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‘Serving readers in a fractured society:

A study of South African newspapers, with comparisons drawn with newspapers in the Balkans.

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INTRODUCTION

Miraculously the centre has held. For all the repression of apartheid, and the excesses of the transition, and the uncertainties of the early years of democracy, a cohesive tension has somehow prevented South African society from falling apart. What role have newspapers played in keeping the fragments together, or are they in fact a force of division? And what should newspapers do if the miracle is to be sustained?

Because South Africa is fractured by ethnic, gender, cultural, religious and class divisions, the reporting of news is inevitably a complex process. While some newspapers have sought to reduce this complexity by serving niche readerships bonded by language and culture, the challenge is particularly great for so-called liberal newspapers that, in a defined geographical region, have

attempted to serve everyone. Usually, in such cases, the target readership is a heterogeneous community with its variety of often conflicting values.

The intention of this research project, therefore, is to examine how South Africa's social fragmentation presents formidable challenges for the media (specifically, in this instance, the press). Also to be examined are certain issues that have assumed particular prominence, to the point where they have become national debates, and how these issues have played themselves out in the press. Further, in some instances, the cases concerned will be viewed through the prism of *The Witness*, a daily newspaper based in Pietermaritzburg, the capital of KwaZulu-Natal province. The objective of this scrutiny is to determine how newspapers in fragmented societies can best serve not only their readers but also the interests of the society in which they are embedded.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Many so-called fractured societies have a legacy of imperialism. In South Africa, from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, a degree of foreign domination has been an enduring reality. This has been alternately Dutch and British, followed by an era of white-minority rule which spanned most of the twentieth century, until the advent of democracy in 1994.

The pattern that has been followed in South Africa is familiar to many post-colonial countries that have undergone fundamental changes. Whenever a dominant, minority, 'foreign' culture is superseded by a resurgent majority, indigenous culture on which the humiliations of recent history weigh heavily, a transformation inevitably takes place. And yet often it is not purely a homogenous indigenous culture that finds itself emancipated: freed of the yoke of subjugation, a variety of minorities begin to assert themselves and to engage in matters of public interest. And so, while a new dominant caste takes root, with the former oligarchs reduced to just a minority among other minorities, another complex reality comes into being, and one that would inevitably seek to find a voice of its own.

With a few exceptions, for over a century, until relatively recently, newspapers in South Africa have served primarily the dominant ‘foreign’ culture of the so-called settler community, whether it be English-speaking or Dutch/Afrikaans-speaking, and the indigenous majority has largely been denied its own voice in mainstream public discourse.

During the apartheid years, some English-language newspapers of a liberal character (prominent among them the now defunct Johannesburg-based *Rand Daily Mail*) attempted to speak for the silenced majority, but with limited success, partly because of government harassment and partly because the sectarian divides and socio-political inequalities were too wide to bridge successfully. Consequently, only since the late 1980s, when the dismantlement of apartheid began to gather momentum, can it be said that an authentically South African voice has started to emerge in the press, although it is still not uncommon, from some quarters, for the country’s media to be condemned for not being patriotic, or truly South African.

If the new democracy has ushered in a cacophony of voices, the racial and cultural polarities have often remained starkly defined. In his introduction to Riccardo Orizio’s study of the colonial remnants in Namibia, Sri Lanka, and parts of the Caribbean and Latin America,¹ Ryszard Kapuscinski makes an observation that also holds true for South Africa: ‘... the lost white tribes of today live in a schizophrenic situation: having deliberately isolated themselves from the ambient culture, they are yet part of it’. He adds that even if they feel that they don’t belong, they are seen from outside as part of the very societies that they reject. Further, ‘they [the societies] reflect, to a remarkable degree, the problems inherent in modern societies where everything is mixed: colour, language, religion, culture. In a way, the fate of the lost white tribes – far from being an historical oddity – anticipated its growing multiculturalism.’

That some South Africans, therefore, feel themselves alienated from the transforming society, and consequently react negatively towards it, is another question that hangs over press coverage in the country. Further, in line with this, a question that must repeatedly be asked is whether or not certain criticism of the new order is racially, and not rationally, motivated. Conversely, another

¹ Riccardo Orizio, *Lost White Tribes* (Vintage 2002), p. xii.

litmus test that must consistently be applied in the media is whether or not legitimate criticism is being refuted by the disingenuous defence that it is racist.

Yet one oligarchy giving way to another, as occurred in South Africa in 1994, is not the only aspect of a transition from foreign domination to self-determination. As Amy Chua compellingly points out in *World on Fire*, the exporting of democracy and a free-market economy in some societies fans ethnic hatred. Chua warns that because the inequities of history have in some countries created market-dominant minorities – ‘ethnic minorities who, for widely varying reasons, tend under market conditions to dominate economically, often to a startling extent, the “indigenous” majorities around them’² – there is great potential for impoverished indigenous majorities to feel intense animosity towards members of those conspicuously different minorities who enjoy disproportionate wealth and influence.

Clear examples of these market-dominant minorities can be found in the same fractured societies that have been mentioned above: the whites in Southern Africa and in parts of Latin America, the Croats and Slovenes in the former Yugoslavia, the Indians in Fiji, and the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

If in Southern Africa it is the whites who are considered the primary ‘market-dominant minority’, so can the South Africans of Indian origin – like their former compatriots in Fiji and East Africa – be seen as a similarly privileged racial caste, and therefore the object of antipathy. When, in 1982, an indigenous Fijian senator declared, pointedly against his fellow countrymen and -women of Indian origin, that he could bring on bloodshed if he wished, and that ‘any race which does not bear along with Fijians can pack and go home’³, he was articulating a sentiment that, in various guises, has long simmered under the surface of South African public discourse, and burst into full view in 2002.

What lit the fuse in this instance was a Zulu-language song called *AmaNdiya* (‘Indians’) by Tony Award-winning South African writer and director Mbongeni Ngema. Crudely stereotyping Indians as racist and money

² Amy Chua, *World on Fire* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), p. 6.

³ Victor Lal, *Fiji: Coups in Paradise: Race, Politics and Military Intervention* (London: Zed Books, 1990), p. 155.

grubbing, the song caused a media storm and was banned not long after its release. Reportedly, Nelson Mandela asked Ngema to apologise but he refused.

But what is as disturbing as the lyrics themselves was the flurry of letters to newspapers that they provoked. One, written by someone in Katlehong, near Johannesburg, and published in Johannesburg's *Sowetan* newspaper, contained phrases like 'it is a known fact that most Indians are worse racists than whites' and 'the Indian people are opportunists and the real racists in South Africa and the rest of Africa'.

Commenting on it at the time, a columnist in a South African newspaper noted that 'In Ngema's song there are no good Indians, just as in Hassan Ngeze's newspaper, called *Kangura*, or *Awakening*, there were no good Tutsis, and in the infamous Nazi hate-sheet *Der Sturmer* there were no good Jews. In differing degrees, in each case the Indians, Tutsis and Jews are demonized and de-humanised'. In the same article is made the observation that 'if such generalizations are not bigotry, then what is? Imagine the outcry if an Indian expressed similar racist remarks about black people.'⁴

But South Africans can take some solace from the fact that even if *AmaNdiya* showed how thin the veneer of the 'rainbow nation' is in places, it did provoke an outraged response. And therein lies the challenge: how newspapers can report on, and comment on, similarly negative sentiments but in such a manner that they can be processed for the greater good.

The economic disparity and its resultant resentment, as articulated by Chua, has also played its part in making more difficult the task of a newspaper to serve a body of readers in a particular readership area. For just as in Britain a highbrow, leftist newspaper like the *Guardian* can rely on a number of assumptions when it packages the news for its readers, so a paper like *The Witness* has no such givens, for its readers reflect the full political spectrum of viewpoints. Further, not only are they so varied in their world views, but they also carry the distinct cultural and economic baggage of having in the apartheid years been either 'advantaged' (i.e. a beneficiary) or 'disadvantaged' (i.e. a victim).

⁴ John Conyngham, 'The Seeds of Genocide', *The Natal Witness*, 5 July 2002.

Demographically, *Witness* readers can be divided into four groups – white 36.76%, black 33.11%, Indian 26.34%, and Coloured (the community of mixed race) 3.79%⁵. Given the particular needs of these distinct bodies of readers, inevitably overlaid by such other considerations as language, religion, culture, gender and class, and the often sensitive nature in which each group inter-relates with the others, it can merely be a matter of nuance in news selection or ‘angle’ that includes or alienates a reader with his or her particular world view.

How sensitive this is can be seen in the context of sports coverage where the extent and positioning of stories and photographs of a particular sports code can play a major role in how that paper is perceived by its readers. The reason for this is that certain sports have historically been associated with certain communities. Broadly speaking, black South Africans favour football and boxing, Indian South Africans favour cricket and football, and white South Africans favour rugby and cricket. In the case of *The Witness*, therefore, a surfeit of rugby coverage says to most black readers that the newspaper has a ‘white soul’, as for many white readers an abundance of football coverage, the majority of whose players are black, proclaims that the paper is aimed at a black readership.

This racially based sporting affiliation has deep roots, whether nourished or deprived, as the case may be, by decades of apartheid generosity towards white sporting codes and neglect of black sporting codes. For example, lavished on rugby were some of the finest stadiums in the world, while football, the sport with the biggest following in the country, was until relatively recently conspicuously underfunded.

The tension between ‘white’ rugby and a ‘black’ government provides pages of copy on an ongoing basis, usually around the issue of the need for a quota of black players in provincial rugby teams and in the Springboks, the retention of whose name, with its white supremacist associations, is also the subject of lengthy debate. At no other time was this tension so conspicuously articulated as when the Springboks won the 2008 Rugby World Cup, only to have sports minister Makhenkesi Stofile announce on national radio that the

⁵ South African AMPS figures, 2008.

team's success should be seen in context because rugby is essentially a minor sport played only by a few nations.

As if sporting differences weren't enough, serving four major religious groupings among a readership is also fraught with possibilities of potential estrangement. On days of significance to particular religions it is de rigueur for *The Witness* to wish its Christian, or Muslim, or Hindu, or Jewish readers well, and any omission or delay is perceived by the grouping concerned as proof of the paper's preference for the 'other'. Particularly challenging is the recognition of the end of the fast at Ramadan, relying as it does on the sighting of the new moon, sometimes in inclement weather conditions.

But such cultural sensitivities are not limited to specifically religious coverage. In March 2003, when the United States declared war on Saddam Hussein, the publication on the front page of *The Witness* of a news wire photograph of a phalanx of American tanks, with their stars-and-stripes pennants flying, advancing across the desert towards Baghdad, evoked outrage from some Muslim readers who saw in the use of the illustration a pro-U.S. triumphalism that they found partisan and deeply offensive.

With such stark polarities, there are clearly no easy answers. If a successful newspaper is, in Arthur Miller's maxim, a society talking to itself, each publication must embrace the challenge of attempting to include the disparate fragments which make up its fractured society, even if that society is undergoing a seismic transformation.

Consequently, how does an established newspaper, say, in a national capital like Colombo, or Suva, or Sarajevo, or even a provincial capital like Pietermaritzburg, react sensitively to the evolutionary reconstitution of its readership and still serve everyone, irrespective of their cultural, religious or racial differences, without losing the core values which have given its editorial voice its particular resonance?

If, say, it is a liberal paper, like *The Witness* and other examples of South Africa's English-language press, with an admonishing edge, does it need to soften its stance until the new order has found its feet and gained purchase? Given the certainty of growing pains and mistakes, should newspapers, particularly those with long pedigrees that straddle the different epochs, even go so far as to assume a myopia and a stance of public-spirited advocacy? Or should they, in the name of democracy, retain a vigorous scrutiny to ensure that

the new order enshrines and entrenches the values that it had sacrificed so much to achieve, even if to do so is to invite criticism for being unprogressive and un-reconstituted, and therefore a relic of the past? By citing various examples, and scrutinizing them, attempts will be made to answer these questions.

VOICES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

At the outset, it is instructive to consider what Charles Husband refers to as the ‘conceptual tools’⁶ that are routinely applied in discussions of the operation of the media in a democracy, and particularly in multi-ethnic democracies. In this regard the notions of the public sphere, citizenship and the nation-state will be considered, insofar as they are applicable to contemporary South African society. First, the concept of the public sphere, which is defined by Curran thus:

According to classical liberal theory, the public sphere (or, in the more traditional terminology, ‘public forum’) is the space between government and society in which private individuals exercise formal and informal control over the state: formal control through the election of governments and informal control through the pressure of public opinion. The media are central to this process. They distribute the information necessary for citizens to make an informed choice at election time; they facilitate the formation of public opinion by providing an independent forum of debate; and they enable the people to shape the conduct of government by articulating their views. The media are thus the principal institutions of the public sphere or, in the rhetoric of nineteenth-century liberalism, ‘the fourth estate of the realm’⁷.

While such a definition may seem idealistic, it goes to the heart of democracy for without the periodic formal election of office bearers and the continual surveillance of their conduct by a vigilant public, the prospect of

⁶ Charles Husband, ‘General introduction: Ethnicity and media democratization within the nation-state’, in Charles Husband (editor), *A Richer Vision: The Development of Ethnic Minority Media in Western Democracies*, (London: UNESCO, 1994), p. 2.

⁷ Husband, ‘General introduction: Ethnicity and media democratization within the nation-state’, p.3.

autocracy is inevitable. And for the public sphere to provide the space and freedom for private individuals to carry out such a role is central to the functioning of a democracy.

Husband goes on to distinguish between ‘formal’ and ‘substantive’ citizenship, the former being merely membership of a nation state, and the latter being a degree of civil, political and social empowerment that allows each citizen to actively engage in the functioning of government, albeit at one remove. Effectively, this means each citizen has a *de jure* and a *de facto* role in how he or she is governed, rather than just the former. However, as is so often apparent, ‘formal citizen status does not guarantee substantive citizen rights’.⁸

Further, in certain countries, one of the primary reasons for exclusion and discrimination is ethnicity, with ethnic minorities denied a voice in national agendas. In this regard, the post-colonial experience in many European countries has created the need for the renegotiation of the national iconography. With the passing of the colonial era has come irrevocable change in the relationship between the metropolitan state and its former colonial subjects, many of whom have since gravitated to the metropolis and need now to be included in the national consciousness of the metropolitan culture.

Whether in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, or elsewhere in Europe, the particular ideological foundation for the construction of citizenship in each country plays a role in determining the relationship between the new ethnic minority and the dominant culture. Examples of this are Germany, which has a narrow ethnic definition of citizenship, and France, which has a demotic-unitarian definition in which citizenship is not subjected to qualifications by gender, ethnicity or religion.

Writing in the 1970s, and taking a consciously American viewpoint, Jane Kramer accused countries in Europe of being cynical about identity, of manipulating the myths of Nation and Citizen that they had mastered, and, despite the lessons of Nazism and Stalinism, of complacently retaining safe ideologies. But then, she noted, outsiders, both native and foreign, began to break the mould of European life. “They are a social and political and certainly an economic fact of life, and they have made Europe a more polyglot, more

⁸ W.R. Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1992). pp. xiv-xv.

various sort of place. But Europe has yet to settle on an ethic, or even an appearance, appropriate to its new reality.”⁹

But that was 30 years ago, and inevitably things have changed. Second- and third-generations have been born to immigrant families, in most cases strengthening the bond between the ‘foreigners’ and their country of adoption, but in recent years links between such minority groupings and terror attacks in European countries have posed new questions about the effectiveness of integration and the establishment of a new sense of belonging.

In South Africa, on the other hand, the advent of democracy in 1994 and the implementation of a liberal and inclusive Constitution have in theory extended the parameters of the public sphere to all citizens, even if the greater space is not yet uniformly occupied by the multiplicity of ethnic groupings that make up the country. Further, while everyone has ‘formal’ citizenship, a variety of factors prevent many members of the population from exercising their ‘substantive’ citizenship.

Voicing such concerns from the perspective of business management is Jimmy Manyi, president of the Black Management Forum, a lobby group to promote the interests of black businesspeople: ‘The challenge faced by the country [South Africa] is that due to a dominant Western business environment, black culture is never accommodated, except in patronizing ways. Various diversity programmes in many companies are understood only to mean how to deal with blacks. Many organizations are quite content with diversity being defined as whites doing all the thinking and strategizing and blacks limited to the implementation.”¹⁰

The above template of concerns could probably be applied to the social fragmentation in many countries in Europe that have failed adequately to integrate their ethnic minorities, but the difference in South Africa is that it is members of the ethnic *majority* that still feel themselves excluded, even if democracy, with its abundance of rights and freedoms, has now been in place for 15 years.

⁹ Jane Kramer, *Unsettling Europe*, (New York: Random House, 1980), pp. xiv-xv.

¹⁰ Jimmy Manyi, ‘Race raising its ugly head again’, *Sunday Times* (South Africa), 19 August 2007.

Another factor that has hindered the emergence of an authentic public voice in South Africa is the legacy of Bantu Education, apartheid's patently inferior education system for the majority ethnic grouping. Coupled to this is the fact that English, effectively the language of power, although officially only one of 11 designated official languages, remains foreign to most citizens. Because fewer than half of the population has even a rudimentary speaking ability in the language, let alone an ability to read or write it, most South Africans remain linguistically excluded from active participation in the predominantly English-language public debate.

The following extract from a letter that appeared earlier this year in a South African newspaper reveals the anger and frustration felt by some members of the majority ethnic group who perceive that the public debate is controlled by an ethnic minority. The matter under discussion was the decision in March 2009 by the country's National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) to drop charges against then suspended Deputy President, and now President, Jacob Zuma:

"The white-owned press has seriously abused the Constitution in the name of freedom of expression, all but convicting Zuma in pursuance of a racist agenda. The line must be drawn as to how far freedom of expression goes before it becomes insulting and belittling of an individual."¹¹

So here again, unlike in Europe, where it is the minorities who feel themselves excluded, for historical reasons members of a majority ethnic grouping still feel themselves discriminated against, in this instance by a allegedly minority-controlled media who are perceived to be manipulating the free-flow of information.

At the speed at which South African society is transforming it is hard to imagine such views persisting indefinitely. Already, the newspapers with the largest circulations, like the *Daily Sun* and the *Sunday Times*, have black editors, and the ownership of the media is becoming more racially diverse. However, such criticism will probably only dissipate entirely, if ever, when there is greater economic equality between the races, and when a reformed education system can provide the majority of the country's citizens with not only a better education but also a greater proficiency in English. A further

¹¹ Sizwe Duma, 'Abuse of freedom', *Natal Witness*, 9 April 2009.

increase in the development of the vernacular language media would also lead to a greater feeling of engagement in public affairs on the part of people who were previously excluded.

In this regard, the importance of education cannot be over emphasized. In the countdown to the bloodletting in the Bosnian capital, when the apparent cohesiveness of the city began to show signs of fraying, U.S. journalist Tom Gjelten observed that “The more urbane and educated they were, the less likely Serbs in Sarajevo were to take the nationalists’ side.”¹²

But as long as such views persist, even if the foundations on which they are based are disintegrating or have disintegrated, they will support Amy Chua’s contention that ethnically-distinct, market-dominant minorities – in other words, the exotic tall poppies in an indigenous field – will inevitably be objects of animosity, and true nationhood will remain elusive.

¹² Gjelten, Tom. *Sarajevo Daily: A City and its Newspaper Under Siege*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1995). pp. 12-13.

‘LOYAL’ OR ‘DISLOYAL’

By its very nature, part of this debate also finds itself caught up in allegations of Afro-pessimism. Broadly defined as a jaundiced view of Africa, held particularly by sections of the Western world, it is challenged by many Africans who see it as an outsider’s compunction to see the continent primarily as afflicted, without giving due consideration to the many positive developments that have taken place, and are taking place, on it.

Two articles in the *World Policy Journal* capture the tension between Afro-optimists and Afro-pessimists. First, a pair of quotes from the former camp, addressed primarily to Americans, which dismiss Afro-pessimism as unfair:

“What Americans see and hear about Africa is framed by a stubborn conventional wisdom – Afro-pessimism – that views the continent as little more than a giant basket case. Deep-seated stereotypes and negative images, and the tendency of the media to see ‘good news’ as ‘no news’, have operated to filter out stories of African reform and renewal and to reinforce a distinctly negative image of Africa.”¹³

“By substituting caricature for analysis, Afro-pessimists have offered up a simplistic and distorted portrayal of Africa, which only serves to reinforce deeply held racial stereotypes, perpetuate a distinctly distorted view of contemporary African realities, and deepen America’s reluctance to become more engaged there.”¹⁴

On the other hand, a subsequent article contends that Afro-pessimism is in fact justified, and that Afro-optimism is unfounded:

“However nuanced, the portrait of the continent the new Afro-optimism draws is simply not borne out by reality. To insist on this point is not to denigrate the efforts of the Afro-optimists to garner support for initiatives on behalf of the continent, or to belittle the efforts some African leaders have made to transform their own societies. It is the fundamental false premise of Afro-optimism – a premise that often seems more akin to an article of religious faith than to an empirical conclusion based on a sober assessment of the available evidence –

¹³ David F. Gordon and Howard Wolpe ‘The Other Africa: An End to Afro-pessimism’, *World Policy Journal*. volume XV, number 1, Spring 1998, p. 49.

¹⁴ Gordon and Wolpe, ‘The Other Africa: An End to Afro-pessimism’, p. 59.

that Africa can compete on equal footing in the current global economy that makes its good intentions perilous.”¹⁵

This tension, and the question of how best to deal with it objectively, plays itself out daily in the South African press. One camp notes Darfur and Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe, and remembers the tragedy of Rwanda, as well as other, less publicized, examples of violence and corruption and maladministration, and feels that these are sufficient grounds for a generally wary view of the continent.

Another feels, among other things, that insufficient credit is given to Africa’s achievements, prominent among them South Africa’s seemingly miraculous peaceful transition from one-party rule to democracy, and the statesmanship of individuals like Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu and F.W. de Klerk, each of whom was awarded a Nobel Prize for Peace for helping to avert a racial conflagration and for leading beyond his specific constituency. And, contends this second camp, has sufficient credit been accorded to the fact that South Africa has not only begun to normalize its formerly deeply unjust society but, in spite of many daunting challenges, has also assumed the role of an African player on the world stage? If it was otherwise, would rugby and cricket world cups have already been entrusted to the country, to say nothing of the football world cup which is due to be held in South Africa in 2010? Will the first African-hosted Olympics not inevitably follow?

When viewed in terms of these polarities, the loyalists can be described as those who are unequivocally loyal to Africa, or who see themselves as having a responsibility to defend Africa, while the ‘disloyalists’ are those who feel inclined to criticize when they consider it necessary, and demand of the continent that it conform to the same high standards as other successful democracies. Within the terms of this standoff, therefore, a critical press finds itself being labeled as Afro- pessimist and, consequently, disloyal. And whenever allegations of disloyalty are leveled, so are they, inevitably, coupled to the notion of foreignness, either explicitly or implicitly. In other words, if you are loyal, you are a true African; if you are not, you are not a true African. This tension remains very much part of the public debate.

¹⁵ David Rieff, ‘In Defense of Afro-pessimism’, *World Policy Journal*. vol. XV, no. 4, Spring 1998, pp. 20-21.

For an example one needs look no further than an opinion piece that appeared in the Durban-based *Daily News*¹⁶ nearly a decade ago. Shortly before, in a cover article, *Newsweek* magazine had criticised aspects of then President Thabo Mbeki's leadership, among them his Aids denialism. In the column, headlined "Hypocrisy of the media", Mbeki's longtime friend Essop Pahad, then occupying an extra-ordinary ministerial position in the presidency, castigated the South African press for not defending Mbeki in the face of such an attack.

Even if one columnist had felt that *Newsweek's* conclusion about the president had been 'overstretched' and several others had metaphorically raised their eyebrows, Pahad was indignant because no paper had rushed to the president's defence. 'The South African press,' he deduced, 'was pretty unmoved by the rubbishing.' After refuting each criticism in turn, Pahad concluded in a manner that can only suggest his disappointment at the disloyalty of the South African newspapers that appeared in this instance to have sided with the 'foreigner': 'Given this strangely over-hostile picture of South Africa, we ask simply: why? And we wonder if there is any rejoinder from our own media, beyond the mild ticking-off that some administered.'

For a refutation of another broadside on mainstream newspapers – namely, that all media criticism of Mbeki flows from a racist/colonialist/foreign conception of black leaders – one has only to consider an opinion piece written by Johannesburg *Mail and Guardian* deputy editor Drew Forrest¹⁷. Responding to an attack by another Mbeki champion, his biographer Ronald Suresh Roberts, Forrest accepts that white editors are soft targets but adds that with the passage of time 'many more mainstream papers are [now] run by black editors who remain unimpressed by the president's performance on Aids, Zimbabwe and other issues.' But so visceral is the debate in some quarters that Mbeki apologists like Roberts, when faced with such a refutation, refer to critical black editors as the 'native assistants' and 'hand puppets' of white neo-colonial masters.

One of Roberts's prime targets is Mondli Makhanya, editor of the large and influential *Sunday Times*, who is accused of being in thrall to 'the shadowy

¹⁶ Essop Pahad, 'Hypocrisy of the media', *Daily News*, 12 March 2002.

¹⁷ Drew Forrest, 'Neocolonials under every bed', *Mail and Guardian*, 29 June to 5 July 2007.

ogre of mining capital'. Forrest then goes on to point out that far from being owned by 'outsiders' like Cecil Rhodes or even Harry Oppenheimer (both of whom, of course, no longer alive), the *Sunday Times* has black ownership and that Makhanya is 'an outspoken opponent of racism and colonialism'.

Another senior journalist who has bridled at the allegation that he has been coerced by 'foreigners' to adopt an anti-African stance is Thabo Leshilo, editor of the *Sowetan* and a committee member of the South African National Editors Forum (Sanef).

Making the allegations against Leshilo and other Sanef office bearers was Dali Mpfu, Group CEO of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), the national broadcaster. In a letter published in the *Mail & Guardian*¹⁸ in 2007, Mpfu contended that in their vigorous criticism of government, newspapers headed by some senior Sanef members were being unpatriotic. The SABC, said Mpfu, would not stand by while being made a whipping boy and scapegoat by a profit-driven media. 'Even less are we [the SABC] prepared to associate with the enemies of our freedom and our people. We cannot remain quiet while our mothers and our democratically chosen leaders are stripped naked for the sole reason of selling newspapers.'

When the *Sunday Times* based a damning expose of Aids-denialist health minister Manto Tshabala-Msimang on unauthorized access to her medical records, Mpfu went further: 'How inhumane and how far removed from the basic value of *Ubuntu* [a specifically African sense of charity]. Shame on all of you, especially those who have turned their backs on your cultural values for 30 pieces of silver, pretending to be converted to foreign, frigid and feelingless "freedoms".'

In a direct and vigorous response, Leshilo accuses Mpfu of racism for suggesting that 'genuine concern about the erosion of press freedoms is nothing but a bourgeois indulgence or a white pastime'¹⁹. That Mpfu had poured scorn on Sanef and directed his harshest criticism at the forum's black members for losing their African values, provoked Leshilo's particularly robust conclusion:

¹⁸ Dali Mpfu, *Mail and Guardian*, 7 September to 13 September 2007, p.30.

¹⁹ Thabo Leshilo, *Mail and Guardian*, 7 September to 13 September 2007, p.30.

‘There we go again: because we are black, we cannot believe in the freedom of the press, but only pretend to be converted. We are, after all, savages incapable of comprehending the intricacies of such “foreign” universal values as press freedom in a free society.’²⁰

As illustrated by the above examples, there is a hyper-sensitivity to criticism among sectors of South Africa’s leadership and a tendency for beleaguered government office bearers to launch ad hominem attacks on their critics. This is especially true when there is a perceivable ‘otherness’ – be it ethnic, gender, cultural, religious or class – that can be attributed to the critic. And when the ‘otherness’ is not readily apparent, as in Ronald Suresh Roberts’s criticism of Mondli Makhanya, and Dali Mpofu’s criticism of Thabo Leshilo, there is a tendency for it to be contrived.

How should newspapers, therefore, respond to the possibility of this destructive ploy being used? Should they, in the name of good neighbourliness and the greater good, abstain from criticism that may provoke it, and be thankful for the many achievements of South Africa’s post-apartheid government? Or should they speak out without fear or favour when they see the values that underpin democracy coming under threat?

In an attempt to answer these questions, let us look briefly at two contentious issues – Aids and Zimbabwe – that have been very much in the world news, and in greater detail at another, more recent, phenomenon which highlights the stark fault lines that fissure South African society.

AIDS AND ZIMBABWE

Former president Thabo Mbeki’s two most widely publicized blind spots, Aids and Zimbabwe, both of which have played themselves out exhaustively in South Africa’s media, fall neatly into the ‘loyal African’ and ‘disloyal foreigner’ dichotomy.

²⁰ Thabo Leshilo, *Mail and Guardian*, 7 September to 13 September 2007, p.30.

In what appears to be an unwavering loyalty to Africa and Africans, Mbeki seemed to have conflated the reality of Aids with an Afro-pessimist Western mindset that sees the behaviour of the continent's inhabitants as irremediably primitive. As if to refute the contention from some quarters that unbridled sexual activity had let loose the scourge in Africa, Mbeki chose to deny the reality of Aids and instead engage with it in an exercise of intellectual one-upmanship. There is no HI-virus per se, he contended, but a variety of other opportunistic afflictions that have caused the tidal wave of premature mortality that has been sweeping across South Africa and other African countries. As long as it was the Western world with which he was at loggerheads, his was a maverick standpoint clothed in African loyalty, but when the rocketing death toll and the resultant uproar in the African public sphere – and particularly in the press – drowned out his hypothesis, his presidency was doomed.

Nothing illustrates the 'loyal African' and 'disloyal foreigner' tension better than Mbeki's impassioned riposte to an article by Charlene Smith, a journalist who in 1999 had been raped and had written graphically about her experience in a Johannesburg-based newspaper. In a direct attack on Mbeki's Aids-denialism, Smith began by stating that every 26 seconds a South African woman is raped, and that it had been her turn 'last Thursday night'. As Mark Gevisser, another Mbeki biographer, relates²¹, Smith 'described how the district surgeon examining her had actually given her a battery of medications – except AZT, the one that might actually save her life: "The rapist bestows a death sentence and the state, by refusing to give cheap medication that could save many women, becomes the executioner. I thought the death sentence was outlawed ..."'²²

Rather than engage with Smith on the question of his Aids-denialism, Mbeki racialised the matter, focusing on her contention that rape was 'endemic' to African culture. This he saw as the utterance of a white woman in a 'blind ... racist rage' following her rape: 'Smith represented the "considerable number of people in our country who believe and are convinced that most black (African) men carry the HI virus"²³ – and were using sexual violence to spread it.'²⁴

²¹ Mark Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred*, (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2007), p.737.

²² Charlene Smith, 'Rape Victims Are Not Statistics... We Are People', *Mail and Guardian*, 9 April 1999.

²³ Thabo Mbeki, 'Mbeki Versus Leon', *Johannesburg Sunday Times*, 9 July 2000.

Thus, in Mbeki's eyes, to have written what she did, Smith is disloyal, as, by extension, is anyone else who feels similarly, or any newspaper that chooses to publish such views.

In the case of Zimbabwe, Mbeki is not alone in his stance. As an African 'loyalist' who has experienced firsthand the evils wrought by 'foreign' domination, he cannot bring himself to speak out publically against the excesses of his African brother, Robert Mugabe, when the critics, in many cases, are the very countries whose ancestors brought about the dispossession of land from Africans, and whose descendents in South Africa play such a large role in the strident criticism directed at him in the South African press.

But here, too, as an increasingly large number of Africans have begun to see themselves and their fellow Africans as the primary victims of Mugabe's excesses, even if the attacks on white farmers have received a disproportionately large amount of coverage in the 'foreign' media, so a groundswell has in some quarters begun to rise against Mugabe.

Gevisser describes Mbeki's reaction thus: 'Because he read any white criticism of Mugabe as racist, an attack on Africans' ability to govern themselves, he could not see the political imperative of quelling such fear ... His racialised reading of the Zimbabwean crisis also sometimes seemed to prevent him from acknowledging that Mugabe had strident black critics too, not to mention millions of black victims.'²⁵

It is noteworthy that the growing criticism of Mugabe's sectarian excesses has come particularly from the more educated Zimbabweans and South Africans – the very same kind of people who among the Serbs in Sarajevo in 1991 did not choose to blindly follow the narrow, nationalist cause but who wanted instead to live in 'a diverse society with a civic culture'²⁶.

²⁴ Mark Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred*, (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2007), p. 749

²⁵ Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred*, p. 440

²⁶ Tom Gjelten, *Sarajevo Daily: A City and its Newspaper Under Siege*, 1st edition. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1996), p.12.

‘BULLYING’ OFFICIAL CONVOYS

Something that more recently has been a source of concern for some South Africans, and has achieved particular prominence in the press, is the phenomenon of official convoys driving at excessive speeds, and the dangers that they pose to other motorists. Usually made up of several large, official vehicles with tinted windows, the cavalcades have been travelling at speeds well in excess of the speed limit along the country’s highways, and in various reported incidents have acted aggressively towards motorists, usually abusing them for not making way quickly enough.

One of the first incidents to become a public issue occurred in January 2007, when a cavalcade that included then KwaZulu-Natal premier Sibusiso Ndebelele was alleged to have endangered the life of a motorist while en route through the KwaZulu-Natal midlands to the funeral of murdered historian David Rattray. On reaching the place of the funeral, that the reportedly emotional motorist, who happened to be white, allegedly berated the premier for the dangerous driving of his convoy, gave the incident a racial dimension.

Also, when the editor of a Pietermaritzburg newspaper, who also happens to be white, was the following day summoned to the premier’s office in the city, it was insinuated that he had published the complainant’s viewpoint as part of a racist agenda. “Why do you listen to the story of an ordinary citizen and not listen to the viewpoint of the premier?” was the question asked of the editor by the premier. Although the premier’s spokesman had responded in the initial news report, the editor asked the premier himself to give his own account of what happened, and in so doing to show up the alleged spuriousness of the complainant’s allegations, but the premier refused, saying that it would be demeaning for him to engage in such an unseemly public debate.²⁷

A month later, by which time other papers in the province had taken up the story, and had written accounts of further similar incidents, the premier summoned the province’s media to a meeting in his provincial headquarters in Pietermaritzburg and in the presence of his executive council reprimanded the journalists, directing his ire at particular editors whose publications had been most forthright in their indignation at what they saw as the officials’ abuse of power.

²⁷ John Conyngham.

Advertising representatives at *The Witness*, Pietermaritzburg's newspaper, were simultaneously told that there had been a directive to withhold government advertising from the paper in retaliation for the attacks on the premier. Although this was denied when an official response was requested, in the ensuing months there was a distinct coldness and a sense of menace directed by the provincial government towards the paper.

Since the January 2007 incident before David Rattray's funeral, there have been repeated incidences of bullying behaviour by the drivers and bodyguards in official convoys, to the extent that the matter has assumed national prominence. In the Pietermaritzburg area, in late 2008, a bodyguard shot out the tyre of a car that was considered to be taking too long to make way for an official cavalcade, causing the car to crash and injure its occupants. The guard in question was taken into custody. Earlier this year there were a number of incidences of convoys travelling in excess of 160 kilometres an hour (100 miles an hour) and of bodyguards either verbally abusing or pointing firearms at motorists, and on one occasion spitting in the face of a woman driver who was pulled over and who asked to see the identification of the officer concerned²⁸.

In one instance, a traffic officer, who requested anonymity for fear of losing his job, said that he and many other traffic officers "were angered by the blue light convoy, as they [the convoy members] paid no heed to road rules that it is their primary duty to uphold"²⁹.

Once again the matter appears to have polarized society along racial lines, as the officials and their bodyguards have in all incidents been predominantly from the majority black population group while the other motorists involved have been from the minority white or Asian communities. This polarization has also generally played itself out in the press.

Veteran journalist Max du Preez, who although himself a white Afrikaner was a prominent anti-apartheid activist, has been forthright in his condemnation of such behaviour, calling on South Africans to protest loudly when politicians try to turn the country into a banana republic. Decrying the politicians'

²⁸ ²⁸ Thando Mgaga, "Convoy bully spat at woman", *The Witness*, 1 April 2009, p.1.

²⁹ Stephanie Saville, "200 km/h charge of the blue light brigade", *The Witness*, 27 February 2009, pp. 1- 3.

‘ridiculous sense of self-importance and their disregard of our rights’³⁰, Du Preez calls on citizens who are bullied by official convoys to protest by putting on their hazard lights and blowing their hooters, and by writing letters to newspapers and phoning in to radio stations. He then goes on to compare senior government figures unfavourably with opposition leader Helen Zille whom he had shortly before seen being driven around Cape Town unobtrusively in a modest saloon car. He concludes by asking why some politicians think that anybody would want to kill them, or even in many cases know who they are, and adds that if the men and women who run large corporations can plan their days without the use of speeding cavalcades, why can’t politicians do likewise?

While, in *The Witness*, the viewpoints of white readers or columnists have with few exceptions echoed Du Preez’s sentiments, as have most letters from Asian readers, some black letter writers have expressed anger at what appears to be disrespect of officialdom by some road users whom they feel are being deliberately obstructionist out of a sense of grievance and mean-spiritedness.

Writing from Imbali, outside Pietermaritzburg, S. Ngcobo asks why there is ‘such a huge uproar over blue-light cavalcades for government leaders? It seems there is a small minority of *Witness* readers and road users who cannot stomach the sight of senior black government officials being afforded the protection and privilege their office grants them.’³¹

Writing in another letter on the same page, John Govender of Pietermaritzburg also expresses annoyance. ‘Like many other black South Africans, I am getting annoyed at the constant criticism by the media of our leaders. There seems to be a distinct agenda when it comes to smearing people democratically elected by the majority of the people to govern the country.’³²

Both responses are significant for a number of reasons. One is that they are united in their criticism of a media that they feel are pillorying the conduct of some official convoys, and therefore accuse journalists of having a nefarious

³⁰ Max du Preez, “Down with cushy VIP cavalcades”, *The Witness*, 5 February 2009.

³¹ S. Ngcobo, “Unfair targeting of cavalcades”, *The Witness*, 19 April 2007, p.14.

³² John Govender, “Unfair targeting of cavalcades”, *The Witness*, 19 April 2007, p.14.

agenda. They also have in common the view that because leaders are democratically elected they are above reproach. Both these viewpoints, while 'loyal', display an alarming acceptance of what, in a functioning democracy, would be considered behaviour with worryingly authoritarian tendencies. However, in the South African context, it is commendable to see people of different racial groupings adopting a similar viewpoint on a contentious issue that does have a racial dimension, and in so doing help to destroy the chilling stereotypes in Mbongeni Ngema's *AmaNdiya*.

THE BALKAN COUNTERPOINT

If the centre held in South Africa, why did it not hold in a similarly divided society like that of the former Yugoslavia, and what role did newspapers play in South Africa's cohesion and the former Yugoslavia's disintegration?

Both countries had as the catalyst for their transformations the collapse of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia directly and South Africa indirectly. While the implosion of the Eastern Bloc let loose the competing nationalisms in the Balkans, in South Africa it gave pragmatic Afrikaner nationalists like F.W. de Klerk the confidence to embrace a transition to democracy in the knowledge that communism no longer presented a threat. Significantly, both countries also had at the heart of their conflict a beleaguered cultural group that felt itself to be god-chosen. Since 1838, when they made a covenant with God before their epic battle with the Zulus at Blood River, which against great odds they won, the Voortrekkers felt themselves favoured by a benign deity. Similarly, according to Serb legend, Prince Lazar, after his defeat by the Turks at Kosovo Polje in 1389, was offered an earthly kingdom or a heavenly one, and chose the latter, thus 'justifying the Serbs' image of themselves as the chosen people'.³³

Given this sense of historical entitlement on the part of the Afrikaners and the Serbs, how they were led was of crucial importance, and here South Africa and the former Yugoslavia differed markedly. Fortuitously for South Africa it

³³ Janine di Giovanni, "Madness Visible: A Memoir of War", (London: Bloomsbury 2005), p. 10.

was at that crucial juncture blessed with statesmen like Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, all of whom adopted a broadly humanitarian and reconciliatory approach that sought to include, rather than exclude, the 'other', in stark contrast to Slobodan Milosevic's malignly exclusive Serb nationalism and Franjo Tudjman's similarly partisan crusade in the name of Croat nationalism.

What role did the press play in each country? Even if Hendrik Verwoerd, South Africa's prime minister until his assassination in September 1966, and the Afrikaner nationalist leader generally considered to be the architect of apartheid, was himself once a newspaper editor, of the Afrikaans-language *Die Transvaler*, most South African newspapers were never mouthpieces for apartheid. The reason for this was not exclusively ideological but more the result of a divided history.

Because of the preeminence of the English language, and the limitations of Afrikaans, a derivative of Dutch spoken only in Southern Africa, there have always been considerably more English-language newspapers in the country than Afrikaans-language papers. And because apartheid was underpinned by Afrikaner nationalism, with its anti-British mythology of the Great Trek and the two Anglo-Boer wars, most English-speakers were excluded from the government, and therefore their newspapers were not ideologically sympathetic, although there was always a degree of complicity on the part of some English-speaking whites who nonetheless benefited from the system because of their race. This meant that while the five or so Afrikaans papers were generally supportive of apartheid, the 15-odd English papers and vernacular language newspapers like the Zulu-language *Ilanga*, were either antagonistic or neutral towards the ideology.

Infamously, in an attempt to gain a sympathetic voice among the English-language press, the National Party government in the mid 1970s secretly funded *The Citizen*, a conservative English-language paper whose origins were later exposed and whose presence to this day as a Johannesburg daily remains tainted by the circumstances of its birth.

The effect of this independence was that the liberal press in South Africa during the apartheid years, with varying degrees of success, in the classic tradition of the Fourth Estate, played a tempering role in politics. This it continues to do, similarly with varying degrees of success, in the country's new

democracy, to the extent that the ANC-led government has on a number of occasions expressed a desire to start its own newspaper to provide less jaundiced coverage than it feels it currently receives from many existing newspapers.

Writing about the Yugoslav media in the three and a half decades of Tito's rule, former *Oslobodjenje* editor Kemal Kurspahic demarcates three distinct stages of development³⁴. In the first, from 1945 to 1950, it played a strict, Soviet-style propagandistic role; in the second, from 1951 to 1974, it searched for relevance during Yugoslav society's unsuccessful attempt at reconciling reform with firm Party control; and in the third, from 1974 to 1980, it adhered to a loyal Party line during a period of decentralization that saw the republics asserting their control over many spheres of life. Thereafter, during the period of upheaval, Kurspahic goes so far as to assert that at a time when many Serbs felt themselves particularly victimized, the Serbian 'media actually gave birth to Milosevic'³⁵.

What at first glance seems remarkable is the apparent ease with which Milosevic coerced, or won over willingly, four Serbian media bosses who were so imbued with Serbian nationalistic fervour as to forget the principles of the watchdog role that underpins a properly functioning media. That they so readily embraced Milosevic's demagoguery confirms that in 'the absence of a tradition of watchdog journalism'³⁶ they were no more than servants of political power and had never truly been journalists. That this was in fact the case is confirmed by the official Code of Journalists of Yugoslavia, which defined a journalist as a 'socio-political worker who, conscientiously adhering to the ideas of Marxism-Leninism, ... participates in the establishment and development of socialist self-management society'³⁷.

Kurspahic goes further, explaining how in the Communist and post-communist eras the media had no experience in critically examining and

³⁴ Kemal Kurspahic, *Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace*, (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2003), p. 6.

³⁵ Kurspahic, *Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace*, p. 32.

³⁶ Kurspahic, *Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace*, p. 214.

³⁷ Mark Thompson, *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina*, (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1999), pp. 14-15.

reporting on the work of state and party institutions, how there was no culture of transparency and public accountability, and how the establishment of a strong civil society is imperative if excesses are ever to be countered. Given this, there was little hope of an effectively functioning public sphere in which newspapers and broadcasters provide the necessary information for an informed and vigilant public to keep government accountable.

In South Africa, on the other hand, a vigorous civil society has in the last two decades played a pivotal role in keeping both the apartheid government and its democratic successor in check. For example, it was none other than the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), an Aids NGO, invigorated by the oxygen of a free press, which led the successful campaign to discredit former president Thabo Mbeki's Aids denialism. By galvanizing both national and international opinion, the TAC and its fellow activists eventually compelled the South African government to provide anti-retrovirals for HIV-positive citizens.

At the heart of the former Yugoslavia's failure to keep its disparate fragments together, therefore, has been the lack of an effective civil society and the abject failure of its political and civic leaders to respect the notion of 'the other'. Without any consideration for cultural groupings other than their own, sectarian interest groups pursued agendas that in their very exclusivity were provocatively divisive. An example of this can be found in public service broadcasting in Bosnia and Herzegovina where not only were the existing legal prescriptions not implemented but the political actors, whether Serb, Croat or Bosniak, insensitively pursued their own self interest. This has taken the form of selective financing for a particular group, the disproportionate representation of a particular group in staffing and programming, and even the insistence in one instance by a particular group that they be given a third channel in their language while they were boycotting the payment of a licence fee. With such contempt for the notion of consensus, it was inevitable that inter-sectarian relations in the region would become 'a vicious circle of crisis, a perpetual engine for the production of conflict and the stalling of reform'³⁸.

When such behaviour is not rigorously and critically scrutinized by an independent media, then the media themselves must accept partial

³⁸ Sandra Basic-Hrvatini, Mark Thompson and Tarik Jusic (editors), "Divided they fall: public sector broadcasting in multiethnic states", (Sarajevo: Mediacentar, 2008), p.115.

responsibility. An example of this occurred in June 1991 when Milosevic found himself so much a political hostage to the aggressive nationalism which had been fanned by unscrupulously partisan journalists that it was impossible for him to back down when Slovenia and Croatia declared independence.

In this instance, as Mark Thompson notes, the media were ‘indispensable conduits for disinformation, propaganda and half-truths. They promoted certain information and opinions while suppressing or marginalizing others’³⁹. As a result, the ‘public is not able to inform itself about the actions of government. Lacking elementary information about the motives and intentions of its leaders, it has been kept blindfolded and disorientated’⁴⁰.

In such circumstances, as Zdenka Milivojevic, from Belgrade University’s Agencija ARGUMENT, noted: ‘What is beyond question is that the journalists’ profession was in the front line in legitimizing the war (through political propaganda) as the only possible solution of the profound Yugoslav crisis ... In this sense one can claim decisively that the media contributed very strongly to the war’⁴¹.

³⁹ Mark Thompson, *Forging War*, p. 292.

⁴⁰ L. Tindemans et al, *Unfinished Peace: Report of the International Commission on the Balkans* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1996), p.153.

⁴¹ *Odgovor*, May 1995. Quoted in Mark Thompson, *Forging War*, p.292.

CONCLUSION

Early in this research essay a number of questions were asked, the thrust of which was: How should newspapers (and other media) best serve a society which is so fractured that even the coverage of essentially neutral topics can prove divisive? With such a raw sensitivity attending public debate, it was suggested that it may be better for even traditionally liberal newspapers in some instances to soften their critical stance, for the greater good of social unity. As a counterpoint, it was also suggested that perhaps society is always better served by a vigorous scrutiny that may be hurtful at one level and yet play an important societal role at another.

In the South African context, the media have a great friend in the Constitution. Forged in the early 1990s, after a centuries'-long legacy of exploitation and hurtfulness, it seeks to heal old wounds and painstakingly to build a new national identity grounded on basic human values. As the cornerstone of the hard-won democracy, the Bill of Rights 'enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom'.⁴² Also enshrined is the bed-rock value of 'freedom of expression', expressly including the 'freedom of the press and other media'.⁴³ Within this framework, therefore, the press can confidently perform its watchdog role, even if in doing so it frequently finds itself at odds with the government and whatever segment of the population feels that its sectarian interests may be under threat.

Nevertheless, South African public debate will not fully serve its democratic role until the public sphere is more proportionately occupied by all the peoples of the country, with the disproportionately loud minority voice muffled by greater participation by the majority. Furthermore, once the debates in the public sphere become more representative of all South Africans, so the society should begin to normalize and the historical fractures begin to blur into the more 'normal' demarcations of democratic societies.

However, if democracy is to be enshrined, there can be no holding back of criticism in the name of a myopic 'African loyalty'. In both the matter of

⁴² Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

⁴³ Section 16 of the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

Aids or Zimbabwe, the dissenting, 'disloyal' voice in South Africa has prevailed because it was based on the democratic premises of good governance and accountability. That, in the matter of Aids, it has seen the democratic dismissal of a president who remained criminally opposed to anti-retroviral treatment for his own incomprehensible reasons, and that, in the matter of Zimbabwe, there is a rising groundswell among Africans against an ageing despot, is vindication of such 'disloyalty'. On the ongoing matter of bullying official convoys, there is still antagonism between 'loyalists' and 'disloyalists' but because such boorish behaviour is starkly at odds with the spirit of the Constitution there is every reason to believe that the 'disloyalists' will prevail.

Without the emergence of a new generation of black journalists, and particularly certain young black editors, who have the best interests of democracy at heart and against whom the dismissals of 'disloyal' and 'foreign' prove singularly ineffective, such democratic advances would not be possible. But whatever the watchdog role demanded of the press, and whatever crusades this may necessitate, the basic premise of human dignity must never be overlooked, for if it is so the press will undermine itself.

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