

Journalism in a Complicated Place: The Role of Community Journalism in South Africa

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A challenge for media in a culturally complex world is building a sense of community between groups with strong cultural cleavages. In South Africa, a fledgling democratic republic is making concerted efforts to foster media that will help to overcome a history of oppression based on difference. A qualitative analysis of interviews with 62 respondents found that the community journalists see themselves as community educators whose role transcends reporting the news. The community journalists interviewed are experimenting with new partnerships and new ways of reporting the news. However, the respondents disagree on the way news should be reported, with some opting for a more solution-oriented approach. The findings underscore that the greatest obstacle to these efforts is finding a way to foster sustainable media that serve historically marginalized communities.

In an increasingly multicultural world, media studies have begun to ponder the role journalists play in informing, bonding and bridging communities that may be composed of an array of cultural groups (Deuze, 2004; Putnam, 1995; Young, 1990). Does a culturally complex world change how community journalists perceive themselves? South Africa's rich cultural landscape provides a microcosm in which to explore this dynamic. This fledgling democratic republic strives to recognize every cultural group, represented through individual media channels with special emphasis – and government support – for media that give a voice to historically marginalized groups (Jacobs, 2004). Through a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews and site visits with journalists across South Africa, this study explores how community journalists define their role and how that perception may vary based on differences in community connection, media type and the backgrounds of individual journalists.

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Literature Review

This study uses the term *community journalism* to define a broad array of media types. There are countless ways to define and categorize media oriented toward communities: community journalism, community media, grassroots journalism, community radio, alternative media, independent media, resistance media, citizen journalism, and NGO media, to name a few (Lerner, Roberts & Matlala, 2009). *Community journalism* research has expanded well beyond the early studies by media scholars in the United States of advertiser-driven, print newspapers — either weekly or small daily papers — that served a geographically defined community (Lauterer, 2000; Byerly, 1961). *Community media*, in comparison, has defined media that are *not* commercially driven and that typically draw on citizens to produce content that gives communities a voice and identity (Fuller, 2007). Nicholas Jankowski defines *community media* as “a diverse range of mediated forms of communication: print media such as newspapers and magazines, electronic media such as radio and television, and electronic network initiatives that embrace characteristics of both traditional print and electronic media” (2002, p. 6). The concept of *community* itself also has many sub-categories: Increased globalization and technology have stretched the definitions of community to include groups that share geographic proximity, ideologies or simply a common interest in something as specific as a favorite rugby or football club (Christensen & Levinson, 2003).

The goal of this study is to advance existing research by comparing the perceptions of journalists who work across this spectrum and to build on the ideas of scholars who see crossover within these categories (Reader & Hatcher, 2011; Milne, Rau, Asta, Du Toit, & Mdlongwa, 2006). This study compares journalists who fit under this broad umbrella of community-focused media. Community journalism is not defined based on the type of media channel, nor the structure of the organization, nor any other categorization of this type. Instead, it uses Reader’s (2011) definition of a *community journalist* as anyone who shares a strong “connectedness” to his or her audience. Defining community journalism based on the orientation of the journalist allows the research to bypass roadblocks that occur when limits are placed based on community type (communities of interest versus geographic communities), media channel (radio versus print) or media structure (commercial, government-subsidized, or community supported).

At the heart of this project are questions as old as democracy itself: How do individuals form into communities, and how do different groups within these communities interact in a way that ensures the fulfillment of democratic ideals for all (Tocqueville, 1835)? Some scholars have argued that a democracy can only work in a homogenous society where all citizens enjoy the same status and common ideals (Dahl, 1989). Political philosopher Iris Marion Young (1990) uses the concept of *cultural imperialism* to describe how oppressed groups are left out of the political discourse of a government if it assumes all groups have equal rights. She asserts that additional steps must be taken to ensure representation for marginalized groups.

For media, the challenge is how to foster a community discourse that involves all groups. *Building community* is a term that has gained traction through the writings of Robert Putnam, who chronicled the decline of civic involvement in public life in the United States (2000). Putnam distinguishes between two ways of building community:

bonding capital and bridging capital. Bonding capital, as the name suggests, are the activities that join together likeminded people into a stronger association; associations of people need media to help champion their voice and join them together into a unified voice (Tocqueville, 1835). For example, the community newspapers that Janowitz observed in urban Chicago in the 1950s and '60s helped a community define its common values, define itself in opposition to the larger city and mark the social rituals of a community (Janowitz, 1967).

But in South Africa, the challenge for journalists is to create a *bridging capital* that links disparate groups. Scholar Mark Granovetter describes this as “the strength of weak ties”: A community becomes stronger when everyone is involved in the political discourse (1973).

How can a community journalist communicate with both groups that enjoy great privilege and groups that are marginalized? South African scholars say this may be the most important challenge facing community journalists (Mtimde, 2007; Milne, Rau, Asta, Du Toit & Mdlongwa, 2006). The country has 11 official languages. The country's government was created with the explicit mandate of having all groups represented. There is government-subsidized support for media that serve historically marginalized groups. As a developing nation, the country has great disparity in wealth, education and economic prosperity. The country also faces daunting challenges with social issues such as the HIV/AIDs epidemic, crime and unemployment (Sparks, 2003; Kupe, 2004).

The Media Development and Diversity Agency Act was created to foster the creation of news media to serve historically marginalized communities (Presidency, 2002). This partnership between government, private sector and civil society groups faces a daunting challenge (Media Development and Diversity Agency, 2009). In a study of South African media, one team of scholars found, “There are significant gaps in the representation of under-served groups in the South African media, both in terms of their own participation, and/or the coverage they receive” (Bosch, Davidson, Jacobs & Wasserman, 2006, p. 4). The media landscape has been dominated by white-owned media. Racial and class disparities were found to have been reinforced; there remained a great need for the inclusion of marginalized groups in the production of their own media.

Media have faced other challenges in the post-apartheid era regarding ethical standards, contentious relationships with the government and a demand for greater quality overall (Garman, 2005). In the early post-apartheid years, it was suggested that the capitalistic model of press would continue to serve mainly those enjoying greater affluence, ignoring many of the most important issues facing oppressed groups (Tomaselli, 1997).

Small, independent press in South Africa face overwhelming competition from four large media groups – Media 24, Times Media Group, Caxton and The Independent – which dominate the newspaper landscape (Media Development and Diversity Agency, 2009). In 2009, when these interviews were conducted, the top three publishing companies owned 47.1 percent of the newspaper titles in the country (Media Development and Diversity Agency, 2009). In their comprehensive case study of six independent community newspapers, Milne et al. highlighted how small, independent publishers are motivated to better the lives of those in their community but add that few of them, “... have the time and expertise to represent the voice of small community

publications in the battle against unfair competition, inequitable practices and marginalization” (2006, p. 113).

It is estimated that 94.1 percent of the adult population in the country has access to radios, the highest of all media channels (Media Development and Diversity Agency, 2009). Community radio is a small part of this radio spectrum, serving about 4 percent of the population (Media Development and Diversity Agency, 2009). However, South Africa has more than 100 community radio stations that provide airtime for local news presented in all 11 of South Africa’s official languages (International Marketing Council). One study of 10 rural community radio stations found that while they are popular sources of community information, many of these news organizations have limited ability to produce their own local content and rely on news produced by newspapers and other media sources (Megwa, 2007). Still, their effect can be powerful. Bosch described how radio builds community in a *rhizomatic fashion*, where horizontal community networks crisscross and strengthen a community through the sharing of information and ideas (2005).

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this inquiry explore factors that may shape the perception of the South African community journalist.

RQ1: How do South African community journalists define themselves? What relationship do community journalists see between themselves and the community they serve; between themselves and government?

RQ2: How does community journalism function in a country with a complex cultural structure?

RQ3: How do institutional rules designed to recognize and even subsidize media that serve the marginalized voices in a society influence the way community journalists define their role?

Method

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to draw on data from a variety of sources (Yin, 1994). Data collection focused primarily on in-depth interviews with journalists along with on-site observations that yielded field notes and observations (Bogdan & Taylor, 1998). Following a procedure that replicated the design of previous studies, primarily the work of Milne et al. (2006), journalists were located with the assistance of numerous media associations in South Africa. The goal was to find journalists who represented a variation in their cultural identity, their backgrounds, the community type, the type of news organization and the region of the country.

Interviews with journalists, which took place during a two-month visit to South Africa in May and June of 2009, followed an interview guide, but were also kept open-ended to allow respondents to have a say in the direction of the discussion. Interviews included one-on-one discussions with journalists as well as group discussions involving

journalists from news organizations from around a particular region. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Dialogue with respondents continued through email and other means. As a final member check of findings in this study, two of the South African editors who participated were brought to the United States, where they visited with journalists to discuss the similarities and differences in their perceptions of the community-journalism relationship and to review initial findings with the researcher.

The project received university institutional review board approval, and every effort was taken to design this study with thought to the impact the work would have on the participants in the study. Information sheets were given to each respondent and oral consent was obtained from all respondents. Analysis occurred in waves over the life of the project with the goal being to allow findings to emanate from the data through ongoing analysis, reflection and challenging of findings (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Results

The 62 respondents in this study came from 11 newspapers and 5 radio stations as well as universities and journalism education programs in South Africa. As Table 1 shows, the news organizations represent the diversity of community media situations in this country: The impoverished townships of Johannesburg, the rural agricultural lands of the northeastern Limpopo Province, the game preserves near Kruger National Park, the diverse international city of Cape Town, the university-influenced community of Grahamstown and the remote and dramatic landscape of the Eastern Cape. Structurally, they include newspapers and radio stations alike. Their business models include community-supported media, commercial media, independent media, group-owned media, media that partner with higher education as well as government-subsidized media. In spite of these differences, common themes emerged.

RQ1: Community shapes journalists' roles, desire for innovation

RQ1 asks how the journalists in this study define themselves and how their relationships within the community influence their work. Two key findings emerge in this area. First, community membership is a strong ethical compass for most respondents. Second, journalists who define themselves as having a strong community attachment strive to be active participants in community activities, eschewing the role of the passive information gatherers.

The power of community membership

Nearly all the journalists interviewed in this study express a strong attachment to the communities they serve. Many of the respondents are not only members of their communities, but also have lived their whole lives in those communities. Chances are that their parents and their parents' parents also called those communities home. At the Afrikaans-language newspaper, *Zoutpansberger* in Louis Trichardt; at the Khosa-language radio station *Vukani FM* in Cala and at *Bush Radio* in Cape Town, journalists spoke of a personal connection to the news events they cover. The respondents see this relationship as both a challenge and an asset.

Table 1: News organizations visited¹

<u>Name</u>	<u>Type, structure</u>	<u>Languages</u>	<u>Location</u>
Kathorus Mail	Independent, monthly, free, commercial newspaper	E English, isi-Zulu, se-Setho	Katlehong, Thokoza and Vosloorus
Zoutnet Publishers	Independent, commercial newspaper group. Publishes two weekly newspapers	Afrikaans and English (Zoutpansberger); English (Limpopo Mirror)	Louis Trichardt
Kruger2Canyon News	Independent, commercial weekly newspaper	English	Hoedspruit
Bush Radio	Community radio station supported by advertising, donation and sponsorship	English, Afrikaans and Khosa	Cape Town
Radio Tygerberg	Commercial, Christian radio station	Afrikaans	Parow (Cape Town)
Grocott's Mail	Independent weekly newspaper owned by Rhodes University	English	Grahamstown
Vukani FM	Independent community radio station	Khosa	Cala

¹ This table includes only news organizations where an actual site visit occurred. Interviews were also conducted with journalists attending a June 11, 2009, workshop on covering municipal government held in East London, comprised primarily of small MDDA-funded newspapers. Interviews were also conducted with journalists in the Cape Town region who worked for the Paarl Post and the Tyberberger, which are owned by one of the larger media groups, Media24.

The challenge of community membership for journalists was vivid on a visit to *Grocott's Mail* in Grahamstown, where a reporter was working on a story about a popular school principal who had lost his job. School officials refused to talk publicly about the issue, but the reporter had lived in the region his whole life and had attended the school. To get more information on deadline he went to the school itself, where people talked with him but refused to say anything publicly. In the end, the reporter knew the people involved, knew what the news in the story was, but ultimately had very little information beyond the hearsay of the community (K. Butana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Scholars of community journalism have long observed the challenge that being a community member poses for journalists. On the one hand it offers intimate knowledge of what is happening; however, it also means that these interpersonal connections and the realization that the journalist will face public accountability for what they write may hold powerful sway over their news decisions (Lauterer, 2000; Tichenor et al., 1973).

Many of the black South African journalists who participated in this study live in townships that have known great oppression and still grapple with poverty, crime and AIDS. All of these journalists spoke of wanting their journalism to make a difference. In Cape Town, the host of one of *Bush Radio's* public affairs radio talk shows said she wants to empower people from her own community to discover solutions to the issues facing them. One of the editors working at the youth-oriented newspaper, *Makoya Zone*, owned by Zoutnet Publishers, said his mission is to inspire his fellow community members by telling them the stories of people who have succeeded:

We try to motivate people to realize what is possible. You can dream big... if he's doing it, you can do it as well. The more we do these kinds of stories, the more people can relate (N. Gabara, personal communication, May 27, 2009).

A citizen-focused view of news was described by a group of journalists from *Vukani FM*, a community radio station in the remote Eastern Cape. The goal in every broadcast – if not the mandate – is to include the voices and comments of fellow community members. One reporter described how she would find stories by going back to “my community” and talk with people she had known her entire life:

You need to listen to the community, what they are saying about anything around them. Then you take that information from your community and do a plan or identify a relevant [government] department to answer this crisis and then you take it from there...

In all, you see, our strategy of coming to the community. The way we are doing our research is not about taking the [notebook] or the recorder and start asking questions. It's just to mingle with them. You go to the communities and talk with the people and get issues. Then we follow them up (T. Mbobosi, personal communication, June 10, 2009).

Community membership leads to innovative approaches

In both formal and informal ways, a number of the journalists interviewed have taken active roles in the community, a finding first observed by Milne et al. (2006). They use terms like “building community” and “cross pollination” as they talk about trying to build a unified community out of disparate groups.

Some news organizations, like *Bush Radio* and *Grocott's Mail*, have done so through formal partnerships with local universities and colleges. In these places, education is a core principle and the news organization is where students and community members go to learn to become journalists. At *Grocott's*, this relationship allows the news organization to experiment with reaching audiences through a citizen journalism newsroom, partnerships with community radio stations, and a cell phone text-messaging project where citizens report the news. In these situations, members of the local community work side by side with students who can come from universities both in South Africa and abroad.

Even in the smallest news organization, active community involvement is at the forefront. The publisher of the *Kruger2Canyon* newspaper led volunteer efforts to build a new school in the community of Hoedspruit and spoke with great pride of “our school” (personal communication, June 1, 2009). Zoutnet Publishers won the World Young Reader Prize from the World Association of Newspapers in 2004 for a series of educational supplements that were distributed through the newspaper and directly to schools throughout the region (van Zyl, 2005). Since then, the newspaper has coupled newspaper readership endeavors with work done to help build and improve local schools.

RQ2: Journalists navigate a complex cultural landscape

RQ2 asks how the complexity of South Africa's cultural makeup might influence journalistic routines. This is a quandary facing all the South African community journalists who participated in this study. The question is how to deliver a news product that meets the needs of the entire community. The Afrikaner journalists at Zoutnet Publishers in Louis Trichardt live in a region where their cultural group is the white minority and where the local government is primarily black. In this situation, the culture of the local black population, primarily the Venda tribe, is built on unquestioning respect for those in charge:

That causes a serious dilemma. How do you handle that? As a white journalist I can write and say look, it is wrong... and my white readers will say yes. The black readers will say, what is wrong with that? They are in power. They know what is right. You actually jeopardize your credibility as a journalist to do such a thing. (F. van der Merwe, Frans, personal communication, May 28, 2009)

Language is one area where journalists at most news organizations say readers are especially sensitive. *Bush Radio*, in an attempt to represent all groups, produces programs in English, Afrikaans, and Khosa. *Zoutpansberger*, in Louis Trichardt, publishes in Afrikaans and English. Zaidi Khumalo of the *Kathorus Mail* said he publishes primarily in English because his readers in the townships outside Johannesburg include an array of ethnic groups including many immigrants who come to the townships from other

countries (Z. Khumalo, personal communication, May 26, 2009). This is not an issue in all of South Africa. At *Vukani FM* in the Eastern Cape, which is more than 95 percent Xhosa speaking, questions about cross-pollination and about serving all residents of the region were met with confusion by respondents. In fact, the questions regarding issues of multiculturalism didn't really seem to make sense to the respondents in this homogenous community.

Coupled with this challenge of language is considering *how* to disseminate news to a diverse community. Zoutnet Publishers decided that multiple news channels, delivering different news content to different cultural groups is the only way to reconcile the differences within the readership area (Andres van Zyl, personal communication, May 28, 2009). *Zoutpansberger* serves the primarily white, Afrikaner community. It is published with articles in both English and Afrikaans, though the journalists say that they hear criticism from Afrikaners if there are too many English stories (Andres van Zyl, personal communication, May 28, 2009). To serve the readers who live in the outlying area – mostly members of the Venda community – this news organization has the English-language *Limpopo Mirror* as well as a youth-oriented publication, *Makoya Zone*.

Most respondents felt news organizations should provide one media channel to serve all communities. They said this approach helps community members understand that despite cultural and language differences, the issues facing the community are ones that everyone shares. The most famous example of this may be *Bush Radio* in Cape Town:

It all links to our mission. That people can see that humans are humans and that we all share, we all hopefully share, a common humanity. And yes that's all glorified terms and we try to steer clear of using them. We try to do this practically (A. Louw, personal communication, June 4, 2009).

At the *Paarl Post* near Cape Town, editor Anne Kruger said she knows that she probably does not have too many black readers of her paper, but she still believes it is crucial that her newspaper makes every attempt to “teach” readers to see their entire community in the newspaper (personal communication, June 3, 2009). She said this happens in large and small ways – like having a reporter cover all the schools in the region and take pictures of students that reflect the diversity of the region.

RQ3: Media subsidies and government support for marginalized groups

RQ3 asked how media subsidization and other government-supported efforts have affected community journalism in South Africa. Respondents agreed that the greatest challenge for community journalism in South Africa lies in encouraging and sustaining media that can serve historically marginalized groups. Journalists identified numerous challenges facing these news organizations. First, the communities themselves do not have a local economy that can support advertiser-driven news publications; and the businesses that do exist in these communities see little financial incentive to advertise to a market audience with little spending power. Second, local government not only does not support these independent news organizations, it also often competes with them by publishing its own newspaper that is subsidized by tax money. Third, residents of

townships interested in starting their own news organizations often lack the business and journalistic training to survive (van Zyl & Khumalo, 2010).

The mission of South Africa Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) is to support specifically these kinds of endeavors (Presidency, 2002). Many of the participants at a June 11, 2009, East London journalism workshop were people who had received MDDA funding to launch their newspapers and radio stations. The challenge, they said, is the publications cannot survive on their own once that initial financing has been depleted. One editor said he'd soon be going out of business because of this.

News organizations that have succeeded have done so, it appears, because they used the MDDA money initially, but knew it would require a mix of funding if they were to survive. *Vukani FM's* station manager Xola Nozewu (personal communication, June 10, 2009) said his station nearly failed because it attempted to operate as a volunteer organization using some MDDA money. Instead, the station reorganized and created a community radio station funded by support from programs sponsored by NGOs, local government, listener contributions and some advertising. *Vukani FM* journalist Xolani Femela, who produces a sponsored show sponsored by NGOs, said the support does not necessarily mean that the shows carry the agenda of the sponsors (personal communication, June 10, 2009). Local government shows include lots of questions from citizens about public services and the station has had great success ensuring that local government officials appear regularly to address concerns in what they said were candid, frank discussions.

A few years ago, when Zaidi Khumalo was thinking of shutting down or selling his township newspaper, the *Kathorus Mail*, he met fellow newspaper publisher Anton van Zyl, who worked out a partnership with Khumalo. Once a month, Khumalo sends all his stories, photos and additional content for his paper to van Zyl's offices, 300 miles to the northeast. There, designers lay out pages and do the final production work. The *Kathorus Mail* is printed and shipped back to Khumalo's community in the townships outside of Johannesburg. Van Zyl described this relationship using the word *Ubuntu*, a concept that is developed more in the discussion section of this manuscript:

In our private lives, we depend on family structures. We try and look after our parents and grandparents. We try and assist when little ones need money for education, even if it's not our own children. In the business world it is also fitting to look at our "family members" and see how we can assist (Van Zyl & Khumalo, 2010).

Different perceptions of how to report news

One unexpected theme that emerged from this research involves differing perceptions on how to frame news in a country that has experienced divisions based on race and culture. There was a perception from some respondents that different cultural groups had different news preferences. Some news organizations, like the *Kathorus Mail* and the *Limpopo Mirror*, routinely fill their front pages with the most graphic images and ghastly news stories. They are coupled with one and two-word headlines that scream out the atrocities. The editor of the *Mirror* said that newspapers targeting black African audiences, like the large national daily *The Sowetan*, have traditionally used a tabloid format with large

headlines and often shocking news stories (W. Lee, personal communication, May 29, 2009). Many of these daily papers grew out of the resistance movement of the early 1980s, which may influence their approach. Some of the front pages of the *Kathorus Mail* included an image a severed hand, an abandoned fetus found in a field, a badly burned body. Editor and publisher Zaidi Khumalo, whose training as a journalist came from his work in the resistance media at *Drum* magazine, said it is his obligation to tell readers about the bad things that are happening in his community and not to shy away from a story even if it is shocking.

If he looks at his community as merely a community of happy faces who are going to be happy to see themselves in their newspaper, to me that's journalism that's not credible, it's not. You must be able to live within the community that you write for. So that if there are issues, those issues affect you as well and you will be able to look at those issues on behalf of the community and this is what's troubling *us*, not *them*. You don't separate yourself from the community, that's very important (Z. Khumalo, personal communication, May 26, 2009).

Other journalists spoke of being motivated toward news that took on larger public issues. *Grocott's Mail*, for example, is now owned by the journalism program at Rhodes University and has a staff that includes professionally trained journalists as well as student interns from Rhodes and other journalism schools in the country. When asked in a group discussion to discuss the stories they were most proud of, the journalists pointed to examples in which the news organization had championed a particular cause or issue. One of those stories involved an elderly woman named Mrs. George who was in danger of losing her home, but thanks in part to ongoing coverage from the paper, the public rallied to find her a new place to live. The paper carried a front-page picture of her in front of her new home, which she moved into on Freedom Day in 2007 (van Winsen, 2007). They were also proud of a front-page photo of students at Rhodes University learning how to properly put a condom on a model of a penis with the headline, "People! This is how it's done" (Meadows, 2008). *Grocott's* general manager in 2009, Louise Vale (now executive director of the Association of Independent Publishers), said there are definitely issues in the community where the paper knows it will be criticized but where they feel it is important to take a stand (personal communication, June 9, 2009).

At other news organizations, the mission and the news values are more oriented toward community building. Heidi Lee Smith, editor and publisher of the newspaper *Kruger2Canyon News*, said she uses her newspaper to promote important local events and to champion issues she feels focus on the positive aspects of her community. Smith, who has no journalism training, also said she will write positive stories about local businesses as a way of promoting those places – a decision she said also ties in with building new advertising clients (personal communication, June 1, 2009). At *Bush Radio* in Cape Town, program integrator Adrian Louw (personal communication, June 4, 2009) said the station's mission is to get beyond news driven by crime and violence.

At a June 11, 2009, journalism workshop in East London, journalists from small newspapers and community radio stations debated the merits of both the traditional objective, conflict-oriented approach to news reporting with what one of the workshop participants referred to as "peace journalism," a solution-oriented style of journalism first

championed by Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung (2000) and that is espoused by NGO-sponsored media groups such as *Internews* (Fairbairn, 2009). Some pointed out that news organizations that simply seek out the positive run the risk of not being seen as credible if they overlook issues that require criticism. However, others countered that “bad news” – especially in historically marginalized communities – must be tempered with information that offers hope. These comments were echoed by one of *Bush Radio*’s program hosts about what she strives for in her programming.

You know, most people in communities know that next door, there is a drug dealer there. They have been knowing that for the past 20 years so they do know that crime happens every week. They know all these things, but what they don’t know is that there are alternatives to their life. You know, you don’t have to stay there and a lot of people are afraid of tackling drug dealers because they feel like... but people don’t know that there are alternatives. (D. Adams, personal communication, June 4, 2009)

Discussion

It is hard to make generalizations about anything in South Africa. It is a country comprised of a collection of cultures and a strong sense of regional pride. This study intentionally chose to interview journalists from across the spectrum of South Africa’s community journalism landscape. There was variation in community structure, media channel, funding structure and the backgrounds of the individuals themselves. The most intriguing finding of this research suggests that, in spite of these differences, if this group of 62 respondents sat down to discuss the future of community journalism in South Africa, they’d likely find much to agree on. Community journalists want to create media that has an impact on their communities; that inspires communities to see the multicultural nature of where they live; that invites everyone to participate in making communities better; and combats inequities that exist because of a history of marginalization and oppression. The following seem important to consider.

Membership is the strength, and the challenge

As noted in response to RQ1, in an age of increased mobility, South African community journalists have an asset that cannot be replicated: They are community members first and journalists second. These community connections go back generations. The respondents describe themselves as active stakeholders in their communities. They are stewards of their news organizations, serving on behalf of their community members. They are boosters of these communities, willing to take on issues both in their editorial content and through leading efforts to improve community life.

Surveys of U.S. journalists have routinely found that community journalists differ from their large-media counterparts in seeing themselves more as populist mobilizers, oriented toward community building through championing the voices of the ordinary citizen (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996). Community journalism scholar Jock Lauterer (2000) says such intimate connections mean journalists consider the community impact of their news decisions.

Bridging communities remains the most daunting challenge

Analysis of RQ2 found that South Africa's desire to become a more inclusive society poses intriguing challenges for community journalists. "Communities" in South Africa are often composed of collections of sub-communities that have historically shared a geographic region but not a sense of being one place. Efforts by media to bridge communities and overcome longstanding stereotypes face daunting obstacles. Community journalists in South Africa are experimenting with many ways of doing this. They offer information through multiple media channels, including newspaper, radio and, increasingly, through new media technologies such as cell phone-delivered text messages. They encourage citizens to join in the production and creation of news. Further, they consider the community as a whole as they make decisions about what to report and how to frame it.

But there is not agreement on the right approach. Some media organizations believe that different cultural groups within a community are best satisfied with separate media channels. Others vehemently oppose this approach, saying one community requires one media channel. Future research should explore whether one media channel satisfy all groups in a multicultural society. If, for example, a media organization is owned by someone from a cultural group that has historically held a position of privilege, is it realistic to expect a true understanding of the situation of marginalized groups within that community (Hofmeyr, 2003; Jacobs, 2004; Kupe, 2004)?

Partnerships open the door to innovation and sustainability

RQ3 asked how government support and subsidies have encouraged South African community journalism organizations. While much more research is needed in this area, the findings suggest that those who rely only on this support struggle in the long run. Those that have succeeded have done so by constructing their own hybrid models of media. They invite and teach citizens to tell the stories of their community. They use community and industry resources to train both journalists and citizens to do this work. They actively seek funding through a variety of sources including government support, partnerships with NGOs, donations, advertising, partnerships with other media and through collaborating with colleges and universities. It's worth noting that many of the challenges recounted by these South African journalists in 2009 are ones echoed by respondents to a Pew Research Center survey of journalists in the United States, which found that non-profit news organizations that receive seed money often lack the resources and training necessary to sustain themselves (Mitchell, Jurkowitz, Holcomb, Enda & Anderson, 2013).

Traditional definitions of news are being scrutinized

An unexpected finding of this research involved differing perceptions among respondents regarding news values. A number of the respondents in this study prefer a style of news that is more solution oriented and may have connections to Galtung's concept of peace journalism (2000). Other organizations – many of them news organizations that serve primarily black African readers – follow a more traditional approach to news, relying on coverage of crime and scandal in what might be called a tabloid-style format. Journalists at these news organizations say they do so because they want to mobilize their

community and that they have to compete with some of the national daily newspapers that follow a similar news style.

In many cases, the news choices seem connected to the background and training of the journalists. Many of the younger journalists had studied journalism either in urban technical colleges or universities. Others had been taught in their own journalism organization. A number of journalists said they had benefited from the small, government-sponsored training programs that do regional workshops. Another group of respondents had come to journalism via involvement in NGOs and as community activists. This last group spoke of producing news content that explored solutions to problems in their communities. Journalists with more formal training and experience seemed to have a slightly different perception of their role, in part motivated toward the watchdog function of media, covering government leaders and institutions.

More research in this area could include ethnographic research with residents in marginalized communities, exploring what type of information they are seeking from news media and what format would be most useful to their lives. One possibility is that research could focus on mapping the storytelling networks South Africa's township communities, replicating approaches employed at the University of Southern California's Metamorphosis Project, which found that residents in the multicultural neighborhoods of Los Angeles have the same desires for their community and are eager for the same information about their community (Chen, Ball-Rokeach, Parks, & Huang 2011). Merrill (2004) notes that this is a crucial question in the exploration of what he calls "community-based ethics" (p. 337). Previous surveys of the public have found that, despite strong criticisms of the press from government officials, the media enjoy a strong public trust in South Africa (Hofmeyr, 2003).

Is there a cultural ethic driving all South African community journalists?

A final question to consider is whether one can generalize about the style of community journalism practiced in South Africa. Two of the respondents in this study used the term *Ubuntu* to talk about their role as journalists. Perhaps this sense of community obligation is one inherent in South African culture, as author Allister Sparks suggested when he explored South Africa's transition toward a democratic republic:

The tradition of communal loyalty and social obligation survives, mutated but still recognizable, in the pullulating townships and squatter camps around the industrial cities...There is still a collectivist style of decision making in the political movements and trade unions and the hundreds of civic associations that exist in the township" (1991, p. 21).

Scholar Clifford Christians (2004) compares the concept of communitarianism with the African concept of *Ubuntu*. He argues that practicing a style of journalism that embraces community membership may eschew the norms of a professionalized style of journalism, favoring a viewpoint that sees the journalist firmly situated in the network of a community. The findings of this study suggest a combination of factors shape the ethic of community journalists including community membership, mission of the news organization and the training and background of the journalist.

This study should be seen as an exploratory project that points to a number of directions for future research. Future research could include content analysis comparing

different media types and looking for differences both in what gets to count as news and also how that news is framed (conflict versus solution-oriented). Audience research is also crucial. Journalists may clearly see their role in the community, but the ultimate judge of their effectiveness is whether those ideals are being felt within the community. Survey research and focus group research may help to answer some of these questions. What's more, the findings did not do enough to explore the question asked in RQ1 regarding the relationship between journalists and government in South Africa. More research should be done to help explore the true impact of government subsidies and institutional support for journalism serving historically marginalized groups.

In 2007, Lumko Mtimde, the chief executive officer of the Media Development and Diversity Agency, summarized what scholars and experts said were the keys to creating a sustainable media to serve all of the cultural groups that comprise South Africa. He concluded that journalism will need to innovate and be creative; that media is the key to encouraging citizens to participate in the democratic process and that media must become diverse in its content. His remarks echo those of U.S. media scholars Leonard Downie and Michael Schudson, who concluded that in this age of great transition, media organizations must create hybrid models of media that partner with non-profit agencies, universities and other groups to both create a new kind of journalism and build a new way of funding media that abandons the traditional model of an independent, powerful media supported solely by advertising dollars (2009). It's a global challenge: How can communities that need media the most create and sustain it? To South Africa's credit, it is a question that is being explored with great passion.

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