relatively high rate of illiteracy and a population of fewer than two million from which to draw readers and an even smaller base from which to draw revenue, it can surely be emulated by other media initiatives.

Countering Government Tactics to Suppress News

Challenges to our survival remain. Government is not well disposed towards The Namibian, and much of taxpayers' money goes into government-controlled media such as radio and television and the government's own

newspaper, which are used to combat the independent, and at times critical, reporting by *The Namibian*. In December 2001, this animosity culminated in a Cabinet decision to have government agencies stop advertising in *The Namibian* because of what were termed our “antigovernment policies.” This was followed by a presidential directive, some months later, instructing that no copies of *The Namibian* should be purchased with government funds. These bans continue to be in effect, and it is a

measure of our self-sufficiency—rooted in the support of the people—that we’ve not been vulnerable to this attempted economic sabotage by government.

Though we haven’t done so, we might decide to contest this ban in court. The ban itself affects about six percent of our advertising revenue and so has had a minimal effect on our operations. What we’ve most feared was a “knock-on” effect with state-owned enterprises and private businesses following suit. With few exceptions, such as the ruling

party itself, these fears have not been realized.

Denial of advertising is a relatively new weapon in the arsenals of various governments, both in Africa and elsewhere, in an attempt to silence critics in the independent press. After *The Namibian* ban, the Botswana government followed suit with a similar embargo on advertising on the Botswana Guardian and Midweek Sun newspapers, which was successfully challenged in court. Operations of these newspapers were

Lessons in Managing Independent Media

At The Namibian, we’ve experienced successes and some failures due to a number of factors both within and outside our control. Our success in ensuring the survival of the newspaper has involved a great deal of management during times of crisis. Highlighting some aspects of this management might be helpful to others who face similar situations.

Maintain an Independent Editorial Policy: Being a newspaper that is not tied to any political party or commercial interest has stood us in good stead in cases of conflict with the authorities. Although governments in Africa continue to accuse independent media of being, in the Zimbabwe example, “running dogs of the imperialists,” or, in our case, of siding with the political opposition, these claims are without basis in fact. So it is vital that we remain true to our principles of independent reporting. *The Namibian* consistently adheres to a clear set of ideals, and this has helped us steer our course, often through very stormy waters. Our founding ethos of being a newspaper committed to democracy and the maintenance of human rights remains strongly in place today.

Build a Committed Staff: The value of this is not to be underestimated, particularly in crisis situations, for staff members contribute to the ethos of a publication, and this, in turn, earns the support of a readership or listeners or viewers. Brave individuals were

the pioneers during the struggle for journalism in the fight against apartheid domination of our subcontinent. Regretfully, courageous people seem to be in shorter supply in our part of the world today. Perhaps this is not surprising since it requires being in the forefront of danger with conflict so prevalent. Yet courage remains an important characteristic for journalists working in independent media.

Become Free From Donor Funding: Donor funding was vital to *The Namibian* as it struggled to get started prior to independence. Donors should ensure that funding is not summarily cut, but should reduce it gradually so that independent media can come to grips with sustainability as soon as possible. Those in power in Africa, who are often the recipients of vast amounts of donor funding, tend to accuse media of being manipulated by foreign agendas when they receive assistance.

Aim to Be the Peoples’ Paper: *The Namibian* has always managed to stay in touch with its readers. During the nation’s years of struggle, we provided an outlet for the voice of opposition against apartheid domination, and through this process we earned what have been called “our struggle credentials.” Because our journalists regularly traveled into military zones in remote rural areas of the country, our base has never been purely urban. Even in our democracy today, unfortunately,

deeply instilled fears of the former regime appear to persist in a country in which free speech is guaranteed. Namibia is largely one-party dominated and SWAPO [South West Africa People’s Organization] has not yet managed to complete the transition from an autocratic liberation movement to a democratic political party. It retains an overwhelming two-thirds majority in the government, so *The Namibian* continues to speak out when many still fear to do so, particularly on issues such as the lack of good governance and the effects of corruption.

Ownership is Key to Survival: Newspapers run by journalists are becoming even more vital in today’s world. In the so-called First World, business managers are taking over, and this results, too frequently, in the unfortunate fact that profits dominate, not principles. This same situation is perhaps contributing to an erosion of newspapers in various parts of the world. In our case, we were largely self-taught. Having been with the newspaper since its inception, I believe it is possible to balance principle and profit. For example, *The Namibian* resists increases in its cover price, aware that information must be accessible to the people, especially in emergent democracies.

Support Creative Management: In the face of adversity, there needs to be a creative approach by the management of any independent media institution. It

seriously affected by the ban as government advertising accounted for about 60 percent of their total revenues. The Swazi government also used this tactic, and The Guardian newspaper in that country remains closed down.

The key question to consider is why some independent media manage to survive and others do not. It is perhaps important for relevant organizations and nongovernmental groups to undertake a study to learn what lessons to draw from these experiences. Often

success seems to come to those publications with a relatively small-sized but dedicated staff who are willing to do what needs to be done to get the paper on the streets or voices on air, despite the worst kind of provocation. There are instances when the so-called mainstream or commercial media in many countries can learn lessons from our experiences.

Force of circumstance and scarcity of financial resources has led us to be multiskilled. My title as editor, for example,

is almost incidental. Since 1985, as a nonqualified journalist who learned the trade by baptism of fire, I have moved on to managing the entire publication, workforce, financial well-being, and everything else that needs to be done. It is a daunting task, sometimes, but being modest in size also keeps us in touch with our roots in the community and relevant to the needs and aspirations of our readers, and these factors are undoubtedly linked to our success.

This doesn't mean we can afford

is a question of strategy. While not easy to prescribe, since situations and threats differ from one country to another, it is important not to simply abandon a project when all possible avenues of survival have not been explored. Here the examples of private radio in Zimbabwe, such as SW, Radio Dialogue, and Voice of the People, are worth noting. When denied licenses to broadcast from within the country, they found creative ways to get around repressive legislation by broadcasting from outside the country via short wave. Similar innovation could also be applied to the struggle for financial survival, and new media technologies make it possible for media battling for self-sufficiency to offer other services, such as assistance with layout and design, to put money into their coffers and find alternative sources of income to survive.

Maintain High Professional Standards: Even in times when the practice of journalism is most difficult, when avenues of access to information are often cut off or denied to the publication in question, it is important that independent media maintain high professional standards. It is harder for authorities to clamp down on a publication or radio station that has a near impeccable record. In our situation, even though the government does not necessarily approve of what the newspaper writes, The Namibian has nevertheless become the newspaper of choice. Even our opponents in the

state feel obliged to read us.

Recognize the Importance of Training: If we believe that self-sufficiency is essential for political survival of media in conflict and post-conflict situations, then the training, in particular, of media management is necessary. There are a number of such initiatives in several parts of the world, including southern Africa, in which managers of emerging media are assisted in the areas of management and training with a view to sustainability. In our case we learned by trial and error, and I was forced to develop business acumen to ensure the financial survival of the newspaper. But, when possible, this should not be left to chance. Management training can bolster a media outlet's chances of survival. I am often critical of how certain training initiatives in our country are undertaken, and this probably applies in other parts of the world as well. Some, though not all, nongovernmental organizations with money to spend launch training initiatives with little consultation with the media people in the country or region. This often results in an ad hoc approach. It is vital that local media organizations are consulted on their needs before such courses are embarked upon.

Use Access to the Courts: During times of crisis, media should make use of the courts and receive assistance to do so. Many impediments to the survival of independent media are legislative

in nature and need to be challenged in courts of law. As we found, even the most draconian systems have loopholes. In Namibia and in South Africa during apartheid, we were able to achieve a measure of independence and continue to publish our newspaper because of our use of the courts. Circumstances with the court system are not the same in all countries and, in the case of Zimbabwe, almost all possible loopholes have been closed. But media in such situations should exploit weaknesses in the system to any extent they can in order to survive.

Remain Lean and Mean: For want of a better expression, it is very important that independent media be managed on modest budgets. This is an essential key to our survival. At The Namibian, we can and do look after the basic needs of our journalists, but we avoid excessive salaries and lavish spending, especially for the most senior employees. In too many examples I've witnessed, or where I've assisted community independent media start up, commitment is tested when resources are meager. And there usually must be a tough transition period prior to sustainability. One should not forget that many big commercial media are being forced to cut back on staff and content and/or programming largely because of bureaucracy and overexpenditure. ■ —G.L.

complacency. Times change, and the struggle is no longer the same one. So we need to be innovative in bringing about change to give our readers more diversity and a fresher approach to content. One of our major projects is a weekly Youthpaper to reach out to youth in an educational and informative capacity in a country where large-scale unemployment and disillusionment about job prospects is a major problem for the next generation.

We have also developed our on-line edition at www.namibian.com.na, which is a popular site both at home and abroad. Web sites can, and have been, useful to many independent media in times of pressure.

In our own region, the most recent example of closure is of The Daily News in Zimbabwe in 2003 despite its favorable court rulings against the government's actions. There are still questions about what led to the decision to finally close The Daily News and who made the decision to do so. Was it done out of fear for the lives of the journalists or because commercial interests played a role and the newspaper's shareholders decided to throw in the towel? [See interview by Yvonne van der Heijden on page 49.] President Robert Mugabe waged a concerted campaign for many years to crack down on independent media, using various forms of harassment, censorship and restrictive legislation. The closure of Zimbabwe's only independent daily, which was started in 1999, unquestionably leaves an information vacuum in that country.

Choice of medium is key to survival. There are circumstances in which print might not be the right choice, depending on a variety of factors prevailing in the country in question. Newspapers are tangible products, and in Zimbabwe and in many other places in the African sub-continent, they provide an easy target for the authorities to confiscate. Radio remains the most important medium in Africa. Most Zimbabweans are now

forced to read pro-government publications, and only a few independent weeklies exist, but there are shortwave broadcasts from abroad. Most private broadcasters cannot obtain licenses in Zimbabwe today, so it can be said that radio is carrying the torch of media freedom following the demise of The Daily News.

Not every independent publication should feel entitled to survive. Neither

The independent media in various countries, whether repressive or in states of transition, need to be as transparent as they want the governments they challenge to be.

should we encourage continual donor reliance, an issue many African publications confront. When professional standards are found wanting or there is a lack of commitment and adherence to strong editorial principles, when people embark on such projects as only commercial money-making ventures (and this happens in our part of the world where money is in short supply and donors are willing to support such projects in countries in transition from violence), these journalists become authors of their own demise.

As journalists, we are all too well aware that in many parts of the world ours has become a dangerous profession, especially in times of war and political conflict. Annual reports of global journalistic organizations bear testimony to the many who have died and/or suffered in the exercise of their craft. Even in democracies such as our own in Namibia the situation remains a fragile one, and this is probably true of many countries newly emerged or in transition from repressive circumstances. Media, especially independent media, inevitably become the target when things go bad. In southern Africa, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) portrays a slightly improved picture of the media landscape in its 2003 State of Media Freedom Report. [See article about MISA's work on page

39.] But there remain the glaringly obvious exceptions, like Zimbabwe, which still tops the list as the most repressive country in our region.

The independent media in various countries, whether repressive or in states of transition, need to be as transparent as they want the governments they challenge to be. Professional ethics are vital, and independent media structures must be clear about their ownership and the role of shareholders. Too often interests of the latter dilute journalist principles, which is why ownership is such a vital issue to survival in the face of conflict. Finally, independent media, whether print

or electronic, is often the backbone of emerging democracies. It is therefore important that encouragement be given by other independent media that have flourished and that can share expertise with those just starting out. In many parts of Africa there appears to be a concerted drive to set up alternative media. This is a positive sign, especially since this was virtually unheard of not too long ago when governments dominated the media in many countries.

Great strides forward have been made and will continue to be made in countries in transition, such as Angola and Mozambique, for example. Assistance in laying the groundwork for democracy is needed in countries in the midst of conflict situations. They need help and support while they work to establish good governance as a foundation from which to promote press freedom and free speech. ■

Gwen Lister, a 1996 Nieman Fellow, will be among three women to receive the International Women's Media Foundation Courage in Journalism Awards for 2004 in October.

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WATCHDOG

The Government Silenced Zimbabwe's Only Independent Newspaper

'Revealing the facts about their corruption and mismanagement really makes bad rulers mad.'

By Yvonne van der Heijden

Wulf Mbanga, founding chief executive of the now-silenced independent newspaper *The Daily News* in Zimbabwe, now joins Dutch pupils on a field trip and discusses environmental issues with local administrators in public. Dressed in the national team's orange color, he watched soccer matches during the European Championship in his favorite local pub. Mbanga recounts these events and others in a weekly column he writes for *Brabants Dagblad*, the regional daily newspaper. At times, his words are humorous, but they always convey a serious undertone that keeps one mindful that his country, Zimbabwe, lacks freedom of expression, and its corrupt government has destroyed the economy through greed and mismanagement and stopped this independent newspaper from publishing.

Mbanga lives with his wife in the city of Tilburg in the southern Dutch province of Noord-Brabant. Here he has been given a year "in asylum," as part of the International Network of Cities of Asylum (INCA). Mbanga is the first journalist Tilburg invited since joining the worldwide INCA network in 2002. [See accompanying box on page 50 for more information about INCA.]

In an interview with him six months after his arrival in November 2003, Mbanga called this opportunity "a fantastic experience." "Here I can write from the heart, honestly. I don't have to look over my shoulder in fear of being arrested again," he said. "I'd like to see more cities of asylum [established] because there are many more writers being displaced around the world."

Mbanga explained that *The Daily News* played a key role in the 1999 emer-

gence of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party, in the national referendum on constitutional reforms held in early 2000, and in the general elections later that year. "The *Daily News* gave the MDC a voice and informed the world of the vicious government crackdown on the opposition before, during and after the elections. It exposed the massive electoral fraud involved in both the general election of 2000 and the presidential election in 2002," Mbanga said, though he left the paper in 2001 when he became a communications consultant.

Zimbabwe's Government and The Daily News

The Daily News was set up as an alternative voice to the government-owned mass media, which kowtowed to the corrupt leadership. "There was a desperate need for the facts, for fair comment and fearless reporting. The *Daily News* pledged itself to observe the highest standards of integrity and fairness: to produce a quality newspaper that would strive to 'tell it like it is,'" Mbanga said. "We knew that these principles would put us on a collision course with the government. But we had to do it; we had to expose this murderous regime."

Soon after the paper hit the streets in 1999, it surpassed the circulation numbers of the government-owned national daily, *The Herald*. The initial print runs of the independent daily were limited to 60,000 by the capacity of its printing press and unavailability of newsprint. Later this rose to nearly 130,000. People lined up to buy the limited copies. Independent advertising statistics confirmed that every copy

was read by at least seven Zimbabweans, from all walks of life. They could read breaking stories, such as the ones about the 1,150 percent salary hike for the president and cabinet ministers at a time when 80 percent of the population was living below the poverty line; about the first lady's multimillion dollar shopping sprees abroad while industry back home ground to a halt; about the allocation of grabbed white farms to political cronies and key defense force officers, and about desperate shortages of fuel, bread, staple maize meal, and bank notes.

"Revealing the facts about their corruption and mismanagement really makes bad rulers mad. They don't like it when you get to the truth. With so many skeletons in the cupboard they get very irate when you start digging for the facts. Therefore the closure of the newspaper was really no surprise to us," Mbanga said. "What is surprising is that it did not happen sooner, as President Robert Mugabe's government became increasingly paranoid after the founding of the Movement for Democratic Change—which was the first viable opposition to its 20-year rule."

"Why then did it take so long before *The Daily News* was banned?" I asked.

"Good question. First, to put the facts straight, *The Daily News* is not banned," Mbanga replied dryly. "It has merely been refused registration to operate as a newspaper because it has failed to comply with the requirements of the newspaper registration law of Zimbabwe. Mugabe is a very smart dictator who obtained two law degrees while he was in prison under Rhodesian rule from 1961 till 1974. He likes legal niceties. Throughout his rule,

he has taken great pains to ensure that new legislation is passed to facilitate his most illegal activities.”

Harassment of the Press

In the case of the newspaper's closure, the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) provided the legal framework. Jonathan Moyo, who is an avowed enemy of the independent media, drafted the legislation in 2000 after he was appointed Minister of Information and Publicity. AIPPA was

enacted in 2002, but staff at The Daily News already had to endure harassments before then. “There is no freedom of information in my country and no protection of privacy,” Mbanga said. “The harassment [of Daily News staff] started on a minor scale. Party faithfuls of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) would confiscate copies of the newspaper, tearing them up and burning them. Readers of the paper were beaten up by party thugs and vendors were arrested by the police for ‘blocking traffic.’”

In time, the harassment became more brutal. “The government began arresting Daily News reporters and denying them access to government information and functions—including official comments from the police communications department. Arrests of the editors, management and local investors followed. On one occasion when Geoff Nyarota, the paper's editor in chief, was arrested, he called me from his mobile phone to tell me that the police were on their way to pick me up as well, although I had left the paper and was only a shareholder in the company that owned it. [See article by Nyarota on page 35.] I was taken in by four plain-clothes policemen and ended up in a tiny, stinking cell with 13 ordinary criminals.

“It was bizarre. We were interviewed by the international press. We kept our mobile phones and communicated with the outside. The next day we were taken to court, falsely accused of fraud, and released on bail. We had to surrender our passports and to report to the police once a week. It was obvious that the police did not have a case against us and, during the trial a few weeks later, the magistrate dismissed the case as being without substance. The government appealed to the High Court but again the case was dismissed [But] the intimidation did not stop. My phone was tapped. I was followed by men wearing dark glasses. Unexplained incidents started to happen,” Mbanga told me. “It exhausted me. I could not concentrate on my work as a communications consultant. The invitation to stay in Tilburg for a year was heaven sent.”

After the closure of The Daily News only two weeklies remain, with limited circulation, which are independent of the ruling party. All other publications are mouthpieces of the government. The electronic media is wholly government-owned. It comprises one television station and four radio stations, which constantly broadcast hate speeches by Mugabe and his officials and crude political jingles and slogans. “People can only listen to blatant propaganda. All day long. The government-owned mass media have lost all credibility,”

International Network of Cities of Asylum

Since the fatwa was issued in 1989 against Indian-born author Salman Rushdie, writers from five continents have been convened each year by Carrefour des Littératures in Strasbourg, France to discuss how to respond to increasing outbursts of intolerance. In July 1993, after the assassination of the writer Tahar Djaout in Algeria, Carrefour des Littératures gathered petition signatures from more than 300 writers in support of creating a new structure capable of organizing aid for persecuted writers. This marked the birth of the International Parliament of Writers (IPW).

Among IPW's goals was the creation of a worldwide network of cities of asylum, as well as working against threats to the freedom of intellectual creation by investigating cases of censure and researching its new forms. In February 1994, the organization established an executive board made up of seven writers, including Rushdie, who was elected its first president. Rushdie drafted a Declaration of Independence to serve as the IPW's charter.

In 1995, the European Charter of Cities of Asylum was adopted by the Council of Europe and approved by the European Parliament. This charter specifies the legal and institutional framework for providing asylum to writers. According to this agreement,

the Cities of Asylum members host for one to two years an author proposed by the IPW with an apartment and a monthly grant provided to the authors in residence. These conditions enable writers to resume their activities in safe surroundings and work conditions and to participate in the cultural life of the host city. It also gives them time to think about a more permanent solution to their situation.

In 2003, IPW decided to dissolve itself and be replaced by the International Network of Cities of Asylum (INCA). Today about 34 cities and regions are part of this worldwide network, including Amsterdam, Tilburg, Frankfurt, Oslo, Coimbra and Barcelona in Europe; Ithaca, New York and Las Vegas in the United States, and Lagos, Nigeria in Africa. This program has enabled the IPW to host authors from Afghanistan, Algeria, Burma, China, Cuba, Iran, Nigeria, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Zimbabwe.

After forming the Cities of Asylum Network, IPW created two new tools for spreading its message: an international journal published simultaneously in eight different languages and a multilingual and multimedia Web site (www.autodafe.org). Its goal is to disseminate censored literary works that give voice to people who have been silenced and to cultures that are fading and to languages in danger of disappearing. ■ —YVH

Mbanga said. "They have degenerated into an unashamed party propaganda machine."

In 2003, more than 50 Zimbabwean reporters working in the independent media were arrested and charged, but not convicted. "It is just harassment. They want to frighten you, so you obey the rules set by an unjust government. The bombing of our newspaper, twice, took the process a step further, resulting in the complete destruction of the printing presses," Mbanga said. "Nobody was arrested for these crimes."

Stories Needing to Be Told

There are plenty of stories from Zimbabwe that Mbanga believes need to be told—about the corrupt officials who enrich themselves and spend public money to live lives of luxury; about the economic mismanagement and plundering of state assets, which has caused massive unemployment and 600 percent inflation; about human rights abuses; about children being trained

in militia camps to torture, and about women being systematically raped. He gives an example of the scandal about food: "Zimbabwe has fertile soil and a good irrigation system in place. But due to the chaotic and corrupt land reform process, the production of maize—our staple diet—has plummeted. Millions are starving. The world wants to send maize, but Mugabe has refused permission. He wants to use food as a campaign tool. The price of a bag of maize meal has gone up to more than one month's salary for ordinary Zimbabweans. This is scandalous!"

In his weekly column in the regional Dutch newspaper, Mbanga invariably touches upon the problems suffered by the people in Zimbabwe. He lectures to many groups and institutions, such as the African Studies Center in Leiden, and writes articles for newspapers such as Britain's *The Guardian* and the *Financial Times* of London. "I need to bring about awareness of what is going on in Zimbabwe," he said. "I am a writer, and I have to use this talent. Voiceless

people depend on people like me to speak out on their behalf and reveal the truth."

Though the issues we spoke about were often sad and depressing, the room was often filled with the roar of Mbanga's laughter. He doesn't know whether he and his wife will be able to return to their country where several of their grown children remain. But they are convinced that sometime things will change. "I am an optimist," he told me. "One day things will change for the better. Maybe not in my lifetime—but change will come." ■

Yvonne van der Heijden, a 1986 Nieman Fellow, is working as a freelance journalist based in Loon op Zand, the Netherlands. From 1991-1999, she was a correspondent in Beijing with the Netherlands Press Association and the Financial Economic Times of Belgium.

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Using the Internet to Examine Patterns of Foreign Coverage

African events are often not reported because Western news coverage is strongly connected to a nation's wealth.

By Ethan Zuckerman

The first week of April 2003, several hundred people were killed in ethnic violence in the Ituri region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Given the magnitude of the event—up to a thousand civilians killed in a single incident—and the history of violence in the region, it made sense to expect media coverage. Shortly before the killings, the International Rescue Committee published a study suggesting that 3.3 million people had died as a result of conflicts in the DRC, making the ongoing violence in the

region the deadliest war in the world since World War II.

But the events in Ituri went almost unreported. On April 7th, the first day American newspapers reported the killings, *The New York Times* ran a brief Associated Press story on the conflict, buried on page A6. Google News, a Web site that monitors 4,500 news sources, listed only 1,200 stories in the preceding month that mentioned Congo. By contrast, on the same day Google News showed 550,000 stories for Iraq, and *The New York Times* ran five Iraq stories

on the front page, as well as a separate section, "A Nation at War."

While it's predictable that the U.S. invasion of Iraq would squeeze most other news off the front page of American newspapers, it's only one of several reasons the conflict in Ituri received so little attention. In their seminal 1965 paper, "The Structure of Foreign News," Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge proposed 12 factors that influence the publication of international news. While Galtung and Ruge's statistical analysis has been questioned, their proposed

factors are still widely used by media theorists to explain the inclusion and exclusion of international news stories.

Galtung and Ruge, writing almost 40 years before the Congo event, could have predicted the events in Ituri would have been ignored in the United States:

- The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a “non-elite” nation.
- No “elite people” were killed in Ituri.
- There’s little cultural proximity between the United States and the DRC.
- The conflict had little meaning for American readers.
- And the decade-long war in the region meant that further killings weren’t unexpected.

Their analysis doesn’t consider news-gathering factors—the difficulty of deploying reporters to northeastern Congo, language barriers, and the lack of communications infrastructure—all of which make it more difficult for reporters to cover the conflict in DRC, especially in contrast to the war in Iraq, which featured opportunities for reporters to be “embedded” within U.S. military units.

Global Attention Profiles

While Galtung and Ruge used 1,250 Norwegian newspaper clippings gathered over four years to propose their rules, the advent of Internet publishing gives us the opportunity to test some of their conclusions with hundreds of thousands of data points. Shortly after the incident in Ituri, I started collecting data from the Web sites of U.S. and British newspapers, news services, and television networks for a project I called Global Attention Profiles. My intention was to create daily maps of news sto-

ries to demonstrate graphically where Western media attention was focused. As the project progressed, I began to look for correlations to economic and political factors to explain the distribution of news.

My main conclusion: Andy Warhol was wrong—we won’t all get 15 minutes of fame.

If this were true, populous nations like China, Indonesia and Brazil would be better represented in the Western media. Media attention, measured by the number of stories that mention a country by name, is correlated only loosely to a nation’s population. It’s correlated much more strongly to economic factors, especially to a nation’s wealth, as measured by gross domestic product. For example, while Nigeria and Japan have roughly equal populations, Japan’s economy is about 100 times the size of Nigeria’s—and there are roughly seven times as many mentions

Media attention, measured by the number of stories that mention a country by name, is correlated only loosely to a nation’s population. It’s correlated much more strongly to economic factors, especially to a nation’s wealth, as measured by gross domestic product.

of “Japan” as there are of “Nigeria” in the average American newspaper on any given day. All the American news sources I tracked showed this pattern; the lone source to show a different pattern was the BBC, which showed a strong bias towards news in former British colonies, including populous and poor nations like Nigeria, India and Pakistan.

Correlation is not causation, and it’s unlikely that news directors check a nation’s current account balance before sending a TV crew to cover a story. But, consciously or not, the people who decide what becomes news are far more likely to cover a story if it involves people from wealthy nations. (Indeed, the less developed nations best covered during the year of my study—Iraq and

Afghanistan—are nations that Americans invaded and occupied.)

While it’s tempting to accuse news organizations of dereliction in failing to cover events in the developing world, blame might fall equally on market forces and the preferences of media consumers. Confronted with the inequity of media attention, many editors and news directors will readily own up to the disparity and go on to explain that they’re the good guys, encouraging coverage of developing nations: If their customers had their way, there would be even less international news and almost no news from poorer nations. Given the need for publications to maintain an audience to sell ads to, perhaps we’re lucky that there’s any coverage of the developing world.

It’s difficult to test this theory without extremely detailed data about what news stories readers and viewers view or skip. But Weblogs give us a way to guess

at reader interest: If a Weblogger mentions a country in her post, she’s likely expressing an interest in that nation. If we found a pattern of Weblogger interest in developing nations—proportionally more mentions of Africa than in the mainstream

media, for instance—we might conclude that editors are underestimating their readers.

Alas, we don’t see this pattern. Looking at data from Weblog search engine BlogPulse, we see roughly the same correlation between wealth and mentions as we do in media aggregator sites like Google News or Altavista News and a slightly tighter correlation to national wealth than in single media sources like The New York Times or The Washington Post. Comparing on a country by country basis, Weblogs are more likely to name travel destinations (Caribbean Islands, some Central American and Southeast Asian nations) and far less likely to mention African, Eastern European, and Central Asian

nations than mainstream media sources. Disparities aside, the statistics suggest that mentions of nations in blogposts are strongly correlated to their appearance in the mainstream media.

Consequences of News Decision-Making

If readers aren't interested in international news and it's expensive for news networks to generate, does it matter that the media doesn't cover violence in Ituri?

It matters a great deal to Iturians. Governments are less likely to send peacekeepers to work to stop the conflict from spreading if they don't read about it in the news. And citizens can't pressure their governments to intervene without awareness of the situation. The huge aid packages coming to Iraq and Afghanistan suggest a relationship between media attention and foreign aid. In the wake of these conflicts, international aid workers have expressed concern that aid to neglected, "unpopular" conflicts will suffer as a result. In more peaceful times, attention makes it more likely that a country will become a trading partner or receive foreign investment.

Wealthy nations have a good reason to care about news in undercovered nations—their security may depend on it. The events of September 11th were carried out by a network that bases itself in weak and failed states. For a brief interval after the attacks, Americans were deeply interested in the Central Asian states that hosted al-Qaeda operatives—this interest waned as global attention shifted from Afghanistan to Iraq. A recent report by the Center for Global Development, "On the Brink: Weak States and U.S.

National Security," suggests that roughly 50 failed and failing states need to be both closely watched and aided so that they don't find themselves participants in terrorism and global crime. All but three of the states mentioned in the report are systematically undercovered by mainstream media. Like the U.S. intelligence community, the U.S. news media are better configured for a world where threats come from superpowers than from failed states.

It seems unlikely that commercial news organizations will refocus on the developing world without some form of external pressure. In 1980, Sean

A recent report by the Center for Global Development, 'On the Brink: Weak States and U.S. Security,' suggests that roughly 50 failed and failing states need to be both closely watched and aided so that they don't find themselves participants in terrorism and global crime. All but three of the states mentioned in the report are systematically undercovered by mainstream media.

MacBride led a UNESCO committee that published a report, "Many Voices, One World," which proposed legal and structural changes to news organizations to improve media coverage of the developing world. The report was opposed so vehemently by media organizations in the United States, United Kingdom, and Singapore that the three nations withdrew from UNESCO to protest implementation of the committee's proposals. One could be forgiven for skepticism that CNN or Fox News will react any better to suggestions to globalize their coverage than newspapers did two decades ago.

The recent crisis in Darfur, Sudan points to one way concerned individuals and organizations can influence global news coverage. A network of NGO's—most notably Human Rights Watch—which had monitored human rights situations in Sudan for years, provided extensive information on the

Janjaweed militias to major newspapers, making it possible for them to write their first stories on the situation. In effect, they did the first round of investigative journalism that news organizations failed to do. After a major report by Human Rights Watch and strong statements from the United States and the United Nations, media attention to Sudan increased dramatically—it is now receiving the third-most media attention in sub-Saharan Africa (behind South Africa and Nigeria).

The attention paid to Darfur also points to the importance of caring. A global community of evangelical Christians has closely monitored the Khartoum government for years, accusing it of systematic persecution of a Christian minority. This community was deeply interested in seeing that stories came out of Sudan and was able to provide feedback to editors letting them know that they cared

about the situation. To encourage news organizations to report on forgotten stories, readers and viewers will have to demonstrate that they care about these issues. But for viewers to care, they will likely need to know a great deal more about these nations. Is this a Catch-22? Or could it present an opportunity for new, participatory media like Weblogs to draw attention to situations and stories that a small group of individuals care about?

I'll be counting news stories and let you know. ■

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African Stories In Need of Reporters

On the eve of the World Press Freedom Day, May 3, 2004, the United Nations Department of Public Information launched "Ten Stories the World Should Hear More About." Half of these under-reported stories deal with humanitarian emergencies and conflict or post-conflict situations in Africa. A sixth story relates to the U.N.'s economic burdens as it is called upon to set up peacekeeping forces in several African nations, including Liberia and Ivory Coast. The stories summarized below can be found at <http://www.un.events/tenstories/>, along with contact information for journalists.

Uganda: Child Soldiers at Center of Mounting Humanitarian Crisis

Uganda's capital city, Kampala, has seen a revitalization in recent years, but a long-standing rebellion of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has forced 1.6 million Ugandans to flee their villages. The most disturbing part of the crisis—which shows no sign of resolution—is that almost 90 percent of the LRA is comprised of children as young as eight years old. Against their will, an estimated 30,000 children are forced to commit acts of violence—as thousands of children are abducted by the LRA. To escape capture, some children and parents leave their homes at night, seeking safety in neighboring towns until dawn. Humanitarians have received less than 10 percent of the \$130 million requested to help with malnutrition and health facilities, severely affected by LRA attacks.

Central African Republic: A Silent Crisis Crying Out for Help

Despite the rich resources and consequent economic potential of the Central African Republic (CAR), the region's continuing struggle with disease and military coups has created a situation the United Nations calls "fragile and

volatile." While elections are envisioned in the wake of General Bozize's 2003 seizure of the presidency, CAR still ranks 154th among the world's 174 poorest countries, and an estimated 15 percent of the population is infected with HIV/AIDS. Armed groups linked to General Bozize continue to commit human rights violations outside the capital of Bangui. Concern is growing that neighboring countries might soon be affected by CAR's volatile situation, such as Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Chad.

AIDS Orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Looming Threat to Future Generations

The unchecked spread of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa is creating a generation of orphans. According to the United Nations, "During the last decade the proportion of children orphaned as a result of AIDS rose from 3.5 percent to 32 percent," a figure expected to climb even higher without "urgent national strategies" addressing government, community and family capacities in sub-Saharan countries. In addition to affecting the orphan generation with poor health, psychological issues, and dramatically high mortality rates, the AIDS crisis is predicted to threaten future generations' growth structures and economies. "... this problem should remain at the center of attention of all concerned—governments, the public, and the media—to stem the spread of this scourge," the U.N. contends.

Bakassi Peninsula: Recourse to the Law to Prevent Conflict

The question of sovereignty over the Bakassi peninsula, a 1,600 kilometer strip of land rich in natural resources, has been a source of contention between bordering countries Cameroon and Nigeria since 1913. In 1994, Cameroon approached the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for a ruling, and after

eight years of peaceful arbitration, the ICJ ruled that sovereignty lies with Cameroon. President Paul Biya of Cameroon and President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria have since requested a Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission that will ensure both parties representation as they consider ways to enforce the ruling. The U.N. cites this as an illustration of "the crucial role of multilateral measures, such as the potential of dialogue and conflict resolution offered by recourse to the ICJ" and calls the Mixed Commission "an exemplary model for preventative diplomacy and a precious tool for moving from a culture of reaction to a culture of peace."

Women as Peacemakers: From Victims to Rebuilders of Society

Ten years after the abuse and violence of the Rwandan genocide, women in Rwanda and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa are rebuilding their countries, establishing democratic governments, and empowering women. These women "through their often unseen and unsung work are bringing peace to many troubled countries," the U.N. asserts. In the September 2003 parliamentary elections, Rwandan women won 49 percent of the seats in legislature, far surpassing the May 2003 constitutional ruling allotting 30 percent of decision-making positions to women. In other areas of sub-Saharan Africa, governments have begun using quotas, and this has led to an increase in the number of women serving in the parliaments. In Liberia, the women who created the Mano River Women's Peace Network were given a voice in Liberian peace talks and became a signatory of the Liberian peace agreement. ■ —*Compiled by Sarah Hagedorn.*

Emotional Connections to African Reporting

Zambia's orphaned children portray many dimensions of the human toll of AIDS.

By Frank Green

Years on the police beat in Richmond, Virginia means coming face-to-face with fatal shotgun wounds, beatings, knifings, decapitations, amputations, incinerations and train wrecks of one sort or another. It also means interviewing victims, witnesses and survivors soon after, or during, a tragedy. As any reporter who has done this can attest, the job can be difficult. The suffering is immediate and readily apparent but because of this the story can be easily conveyed in words and photographs.

Despite these experiences, I wasn't prepared for what I encountered at Chamboli Cemetery, a sprawl of knee-high brush, bare earth, and makeshift tombstones in northern Zambia. There the sound of picks and shovels mixes with wailing. Vehicles carrying mourners rise out of the dust and add to the general din as they travel down a dirt road through acres of the wood and scrap metal markers.

It was here, a few miles south of the Congolese border, that freelance photographer Joe Rodríguez and I wound up one morning during our travels in Africa to cover the sub-Saharan AIDS epidemic. This is a slow-motion train wreck of epic proportion: It has killed an estimated 600,000 and infected 1.2 million of the 10.6 million Zambians. Zambia is not the hardest hit of African countries, but the extent of its AIDS epidemic is representative.

There were times when Joe would tell me about how he was experiencing anger along with sorrow and of how he would try to protect himself emotionally by working with his camera to get closer to the people. He'd listen to their stories and share parts of his life with them.

I kept as busy—and distracted—as possible, by reporting, traveling extensively, and taking notes during the day

and typing them up at night. I found the writing therapeutic. I worked hard to simply write what I saw with the idea of letting readers decide how they felt about what I observed.

Paying for African Reporting

Joe and I were in Zambia thanks to a grant from the University of Washington's Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma and the support of the Richmond Times-Dispatch, the newspaper where I am a reporter. Joe and I are both Ochberg Fellows. The Dart Center and the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies established the Ochberg Fellowship to help journalists report responsibly and credibly on violence and traumatic events. Fellows attend a two-day seminar on the role

emotional trauma plays in coverage of violent events. Some, like Joe and me, are fortunate to receive a subsidized reporting assignment. This came to me because of my experience covering prisons, and an important part of the Zambian AIDS project was coverage of an AIDS education and detection effort in a prison there.

Louise Seals, the managing editor of the Times-Dispatch, observed that our newspaper could not have afforded to take on the Zambia project had it not been for the Dart Center grant. No international travel had been built into the newsroom's budget. And Executive Managing Editor Bill H. Millsaps was confident Joe and I would use our grant-funded reporting time to bring to readers an important look at what Africans are experiencing with the onslaught



Mourners attend the funeral of a Zambian AIDS victim. Each of them has AIDS, and one of the women has lost three adult children to AIDS and now cares for eight orphaned grandchildren in the nearby Luangwa Township. Of Luangwa's 2,000 residents, 900 either have the virus or have been widowed or left parentless by it. July 2003. *Photo by © Joseph Rodríguez.*

of AIDS. "Behind payroll, newsprint is our second biggest expense. Even so, we had no hesitancy about opening up the space sufficient to adequately display [the] stories and Joe's pictures," said Millsaps.

Though stories about Africa are often ignored in small to midsize dailies (our paper has a daily circulation of 190,000), the Times-Dispatch, which is published in a city with an African-American majority, has traditionally run more news about Africa than most newspapers its size.

The Zambian Experience

Our reporting trip began in the sprawling Zambian capital of Lusaka, then moved on to the northern city of Kitwe, south to Livingstone, then back to Lusaka. The groundwork of our journey was laid by Ochas Pupwe, a Zambian student who helped run an AIDS detection and education program in the largest prison in Central Africa. As we quickly discovered, AIDS has hit urban areas in Zambia hard, but the effects of the disease are also evident in the countryside.

Ignorant of the crocodiles, we were ferried across the Kafue River by boys paddling crude wooden boats to the village of Mufuchani. A short walk up a path bisecting stone and mud brick huts we found Memory Mwape laying on a reed mat in the shade of a tree. Her head rested in her hands. A good meal, much less a physician and antiretroviral drugs, were beyond her means, though her body was ravaged by AIDS. Pain and hopelessness we read on her face turned to an expression of apprehension at our sudden presence. Her husband, Robson Kaingu, whom we learned later is HIV positive, hovered nearby. Children and adults began to gather around us as we talked. Nearby a rowdy group of women drank a homemade brew called chibuku. Mufuchani, with 500 residents, buries five AIDS victims each week.

I'd had little contact with AIDS before I went to Africa, a continent to which I'd never traveled before. It was a place I always imagined was humid, dark and full of wild (but endangered) animals. Its people, I believed, were afflicted

by wars, genocide and famine. Joe had been to Africa before and had more intimate contact with AIDS since he'd had friends and relatives die of the disease in Spanish Harlem. He also covered AIDS in Mozambique in 1990. "I knew about AIDS in Zambia," Joe told me, "but I was quite overwhelmed when I got there. As we walked into different villages and started talking to people, it seemed like every other woman was a widow, every other family had some kids from next door who were orphans."

Zambia shattered my preconceptions about Africa and AIDS. Zambia, I soon discovered, is a place that shifts from magnificence and generosity to wretchedness and cruelty in a short stretch of time or distance. The AIDS epidemic is largely hidden, since the disease still carries a heavy stigma. Many who are infected refuse treatment so as not to reveal they have the virus. Former prostitutes refuse to be tested and risk further spread of HIV.

It is, of course, the children who are



Memory Mwape, 31 years old, is dying of AIDS and cannot afford medicine. In Mufuchani Village, Kitwe, Zambia, where she lives with her three children and husband, there is no school, clinic, store, running water, or electricity. There are hundreds of AIDS orphans. August 2003. *Photo by © Joseph Rodríguez.*

particularly difficult to cope with emotionally. There are an estimated 600,000 to 700,000 children orphaned by AIDS in Zambia, and there could be as many as one million by 2010, according to the United Nations and the U.S. Agency for International Development. It just takes one or two to break your heart. Many of these children also have AIDS, tuberculosis and other health problems and are too young to know the implications of their illness. Those old enough to remember their parents speak of how much they miss them.

One weekday morning we were surrounded by nearly 90 orphans at a "feeding" station that was organized by a local relief group. There are three such feedings a week for the children who live in the township of Kwacha, just outside Kitwe. Excited by seeing strangers, many of the children surrounded us. They were delighted by receiving the food and seemed happy to be among so many other children they have come to know. "The kids were the ones who kind of threw me back," Joe said. "The orphans." Joe told me he was crying inside. We were silent as we sat in the back of a van as we drove away from Kwacha, on our way to visit more widows and orphans.

One of Joe's strongest memories of our trip was something an AIDS worker, Martin Chisulo, who is also HIV positive, told him when asked why Zambians have such large families. It is part of their culture, he replied, and explained that a Zambian is considered a great man when he has many children. "It is the only wealth that we have," Chisulo said. "We also die a lot, so we must have more children."

Perhaps because my life has not been touched personally by this disease, I was largely able to remain detached from what I was seeing. It was witnessing the depth of poverty and prevalence of hunger that upset me more than reporting on the disease. Seeing this made me question the idea of universal justice. I found Zambians wonderfully friendly and generous. One tenet of the Dart program is to treat victims of disease and disaster with dignity, and this was an easy thing to do in a country where so many of the people maintain their



These Kitwe, Zambian street kids, sniffing glue, are AIDS orphans. No country in the world has a higher proportion of its children who are orphans than Zambia.



Kamfinsa Prison. In 1999, a Human Rights Watch report complained about crowding in Zambian prisons and jails that led to the spread of respiratory illnesses and other diseases, including AIDS. Kitwe, Zambia, July 2003.

dignity amid a withering host of indignities. What I found hard to understand is why so many of them suffer so much and so patiently.

Getting into the Kamfinsa Prison was particularly difficult, but made possible because Pupwe helped run the AIDS project there and knew the warden. Most of the inmates were razor thin, starving on a meager diet of corn porridge served up in large black kettles. Medicine was not available to inmates unless they had friends or family members who could afford to buy it for them. Though the conditions were in many ways far below those found in U.S. prisons, there seemed to be no tension between inmates and the unarmed guards freely walking among them. Also, unlike in U.S. prisons, female inmates were allowed to keep their children with them until they reached school age.

Many Zambians are courageously fighting the epidemic. Yet there is also ignorance, indifference and recklessness when it comes to AIDS.

A high point of the trip occurred on a rutted, cratered road on our way to Livingstone. The red and gold sky as the sun set over the distant Zambezi River cast a soft glow over the landscape. It was chilly inside the cab of the pickup truck, and its cargo bed was full of young Zambians happy to be riding to the city instead of walking. In the twilight, we passed occasional huts with cooking fires burning. The smoky smell of wood and charcoal was carried by the wind. The driver told us of the time he had been delayed on this road for half an hour while a herd of elephants crossed.

The ride was magical. Though the words I wrote reflected on the death and devastation I saw, this evening's ride is how I will remember Africa. ■

Frank Green is a reporter with the Richmond (Vir.) Times-Dispatch. Joseph Rodríguez, a freelance photojournalist, is the author of "Juvenile," published by powerHouse Books in January 2004.

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Photos by © Joseph Rodríguez.

A Mid-Sized Newspaper Connects Its Readers to Africa

Times Union journalists traveled to Malawi to trace the links of local citizens to the people of sub-Saharan Africa.

By Rex Smith

Paul Grondahl and Steve Jacobs didn't expect to be following a funeral march through fields of maize in an impoverished Malawi village in the spring of 2003. They hadn't imagined the groans of pain echoing off the bare cement floors of a crowded hospital, where patients waited in dark, filthy hallways for someone to die so a plywood bed would become available in a makeshift cholera ward.

Grondahl and Jacobs had each spent almost 20 years working for the (Albany) Times Union, and they knew that foreign reporting wasn't often a part of the newspaper's journalistic repertoire. Like most American newspapers, the Times Union recognizes that its franchise depends upon its local reporting. As the dominant daily in New York's Capital Region, the newspaper also strives for leading coverage of state government and politics.

Why would our newspaper send a team to one of the poorest nations on earth, far away from the community we serve? Why would we publish a full-color, 24-page section featuring these journalists' reports and devote countless hours to creating an ambitious presentation of this project on our Web site?

Deciding to Report in Africa

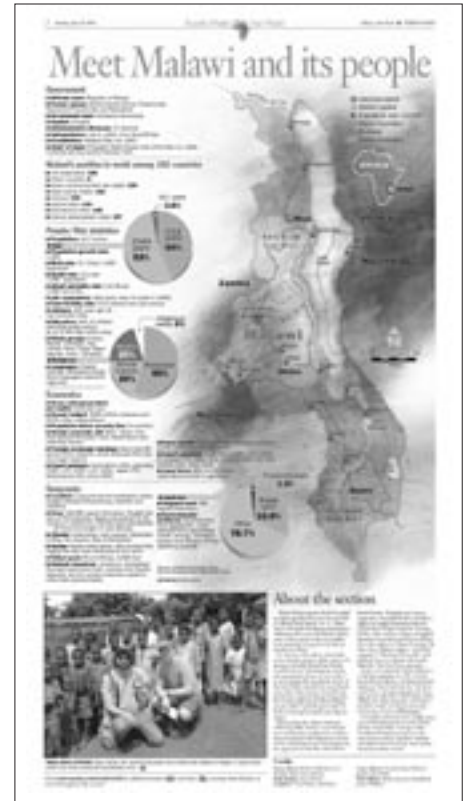
The Times Union's so-called Africa project, "Fourth World/Our World: Lifelines at the Edge of Survival," emerged as one of the newspaper's most notable undertakings. When Grondahl, a reporter, and Jacobs, a photographer, were enduring sub-Saharan Africa's stifling heat, with red mud caked on their boots and in their hair, they couldn't envision stand-



The newspaper's front page for its special section on Africa.

ing in the spotlight in tuxedos at a National Press Club banquet, accepting a national award that recognized their innovative, insightful coverage. Nor could they know how many readers would be awakened to a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions, in a place where 20 million people face hunger and malnutrition, where more than 70 percent of the world's HIV/AIDS cases are found, and where disease and hardship are expected to kill people before they reach the age of 40.

At the beginning of 2003, most Ameri-



The second page of the Africa reporting, including a map and key facts.

can journalists, if they were looking overseas at all, were focusing on Iraq, where a U.S. invasion loomed. Thinking that the Times Union might embed a team with American troops, I'd sent a reporter and photographer through a Pentagon training program.

But good journalists have a way of finding stories in places where other people don't happen to look, and that's what happened when Steve Jacobs went out on a daily photo assignment in early January. He shot photos of Emelita Williams, a local woman who was collecting

supplies for a school that was being built in Malawi, not far from where she had been born. Williams had helped start construction of the unfinished school some years before, and she wanted to carry the supplies back and finish the project. Jacobs saw a larger story.

“Emelita will be going back to her homeland in just four weeks to help distribute the most recent supply shipment to the children at the school she helped build,” Jacobs wrote to me in a mid-January memo. “I propose to photograph this story, offering pictures of the Williams family at their jobs, at school, and at home in the Capital Region, as well as to show Emelita’s experience when she gives hope to the young faces in her native homeland, in Africa.”

I wasn’t convinced. One family’s humanitarian effort was a good story, but not so good that I could justify blowing the newsroom’s travel budget for an entire quarter. Jacobs, undeterred, enlisted Grondahl, the newspaper’s most honored reporter. The two had traveled together to Northern Ireland a few years ago, tracking links to our community’s sizeable Irish population, and had collaborated on groundbreaking projects involving state prisons and mental health facilities.

Meanwhile, I had grown uneasy with the notion of embedding anybody from the Times Union in Iraq. I wondered: What unique reporting could we do? Editors at papers the size of the Times Union (about 100,000 daily and 145,000 Sunday) too often send staffers to far-away places more for their own ego enhancement than for journalistic merit. How could I justify spending so much money just to put a Times Union byline on a war story that could be produced just as ably by any of the various sources available on our wires?

Five days after Jacobs’ initial memo, President Bush surprised listeners when in his State of the Union address he called for \$15 billion in spending over five years “to turn the tide against AIDS in the most afflicted nations of Africa and the Caribbean.” That, I thought, might focus our readers’ attention on Africa, perhaps giving more relevance to Emelita’s story. Grondahl dropped me a

Hope in a Can of Green Beans

The Times Union special section involved a series of short stories written by Paul Grondahl. A story follows:

Two thousand hungry villagers have been sitting cross-legged in the red dirt for four hours, still as statues, pressed tightly, shoulder to shoulder. Men on one side, women on the other.

Word has spread that Americans will deliver food today to Madisi, a village on the brink of starvation and reeling from a cholera outbreak a few days earlier.

A flatbed truck drives up with cases of canned green beans sent by a U.S. donor.

Suzi Stephens of the Malawi Project arrives.

“Mama Suzi,” as the Malawians call her, receives a rock star’s ovation. Men stand and applaud. Women make shrill trills with their tongues that sound like a melodic war whoop. The crowd parts and Mama Suzi wades through.

The throng queues up in long, orderly rows. Mama Suzi begins passing out 6-pound, 10-ounce cans of Crest Top Blue Lake Green Beans. One can per person.

Village elders stop her. They huddle, confer and show her a list of 284 names, the most needy cases, mostly widows and orphans.

note. “We could do a two-for-one trip,” he suggested, “in which we’d spend a couple days with the Williams family at the new school and the arrival of food and supplies and then branch out and do an AIDS epidemic story.” After talking it over with Managing Editor Mary Fran Gleason, I asked Grondahl to do some preliminary reporting on a single broad project, one that would examine the humanitarian crisis in Africa through the prism of Emelita’s story.

Grondahl’s subsequent memo the next week convinced Gleason and me that this was the kind of foreign reporting worth undertaking. “We propose to tell the epic tragedy of Africa—drought, famine, AIDS, political corruption, and



Transporting free food from a relief distribution program. Malawi, March 2003.

Photo by Steve Jacobs/Times Union.

Tradition dictates that the neediest are served first. The elders call out each name. There is a pause as each moves to the front of the line.

Just then, the skies let loose. A hundred battered umbrellas snap open. A monsoonal downpour turns the red dirt clearing into a lake the consistency and color of butterscotch pudding. The lines stay straight and orderly.

Boys dig bugs from the muddy hillside and pop them into wet mouths, their tattered clothes streaming with rainwater. “A Malawi shower,” they call it.

There are enough green beans to give one can—one meal for a family—to about half the crowd. Hundreds of others return to their huts, wet and hungry. ■

a steady march of death and devastation—through the moving story of a [local] family and its struggle to save a small group of AIDS orphans in a tiny village in Malawi,” it began. He estimated total cost of travel at less than \$4,000.

Just three weeks later, as hundreds of other journalists were joining U.S. troops massing for the Iraq invasion, Grondahl and Jacobs took off for Malawi. They stayed for 16 days.

The Web and Newspaper Presentations

We knew these two veteran journalists would come back with plenty of mate-

rial for whatever kind of project we might want to publish. But Grondahl and Jacobs also had prepared to present their work on www.timesunion.com, our Web site, which for several years has enhanced our newspaper's storytelling in visually dynamic ways. So they packed among their reporting tools equipment for digital audio and video recording. Experience has taught us that when we plan our Web reporting as an integral part of the overall package, both the print and online versions of the story are strengthened. We weren't wrong: Each of these presentations offered readers different ways to engage with the information our reporters brought home.

During their pre-trip reporting, Grondahl and Jacobs also had come across a few humanitarian efforts in sub-Saharan Africa that are based in the Capital Region. Those efforts turned out to be an unexpected but major thrust of the project. Not only did those projects, in turn, lead to others that Grondahl and Jacobs visited in Africa, but also

in the weeks after the team returned their reporting focused on other Capital Region links to sub-Saharan Africa. The story of Emelita Williams became but one element of the overall package.

Malawi is a country roughly the size of Pennsylvania. Among the 192 nations of the world, Malawi's life expectancy ranks 186th and its per capita gross national product ranks 189th. Grondahl would later write that it was "so desperately poor and in such an utter state of collapse that it doesn't even qualify as a member of the underdeveloped Third World." Amazingly, he found, it also was too poor to qualify for the aid dollars that Bush had promised to alleviate the suffering of AIDS in Africa.

As a journalist, Grondahl has more finely tuned senses than most of us. He sees and hears, tastes, smells and touches more than most reporters, and it all goes into his notebook, from which he extracts strands of stories that he braids together into eloquent prose. A challenge upon his return was to draw out this remarkable reporting and writ-

ing without letting it yield an unwieldy batch of mainbars and sidebars.

The solution was to present the entire package as a series of short stories, linked under "chapter" headings, with no single piece dominating the package. All of it would be published on a single day, in a section that we realized would cover several pages. We wanted to present Jacobs' powerful photography in color, but we knew that wouldn't be possible on the Times Union's 34-year-old press. We enlisted our marketing department to find sponsors who would pay for high-quality printing offsite.

What emerged on the last Sunday of June 2003 is what we view as a prototype of contemporary reporting, in a form we have roughly mimicked in presenting other projects since then. In addition to the Africa project's dramatic Web presentation, readers of the paper found a 24-page full-color section (including 2 1/2 pages of sponsorship) that presented 80 photographs and dozens of articles, divided under three chapter headings: "Affliction," "Affirma-



A Malawian holds a handful of maize, a native corn-like food that people use as their primary food source. March 2003.



A Malawian child, sickened by cholera and AIDS, is fed by a villager in a makeshift hospital. March 2003.

Photos by Steve Jacobs/Times Union.

tion” and “Cooperation.” The voices of experts, rather than intruding into Grondahl’s descriptive narratives, were pulled out as Q&A segments along the bottom of the pages. Personal insights

that augmented the storylines were offered in nine installations of a reporter’s journal. A full-page map pinpointed the humanitarian efforts that Capital Region groups and congregations had

launched in Africa. On the front page of the newspaper, a more traditional story introduced the special section inside, exploring the policy issues that stood in the way of progress toward solving



Elderly Malawian women openly cry, yell and grieve as they walk to the village burial grounds during a traditional funeral service for a woman who died of AIDS. The women walk separately from the men. Malawi, March 2003. *Photo by Steve Jacobs/Times Union.*



Malawian men and women, in the background, pass the grave of a villager that is marked with a cross deep in the bush fields. Malawi, March 2003. *Photo by Steve Jacobs/Times Union.*

the crisis. In all, 16 journalists at the newspaper worked on delivering this project to our readers.

We heard many comments from readers, most of whom had never known of the many links between our community and a part of the world so

badly scarred by poverty and disease. But we were also struck, sadly, by how quickly the story seemed to vanish from our readers' consciousness. If we created a community dialogue, as we had hoped to do, in part through our interactive Web site, it was a quiet one,

heard largely in the places where such conversations might be expected to take place anyway: houses of worship and a few schools.

We had done our best to present a vital issue to our readers, not imagining that we could change the world, of course, but confident that we would make things a bit better. And perhaps we did that, and maybe that's all a newspaper can hope for when trying to present a serious issue from a distant land to a readership distracted by war and politics and entertainment and the busyness of everyday life. What we did might have helped forge some enduring connections. For those of us who tried to connect our world with theirs, we believe firmly it was worth the effort. ■



To combat dehydration, medical workers struggle to start an intravenous drip in the arm of a two-year-old boy stricken by cholera during an outbreak in the village of Madisa, Malawi. March 2003. *Photo by Steve Jacobs/Times Union.*

Rex Smith is editor of the Times Union in Albany, New York. "Fourth World/Our World" won the 2003 Scripps Howard National Journalism Award for Web Reporting. (The Africa project can be found at www.timesunion.com/fourthworld.)

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When Tragedy Is No Longer a Good Enough Story to Tell

An African journalist chronicles his life and revisits some of Africa's major news stories of the 1990's.

The Zanzibar Chest: A Story of Life, Love, and Death in Foreign Lands

Aidan Hartley

Atlantic Monthly Press. 414 pages. \$15 pb. \$24 hc.

By Wilson Wanene

Reporting on Africa for a Western audience can be strange at times. Even when diverse news organizations are forced to suddenly converge on a crisis, certain working rules easily take root back at the head office in London or New York. Amid competition from domestic events, news from other world regions and tight budgets, the reporter on the

ground is supposed to know just how to pitch the story, what to include, what won't work, and so on.

During the Ethiopian famine of 1984, for example, the massive media coverage brought disturbing pictures of starvation that shocked America and Europe into responding with aid. However, by 1992, when the Somali

famine was in progress, the rules had changed. The conventional wisdom was that "donor fatigue" had afflicted the West. The foreign correspondent, to make the story compelling, had to not simply show the run of the mill starvation victim. A TV soundman, for instance, was shrewd if he managed to tape the last breaths of a dying Somali

man. A British cameraman in the Sudan could demand that his guide locate a thinner group of kids after the initial one—already with bloated bellies and shrunken arms—was deemed not jolting enough for viewers.

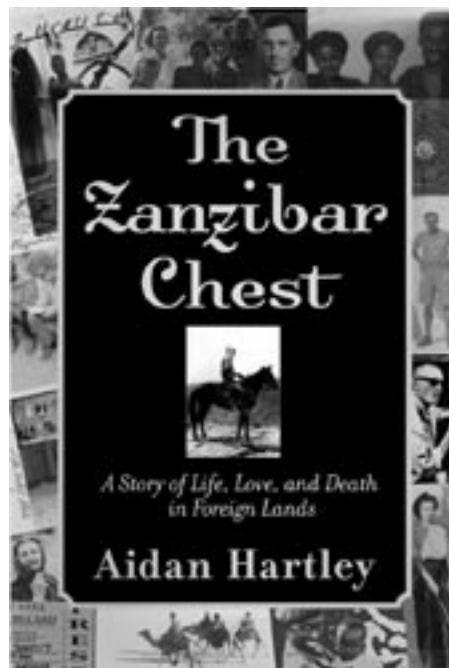
The tension between a concern to accurately describe horror or tragedy coupled with the introspective question of whether a journalist's work can make a difference, and the duty to simply report and move on, runs through Aidan Hartley's "The Zanzibar Chest: A Story of Life, Love, and Death in Foreign Lands." The book covers his reporting on Africa during the 1990's for Reuters' Nairobi bureau. This was a period that included the 1991 toppling of Mengistu Haile Mariam, the brutal Ethiopian strongman; the breakdown of the Somali state, the rise of warlords, civil war and famine, which resulted in Operation Restore Hope in 1992, and the deaths of 18 U.S. servicemen; and the 1994 Rwanda genocide in which about 800,000 lives were extinguished within three months.

When recalling the big tragedies and how he approached them, Hartley states, "there was no way to sell the story unless you could expose suffering on a scale rarely or never witnessed before." At another point he writes: "Jonathan [a Reuters colleague] told me that there was only one sure way of selling a story from Africa to an editor. It was what is called in the trade 'color': a quirky opening vignette, a twist of pathos, the exotic or the bizarre."

Hartley takes a reader to the center of each of the major stories and provides powerful and memorable descriptions. He's the only European reporter with Meles Zenawi, the Ethiopian prime minister, when he's still a rebel and marching his men at night onto the capital to seize power ("Meles now slept across from me under a thorn tree."). He enters the Somali presidential mansion soon after Mohamed Siad Barre has been chased out of power ("At the gate, the carcass of the president's pet lion lay in its cage."). And he's with Paul Kagame, Rwanda's president, when he too is still a rebel and leading his Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) toward

Kigali, the capital, after the genocide. At one point they are forced to stall as they consider how to tear through government troop lines ("'Okay,' I said, 'we'll walk.' 'You can't possibly walk,' said Paul Kagame, the RPF's taciturn commander in chief."). Africa news junkies will relish such tidbits.

But the account is also a memoir for Hartley, a Kenyan of British descent. From the aging diary notes



he finds—belonging to his deceased father's colleague, Peter Davey, who was murdered in Arabia in 1947 where he and the senior Hartley served as colonial officers—he visits Arabia and traces his family's history there. The papers were stored by his father in a Zanzibar chest at the house the Hartleys owned on Kenya's coast, which inspires the book's title.

"Zanzibar Chest" is therefore a somewhat complex story in which chapters alternate between his Africa reporting and the reconstruction of a colorful family history of service to the British Crown, going back 150 years. Hartley's father, who's depicted as progressive and hard-working, was sent to work on water and irrigation projects in Arabia in 1938, after having served as a colonial

officer in Tanganyika, presently known as Tanzania. The 16 years the elder Hartley spent in Arabia are worthy of a book in their own right and culminate in Davey's murder by a sheikh who fell out with the British. The writing on his father, who returned to Africa and eventually settled in Kenya, is clearly a tribute to him as well as an exercise in self-discovery.

At a deeper level, what is significant about "Zanzibar Chest" is that it's essentially a demonstration of how the personal can be put to good use in journalism. Hartley's personal life is closely linked with East Africa. He clearly knows the area well. He scorns at mechanistic or impractical dictates from his faraway Reuters' bosses; he mixes easily with those being covered, and he has that urge—common to the native explaining to a foreigner—to seek a nuanced explanation to a story and show there's more to it than at first appearance.

To be sure, there's a downside to this. Some readers may be uncomfortable with the extent to which he reveals himself. Being in his 20's and 30's when he reported in Africa, the book includes kiss-and-tell passages on his sex life. They're in an account containing harrowing tales such as those on the Rwanda genocide and Somali strife that claimed the lives of three of his Reuters' colleagues at the hands of an irate mob.

But the book is fascinating and holds one's attention. The memoir and journalism mix quite well. A gifted writer, Hartley feels that it is only when he casts a wide eye, to take in his family's colonial past, does he find meaning to his experience in Africa. At book's end he observes: "I was the son who grew up loving Africa because of his father. I loved it and wanted it to love me back. In witnessing the suffering and beauty of Africa's story, I have finally become a tiny part of its fabric." ■

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War and Terror

The dangers and challenges to journalists who report on the war in Iraq have been amply demonstrated in threats to their safety, difficulties of establishing and maintaining trust with Iraqi sources, and restraints put on newsgathering by available newsroom resources. In trying to learn more about who the Iraqis are who constitute the resistance forces and why they are fighting, **Patrick Graham**, a freelance journalist who wrote “Beyond Fallujah: A Year With the Iraqi Resistance” for Harper’s, encountered all of these dangers and difficulties. But he emerged with an article that offered a different perspective on the fighters and the support they have within their regions than the usual characterizations provided by military sources and conveyed in many news stories. In addressing why this matters, he writes, “Had the U.S. media demanded the army show more evidence of the ‘foreign fighters’ in Ramadi and Fallujah and forced them to account for their words . . . that the ‘terrorists and insurgents’ were unpopular, then the U.S. Army might have had to deal with what was really happening there . . . and if this had happened, perhaps fewer Iraqis might have joined the resistance as a reaction to the U.S. Army tactics.”

Washington Post national correspondent **Anne Hull** teamed up with Post reporter Tamara Jones to suggest to military officials a homeland version of embedded war reporting. “Our loose idea was ‘St. Elsewhere’ in wartime,” Hull writes. The reporting team asked for—and received—permission from the U.S. Army to place themselves within the daily routines of Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where wounded troops returning from Iraq were being treated. In their two-day narrative series, the reporters focused on the experiences of three soldiers on Ward 57. In writing about children whose parents are serving in Iraq, **Barbara Walsh**, a projects writer for the Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram, spent many hours talking with the youngsters about how the absence of mommy or daddy is affecting their lives. Many of the newspaper’s readers, she says, “hadn’t considered how the war would tear up families.” Journalism professor **Dale Maharidge** shares what he learned on his journey across the United States in the wake of 9/11 and published in the book, “Homeland,” along with photographs taken by **Michael Williamson**, and speaks to the need for journalists to “document the fear and anger that is driving our nationalism.”

Former investigative reporter **Stephen Berry**, who now teaches journalism, describes what happened when Pentagon officials persuaded CBS News’s “60 Minutes II” program to twice delay broadcasting its breaking news story about prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison. Berry contends that “such newsroom practices . . . influence how other news outlets might respond to similar pressures by demonstrating how they dealt with government efforts to manage the news process.” **Charles Zewe**, a former correspondent and anchor for CNN, places the Bush administration’s creation of a 24-hour news show as

“the megaphone for the Pentagon” in the context of past efforts by war-time governments to control the news. Zewe refers to The Pentagon Channel’s content as “infoganda, a fusion of information and propaganda.” Zewe says this is among “the latest twists in the Bush administration’s ongoing efforts to shape public opinion by going around traditional news outlets with positive stories about its policy initiatives.” **Rose Economou**, former producer for CBS News and a journalism professor, finds that two popular documentary films—“Fahrenheit 9/11” and “Control Room”—raise questions journalists should ponder. The films illustrate, too, that what separates documentary filmmakers from journalists is their “powerful, purposeful and persuasive use of emotion . . .” **Bob Davis**, editorial page editor of The Anniston (Alabama) Star, writes about his paper’s response when the consortium that provides its prepackaged Sunday color comics eliminated Doonesbury. The Star’s publisher called the decision “censorship by plebiscite,” after consortium members were polled and voted 21-15 in favor of dropping it. As Davis writes, “A newspaper that only gives its readers what they say they want is not serving its highest calling.”

Secrecy

The ability to use the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is essential to the watchdog role that journalists play. According to **Pete Weitzel**, former managing editor for The Miami Herald who is now freedom of information coordinator for the newly formed Coalition of Journalists for Open Government, in this era of greater government secrecy more barricades—regulatory and procedural—have been erected that stymie or prevent access to government records by journalists. Not only has news reporting on this issue been “limited and tepid,” according to Weitzel, but “there has been no coordinated information gathering or strategic planning about secrecy and reporters’ access to information within the journalism community or among its organizations.”

Seth Rosenfeld, an investigative reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle, describes his two-decade fight, involving three lawsuits filed under the FOIA that were resolved just short of a Supreme Court hearing, to secure FBI files about information the agency had compiled about those who were involved with protest activities at the University of California at Berkeley during the 1950’s and 1960’s. By sharing problems he encountered—and describing the methods he used to push ahead with his requests—Rosenfeld lets us know that his “experience demonstrates that FOIA requests are most likely to succeed when they grow out of and are informed by regular reporting.”

York Daily Record/Sunday News reporters are encouraged by editors to make wise and frequent use of FOIA requests to supplement their investigative work. Each one, writes **Rob Walters**, the paper’s business editor, computer-assisted reporting editor, and investigative projects editor, “is a lesson in how the process works and how to use the act successfully.” In the paper’s coverage of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s delayed notification about the threat of a terrorist attack on nearby Three Mile Island’s Unit 1 (nuclear) reactor and the county’s grand jury investigation of the York’s 1969 racial riots and murders, Walters explains how reporters used FOIA requests to bring previously withheld information and records to readers’ attention. An accompanying box offers a range of tips about how journalists can most effectively make FOIA filings. ■

When Fighting is Glimpsed From a Different Perspective

In setting out to better understand the roots of the Iraqi resistance, a journalist learns how controlling the press can affect the course of events.

By Patrick Graham

In the fall of 2003, I was driving between Ramadi and Fallujah in an old pick-up with Mohammed, a man in his late 30's who was part of a small resistance group fighting the U.S. Army. There'd been an attack on an army convoy earlier that day, and American tanks had blocked the road to protect soldiers from further attacks and caused a traffic jam on the highway. Young boys carrying metal bowls went up and down the line of hundreds of parked cars offering free water to the people in them. This was a display of traditional Iraqi hospitality, now part of the nervous carnival atmosphere that prevailed each time U.S. soldiers were attacked along this highway.

If someone shot at the soldiers, heavy machine guns would open up with their hollow jackhammer thuds to drive bullets the size of a thumb through cars and people, tearing everything apart. This happened along this road a few times a week. Locals now called it the "Highway of Death." Up ahead we could see a large truck with a crane removing the wreckage of a charred Humvee from a bridge where it had been blown up a few hours earlier.

Mohammed seemed focused on a swiveling turret and huge barrel pointing down the road at us from 30 yards away as we inched slowly toward a road-blocking M1 Abrams tank. Mohammed pondered the symbols and writing on the tank, talking aloud as he did this. "I guess they draw the skull to make the feeling inside of anyone who sees it that this is death, like pirates," said Mohammed, pointing to a skull and crossbones stenciled on the tank's armor. "What is 'helter-skelter'—it means going in every

direction, isn't that right? In Arabic we say 'shather mather.'"

After such an attack, I wasn't eager to get too close to the U.S. Army, especially riding with someone like Mohammed. But he stopped the car and stared at the tank. "Wouldn't it make you angry to have a foreign army here, doing this?" he asked me, as he looked my way, smiling. He seemed to like making me nervous. After we'd pulled back a bit and stopped, I asked what he was thinking.

"I like to get close to the tanks," he said, his eyes still on its muzzle. "It gives a feeling that we are humans, that we are fighting for our rights. And it makes us feel free—not dependent on Saddam Hussein and his forces."

This seemed a strange answer, formal and cryptic in Mohammed's way. And it reminded me of something he'd told me: "We have a saying—the people of Mecca know the most about Mecca." In Arabic, there is a saying for everything, most of them untranslatable. What this one meant is that this is his land, and no one can come here and expect to know it the way he does, a local farm kid who grew up hunting ducks and hanging out with his cousins by the river.

Reporting on the Resistance

Beginning during the late summer, I'd spent hundreds of hours with Mohammed. We had talked about politics and "friendships" between men and women in the West, but until this day I'd never gone near the U.S. Army with him. To do so was like we'd crossed some line, gone up to the edge of the looking glass and peered in. On the other side, everything was bigger—the tanks, the guns, and the

bombs were on another scale of large. One felt their power. Mohammed was right: This was death.

His was also a comment about tactics. In May 2003, he and 15 others had formed a resistance group and began laying Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) on the highways and roads of Al Anbar, Iraq's western province. By September, he confided, they had carried out about 20 "operations," the term Iraqis use for attacks on American troops. As the fall progressed, Mohammed lost count.

"Do you think you can beat the Americans?" I asked Mohammed.

"That," he replied, "is a very difficult question."

I met Mohammed, who is now in Abu Ghraib prison, through relatives of his. We spent a lot of time together because he wanted to explain why he was fighting Americans. Others in his group were angry with him for talking to a Westerner. They viewed me as a potential spy. Mohammed spoke English, so this meant he didn't have to worry about whether or not a translator would betray him. I was living in Baghdad and would make trips to his village, where I stayed with a young sheik whom I had met during the war.

From these visits, it became clear to me by early August that what was happening around Fallujah and Ramadi was very different than the way it was being reported in the Western press. In part, this could be explained by the fact that when the attacks began against U.S. soldiers that summer there seemed to be some reluctance on the part of the Western press to cover it. Nor were many journalists spending much time

reporting on those who were members of the resistance forces. And there were reasons for this, too.

Reporting about the Iraqi resistance was not like it was with other rebel armies who are often media-conscious and go out of their way to court the Western press. In part, this was because there was no central command or goal—these forces began as an assortment of groups that slowly, over time, hooked up together. As a result, it was very difficult to get an understanding of their overall strength and their political ends, which varied enormously.

Lacking self-definition, the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and the U.S. Army stepped in and portrayed them in ways they believed would best “play” with an American domestic audience. And definitions shifted, given the timing and circumstance of each characterization. Resistance fighters were branded “Saddam loyalists,” which was certainly true in some cases. They could also be described broadly as “foreign fighters,” again true, but only in a relatively small number of cases. As time went by, they could be labeled as being “Taliban-like,” true for a small group of conservative Islamists but not true of someone like Mohammed or others in his group to whom he introduced me. Amid such confusing and shifting labels, it became very easy for the U.S. Army and the CPA to put forward a simplified “Good Guy/Bad Guy” caricature of the conflict, which, in actuality, had complexities to it that were important for Americans to understand. Yet these caricatures went relatively unchallenged by most of the Western media.

After spending a few months away from Iraq—having reported from there as the troops moved toward Baghdad—I returned in August of last year and came to report in this area. What I saw and heard hadn’t been reported much. The people in the area were involved in a complicated debate, often occurring among family members, about whether or not to support the U.S. occupation and make money (the default position of the traders and contractors in this area) or to fight. But when the U.S. Army (the 82nd Airborne Division) hit back hard against those who decided to fight,

people there, in general, turned strongly against the occupation-government.

Defining the Resistance

But the complicated roots of this discontent weren’t reflected in much of the Western media. To Western eyes and ears, Fallujah and Ramadi became “bastions of Baathism” or Baathist enclaves. How accurate was this portrait, I wondered, and did Western audiences understand what these descriptions meant? In using these labels, were journalists relying on some kind of polling? (That was doubtful, given how hard that would be to do there.) Had they spent more than a day or two in this region of Iraq? How many people had they talked with? Did they mean to imply that the Duleimi and Jumeili tribes had the same relation to Saddam? What about the recalcitrant Albuweisi that had caused trouble for Saddam?

Details such as these—important to understanding the dynamics of what was happening here—were rarely, if ever, delved into by Western reporters. Interestingly, once the religious aspect of the resistance was made visible to Western eyes, those who lived in Fallujah were transformed suddenly into jihadis who wanted to set up a Taliban-like state.

Neither of these extreme characterizations—the secular or the religious—reflected reality. What they demonstrated, instead, was the confusion of journalists and the need felt by many of them to dramatize a complex situation in simpler language in order to make themselves sound knowledgeable and keep their news organizations dramatically engaged.

Reporting in Fallujah reached a nadir when a major U.S. newspaper reported that a group of Iranians had attacked the city’s police station in the spring of 2004. This was an absurd proposition and, of course, it hadn’t happened. But the overall portrait of the area was one in which extremists of one kind or another were in charge—it really didn’t matter which group it was. When the Marines went into Fallujah in April 2004 and killed hundreds of its residents (we don’t know how many), reporters had

already described the town as one full of Saddam-loving Baathists, foreign fighters, and jihadis who needed to be shown a lesson or two. These reporters, uncertain about exactly who comprised the resistance, had relied too heavily on the confusing, simplified portrait given by the U.S. Army, who were themselves, after all, attempting to demonize the enemy to justify the military response.

People who live in places like Fallujah and Ramadi had a complex relationship with Saddam. It was just as easy to find people who hated the dictator as those who missed him. People were technocrats and former army personnel, as well as businessmen, who saw no future in the new Iraq. Of course, as time went on and fighting intensified, Saddam grew more popular. And as attacks on U.S. troops increased, descriptive terms like “former regime element” (FRE) and “anti-Iraqi forces” (AIF) came into more general use among spokesmen for the U.S. Army and CPA. Bizarre press releases were handed out in which Iraqis attacking American soldiers were called AIF—Iraqis called anti-Iraqis because they were fighting non-Iraqis.

This pattern of defining the enemy before he defines himself turned out to be a remarkably effective way of controlling press coverage. To explain, for instance, that this rebellion had tribal and religious aspects to it, a journalist would first have had to write around the Good Guy/Bad Guy terminology (which became formal U.S. Army wording) and then explain the tribal history under Saddam and delve into the complexities within Sunni Arab culture (a Sufi/Selafie split). Even finding the word to use to describe the anti-American fighters became a source of confusion and debate. Were they rebels? But that was too American sounding. Were they forming a “resistance”? No, that was too anti-Nazi sounding. Or were they insurgents and terrorists, the preferred terms of the U.S. administration?

During the fall of 2003, some journalists in the house in Baghdad where I was living invited a bright, ambitious Englishman for dinner who worked in the media department of the CPA. He stayed impressively on message all dinner, determined that that it was an

“insurgency” run by “terrorists.” It was pretty clear that he had no idea who they were, but the nomenclature gave him a kind of certainty that was impressive. The rest of us, mostly freelance journalists, were not so certain.

The truth is that journalists reporting on these battles didn’t know who they were. As a result, many news outlets turned to the U.S. Army that, it turned out, was no better informed or, if they were, were not about to share what they knew honestly.

Challenges for Journalists

Reporting in Iraq following the invasion/liberation was like walking into a fog bank after leaving a dark room—it seemed brighter than before, but when your eyes adjusted you were still stuck in the gloom. Everybody had a different view of what happened under Saddam, what was happening under the Americans, and what would happen next. Without an agreed upon history, it was hard to come up with a cogent sense about what is going on now.

Few American reporters, with the notable exception of The Washington Post’s Anthony Shadid, spoke Arabic. The rest of us were unlikely to have a candid discussion with an Iraqi while an interpreter listened. It took months before people trusted you enough to tell you what was going on and have you trust what they said or, at least, understand where they were coming from. If Mohammed hadn’t spoken English, I doubt that I would have had access to what some of the people fighting U.S. troops were actually thinking—and even this limited understanding involved hundreds of hours of hanging out, driving around, or sitting in people’s houses.

There were a number of other problems for journalists who wanted to write about the resistance, which people in this area of Iraq call the “mukawama.” One barrier to move past was the U.S. and CPA propaganda machine with the enormous time and effort they put into micro-managing the media. I’ve talked to nongovernment organization workers who were contacted by the CPA and told not to talk to certain

journalists. I was in the bureau of an American newspaper when the paper pulled an unpopular (with the CPA) journalist from an embed with a military unit because the White House had supposedly contacted that unit directly. Now the newspaper was worried for his safety. The bureau chief also decided to “lay off” the CPA that week, which meant not running any critical stories for a while.

Another problem about researching the resistance was checking the facts of what you were being told. How was it possible to be certain the people you were talking with were attacking Americans? To deal with this, a very good reporter I met decided to only write stories about resistance fighters who had been killed. That was better for fact-checking but difficult for interviews. The easiest way would be to go out with the mukawama, and that is what reporters do in other countries. They hang out with the rebels. But after 30 years of Saddam’s dictatorship, Iraqis tended to be very paranoid, especially those in the resistance.

I had other concerns, as well. How could I prove to an editor that people like Mohammed were actually in the mukawama, unless, of course, I went on an operation? I was reluctant to go on one of these for a number of reasons. It was insanely dangerous, because the men I met told me they attacked the U.S. Army directly by setting off IED’s, then firing rocket-propelled grenades. I agreed to go on an attack involving a train. Somehow this seemed less dangerous. But it was delayed, and I missed my chance.

However, the offer brought up a number of journalistic problems that I’ve not seen well examined. In other wars, going with a rebel group is standard work. But if reporters are arrested in occupied Iraq with a group of men who have just set off an IED that has killed U.S. soldiers, what is their legal standing? Are they accessories of some kind? I asked a friend in the Red Cross this question, but he wasn’t sure. This seems like new journalistic territory, and the lack of clear answers worried me, in part, because I was a freelancer and had no major institution to back

me up.

Another worry I had was the level of surveillance carried out by U.S. military intelligence. Did they listen to journalists’ satellite phones? Were they watching our e-mails? I think I had a very exaggerated sense of their capabilities at first. I was worried, too, that I would somehow expose the people’s families to the violent and often incompetent force of a U.S. military raid. All of this made me extremely paranoid. Had the army, particularly the 82nd Airborne Division that operated in this area, raided their houses, there was a pretty good chance that someone in their family was going to get killed, since these kinds of deaths happened on a regular basis.

Underestimating the Resistance

Throughout the fall, it was difficult to gauge how U.S. forces were doing in the growing guerilla war in Ramadi and Fallujah. Because I lived in Ramadi for a few weeks in September, I quickly realized that there was major, underreported insurgency going on. Yet listening to the press conferences, there was a clear sense that the U.S. Army was beating the Bad Guys. Out there, operations were happening every day. By October, maybe even earlier, my sense was that the army had lost control of Fallujah as well as the areas around Ramadi. But because journalists in Baghdad depended primarily on body counts (disproportionately low because of body armor), the frequency of these attacks went unnoticed until November when an astonishing 80 U.S. soldiers were killed. And, even then, the full strength of the mukawama was underestimated.

Had the U.S. media demanded the army to show more evidence of the “foreign fighters” in Ramadi and Fallujah and forced them to account for their words when they repeatedly said in press conferences that the ‘terrorists and insurgents’ were unpopular, then the U.S. Army might have had to deal with what was really happening there. Perhaps if journalists had been more thorough in their questioning and reporting, the army might have

changed its tactics and stopped shooting as many civilians, rounding them up in large numbers for no reason (according to the Red Cross 90 percent of those arrested were innocent), and humiliating them on a regular basis in front of their families. And if this had happened, perhaps fewer Iraqis might have joined the resistance as a reaction to the U.S. Army tactics.

As Mohammed said to me: “The Americans are our best ally; we should give them a medal.”

At times, it seemed as if the occupation army was going out of its way to anger the local population. And, of course, when the photos of Abu Ghraib surfaced that anger was not possible to control, especially in places like Ramadi and Fallujah, where so many people had been arrested and sent to the prison.

Had the army’s statement received more scrutiny, they might have looked for a party to negotiate with instead of just “kicking Iraqi ass,” as they claimed in press conferences. Iraqis told me they believed the army made these mistakes on purpose so the fighting would continue and U.S. forces could stay in Iraq. This was one of the many conspiracy theories Iraqis developed to explain why the United States appeared to be making so many mistakes. Those Iraqis I spoke with found it hard to believe that any group of people could be so ignorant of their culture.

My sense, as a reporter, is that the army grew used to acting with impunity and having its interpretation of the guerrilla war repeated almost verbatim. Essentially, there was little or no genuine check or balance in this part of Iraq. It wasn’t until June 2004 that senior U.S. officers began to admit publicly that they had underestimated the resistance—some nine or 10 months after they should have known things were not going in their favor. In a way, the army and the CPA were almost too successful at selling their version of events. By the end of April, when it became clear how badly things were going in this area, it was hard to take what they said seriously any more.

Another problem was the Western press itself, whose members were caught up in their own pro- or anti-occupation debate. This debate had two parts. The European press was, on the whole, very unsympathetic to the U.S.-led occupation, and there was a fair amount of anti-American sentiment that, in turn, made some American reporters defensive. Among American journalists there was a debate about the war as well as the occupation. These personal debates served to blur the coverage considerably.

There were major journalistic failures, too, in the coverage of Ramadi and Fallujah. This is not to say that coverage of Iraq was a failure. Obviously,

some remarkable reporting was and is being done by journalists working in very dangerous situations in a complex cultural environment. Increasingly, a lot of it is being done by the Iraqi staff of various bureaus, especially translators who go alone into areas where it is too dangerous for foreigners to travel. But it seems more than coincidence that the area in which American reporting was often the weakest was also the area where the U.S. Army was having its greatest trouble.

As someone who had the rare chance to view things from another perspective, I would observe that the U.S. media portrayed powerfully what it was like to drive around inside American tanks. What they failed to do as well was help Americans understand more about what it is like for Iraqis to see the skull and crossbones and read “helter skelter” as a turret swivels around and points in their direction. ■

Patrick Graham, a freelance journalist, wrote “Beyond Fallujah: A Year With the Iraqi Resistance,” published in Harper’s in June 2004.

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Proposing a Variation on Embedded Reporting

Switching from the battlefield to inside a military hospital, we would ‘explore the physical and psychological aftermath of war.’

By Anne Hull

The idea was simple. If the Pentagon was embedding journalists with military units in the invasion of Iraq, why couldn’t it apply the same principle inside the nation’s largest military hospital? This was the essence of the pitch that Tamara Jones, a fellow Washington Post reporter, and I made

to the commander at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

The war was seven weeks old when Tamara and I, both feature writers for the Post, decided to team up to report a story about the war wounded being shipped home from Operation Iraqi Freedom). Working at the Post, we had

the benefit of geography: Almost all military casualties funnel through either Walter Reed or National Naval Medical Center in nearby Bethesda, Maryland. Our loose idea was “St. Elsewhere” in wartime. We’d locate ourselves inside a military hospital to explore the physical and psychological aftermath of war. We

wanted a counterpoint to the ongoing stories and imagery of tanks rolling toward Baghdad and Pentagon officials pointing at maps. It was time for a gut check. The casualties were starting to come home.

In its ambition, the story was a straightforward feature. But to report it required special access. Aside from a few brief interviews, no journalists had been given prolonged access to soldiers at Walter Reed since the war started. To make matters more difficult, Pfc. Jessica Lynch had recently been admitted, and the hospital was in a tighter lockdown than normal. The final hurdle was HIPAA, a new federal patient privacy law that had just taken effect and would seriously limit our ability to even be near patients.

We met with Major General Kevin Kiley at Walter Reed to make our request. We brought clips and offered references. We promised nothing except fairness and sensitivity. Driving home from that meeting, Tamara and I put our chances at 50-50. Why would the government let us write about the realities of war? Working in our favor was the fact that the embedding concept was generally viewed as successful. After two long weeks, we received the green light, with one disappointing caveat: We would be shadowed at all times by either a public affairs officer (PAO) or a judge advocate general (JAG) officer. We agreed. The second blow came on our first day of reporting. President Bush announced that major combat operations in Iraq were over. But what seemed like terrible timing for this story actually turned out to be a haunting theme. Though major combat operations were over, the casualties kept coming.

Embedded at the Hospital

Walter Reed is a 147-acre compound. To have tried to write about the whole hospital would have diluted the potential impact of the material. After a few days of reporting, we decided to locate our entire story on Ward 57, the orthopedic ward where amputees are treated. There is probably no other place in the hospital that reveals with more nakedness the after-tremors of war.

At 5:30 each morning, we began making rounds with doctors. Most of the soldiers had lost a leg to landmines, rocket-propelled grenades, or sniper fire. Some were having additional surgeries for a higher amputation due to infection or to prepare the stump for a prosthetic. Bandages had to be changed daily, often with the help of a morphine injection. These initial few days of reporting involved a lot of quiet observation out of respect for the soldiers' privacy. While we gave the soldiers plenty of space early on, we hounded the doctors and nurses with numerous questions.

After meeting a dozen soldiers, we narrowed our focus to three, each distinct in personality, rank and resolve. First Lt. John Fernandez was a West Point graduate and newlywed who'd lost both legs in a rocket attack. Pfc. Garth Stewart was a ground-pounder who loved combat and philosophy. Pfc. Danny Roberts was a bookish reservist who had the most trouble dealing with his injury.

As with all reporting—but especially narrative reporting—it was crucial to witness firsthand as much as possible. We had the good fortune, too, of having Post photographer Michael Lutzky work with us. As time went by, the three of us roamed unaccompanied through most of the hospital, unencumbered by the PAO or JAG officer. We had either earned their trust or outlasted their stamina.

In many ways, Walter Reed was like any hospital. There were moments of human suffering, peak drama, and numbing boredom. The main difference was that these patients were linked to each other by the same brutal circumstance. They had crossed the sands of Iraq as whole men and they had come home physically compromised. Now they were all lying under the same fluorescent lights on the fifth floor at Walter Reed, with CNN flickering live from Baghdad. The parallel worlds were always toggling.

Interweaving Layers of the Story

We expected the soldiers to have some bitterness. We found mostly the oppo-

site—a generation of enlisted professionals grossly inconvenienced by their injury. The army was their vocation, and the American flag was their company logo. They had been trained and went willingly, even eagerly, and these were the consequences. Sometimes we struggled to understand this mindset. Here was Lt. Fernandez, a former lacrosse captain at West Point, who came home from Iraq with bandaged feet but, 12 surgeries later, both legs were amputated. Nurses on Ward 57 broke hospital rules by slipping a cot into Fernandez's room so that his new wife, Kristi, could sleep next to him. As Fernandez got stronger, he moved from a bed to a wheelchair. He expressed only stoicism. We reminded ourselves that we were witnessing the first phase of a long journey. Maybe anger would come later, maybe it wouldn't.

During the 15 days we spent at Walter Reed, Tamara and I tried to pierce through the "Band of Brothers" mentality that seemed to inhabit this ward. I now believe many of the soldiers were still in some form of shock. The one place you could see them confronting their new limitations was physical therapy. Some cried. Some yelled in agony. Some just lay on the tables and stared at the ceiling.

We consciously wanted to avoid either extreme of hyper-patriotism or ironic cynicism. But some truths were hard to ignore. The White House talked of a decisive victory in Iraq while the planeloads of wounded kept coming. Every day at Walter Reed, we watched members of Congress and other government officials make the rounds on Ward 57, at times waking soldiers up to shake their hand so that a photograph could be taken. Soldiers combed their hair for Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's visit but it was Jim Mayer, a double-amputee from Vietnam, in whom they really confided. As young as the soldiers were, their radar was acute enough to sniff out frauds and glad-handers. They saved their confidences for other soldiers.

Ward 57 had plenty of humor. One soldier, newly dosed with morphine, asked if any Playboy bunnies were in the house. When Hulk Hogan visited



Garth Stewart shows his buddies his new leg after they returned home to Fort Benning from their tour in Iraq. *Photo by Michael Lutzky/Courtesy of The Washington Post.*

the ward, he looked down at a young private who'd lost his foot to a land mine and growled, "They'll fix that flat tire and get you runnin' again." Such logic from a man with orange skin was much appreciated. The soldiers' jubilation over the ridiculous was a profound reminder that most of them were just 19 or 20-year-olds.

No soldier was willing to publicly criticize the United States or the decision to go to war. Our reporting took place before the mission became so messy and prolonged and before the various reports on the flawed intelligence that led the United States to invade Iraq. Returning to Ward 57 now might yield a different story.

Publishing the Soldiers' Stories

After our three soldiers were discharged, we did some follow-up reporting and then spent three weeks writing the story. We struggled to find a unified voice between two writers. We disagreed over what emotional trigger points were important or not. Editor Mary Hadar kept the train on the tracks. Our story ran as a two-day series on the front page of the Post, accompanied by wrenching photos. The Post received a lot of mail. Veterans wrote to say thanks for paying respect to our nation's warriors. Those who opposed the war wrote similar notes of gratitude. Both "sides" felt that their "truths" had been aired.

A closing note: When our story was published in July 2003, Walter Reed had treated 650 battle casualties from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). As I write this essay, Walter Reed has just released its weekly bulletin, dated August 30, 2004, with its number of OIF casualties treated: 3,403. ■

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Documenting the Experiences of Military Families

'... as I set out to tell this story, I soon discovered that the voices of military children were all but invisible.'

By Barbara Walsh

One little girl could barely talk. Another boy was too shy to speak. A preschooler wanted to play hide and seek rather than answer my questions. These were the kids I'd chosen to write about, and reporting their stories would require a lot more than a reliance on their words. Much of my narrative would come from talk-

ing to relatives, teachers, parents. My reporting would focus on observing the children in their homes, seeing their artwork, visiting with them in their bedrooms, and having them show me their treasured possessions.

My assignment for the Portland (Maine) Press Herald this spring was to write about military families who

had soldiers deployed in Iraq with the Maine Army National Guard. I learned as I reported this story that there were many kids who were depressed, unable to sleep or eat, who cried every time mom or dad called from Iraq. Young children who demanded: "You come home right now, Daddy!" Many of these children were receiving counseling from

private or National Guard-sponsored agencies.

"A lot of these kids are having problems," a National Guard spokesman said. "If they're four or five, they don't understand why mommy or daddy isn't coming home. If they're 8, 10, or 11, they can be mad and have trouble expressing themselves."

Yet as I set out to tell this story, I soon discovered that the voices of military children were all but invisible. I found few articles on how they were coping with the absence of their parents, who were serving in Iraq. Early on, I sensed that reporting for this series of articles would be a challenge, but I believed that these children's stories deserved to be heard. The guard spokesman agreed, telling me: "People talk about our soldiers being heroes, but these kids, these families are heroes. They're making huge sacrifices, too."

I had done plenty of reporting on children and teenagers and knew that interviewing kids is often unpredictable and called for a lot of creative approaches to reporting. This story was no different. I had to make repeated visits to their homes and search for ways to make them feel comfortable with me and my questions about their sadness and fear.

Children Reveal Their Feelings

During my work on these articles about military families, I met two sisters, Emily and Olivia Wilkinson. Their mom and dad, who both serve in the National Guard, left for Iraq in January. They will be overseas for more than a year. Emily was two, and her older sister, Olivia, was four. I wanted to write about them, but their grandmother discouraged me: "They're too young," she said. "Emily can barely talk."

I found their story was too powerful to abandon. Once their mother approved of it in an e-mail from Iraq, I visited their home. The girls were eating dinner and had little to say to me as I asked about their parents who were far away. Instead, I talked with their aunt and uncle, who were caring for them until their mom and dad returned. From

them, I learned that during the first few months of her parent's absence, two-year-old Emily often asked: "Where's Mommy? Where's Daddy?" At times, Olivia told her parents angrily on the phone: "I miss you. You come home right now!" Olivia also had occasional bad dreams about her parents. She said her dreams were too bad for her to want to talk about.

During my two visits to the girls' home, I brought a video camera to record them. I knew their words and thoughts about their parents would be precious and few. I wanted to be able to play back scenes, capture their expressions, hear their voices. The girls didn't mind the video camera since their aunt and uncle often videotaped them for their parents.

Instead of talking about her feelings during my first visit, Olivia wanted to play hide and seek with me. I played a quick game and then asked her and Emily to show me their bedrooms. I followed them upstairs, videotaping Emily as she ran down the hallway. She pointed to a map and collage hanging on the wall. A photograph of her mother and father, smiling, their heads tilted together, was taped to the Iraqi map. Above their picture hung a map of Maine. A photo of Emily and her sister Olivia was also taped there. Emily pulled the picture of her parents off the Iraqi map and kissed their faces with a loud smack: "Mommy. Daddy." Each night she and Olivia take the picture down. "We give them a good-night kiss," Olivia told me.

I also asked to see the children's drawings and crafts they'd made for their mother and father. It was when I asked about the girls' daily rituals that I learned about the "Mommy Tape." Before going to bed each night, the girls gathered around a tape recorder to listen to their mother sing songs she had recorded before she left for Iraq.

One of the most compelling scenes in the story resulted from watching them listen to the tapes. Teeth brushed, pajamas on, they were lying on their parents' bed and resting their heads on the small black recorder as their mother's voice softly sang to them: "Hush little baby don't say a word. Momma's going to

buy you a mocking bird. If that mocking bird don't sing, momma's going to buy you a diamond ring . . ." Emily Wilkinson kissed the recorder, "Mommy," the two-year-old said affectionately, as if her mother walked in the room.

"You are my sunshine, my only sunshine," her mother crooned. "You'll never know how much I love you. Please don't take my sunshine away." Olivia hummed along with her mother. "I love you Olivia," Alicia Wilkinson's recorded voice told her daughters. "I love you Emily."

The tape ended and the girls kissed the recorder again. Olivia whispered: "Good night Mommy."

The story about the girls ran on Mother's Day. It prompted a lot of readers, including the girls' mother, to cry. But the article also helped readers understand how two little sisters struggled to get by while their parents were far away.

Michael Kelley was older than Olivia and Emily but he, too, wrestled with his sadness and anger. Michael was 11. To his dad, Michael has always been "Bud." In the winter, they ice-fished. In the summer, they camped and played ball. After his father left for Iraq, Michael cried for two weeks. He cried in the morning, at night, and at school. He called his mom daily from the school nurse's office. "I have a stomach-ache, I want to come home," he'd tell her. For two weeks, he couldn't sleep. He couldn't eat. He didn't want to leave his home.

"He was incredibly sad," his mother, Kim Kelley, remembered. His mother told Michael that his father was working hard in Iraq, building orphanages and schools. "I'm proud of him," Michael said. "But why does he have to be gone so long?"

A grief counselor explained to me that when a young child's mother or father is away for 18 months, this time can seem like forever to a kid. The temporary loss may also stir the same emotions that a death in the family brings—grief, anger, sadness, confusion and fear. These children suffered everyday losses. Their dads weren't there to tuck them into bed at night. Their mothers weren't there to hug them when they got off the school bus. Their fathers missed Boy

Scout ceremonies and father-daughter dances. They missed birthdays, holidays, graduations.

Missing Their Father

When I showed up at Michael's home to speak with him about his dad, his mother warned me that he was shy. He rarely spoke about his father and how much he missed him. I asked Michael if we could talk in his room. Michael sat on his bottom bunk bed, bending the legs of plastic action figures. His brown eyes peered at me nervously from behind his glasses. I asked him about his two guinea pigs, who scrambled in their cage on top of his bureau. He explained that his mom bought him the pets a few weeks after his dad left, and he quietly told me that his new pets gave him something else to think about besides the many months he'll be separated from his father.

Michael was silent and staring at his sneakers. I looked around his room and asked him about the army helmet and the desert camouflage uniform that rested on a nearby shelf. Michael gingerly picked up the shirt. "It's my Dad's. He gave it to me before he left." He pulled the shirt over his head. It hung on his thin frame, the sleeves draped over his hands. "I wore it to school yesterday," he explained, sitting up straight to show the right pocket that read: Kelley. "It's kinda heavy, but it feels good on," he said.

When asked how he felt when his dad had to leave, Michael eyed his socks and answered softly: "Nothing really." He fell silent, touching the cuff of his dad's uniform before reluctantly admitting: "In the beginning, yeah it was hard. The first few weeks I didn't get much sleep."

The interview with Michael lasted less than 30 minutes, and I knew I was going to have to get a lot of background from his mother. I sat with her while Michael played outside. She explained that Michael had buried his emotions about his dad. Once he told her: "I just think about him. I think about the day he is going to come back." His mother said that during the first few weeks after his dad left, Michael couldn't e-mail

his father because it hurt too much. Instead, he read his dad's messages that said, "I love you and miss you." And the one that told him, "I'm proud of you," congratulating him on becoming a Boy Scout.

Michael looked more serious now, his mother said. Different. At times, he'd ask his mom if he could do his dad's old chores. He took out the trash, washed the dishes, and asked to do the snow blowing. Eventually he began writing his dad more e-mails and one week used some of his money to buy his father a box of candy, peanuts and gum. Michael drew a picture of himself, a brown-haired boy with glasses, and wrote: "Hello Daddy. I love you."

While talking to Kim about her son, she explained that her six-year-old daughter had her own difficulties with the temporary loss of her father. Michael's younger sister, Victoria, didn't understand that her dad was going to be gone for a year and a half. She thought he'd only be away a short time, like last year when he went away for National Guard training. When three months passed, she too began crying in the morning and at night. For weeks before she went to bed, Victoria asked her mom: "Did you put the house alarm on?"

"She just didn't feel safe," her mother said. "I told her that Daddy wouldn't leave us if he didn't think we were OK." One night as her mother tucked her into bed, Victoria asked: "Will Daddy get shot?" Her mother paused. "Daddy is going to take every precaution," she said. "He's going to stay safe."

Victoria nodded and said her prayers: "God Bless Daddy, Michael, and Mommy."

I learned too that each night a brown stuffed bear sat on the corner of Victoria's bed. Dressed in a desert camouflage uniform, it watched over the red-haired girl as she slept. Victoria called it "My Daddy Bear." Christmas morning she and her brother had found two stuffed bears sitting beside the tree. Santa left them. Tucked inside their desert uniform pocket was a note: "Dear Victoria and Michael, whenever you're sad, hug your bear and your Daddy will feel it. Whenever you miss

your Daddy, talk to your bear and your Daddy will hear you."

Victoria took the bear to school, on car rides, sat him at the dinner table, and held him as she watched Sponge Bob cartoons. Before bed, she hugged the bear, telling him: "Goodnight Daddy. I love you." Still there were difficult days that even the Daddy Bear could not soften. The night Victoria attended the Girl Scout Father/Daughter Dance was one of them. Her mother curled Victoria's hair, pulled it up in a ponytail with ringlets that fell to her shoulders. They sprinkled glitter on her cheeks, and she wore a wrist corsage with tiny pink roses.

She headed out the door smiling, holding her uncle's hand. But once she arrived at the gymnasium, the sight of a roomful of fathers and daughters dancing overwhelmed her. She began to cry hysterically. "It reminds me too much of Daddy," she told her uncle. "I can't stay here." Later, she explained to her mom, "All the girls were with their daddies and I wasn't with mine."

The story about Michael and Victoria Kelley was published this past spring, and it also prompted several readers to write the newspaper. Many of them hadn't considered how the war would tear up families. The articles also helped Michael and Victoria's friends and teachers understand a bit more about their sadness, the daily losses they faced without their dad. "A lot of people forget about the kids," their mother said. "They realize there is a war going on and the soldiers are over in Iraq, but they forget about how all this affects the families. These stories helped people see that the war affects all of us, especially the children." ■

Barbara Walsh is projects writer for the Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram. She has worked for newspapers in Massachusetts, Florida and Maine and has won several national awards. She was part of The (Lawrence) Eagle-Tribune reporting team that won a Pulitzer Prize in the General News Reporting category in 1988.

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‘Homeland’

A journalist reveals America in the wake of the September 11th attacks.

By Dale Maharidge

At the end of 2001, I drove west over the George Washington Bridge, into homeland America. Fifteen weeks had passed since I’d stood on my uptown rooftop and watched the second tower fall. That day my gaze was drawn beyond the New Jersey Palisades; I wondered about the middle of the country. I knew that a genie had been uncorked, that we were about to see new evidence of what novelist Philip Roth calls the “indigenous American berserk.”

I drove thousands of miles and talked with hundreds of people in the next few years. There was anarchist Katie Sierra, 15, in West Virginia, who wore a protest T-shirt to high school and ended up with a city hating her. There was Dean Koldenhoven, 67, the Republican

mayor of a Chicago suburb who stood up for Muslims and paid a heavy price. There was a white nationalist who said he’d work with Farrakhan to fight the Patriot Act.

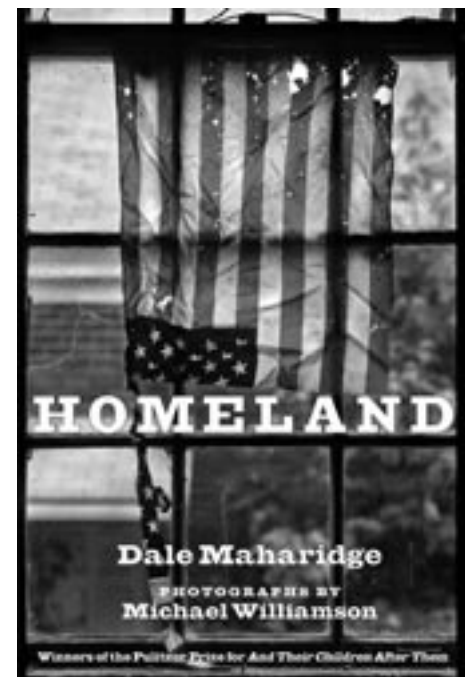
My photographic collaborator, Michael Williamson, and I had spent more than a quarter of a century documenting America. That work was merely preparation for “Homeland.” I wrote it as if the future of our country depended upon it, and I don’t mean this in a self-aggrandizing way. Our nation’s fate depends on what all of us do journalistically in the next few years. There is the obvious watchdog reporting needed in Washington—but of equal importance, all across America, journalists must document the fear and anger that is driving our nationalism. ■

Dale Maharidge, a 1988 Nieman Fellow, is currently working on a book about a small town in Iowa. “Homeland” was published by Seven Stories Press in May 2004. Maharidge has had four books published, including “Homeland,” with Michael Williamson, a staff photographer at The Washington Post. One of those books, “And Their Children After Them,” won the 1990 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction. Maharidge will be teaching at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism in January.

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A farmer’s truck, painted after a neighbor’s son was killed in the Iraq War. Winchester, Virginia. *Photo by Michael Williamson.*





Bonneville Salt Flats, Tooele County, Utah. *Photo by Michael Williamson.*

These excerpts and photographs are from Dale Mabridge's book, "Homeland."

Flags snapping. From poles. Antennas.
USA.
Freedom.

You can choose between any of one newspaper in most cities. You can choose between any two bookstores. Any of three office supply outlets. Any Wal-Mart. Home Depot. Or Lowes. A Big Mac. Whopper. Fries.

Freedom. Just another word for nothing left to choose.

Flags were for sale everywhere. In the weeks after 9/11, they were simple flags in the form of peel-off decals and cloth. Sales were brisk. But by that December, truckstops across the country uniformly reported to me that sales had fallen.

Within a year, manufacturers got creative. At a Sheetz gas station in Breezewood, Pennsylvania, we found a box of flag motif window-stick decals at \$2.99 each. They were the size of an open hand, with rubber suction cups used to affix them to auto and truck glass. These were exactly like the Baby On Board decals one saw in car windows during the 1980's:

- Don't Mess With The U.S., with a fighter jet in the middle
- Peace fingers, the Churchillian V for victory, in red, white, and blue
- God Bless America
- These Colors Don't Run
- No Nukes, in the center of a circle with a slash through it
- Justice Will Prevail
- America Stands Tall
- Let's Roll
- Proud To Be American

The manufacturers hedged bets—a little. The results of the “decal poll”: of the 16 decals in the box, three were “liberal,” in the form of two No Nukes and one “peace fingers.”

USA. Land of the Free. Pee in a bottle if you want the job. Cameras watch. From bridges. In rest areas. Malls. At work.

“For your protection.”

We must truly be free. If they watch over us so carefully. ...

I certainly had no answers. What did anyone really know? In that fall and winter of 2001, all I could do was watch and talk and absorb the anger and confusion, and try to make sense

of the nationalism I was seeing in the angry citizens.

The rally with the rawest display of nationalism happened just a week before Christmas 2001, on West 49th Street across from the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center. It was a Saturday, the streets jammed with tourists who'd come to watch the skaters on the ice rink, to drink hot toddies—not to see several hundred ANSWER [Act Now to Stop War and End Racism] people and others penned in by a ring of cops.

The mood was ugly. As a hostile bystander argued with a protestor, calling him a traitor, another man began screaming from the other side of the barricade.

“Get the fuck out of the country! Get out!” Josh bellowed to the gathering protestors. He was red-faced, sputtering. I asked Josh why he was here.

“I was down at Ground Zero. I've seen a lot of fucking friends die.”

Josh is a paramedic. He told me and my friend, photographer John Trotter, about how he waited to help survivors at a base medical center set up at Liberty Plaza for casualties that never came. In the weeks that followed, he spiraled into a depression. He rolled up his left pant leg, showed a tattoo: 9-11-01 in blue, two-inch numbers.

“Take a fucking picture of that,” he said. John did. “Day of infamy. And people out here protesting. The cops that died. The firefighters. People who cleaned shit for a living, making \$300 a week. What happens? They're dead. There's still more to come. There are sleeper cells here.”

The protest began. Josh resumed screaming at a series of speakers. A cop nudged Josh across 49th Street. American flags waved in the breeze above a Santa Claus ringing a bell. A speaker talked about justice, not war.

“Justice, not war!?” Josh sputtered. “What does that mean? It doesn't make any sense!”

The passersby rooted him on.

“You tell them!”

A speaker now said, “No to scapegoating of Arab-Americans.”

“What planet is that guy on?” a passerby asked loudly to a companion.

Now someone sang a civil rights song about marching on Montgomery and Selma. Then a few people unfurled a Mumia Abu-Jamal banner on two poles. Suddenly, Mumia's face was grinning directly at Josh across the street.

"There's a cop killer right there! A convicted cop killer!"

Josh positively gyrated.

"Don't you have a brain?"

A woman speaker talked about the 1960's.

"Different time, lady!" Josh hol-lered.

The message was locked in the past. There was little about the present. This went on for a long time. The reaction of the crowd was not simply dislike. It was seething.

"How can you allow them to do this!?" one woman screamed at a cop. The people in the crowd were ready to abandon the U.S. Constitution. The Bill of Rights. Give up everything America stands for. And this wasn't only hap-pening in New York.

... The crowd was angrier than it had been an hour earlier. A speaker talked about the Afghan bombing, ask-ing, "Does it justify killing innocent children?"

"It does justify it!" a woman walking behind Josh barked.

These comments came not from red-necks, but geeks and little blue-haired ladies who suddenly sprouted Freddie Krueger voices.

But the biggest boos came not from

the loudest speakers. When Michael Ratner, an attorney with the Center for Constitutional Rights took the microphone, he talked quietly about America's role in the world. He asked why we are hated, about how our poli-cies are affecting impoverished people across the globe.

"We're creating terrorists," Ratner calmly said. "We have to look at why."

The crowd across 49th Street went ballistic, all the way back to the tree half a block distant. The Santa stopped ring-ing her bell and waved a fist, shouting. It was mean and nasty.

"Boo! Boo! Boo!"

A spontaneous cheer went up.

"USA! USA! USA!"

It sounded like a football crowd. ■

WATCHDOG

CBS Lets the Pentagon Taint Its News Process

In acquiescing to government requests for two broadcast delays, CBS News erred.

By Stephen J. Berry

Dana Roberson, the veteran CBS associate producer who obtained the notorious Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse photos, describes herself as a "spontaneous type" of newsperson. "I'm like, okay, let's go with it," she said in a recent interview at her office in New York.

That instinct drives most good journalists. It is the force behind what Richard Hanley, director of journalism and e-media at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut, calls "the natural tempo and rhythm" of the news process. When it flows as it should, a journalist gets a story idea, gathers and verifies the facts, and submits the story for editing. The news organization publishes it without delay and lets the chips fall where they may.

Editors normally don't let anyone mess with the tempo and rhythm of the news process absent compelling evidence that a story, such as one revealing troop movements or battle plans, would directly result in dire consequences.

They must be especially protective of this decision-making process when bad news is about to emerge, for that is when government tries to use its influence to lessen a story's impact on public reaction. By resisting such ef-forts, editors and producers protect the public's right to an independent press and shield the news against government manipulation.

The Bush administration has been masterful at managing war news. It has leaked false prewar information to bol-ster its argument that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, embedded journal-ist with frontline units, and prohibited shooting photographs of flag-draped coffins of dead soldiers.

When the Abu Ghraib prison story was about to break, the Pentagon twice—during a two-week period—persuaded CBS to delay airing the photographs on its weekly "60 Minutes II" program. By granting the delay, CBS let the govern-ment interfere with a major story at a point when the broadcast date had been

set and the story had been completed except for the Pentagon's response. The Abu Ghraib photos showed Ameri-can military police forcing nude Iraqi prisoners into humiliating and sexually explicit poses, revealing what Roberson calls "the ugly side of war." This story raised important questions about the administration's management of the war. When broadcast, it proved pivotal to shifts in public opinion about the war and the handling of its aftermath.

Such newsroom practices by CBS do have an affect on the media's cred-ibility as an independent purveyor of news. They influence how other news outlets might respond to similar pres-sures by demonstrating how they dealt with government efforts to manage the news process. "Next time it could be four weeks," said Hanley, a critic of the delays. "CBS has a precedent-set-ting impact."

Journalists have taken major hits for their war coverage. In late May, The New York Times's editor, Bill Keller,

acknowledged that many of its stories supporting the President's claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction were based on inaccurate information from anonymous administration sources and Iraqi exiles who had a stake in this position being featured in such articles.

The Abu Ghraib Story at CBS News

At the start, CBS News's Abu Ghraib story followed the network's normal news process. Roberson began the chase in February after a source tipped her about the photos. She and lead producer Mary Mapes traveled to Kuwait and talked to dozens of sources. Finally, someone sent the photos anonymously to Roberson. She and Mapes authenticated them, researched past stories, and conducted more interviews. After weeks of work, they had enough nailed down to broadcast the story and were ready to get the Pentagon's response.

Roberson, Mapes, Executive Producer Jeffrey Fager, a network attorney, senior producer, and others talked about how to report about the photos as the ground conflict was heating up in Iraq. Roberson noted that everyone understood that this story could have serious consequences, especially with fighting in Fallujah and Najaf intensifying. "We knew this was not going to make the situation any better," she said. Nevertheless, the decision was made to broadcast the story on Wednesday, April 14.

Four or five days before this date, "60 Minutes II" sought the Pentagon's perspective. By then, several people, including an American soldier and a civilian contractor, had been taken captive by insurgents, and this became a factor CBS News also brought into its decision-making process, Roberson said. The day before the broadcast, the Pentagon agreed to provide a lieutenant colonel to respond, and cameras were set up in a hotel across the street from the network's Washington bureau so CBS News's Dan Rather could conduct the interview.

It was on this day that the network let the government interrupt the rhythm

and tempo of its news process. In requesting a broadcast delay, Pentagon officials cited factors CBS News staff had discussed, including the tense situation in Iraq and the danger to hostages, according to Roberson. They also said they wanted more time to arrange for a higher-ranking officer to discuss the story. Fager granted the delay.

Upon hearing this, Roberson had mixed feelings. "I felt there is never a good time to run such a story," she said. "We are journalists. We sometimes have to tell tough stories, and these photos provided eyewitness accounts of what was going on." Iraqi civilians were dying almost every day, and Roberson didn't believe the broadcast of these photos would inflame the situation more than it already was. However, she saw merit in agreeing with the delay. "But I wasn't sure," she said, "because once we delayed it, it could be the same thing every week. And we didn't know then how many other people would get on the story." The story could have been broadcast with the lieutenant colonel's response, but Roberson believed a general's comments would add credibility. Mapes, speaking on the Charlie Rose television show, said, "We believed it was the better part of valor to defer the story for a week."

The week passed. On the day before the rescheduled broadcast, General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke with Rather and asked him to hold off. He again cited the tensions on the ground and danger to hostages. After consulting with Rather about General Myers' request, Fager agreed to another delay. He said top CBS executives, including network president Andrew Heyward, were involved in this decision.

Meanwhile, Roberson was feeling antsy and disappointed. "I had these pictures and they were burning a hole in me," she told me. "My feeling was to get them on the air and get it over with. But it is easy to vent when you are not the one who has to make the decision."

As the third scheduled broadcast date approached, CBS News learned other reporters had the story. It broadcast its story on April 28, airing a response

from Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt. In a postscript, Rather disclosed that the Pentagon requested the delay because of the "danger and tension" in Iraq, and that CBS granted the delay while pressing the department to "add its perspective."

Roberson was relieved and exhilarated. Despite the frustrating delays, the story was a major scoop for her and "60 Minutes II," and the plaudits poured in.

Looking back, Fager said the Pentagon's concerns justified further consideration, and the two-week delay provided time to gather more information about the military investigations. He also said he was haunted by the thought of denying General Myer's request and then learning about an American soldier turning up dead the next day with an Abu Ghraib photograph around his neck. Rejecting any suggestion that he allowed the Pentagon to manage the news, Fager said, "We ran the story."

Running the story was a no-brainer. Roberson and Mapes' work was the tough part, and Fager dilly-dallied with it for two weeks, acceding to government pressure even after he and other journalists at CBS had considered the possibility of major ramifications. Moreover, the Pentagon's claims were weak for a variety of reasons. For one, its fears could apply to many war stories, such as those about Iraqi civilians, including children, falling victim to errant U.S. firepower. For another, predicting a story's impact is futile. New stories have consequences—good and bad, short- and long-term—and they usually play out in ways that journalists cannot predict.

The Consequences of the Delay

Holding the Abu Ghraib story for this long could have jeopardized the significance of this news. CBS did not know whether the Pentagon's request was a stall to find a better way to manage the impact or to allow time for another issue to arise that would lessen it. It appears that CBS News let the government frame the decision in such

a way that it could justify continuous delays by claiming the Iraq situation is still tense and the insurgents still hold American hostages. Indeed, Americans and hostages from allied nations were in captivity well into the summer months. Tensions and bombings also continue despite the transition to an interim Iraq government.

Delaying the broadcast or publication of important stories denies the public an opportunity to assess government officials' unrehearsed reaction to stories that call them to account. Such reactions are an integral part of a story. When CBS went to the Pentagon for a response, it was not a journalistic ambush. The military announced its investigation into prison abuses in January, and it knew about the photos at least as early as February. By granting these long delays, the Pentagon would have had the time to consult media managers, to carefully script a response, to run it by focus groups to better gauge how it would play, and amend it accordingly.

Nor was CBS justified in giving the Pentagon more time to put a general in front of its cameras. The Pentagon had

plenty of time—four or five days—between the day “60 Minutes II” first sought a response and the initial broadcast date to determine who would offer its response. General Myers was also much less accommodating when he waited until the day before the second broadcast date to appeal for a second delay. Myers' request also brought nothing new to the table except the power and prestige of his high office, and this turned out to be an important factor in Fager's decision-making. “When the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff makes a personal plea and says he's doing it for the safety of our troops, you have to listen,” Fager said.

But Myers' rank was no reason for Fager to snap to. Military higher-ups deserve respect, but not awe. The content of Myers' request, of course, should be “a factor in the equation,” said Robert Steele, a journalism values professor at Poynter Institute for Media Studies. “That said, we shouldn't allow journalistic principles to be eroded by those wearing epaulets and stars. It means you do a quick reanalysis of your decision.”

The pressure that the Pentagon applied to Fager typifies the daily challenge to press independence. The press cannot be cowed by authority. In granting the delays, CBS was trying to be “a good citizen,” Fager said. To be a good citizen, the press just have to do their job, which is all most people expect of us. Our job is to ferret out the news and report it as soon as possible, not hold it back. Although there was no readily apparent harm from delay of the broadcast of the Abu Ghraib story, we will never know for sure. That's why the press should not allow anyone to mess with the rhythm and tempo of the news process. ■

Stephen Berry, an associate professor of journalism at the University of Iowa, teaches reporting, writing and investigative journalism. He was a newspaper journalist for more than 33 years, having worked most recently for the Los Angeles Times. He and a colleague won the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting.

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‘Infoganda’ in Uniform

The Bush administration creates media outlets to tell its story.

By Charles Zewe

Multicolored bars, one for each of the nation's five military services, sweep across a bluish photo of the Pentagon as a buzz-cut Marine corporal announces, “This is a Pentagon Channel report . . .” Except for the anchor in uniform, the news show looks like any one of a dozen cable news programs on the air these days. In a darkened control room in Atlanta, meanwhile, military contractors tweak a live shot being fed to “Fox and Friends” for an early-morning interview with an Army captain who's been collecting soccer gear for kids in Mosul, Iraq.

The seemingly disparate operations are the latest twists in the Bush administration's ongoing efforts to shape public opinion by going around traditional news outlets with positive stories about its policy initiatives. “We're the house organ, we're the megaphone for the Pentagon,” said Allison Barber, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Internal Communications, who is in charge of the Pentagon Channel (TPC). At the U.S. Army's Digital Video and Imagery Distribution System (DVIDS) hub in Atlanta, there is a similar utilitarian philosophy. “We provide the pipe,

a trough of products for national, local and military media,” said Lt. Col. Will Beckman, DVIDS director of operations.

Media observers worry, however, such efforts further colonize American news organizations, and by extension public opinion, in ways similar to the effect televised coverage sent home by embedded reporters had with its overwhelmingly upbeat but sometimes misleading accounts of the war in Iraq. And when the Bush administration was caught cranking out covert propaganda disguised as TV news stories promoting

its prescription drug plan, Rob Corddry, a mock correspondent for Comedy Central's "The Daily Show," described the bogus government-produced segments as "infoganda," a fusion of information and propaganda.

These new infoganda missions, if successful, could give the Pentagon taxpayer-financed links to every home in America. Both operations follow the scrapping of the Department of Defense's (DOD) plans for an Office of Strategic Influence to spread pro-U.S. stories in foreign countries. TPC's May launch came within weeks of the U.S. taxpayer-financed debut of the \$95 million Iraqi Media Network's Al-Iraqiya TV that, coupled with the \$65 million, Virginia-based al-Hurra, Arabic for "The Free One," and new radio services—Radio Sawa and Radio Farda—are blanketing the Arab world with American ideals as an antidote to pan-Arab nationalism.

Bypassing the 'News Filters'

Policy experts have long recognized military operations require public support because of the high cost of blood and money. American presidents set up propaganda offices during both world wars and have frequently "gone public" to try to shape public opinion. Last December, President Bush, who considers national news organizations overly negative, told ABC News's Diane Sawyer, "I get my news from people who don't editorialize." As a result, the White House regularly looks for ways to bypass national news organizations, perhaps more than any previous administration. "I'm mindful of the filter through which some news travels, and somehow you just got to go over the heads of the filter and speak directly to the people," the President told a Baltimore news anchor. "The people," in the case of the two new operations, are America's 1.4 million active duty troops, 1.2 million National Guard members and reservists, 650,000 civilian employees, and 25.3 million veterans and their families. "We've got an obligation to inform the American people about what their sons and daughters are doing," said Lt. Col. Beckman.



President George W. Bush answers questions during an interview with Air Force Tech. Sgt. Sean Lehman of the Pentagon Channel at the Pentagon on May 10, 2004. *Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jerry Morrison, U.S. Air Force/Department of Defense.*

Produced at a military broadcast center in Alexandria, Virginia, TPC, for years a closed-circuit feed available inside the Pentagon only, is being paid for by a \$6 million supplement to the approximate \$120 million a year budget the DOD spends on public information operations. TPC's 24-hour mix of C-SPAN-style public affairs and cable TV news is also being offered free of charge to the nation's domestic cable systems.

DVIDS utilizes portable KU-band military uplinks manned by army public affairs troops stationed in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait and Qatar. Live shots, packaged stories, and raw footage shot by army videographers are fed to an Atlanta teleport run by Crawford Communications and then relayed at no charge to networks or local stations.

Story content for both services ranges from the topical to the journalistically dubious. Airtime is as likely to be devoted to a gritty profile of combat medical teams as it is to so-called "happy face" features, such as a soldier dressed up as the Easter Bunny, or infantry grunts rescuing a kitten trapped inside a marble column at Saddam's former Al Faw palace. Slogan-like sound bites are

commonplace. A medical chopper pilot is quoted in one story saying he returned to Iraq because "it's part of being an American." Not surprisingly, reports echo the pro-war sentiments of the administration and its official strategy asserting a right to unleash "preemptive" military action, if threatened.

To visually support this narrative, high-tech weaponry is showcased. Triumphant superheroes are shown decked out in night-vision goggles, blitzkrieging across the desert. The humanism of U.S. troops is also emphasized, as combat surgeons save dying children and military engineers patch up shattered schools and rebuild power plants. In keeping with Pentagon policy, however, there are no shots of wounded or dead Americans, nor bloody pictures of insurgent turmoil, such as burning fuel convoys or the grisly car bombings.

What is most striking is the absence of any opposing views. Since both media services are regarded as in-house public relations tools, Pentagon officials claim they are exempt from the 1917 Gillett Amendment and the 1948 Smith-Mundt Act, both of which prohibit government propagandizing of U.S. citizens,

along with DOD directives that prohibit “censorship or manipulation” of news broadcast to American forces.

Since it first served Union troops in the Civil War, the storied *The Stars and Stripes* newspaper, with its circulation of more than 60,000 and a readership of perhaps twice that, has practiced a battle-tested tradition of editorial independence and balance in reporting military news despite the fact it falls under the control of the same DOD office that runs TPC. Similarly, the American Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) rebroadcasts, uncensored, to military audiences overseas the nightly newscasts of the major networks. TPC, however, follows an apparent editorial policy of telling half the story. For instance, on the day kidnapped U.S. Army Specialist Keith Maupin appeared in a videotape shown by the Arab satellite network Al Jazeera, and broadcast by the four over-the-air networks along with Fox, CNN and MSNBC, TPC newsbreaks ignored the story. Likewise, although TPC broadcast news conferences, briefings and congressional hearings that explored the Abu Ghraib cruelty allegations, its news programs ignored the controversy.

Pentagon officials turn aside charges of selective bias. “We’re so not a breaking news channel, that’s not even part of the goal,” said Barber. “Everything we do is command information.” But one military official, who wanted to remain anonymous due to his unpopular perspective, described the network as a “humorous and pathetic” attempt to inhibit the news flow to military personnel.

Among former civilian journalists who now work for the DOD, there is support for the effort. “I see nothing wrong with the DOD attempting to provide the people that work for it with news and information,” said Bob Jones, chief of electronic news for the Air Force News Service and a former regional bureau chief for CBS News. “You don’t see on the Pentagon Channel any of the military attacks on Fallujah or Baghdad. By the same token, you don’t see a wealth of stories about soldiers playing soccer with kids or building schools in Iraq on the CBS Evening News. That’s the kind

of story that needs to be told.”

In a close presidential election, telling the story in the way one wants it to be told can become potentially critical, considering it was absentee military ballots in Florida that delivered the 500-vote margin that sent Bush to Washington. Military personnel are thought to be two-to-one Republican, but a Battleground Poll this summer showed 41 percent of veterans and 42 percent of veteran’s families disapproved of the way the President is handling his job.

Barber, a veteran Republican political operative, denies the Pentagon Channel is meant to craft a positive image of the U.S. military in an election year. But what ends up on the air undercuts, at times, her apolitical stance. In a May 10th interview with Bush, TPC anchor, Air Force Tech Sgt. Sean Lehman, referring to the Abu Ghraib photos, asks the President, “How do we set that aside and continue what we need to do?” Later in this interview, President Bush claims Iraqis are “sitting there watching this election process of ours,” and implies Iraqis are rooting for him, declaring “they want to see if I’ve got what it takes to stand up to the political pressures and do what I think is right.” His assertions go unchallenged.

There are also questions about the intent and reach of these media operations. A DVIDS memo recommends “engaging the news media and key [non-military] audiences ... with aggressive, forward-leaning tactics,” while internal memos and an early feasibility study encouraged TPC planners to pursue becoming the “default viewing choice for the military community.” One message even discusses a “campaign” to get troops, veterans and military retirees to pressure private cable operators to add TPC.

What impact are these efforts having? As of mid-July, DVIDS had produced 92 live shots and fed raw footage to a variety of clients, including all the major U.S. over-the-air and cable news networks and a handful of local stations. In addition, DVIDS supplied more than 2,700 still photos to commercial and military newspapers, including one shot that ended up on the front page of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. While the

newspaper credited the military photographer, most television segments failed to mention that the military was the source of its material.

Only a handful of domestic military installations have added TPC to base cable systems while few, if any, of the nation’s 10,000 cable providers have put TPC on their lineups. “I wonder about the effectiveness of it based on exposure,” said Jones. “Who’s going to be seeing this and how are they going to see it?”

These questions remain unanswered, as does the future of these enterprises should the election in November bring in a new administration. Both operations have purchased only a year’s worth of satellite time to transmit programming. What is most significant about these Pentagon efforts is not their impact but their intent. At a time when justification for the war in Iraq is spoken of in terms of democratic ideals of truth and free expression, this purposeful creation of “infoganda” outlets that obscure reality by reporting sanitized half-stories to America’s fighting forces and citizens strikes an odd pose with the administration’s lofty rhetoric about freedom. ■

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Documentaries Raise Questions Journalists Should Ask Themselves

‘Have they delved deeply enough into issues surrounding the nation’s war on terror and its homeland security?’

By Rose Economou

Academy-award winning documentary filmmaker Michael Moore is clever, committed and concerned, and in his film “Fahrenheit 9/11” he employs the elements of documentary filmmaking—expert interviews, location shooting, archival footage, and witty on-camera antics—to create an unconventional cinematic experience. His movie provokes laughter and tears and leaves viewers hungry for political satire and genuine civic discourse. His film is not at all like Ken Burns’s seven-part, documentary recounting of the Civil War, but rather it is a film created to offer an unapologetic challenge to the character, qualifications and ability of President George W. Bush. It also turns out to be an indictment of American journalism for many of the stories the mainstream press failed to examine.

With his periodic signature-interludes of comedic relief, Moore methodically and selectively works to build his case:

- He returns to the 2000 election and Florida’s disenfranchisement of minority voters and the failure to convince one U.S. Senator to join a formal Congressional Black Caucus objection to voting irregularities in that state.
- He jabs at the politicization of the U.S. Supreme Court and questions the Bush family’s financial connections to Saudi oil interests and the family of Osama bin Laden.
- He revisits the horror of 9/11 and families that were destroyed. Moore questions whether members of the bin Laden family should have been

allowed to leave the United States without first being interrogated by the FBI.

- He discloses that when George W. Bush was governor of Texas he hosted representatives of the Taliban, who were known to be harboring Osama bin Laden. While in Texas, the Taliban connected with U.S. corporate interests who would eventually secure a natural gas pipeline through Afghanistan after one of their consultants was anointed President.
- He demonstrates why Americans have reason to question the effectiveness of homeland security and suggests that the government has manipulated our fear of terror and made us more accepting of military campaigns against Afghanistan and Iraq.
- He reminds us that it is often the poor with fewer options at home who pay the ultimate price in wars abroad and sears into our memory the aching, black hole of a mother’s grief.

Grief is also a thread in a lesser-known documentary film—“Control Room”—directed by Jehane Noujaim. Noujaim is a young filmmaker who gives her audience a rare behind-the-scenes look at the Arab satellite news channel, Al Jazeera, and its coverage in the days immediately preceding, during and after the war in Iraq. She shows the horrifying TV images of Iraq being pummeled by coalition bombs and its citizens killed, wounded, detained, cuffed and in search of loved ones buried by rubble. She also reveals the graphic and piercing close-ups of bleeding and disfigured

children and dead, twisted bodies of American POW’s and the charred torsos of American contractors hung and dragged by an angry, screaming mob through the streets. Unlike American television news coverage, the selected Al Jazeera soundbites of angry relatives and grieving loved ones, which are translated for the moviegoer, might give “proof” to the rest of the Arab world that the Americans in Iraq are more invaders than liberators.

Located in Doha, Qatar, about 700 miles from Baghdad but not far from the coalition’s Central Command, or Centcom, Al Jazeera—which Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld calls “Osama bin Laden’s mouthpiece”—has been a dominant and controversial media voice in the Arab world since 1996. A senior producer says its mission is to inform, educate, stimulate free debate, and shakeup the rigid societies of the region. For filmmaker Noujaim, whose mother is American, father is Egyptian, and has spent her life traveling between both cultures, the news agency opens its doors and gives her access to its reporters, producers and camera crews, who are willing to admit their pro-Arab bias and skepticism of U.S. motives for making war and the coalition’s management and distribution of information about the war. She consistently shows the staff as professionals and as real people, especially when a colleague of theirs falls.

Relegated to art cinemas, “Control Room,” is superficial, uncritical and sheds little light on the news agency, its journalistic standards, or Iraqi news coverage. Here is a sampling of what we don’t learn from the film:

- We do not learn very much about who owns Al Jazeera and what special interests they serve, if any.
- We hear no explanation of why it televises unedited tapes from Osama bin Laden or gives a video stage to the demands of masked terrorists parading their hostages.
- While viewers glimpse dispatches and never-before-seen video broadcast during the war in Iraq, they are given no sense of the impact those reports and images had on Al Jazeera's roughly 40 million Arab viewers.
- We are given no way to know how this supposedly "independent" news channel covered Iraq, Saddam Hussein or his torture of political prisoners before the war.

By the film's end, no evidence has been shown to enable us to know whether Al Jazeera is capable of providing its audience with responsible news that is comprehensive, fair and accurate. Yet in watching the documentary, one is troubled by the same-day "accidental" bombing deaths of three different Arab journalists by American warplanes. These killings come after a series of critical public comments by President Bush and Rumsfeld that are heard in the film. One is left not knowing whether these deaths were a coincidence or an example of premeditated precision bombing. Viewers see excerpts from a press conference to explain "the facts" and offer the "official" response from Central Command and watch the last video of the slain Al Jazeera correspondent and listen to a prerecorded plea from his widow, but the film ends without them knowing if Al Jazeera or the filmmaker investigated the tragedies further or pressed the U.S. military for more answers.

Documentary Filmmaking

In his book, "Doing Documentary Work," Robert Coles defines "documentary" by tracing the noun "document" back to its Latin root, *docere*, to teach. In its original intent, the word described

something that offered clues, proof or evidence. "Fahrenheit 9/11" and, to some extent, "Control Room," do this. But do these films do what documentaries have traditionally done—enlighten viewers, search for understanding, or



A poster from the film's Web site.

challenge myths? Does it matter that journalists have criticized "Fahrenheit 9/11" for manipulating words and images in unfair ways to convey its strong point of view? Or that "Control Room" is a sympathetic portrayal of a controversial news organization that raises more questions than it answers?

Both films do succeed in awakening interest in these topics. And at a time when so much "noise" arrives over the airwaves, cable and Internet masquerading as journalism, should it still bother journalists how evidence is gathered, facts are presented, and a story is reported? More than ever, it should. And even though there is sloppiness evident in some aspects of how the films' facts were collected, assembled and conveyed, when journalists view these documentaries surely they must ask themselves why they failed to connect some of these same dots. Did they

do all they could to uncover the "truth" about the 2000 election in Florida? Have they delved deeply enough into issues surrounding the nation's war on terror and its homeland security? Have they found ways to report and convey information about the complicated and seemingly intractable political relationships of the Middle East and Central Asia to readers and viewers? What about their coverage of the interwoven business and political interests that drive U.S. foreign policy? And the fundraising that goes on by presidential candidates?

What often separates journalist from documentary filmmaker is the powerful, purposeful and persuasive use of emotion by people like Michael Moore. Journalists, by and large, don't travel in such emotion-laden territory, but instead must rely on their presentation of the evidence to present a compelling case for both interest and response.

These documentaries—by touching on aspects of journalism and provoking questions about the role "facts" should play in such films—have served as a valuable reminder to journalists of the popular interest these topics still hold for Americans. Perhaps Moore's film—with its ability to attract a broad audience to its story—will provoke journalists to turn their skills in the direction of deeper and more sustained coverage of these issues. ■

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Protesting Doonesbury's Dismissal

'What is practiced these days is not censorship with a U.S. government stamp.'

By Bob Davis

What is a comic strip worth? Is it worthy of a battle to keep it from being removed by critics offended by its political jabs? Why make a fuss over something that's drawn in pen and ink with at most 50 or so words? The creator of Doonesbury has even suggested it's best not to lose one's cool over something so common. "A comic strip," Garry Trudeau recently told *Rolling Stone*, "isn't one of those things you want to seem too worried about."

Maybe, though, in this political climate it's worth the time of journalists to take a stance on this small thing. That's what the publisher and senior editors at *The Anniston (Alabama) Star* believe. After learning that the consortium that provides *The Star* with its prepackaged Sunday color comics was removing Doonesbury, against Trudeau's advice we decided to not keep our cool. Of course, we would find a new spot for Doonesbury on Sundays. But it's not fair, we thought, for Continental Features to single out this strip, which is not popular with conservatives.

Earlier this year, Continental, which operates as a sort of cooperative, decided to poll its 38 members on whether or not to keep Doonesbury. The strip lost, 21-15, with two nonvotes. Why subject one strip—and only one strip—to an up-or-down vote? "This is a business decision," Van Wilkerson, Continental president, told *The Star*. "It doesn't have anything to do with personalities or Garry Trudeau or Doonesbury or anything else." But this whole episode smelled like "censorship by plebiscite," as *Star* Publisher and President H. Brandt Ayers wrote in his letter to the consortium.

It was the C-word—censorship—that riled many, as news of our protest reached media Web sites. Once Matt Drudge and conservative Web forums linked to those stories, the e-mails

started flooding in. Censorship, my e-mailers informed me, was not possible at the hands of a private business concern. Only government can censor, they wrote.

Checking a series of dictionaries, I could find no explicit reference to censorship only coming at the hands of government. A censor is, according to Webster's New World, "an official with the power to examine publications, movies, television programs, etc. and to remove or prohibit anything considered obscene, libelous, politically objectionable, etc."

Can government do that? Yes. Can others do it? Sure. Is all censorship bad? No.

A television program cancelled over poor ratings can fall victim to censors. The tale is told in the circumstances. Cancel "The Drew Carey Show" and few will raise an eyebrow. Cancel the Smothers Brothers show, with its edgy and political content, and we might have something more nefarious. Stop playing the music of the Dixie Chicks after they say unkind things about President Bush, and we have a problem.

Thus, when Ayers' letter told Continental that its actions were "offensive to First Amendment freedoms," it was not to claim an outright violation of free speech. It was, instead, to suggest something more nuanced. Overt government censorship is rare these days. The job of battlefield censor has changed thanks to advances in wireless technology that make transmitting the story and photo from the scene only a laptop and satellite phone away. Government censors no longer wield a heavy pen to black out offending copy before it is sent back to the copy desk. Instead, the Pentagon relies on softer ways of trying to get its message across.

During the most recent war in Iraq, American media outlets themselves did the work of government censors.

Many embedded reporters, all Pentagon-trained and -approved, became cheerleaders. They played down the unseemly images of war and number of civilian casualties. They actively boosted the mythological exploits of Pfc. Jessica Lynch, and during the lead-up to war were too willing to swallow the administration's story.

What is practiced these days is not censorship with a U.S. government stamp. There are plenty of others in the media who are ultrasensitive to what will set off protests from a vocal segment of readers or viewers who are willing to do the work of the censor, either purposely or unknowingly. Many of these censors do not have a hidden agenda when they do away with unpopular content. They are answering the call of the marketplace. That is their right, but it should be done with great care. A newspaper that only gives its readers what they say they want is not serving its highest calling.

Many Southern newspapers are still wrestling with the shame of pleasing their white readership by staying silent during the Civil Rights era of the 1950's and 1960's. Most recently, Kentucky's *Lexington Herald-Leader* offered an apology for its timid coverage of African-Americans' struggle against segregation. While not of the same magnitude, this struggle over the removal of Doonesbury does have a familiar ring.

True, most newspapers are operated as businesses. But when freedom of the press is mentioned so prominently in the Bill of Rights, it must be operated with something more than the bottom line in view. An independent press exists to check government. We must serve as a forum for a wide variety of views.

Better to attempt to explain the value of Doonesbury as a voice that challenges the conventional wisdom than to kill it outright. Make it an exercise in democracy that goes beyond a majority-rule

vote. It's a lesson in citizenship. Our nation's founders believed strongly in protecting the minority viewpoint. Fostering debate and dissent is deep within the nation's DNA. Read Trudeau's work or not, but appreciate it for what it is—one person standing up and saying “that's not right.”

Offer up a vote on the prominence of news stories, and that item on Halliburton's sweetheart government contracts is shoved to the back of the section by the same critics anxious to keep Doonesbury out of their daily paper.

To us, this ugly scenario seems worth

losing our cool over. We wouldn't want to see it become a trend. ■

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WATCHDOG

The Steady March of Government Secrecy

Journalists strategize to gain access to information the public has a right to know.

By Pete Weitzel

Government secrecy is a big and expensive business—and it's getting bigger and more costly. Last year, the federal government spent more than \$6.5 billion classifying and declassifying federal records. It marked 14.2 million documents as “Top Secret,” “Secret” or “Classified,” putting them under lock and key for a minimum of 10 years. The rate of classification—up 26 percent in 2003 and more than 40 percent since 9/11—is almost double that during the last several years of the Clinton presidency.

By one estimate, during the past 25 years the U.S. government has classified between 7.5 and 8 billion pages of information—enough to replace all 18 million books in the Library of Congress with shelf space to spare. This revelation prompted the Intelligence Security Oversight Office to suggest the secret keeping is excessive and call for restraint. It warns the federal government is classifying so much that it is putting the very secrecy it prizes at risk. Even some members of Congress said “whoa” when the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) censors blacked more than half of the 500-page Senate report on pre-Iraq war intelligence. Four senators, including former Majority Leader Trent Lott, filed a bill to create an independent

panel to review similar classification decisions. Lott called the CIA's censorship “absolutely an insult.”

There's no estimate of the number of documents exempted entirely or in part from discretionary disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). This act became law in 1967 and provided the first statutory right of

processing.

The always-slow FOIA process became even more difficult shortly after John Ashcroft settled in as attorney general. He sent federal agencies a new directive on FOIA that reversed the policy of his predecessor Janet Reno, who was the daughter of journalists. In 1993, Reno advised government departments

to be proactive on behalf of the public in handling FOIA requests. Treat government information as inherently public, she advised, and do not invoke discretionary exemptions unless there is evidence of “foreseeable harm” as a result of making information public.

Conversely, Ashcroft advised that the federal government should be at least as committed to protecting national security, the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies, sensitive business information, and personal privacy. Under Ashcroft's directive, these interests are to be given “full and deliberate consideration” when an FOIA request is made. He told federal agencies to look for a “sound legal basis” to withhold information and let them know they'd find support in this approach from his department. Perhaps it's coincidental, but FOIA requests to the Justice Department fell by 70 percent the following year. It may also be coincidental that the classification of

The culture of closure that dug its roots in the nation's capital after 9/11 is being imposed across the nation through federal funding mandates and nondisclosure agreements.

access to federal government records. In 2003, there were 3.2 million requests for federal government records, a 36 percent increase in one year. About half of these were granted. The information “grants” frequently come with heavy and inconsistent redaction and only after long delay. (Indeed, the government's use of the term “grant” might be a warning; it suggests officials regard release of information to be a gift or favor rather than something that citizens have a right to.) Last year, it took the attorney general's office an average of 361 days to handle a “complex” request and 80 days to handle one given expedited

documents by justice—which makes them exempt from FOIA—increased by 80 percent in 2003.

The Spread of Informal Secrecy

The examination of classification and FOIA records provides only a partial picture of government secrecy. There is nothing to hint at how many records are now off the books and hidden behind new or newly defined designations that comprise an informal but very real fourth level of classification. The culture of closure that dug its roots in the nation's capital after 9/11 is being imposed across the nation through federal funding mandates and nondisclosure agreements. By one estimate, as many as four million local and state officials could be effectively gagged by requiring them to sign don't show, don't tell agreements. Secrecy is trickling down to many state and local lawmakers as well as with efforts to close records and meetings. And audits conducted by news organizations in several states this past year showed that only half of state and local officials complied with existing open records laws.

Much of this new federal secrecy was authorized by Congress in an orgy of "national security" legislation after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Only now are many of the details of this secrecy legislation being discovered as federal agencies, most prominently the Department of Homeland Security, draft new rules to implement those laws and in doing so reveal some of the regulatory details.

Perhaps most troubling to emerge is a new Transportation Security Administration (TSA) regulation that gives muscle and reach to a three-decades-old term: Sensitive Security Information (SSI). The evolution is instructive. It shows how a shroud of secrecy can be subtly laid over government.

SSI dates to 1974 and a wave of airline hijackings, when Congress gave the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) authority to gather information on people who booked airline passage. Congress said the FAA could withhold this and other SSI it gathered, if its re-

Journalists Act to Combat Government Secrecy

Today journalists are observing a growing culture of secrecy in Washington and the use of "national security" to justify restricted access and sometimes complete closure throughout all areas of government. Organizations representing their interests have taken initial steps toward pushing back.

The American Society of Newspaper Editors has begun to organize a national Sunshine Sunday for March 13, 2005 and will ask newspapers and TV stations across the country to prepare special reports, editorials and other commentary for that day about open government. It is working with the Coalition of Journalists for Open Government to enlist support of all of its member organizations. This could be the first step in a national FOIA awareness campaign.

SPJ [Society of Professional Journalists] is developing a "tool kit" on how to conduct an FOIA audit—a look at how well, or poorly, officials in a community or region or state comply with that state's open records laws. Audits have been successfully conducted in about a dozen states and put public officials on notice, prompting a variety of remedial actions and informing the public about the law and their rights.

The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press has just published the fifth edition of "Homefront Confidential," its comprehensive analysis of the laws and regulations dealing with national security and their consequences. The report raises the "threat level" to freedom of information. ■ —P.W.

lease would be "detrimental to safety of airline passengers." By this summer, SSI had morphed into something far different—and for open government advocates and working reporters, something far more ominous.

SSI now includes not just information on passenger screening and policing but also information related to infrastructure, which could, of course, apply to records about environmental threats. It might also apply to operations information. The language seems to also empower TSA and the Department of Transportation to extend security oversight—and its ability to seal sensitive information, however loosely defined—to local transit systems and to the transport of hazardous wastes on the nation's highways, and also to pipelines.

Translated into an "Interim Final Rule," legislative changes provide the new and larger Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and related departments with the authority to designate as SSI any information—whether they create it or collect it—about any form of transportation they regard as being in any way related to security. This includes state, regional and local

records as well as federal documents. Certain agencies are empowered to execute nondisclosure agreements with state and local officials and private contractors to make sure they don't disclose the information. These nondisclosure agreements are a relatively new tool in the secrecy game, and they work because any breach carries a stiff fine and possible prison time.

The TSA regulations did not make news in Washington. Nor was much attention paid to an earlier set of regulations allowing the Department of Homeland Security to gather and seal vast amounts of information on the nation's infrastructure or a recent directive on instructing DHS employees to mark sensitive but unclassified information as being for official use only.

Indeed, one reason the shroud of secrecy that covers Washington today is so frightening is because it's become so routine. Secrecy is the standard, not the exception. Any presumption of transparency has been lost.

Failing to Get Information

The Freedom of Information Act was passed by Congress as an amendment

to the 1946 Administrative Procedure Act (APA). This earlier act had required federal agencies to keep the public informed about rules and procedures and said members of the public should be able to participate in the rulemaking process. At the same time, APA suggested there were exceptions to openness: Information might be withheld on “any function ... requiring secrecy in the public interest.”

FOIA became law after a 16-year campaign by journalism organizations and others to promote the citizen’s “right to know.” It was strengthened in 1974 and expanded to include electronic records in 1995. But FOIA was never an easy process. Procedural delays are built in; for example, an agency doesn’t even have to respond for 20 days. And there is a cumbersome review process: Information can be withheld if it falls within any one of nine broad categories of exemption.

Under the Bush administration, there has been progressive closure with the spread and speed of secrecy increasing after 9/11 through legislation, presidential orders, department directives, and broad administrative legal interpretations. The Ashcroft memo set the tone, rewriting the rules of engagement to give bureaucrats who wish to play hardball the encouragement to do so.

Some examples of how the secrecy game is now being played:

- The Justice Department earlier this year turned down an FOIA request for a list of terrorism-related indictments, then rejected a follow-up request for copies of all of the press releases issued on those individual indictments. The reason: invasion of privacy.
- Justice also turned down a request for information on registered foreign government lobbyists. The reason: The database is so old, the department said, that if we try to run it the system will crash.
- The Labor Department’s Mine Health and Safety Administration refused a reporter’s request for biographical information on a new deputy secretary. The reason: privacy.
- TSA turned down a request for infor-

mation about its “no fly” list of those automatically pulled from airport security lines for a more thorough screening. It cited both privacy and SSI as reasons for their withholding documents. A federal judge in a suit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) ruled that the names withheld had appeared in newspaper articles and other information was “innocuous” and in some instances had been used in public slide presentations. The judge ordered the information to be released.

- The TSA refused the request of a Minneapolis reporter who thought it would be a public service to let people know what items commonly carried by airline passengers frequently set off airport screening machines. The reason: SSI.
- After White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card sent a memo ordering a review of Web postings in 2002, at least 6,000 documents were being pulled from government Web sites. There was no way of knowing the nature or extent of information withheld from government Web sites since then, but one recent incident hints at the new creativity of closure. The Center for Army Lessons Learned posted a book-length critique of Operation Iraqi Freedom with this disclaimer: “This document has security functions enabled to prevent printing, downloading, cutting and pasting.”
- The Environmental Protection Agency took another approach: eliminate the evidence. Its annual Toxics Release Inventory, typically a 400-page report containing data and analysis of the nation’s chemical plants and potential dangers, was reduced to six summary pages this year as a result of industry lobbying. That left environmental writers who regularly use the inventory in computer-assisted reporting without a byte to chew on.
- The Pentagon classified the army’s report on abuses at Abu Ghraib prison as “secret” and kept the marking even after photos taken by service personnel became public. The In-

formation Security Oversight Office (ISOO) challenged both the legality and the wisdom of the Pentagon’s action. ISOO Director William Leonard noted that information that reveals violations of the law cannot be classified. He questioned the “bureaucratic impulse” to mark as “secret” one passage discussing the potential political fallout of releasing the report. “It’s difficult to see how that information (could) ... damage national security,” Leonard observed.

Frequently during the past two years Leonard has said that over-classification hurts the entire system by making secrets less secure because it inevitably invites leakage from “the highest levels of our government.” Within a month of Leonard sending this memo to the Pentagon, U.S. News & World Report reported that it had obtained all 106 classified annexes to the army’s Abu Ghraib report.

The Patriot Act, which became law just six weeks after the terrorist attacks, expands the FBI’s investigatory powers. Among these powers is the ability to obtain secret court orders to seize personal and private business records and to eavesdrop on telephone and e-mail conversations. It permits secret court hearings of alleged terrorists. Little is known—not even the names—of more than 1,200 presumably terrorist-related arrests and the deportation of at least 750 people. Nor does anyone outside the government know how many court docket entries have been erased or simply not entered. Secret federal court hearings have been held with no public record of when or where or who is being tried. Everyone involved is gagged. The Supreme Court even allowed the Justice Department to file a sealed brief in one case. Such is the level of paranoia about secrecy in the government that when the ACLU filed a suit challenging Patriot Act provisions, it was prohibited from going public with the details of the suit. Its press release announcing the in-court protest was censored.

The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press is trying to track down information on reports of at least 50 secret federal court cases across the

The Associated Press Responds to Increased Government Secrecy

In May 2004, Tom Curley, president and chief executive officer of The Associated Press, delivered the 38th Annual Hays Press-Enterprise Lecture in Riverside, California. His address was entitled "Why Access is Good for Security." An excerpt from his lecture is printed here.

"State FOI audits ... have been very effective tools for testing official compliance with state FOI laws and raising public awareness of their rights. ... Starting now, AP bureaus in any state where such audits have not been conducted will be instructed to make phone calls and start a project immediately. And AP will press in every state for regular audits at least once every five years. Bureau chiefs also will be directed to provide a status report on access for still

and video cameras to state and federal courtrooms in their territories. Where there is no active effort under way to expand access, or the effort has faltered, chiefs will be asked to develop a plan to move things forward. AP bureau chiefs will be directed to review procedures for responding when access to information proceedings is blocked. We will help them spread the word, speed the process and decide when to hire counsel and seek allies among other media, and fight back. We will issue fresh instructions to AP editors at every level to be sure any news story that benefits from an FOI request or suffers from lack of public information that was refused by a government source says so clearly. There is a lot more we can do, especially if we work together." ■

country. Does this attempt to get information encourage similar closure in other courts? In July, public defenders in Washington, D.C. filed a petition listing 200 superior court cases that had been closed and records sealed.

Earlier this year, the Congressional Research Service observed that one consequence of the Homeland Security Act—creating a huge new government department to oversee the nation's internal protection from terrorism—is that vast amounts of data are now being marked "sensitive" as they are being created or gathered, and thus they are "born protected." Yet no criteria have been established for this marking, nor is there any provision for review of the decision to "safeguard" this information from public view.

Journalists' Responses to Secrecy

News reporting on all of this has been limited and tepid. Instead, the ground wars in Afghanistan and then Iraq, the broader war on terrorism, and inside-the-beltway obsession with partisan

politics dominate the news. The war on terrorism seems to have put a damper on aggressive reporting and watchdog writing about efforts by government to "safeguard information."

There have been a few high-profile exceptions. Vice President Dick Cheney's refusal to make public information on his energy task force has been widely reported, as has the ban on photographing of coffins of military personnel and the stamping of "Top Secret" on the already public photos of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. Lawsuits challenging secret court proceedings have also been widely reported.

A reporter from the (Miami) Daily Business Review, Dan Christensen, had begun a year-long reporting assignment on secret hearings being held in federal courts, when he saw an unusual entry on a docket sheet, asked a few questions, and got stonewalled. Later, the U.S. Supreme Court sanctioned the approach of secret dockets and hearings, even to the point of allowing the Solicitor General to file a sealed brief. And few newspapers carried the first day story from The Associated Press

(AP) when U.S. marshals seized and destroyed reporters' tape recordings of a speech given by Justice Antonin Scalia. The Washington Post did not mention it. The New York Times carried a single paragraph.

Paradoxically, many of the nation's journalism-related foundations and organizations have taken notice of this issue. During the past four years, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the McCormick Tribune Foundation have given grants of more than \$7.6 million for freedom of information projects in the United States. One of those projects is the Coalition of Journalists for Open Government, which began with Knight support this past January. Its mission is to coordinate the freedom of information efforts of its member organizations, now numbering 27. I was hired as its coordinator. Members of the coalition include the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA), Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), the Newspaper Association of America (NAA), and Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. [See box regarding these projects on page 85.]

In April, the president of the AP, Tom Curley, called for a new assault on government secrecy. It was time, Curley said, for journalists to "push back" at all levels against government efforts to close records and meetings. The AP, he pledged, would start more aggressively reporting on open government issues and would support FOI audits in every state. [See accompanying box for more on changes at the AP.] In the months since then, there has been a marked increase in AP reports on secrecy and closure. Curley also said AP would help to establish a governmental affairs office in Washington, D.C. to monitor and lobby on these issues. No details of that initiative have been announced, but AP officials are meeting with representatives of journalism organizations, FOIA attorneys, and open government advocates as part of their planning.

ASNE, SPJ and RTNDA have legal counsel in Washington, but their employment is part-time and some of the lawyers' time must be devoted to non-

legislative matters. The most consistent and concerted lobbying by media organizations is done by the National Association of Broadcasters and the NAA, the respective ownership organizations for television and newspapers. However, their focus is on business issues. NAA does some lobbying on FOIA issues and recently was able to get the House to nudge Health and Human Services for a much-needed clarification of its regulations implementing the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Those regulations effectively close off reporter access to critical information on victims of crime, accidents and disasters.

There has been no coordinated information gathering or strategic planning about secrecy and reporters' access to information within the journalism community or among its organizations. No one looks at upcoming federal legislation or monitors departmental policies and regulations to identify such access issues. While the individual organizations sometimes send letters of protest or submit comments urging changes in regulations, no concerted legislative strategy or proactive plan is in place to attempt to reverse the pattern of increasing closure. Media organizations tend to go their separate ways. When they do come together, it has usually been out of common frustration and to fight for a common cause, such as freedom of information.

What is starting to happen today has a parallel a half century ago. In the late 1940's, Basil L. Walters, executive editor of the Chicago Daily News and chair of ASNE's World Freedom of Information Committee, said that in their own communities U.S. newspapers were "permitting the people's right to information to go by default." The first step he proposed: Drop the word "World" from the committee name and focus on problems in their hometowns.

At this time, there were few if any legal experts on government access,

and editors across the country were increasingly frustrated and unsure how to respond when local government officials closed meetings or denied access to records. ASNE hired attorney and legal scholar Harold L. Cross to analyze the laws across the country

There has been no coordinated information gathering or strategic planning about secrecy and reporters' access to information within the journalism community or among its organizations.

and make recommendations. His book, "The People's Right to Know," set the stage for a national campaign by ASNE and other journalism organizations that would continue into the 1960's.

The predecessor to the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi (SDX), developed a model open meetings law and pushed for its adoption. At the time, only one state had such a law. The campaign slowly built support, and change came, a piece at a time. For example, the first open meeting bill in Florida was introduced in 1953 by a delegation from the St. Petersburg area that had been lobbied by their local SDX chapter. The bill won initial support in the house but never budged in the senate. Similar bills were introduced in every session from 1957 to 1965 and met the same fate. In 1967, using a model law clipped from the SDX magazine, Quill, a senator from Gainesville, with the support of a reapportioned, reform-minded legislature, managed to get Florida's much-admired "Government in the Sunshine" law passed. The political culture and climate for openness also evolved in many other states during those years. By 1967, at least 35 had adopted some form of open government legislation, and the federal government had approved the Freedom of Information Act.

It's worth considering another historic parallel. When victory in World War II was in sight, if still a long way off, President Franklin D. Roosevelt

challenged the nation in his 11th State of the Union address to think beyond the war to issues of "economic security, social security, and moral security." Only when we establish each of these, he said, will we have gained true national security. Today the federal government

treats security as having only one dimension and demands that we, as a people, sacrifice other freedoms to achieve freedom from fear. If we as journalists allow this to happen, we

will not only have forsaken our mission but our country. The strength of our nation is protection of its many freedoms—the first of which must be the freedom to have access to information about the decisions our government leaders make. Without that, all other freedoms are less secure. ■

Pete Weitzel is the freedom of information coordinator for the newly formed Coalition of Journalists for Open Government (CJOG), based in Washington, D.C. He is a former managing editor of The Miami Herald. He helped found the Florida First Amendment Foundation, serving as its president from 1985 to 1995, and the National Freedom of Information Coalition, serving as its second president. In recent years, he taught at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, the University of North Carolina journalism school and Duke Law School, and served as executive director of the North Carolina Center on Actual Innocence, an organization that investigates cases of possible wrongful conviction. He became CJOG coordinator in January.

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WATCHDOG

Using Public Records Laws to Expose Government Misdeeds

For one journalist, it took 20 years, lots of research, and several court decisions to uncover the FBI’s abuses of power and secrecy on a campus during the cold war.

By Seth Rosenfeld

I was a journalism student at the University of California at Berkeley when I sent off a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) records concerning the university. I knew that during the 1950’s and 1960’s Berkeley had been involved in some of the nation’s biggest protests over academic freedom, free speech, and the Vietnam War. I also knew that congressional hearings in the 1970’s had revealed illegal FBI spying on thousands of Americans engaged in lawful dissent elsewhere. I was curious about what the FBI had been up to behind the scenes at Berkeley.

I had no idea I was embarking on a two-decade fight to get the FBI files or that I would bring three lawsuits under the FOIA that would reach the U.S. Supreme Court. Neither did I know that ultimately the FBI—which had denied snooping on campus—would release more than 200,000 pages showing that J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI conspired with the head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to harass students and faculty, waged a covert campaign to get University of California (U.C.) President Clark Kerr fired, contributed to the 1966 defeat of Democratic Governor Edmund Brown, and provided secret political support to his successor, Ronald Reagan.

Nor did I envision that 20 years later, on June 9, 2002, the San Francisco Chronicle would publish my article disclosing these abuses of power and secrecy during the cold war, just as the FBI was once again being given vastly expanded power and secrecy in the war on terror, raising anew concerns



Police drag demonstrators from the steps inside San Francisco’s City Hall, site of a House Un-American Activities Committee meeting in 1960. *Photo by Bob Campbell/San Francisco Chronicle.*

about civil liberties and government accountability.

Federal bureaucracies have a long and well-documented history of needlessly stamping public records “confidential.” No administration has embraced the FOIA; President Johnson threatened to veto the new law in 1966, and President Ford vetoed the 1974 amendments that Congress nonetheless passed to strengthen it. But journalists in the post-September 11th world face what a Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press study, “Homefront Confidential,” called “unprecedented” secrecy at

the local, state and federal level.

By describing my struggle to obtain the FBI records about Berkeley, I hope to offer useful tips on how journalists can break down (and otherwise get around) government stonewalling on public records acts’ requests. Although my request was made under the FOIA, these suggestions also apply to local and state public records acts, which are often modeled on the federal law. And though my request was unusually large and complex, these tactics might be adapted to smaller and shorter-term requests.

Investigating the FBI Files

My pursuit of the FBI files began at the Berkeley post office in 1981, when I mailed off a request seeking “any and all” records concerning U.C. I figured I’d get the files fairly soon. After all, the FOIA is the main federal law requiring timely public access to executive branch records. Agencies must grant or deny requests within 20 working days (or 30 if the request is voluminous or otherwise complicated). All executive branch records must be released unless the government specifically shows that the information falls under one or more of nine exemptions. Even if some parts of a record are exempt from release, all the other reasonably segregable parts must be released.

Months passed with no reply from the FBI. I filed an administrative appeal of the delay with the Justice Department, a prerequisite to filing a lawsuit. Finally the bureau sent a letter saying that processing the papers would cost about \$35,000; it would gladly start as soon as I plunked down a 25 percent deposit. I asked the FBI to waive fees, which agencies must do if releasing the records would primarily benefit the general public. But in the bureau’s editorial judgment, there was no public interest. I was stymied.

Then in 1984, a pro bono lawyer took my case, and I sued for a fee waiver. While he handled the legal aspects of the case, I used my journalistic skills to show that releasing the records was in the public interest. In researching the 1964 Free Speech Movement (FSM), for example, I found news clips on the California legislature’s recognition of the FSM as an important civil rights event. I interviewed an expert on FBI records, who gave me a written declaration saying that administrative markings, handwritten notes, and other marginalia that often appear on FBI records were not meaningless but were substantive information about bureau operations. A historian gave me a declaration stating

the requested records would provide new insight into historically significant events. All of this was submitted to the federal judge hearing my case. She ruled that I had “persuasively demonstrated” that my research “requires meticulous examination of record(s) that may not on their face indicate much to an untrained eye.” She said the FBI’s denial of a fee waiver had been “arbitrary and capricious.” She ordered the bureau to waive all fees.

With that roadblock gone, the FBI finally released about 5,000 pages. But they were so heavily censored I

grounds. (When a person dies, their right to privacy is greatly diminished.) I obtained notarized waivers from other people giving me permission to request their otherwise personal files.

I had some luck, too. While perusing a used bookstore, I came across a tell-all tome by a former FBI informer titled, “I Lived Inside the Campus Revolution.” Dates and events he discussed seemed to match those on some heavily deleted informant reports. I also found some FBI records released elsewhere that the bureau had blacked out in my case. This heightened my doubts about

the bureau’s dire claims that releasing the same or similar information in the files I had requested would harm law enforcement operations or endanger national security.

My research also questioned whether some of the FBI’s investigations were

undertaken for legitimate law enforcement purposes. If not, then the bureau couldn’t withhold information about them under the law enforcement exemption. The FBI had claimed that records on its investigation of the FSM should be withheld because they concerned a legitimate probe of possible violations of laws against riots and subversion. My research demonstrated that the FSM was engaged in nonviolent protests against a university rule that barred political activity on the Berkeley campus.

I contended that the FBI’s investigation of the FSM constituted improper political surveillance and that as a result the bureau could not withhold records about its inquiry under the law enforcement exemption. Likewise, the FBI claimed its investigations of U.C. President Clark Kerr were routine background investigations. My review of some of the released FBI records indicated that bureau officials had used the background investigation process as a pretext to undermine Kerr because they believed he was not tough enough on campus dissenters.

Investigative journalism and routine beat coverage can not only point reporters to information they should request under public records laws, but also to obits, waivers, official studies, and other materials that can be used to overcome baseless secrecy claims.

wondered if the bureau had become the nation’s largest consumer of Magic Markers. The FBI asserted that the information had to be withheld under several exemptions to the FOIA for information concerning national security, law enforcement operations, and the privacy of people named in the records.

By now I had taken a full time reporting job with The San Francisco Examiner. But I continued to work on the project on my own time. I believed the FBI’s secrecy claims were greatly exaggerated, and I’d become all the more curious about what the bureau was holding back.

I brought a second lawsuit challenging the deletions. The FBI, of course, could see what the censored material said; I could not. But my research about events in Berkeley gave me a good idea of what lay behind many of the Rorschach-like blotches. For instance, at the library I found decades-old Congressional reports that seemed to discuss subjects the FBI contended were still classified. I gathered obituaries of people who likely appeared in documents the bureau had excised on privacy

The Court Decides

All this material was submitted to the federal magistrate whom the judge had assigned to review the blacked-out documents. This process is called a “Vaughn” proceeding, after the federal court decision that established it. The requester and the federal agency each pick a number of sample documents and submit their evidence as to why the information should be withheld or released. The court then reviews each side’s arguments—and the uncensored records—in chambers.

A full year passed before the magistrate completed her line-by-line analysis. She ruled that most of the deleted information should be released. The Justice Department challenged the ruling before the U.S. District Court judge. In an opinion issued three years later, the judge upheld virtually all of the magistrate’s findings. The judge said I had presented “highly persuasive” evidence showing that though the bureau may have initially had legitimate ground to investigate the FSM, its inquiry devolved into unlawful political surveillance. The judge also said the FBI unlawfully targeted Kerr. The judge ordered the records released, saying they go to “the very essence of what the government was up to during a turbulent, historic period.”

The U.S. Department of Justice, which represents federal agencies in FOIA lawsuits, asked the judge to reconsider. She declined. The department appealed to the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, arguing that judges have no authority to question whether FBI records concern legitimate law enforcement and that the courts must



Double-decker sit-ins under and on top of tables at Berkeley’s Sproul Hall in 1964. *Photo by Peter Breinig/San Francisco Chronicle.*

therefore defer to the bureau’s decisions to keep records secret. If upheld, that position would have pulled the teeth of judicial review right out of the Freedom of Information Act.

Three more years passed. In a unanimous 1995 opinion written by a Reagan appointee, the court affirmed virtually all of the District Court’s ruling. The appeals panel said FBI memos “strongly” suggested that the bureau sought to “harass political opponents of the FBI’s allies among the [university’s governing] Regents, not to investigate subversion and civil disorder.” The appeals court also said the records showed that “the FBI waged a concerted effort in the late 1950’s and 1960’s to have Kerr

fired from the presidency of U.C.” Those documents, the court added, “strongly support the suspicion that the FBI was investigating Kerr to have him removed from the U.C. administration, because FBI officials disagreed with his politics or his handling of administrative matters.”

The Justice Department asked the appeals court to reconsider. The court said no. The department next asked the entire Ninth Circuit, which comprises federal appeals judges throughout the Western states, to review the decision en banc. No judge agreed. By now, five federal judges had ruled that the FBI repeatedly violated the FOIA by withholding public records that were in some cases 50 years old. Still, in 1995 the department asked the U.S. Supreme Court to review the appeals court’s decision.

Before the high court decided whether to hear the matter, the FBI agreed to settle by releasing more than 200,000 pages. To promote government accountability, the FOIA requires federal agencies to pay the legal fees of plaintiffs who prove information was wrongly withheld. So as part of the settlement, the FBI paid my lawyer’s fees of more than \$600,000.

The court record shows the FBI spent more than 15 years and \$1 million in tax dollars trying to suppress public records documenting its unlawful activities. Kerr, who died last year at 92, was one of the nation’s most respected educators. The FBI never found any evidence of misconduct by him. He was shocked when I showed him memos detailing the FBI’s campaign against him.

Lessons Learned

By now, I had moved to the San Francisco Chronicle, and this is where I first

published my account of this multiyear FOIA effort. In response to the Chronicle story, titled “The Campus Files,” U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein opened a formal inquiry into the FBI’s actions. She told FBI Director Robert Mueller that “as we have seen from this Chronicle article, FOIA is often the only way the American people can be assured of government accountability.” The New York Times observed in an editorial that “These accounts of the FBI’s malfeasance are a powerful reminder of how easily intelligence organizations deployed to protect freedom can become its worst enemy.”

My experience demonstrates that FOIA requests are most likely to succeed when they grow out of and are informed by regular reporting. Investigative journalism and routine beat coverage can not only point reporters to information they should request under public records laws, but also to obits, waivers, official studies, and other materials that can be used to overcome baseless secrecy claims. Public records laws do not require agencies to conduct research for requesters, beyond a reasonable search of their own files. But these additional

materials can be submitted along with an explanatory cover letter and might help to educate the officials handling the request about why the information should be released.

Requests should specify the target information but be worded broadly enough to close loopholes. I discovered that the FBI initially searched for records on the “University of California,” but not for “California, University of” and other variations.

Of course, it’s important to keep copies of all correspondence with an agency and notes of any conversations with officials. This administrative record will become the basis of any suit challenging the agency’s failure to release public information and will be read by the judge. For the same reason, it is wise to be polite and professional in all dealings with the agency.

Many journalists don’t bother with records act requests. In fact, the biggest users of the FOIA are corporations seeking information on competitors and regulators. But FOIA requests are worth pursuing even if they take time to produce results. Reporters can easily submit a request, then periodically

pursue it in between their other work on the beat or the projects team. One day, the post office might deliver a box of smoking guns.

I hope it does not take another 20 years to find out what the government is up to during these turbulent times. But I know it will be up to reporters, editors and news executives to make sure people find out. Public records laws can play a critical role in that mission—and in protecting the public’s right to know. ■

Seth Rosenfeld is an investigative reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle. His report on the FBI at the University of California during the cold war, “The Campus Files,” can be found at www.sfgate.com/campus, along with examples of documents the FBI tried to unlawfully cover up.

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WATCHDOG

When FOIA Requests Become a Reporting Habit

At the York Daily Record/Sunday News, reporters don’t hesitate to push agencies for undisclosed information.

By Rob Walters

Shortly before 5:30 p.m. on October 17, 2001, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) received word of an immediate threat against Three Mile Island’s (TMI) Unit 1 reactor. An American who controlled the “refrigeration” to the reactor was to attack the plant’s interior while someone else would deliberately crash a plane into the reactor’s containment building.

The NRC received this threat five weeks after the September 11th terror-

ist attacks and during the height of the anthrax scare. The federal agency took the threat seriously. The government scrambled to get two fighter jets to south central Pennsylvania to patrol the skies over TMI. The agency eventually deemed the threat not credible.

For York County residents, who live in the shadow of TMI, the threat and the fear associated with it was real. The York Daily Record/Sunday News reported that some lawmakers criticized how of-

ficials handled the crisis. For example, some local government officials had not been notified about the potential threat that evening. The paper quoted a lawmaker as saying, “They didn’t spell out what it was except it was a threat they were taking seriously.” Understandably, readers wanted to know more, including reassurance that the government and plant operators were prepared if terrorists had indeed picked TMI, site of America’s worst nuclear disaster, as

a potential target.

Shortly after the October threat, the York Daily Record filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request with the NRC to dislodge documents related to the agency's response to the threat. More than a year after the paper filed the request, the NRC released a two-paragraph e-mail written by an inspector who complained about the lack of direction when responding to the threat. After the NRC denied the paper's original request, the Daily Record appealed. The NRC's executive director for Homeland Protection and Preparedness reviewed the appeal and eventually ruled some documents could be released to the Daily Record because they contained information of legitimate public interest.

It turns out that the NRC withheld about 150 pages of information related to the threat, including a chronology of information and actions, handwritten logs, and lesson-learned reports. The records, released on December 3, 2003, provided a minute-by-minute account revealing that officials believed simultaneous attacks would occur from the air and from a saboteur inside TMI. They also showed the following:

- TMI officials did not learn of the threat until about an hour after the NRC received it.
- The reactor and its radioactive core were more vulnerable on this day because the vessel was being refueled. To allow for that, a massive hatch had been removed from the vessel and the head was off the reactor pressure valve. Workers needed almost three hours to close that hatch.
- Aside from investigating the threat against TMI, federal and state officials contended with other issues, such as airplanes venturing into restricted airspace around the plant and public announcements by outside airports concerning security at the plant.

We published stories based on what we learned from these records. The newspaper used the documents to build stories and graphics to explain what happened behind the scenes that

night and to describe lessons officials had learned and what steps the plant and the government would take to better coordinate their response should a

similar threat arise. For example, one NRC official noted the difficulty the agency had in reaching the plant's senior management.



The interior of the armored car in which York police officer Henry C. Schaad was shot in 1969, a case the York County district attorney's office investigated in 2000. *Photo courtesy of York County Coroner's Office and York Daily Record/Sunday News.*



Reporters used the FOIA to obtain records about a possible terrorist threat to Three Mile Island's nuclear power plant. October 2003. *Photo by Paul Kuehnell/York Daily Record.*



Persistence by journalists revealed information through FOIA requests about the 1969 killing of Lillie Belle Allen. This photo was found in the York County coroner's report.

The Newspaper Begins Its Use of FOIA

When this threat to TMI came, the York Daily Record was already well-versed in how to use the FOIA to obtain records that would enable the paper to tell the stories that might otherwise go untold. The Daily Record/Sunday News has a daily circulation of about 48,000 and reaches roughly 93,000 homes on Sunday, and given our wide-ranging experience with FOIA requests, we were in a good position to challenge the government's blanket denials of information releasable under the FOIA prior to September 11th.

In 2000, when the York County district attorney's office convened a grand jury to investigate the 1969 killings of a black woman and white police officer, the paper learned quickly that it needed to pursue a variety of investigative avenues to report this story. Because we operate in a highly competitive two-newspaper town, getting accurate and complete information that we need to report a story is critical. In this case, since the city's mayor was a suspect in one of the murders, the need to obtain all the facts we could was even more essential.

With the grand jury proceedings cloaked in secrecy and Pennsylvania having weak open-records laws, the paper turned to the federal government and the FOIA to learn more about what happened in York during the city's 1969 riots. Through FOIA requests, we discovered that the Pennsylvania State Police knew at the time who was involved in the murders but failed to make any arrests. Federal documents also revealed that the National Guard, which had been called upon to restore order, had been given inaccurate information about what was happening in the city at the time.

This information did not come easily to the York Daily Record. Staffers had to learn what to ask for and how to ask for it through FOIA. Filing the request, we learned, wasn't enough. Reporters had to be persistent, calling FOIA officers at least once a week to check on the status of requests and prod gatekeepers to

Tips About FOIA Filings:

1. FOIA for the FOIA logs. Not only do they contain clues to stories, but also reporters will discover fascinating/entertaining requests. One CIA log, for example, showed a requester had asked for "radar and visual sightings of UFO's."
2. The federal government keeps papers on just about everything. If you drive to work each day on an interstate, think about which government agencies oversee federal highways. Do you eat at fast-food restaurants? Who inspected the meat you are eating? Listen to the radio or watch TV? What agency oversees the public airways? The federal government has scores of agencies. Each maintains logs, chronologies, audits, lesson-learned reports, and handwritten notes used to make official reports. FOIA for everything.
3. Encourage readers to become part of your FOIA army. Publish sample FOIA letters as a breakout to your FOIA-based stories. List sample FOIA letters on your Web site, and ask readers to provide you with ideas.
4. Learn the language and know the proper title of documents you wish to obtain. Try to make your requests as specific as possible.
5. Be a woodpecker. Check back with the FOIA officer each week, or each day if you have to, until you get what you want.
6. Write an FOIA request to the FBI for the file on local celebrities when they die. Look back over the past 40 or 50 years and write FOIA's for now-deceased prominent members of your community. Include a published obituary as proof of death.
7. Seek to obtain information electronically. Ask for databases and work-related e-mails—they can be a gold mine.
8. Keep requests to a determined range of years and events.
9. Fax or e-mail FOIA requests rather than rely on postal mail. Because of concerns about anthrax-related attacks, correspondence to government agencies might go unopened for extended periods of time.
10. Appeal, appeal, appeal. If your original request is denied, write an appeal letter. ■ —R.W.

York Daily Record/Sunday News Stories Based on FOIA Requests

- In February 2002, The York Daily Record/Sunday News wrote about a convicted killer sitting on death row for 20 years, longer than anyone else in the United States. In its investigation, the York City Police Department had sent the murder weapon—a knife—and handkerchief to the FBI for testing. No latent prints of value were found on either item, according to the FBI's lab reports, which were obtained through an FOIA request. This information was used in a series of stories that raised questions about the defendant's legal representation, prosecution and sentence. In June 2002, a judge changed the sentence to life in prison without parole.
- Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Robert Maynard started his newspaper career in York in the 1960's. While in York, Maynard drew the attention of FBI agents, who secretly sought to discover if he was a member of the radical Black Liberation Front. We learned from an FOIA request that when the FBI closed this case, agents had discovered only that he was involved in a group called York Action for Peace and a program named the Benton-York Twinning Project that assisted poor blacks in Mississippi.
- We used the Pennsylvania National Guard's own records to evaluate its readiness after the September 11th terror attacks. Guardsmen were deployed to protect Three Mile Island

(TMI) and Peach Bottom Atomic Power Station. Among our findings: A quarter of the Pennsylvania National Guard soldiers are not trained in their specific military jobs, and a high-ranking Guard official suspended physical fitness training for full-time guardsmen to increase readiness numbers. In putting the fitness program on hold, the Guard official violated army regulations. We also reported that the state's National Guard troops called to protect its 16 commercial airports following the September 11th attacks were given minimal guidance on what to look for if someone tried to breach security. The 160 guardsmen who patrolled the airports reacted to or resolved 78 incidents, including checkpoint closures, security breaches, and armed and unruly passengers between October 1, 2001 to May 31, 2002; guardsmen backing up law enforcement at Pittsburgh International Airport experienced turf battles with screeners and the Allegheny County Police, and officials removed five soldiers from duty for disciplinary reasons.

- We obtained the NRC's Nuclear Materials Event Database. The commission uses this database to track the use of radioactive matter and equipment used to handle it. Six companies with ties to York County, including TMI, are listed in the database. Among the findings: 15 Pennsylvania companies

had radioactive events classified as abnormal by the NRC—meaning it was an incident posing a possible risk to public health and safety; the NRC investigated York Hospital three times for events ranging from broken equipment to the wrong injection of radioactive medicine, and the NRC inspected TMI Unit 1 in 1991 for the overexposure of two workers who handled fuel debris and in 2001 for a worn tower assembly.

- In response to an FOIA request, the Federal Aviation Administration provided 61 Investigation of Pilot Deviation Reports from September 11, 2001 to January 31, 2002. The reports showed pilots, several from York County, violated an expanded no-fly zone over Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland not far from the Pennsylvania state line.
- From 1990 through April 2002, 128 pilots nationwide violated FAA drug or alcohol regulations, including four from Pennsylvania who lost their licenses, according to information gathered through an FOIA request. A York County resident and former general aviation pilot was among those to be stripped of his license. ■ —R.W.

To view more York Daily Record/Sunday News's FOIA-based stories, go to www.ydr.com/foi.

release the information. We also had to learn how to file appeals. A significant number of appeals, in that case, resulted finally in the release of information.

Making FOIA a Reporting Routine

One critical lesson the York Daily Record's staff learned from its recent coverage of the 1969 riots and September 11th is that it is best to be familiar

with how to file an FOIA request before information is actually needed. Several Web sites, including the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, post sample letters or have an FOIA-letter generator. To write a letter, reporters fill in the blanks and click.

Some requests are denied because people don't know what or how to ask the government for records. To learn more about the process, the York Daily Record's reporters sent FOIA requests to

various government agencies and asked to look at FOIA request logs. Those logs showed what types of records the agencies kept and what types of information the paper could reasonably expect to receive.

Reporters also learned to think in a different way. If the federal government issued a report, staffers looked at the footnotes to see if there was a survey or a database that was involved in the publication's preparation. If so,

we filed an FOIA request for that raw information.

We discovered, too, that the government has a form for everything, so we started to look for the appropriate form names associated with topics we were interested in. Reporters then filed FOIA requests for those forms.

In 2002, the York Daily Record set as its goal the filing of 250 FOIA requests. Each FOIA request is a lesson in how the process works and how to use the act successfully.

We met our goal and, along the way, staff members wrote several stories based on what we found out from those requests. Or we were able to bolster reporting on other articles with information the paper received from these federal documents.

Though we work with daily deadlines and breaking news, staff members are urged to always think long term and about follow-up stories the paper might want to publish. Making an FOIA request at the York Daily Record is no longer a goal. It is part of our routine. Persistence and patience are traits we've developed in pursuing information through the FOIA process. From experience we know that an FOIA request filed today most likely means we won't publish a story using the information we are able to get for a month or even a year from now. Reporters at the paper are still receiving information from FOIA requests the paper made following the September 11th attacks.

On July 2, 2002, then-Pennsylvania Governor Mark Schweiker signed the Right-To-Know (RTK) act, the first update to the state's open-records law since 1957. The multiyear fight for better open records in our state's antiquated law is one that former York Daily Record editor/publisher, Dennis Hetzel, spearheaded as chairman of the Pennsylvania Newspaper Association's Government Affairs Committee. After this new law was signed, reporters at the paper applied the lessons we'd learned from filing FOIA's. We created a RTK form letter to use when filing state requests, and when state or local officials dragged their feet on the paper's requests, we employed the same strategies—with the



State police stand ready with weapons during a security alert at Three Mile Island. October 2001. *Photo by Bil Bowden/York Daily Record/Sunday News.*

same persistence—so that the paper could prevail.

York Daily Record reporters now understand the value in making such requests and how the information we are able to get serves as a vital reporting tool. The paper dedicates a section on its Web site (www.ydr.com) to FOIA reporting; stories based on information from an FOIA request are labeled. The paper also places information on its Web site to let readers know how they can use FOIA or RTK to obtain their own records.

The government's reaction to the events of September 11th altered the boundaries of what information can be released under FOIA. However, the law itself has not changed. York Daily Record staff members continue to file FOIA requests, and we still receive information. And when reporters' requests are denied, the paper appeals. Staffers look at the specific exemption cited and challenge the government's logic for the denial. Often, the paper's appeals are successful.

Filing an FOIA request should not be a last-resort reporting tool. Reporters who routinely file such requests are often rewarded with thick envelopes with information they would not have otherwise received. ■

Rob Walters is the business editor, computer-assisted reporting editor, and investigative projects editor for the York Daily Record/Sunday News. Contributing to this article were York Daily Record/Sunday News staff members Sharon Smith, Sean Adkins, and Michelle Starr. The newspaper received back-to-back John V.R. Bull Freedom of Information Awards in 2002 and 2003—Pennsylvania's top Right to Know honor. The paper's FOIA work also earned the Pennsylvania Newspaper Association's public service award in 2003, and it was an Investigative Reporters and Editors' Freedom of Information Award finalist in 2003 and 2004.

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Foreign Correspondence

While traditional Western foreign correspondents are decreasing in number at many news organizations, their work is not becoming extinct, but is “evolving into new forms,” argue **John Maxwell Hamilton**, dean of theanship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University and a former foreign correspondent, and **Eric Jenner**, former international editor of The New York Times’s Web page. They describe this situation by highlighting the increased use of locally based journalists to gather news and computer technology that influences the quality and delivery of foreign news. They also urge news organizations to embrace change. “Looking only backward at this old model keeps us from making the new correspondence as useful as it could be in elevating American understanding of an increasingly complicated and hostile world,” they write.

Fons Tuinstra, a Dutch foreign correspondent based in Shanghai, explores the topic of foreign correspondence through what he observes happening in China. The Internet, he writes, is becoming “the dominant information provider for academics, the international business community, and journalists,” at a time when the rate of postings of new foreign correspondents to this thriving Chinese city is slowing, the resources given them to do their jobs are declining, and “interest in publishing what foreign correspondents have to report is falling, too.” He concludes by suggesting that Weblogs offer a possible new approach to publishing foreign news, even though most lack a sustainable revenue source. Tuinstra also responds to a Nieman Reports’ article about censorship of the Internet in China.

Reporting on North Korea

Former CNN Tokyo and Beijing bureau chief **Rebecca MacKinnon** describes why she launched her Weblog about North Korea (www.NKzone.org) and how it has developed. During her fellowship at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics & Public Policy at Harvard University, she used her Weblog work to examine “how online, interactive, participatory forms of media might enhance or improve ways in which international news is consumed and reported.” She explores similarities and differences between Weblogs and journalism. What she does with her Weblog, she writes, is “a raw, unvarnished form [of journalism] that still makes many professional journalists uncomfortable . . .”

Thomas Omestad, a senior writer at U.S. News & World Report, wrote the magazine’s cover story about North Korea’s political prisons, and he explains how the article was reported, including essential interviews with gulag survivors. “We felt that the story of the gulag should be told in human terms—from the viewpoint of the victims,” he says. Freelance photojournalist **Dermot Tatlow** had a rare opportunity to visually record life in North Korea, and his images and words speak to what he experienced and saw. He writes about many restrictions he encountered. “I knew I’d have to find the delicate balance of getting photographs the news organizations wanted to publish and not getting expelled prematurely.” **Barbara Demick**, Seoul bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times, tells how she reports on North Korea, a country shrouded in extreme secrecy, by “exploring around the edges,” seeking out defectors and North Korean experts in South Korea, and learning from the tiny expatriate community (aid workers, diplomats) who live in North Korea. ■

Foreign Correspondence: Evolution, Not Extinction

‘The new correspondents are reshaping foreign news in ways that have potential for good and, without interventions, for bad.’

By John Maxwell Hamilton and Eric Jenner

The foreign correspondent, Bernard Cohen observed in his 1960’s classic book “The Press and Foreign Policy,” is “a cosmopolitan among cosmopolitans, a man in gray flannel who ranks very high in the hierarchy of reporters.” Correspondents talk to heads of state and dine on the Via Veneto, while colleagues back home toil under the watchful eye of editors. “Twice as many foreign correspondents as Main Street journalists have attended private colleges and four times as many have graduate degrees,” according to a 1996 study by Stephen Hess of the Brookings Institution.

This image of the foreign correspondent continues to have *some* relevance. The traditional foreign correspondent remains elite, perhaps even more so than in the past. After all, their numbers are decreasing, a trend often expressed in Darwinian terms. “While there are still correspondents based abroad,” former foreign correspondent and media critic Marvin Kalb noted, “the genre known as ‘foreign correspondent’ is becoming extinct.”

But the image is misleading, too. Foreign correspondence is no longer the exclusive province of the traditional trench coat-wearing journalist, covering news for a network or major print outlet. New varieties of foreign correspondents have emerged, some of whom scarcely consider themselves journalists.

Foreign correspondence is not becoming extinct. But it is evolving into new forms.

The New Foreign Correspondents

The first of these new journalists is the *foreign* foreign correspondent. Edi-

tors and producers have traditionally worried about their reporters “going native,” a newsroom term to describe reporters out of touch with the home audience. To guard against this, news organizations have made minimal use of foreign nationals—until recently.

A single foreign correspondent costs a newspaper around \$250,000 a year. Broadcast foreign correspondents, who have agents to negotiate their salaries and need technical support to do their reporting, cost far more. The obvious solution for bottom-line conscious news executives is to use more foreign journalists. Only 31 percent of correspondents for American media overseas are American, according to a recent survey led by a colleague, Denis Wu. This is a sharp decline from the early 1990’s, when another scholar working off a similar database found about 65 percent were American.

Growing global interdependence is another factor changing the nature of foreign reporting. The old-fashioned view is that foreign news is foreign and local news is local, and people want more of the latter and less of the former. In a world of porous borders, however, the lines between foreign and domestic blur for news just as they blur for commerce, health, culture and the environment. Local farmers and agricultural extension agents pay close attention to the ups and downs of foreign markets for crops; local entrepreneurs identify opportunities abroad; communities declare themselves nuclear free zones, and state development authorities send delegations to monitor and lobby international trade negotiators.

While local media have a long way to go before adequately mining such stories, reporting of them is on the

rise. Eighty-six percent of editors in a 2002 study conducted by the Pew International Journalism Program said that companies in their community had overseas investments. Of those who noted these foreign connections, 50 percent regularly or fairly regularly covered these stories. Similar responses were given for stories about immigrants, university connections abroad, and foreign business and investment in the community.

“We’re in a new era now in which the ambiguity in what is international and what is not international is very great,” veteran Washington Post foreign correspondent Don Oberdorfer said. “Say[ing] that if the news isn’t coming from overseas then it’s not international, we’re misleading ourselves.”

Meanwhile, as international travel has become cheaper and more convenient, local television and newspaper organizations are sending reporters abroad on short-term assignments. In the Pew International Journalism Program study mentioned above, foreign editors at 39 of the 81 largest newspapers had used parachute journalists; so had seven of the 72 editors representing the smaller newspapers. To increase such reporting even more, the International Center for Journalists has launched a program sending reporters from medium and small media markets abroad to look for foreign links to their communities.

Local foreign correspondence challenges assumptions about the much-maligned concept of “parachute journalism.” Critics object that parachute journalism is simply a way to avoid the costs of posting correspondents abroad permanently. Whatever the merits of that argument for networks and major newspapers, it does not hold for local

news operations, which never had permanent foreign correspondents in the first place. Local parachute journalists add to foreign coverage, rather than detract from it.

The Assist From Computers

Yet another factor altering the landscape of foreign reporting is new media technologies, which have lowered the economic barriers of entry to publishing and broadcasting. The Internet has made it possible for media companies to create special “wires” they can retail at a premium.

An obvious example is Bloomberg. Its news service has about 255 print and 100 radio and television journalists inside the United States and far more—1,000 print and 200 broadcast—outside. Given the quality of its financial reporting, its audience pays a premium to receive high-quality, specialized news in real time over their Bloomberg terminals: \$1,650 for a single terminal per month or \$1,285 a month per terminal if the client has more than one.

Because 50 percent of Bloomberg’s subscribers are outside the United States, it is misleading to call its reporters foreign correspondents. A Bloomberg reporter writing on soybeans from China is a foreign correspondent to the subscriber in New York but a local reporter to the subscriber in Beijing. Although Bloomberg—which is privately held—will not provide detailed financial information the way traditional media will, interviews with executives suggest that the extensive use of local reporters overseas, plus advantageous economies of scale resulting from the large number of correspondents employed, lower overall per-correspondent costs.

Yet another kind of foreign correspondence is in-house news and information gathering. Virtually every global corporation these days has a computer-linked network in which “staff reporters” provide original information as well as news summaries to employees around the world. Federal Express has what it calls FedEx TV, which delivers video on demand to employees. “This is what you would have read if you had

time to read the paper when you came in the morning,” says Richard D. Badler, senior vice president for corporate communications at Unisys.

Some journalistic purists might want to dismiss such entities as unrelated to news. But corporations place a premium on exactly what journalists value—accurate and timely information. This is why corporations often hire journalists to do the work. Says one modern corporate executive responsible for in-house reporting, “It’s all about ‘I’ve got news.’” Purists also should keep in mind that Reuters and Havas started out as services for embassies, government agencies, banks and other businesses.

A third kind of technology-driven foreign correspondence is do-it-yourself reporting. With groups and individuals able to post information on Web sites, anybody can be a publisher or, for that matter, a reporter. Salam Pax is a timely example. In early 2003, this self-described 29-year-old Iraqi architect posted reports on the conditions of Baghdad, his beleaguered hometown. His Web site “Where is Raed?” provided some of the most vivid and personal dispatches in the lead-up to war. Although there was much speculation as to whether Pax was a fictitious character dreamed up by Mossad or CIA propagandists, freelance journalist Peter Maass verified that the person who called himself “Salam Pax” was indeed real and had worked for him as a translator in Iraq.

“Today and in the future,” veteran network foreign correspondent Garrick Utley observed, “anyone sending information from one country to another is a de facto foreign correspondent. The number of correspondents, accredited or not, will rapidly increase. Equipped with camcorders and computers, they will send out and receive more foreign dispatches.”

Internet users in many countries can easily gather news right at home simply by surfing the Web. In so doing they create another new kind of foreign correspondent, the foreign local correspondent. That is a reporter in India writing for an Indian daily, whose work

is read over the Internet by a resident of Indianapolis.

Implications

Contrary to all the handwringing, the traditional foreign correspondent is not facing extinction. The normal pattern of foreign correspondence, beginning with the Spanish-American War, is marked by bursts of coverage, usually because of a major conflict, followed by a decline in reportage. True to this pattern, news media sent large numbers of reporters into the Iraq War.

What is changing is the arrival of many new varieties of foreign reporters. The new correspondents are reshaping foreign news in ways that have potential for good and, without interventions, for bad.

Increasing the amount of foreign news is potentially good. Understanding local connections to the rest of the world has the potential of creating more interest in foreign affairs among average Americans. Seeing events overseas from the perspective of other countries, something that might occur with greater use of *foreign* foreign correspondents, is equally valuable if we are to build constructive international relationships.

But we must also worry about the quality of that news. Local foreign correspondents with no experience abroad are less likely to appreciate nuances of foreign affairs. And do-it-yourself foreign correspondents are less likely to be trained for reporting. Even if many do have fidelity to unearthing facts and placing them in a fair context (rather than transmitting more biased reporting), how can the Internet subscriber know which ones don’t?

Nor can we assume that these new varieties of foreign correspondence will reach a broad audience. The result may be just the opposite, with a growing gap between information haves and information have-nots. Corporations and individuals who can afford expensive newsgathering staffs and advanced media technology have a big advantage.

Traditional journalists—and journal-

ism educators—are tempted to dismiss these new varieties of foreign correspondents as insignificant upstarts of little consequence. This is reminiscent of those mid-19th century owners who dismissed the penny press only to be rendered obsolete themselves. The better approach is to think seriously about how to train men and women to fill these new correspondent roles. No longer can a beginning reporter think he or she will only be covering local news. We need, too, to develop best practice models and to prepare our

citizens to be intelligent consumers so they can separate best practices from bad ones.

The traditional elite correspondent working for a major network, national magazine, or major daily newspaper no longer has hegemony over foreign news. Looking only backward at this old model keeps us from making the new foreign correspondence as useful as it could be in elevating American understanding of an increasingly complicated and hostile world. ■

John Maxwell Hamilton, dean of the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University and a former foreign correspondent, worked on this essay as a fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, & Public Policy at Harvard University. Eric Jenner, former international editor of The New York Times's Web page, is a doctoral student at LSU. A version of this article is in Journalism (August 2004).

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Caught Between the Cold War and the Internet

How foreign news will be covered is a question—with a few possible answers.

By Fons Tuinstra

What is happening to foreign correspondents—those envied reporters who travel to where the news is happening and relay it back home? From here in Shanghai, China it is clear that what used to be is no longer.

In the summer of 2003, at the Shanghai Foreign Correspondents Club, a discussion with Graham Earnshaw, who is the editor in chief of Xinhua Finance News (XFN), provided a wake-up call to any of our members who might be thinking the good old days of foreign correspondence might yet return.

For most of his 30 years in Asia, Earnshaw worked for Reuters as an Asian correspondent. After retiring from the news service in the late 1990's, Earnshaw signed on with XFN. (Xinhua, which is the official newswire of the Chinese government, is a minority shareholder in XFN.) Earnshaw predicted, not surprisingly, that XFN would succeed as a conveyor of financial news. But his other prediction was a bit more startling to hear: He said he believed that both Reuters and Bloomberg would become obsolete in two to three years, because since the end of the 1990's both of them had been losing their technological competitive advantage of being able

to deliver news in real time to their customers.

The Internet, he went on to say, now made it possible for others, including XFN, to do the same kind of newsgathering at a lesser cost. The worldwide operation of the older newswires—deploying a high number of journalists—is too high of a burden, Earnshaw argued. Revenue streams in many places were being reduced to a trickle, and this meant that much of the overall news operation was having to be subsidized by work in the more profitable financial markets.

XFN's focus is on only those lucrative financial markets, and it puts reporters in place in markets where it makes commercial sense (not journalistic sense). It follows that if this kind of selective placement is happening at places like XFN, then this competition erodes the more profitable sections of the market for traditional financial newswires. "Nobody is interested in the financial market in Indonesia, so why should we put somebody there?" Earnshaw said, "There is even hardly any interest in Japan."

Earnshaw expressed little concern for what news might not get reported. "I do not care," he replied to a ques-

tion about missed news. "I'm in it for the money."

A View From Shanghai and Beyond

That summer I also canceled my subscription to the Far Eastern Economic Review. It had been my last subscription for a print publication. From that point on, for a subscription fee of \$15 per month, Shanghai Telecom would deliver all the information I needed through my broadband connection. But Shanghai Telecom is not paying the bills of any reporter I know. If everyone did as I was doing, who would pay my bills for reporting the news?

During the past five years in China the Internet has developed into the dominant information provider for academics, the international business community, and journalists. One reason for this is that getting print media sent from outside of China requires its recipient to pay a heavy import surcharge to the Chinese monopoly in charge of bringing them into the country. Censorship of Web sites, by the government, has also been fairly easy to circumvent. In the larger cities, broadband is treated by the Chinese government as a utility like the

water supply and, by 2004, a quarter of the 80 million Chinese Internet users were using broadband, double the number in the United States.

These changes were happening at the same time the number of foreign correspondents in Shanghai—the largest and most thriving city in China—did not go up substantially, and the resources

they had to do their jobs were declining. At first, we blamed the economic crisis, and then we looked to the major international events (September 11th, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq), and that gave us reason to believe we were living in extraordinary times that would return to normal when these crises were over.

China and the Internet: A Reader Responds

“Is Internet censorship worth fighting?” Jonathan Zittrain asks in his article, “China and Internet Filters,” in the Summer edition of *Nieman Reports*. While the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School, which Zittrain helped to create, has done important work in documenting how China’s filtering and blocking technology work to regulate the flow of certain information, this article gives a misleading impression of how this situation is playing out in China today.

Unlike what Zittrain suggests, daily Internet experiences in China are not substantially hampered by the technological features used as censoring devices. Older URL-blocks can be easily circumvented. In fact, learning how to do this is one of the first things university students in China do when they go online, and they do this for a very practical reason: unless they find ways to circumvent the “financial block” they will be forced to pay one renminbi per hour (the equivalent of 12 cents) to surf the Internet.

When the Chinese government instituted a new censorship system of Internet filters in the summer of 2002, it caused so much economic damage that it had to be toned down, which meant that in reality the filters blocked very little. The way the system worked was to automatically disconnect the user for half an hour whenever it noticed a banned word. This system also applied to e-mail, so even a minor e-mail offensive by, for example, the banned religious group Falun Gong, could bring

the whole Internet to a standstill. From the Chinese perspective, such an occurrence would be counterproductive. So after about a month and a half of this attempt at censorship, we no longer noticed filters except during short times around sessions of the National People’s Congress and the anniversary of Tiananmen Square.

Now, unlike two years ago, I can’t find any banned English words, and in Chinese such words are easily circumvented by using one of that language’s many homonyms. A valuable lesson I find in this is the failure of technology to control the Internet. However, the Internet remains very much a technologically driven industry in which the fallibility of its engineering is still not a much-discussed subject.

Internet censorship in China is something that must be put in a broader context of all that is happening in this country. Changes in policies, like a recent fling into banning service providers that host Weblogs, indicate trends that are well worth watching, and that is the value the Berkman Center brings in its ongoing efforts to document these activities. But how these Internet policies impact the daily life of most Chinese citizens, just as in the case with so many other regulations in China, is rather marginal. Asking media companies to flock to the barricades in a fight against such Internet blocks might therefore not be that effective. ■

*Fons Tuinstra
Shanghai, China*

In the meantime, colleagues working in Shanghai and Beijing joined emerging low-budget local media operations or trade publications to survive the crisis. Others widened their beats to other parts of Asia, even while budgets were curtailed. And China, the hottest story in Asia, didn’t experience its anticipated substantial gain in foreign correspondents. In Shanghai, the official number of foreign correspondents went up by a dozen during the past three years (to about 70 by the end of 2003), a still minuscule number compared with those in other large financial centers.

Depressing anecdotes accompanied the new arrivals. The Dutch correspondent of *de Volkskrant*, a major daily, arrived in January 2004 and was working with one third of his predecessor’s budget. His paper closed its operations in Africa and India and was sold in March 2004 to a London-based investment bank that wanted to bring the daily paper to the stock market, and more cost cuts are anticipated. Smaller countries tended to eliminate much of their foreign-based staff, while others maintained a marginal presence. Swedish media recalled their China correspondents in 2002. In March 2004, the BBC decided to close its renowned program “East Asia Today.” And during 2003 and 2004 there were worrisome signs of similar declines in the number of foreign correspondents and the resources given to them in other places in Asia.

Interest in publishing what foreign correspondents have to report is falling, too. *Il Manifesto*’s long-serving Southeast Asian correspondent, Pio d’Emilia, who works out of Tokyo, says the number of stories he wrote for his paper decreased dramatically from 1997 (207 articles)—his record year—to 87 articles in 2002. He is the only remaining Italian correspondent in Tokyo after more than half a dozen Italian reporters left during the 1990’s. “Our paper has only two pages for foreign news,” says d’Emilia. “They prefer to have breaking news and not the stories I can write about the changes in the Japanese middle class.”

Of course, while places in Asia experience a slackening of growth in numbers

of foreign correspondents, Brussels, for example, welcomes many new ones due to the presence of NATO and the European Union (E.U.). "Each new member state in Europe means about 30 new colleagues here in Brussels," says Marc van Impe, chairman of the Belgium Press Institute in Brussels. "I get at least three calls per week of new colleagues coming here." But much of the news out of Brussels is domestic European news, which means that dispatches about the developments in the E.U. replace reports from the respective capitals in Europe, so in some ways these journalists are not really *foreign* correspondents.

In Europe, it seems that only the Financial Times has the clout necessary to keep its foreign operations thriving. The United Kingdom has nine national papers and the Netherlands six, which are relatively large numbers compared with the United States, and though many of them still cover international news independently, their foreign news operations are falling back very fast. A few of the larger, established news organizations—especially in the United States—like The New York Times and The Associated Press (AP) are moving against these trends. "In the decade I've worked for The New York Times the number of foreign correspondents has actually grown from 30 to 50," observed Howard French, a long-time Times's foreign correspondent, in a lecture he gave at Temple University in Tokyo. In part, the Times's foreign coverage is supported by its successful syndication service.

The AP provides a major part of the online stories that print media publish worldwide. In theory, the Internet allows unprecedented access to online stories throughout the world and to the varying perspectives—from radical Islamic voices to the official views of the Chinese government. But increasingly the AP has become the dominant international newswire—the McDonalds of foreign newsgathering—and there is not much room for diversity in its menu.

Aside from the AP, the outlook for newswires is grim. The German Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA) is on

its way out, with no serious syndication outside Germany, and it is now losing customers in Germany, too. The French Agence France-Presse (AFP) is doing much better in terms of international content syndication but will only survive as long as the French government is prepared to annually pay 30 percent of its costs. Even French patriotism might have its limits. Reuters is struggling and announced it will outsource part of its journalistic work to India, after already outsourcing its information technology departments there.

Enter the Internet

Since the end of the cold war, news has become more of a commodity, and the Internet has made this more visible than ever. With the disappearance of the ideological conflict between capitalism and Communism, news organizations found it easier to close down expensive foreign posts. This decline has been particularly evident in broadcast media in which American networks led the way in markedly reducing their staff foreign postings.

The work done by foreign correspondents is now also in the forefront of changes triggered by the proliferation of the Internet. When XFN's managing director Graham Earnshaw was asked in August 2003 what he considered a viable alternative for the traditional network of foreign correspondents, he came up with the concept of "cottage journalism." In using the word "cottage," he is referring back to how the textile industry operated in preindustrial Britain, before the industrial revolution. Mass industrialization pushed cottage industry out of the production process. In his view, with the Internet, we might soon witness in the media a return to the cottage industry model.

In the September 2003 issue of Foreign Affairs, John Maxwell Hamilton writes about Weblogs as presenting a possible alternative for the classic arrangement of foreign correspondence. [See Hamilton's story on page 98.] In the United States the "blogosphere" is developing very fast, as it is in a few other countries. There are still many

countries, of course, where most people are not connected to the Internet, and so this makes its use as a mass communication tool still problematic there. But already, in places like Iran and Iraq, some bloggers have shown how the Internet can be a powerful tool in providing the kind of frontline information that traditional news media aren't able to obtain.

Entering the blogosphere can be like entering a new and different country, not too much different from the feeling I had when I visited China for the first time and dealt with a different culture and language. In the summer of 2003, as I read about and talked with people about how Weblogs might be used in this way, European and Asian colleagues wondered if I was speaking a new language. When I used words like "narrow media" and Weblog, it was clear that for many of them these were new concepts. As I traveled the world, trying to learn more about the Internet and the role it might be able to play in foreign reporting, I found that new journalistic approaches to managing the information and news that get produced are lacking, as are ways of packaging it for audiences. And the target audiences may no longer be the mass audiences of the past but narrower groupings of news consumers.

I located some emerging Internet initiatives on foreign news. Many of the ones I found are even less mature than Weblogs themselves, but they might be what will be needed to replace the reporting work of the vanishing corps of foreign correspondents. Former CNN Beijing and Tokyo bureau chief, Rebecca MacKinnon, for example, recently set up a Weblog that shares news and information about North Korea. [See MacKinnon's story on page 103.] With her blog, MacKinnon creates an interactive exchange of news and information that she and members of her blog's community post. On occasion, she will offer analysis to help put information into context. Her Weblog is an example of how solid journalism and Weblogs can combine to create another source of foreign news.

What hampers development in this

direction is finding ways to commercially finance this kind of reporting, information gathering, and dissemination. While MacKinnon's blog on North Korea is exciting—and informative—as a journalistic project, the classic revenue stream from advertisements and readers are not yet there, though some Webloggers have developed a donated funding stream from members of their online community.

Another service, like allafrica.com, brings together news reporting on Africa that depends on using mostly traditional media, unlike what MacKinnon does with her Weblog. While such a site is useful as a packager of news from an underreported region of the world, it lacks the assets that Weblogs possess—the ability to capture wide diversity of opinion that is expressed with the emotion, some would say passion, which bloggers often bring to their work and traditional media avoid.

On the other hand, an Internet entity like indymedia.org, which claims to have 60,000 “foreign correspondents” who post reports and talk online about anti-globalization events and media, has its own inherent problems. Opinions expressed on this site—while filled with passion—are closely related to those of the anti-globalization movement, and what gets reported doesn't come with the reliability of well-reported news. A similar model is used by the Web site livinginchina.com, an English language site that has expanded its news and information gathering into India, Latin America, and Europe. Although this site does not have a tendency toward ideological leanings, it also lacks a sustainable revenue model and uses no journalists either as reporters of news or as managers.

Given the Internet's potential, this is where foreign news journalists might start looking for ways to employ their

mixture of reporting skills to figure out how to better use this new technology to inform audiences. They might not reach the mainstream audiences to which they are accustomed to delivering the news. But they might reach well-defined niche audiences willing to pay for news and information gathering that they can depend on and trust. ■

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Blogging North Korea

The Web provides a good opportunity for ‘niche’ audiences to find more international news.

By Rebecca MacKinnon

It's not every day that one gets an e-mail from “Special Delegation—DPR of Korea.” Mr. Alejandro Cao de Benos—a Spanish-born North Korean citizen and Special Delegate to the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea—regretted to inform me that I was not welcome to visit his adopted country.

Mr. Cao de Benos is a gatekeeper of sorts for people who want to get into North Korea. (Why this Barcelona native decided to become a North Korean citizen and representative of the North Korean government is another story.) The door into North Korea has been shut to American journalists since mid-2002, thanks to tense relations

between Pyongyang and Washington. While it is possible for non-American journalists, tourists and businesspeople to visit, American visitors are generally not welcome.

Hoping for an exception, I had e-mailed Cao de Benos to ask if I might apply to join an international group of peace activists and journalists that he planned to take to North Korea in July. I introduced myself as a former CNN reporter with experience covering North Korea, now a freelance journalist running a Weblog on North Korea at www.NKzone.org. His response: “I decided to allow the possibility of ‘fair journalism’ to those individuals and companies with a clean record on information about

North Korea. Unfortunately the line you decided to take is the same like many others that talk and comment so much about our government and system without real knowledge. NKzone is contributing to the jungle of lies sponsored by Washington.”

His main beef: NKzone had recently featured an interview with the German doctor and North Korean human rights activist Norbert Vollertsen, as well as other information provided by him about activities condemning the North Korean government for its human rights abuses. In the view of Cao de Benos, “fair journalism” about the DPRK requires omitting the perspective of such human rights activists.

Creating an 'Information Community'

Despite the fact that a North Korean government official labeled my Weblog a "jungle of lies," North Korea zone aspires to be a new form of alternative media. It aims to provide a place in cyberspace for the exchange of information, opinion and analysis on North Korea—one of the most badly covered countries on earth, thanks to officials like Cao de Benos. If North Korea did not possess nuclear weapons, the implications of this lack of coverage might not be so dire. But as the United States faces difficult options in its efforts to disarm North Korea, the lack of knowledge—or even basic verifiable information about that country—could have serious national security implications.

NKzone was launched in February 2004 as part of my project for the Shorenstein Center for the Press, Politics, & Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, examining how online, interactive, participatory forms of media might enhance or improve the ways in which international news is consumed and reported. For commercial reasons, American newspapers, magazines and TV news outlets have limited space for international news. The Internet provides an opportunity for people who want more information about what is going on around the world to find it—and a cheaper way for news organizations, interest groups, or amateur enthusiasts to deliver it.

But the Internet does more than provide a new, more cost-effective and convenient vehicle for news and information. New interactive techniques and Weblog software tools are changing what used to be a one-way "lecture" given by the broadcaster or publisher to the passive reader or viewer into a two-way conversation. In fact, as a Weblog author I have ceased to use the word "audience" to describe the people who read my blog posts, add their own comments in reaction, send me e-mails with information, and link their own Weblogs and Web sites to NKzone. Instead, I call them my "information community." They are by no means a passive audience.

As a foreign correspondent who has long been concerned about the mainstream media's shrinking appetite for international news, it is my hope that new forms of participatory media such as Weblogs can enable the public not only to have greater access to information and debates about international events, but also to become more directly engaged with news from faraway places. By building a worldwide information community of people interested in learning more about a particular place or issue than is possible through the mainstream media and then engaging in a conversation with that community, Weblogs may be an effective new tool for making events in distant countries more relevant and interesting.

The NKzone Weblog

NKzone was created using TypePad, a Weblog-software and hosting service. It is one of many commercial Weblog tools available that require no previous Web design or HTML coding skills or programming knowledge. Using this service, I was able to quickly and easily post daily updates to the Weblog. These updates included hyperlinks to sources of news about North Korea elsewhere on the Web: primarily English-language articles from non-U.S. specialists, and obscure media sources with more extensive information and analysis about North Korea than one would generally find in *The New York Times* or on CNN.

Often I added my own analysis of North Korea-related news developments, based on my experience as a journalist who has worked in northeast Asia for more than a decade. (I covered the North Korea story as part of my beat and had the opportunity to visit North Korea five times.) Most importantly, I invited anybody who has traveled to North Korea or who has engaged in the study of that country to share their information and analysis. I quickly began to receive daily e-mails from people around the world with links and documents they hoped I would include on NKzone.

Because of the lack of Western media access to North Korea, many

nonjournalists have greater insights to that secretive country than journalists do. No single journalist can hope to adequately shine the light into North Korea's vast information black hole. The idea behind NKzone is that the collective effort—a combination of professional journalists, other experts, and informed amateurs—might do a better job. My goal was to tap into these people's knowledge and expertise by inviting them to contribute in one of three ways: by e-mailing information that I could then post onto NKzone; by joining an online discussion in the Weblog's "comments" section following each post (type text into a "comments" box and hit a button that says "post"), or by becoming a "guest author" with pass codes enabling them to post information directly onto the main column of NKzone—a status granted only to those who I determine are in a position to contribute original and clear insights on North Korea.

Opinions posted in the "comments" sections have ranged from extremely pro-engagement to hard-line pro-regime change. Occasionally there are strong online arguments. I've had to admonish people who trade personal insults in the comments section, but have not censored a single comment or post. (That is, except for "comment spam," solicitous and off-topic comments aimed at promoting other people's Web sites or products, similar in nature to e-mail spam.)

As of this writing, NKzone—which is not advertised or commercially promoted in any way—receives an average of 500 unique visitors per day, according to a software program that helps monitor Web site traffic. Approximately 200 more people receive daily updates of NKzone's content through an e-mail subscription list, and an unknown number receive the updated content through RSS (Really Simple Syndication) aggregator programs—software tools that distill updated content from large numbers of Weblogs and news sites onto one Web browser page.

With the help of a software tracking program and a voluntary online survey of nearly 200 people, I found that about half of NKzone's community

is in North America, with about one quarter in East Asia and a substantial number in Western Europe. Roughly 25 percent of those surveyed claimed that some aspect of their job relates to North Korea. Others indicate a range of professional or personal reasons why they feel a need to become better informed about North Korea.

How do people find out about NKzone? According to both the voluntary survey and the Sitemeter tracking program, the majority of NKzone's community initially came to it in one of three ways. One very common way is through a Google search. In mid-July, "North Korea zone" was item number eight on the first search results page for a Google search on the term "North Korea"—beating North Korea's official news agency, which was number 10. The second most common way that people come to NKzone is through the growing number of other Web sites and Weblogs that link to it. Third is essentially "word of mouth:" for instance, when one respected scholar who writes about North Korea sends out an e-mail recommending NKzone to a list of other scholars and journalists interested in North Korea.

The NKzone community appears to be quite loyal: 30 percent of survey respondents said they access the site daily, while nearly 28 percent visit "a few times a week." What do they like about NKzone? One respondent wrote: "I like the policy of allowing people of all viewpoints to have their say. NKzone allows me to access news on NK that otherwise would take a lot of digging. Given the small amount of time I have for reading news, it's likely that I would get very little news on NK if it wasn't for NKzone aggregating it for me."

In response to the question, "What does North Korea zone do for you that you're not getting from newspapers, magazines, TV or conventional news Web sites?" One person replied: "A lot! In fact, most of the media sources are too busy ignoring one of the most repressive regimes in the world." Another wrote: "Conventional media has next to nothing about the DPRK beyond mentioning that Kim Jong Il is a madman or that they're starving but have a very

North Korea zone
A zone for discussion and information exchange about North Korea

August 18, 2004

NK food prices & hunger concerns
by Rebecca MacKenzie @ 11:32 PM in Food Aid

Despite North Korea's recent claim that it no longer needs U.N. food aid, U.N. officials warn that food prices are skyrocketing under recent reforms and that many could go hungry in the coming year. The Voice of America quotes the World Food Program's Richard Ragan:

"Unfortunately people who live in the urban environment, who have worked in the industrial sector and who've been almost wholly dependent on the public distribution system, are the ones having the most difficult time right now."

There is a similar report from the BBC.

However, the IHT quotes Ragan as pointing out that, thanks to an increase in donations from Japan, Russia, and the U.S., the WFP will have enough food to feed its target 6.5 million recipients for "the rest of the year and beyond." The WFP targets the most needy groups: children, the elderly, and childbearing women.

Comments (2) | TrackBack (0)

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ABOUT NKZONE
Banner photo: Chuck D'Elia
This is a "blog-zone" on North Korea: an interactive site that lets you stay informed and also lets you share what YOU know about North Korea with other people around the world. Have you been to North Korea? Do you know people who have? Do you have information and insights about North Korea that you'd like to share? Please share your knowledge with NKzone. Email: nkzone@earthlink.net
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About Dr. Leslie
Techies

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All Headline Feeds
- North Korea
- News and Headlines
All: Weather/Climate - Also Local Weather
Climate/Stand on Verge of Disappearing in Global Market
Has North Korea Changed Its Plans on North Korea Solution?
Chongju City Abandoned
Question That Came Arising in Chinese History
UN's Park Wonjo Commends Activities Included in Investigation
North Korea Talks with UN, Other UN
Web search for North Korea powered by Feedburner
TRINK News Updates
Japan requests U.S. cooperation for satellite launch

The homepage of the NKzone Weblog.

big army. I want to know what makes them tick, and I pick some of that up via NKzone." Yet another respondent hit upon the value of media listening to and conversing with its information community, as opposed to just talking at the audience: "You can see nonexperts' views here. Of course, it's experts and politicians who make all the policies regarding North Korea. However, they have to persuade those nonexperts first before they do anything about North Korea. In that sense, we have to pay more attention to nonexperts' views."

This is a niche community, not a mass audience. But the hope is that NKzone can serve as a resource and public service for those who want to go beyond what they're getting from their usual media diet.

Weblogs and Journalism

Writing for a Weblog is different from reporting for a news organization. I can, of course, post anything I want, with no editors to argue with about relevance or coherence. This has good and bad aspects, as everybody's work can be improved by an editor. However, pub-

lishing editor-less to the Web does result in a much more direct, personal voice than one tends to have in conventional news reporting. This is something that many in NKzone's community have said they appreciate.

I can also be completely transparent about my successes and failures, and this also seems to be a subject of great interest to my community. If I had made my query to Cao de Benos as a journalist with a conventional news organization, my community most likely would never have known about my attempt to get into North Korea. Audiences of conventional news media hear only about our successes—not our failures. As a consequence, I think that audiences generally are not aware of the effort required for journalists to cover certain kinds of stories.

With a Weblog, it was easy for me to recount my exchange with Cao de Benos and his rejection of my efforts to join his group to North Korea in full, including my reply in which I invited him to supply his information and analysis on North Korea, which I was happy to reproduce in full, unedited, on NKzone. Not only did visitors to the site leave a lively se-

ries of comments to this post, but one commenter brought our attention to something I was not aware of—a link to a segment of streaming video on a pro-North Korea Web site in which Cao de Benos proclaims his love for North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Il (and at one point even sings about it). This provoked more reactions and discussion. More importantly, the whole exchange provided insight into the nature of the North Korean regime and the people who support it in a very different way than a conventional news report could have done. Members of the NKzone community were able to experience and participate in the process of discovery. They also helped me uncover facts I would not otherwise come across: One member dug up the identity of the chairman of a pro-North Korean organization in the United States. This man, quoted with great fanfare by North Korean media, is a homeless person living in Oregon.

Is this journalism? I believe it is—albeit a raw, unvarnished form that still makes many professional journalists uncomfortable and gives most of their editors goose bumps. NKzone is not fact-checked or subedited, although as a trained journalist I make a point to credit my sources and fully disclose their biases and backgrounds. I try to be careful with my facts as any journalist is trained to be and certainly don’t make things up—NKzone’s visitors must trust me on that, despite the fact that I do not have the credibility and weight of a major brand news organization behind my work. However, if members of the NKzone community detect error, bias, or omission of important information in my blog posts, they quickly inform me in the “comments” section at the bottom of the offending post. In some cases I’ve then engaged in discussions with them about the facts of a situation. The online format makes it very easy to correct and acknowledge errors and thank people who point them out. Judging from NKzone community feedback,

how Weblog authors handle errors is key to building credibility.

For now, NKzone is primarily derivative journalism—drawing upon the firsthand reports of professional news sources and accounts from people who have been to North Korea more recently than I. Am I trying to compete directly with conventional mainstream media? No. There are kinds of investigative and life-threatening journalism that I believe will always be difficult if not impossible to do well without the deep financial pockets, legal staff, and reputation of powerful media companies. There are some kinds of stories that will always be best told by long, well-crafted, highly

Is this journalism? I believe it is—albeit a raw, unvarnished form that still makes many professional journalists uncomfortable and gives most of their editors goose bumps.

edited and fact-checked pieces of text, audio or video—not by blog posts.

Still, after a semester of blogging I believe a Weblog like NKzone can fill a niche demand that mainstream media organizations are not filling in their current formats. I have received numerous e-mails from journalists who find NKzone to be an invaluable source of leads for stories, academics who find it a useful way to keep abreast of developments and debates, and many others working in a range of other fields who are appreciative of the free information and discussion that NKzone provides.

But is the NKzone model sustainable? I’ve been able to spend a substantial amount of time working on the site every day thanks to several fellowships at Harvard University. When those end, NKzone faces a problem typical of many dot-com projects: A significant number of people find it valuable and useful, yet there is no clear business model. NKzone is unlikely ever to become a profitable enterprise. Turning it into a fee-based service would run counter to the idea of an open, information-sharing community. A more likely route is

as a nonprofit public service funded by grants and donations or as a service sponsored by an organization or academic department with an interest in promoting more enlightened discussion of the North Korea issue. The NKzone model—building an information community around a particular issue—may perhaps be most effective and sustainable when used by an organization or group that has an interest in filling specific “holes” in mainstream news coverage and that already has sources of funding to pay a few people to run the project.

There is also no reason why mainstream newspapers, TV companies, and newsmagazines with online editions can’t also try to fill some of these niches themselves by utilizing the techniques and technologies of Weblogs. In taking this step,

there will be fears—and real risks—of losing control over information and brand image. Many major American media companies such as CNN do not allow their reporters to blog. Others—including The New York Times, The Washington Post, and MSNBC—have begun to experiment with Weblogs and Weblog-like forms of journalism.

It is a new media frontier waiting to be occupied by whoever gets there first. ■

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Focusing on Human Rights

With survivors telling their stories, U.S. News & World Report describes life inside North Korea's gulag.

By Thomas Omestad

So many killed and tortured, and yet so little coverage. That, in broad terms, was the motivation for U.S. News & World Report to conduct a months-long probe into the secret world of the North Korean political prisons. While the media have showered plenty of attention on North Korea's bid to develop nuclear weapons, relatively little effort has gone into examining human rights conditions in the impoverished, totalitarian state.

More than 200,000 North Koreans are believed to be held in political prisons, and some 400,000 have perished there over the years, according to U.S. and South Korean officials and human rights activists. These camps are important not only for the human cost they exact but because they are a signature means of control for a regime obsessed with threats within and without. North Koreans have been tossed into the gulag for such offenses as sitting on a picture of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il or listening to foreign radio. Perceived political foes—and, in many cases, their kin—are removed from society and sent into prison. The prisons serve to strike fear into any North Korean who might rise to challenge the government.

To my editors and me, this modern-day gulag—as the chain of camps are known—seemed to provide an important window on the North Korean system, revealing part of the basic nature of a regime at loggerheads with the United States.

Starting to Report the Story

In the winter of 2003, I sat in the office of a senior Bush administration official for the first in what would become a long string of interviews and meetings on the imprisonment of political

opponents—real and imagined—in North Korea. The official, speaking on background, related a practical problem U.S. intelligence had faced in gathering information about the gulag. A U.S. spy satellite couldn't locate the fenced perimeter of one camp in northeastern North Korea. Only after repeatedly pulling back the frame did the satellite at last capture the fortified fencing that marks the full dimensions of the complex: something larger than the entire District of Columbia, with clusters of buildings here and there resembling small villages. This official—and others—said that the Bush administration was focusing more attention on the gulag.

There was an important reason for that focus: George W. Bush himself. In Bob Woodward's book, "Bush at War," the President showed his agitation over the North Korean camps, talking about the torture and separation of families and shouting, "I loathe Kim Jong Il!" But the President's personal anger over the camps goes deeper, it turns out. Recalling a private conversation with Bush, Senator Sam Brownback, a Republican from Kansas, told me that the gulag, more than anything else, is "why the President is after Kim Jong Il: It's how he treats his own people."

Brownback's interview proved to be important for us. The sense that the camps are one motivation for Bush's hard-line response to North Korea deepened our belief that reporting on the gulag was well justified—and not only as a story of horrors inflicted on the powerless by the powerful.

Ultimately, though, we felt that the story of the gulag should be told in human terms—from the viewpoint of the victims. Knowledgeable officials in Washington and Seoul, as well as hu-

man rights activists in both countries and academic observers, could provide useful context and overview. But the most compelling reports would come from those few who had survived the camps and fled North Korea to tell their stories. That meant doing most of the reporting from South Korea.

The North Korean government denies that political prisons even exist, and no reporter is believed ever to have had an opportunity to visit one. First-hand observation is impossible. And a striking fact that emerged quickly in our reporting was how small the field of potential interviewees with personal experience in the camps was: some 10 in all. Relatively few people are released from the camps, and few of those have then managed to escape from North Korea.

Working through human rights groups in Seoul, I managed to interview five people who survived or worked at the camps and who live in South Korea. But the exercise quickly laid bare the problem that has made most traditional human rights groups reluctant to publish major studies about the camps: there exists a frustratingly limited amount of corroborating and firsthand evidence, at least when compared with typical human rights investigations.

"There is a reluctance to credit the stories of refugees," says a veteran human rights worker in describing the North Korean problem. And there is something else that has apparently deterred human rights groups, in general, from taking on the North Korean gulag in a big way. This involves a past pattern by South Korean intelligence of manipulating information about North Korea. Past distortions about Kim Jong Il's lifestyle, living conditions in the North, and Pyongyang's military

capabilities have sown cynicism in South Korea and among human rights observers about the quality of the scant information on the camps that has been carried out of the North. An important and recent exception has been the work of the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, a group that last year released an ambitious and broad study of political imprisonment in the North. The study's author, David Hawk, became an important source for our story, serving as a master of detail on what has been a topic with few specialists.

Despite these difficulties, a broadly consistent assessment of the scope and role of the camps—and the nature of the abuses—is shared by officials in Washington and Seoul and by that portion of the human rights community that has watched North Korea closely. The most detailed accounts, naturally, come from the survivors. A Seoul-based group called the Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, led by Benjamin Yoon, proved to be an invaluable source of analysis and, more importantly, a way station for contacting those who spent time in the camps. The Citizens' Alliance and the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea both helped provide confirmation of the identity of the survivors I interviewed, as well as the reliability of their general accounts. In some cases, U.S. officials on background, as well as the published proceedings of past human rights conferences, provided further backup for the stories of the victims.

Hearing Survivors' Stories

Some survivors were reluctant to talk, I was warned. And yet, most of those whom I met with seemed eager to tell their stories. They conveyed a sense of mission: to bear witness to what they have experienced and seen. Talking with them, in some respects, was similar to interviewing victims of savage crimes anywhere. These were not interviews that could be conducted crisply or efficiently in terms of quickly draw-

ing out organized bits of information. Sometimes our conversations went on for hours, a reflection of both the time needed for consecutive translations and the need to let the victims talk without feeling pressure. The sessions were often dominated by rambling recollections, with specific anecdotes tumbling out slowly.

As they described the torture ses-

I felt that the writer's job was mostly to get out of the way and let the stories—once distilled—tell themselves.

sions, some survivors showed moments of great emotion. Lee Soon Ok, a woman who'd done accounting work for a Communist Party distribution center and who later endured beatings and water torture, teared up as she expressed disbelief that a system she had loyally served had turned against her so brutally. But more often, I was struck by the deadpan recollections of torture methods and details of camp life. Some chose to show me physical scars from their abuse. Lee Young Kook, a man who once served as bodyguard for Kim Jong Il, rolled up his pants to show me the grayish-brown scars on his right leg, a remnant of blows from long wooden sticks. "It was a system to kill us," he said.

In its telling, there is little need to dramatize such material. It speaks for itself. I felt that the writer's job was mostly to get out of the way and let the stories—once distilled—tell themselves. One particularly articulate survivor, Kang Chul Hwan, was imprisoned at the No. 15 camp at Yodok as a boy simply because his grandfather was suspected of disloyalty. Kang was eventually released, and after he escaped to South Korea he became a journalist for a major Seoul daily, Chosun Ilbo, covering a subject he has lived: North Korean affairs. Perhaps because of his professional instincts, Kang proved to

be among the most dispassionate and detail-oriented interviewees in recalling his years in prison.

In Seoul, I was also able to meet up with a former camp driver named Ahn Myong Chul. His observations were especially useful, coming from someone who had been part of the prison establishment but who later turned against the system and fled. That interview was perhaps most memorable—and uncomfortable—for his matter-of-fact recollections of participating in the beating of prisoners, acts he now obviously regrets. But at the time, he acknowledged, the attitude among security personnel was that prisoners were somehow less than human. By telling their stories now, Ahn and the lucky few who got out of the gulag are exposing horrors once successfully hidden from view.

Despite the fact that international news covers rarely sell well, the editors thought that the poignancy of the story and the depth of depravity—along with the importance of North Korea as a security issue—together justified making it a cover story. The article generated considerable reader interest. I was invited to several television interviews and a couple of panels touching on the topic. I was told by a U.S. senator a few weeks later that the story was seen by a number of lawmakers and influenced their views as they considered new legislation on admitting North Korean refugees to the United States. ■

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Taking Photographs in North Korea

‘You are not allowed to photograph people. You are not allowed to go anywhere without a guide.’

By Dermot Tatlow

Soon after President Bush declared North Korea to be one of three members of the “axis of evil” in 2003, I was twice sent there as a photojournalist, once for *Time* and once for *The Boston Globe*. Getting in was only half the battle. Producing images to shed light on how people live in this most secluded of nations was much harder. The North Koreans are zealous in making sure that foreign journalists see only what they are meant to see and

nothing more.

Arriving at the airport, I was subjected to a thorough search and forced to yield my cell phone and other communications equipment I had. The minders who met me there and remained with me every step of the way were polite, but they made their rules very clear: “If you want to take a photo you must ask us for permission,” they said. “You are not allowed to photograph people. You are not allowed to go anywhere without

a guide. If you do, it is a serious matter and will result in your early departure from the DPRK [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea].” Having been in North Korea a few years earlier, I knew I’d have to find the delicate balance of getting photographs the news organizations wanted to publish and not getting expelled prematurely.

Being in North Korea is to experience an overwhelming feeling of emptiness. The cities seem absent of inhabitants.



The “Dear Leader,” Kim Jong Il, celebrated on a billboard in downtown Pyongyang, North Korea. *Photo by Dermot Tatlow.*

There is little traffic and few crowds. The winter is bitterly cold, and people tend to stay indoors. There is no advertising, little color to catch the eye, and almost no shops or signs of commerce. People keep away from foreigners, especially ones with cameras and, if approached, they quickly scurry away.

On one of my trips, we drove from the capital, Pyongyang, down a deserted highway to Kaesong, a city just north of the border with South Korea. Fuel is in short supply. During the day, people walk along highways devoid of cars. Despite living in high-rise buildings, women carry buckets to an outside spring to collect water. Either the water pumps were out of order or their pipes had frozen. On this particular night, in subzero temperatures, we drove along pitch-black streets. No light came from the street lamps, and in only a handful of the apartments in the many buildings we drove past could we see a faint glow of light from windows. There seemed to be virtually no electricity. The tourist hotel where we stayed had its own generator, but with little fuel available it stopped running at 10 o'clock that night. Lights out, and goodnight.

In a country that has acute food shortages, tourists eat extremely well. It was a constant struggle to survive the endless alcohol-laden toasts and then draw to a close these multicourse banquets that are held for foreign guests. But that was my goal, since I needed to find ways to get our hosts out of the restaurant so I could quietly snap a few more photos. On just a few occasions, I succeeded.

At one point in our journey, we stopped by the side of the highway south of Kaesong to let a North Korean official explain the location of a planned industrial development zone they hoped South Korean investors would build. As the North Korean official waxed lyrical about the development potential of his country, a man and a youth walked by carrying enormous bundles of dried grass on their backs. Presumably the grasses were either for fuel or animal feed. As they came to a partially frozen river, the two of them waded across it, without breaking their stride. I realized



Barefoot peasants carry animal feed across a partially frozen river outside of Kaesong, North Korea. They did not put on shoes as they continued to walk back to their farms. *Photo by Dermot Tatlow.*



The main square in Pyongyang, North Korea, with the national flag and a portrait of Kim Il Sung prominently positioned. *Photo by Dermot Tatlow.*

they were barefoot and expected them to put their shoes back on when they reached the other side. They did not. They just kept on walking barefoot along the frozen ground off into the distance. ■

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At the tense border between North and South Korea, a North Korean guard eyes his South Korean counterpart.



On their wedding day, a couple goes to the historic Song Kyun Guan Confucian Academy in Kaesong, North Korea, to be photographed. She wears traditional dress, he wears a Western suit. Both wear the ubiquitous pin badges of Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung near their hearts.

Photos by Dermot Tatlow.



To celebrate the birthday of Kim Jong Il, a brass band was driven to Onjung-Ri to perform for South Korean tourists and journalists at the Hyundai tourist resort. Kim's birthday on February 16th is a national holiday.



In winter in Pyongyang, North Korea, with little electricity and no running water, women are forced to carry water home.

Photos by Dermot Tatlow.

The Hidden Stories of North Korea

Relying on defectors, experts and occasional glimpses, a reporter tries to provide information and insights about this closed society.

By Barbara Demick

When I tell people I am the Los Angeles Times's Korea correspondent, they invariably pose that most embarrassing question: "How much time do you spend in North Korea?"

It is not easy to explain the rather ludicrous predicament of writing about Korea when I am more or less banned from the half of the Korean peninsula that is North Korea. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as it is properly known, admits journalists only with official delegations and, on those rare occasions, they are as closely chaperoned as many a girl at her first school dance. The coverage opportunities are even worse for those of us holding U.S. citizenship, especially since February 2002, when President George W. Bush famously lumped North Korea into his "axis of evil."

The antipathy between North Korea and journalists is mutual. There's not much that is positive to say about North Korea, and the country gets absolutely awful press. The British journalist Christopher Hitchens described it in a 2001 article for *Newsweek* as the worst country in the world. The same magazine later ran a cover story headlined "Dr. Evil" about North Korean leader Kim Jong Il. A BBC documentary crew who talked their way into North Korea last year used a hidden camera to catch embarrassing shots of their minders. It will be a long time before another Western television crew gets visas.

North Koreans invariably appear in the media as automatons, conspicuously displaying adulation of their leaders in the mass gymnastic spectacles of which the North Korea regime is so proud. Of course, to a foreigner, such spectacles evoke images of the Third Reich (Leni Riefenstahl's documentary "Triumph of

the Will" immediately comes to mind) and contribute to North Korea's dismal image in the West.

In many other ways, North Korea does itself a disservice. Extreme secrecy breeds rumor. The very lack of consistent press coverage fuels all sorts of speculation and urban legend about what happens inside North Korea—cannibalism, infanticide, human biological experimentation. Nothing is too horrific to be ascribed to North Korea, much of it probably true, but exaggerated.

What might be written from inside North Korea could hardly be worse than what's now written from the outside. In some cases, journalists might actually be helpful. Iraq, which I covered in the late 1990's as Middle East correspondent for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, used to selectively admit journalists with the hope that they would publicize the impact of U.S.-imposed economic sanctions. Indeed, the sanctions had contributed to rising deaths of young children, and journalists dutifully reported this, which led to the easing of sanctions. Similarly, the dire lack of electricity in North Korea could make for a moving feature story that might lend credence to Pyongyang's pleas for foreign energy assistance. But North Korea seems to have little interest in generating such coverage and, for now, we and the rest of the world—like the North Koreans themselves—are left in the dark.

Covering the North Korea Story

So how is a journalist supposed to responsibly cover North Korea? This has been my challenge since opening a bureau in Seoul for the Los Angeles Times in November 2001. We are one of the few American news organizations with

a bureau devoted exclusively to coverage of Korea. Although we are located in the South Korean capital—there are predictably no foreign news bureaus in Pyongyang—we consider it our mission to cover both Koreas. There are a couple of ways we've found to cope with North Korea's news blackout, all of them admittedly imperfect.

Defectors: Journalists covering North Korea rely heavily on defectors. More than 4,000 defectors now live in South Korea and many more live in China. They are a gold mine of information about what life is really like outside the showcase city of Pyongyang. Away from North Korean minders and informants, they tell of eating bark and bugs to survive during the years of famine and of faking tears at the funeral of North Korea's founder Kim Il Sung to feign loyalty to a despised regime. A retired chemist told me recently about watching political prisoners gassed to death with a cyanide compound as part of an experiment with chemical weapons. Others have told us about youth leagues enlisted to grow opium poppies for North Korea's illicit drug trade. In these interviews, which often last for hours and involve considerable shedding of tears, one gets a glimpse of the flesh-and-blood people behind the caricatures.

The difficulty is that it is often hard to substantiate the claims of defectors. Desperate to win asylum, they have a powerful incentive to embellish. The unfortunate custom among some South Korean and Japanese journalists of paying for interviews adds another incentive for them to make up stories. Another problem is that defectors are not really representative of the North Korean population. As with any other

refugee population, they tend to be the people who were most disenchanted with life in their home country. A disproportionate number come from a single province, North Hamgyong, at the Chinese border. Often, by the time they've arrived in South Korea they've been out of North Korea for several years, so their information can be out of date. We get around this by trying to interview defectors in China, where they usually come first, but this can be difficult because they are fearful of attracting the attention of the Chinese government and getting deported home.

Even in South Korea, North Korean defectors do not feel completely free to speak out. Many worry about the impact on their family members back home if their names appear in a U.S. newspaper. The South Korean government also discourages some high-level defectors from talking to the press. During a recent interview with Hwang Jang Yop, the highest-ranking North Korean official to defect south, agents of the South Korean National Intelligence Service squeezed into a tiny conference room with us, a hovering presence that had a decidedly chilling effect on the interview.

Exploring Around the Edges: Even if a journalist can't get a visa to visit Pyongyang, there are ways of exploring around the edges of North Korea. One place journalists can go is to an enclave in the far southeast coast of the country, where for the past couple of years a South Korean company, Hyundai Asan, has been running hiking tours for tourists to scenic Mount Kumgang. To be sure, tourists have absolutely no freedom of movement to get off of their tour buses or heavily patrolled trails. But you can still peer from your bus window into the dismal villages and chat with the North Korean security guards on the trails.

On one trip, I was able to talk to the staff of a North Korean restaurant about capitalist-style reforms and the tourism business. Another time, I went with an energy expert affiliated with the Nautilus Institute, a Berkeley, California-based nonprofit, who was able to point out what I might otherwise have missed—the extensive damage to the electrical grid. This damage made it impossible

for many North Koreans to switch on the lights, even if they had the energy resources. He also observed the primitive tools being used by a highway crew to build a new road. One couldn't help but notice how the villages seemed to magically disappear from the landscape once night fell because of no electricity or even oil lamps to alleviate the darkness. On the basis of that trip, I was able to write a fairly detailed front-page story about North Korea's energy crisis.

Journalists can also sneak a glimpse of North Korea from the Chinese border. On a trip last summer, I traveled with three South Koreans along much of the 800-mile-long border between North Korea and China. We took a boat ride on the Yalu River where we could see up close the idled factories and the rusting hulk of a Ferris wheel that hadn't revolved in years. We went to an island in the river where we were so close to North Korea that we could talk to military border guards. They were mostly obsessed with begging for cigarettes, beer and sunglasses. One flirtatiously let a South Korean colleague of mine, an attractive young woman, hold his rifle. I used that scene later for a story about plummeting morale in the North Korean Army.

Experts: There are a wealth of North Korean pundits in South Korea. They have an amazing variety of information at their disposal that they analyze with the discerning eye of Kremlinologists. Some of it is gleaned from North Korean media, other comes from defectors or sources inside North Korea. These experts can tell you everything from who's up and who's down in the North Korean workers' party to the price of rice. Most of them haven't spent any more time inside North Korea than I have, but they've devoted a lifetime of scholarship to this hermit kingdom. They are an excellent resource, although many tend to have a strong political bias—either harsh critics of North Korea from the old school of anti-Communism or supporters of South Korea's current "sunshine policy" of dialogue who tend to be forgiving to a fault about North Korea's shortcomings. Still, they know a lot.

A resource less frequently tapped by

journalists is the tiny expatriate community living in Pyongyang. These are mostly aid workers, U.N. employees, and diplomats. Although their movements are restricted in North Korea, they do actually live in the country and interact daily with North Korean colleagues. I try to interview as many of the aid officials coming through Seoul as possible. They tend to present a more positive and less caricatured portrait of North Korea than outsiders. If I were to generalize, I would say they describe not an "axis of evil," but a flawed country trying to cope with a failed ideology and economy, desperately seeking a place for itself in the world. The Pyongyang-based aid community was especially helpful after April's big train accident in Ryogchon, supplying journalists who were unable to get to the site detailed descriptions of the devastation and photographs.

Admittedly, all of the above are merely coping mechanisms for those of us who have to cover what is probably the most closed country in the world. There is no substitute for being there, as any good journalist knows. But at the moment, there is no sign that North Korea is about to open its doors. This is a country, after all, with virtually no Internet access or even international telephone service. In an era in which gigabytes of information can be moved across continents with barely a click, North Korea is, in effect, a black hole in the global village.

A colleague once compared North Korea to a jigsaw puzzle with a million pieces. Each time one gathers a nugget of news, it is tantamount to finding another piece of the puzzle. For now, a lot of pieces are still missing. As journalists, we use the tools we have to try to find them. ■

Barbara Demick is the Seoul bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times. A foreign correspondent for more than 10 years, she previously covered the Middle East and Eastern Europe for The Philadelphia Inquirer.

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Partnering With Young People

A program to improve child health engages teenagers interested in journalism.

By Jerome Aumente

An impressive effort is underway in Trenton, New Jersey's capital, to provide every newborn, infant and toddler with resources to develop healthier lives. By using a multimillion-dollar grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Children's Futures provides parents and children with comprehensive health and social services through a network of new community centers and special programs. It is a possible prototype for efforts elsewhere to nurture children during crucial periods of development—prenatal through the fragile early years.

Local print and broadcast media have made commitments to report on these issues—and these approaches to responding to them—and the Children's Futures program is enlisting young people to help communicate this information to the members of the community. In doing so, these young people couple community service with career training as print or broadcast journalists, poets, artists, writers or photographers.

In March, about 30 young people from Trenton Central High School and from several youth groups met at a hotel for a daylong seminar that I moderated with journalists, educators and child health specialists. The workshop participants were predominantly African American and Hispanic American. Our message: There are ways for them to explore the possibility of journalism careers by reporting and communicating about these important child health development issues in the Trenton community. And in the process of doing this, they could put themselves in a better position to take advantage of the urgent need of the news media and

universities to make newsrooms more racially and ethnically diverse.

As the workshop ended, we invited them to use words, sounds and images to articulate their thoughts about their own young lives—about their relationships and friendships leading to courtship and lifelong commitments, to children and family and parenting.

When a community specialist asked students at the workshop whether they knew of someone who left school because of teenage pregnancy, two-thirds raised their hands. On her workshop application, one teen described her baby sister's struggle to deal with lead poisoning as her motivation for wanting to be involved. Others discovered personal connections between the program's themes, their life experiences, and career aspirations.

In his keynote speech, Acel Moore, a 1980 Nieman Fellow who won a Pulitzer Prize and is associate editor of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, urged the students to be diligent in gathering news and information, to be skeptical and scrupulously accurate, and to expect stiff competition for jobs. He described an ongoing project he initiated to let young people publish stories written about their communities in special youth pages of the *Inquirer*.

Other speakers from the Princeton Packet community newspapers, New Jersey Network (NJN) Public Television, and Morris Broadcasting (Radio) Company provided tips on how young people can break into journalism. The New Jersey Press Association staff described some of its college scholarships and special summer minority training programs. Speakers from Rutgers University and Temple University reviewed

trends in new media, the Internet, and advanced broadcasting in a digital age. High school teachers described video and photography projects that could connect with career goals. The mayor and school superintendent urged students to get involved in their community.

The time we spent together was equal parts information and inspiration. One teenager who attended the youth workshop wrote to us about what the day's experience had meant: "I think today made a change in the way I looked at life. I found different perspectives of the media. I would give this summit an A-plus because it allowed teens to voice their own opinions. Thanks." Others expressed similar kinds of appreciation for giving them this outlet for their thoughts.

What was clear to those at Children's Futures—and to me—is that what is happening in Trenton to improve children's health must also be connected to improving the lives and future prospects of those leaving childhood and moving through adolescence. This can be done by getting them involved in learning and using communication skills to connect with efforts like this one. With this in mind, I worked to organize some media training programs with Children's Futures' President Rush Russell and Vice President Melinda Green.

So far we've held a workshop for print and broadcast journalists to provide tools and knowledge to help improve news coverage of child health and development, and we had this daylong seminar for these young people in Trenton. This fall, we intend to offer a seminar about important policy issues for lawmakers and health experts and

will again work with members of the news media to inform them about child health legislation and policy concerns that merit the public's attention.

As an outgrowth of these gatherings, discussions are underway about the possibility of linking a newly created citizen-run, educational foundation for the Trenton schools with the student media interests. NJN is exploring possible joint television grant applications with Children's Futures, and the high school's media studies program might find ways for the students to do projects

about child health. The School of Communication, Information and Library Studies at Rutgers University and the New Jersey Press Association—which are partners in the project's media initiatives—are also looking at ways to work with the young people.

What makes us hopeful about this connection is what we heard when one of them asked us about next steps and then supplied an answer. Perhaps, this student suggested, they could all “shoot for the moon and land among the stars.” ■

Jerome Aumente, a 1968 Nieman Fellow, is distinguished professor emeritus at Rutgers University's School of Communication, Information and Library Studies. His projects include training of Arab journalists, programs in Macedonia and Russia in journalism education, and a book on the history of newspapers in New Jersey.

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—1947—

Robert C. Miller died on July 26th at home in Hilo, Hawaii after a series of strokes. He was 89 years old.

The day after his college graduation, Miller began his job at United Press International (UPI) where he worked as reporter and bureau chief until his retirement in 1983. He also served as UPI bureau chief in Sydney and Tokyo and spent 16 years as head of the wire service in Honolulu. In 1944, Miller received the Purple Heart for injuries sustained as a civilian in Verdun.

Bruce Cook, senior editor of UPI, writes that Miller “was a hero to me and other young reporters in Hawaii in the sixties. ... Bob had assignments most reporters only dream about. He was a colorful writer and great storyteller.”

Less than a week before his death, Miller married **Michi Haga** after a courtship said to have lasted over 53 years.

—1955—

Sam Zagoria, class correspondent, reports that his classmate **Piers Anderton** “is alive, but not so well, and living in England.” Anderton was diagnosed with cancer just after Christmas last year. Despite his illness, his wife, **Birgitta**, writes, “luckily [he] still has his wonderful American-kidding-around sense of humor.” Piers and Birgitta welcome hearing from their Nieman friends.

—1956—

Ronald Plater died on June 5th at

St. Vincent's Private Hospital in Sydney, Australia. He was 82.

Plater served with the Royal Air Force in World War II and was awarded the Military Cross on April 22, 1943. A long-time journalist, Plater switched to public relations when he joined Eric White Associates in the 1950's. Plater led the New South Wales branch of the Public Relations Institute as president and became national president for the year of 1973.

Plater also served as chairman of the consultancy Ronald Plater & Company Party Limited. He is survived by his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

—1960—

Thomas Dearmore died on July 2nd in Cathlamet, Washington. He was 76 years old.

Dearmore was born in Mountain Home, Arkansas and attended the Army Air Corps program at the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts (now New Mexico State University). While serving in the Air Force from 1944 to 1946, he edited the base newspaper in Spokane, Washington.

After he left the Air Force, Dearmore became coeditor and co-publisher of his family's award-winning weekly publication, *The Baxter Bulletin*. In 1970, he joined the editorial page staff of *The (Washington) Evening Star*. In 1976, Dearmore returned to Little Rock to become associate editor of the *Arkansas Gazette* (now the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*). Later he joined *The San Fran-*

cisco Examiner as editorial director of the opinion pages, a position he held until his retirement in 1991. After his retirement, Dearmore continued to write opinion columns.

“Racial equality and fairness became a lifelong theme of Dearmore's eloquent editorial voice,” recalls James Heavey in his *Chronicle* column. “His blend of country warmth, humor and hard-eyed political perception was rare. ...” Heavey served on the editorial staff of both *The Evening Star* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* with Dearmore.

Dearmore is survived by two children and one grandchild.

—1961—

Donald G. Brazier died on November 5, 2003 in Seattle, Washington.

A retired Navy captain, Brazier served in World War II, Vietnam and the Western Pacific for 45-day tours of active duty from 1966 to 1968, writing news and feature stories and doing photography. He was a stringer for *The Wall Street Journal*, worked for *The New York Times*, and retired from *The Seattle Times* as ombudsman after 40 years with the newspaper.

Brazier is survived by his wife, **Susan Howard Brazier**, three children, three grandchildren, and a sister.

—1962—

Ian Menzies would like to let his classmates know that his wife, **Barbara**, died last month after a long battle with cancer. Menzies spent the last three

years as his wife's caregiver. He states that he is well but a bit unsettled as he prepares for his fourth move in one and a half years.

—1967—

Dewey James writes, "I am retired—really retired—and enjoying it. Aside from doting on our three grandchildren and our newly acquired daughter-in-law, **Barbara** and I have done some traveling and are more or less model senior citizens. After three decades plus in journalism, much of which was spent churning out editorials (usually three a day) and a few hundred columns, I retired from active newspapering."

James left the Morning News in Florence, South Carolina in 1989. After that he was director of the Pee Dee Heritage Center at Francis Marion University and retired again in 2001. He can be reached at dew_james@yahoo.com.

Philip Meyer received the Professional Freedom and Responsibility Award from the Newspaper Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication at its annual meeting in Toronto in August. The award is for contributions to both the professional and academic side of journalism.

Meyer's next book, "The Vanishing Newspaper: Saving Journalism in the Information Age," is scheduled for November publication by the University of Missouri Press. His e-mail is philip_meyer@unc.edu.

Alvin Shuster is senior consulting editor of the Los Angeles Times, having retired in 1995 as the foreign editor, a job he had for some dozen years. He writes: "The result is no lifting of heavy or light copy, no approval authority over weird expense accounts, no queries from the far flung asking where they are going next, no keep-awake worries about whether our folks are in the right place at the right time. The younger minds have taken over all that, and I miss daily contact with that talented foreign staff. But I do have an office at the paper and keep in touch.

"After retiring as foreign editor, I

worked with the International Press Institute and became founding editor of its new magazine on international journalism that is now in the hands of Stu Loory at the Missouri School of Journalism. In 1999, I served as the chairman of the Pulitzer Prize jury on international reporting. **Miriam** and I have also been traveling, revisiting many of our favorite places overseas. We plan to see America one of these days."

Shuster's e-mail address is Alvin.Shuster@latimes.com.

—1968—

Michael Green has written his memoirs, "Around and About," published by New Africa Books, Cape Town, South Africa. The book covers his 50-year career in journalism and includes a chapter on Harvard, with special reference to South African involvement over the past 45 years. Green, who is retired and lives in Durban, was a newspaper editor for 20 years. He was the eighth Nieman from South Africa, and his daughter **Philippa (Pippa) Green** was the 39th, in the class of 1999. They are the only parent-child combination to have been awarded the fellowship in South Africa. Pippa is now head of radio news of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. [See Pippa Green's article on page 41.]

—1970—

J. Barlow Herget is now host of State Government Radio, an online radio station that covers North Carolina's state government. He also continues to be a panelist on "NC Spin," a television program that addresses topics of interest to North Carolinians. Herget has written for the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, the Detroit Free Press, and North Carolina's The News and Observer. He served for four years on the Raleigh City Council. Herget is the coauthor of "Insider's Guide to the Triangle," which he periodically updates.

—1971—

Jim Ahearn recently celebrated 50 years of marriage to **Mary Ann** at a surprise anniversary party orchestrated

by their four children at a restaurant in Southold, New York, where they have a second home. Now in semi-retirement, Jim still writes a regular column for The Record of North Jersey, where he served as state house correspondent, editorial page editor, and managing editor.

Itsuo Sakane writes: "Since the mid-60's, I have been exploring my interests in the new movement of art and technology in the world, working in the intersecting fields of art, science and technology. I have written columns for the Asahi Shimbun and other media, organized exhibitions of new art works, and taught media art at college and university. My Nieman experience expanded my scope as I met unique artists, scientists and engineers who shared similar interests. After retiring from the Asahi Shimbun in 1990, I was invited to be a professor at Keio University, and I organized course lectures on Theory on Science-Art, Environmental Design, and a multimedia seminar.

"In 1996, by the governor's request, I organized a new school of the International Academy of Media Arts and Sciences (IAMAS) in Ogaki City, Gifu Prefecture. IAMAS was comprised of two courses, including what has become the graduate school of the Institute of Advanced Media Arts and Sciences. After seven years as a president of IAMAS, I retired in March 2003 and was given a title of emeritus president. I have been an international and honorary co-editor of Leonardo, a journal of the International Society for Art, Science, and Technology from 1985 to the present.

"I have published many books based on my columns and translated books related to art and science. Recently I published 'Expanded Dimension—Beyond the Conflict between Art and Science' (NTT Publications, 2003). I have received several awards, including the Prix Ars Electronica Golden Nica for Life Achievement (2003) and the Commissioner for Cultural Affairs Award (2003)."

Jo Thomas, as of July 1st, is now associate chancellor of Syracuse University (S.U.). "Why did I do this?" writes Jo. "My boss, Nancy Cantor, left the Uni-

versity of Illinois to become president and chancellor at S.U. and asked me to go to Syracuse with her.” Jo had been assistant to Cantor at the University of Illinois. Thomas, best known for her many years of reporting from all over for The New York Times, adds that her husband, **Bill**, will also be leaving the University of Illinois faculty to join the anthropology department at Syracuse and its Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

Ron and Diane Walker, who have lived in St. John, Virgin Islands since 1993, welcomed classmates Jim and MaryAnnAhearn and Jo Thomas and her husband, **Bill**, to their home. **Maxine** and **Dan Rapoport** have also visited. Ron, a former managing editor of the San Juan Star in Puerto Rico, still writes

a regular op-ed column for that newspaper and for the St. John Times.

—1974—

Steve Northup’s wife of 30 years, **Lee Kaufman Little**, died in June of pulmonary hypertension. Lee was a clinical psychologist in private practice in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she and Northup lived in a house they built by hand in 1977. Northup has been a staff photographer for United Press International (UPI), The Washington Post, and Time. He has also worked as assistant managing editor/graphics for The Santa Fe New Mexican. Now Northup is the photographer for the New Mexico Living Treasures Project and for the last decade has given photographic workshops in New Mexico, Guatemala and Scotland.

This winter he will be traveling to Laos to do a book with Martin Stuart-Fox, who was his Vietnam correspondent in 1965-66 while with UPI.

Morton Kondracke’s wife, **Milly**, died at age 64 on July 22nd at her home in Washington, D.C. from complications of Parkinson’s disease.

Kondracke wrote the book “Saving Milly: Love, Politics, and Parkinson’s Disease,” in 2001 about his wife’s illness and their efforts to manage the disease’s debilitating effects. Kondracke’s book documents the experiences they had as advocates for Parkinson’s disease research and the crucial role Milly played in the fight for increased funding.

Kondracke is executive editor of Roll Call, a Washington, D.C. publication providing Congressional news.

Reflections on the life of Aggrey Klaaste, the ‘soul and spirit’ of the class of 1980.

By Acel Moore

It was deeply saddening to learn of the death of **Aggrey Klaaste** on June 20th, who for me embodied the soul and spirit of the class of 1980. Klaaste, 64, was one of South Africa’s most distinguished journalists. During the anti-apartheid movement and post-apartheid period, he was one of the nation’s most important figures in his role as editor of the *Sowetan*, the largest black newspaper. Nelson Mandela recognized his importance—Klaaste was one of the people Mandela visited soon after he got out of prison.

The news of Klaaste’s death brought eulogies filled with praise and tributes from political, civic and journalistic leaders in South Africa, including President Thabo Mbeki. He praised Klaaste for his innovative and courageous journalism. Klaaste deserves this credit for inspiring others to act and for the strength and clarity of his work. Through his writings and commentary, Klaaste coined the phrase, “nation-building.”

In 1977, Klaaste was the number two editor of *The World*. That black-run newspaper was banned, and its editors detained by authorities, after it

printed stories reporting the facts about the death and injuries of anti-apartheid protestors by South African police. (Under the apartheid regime at that time, the government could arrest and detain people and censor and ban newspapers whenever they saw fit—without a trial.) Because of those accounts, Klaaste and the late editor of *The World*, **Percy Qoboza**, (Nieman ’76) were arrested and detained. Klaaste was released after nine months in detention and Qoboza after three months because of national and international pressure and letters of protest from journalists and others around the world.

Klaaste was physically of slight build, but his heart and intellectual curiosity made him a powerhouse. Despite his tenacity, he was gentle and thoughtful. In his special way, he not only reminded us of the value of a free press but also of other rights and privileges that Americans take for granted.

I’ll forever remember Klaaste’s first weeks of his nine-month Nieman year. He would flinch and reach for his passport whenever he saw a police officer. He was reluctant to eat in restaurants

near Harvard Square when whites were the predominate customers.

While a Nieman Fellow, he spent most of his waking hours reading. He enjoyed American literature, philosophy, black thought, and history. Such writings were banned in South Africa and, Klaaste said, blacks could be imprisoned if they were caught with banned books. He told me that even the book “Black Beauty” was banned. “They didn’t know it was about a horse,” he said with a wry smile.

Aggrey, through his journalistic skills and courage, contributed to today’s independent nation of South Africa that continues to rebuild from the destruction of apartheid. I feel honored to have known him at Harvard, and I was fortunate to have borne witness to his journalistic resolve during a visit to his South Africa in 1985.

Aggrey is survived by his wife, **Caroline**, and three children. The Nieman class of ’80 and, I’m sure, the wider Nieman community, join me in paying tribute to his memory. ■

Acel Moore is associate editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer.

—1981—

Carlos Aguilar, after a career with CBS News and local and regional TV news operations in Houston and Dallas, has been teaching media literacy and technology to at-risk inner-city high school students in Houston and just completed study for and was awarded his Texas secondary teaching certification. Carlos's "classroom" at Davis High School in the Houston Independent School District features a state-of-the-art TV studio with nonlinear computer editing stations for each student, and his students not only provide news and information for their own campus but also contribute to the district's cable TV channel.

Carlos has stayed active in broadcast journalism even while teaching full time, most recently as a part-time reporter for the just-dismantled News 24 Houston Time Warner Communications all-news station. He covered general news and aired a twice-weekly feature, "The Real Houston."

David Lamb, a reporter for the Los Angeles Times, has accepted a buyout offer from the paper but will continue to write and travel. Lamb began as a reporter at the Times in 1970 on the metro staff. He worked in New York on the national staff and then on the foreign staff in Sydney, Nairobi, Cairo and Hanoi. For the past few years he was based in Washington, D.C., as national correspondent. He has written a number of books, including "The Africans," "The Arabs," and "Vietnam Now: A Reporter Returns."

The Times's national editor, Scott Kraft, said in his announcement about Lamb's retirement that he "epitomized the word 'correspondent' at this newspaper for 32 years. ... What those of us who are current or former foreign and national correspondents remember best is that David was the gold standard—a talented reporter and writer but also a valued and generous colleague who was the best friend to have in a war zone and the best company at dinner in a three-star restaurant (back when those were allowed on the expense account). He's a class act"

—1983—

Callie Crossley has been appointed to the duPont-Columbia jury, which decides the annual recipient of the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Award. Crossley herself received the duPont-Columbia Award's highest honor, the Gold Baton, for her production work on "Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years 1954-1965," the first of two series about the American Civil Rights Movement. Crossley's hour, the sixth of the series, "Bridge to Freedom," also received an Oscar nomination in 1987 for Best Documentary Feature.

Crossley is program manager at the Nieman Foundation and a media critic on "Beat the Press," WGBH-TV in Boston, Massachusetts. "Beat the Press" received the Arthur Rowse Award for Press Criticism from the National Press Club in July 2004. The award was the second for the program; the first came in 2000. Crossley is also principal of CrossChannels, a company she founded.

—1989—

Bill Kovach received the 2003 Richard M. Clurman Award for Mentoring, an award given to "senior professionals who are superb on-the-job mentors." The award, which is administered by the University of Michigan, was presented to Kovach by Jill Abramson of The New York Times. Kovach is chairman of the Committee of Concerned Journalists, coauthor of "The Elements of Journalism" and "Warp Speed," and former Curator of the Nieman Foundation.

—1990—

Brian Pottinger was appointed chief executive officer of Johnnic Communications Africa Limited, South Africa's leading media and entertainment company. He was formerly managing director for BDFM Publishers, a business media associate of Johnnic Communications.

—1991—

Rui Araujo's most recent book, "Lisbon Killer," published by Oficina

do Livro, is now in its second edition. Araujo, based in Lisbon, Portugal, is now working on his third thriller.

Tim Giago has retired as CEO of Lakota Media, Inc. He will continue to write his syndicated column for the Knight Ridder Tribune News Services. In his final column as editor and publisher of Lakota Journal, Giago wrote:

"When I started the Lakota Times [now Indian Country Today] more than 20 years ago, there was not a single independently owned Indian weekly newspaper in America. ... I knew that if I produced a product they could read, gain knowledge from, and just plain enjoy, it would succeed no matter the economic conditions."

Giago sold Indian Country Today in 1998 and started the Lakota Journal, part of Lakota Media, Inc., in 2000. He has received The (Baltimore) Sun's H.L. Mencken Award, the National Education Association's Human & Civil Rights Award, and the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors' Golden Quill Award.

—1992—

Seth Efron is the executive editor of State Government Radio, based in Raleigh, North Carolina. State Government Radio is a news service that, as of this writing, is in its embryonic state. It is a division of Curtis Media Group that will cover North Carolina government, policy and politics. The service will be Internet-based with both streaming audio broadcast and text services at www.StateGovernmentRadio.com. Programming is also available "over the airwaves" in the Raleigh area. Curtis Media Group is North Carolina's largest network of radio stations, now at 14, located throughout the state.

—1994—

Larry Tye's new book, "Rising From the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class," has been published this year by Henry Holt and Company. The book tells of the men who worked on George Pullman's railroad sleeping cars, examining their role in

1994 Reunion Renews Nieman Spirit

When is a Nieman not a Nieman? Never! The class of 1994 reconfirmed that, gathering in Cambridge over Memorial Day weekend for our 10th anniversary. Former Curator **Bill Kovach** and his wife, **Lynne**, who led and inspired the Class of '94, joined nine fellows and three affiliates to look back at the decade since our amazing year at Harvard.

Larry Tye, Terry Gilbert and Henry Stevens, Lorie Conway and Tom Patterson, Alan and Yoko Ota, Jerry Kammer, Greg Brock, Melanie Sill, Maria Henson and I were there, and we sorely missed the fellows who weren't able to make it.

We had fun. We ate, we drank, we danced at that Cambridge institution The Cantab. But amid the hugs and the reminiscing, we couldn't resist falling back into our old Nieman habits of hunkering down for long conversations about the state of our profession.

Many of us are deeply worried about plummeting public confidence in the media and about the doubts journalists are expressing toward their own colleagues and institutions. Crises at The New York Times and USA Today, criticism of the media's coverage of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, news organizations

that seem to be dividing into "blue and red" camps—we talked about all of these issues and more. No holds or questions were barred, but we spoke and listened in that professional supportive Nieman way that allows for open honest discussion and a diversity of views. Did we solve the profession's problems? Hardly. But I think we all walked away refreshed and enlightened by the intelligent discussion and renewed by a shared passion for getting it right.

We also reintroduced ourselves 10 years after those first, nervous introductions of orientation week. It was more than just catching up. It gave us a chance to see how much we have put into practice ideas and inspirations we took away from our year at Harvard. For some, that means actually running a newsroom. For others it is trying new forms of journalism, or consulting, or book-writing.

The bottom line is, we passionately believe in what we do. Gathering together for something as simple and profound as a class reunion to share that belief reinforced our efforts. I highly recommend it. ■ —*Katie King is a writer and online media consultant based in Washington, D.C.*

the Civil Rights Movement, black trade unions, and the birth of the African-American middle class. Tye is also the author of "The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations" (Crown, 1998) and "Home Lands: Portraits of the New Jewish Diaspora" (Henry Holt and Company, 2001). He is the program manager of the Health Care Fellowship program at Babson College's Center for Executive Education in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

—1995—

Marilyn Geewax received a master's degree in liberal studies from Georgetown University on May 22nd. She focused her studies on international economic affairs. Geewax is the national economics reporter in the Washington

bureau of Cox Newspapers, Inc.. She also is an adjunct professor at George Washington University, where she teaches business journalism.

—1996—

Gwen Lister was selected to receive one of three Courage in Journalism Awards for 2004 from the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF). Lister, founder of The Namibian, a journalist from Paraguay, and one from Algeria are being honored for risking their lives to "report on corruption, human rights violations, and terrorism." The award was established in 1990 by the IWMF with the intent of strengthening the role of women journalists throughout the world. Ceremonies to present the awards will be held in Los

Angeles and in New York in October. [See Lister's article on The Namibian on page 43.]

David L. Marcus happily announces that he's finished his nonfiction book about adolescents on the edge. In January, Houghton Mifflin will publish "What It Takes to Pull Me Through: Why Teenagers Get in Trouble—and How Four of Them Got Out." Marcus, who left the staff of U.S. News & World Report, is freelancing and teaching at Ithaca College's Park School of Communications. For more information, see www.DaveMarcus.com. He can be reached at Dave@DaveMarcus.com.

Jacques Rivard writes that he left the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. on September 1st, "after 32 years of TV coverage mostly devoted to the Green Beat. A retirement period could be very interesting, as I intend to travel the world for a while, visiting my friends in Asia, possibly ending up in Seoul and Beijing. Then, on my return, I'll focus on what I like most: journalism and teaching. Retirement is about keeping fit." Rivard can be reached at jacquesrivard@canada.com.

—1997—

Maria Cristina Caballero is listed in Diane Hoyt-Goldsmith's book "40 Famous Women," published in England by Celebration Press. The book highlights Caballero's career and attests that she "became a respected journalist who risked her life to investigate the violence and human rights abuses in her country."

Caballero and her husband, **John Lenger**, had a baby, Juan Raphael Joseph. Caballero is a fellow at Harvard's Center for Public Leadership.

—1998—

Philip Cunningham's first novel, "Peacock Hotel," has been released in Thailand in September 2004 by Blackberry Press. "Peacock Hotel" tells the story of a Californian who tries to regain the enthusiasm of his youth by moving to Bangkok. Through his experiences,

the highs and lows of Bangkok life are exposed. Cunningham writes: "I'd like to give everyone a copy, but I am told that's not a realistic business plan." For more information about "Peacock Hotel," visit www.dcothai.com.

Marcelo Leite is leaving his job as science editor at the Brazilian daily *Folha de S. Paulo* in August after more than 18 years at that paper. He will continue to write his Sunday column, *Ciencia em Dia* (Science Update) and freelance.

Kathryn Strachan, a freelance journalist in South Africa, has been named one of this year's 10 Rosalyn Carter Fellows for Mental Health Journalism by the Carter Center's Mental Health Program. Strachan is one of the first two South African journalists to be named a Carter Fellow. Strachan will be interviewing

patients, their families, people in their communities, health workers and traditional healers, and plans to write magazine articles on deinstitutionalization programs in South Africa.

David C. Turnley married **Melina Zacharopoulos** on July 11, 2004 at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in New York. According to their marriage announcement in *The New York Times*, Zacharopoulos worked until April as an associate at the law firm Sheresky Aronson & Mayefsky. Turnley, a freelance journalist, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1990 for his coverage of 1989 uprisings including Tiananmen Square and the fall of the Berlin Wall. He has published the book "Baghdad Blues: A War Diary" (Vendome Press, 2003), among others, and directed the documentary "La Tropical," about a famous

dance hall in Cuba.

—2000—

Andreas Harsono writes: "I was appointed chair of the Pantau Foundation in September 2003. It is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to elevate the standards of journalism in Indonesia. It is a new organization (established in 1999) that provides journalists with training and opportunities for media research and publishes books on journalism. It is like a community of journalists, artists, photographers and cartoonists. Its focus is to help in the less developed but vast eastern Indonesia.

"I recently translated and published Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel's book 'The Elements of Journalism' into Bahasa Indonesia. The book is pretty popular now in Indonesia and used by many schools of communication. But I mainly work on my book, a political travelogue about identities in my country, entitled 'Indonesia: Political Journey,' which I plan to publish mid-next year. ..."

Harsono is an associate editor of the Internet journal *First Monday* and periodically writes for Bangkok's *The Nation* and Kuala Lumpur's *The Star*. Since 1995, he has been on the board of the Jakarta-based Institute for the Studies on Free Flow of Information.

—2001—

Linda Robinson's book, "Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces," is to be published in October by PublicAffairs. In the book, Robinson tells the stories of men in the U.S. Special Forces and documents their role from post-Vietnam combat in Panama to the frontlines of the war on terrorism. Robinson wrote, "I had been visiting war zones since the 1980's and had begun my journey into the world of the Special Forces before September 11, 2001, but the attacks galvanized me to write a book about how they are sent around the world into all kinds of unconventional conflicts to figure out what to do, with less shooting and more cleverness than one might imagine."

Robinson is currently a senior writer for U.S. News & World Report.

'Old Europe' Welcomes Members of the Class of 1999

The population of Berlin swelled by about a dozen in late June as members of the Nieman Class of 1999 descended on the heart of "old" Europe for a much-anticipated reunion.

Ilka Piepgras organized the gathering, showing off a city that had changed a great deal since the wall came down. Those attending were **Lily Galili**; **Pippa Green**, her husband, **Alan Hirsh**, and their son, Matthew; **Frans Roennov**; **Bill** and **Karin Graves**, and me and my family, **Ruth Pritchard-Kelly**, Gwyneth and Beatrice. We were delighted that **Bill Kovach** and his wife, **Lynne**, also made the trip.

Ilka was a wonderful host. We visited the sleek offices of Ilka's paper, *Die Zeit*, where we met with editor at large Theo Sommer. We also experienced a bit of cold war nostalgia when we sat down with Michael "Mischa" Wolf, the former head of East Germany's spy apparatus. (Wolf's first job was as a reporter. "It's not so different between journalists and [secret] agents," said the man who prided himself on ferreting out sensitive information from the West.)

We toured the offices of *netzzeitung*.

de, the Internet newspaper run by Ilka's husband, **Michael Maier**, and a rarity in the new media world: a Web paper that is actually making money.

Ilka took us for a cruise on the river and led us on a walking tour of Berlin, complete with a bird's eye view of the city from the gloriously glass-domed Reichstag. She threw a party at her apartment where we could meet her twins, Rebecca and Jonathan, and stepkids Bernie, Anna, Ruth and Susanna.

We cross-pollinated with Niemans from other years. **Paolo Valentino** (Nieman '90) hosted dinner at an Italian restaurant. And **Paul Stoop** (Nieman '95), and his wife, **Adelheid Scholten**, welcomed us to the American Academy in Berlin, where he is deputy director.

It was after visiting the American Academy, set in an airy mansion on the shore of Wannsee Lake, that many of us contemplated learning German or at least feigning an interest in things Teutonic. We were wondering how best to wangle a fellowship at the academy and perhaps recreate that Nieman year experience. ■ — *John Kelly is a reporter for The Washington Post.*

Peter Turnley writes: “I’ve been offered a one year, renewable agreement with Harper’s magazine to create four major eight page photo essays for the magazine during the next year. I will be listed on the masthead as a contributing editor and, most importantly, the philosophy behind this new agreement is that I will author my own visual stories that will be given prominent display quarterly in a magazine with a long and rich tradition of publishing excellent writing

and journalism. I think this marks not only a very exciting opportunity for me, but also a wonderful development for photojournalism and for the use of visual storytelling in magazine journalism. ...” Turnley’s first essay appeared in Harper’s August issue.

—2002—

Rami Khouri is one of three journalists honored by Search for Common

Ground with the Eliav-Sartawi award for Middle Eastern Journalism. The award is in recognition of the courageous articles they have written and had published in the Arab, Israeli and Western press, articles that “have sought to promote dialogue and peaceful coexistence, to break down myths and stereotypes, to expose readers to new perspectives, and to open windows of understanding into the society of ‘the other.’” Khouri won in the Arab press category for his article, “Affirming the Law and National Will, From Babylon to Beirut,” which appeared in *The Daily Star* (Beirut) in October 2003. The award ceremony was held in September in Brussels.

Khouri is the executive editor of *The Daily Star* in Beirut, Lebanon, and his weekly column, “A View from the Arab World,” is now being internationally syndicated by Agence Global, a U.S.-based agency (www.agenceglobal.com).

—2003—

Shyaka Kanuma is in his fall semester at City University in London, England working toward a master’s degree in journalism. He is a recipient of a British government scholarship. Before moving to London, Kanuma was based in Rwanda working as an information and media consultant for UNHCR, the U.N. agency for refugees. He also contributed articles for publications in Eastern Africa and South Africa. [See Kanuma’s article about his experience as a journalist in the independent press in Rwanda on page 37.] ■

Media Nation: A New Nieman/Student Collaboration

A first-time partnership between the Nieman Foundation, the University of Massachusetts-Boston [UMass Boston] Center on Media and Society, and *The Boston Globe* produced a two-page daily newspaper about the news media covering the Democratic National Convention in Boston in August. The newspaper, *Media Nation*, was published on four sequential days as a part of the *Globe*’s special convention coverage. *Media Nation* is available on the World Wide Web at <http://medianation.umb.edu>.

The paper broke news on the plight of many international reporters who found themselves without expected workspace when the Bush administration failed to fund an international press center for the first time in 20 years. It examined how Arab-language news organizations were covering the convention and the growing influence on political reporting of Hispanic and African-American media organizations. Talk radio, the convergence of news-gathering (led by innovations at *The Associated Press*) and efforts by MSNBC to climb out from the shadows of CNN and Fox were also among the stories that *Media Nation* published.

The Kovach Library and computer room at Lippmann House were transformed into a newsroom for those doing research, producing graphics, and editing the content. In a not-so-quiet corner of the *Globe*’s workspace at *The Fleet Center* in Boston, more *Media Nation* editors and reporters gathered information, conducted interviews, checked out

tips, and wrote the stories.

Seasoned news professionals directed and oversaw a staff of 20 college students from Harvard and UMass Boston. Ellen Hume, director of the UMass Boston Center on Media and Society and I were coeditors. Other news professionals working on the project included broadcast veteran and founding editor of *Stateline.org* Ed Fouhy, Nieman Foundation senior web editor, Melinda Grenier, and former *Wall Street Journal* graphics editor, Karl Hartig. Nieman Fellow **Doug Marlette** provided a daily political cartoon. College staffers came from *The Harvard Crimson* and the communications studies program at UMass Boston. Funding was provided by the Christopher Georges Fellowship Fund, which is administered by the Nieman Foundation.

Hume, with assistance from Grenier, other UMass faculty, and me, developed a four-week independent for-credit course of study for the UMass Boston students to prepare for the project, while the Harvard students also spent two weeks prior to the convention preparing. Monica Clark, a Harvard *Crimson* staffer who worked on the project, said “*Media Nation* made me realize that I want to be a political journalist—either print or broadcast or both. It’s a great feeling to finally know what I want to do.” ■ —*Seth Effron, a 1992 Nieman Fellow and former special projects director for the Nieman Foundation, is now executive editor of State Government Radio in Raleigh, North Carolina.*

Guillermoprieto Added to Nieman Class of 2005

Alma Guillermoprieto has joined the Nieman Fellows class of 2005. A frequent contributor to *The New Yorker* and *The New York Review of Books*, Guillermoprieto has written about Latin America for more than 20 years.

Using a Camera to Shoot the Big Five

A retired journalist refocuses to connect with ‘the slower heartbeat of the African bush.’

By Hennie van Deventer

Being an expert with a camera is not required to take great wildlife photographs in South Africa’s famous Kruger National Park in the province of Mpumalanga. Amazing opportunities present themselves regularly. On a day trip through the reserve a visitor can expect to encounter a large diversity of species and at least two or three of the “big five”—lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and buffalo. Those most fortunate score five out of five.

A decent camera is required, but also valuable are alertness, patience and perseverance—three qualities I have learned the hard way since 1998, the

year of my retirement from journalism. At first many prize photographs escaped me as a result of my hasty journalistic nature and lack of bush awareness. Then I toned down and refocused, changing my lifestyle to suit the slower heartbeat of the African bush. Not only did my quality of life immediately improve, but also the quality of my photographs.

Although strictly an amateur, I am thrilled to have the walls of our bush cottage in Sabiepark, a private reserve neighboring the Kruger, be adorned with dozens of special wildlife images. These pictures include members of the big five and also stately giraffe, graceful

impala, quaint wildebeest, plump zebra drinking at water holes and cheetah and hyena on the prowl. There are a fistful of many impressive birds, too, and all of these were shot with my Canon EOS 500N fitted with a flash and a modest 75-300 zoom. I often rely on automatic mode. As far as film is concerned, experience has taught me that 100ASA film is a good all-round choice. It is, however, advisable to carry a couple of rolls of faster (400) film as well, for dull conditions or to get extra reach for flash photography at night.

The van Deventer cottage, dark brick and thatched, is less than two miles from

On the morning of my wife’s birthday in 2003, we found this pride of lions—14 in all—draped on a rock right next to the road. The exceptional scene seemed to be choreographed by an expert. The lions patiently allowed us to photograph them from all sides before slowly getting up, stretching and sauntering away into the bush. *Photo by Hennie van Deventer.*



the Kruger gate and only 10 miles from Skukuza, the main rest camp. One of the unique perks of living in Sabiepark is the opportunity for quick visits to Skukuza or short, concentrated drives along the Sabie River, with its lush growth. A “wild card” at a bargain price offers unlimited entry—and adventure. On the short stretch to Skukuza we have come across lion kills, angry elephants, or vast herds of buffalo blocking the traffic for hours,

even giraffe making love—a rather complicated, hasty affair. On the other hand, on quiet days we have driven for hours without sighting anything special. It’s the luck of the draw. We know that, and we never complain. ■

Hennie van Deventer, a 1977 Nieman Fellow, was chief executive of Newspapers of Naspers in Cape Town, South Africa from 1992 until his re-

tirement in February 1999. Previously he edited Die Volksblad in Bloemfontein for 12 years. In 1997 he was awarded the Phil Weber gold medal, the highest honor bestowed by Naspers, for sustained performance in a career spanning 35 years. He is also the author of six books.

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A magnificent leopard awakens in a tree, ready for the night’s activities. This feline mammal, usually sporting a tawny yellow coat with black rosette-like spots, represents one of the great sights of the African bush. For many visitors, encountering a leopard is more exciting than coming upon a lion.



Impala, a smallish antelope with lyre-shaped horns, have the ability to move with enormous, yet very graceful leaps when disturbed. Thousands of them roam Kruger Park. The name “impala” comes from the Zulu language.



Photos by Hennie van Deventer.

A white rhino appears menacingly from the bush. This powerful animal, with its massive body, two horns on its nose, very thick skin, and three digits on each foot is a real danger when provoked. The black rhino is even more aggressive, but smaller. Both white and black rhinos are considered members of the big five.



It takes time and patience for a thirsty giraffe to get the legs, front and back, in exactly the right position. And it must not be easy on the nerves to stand stretched in such a vulnerable way. Finally settled to enjoy a drink, this giraffe withdrew a moment after the photo was taken; evidently the muddy pool had a foul taste or smell.

Photos by Hennie van Deventer.