

**Deliberating the *Dialogues*: A critical examination of the
nature and purpose of a *Daily Dispatch* public journalism
project**

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by

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Abstract

This thesis critically examines the nature and purpose of a series of four town-hall-like meetings, the *Community Dialogues*, held in the townships and suburbs of East London, South Africa, in 2009. They were undertaken by a mainstream, commercial newspaper, the *Daily Dispatch*, under the banner of the worldwide public journalism movement.

Following Christians et al (2009), the thesis sets out a normative framework of media performance in a democracy, including a detailed and critical normative theory of the ‘facilitative role’ proposed and developed by Haas (2007), one of the public journalism movement’s key advocate-theorists. It also draws on a variety of theoretical frameworks and perspectives in the fields of Political Studies and Media Studies to provide an analytical overview of the complex matrix of political and media contexts – at the macro (global), meso (national) and micro (local) levels – that have helped give impetus to the *Community Dialogues* and also shaped their ongoing operation as a public journalism strategy in the South African context. Following a critical realist case study design, the thesis goes on to provide a narrative account of the *Dialogues* based on in-depth interviews exploring the motivations, self-understandings and perceptions of those journalists who originated, directed and participated in this project, as well as observation of a *Community Dialogue*, and an examination of some of the journalistic texts related to the *Dialogues*. This primary data is then critically evaluated against normative theories of press performance, especially Haas’s ‘public philosophy’ of public journalism.

The thesis found that apart from their undoubted success in generating a more comprehensive and representative news agenda for the newspaper, the *Dialogues* often fell short of Habermas’s (1989) proceduralist-discursive notion of the ‘deliberating public’, which sees citizens share a commitment to engage in common deliberation and public problem solving. This can be attributed to a number of problems, including some important theoretical/conceptual weaknesses in the *Community Dialogues*’ project design, the relative immaturity of the project, the domination of civil society by political society in the South African political context, and a number of organisational constraints at the *Daily Dispatch*. On the other hand, the newspaper’s editorial leadership has shown clear commitment to the idea of expanding the project in the future, establishing a more a more structured programme of community engagement, and nurturing a more sustainable public sphere, including the building of a more dialectical relationship between the *Dialogues* and civil society.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1-6
Chapter 1: Political and media contexts of the <i>Daily Dispatch's Community Dialogues</i>	7-28
Chapter 2: Public journalism: An overview of historical trends, theoretical concerns and its 'public philosophy'	29-48
Chapter 3: Research methodology	49-58
Chapter 4: The origins and imagined purposes of the <i>Community Dialogues</i>	59-68
Chapter 5: The <i>Community Dialogues</i> and the news agenda-setting function	69-74
Chapter 6: Building horizontal bridges: a critical examination of the first two <i>Community Dialogues</i>	75-84
Chapter 7: Building vertical bridges: a critical examination of the third <i>Community Dialogue</i>	85-92
Chapter 8: A platform for public problem solving: a critical examination of the fourth <i>Community Dialogue</i>	93-103
Chapter 9: The problem of the public in public problem solving	104-108
Conclusion	109
References	110-124
Appendix A: <i>Daily Dispatch</i> newspaper articles about the <i>Community Dialogues</i>	125-217
Appendix B: Schedule for semi-structured, in-depth interview with those involved in planning and execution of the <i>Daily Dispatch's Community Dialogues</i>	218-228

Introduction

Origins of and contexts for the research

This thesis critically examines the nature and purpose of a series of four town-hall-like meetings, the *Community Dialogues*, held in the townships and suburbs of East London, South Africa in 2009. These were organised by a mainstream, commercial newspaper, the *Daily Dispatch*, under the banner of the worldwide public journalism movement. The research was undertaken in a time of great ferment in journalism. Online media and “the people formerly known as the audience” (Rosen 2006; Gillmor 2004) are driving tectonic changes in the global media industry. Together with worldwide recession, these shifts have already led to widespread closures of newspapers and other media organisations, especially in Western democracies. The Pew Centre for Excellence in Journalism (2010) reports that American newspapers industry has lost 30% of its reportorial capacity since 2000. The South African newspaper market, in defiance of international trends, has seen rapid growth since the year 2000, marked by new entrants into the market and rising overall circulation and readership (Audit Bureau of Circulations 2006). Between 2000 and 2005, total circulation of daily newspapers increased by 38.4%, from 1.13 million per day to 1.57 million (ABC 2006).

While this suggests a healthy print media sector, closer analysis reveals a less rosy picture for the ‘mainstream’ or established dailies (which also purport to be ‘serious’ and news-focused). The increase in total daily newspaper circulation is entirely accounted for by two new publications, the *Daily Sun* (with a circulation of 444 061 in 2006), a tabloid newspaper aimed at lower middle class, or “blue-collar”, black readers which has become South Africa’s largest-circulation newspaper, and *Isolezwe* (a circulation of 86 232 in 2006), a Zulu language newspaper targeting a similar black readership (ABC 2006). The two newcomers are not only attracting new readers, but are also taking readers away from established newspapers, especially those that target the same reader types, such as the *Sowetan* and the *Citizen* (Milne et al 2006: 39). However, despite its relatively small size and the economic pressures associated with the fact that it serves one of South Africa’s poorest regions, the *Dispatch* has been more robust in shaking off competition from the *Daily Sun*. The newspaper posted a modest increase in circulation in recent years, ending at 33 000 in 2009, with an estimated 295 000 readers (Trench interview 19/02/2010), making it the largest Eastern Cape newspaper. On the other hand, the *Dispatch* has not been

immune to recessionary pressures and the newspaper offered voluntary retrenchment packages to its editorial staff at the end of 2008.

The *Dispatch* has an enduring reputation for its anti-apartheid stance, largely thanks to Donald Woods, editor from 1965 to 1977, who became a friend of Steven Bantu Biko (leader of the Black Consciousness Movement). Woods provided support to Biko through his editorials and after Biko's death in police custody, Woods went into exile (Williams 1997). In recent years, the newspaper has garnered a string of national investigative journalism awards for its exposés on baby deaths at Frere Hospital, xenophobia in East London townships and 'killer water' in the Ukhahlamba District Municipality. In parallel with this attempt to resuscitate the newspaper's legacy of investigative journalism, in 2009 current editor Andrew Trench pioneered the *Community Dialogues* as a public journalism project. Trench's interest in public journalism – a global journalistic reform movement begun in the United States in the late 1980s – was sparked in 2005 when he encountered it on a website while working at the *Sunday Times*:

I realised there was little prospect of doing such journalism at the *Sunday Times* because of the nature of the paper. It was one of the reasons I was keen to return to the *Dispatch* because there would be a prospect of doing this kind of thing. The story that really fired my imagination was the *Charlotte Observer's Taking Back the Neighbourhoods* [public journalism] project [about crime] which you could just see was exactly the right kind of thing for South Africa. (Trench personal correspondence 03/03/2010)

When Trench learned towards the end of 2008 that he would take over from Phylcia Oppelt as *Daily Dispatch* editor, he invited me together with colleague Sim Kyazze from the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, to present some ideas to his reporters and sub-editors on the theme, "Public Journalism and the 2009 elections". The seminar took place on December 3, just two days into Trench's editorship. Trench admits that part of the motivation for initiating the *Community Dialogues* was that they presented a "commercial benefit in terms of building relationships with readers" (Trench interview 26/10/2009) in a time of increasing economic pressure. However, also providing substantial impetus to the *Daily Dispatch's* ambitious editorial agenda was a set of powerful ideas and assumptions about the role journalism ought to play in a democratic society shared by a number of the editorial leaders of the newspaper.

My own interest in this research emanates from my involvement in the 'alternative', anti-apartheid student press in the late 1980s and early 1990s and from my subsequent professional involvement in the teaching and practice of alternative forms of journalism – notably community journalism and development journalism – at East Cape News Agencies and the Development

Media Agency between 1992 and 2000. However, I only encountered the theory and practice of public journalism after joining the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University. I was inspired and absorbed by the richness of the debates in public journalism and puzzled by the failure of this reform movement to gain any purchase in the South African media industry despite our rich alternative press history and post-apartheid commitment to public service broadcasting and community media. In 2005, I developed, with a number of colleagues, a third year, praxis-based course called Journalism, Democracy and Development, which retains to this day a strong emphasis on public journalism.

On 24 February 2009, less than three months after I presented the seminar on public journalism to the *Dispatch*, Trench announced in his column *Dispatches From the Trench* (2009a) that his newspaper was to launch the *Community Dialogues* on March 17. Referring explicitly to the theory and practice of public journalism, he wrote that the *Dialogues* would serve at least four core journalistic and civic purposes:

- First, they would help the newspaper “connect to the heart of East London’s neighbourhoods” and share its agenda-setting function with the public: “We shouldn’t leave politicians, or even newspapers, to set the agenda for public discourse. The most important voice is your voice. The *Community Dialogues* provide a platform for ordinary citizens to speak out, tell their own stories and express their needs” (Trench 2009a).
- Second, they would help the newspaper facilitate vertical linkages between ‘civil society’ and ‘political society’ (Heller 2009: 125), sometimes referred to as ‘linking social capital’ (Bank et al 2004): “We’ll make sure the voices raised at these meetings are heard loud and clear by those in authority” (Trench 2009a).
- Similarly, they would help the newspaper build horizontal links – or ‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ social capital (see Putnam 1995) – within civil society: “My vision is that the *Dispatch* has a role as a builder of bridges in our community and as a catalyst for constructive discussion about our world” (Trench 2009a).
- Lastly, they would support public problem-solving efforts: “We will ... look to these meetings for ideas on how the paper can back community-based campaigns which will result in change for the better” (Trench 2009a).

This thesis is concerned with examining these and other ideas of the editorial leadership of the *Daily Dispatch* in the light of some recent theoretical work on press roles. For example, five leading media theorists recently collaborated on *Normative Theories of the Media* (Christians et

al 2009), which explores the philosophical underpinnings and the political realities that inform a 'normative' approach to the question of the role of journalism in a democratic society. The authors identify four distinct but overlapping roles for the media: the monitorial role of a vigilant informer collecting and publishing information of potential interest to the public; the facilitative role that not only reports on but also seeks to support and strengthen civil society; the radical role that challenges authority and voices support for reform; and the collaborative role that creates partnerships between journalists and centres of power in society, notably the state, to advance mutually acceptable interests.

Public or civic journalism, falls comfortably within the 'facilitative role' outlined above. It has been practised by more than one fifth of all mainstream newsrooms in the United States and has reached at least a dozen countries in South America, Europe, Asia/ Pacific Rim and Africa (Haas 2007). Public journalism was strongly influenced by the 'deliberative renaissance' in Western political theory in the 1990s in response to perceived 'democratic deficits' inherent in the model of liberal proceduralism hegemonic in the US. For Merritt, it was further predicated on far-reaching critiques of mainstream journalism's limited journalistic mission of "telling the news" to "a broader mission of helping public life to go well" (1995: 113-114). In his book *The Pursuit of Public Journalism*, Haas (2007) sets out a normative theory of public journalism, which he calls a 'public philosophy', which is the most detailed and theoretically sophisticated defence of public journalism yet mounted. This 'public philosophy' is outlined in **Chapter 2** and is referred to throughout the thesis as a critical reference point in examining the nature and purpose of the *Community Dialogues*.

However, it is important to recognise that these *Dialogues* have occurred in a very particular time and place, and that any normative theory developed in other parts of the world, especially in the developed North, may not be able to take into account all the contextual factors framing and influencing media theory and practice in the developing South. **Chapter 1** of this thesis therefore draws on a variety of theoretical frameworks and perspectives in the fields of Political Studies and Media Studies to provide an analytical overview of the complex matrix of political and media contexts – at the macro (global), meso (national) and micro (local) levels – that may have helped give impetus to the *Daily Dispatch's Community Dialogues* and also shaped their ongoing operation as a public journalism strategy. An attempt is made to examine how these contexts pose particular challenges, but also present peculiar opportunities, for the *Community Dialogues*.

The goals of the research and the research process

Since very little journalism has so far been produced under the banner of public journalism in South Africa there is consequently little research on this topic in this country. One of the overarching goals of this thesis is thus to help fill a gap in the research literature around the applicability and usefulness of the theories and practices of public journalism in the South African context. In addition, Haas writes that there is an “unfortunate and surprising gap” in the global civic journalism research literature around the use of community forums in civic journalism (2007: 62), which this research also aims to ameliorate. While numerous studies have looked at civic journalism's news coverage, little is known about the exact purpose and nature of the various citizen forums, like the *Community Dialogues*, that news organisations sponsor and that help form the basis for their subsequent reporting.

As will be discussed in **Chapter 3**, one of the specific goals of the research was to explore the self-understandings and perceptions of those journalists who originated, directed and participated in this project. Why did they initiate it, how did they run it, and what did they hope to achieve through it? Do they believe there has been any divergence between what they initially hoped for and the way that it turned out? Secondly, the research included observation of a *Community Dialogue*, encompassing the way it was structured and facilitated, and how the various participants interacted with each other. Lastly, the research examined some of the journalistic texts that covered the *Community Dialogues* themselves as well as subsequent coverage of issues raised at the *Dialogues*. Following a broadly ‘critical realist’ epistemological framework, this primary data was then critically evaluated against a detailed and critical normative theory of public journalism proposed and developed by Haas (2007), one of the movement’s key advocate-theorists.

The presentation of the research findings

After presenting the theoretical frameworks for the study in Chapters 1 and 2 and the research methodology in Chapter 3, the research findings are presented in six short chapters – **Chapters 4-9** – following a broadly chronological arc in order to tell the story of the *Dialogues*, beginning with the conception of the project, through an exposition of each of the four *Dialogues*. At the same time each chapter explores in depth a distinct cluster of theoretical and practical problems associated with accomplishing public journalism in the South African context in accordance with Haas’s ‘public philosophy’.

Chapter 4 deals with the origins and imagined purposes of the *Dialogues* and critically examines the self understandings of *Dispatch* journalists in relation to the political economy of the *Dialogues* and the extent to which they match Haas's requirement for serving marginalised publics. Chapter 5 explores the impact of the *Dialogues* on the journalistic self-understandings and newsgathering routines and strategies of the *Dispatch* staff, and explores the implications for the newspaper and for journalism of its attempts to share its agenda-setting function with the public through the *Community Dialogues*. Chapter 6 covers the first two *Community Dialogues*, which took place in neighbouring locations on consecutive days – the racially mixed, middle class suburb of Beacon Bay and the informal African settlement of Nompumelelo – and critically assesses the extent to which these *Dialogues* were able, in the words of the *Dispatch*, to “build bridges” (Trench 2009a) within and between communities. Chapter 7 critically examines the third *Community Dialogue* held in the inner-city area of Southernwood. It draws on theories of both investigative journalism and public journalism to interrogate the newspaper's attempts to build ‘vertical bridges’ between civil society and political society in its effort to find solutions to public problems raised by citizens at this *Dialogue*. Chapter 8 focuses on some of the micro-dynamics observed at the last *Community Dialogue*, held in the coloured area of Buffalo Flats, including the protocols, structures, interactions, discourses and content areas associated with the meeting. It also evaluates some of the subsequent journalistic coverage of these events, in relation to Haas's (2007) normative prescriptions about how journalists can promote meaningful public dialogue and deliberation. Chapter 9 provides a critical overview of all four *Community Dialogues* and considers some of the ways that the *Dispatch*'s public journalists and citizens of East London could collaborate on public problem solving efforts in a sustainable way despite some of the constraints posed by the South African context. Lastly, the *Dispatch*'s ambitious plans to expand and improve the *Community Dialogues* are outlined.

Chapter 1

Political and media contexts of the *Daily Dispatch*'s *Community Dialogues*

Introduction

A number of media theorists have explored the complex links between media and democracy (Keane 1991; Curran 2002; McChesney 1999; Rosen 1999b). Some, like Drale (2004) and Christians et al (2009) present compelling schema which specify how differing conceptions of democracy have a direct bearing on different ideas about how journalism might be conceived of, organised and produced. Accordingly, the first part of this chapter sketches two broad traditions in democratic thought – liberal proceduralism and civic republicanism – and describes the ‘renaissance’ of more deliberative forms of democracy in the West in the 1990s in response to perceived ‘democratic deficits’ inherent in the hegemonic model of liberal proceduralism. The concept of ‘democratic deficit’ is then explored further in relation to contemporary socio-political dynamics in South Africa, including a particular focus on East London, the home of the *Daily Dispatch*. It is argued, following Heller (2009) and other theorists, that despite success in consolidating its legislative democracy, there has been little, if any, ‘democratic deepening’ in South Africa, especially amongst subaltern publics.

The second half of the chapter links democratic theory to journalistic practice. First, four normative theories of the media’s role in democracy outlined by Christians et al (2009) – the monitorial, facilitative, radical and collaborative roles – are considered, including some of the overlaps and tensions between them. Thereafter, more ‘sociological’ approaches within Media Studies are considered to examine some of the ways in which the capacity of the commercial news media to fulfil any of these normative roles – including the facilitative role undertaken by public journalism – are shaped and often severely constrained by the political, economic and socio-cultural environments within which they operate. With these theoretical contexts in mind, the theoretical debates and political tensions in the post-apartheid era over the preferred role of the media in South African society are examined.

1. Conceptualising democratic practice

While there are many variants of democracy, Christians et al (2009: 93) argue that they are best understood in relation to two broad traditions in democratic thought: civic republicanism and procedural liberalism. Civic republicanism emphasises the importance of common goals and shared

values and expects the state to play a key role in securing what is shared and valued. It regards “a life in common as the best way to discover a good together that we could not know alone” (Christians et al: 94). In contrast, procedural liberalism accents the interests of free and autonomous individuals and requires the state to protect the means (usually the marketplace) by which individuals pursue their own ends. It focuses on “individual ends that are known prior to, and independent of, any associations between and among individuals” (Christians et al 2009: 94).

Despite what Gaventa calls the “triumph of procedural liberalism” as the hegemonic global model of democracy there has been growing disillusionment with this approach and there has been increasing talk of a “democratic deficit” in both developed and developing contexts (2006: 8). This perception of democratic deficit gained particularly strong traction in the West in the 1990s in the form of what Gastil and Keith describe as “the deliberative renaissance” (2005: 14). For example, Fishkin (1991) outlined a proposal for how a more dialogical, direct-participatory form of democracy could be furthered within large-scale, complex societies. He was opposed to conventional opinion polls which he saw as mere aggregations of individual opinion and advocated instead deliberative opinion polls in which statistically representative, random samples of citizens would be brought together and offered opportunities to talk, both in small groups and plenaries, about political problems over an extended period. For Fishkin, this would “provide the possibility of recreating the conditions of the face-to-face society in a manner that serves democracy in the large nation-state” (1991: 92-93). For his part, Yankelovitch (1991) favoured a more deliberative conception of public discourse which was less dependent on face-to-face dialogue. He argued that publics should be helped to identify problems, “work through” them by formulating choices, articulate the competing core values underlying those choices, and examine the consequences of each choice. This would enable ‘public judgement’ about how the problem should be resolved. Public judgement is the point at which actual resolution of a problem occurs, as it is “the state of highly developed public opinion that exists once people have engaged an issue, considered it from all sides, and accepted the full consequences of the choices they make” (Yankelovitch, 1991: 6). This emphasis on inspiring citizen participation was also influenced by Harwood (1991), whose focus group findings challenged the assumption that citizens are not interested in politics and do not want to participate actively in public life. He *did* find that citizens feel excluded from public life by a closed political system and cannot imagine any meaningful political role for themselves. However, he also found that if citizens believe that participation will bring about genuine change, they are prepared to get involved in civic affairs. Like Harwood, Putnam (1995) noted in *Bowling Alone* a long-term decline in civic participation in local community affairs and called for the development of “social capital”, which he defined as “features of social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (1995: 67).

In the context of developing world countries like South Africa, Heller argues along similar lines to the US theorists that the core ‘democratic deficit’ is “effective citizenship” (2009: 125). However, he argues that these deficits are particularly acute because inequalities in South Africa run deep and access to rights are restricted by the subaltern social locations of the majority of citizens and/or are compromised by institutional weaknesses.

‘Democratic deficit’ in South Africa: The subordination of civil society and the crisis of effective citizenship

For Heller, a key driver of democratic deficit in South Africa is the fact that civil society is increasingly subordinated to political society and “deliberation is being displaced by power” (2009: 125). He distinguishes political society from civil society by their different “modes of social action”: political society is “governed by instrumental-strategic action and specifically refers to the set of actors that compete for, and the institutions that regulate the right to exercise legitimate political authority”, while civil society refers to “non-state and non-market forms of voluntary association that are governed by communicative practices” (Heller 2009: 124). He argues that a weakened civil society cannot provide a deliberative space in which citizens can meaningfully practise democracy on a day-to-day basis or serve as a countervailing force to the aggregative, power-driven logic of political society (2009: 124).

While South Africa enjoys high levels of consolidated representative democracy (i.e. a democratic system), this should not be conflated with a high degree of effective citizenship (i.e. a democratic society). Heller evaluates the strength of civil society by interrogating it both ‘horizontally’ and ‘vertically’. The vertical dimension refers to institutionalization and forms of integration between state and citizens. On the horizontal plane he examines the extent to which citizens make use of their associational capacities and recognize one another as rights-bearing citizens. He is particularly attuned to societal inequalities because these can “distort the associational playing field and produce political exclusions” (Heller 2009: 125). Theorists of social capital like Putnam (1995) argue that horizontal social capital can be further divided into bonding capital (horizontal connections within groups) and bridging capital (horizontal connections across groups). Bonding social capital may separate people into different social groupings, but bridging social capital will reduce the difference between them by linking them together in new ways (Bank et al 2004: 7). Meanwhile, vertical linking social capital should allow all groups to prosper by making the right connections with the institutions (of the state and market) that can offer them support, resources, opportunities and influence (Bank et al 2004: 7). In terms of the theory, these multiple levels are seen as an ecosystem where all parts need to be connected if the system is to operate effectively. If one part is removed or weakened or others strengthened artificially, the system breaks down. An insufficient density, diversity and depth of association can leave societies more vulnerable to authoritarian rule and poverty. For Heller, state-

society relations in the developing world tend to be dominated by “patronage and populism, with citizens having either no effective means of holding government accountable [in between occasional elections], or being reduced to dependent clients” (2009: 125).

The weakness of South African civil society seems paradoxical given that the struggle for democracy was driven in large part by civil society. Also apparently paradoxical is that despite the relative success of democratic consolidation in South Africa, most South African citizens are still unable to exercise their civil and political rights effectively (Heller 2009: 129). Mattes (2002: 29) notes that a 2000 review of a range of public opinion indicators collected by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa) demonstrated that across almost all the key indicators of democratic political culture, South Africans had one of the most passive citizenries in southern Africa. South Africans had extremely low levels of actual contact with government leaders or other influential community leaders. In another apparent paradox, the survey also showed that, compared to other countries in the region, South Africans had very high participation in protest action. Atkinson (2007: 58) reports that the Minister for Safety and Security put the number of protests in 2004/5 at almost 6000, which she notes is one of the highest levels of social protest in the world. This rules out any notion of an inherent ‘culture of apathy’ and Mattes (2002: 29) concludes that South Africans’ low political participation rates between elections can be explained by the fact that the system offers them few incentives to do so.

Heller argues that civil society in South Africa remains highly constricted along both the ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ axes of democratic deepening. He sees some hope ‘horizontally’ but argues that the really intractable democratic deficit lies in the ‘vertical’ dimension of democracy, the link between civil society and the state (2009: 131). He offers two reasons for this. Firstly, “the surface area of the state remains quite limited” (Heller 2009: 131), especially at local government level. Secondly, the ANC monopolizes the channels of influence and also exerts considerable power in setting the agenda, resulting in a public sphere “shaped largely by forms of influence that flow directly from political or economic power (parties, lobbies, powerful brokers) rather than from the deliberation of reason-bearing citizens” (Heller 2009: 131).

Furthermore, Van Donk et al (2008) note that local government has become increasingly bureaucratized, managerialised and centralized, ostensibly to facilitate more rapid delivery, but with a concomitant reduction in the quality and scope of participatory processes and institutions. Community development forums have either been dismantled or hollowed out and many government functions have been privatized or outsourced to consultants, thereby bypassing community structures. At the ward level, elected councillors and their hand-picked ward committees have been given a new role and new resources for co-ordinating local development. Because of the electoral dominance of the

ANC and the very tight control it exerts over the selection of councillors, Heller writes that “the new ward committee system feeds into ANC patronage” (2009: 132).

Heller writes that a second critical space of state-civil society engagement is the “political opportunity structure” for social movements (2009: 134). While the partial demobilization of once powerful social movements was inevitable with the transition to democracy in South Africa, Heller (2009: 134) notes the degree to which movements have been almost completely neutralized in the contemporary moment. But, despite this, in recent years the extent of dissatisfaction over the quality of local government and persistent unemployment has fuelled the rise of new social movements in urban areas. While these movements maintain high levels of protest they “remain largely local and inchoate, and have had little choice but to resort to contentious actions, many directed specifically at ward councillors” (Heller 2009: 136). They have largely been met with silence or outright hostility by the Government.

He also notes that “civil society has become deeply bifurcated between an organized civil society that effectively engages with the state and a subaltern civil society that is disconnected from the state and political society” (2009: 138). Business groups, professionalized NGOs and organized labour continue to be well positioned to engage with the state, while “subaltern civil society, and especially the urban poor, has more or less been sidelined from the political process in South Africa” (Heller 2009: 138). Highly paid consultants (often working for ‘non-profits’) have taken the place of community representatives in occupying the space between the state and society.

In their study on Mdantsane, East London’s largest township and the second largest in South Africa, Bank and Makubalo (2004: 114) argue that one of the problems with the kind of civil society that emerged in South Africa during the 1980s was that it had emerged and developed in a context of extreme repression and absolute exclusion, and was largely sealed off from the state and the market because it was explicitly organised *against* the state and, to some extent, the capitalist market place. This is in contrast to global trends in deliberative democracy since the 1990s, where a ‘third way’ approach has been gaining support, based on a partnership between all three sectors of society – public, private and civil – and one which sees new ways of achieving social progress through building societies that are ‘civil’ (Bank et al 2004: 115). The absence of this partnership in the South African context has led some scholars to question whether struggle-era organisations qualified to be described as, or mobilized in the name of civil society at all. Bank et al write: “Firstly, since these organisations were mostly political oppositional forms in another guise, they were political, even ‘state-like’, rather than ‘civil’ in nature. Given the banning of the ANC, and in the absence of legitimate local authorities or a legitimate legal system, they assumed functions ranging from the regulating of community affairs to the meting out of justice” (2004: 115). Neither the civic associations like the South African

National Civics Organisation (Sanco) nor the trade unions seemed to approximate a pluralist public sphere, independent of political interest or influence.

In the absence of a strong, independent civil society, Heller argues, the ANC and its alliance partners became the only institutional conduit to the state, exacerbating the asymmetry of power between political society and civil society in South African democracy (2009: 142). This asymmetry continues to allow a cohesive ANC political elite to dominate, explaining the comparative success of democratic consolidation in South Africa. On the other hand, the same process allowed a dominant class coalition to secure both its political and economic position, precluding more redistributive developmental paths and “short-circuit[ing] the social incorporation of the masses” (Heller 2009: 142). While subaltern civil society is still vibrant and the conditions for social movement formation are relatively favourable, we have seen that political society is largely immune to their impact. South Africa’s consolidated democracy has thus not been conducive to democratic deepening. The spaces for effective citizenship have been limited and political society has failed to embed itself in civil society and make itself accountable to citizens (Heller 2009: 144).¹

Spatial separations and democratic deficits in Buffalo City

Swedish researchers Berg & Ölberg describe East London as consisting of “distinct peri-urban neighbourhoods”, ranging from “well-developed suburbs around the city core to poorly-developed dormitory townships” (2005: 15). Many of East London’s townships have informal settlements connected to them, as is the case with the poor, densely populated township of Duncan Village. Even further away from East London are large settlements like Mdantsane that were once part of the apartheid Bantustans. Berg et al write:

The neighbourhoods and the different functions of East London are very spread out and interaction is not encouraged by this spatial structure. The division of different residential groups is still very evident and the neighbourhoods in East London are economically and socially homogenous, and separated from each other. (2005: 15)

However, they note that there is some ethnic diversity in the middle- and upper-class residential areas as well as in poorer inner city areas like Southernwood (Berg et al 2005: 15).

Meanwhile, in their research on Mdantsane, Bank and Makubalo (2004: 113) confirm that there are significant ‘democratic deficits’ in the area. As in other parts of the country, Sanco lost a great deal of former power and influence within Mdantsane in the post-apartheid era. This is because it operated as a “state-like structure” prior to liberation and has subsequently had to hand over many arenas of control, such as popular justice and policing, to the state. Bank et al (2004: 160) also note the weakness of economically-orientated civil society organisations in this area and the impact this has had on the development of new partnerships for economic revitalisation. They also describe the powerful influence of the state’s ‘participatory development’ programmes in structuring civil society

responses in Mdantsane. State and donor-led anti-poverty initiatives set the development agenda for civil society in Mdantsane, aimed at linking individuals and groups into circuits of resources provided by state grants or small project opportunities. This shifts the focus away from horizontal bonding and bridging social capital formation towards a distorted and dependent form of vertical linking social capital formation. This is because civil society organisations position themselves *reactively* to become ‘clients’, or the ‘targets’ of state ‘development interventions’, poverty alleviation packages and state social grants. When the grants run out, the projects that formed around them fall apart. There are some organisations without state links (churches, burial societies and savings clubs), but these are mainly neighbourhood based and there is little evidence of bridging practices, which allow groups to fan out with new cells across and beyond the township (Bank et al 2004: 161).

In considering lending and borrowing patterns in the context of extreme poverty, the study by Bank et al (2004) explored the relationship between scarcity and an image of limited good, where people believed that one person’s gain was another’s loss and the kind of competition generated by that view. The study concluded that building trust and cooperation (‘bonding social capital’) was difficult, reflected in the conflict-ridden state of neighbourly relations. People mainly targeted kin and close friends to help them out rather than their immediate neighbours. For Bank et al (2004: 160) this is partly a function of the weakness of civil society and reflects an increasing withdrawal into the private sphere and a denial of common social interests and civic responsibilities.

In terms of ‘bridging social capital’, there were very few organisations able to bridge specific neighbours and areas: some larger churches had connections across the township, as did certain burial societies, and, the community policing and anti-crime initiatives had formed into a network (Bank et al 2004: 143). Sango structures have declined in Mdantsane and the organisation lacks the capacity to operate as an influential social movement. It used to create bridging capital which connected neighbourhoods, streets and areas across the township, laying the foundation for integrated social and political action (Bank et al 2004: 144). Bank and Makubalo conclude:

If civil society is most developed and effective when it displays internal diversity and is able to simultaneously display strengths in bonding, bridging and linking social capital, then it must be concluded that Mdantsane is in a very weak position. It has a citizenry which feels defeated by de-industrialisation and trapped by poverty and which has come to rely almost entirely on the state for resources to address their socio-economic dilemmas. (2004: 144)

While Mdantsane is just one of Buffalo City’s townships and has its own very particular history, it is by far the largest and may be seen as broadly representative of the social and economic problems experienced by many other townships in the metropole, including those visited by the *Daily Dispatch’s Community Dialogues*.

Meanwhile, since June 2009 political infighting in the Buffalo City Municipality (BCM) – incorporating East London, King William's Town and Bhisho – had by February 2010 brought the

area to “the brink of financial and administrative collapse” (Piliso 2010). A series of February 2010 news reports in the *Daily Dispatch* painted a grim picture of the city's municipal services. They cited the poor maintenance of roads, inconsistent refuse collection, dilapidated bulk water infrastructure and a billing system in disarray. A senior official in the provincial department was quoted as saying that the municipality's appalling service delivery record was a result of political interference and infighting (Piliso 2010).

2. Media and democracy: Normative theories about journalism’s role in society

As we saw above, the editor of the *Daily Dispatch* Andrew Trench (2009) claimed in his blog that the decision to host the *Community Dialogues* was made, in part, to address the sorts of ‘democratic deficits’ described in the previous sections. Firstly, it was hoped that the *Community Dialogues* would help nurture “connecting bridges” (i.e. bonding and bridging social capital) within and between the different geographical zones and heterogeneous social groups that make up the wider community of East London by providing a forum for citizens to speak out, deliberate and find points of consensus between them. And secondly the *Community Dialogues* were to act as a bridge between communities and government officials (i.e. linking social capital). He then went on to talk about the newspaper’s need to “connect to the heart of [East London’s] neighbourhoods” which would help it move from “describing problems to try and help solve some of them”. In doing so, Trench was expressing some powerful ideas and assumptions about the role journalism ought to play in a democratic society. It is the purpose of this next section to interrogate, classify and clarify some of these ideas and assumptions.

The best known theoretical treatment of the role of media in society, *Four Theories of the Press* by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956), is badly outdated, prompting five leading media theorists to collaborate on a new text, *Theories of the Media* (Christians et al 2009), which explores the philosophical underpinnings and the political realities that inform a ‘normative’ approach to the question of the role of journalism in a democratic society. The authors’ premise is that there are essentially two types of “theories of the press” (see Christians 2009: vii): first, those prescribing the normative tasks for the media in society, and second those describing the ‘factual’ role of the media in society. The latter approaches the issue from the ‘objective’ angle of ‘media sociology’, while the former deals with the ‘subjective’, culturally-related values held by various actors about the mission of the media (Christians et al 2009: viii). Normative approaches, then, are concerned with more than just what *is* the role of journalism in democratic society, but what this role *should be*, which leads to an interrogation of values and objectives. The authors admit that normative theories are culturally bound constructs or paradigms rather than actually-existing systems, but assert the need for normative

theories as “cognitive maps for media professionals” (Christians et al 2009: viii). They believe that normative theory “attempts to explain why a certain organisation of public discourse leads to better collective decisions and eventually to an improved quality of life” (Christians et al 2009: ix).

Normative theories may help to expose discrepancies between philosophical rationales and actual media operations, which is one of the imagined tasks of this thesis. Normative theories are therefore justified “not as affirmative instruments to strengthen the prevailing ideology, but as instruments of emancipation from the status quo” (Christians et al: ix) as they support serious press criticism. The authors go on to identify four distinct but overlapping roles for the media, which are now discussed in more detail.

The monitorial role

Christians et al (2009: 125) note that journalism’s ‘monitorial’ role is widely recognised and is the least controversial in terms of conventional ideas about what the press should be doing. It refers to all aspects of the collection, processing and dissemination of information about current and recent events. Some comment and interpretation is provided, but this is subordinated to representing reality and giving objective accounts. There are different versions of the scope of the monitorial role, ranging from the more or less passive channelling of information to carrying out a strong watchdog role. However, most mainstream news organisations, even those with a strong focus on investigative journalism, stop short of partisan advocacy as they are restrained by precepts of professional practice where opinion and attitude is separated from facts supported by evidence.

The linear ‘mobilisation model’ usually associated with investigative journalism (Protess et al 1991: 15) holds that media exposés of “villainy and victimisation” lead to the mobilisation of public opinion, which acts as a catalyst for public policy reforms. This reinforces one of the central ideas in the monitorial role of journalism – that citizens informed by the media of wrongdoing will exert their will on an accountable government. The mobilisation model appeals to both the professional values of independence (from government) and social responsibility (towards the public good).ⁱⁱ

The facilitative role

The ‘facilitative’ role relates to social responsibility theory (see Siebert et al 1956) and to notions in democratic societies of the press as a fourth estate that supports debate and people’s decision making. In the facilitative role, Christians et al (2009: 126) see journalism as a means of improving the quality of public life and contributing to deliberative forms of democracy as opposed to ‘aggregative’ or procedural liberalism. Journalism is used to widen access and promote active citizenship by way of debate and participation. Aside from deliberative democracy the media also facilitate civil society and promote the cultural conditions conducive to democratic life, such as inclusiveness, pluralism, and

collective purpose. They help to develop a shared moral framework for community and society, rather than just looking after individual rights and interests. The facilitative role is in tension with individualism because individual rights are subordinated to a larger good, which is developed through public dialogue and deliberation. The facilitative role is also hard to reconcile with many of the professional ideologies and practices of a press driven by profit and competition (Christians et al 2009: 126).

The two-decades-old public journalism movement – which the *Daily Dispatch* effectively ‘joined’ through the launch of its *Community Dialogues* project in 2009 – exemplifies this facilitative role. From this perspective, journalism is a democratic practice that “stimulate[s] citizen deliberation and build[s] public understanding of issues, and ... report[s] on major public problems in a way that advances public knowledge of possible solutions and the values served by alternative courses of action” (Lambeth et al 1998: 17). Such journalism differs from conventional journalism in seeing people as a public rather than as individual consumers and “as potential actors in arriving at democratic solutions to public problems” (Merritt 1998: 113). Chapter 2 will explicate the concept of public journalism further, including an exploration of some of the overlaps and tensions between the monitorial and facilitative roles of journalism.

The radical role

For Christians et al (2009: 126), the radical role exposes abuses of power and aims to raise popular consciousness of wrongdoing, inequality, and the potential for change. The radical role is distinguishable from the occasional critical attention given within the scope of the monitorial role and involves “systematic and principled engagement according to clearly stated values. The goal is fundamental or radical change in society” (Christians et al: 126). Under conditions of authoritarian government, the need for a radical press role is apparent, but the conditions for its practice are limited. In liberal democratic society, the radical role tends to be fulfilled by a minority sector of the printed press that represents some social or political movements and advocates radical opinions and policies along partisan lines (Christians et al 2009: 126).

In his comprehensive overview of alternative media, Downing shows that such media typically perform dual functions as “counter-information institutions” and “agents of developmental power” (2001: 45). Alternative media also have close, even symbiotic, relationships to social movements. Haas (2004: 116) argues that, besides being the first to articulate and diffuse the agendas of many emerging social movements, alternative media have helped bring those agendas to the attention of governmental institutions and mainstream media. The commitment on the part of alternative media to providing counter-information to that offered by mainstream media and to advocating social and political reform “manifests itself in their organizational structure, news coverage and, not least

importantly, the relations between journalists and audiences” (Haas 2004: 116). Alternative media are usually non-hierarchical in structure and their alternative news coverage is generally produced by the same people whose concerns it represents, from a position of engagement and direct participation (Traber 1985). In the anti-apartheid era, South Africa once had a rich tradition of alternative media, conceived as “facilitators of social communication” rather than mere “sources of information” (Tomaselli and Louw, 1990: 213), but now has very few remaining examples of this form of ‘press’ (see Harber 2004). As we will see in Chapter 2, public journalism theorists Haas and Steiner (see Haas & Steiner 2004; Haas 2004; Haas 2007) have borrowed a number of ideas and concepts from radical alternative journalism, either as a counter against perceived theoretical gaps and weakness in public journalism, or simply as a means to enrich and invigorate the actual practice of public journalism.

The collaborative role

According to Christians et al (2009: 127) the collaborative role advocates some sort of collaboration between state and media. A typical situation where this role is appropriate is a ‘new’ nation, like South Africa, “with its intense pressure toward economic and social development under conditions of scarce resources and immature political institutions” (Christians et al: 127). Also, conditions of crisis and emergency which pose a threat to society, like crime and safety or HIV/AIDS, can steer the state and the media towards each other. This is also true of the developed world, particularly in the example of terrorism or war. Collaboration can be voluntary, can meet the needs of both parties, and can be legitimated on grounds of immediate necessity, although this form of collaboration almost inevitably impinges on the independence of the press and other media. Apart from the literature on development journalism which deals with some of these tensions (see below), the collaborative role is hardly represented at all in the literature on press roles, because it contradicts the hegemonic libertarian and professional journalistic ideology of an independent press. The term ‘development journalism’ has become associated with certain media practices and arrangements deemed appropriate for ‘developing’ nations of the South. Collaboration in the tradition of development journalism usually involves a partnership with the state, though not always a formal one, premised on a commitment by the press to play a positive role in the processes of development. Responsibility tempers press freedom: “journalists can question, even challenge the state, but not to a point where they undermine a government’s basic plans for progress and prosperity” (Christians et al 2009: 201).

Writing in the African context Domatob and Hall show how development journalism was seen as a “revolutionary tool of African liberation from colonialism and imperialism” and a way to build fragile post-colonial nation states through the creation of a trans-ethnic national consciousness, where it encouraged co-operation and peaceful co-existence between diverse and sometimes hostile communities (1983: 10). African governments were keen to use the media to contribute to national

development goals, inform citizens of relevant governmental policies, introduce national leaders, foster political stability, promote national integration and educate its citizens. But, development journalism was soon denounced by African journalists who saw the corruptions of professional journalism which emerged in its name (Domatob et al 1983: 12). African governments suppressed press freedom, barred free elections, individual rights and an independent judiciary, often justified on the grounds that the machinery of government was too frail to withstand the effects of a free press that could ferment political discontent and render social integration impossible (Domatob et al 1983: 12).

Shah argues that development journalism was similarly prone, in the Asian context, to devolving into a “rationale to take control of mass media to promote state policies, often as a part of larger campaigns of repression” (Shah 1996: 143). This is in contrast to the origins of development journalism in the 1960s, where it was “independent journalism that provided constructive criticism of government and its agencies, informed readers how the development process was affecting them, and highlighted local self-help projects” (1996: 143). To avoid being corrupted, newer incarnations of development journalism (see Galtung & Vincent 1992) pointedly avoid clear claims to support a state-press partnership and instead highlight the importance of a press that promotes citizen involvement in programmes of social change. Shah’s (1996) notion of emancipatory journalism saw a role for journalists as “participants in a process of progressive social change” (1996: 144). He emphasises roles for development media that “recognise differences among and between marginalised groups” and that “exist alongside and produce content different from the mainstream media” (1996: 162). This more nuanced version of the concept of development journalism is similar in many ways to the claims made for the media under the facilitative and radical roles. But, Christians et al argue that Shah fails to address the power of the state and “the state’s interest in maintaining certain roles for the mainstream media” (2009: 202). Key questions are unanswered. For example, what happens when the state turns to the media for assistance in a nation-building agenda? What is the nature and role of an ostensibly independent press that limits itself, at least in some areas, to ‘constructive criticism’ of the state?

Christians et al explore the idea of “collaboration through acceptance” (2009: 200). They write that when journalists “take into account *all that needs to be known* about the *particular arrangements and outcomes of collaboration*, including the assessment of the consequences of cooperation for the larger community, and judge a collaborative role to be ‘correct’ or ‘proper’, they enter into a *fully normative* agreement to cooperate” (2009: 200, emphasis in the original). Articulating and accepting a normatively viable collaborative role for the press requires a different view of the state and state-press arrangements to that of most Western perspectives on press freedom. But are collaborations with the state always dishonourable and indefensible? If South Africa can be said to suffer from a number of conditions of crisis and emergency which pose a threat to society – crime and public safety, HIV/AIDS, poor service delivery, unemployment – then “fully normative agreements” to cooperate

between the South African media and state on selected issues of crisis and emergency, may indeed be possible and desirable. These agreements are, in any case, partial and do not imply that journalists have to abandon their other (monitorial and facilitative) roles.

The relationship between the roles

Christians et al (2009: 32) suggest that their typology is less a classification of media tasks than of “primary purposes” and of the mode and spirit in which a given medium chooses to operate. They suggest that there are certain oppositions and potential conflicts of role. Most distant are the collaborative and radical roles, as radicalism implies a position of opposition to established authority. However, the demarcations between the different roles are not always so easy to define.

It is hoped that this study will begin to tease out some of ways in which the roles intersect with one another in the South African context through the *Daily Dispatch’s Community Dialogues*. However, it is first necessary to move away from normative theory to explore what Christians et al (2009:) call a more “sociological approach” in order to interrogate critically the actual capacity of the commercial news media to fulfil any of its normative roles given the constraints posed by the political, economic and socio-cultural environments within which they operate.

3. Basic ‘sociological’ critiques of mainstream, commercial journalism

The economic context

The neo-Marxist ‘political economy’ critique of mainstream, commercial media emerged as a powerful force in Media Studies in the 1970s. One of its proponents, Curran, writes that many of the normative ideas about the democratic role of the media “derive from a frockcoated world where the ‘media’ consisted principally of small-circulation, political publications and the state was still dominated by a landed elite” (2005: 122). He suggests that the monitorial, ‘watchdog role’ of the media is exaggerated, as “many so-called ‘news media’ allocate only a small part of their content to public affairs – and a tiny amount to disclosure of official wrongdoing” (2005: 124). Curran is equally sceptical of the plausibility of the ‘facilitative’ role of the media, or what he calls “an admirable stress on the need for civic information, public participation, robust debate and active self-determination”, and the press’s role in representing people to authority (2005: 129). He points to the “inadequacy of the neo-liberal model” that assumes media to be independent and to owe allegiance only to the public who fund them (2005: 126). For Curran, this model ignores the many other influences which can shape the media, including market pressures, “the political commitments and private interests of media shareholders, the influence exerted through news management and the cultural power of

leading groups in society” (2005: 126). All this can lead to the downgrading of investigative journalism, especially the critical surveillance of corporate power (2005: 129).

On the other hand, Curran writes that the notion that privately-owned media *slavishly* support corporate interests downplays the possibility of countervailing influences (2005: 127). For example, privately-owned media need to “maintain audience interest in order to be profitable; they have to sustain public legitimacy in order to avoid societal retribution; and they can be influenced by the professional concerns of their staff” (Curran 2005: 127). These factors work against the “total subordination of private media to the political commitments and economic interests of their shareholders” (Curran 2005: 127).

However, powerful factors limiting consumer power are the maintenance of corporate oligopoly, the high barriers to market entry for new competitors and the operation of the market, which generates strong pressure, in mass markets, for media producers to converge towards the conventional and mainstream. Curran calls this “an invisible form of censorship which excludes social groups with limited financial resources from competing” (2005: 133), while McChesney (2004: 30) casts advertisers, not consumers, as the media’s most important customers.

Curran asks: “If privately owned media are not automatically the voice of the people, whom then do they represent?” (2005: 133). For him, this depends, partly, on “the configuration of power to which the media are linked” (2005: 133). In the South African context, it is argued that since, following Heller (2009), political society dominates civil society, media tend to reflect this ANC-dominated power dynamic, which stifles either monitorial or facilitative journalism. On the other hand, since there are significant cracks in the current Zuma-dominated power network, disagreements can “produce tip-offs from rival, elite groups, which can trigger investigative journalism”, and “conflicts can generate media debate” (Curran 2005: 134). However, Curran notes that the initiative for change “usually comes from within the structure of power” (political society) rather than from civil society (2005: 134).

While Curran is cynical about the notion of private media as “tribunes of the public” (2005: 134) and stresses the need to take into account the full range of influences shaping journalism, he allows scope for countervailing forces:

An energised civil society, well-developed alternative networks of ideas and news sources, idealistic media staff and radical consumer pressure can combine to detach part of the media from the prevailing system of power. (2005: 134)

We now consider how the commercial logic of news operations may distort areas of journalistic practice that are of particular concern to this study. For example, what is news and where does it come from? How is the news media agenda typically set, by whom, and why? How are stories framed, whose voices and definitions of reality predominate in news journalism, and why?

Elite control of the news media agenda

Another critique of mainstream journalism is that their news agenda is influenced by a range of powerful forces, some of which were described by Curran (2005) above. For McCombs this agenda is particularly susceptible to influence from: political, economic and social elites, together with the public relations officers and advertisers in their pay, who provide the information for most news stories; other (especially higher status) news organisations; and journalism's professional ideologies, norms and traditions (2004: 117).

The strong influence of elites on the news agenda-setting function may have some legitimacy to the extent that some political elites and the institutions they work for represent and uphold the interests and concerns of the constituencies that elected them. But, in greatly unequal societies like South Africa, critics like Bond (2000) argue that there is a major disconnect between pro-poor political campaign promises and progressive public policy on the one hand, and the delivery on promises and implementation of policy on the other. One major reason for this is the disproportionate power and influence that resides with global and national economic forces and institutions, which are substantively unaccountable to the wider public. Another, as we have seen, is the subordination of subaltern civil society to a largely unaccountable, ANC-dominated political society (Heller 2009).

Gans (1980: 128) argues that since the overriding concern for deadline-driven journalists in assessing news sources is efficiency, reporters are led to repeated contact with a very narrow range of sources which tends to reinforce hegemonic ideas. This homogeneity is reinforced by the fact that journalists use other journalists and other media as one of their main sources of ideas and validation. High status news organisations, such as the major metro daily newspapers serving relatively elite audiences, help set the agendas of other news organisations. McCombs (2004: 119) refers to this simply as "intermedia agenda sending", while Pierre Bourdieu refers to it as the "circular circulation of information" (1998: 23-24). Another problem is that journalists are drawn from a similar social class to their elite sources and prefer their company, or soon come to share the worldview of their elites through their ongoing contact with them. Also, as Keeble (1998: 56) points out, those journalists who have contact with people at the top of the sourcing hierarchy enjoy high status, while those with contact with marginal groups enjoy no special journalistic status.

The skewed and disproportionate elite influences on the news agenda are in turn filtered through the ground rules established by the professional ideologies and norms of journalism (McCombs 2004: 117). Professional notions of 'newsworthiness' are one of these powerful filters. Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) revision of Galtung and Ruge's (1965) seminal taxonomy of news values includes "the power elite" and "celebrity". This implies that the ideal news source is also a news actor, whose own words make news. Bell argues that to a large extent, "news is what an authoritative source tells a journalist" (1991: 191). Subalterns and minorities tend to be ignored. Therefore, the 'news values' employed by

journalists in the selection and construction of stories are not the neutral expression of professional practice, but are ideologically loaded.

The problem of 'primary definers'

According to Hall et al in *Policing the Crisis*, the contexts and demands of news production discussed in the previous section combine to give the powerful a built-in advantage in the contestation of news agendas or framing of news issues. This is not necessarily a result of conscious action taken by the powerful to manipulate, although it doesn't preclude this either. Rather, the routine information gathering and news processing procedures operating in most news organisations make this likely to happen. Since powerful institutions are positioned at the top of "a hierarchy of credibility" (1978: 58), journalists are likely to take the frameworks for understanding events offered by representatives of such institutions as a starting point for their reports – they thus become the primary definers of topics (Hall et al 1978: 58). Hall does not suggest that other possible sources, including those who might contest the primary definitions of the powerful, will be barred from any access to news agendas but that their views or interpretations will be regarded as secondary definitions or that they have to work within the 'terms of the debate' already established by the primary definers.

This theory of primary definition was critiqued by Schlesinger (1990) who, while wanting 'to retain a theory of dominance', still insisted that there were more opportunities for non-official news sources and politically marginal groups to intervene in the defining of news agendas than implied by the concept of primary definition. For Schlesinger, Hall's analysis underestimated the 'potential openness' of particular media organisations and suffered from a number of theoretical flaws (Schlesinger 1990: 68).

Notwithstanding possible points of weaknesses in the theory of primary definition, Manning (2001: 139) argues that there remains a tendency for the powerful to enjoy routine or structured advantages in news access. Media Studies theorists in the political economy tradition foreground the interplay between economic, political and cultural practices and structures and see them as providing the context – the opportunities and constraints – within which actors struggle to mobilise material and symbolic resources (Manning 2001: 140). In robust democracies some of the actors involved in this struggle are non-elite social movements, other members of civil society and journalists themselves. However, where a strong civil society doesn't exist, as is arguably the case in South Africa, a media-centric question would be: What strategies can be used by news organisations to open up the news agenda setting process to politically marginal groups? As we will see in Chapter 2, public journalism emerged, at least in part, in answer to these kinds of questions and in response to mainstream journalism's 'structured', lopsided focus on the agendas and perspectives of elite actors.

4. Theoretical and political debates about the role of journalism in post-apartheid South Africa

Ubuntu communitarianism

Recent theoretical debates within academia have been given a very particular inflection by the appropriation by scholars like Christians (2004) of the African philosophical concept of *ubuntu* in helping to evaluate media performance. Part of what is being challenged here is “the normativity of ‘Westernness’” and the “systemic and continuing structures of colonial power” (Fourie 2008: 60). From the perspective of postcolonial studies, then, “present and dominant normative media theory is then seen as a product of Western epistemology” and is a very particular (and limited) way of thinking about the role of the media in society (Fourie 2008: 60).

Ubuntu is derived from the Zulu maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, meaning “a person is a person through other persons” or “I am because of others” (Louw 2004: 2, cited in Fourie 2008: 61). While it is an African worldview or indigenous belief system, Christians (2004: 235) argues that it is also understood as a universal value, and he uses it to invigorate communitarianism as a normative system for understanding the press. He argues that *ubuntu* and communitarianism – which have much in common with ‘civic republicanism’ and the ‘deliberative model’ of democracy – are both opposed to ‘aggregative’ Western liberalism in which individuals are seen as separate, autonomous atoms. However, *ubuntu* communitarianism claims to be equally opposed to collectivism. In *ubuntu* communitarianism, community is not opposed to the individual nor does it simply engulf the individual (Christians 2004: 235).

For Christians (2004) the mainstream, monitorial view of news as objective information is too narrow for the complexities of a world understood in *ubuntu* terms. A journalism informed by *ubuntu* communitarianism, ought to appeal to listeners and readers by “speaking of moral issues in appropriately moral discourse” (Christians 2004: 248). Rather than merely transmitting technical, specialised data to audiences, the aim is to be a catalyst for moral agency through both style and content. When they critique injustices, journalists should do so in terms of common values that have wide acceptance in the community as a whole. Also, *ubuntu* undermines journalism’s focus on elites because “every person is regarded as a fountain of knowledge who has valuable things to contribute to society as a whole” (Blankenberg, 1999: 51). Journalists are urged to take their cue from indigenous storytelling practices and to recall traditional stories and national myths through symbol and narratives, “ensuring the solidarity of the community” (Blankenberg, 1999: 51). Journalists should align themselves with “the interpretations and epistemologies of the ‘common people’ in order to tell the stories that accurately reflect, and reflect *on*, their concrete experiences and spiritualities” (Blankenberg, 1999: 59). Interestingly, South Africa’s mass circulation tabloid press, which is aimed

primarily at a black, working class readership, can be said to be closely aligned with Blankenberg's "interpretations and epistemologies of the common people" (1999: 59). However, Christians (2004: 248) goes on to say that a journalism inspired by *ubuntu communitarianism* would also attempt to stimulate interaction among citizens, and between citizens and politicians, leading to proactive involvement in getting things done. The ultimate goal of reporting would be "civic transformation and renewal" (Christians 2004: 248), a prescription almost indistinguishable from the 'facilitative' role of the media and public journalism (Christians 2009: 126). Since it is arguable whether tabloid journalists would see their ultimate goal as promoting "civic transformation and renewal", this may be the point at which the tabloids would part company with Christians's conception of *ubuntu communitarianism*.

Christians further recommends that the traditional barrier between journalist and citizen should break down and they should come to occupy the "same social and moral space" (2004: 250). For Christians the "elimination of the divisions among ourselves—conceptually and practically—opens the pathway to crossing barriers and to reconciliation across cultures and the world" (2004: 251). *Ubuntu communitarianism*, thus, presents some powerful ideas to a country as profoundly diverse and unequal as South Africa which is served in the main by journalists who are separated – spatially, socially and culturally – from their audiences. Despite this, the concept was not warmly received by some South African media theorists, notably Fourie (2008). He criticises *ubuntuism* as the basis of a model for African media performance for a number of reasons, but is particularly concerned that *ubuntuism*, or any moral philosophy, can easily be misused or hijacked – like Christian nationalism under apartheid – for ideological and political agendas.

Fourie (2008: 70) cites authors such as Mbigi and Maree (1995), who warn that *ubuntuism* can subvert constitutionally entrenched freedom of expression when it lapses into an intolerance of any oppositional opinion or deed, including an intolerance of media criticism and exposure. Fourie goes on to argue that some attempts to 'de-Westernise' Media Studies – including, as we have seen, attempts to construct the concept of 'development journalism' – have been "conservative, jingoistic, and 'anti-West', ending up in legitimizing repressive regimes, undemocratic practices and tightly controlled media systems" (2008: 70). He argues that when media report on corruption, nepotism, and malpractice of government officials, the ANC and/or the Government criticise Western news values and journalistic practices and encourage the idea of *ubuntu* as an ideal normative framework for the South African media to report from 'an African perspective' (2008: 70). He also asks whether *ubuntuism* isn't part of a prescriptive and exclusionist politics of Africanisation, and in assessing the practical implications of *ubuntu* for journalistic practice, he worries that it may include a redefinition of the concepts of newsworthiness and news values (2008: 70). He writes that it is "not practical" to "consult the community and seek the community's consent on every issue even if the journalist is part of and in close contact with a community" (Fourie 2008: 71). Fourie thus seems either dismissive, or

unaware of, the considerable work done by the theorists and practitioners of public journalism and alternative journalism, which has helped journalists find new methods and strategies for building closer and more accountable relationships with the communities they serve. More seriously, he appears to be unaware of the theoretical project being undertaken within public journalism by theorists like Haas (2007), rejecting both communitarianism *and* liberal individualism. Haas argues that neither offer “democratically viable conceptions of the public” and attempts to instead find a “third way” around the impasse (2007: 28).

State-media relations tensions in post-apartheid South Africa

The ANC and the government have critiqued the South African commercial media for their alleged infatuation with more adversarial, watchdog elements of the monitorial role; the privileging of freedom of the press over the rights to dignity and equality; their lack of accountability; their neglect of poorer sections of the media market; and for their apparent eschewal of more a more collaborative role in support of a ‘national interest’, ‘nation building’ and the developmental goals of the post-apartheid state (see Duncan 2003; de Beer & Wasserman 2005). Sections of the commercial media have meanwhile raised shrill voices against perceived attacks on their performance and on their independence, and have accented related concerns that a more collaborative role (between the state and the media) would render the media vulnerable to state propaganda (Duncan 2003: 3).

According to Duncan (2003: 3), after 2000 the ANC and the government increasingly invoked a political economy critique of the South African commercial media. For example, leading ANC member Pallo Jordan argued at a 2003 Media Freedom Day event that commercialisation of the media was leading to the marginalisation of the interests and aspirations of the poor in South African newsrooms. When President Thabo Mbeki addressed the All Africa Editors' Conference in April 2003 he linked the increasing concentration and conglomeration of media to the homogenisation of views, commodification of news and views, the dumbing down of analysis and the tailoring of facts to suit its own world view.

Duncan notes that competing elements in the South African media have responded in different ways to challenges from the ANC and the Government (2003: 4). The first “treats Government's incursions into the media with extreme suspicion, as an attempt to reign the watchdog role of the media in, reduce its independence, and deligitimise it in order to pave the way for statutory regulation, and ultimately control of content”(Duncan 2003: 5). Self-regulation, in the form of the Press Ombudsman, is posited as a response to these threats. The other key strategy is to simply re-assert the ‘public interest’ as a counter to the ‘national interest’. In its submission on the Broadcasting Amendment Bill in 2003, the Media Institute of South Africa (Misa) defined these two terms as follows:

It is our contention that the use of the term 'national interest' in relation to newsgathering and dissemination is too restrictive and can have a narrow political connotation. Journalists work in the public interest which is much wider. Politicians of a ruling party may decide that there should be secrecy over an issue 'in the national interest' – where the meaning of 'national interest' is defined by the politicians. Journalists work in the 'public interest', a sounder, much wider base which might override 'national interest'. Chapter Two of the constitution protects the 'public interest'. (quoted in Duncan 2003, 6)

However, a second stream in the media landscape appears to be more comfortable with notions of the 'national interest' and, following Christians et al (2009), the possibility of a more 'collaborative role' for the press. For example, according to political commentator Xolela Mangcu, if 'national interest' was based on the founding values of the constitution there would be sufficient room for consensus-building around this concept (Duncan 2003: 7). This argument is developed further by the SABC's Ihron Rensburg who sees South Africa as a post-colonial country needing to build a united, inclusive nation around common values. Rensburg's position may thus be seen to support both the 'collaborative role' and the notion of *ubuntu* communitarianism. Meanwhile, former chairperson of the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef), Mathatha Tsedu, noted the existence of 'two publics': "one well organised, which understands its own interests and knows how to push it, and the other consisting of 'the silent ones' and whose interests are therefore marginalised by virtue of their silence" (cited in Duncan 2003: 7).

While Duncan argues that the media should not uncritically accept the government's communication agenda simply because it is being "implemented by a progressive government serving the needs of the poor" (2003: 8), she nevertheless suggests that media should not automatically dismiss the government's critique of their performance and interpret it as an attack on their independence. She urges media to engage with the government critique of the media on the terrain of critical media theory. She warns that "if this task is not undertaken, the government's understanding of media accountability cannot be contested" (Duncan 2003: 8). Voluntary self-regulation is an easy target and the government's understanding appears to be veering increasingly towards accountability to the state as evidenced by Minister of Communications Sipiwe Nyanda's 2009 Public Services Broadcasting Bill.

As we will see in Chapter 2, town hall meetings, along with a number of other public journalism strategies, were engineered by journalists in a variety of countries as a response to theoretically-informed critiques of the (poor) democratic performance of the commercial press. Similarly, in the South African context, the *Daily Dispatch's* attempt to build relationships of accountability and trust with diverse publics within East London through the *Community Dialogues* can be seen, in part, to have arisen as a response to government criticism of the newspaper as a member of a 'narrowly interested' commercial media. The newspaper's attempts to build relationships of accountability

represent a direct form of media accountability that goes beyond the weak, indirect forms of voluntary self-regulation proffered by the South African media industry.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on a variety of theoretical frameworks and perspectives to provide an analytical overview of some of the political and media contexts within which the *Daily Dispatch's* *Community Dialogues* have operated as a public journalism strategy. This has afforded insight into some of the conceptual and practical constraints, threats and difficulties faced by the *Daily Dispatch* in its endeavours, but also some of the opportunities afforded by its new venture, which will be discussed in this study. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth focus on the theory and practise of the two-decades-old public journalism movement.

Endnotes

ⁱ Piper and Matisonn (2009) are more optimistic than Heller (2009) about the prospects for democratic deepening in the current political moment. They argue that at the organisational level the sea change in the ANC since the Polokwane conference reflects the revival of influence of the SACP/ Cosatu. At the societal level they believe this is the equivalent of subaltern civil society demanding greater access to economic prosperity and political recognition (Piper et al 2009: 155). They argue that until more substantial social movements appear in civil society “the organisations most likely to get poor and marginalised people participating in politics remain the alliance partners” (2009: 154). In this regard they note that Jacob Zuma is able to mobilise poor and marginalised constituencies much more effectively than civil society and social movements. For Piper and Matisonn (2009: 155) the factionalism in the ANC is understood as the struggle of constituencies marginalised under Thabo Mbeki’s rule to access power. In the absence of a range of vibrant social movements, Cosatu and the SACP have been seen as the organisations that could mobilise communities, and especially the poor, on social issues. However, the extent to which Cosatu and the SACP have the ability, or even the desire, to mobilise communities around local ‘bread and butter’ issues like housing, waste removal, sanitation and other more mundane aspects of municipal ‘service delivery’ which regularly turn up on the agendas of the *Daily Dispatch’s Community Dialogues*, is open for debate. While high levels of service delivery protests continue in South Africa, they appear to remain localised and are seldom organised under the banner of the tripartite alliance.

ⁱⁱ This view of popular democracy is not universally shared. Lippmann (1922 cited in Haas 2007: 7), among many others, portrays the public as highly passive and generally unmobilizable. Special interest groups and other elites, rather than the public, are seen as the key sources of pressure on public policy makers. In this view, media may be capable of changing public attitudes, but with minimal consequences. They do not activate the public to participate in civic life, although they may be important for influencing the attitudes and behaviour of political elites.

Chapter 2

Public journalism: An overview of historical trends, theoretical concerns and its ‘public philosophy’

Introduction

The two-decades-old public journalism movement was described in Chapter 1, following Christians et al (2009: 126), as falling squarely within the ‘facilitative role’ of the media. This ‘facilitative role’ – understood by Christians et al (2009: 126) as a way of promoting inclusive, plural and active citizenship, improving the quality of public life and contributing to deliberative forms of democracy – can be seen to be of special interest to South African journalists given what Heller describes as the “subordination of civil society to political society” in this country and the attendant “crisis of effective citizenship” (2009: 125).

The editor of the *Daily Dispatch* articulated elements of the ‘facilitative role’ when he launched the *Community Dialogues* in March 2009 (Trench 2009a), effectively leashing his newspaper to the global public journalism movement. Since the *Community Dialogues* are the object of this inquiry, the focus of this chapter is on the theory and practice of public journalism, including an explication of Tanni Haas’s (2007: 25) ‘public philosophy’ for public journalism. This ‘public philosophy’ is presented in some detail as it represents the most theoretically sophisticated defence of public journalism yet mounted and constitutes, in effect, a comprehensive normative theory of public journalism.

In Chapter 1 we saw that while Christians et al (2009: ix) imagined the four roles of the media – monitorial, facilitative, radical and collaborative – as distinct and described certain oppositions and conflicts of role, they also conceded that the demarcations between the different roles are not always easy to define. In this chapter I interrogate some of the overlaps and tensions between the four normative roles of journalism and some of the principles and practices of the various journalistic approaches – for example, investigative journalism, public journalism, alternative journalism and development journalism – sometimes associated with each of them.

1. Intellectual and historical origins of public journalism

Even though public journalism only emerged as a press reform movement in the United States following widespread critiques of the news media’s superficial coverage of the 1988 presidential

election, it has strong intellectual antecedents dating back to the 1920s debate in the US between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey about the role and responsibility of journalism in a democratic societyⁱ.

In 1988, journalists were criticised for covering the election as a ‘horse race’ between the main candidates, failing to facilitate public debate over substantive ideas and issues, and casting citizens as passive spectators who would eventually ratify the most effective campaign (Eksterowicz 2000; Anderson, Dardenne, & Killenberg 1995; Carey 1995; Merritt 1998; Rosen 1999b). Following these critiques, and strongly influenced by the ‘deliberative renaissance’ in Western political theory in the 1990s described in Chapter 1, public journalism gathered momentum as a reform movement within the mainstream media in the early 1990s. In particular, the movement responded to what were perceived as two dangerous and widening gaps in contemporary society: between citizens and government, and between news organisations and their audiences (Haas 2007: 3). A key assumption made by public journalism advocates was that mainstream journalism did little to encourage citizens to participate in local community affairs. These journalistic weaknesses had, in their view, also contributed to a declining public interest in, and perceived relevance of, journalistically mediated political information, which contributed to declining newspaper circulation and readership (Haas 2007: 3). Public journalism advocates also argued that the increasing professionalization of journalism required journalists to privilege official, “authoritative”, “credible”, “representative” and “expert” sources (see Keeble 1998: 40), which inevitably led to a focus on the agendas and perspectives of elites. This had distanced journalists from the concerns of ordinary citizens. To help reduce these gaps, journalists should therefore see their primary responsibility as one of stimulating increased civic commitment to, and active citizen participation in, democratic procedures (Haas 2007: 3).

However, as a practice, public journalism also has strong links to a number of the earlier, alternative journalistic approaches encountered in Chapter 1, including ‘development journalism’ practised by journalists in countries of the developing South, as well as forms of journalism practised outside mainstream commercial and public broadcasting media, such as ‘radical alternative journalism’ and ‘community journalism’. All these share some features with the public journalism movement as all have sought to produce journalism that is more democratically responsive and meaningful to its audience in terms of forms and practices. But, it is another American journalistic reform movement, the muckrakers of the Progressive Reform Movement of the early Twentieth Century, that would appear to have most in common with public journalism (Eksterowicz 2000: 6).

Muckraking and public journalism

Reform-minded muckraking journalism may be classified as a hybrid of committed investigative journalism and advocacy journalism (itself a form of alternative journalism) whose practitioners were

“intent on using exposure and revelation as a means of shocking and educating their audiences and urging its members to relevant action” (Boyer 1984, 123, cited in Eksterowicz 2000: 7). They attempted to confront the myriad social problems affecting American society on an unprecedented scale – poverty, illiteracy, inequality, poor working conditions, health issues, and a host of family-related problems. Like public journalists, the early American muckrakers sought to educate the public and activate citizen participation for the purpose of effecting social and political reforms. But, Eksterowicz argues that whereas the Muckrakers practised ‘exposure journalism’ via investigations aimed at reforms (i.e. an emphasis on the ‘monitorial’ role and, to some extent, the ‘radical’ role of the media), “public journalists, in part, decry the mainstream press’s emphasis on ‘negative reporting’” (2000: 8) and instead concentrate upon aiding communities to find solutions (i.e. the ‘facilitative’ role).ⁱⁱ

2. Public journalism critiques of mainstream journalism

Two basic public journalism critiques of mainstream journalism are outlined in this section. The first is concerned with the extent to which elites exert control over the mainstream news agenda in modern mainstream journalism and the fact that citizen voices are worryingly mute. Mainstream journalism is critiqued by public journalism advocates for its lopsided focus on the agendas and perspectives of elite actors and for its lack of commitment to citizen participation, both of which had distanced journalists from the concerns of ordinary citizens. To help reduce these gaps, public journalists should therefore see their primary responsibility as one of stimulating increased civic commitment to, and active citizen participation in, democratic procedures (Haas 2008: 3). Instead of listening exclusively to elite representatives of the citizenry, public journalists are urged to go directly to source by setting up ‘democratic listening posts’ in the form of town hall meetings, focus groups, citizen juries and the like (see Schaffer 2001; Harwood & McCrehan 2000). Also developed was a set of conceptual tools and strategies – for example, the ‘civic mapping’ of ‘quasi-official places’, ‘third places’ and ‘incidental spaces’, as well as ‘civic framing’ (see Harwood & McCrehan 2000; Schaffer 2001) – designed to help journalists challenge the norms and routines of daily mainstream journalism (Haas 2007: 17). These strategies were aimed, at least in part, at uncovering hidden layers of civic life, and ultimately a ‘citizens’ agenda’ (or perhaps more accurately, a set of competing ‘citizens’ agendas’), relatively uncontaminated by the perspectives and claims of elites, and less prone to influence by the agendas of other, more powerful, news organisations and the stultifying professional routines of their own newsrooms.ⁱⁱⁱ

The second critique concerns commercial journalism’s profit-making orientation and its tendency to “complain about the quality of public life” (Rosen 1998: 54). By contrast, public journalism subscribes to “a broader mission of helping public life to go well” (Merritt 1995: 113-114).

Mainstream media owners and advertisers have a commercial interest in catering to demographically attractive audiences – in South African parlance, those with higher living standards measures (LSMs) – whose needs are not necessarily the most politically compelling. This imposes structural limitations on broad-based citizen participation in democratic processes (see Pauly 1999). This critique of commercial journalism is consistent with that of theorists who argue from a political economy perspective (see Mosco 1996; Golding and Murdock 1991). As we saw in Chapter 1, theorists in the political economy tradition draw on the idea of structuration to describe the process through which action is constrained by structure, but also how cultural or political practices modify structures. They analyse the ‘politico-cultural’ micro-engagements of journalists in the context of the larger political-economic environment, including market pressures, the interests of media owners, and the regulative capacities of government. As a reform movement within the mainstream press, public journalism is immersed in a commercial framework and is thus in no way immune from the pressures described above. But, as we shall explore in more depth later, some of public journalists’ ‘micro-engagements’ include focusing on problems of concern to citizens, elaborating on what residents can do to address those problems, and sponsoring various temporary or more permanent sites for deliberation and problem solving. I now turn to a brief exploration of some of the many practical manifestations of public journalism.

3. The practice of public journalism

Public journalism emerged in practical form as a series of initiatives within the mainstream news media in the US in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Haas (2007: 11) groups these initiatives within three overarching categories:

1. Election initiatives;
2. Special reporting projects;
3. Efforts to make public journalism an integral part of routine information-gathering, news-reporting and performance-evaluation practices.

According to Friedland and Nichols (2002), election projects account for only ten percent of public journalism initiatives conducted. The majority of initiatives have taken the form of special short and long term reporting projects on problems of concern to citizens, such as poverty, racism and educational inequality. In addition, many others have eschewed project-based work in favour of trying to integrate public journalism ideas and techniques into their day-to-day information-gathering, news-reporting and performance evaluation practices (Haas 2007: 12). To this end, “some news organisations have restructured their newsrooms from conventional beat systems revolving around the normal institutional sources of information to include multiple geographically-based or topic-based teams focusing on specific neighbourhoods or problems of concern to local residents” (Haas 2007:

12). Others meet regularly with groups of residents to discuss which problems they would like to see covered, and subsequently invite residents to evaluate their coverage.

Joyce Nip (2006: 180) identifies a number of key practices in public journalism. These include:

1. Listening to the public to help set a 'citizens' news agenda';
2. Giving ordinary people a voice;
3. Covering stories in a way that facilitates public understanding and stimulates citizen *deliberation* of the problems behind the stories;
4. Presenting news to make it more accessible and easier for people to engage in the issues;
5. Helping organise sites for public deliberation and problem solving.

This and other more comprehensive lists forcefully demonstrate that public journalism practitioners around the world engage in a variety of practices that are distinct from those of most mainstream journalists^{iv}.

While public journalism has been taught to, and practised by, students in some South African tertiary educational institutions, until recently only a handful of professional journalists were formally exposed to its precepts and techniques. Globally, the public journalism movement is a controversial topic among journalism scholars and practicing journalists. Some of the main critiques of public journalism are covered in the next section.

4. Critiques of public journalism

Public journalism has been critiqued by a variety of media scholars and journalism practitioners from multiple vantage points (Black et al 1997; Glasser 1999; Haas & Steiner 2006). I shall deal with two primary objections to public journalism in this section. The first is that public journalism challenges one of the pre-eminent professional ideologies in American journalism – that the journalist should be positioned as a disinterested, neutral observer who occupies a privileged position detached from citizens and their concerns. In contrast, public journalists re-conceive their role in public life as “political actors” (Rosen 1996: 22) or “fair-minded participants” (Merritt 1998: 7) who care about whether public life goes well. However, it is important to note that most early advocates of public journalism (for example, Charity 1995; Merritt 1998) argued that public journalists should be concerned with the processes and procedures, but not with the outcomes of citizen deliberation. In other words they should not endorse particular politicians or political proposals, and they should avoid partnering with special interest groups that seek to further particular political interests. Public journalism editor Buzz Merritt used the metaphor of the referee to underscore the importance of a detached but not uninterested press:

The function of a third party – a referee or umpire or judge – in sports competition is to facilitate the deciding of the outcome. Ideally, the official never impinges on the game; if

things go according to the rules, he or she is neither seen nor heard. Yet the presence of a fair-minded participant is necessary in order for an equitable decision to be reached. ... The referee must exhibit no interest in the final score other than that it is arrived at under the rules. (1998: 94-95)

Haas (2007) follows Glasser (1999; 2000) in taking issue with these stipulations. Glasser (1999) argues that public journalism's fear of political advocacy limits its potential partners to foundations, universities, civic groups and other apparently politically benign organisations and excludes trade unions, political parties, professional associations, local reform movements, and other special interest groups. This, according to Glasser, "isolates the press from the very centres of power that are likely to make a difference locally, regionally, nationally and even internationally" (1999: 10). Haas agrees and argues that under conditions of widespread social inequality – particularly acute in the South African context – journalists should be concerned with whether both the processes and outcomes of citizen deliberation serve the interests of marginalised social groups (Haas 2007: 6).

The second major critique of public journalism is the suspicion that it has been adopted by mainstream media companies as a cynical marketing ploy. This is because public journalism's emphasis on audience concerns may serve the circulation and profit interests of owners and advertisers, rather than citizens' democratic needs (see Hardt 1999). Public journalism is seen by these critics as an audience-pleasing strategy akin to readership/marketing surveys. However, it can be argued that the techniques of public journalism – aimed at involving citizens in deliberation and problem solving as members of larger publics – are very different to readership surveys, which address audiences as individual consumers of news. In any case, Haas and Steiner report that public journalism projects have "at best produced only modest increases in circulation or readership. No evidence suggests that public journalism increases profits; indeed, projects are costly" (2006: 243). However, even those who accept that public journalists are motivated by the 'higher purpose' of civic participation rather than increased profits question the practicability of these ideals under the constraints imposed by commercial media systems. Others argue that by appealing to the civic conscience of individual editors and reporters, and by casting journalism's problems as rhetorical rather than structural, advocates will not effect fundamental changes to the commercial logic of news organizations (see Peters 1999). These critiques of public journalism – similar to the critiques of mainstream, commercial journalism – fit comfortably into the neo-Marxist political economy approach (see Mosco 1996; Golding & Murdock 1991; Garnham 1990). But, as we have seen, the political economy approach aims to avoid economic reductionism, and instead foregrounds the interplay between economic, political and cultural practices and structures and sees them as providing the context – the opportunities and constraints – within which actors struggle to mobilise material and symbolic resources.

Unlike political economists, most public journalism advocates tend to privilege the agency of public journalists over the structure of the commercial media system and wider society within which they work. In addition, public journalism theorists have produced convincing empirical evidence suggesting that market imperatives do not necessarily prevent news organizations from promoting broad-based citizen participation in democratic processes (Haas & Steiner 2006: 242). For example, many public journalism projects have sponsored deliberative forums such as focus groups, roundtable discussions, and town-hall meetings for people of lower socio-economic status and other marginalized or minority groups not coveted by advertisers. These news organisations have dealt with difficult, unpopular problems such as race, poverty, inner-city crime, alcohol and drug abuse, child care, domestic violence, health care, homelessness, immigration, public housing, racial profiling, unemployment, and welfare (Friedland & Nichols 2002).

Thus, Haas and Steiner argue that “contrary to the accusation that public journalism represents pandering, public journalism projects have not been geared to the wealthy and powerful segments that this claim implies would be most attractive to news management” (2006: 243). They concede that it *is* possible that some news organizations have embraced public journalism out of a concern with profit, but point to a survey by Loomis and Meyer (2000) which found that companies whose top executives expressed more concern for social responsibility than for generating profits were significantly more likely to practise public journalism than companies whose top executives favoured profits over social responsibility. Haas and Steiner (2006: 243) also concede that an appeal to the civic conscience of individual editors and reporters will not inspire fundamental changes to the commercial logic of news organizations, but suggest that top executives with civic consciences can and do ensure that news organizations are guided, at least in part, by a concern for social responsibility.

In developing his ‘public philosophy’ for public journalism (2007), Haas draws on critiques of Habermas’s concept of the public sphere which take into account how existing structures of power and domination constrain the ability of journalists to secure the active and equal participation of citizens in democratic processes. His ideas and prescriptions for a more politically engaged journalistic practice place him at the critical outer limits of the public journalism movement. Yet Haas would acknowledge that even at its most critical, public journalism is a ‘reformist’ movement – it is part of mainstream journalism and works in the capitalist marketplace within long-standing organisational, institutional and professional power structures. A key question remains: Does public journalism’s location within the market prevent it from mounting a serious challenge to the power relations of the mass media and the deep structures of dominance in the wider society?

5. A ‘public philosophy’ for public journalism

Although public journalism can be distinguished from mainstream journalism by its practices, it is problematic to define it solely in these terms. This is because the philosophical and political assumptions that underlie these practices and the way they manifest themselves in ‘real world’ situations differ widely across different news organisations and contexts. Critics like Anderson, Dardenne and Killenberg (1997) state that public journalism lacks what Haas calls a coherent “guiding ‘public philosophy’ that clearly explicates wherein the ‘publicness’ of public journalism lies or ought to lie and why” (2007: 25). Similarly, Glasser speaks of public journalism’s “disarray as a normative theory” (2000: 685).

Haas’s project in *The Pursuit of Public Journalism* (2007) is to set out a detailed, theoretically-based ‘public philosophy’ for public journalism: “If public journalism is to prosper as a distinct and legitimate journalistic notion in its own right, it is essential that it be embedded within a guiding public philosophy rather than remain defined by its criticisms of perceived flaws in conventional, mainstream journalism and by its own alternative practices” (2007: 46). A critical exposition of this ‘public philosophy’ is set out in the rest of this chapter.

What is the nature of the ‘public’?

The first problem that Haas (2007) tackles in outlining his public philosophy is how journalists should conceive of the public in the first place. Is the public understood in a communitarian/civic republican or a liberal framework? Communitarians like Christians (1997) argue that the public represents a unity of citizens who share an overarching vision of the common good. The mission of a communitarian public journalist is to use news and other forms of public discourse as agents of community formation (Haas 2007: 27). By contrast, in a liberal procedural democratic framework the public is seen to represent an aggregate of individual citizens who share little more than a common membership of a given nation-state. Barney argues that public journalism should allow individuals “to retain their right to self determination” (1997: 72) in the face of communal pressure.

For Haas neither communitarianism nor liberal individualism “will do” as neither offer “democratically viable conceptions of the public” (2007: 28). On the one hand, the communitarian view of the public underestimates how visions of the ‘common good’ can vary both within and beyond the local community. This view of the public is too strong to allow for the negotiation of mutually conflicting values among citizens, especially in highly unequal, multicultural states like South Africa. On the other hand, he argues that the liberal view of the public lacks the strong, shared sense of solidarity and purpose needed to undergird citizen participation in joint deliberation and problem solving (Haas 2007: 28). In the communitarian view, journalists would have to give over

their editorial power to dominant community values in pursuit of community consensus, while in the liberal view the public defines journalists' responsibilities in terms of neutral information dissemination whose main aim is to protect individual citizens from government interference (2007: 28).

Haas (2007: 28) attempts to move past this impasse by locating public journalism in Habermas's (1989) proceduralist-discursive notion of the "deliberating public". Here, citizens share a commitment to engage in "common deliberation". Following Habermas (1989) a genuine public comes into being when citizens subject their own opinions and their underlying reasons for espousing those opinions, to rational-critical evaluation by others and, at the same time, subject the opinions of others, and their underlying reasons for espousing those opinions, to the same scrutiny (Haas 2007: 28). Rational-critical evaluation requires citizens to take into consideration the perspectives of others "by according them equal weight to their own rather than to elevate their own perspectives to an indisputable standard" (Haas 2007: 29). But, even a cursory examination of public discourse in South Africa calls into question whether this form of rational-critical evaluation is plausible given, firstly, the relative weakness of subaltern civil society in South Africa discussed in Chapter 1, and secondly, conditions of profound heterogeneity and inequality in the wake of colonial and apartheid histories of violent dispossession, conflict, class exploitation and racial oppression. Political discourse in South Africa's immature democracy is often highly racialised, fractious and ill-tempered, with protagonists resorting to racial name-calling, mud-slinging and the recitation of well-rehearsed, predictable responses to public problems.

Peters is sceptical of rational-critical evaluation for different reasons. He finds public journalism's "vision of proper political activity to be relentlessly serious" and overly rational (1999: 108). He argues that people are most free, most human, when they are at play (Peters 1999: 109). Democracy is seen as a matter of serious play and participation in a kind of collective art making, which opens the possibility of a journalism which experiments in form, style and appeal. Human qualities of empathy and solidarity, and an appreciation of diversity and mutual perspective taking can, arguably, be better promoted through narrative journalistic forms, not just rational-critical deliberation. As Rorty argues, "Solidarity is to be achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers" (1989: 87). This might be interpreted as a potential blind spot in Haas's 'public philosophy' of public journalism. On the other hand, nothing in Haas's public philosophy precludes public journalism from experimenting with narrative forms. Indeed some of the best public journalism is narrative-based (see Shaffer 1996).

Meanwhile, in service of his notion of the deliberating public Haas urges journalists to "help create and sustain an open-ended, unbounded public sphere to which all citizens have access and in which all topics of concern to citizens and all opinions available can be articulated, deliberated and critiqued"

(2007: 29). Haas's assumption is that citizens do not currently have enough opportunities to come together as a deliberating public and that journalists can do something to redress this (2007: 29). In addition to including a diverse spectrum of citizens in their journalism, Haas urges journalists to go beyond simply reporting this diverse opinion – they should, in addition, explicate citizens' underlying reasons for holding certain opinions because citizens would be unable to evaluate the merits of these opinions without a proper understanding of the reasoning processes of other people (Haas 2007:29). This is in contrast to both the liberal conception of a 'marketplace of ideas' where ideas and opinions compete for dominance and to the civic republican/communitarian 'common good' where opinions are seen as building blocks towards a higher consensus. Rather, citizens' opinions are solicited by journalists as contingent contributions to the public conversation, "ones that could be sharpened, or rounded, even substantially altered, and certainly explored by a variety of subsequent voices" (Anderson et al 1994: 54).

In addition, Haas argues that journalists shouldn't situate themselves above or detached from the deliberating public – they should also help nurture a critical public sphere "about" journalism (Haas 2007: 31). Journalists should disclose the assumptions and aspirations that inform their work, which would allow citizens to critique their work. In turn, journalists should respond publicly to citizens' criticisms and evaluations. Thus, the notion of the deliberating public requires journalists to further a genuinely public, as opposed to a community-based approach, to journalism. Community-based approaches ground reporting in the topics, opinions, and values presumed to characterise a particular community, which is a problematic assumption. A public approach to journalism engages in conversation with all citizens, without presuming some natural, local or transcendent consensus (Haas 2007: 31). For Haas, the only sense in which the notion of community is useful is following Compton who argues that "community exists by virtue of reasoning together" (2000: 459, cited by Haas 2007: 31).

The accountability of journalists and the setting of the news agenda

Public journalists are unanimous that they should privilege a non-elite cast of citizen sources and voices. But, this does not answer the question of who should have the *ultimate* say over the news agenda – journalists or the public? In this regard, public journalism has been critiqued, both for going too far and not far enough (Haas & Steiner 2004: 247). On the one hand, public journalism has been accused of pandering to the public (i.e. not taking enough responsibility upon itself for setting the news agenda) and, on the other, for lacking accountability to the public (i.e. clinging to its agenda-setting function). Public journalism surely cannot be simultaneously overly accountable to the public and too lacking in public accountability?

The accusation that public journalism abdicates its professional responsibility for setting the news agenda comes from Glasser who argues that public journalism makes “inadequate claims” about the authority of the press to set a public agenda (2000: 685). He sees in public journalism an obsession with liberal proceduralism (democratic means), but an indifference towards any specific outcomes (democratic ends). Glasser argues that “by denying the press the authority to set its own agenda, public journalism substitutes the community’s judgement ... for the judgement of journalists; it confuses community values with good values as though the former always implies the latter” (2000: 684). For Glasser, the press should have an agenda-setting role and it needs to provide public leadership. It should “set forth clearly and convincingly its politics – to defend its values and how and where they coincide with, or depart from, what it understands to be the expressed or implied values of the community” (2000: 685). In the South African context the ‘politics’ of some sections of the press – including, for example, their principled support for gay rights and opposition to the death penalty – may diverge widely from majority views in society, and by extension, from the majority views of their own audiences. Glasser’s public journalists would be duty bound to hold on to their politics – they would continue to uphold the South African Constitution and to protect the rights and interests of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society. A clearly spelt out newsroom agenda – even a politically unpopular one – would play a leadership role in society and also have the practical benefit of helping publics understand why some issues are on the newspaper’s agenda and others not. For as Glasser points out, “Without an intelligible and defensible political agenda, journalism lacks meaning and order” (2000: 686).

Conversely, Michael Schudson (1999: 120) argues that public journalism stops far short of offering a model of journalism in which authority is vested in the public (rather than the market, the party or in the journalist). He thus accuses public journalism of being a conservative reform movement that retains the authority of journalists – and the corporations they work for – as professionals who know better than citizens themselves what citizens need. He laments the fact that public journalism does not propose new media accountability systems – such as national news councils, citizen media review boards, or publicly elected publishers and editors – which would vest authority in the public. While Schudson (1999: 122) acknowledges that public journalism has developed strategies for sharing the setting of the news agenda with groups in the community, he argues that authority about what to write and whether to print always stays with the professionals.

In setting out his ‘public philosophy’ for public journalism, Haas (2007: 33) argues, in line with Glasser (2000), that it is important that journalists should hold onto their authority about what to write and whether to print. Giving citizens unfettered control of the news agenda compromises journalists’ ability to maintain a critical editorial and reportorial stance in relation to the community, and forces journalists to gloss over community conflicts for fear of offending certain community segments (Haas

2007: 33). Haas believes that public journalists should ultimately retain the authority to add to or subtract from the agenda that their public listening reveals.

But, in answer to Schudson he argues that public journalists' efforts to involve citizens in the agenda-setting process are qualitatively richer and deeper than anything practised by mainstream, commercially-driven media. For example, while mainstream media commission market research which enables editors to shift their reporting agenda to meet the needs and tastes of their readers, which has even led to a revival in readership figures, D'arcy reports (2000: 215) this has also led editors to concentrate on a narrow news agenda and pay less attention to monitoring the performance of public services. By contrast, Haas notes, public journalists have convened town hall meetings and focus groups, where readers are not polled in the old-fashioned way to find out what issues interest them as individual consumers of news. Instead, public journalists address citizens "as members of deliberative publics concerned with issues that go beyond their immediate self-interests" (2007: 33). Also, instead of constructing readers as just receivers of news, public journalists construct readers as citizens who might be interested in becoming involved in efforts to address given issues in practice. Some public journalism news organisations have instituted other means of involving citizens in the agenda-setting process. Some have restructured their newsrooms from conventional beat systems oriented towards institutional/elite sources of information to include multiple teams focusing on particular topics of concern to citizens (Haas 2007: 33).

Haas (2007: 33) laments, with Schudson, that not all public journalists have managed to develop and sustain formalised means of involving citizens in the agenda-setting process. He also agrees with Schudson that more should be done to nurture a public sphere 'about' journalism, which would allow citizens to hold journalists accountable for their work in terms of explicitly stated journalistic values. He believes that public journalism needs better mechanisms for publicly responding to citizen criticisms. Although various informal measures such as online reader feedback may sensitize journalists to citizens' views, more formal measures would ensure sustained, meaningful citizen participation.

In summary, then Haas's argument is that public journalism should have some sort of 'telos' – a set of non-negotiable principles designed to guard against the erosion of certain "pre-eminently desirable" values (2007: 33). In the South African context, journalistic principles could take their cue from the values of the Constitution, which, for example, forbids discrimination on the grounds of race, gender or sexual orientation. Journalists with their own coherent political agenda would ensure that even when the majority of citizens demand that murderers be hanged or that books be burnt, they know that they are required to stand against these things. This apparent subversion of democracy in defence of democracy reveals the paradox at the heart of liberal democracy: the people govern but this is only possible if there are certain things about which they are not allowed to pronounce, including the

regime of rights (to freedom of expression, association and so on) upon which the very idea of a democratic politics depends. As Vincent points out “the paradox in liberalism is genuine, abiding and irresolvable” (2009: 219). It is for this reason that liberal/constitutional democracy requires the inculcation of democratic values as much as it does democratic institutions and legislative frameworks if it is to work. In the South African context, to inculcate democratic values means to create the cultural conditions for the acceptance of the Constitution’s fundamental founding principles. It is thus the job of public journalists to inculcate these values and uphold the Constitution, which can only do its work, in a constitutional state, argues Vincent “if it enjoys widespread legitimacy and where ‘the people’, far from believing that it should be submitted to the test of their will, would be horrified at the thought of its alteration” (2009: 219).

We have seen how public journalists can use formal strategies of accountability, such as convening public meetings, in order to *share* their authority with citizens in the setting of the news media agenda. Put another way, public journalists allow citizens the opportunity to surface strong, hitherto buried, stories ideas. However, since public journalists should, following Haas, subscribe to their own ‘telos’, they are not obliged to print these stories. This is all well and good, but it imagines the use of public meetings and other public journalism strategies in a relatively safe and utilitarian paradigm. Public journalists have in fact gone far beyond this by attempting to use public meetings and other strategies to facilitate public ‘dialogue’ and ‘deliberation’ within and between publics, often with the express purpose of finding solutions to public problems. This forms a core element of Haas ‘public philosophy’ for public journalism.

6. Public deliberation and public problem solving

Before explicating the deliberative and problem solving roles of public journalism, however, Haas (2007: 34) is at pains to differentiate between the concepts of ‘dialogue’ and ‘deliberation’. For him, it is clear that a deliberating public comes into being when groups of citizens engage one another in actual face-to-face ‘dialogue’. But, he suggests that it can also come into being when mass-mediated political coverage prompts individual citizens to ‘deliberate’ (in the sense of ‘critically reflect’) about given topics, even if such deliberation does not coincide with or subsequently result in actual social interaction with others. While the notions of “dialogue” and “deliberation” seem to point to different models of democracy and envisage different roles for journalists, Haas argues that they are not mutually exclusive. For him, the notion of the “deliberating public” is best furthered in a dialectical relationship between these two forms of public discourse. While a process of mass mediated deliberation can expose a wide audience of citizens to the opinions (and reasoning processes) of others, Haas (2007: 35) argues that face-to-face dialogue can offer groups of citizens opportunities to more carefully evaluate the relative merits of others’ opinions (and reasoning processes). Evaluations

formed during such face-to-face encounters can be channelled back into a process of mass-mediated deliberation for the benefit of a wider (media) audience of citizens. These mutually supportive aspects of public discourse can be integrated into a continuous cycle.

To ensure that genuine dialogue and deliberation take place Glasser and Craft stipulate that journalists should preserve “the identity and integrity” of citizens’ dialogical encounters by retaining the to-and-fro of argument in their reporting instead of merely summarising their outcomes in their own words. They should also frame “topics as issues rather than as events” and solicit “debate and commentary without regard for the speaker’s power or privilege in society” (1998: 213).

Furthermore, Haas (2007: 36) argues that journalists should facilitate a public sphere to which all citizens have access and in which all topics of concern to citizens and all opinions available can be articulated, deliberated and critiqued. To achieve this, he advocates that journalists involve citizens in setting the news agenda as well promoting a form of public discourse that combines face-to-face dialogue with mass-mediated deliberation. But, in considering “what the actual goals of public deliberation might be, and which institutional arrangements would best further those goals”, Haas turns to Fraser’s (1990) critique of Habermas’s (1989) theory of the public sphere (2007:36).

Habermas argues that citizens should set aside social inequalities and interact as if they were social equals. Only by abstracting from social inequalities would citizens be able to focus their deliberations on topics of common concern (Haas 2007: 36). Fraser (1990) takes issue with this assumption, as well as with the goal of focusing deliberations on topics of common concern to all citizens because, in her view, the ‘setting aside’, abstracting or veiling of social inequalities has always functioned to privilege the interest of dominant social groups over those of subaltern social groups by universalising narrow group interests. Instead, Fraser argues that citizens should explicitly articulate or ‘publicise’ inequalities. She is critical of communitarians, who assume that a ‘community’ represents a unified site bounded by shared values and interests. By virtue of inhabiting a certain geographical territory, citizens are assumed by communitarians to confront common problems and to share an overarching vision of the common good that enables them to reach consensual solutions to those problems (if they treat each other with mutual understanding and respect). But, for Fraser this ignores how communities are fragmented into multiple social groups, situated in what she calls “relations of dominance and subordination”, structured by race, class and gender (1990: 65). These social inequalities, particularly acute in the South African context, may preclude the emergence of a shared, overarching vision of the common good. Consensus may not even be the most realistic or appropriate goal, especially if it means ratifying an unjust status quo or precluding further debate.

In the light of these arguments, Haas (2007: 37) suggests that journalists should help citizens reflect on their different, potentially conflicting, concerns as the focal point of public deliberation. They should offer citizens the opportunity to reflect on one another’s reasons for espousing certain opinions

and also offer them opportunities to articulate the social locations from which they view given topics and to reflect on how those social locations affect their sense of problems and solutions. Dwelling on conflict may seem like poor advice in immature, conflict-ridden democracies like South Africa, where public discourse is already fractious and ill-tempered, with protagonists resorting to racial name-calling, mud-slinging and the recitation of well-rehearsed pat answers to public problems. But, Haas's (2007: 38) point is that public journalism can penetrate the superficial conflict of public debate, by becoming a means through which citizens come to understand that they have different and conflicting interests. Even more importantly, journalists should orient themselves away from the bluster of elite politicians and listen for different perspectives among citizens and encourage an acknowledgement that some social locations hinder or prevent certain citizens from speaking in public. An emphasis on transcendent communion may in itself be silencing. Subaltern communities need to be heard and citizens with more social power may be more willing to listen if journalists helped them consider how social inequalities may harm some citizens' abilities to participate on an equal footing. This is not to argue that journalists should essentialise social identities, promote divisiveness, or exaggerate the impact of minor differences. They should not reductively assume that single social identifiers determine one's perspective – but instead help articulate the interrelations between various social signifiers. Haas's (2007: 39) basic point is that a sense of social solidarity is more likely to emerge from mutual respect – including an acknowledgement of diversity – than from an abstract pursuit of commonality.

The structure of the public sphere

Haas (2007: 39), concerned to make public deliberation as open and inclusive as possible, explores which institutional arrangements would best further this goal. He argues that Habermas's notion of a single unified public sphere not only presupposes that topics of common concern exist, it also “deprives subordinate social groups of spaces for *intra*-group deliberation about their particular concerns outside the supervision and control of dominant social groups” (2007: 39). Fraser (1990: 66) thus calls for “multiple discursive domains” organised around distinct bases of affinity and interest. This is because, in socially stratified societies, “arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public [sphere]” (Fraser 1990: 66, cited in Haas 2007: 39).

However, Fraser does not mean to completely isolate her multiple counter-publics from a wider public. Instead, subaltern social groups are first given opportunities to circulate counter-discourses through which to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, needs and interests. These opportunities effectively function as a “training ground for agitational activities” directed towards wider publics (Fraser 1990: 65). Following Fraser, Haas (2007: 40) argues that journalists should help nurture a public sphere composed of multiple discursive domains in which members of different

social groups could articulate and deliberate about their particular concerns *among themselves*. This is a form of participatory ‘affirmative action’ that encourages participatory parity. Thereafter, journalists would carry articles on given *intra*-group deliberations to help audiences understand how particular social locations affect certain groups’ sense of problems and solutions. Only after this was done, would journalists go on to invite all the participants to do so jointly. This is to encourage discursive contestation between a plurality of publics in a joint discursive space. Articles reporting back on more encompassing inter-group deliberations would help audiences compare conflicting concerns as well as identify possible points of overlap that might subsequently form the basis for joint public problem-solving (Haas: 2007: 40).

Promoting public problem solving

Public journalism promotes public deliberation, but should it go further to help the public “act upon, rather than just learn about, its problems” (Rosen 1999a: 22)? Haas (2007: 41) thinks it should and provides a model for the kind of problem-solving public journalists should help promote. He is mindful of Glasser’s complaint that town hall meetings and other attempts by public journalists to convene the community amount to:

at best a contrived and artificial response to the need to cultivate citizenship because they create at most an ad hoc venue for discussion, a small and temporary site for a debate managed by and too often only for the press. Without the means to sustain these discussions over time and the conviction to broaden the range of topics they cover, the press cannot claim to have established much in the way of a tradition of civic participation. (1999: 11)

Haas (2007: 41) argues that journalists should encourage citizens to continue their deliberations and act upon their outcomes within the institution of the wider civil society (civic organisations through which citizens can organise themselves for both continued political deliberation and action). To aid this process, journalists should offer mobilising information – for example, information on how to join up with relevant civic organisations. Haas proposes that the public sphere (including journalism) and civil society should stand in

an explicitly dialectical and mutually supportive relationship. While civil society can offer citizens opportunities to cultivate their political identities as well as to articulate, deliberate and act upon particular political positions that emerge, the public sphere can nurture discursive spaces in which those positions are shared and discussed among a wider audience of citizens. (2007: 41)

Journalism thus becomes the means by which citizens debate and propose new directions for political activity in this unitary public sphere which in turn is channelled back into the institutions of civil society, forming a continuous cycle. Unfortunately, while public journalists have been diligent about reporting on the citizen encounters they sponsor, they seldom report back on any subsequent political activities that their reporting help inspire (Haas 2007: 42). The notion of public life thus continues to be understood in narrow, media-centric terms.

Haas (2007: 43) also warns public journalists to consider carefully which particular kinds of intervention would be required to address given problems before they promote any public problem solving activity. Scholars have taken issue with public journalism's exclusive focus on local, citizen-based intervention to the detriment of other, potentially more appropriate forms of intervention. Glasser, for example, has suggested that "convening the community" might become "a technique of co-optation or legitimation that creates a false sense of participatory involvement without challenging entrenched elite interests" (1999: 10). Similarly, Parisi argues that public journalism's focus on local, citizen-based intervention "could be interpreted as evidence of an underlying alliance with dominant interests, and [public journalism] could thus be termed 'hegemonic' – a means of accommodating the contradictions of current news gathering without bringing about genuine change" (1997: 682).

In response, Haas suggests that journalists should consider whether given problems could be adequately addressed by citizens themselves or whether those problems would require more deep-seated, systemic intervention by government officials. Second, journalists need to consider whether given problems could be adequately addressed through local intervention, whether citizen or government based, or whether those problems would require intervention of a broader provincial, national or even international scope. For problems potentially resolvable by citizens themselves, journalists should support citizens' own efforts to formulate and enact concrete solutions to those problems (i.e., a direct-participatory form of public problem-solving). They could do this by describing what citizens in other localities have done in the past or are doing to address similar problems, creating spaces for citizens to deliberate about those problems among themselves, encouraging citizens to join existing or create new (local or larger scale) civic organisations, and publicising citizens' application for resources. For problems requiring more deep-seated, systemic intervention journalists should encourage citizens, in consultation with experts who have particular knowledge about the problems in question, to formulate possible solutions and then to lobby relevant government officials to enact those solutions in practice (i.e., a "representative" form of public problem solving). Some problems are resolvable by citizens, but others require collaboration between citizens, experts and government officials to be adequately addressed (Haas 2007: 44).

In this regard, Glasser notes that public journalism's "fear of advocacy isolates the press from the very centres of power that are likely to make a difference" (1999: 10). Haas (2007: 44) agrees and urges public journalists must move beyond their mistrust of expertise – the belief that expert participation in public deliberation would somehow taint the authentic expression of public opinion. They should also interrogate their understanding of the participation of government and other centres of political power. There is an assumption that the involvement of officials will be detrimental. This is not necessarily the case and, as we observed earlier, the relationship between investigative journalism and officials can often be 'collaborative' rather than 'monitorial' or adversarial.

This leads us to the question of the journalist's own role in the process of identifying potential solutions to problems. Public journalism orthodoxy was that journalists should be involved in the "processes" not with the "outcomes" of citizen problem solving efforts (Glasser 1999: 10). Rosen suggests that journalists should maintain a stance of "proactive neutrality" that "prescribes no chosen solution and favours no particular party of interest" (1996: 13). Haas (2007: 45) questions why journalists shouldn't have the responsibility to assess whether the interventions endorsed by citizens advance the overarching goal of reducing social inequality. If solutions advance the interests of dominant social groups over those of subordinate groups, journalists should see it as their right – and responsibility – to say so. For example, they could advocate alternative solutions and lobby relevant government officials. In other words, journalists need to act in ways that they perceive to be in the best public interest. They must defend the value of social equality when these are perceived to be threatened by interventions endorsed by citizens themselves. For Haas, then, the 'publicness' of public journalism extends beyond offering citizens opportunities to participate in public deliberation and problem solving, to journalists acting in what they perceive to be the "best public interest" (2007: 45). Public journalists should actively assert and defend their explicitly stated journalistic values, especially the value of social equality.

Conclusion

Haas's 'public philosophy' of public journalism is the most exhaustive and sophisticated attempt yet made to overcome public journalism's alleged theoretical and philosophical disarray. In it he makes a bold call for an assertive journalistic involvement in public affairs, including the right to "actively endorse those politicians, candidates for office, and special interest groups whose agendas would best serve the overarching goal of reducing social inequality" (2007: 46). Despite some of the weaknesses and gaps discussed in this chapter, his public philosophy provides a substantive normative model against which progressive public journalism projects and practices may be measured. I am now in a position to consider the research methodology employed by this study before presenting the research data and undertaking a critical analysis of the *Daily Dispatch's Community Dialogues*.

Endnotes

ⁱ In *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom Public*, Lippmann (1922, 1925) argued that the best democracy could hope for was for citizens to elect political leaders who, with the help of experts, could communicate the results of their deliberations and actions through journalists to “a public incapable of governing itself” (Haas 2007: 7). In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey (1927) countered that modern mass media offered an opportunity for journalists to help bring into being a deliberative public. A daily newspaper could educate the public about political problems, help form the public by reporting on the connections between political decisions and their consequences, and help the public act on its understandings (Coleman 1997). Two decades later, in 1947, the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press was conducted. In a landmark report entitled *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert et al 1956), three members of the commission summarised a number of the commission’s ideals as the “social responsibility theory” of the press. These ideals later featured prominently in public journalists’ arguments about the responsibilities of journalists in relation to the public (Lambeth 1998).

ⁱⁱ There are striking resemblances between the social problems of early twentieth century America described above and early twenty-first century South Africa, making South Africa fertile ground for reform-minded, muckraking journalism. Furthermore, it was noted in Chapter 1 that South Africa’s one-party dominant political system suffers from ‘democratic deficit’ and is hamstrung by a ‘service delivery crisis’ and high levels of political corruption and nepotism, problems that confronted the American political system in the last century. The American muckrakers helped to transform the US Congress and move it from an era of party government to one of committee government Eksterowicz (2000: 8). The rise of a nonpartisan bureaucracy hiring for competence instead of political nepotism “signalled the demise of the spoils system and the consequent weakening of political parties” (Dodd and Schott 1976, 21-29 cited in Eksterowicz 2000: 8). A similar process would no doubt contribute to the transformation of South Africa’s democratically deficient political system.

ⁱⁱⁱ In his introductory journalism textbook *Journalism: Principles and Practice* (2009: 62), Tony Harcup exhaustively lists 75 “common sources of news stories”. Included in the list are “readers/ viewers/ listeners/ users” and “community groups”, but at no point does he recommend town hall meeting, roundtable discussions, focus groups, door-to-door visits or any other strategy adopted by public journalists to access potential news stories from ordinary citizens.

^{iv} A more detailed list of the practises of public journalism would include:

1. Listening to the public to help set a ‘citizens’ news agenda’:
 - a. Information-gathering methods and listening techniques to identify problems of concern to local residents – conducting polls, surveys, town hall meetings, focus groups, readers’ panels, and organizing intimate living room or kitchen conversations;
 - b. The organized events are themselves reported (from the perspectives of residents rather than local government officials, experts and other elite actors);
 - c. A network of editorial councils is set up, which offer citizens structured opportunities to formally discuss with journalists which topics they would like to see covered and how they would like to see those topics reported as well as to evaluate whether coverage adequately reflected their concerns (Chavez, 2005);
 - d. Reporters go to ‘third places’ and/ or ‘incidental spaces’, where “people gather to talk and do things together” (Harwood and McCrehan, 2000), to listen to the people’s concerns;
 - e. Newsrooms are made more accessible (Schaffer, 1996);
 - f. The effort to listen to the public is continuous and systematic (Lambeth, 1998), reshaping the news agenda in a back-and-forth cycle (Charity, 1995).
2. Giving ordinary people a voice:
 - a. Engaging in ‘civic mapping’, which “requires journalists to plunge a little deeper into the civic layers of our communities, beneath the official and quasi-official zone of elected officials and designated community leaders” (Schaffer, 2001);
 - b. Interviewing differently: asking questions that open up the conversation; allowing people to talk at their own pace;
 - c. Citing more often or more prominently in the news the views of citizen organizations or unaffiliated individuals;
 - d. More recent interactive techniques include website interactions and online games (Thomas, 2002).
3. Covering stories in a way that facilitates public understanding and stimulates citizen *deliberation* of the problems behind the stories:

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- a. Presenting stories that focus on issues, sometimes providing historical background or other information connected to the issues.
 - b. Reporting on areas of agreement, rather than polarizing the issues.
 - c. Including in the story information about possible solutions to problems.
 - d. Elaborating on what residents themselves can do to address given problems in practice;
 - e. Revealing in news reports the values served by taking alternate courses of action.
 - f. Framing stories along the ‘master narrative’, which is the progress (or lack thereof) made by the community in solving the problem (Charity, 1995).
4. Presenting news to make it more accessible and easier for people to engage in the issues:
 - a. Paying attention to the ‘civic design’ (Ford, 2000) of newspapers, by employing fact boxes, check lists, issue maps, reader rails, grids, charts, and graphs;
 - b. Include ‘mobilizing information’ in stories, which members of a news audience can use to “determine how, whether and where to express their attitudes in political influence processes” (Lemert et al., 1977).
 5. Help organise sites for public deliberation and problem solving:
 - a. News organizations convene or sponsor roundtable discussions, community forums and enlist citizens to take part in efforts at problem solving (Corrigan, 1999);
 - b. Champion the solutions suggested by citizens (Charity, 1995) including the possibility of helping to establish community organisations that will advance citizen-generated solutions to problems.

Chapter 3

Research methodology

Introduction

The idea for this research emerged in late 2008 after the author was invited to present a seminar to the editorial staff of the *Daily Dispatch* about the possible use of public journalism ideas and methods in the coverage of the 2009 general elections and beyond. Shortly after this seminar a series of *Community Dialogues* were designed and executed by the editorial leadership of the *Daily Dispatch* as a public journalism strategy. There was thus, from the outset, an element of collaboration between the researcher and the research subjects. However, while this researcher was aware of the launch of the *Community Dialogues* in March 2009, it was not possible to begin this research process until August 2009, after which the researcher was able to observe and record the fourth and last *Community Dialogue* of the year in October 2009. This chapter examines some of the methodological perspectives and issues that framed this critical, in-depth case study before outlining the research design employed for its exploration of the nature and purpose of the *Community Dialogues*.

1. Epistemological considerations

This research was undertaken within a broadly ‘critical realist’ epistemological framework (Deacon et al 1999). Frankfurt School theorist Theodor Adorno (cited in Dant 2003) finds the origin of the words ‘criticism’, ‘critique’ and ‘critic’ in the Greek word *krino*, ‘to decide’. The critic is one who is in a position to make judgements, who decides whether something is good or bad, or who points to faults that, if rectified, would lead to something better. But, Raymond Williams (cited in Dant 2003: 6) urges us to take a broader view of criticism. While he makes this plea in reference to literary criticism rather than journalism, it is still useful to observe that criticism is for him more than fault finding (Dant 2003: 6). This broader view of criticism leads us closer to the notion of ‘critique’, the principal method of the critical theory pioneered by the Frankfurt School, and it is this definition of *krino* that the researcher, in collaboration with the research participants (the editorial leadership of the *Daily Dispatch* responsible for the *Community Dialogues*), has tried to privilege in this case study. For Adorno, critique is essential to democracy as it provides the system of checks and balances that protect democracy (and it thus already has much in common with the institution of journalism). As Dant argues, critique “begins to challenge whole systems rather than identify failings. [It] confronts the form of society as a whole, perhaps identifying particular features, but treating them as consequent upon the underlying character of the social system” (2003: 7).

Meanwhile, the realist philosophical position accepts that there are “social and cultural structures that shape people’s options for action but exist independently of their awareness of them” (Deacon 1999: 10). These social and cultural structures are not immutable and are “continually modified by social action until they are eventually transformed into something else” (Deacon et al 1999: 10). The job of the critical analyst is thus to bring structures to light and “explain how they work in order to encourage informed action aimed at eradicating barriers to equity and justice” (Deacon et al 1999: 10). Thus, while interpretive approaches concentrate on the meanings people mobilise to make sense of their worlds, critical realism is more concerned with “the generative mechanisms underlying and producing observable events” (Bhaskar, cited in Deacon et al 1999: 11). The critical realist researcher must thus analyse transformations at the macro, meso and micro levels, including “intimate features of the human self” (Mills, cited in Deacon et al 1999: 11), and see the relations between them.

As can be seen from Chapters 1 and 2, this study has drawn on a number of broadly ‘critical’ theoretical frameworks which provide the lens through which the primary research data was collected at the micro level. For example, it follows Christians et al in seeing normative theories of journalism as a potential “instrument of emancipation from the status quo” (2009: ix) as they support serious press criticism. However, having *a priori* theoretical frameworks carries the danger that it can “lead to a false consensus – making the data fit the framework – or failing to see the unexpected” (Simons 2009: 33). Building theory from the data has the advantage of being grounded in the ‘lived’ experience of participants and the peculiar dynamics of the South African context, leading to a unique understanding or potential theory of this case – although the difficulty here is generating a theory from contrary, complex qualitative data.

2. The research context and research relationships

Both the key ‘research subjects’ and I, as researcher, attempted to play a critical, ‘emancipatory’ role in relation to examining the nature and purpose of the *Community Dialogues*. We shared the same broad knowledge interests and goals in the research process. For example, both parties were aware, to a greater or lesser degree prior to the start of the research process, of normative theories of public journalism which served to guide their understandings and actions. The hope was that the research process might contribute to ongoing efforts to critique and reform mainstream, commercial journalism practices, so that they might better serve the needs and interests of South African civil society, especially subaltern civil society. This researcher’s preferred way of working was thus to see the *Daily Dispatch* journalists as research participants who were “engaged in the study in a shared experience that they can value”, if not partly own (Simons 2009: 36). There was an acknowledgement that I was attempting to research with them, not simply gathering data on or about them for my own project. The process was less aimed at reducing bias than “developing inter-subjective objectivity

through dialogue and critique among research participants, including the researcher” (Rhodes Environmental Education Unit 2001: 5). Conducting the case study in this way involved engaging with the key participants throughout the process, “documenting their perspectives and judgements, negotiating meaning and interpretations with them using accessible methods and language” (Simons 2009: 36). This was not easy to accomplish as the research was not conducted in the researcher’s home city and journalists are under constant deadline pressures. While very willing participants, the senior editorial staff members who participated in this research were not always able to give up the blocks of time necessary either for in-depth interviews or for providing feedback on draft research reports, precluding the possibility for a genuinely participatory action research process.

The research process was also not as ‘collaborative’, ‘participatory’ or ‘democratic’ as hoped for, as the researcher had done considerably more reading in critical theory and public journalism prior to the commencement of the research process than any of the research participants. So while participatory research seeks ‘co-construction’ of meaning and has the potential to disrupt disempowering conventional research relations, existing power gradients and assumptions often worked against this potential. This problem was particularly true of this researcher’s relationships with some of the more junior *Daily Dispatch* journalists who had no prior knowledge of public journalism and indicated their nervousness at being interviewed about the *Community Dialogues* by a university-based researcher. Nevertheless, all participants demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm and interest in the research and articulated a strong desire to nurture the research processes and relationships beyond the write-up of this thesis.

3. The *Community Dialogues* as a critical case study

According to Simons, a case study is:

an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project... in a ‘real life’ context. It is research based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led. The primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic... to generate knowledge and/ or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action (2009: 21).

In addition, Yin writes that a case study inquiry relies on multiple sources of evidence and “prior development of theoretical propositions to guide the collection of data” (1994: 13). In the case of the *Community Dialogues* case study a number of theoretical propositions, in particular the ‘critical’ normative theory of public journalism proposed by Haas (2007), helped to guide and frame the collection of data.

According to Simons case studies can be divided into “intrinsic” and “instrumental” categories depending on the purpose of the research (2009: 21). An ‘intrinsic’ case study is undertaken to better understand a particular case. It is not undertaken primarily because it represents other cases or

because it illustrates some particular trait, characteristic, or problem. Rather, it is because of its uniqueness or ordinariness that a case becomes interesting. The intention is to better understand intrinsic aspects of the organisation or project, not to understand or test abstract theory or to develop new theoretical explanations. An ‘instrumental’ case study on the other hand provides insights into an issue or refines a theoretical explanation (Simons 2009: 21). The case is of secondary importance. It will serve only a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else. The case is often looked at “in depth, its contexts scrutinised, its ordinary activities detailed, but because this helps us pursue the external interest” (Simons 2009: 21). However, because we simultaneously have several interests, often changing, there is no firm line distinguishing an intrinsic case study from an instrumental one – a zone of combined purpose separates them.

In this instance the *Community Dialogues* were chosen primarily for the instrumental role they could play in helping us to understand theoretical issues and help tackle some of the problems associated with the practice of public journalism in South Africa. In addition, by tackling the under-researched area of newspaper-sponsored public meetings, it is hoped that the research may be of interest to international theorists and practitioners of public journalism. At the same time, an understanding of the *Community Dialogues* has intrinsic value, especially for the various participants involved in the project in East London.

Simons identifies a third category of case study, a “collective”, which involves “the extensive study of several instrumental cases” (2009: 21). The selection is intended to allow better understanding or perhaps enhanced ability to theorize about a broader context. Since there are no other official public journalism projects being undertaken by the mainstream media in South Africa this form of case study is not yet feasible. Meanwhile, to these types may be added those indicated by Bassey, who categorises cases as “theory-seeking”, “theory-testing”, “story-telling”, “interpretive” and “evaluative” (1999 cited in Simons 2009: 21). This case study is ‘interpretive’, ‘theory-seeking’ and ‘story-telling’ in its attempts to explore the self-understandings of the nature and purpose of the *Community Dialogues* articulated by the *Daily Dispatch* editorial staff, as well as in its effort to observe the *Community Dialogues* themselves and examine the journalism associated with them. But is also ‘theory-testing’ and ‘evaluative’ in its attempt to examine and evaluate the *Community Dialogues* critically against normative theories of public journalism developed by its advocate-theorists.

While this case study has much in common with an ‘evaluation case study’ it cannot be described as such because the researcher was not in a position to closely examine the value placed on the project by different people and interest groups in the target communities of the *Community Dialogues* given the limited scope and length of this mini-thesis. Instead, it has limited its scope to a ‘media-centric’ exploration of the nature and purpose of the project from the vantage point of the understandings and

aspirations of the editorial staff of the *Daily Dispatch*, and in terms of sociological and normative theories of public journalism developed in the field of Journalism Studies. An attempt is also made to assess the influence of the project on social capital formation in the target communities and to gauge its success in solving public problems.

4. The case study design and research questions

This qualitative case study had an open design that shifted in response to a growing understanding of the case. Factors considered in designing the case included the identification of research questions, the overall methodology, specific methods that would provide relevant data to inform the questions, criteria for the choice of participants and ethical procedures to ensure participants were fairly treated.

While the main research question is ‘What is the nature and purpose of the *Community Dialogues*?’ subsidiary questions flowing from this main question include:

- How do key members of the *Daily Dispatch*’s editorial staff perceive the nature and purpose of the *Community Dialogues*? Why did they initiate it, how did they run it, and what did they hope to achieve through it? Do they believe there has been any divergence between what they initially hoped for and the way it ‘turned out’?
- How are the *Community Dialogues* structured, framed and facilitated, and how do the various participants interact with each other?
- What is the nature and scope of the journalistic and/or civic activity that the *Community Dialogues* might have helped inspire?
- Did the *Daily Dispatch* consciously aspire to share its agenda-setting function with the public through the *Community Dialogues*? Was it successful in sharing this agenda setting function? What are the implications of this?
- Do the *Community Dialogues* help to constitute a *sustainable* public sphere in which all topics of concern to citizens can not only be articulated, but also deliberated, and acted on over time?
- Given the conditions of profound social division and inequality in the Eastern Cape, what is the *Daily Dispatch*’s agenda in relation to ensuring that the concerns of the most marginalised social groups are articulated and heard to the same extent as those of dominant social groups, and how does this agenda play itself out in the *Community Dialogues*?
- To what extent are the democratic ideals and practical prescriptions embedded in Haas’s normative theory of public journalism desirable and/or achievable given the political and media contexts and constraints within which the *Daily Dispatch* conducts its *Community Dialogues*?

5. Data gathering methods

It is important to recognise that the case study is not a data-gathering technique in itself, but a methodological approach that incorporates a number of data-gathering measures (Berg 2001: 225). This is in line with the notion that a mixing of methods is central to critical realism (Deacon et al 1999: 11). While critical realists incorporate the kinds of work done by interpretive researchers in exploring “how people make sense of their world on a day-to-day basis”, they also aim to go beyond them by “considering the underlying formations that organise meaning making” (Deacon et al 1999: 11).

Consequently, this research has sought rich, detailed information of a qualitative nature using three key methods often used in case study research to “facilitate in-depth analysis and understanding”: these are “interview, observation and document analysis” (Simons 2009: 33). However, since this research is framed by the critical theory outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 it attempts to foreground “the underlying formations that organise” the way “people make sense of their world on a day-to-day basis” (Deacon et al 1999: 11).

Interviewing

In-depth interviews were conducted with those members of the *Daily Dispatch* editorial staff who had a key role in planning and executing the *Dialogues*, including the editor, deputy editor, leader page editor and news editor. They were chosen for interview to investigate their self-understandings and perceptions of the purpose and nature of the *Community Dialogue*, including an examination of their own goals and a self-evaluation of the extent to which those goals were reached. In addition, some of the journalists who had either attended the *Dialogues* or written follow-up stories on the issues raised at the *Dialogues*, were also interviewed.

According to Henning (1999: 50) there are two main trends in interviewing in qualitative research: the conventional standardised interview and the discursive, constructionist interview. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were attempted with several editorial staff of the *Daily Dispatch*. The interview schedule is included as Appendix 2. The interview questions were informed by the theoretical perspectives outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. In the case of both the editor and the organizer of the *Community Dialogues*, more than one interview was conducted over an extended period. In this case the first interview was typically longer and more structured, with the interviewer attempting to control the process in order not to let the speaker deviate too far from the topic and also to make sure that no leading questions were asked and that there was little “contamination” of any kind (Henning 2004: 53). However, the second and third follow-up interviews were more informal and unstructured, allowing both the interviewer and interviewee more scope for the exploratory and collaborative co-

construction of meaning and knowledge. A disadvantage of the more structured interview is the possibility that it creates an asymmetrical power positioning which negatively affects the interviewee's sense of trust and freedom (Henning 2004: 66). More structured interviews did not work as well when interviewing more 'junior' journalists because the formality and control inherent in this approach exacerbated the already asymmetrical power relations between me as a media academic and these young interview subjects. On the other hand, since all the interviewees were journalists they had a good working knowledge of the interview situation and were able to take on the identity of an "ideal interviewee" (Henning 2004: 51).

These interpersonal interviews generated a number of outcomes. First, they produce rich data on the interviewees' perspectives on the topics presented. Second, they promoted active engagement and learning for both interviewer and interviewee in identifying and analysing issues. Third, they created the flexibility to change direction and "pursue emergent issues, to probe a topic or deepen a response, and to engage in dialogue with participants" (Simons 2009: 43).

Observation

One of the *Community Dialogues*, held in Buffalo Flats in October 2009, was chosen for observation. In addition, I also observed two related public forums sponsored by the newspaper – a *Youth Dialogue*, a schools debating competition, and two *Dispatch Dialogues*, addressed by academics and political activists, which produced some useful comparative data. I had intended to record the Buffalo Flats *Dialogue* as a "fly on the wall" observer (Deacon et al 1999: 250), but because both my name and the institution I 'represent' (Rhodes University) were mentioned on two separate occasions during the *Dialogue*, I may have been seen to be a 'participant' by some of those present.

Observation of a *Community Dialogue* was central to this research because it gave "a rich sense of the setting" (Simons 2009: 55), as well as the structures, rules and protocols of the meeting and even the artefacts displayed, all of which cannot be obtained solely by speaking to people. The researcher was able to observe the ways in which the social actors used language and symbols to make meaning, as well as the norms and values that appeared to govern their interactions. Guided by the purpose of the research, the researcher focused on certain aspects of the *Community Dialogue* "mise en scene" (Henning 2004: 89). While field notes reflect this focus, the observation also yielded an audio recording and verbatim transcript of what was said at the event, which lent itself to closer analysis and reinterpretation. Lastly, the observations also provided a cross-check on data obtained in interviews, strengthening the validity of the account (Henning 2004: 90).

But, the observation of the *Community Dialogue* was conducted with the express objective of harnessing information that addressed specific, focused questions within the case study research design. Firstly, how are the *Community Dialogues* structured and facilitated, and how do the various

participants interact with one another? For Henning (2004: 90), this could be described as an ethnomethodological observation, including an observation of what has become known as “talk-in-interaction” (Psathas 1995), in which conversation in particular settings is analysed with a view to eliciting the underlying structures of such talk. For example, who speaks at the *Community Dialogue*? How do they speak and take turns? How is this speech framed and mediated by the facilitators? What are the rules of engagement? Who keeps to these rules and who tries to break them? What discourses are used? How do the arguments unfold? Are the contributions primarily informational or rhetorical? What are the overt and tacit rules that govern interaction? How does the chair manage (control) the meeting by means of spoken and unspoken language?

Secondly, do the interactions in the *Community Dialogues* help to constitute a *sustainable* public sphere in which all topics of concern to citizens can not only be articulated, but also deliberated, and acted on over time? For example, do participants express the underlying reasons for holding the views that they hold? And does the *Dialogue* foster participatory parity?

While I observed just one *Community Dialogue*, this two-hour event generated a considerable amount of data, which had to be sifted and summarised to make it manageable. Decisions about what was ‘significant’ were made in relation to the kinds of questions framed above.

Document research

All print-edition and online stories published by the *Daily Dispatch* in 2009 either relating to news, editorial or blog coverage of the *Community Dialogues* or relating to subsequent newspaper coverage of issues raised at these meeting were downloaded using the *Daily Dispatch*’s research database. Document analysis was a helpful precursor to interviewing key research subjects and observing the *Community Dialogues*. News clippings provided a rich historical record of what had transpired at the *Community Dialogues*, while blog entries and editorials provided an insight into what some of the editorial leaders of the newspaper felt about the process. The documents helped to suggest issues that were crucial to explore and to provide a context for the interpretation of the interview and observational data. While these documents were primarily used for their content value (for example, what was said at the *Community Dialogues*, and what subsequent coverage they helped to inspire) these texts are open to other, deeper forms of textual and discursive analysis. For example, they can be interrogated and evaluated in terms of the extent to which they help to promote some of the democratic ideals underpinning Haas’s public philosophy for public journalism. For example, Glasser and Craft (1998: 213) stipulate that to ensure that genuine dialogue and deliberation occurs, journalists should preserve “the identity and integrity” of citizens’ dialogical encounters by retaining the “to-and-fro of argument” in their reports (1998: 213). Were the *Dispatch* journalists able to capture the to-and-fro of the *Community Dialogues* in their journalism and were they able to deal with

complex and partially opaque subtexts lurking just beneath the surface of the *Dialogues* by, for example, immersing themselves in these communities over time and writing in-depth narrative features on these issues. Or did they tend to focus on the many ‘bread and butter’ public complaints that emerged from these meetings in a series of short hard news stories? What model of deliberation and/ or public problem solving did these different genres and journalistic approaches promote? These documents were thus used both to portray and enrich the context of the *Community Dialogues*, but also to contribute to an analysis of some of the key research questions.

7. Data analysis procedures

All the *Daily Dispatch* documents relating to the first three *Community Dialogues* were organised in chronological order, to help construct a narrative of the *Dialogues*, and to identify and probe some of the key issues to explore in the interviews and observation. A first round of interviews with key subjects was conducted, followed by the observation of the Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue*, and a second round of more less formal/structured interviews with a wider range of interview subjects.

It was the researcher’s task to interpret the meaning that emerged from this data and present their most salient features in critical and coherent form (Jhally & Lewis in Ruddock 2001: 138). Thematic coding was used as the mode of analysis. Jensen describes this technique as a “loosely inductive categorization of interview ... extracts with reference to various concepts, headings or themes” (1982: 247). The researcher’s job was thus to report on those sections of the data sets that raised critical themes and questions and shed most light on the research questions already at hand. It was important to consider the vantage points from which the interviewees and *Community Dialogues* participants spoke – their positioning vis-à-vis the content and their stake in the outcome. For example, the view of the *Daily Dispatch*’s senior staff concerning the nature and purpose of the *Community Dialogues* is coloured by their position as initiators and facilitators of the project. They had a direct stake in managing perceptions of the project. More junior staff members had less complex understanding of the nature and purpose of the *Community Dialogues* and had less invested in their success. Also, the relative powerlessness of junior journalists in the organization, made it difficult to assess accurately whether their professed support for the project was ‘genuine’ or a function of their need for approval from the newspaper’s hierarchy.

Following a period of deep immersion in the data, a story began to emerge as did a number of key categories. It was decided “to select data that would tell an eventful story” (Simons 2009: 118) and present this data in a broadly ‘chronological’ order, beginning with the conception of the project, through to an exposition of each of the *Dialogues*, and ending with an outline of the *Dispatch*’s plans for the future. The resultant six short chapters broadly follow this narrative arc in an attempt to ‘tell the story’ of the *Dialogues*. At the same time each chapter explores in depth a distinct cluster of

theoretical and practical problems associated with accomplishing public journalism in the South Africa context.

Chapter 4

The origins and imagined purposes of the *Community Dialogues*

Introduction

This chapter provides an historical overview of the events that led to the launch of the *Daily Dispatch*'s first *Community Dialogue* in March 2009, including an exploration of some of the factors that led to their adoption as an editorial strategy. First, we consider the motivations and imagined purposes of these *Dialogues* from the viewpoint of the editorial leaders of the newspaper. The research reveals that the impetus for the *Community Dialogues* came from a variety of sources, including:

- The editor's knowledge of, and personal commitment to, the idea of public journalism;
- The editorial leadership's belief that public journalism techniques like the *Community Dialogues* could enhance the journalism of the newspaper by helping citizens inform the news agenda and helping the newspaper and individual journalists build better relationships with citizens/readers;
- The editorial leadership's belief that the *Dialogues* could help build horizontal and vertical social capital in the city, and help facilitate solutions to public problems;
- The editor's deployment of the *Dialogues* as response to direct political pressure placed on the newspaper by ANC politicians – the *Dialogues* served to immunise the *Dispatch* from political criticism because they represented a direct form of media accountability that went beyond indirect forms of voluntary self-regulation;
- The editorial leadership's investment in the *Dialogues* as a response to increased economic pressure on the newspaper – they have served to soften the impact of recessionary economic conditions by helping to build relationships of loyalty and trust between the newspaper and its readers.

Second, we interrogate the motivations expressed by the editorial leaders of the *Dispatch* in the light of political economy critiques of public journalism encountered earlier, as well as Haas's (2007) 'public philosophy' of public journalism. Are the *Dialogues* a cynical marketing ploy serving the circulation and profit interests of owners and advertisers, rather than citizens' democratic needs? Even if the *Dispatch*'s efforts are motivated by 'higher purposes' than profit, to what extent does the

structural logic of the commercial media system, within which the *Dispatch* is embedded, constrain the democratic efficacy of the *Community Dialogues*?

1. Origins: the *Dispatch Dialogues* as a predecessor to the *Community Dialogues*

The *Community Dialogues* were preceded by a series of highly successful public lectures and panel discussions called the *Dispatch Dialogues*. The *Dispatch Dialogues* were initiated in 2007 by the then editor, Phylcia Oppelt (Trench interview 26/10/2009). They were intended to “provide readers with access to powerful, influential ideas and figures” and “to create a platform for a broader public discussion about issues in the public domain and to bring readers into that discussion” (Trench interview 26/10/2009). The first *Dispatch Dialogue*, held in December 2007, was addressed by Mark Gevisser, the author of *Thabo Mbeki: A Dream Deferred*. The newspaper subsequently hosted a further 21 *Dialogues* in the period up to March 2010ⁱ. *Dispatch Dialogues* organiser and leader page editor Dawn Barkhuizen says that what struck her most forcefully about the first few events was the “unbelievable hunger in the audience. They were virtually rugby tackling each other to get to the microphone – people wanted to speak” (Barkhuizen interview 01/10/2009). To promote the *Dispatch Dialogues* a number of articles (either book extracts, backgrounders or opinion pieces) were published in the two-week build-up to each event.

Attendance at the *Dispatch Dialogues* exceeded expectations. Current editor Andrew Trench attributes their popularity to the “massive hunger” for this type of platform as “there isn't really anything else like this” in East London (Trench interview 26/10/2009). On some occasions there was not enough room at the venue. According to Barkhuizen, the *Dialogues* have “developed an identity of their own and they have a following – people drive from Mthatha, Queenstown and Grahamstown. People phone me with suggestions” (Interview 01/10/2009).

Towards the end of 2008, Trench learned that he would take over from Oppelt as *Daily Dispatch* editor. Five years earlier, he had read about public journalism on the web and was “keen to return to the *Dispatch*” because he thought there would be “a prospect of doing public journalism in a smaller city like East London” (Trench personal correspondence 03/03/2010). Days after his instalment as editor on 1 December 2008, I presented some ideas to his reporters and sub-editors on the theme “Public Journalism and the 2009 elections”. The following February he announced in his *Dispatches From the Trench* column that his newspaper was to launch a newly-branded, citizen-centric version of the *Dispatch Dialogues* called the *Community Dialogues*, where “we will invite you to come and air your views on the pressing challenges of your neighbourhoods and share your thoughts on how some of these things can be solved” (2009a).

In the same column Trench wrote that he was “inspired” by the civic journalism movement “that had taken hold across the globe” and explicitly described the *Community Dialogues* as a form of civic journalism (2009a). He stated, following Merritt (1995), Rosen (1999a) and other advocate-theorists, that one of the purposes of civic journalism was to see “the media change from being the passive observer and describer of events to being an active partner with its readers in helping to make things better” (Trench 2009a).

When asked to prioritise the roles for journalism in contemporary South Africa according to Christians et al’s (2009: 32) four-part typology, Trench saw the monitorial role as being “at the top of the pyramid” (Trench interview 26/10/2009). In the 1970s and 1980s the *Daily Dispatch* had developed strong anti-apartheid credentials and a reputation for investigative journalism. “The speaking truth to power role is a long tradition going back to the [Donald] Woods era. I think that for a while that reputation had subsided. One of the things we’re trying to do is resuscitate that legacy” (Trench interview 26/10/2009). However, alongside this monitorial role, Trench believes that the *Daily Dispatch* should also play a ‘facilitative’ role:

We have more to do that just shout out loud – it’s also about building the conversation. One of the things that has become important to me as an editor at the *Dispatch*, which I always speak to readers about, is that I really see the paper as a bridge-builder in the community. There are two legs to it. First is the traditional watchdog role of journalism. But the other thing is to be located in your community and to have a relationship with your community. The values in that kind of journalism are different to the values on the other side. The idea is to have a material impact on the lives of our readers – not just describing a reality but to contribute to what that reality is as well. You can hold these two things together, but there can be a contradiction there too. Telling truth to power can be a very loud posturing kind of stand, and the other thing can be quite a gentle conversation. As one goes down the road of the one the tone of the other changes a little bit too. (Interview 26/10/2009)

2. Impetus to and imagined purposes of *Community Dialogues*

Trench says his newspaper has put in “a lot of work over the years” on ‘facilitative’ strategies like the *Dispatch Dialogues*, the *Community Dialogues* and his weekly column *Dispatches From the Trench* (where he speaks directly to readers about his thinking as editor). He says these strategies are designed to transcend the monitorial role and “develop relationships with our readers in a very direct way” (Trench interview 26/10/2009).

Christians et al (2009: 32) confirm that while there are certain oppositions and potential conflicts, the four roles in their typology are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, the monitorial role can be less adversarial than is ordinarily understood, sometimes even involving co-operation between journalists and the agencies they investigate. As we will discover in Chapter 7, the newspaper has embraced the idea of collaborating with the Buffalo City Municipality and the police on certain campaigns like the clean-up of parks in inner-city areas.

When Trench first wrote about the *Community Dialogues* (2009a) he saw them performing a number of core journalistic and civic purposes. They would:

- Help journalists connect to neighbourhoods and develop sources/ contacts;
- Give citizens a platform to speak out about their stories/ problems and express their needs;
- Allow journalists to share their agenda setting function with citizens and find compelling story ideas;
- Help facilitate vertical linkages between ‘civil society’ and ‘political society’ (linking social capital);
- Help build horizontal links (bridging and bonding social capital) within civil society, and;
- Support public problem-solving efforts.

However, notably absent from Trench’s list are some of the detailed prescriptions around the purpose and nature of *public deliberation* to be found in Haas’s ‘public philosophy’ of public journalism. For example, Haas suggests that journalists should help nurture multiple discursive domains in order to promote participation by all and to help uncover buried conflicts of interest and perspective among different social groups. This would allow these different social groups a chance to deliberate their own concerns before they are brought together within a joint discursive space for joint public problem-solving (Haas 2007: 47).

When Trench talks about building horizontal links within civil society, he fails to distinguish between the bonding social capital that is promoted through the nurturance of multiple discursive domains (including subaltern public spheres) and the bridging social capital that is promoted through a joint discursive space (or unitary public sphere). Another potential weakness in Trench’s formulation is the lack of detail and precision around the specific roles that citizens, experts, government officials and journalists should play in relation to one another in the problem solving process. The *Daily Dispatch* does not distinguish between problems potentially resolvable by citizens themselves and those that may require citizen collaboration with experts and/or government officials on the formulation and enactment of given solutions. The exact role of journalists in the problem solving process is also not clear. The *Daily Dispatch* can thus be said to have significantly ‘under-theorised’ the nature and purpose of its own creation. This is a theme that will emerge repeatedly in the next five chapters.

For Trench, the relative success of the *Daily Dispatch* in attracting community members to the *Community Dialogues* stands in stark contrast to the poor attendance at other public meetings, like community policing forums and ward committee meetings reported by community members at the Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009). Trench says that it shows “a deep-seated trust with the *Dispatch* that goes back many, many years” (Trench interview 26/10/2009):

I think that what gets people there is the fact that there is this institution in the community that seems to be relatively neutral, or at least doesn't have any direct stake in any of these issues. And there is some kind of confidence that something will come of that kind of conversation. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

He says that the fact that the *Community Dialogues* represent a more interventionist type of journalism fits "the history, legacy and profile of the paper", especially its "close connection to the community" (Interview, 26/10/2009).

Political pressure as an impetus for the Community Dialogues

Trench notes that one of the key strategic reasons for investing in the *Community Dialogues* was to obviate the extreme political pressure applied to the *Daily Dispatch* in the run-up to the 2009 general elections:

We had senior [ANC] politicians coming in here and making threats against me and my staff and things like that. And I was thinking, 'How do you get around this? Do you stand here and shout about it or retreat?' No. What you do is invest in your relationship with your constituency. Our 300 000 readers are pretty influential people because they can afford to buy a newspaper. And these are people that we have a relationship with. The way to deal with that is to make sure the relationship is real and that it is completely invested and that people outside see that the connection is there. Because then as a media institution you are a hell of a lot stronger. And I can tell you that [since the *Community Dialogues* started] we haven't had any more of those okes knocking on our door! It's one way of dealing with the threat. (Trench interview 19/02/2010)

The *Daily Dispatch's* attempt to build relationships of accountability and trust with diverse publics within East London through the *Community Dialogues* can thus be seen to have provided the newspaper with a powerful rhetorical and practical bulwark against government criticism of it as a member of a 'narrowly interested' commercial enterprise. This is because the *Community Dialogues* have provided subaltern social groups with the means to influence the commercial media's agenda setting function, which represents a more direct form of media accountability that goes well beyond weak, indirect forms of voluntary self-regulation usually proffered by the South African media industry. In contrast to the ANC Government's formulation that the state should be the repository of the will of the people understood as the 'national interest' (see Duncan 2003), the *Daily Dispatch* assumes that '*the people*' are the ultimate repository of the will of the people and accordingly set out to discover 'public interest' empirically by engaging directly with these publics through the *Community Dialogues*.

Another strong impetus for the *Community Dialogues* was that since mid-2009 the Buffalo City Municipality had been wracked by political in-fighting, which had brought local government in the city "to the brink of financial and administrative chaos" (Piliso 2010). In the midst of a visible breakdown in basic service delivery, the *Community Dialogues* stepped into the vacuum to provide a rare vertical bridge between those elements in local government still committed to public service and

an increasingly exasperated citizenry. According to former *Daily Dispatch* council reporter Babalo Ndenze the in-fighting between two powerful ANC factions in the province was “killing service delivery because no decisions were being taken at council meetings” (Interview 19/02/2010). Deputy editor Siqoko confirms this prognosis with this description of a BCM council meeting:

I went to city hall and sat in the gallery and couldn't believe it. How we decided to give these guys a mandate to run our city escapes me... They can't agree on how a meeting should be structured – whether it is a continuation of the last meeting or not. They couldn't agree on those basic issues (Interview 18/02/2010).

At the same time, as we saw in Chapter 1, civic structures like ward committees designed to represent the interests of all citizens in residential areas have become highly ‘politicised’. Siqoko comments:

You go to a ward committee and all they talk about is the ANC's plan for this area, the ANC's election manifesto says this and all that. If I'm not a member of the ruling party, in whose interests is this? They do not discuss issues that actually affect the local community. This is a structure that is supposed to be helping all of us as the community. There was a time when we knew what was happening in our areas and we wanted to be part of SGB [School Governing Body] structures, and the community safety forums [CPFs]. But, the CPFs were supposed to be about me and you sitting with the community safety officer, and the police commissioner. We would together devise a crime prevention plan for our area. But the only thing that is discussed at CPF meetings is party politics. (Interview 18/02/2010)

Siqoko also laments the weakness of watchdog bodies in South Africa. He says he cannot phone the anti-corruption unit in the Office of the Premier of the Eastern Cape because “somebody I know is going to respond there” and he will not be protected as a whistleblower (Siqoko, interview 18/02/2010).

In this context, it was unsurprising that citizens displayed such overwhelming enthusiasm to participate in the *Community Dialogues*, as they may have represented the only viable public sphere able to withstand pressure from political society.

The economic impetus for the Community Dialogues

At the end of 2008, the *Daily Dispatch* embarked on a process of offering voluntary retrenchments to a number of editorial staff members as a result of declining advertising revenue associated with the deepening economic recession. The size of the newspaper also contracted placing pressure on editorial space. While circulation held steady, the recession also negatively affected the affordability of the newspaper, especially in poorer communities. Besides its journalistic and civic benefits, Trench argues that the *Community Dialogues* also present “a commercial benefit in terms of building relationships with readers” which helped to “soften the impact” of what they were going through (Trench interview 26/10/2009).

One key marketing strategy to have come directly out of the *Community Dialogues* was the idea of putting up posters in neighbourhoods relating to hyperlocal issues affecting that area. Trench explains:

“Sitting there as editor and hearing how worked up people are about issues in the neighbourhood it made sense for me to know that I have stories about those issues that are up on poles. Then they’re more likely to buy the paper. The posters come directly out of the editorial from the *Community Dialogues*” (Interview 26/10/2009).

As noted above, critics argue that public journalism was adopted by mainstream media companies as a cynical marketing ploy because its emphasis on audience concerns might serve the circulation and profit interests of owners and advertisers, rather than citizens’ democratic needs (see Hardt, 1999). But, Haas and Steiner report that no evidence suggests that public journalism increases profits; indeed, “projects are costly” (2006: 243). Trench says that the overarching impetus for the *Dialogues* was never to protect circulation (Interview 19/02/2010). Instead:

There were a whole lot of things we had to protect, including our freedom as an institution and our circulation in a recession. And when you ask yourself how you do all those things you come back to the same answer – a strong relationship with your readers. I think it has worked because most of our readers have stayed the course with us. We are facing more competition in this area than ever before. The *Daily Sun* ... had become the biggest Eastern Cape newspaper. But, we’ve taken that back from them. A large part of that is because of this kind of stuff. Who do you choose: The paper that is part of your community and with you or the outsider from Joburg? Every day I see the benefits of the *Dialogues*. The strategy is really about relationships... Through all these strategies we’re sending a very strong message to people that we are heavily invested in this relationship. We’re not just serving the community – we are a part of it. (Trench interview 19/02/2010)

A concern for the most marginalised social groups?

Even if we accept that the *Community Dialogues* are motivated by the ‘higher purpose’ of being an active participant in the civic life of Buffalo City rather than simply increasing profits, the *Daily Dispatch* nevertheless operates within the structural logic of the South African commercial media system. The practicability and force of the *Dispatch*’s civic and journalistic ideals must be interrogated in the context of a system wherein media owners and advertisers have commercial interests in catering to demographically attractive audiences whose needs are not necessarily the most politically compelling. The media system may place structural pressures on broad-based citizen participation in democratic processes (see Pauly 1999).

In his public philosophy for public journalism, Haas (2007) argues that the concerns of the most marginalised social groups should be articulated and heard to the same extent as those of dominant social groups. In 2009, the *Community Dialogues* were first held in a mixed race middle class suburb (Beacon Bay), then in an informal, African working class settlement (Nompumelelo), followed by a decaying mixed race inner-city suburb (Southernwood) and lastly in a primarily lower middle class coloured suburb (Buffalo Flats). According to Barkhuizen, the first three were primarily ‘about’ geographical spaces, while the fourth was “the first decided by identity politics. The vast majority of people who came to that [Buffalo Flats] *Dialogue* were coloured: some were middle class, some

lower middle class, some working class – in other words, a fairly broad spectrum of income groups represented – but it was clearly a coloured area” (Interview 1/10/2009). While one of the *Community Dialogues* was conducted in the poor African informal settlement of Nompumelelo, Trench admits that the *Community Dialogues* have not been driven by the need to address the needs and interests of the most marginalised or ‘subaltern’ social groups:

I don’t think we’ve really gotten into exploring the *Dialogue* with the most marginalised at this point. Even though some of the communities are quite marginalised, they’re by no means at the bottom of the scale. That would be in Duncan Village and places like that. Or we could do very specific *Dialogues* with abused women in shelters or whatever. I think the scope and agenda of the *Community Dialogues* is pretty broad and general at the moment. And certainly not necessarily picking up the issues of the most marginalised and most voiceless. We haven’t really gone down that road yet. (Trench, interview 26/10/2009)

One of the conceptual problems facing the *Daily Dispatch* is whether the newspaper (and by extension, the *Community Dialogues*) should prioritise serving its known audience of readers and attempt to attract new ‘demographically attractive’ readers, or instead orient itself to the all publics, including a strong concern to articulate the concerns of the most marginalised social groups who might never read the newspaper. Trench comments:

If we’re honest about it I think there is a danger here. Obviously we have focused our *Dialogues* initially around areas that have strong reader representation – partly because we already have a good conversation going. (Interview 26/10/2009)

Apart from Nompumelelo, they have not yet been held in very poor urban townships like Duncan Villageⁱⁱ or the many marginalised peri-urban and rural settlements in Buffalo City and beyond.

Duncan Village... needs to be done, but [it] is a minefield from the community dynamic point of view. We have a reporting relationship with those communities [like Duncan Village], but we don’t have the depth of coverage like some of the other communities that we’ve had these *Dialogues* in. We understand them because we live there and generally understand the dynamics pretty well. It needs a lot of other careful work done before venturing off into areas where we really are strangers [like Duncan Village]. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

While few, if any, *Dispatch* journalists live in places like Duncan Village, these areas are still important to the newspaper:

In Duncan Village we have a helluva lot of readers. It’s one of our highest sales areas in the city [2000 copies sold per day]. A Duncan Village poster moves papers. It is a reason why we should be there, just from a self interest point of view. But because Duncan Village is so extreme, we do a helluva lot of daily reporting about it anyway – stuff is just cooking in that area. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

For Trench, some of the *Dialogues*, especially the one conducted in Beacon Bayⁱⁱⁱ, have been about “teasing out stories in different areas that we’re actually not very good at covering”:

Strangely... Beacon Bay is a place we’re very bad at covering. With suburban ordinariness, how do you find a story? So we said, ‘let’s have a *Dialogue* and see what people care about.’ So those very marginalised voices may not be represented in the *Dialogues* but they are in some ways almost overrepresented in the mainstream coverage of the paper. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

While marginalised *places* like Duncan Village may, as Trench claims, be “overrepresented in the mainstream coverage” of the *Daily Dispatch* it is debatable whether marginalised *voices* are well represented in these stories. Instead, it would appear that ‘political society’ rather than ‘civil society’ sets the news agenda for these areas. Marginalised publics are not involved in genuine public deliberation in these areas and are seldom part of public problem solving efforts.

In summary, while decisions around which communities to include in the *Community Dialogues* have been structured by the concerns and logic of the commercial press, it is indisputable that the *Daily Dispatch* has sponsored *Community Dialogues* for at least some people of lower socio-economic status and other marginalized or minority groups not coveted by advertisers. It can thus, in Haas’s terms, be said to have attempted to open up “multiple discursive domains” in order to promote participation by a wide range of publics (Haas 2009: 47). The newspaper has dealt with ‘unpopular’ problems such as the lack of local government service delivery, poverty, inner-city crime, alcohol and drug abuse, public housing, unemployment, and so on, raised at the *Community Dialogues*, making it difficult to accuse the *Daily Dispatch* of pandering to the wealthy and powerful segments that are supposedly most attractive to news management. This is not to say that the *Community Dialogues* are blind to, or insulated from, a concern with profit, but the testimony of the newspaper’s editorial leadership would indicate that they are primarily guided by a concern for social responsibility and quality editorial in the public interest. While public journalism is a ‘reformist’ movement – part of mainstream journalism and working in the capitalist marketplace within long-standing organisational, institutional and professional power structures – its location within the market does not necessarily prevent it from mounting some sort of challenge to the power relations of the mass media and the deep structures of dominance in the wider society.

In developing a ‘public philosophy’ for public journalism (2007), Haas attempts to take into account how existing structures of power and domination constrain the ability of journalists to secure the active and equal participation of citizens in democratic processes, and provides ideas and prescriptions for a more politically engaged journalistic practice. I now turn to an interrogation of one of the core issues in Haas’s public philosophy – the setting of the news media agenda.

Endnotes

ⁱThe following *Dispatch Dialogues* were held after the launch event in December 2007:

- 05/08/2008: The State of Education in South Africa. East London.
- 09/10/2008: Government Meets Business, the Opposition, and Civil Society on Service Delivery Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha.
- 21/10/2008: Circumcision in the 21st Century. Guild Theatre, East London.
- 28/10/2008: The ANC Underground in South Africa (Raymond Suttner). Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- 19/02/2009: From Poverty to Power (Duncan Green). Guild Theatre, East London.
- 04/03/2009: Do It: How Ordinary Citizens Can Transform our Land (Bobby Godsell). Guild Theatre, East London.
- 07/04/2009: Jacob Zuma: An Unstoppable Tsunami? Guild Theatre, East London.
- 13/05/2009: Politics and Morality: The Decline of the ANC (Andrew Feinstein). Selborne College, East London.
- 01/06/2009: HIV/AIDS – Beyond Denialism. Guild Theatre, East London.
- 26/06/2009: The Dinokeng Scenarios: Three Futures for South Africa. University of Fort Hare, East London.
- 30/06/2009: God and Government: The Role of Religion in Politics. Guild Theatre, East London.
- 10/07/2009: How the Eastern Cape Automotive Sector is Weathering the Global Meltdown
- 02/09/2009: Moloetsi Mbeki in Conversation with Prof Peter Vale. Guild Theatre, East London.
- 06/09/2009: Our youth speak out. Debate competition. Guild Theatre, East London.
- 19/10/2009: Do we need a new party of the left? Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- 19/10/2009: Black man you are on your own (Saleem Badat). Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- 01/12/2009: South African Democracy and the Retreat of Intellectuals (William Gumede and Leslie Dikeni). University of Fort Hare, East London.
- 20/01/2010: South Africa's Prospects Under Jacob Zuma (Xolile Mangcu). Guild Theatre, East London.
- 02/03/2010: Freedom, Citizenship and the Constitution (Max du Preez). Guild Theatre, East London.
- 10/03/2010: How can the province's money best be put to use? Panel discussion. Sanlam Hall, East London.
- 19/03/2010: African Tradition in a Modern South Africa (Pathekile Holomisa). Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha.

ⁱⁱ Duncan Village, a working class African township planned for 30 000 people, now houses a population of well over 100 000 (Berg et al 2005: 14). It is situated approximately 5 km west of East London's city centre. Despite its closeness to the city, it is isolated by various topographical features, highways and buffer zones. These boundaries contribute to the isolation of Duncan Village not only from the city centre but also from the surrounding neighbourhoods, the mainly coloured residential areas of Braelynn, Pfefferville and Buffalo Flats.

ⁱⁱⁱ Beacon Bay, an upmarket suburb of greater East London, is situated about 10 minutes' to the north-east of the city centre, between the Nahoon and Quinera rivers.

Chapter 5

The *Community Dialogues* and the news agenda setting function

Introduction

This chapter presents evidence to show idea that the *Community Dialogues* have succeeded in assisting the *Daily Dispatch* develop its news agenda and in helping individual journalists to build their network of sources and knowledge of local communities. The chapter also shows how these public meetings have had an effect on the newsroom's dominant news values and examines some of the newspaper's other strategies for ensuring accountability, such as the editor's *Dispatches From the Trench* column, which tries to nurture a public sphere 'about' journalism. The chapter is especially concerned with the way the *Dispatch* has attempted to resolve some of the philosophical tensions presented in Chapter 2 around who should have the *ultimate* say over the news agenda – journalists or the public?

1. The *Community Dialogues* and the news agenda

News editor Brett Horner reports that each one of the *Dialogues* has unearthed a "bank" of citizen-inspired stories "which can be relied on" (Horner, interview 20/01/2010). Many of these ideas have been followed up by the newspaper. As we saw earlier, mainstream news media agendas are influenced by a range of powerful forces, such as mostly elite sources who provide the information for most news stories, other news organisations, and journalism's professional ideologies, norms and traditions (McCombs 2004: 117). One of the most powerful reasons a journalist might have in convening a town hall meeting or focus group is that this can help him or her ascertain what is going on in communities and what these communities think should be reported on in the first place. As we saw in the introduction, the *Dispatch's Community Dialogues* were imagined, in part, as a way to give ordinary citizens a platform to "speak out, tell their own stories and express their needs" (Trench 2009).

While citizens are, under normal circumstances, able to approach the newspaper individually via the letters page, SMS and the like, the *Community Dialogues* give groups of citizens unprecedented access to the newspaper's editorial staff, affording them heightened potential to influence the news agenda. Even more significantly, these efforts happen in a political context where there are "intractable democratic deficits" in the 'vertical' dimension of democracy (Heller 2009: 131). The

ANC not only monopolizes the channels of influence but also exerts considerable power in setting the political agenda by determining which issues and claims and even identities enter the political domain.

Trench follows Haas's (2007) view that public meetings can be used by journalists to *share* their authority with citizens in the setting of the news agenda. Trench recoils from the idea of *handing over* the news agenda or calling the list of story ideas generated a 'citizen's agenda' (Interview 26/10/2009). His view is that citizens should not be *setting* the agenda – they should instead be “informing” it:

So when we go there and listen to what the citizens have to say we still are exercising our journalism skills and judgements in terms of what is of broader interest, what is of greater or lesser interest... But, what you've got is a much greater set of inputs coming into that agenda, so your agenda becomes more interesting. And you have a slightly elevated position because you've been to other communities, whereas they haven't. So you have the perspective of trends and commonality and linking things up, which ultimately works for us journalistically. It's about trying to develop a more sophisticated news agenda that's more informed by the issues and interests of citizens. (Interview 26/10/2009)

However, Trench believes that *Daily Dispatch* journalists should not be *obliged* to share their news agenda with citizens. For him, the “slightly elevated” position of the public journalist (Trench interview 26/10/2009) ensures that they are able to uphold a set of non-negotiable principles designed to guard against the erosion of certain “pre-eminently desirable values” (Haas 2007: 33). To give citizens unfettered control of the news agenda would compromise journalists' ability to maintain a critical editorial stance in relation to the community, and might force journalists to “gloss over community conflicts for fear of offending certain community segments” (Haas 2007: 33). Trench agrees with Haas that public journalists should retain the ultimate authority to add to or subtract from the agenda that their public listening reveals.

Nevertheless, the *Dispatch's* editorial leaders are determined to take very seriously the many issues unearthed by the *Community Dialogues*. Trench believes that the *Community Dialogues* have brought home the amount of work still needed to build grassroots contacts in neighbourhoods and he is “ashamed” to admit that some issues, like the dispute regarding where to put Nompumelelo's new high school, were previously unknown to the newspaper (Trench 2009e):

These meetings are ... helping us to realign our news agenda in the paper to properly reflect the concerns and aspirations of our readers' lives. The first two meetings show that it's the bread-and-butter stuff that people care about. In Beacon Bay they spoke about street lights that didn't work, verges that needed cutting, trash that went uncollected, crime, potholes and traffic jams... it strikes me that a quick way of rebuilding confidence in the city and in people's perceptions of the quality of their lives is to simply start sorting out these basic services. These are issues that will be high on the agenda of this newspaper in the months to come. (Trench 2009e)

2. Doing journalism on ‘bread and butter’ issues

For *Dispatch* deputy editor Bongani Siqoko, the main problem with contemporary journalism is the disconnect between journalists and the communities they write about:

Back in the old days we never struggled to have news coming out of the townships. Our reporters lived in these areas. But all of us have now moved to town. We don't go out to meet people or attend any community meetings where we live. Even our own *Dialogues* – if the journalist is not assigned, they don't go there. They don't find out what are the issues in this community. (Interview 18/02/2010)

Trench felt “humbled” as an editor to realise how fundamentally “bread and butter” the issues are that are important to readers:

It was a really good wake-up call about the balance of content. As much as it is fantastic to have the big ticket investigations that win awards, I also realised that there is also a massive hole in our news agenda and if we actually wanted to ensure that the relationship with our readers was connected properly it was the kinds of things that people were talking about in these *Dialogues* that were essential. And from those discussions and the issues that people raised the trick was to figure out how you do that in journalism. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

Horner says the *Dispatch* has come to “embrace bread and butter issues – thick slices with lots of butter”, which runs counter to dominant journalistic news values that accent “big stories” (Horner interview 20/01/2010). On the other hand, Horner worries that “it is all very well putting something in the spotlight for a month or so, but what happens afterwards” (Horner interview 20/01/2009). One *Dispatch* strategy for maximising the impact of this ‘little story’ approach is to identify a couple of stories that can be done rapidly and include in these stories some voices from the community that hosted the *Community Dialogue*. This “sends a message back to people” that there has been some attention paid to what they have said (Trench interview 26/10/2009) and “they begin to feel powerful” (Trench interview 19/02/2010):

Imagine I drive to work every day and I drive over this pothole... Then I make a noise to the newspaper and the pothole is filled in... I feel better about my city, my environment. That's what the *Community Dialogues* showed me from an editing point of view – it brought home the old parish pump school of journalism. This is the shit that people care about! (Trench interview 19/02/2010)

While many of the story ideas that come out of *Community Dialogues* actually go into the newspaper, “there are also many, many stories that slip through the net just from a capacity point of view because it's just like a shotgun of ideas and it's difficult to get to even half of them” (Trench interview 26/10/2009).

Another strategy is to look out for issues that can be built into campaigns. One example is the *Trash Busters* campaign which tackles waste management in the city. A number of stories branded with the *Trash Busters* campaign logo have been run over an extended period, including an interactive trash map where citizens report the location of uncollected refuse. Another example is the Southernwood slumlords campaign, a three-month-long investigative journalism project, covered in Chapter 7.

Horner says that there has been a long-term shift in the news values articulated in the newsroom running in parallel to the *Community Dialogues*. ‘Bread and butter’ stories have become the norm:

We do all of those stories naturally now. When somebody pitched a story in the past they might have gone, ‘Oh, maybe that’s a bit too small for us’. Now it’s, ‘Oh, I know my news editor is going to get so excited’. (Horner interview 20/01/2009)

An example of the way the *Dialogues* have had a lasting impact on the *Dispatch*’s news values is a recent story about a man who dropped dead outside a clinic. Since complaints about municipal clinics had been deafening at all four *Community Dialogues*, Trench decided to lead with the story. “Two years ago I would never have considered carrying a story like that as the lead. But, we know that people care about these places and have a strong opinion about them” (Interview 19/02/2010). He says there are days when the only national news in the *Daily Dispatch* are news briefs and there is no international news at all:

It’s not ideal but that’s how much copy we’re producing. I was looking at the [Natal] *Witness* [newspaper] the other day and they’re generating on average about six local stories a day. We’re doing between 30 and 40. The volume of news being generated out of this place is massive. We never sit there and say, ‘Oh my god, there’s nothing to write about’. That’s also the dividend of the relationship building. The stuff pours at you. (Interview 19/02/2010)

3. Other alternative editorial strategies

In addition to the *Community Dialogues*, the *Dispatch* has employed other public journalism-inspired editorial strategies aimed at accessing alternative story ideas from the grassroots. One notable example was the *Dispatch Adventures* where small journalistic teams travelled for one week each over 14 weeks to different parts of the Eastern Cape. Trench says that the idea was to “consciously broaden our reporters’ appreciation of the area that we cover and to physically make contact with people in areas that are outside our daily beat coverage” (Trench interview 19/02/2010). Brett Horner was “way up north in Oviston” when his team came across a township called Backstage which was a ghost town of uncompleted RDP houses (Horner interview 19/02/2010). This discovery laid the foundation for a very successful three month *Dispatch* investigation into widespread dysfunction and mismanagement in the Eastern Cape housing programme called “Broken Homes”, covered in more detail in Chapter 7.

4. *Dispatches From the Trench: Nurturing a public sphere about journalism*

Dispatches From the Trench is a regular weekly column, in which the editor directly addresses his readers in the first person about ideas and issues relating to his editorship of the newspaper. As Trench explains, the column’s purpose is to break down the ‘citadel’ idea of an editor and nurture a

‘public sphere’ *about* the newspaper’s journalism, allowing citizens to hold the editor accountable for his work in terms of his own explicitly stated journalistic goals and values.

If people understand what you’re thinking, why you’re thinking that, where you’re going, they are more likely to come along for the ride. And also it’s a form of consultation. I’ve seen so many newspapers make dramatic changes without consulting the key constituency. For me, it was like creating my own *Dialogue* with readers to tell them what our thinking is and where possible to help contribute to the ideas. And it’s interesting, people do come back and offer their views – sometimes a huge amount... People feel that the paper cares about what they have to say about it. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

Trench notes that a new *Dispatch* feature called “15 Minutes With...” was developed in direct consultation with readers. However, while *Dispatches From the Trench* and the *Community Dialogues* provide some opportunities to sensitize journalists to citizens’ views, it could be argued that more far-reaching measures are required to ensure more sustained, meaningful citizen sharing of the news agenda. For example, some news organisations have restructured their newsrooms from conventional beat systems oriented towards institutional/elite sources of information to include multiple teams focusing on particular topics of concern to citizens. Others have developed a comprehensive network of editorial councils which offer citizens formal opportunities to discuss with journalists which topics they would like to see covered and how they would like to see those topics reported as well as to evaluate whether coverage adequately reflected their concerns (see Chavez 2000).

5. The response of *Daily Dispatch* journalists to the *Community Dialogues*

The *Community Dialogues* have been well relatively well attended by *Daily Dispatch* journalists. Ndenze (Interview 19/02/2010) said he was pleased at the number of story ideas that the *Dialogues* generated and the number of contacts they were able to make in an evening. According to Trench, journalists are “intrigued” by the *Dialogues* because their range of sources has been “broadened very, very rapidly” and they came away “enthused at the insights they’ve got into the community” (Interview 26/10/2009). Also, editors cannot “find a better way” to educate their journalists about “what readers are about” (Trench interview 26/10/2009). On the other hand, Trench says he “would imagine that some reporters are uncomfortable with the idea”:

In fact, I’d be surprised if people weren’t. But, it’s certainly not an issue that has been elevated in any kind of formal way if there have been reservations – and I think we have a pretty transparent, open workplace where they would have been raised if that was an issue. I think it’s maybe because it’s a younger team and they’re probably just more willing to have a go at trying different things. (Interview 26/10/2009)

Council reporter Babalo Ndenze confirms that the *Community Dialogues* did more for him than “just getting stories”:

It was also about developing contacts and relationships with people on the ground. I had a section in my contact book with just [*Community Dialogues*-related] contacts. And people do keep in touch with you if they know that you actually do something about what they tell you. (Interview 19/02/2010)

Having established the usefulness of the *Community Dialogues* as a means to enrich and deepen the journalistic practices of the *Daily Dispatch*, I now turn to a detailed exposition of the first two *Daily Dispatch Community Dialogues* and their imagined role in building ‘horizontal bridges’ within and between communities in East London.

Chapter 6

Building horizontal bridges: a critical examination of the first two *Community Dialogues*

Introduction

As we have observed, one of Andrew Trench's imagined core purposes for the *Community Dialogues* was the building of 'horizontal bridges' within civil society. This chapter focuses on the first two *Community Dialogues*, which took place in neighbouring locations – the middle class suburb of Beacon Bay and the informal African settlement of Nompumelelo – on consecutive days. It critically examines Trench's statement that these two communities "are really one community" bounded by shared values and interests (2009a). Trench expressed his desire to build "connecting bridges" between different geographical zones and heterogeneous social groups in East London and to provide a forum for public deliberation – and possible consensus formation – between them (2009a). While the first meeting in Beacon Bay was relatively successful and led to, amongst other things, the launch of a Resident's Association in the area, the second meeting in Nompumelelo became very heated and was cut short by the organisers. Given the very different experiences in Beacon Bay and Nompumelelo, the *Dispatch's* notion of 'building bridges' within and between these two 'communities' is questioned by drawing on theories of social capital (Putnam 1995), critiques of Habermas's notion of the public sphere (Fraser 1990; Haas 2007), and political studies of contemporary South African democracy (Heller 2009). It is argued that social inequalities, particularly acute in the South African context, may preclude the emergence of a shared, overarching vision of the common good. Consensus may not be realistic or appropriate goal, especially if it means ratifying an unjust status quo or precluding further debate.

If, instead of pursuing consensus, the *Dispatch* followed Haas's 'public philosophy' of public journalism, its journalists should help nurture Nompumelelo's subaltern civil society by providing opportunities for "intra-group deliberation *among themselves* about their particular concerns outside the supervision and control of dominant social groups" to enhance the formation of horizontal *bonding* social capital (2007: 36). Meanwhile, *Dispatch* journalists should carry articles on these *intra-group* deliberations to help wider audiences understand how the particular social locations of Nompumelelo's citizenry affect their sense of problems and solutions. Only once Nompumelelo citizens could confidently express their interests would they would be in a position to meet jointly with representatives of wider publics to build horizontal *bridging* capital. On the other hand, it is argued that the extreme weakness of civil society in Nompumelelo, and its domination by a fractious

political society, could preclude the emergence of a subaltern discursive domain there. In addition, the very notion that *Daily Dispatch* journalists could/should be responsible for nurturing subaltern publics in the South African context is questioned.

1. The first *Community Dialogue*: Beacon Bay

Echoing Trench, news editor, Brett Horner complains that it is difficult to cover middle class suburbs like Beacon Bay:

They're usually the first people to complain and the last to have their names in the paper. You go into a poor area and they will give you everything that you need – it's never difficult finding and researching stories there. The suburbs are a real pain in the butt for us. It relates to the whole suburban idea of seclusion. They'd rather just peer over the fence. (Horner interview 20/01/2010)

Nevertheless, on March 17 2009, in a church hall in Beacon Bay, the *Daily Dispatch* successfully launched its first *Community Dialogue* with over 150 citizens in attendance. Immediately after the meeting Trench wrote the following in his *Dispatches From the Trench* blog:

I'm on such a high from the meeting I've just come back from I had to blog about it while the juice was pumping through my veins. I've just got home from our first *Community Dialogues* meeting in the East London suburb of Beacon Bay. It was our first venture into civic journalism. Through this series of "town hall" (more like church, and borrowed classroom) meetings, we're trying to find a way to connect our newspaper right into the heart of our neighbourhoods and to try and move from describing problems to try and help solve some of them...

I must admit to being nervous that the meeting would end up being hijacked by politicians and become a mudslinging session. Boy, was I surprised. In the NG Kerk we had a good 160-170 residents, including some folk from Nompumelelo. Elderly residents spoke about their concerns about crime, about street lights that did not work and curbs that were untrimmed. The folk who spoke for Nompumelelo, what did they speak about? Pretty much the same things.

They spoke about wanting to improve the school in the settlement and the residents of Beacon Bay said: We want to help. They agreed on fixing the local clinic, on tackling other issues of education.

One woman from Beacon Bay suggested that the community establish a Community Integration Committee where they can all work together to improve the lot of everybody, and to extend these community discussions beyond the Community Policing Forums. It was amazing to witness the common purpose that exists in this neighbourhood, the incredible goodwill that, if harnessed, would make such an enormous difference to people. (Trench 2009b)

One of the many issues that emerged was the Department of Education's plan to build a school for the Nompumelelo community in the middle of Beacon Bay. Barkhuizen said it was "a most bizarre idea":

The township people didn't want it. They were saying, 'How are our children going to get home at night. It's far. It's not on the periphery of the township.' The authorities were gaily carrying on with their plan to build the school – but the community stood up against it at the *Community Dialogue*. Nobody had bothered to consult the community before. (Barkhuizen interview 01/10/2009)

Representation at the Beacon Community Dialogue

Beacon Bay is a middle class suburban neighbourhood and most of those who participated at this *Community Dialogue* matched this profile. However, a number of people from Nompumelelo also attended, and “the meeting was better for it” (Trench interview 26/10/2009). Also, there were some ANC representatives at the meeting “and there may have been some Cope people as well” (Trench interview 26/10/2009). Trench believes there may have been “some kind of misunderstanding” about the nature of the *Community Dialogue* as it took place in the build-up to the 2009 general election on April 22 (Trench interview 26/10/2009).

What’s fascinating about that is that there were people with ANC T-shirts who had been shipped in and when we started talking about the bread and butter issues they were getting up and denouncing the councillor and re-aligning themselves. Even though they were there under a political flag, when they actually started speaking about the bread and butter stuff their political allegiance had been set aside. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

Meanwhile, the middle class participants at first exhibited what Trench calls “the traditional reticence of white suburbanites to be active” (Trench interview 26/10/2009):

[Beacon Bay residents] are the kind of people who are quite happy to write letters to the editor complaining about things. But to bring people into a space like that and say, ‘OK, this is about people doing something’ and standing up and being counted? There was an awful 15 minutes at the beginning where I feared that the whole thing was just going to fall flat... But, it just took a couple of people to start talking. And it then took on a life of its own. What was really amazing for me in the Beacon Bay one was that you could see that it was the first time that white neighbours and black neighbours were talking to each other and realised “hello” we actually have a very common, shared worldview just because we happen to live in this place. There was a really great vibe with it at the end – a desire to take things forward. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

Despite some representation from Nompumelelo, the make-up of the audience at the Beacon Bay *Community Dialogue* was relatively homogenous “in terms of income and shared experiences and so on. I suppose what you weren’t getting at Beacon Bay were domestic workers talking – although there were some [in attendance]. There was a domestic worker issue raised, although it was raised by a suburbanite” (Trench interview 26/10/2009).

Editorialising the Beacon Bay Community Dialogue

The following day (March 18) the Beacon Bay *Community Dialogue* was covered in the leader page editorial. In it, the newspaper declared that it had “no agenda” other than “to provide platforms for ordinary citizens to speak out, to tell their own stories and express their needs –whatever they may be” (*Daily Dispatch* 2009a). The editorial reminded readers that the *Community Dialogues* would that evening be taken “across the N2 to Nompumelelo [an African informal settlement], a stone’s throw from Beacon Bay”:

We expect contrasting issues to emerge, taking into account the socio-economic vagaries of the two locations. But what we also hope to find are the connecting bridges that bind two very

different communities. Because by exploring the bonds we have in common – rather than the things that separate us – the idea of a Rainbow Nation may seem less obscure than it does right now. (*Daily Dispatch*, 2009a)

The editorial here expresses a desire to build ‘connecting bridges’ (or horizontal ‘bridging social capital’) between different geographical zones and heterogeneous social groups and to provide a forum for public deliberation – and possible consensus formation – between them.

Citizen-inspired follow-up activity in Beacon Bay

Following the Beacon Bay *Community Dialogues* a forum of domestic workers was set up to help the suburb battle crime. Trench comments: “That was great because it was an idea that was generated from the community and driven by the community and we reported on its progress. Just by having the conversation, some things started happening” (Interview 26/10/2009). However, according to *Dispatch* council reporter Babalo Ndenze, this initiative was primarily driven by the crime prevention unit of the SAPS, rather than by citizens (Interview 19/02/2010). Domestic workers were given safety tips and lessons in “how to spot a suspicious figure in the neighbourhood, which numbers to call and so on and it petered out” by early 2010 (Ndenze, interview 19/02/2010). A more lasting legacy of the *Dialogue* was the establishment of Beacon Bay’s first-ever Ratepayers’ Association. For Horner, this indicated that citizens were “now taking the cue and going with it themselves, which is what we wanted to see” (Interview 20/01/2010). The association has been in regular contact with Horner, and he has provided ongoing publicity for their activities. Meanwhile, in November 2009 Trench won an award from the Beacon Bay Rotary Club, which acknowledged the newspaper’s service to the community. He wrote: “That’s the kind of award that, for me, beats any national journalism gong hands down” (Trench 2009f).

2. The second *Community Dialogue*: Nompumelelo

On the evening of 18 March the second *Community Dialogue* was held in a crammed classroom in the informal settlement of Nompumelelo. Trench describes this explosive meeting as “popping the cork on a shaken bottle” (Interview 26/10/2009). His fascinating account of the meeting in his *Dispatches From the Trench* blog is illuminating:

There was a loud cry of approval when we insisted that the politicians would have to keep mum and listen. We got off to a roaring start compared to the more muted beginning in Beacon Bay the night before. As soon as we opened the floor hands shot up, waving to be noted... The complaints were endless... It was an incredible process to watch, almost a cathartic release by people who appear to have seldom been asked to talk about such things publicly. I wondered to myself what this says about local leadership. Why were people so eager to talk? Had their leaders never asked them about this stuff before? (Trench 2009d)

But it was when the meeting turned to gathering possible solutions to these problems that things became extremely heated, as battles between neighbours began to play out (Trench 2009d). The

meeting was closed soon after. One of the lessons from that meeting, says Trench, is that it is not the correct forum for proposing solutions: “There is so much people want to get off their chests, that it’s impossible” (2009d). *Daily Dispatch* news editor Brett Horner says that an accusation from one audience member that the newspaper was “just coming here to get stories” demonstrates an underlying perception in poorer communities that the newspaper visits these areas “purely for its own gain” (Horner interview 20/01/2010). He continues: “Of course, we set out to do more than just generate two weeks of copy” (Horner interview 20/01/2010).

Meanwhile, Trench describes the meeting as “a wake-up call” and laments the fact that the newspaper struggled to understand the grassroots political dynamics and how those dynamics coalesce around very basic issues” (Trench interview 26/10/2009):

When you’re talking about roads being cleaned up or the state of a housing project, there’s a lot of sub-text to it in those communities. When you’re coming to it as an outsider it takes a little while for you to pick up that there’s a lot of code going on as well. So it’s a bit of a minefield. Certain communities are more of a minefield than others. Especially poorer township communities, where there is more of a history of grassroots politics are more of a challenge to understand what’s really going on and what people are saying and how various community agendas might be playing out. In suburban communities, like Beacon Bay, it is a little bit more straightforward, partly because there’s a lack of politics. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

Representatives of ‘political society’ either tried to dominate the *Community Dialogues* platform or accused the paper of having a political agenda of its own. Trench notes: “We have to make it clear that political leaders who are there need to listen, not talk. They have to respond to the community, not make rhetorical speeches” (Interview 26/10/2009). From Trench’s column it appears that this *Community Dialogue* barely afforded residents the opportunity to vent their complaints, let alone offer opportunities for careful deliberation around possible solutions (Trench 2009d). Trench concedes that the timing of the Nompumelelo *Community Dialogue* was poor because it happened in “a very charged environment” just before the elections “where we had Cope and ANC okes at each other’s throats” (Trench interview 26/10/2009). But he also points to the deeper problem of a fundamental disconnect between ‘political society’ and ‘civil society’. ‘Political society’ tried to dominate even in a ‘civil society’ forum designed to allow residents a rare opportunity to express their frustrations (see Heller 2009: 125). For Trench there is “a huge [vertical] chasm” between political representatives and “the real needs and desires of ordinary people” (Interview 26/10/2009):

Somehow those needs aren’t getting articulated up the line and represented by political representatives... Which makes me question – well, how deeply entrenched is the democratic tradition that we talk about? Because if it was real and fundamental and local political leaders were properly connected to community leaders you wouldn’t have that experience... You also realise that in most of these communities the most basic discussion about the most simple things – a tap, the supply of water – is a major political issue. A criticism of [a problem] is immediately seen as taking a partisan position because by implication you’re saying that the ANC person who’s representing us isn’t doing their job properly, therefore you’ve aligned yourself to another point of view. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

The experience at the Nompumelelo *Community Dialogue* confirms the analysis that there are serious democratic deficits besetting South African democracy, including the problem of the subordination of subaltern civil society to political society. Nompumelelo residents can be understood to be members of a “subaltern civil society” who are unable to meaningfully practise democracy on a day-to-day basis or serve as a countervailing force to “the power-driven logic of political society” (Heller 2009: 138). This creates peculiar problems for the *Daily Dispatch*'s nascent attempts to facilitate deliberation and promote public problem solving in this community.

3. Building horizontal bridges between Beacon Bay and Nompumelelo?

For Trench, the creation of an anti-crime initiative and Ratepayers Association within Beacon Bay in the wake of the *Community Dialogue* represents significant success (Trench interview 26/10/2009). However, what neither of the two *Community Dialogues* was able to facilitate was any ‘bonding’ citizen initiatives *within* Nompumelelo or any ongoing bridging connection *between* Nompumelelo and Beacon Bay, something Trench was “hoping for from an idealistic point of view”:

They are really one community with two completely different economic profiles. In the Beacon Bay *Dialogue* there was a lot of sentiment – from whites, and also black suburbanites living there who understood Nompumelelo a bit better than the white residents – about getting together and getting to know these people a bit better. But, when we floated that idea in Nompumelelo, it just became a huge political hand grenade. The ANC... saw it as a direct attempt to undermine their role. Those things are sad, because you can see how entrenched local interests are preventing things from happening. I mean there definitely is potential and sentiment there. But I also think that's when a newspaper needs to step away maybe. Because it's just too dangerous to go further down that road. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

For Trench, this was disappointing: “I tried to underline to people that there are [others] down the road who lead a completely different lifestyle and have a completely different environment to them, but that there's actually a lot of things that are very similar. Obviously, it is in my interests as an editor to try to find the issues that move across communities because there's more interest in those stories” (Interview 26/10/2009). A hard news story on the Nompumelelo and Beacon Bay *Community Dialogues* published in the *Daily Dispatch* quotes ward councillor John Cupido, whose ward covers both areas, as saying that a common platform, which he referred to as a “dialogue committee” (Ndenze 2009a), was necessary. According to Cupido, the ward committee “was not effective enough because it had elected members” (Ndenze 2009a), reinforcing the idea that an informal civic structure, like his dialogue committee, might be more effective than formal, legislated structures that have been contaminated by ‘political society’.

But, this begs the question: Would it be either desirable or viable for the *Daily Dispatch* to host a joint Nompumelelo-Beacon Bay *Community Dialogue*? Trench feels that this might be possible if it was focused on a very specific and more ‘neutral’ issue (Interview 26/10/2009). However, he was hard-pressed to name a single ‘neutral issue’. Crime was a common issue, but “even that would become

quite politicised” (Trench interview 26/10/2009). Another issue of joint concern was education because “there was a big issue about the location of a high school in the area. On the other hand, it’s an issue that has completely split the two communities” (Trench interview 26/10/2009).

These problems serve to alert us to some of the critical considerations in Haas’s ‘public philosophy’ of public journalism. Haas (2007: 36) turns to Fraser’s (1990) critique of Habermas (1989) in determining what the goals of public deliberation might be, and which arrangements would best serve those goals. Fraser is critical of the idea that citizens should set aside social inequalities and focus on topics of common concern because this privileges the interests of dominant groups over subaltern groups. Instead, Fraser argues that citizens should explicitly articulate or ‘publicise’ inequalities. She would thus be critical of Trench’s notion that Nompumelelo and Beacon Bay “are really one community” (Trench, interview 26/10/2009) bounded by shared values and interests. By virtue of inhabiting a certain geographical territory, Trench assumes that citizens should confront common problems and share an overarching vision of the common good that enables them to reach consensual solutions to those problems (if they treat each other with mutual understanding and respect). But, for Fraser (1990) this ignores how communities are fragmented into multiple social groups, situated in relations of dominance and subordination, structured by race, class and gender. These social inequalities, particularly acute in the South African context, may preclude the emergence of a shared, overarching vision of the common good. Consensus “may not be a realistic or appropriate goal”, especially “if it means ratifying an unjust status quo or precluding further debate” (Haas 2007: 36). According to Trench, the reason the ANC opposed the idea of a joint Beacon Bay-Nompumelelo forum was because, as representatives of ‘political society’, they were protecting their own entrenched interests. While there may be some truth in this, we could also consider the possibility that some were objecting to the idea of meeting with Beacon Bay residents because they might be forced into ‘relations of subordination’ where the emphasis on commonality and consensus may demand their silence or, at the very least, an acceptance of compromise. In other words, since social inequalities may harm some citizens’ abilities to participate on an equal footing, it is not unreasonable to expect subalterns to want to withdraw.

Haas argues that subaltern social groups – in this case, Nompumelelo’s civil society (rather than its ‘political society’) – should be given more spaces and opportunities for *intra*-group deliberation *among themselves* about their particular concerns “outside the supervision and control of dominant social groups” (2007: 39). This would enhance the formation of horizontal bonding social capital. Meanwhile, public journalists would nurture this subaltern discursive domain and carry articles on the *intra*-group deliberations to help wider audiences understand how the particular social locations of Nompumelelo’s citizenry “affect their sense of problems and solutions” (Haas 2007: 40). Only once the citizens of Nompumelelo had used these “agitational training grounds” (Fraser 1990: 65) to discover and confidently express their interests would they be in a position to meet jointly with

representatives of wider publics (including in this case, the citizens of Beacon Bay) (Haas 2007: 40). However, given the extreme weakness and fractiousness of civil society in Nompumelelo, it would clearly take a great deal of time and effort to nurture a subaltern discursive domain here, a problem we consider in the next section.

When (if?) Nompumelelo is finally ready for a joint Nompumelelo-Beacon Bay *Community Dialogue*, public journalists should cover it in such a way that citizens are able to reflect on “their different, potentially conflicting, concerns and interests” (Haas 2007: 39). Journalists covering “this discursive contestation between a plurality of publics in a joint discursive space” should write articles which help audiences compare conflicting concerns as well as “identify *possible points of overlap* that might subsequently form the basis for joint public problem-solving” (Haas: 2007: 40). In other words, the sense of social solidarity that Trench was looking for may be more likely to emerge from mutual respect – including an acknowledgement of diversity – than from a premature and abstract pursuit of commonality.

4. A more radical role for public journalism? A critique of Haas

Haas’s ideas have theoretical force, but many mainstream editors and journalists, even those favourably disposed to public journalism, may recoil from some of his prescriptions. The notion that journalists should be responsible for the nurturance of ‘multiple discursive domains’ (including domains for ‘subaltern counter-publics’), may seem a daunting, expensive, time consuming and even inappropriate burden to have to bear.

But, there are even deeper conceptual and theoretical problems here. This is because despite Haas’s (2007: 38) enthusiastic embrace of Fraser’s critique of Habermas’s notion of the public sphere, he remains wedded to Habermas’s proceduralist-discursive notion of the “deliberating public”, including the idea of that all citizens (subaltern or otherwise) should submit their opinions to rational-critical evaluation by others. It could be argued that subaltern publics – even those who have the chance to ‘find their voices’ by deliberating amongst themselves – would nevertheless continue to be disadvantaged by having to conform to this rational-critical bias. Christians (2004) confronts this problem by introducing in normative media theory his concept of *ubuntu* communitarianism, which is critical of Western epistemology. He follows Blankenberg in urging journalists to help build community solidarity and moral agency (bonding social capital) by aligning themselves with the common values, indigenous storytelling practices, interpretations and epistemologies of “the common people” in order to “tell the stories that accurately reflect, and reflect on, their experiences and spiritualities” (1999: 59). Christians argues that the traditional barrier between journalist and citizen should break down as they occupy “the same social and moral space” opening pathways for “reconciliation across cultures” (2004: 251). Similarly, as was argued earlier, the alternative media

organisations that have historically served subaltern counter publics allow for a multitude of discourse forms “whose communicative trust depends not on closely argued logic but on their aesthetically conceived and concentrated force” (Downing 2001: 52). Downing cites Raymond Williams’s allusion to the centrality of emotion, imagination, art and aesthetics in radical media and the danger of seeing their role as informative in a purely rational sense. All this appears to be in strong contrast to the Habermasian ideal of rational-critical discourse proposed by Haas for public problem solving. It can also be contrasted with established journalistic professional codes like objectivity, although there is certainly space for attributes like emotion, imagination and art in some mainstream journalistic approaches like narrative journalism and tabloid journalism.

But, there are some things, relating to the political purpose of alternative media, that mainstream journalists (even *dedicated* public journalists) would be hard pressed to achieve. Downing (2001) and Rodrigues (2001) argue that alternative media are best placed to contribute to processes of cultural or developmental ‘empowerment’ amongst subaltern counter-publics. In many cases, content production is not necessarily even the prime purpose of alternative media. Rodriguez goes as far as to suggest that “what is most important about [alternative] media is not what citizens do with them but how participation in these media experiments affect citizens and their communities” (2001: 160). Following Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) notion of radical democracy, Rodriguez argues that the significance of alternative media resides less in their ability to impact upon governmental institutions and more in their ability to alter individual and group self-perception, challenge oppressing social relations, and thereby enhance participants’ own access to power.

Can public journalism produced by mainstream commercial news organisations reasonably be expected to effectively do this kind of work? For example, even if individual public journalists felt motivated or even able to act as agents of developmental power or forge close ties with social movements, their efforts would be mediated by the political economy of the commercial press. So while Haas’s article, ‘Alternative Media, Public Journalism and the Pursuit of Democratization’ (2004) urges public journalists to further their democratic goals by emulating alternative media concepts and practices, he might nevertheless be criticised for failing to specify exactly how public journalists might go about practising them in the context of a commercial news organisation driven by deadlines, production quotas and profitability. Similarly, while Haas (2007: 40) encourages journalists to help nurture multiple discursive domains in which members of different social groups articulate and deliberate about their particular concerns among themselves, he offers no philosophical guidance for determining just how much responsibility public journalists and their news organisations should bear for cultivating these domains or any specific guidance on whether or how they should go about nurturing developmental power within them.

As we have seen, public journalists may not be well placed to build developmental power in an alternative public sphere. Indeed, this more ‘radical role’ (see Christians et al 2009) for journalism would ordinarily be performed by alternative and/or community media – and as we observed earlier, while there are a few community radio stations in the eastern half of the Eastern Cape, there aren’t any significant community or alternative media institutions in East London serving subaltern publics. All of this begs the question: Is the *Daily Dispatch* committed to the idea of nurturing subaltern public spheres and, if so, how should it go about doing this? We will return to these issues when discussing the *Daily Dispatch*’s attempts at solving public problems in Chapter 9. I now move on to a closer examination of the imagined role of the *Dialogues* in creating ‘vertical bridges’ between citizens and officials. How efficacious are the *Dialogues* in helping to create these bridges and what are the consequences of is this strategy for nurturing civic life and for solving public problems?

Chapter 7

Building vertical bridges: a critical examination of the third *Community Dialogue*

Introduction

Another of Trench's imagined core purposes for the *Community Dialogues* was the building of 'vertical bridges' between civil society and political society. This chapter focuses on the third *Community Dialogue* held in Southernwood, which was attended by over 200 citizens, but also by representatives of the Buffalo City Municipality (BCM) and the South African Police Services (SAPS). This *Dialogue* was considered by the editorial leadership of the *Daily Dispatch* as the most successful yet, not least because it prompted the Buffalo City Municipality to make some positive, measurable changes in the area.

This chapter evaluates the some of the 'successes' of the Southernwood *Dialogue* in the light of Haas's (2007) prescriptions for public problem solving, as well as the classic 'mobilisation model' of investigative journalism outlined by Proress et al (1991). While the way these successes were achieved deviated substantially from the 'mobilisation model', it is argued that they nevertheless mirrored more closely the monitorial role of journalism (i.e. investigative journalism) rather than the facilitative role (i.e. public journalism). It is argued that despite the 'successes' of the Southernwood *Dialogue*, it exposed a critical weakness in the execution of public journalism in South Africa. This weakness relates to the fact that after unearthing public problems in dialogue with citizens, *Daily Dispatch* journalists embarked on and/or catalysed forms of action that did not necessarily require further participation from citizens. This suggests a 'media-centric' rather than 'citizen-centric' model.

1. Southernwood: The third *Community Dialogue*

At a lively meeting in the decaying inner-city area of Southernwood on 1 April 2009, residents launched a fusillade of complaints about crime, grime, drugs, illegal shebeens, slumlords and the appalling state of the local parks which had become a haven for criminals and drunks (Ndenze 2009f). In the *Daily Dispatch* report on the meeting the following day, Southernwood ward councillor Robert Muzzel was quoted complaining that residents never attend community meetings in the area (Ndenze 2009f). Yet around 200 people turned out for the *Community Dialogue* and participated in a focused, solutions-oriented discussion. Trench commented on how quickly a consensus was built at this *Dialogue*:

Southernwood was interesting because there you had a shared experience between black and white neighbours who are living in an inner city area with a lot of social problems. It was the one... where people were agreeing with each other very quickly... There was far more of a kind of community activist element. It was also interestingly one of the few ones where local councillors were represented and the cops came... It was also the one *Dialogue* where I personally made a promise to people about the parks and the slumlords. You could see that there were these two things that if you could do something about them then it would make a big difference to the way people felt. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

Immediately after the Southernwood *Community Dialogue* the *Daily Dispatch* ran a number of articles on the state of the parks (see for example Ndenze 2009f; 2009g; 2009h; 2009k; 2009m). To Trench's surprise the Buffalo City Municipality (BCM) began to pave the parks in St James and St George's roads, install new lights and cut the grass and bushy areas. Meanwhile, the police instituted visible police patrols. Trench believes that it "definitely helped" that the councillors and police were at the *Community Dialogue*:

I don't know what happened behind the scenes but very rapidly the city moved on the issue. The police had a platform and thus ammunition to say [to BCM], 'Look we were at this thing. Did you see the stories in the paper? This is a major issue to do with crime in our area and we need you to clean this up so that we can remove crime.' The cops actually said to me afterwards, 'If you [the *Daily Dispatch*] can press on this thing on the parks, it would actually make our jobs easier. This is a huge source of crime in our area'. (Interview 26/10/2009)

2. The creation of vertical linking capital

What made Southernwood's 'extreme makeover' so remarkable, argued an enthusiastic *Daily Dispatch* editorial, was that "it was the direct result of our readers speaking their minds. For once our readers' voices were heard and something was done... That surely counts as a success, as small as it may be, in our contemporary times of indifference" (*Daily Dispatch* 2009e). The editorial conceded that "much more than cosmetic amendments are necessary to restore the community fabric of Southernwood", but the newspaper was happy to celebrate this as "a victory for the people by the people" (*Daily Dispatch* 2009e). Municipal spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya confirmed that the swift action taken in the parks had followed concerns raised by the *Dispatch's Community Dialogues* and added that the council would soon be erecting jungle gyms in the area (*Daily Dispatch* 2009e). Trench comments that he was "amazed at how quickly the city responded" (Trench interview 26/10/2009):

It really has made an impact in that area. It's funny, but it's the little things that have been successful – cleaning up the rubbish, getting the parks sorted out. But, it's nice – people can see something in their environment that is directly connected to that interaction with the newspaper. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

For Trench, the fact that representatives of key constituencies like local government, the police, the media and the local community were in the same room at the same time increased the probability of achieving practical, measurable success: "I think because that meeting was well represented by other players, it moved quickly. Some of those players can also see a benefit. If things happen they can also claim some ownership of it since they were part of that meeting, which is fine as long as things get

done” (Trench interview 26/10/2009). Taking their lead from the testimony of citizens at the Southernwood *Community Dialogue*, the police, in particular, put pressure on the press and the BCM to expedite the issue.

Unusually, positive results appeared to be achieved in the absence of adversarial relations between the newspaper and the BCM. On the contrary, once the parks had been cleaned up the *Daily Dispatch* received an email from the BCM asking them to partner on a clean-up campaign (Trench interview 26/10/2009). However, according to Trench this partnership later “fizzled to nothing” (Interview 19/02/2010) due to the deep political crisis that paralysed the Buffalo City Municipality in the second half of 2009. He is hopeful that once the political battles in the city are settled “and a particular camp prevails, we can do business”:

There have been very strong overtures to the paper... from politicians, partly to gain our support for their own ends. But some of them seem to be very, very committed to get this thing moving. On all sorts of things –we have this water drama at the moment, we’ve got the rubbish issue. It’s starting to flash that with the right kind of relationship with the paper that there can be a congruence of interests and things can improve. (Trench interview 19/02/2010)

Trench thus indicates that he would, under the right conditions, be prepared to enter into what Christians et al call a “*fully normative* agreement to cooperate” with the state in which journalists “take into account *all that needs to be known* about the *particular arrangements and outcomes of collaboration*, including the assessment of the consequences of cooperation for the larger community, and judge a collaborative role to be ‘correct’ or ‘proper’” (2009: 200, emphasis in the original).

However, these agreements are partial and do not imply that journalists have to abandon their other (monitorial and facilitative) roles. As Trench points out:

We still have our rules of engagement. We are saying to them [BCM], ‘This thing must work and if it doesn’t we’ll have a go at you even if you’re a partner. We will help you make it a success but we expect a 100% commitment and if there isn’t 100% commitment or if it’s some sort of cheap publicity trick we’ll walk away and we will tell our readers why.’ So if they want to engage at that level there’s also going to be high risk for them because they have to ensure that it’s going to be implemented properly. If they have come to the table with a genuine offer to make that happen I’ll throw everything behind it because people walking around their neighbourhoods seeing them clean and spruce it changes the psychology of our community completely... It’s obviously an easy thing to fix. So you can very quickly change perception and get it sorted out. (Interview 26/10/2009)

The *Dispatch* and BCM have in the past entered into these sorts of explicit partnerships, including a pothole ‘fill-in’ campaign and a manhole ‘cover-up’ campaign. According to Horner:

The newspaper sat down with the guys from BCM and we said, ‘Right this is what we’re going to do – how can you help us out?’ They said, ‘Well, we’ll set up a hotline a specific number where people can phone in and we will then go out and repair those holes.’ I’m not sure BCM would have done that otherwise. They either didn’t have the capacity or the will to do something like that themselves. (Interview 20/01/2010)

Trench argues that since the BCM is such a divided institution it is easy to find allies within local government:

Barring a couple of individuals, the attitude towards the paper – especially around this neighbourhood stuff – is actually massively positive. I’ve had private emails from very senior [officials] saying, ‘I can never say this publically, but I just want you to know that we are following what you guys are doing very closely’. They say they’ve sent people to these meetings to go and sit and listen. Official citizen complaints are supposed to be channelled through ward councillors to the bureaucrats sitting in the city. But the councillors are so embroiled in their own political nonsense that there’s nothing coming in... You do have to find particular people to work with – it’s not this homogenous thing where you go off and sign a record of understanding. On the potholes you go off and find someone in the roads department that is going to be our ally on this and work together to make a difference. (Trench interview 19/02/2010)

The *Dialogues* can thus be seen as partly standing in for the failed accountability structures of the state. Furthermore, the success of the stories on Southernwood’s parks supports Trench’s analysis that the *Community Dialogues* have worked well as a vertical link between communities and authorities, even if they may have been less successful in generating horizontal bonding or bridging capital.

The bridge between communities and authorities has definitely worked well... There’s been practical, measurable success. It’s nice – people can see something in their environment that is directly connected to that interaction with the newspaper. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

It is notable that the way the *Daily Dispatch* has achieved success around some of the issues raised at the *Community Dialogues* deviates from the classic ‘mobilisation model’ of investigative journalism outlined by Protess et al (1991: 15), which states:

1. Vigilant journalists use their contacts and various research methods to bring wrongdoing to public attention (through published media investigations).
2. Their journalism leads to changes in public opinion: an informed citizenry responds by demanding reforms from their elected representatives.
3. Policy makers take corrective action (policy reforms).

Following the Southernwood *Community Dialogue* the process of ‘fixing’ the Southernwood parks followed a far messier, multi-step model:

- Vigilant journalists use media-sponsored public meetings (like the *Dialogues*) as a new way to build contacts and discover from citizens instances of problems/wrongdoing.
- Some of this wrongdoing is brought to the attention of wider publics when it is reported in a story about the *Community Dialogues* in the newspaper the following day.
- Some *elements* in positions of authority (local government, the police, etc.) who attended the *Community Dialogues* put pressure on themselves and/or each other and/or on the newspaper to do something about this wrongdoing.
- Some elements in positions of authority attempt to fix the problem immediately after the *Community Dialogues*.
- Some of the ‘wrongdoing’ which has not yet been attended to and is reported in more depth by the newspaper in follow-up articles.

- Some elements in positions of authority finally respond to the negative publicity by fixing the problem or part of the problem, but this is not accompanied by any reforms in public policy.

Thus, the ‘model’ of the Southernwood parks story presented above, deviates substantially from the classic ‘mobilisation model’. Nevertheless this model continues to mirror more closely the monitorial role of journalism (i.e. investigative journalism) rather than the facilitative role (i.e. public journalism) – although it may be seen to exemplify elements of the monitorial *and* facilitative *and* collaborative roles.

But, another story tackled by the *Daily Dispatch* in the wake of the *Southernwood Dialogues* deviated even more radically from the ‘mobilisation model’ in that it elicited *no response whatsoever* from the relevant authorities.

3. The Slumlords investigation

In November 2009 the *Daily Dispatch* published the results of a three-month-long investigation into slumlords, a critical issue in the Southernwood community that was identified at the Southernwood *Community Dialogue*. In a series of hard-hitting newspaper reports by Gcina Ntsaluba, the *Daily Dispatch* named and shamed slumlords in King Williams Town and in Southernwood. According to Trench, it was important to deliver on the promise he made to the Southernwood community at the *Community Dialogue*” (Interview 26/10/2009). Again, the interests of a number of stakeholders – BCM, the police, the *Daily Dispatch* and the local community – seemed to coalesce around an issue. While for Trench the slumlords issue is primarily a “city problem because they haven’t been enforcing their regulations properly”, it also “feeds into social problems and crime. So there are other interest groups [including the police] that can benefit out of these things” (Interview 26/10/2009).

Early on, the legal department of the BCM acknowledged that they were required by law to prosecute slumlords. However, no legal action has ever been taken (Trench interview 19/02/2010). Trench believes that Buffalo City’s political institutions are so smothering that local government bureaucrats are either too afraid to act or feel that they can’t move without a clear message from their political bosses (Trench interview 19/02/2010). Ntsaluba reports that he chased BCM for two months “asking for a proposed plan of action to get rid of the slums in Southernwood. To this day I haven’t heard anything – there are clearly political interests at stake” (Ntsaluba interview 19/02/2010). Meanwhile, many readers “made a big fuss” about the Slumlords investigation by emailing, posting comments online, or calling in because it was a story that was “relevant to them” as they “see it every day as they drive by” (Interview 19/02/2010). But, this overwhelming change in public opinion did not translate into the application of pressure on the authorities to act.

4. The Broken Homes investigation

In stark contrast to the ‘failure’ of the Slumlords investigation, Ntsaluba achieved astonishing success with a second in-depth investigation in 2009, this time about failed RDP housing projects in the Eastern Cape. As we saw in Chapter 6, this story emerged out of the public journalism-inspired newsgathering approach of the *Dispatch Adventures*. It drew into the spotlight 20 000 unfinished and/or ‘broken’ RDP houses across the province abandoned by ‘emerging contractors’. After his investigation but before publication, Ntsaluba gave the MEC for Housing an opportunity to comment: “She gave us good feedback and admitted that there were problems” (Ntsaluba interview 19/02/2010). It was at this point that the new national Minister of Human Settlements, Tokyo Sexwale, stepped into the frame and publically commended the *Dispatch* on its story. Ntsaluba related that Chris Vick, the minister’s special advisor, had later told him the investigation was “the only tangible research they’d got in South Africa in terms of housing” (an alarming anecdote given the enormous resources at the state’s disposal to conduct or commission research on one of its top political priorities) (Interview 19/02/2010). Sexwale proceeded with a series of far-reaching steps: First he met with all nine national housing MECs, and then with municipal managers and mayors. Then he directed the parliamentary portfolio committee on human settlements to visit the Eastern Cape to do their own assessment of some of the places Ntsaluba had written about. After that, houses in the Port Elizabeth area were demolished, contractors were blacklisted or fired, new houses went up “all over the place”, and a new project was started for emerging contractors, the Emerging Contractors Development Programme (Ntsaluba interview 19/02/2010). “So we got a national policy intervention, new programmes – I didn’t expect them to go to that extent, I really didn’t” (Ntsaluba interview 19/02/2010). Ntsaluba’s analysis of this unprecedented government response to a *Dispatch* investigation was that the story had presented Sexwale with “an opportunity to show his mettle” and “make some noise” in the Eastern Cape (Interview 19/02/2010).

Compared with the Slumlords investigation, there had been a relatively muted *public* response to the Broken Homes project. While ironic, this lack of interest from the public tallies with Protesse et al’s (1991: 19) revision of the mobilisation model of investigative journalism. Protesse et al argue that if, as suggested by the mobilisation model, the public is a necessary link between the media and policy changes, then that link is often weak and unreliable (1991: 19). They argue that while investigative journalists and officials would appear to be natural adversaries their relationships may be more complex, less adversarial – and considerably more ‘collaborative’ – than is usually understood. Policy making changes often occur regardless of the public’s reaction and may be triggered by other factors – in this case, a new national minister out to make a name for himself cosying up to a newspaper that hands him a fortuitous piece of research exposing a dysfunctional provincial housing department and some useful clues on how to solve a nationwide policy problem.

5. Solving public problems without the public

Despite the glaring differences between these three examples (the Southernwood parks stories, the Slumlords investigation and the Broken Homes project), there is nonetheless an important common thread running through all of them: regardless of the relative ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of each in solving public problems, they all expose a critical weakness in the execution of public journalism in the South African context. This weakness relates to the fact that after unearthing public problems in dialogue with citizens, *Daily Dispatch* journalists embarked on and/or catalysed forms of action that don’t necessarily require further participation from citizens. This suggests a ‘media-centric’ rather than ‘citizen-centric’ model. This media-centric approach might be more acceptable if the *Dispatch* claimed an exclusively monitorial role for itself. Instead, it has laid powerful claim to a facilitative role.

But, where are the citizens in all of this? Local governments and national ministers have stepped in to solve problems with seemingly very little regard for public opinion or reference to solutions citizens themselves might have deliberated on and proffered. For Haas (2007) and most other advocate-theorists, public journalism ideally should both facilitate *public* deliberation and promote *public* problem-solving. A critical question, then, is whether the *Community Dialogues*, as a series of one-off town-hall style meetings in disparate communities, can be understood to facilitate public deliberation, as defined by Haas’s (2007) ‘public philosophy’, and contribute to a process of public problem solving. We have already considered some of the problems facing public journalists at the *Daily Dispatch* who might, despite the considerable odds stacked against them, want to help nurture a public sphere composed of multiple discursive domains in which members of different social groups articulate and deliberate about their particular concerns among themselves. These problems were amply illustrated by the ‘failure’ of the Nompumelelo *Community Dialogue* which, even though it was held for a relatively homogenous (subaltern) social group, had to be cut short due to the tensions in the room (Trench 2009d). On the other hand, it could be argued that this was a one-off attempt in the build-up to a contentious election, and that a series of repeat attempts to convene the community over a much longer period of time could have done much to develop a subaltern public sphere in Nompumelelo. But, as we have seen, it is arguable whether the *Daily Dispatch* currently has either the resources, the appropriate skill sets, or even the political will and inclination to adopt the more ‘radical’ role of nurturing developmental power in this discursive domain over time.

Another of Haas’s prescriptions is that journalists should encourage citizens to continue their deliberations within the institutions of civil society and provide information on how to join up with relevant civic organisations. In doing so, he makes the assumption that these organisations exist and are worth joining in the first instance, which, as we saw above, is not necessarily the case in South Africa, because civil society has been suffocated and infected by a deeply divided political society. In

addition, Haas appears to leave out of the public problem-solving equation the possibility that aside from helping to set the news agenda in the first instance, citizens may not be required to play any further role in the process of finding solutions to public problems. Once journalists have been alerted to public problems by citizens via forums like the *Community Dialogues*, journalists have the power to investigate and expose some of the causes of these problems and to put pressure on the responsible officials and policy makers through negative publicity. In other words, monitorial and/or collaborative methods may, under the sort of conditions experienced in the South African context, yield better results than the dialogical/ deliberative problem-solving methods associated with public journalism. On the other hand, by using investigative rather than deliberative methods to help solve public problems, news organisations might be accused of failing to build either horizontal or vertical social capital and of ultimately failing to help citizens develop the capacity to solve future problems.

Therefore, it is argued that to find lasting solutions to public problems – for example, policy changes that promote democracy, efficiency or social justice – journalists may, in South African conditions, sometimes need to accent the monitorial role, sometimes the facilitative role, sometimes the collaborative role, and perhaps sometimes the radical role, or even complex configurations of all four in a single project. Before declaring that the *Community Dialogues* are incapable of facilitating ‘genuine’ public deliberation in the South African context, or that investigative methods are preferable to deliberative ones, I now turn to an in-depth analysis of the protocols, quality and structure of the last *Community Dialogue* held in 2009 in Buffalo Flats. Thereafter, I conclude with an examination of exactly how, if at all, the *Dispatch’s Community Dialogues* have contributed to a process of public deliberation and public problem solving, and evaluate prospects for the future.

Chapter 8

A platform for public problem solving: a critical examination of the fourth *Community Dialogue*

Introduction

Since the author was able to attend the last of the 2009 *Community Dialogues*, held in a primary school hall in Buffalo Flats, a coloured suburb of East London, this chapter attempts to focus on some of the micro-dynamics of a *Community Dialogue*, including the protocols, structures, interactions, discourses and content areas associated with the meeting. The analysis and interpretation of the *Dialogue* is based on the author's own observation of the event combined with interpretations offered by several members of the *Daily Dispatch*'s editorial staff who attended. Thereafter, an attempt is made to evaluate this *Community Dialogue*, and subsequent journalistic coverage related to it, in terms of some of Haas's (2007) normative prescriptions about how journalists can promote meaningful public dialogue and deliberation.

1. Planning and pre-publicity for the *Community Dialogues*

Two weeks before a *Community Dialogue* takes place, it is advertised widely through a poster campaign in the area surrounding the venue, and in the newspaper itself. The wording of the poster for this *Dialogue* – which was similar to the wording used for the first three *Dialogues* – is instructive: “Calling residents of Buffalo Flats, Pefferville and Parklands: What issues need attention in your neighbourhood: Tell this newspaper” (Daily Dispatch 2009b). There is therefore a strong emphasis on hyperlocal (neighbourhood) issues, especially *complaints* around problems and deficits, in the framing of the event. Barkhuizen says that this emphasis on neighbourhood problems “is necessary, so that you don't end up with a political meeting (Interview 01/10/2009).

In addition, a wide range of organisations and people were formally invited to the *Dialogue*: political parties, clergy, community activists, businesses, community safety forums, the police and so on. The Buffalo Flats *Dialogue* was ‘boycotted’ by the ward councillors who were elected to serve the communities represented there. According to deputy editor Bongani Siqoko, a friend of his who is a councillor in the area said he was “scared of facing those people” (Interview 18/02/2010). The journalist who covered the event, Babalo Ndenze, said that many people at the Buffalo Flats *Dialogue* did not know who their ward councillor was (Interview 19/02/2010).

Meanwhile, in the week leading up to the event, a journalist was sent out to Buffalo Flats, Pefferville and Parklands to do some journalism. The pre-publication of localised stories, which were also heavily advertised on posters in the area, heightened community awareness of local issues and created publicity for the *Community Dialogue*. It is notable that while the *Dialogue* was billed as being for the residents of three areas the meeting was held in a school hall in the predominantly middle class area of Buffalo Flats, because it offered the best available venue (a primary school hall) (Barkhuizen interview 01/10/2009). The location of the meeting may have precluded greater attendance by residents from the poorer areas of Pefferville and Parklands.

2. Introductions, framings, and protocols

All four *Community Dialogues* were facilitated by Zukile Mningi, who works for a local non-governmental organisation and has years of experience as a facilitator/ mediator. Also on the platform was organiser Barkhuizen, whose job it was to police the amount of time each resident was allowed on the floor. Mningi's outline of the protocols and procedures for the Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogues* were as follows:

Facilitator (Mningi): The way it will work is that we will take five speakers at a time. And we'll evaluate after that – we'll see the progress. One. We take issues and comments and then after that possible solutions. Two. When you address the plenary, don't introduce yourself as a member of an organisation. Please talk as yourself, as a resident of the community. Three. What has been happening in the past *Dialogues* is that people have been beating around the bush. I'm requesting you to go straight to the point. (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009)

For Trench, the control of speaking time is a crucial factor in the success of the event:

In terms of structure I think the thing we learnt very quickly was time: you can't let them go on too long (individually and collectively) because you start to become bogged down... It's really important to have a professional facilitator or somebody who can really handle a crowd. They've got to keep people's attention focused around the bigger ideas and also to quell some of the voices that come from left field. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

Unfortunately, on the day of the Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* Barkhuizen forgot to bring her collection of colour-coded cards (red, green, yellow) which she usually uses to control the speaking process at the *Dialogues*. While the *Dialogues* are usually introduced by the editor, the Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* was introduced by the deputy editor, Bongani Siquoko, as Trench was on leave at the time. Trench describes his standard introduction (at the other three *Community Dialogues*) as follows:

What I say to people is we have come to listen to you. I say that we've got 300 000 readers every day and that this is a very powerful way to ensure that what you care about is heard by other people. And that we undertake to take the issues of that community very seriously. I use examples of things that have been done in other communities – other stories that we've done coming out of the *Community Dialogues*. And I also make it clear that this is not a platform for political speeches. It's about talking about everyday reality and describing the very real issues that people encounter. And we open the door – if anyone has any solutions to any of

these problems, raise them. People are generally surprised at the number of people who have arrived. I say: ‘Look at all the people who have arrived – this is a great opportunity to organise yourselves. Don’t leave here without sharing telephone numbers.’ The idea is to create some sort of network there that hopefully has some sort of impact. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

Party politics is set aside for the evening, but that is not to say that political parties should not attend:

We don’t say that as a political leader you can’t come. We say that when you come, you come as a member of the community. And we invite you to listen. At some of the *Dialogues* there have been some very specific things raised - and at the end, as a matter of good manners, we’ll say to the councillor, look a number of negative things have been raised about your performance, would you like to respond? Make any undertaking you’d like to make and then we’ll wrap it up. So the guy doesn’t feel like he was a punching bag. We say we are also not here to describe what you perceive to be the inadequacies of your councillor – we’re here to find out what are the issues that you face. Not who is to blame for them. That’s another story – let’s just try to *understand* what the problems are and then we’ll worry about who is to blame. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

Bongani Siqoko’s opening speech to around 200 residents at the Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* covered similar ground:

We call these gatherings *Community Dialogues*. It’s a concept that Dawn and our editor came up with when we looked at the role the newspaper is playing in the community that we are serving. It’s around what American journalists called civic journalism. We thought we would go down this road where we would visit various communities – providing these communities with a platform to voice issues as a community and where possible attempt to find solutions to those issues. Everybody knows of the role of the newspaper as a watchdog. And we’d like to believe that we are playing that role very well. But, there is another role we can play in these communities – that of a guidedog – in addition to our role as a watchdog. A newspaper is a very influential institution. You are going to raise issues with us and we as the newspaper will report on some of those issues. We will take some of the issues that you raise here to the powers that be and see if they’re not going to try to sort out some of those. But, we want also to encourage you to try to find solutions to problems. And as a newspaper, we want to be part of that process whereby you find solutions to problems. In Beacon Bay, there were a number of issues. One of the issues was problems with their street lights. Two days later their lights were fixed... So that’s the nature of this meeting. (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009)

Siqoko’s framing of the *Dialogue*, in particular his reference to “what American journalists call civic journalism”, was challenged by some participants (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009).

3. Clarifying the role of the *Daily Dispatch*

Two participants referred to the statement on civic journalism in their remarks. The first, a man wearing an ANC t-shirt, called into question the appropriateness of an “American concept like civic journalism” in the South African context:

Male resident (ANC t-shirt): ...What brings an American concept of civic journalism to South Africa? I think that what has to be clarified and agreed upon is that the media has been found wanting in the reporting of the goods that are being done in certain communities irrespective of the lack of knowledge of some of the people who selectively at times want to come to

gatherings for publicity to come and echo the small efforts they are making while in the back door there are a number of people who for years, in and out, have been activists in this community dealing with a number of social ills from grants of people, lock-outs of houses, dealing with issues of crime, fighting with the same police to resolve murderous cases in this community. Those things have always gone unnoticed and unreported by the same media source. And then sometimes we question the integrity of the *Daily Dispatch*, of this whole intention because it warrants concern. (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009)

A second participant said he was confused and asked whether the *Community Dialogue* was a campaign directed against the lack of services in the area being run by the *Daily Dispatch* and whether it was being conducted in partnership with government:

Yes. I want to know some clarity on this campaign of the *Daily Dispatch*. Is it conducting a government survey. Or are you doing this survey on your own? Number two. If you are involved in this campaign we'd like clarity – and I'm now going to be careful about the words I use. In the past we have been pushed from pillar to post. Is this just another of your picnics? (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009)

The deputy editor responded:

Bongani Siqoko: ... To answer your question, sir, we are not working with the municipality. This is not a campaign. I think that, as a newspaper, we are doing what we are supposed to be doing. Going to the people and listening to people's frustrations. If people here have praise for this government, for what this government has done, we will report exactly that [Voice in audience: "Thank you."]. If people here have issues as we have heard – issues with service delivery and all of that - we will report exactly that [Another voice in audience: "Thank you"]. The facilitator will lead us in this gathering in the process of trying to find some solutions. And I said that as a newspaper we would like to be part of that. If you have issues with the *Daily Dispatch* I really don't mind you raising those issues. But, can I request that you find a proper platform to raise those issues. [Cheers, whoops and applause.] ... There is a strong lead that we are running in tomorrow's newspaper on page 4. It is about the parks here in Buffalo Flats that is apparently being used by drug dealers. And I was saying to the guys – I want you to make an attempt to find positive stories coming out of Buffalo Flats and Parkside. Because I am well aware that there are people who are going the extra mile doing good in these communities. I think we reported when you guys were cleaning up the school and painting the school. ["Yes, yes"] We have reported on the good work that is doing in this community. We have reported on old mothers who have absolutely nothing who have taken in orphans who they are raising on their own and those people are from this community. ["Yes, yes."] If you read the *Daily Dispatch*, sir, you will have read those stories. But, I'm saying that if you have issues with the *Daily Dispatch*, I am willing to listen to you. But, this is not the platform. ["Yes, right" Applause.] (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009)

Despite the heated contestation by representatives of 'political society' of the legitimacy of the *Daily Dispatch*'s facilitation of the *Community Dialogues*, the many representatives of civil society who turned up for the event, strongly supported the initiative. Indeed, a number of speakers thanked the newspaper for organising it.

4. The discourse of complaint

The first person to speak – the daughter of a late and former deputy mayor of East London – set the tone for the meeting by listing a number of complaints about the lack of service delivery by local government in her area:

Telana Halley: Firstly, the main thing that I have a problem with in this community is service delivery. I'm for increasing service delivery in this community. I've lived in this community my whole 25 years of life and it just seems to be getting worse and worse. Firstly, we don't have bins in this community. There's not one decent bin in this community. From Parkside all the way through Pefferville and the Flats I've not seen one bin. Second, our streets are littered – it's not funny how the municipality doesn't pick up a single piece of paper. Two weeks ago on Heritage Day me and my cousin, Simone Klaasen, organised a big clean-up, trying to rid our community of litter and it was shocking at first to see our community's turn-out. We tried to mobilise the community and nobody is ready to help us. We're apathetic if I could say that. Everybody wants to complain but nobody wants to actually do something about it. [Applause.] Clearly the municipality isn't going to do anything so I think we need to start from here, from us. [Hear, hear.] We tried to clean up the litter and to our shock it was disgusting – we bit off far more than we could chew. Over the road from a shop was a dump site that started from around 1992. There were black bags and black bags of dirt and we hadn't even finished. We cut the grass outside this very school. It was paid for from money that we collected from door to door. We asked every single house in Buffalo Flats to donate for cutting grass. Surely the municipality can cut grass. Surely we pay tax? Surely we should get some services for the money we pay every month? ... [Applause.] (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009)

A summary list of the issues raised by the next four participants (after Telana Halley's initial contribution) follows:

Man: Appalling service delivery; poor bridge in Parkside (after rain, too much water on it.); non-existent pavements; an electrical pole was knocked over years ago and is still lying on the ground.

Woman: No accountability in municipality; lights cut off without warning; councillors don't help.

Man: Lack of sports facilities; no decent library for the children; no swimming pool.

Woman: No clear demarcations between wards; don't know who my councillor is; coloureds are excluded from certain developments. (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009).

A further 38 people spoke at the *Community Dialogue*. Most raised new issues while some either reinforced or contested earlier points, or attempted to suggest solutions to some of the problems already raised. However, since the facilitator allowed problems to be raised in the 75 minutes or so between 18h15 and 19h30, this left just 30 minutes at the end of the *Community Dialogue* to discuss 'solutions'.

5. Political society versus civil society

As noted above, the man in the ANC t-shirt cast aspersions on attempts made by Telana Halley and others to organise a voluntary clean-up of Buffalo Flats. He accused her of seeking publicity for her “small efforts” while “in the back door there are a number of people for years in and out have been activists in this community” (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009). Later in the meeting, Halley responded in the following way:

Telana Halley: I just want to comment on... what you said about the objectivity in reporting in the *Daily Dispatch*. I think that the vigorous reporting that the *Daily Dispatch* has done on community projects has excelled, and has improved our community drastically. Take a case in point, when you reported on the Buffalo Flats clean up, it wasn't because of fame that we reported it. We reported it so that we could get more sponsorship. And this was confirmed because we had so much sponsorship after that. The more vigorous the reporting and the more the *Daily Dispatch* is a watchdog and shedding some light on the situation in Buffalo Flats, that is one solution. Not for fame, but to bring light on the situation. [Whoops, yahoos and applause.] (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009)

Thus, in addition to some contestation of the legitimacy of the *Daily Dispatch's* claim to sponsor the community meeting, there was also contestation of the meaning, legitimacy and efficacy of grassroots voluntary activity in the area (in this case, Telana Halley's clean-up campaign). This was an intriguing example of what appeared at times to be a robust contestation between representatives of 'political society' and 'civil society' of what constituted legitimate political action in the area. Indeed, much of the very little 'solution time' left at the end of the meeting was dominated by seasoned representatives of 'political society'. For example Dan Boreman of the ANC attempted to assert his leadership credentials by making a number of suggestions for the way forward:

Dan Boreman: With all due respect Mr Facilitator. Not all of us in the community are conversant with organisational structures – how they function in the community. And perhaps, I think, you will limit people like myself and others who are strong activists with a number of solutions that we would like to share with other community members. And I think in your opening remarks you said that some of the community members must share some of the possible solutions. Please allow us that. [Some “yeses” in audience.]

Facilitator (Mningi): OK, fine. That's fine. Point taken. Let's raise points that we want to raise. But, 8 o'clock we're out of here.

Dan Boreman: My recommendation to this community in all its tiers of representation, whether religious, political, business, NGOs, otherwise is that the time has come for us to share a common platform to discuss the same issues here with the purpose of seeking solutions that might lie amongst ourselves. There are issues and simple things that we can address in our community that are our responsibility by virtue of the social fibre, which we are responsible for. We invite such debate solely, not to seek political votes, but saying let us co-operate in the context of seeking solutions in Buffalo Flats. (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009)

Boreman went on for another ten minutes (much longer than anyone else was allowed to speak at the *Dialogue*), touching on a wide range of issues. At the end, he finally gave up any pretence of speaking as an 'ordinary citizen' and instead spoke on behalf of the ANC:

In closing, chair, I want to say that as the ANC we have taken a strong position [shouts of “no, no” presumably in response to Boreman’s declaration of his ANC identity] – all of these councillors who are failing and not doing their jobs, will be dealt with. We will get rid of them. [Applause. Some whoops.] (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009)

6. Facilitation problems

Towards the end of the meeting, the facilitator appealed for a renewed commitment to finding solutions to the problems and issues raised:

Facilitator (Mningi): Ladies and gentlemen, we are going to miss the boat here. I am appealing to you... let us not be personal. Let us bring each solution to a problem. [“Ya, ya”.] Not about your victories – you see what I mean. I’m not saying that you did that, but I want to guard the rest of us... (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009)

By then however, the meeting was becoming increasingly restless and mired in procedural points related to perceived deficiencies in the facilitation process:

Man: On a point of order Mr Chairperson, I have a problem with you. The same people that you asked for the problems are the same people whose hands you are going for now. So you are asking the rest of us just to sit here and make the building full.

Facilitator (Ndingi): If you see that I have done that, it was not purposeful. I apologise. But, I think this lady is coming for the first time.

Man: I’m trying to get your attention to the fact that...

Facilitator (Ndingi): No.

Man: All these gentleman have spoke before. Surely we need an opportunity.

Facilitator (Ndingi): Ya, ya. Let’s listen to this lady and then we’ll give it to him. (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009).

Another problem was that just 11 of the 43 contributions made from the floor at the *Community Dialogues* came from women. And just two women participated in the last section of the meeting when solutions were being proposed. This trend did not go unnoticed in the meeting:

Woman: Good afternoon. Now I can see really see that women are being marginalised here because it’s all men speaking here. [Laughter.] And I see less women. I don’t want to repeat what was said already but the only solution is that another meeting like this must be organised and the same people must come. Also, that the women who are here now should really work with one another. [“Yes.”] So that all of us can get together as women and discuss methods and maybe coming up with clues and moving from one school to the other, and dealing with the issue of substance abuse by kids. (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009).

Similarly, another participant made a veiled criticism of the fact that the entire *Community Dialogue* had been conducted in English, despite the fact that Afrikaans was more widely and confidently spoken by residents in the area.

Man: Goeie aand dames and here. We speak Afrikaans inside this community [“Ya, ya”.] But, it’s fine. (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009)

In addition, Barkhuizen remarked that she was disappointed with the general quality of the Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* and that this was linked to the quality of the facilitation:

I got quite bored and frustrated. I wanted to stop them and say come on, stop grand standing, get to the point... There were a few people last night who came with their little speeches. It was more about them. In Southernwood we went straight into it. Part of my problem is that I have a short fuse. One has to have some boundaries. I forgot my cards last night. Those things are incredibly important. We might have been able to control it better if we'd had the cards. I improvised by just standing up. (Barkhuizen interview 01/10/2009)

7. An evaluation of the Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue*

Despite the many problems at the Buffalo Flats Dialogue described above, Barkhuizen said she had learnt a number of things from the meeting:

The other thing that I realized is that there is a lot of disaffection with the ANC. And the first thing I thought when I woke up this morning and saw Standerton in flames [violent protest in Standerton led the national news on 01/10/2009] was thank God we are doing this because we are trying to do something to obviate that. And I think the other thing I discovered last night was that people are still expecting others to do things for them. You are not yet at a place where we are proactive. (Barkhuizen interview 01/10/2009)

At a more fundamental level, however, it could be argued that the Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* fell short of Haas's prescriptions for "a deliberating public". But, as Trench noted about the *Community Dialogues* as a public journalism strategy:

There's actually a pace to it that you've got to keep going. Some people would say that's not ideal because you're not able to have a thorough discussion. *But, it's not really a discussion at this point – it's an airing of issues and views and people are contributing* (Trench, interview 26/10/2009, emphasis added).

It is significant that Trench says that the *Community Dialogues* are an 'airing of issues' rather than 'a discussion'. This implies that the *Community Dialogues* are at this point more valuable to the *Daily Dispatch* in uncovering a citizens' agenda and playing a monitorial role rather than as forums for promoting rich, dialogical or deliberative forms of public discourse. On the other hand, the expectation of rich deliberation from a project in its infancy is perhaps both unfair and naïve.

Nevertheless, it is certainly true that the *Community Dialogues* are very unlike Fishkin's (1991) deliberative opinion polls, where citizens engage in face-to-face *dialogue* about *focused* topics over an *extended period of time* (see Haas 2007: 34, my emphasis). The relatively superficial airing of issues and views at the *Community Dialogues* also stands in contrast to the idea of mass-mediated *deliberation*, which exposes a wide audience of citizens to the opinions and reasoning processes of others. Hard news reports published in the *Daily Dispatch* about the *Community Dialogues* have tended to summarise the outcomes of these events (see Ndenze 2009a; Ndenze 2009b; Sangotsha 2009), rather than following Glasser and Craft's (1998: 213) stipulations for ensuring that genuine dialogue and deliberation are promoted through journalism.

Glasser and Craft argue that journalists should preserve “the identity and integrity” of citizens’ dialogical encounters by retaining the “to-and-fro of argument” in their reports (1998: 213). With the notable exception of the blog entries on the *Community Dialogues* written by the editor, the news reports filed about these events themselves have often been disappointingly thin. This could be in part because the quality of the dialogical encounters was poor in the first instance, but as can be seen from the few quotes from the proceedings offered in this chapter there is certainly a great deal of rich dialogue to report on. Another, more likely explanation is that journalists are either insufficiently equipped as journalists or insufficiently guided by their editors to do justice to these complex events. For example, apart from a few editorials, coverage of the *Community Dialogue* events has seldom deviated from the standard hard news story form to include analytical features, backgrounders, human interest pieces, colour pieces, deep vox pops, infographics, etc. all of which might do better justice to the event itself and, subsequently, to the issues raised within it. Whatever the explanation, this journalism (see, for example, Sangotsha 2009; Ndenze 2009) cannot be seen to have contributed to the cause of promoting public discourse that combines the strengths of face-to-face dialogue with mass-mediated deliberation outlined by Haas (2007: 36). Barkhuizen laments the lack of skilled journalistic staff which, for her, precludes the production of journalism that would do justice to issues around political identity that were so evident in the Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue*:

I was interested in the underlying themes that came out last night. The issue of identity especially – I thought how tragic because we still have a coloured community who are caught ‘in between’. I don’t know that our reporting is at a standard that can reflect that sort of thing (unless I write it). So you have reporters looking for the small easy pieces: the bridge, the litter. So, themes and abstract things don’t get covered. (Interview 01/10/2009)

For example, on the theme of coloured identity, one particularly strident participant at the Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* said the following:

Man: The municipality can give us things, but they cannot give us our personhood. If we can allow them to destroy us as coloureds, us and others, and we are quiet on that, that is a grave oversight. If you go to chambers you will find out that the debates are as much about colour as it is about the issues at hand. Because if we say swimming pool then we will want to build one in Zwelitsha then in Timbuktu then three in Mdantsane before we can even think of one in Buffalo Flats. There are people in council that have a problem with coloureds. [Loud applause.] And if we allow them to continue to have problems with coloureds, we will have a race war. Previously, we were too black to be white [“Ya”.] and now we are too white to be black. And the BEE policies are only for them. And it’s only us who will allow them to do this. Thank you. [Mild applause. Some laughter and exasperation] (Recording Buffalo Flats *Community Dialogue* 30/09/2009)

A number of other speakers made points relating to the issue of coloured identity throughout the meeting, although few were as outspoken as the man quoted above. Despite these strong sentiments and the ubiquity of these themes, coloured identity was not mentioned in any reports on the *Community Dialogues* in the *Daily Dispatch*, on the blog, or in any subsequent journalism undertaken by the newspaper. Again the more ‘monitorial’ issues predominated, while the more ‘facilitative’

issues – which could have been followed up using more in-depth or imaginative forms of journalism like narrative journalism – were extruded.

While Horner agrees with Barkhuizen that not too many of his journalists could cover a deeper story on coloured identity, he does believe that some of his reporters would be equal to the task. But, he goes on to concede that the overarching frame of the *Community Dialogues* as a forum for ‘bread and butter’ complaints may have diverted attention away from more fundamental issues:

Maybe it’s my fault for saying to the journalists this is the kind of stuff we’re looking for and this kind of deeper stuff is then just not on their [journalists’] radar. It [the coloured identity issue] is something that needs to be told. Buffalo Flats is such a neglected area. It’s probably more neglected than some of the black areas. I can see where they [the *Community Dialogue* participants] were going with those kind of clichés [about the neglect of coloured communities]. So maybe it is incumbent on us to be telling not only the bread and butter issues but why those bread and butter issues are so important to these people. (Interview 20/01/2010)

Horner’s point mirrors Haas’s (2007: 37) prescription that journalists should help citizens reflect on their different, potentially conflicting, concerns as the focal point of public deliberation. In this view citizens should be “given the opportunity to reflect on one another’s reasons for espousing certain opinions” and should also be given “opportunities to articulate the social locations from which they view given topics and to reflect on how those social locations affect their sense of problems and solutions” (Haas 2007: 37). The *Dispatch*’s editorial leaders agree that the journalism produced about the *Community Dialogues* has thus far not capitalised on these deliberative ‘opportunities’.

8. Small victories?

When deputy editor Bongani Siqoko returned to Buffalo Flats a few months after the *Dialogue* to watch a football game, some of the residents who had been at the event recognised him and approached him. They thanked him for hosting the *Dialogue* and said that they appreciated the fact that the newspaper had begun reporting on issues that “affect them on a day to day level” (Siqoko interview 18/02/2010). Residents contrasted this to the way the newspaper had in the past focused on murders, drugs and rapes, which had ‘ghettoised’ the area. There were also some small victories. For example, after the *Daily Dispatch* wrote about the state of the parks the municipality stepped in and cleaned it up. Also, East London’s biggest dumpsite, Second Creek – an eyesore, health hazard and magnet for vagrants – was permanently closed. Siqoko says the *Dispatch* had started seeing Buffalo Flats “as a community” and the newspaper became proactive in writing about issues “that are close to [citizens’] hearts” (Interview 18/02/2010). Locals have recognised this and sales have improved in the area. On the other hand, former council reporter Babalo Ndenze labels the Buffalo Flats *Dialogue* “a flop” largely because no one in a position of accountability – for example, a ward councillor – was present (Interview 19/02/2010). However, the relative success or failure of this or any other *Dialogue*

can be determined only if the terms of evaluative reference are clear. For these terms of reference, we must turn to a final consideration of Haas's 'public philosophy' of public journalism.

Chapter 9

The problem of the public in public problem solving

Introduction

A key question we are left with is whether the *Community Dialogues* can be said to help “*the public act upon*, rather than just learn about, its problems” (Rosen 1999a: 22, my emphasis). In this final chapter we consider some of the ways that public journalists and citizens could collaborate on public problem solving efforts in a sustainable way despite some of the constraints posed by the South African context. Lastly, we consider the future plans and prospects for the *Community Dialogues*.

1. Solving public problems without the public?

It is relatively easy to ‘learn about’ public problems: for example, by helping to share its agenda setting function with the public, the *Community Dialogues* have certainly helped the *Daily Dispatch* ‘learn about’ the many public problems affecting various parts of East London. Also, because the newspaper has published reports about these problems, both the general public and relevant authorities have been able to ‘learn about’ these public problems, too. But, to the extent that solutions were found to any of these problems, it is illuminating to consider who exactly ‘acted’ (if acting is defined as either designing or implementing solutions). In the example of the *Daily Dispatch*’s *Community Dialogues* it would appear that with the exception of Beacon Bay, where civil society – in the form of a new Ratepayers’ Association – organised around some of the themes discussed in the *Community Dialogues*, the main agency responsible for actually solving problems was the Buffalo City Municipality (BCM). They were either alerted to the problems through their participation at the “airing of issues and views” at the *Community Dialogue* itself, or through subsequent publicity in the newspaper. In other words, beyond basic publicity, the involvement of citizens was not critical to developing or executing solutions. Trench rightly questions this situation. He believes that while the *Dispatch* can be “an amplifier of voices so that the people that need to get to hear what is being said”, it is also up to members of civil society to hold officials accountable (Trench interview 26/10/2009).

It may be argued that the *Dispatch*’s *Community Dialogues* have therefore fallen short of the model provided by Haas (2007: 41) for the kinds of public problem-solving he thinks public journalists should help promote. Indeed, Glasser’s searing critique of journalistic attempts like the *Community Dialogues* to convene the community, appear to apply forcefully to the *Daily Dispatch*:

It is at best a contrived and artificial response to the need to cultivate citizenship because they create at most an ad hoc venue for discussion, a small and temporary site for a debate managed by and too often only for the press. Without the means to sustain these discussions

over time and the conviction to broaden the range of topics they cover, the press cannot claim to have established much in the way of a tradition of civic participation. (1999: 11)

Jeremy Iggers agrees:

Citizens brought together for news media-sponsored encounters do not constitute a genuine public – they represent a collection of strangers... who may not see each other again... and who have not had the opportunity to develop the relationships of trust and understanding that are essential to democratic cooperation. (1998: 146)

To help *sustain* a public sphere to which all citizens have access, and in which all topics of concern to citizens can be articulated, deliberated, and critiqued, *Daily Dispatch* journalists need to engage citizens in an ongoing way.

2. A sustainable public sphere

Trench indicates a desire to do the *Community Dialogues* on shorter cycles so that the newspaper is able to revisit communities:

I don't think any of us really realised, before this thing started, the scale of the issues that people would bring to the table. Another problem is to manage it in a reasonable amount of time to keep people's attention. So this is just an initial round really – people putting the key issues of their community on the table. And we realised we couldn't even get into exploring solutions. But, having gone to a community once, when you go back again you can say let's talk about X and go to a really specific focus. (Trench interview 26/10/2009)

To ensure a more permanent impact, then, a much more sustained commitment is required from the press. In addition, Haas (2007: 41) argues that journalists should encourage citizens to continue their deliberations – and act upon their outcomes – within the institutions of the wider civil society. To aid this process, journalists should offer mobilising information – for example, information on how to join relevant civic organisations. They could also describe what citizens in other localities have done in the past or are doing to address similar problems; create spaces for citizens to deliberate about those problems among themselves; encourage citizens to join existing or create new (local or larger scale) civic organisations; and publicise citizens' application for resources. Haas proposes that the public sphere (including journalism) and civil society should stand in “an explicitly dialectical and mutually supportive relationship” (2007: 41). However, since Haas writes from an American perspective, what his schema fails to take into account is the critical weakness of subaltern civil society in South Africa.

Civil society is supposed to offer citizens opportunities to cultivate their political identities as well as to articulate, deliberate and act upon particular political positions that emerge. In addition, and in support of this, the public sphere is supposed to “nurture discursive spaces in which those positions are shared and discussed among a wider audience of citizens” (2007: 41). But, if civil society is too weak, journalists will find it difficult to nurture a subaltern public sphere without essentially ‘standing in’ for civil society. If South African citizens seldom come together to debate or act on anything in the first place, journalism cannot become the means by which citizens debate and propose new directions

for political activity in either subaltern or unitary public spheres. On the other hand, it *is* possible that the public sphere created by the *Community Dialogues* has played a catalytic role in jump-starting civil society. There is some evidence suggesting that the *Community Dialogues* have indeed inspired subsequent civic and political activities in some parts of East London, although it has unfortunately been beyond the scope of this study to evaluate the precise extent and nature of this impact.

While Haas (2007: 44) believes that there are some problems that are potentially resolvable by citizens themselves, he argues that other problems require more deep-seated, systemic intervention. In these cases, Haas suggests that journalists should encourage citizens, in consultation with experts who have particular knowledge about the problems in question, to formulate possible solutions and then to lobby relevant government officials to enact those solutions in practice. Trench commented:

Once we had identified a key issue for discussion people who've attended the meetings have said: 'Can't you bring some of the powerful people who matter here to be part of the discussion? You know, it would be good to have somebody from the city water department, the local councillor should come and be part of this discussion, too.' It's almost as if round two is where we might get to the proper 'dialogue'. Although initially I was nervous about inviting those people because of a fear of having the platform hijacked. But, now that you know what that issues are, you can manage that situation a little bit more strongly and actually have a conversation with those people who are coming and say: 'Look, these are the rules of engagement – it's about listening and putting solutions forward and we're going to write about that'. (Trench, interview 26/10/2009)

However, Trench's suggestion that government officials should be invited to more focused, follow-up *Community Dialogues* leaves out one of the steps in the process suggested by Haas: that *experts* should be consulted first to help formulate solutions before lobbying government. If Heller (2009) is correct in assuming that the really intractable democratic deficit lies in the 'vertical' dimension of democracy – the political practices and channels that link civil society to the state – then it is clear that much more care needs to be taken to explicate the role ordinary citizens, experts, government officials and journalists should play in relation to one another in the problem solving process, especially in South Africa, where subaltern civil society is dominated by political society.

3. The journalist's role in finding solutions

This leads us to the question of the journalist's own role in the process of identifying potential solutions to problems. Public journalism orthodoxy was that journalists should be involved in the "processes" not with the "outcomes" of citizen problem solving efforts. Rosen suggests that journalists should maintain a stance of "proactive neutrality" that "prescribes no chosen solution and favours no particular party of interest" (1996: 13). But why, argues Haas (2007: 45), shouldn't journalists have the responsibility to assess whether the interventions endorsed by citizens advance the overarching goal of reducing social inequality. If solutions advance the interests of dominant social groups over those of subordinate groups, journalists should see it as their right – and responsibility –

to say so. For example, they could advocate alternative solutions and lobby relevant government officials. In other words, journalists need to act in ways that they perceive to be in the best public interest. They must defend the value of social equality when these are perceived to be threatened by interventions endorsed by citizens themselves. For Haas, then, the ‘publicness’ of public journalism extends beyond offering citizens opportunities to participate in public deliberation and problem solving, to journalists acting in what they perceive to be the “best public interest” (2007: 45). Public journalists should actively assert and defend their explicitly stated journalistic values, especially the value of social equality. In both word and action, the editorial staff of the *Daily Dispatch* have strongly indicated their support for this position.

4. Future prospects

While the *Community Dialogues* have fallen short of what Haas calls “Habermas’s (1989) proceduralist-discursive notion of the ‘deliberating public’”, which sees citizens share a commitment to engage in “common deliberation” (2007: 28), it is difficult to deny the power of what has already been achieved and the potential for the future. The *Daily Dispatch* is committed to the idea of nurturing a more sustainable public sphere and establishing a more dialectical relationship between the *Dialogues* and civil society (Trench interview 19/02/2010). Trench also wants the relationships between the newspaper and the officials to evolve “so that the paper isn’t just a yapping watchdog – it’s also seen to be moving things forward and also has an active role in the solutions” (Interview 19/02/2010). But, to do all of this, he says he “needs more capacity” (Interview 19/02/2010). In the medium term, Trench is aiming for a more structured programme of community engagement. At present the newspaper’s lack of resources have forced it put together something “when we can” or “in an area that looks interesting” and after the Buffalo Flats *Dialogue* the newspaper “had to take a break simply from a resource point of view” (Interview 19/02/2010). Instead, he wants the *Dialogues* to become “part of the programme of life in the area that we cover”:

What I’m proposing is for funding to allow me to hire three reporters and a unit head for a year to organise at least two *Community Dialogues* a month, to extend the *Dialogues* into rural towns and villages, drive content from those *Dialogues* into the paper on a daily basis as well as augment the main newsroom’s reporting on the big stories that emerge, build a bespoke *DispatchCivic* website to encourage further engagement and produce a quarterly *DispatchCivic* supplement... among other things (Trench personal correspondence 24/02/2010).

In the short term, there are three places Trench would like to take the *Community Dialogues* to next:

1. “Out in the sticks somewhere. This to get an idea of what that news agenda might be for those kind of readers, who are a significant part of our audience” (Trench interview 19/02/2010).
2. “Mdantsane, although we haven’t figured out how to do it yet. Because the area is so politicised you realise you can put yourself in a very dangerous space, from a safety point of

view and various other reasons... So we've been thinking of going in and having a smaller focus group discussion approach... The Nompumelelo thing really started to wobble. We have to be in these townships because you can't be perceived to be swanning around the suburbs" (Trench interview 19/02/2010).

3. "Southernwood. [At the first *Community Dialogue* in Southernwood] I stood up and promised we would expose the people we could – and we did. I also promised that we are going to come back. But, that community also has to now pick up on what we did and use its own voice as a suburb or neighbourhood to make things happen, to put pressure on the councillors to do their jobs. It is very frustrating that you invest a huge amount of time and effort to expose these things and then to essentially hit a brick wall. But, when we go back we'll have a deeper understanding of what we're talking about" (Trench interview 19/02/2010).

News editor Brett Horner agrees that the newspaper should return to Southernwood as he feels "deeply unsatisfied with the notion that we should just put stuff out there and if the world ignores it, too bad" (Interview 19/02/2010). Horner believes that citizens are becoming "much more aware of what they should be doing" and that there is "a new activist sentiment running through the country at the moment" (Interview 19/02/2010). He believes that in a smaller city like East London the *Dispatch* has to play an active role in prodding civil society into life: "We can't do everything for you, but let's get going" (Interview 19/02/2010). The journalist who worked on the Slumlords exposé, Gcina Ntsaluba, is confident that more people would attend a Southernwood *Dialogue* a second time around "because they're aware and angry" (Interview 18/02/2010). However, no-one is entirely clear about how a second Southernwood *Dialogue* should be framed, organised or structured. For example, should the newspaper invite 'experts' who could help citizens find solutions? If so, should the BCM be allowed in the room at the same time? Who should be responsible for applying pressure over time – and what sort of pressure – in order to find solutions? Should the 'monitorial', 'facilitative', 'radical' or 'collaborative' role of the press be accented through the *Dialogue*? Or should it be used to nurture subtle combinations of all four? Should other forms of media be encouraged to help play a more radical role in nurturing civic life in East London?

These are just some of the questions that will test the leadership of the newspaper as they gear up for a new phase in their public journalism experiment.

Conclusion

This thesis has critically examined the nature and purpose of the *Community Dialogues* in a South African context. It started by outlining some of the political and media contexts – at the macro, meso and micro levels – within which the *Dialogues* were conceived and executed, and went on to situate the project as part of the worldwide public journalism movement and the highly-developed ‘sociological’ and normative theories associated with it. The thesis then attempted to ‘tell the story’ of the *Dialogues* from the vantage point of those at the *Dispatch* who designed and executed the project. In order to do this it drew on their testimony, on the journalism associated with the *Dialogues*, and on my own observation of one of the *Dialogues*.

However, in addition to telling the story of the *Dialogues*, each of Chapters 4-9 attempted to evaluate the democratic value of the *Community Dialogues* in the light of Haas’s public philosophy of public journalism, which draws on, amongst other influences, Fraser’s (1990) important critique of Habermas’s (1989) notion of the public sphere. Each of these chapters deals with a conceptual issue associated with Haas’s normative theory. It is clear from the exposition of these issues that apart from its undoubted success in using the *Dialogues* to generate a more comprehensive and representative news agenda, the *Dispatch* faced considerable obstacles in promoting public deliberation and public problem solving efforts through the *Dialogues*.

This can be attributed to a number of problems, including some important theoretical/conceptual weaknesses in the *Community Dialogues*’ project design, the relative immaturity of the project, the domination of civil society by political society in the South African political context, and a number of organisational constraints at the *Daily Dispatch*. On the other hand, public journalism is now a key part of the *Daily Dispatch*’s formal strategic plan: the newspaper’s editorial leadership has shown clear commitment to the idea of expanding the project in the future, establishing a more a more structured programme of community engagement, and nurturing a more sustainable public sphere, including the building of a more dialectical relationship between the *Dialogues* and civil society.

It is hoped that this preliminary research has shown that the *Dialogues* have much to offer media theorists in considering both normative and ‘sociological’ theories of contemporary South African journalism, and much to offer professional journalists struggling for “emancipation from the status quo” (Christians et al: 2009: ix).

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Appendix 1

Daily Dispatch* newspaper articles about the four *Community Dialogues

Anonymous. 2009. Thanks to the Dialogue team. Letter to the editor. Published on Page 10, 05/10/2009

Published on 05/10/2009 0101DD05/10/09 MON NEWS10 AL

Thanks to dialogue team

I WOULD just like to thank the entire Daily Dispatch team for organising last week's dialogue in Buffalo Flats. I'm sure you noticed that there were people who appreciated the platform that you gave us, and further the aggressive reporting you have done about the community's problems.

After the **dialogues** many of us swapped e-mail addresses and phone numbers. There were so many people that I met there who are like-minded.

Thank you again for giving us this platform and an opportunity to network within our community.

Also, thank you for the editorial published on Friday Change is in your reach (DD, October 2) – it really sent a new ray of positivism into my heart! You can't begin to understand how enthusiastic I was after reading the editorial – having your support is such a huge help. Thank you again for giving our community a voice. I think you'll be seeing the fruits of your labour pretty soon, I see a huge change coming. – Name withheld, Buffalo Flats

Chiel. 2009. Community spirit. Published on Page 2, 17/09/2009.

Published on 17/09/2009 010IDD17/09/09 THUR NEWS2 AL

Community spirit

YESTERDAY I “reintroduced” the ideas of American broadcaster Earl Nightingale, one of the first global motivational “gurus”, on how to battle the unemployment that’s such a terrible scourge in these recessionary times.

I say reintroduced because his views are from talks first broadcast in SA on the old Springbok Radio back in the mid-70s.

Copies were sent to me by Gonubie reader G Taylor who found them when he was clearing out his wardrobe.

Of course, Nightingale’s talks were based on the problems in America but some 40 years on – and 20 years after his death – his opinions have particular relevance for South Africa today.

In yesterday’s article he basically suggested there should an alternative to social welfare grants for the able-bodied – by putting people to work on jobs that the country needs doing, instead of just handing out social welfare grants.

A win-win situation; they would have the dignity of not just taking handouts, and taxpayers would get something back.

Another “talk” was more focused and based on an example of a community at work in a little town called New Philadelphia in Ohio.

The Community **Dialogues** the Dispatch has been running have proved what tremendous community spirit there is in the Eastern Cape so perhaps the US example will inspire some out-of-the-box thinking here.

What the Ohio community did was buy up a closed-down factory building in their town – by selling shares at the equivalent of about R20 each – and then persuading an expanding company they had suitable premises and a willing labour force. The marriage brought a new impetus to the town, prompting the president of the company that moved in to wax lyrical about the need for American character, integrity and self-reliance.

“When the greedy something-for-nothing, the somebody-else-not-me selfishness saps American character, American strength goes with it,” he said.

Greedy something-for nothings? The somebody-else-not-me types? Sounds like the worst of our politicians and public officials, doesn’t it?

Mr Taylor suggests that by “rewinding” these ideas it might give our leaders some good ideas of their own. I hope so.

Mr T also tells me he's writing the life story of a branch of his family at the prompting of his son, who moved to New Zealand 13 years ago and is the principal of an IT College in Christchurch.

It looks at his life and that of his father and his father's four brothers and sister, whose son Owen Nel is the head of Clarendon High School.

Best of luck with the book, and thanks for Nightingale's talks, which I hope will be food for thought for local entrepreneurs.

Today's Chiel is Stevie Godson. E-mail her at stevieg@dispatch.co.za

Tailpiece

WORLD'S shortest fairy tale:

Once upon a time, a guy asked a girl "Will you marry me?" The girl said, "NO!" And the guy lived happily ever after and rode motorcycles and went fishing and hunting and played golf a lot and drank beer and Scotch and had tons of money in the bank and left the toilet seat up and f**ted whenever he wanted.

Caption for image:

Daily Dispatch. 2009a. Editorial: Helping to build bridges. Published on Page 7, 18/03/2009.

Published on 18/03/2009 0101DD18/03/09 WED NEWS7 AL

Helping to build bridges

THE 21st century has brought irrevocable change to the media world. Change that has come so quickly in some quarters that it has gobbled up our tried and tested notions of how newspapers function.

Economically speaking, the historical models of business are evaporating with the advertising revenue they used to depend on.

But more fundamentally, we have had to reshape our existence so that we no longer act as mere purveyors of information to the public.

For the past 16 months the Dispatch has departed from the role of information provider by hosting, in partnership with the University of Fort Hare, our popular series of Dispatch **Dialogues** .

Based on the “town hall” concept, these **dialogues** are designed to give our readers a chance to have their say and become active citizens.

Last night we took the process a step further, to a Beacon Bay church hall, where we held the first in our series of community **dialogues** .

Rather than presenting speakers, the floor was immediately opened to the public.

Galvanising the citizenry is an essential ingredient of a mature and progressive democracy. And with the elections bearing down on us it is vital that the electorate is involved, takes ownership of issues and provokes its leaders into action.

Make no mistake, these **dialogues** are not designed to flay the politicians. There is no agenda on our part other than to provide platforms for ordinary citizens to speak out, to tell their own stories and express their needs – whatever they may be.

The politicians have the means to reach the electorate if they want to; citizens find this harder to do.

We encourage our readers to engage with us and their neighbours about the pressing issues of their lives.

Tonight we take the **dialogues** across the N2 to Nonpumelelo, a stone’s throw from Beacon Bay. We expect contrasting issues to emerge, taking into account the socio-economic vagaries of the two locations. But what we also hope to find are the connecting bridges that bind two very different communities. Because by exploring the bonds we have in common – rather than the things that separate us – the idea of a Rainbow Nation may seem less obscure than it does right now.

Daily Dispatch. 2009b. Editorial: Beacon Bay sets the tone. Published on Page 7, 19/03/2009.

Published on 19/03/2009 0101DD19/03/09 THURS NEWS7 AL

Beacon Bay sets the tone

EARLIER this year, as the election campaign began, we appealed in this space for politicians to pour cold water on the heated words which had started to become a feature of the race.

We reflected on the potential for serious conflict in KwaZulu-Natal between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party and voiced our concern that, with the intense political tussle between the ANC and the Congress of the People, the Eastern Cape might be ripe for trouble.

Indeed, at the time of that writing there had been reports of sporadic attacks between ANC and Cope supporters in this area.

Today we are only weeks away from the election on April 22 and it would appear that the political temperature has, thankfully, cooled.

Of course, the political rhetoric remains sharp from all quarters and, of course, ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema continues to entertain with his parody of politics, particularly in the giggle of an episode between himself and DA leader Helen Zille.

Several months ago figures like Malema and others would have rung alarm bells with their invective. Today, it is increasingly seen for what it is.

Hopefully we will not regret writing these words, but it would appear that our democracy is stronger and more mature than it seemed earlier this year, when angry words raged between our politicians.

Few, if any incidents of violence between supporters of rival parties in this province have been reported lately, and all participants in the coming election appear to be going about their business without threats of physical violence.

This is encouraging and would suggest that we are able to engage in vigorous politicking without descending into violence and insults.

On Tuesday night we witnessed an example of such tolerance at the first of our Community **Dialogues** , which was held in Beacon Bay.

Local representatives of all the major political parties as well as residents of the area came together and rested their political differences to talk about local issues and how to solve them.

Politicians and activists from their parties listened to each other politely and spoke with respect to each other about the real issues that Beacon Bay residents raised. From this informal meeting rose the glimmer of a consensus about how a community could improve itself.

While it's still early days, it was an exciting thing to witness and reminded us that our democracy is not built on sand as some have feared.

We hope that the example presented in Beacon Bay this week will be a lesson to all and will characterise the final lap in this election race.

Daily Dispatch. 2009c. Letter to the Editor: Dialogues break down barriers. Published on Page 11, 25/03/2009.

Published on 25/03/2009 0101DD25/03/09 WED NEWS11 AL

Dialogues break down barriers

A GREAT initiative by the Daily Dispatch for bringing down the walls! (Dispatch **dialogues** : Your voices (video), Dispatch Now 24/7, March 18) Let's talk some more. It is people who make up a community, town and country! — Dembula Mkhonde

qGOOD start by talking to the people and finding out what they have come to expect for the progress of their community – and holding those in the relevant positions accountable. — Lola

Published on 03/04/2009 0101DD03/04/09 FRI NEWS9 AL

Fiddling as Rome burns

THE firsthand accounts of life in Southernwood, East London, given by residents at the Dispatch Community **Dialogues** on Wednesday night were shocking. For two hours a range of residents – including youths, grandmothers, veterans who have lived in this once-leafy suburb for 30 years and migrant workers from Sterkspruit – stood up one after the next and bitterly complained about what is best described as a life under siege.

Terrorised by brazen drug dealers, muggers, illegal taverners, drunks and reckless drivers, they said they are afraid of venturing out of their homes and workplaces, not only after dark, but in broad daylight. They complained that:

| There is nowhere for the many children who live in this relatively densely populated area to play because the unkempt parks have become the playgrounds of rapists, drug addicts and vagrants. Even worse is that shebeens have sprung up opposite Southernwood Primary;

| Some streets have virtually become no-go zones because muggers lurk in overgrown bushes, and some of the suburb's once grand old houses are so dilapidated that shacks are being built inside them;

| Chances of getting a good night's sleep are slim because of the deafeningly loud music that thunders out of neglected doss houses in which unscrupulous landlords have gutted the interiors and jammed in up to 15 people per bathroom;

| The area is a potential health hazard, with rats “the size of cats and Jack Russells” and a dysfunctional sewerage system. It is also a potential fire hazard with makeshift electrical extensions feeding random dwellings in garages and gardens;

| Calling on the authorities to intervene is of little use. The police take hours to come and virtually every resident complained of the frustration of dealing with Buffalo City Municipality – because call centre operators seldom answer calls and the service is slow if it happens at all; and

| The response of the universities – whose students form a large portion of the population and are responsible for much of the noise – is also unsatisfactory.

No doubt most residents would move out had they the financial liberty to do so, but the sad truth is that these honest, ratepaying citizens are effectively trapped in what has become a crumbling, filthy, unsafe ghetto where property values have imploded, infrastructure has decayed and slum lords, illegal shebeen owners, rowdy youth and criminals have been allowed to cause havoc with virtual impunity.

But the problems of inner cities are not unique – nor are they insurmountable. Inner cities around the world have been redeemed. Tackling the problems, however, requires political will.

Is this being demonstrated by our municipal leaders? No, as Rome burns they are occupied with self-serving political games, apparently having lost sight of those who they are paid to serve.

Daily Dispatch. 2009e. Notice: Notice board for Dispatch readers. Published on Page 2, 03/04/2009

Published on 03/04/2009 0101DD03/04/09 FRI NEWS1 AL, 03/04/2009 0101DD03/04/09 FRI NEWS2nd1 AL

Notice board for Dispatch readers

THE Daily Dispatch will on Tuesday next week publish its first weekly notice board, which is a space to publicise public meetings in different communities in our circulation area.

The editorial space is being made available as a free service to the community in response to calls by **Beacon Bay**, Nompumelelo and Southernwood residents during community dialogue meetings to help publicise public meetings.

The notice board will be called In Touch and will be a weekly feature on Tuesdays only.

The deadline for submissions is 1pm on Mondays.

To advertise your meetings on In Touch, please contact Council Reporter Babalo Ndenze on 0437022132 or e-mail intouch@dispatch.co.za

Published on 07/04/2009 0101DD07/04/09 TUES NEWS6 AL

HERE is the first of our new community noticeboards, In Touch.

The Daily Dispatch is offering residents who want to publicise community meetings to make use of the weekly free notice board.

Please note that only Community Policing Forums (CPFs), ward meetings, school governing body meetings or any meeting which aims at improving communities will be publicised. Political party meetings or fund-raising events will not be considered.

The Cambridge Sector Crime Forum will be meeting at the Vincent Methodist Church Hall in Preston Avenue on April 16 at 6pm. The meeting will be attended by senior police members from Cambridge Police Station and some councillors who represent the area. For more information, interested parties can contact Sector Crime Forum chairperson Philip Cronjé on 0437024066.

The Sector Policing Forum, Edly Simons Sector, which operates in the **Beacon Bay** area, has established a Domestic Workers and Gardeners' Forum.

The first meeting will be tomorrow at 3pm in the Large Library Hall in **Beacon Bay**. Residents are encouraged to release their staff to attend the meeting, which will be presented by police officials from the **Beacon Bay** Police Station.

To post your notice on In Touch, contact Babalo Ndenze on 0437022132 or e-mail intouch@dispatch.co.za.

Daily Dispatch. 2009f. Editorial: A ray of sunshine. Published on Page 9, 22/07/2009.

Published on 22/07/2009 0101DD22/07/09 WED NEWS9 AL

A ray of sunshine

DISPATCH readers would have been greeted with a jolt of good news yesterday in our report on the makeover of the public parks in Southernwood, East London.

But so what, you may ask. Why should we glorify this seemingly mundane obligation of the authorities to taxpayers? After all, the unwritten terms of the contract stipulate that in exchange for our hard-earned rands, our leaders will use that money to maintain, among other services, the upkeep of our open spaces. It's a reasonable expectation by citizens and anything less is an abrogation of those terms.

But we all know it is never that simple and the reasons are too numerous and onerous to expand on. Suffice to say that politics has, in recent years, been a rather sorry bedfellow of service delivery.

The basic provision of services has time and again deferred to the whims of political expediency, and tragically so.

So what makes this particular event – as perfunctory as it should be – so remarkable is that it was the direct result of our readers speaking their minds. For once our readers' voices were heard and something was done about the plight of a community and its residents. That surely counts as a success, as small as it may be, in our contemporary times of indifference.

For those of our readers who remain unswayed by this victory in activism, it's worth recalling how it was achieved.

Back in March we began running a series of community **dialogues** where we encouraged residents of particular areas to tell us about their particular concerns.

Southernwood happened to be one of those stops on the circuit – one where we encountered a fusillade of complaints, chief among them the poor state of the suburb's public parks.

Crime and grime had replaced the usual purposes of open spaces as places of communion and recreation, residents cried.

We promised to do what we could to get council to listen. And following column inches dedicated to this particular problem, Buffalo City recently acted and have cleaned up Southernwood's parks.

We know that much more than cosmetic amendments are necessary to restore the community fabric of Southernwood. And the challenge for the municipality is to maintain this upliftment, in Southernwood and beyond. But for now we'll celebrate this little ray of sunshine as a victory for the people by the people.

Published on 02/10/2009 0101DD02/10/09 FRI NEWS9 AL

Change is in your reach

ON WEDNESDAY night the Daily Dispatch hosted another round of community **dialogues** and this time the people of Buffalo Flats, Parkside and Pefferville were given a chance to tell us about life in their neighbourhoods.

High on the agenda were complaints of service delivery, or rather the lack thereof.

Littered streets, dangerous public spaces, erratic refuse collection, permanent potholes, inadequate recreation facilities and a proliferation of taverns were just some of the gripes heard.

The Dispatch has been writing about these matters in the same areas for some time.

We know that each day as we write about the struggle of life in Buffalo Flats and neighbouring communities it serves as a reminder to our readers there that their lot is bleak.

That has never been our intention.

Still, there is no getting away from the crime and abuse that has become so prevalent in these neglected neighbourhoods.

On Wednesday night we heard it amplified.

But amid the problems and concerns, we were also struck by the enterprise of a few souls who will not let anything stand in their way.

They may not have the means to make an overnight difference, but what they do possess is spirit and will.

Take 25-year-old Telana Halley, who was part of a big clean-up on Heritage Day, for example.

Halley chided residents absent from the dialogue for a missed opportunity.

“Everyone wants to complain, but no one wants to make a difference,” she said, to applause from the audience.

Halley needs to know the Dispatch is on her side and is committed to doing what it can in planting seeds of hope on the streets of Buffalo City’s depressed west side.

There were some distressing remarks from ANC supporters, who saw fit to chastise the Dispatch for having an apparent agenda.

Well, they were right on that score. We do have an agenda, and it's simply this: to help improve the lives of our citizens and to give them a chance to help themselves. The alternative could be an explosion of frustration the likes of which has just happened in Standerton, Mpumalanga.

In our efforts to bring change the Dispatch has had some success. For example, we succeeded in having Second Creek closed down recently after a sustained campaign of reporting on the health hazards of the dumpsite.

With the municipality responding, albeit slowly, to our overtures, there has never been a better time for residents to make their voices heard – and know that the possibility for change is within their reach.

Daily Dispatch. 2009h. Editorial: Take note, Mayor Faku. Published on Page 10, 11/12/2009

Published on 11/12/2009 0101DD11/12/09 FRI NEWS10 AL

Take note, Mayor Faku

BEACON Bay residents have revived their ratepayers' association and this week met to elect their leaders. They have been threatening the move for some time now. It's an action born of frustration.

Like workers who turn to a union when they feel slighted from the top, so the residents of this East London suburb have used their disaffection with Buffalo City to stand together for a common purpose.

It is the surest sign of unhappiness with the authority that has led them to this point.

City spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya, when asked for comment on this development, offered weakly: "... the platform recognised by law is ward committees."

It fails miserably as a scare tactic, if that was the intention. On another level it offers more proof of Buffalo City's disconnection to the people who prop it up year after year.

The reason that residents in Beacon Bay formed a ratepayers' association is because the ward committees have failed.

The few councillors who are active within their wards and carry the voice of their constituents to council often get no further.

They are met with indifference from the council and the administration.

Their power is effectively neutered.

And that is why people of Buffalo City are beginning to do it for themselves.

There is a renewed spirit of activism emerging in our communities. In the vacuum of leadership at City Hall, it is hardly surprising.

Our advice to Mayor Zukisa Faku is to take notice of these developments. They are happening because of the singular failure of council.

And there can be no excuses, for the warnings have been loud.

Take the Dispatch community **dialogues** , for example. We were stunned by the sentiment of the people. They were angry and desperate and unfulfilled by a history of broken promises. While they seethed, council fought.

Recently the Dispatch followed up on a promise to residents in Southernwood to investigate the burgeoning slums in the city and our findings couldn't have been more conclusive.

While council has stuttered along, King William's Town and Southernwood fell apart at the hands of unscrupulous homeowners.

Beacon Bay residents have seen this downfall and have decided to take control of their own futures. One cannot fault that attitude which seeks to preserve when the order of society is being dismantled.

The call has already gone out to create a wider network of ratepayers' associations in Buffalo City. Gonubie has one already. Should others follow, the tide of influence will shift – and Buffalo City will have only itself to blame.

Fengu, M. 2009a. Suburban parks given a facelift after complaints. Published on Page 3, 21/07/2009.

Published on 21/07/2009 0101DD21/07/09 TUES NEWS3 AL, 21/07/2009 0101DD21/07/09 TUES NEWS2nd3 AL

Suburban parks given a facelift after complaints

BCM say it's part of turnaround strategy

By *MSINDISI FENGU*

PUBLIC parks in an East London suburb, which became a haven for criminals and drunkards, have been given a remarkable makeover by Buffalo City Municipality.

Following reports by the Dispatch on the state of the open areas in Southernwood, BCM paved the parks in St James and St Georges roads, installed new lights and cut the grass and bushy areas.

Municipal spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said the process of maintaining the parks was part of a project to beautify the city.

“Following concerns raised by residents during our public hearings and in platforms like the Daily Dispatch **Dialogues**, we have made inroads in ensuring that we use resources, including finance, to make our communities safer.

“We heard the call from the communities that open spaces were becoming crime hotspots and we wanted to change that as our law enforcers have committed to be more visible in these areas.”

The project to beautify the city is part of BCM's turnaround strategy to ensure communities live safely, said Ngwenya, adding that Jungle Gyms would be erected for children to play on.

The project would also boost tourism, he said.

“We want to go beyond community consultation processes, and we encourage residents to use our customer care call centre to report their concerns.”

Southernwood residents said at a Dispatch **Dialogues** meeting that the parks had deteriorated to such an extent that people were defecating in them in broad daylight in full view of residents.

Jill MacGregor, from the SA National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence based in St Marks Road, said: “We encourage and appreciate what BCM has done for the community. There is little space here for children and the youth to play and the parks provide just that.”

Resident David Siphoso, who works at Life St Dominic's Hospital, said BCM had done a good job by installing lights in the park.

“It’s much safer when I go home in the evening from work. They also cleaned up and there’s no longer a terrible smell coming from garbage.”

Resident Pamela Ntintili, however, said crime was still a huge concern. “While we appreciate what BCM has done, crime is still rampant. Last week a lady was mugged of her cellphone by a youngster during the day. We would really appreciate some police visibility here.”

Nwabisa Kolisi said: “At least now, there is no long grass, bushes have been removed and also there is paving.”

East London police spokesperson Superintendent Mtati Tana said police were patrolling the Southernwood area and its parks.

“We have a 24-hour patrol, and police are always on guard,” he said.

Caption for image:

SAFER: One of the Southernwood parks that have been cleaned up and given a facelift by BCM.

Caption for image:

PRISTINE: Southernwood’s new-look park, which was a disgrace but now looks smart with grass cut, bush removed, new paving and lights after residents expressed concern in the Daily Dispatch a month ago. Pictures: MLONDOLOZI MBOLO

Fengu, M. 2009b. Students to clean park in suburb. Published on Page 5, 17/09/2009

Published on 17/09/2009 0101DD17/09/09 THUR NEWS5 AL, 17/09/2009 0101DD17/09/09 THUR NEWS2nd5 AL

Students to clean park in suburb

By MSINDISI FENGU

STUDENTS from two colleges in East London will get their hands dirty today when they clean up Southernwood Park.

The students, from Boston City Campus and Business College and MSC College, will begin the operation at noon – an initiative aimed at “giving back to the community”.

Events co-ordinator at Boston City Campus and Business College Erich Stapel said the campaign was a venture between Boston City, MSC, and Intengu Communications.

Besides helping the community “we also want to teach the students about social responsibility and cleanliness”.

Stapel said they were involved in the campaign not only because Boston students frequented the park, but because they had an obligation to properly maintain surrounding areas.

Southernwood Park was recently renovated by Buffalo City Municipality and was part of BCM’s project to “beautify” East London. BCM paved the parks in St James and St George’s roads, installed new lights, cut the grass and trimmed bushy areas after the Daily Dispatch reported on the poor state of public areas in Southernwood.

During the Daily Dispatch Community **Dialogues** earlier this year, Southernwood residents complained that parks in the area were no longer safe for children and had become “havens” for criminals.

They said the overgrown parks in St James and St George’s roads had deteriorated to such an extent that people defecated there “in broad daylight” in full view of residents.

Ward committee member Thozama Mdingi, who lives in St George’s Road, said at the time: “We have a park in front of us. That park is filthy; it’s even being used as a dump ... People stop their cars there and urinate. It stinks, it really stinks.”

Municipal spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said at the time that following complaints made at the **Dialogues** and at other public hearings, “we have made inroads in ensuring that we use resources ... to make our communities safer”.

Fengu, M. 2009c. We'll end up with snakes in the grass, say residents. Published on Page 3, 29/09/2009.

Published on 29/09/2009 0101DD29/09/09 TUES NEWS3 AL, 29/09/2009 0101DD29/09/09 TUES NEWS2nd3 AL

We'll end up with snakes in the grass, say residents

By MSINDISI FENGU

BUFFALO Flats residents are outraged at Buffalo City Municipal (BCM) workers, who they claim t don't clean up after they cut grass on the pavement in front of houses.

Residents who live along Greenpoint Road yesterday claimed BCM workers often left the grass uncut and overgrown in front of their homes.

They said they feared that snakes during the summer season would hide in the grass, raising safety concerns.

They voiced their concerns days before the Daily Dispatch is to hold a community dialogue meeting at Buffalo Flats Primary School Hall – at 6pm tomorrow.

Buffalo Flats, **Pefferville** and Parkside residents will have the opportunity to raise their concerns over issues about service delivery.

Buffalo Flats resident Rodwell Fredricks said yesterday that they had problems with municipal workers, who would cut the grass but then leave it unraked.

He said this created “a filthy condition for the suburb”.

“They come in and cut (the grass), but don't rake and pick the grass up,” Fredricks said.

Olive Groepe said workers would not rake the grass and, as a taxpayer, she felt cheated.

“They come with their tractor and cut it, but don't rake it up. This makes our area look dirty and also exposes us to snakes.”

Groepe said she had since told municipal workers not to cut the grass in front of her house.

Sally Thompson said municipal workers would sometimes take almost a month to visit the area and cut the grass.

“It's been a while that they have come to cut it. They are really not doing a good job,” Thompson said.

“They just leave it in front of our houses.”

Brown Albert said the situation was dangerous, especially for children during the summer season.

“We fear that in summer we will find a lot of snakes and they will hide in the grass,” Albert said.

Approached for comment yesterday, BCM spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said he needed more time to respond to claims made by residents.

— msindisif@dispatch.co.za

Caption for image:

FEELING CHEATED: Buffalo Flats resident Olive Groepe, outside her house in Greenpoint Road, is unhappy with the service received from the municipality. Picture: ALAN EASON

Fuzile, B. 2009a. B Bay sees 10 car thefts in eight weeks. Published on Page 3, 11/03/2009.

B Bay sees 10 car thefts in eight weeks

By BONGANI FUZILE Crime Reporter

IN THE past two months the suburb of Beacon Bay has been rocked by a spate of vehicle thefts that have left residents fuming.

Police said 10 vehicles had been reported stolen in the period, but would not say if any of the vehicles had been recovered.

Superintendent Mtati Tana said part of the reason for escalating vehicle theft was because of negligence by owners.

“What we’ve noticed is that some motorists don’t secure their vehicles. Some leave them unattended in secluded areas and that puts them at high risk to be stolen,” said Tana.

A victim told the Daily Dispatch: “I contacted the police when my car was stolen from Retail Park in January, but up to today it hasn’t been found. The area is not safe at all these days. I am blaming the security at the mall, though.”

Two of the vehicles were stolen from Beacon Bay Retail Park shopping mall.

Retail Park’s Urshula Page said they were aware of two incidents in one week – in January a green Ford Lazer and a red Opel Monza were stolen.

“Since these two incidents our security provider has taken over the management of the car park attendants. They’ve increased the level of “value added service” to our customers,” she said.

One resident said his vehicle was seen being driven around in Mthatha. “It hasn’t been found still today.

“There are thugs from other areas who are targeting this quiet area.”

Tana said the problem was not only in Beacon Bay. “Other areas are at risk as well. Though we are very concerned about this, we are pleading with motorists to put in car trackers and other digital devices that will protect their vehicles.

“Motorists must look after their vehicles and mustn’t leave cellphones, laptops and other important properties that can attract thugs to their vehicles,” he said.

The Dispatch Community **Dialogues** will take place on March 17 at the NG Kerk Hall, Bonza Bay Road, and on March 18 at Sinempumelelo Primary School Hall.

Residents of Beacon Bay and Nompumelelo are invited to attend and make their voices heard.

Fuzile, B. 2009b. Disgusting state of 'priority' township. Published on Page 3, 14/03/2009.

Disgusting state of 'priority' township

By BONGANI FUZILE Crime Reporter

A STONE'S throw from the pristine middle-class suburb of Beacon Bay, Nompumelelo township is strewn with uncollected rubbish and filth.

Some residents blame Democratic Alliance ward councillor John Cupido, claiming he has not shown any interest in their problems.

Community member Nyamankulu Xakabantu claimed: "He is always too busy to attend to us. All he tells you is that we never voted for him."

Xakabantu said they had no service delivery: "It's only poverty and crime as residents try to make ends meet."

But Cupido said the township had been his priority

"All the R100000s that we've received from the municipality (ward development fund), I've used in that township. On Monday I'm meeting the Department of Roads in the township to look at how are we going to fix the roads. There is a plan for 1km to be fixed."

He said an R800000 taxi rank was also in the pipeline.

He suggested that the ANC was focusing on the township now that it had been announced that he would be going to Bhisho after the elections.

"Nompumelelo is my first priority any time; I am there to help those people."

When Saturday Dispatch visited the township yesterday, there were piles of uncollected rubbish all around the RDP houses.

Women and children were filling water bottles and buckets at a communal tap next to a dumpsite. Other women were washing their clothes nearby.

"If refuse trucks from the municipality were coming here regularly, we would be living a happy life," said Bonza Plaatjie. "This is unhealthy."

Pumzile Meje, a taxi driver, complained about the state of the roads: "There are no road signs and school kids end up being victims of speeding cars."

Sivuyile Konwayo said the township youth used facilities at nearby suburbs like Dorchester Heights, Beacon Bay and Abbotsford to play sports. "We don't have any sports facilities. We use school halls as multi-purpose centres and any available space to play sports. We have nothing and this makes us actively involved in crimes."

Caption for image:

RUBBISH EVERYWHERE: Nompumelelo residents want to know why there is no service delivery in their township and why the refuse collection vehicle misses their area. Above, children collect water from a communal tap near a pile of the rubbish. Picture: ALAN EASON

Mgwatyu, X. 2009. Clean up, says Southernwood. Published on Page 5, 31/07/2009.

Published on 31/07/2009 0101DD31/07/09 FRI NEWS5 AL, 31/07/2009 0101DD31/07/09 FRI NEWS2nd5 AL

Clean up, says Southernwood

By XOLISA MGWATYU

RESIDENTS of Southernwood have described some parts of the area as a “dump site” and “hazardous to health”.

The suburb was one of the areas named as being the dirtiest in Buffalo City during the Daily Dispatch Trashbusters campaign.

Earlier this year, residents also complained during Dispatch Community **Dialogues** about rubbish piling up.

Glen McCarthy, of St Peters Road, said driving through the suburb was like driving through a dump site with refuse bins overflowing and black refuse bags being torn by dogs, leaving the mess scattered all over.

“Southernwood needs an urgent intervention from the municipality,” said McCarthy. “How long must we stay in this dump?”

Another resident, Thozama Mdingi of St Georges Road, said they once took on the “burden of cleaning” but urged the council to act rather than talk.

Ndenze, B. 2009a. Beacon Bay cops 'doing great job'. Published on Page 4, 19/03/2009.

Published on 19/03/2009 0101DD19/03/09 THURS NEWS4 AL

Beacon Bay cops 'doing great job'

By *BABALO NDENZE*

BEACON Bay residents and opposition political parties put their differences aside when highlighting their concerns at Tuesday night's Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue.

The dialogue session was one of many that will take place during the year where East London communities can voice their concerns about issues affecting them.

Crime prevention topped the **Beacon Bay** agenda, but other issues such as lack of street lighting and traffic lights and the prevalence of potholes also came under the spotlight.

The dialogue, at the NG Kerk in **Beacon Bay**, was attended by about 100 people, made up of residents, members of the ANC, Congress of the People (Cope), DA and the ACDP.

Beacon Bay Community Policing Forum (CPF) chairperson Gerry du Toit commended local police for their work, but added they were not getting enough support from the municipality.

"The councillor representing us is an ex-officio member of the CPF. One councillor hasn't attended a CPF meeting in about nine to 10 years," said Du Toit.

He said another concern for residents was the condition of roads and street lights, and council needed to put in place more traffic measures like roundabouts and traffic lights.

"Things are neglected for a long time before they get attended to," Du Toit said, adding that operating hours of shebeens and taverns in neighbouring Nompumelelo were also a cause for concern.

"The squatter shacks (on the side of the road) are growing at an alarming rate. And a lot of (Nompumelelo residents are jay-walking) and it's only a matter of time before someone gets hurt. But we're happy with the police, they're doing an excellent job," said Du Toit.

Nasiwe Nelani, who has lived in **Beacon Bay** for the past 12 years, complained about the local clinic providing services for most domestic workers in the area.

She said at times patients had to queue all day without attention, and return the following day.

ANC member Pumla Nazo called for more co-operation between Nompumelelo and **Beacon Bay** residents.

She said the two communities needed to be integrated. "(Ward meetings) must not be held separately," she said.

Resident Rowan Thiele said Beaconhurst School and schools in Nompumelelo should work more closely to improve the education standards of less privileged pupils in Nompumelelo.

The local library needed a major overhaul to attract more young people, he added.

Caption for image:

THRASHING OUT ISSUES: The Daily Dispatch's first Community Dialogue was held in **Beacon Bay** on Tuesday. Picture: NIGEL LOUW

Ndenze, B. 2009b. BCM fights to keep its clinics: Takeover by Bhisho would be a 'disaster'.
Published on Page 4, 19/03/2009

Published on 19/03/2009 0101DD19/03/09 THURS NEWS4 AL

BCM fights to keep its clinics: Takeover by Bhisho would be a 'disaster'

By *BABALO NDENZE* Council Reporter

BUFFALO City councillors are to fight against a move by Bhisho to take over the running of all council clinics.

The move was disclosed during the Daily Dispatch's Tuesday night Community Dialogue in **Beacon Bay**.

Democratic Alliance councillor Annette Rademeyer, a member of BCM's public safety and health portfolio committee, said a decision to oppose the move was taken at last week's portfolio committee meeting.

"If this happens it will be a disaster," she declared.

"Buffalo City took a decision and they don't want the province to take over."

Rademeyer said statistics showed that the medicine availability rate at council clinics stood at 93percent.

"(At council clinics) you will seldom hear complaints of medicine not being available," she said.

"There are problems of rude staff, but at provincial clinics they will be very lucky if they can get a Panado."

PAC councillor Costa Gazi said the decision could be feasible in some cases, but it "won't be the best decision" for Buffalo City.

"When I was in Cecilia Makiwane Hospital (in Mdantsane) we were part of the provincial service.

"When we transferred we tried to unite with the council but we couldn't form a service.

"As far as the province's decision is concerned, we will have to resist it as Buffalo City. In two years' time we will become a metro and a metro runs its own clinics.

"This attempt is a lot of rubbish. It's obstinate."

Gazi said the province should rather focus on channelling more money to council clinics.

But if they still wanted to go ahead, they should also make sure the environmental health services are part of the plan.

“It’s important to have clean water (and sanitation) because they make a big contribution to public health. You have to have the two (clinics and environmental health services) combined in one service.”

The provincial Health Department said the decision to assume control of council’s public health centres was taken at a national level.

Provincial health spokesperson Sizwe Kupelo said: “It’s a national health resolution. Primary healthcare should be provincialised.

“The national health council resolved that all provinces are expected to be provincialised.

“In the Eastern Cape, the premier has asked to find solutions so we are now organising a summit.”

He said it would take place sometime next month.

Buffalo City spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said the issue was a matter between all municipalities and the province.

“We wouldn’t like to be drawn into a dialogue,” he said.

Ndenze, B. 2009c. Developer eyes council land: But police want to expand offices there.
Published on Page 8, 28/03/2009.

Published on 28/03/2009 0101SD28/03/09 SAT DISP NEWS8 AL

Developer eyes council land: But police want to expand offices there

By *BABALO NDENZE* Council Reporter

A PRIVATE developer could scupper the Beacon Bay police station's plan to acquire an adjacent piece of land to expand its operation.

The unidentified developer, rumoured to be a supermarket chain, is eyeing the same plot. Contacted for comment, they denied the rumours.

Beacon Bay police, who have been receiving a lot of praise from the community for their hard work in bringing crime in the area under control, are in desperate need of more space.

The sale of the land – between where the station is now and the Beacon Bay Clinic – was raised at the recent Daily Dispatch Community **Dialogue** .

Buffalo City Municipality (BCM) confirmed that they had received more than one application for the purchase of the land. It said council would decide soon on who to sell the land to.

Beacon Bay police station Commissioner Cecil Damoyi said their present building could no longer accommodate everyone.

“We can no longer accommodate personnel in our existing structure which belongs to the municipality. Our provincial and national offices are trying their best (to get the land) because of a lack of space,” said Damoyi.

He said the police's provincial office and the Department of Public Works were working together in trying to secure the land. The department would purchase the land and develop it on behalf of the police.

Damoyi said he wasn't aware of any other parties interested in the land.

“This is to alleviate the shortage of space because it is not conducive for our personnel. It's difficult to carry out our day to day functions. We envisage getting more personnel,” he said.

Police provincial spokesperson Superintendent Sibongile Soci said they had approached the national Department of Public Works to negotiate with BCM to purchase the land as well as the existing premises.

She said meetings were held with BCM to obtain the land and that the negotiation process was ongoing.

Beacon Bay Community Police Forum (CPF) deputy chairperson Gerry du Toit said the land would be ideal for new buildings and offices for various departments, as well as a bigger parking area for official police vehicles.

“The SA Police Service is very keen to purchase the land, but a private developer wants to purchase it as well and if the municipality sells it to the private developer it will be contrary to the public and the police’s interest. It would be wrong if the municipality sells it to the private developer,” said Du Toit.

According to the municipality’s website, once a prospective buyer has identified a piece of council-owned land, they must obtain a locality plan from the land administration division indicating on the plan the portion of land they want to purchase or lease.

Applications are then circulated for comments. A report will then be submitted to the council for a final decision.

Council spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said: “There is no sale transaction that has taken place between the municipality and any private developer with regards to the subject site. A report will be submitted to council for consideration and the applicants will be informed of council’s decision,” said Ngwenya.

He said the private developer would be made public once the report had been submitted to council.

“Officials will make recommendations to council and make their decision based on that (recommendations). It’s a democratic way of doing it,” said Ngwenya.

Caption for image:

AREA OF CONTENTION: Gerry du Toit, deputy chairperson of the Beacon Bay Community Police Forum, checks the plot of land on a map. The land is in the background. Picture: NIGEL LOUW

Ndenze, B. 2009d. Seeking ways to bridge the divide: Moves to integrate Nompumelelo, Beacon Bay. Published on Page 5, 31/03/2009.

Published on 31/03/2009 0101DD31/03/09 TUES NEWS5 AL, 31/03/2009 0101DD31/03/09 TUES NEWS2nd5 AL

Seeking ways to bridge the divide: Moves to integrate Nompumelelo, Beacon Bay

By BABALO NDENZE

ONE community lives in abject poverty and the other is, by comparison, an affluent suburb with green lawns, swimming pools and shopping malls.

The gulf between the neighbouring communities of Nompumelelo and Beacon Bay in East London couldn't be greater. In fact, they are separated by far more than the N2 freeway.

Because of this, calls to uplift Nompumelelo and integrate the two are becoming louder. And it was at a recent Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue in Beacon Bay where one resident suggested they establish a community integration committee for the two to work in harmony.

Ward 29 councillor John Cupido, whose ward covers both areas, said there were a number of initiatives the two communities could use to bring themselves closer together.

Cupido said a common platform was needed where the two could meet regularly to share ideas and raise concerns.

“There is a need for a place where the two communities can learn from each other. We will also need to bring business in. There is a need to prioritise employment for people in Nompumelelo,” said Cupido.

He said the employment of people from Nompumelelo in the various projects and businesses in Beacon Bay made good sense because the workforce was in close proximity, slashing transport costs.

“But one thing I've noticed is that people complain about the taxi rank in Beacon Bay. A lot of people ask why there should be a taxi rank in Beacon Bay.

“They also complain about (employees) coming to work late. The taxis don't drop people off at the door so I can understand why people get in a bit late for work,” Cupido said.

He said a community dialogue, similar to the one introduced by the Daily Dispatch, would go a long way towards bringing the two communities together. He said a ward committee was not effective enough because it had elected members.

“I definitely think a (dialogue) committee like that would work. There are a few people in Beacon Bay with projects that employ people in Nompumelelo.

“If we form that committee ... there needs to be a buy-in factor from both communities. But the (Nompumelelo) community gets very suspicious if there is no communication,” said Cupido.

SA National Civic Organisation (Sanco) and ANC chairperson in Nompumelelo, Andrew Dlamini, who lives in the area, agreed with Cupido on certain points.

However, Dlamini said a meeting scheduled for Sunday with the municipality to discuss their concerns didn't materialise.

He said one way the two communities could form a closer link was through job-creation.

“Businesses should employ at least 50percent (of their workforces) from Nompumelelo. We need to meet with the powers-that-be. I, for example, sent my CV (to a new development in the area).

“They are building and there's nothing we can do. They employ people from places like Mdantsane and no one from here. Our people don't get employed,” said Dlamini.

During the **dialogues** in both areas, residents complained about crime and how youngsters had no extra-curricular activities to keep them occupied.

“Our youth need things to do. Sport and employment are the most important things in eradicating crime. Our councillor needs to come to the party. I don't remember a single moment in the past year when Cupido came over here. When he does come he talks about tarring the roads. Tar is not the priority here. Poverty and crime are,” said Dlamini.

But Dlamini said schools were setting a good example on how the two communities could work together.

Nearby Merrifield Preparatory School has an outreach programme in which its pupils interact with pupils from Sinempumelelo Primary regularly.

Nokuzola Ndabambi, the principal of Sinempumelelo Primary, said her school had a good working relationship with Merrifield.

“We are co-operating with Merrifield. We do skills training with them. There's also a lot of interaction between the children. They interact and read with each other,” she said.

The head of Merrifield's primary school, Debbie Lacey, said teachers from the school's outreach programme ran a computer training programme in Nompumelelo.

“We also have an exchange programme where the children do their homework here.”

Caption for image:

MAKING A POINT: A discussion is held at the Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue. Picture: NIGEL LOUW

Caption for image:

SEEKING BRIGHT FUTURE: Aluta Peters, 9, and his friend, Abongile Tshaka, 10, play soccer in the main street of Nompumelelo yesterday. Picture: THEO JEPHTA

Ndenze, B. 2009e. Protests over ‘booze road’: Police plan to raid the shebeens and taverns.
Published on Page 4, 01/04/2009.

Published on 01/04/2009 0101DD01/04/09 WED NEWS4 AL

Protests over ‘booze road’: Police plan to raid the shebeens and taverns

By *BABALO NDENZE* Council Reporter

RESIDENTS of a notorious street in an East London suburb that at one stage boasted three taverns next door to each other are calling for urgent action from authorities.

The frustrated Southernwood residents say the situation is getting worse.

At the end of last year, the Daily Dispatch reported how terrified residents of Nahoon View Road were being held “hostage” by criminals who had taken over the once-quiet street on the suburb’s eastern boundary. The road is about 200m long and has fewer than 20 houses, but it includes two taverns, at least two illegal shebeens and a few more outlets that sell liquor.

One resident, who asked to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals, said in the five years he has lived there, the situation had been getting “worse and worse”. The area had become a playground for criminals, especially during the early hours of the morning when people were drunk.

“There are also young children living in this street and it’s very risky with all the speeding cars,” he said.

A woman resident said she struggled to sleep but had to get up early to go to work. “With the noise levels, no one sleeps around here. We would be very happy if this place would just close. Some of us have to work,” she said, speaking through her bedroom window.

Police spokesperson Superintendent Mtati Tana said police conducted regular inspections on taverns in East London. As part of their crime prevention activities, they arrested a 24-year-old woman and seized over 250litres of liquor at the West Side Pool Club, on the northern side of Southernwood, on Monday. The woman paid a R1000 admission of guilt fine and was released.

“The liquor is in police custody at East London Police Station. Police are to continue operations throughout the (Easter) season and people are warned not to deal with liquor without a licence. A stern warning is (being) sent to people not to abuse alcohol,” said Tana.

He said the Nahoon View Road taverns and shebeens would also be subjected to raids. “In a way they do contribute to crime. But police have plans in place like checking for liquor licences, and people selling alcohol to people who are already intoxicated.”

Residents of Southernwood will have an opportunity to discuss this and other issues at the Dispatch Community **Dialogue** at Turnbull Park tonight at 6pm.

Caption for image:

SUBURBAN SHAME: Part of Nahoon View Road in East London's Southernwood where residents say shebeens and taverns ruin their lives. Picture: MLONDOLOZI MBOLO

Ndenze, B. 2009f. Southernwood residents raise crime, grime and alcohol issues. Published on Page 1, 02/04/2009.

Published on 02/04/2009 0101DD02/04/09 THURS NEWS1 AL, 02/04/2009 0101DD02/04/09 THURS NEWS2nd1 AL

Southernwood residents raise crime, grime and alcohol issues

By *BABALO NDENZE*

CRIME, grime, drugs and illegal shebeens dominated last night's Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue in Southernwood.

Almost 200 residents from across the economic spectrum packed the Turnbull Park Hall where they agreed that all those issues needed urgent attention.

The dialogue was the third of an initiative introduced by Daily Dispatch editor Andrew Trench to give residents of different neighbourhoods a platform to voice their concerns as part of the newspaper's civic journalism. The previous two **dialogues** were in Beacon Bay and Nompumelelo.

Jill MacGregor from the South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (Sanca) said the problem of crime was something "very close to her heart".

She referred to "a lot of drug-dealing residents", a lot of shebeens and illegal shebeens.

Zandisile Baku said the ward councillor, ward committee and street committees should come together with the police forum.

The area's ward councillor Robert Muzzel said Southernwood residents did not attend meetings. At one meeting only three people pitched up.

Ndenze, B. 2009g. Unsafe parks ‘a haven for drunks and criminals’: Residents in EL suburb urge council to take action. Published on Page 4, 03/04/2009.

Published on 03/04/2009 0101DD03/04/09 FRI NEWS4 AL

Unsafe parks ‘a haven for drunks and criminals’: Residents in EL suburb urge council to take action

By BABALO NDENZE Council Reporter

SOUTHERNWOOD residents say recreational parks in the area are no longer safe for children and have instead become “havens” for criminals and drunkards.

The overgrown parks in St James and St Georges roads have also deteriorated to such an extent that some people defecate in the parks “in broad daylight” in full view of residents.

Concerns over the state of parks in the East London suburb were raised by residents at Wednesday’s Dispatch Community Dialogue.

Jill MacGregor from the South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (Sanca) in St Marks Street said crime in the area was very “close to my heart”.

“In Southernwood, we have a very unfortunate situation as residents. I would like also to see a more responsive municipality because I think the municipality’s lack of responsiveness with regards to keeping the parks looking in good shape, a lot of unsavoury people – if I can put it in that way – infiltrate those areas.

“It becomes a nightmare for anybody living within Southernwood or working in Southernwood, particularly after hours, to feel safe as they move around,” said MacGregor.

She said Sanca employed staff who worked night shift and had on numerous occasions fallen victim to criminals. “Our nursing staff have been mugged coming to work and leaving work again. We have employed additional security and we have put up security cameras.”

Ward committee member Thozama Mdingi, who lives in St Georges Road, said people did as they pleased at the park near her home. “We have a park in front of us. That park is filthy; it’s even being used as a dump. The worst part of it, when you’re busy sitting at home, a person just takes a stroll there, strips and defecates in broad daylight. People stop their cars there and urinate. It stinks, it really stinks.”

When the Daily Dispatch visited the parks yesterday, none of the residents living nearby had a single good thing to say about them.

Siya Rusi, who lives directly opposite the park in St George’s Road, said it was very dangerous, especially during winter. “People get robbed and killed here. It’s been happening for years now. We arrived here in 1999. It’s a little better during summer because the sun rises pretty early.”

He said residents raised their concerns about the park “years ago”.

“We were told they would fence it off and build shops there,” said Rusi

“It does need to be converted into some kind of a shopping complex. The park near Boston City Campus and Business College (in the same street) is also quite problematic.”

A vendor who works right in front of the park said: “People are getting robbed during the day even, it’s not just at night.”

Questions were sent to Buffalo City Municipality spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya regarding the state of the parks in the area, but he had not responded when we went to press.

Caption for image:

PROBLEM PARKS: A young child lags behind her mother as they pass the St Georges Road recreational facility that residents say is unsafe, especially for children, and used as a toilet.

Picture: ALAN EASON

Caption for image:

ANXIOUS: Residents at the Dispatch Dialogue. Picture: NIGEL LOUW

Ndenze, B. 2009h. Lucky bean tree in the spotlight: Residents want it removed. Published on Page 5, 04/04/2009.

Published on 04/04/2009 0101SD04/04/09 SAT DISP NEWS5 AL

Lucky bean tree in the spotlight: Residents want it removed

By BABALO NDENZECOUNCIL REPORTER

A TREE growing over a pavement in Southernwood has raised the ire of residents, with some calling for its removal.

The tree is situated in St George's Street right next to the Boston City Campus and Business College. It's of the Erythrina Lysistenon species, otherwise known as the coral, or lucky bean, tree.

The hundreds of residents and students who use the pavement every day are forced to duck every time they approach the tree. Some resort to crossing the road when they approach it. There have also been reports of thugs hiding behind it and ambushing people.

Even delivery trucks can't escape it, with a lot of them hitting its branches as they go past.

The tree, which seems to be growing sideways, was mentioned – and labelled a menace – at Tuesday's Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue in Southernwood.

A vendor who sells her goods from under the tree because of the shade it provides, said she had noticed that some people walked past it cautiously.

“People who walk past here have a problem with it. Trucks driving by also are also getting damaged by this tree. Residents have been complaining for a long time. They want it removed,” she said.

Lwando Qangule, a student living in the area, said he used the pavement there daily. “Sometimes this tree forces us to walk in the street,” he said.

Local councillor Robert Muzzel said he was aware of the situation, and that he would be looking into it. “It (the tree) came up in Tuesday's (Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue) meeting. I've got four pages of things to work through. I will be looking at all the issues that came up on Tuesday.”

Buffalo City Municipality spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said the municipality dealt with problems such as trees that obstructed traffic or pedestrians when they were brought to its attention.

Residents with complaints could contact the city's customer care department.

“What (the customer care officials) do is, they log in the problem as a complaint and send it through to the relevant department. If it (the tree) is obstructing traffic, for instance, traffic

engineering might deal with it ... Parks and public spaces are handled by community services,” said Ngwenya.

Residents who wished to report problems could contact the customer care department on 0437051017.

Caption for image:

DUCK! A pedestrian ducks under the tree, while a vendor sits in its shade. Picture: ALAN EASON

Caption for image:

Ndenze, B. 2009i. Residents want neighbourhood watch. Published on Page 6, 07/04/2009.

Published on 07/04/2009 0101DD07/04/09 TUES NEWS6 AL

Residents want neighbourhood watch

By BABALO NDENZE Council Reporter

FED-UP residents of one of East London's most crime-ridden neighbourhoods are calling for the formation of a neighbourhood watch – and more help from the police.

They say this will go a long way in the fight against crime.

Resident Tertia Kirten said she has already spoken to her neighbours in Southernwood and all of them were “keen”.

She said the crime hotspots, like the streets with liquor outlets and illegal shebeens, needed to be patrolled.

“There are problems and when we call the police it takes two to three hours for them to come out. Neighbourhood watches are a very good idea. It will help in walking around and riding at night, especially where the shebeens are and the parks where people normally get raped.”

During last week’s Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue, Southernwood residents said recreational parks in the area were no longer safe for children and had become havens for criminals and drunkards. Nahoon View Street has become notorious for its two taverns and a number of illegal shebeens.

“There is also a lot of drunkenness ... It’s becoming too much,” said Kirten, who lives a few streets above Nahoon View.

She said her husband was even willing to become a police reservist because of the crime situation.

“We need to get residents concerned with crime to come together and work together. In De Villiers Street they were hitting each other with pangas. The public can do a lot, but we need the help of the police.”

Another resident, Zandisile Baku, suggested that the ward committee and residents should work together with the community policing forum.

Ward councillor Robert Muzzel said a neighbourhood watch was a good idea, but it required commitment from residents.

“It’s easy to talk about the formation, but when you get them (residents) together the level of commitment becomes a problem. The CPF does meet from time to time and I would be very happy to have more community meetings,” said Muzzel.

He said the lack of commitment in neighbourhood watches was a general problem in most areas.

Police spokesperson Superintendent Mtati Tana said the satellite police station in Southernwood was functioning and encouraged residents to make use of it. “When people have complaints to the 10111 number in that area, they will respond.”

Ndenze, B. 2009j. Beacon Bay to create domestics' forum. Published on Page 6, 07/04/2009.

Published on 07/04/2009 0101DD07/04/09 TUES NEWS6 AL

Beacon Bay to create domestics' forum

By BABALO NDENZE Council Reporter

THE **Beacon Bay** community has heeded a call made at a Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue to create a forum for domestic workers and gardeners in the area.

At the same meeting, a resident also suggested the area establish a community integration committee for the neighbouring communities of Nompumelelo and **Beacon Bay** to work in harmony.

Bertie Heckroodt, chairperson of the sector policing forum in the Edly Simons Sector, said they had scheduled a meeting for tomorrow at the library hall in **Beacon Bay**, where the creation of a Domestic Workers and Gardeners' Forum would be discussed.

The sector policing forum operates under the auspices of the **Beacon Bay** community policing forum.

"This sector has taken the initiative to establish a Domestic Workers and Gardeners' Forum to create an awareness of vigilance and observation regarding relevant security matters for their own safety, as well as that of the community," said Heckroodt.

She said domestics and gardeners were "valued as community members and their participation in community matters is appreciated".

Heckroodt encouraged residents to release their staff to attend the meeting, which will be presided over by **Beacon Bay** Police Station officials.

The meeting will focus on a number of issues affecting domestic workers and gardeners, like crime and services.

Heckroodt said the forum would be the first of its kind in East London.

"What we've done is we got hold of all members in our sector and e-mailed them to (encourage) them into taking part. A number of people gave a good response.

"This is our first trial run. This is the first of its kind in East London. Some cities do have it, like in Johannesburg. We had a similar forum in Saxonwold when I was in Johannesburg," said Heckroodt.

She said they would encourage all employers of domestic workers and gardeners to allow them time to attend the meeting, even if it was during the day.

Nompilo Jaka, a local resident who had employed her domestic worker since 2007, said she fully supported the creation of the forum. “I support it as long as it’s going to have benefits for them. It’s a good idea,” said Jaka.

Sindiswa Xula, Jaka’s domestic worker, said she too supported the initiative, but wouldn’t be able to attend as she would be away for the Easter break.

“But it is a good idea. I personally don’t have any problems. I’m very happy at my job,” she said.

Ward councillor John Cupido praised the community for not paying lip service and actually doing something about the plight of domestic workers.

“I think it’s fantastic, there’s nothing wrong with that. I look forward to seeing what type of communication and symbiosis that will come from it,” said Cupido.

Ndenze, B. 2009k. BCM targets 'certain areas' for sprucing up: 'Turnaround plan' starts making a 'slight improvement' Published on Page 3, 08/04/2009.

Published on 08/04/2009 0101DD08/04/09 WED NEWS3 AL, 08/04/2009 0101DD08/04/09 WED NEWS2nd3 AL

BCM targets 'certain areas' for sprucing up: 'Turnaround plan' starts making a 'slight improvement'

By BABALO NDENZE Council Reporter

BUFFALO City's workers have hit the streets of East London, cleaning up pavements and parks in what they say is a "turnaround plan".

In Southernwood, a park that residents decried at a recent Dispatch Community **Dialogue** meeting, was spick and span just days afterwards.

Zandisile Baku, who lives in St George's Road, said there was a slight improvement near where he lives.

"There is a little difference. They (cleaners) came in the morning and again in the afternoon. But I'm not sure if the municipality has enough staff. I'm not sure if the (current staff) is coping. But St George's where I live looks better," Baku said.

Buffalo City Municipality (BCM) spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said yesterday that the grass in the parks in Southernwood had indeed been cut by the municipality.

Ngwenya said BCM was well aware of the problems with the parks and said that cutting the grass was just part of the city's strategy to clean up certain areas around Buffalo City.

"We have come up with a turnaround plan," he said yesterday.

"Work started in this area about two weeks ago, the case in point being the St Peter's Road (park) that has been completed," said Ngwenya.

"Recently the municipality has focused on Settlers Way, the North East Expressway and Douglas Smit Highway. This is part of that strategy that the city is embarking upon.

"Efforts are to uphold our vision to make the city a people-centred place of opportunity where the basic needs of all are met," Ngwenya said.

When the Daily Dispatch visited the area yesterday, although the grass in the park in St George's Road had been cut around the children's playground in the lower part of the park, the edges were still unkempt.

Local resident Tertia Kirten said she wasn't convinced the city was cleaning up the area as it was claiming.

“If you go down to St George’s Road and get to Hill Billy’s at the entry to the park, there is still rubbish being dumped there. The park is overgrown with high grass. They are probably using a lawn mower to cut around the children’s swings,” Kirten said.

BCM also apologised to residents for not collecting refuse in a number of suburbs last month, soon after the Daily Dispatch publicised how the city had failed to collect refuse in a number of areas.

At the time, 18 refuse trucks were being dispatched to collect the rubbish.

Caption for image:

SOMEWHERE TO GO: Children play in St George’s Park in Southernwood yesterday. The municipality had the grass cut recently. Picture: ALAN EASON

Ndenze, B. 2009l. Security measures top home front agenda: Police, domestic workers, gardeners meet. Published on Page 5, 10/04/2009.

Published on 10/04/2009 0101DD10/04/09 FRI NEWS5 AL, 10/04/2009 0101DD10/04/09 FRI NEWS2nd5 AL

Security measures top home front agenda: Police, domestic workers, gardeners meet

By BABALO NDENZE Council Reporter

DOMESTIC workers in **Beacon Bay** raised a number of concerns about their safety this week during the first ever public meeting between them and their employers.

Crime and ways to prevent it dominated the inaugural gathering of the Domestic Workers' and Gardeners' Forum.

The meeting was attended by police officials, the local ward councillor, domestic workers and their employers.

The forum came together after the **Beacon Bay** community called for its establishment at a recent Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue.

Bertie Heckroodt, chairperson of the sector policing forum in the Edly Simons sector, said the sector committee took the initiative to establish a forum to "create an awareness of vigilance and observation regarding relevant security matters for their own safety, as well as that of the community".

Patience Dlabati, a domestic worker, said she was concerned about the dense vegetation around her workplace.

"What are we people, who have thick bushes instead of houses next to our places of employment, supposed to do? These criminals sit and wait in the bushes the whole day (before striking). We don't have houses next door," Dlabati said .

Olga Monky, another domestic worker, said some of her colleagues didn't have access to a telephone at work and this posed a problem when they wanted to report a crime or a suspicious person.

"When we notice someone suspicious and some of us don't have access to telephones at work, then what? I personally can use the telephone where I work, but some of us can't," Monky said.

Local resident Annetia Heckroodt recommended that all domestic workers and gardeners get access to a panic button that would alert either the police or an armed response company.

"It's very important if there are panic buttons for the inside and a panic button on the outside for the gardener. My domestic has a remote (panic button) that she hangs around her neck," Heckroodt said.

Captain Steve Russon from the **Beacon Bay** Police Station said panic buttons were important because domestic workers were the ones who usually bore the brunt of home invasions and robberies.

“They need to be aware. Inform them of the security measures,” Russon said.

“They are the ones more than likely to notice something suspicious. Housebreak-ins, for example, are committed during the day when homeowners are at work.”

Police Captain Mzolisi Langa told the domestic workers that the police were highly dependent on them.

“We don’t see these people (criminals) all the time. When you see them just phone the police and we will deal with them,” said Langa.

He said gardeners should always make sure that there were no overgrown bushes in a yard as this could make it easy for criminals to hide.

Local councillor John Cupido recommended that the forum also attend Community Policing Forum meetings.

Caption for image:

CRIME FIGHTERS: **Beacon Bay** domestic workers and gardeners collect crime prevention pamphlets from the police after their meeting on how to fight crime. Picture: THEO JEPHTHA

Ndenze, B. 2009m. Southernwood residents see red over graffiti, stickers. Published on Page 6, 16/04/2009.

Published on 16/04/2009 0101DD16/04/09 THUR NEWS6 AL

Southernwood residents see red over graffiti, stickers

By *BABALO NDENZE* Council Reporter

MEMBERS of the Southernwood community say graffiti artists, and the many stickers advertising abortions, are defacing their neighbourhood and they are calling for more action from the authorities.

The issue was raised at the Daily Dispatch Community **Dialogues** in the area two weeks ago, where residents said the graffiti was making their neighbourhood ugly. Graffiti can be seen on the houses along Gately Street. Even the World War 2 cenotaph near the Buffalo City FET College has been defaced by graffiti artists.

Ikhwezi Lokusa Wellness Centre manager Kazeka Somhlahlo said she has given up on the graffiti that has been emblazoned all over her centre's front wall.

"It's been there for a while now. My belief is that people just want attention and when you give them that attention they get exactly what they want. We've ignored it for that purpose. That's my belief."

She said it was pointless painting over it because it would only reappear in no time.

Beryl Anderson, a Webb Street resident, said it was not just the graffiti that was a problem, but the proliferation of abortion stickers was also an eyesore in the neighbourhood.

"We have a huge problem with the graffiti. We've been to the municipality and the police. We can't do anything.

"There are also those abortion stickers all over. It's disgusting," Anderson said.

She said the stickers were not sending a good message to the young people of Southernwood.

"Surely something must be done. This (graffiti) is a crime.

"It's been going on for a long time, but it's gotten worse in the last year or so," said Anderson.

She said residents have had enough of painting over the graffiti. "They're going to come back and do it again. This is what's making Southernwood a slum," Anderson said.

Leon van der Westhuizen, an armed response guard who works in the Southernwood area, said some graffiti on walls was good to look at, but the art form needed to be done in a secluded area.

"This one (near Buffalo City FET College) is nice.

“This is good work. But they need a special wall (where they can paint).

“On the corner of St George’s and Gately streets there’s a guy who has just painted his wall and they sprayed graffiti on it again,” Van der Westhuizen said.

BCM spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said: “The city police can arrest you in terms of a bylaw if they catch you (in the act).

“If we have evidence and a witness, we can clean it ourselves and then claim the money from you.”

Caption for image:

HIT AND SPRAY: Creative and colourful graffiti in Southernwood – some call it art, others abuse. Picture: THEO JEPHTHA

Ndenze, B. 2009n. Rich and poor share a dream: They want more jobs, less crime, better service delivery and homes for everyone. Published on Page 9, 23/04/2009.

Published on 23/04/2009 0101DD23/04/09 THURS NEWS9 AL

Rich and poor share a dream: They want more jobs, less crime, better service delivery and homes for everyone

By BABALO NDENZE

THE gulf between the neighbouring communities of Nompumelelo and Beacon Bay in East London might be great, but both areas had similar expectations when they headed to the polls yesterday.

Job creation, crime prevention, housing and basic services are some of the issues both communities are hoping will be addressed by government.

The shared issues were brought up in recent Dispatch Community **Dialogues** hosted in both areas, even though the communities are separated by more than just the N2 freeway.

On one side a community lives in abject poverty while the other is comparatively affluent.

In scenes reminiscent of the first democratic elections in 1994, residents from both communities turned out in their thousands to cast their votes.

In Nompumelelo, the queue stretched hundreds of metres from the polling station at the Chris Hani Memorial Clinic, while in Beacon Bay, the line of voters stretched right around the street corner at the Beaconhurst High School polling station.

Both sets of voters were eager to put their crosses on a ballot in the hope of change in their respective communities.

On the huge turnout of voters in Nompumelelo, party agent Andile Nxoboshwane said this could be attributed to people being fed up with the lack of service delivery.

In 2004, Nompumelelo had 2129 registered voters. This year it had 3877.

“We are happy with the turnout. The youth has come out. But I think service delivery is what’s bringing the people out to vote,” said Nxoboshwane.

Eager voters gathered outside the polling station in the bitter cold from as early as 1am. Even those who failed to capitalise on the special vote period for the elderly, disabled and pregnant were out in their numbers.

Pregnant women and elderly men with walking sticks braved the cold to cast their votes.

Doreen Cibe, a pensioner from Nompumelelo, said housing was the priority. “Look at these RDP houses. My RDP house is messed up. The windows don’t close and they don’t even have handles. I’ve been voting since 1994,” she said.

Siyabonga Soli, a Nompumelelo resident who has a casual job in Bonza Bay, said he hoped the government would finally be able to deliver services to his community.

“We want houses, proper streets, water and electricity. Jobs are also scarce in this community. I’ve been voting for a while now. I voted for the same party in 2004, but I don’t see anything different,” said Soli.

An ANC supporter who asked to remain anonymous said she had reached a stage where she just voted for the sake of voting. “There’s nothing we are getting (from the government) anyway. I voted for the same party, though,” she said.

Joyce Strydom, a Beacon Bay resident, said racial harmony was her biggest wish after the elections, not just in her area, but across the country. “I really think the most important thing is peace between all the different races. If we can sort that out, everything will work out. There won’t be any more of this crime and rape that’s going on.”

Strydom hoped that whoever took control after the elections would refrain from prioritising “fancy things”.

“They must build houses for the poor. And it’s not just black people who are poor – there are also poor whites, Indians and coloured people. Do you know that there are people sleeping in a tank in East London? I pray every night for the people that are suffering.”

Carlos and Julia Dafonseca, a couple from Beacon Bay, said crime and job creation, especially for young people, should be prioritised. Carlos said: “We’re also hoping for change. The sharing of power is also very important. We’re privileged because we’ve got good jobs. So in that respect we’re not really voting for jobs. The youngsters are the big concern. They are the ones who need employment opportunities. Crime, on the other hand, needs to be put in context. It needs to be managed properly. There is crime all over the world. How to solve and prevent it is what’s important and how you punish those who commit crime.”

Caption for image:

HOPING FOR CHANGE: Voters queue at the Beaconhurst School voting station in Beacon Bay. Picture: NIGEL LOUW

Ndenze, B. 2009o. Troublesome tree chopped down. Published on Page 5, 14/05/2009.

Published on 14/05/2009 0101DD14/05/09 THURS NEWS5 AL, 14/05/2009 0101DD14/05/09 THURS NEWS2nd5 AL

Troublesome tree chopped down

By BABALO NDENZE Council Reporter

A TREE in Southernwood which had grown sideways over a road and been labelled a menace by local residents, has been chopped down by the council.

During a Dispatch Community **Dialogue** last month, residents complained about the tree and called for its removal.

The tree, in St George's Street next to the Boston City Campus and Business College, had been blocking the pavement and hundreds of residents and students were forced to duck every time they approached the tree.

Even delivery trucks could not avoid it, with many clipping its branches as they drove past.

There were also reports of thugs hiding in the branches and ambushing people.

The tree is of the Erythrina Lysistenon species, otherwise known as the coral or lucky bean tree.

Buffalo City Municipality spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said the removal showed the city took residents' complaints seriously.

Ndenze, B. 2009p. DA fights to retain seat in by-election battle. Published on Page 4, 02/07/2009.

Published on 02/07/2009 0101DD02/07/09 THUR NEWS4 AL

DA fights to retain seat in by-election battle

By BABALO NDENZE Council Reporter

POLITICAL parties in Buffalo City will be locking horns again when they compete for control of Ward 29 in a by-election next week.

The ward, which covers Beacon Bay, Nompumelelo, Abbotsford and Dorchester Heights, was left vacant when its councillor, the Democratic Alliance's John Cupido, joined the provincial Legislature after the April elections.

The by-election will take place next week Wednesday.

Candidates from the DA, ANC and Cope will be fighting for control of the ward, which has been the focus of two Daily Dispatch Community **Dialogues** where residents voiced concern over service delivery and safety.

The candidates are Rowan Thiele from the DA, Pumzile Mpangalala from the ANC and Cope's Xolelwa Dama.

Thiele said the DA was ready to retain control of the ward after weeks of door-to-door and awareness campaigns and petitions.

"We are getting feedback from residents as to what they expect from council," he said.

"Safety is a big concern. We are also getting feedback from the police from the Beacon Bay police station. Crime is relatively low in our area and that's quite encouraging."

Thiele said the DA would source more funding for CCTV cameras in any crime hotspots in the area.

"We are looking at getting a roaming CCTV system that can move around. And the Community Police Forum has taken a decision to purchase the cameras from donations. The cameras will be mobile. We are also looking at getting one at the entrance of Nompumelelo."

Thiele said general service delivery would also be a key focus for the DA. "As far as council goes, we want to retain the ward. We also want to maintain and increase service delivery and bridge the gap between Nompumelelo and the Beacon Bay area.

"The schools also need to start talking to each other. But this is not a short-term goal. It's a five- to 15-year plan because at the end of the day we are all in one ward," Thiele added.

Cope spokesperson Nkosifikile Gqomo said his party was confident of a good result next week.

“In terms of preparations, we are working. We’ve got teams of people going door to door. This area is a DA area, but we will be putting up a fight as Cope and we hope we will win that fight.”

Gqomo said during the April polls, Cope performed better than the ruling party in the ward and they were hoping to repeat this.

Mpangalala would not comment on his candidacy and ANC Chief Whip Sonny du Plessis and election co-ordinator Mhleli Matika also would not comment.

Caption for image:

BACK TO THE HUSTINGS: Election posters line the streets of Beacon Bay. Picture: ALAN EASON

Ndenze, B. 2009q. ANC take elderly and very sick to vote in Buffalo City by-election. Published on Page 4, 09/07/2009.

Published on 09/07/2009 0101DD09/07/09 THUR NEWS4 AL

ANC take elderly and very sick to vote in Buffalo City by-election

By BABALO NDENZE Council Reporter

SICK and elderly voters were brought out in their numbers by the ANC in its bid to wrest control of Buffalo City Ward 29 from the DA at yesterday's by-election.

At the Nompumelelo voting station, one elderly woman cast her vote from inside a car because she needed an oxygen tank to help her breathe.

The woman, who refused to be named, said she was not happy at being taken to the polling station. "I didn't like it at all. The ANC people took me there. I'm not feeling very well."

ANC Mdidiyeli Jiba branch secretary Pumla Nazo said she was aware of the circumstances surrounding the sickly woman, and did not approve of her being taken there in that state.

"I did ask when I saw the woman with a tube. I said she should have been left at home," said Nazo.

She said her family had agreed to take her to the polling station.

The by-election was held to elect a ward councillor to succeed former DA councillor John Cupido, who vacated the post when he joined the provincial Legislature after the April 22 elections.

The ward covers Beacon Bay, Nompumelelo, Abbotsford and Dorchester Heights. At the Beaconhurst High School polling station only 120 voters had cast ballots by 10am. In Nompumelelo, 556 voters cast ballots by 1pm. The ward has over 3000 registered voters.

Candidates from the DA, ANC and Cope are fighting for control of the ward, which has been the focus of two Daily Dispatch Community **Dialogues** where residents voiced concern over service delivery and safety.

The candidates are Rowan Thiele from the DA, Pumzile Mpangalala of the ANC and Cope's Xolelwa Dama.

Speaking from the Beaconhurst High School polling station, DA provincial spokesperson Bobby Stevenson said that by 12pm, 276 voters had cast their votes.

"It was about a 10 percent voter turnout by lunch time. It will probably be 20 to 30 percent at the end of the day in this area.

“But it will be a neck and neck contest with the ANC. Support for the DA and ANC is evenly matched and it all depends on whose voters turn out. By-elections are known for low voter turn out and apathy.”

The DA received 82 percent of the vote in 2006, compared to the ANC’s 12.91.

Stevenson and DA councillor Annette Rademeyer were at the polling station to support the party’s young candidate.

“In the general elections the DA got a lot of young voters – we have to make sure we take care of that young constituency,” added Stevenson.

In Nompumelelo – an ANC stronghold in the ward – voters had come out in slightly larger numbers.

“This voter turn-out is making me smile,” said Mpangalala, who was kept busy ferrying elderly voters to and from the polling station in Nompumelelo.

“There are quite a lot of them at the moment and we are bringing a lot of them here and doing it ourselves,” said Mpangalala, who is also the deputy chairperson of the ANC Mdidiyeli Jiba branch.

He said the figures would increase as people returned from work.

Dama was optimistic that Cope would perform well. “We are happy at the voter turnout. People are still at work, but we’re confident. We are focusing on the DA.”

Dama added: “We are not afraid of the ANC.”

Caption for image:

BATTLE FOR DA SEAT: Voter Kerry Clark casts her ballot in the Beacon Bay- Nompumelelo by-election. Picture: MLONDOLOZI MBOLO

Ndenze, B. 2009r. Security training for domestics: Police draw up anti-crime programme
Published on Page 6, 03/09/2009.

Published on 03/09/2009 0101DD03/09/09 THUR NEWS6 AL

Security training for domestics: Police draw up anti-crime programme

By BABALO NDENZE Council Reporter

BEACON Bay thieves beware – domestic workers have joined the fight against crime and will soon be better equipped by local police with ways to ward off criminals.

Police are busy putting together a programme to assist them in the fight against crime.

Crime prevention officer Captain Steve Russon from the Beacon Bay police station said domestic workers usually bore the brunt of home invasions and robberies.

“But we are still busy with it (programme) at this stage. We will be having a meeting. So we will have to consult to see if we’re in agreement on what we’ve put together so far,” Russon said.

He said they would be taking the police’s general safety pamphlets and incorporating them into the programme.

“We will work through them systematically and make it more user-friendly. It will be in both English and isiXhosa. At the end of the day we need to make sure we reach the right target,” said Russon.

Domestic worker Patience Dlabati said she fully supported the initiative to make them more vigilant and aware.

“I’m not sure if it will help but I’m optimistic. Yesterday, for instance, there were thieves who broke in and tried to steal the generator from the garage.

“I wasn’t in at the time, but she (the employer) pressed the panic button. They managed to escape. This is the second time this has happened,” Dlabati said.

She said the panic buttons worked but a more defensive tool like a pepper spray gun would also be useful.

“When you are under threat you need something to fight with,” Dlabati said.

Victoria Bhishoti, another domestic worker in the area, said the programme would help them a lot.

“These young men broke into the house while I was here. We also need these panic buttons,” Bhishoti said.

In May, Beacon Bay residents formed a Domestic Workers' and Gardeners' Forum where domestics in the area raised a number of concerns about their safety.

Crime and ways to prevent it dominated the inaugural gathering.

The forum came together after the Beacon Bay community called for its establishment at a Daily Dispatch Community **Dialogue** .

Bertie Heckroodt, chairperson of the sector policing forum in the Edly Simons area, said the sector committee took the initiative to establish a forum to create an awareness and vigilance.

Heckroodt said the programme was still being developed but would include tips on which numbers to call in an emergency.

The domestics would also be taken through practical questions they should ask when a stranger or a suspicious person rocks up at the front door.

“We will also be looking at things like how do you handle domestic violence. The spray gun is definitely something to be considered,” Heckroodt said.

Caption for image:

WATCH OUT, TSOTSI: Beacon Bay domestic worker Patience Dlabati stands at her employer's doorway with a can of pepper spray. Picture: NIGEL LOUW

Ndenze, B. 2009s. New Nompumelelo-B Bay clinic body to be set up. Published on Page 3, 08/09/2009.

Published on 08/09/2009 0101DD08/09/09 TUES NEWS3 AL, 08/09/2009 0101DD08/09/09 TUES NEWS2nd3 AL

New Nompumelelo-B Bay clinic body to be set up

By BABALO NDENZE Council Reporter

RESIDENTS of Beacon Bay and Nompumelelo, after months of complaining about lack of service at their local clinics, will now have a direct hand in sorting out problems.

In an effort to improve primary healthcare services, residents are in the process of forming a clinic committee to address health concerns in the two neighbouring areas.

The Beacon Bay and Nompumelelo clinics have frustrated residents for some time. Complaints about the clinic service were also raised during the Daily Dispatch community **dialogue** held earlier this year.

Ward councillor Rowan Thiele said a number of issues were raised at last week's meeting in Nompumelelo where the committee was discussed and people encouraged to join it.

The structure of the clinic committee, as legislated in the National Health Act, would consist of the local councillor, the community and clinic heads.

Duties of the committee would include drawing up an action plan to improve the situation at both clinics and working to "improve the general community health".

"Staff from both clinics will sit on the committee. At the Nompumelelo meeting last week we had about 25 to 30 members of the community, three officials and the district supervisor," Thiele said.

Nompumelelo resident Andile Nxoboshwane said: "It (the committee) will ... bring community and clinic together because people are complaining that they have to wait from 9am to 5pm some times.

"The biggest problem here in Nompumelelo is the shortage of staff. Even people from Ducats depend on that clinic."

Residents of Beacon Bay met last night to discuss the committee and get others to join.

Beacon Bay service delivery activist Judy Sanan said she fully supported the committee's formation.

"There have been many complaints about the way people are treated and things like shortages of medicine."

BCM spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said meetings had been held with the EC Department of Health to increase the subsidy to fund BCM council-approved unfunded professional nurse posts.

“As for the committee, we can only welcome such initiatives,” Ngwenya said.

Ndenze, B. 2009t. What do we get for our rates? Published on Page 4, 01/10/2009.

Published on 01/10/2009 0101DD01/10/09 THUR NEWS4 AL

What do we get for our rates?

By BABALO NDENZE Council Reporter

SERVICE delivery took centre stage during last night's Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue in Buffalo Flats. About 50 residents from Buffalo Flats, Pefferville, Egoli and Parkside attended.

The dialogue was the fourth in the series of civic journalism initiatives introduced by the Daily Dispatch to give residents of different neighbourhoods a platform to voice their concerns.

The previous three **dialogues** were held in Beacon Bay, Nompumelelo and Southernwood.

Addressing the audience last night, Dispatch deputy editor Bongani Siqoko said the previous **dialogues** had forced authorities to act on some of the issues raised.

He also called on the community to find solutions where possible.

Telana Halley, 25, who has lived in Buffalo Flats all her life, said service delivery was by far the biggest problem in the area.

"The main thing I have a problem with is ... With all the (rates) increases we are not seeing an increase in service delivery. There are no bins in this community. There is not one blue bin in the neighbourhood."

She said the streets were so filthy they were forced to organise a big clean-up on Heritage Day.

She added that the turnout by members of the community was "shocking".

"Everyone wants to complain, but no one wants to make a difference," she said to applause from the audience.

Halley said refuse collection, grass cutting and potholes also needed attention.

Adam Fray, another resident, agreed with Halley saying service delivery was "appalling".

"We pay rates but look at our streets. I feel shy when people come to visit from other towns."

Nosipo Matika, from Egoli, said her main issue was the lack of stormwater drains in her area.

"The municipality has been asked since 1998 to get storm-water drains in Egoli," she said.

Residents also demanded to know where the local councillors were during the meeting, and called on them to do something about the problems affecting their neighbourhoods. —
babalon@dispatch.co.za

Caption for image:

MAKING A STRONG POINT: Community member Adam Fray lists problems during an open discussion at the Daily Dispatch **Dialogues** at the Buffalo Flats Primary School yesterday.
Picture: ALAN EASON

Ndenze, B. 2009u. Residents rained out of homes. Published on Page 4, 14/10/2009

Published on 14/10/2009 0101DD14/10/09 WED NEWS4 AL

Residents rained out of homes

By BABALO NDENZE Council Reporter

EGOLI residents have had to dig trenches around their homes to prevent rain water from flooding them.

They said this was because **Buffalo** City Municipality (BCM) had failed to put in place a proper storm water drainage system.

Shoddy workmanship on the houses has also been blamed for the flooding.

Joyce Welman, who has been dubbed “mayor” of Egoli, has taken it upon herself to help resolve the problems facing the neighbourhood.

Welman said the past few days of rain had been a major headache for residents, many of whom had been living with the problem for the past 11 years. “It has rained for a few days now and people have been forced to open a few trenches to prevent the water from seeping into their houses. Nothing has been done about this yet,” said Welman.

Residents also raised their concern over the storm water system during a recent Dispatch Community Dialogue in **Buffalo Flats** .

Welman said authorities had failed to address the matter. “These people don’t take notice of us. Maybe it’s because we don’t have a councillor.”

When the Dispatch visited the area yesterday Welman pointed out the only two storm water drains. Both were damaged.

She said with the rainy season starting, the problem would get worse.

“Some of the houses around are knee-deep in water. How can they expect people to stay healthy in this moisture, and the summer rainy season is approaching?”

Egoli resident Eugene Klassen said her house had been flooded for over a decade. “It’s been 11 years this has been happening. The municipality has not come here. We are literally swimming in these houses. We have to put our belongings on top of bricks when it rains,” said Klassen.

Felicity Malgas said the problem had been affecting her since the day she took up residence.

“It’s been flooding since we moved in,” she said.

BCM spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said that a few months ago, executive mayor Zukisa Faku, along with representatives from the national Human Settlements Department, visited Egoli.

“The compelling reason for this inspection and walk-about which was undertaken, was to gain a first-hand account of the plight that our people in the area find themselves being confronted with,” said Ngwenya.

He said the 382 low-cost housing units in Egoli were developed in 1997 by the **Buffalo Flats** Development Trust.

“The houses require rectification as they have structural defects, which are affecting the integrity of the house as a whole.

“A report is currently being compiled which will detail the extent of the repair work that will be undertaken in the rectification project,” said Ngwenya. — babalon@dispatch.co.za

Caption for image:

SOMEONE HAS TO: Joyce Welman, who has been dubbed 'mayor' of Egoli, has taken it upon herself to help resolve the problems facing the neighbourhood. Picture: PHILLIP NOTHNAGEL

Ndenze, B. 2009v. New flats for Southernwood: Notorious St George's park makes way for housing. Published on Page 6, 19/12/2009.

Published on 19/12/2009 0101SD19/12/09 SAT DISP NEWS6 AL

New flats for Southernwood: Notorious St George's park makes way for housing

By BABALO NDENZE Council Reporter

SOUTHERNWOOD'S notorious St George's park is no longer, and will be replaced by a R100 million nine-storey residential apartment development.

Construction on the site has already begun, with bulldozers and trucks busy with the foundation phase.

The development is being carried out by Own Haven Housing Association and should be complete by June 2010.

Own Haven is the same agency responsible for the R21 million revamp of Skyways. The 14-storey building was combined with its neighbouring block, Rose Gardens and given a new name – Skyview.

Andrew Wiseman, managing director of Own Haven Housing Association, said the new development, Southernwood Square, will be in the shape of a horseshoe with five cores around a centralised tower.

He said the land had been purchased at a "nominal" price of R25000 from Buffalo City Municipality (BCM).

"The land was made available at a nominal price by council. Council identifies parcels of land suitable for social housing and that was one of them," said Wiseman.

The apartment block will have 249 units comprising of bachelor, one bedroom, two bedroom and three bedroom flats.

It will also boast a "well-designed" playground, community facility, laundry room, energy and water efficient technology, security and will be disability friendly.

"Southernwood Square is strategically located within walking distance of East London's CBD, beaches and several other significant recreational and commercial centres. The site is also located within walking distance to one of East London's main hospitals," said Wiseman.

Residents and businesses near the site have welcomed the development, with some saying the park should be done away with as it had brought a number of bad elements to their neighbourhood.

During the Daily Dispatch Community **Dialogues** in the area residents said the recreational parks were no longer safe for children and had become havens for criminals and drunkards.

Residents said the overgrown park in St George's Road had deteriorated to such an extent that some people defecated in the park and a number of crimes were committed there.

Kate Makan, who works at the nearby Fairways Superette, said the development was a good investment for the area.

Resident Zandisile Baku said development was just what Southernwood needed.

“That park was never really that important based on the situation in Southernwood at the moment. Bad things happened in that park with people getting raped, and so on,” said Baku.

He hoped the complex would be affordable. “People have problems and they can't afford flats like Skyview where the pricing is high,” said Baku.

Ward councillor Robert Muzzel had no problems with the park being rezoned and developed into a residential area.

“In Southernwood the housing shortage is critical with the influx of students. The park was not serving the purpose it was meant for. I'm all for this development.” — babalon@dispatch.co.za

Caption for image:

BIRD'S EYE VIEW: An artist's impression of what the development will look like. Picture: SUPPLIED

Caption for image:

HARD AT WORK: Construction vehicles busy digging at the site yesterday. Picture: PHILIP NOTHNAGEL

Caption for image:

Nkonkobe, Z. 2009a. Residents furious over stinking sewage from neighbour's house. Published on Page 5, 30/09/2009.

Published on 30/09/2009 0101DD30/09/09 WED NEWS5 AL, 30/09/2009 0101DD30/09/09 WED NEWS2nd5 AL

Residents furious over stinking sewage from neighbour's house

By *ZISANDA NKONKOBÉ*

TWO East London families are battling to live with sewage flowing from a faulty pipe in their yard – fed from a neighbour's toilet.

When the Daily Dispatch visited the Parkside houses in Phillip Road yesterday, the stench was overwhelming.

Jolene Arenes pointed to a large pipe in her yard that leads from a house next door.

She said sewage from the pipe spilled into her yard and spread into her other neighbour's garden as well.

“It always stinks here because of this,” said Arenes, who pointed out that the house where the sewage originated was not affected because it's not in their yard.

“We put a mat over the opening of the pipe to try to lessen the smell but it doesn't help much.”

Both neighbours complain of the constant smell they have to live with, and are worried about the health risks it poses. “I have children living here so I'm really worried about this. My little girl has had a skin condition on her face since she was born. We also worry because we have dogs here and they sometimes go sniffing about in the sewage.”

Gaylene Oliphant, who lives in the next house, said: “It stinks here, and it used to come into our yard. My mother and I have had to put a fence up in our yard to stop the sewage from getting in.”

Both families said they reported the matter to Buffalo City Municipality every time the sewage spilled into their yards, which they claimed “happened a lot”.

They said the municipality cleaned up the mess, but had not yet fixed the problem.

“We have reported the matter to the municipality so many times,” said Oliphant. “Sometimes they do come out and clean but other times they don't. I think they are getting tired of this. But so are we.”

Buffalo City spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said: “We do not fix broken pipes inside people's yards; however we will clean up ... and our plumbers would offer advice on the cause of the problem and how to sort it out.” He advised residents to “contact our health department and lay a complaint”.

Nkonkobe, Z. 2009b. Kids' playground a hooligans' hangout: But BCM ready to sort it out in R5m upgrade of city parks. Published on Page 4, 01/10/2009.

Published on 01/10/2009 0101DD01/10/09 THUR NEWS4 AL

Kids' playground a hooligans' hangout: But BCM ready to sort it out in R5m upgrade of city parks

By ZISANDA NKONKOBÉ

IT'S A children's playground with the remains of what was once swing sets and a slide but children keep away.

The unkempt Buffalo Flats playground in East London has been taken over by youths who, residents say, drink alcohol and smoke drugs in the surrounding bush.

But Buffalo City Municipality spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said yesterday that the park – between Tomorrow Land Educare and Greenpoint Bowling Club – was in line for some of the money set aside to sort out the city's parks.

“One of our key projects for this year is to develop open spaces and beautify them,” he said.

“The municipality has set aside R5million for children's playgrounds, grass cutting and bush clearing in all these parks.

“The Buffalo Flats park is also in line for this.”

Buffalo Flats resident Pamela Kiewiets described the park as their biggest problem.

“Day and night there is loud music coming from the cars that are always parked around there. They drink, they urinate around our yards and they do drugs.”

Kiewiets said she had complained to the police and the municipality on numerous occasions.

The police had once chased the youths out of the Educare centre after a report that they were smoking drugs. But officials' efforts had had no long-term effect, she said.

Residents resorted to burning the grass out of frustration at the lack of effort from the municipality.

Freddie Blignaut, owner of Greenpoint Bowling Club, said that the group of youngsters not only sat around smoking in the park but they removed slabs from the fence surrounding his property.

They also got up to mischief in his yard. “These kids keep breaking the fence into my land. They sit between the trees and smoke,” said Blignaut.

“They also steal from me. I once caught them stealing my braai stand. And because of the broken bottles that they always leave lying around people have also started dumping on my land.”

Blignaut said he had called the police at least five times this year, but the youths returned as soon as the police had left.

Caption for image:

PARK PROBLEM: Youths smoke drugs and chase the kids away. Picture: MLONDOLOZI MBOLO

Caption for image:

Nkonkobe, Z. 2009c. The bridge under troubled waters: Parkside traffic in danger when it rains. Published on Page 6, 08/10/2009.

Published on 08/10/2009 0101DD08/10/09 THUR NEWS6 AL

The bridge under troubled waters: Parkside traffic in danger when it rains

By ZISANDA NKONKOBÉ

RAIN may be welcome in other parts of drought-stricken Eastern Cape, but heavy falls are a nuisance in Parkside when residents try to cross a flooded bridge.

“When it rains here water comes up really high,” community leader Dan Bolman told the Daily Dispatch this week. “The bridge . . . just collects water from both sides. What makes it worse is the river that flows underneath it. When the river rises it becomes a nightmare to drive here.”

Bolman represented a number of community members who raised the issue of the problem bridge at a recent Community Dialogue hosted by the Dispatch at Buffalo Flats Primary School last week.

The dialogue gave residents of Buffalo Flats, Parkside and Pefferville an opportunity to bring up their concerns – and seek solutions.

Many complained that when the bridge became flooded it led to accidents and at times made it impossible to get in and out of Parkside.

They also complained about the lack of a proper pedestrian walkway from the bridge, forcing pedestrians to walk on a gravel path.

Bolman said the stormwater drainage at the bridge was the problem as the two drainage points were not sufficient to cope.

“The bridge doesn’t drain water properly,” he said. “The drains are there but they are clogged up by rubbish. People who dump their rubbish there are another contributing factor.”

When the Dispatch visited the bridge this week, pieces of cardboard and grass cuttings blocked the two drains at the bridge.

Leading up to the bridge, pedestrians have to walk in the road and dodge cars without a pavement, or take a steep gravel path that is almost completely obscured by trees.

Buffalo City Municipality spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said the matter of the bridge had been raised by the residents of Parkside in recent budget and Integrated Development Plan hearings held by the city.

Ngwenya said the main purpose of the meeting was to hear directly from the people residing in the areas of concern where they would like the municipality to focus on ensuring service delivery.

“Finances have been allocated in this financial year to the construction of a pavement leading to the bridge,” he said.

“The matter has been referred to our engineering services for further input.”

Caption for image:

IMPEDING THE FLOW: Blocked drains on the bridge that leads up to Parkside. Picture: THEO JEPHTHA

Caption for image:

Rademeyer, A. 2009. Letter to the Editor: BCM needs skills upgrade. Published on 23/02/2009.

BCM needs skills upgrade

I ATTENDED your historic first Community Dialogue, which was held in **Beacon Bay** on Tuesday evening. I must congratulate the Dispatch for taking this initiative and hope that the dialogue will be extended throughout the suburbs of Buffalo City.

Largely, the focus was on crime but some of the speakers touched on a lack of service delivery, potholes, grass not being cut and other municipal-related problems. Many people who attended came up with ideas on how the community could help each other to overcome the various problems facing the community, from volunteer programmes to getting more involved in organisations like the Community Policing Forum.

I mentioned the fact that no one had mentioned holding the municipality accountable. Whilst volunteering can be a supplementary activity, the residents of Buffalo City are paying rates and taxes and the municipality is supposed to deliver a service for the money that they are being paid. The municipality should be held accountable for not delivering the services that they are being paid for. All of our properties are in the process of being re-valued, which will mean more revenue for the municipality. I wonder whether we can expect increased service delivery to go along with the increased payments.

With all the in-fighting amongst the ANC, and corruption scandals being the order of the day, sight has been lost of service delivery. We hardly have any directors – these people, some of whom have years and years of experience, are leaving in droves which leaves the municipality rudderless.

Money is being wasted on frivolities whilst there is a real and urgent need, especially amongst our poor and impoverished communities.

It is unthinkable that a city can want to get rid of people who have expertise and experience and replace them with people who are clearly out of their depth. The only solution is to employ people who are qualified and who have the experience in the critical departments of the municipality, in order for service delivery to take priority in the city.

Stability has to be restored to this municipality by employing directors who are qualified and competent for the job, and bringing back some of the directors who have left. – Councillor Annette Rademeyer, Democratic Alliance

Sangotsha, V. 2009a. Crime fight tops B Bay agenda. Published on Page 1, 18/03/2009.

Published on 18/03/2009 0101DD18/03/09 WED NEWS1 AL, 18/03/2009 0101DD18/03/09 WED NEWS2nd1 AL

Crime fight tops B Bay agenda

By VUYOLWETHU SANGOTSHA

CRIME and how to fight it came under the spotlight at the first Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue last night in Beacon Bay.

Residents from across the economic and demographic spectrum agreed that crime was a major issue.

The dialogue was introduced by Daily Dispatch editor Andrew Trench, who said the community debates were aimed at giving ordinary people a platform to voice concerns.

The initiative was part of the newspaper's civic journalism.

"We've come to listen to what you've got to say," he said, adding it was the first time the Dispatch had launched such an initiative, and he was not aware of any other newspaper in the country doing it.

Residents agreed that crime was the major issue, but also expressed concern on such issues as slow service delivery, quality of education, street lighting, traffic and bad road conditions, including potholes.

Some residents pointed to the need to help the under-developed area of neighbouring Nompumelelo.

Pumla Nazo, a member of the ANC, complained about ward meetings, saying they were held separately in Beacon Bay and Nompumelelo. She argued there should be joint meetings as residents lived in one ward.

"We need to assist to improve Nompumelelo and integrate both areas," Pumla added.

Most speakers acknowledged imbalances between schools in Beacon Bay and Nompumelelo, and called for action to uplift schools from Nompumelelo.

Others said that community policing forums (CPF) could do more to combat crime, suggesting the establishment of street committees to help.

Local ward councillor John Cupido insisted that with the support of the community, the CPF could fight crime properly, but that locals needed to become more involved.

The dialogue was well received with speakers praising the Dispatch for providing such a platform. Another will be held at Sinempumelelo Primary School in Nompumelelo at 6pm today.

Sangotsha, V. 2009b. BCM has failed us, says Nompumelelo. Published on Page 1, 19/03/2009.

Published on 19/03/2009 0101DD19/03/09 THURS NEWS1 AL, 19/03/2009 0101DD19/03/09 THURS NEWS2nd1 AL

BCM has failed us, says Nompumelelo

By VUYOLWETHU SANGOTSHA

RESIDENTS from Nompumelelo township have accused the Buffalo City Municipality (BCM) of neglecting their area.

This emerged during the second Daily Dispatch Community **Dialogues** meeting, held at Sinempumelelo Primary School last night. Residents raised a number of issues including high levels of crime, service delivery, unemployment, illegal occupation of RDP houses, roads in a bad state, blown street lights, failure to collect refuse, high rates, and nepotism.

Other issues raised were the lack of facilities and drug abuse, which were linked to high levels of crime.

“Whenever there are job opportunities people employ their families and friends,” said Simphiwe Nxokoshane. He argued that local youth needed to be empowered, and felt that BCM should do more to educate young people about its projects.

Nomnikelo Daka complained there was no community hall, and as a result the elderly had to queue in an open field in bad weather for pension grants.

Another resident said: “Since last week the refuse had not been collected. Dogs are tearing these bags and this poses a health hazard to our children, who are playing in the streets.”

The community also complained of the failure to build a high school and upgrade existing schools.

Daily Dispatch Deputy Editor Bongani Siqoko said the **dialogues** were a platform for communities to voice concerns.

IMore reports, page 4

Sangotsha, V. 2009c. Township meeting has heated finale. Published on Page 4, 20/03/2009.

Published on 20/03/2009 0101DD20/03/09 FRI NEWS4 AL

Township meeting has heated finale

By VUYOLWETHU SANGOTSHA

THE second Daily Dispatch Community Dialogue ended in near chaos at Nompumelelo township on Wednesday night.

Part of the crowd of over 100 who packed a school hall at Sinempumelelo Primary became unruly when a resident questioned the motives of having the meeting.

The man said he could not understand why the Daily Dispatch did not bring panelists from political parties. "We are going to vote for the political parties and not for your newspaper. Politicians are the ones who must come to listen to our problems," fumed the resident, before accusing the Dispatch of not having the interests of their community at heart. The man argued that parties should be brought to the **dialogues** so they could be accountable to the people.

He said when hosting similar meetings the electronic media always invited political parties to debate with the audience.

After residents shouted him down and ejected him from the meeting, some wearing Congress of the People (Cope) and ANC gear started clapping their hands, singing and dancing. At this stage, the meeting became uncontrollable.

At the beginning of the evening, the Dispatch's deputy editor, Bongani Siqoko, told residents that the dialogue was not a platform for political parties to campaign for votes.

Siqoko said it was a platform for ordinary people to voice their concerns, which the paper would then write about.

Earlier in the evening, residents raised issues affecting their community like high levels of crime, poor service delivery, unemployment, illegal occupation of RDP houses, roads being in a bad state, broken taps, blown street lights, no community hall, failure to collect refuse, high rates and nepotism.

Other issues raised were the lack of facilities, and drug abuse among the youth, which they linked to high levels of crime.

In response to some of the issues raised, local ward councillor John Cupido later told the Dispatch he had been constantly fighting with the municipality to fix the problems of residents.

"People must realise that I'm not the municipality. I'm one of the people who has been fighting with the municipality to make it better here," he said.

Caption for image:

LOTS TO SAY: Residents of Nompumelelo township listen and talk about the issues that affect them. Picture: THEO JEPHTHA

Siqoko, B. 2009. Deputy editor's dispatch. Published on Page 8, 07/10/2009

Published on 07/10/2009 0101DD07/10/09 WED NEWS8 AL

I AM convinced that most of our councillors are taking their constituencies for granted while others are not up to the demands of their jobs.

After four Daily Dispatch Community **Dialogues** , I am confident enough to make this bold statement. You see councillors are supposed to be playing a very critical role in linking municipal authorities with the different communities out there. They are expected to form a bridge between the municipalities and communities. Not only that, they must also facilitate effective communication and be responsible for informing those in authority about the problems, needs, frustrations, aspirations and potential problems that may arise in their respective communities.

Since the beginning of the year, the Daily Dispatch has been running a series of meetings around the city in an effort to get the residents of Buffalo City to speak out about their problems. So far we have done four – in Beacon Bay, Nompumelelo, Southernwood and Buffalo Flats. The one thing that has been common to all these meetings has been the community's desire to be heard.

This heart's cry was even louder at the Buffalo Flats dialogue. And while the residents of Buffalo Flats, Parkridge, Pefferville and Egoli, who packed the hall to capacity, used the dialogue to voice their problems with the lack of service delivery in their areas, they were equally frustrated by the fact that none of their councillors were present.

Councillors Sonny du Plessis, Mayenzeke Dinizulu, Koko Qebeyi and Siyabonga Jabavu were absent and missed out on an opportunity to engage with their constituencies.

One can only wonder if they understand the role they are mandated to play.

In the three other **dialogues** – Beacon Bay, Nompumelelo and Southernwood – residents had also expressed unhappiness over their councillors and complained about the lack of service delivery in their areas. But I must say it was nice having councillors John Cupido and Robbie Muzzell in the crowd. I am sure they also got a clear understanding of what their communities expect of them.

Caption for image:

Sokopo, A. 2009a. Row over overcrowded school: Parents, suburbanites object to new site for different reasons Published on Page 6, 21/03/2009.

Published on 21/03/2009 0101SD21/03/09 SAT NEWS6 AL

Row over overcrowded school: Parents, suburbanites object to new site for different reasons

By ASA SOKOPO Education Reporter

A HIGH school in East London is so overcrowded that there are 130 children crammed into one classroom – and pupils walk over desks because there is no legroom.

Yet despite this severe overcrowding at Sakhikamva High School in Nompumelelo township, residents are resisting plans to build a new high school in a nearby middle-class suburb.

And residents of Beacon Bay, where the Education Department wants to build the new school, are opposed to their neighbourhood being designated as the proposed site.

Now these two communities – separated only by the N2 freeway – are divided over the issue, while more than 850 pupils in Sakhikamva are squashed into 10 ramshackle wooden classrooms.

Desks are packed so closely together that pupils walk over them to get to their seats.

“We need a better school but it seems the community is divided on this. Our parents are fighting over the move,” Sakhikamva Grade 11 pupil Ondela Sokomani said when the Dispatch visited this week.

Details of the tug-of-war emerged during the first hosting of the Dispatch Community **Dialogues** on Tuesday night in Beacon Bay.

The same issue was heatedly discussed at another community dialogue the next night in Nompumelelo.

While Nompumelelo residents say the move will make the school expensive and inaccessible, Beacon Bay residents believe it will attract crime and increase traffic to their suburb.

The Department of Education says land for Sakhikamva High School has been located in Coad Road in Beacon Bay – 4.5kms from the township.

Residents of Coad Road said they were concerned about the traffic and activities on the road which may lead to crime.

“Those children are from Nompumelelo and the fact that they are from there will show in their behaviour ... They are ill-disciplined,” a neighbourhood resident said.

Another resident said, in principle, he was not completely against the school, but was concerned about break-ins in the area.

“Traffic is going to be much heavier but if it’s going to happen, it’s going to happen,” another resident said.

Meanwhile, parents of pupils at the school said children from the township would not be able to adapt to the suburbs.

Sakhikamva parent Amanda Mazaka said: “How are children from the townships going to adapt to school life in the suburbs? Will they even be accepted?”

Another resident, Pumzile Mpangalala said the move from Nompumelelo to Beacon Bay would disadvantage the community.

“If the school is in the suburbs, how is it going to cater for township children?”

“Look at Beaconsburg; that school is for the elite and children from Nompumelelo get accepted with difficulty,” he said.

But the principal of Sakhikamva, Mpumzi Mab-usela said he did not understand his community’s resistance.

“We all agreed to this in 2007 and the community agreed that the current location is not appropriate for a school,” he said.

Mabusela said the school was established in 1999 on a farm called Nompumelelo.

In 2004, the school was moved from the farm to its current location which consists of plots owned by members of the community.

“There is no space for a school in Nompumelelo but not only that, the environment the school is in is not conducive for learning,” he said.

Another Nompumelelo resident, Mkhusele Mawethu said having a school which caters for black pupils in a white suburb would not work and alternate land needed to be located.

To solve the fracas, ward 29 councillor John Cupido advised those opposed to the school being built in Coad Road to appeal to the department.

Education spokesperson Malibongwe Mtima said the site was given the go-ahead because the community and school governing body recommended it, saying they wanted the best.

Mtima could not give a date for the school’s construction, but said it would be built in the coming financial year.

Caption for image:

CRAMPED FOR SPACE: Over 130 Grade 10 pupils are crammed into their class with teacher Hazel Manqphu at Sakhikamva High School in Nompumelelo. Picture: NIGEL LOUW

Caption for image:

Sokopo, A. 2009b. New mall opens its doors. Published on Page 3, 26/03/2009.

Published on 26/03/2009 0101DD26/03/09 THUR NEWS3 AL, 26/03/2009 0101DD26/03/09 THUR NEWS2nd3 AL

New mall opens its doors: First seven stores are only the beginning

By ASA SOKOPO

DEVELOPERS of the new multi-million rand shopping centre in Beacon Bay are confident of success, despite the gloomy economy.

This will be the second shopping centre slated to open in East London this year, with Hemingway's Mall scheduled for the end of the year. And today will mark the first day of trading for some of the shops at the new mall, called Beacon Bay Crossing.

While construction is not entirely completed, phases of the mall are gradually being opened and preparations are already in place to construct a traffic circle on the busy Bonza Bay Road.

Beacon Bay Crossing, located next to Nompumelelo township, will open seven stores tomorrow.

Project manager Denis Peens, of Facilities Management and Design, said that despite the economic downturn, research indicated that East London, Mthatha and Queenstown shoppers required a destination shopping centre.

"It's the first time we've had these names in East London. We have been very selective of the tenants we chose," he said.

The first phase of the mall will be made up of Hi-Fi Corporation, Tekkie Town, Meltz, Altech Autopage, Outdoor Warehouse, Cash Crusaders and Dial-a-Bed.

While Peens was reluctant to name the shops for the second part of phase one, to open in a month's time, he said they would be unique in East London.

"We are still negotiating to bring new blood to East London," Peens said.

Behind the centre is a valley which Peens said would soon be modified for enthusiasts of quad biking, BMX riding, mountain biking, and rope climbing.

"We're even going to have a place where concerts will be held," he said.

The location of the new mall has raised questions about its co-existence with Nompumelelo.

Last week residents who attended one of the Dispatch Community **Dialogues** in the township berated "businesses" for failing to employ the community.

Peens said they were working in partnership with Nompumelelo residents. He said after a spate of thefts on site when construction began this time last year, a meeting was held at the home of community leader Andrew Dlamini.

Following the meeting, the thefts ceased and many people from Nompumelelo were employed, Peens said.

“We have to embrace (the community) because we believe that we will be generating income from them,” he said.

But Dlamini and fellow resident Alfred Daka both said they were approached by Peens to compile lists of unemployed residents, but nothing came from it.

“They need to consult all structures in the community ... there are very few people from the community working there,” a resident, Mpumzi Mpangalala, said.

Workers on site, however, refuted this, saying most of their colleagues were from Nompumelelo.

“There may be over 200 people from Nompumelelo working on the site,” said one worker, who did not want to be named.

Caption for image:

HAVE MALL, WILL SHOP: The valley behind the new Beacon Bay shopping centre forms a natural amphitheatre for outdoor activities. Picture: NIGEL LOUW

Sokopo, A. 2009c. Calming the traffic in Beacon Bay. Published on Page 3, 05/09/2009.

Calming the traffic in Beacon Bay

By ASA SOKOPO

ANOTHER traffic circle is on the cards at the entrance to the Nompumelelo township – indicating that appeals for traffic calming measures by Nompumelelo and Beacon Bay residents at the Dispatch **Dialogues** earlier this year did not fall on deaf ears.

One traffic circle has recently been constructed on Bonza Bay Road opposite the new shopping centre, Beacon Bay Crossing. Now a second one could follow soon after the construction of a motor dealership on the lower Bonza Bay Road.

According to developers Slipknot Investments 777, the construction of a circle at that location was one of BCM's specifications to control traffic in and out of the centre.

BCM's acting general manager in traffic planning and operations Sekela Sijadu said money was budgeted to build the circle at the intersection. He could not say when it would start: "We are still tying up loose ends."

Sijadu said that when developments are planned, the developers are required to submit an environmental impact assessment (EIA) which reveals traffic information.

"All the recommendations are in the EIA," he said.

Nompumelelo resident Mbonile Jamani, who is also a member of the settlement's steering committee, thought construction could start as early as Monday.

Jamani said there were also initially plans to install robots at the intersection but that plan had since fallen through.

Last month, BCM announced that it had set aside R25million to upgrade roads and infrastructure around Beacon Bay and surrounding areas over the next three years.

The spatial development plan indicated R2.8m would be spent next year. Projects include improvements to intersections in Bonza Bay Road and the mini-circle between Beaconhurst Drive and Hillcrest Drive.

Taxi driver Zilindile Msithweni said that, in his 27 years as a taxi driver in the Beacon Bay and Gonubie area, he had seen many accidents at the Nompumelelo and Gonubie intersection.

"There are all sorts of accidents here, one at least three times a week. If they can't install robots then they should at least build a circle. There are far too many cars here."

Another driver, Phindile Mbatsha from Mzamomhle in Gonubie, said the circle at Beacon Bay Crossing would not calm the traffic. "Cars from Nompumelelo come at a high speed and that causes many accidents," he said.

Caption for image:

HOW EFFECTIVE? The traffic circle near the new Beacon Bay Crossing shopping centre.
Picture: MLONDOLOZI MBOLO

Trench, A. 2009a. Dispatches From the Trench : Taking it to the people. Published 24/02/2009. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on 14 December 2009 at <http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/trench/2009/02/24/taking-it-to-the-people/>

Trench, A. 2009b. Dispatches from the Trench: Our Civic Journalism Monster Comes to Life. Published on 17/03/2009. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on 14 December 2009 at <http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/trench/2009/03/17/our-civic-journalism-monster-comes-to-life/>

Trench, A. 2009c. Dispatches From the Trench: 'Rock 'n' Roll Nompumelelo. Published 19/03/2009. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on 29 July 2009 at <http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/trench/2009/03/19/rock-n-roll-in-nompumelelo/>

Trench, A. 2009d. Editor's Dispatch. Published on Page 7, 25/03/2009. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on 29 July 2009 at <http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/dialogues/2009/03/25/editor's-dispatch/>

Published on 25/03/2009 0101DD25/03/09 WED NEWS7 AL

I SPENT a couple of evenings last week having my eyes opened. A number of colleagues and I hosted the first two in our series of community **dialogues**, which I have written about in this space before.

Readers may recall that the intention behind these meetings is for the paper to become involved in the issues that our readers really care about and to see what we can do to make a difference.

The first two meetings – in Beacon Bay and Nompumelelo – were well attended with the enthusiastic involvement of locals. They also had some unintended consequences.

For one, it brought home to me the amount of work that we need to do to build our grassroots contacts in neighbourhoods. In Beacon Bay, for example, residents spoke about an ongoing dispute regarding a new high school for the area. The same issue was raised in Nompumelelo. I'm ashamed to say it was the first we had come across this story, which serves to underline the work that we will need to do.

These meetings are also helping us to realign our news agenda in the paper to properly reflect the concerns and aspirations of our readers' lives. The first two meetings show that it's the bread-and-butter stuff that people care about. In Beacon Bay they spoke about street lights that didn't work, verges that needed cutting, trash that went uncollected, crime, potholes and traffic jams. In Nompumelelo the issues were not much different: a lack of basic services, crime and unemployment.

The things that get to people in these two neighbourhoods – as vastly different as they are – are remarkably similar.

What also struck me was the absolute lack of confidence that residents of both areas have in the ability of Buffalo City to fix or address these problems. There appears to be a general feeling of despondency. In Beacon Bay I asked residents if they thought that things like broken street lights, uncollected rubbish and a breakdown in other basics contributed to social problems like crime. There was a resounding "Yes".

Now, I don't know if this is true but it strikes me that a quick way of rebuilding confidence in the city and in people's perceptions of the quality of their lives is to simply start sorting out these basic services.

These are issues that will be high on the agenda of this newspaper in the months to come. Next Wednesday we'll be meeting the residents of Southernwood and I'm sure my eyes will be opened further. Come and join us there.

Trench, A. 2009e. Dispatches From the Trench. Published on Page 9, 23/09/2009.

Published on 23/09/2009 0101DD23/09/09 WED NEWS9 AL

OVER the next couple of months the editorial team here at the Dispatch will be starting a new round of our Community **Dialogues** which we began earlier this year before the elections.

The **dialogues** are about us getting out into the neighbourhoods we cover and trying to understand a little more about our readers and the kind of campaigns we need to be looking at in our pages.

Earlier this year we held **dialogues** in Beacon Bay, Nompumelelo and Southernwood which were enormously successful from a journalistic point of view. We are still working our way through the issues that residents raised with us and there have been a couple of successes; the most stand-out among them has been the brilliant reaction of the Buffalo City Municipality in tackling the sad state of parks in Southernwood.

This was a major concern for residents who saw these parks as a source of social ills like crime. It was incredibly rewarding for us to see the local authority listen and act on what our readers had to say.

Meanwhile, there is at least one major investigation which we are working on as a result of the Southernwood dialogue, which I won't say too much about yet in case I let the cat out the bag for the villains we are after. But if you were at the Southernwood dialogue you will remember that I made a promise, and let me assure you that we intend living up to that.

Next week the team will be in Buffalo Flats listening to the issues there and I hope we'll see many of our readers at Buffalo Flats Primary on Wednesday. I won't be at that one unfortunately as I'll be taking a couple of weeks leave but senior staff including deputy editor Bongani Siqoko and Dawn Barkhuizen, our leader page editor and the key mover behind our **dialogues**, will attend and I'll be picking their brains when I return.

We also hope to have as our guests some colleagues from Rhodes University's journalism department who assisted us in planning the community **dialogues** project and who are keen to observe one first-hand.

From a journalism point of view this series of neighbourhood meetings is creating a fair amount of interest in our industry as it is a relatively unusual project for a South African newspaper to have embarked on. So please come along and help us find a way to report on stories which are really important to you and help us make a difference to your neighbourhood.

Trench, A. 2009f. 'Editor's Dispatch. Published 25/11/2009. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on 29 January 2010 at

<http://www.dispatch.co.za/article.aspx?id=362363>

Appendix 2

Schedule for semi-structured, in-depth interview with those involved in planning and execution of the *Daily Dispatch's* *Community Dialogues*

Part 1: Scene-setting

At the beginning of the interview the researcher will outline the topic and overarching aim of the research. He will also clarify the role of this specific interview in the research process:

The **research topic** is: “Deliberating the Dialogues: A critical examination of the nature and purpose of the *Daily Dispatch’s Community Dialogues*.”

The **overarching aim of the research** is to develop an in-depth, critical understanding of the nature and purpose of the *Community Dialogues* in relation to some key concepts in civic/ public journalism. It is hoped that the research process may help the *Daily Dispatch* clarify and develop its own efforts in this area and copies of the research report will be made available to the newspaper. It is further hoped that the research into the *Community Dialogues* may be of interest to a wider audience in that it aims to help fill a general gap in the global civic journalism research literature around the use of community forums in civic journalism. While numerous studies have looked at civic journalism's news coverage, little is known about the exact purpose and nature of the various citizen encounters, like community forums, that news organisations sponsor and that help form the basis for their subsequent reporting.

The **specific goal of this research** is to investigate why the *Daily Dispatch* has chosen to convene ‘the community’ for a series of ‘dialogues’ and how these *Community Dialogues* work in practice as a civic journalism strategy. A number of subsidiary research goals flow from this overarching goal:

- How do key members of the *Daily Dispatch’s* editorial staff perceive and understand the nature and purpose of the *Community Dialogues*?
- How do these forums work in practice? For example, who is invited and who attends? What are the structures, protocols, routines and foci of such forums? Who chairs them? What role does the news organisation play in them? How does the conversation unfold and develop and what is the nature of the interaction between the participants? What is ‘achieved’, both philosophically and concretely, through these forums? Is it a *sustainable* public sphere in which all topics of concern to citizens can not only be articulated, but also deliberated, and critiqued over time?
- How do the actual practices at these forums measure up to, on the one hand, the expressed perceptions and understandings of the *Daily Dispatch* staff and, on the other, to some of the democratic ideals underlying the public philosophy of civic journalism proposed by some of its principal theorists and proponents. For example:
 - If the *Daily Dispatch* editorial staff see the *Community Dialogues* as an opportunity for citizens and journalists to serve as genuine partners with equal opportunities to influence the news media agenda, does this happen in practice? Or do citizens merely serve in an advisory capacity for journalists who listen to citizens’

suggestions but ultimately decide upon the news media agenda on their own?

- Who is being convened exactly? Does the *Daily Dispatch* tend to sponsor multiple forums – creating multiple discursive domains – in which members of specific social groups (based on some of the key markers of social identity, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, neighbourhood, religion, politics, generation, sexual orientation) can deliberate about their particular concerns among themselves? Or, does it tend to sponsor more encompassing forums – a general public sphere – in which members of various social groups are encouraged to jointly deliberate about problems of presumed common concern? If the latter is the case, how do these forums promote participatory parity among members of different social groups?
- What is the precise nature and scope of the *Daily Dispatch*'s journalistic coverage of the *Community Dialogues*? How does this coverage measure up to, on the one hand, the perceptions and understandings of the *Community Dialogues* expressed by the *Daily Dispatch* staff and, on the other, to some of the democratic ideals underlying the 'public philosophy' of civic journalism proposed by some of its principal theorists and proponents?
- Lastly, are the *Community Dialogues* the only or even the primary, civic journalism strategy employed by the *Daily Dispatch*? How do the forums relate – if at all – to other civic journalism strategies and techniques employed by the newspaper?

This specific in-depth, open-ended interview will be conducted with key staff members of the *Daily Dispatch* involved in the planning, execution and reporting of these forums (perhaps including the editor, deputy editor, leader page editor as well as some of the journalists assigned to cover these events) to investigate their understandings and perceptions of the purpose and nature of the *Community Dialogues*.

Part 2: The interview

a. Personal history and journalism

Why did you decide to become a journalist?

Tell me about your career as a journalist and, specifically, your time at the *Dispatch*.

How do you feel about your career as a journalist? Have your views about journalism changed over the years? If so, why?

b. Journalism and South African society

What do you think is the role of journalism in contemporary (South African) society... and in (South African) democracy? (*Note to self: Perhaps probe in relation to Christians et al's concepts of the monitorial, facilitative, radical, and collaborative roles of journalism.*)

How would you describe the relationship between the *Daily Dispatch* and the ANC, between the *Daily Dispatch* and metro and provincial government, between the *Daily Dispatch* and opposition parties, between the *Daily Dispatch* and civil society, and between the *Daily Dispatch* and the communities it serves?

c. The *Daily Dispatch*

How long have you been at the *Daily Dispatch*?

Given your understanding of the role of journalism in society, what role do you think the *Daily Dispatch* is playing in the East London context? Has the role of the *Daily Dispatch* changed over time? If so, how do you account for the changing role of the *Daily Dispatch* over time?

What are some of the weaknesses of the *Daily Dispatch*? What are some of the challenges (threats, constraints, difficulties) you and your fellow journalists face working here?

What are some of the strengths of the *Daily Dispatch*? What are some of the opportunities presented to you and your fellow journalists by working here?

d. The *Dispatch Dialogues* and the *Community Dialogues*

What are the *Dispatch Dialogues*? How did they come about?

What are the *Community Dialogues*? How did they come about?

What do you think are the main differences between the *Dispatch* Dialogues and the *Community Dialogues*?

What has been your experience of the *Community Dialogues*, both as a “citizen-observer” and/or as a journalist?

What do you think has been achieved so far with the *Community Dialogues* (both journalistically and in terms of “helping civic life go well”)?

e. The purpose of the *Community Dialogues*

Why did the *Dispatch* set up these *Community Dialogues*? What is ‘achieved’, both philosophically and concretely, through these forums a. for the newspaper and b. for the community? Would you say they were of primary benefit to the newspaper or the community? Explain.

- Were the *Community Dialogues*, either primarily or in part, convened to create and better opportunities for public debate, dialogue and deliberation? How would you define dialogue? Why did you choose the term dialogue rather than debate or anything else? What exactly do you hope will be accomplished through dialogue?
 - Are the *Community Dialogues* an ad hoc venue for discussion or are they envisaged as a more *sustainable* public sphere in which all topics of concern to citizens can not only be articulated, but also deliberated, and critiqued over time? Would the *Daily Dispatch* want any of its journalists to see their primary responsibility as one of stimulating increased civic commitment to, and active citizen participation in, democratic processes aimed at solving problems?
- Were these forums, either primarily or in part, seen as an aid to helping *Dispatch* journalists find stronger and/or more pertinent news stories?
- Do the Dialogues help *Dispatch* journalists cover stories in new/ better ways (i.e. through reporting on dialogue and deliberation)?

f. The *Community Dialogues* in practice

Describe the way the *Community Dialogues* work in practice?

- What has worked well? What problems have you encountered? How did you overcome them or hope to overcome them in the future?
- How have the experiences at the different Dialogues compared? How do you account for the differences?
- Who was invited, how were they invited and who attended? More philosophically, who was being convened exactly? Does the *Daily Dispatch* tend to sponsor multiple forums – creating multiple discursive domains – in which members of specific social groups (based on some of the key markers of social identity, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, neighbourhood, religion, politics, generation, sexual orientation) can deliberate about their particular concerns among themselves? Or, does it tend to sponsor more

encompassing forums – a general public sphere – in which members of various social groups are encouraged to jointly deliberate about problems of presumed common concern? If the latter is the case, how do these forums promote participatory parity among members of different social groups?

- Should the Dialogues promote consensus or should they help citizens reflect on their different, potentially conflicting concerns?
- What are the structures, protocols, routines and foci of such forums? For example, who chairs them? How is participation facilitated, particularly in relation to diversity issues? Are participants given the opportunity to reflect on one another's reasons for espousing certain opinions and also offer them opportunities to articulate the social locations from which they view given topics and to reflect on how those social locations affect their sense of problems and solutions? What role does the news organisation play in the Dialogues?
- How does the conversation unfold and develop and what is the nature of the interaction between the participants?
- What have you learnt from the *Community Dialogues* so far?

g. Neutrality versus an activist role for journalism

Where do you stand in relation to some of the dominant ideologies of professional journalism like objectivity and neutrality? Would it be true to say that you think it is appropriate for a daily metro newspaper to actively convene these *Community Dialogues* (and to report on its own creation)? Do you think there is room for a more interventionist or activist role for the press? If so, should the press remain a nonpartisan and apolitical ("fair-minded") interventionist? Why? Could journalism's fear of advocacy isolate it from the very centres of power that are likely to make a difference locally, regionally, nationally?

h. Setting the news agenda: journalists versus citizens

By generating a long list of issues and concerns can the newspaper can be said to have succeeded in surfacing a 'citizens' agenda'? Is this sharing your agenda-setting function with the public? Does it make sense for the press to allow citizens to set the news agenda? Shouldn't the journalists be setting the news agenda? Can citizens really have sound news judgement? What should a "fair minded" press do when a majority of people at a Community Dialogue call for a book burning, or for the re-introduction of the death penalty, or generally espouse views – for example racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic views – that attempt to disqualify certain citizens from participation?

What are some of the major influences on the *Daily Dispatch's* news agenda?

What is the *Daily Dispatch's* agenda in relation to the idea that the concerns of the most marginalised social groups should be articulated and heard to the same extent as those of dominant social groups? How do you think this agenda plays itself out in the *Community Dialogues*?

What do you think of the notion that journalists should be able to endorse specific political proposals and partner with special interest groups that seek to further their particular interests? (In other words, in addition to assuring that public life goes well, are you interested in whether public life yields tangible results for marginalised group – for example, more material equality, dignity etc.)?

What is your response to the critique that public journalism panders to the public – that it doesn't take enough responsibility for setting the news agenda? Glasser: "Public journalism substitutes the community's judgement for the judgement of journalists. It confuses community values with good values as though the former always implies the latter." He says the press should defend its values and how and where they coincide with, or depart from, what it understands to be the expressed or implied values of the community.

Ironically, public journalism has also been accused of retaining too much power. They have developed strategies for sharing setting the news agenda with the public – but authority about what to write and whether to print always stays with the professionals. What is your response to this critique?

i. Public accountability

Some critics lament the fact that public journalism does not propose new media accountability systems – such as national news councils, citizen media review boards, or publicly elected publishers and editors – which would invest more authority in the public. (For example, Grupo Reforma in Mexico has developed a network of editorial councils which offer citizens opportunities to formally discuss with journalists which topics they would like to see covered and how they would like to see those topics reported as well as to evaluate whether coverage adequately reflected their concerns.) What is your reaction to the idea of instituting accountability systems at the *Dispatch*? Do you favour any particular accountability system?

What is the purpose of Andrew Trench's *From the Editor* editorials? Did this feature precede Trench's editorship or was it his idea? What do you think of the idea that journalists should disclose the assumptions and aspirations that inform their work so that citizens can critique their work? (i.e. The idea of a critical public sphere "about" journalism.)

What volumes of reader feedback – either through letters or online comments – do you receive? What is the quality of this feedback, in your view? What impact/ use value has this feedback had?

What is the difference between polling readers to find out what issues interest them and inviting them to *Community Dialogues*?

j. Southernwood and the mobilisation model (investigative journalism)

At a lively, well-attended Community Dialogue in Southernwood, complaints over the appalling state of the local parks were unearthed for the first time. The *Dispatch* subsequently gave over many column inches to investigative reports on the state of open areas in the area. Soon after, the Buffalo City Municipality gave the parks a makeover. In one of your blog entries you said that what made this remarkable was that “it was the direct result of our readers speaking their minds. For once our readers' voices were heard and something was done... That surely counts as a success, as small as it may be, in our contemporary times of indifference.”

The classic mobilisation model of investigative journalism goes like this:

1. Vigilant journalists bring wrongdoing to public attention (published media investigations).
2. Changes in public opinion: an informed citizenry responds by demanding reforms from their elected representatives.
3. Policy makers take corrective action (policy reforms).

It appears that you've reversed the order of stages 1. and 2. You have given voice to public concerns and channelled this into public opinion formation through the Dialogues? You then reported on it, whereafter authorities responded to the negative publicity by fixing the problem. Comments?

Despite the success in Southernwood, you are on record as saying that “much more than cosmetic amendments are necessary to restore the community fabric of Southernwood”. Do you see it as the role of the paper to help restore this “community fabric”? If so, how would you go about contributing to this?

k. The Nompumelelo Dialogue: issues and problems

At the Nompumelelo Dialogue one of the participants said that the *Dispatch* had convened the meeting just to get good story ideas. Your response in your blog post was, “Duh!”. Could you elaborate on your response? Why do you think this citizen couched the idea of uncovering a ‘citizens’ agenda’ in this negative frame? Do you think you could counteract this negative framing in future? What obligations do you think you have to the people who participate in the Dialogues, if any, beyond allowing them the opportunity to participate? (For example, should all contributions be reported on in some way? How should the contributions be followed up on and how far should the newspaper go in helping to find solutions to problems raised?) Is there a danger that the Dialogues could raise unrealistic expectations around finding solutions to problems raised, particularly given the fact that poverty and unemployment are endemic in some of the communities you have visited?

Andrew Trench described the Nompumelelo Dialogue as “popping the cork on a shaken bottle” and said that one could not easily take a town hall-style meeting into such a community. To quote further: “As events unfolded it became clear that internecine battles between neighbours were starting to play out in that classroom.

Don't even try and get into ideas for solutions at such a meeting. There is simply so much that people want to get off their chests that it's impossible." It appears that this meeting played some sort of cathartic role in the community, if nothing else. Is this a legitimate purpose for such a meeting? Did you come away with a citizens' agenda of some kind? How did you – or how do you still intend to – follow up on the Nompumelelo meeting? How will/ did you follow-up differ from your first foray into this community? Compare and contrast the meeting at Nompumelelo with the preceding meeting in nearby Beacon Bay. How do you account for the difference between these two meetings? What were your motivations for holding back-to-back meetings in Nompumelelo and Beacon Bay?

I. Public problem solving

In one of your *From the Trench* blog entries you write that the *Community Dialogues* were part of an attempt to "try and move from describing problems to try and help solve some of them". How committed are you to this idea? What should be the primary vehicle for these problem-solving efforts – investigative reporting on the part of journalists (media-centric) or dialogue/ deliberation on the part of citizens (citizen-centric)? If the latter, should these problem-solving efforts be sponsored and driven by the newspaper or by organisations in civil society?

What ideally should be the relationship between the newspaper (the public sphere) and civil society (comprised of civic organisations)?

If problems are potentially resolvable by citizens (rather than the paper per se), what should the *Daily Dispatch's* role be in supporting citizens' own efforts to formulate and enact concrete solutions to those problems? (Some example: 1. Describe what citizens in other localities have done in the past or are doing to address similar problems. 2. Create spaces for citizens to deliberate further. 3. Encourage citizens to join existing or create new civic organisations. 4. Publicise citizens' application for resources.)

If problems require more deep-seated, systemic intervention could *Dispatch* journalists encourage citizens, in consultation with experts, to formulate possible solutions and then to lobby relevant government officials to enact those solutions in practice? In other words, would your newspaper condone the idea that some problems require collaboration between citizens, experts and government?

What if the solutions endorsed by citizens in this newspaper-sponsored process advance the interests of dominant social groups over those of subordinate social groups? Would you see it as your right – and responsibility – to say so? Can middle class journalists truly know and advocate the interests of subordinate social groups?

m. Journalistic coverage of the *Community Dialogues*

What is the precise nature and scope of the *Daily Dispatch*'s journalistic coverage of the *Community Dialogues*?

- What appeared on the pages of the newspaper immediately after the Community Dialogue has occurred? How prominent were the reports? Column centimetres, layout, pictures, graphics?
- What appeared in the online *Dispatch Dialogues*? Nature of the reports, layout, photos etc.?
- Any subsequent coverage of the issues raised at any of the *Community Dialogues*?

How does this coverage measure up to your expressed hopes for the *Community Dialogues*? Has this coverage differed from normal, everyday coverage? How exactly? Has it surfaced any ethical concerns?

o. Other civic journalism strategies and their relation to the *Community Dialogues*

Are the *Community Dialogues* the only or even the primary, civic journalism strategy employed by the *Daily Dispatch*? How do the forums relate – if at all – to other civic journalism strategies and techniques employed by the newspaper? For example, have you introduced any new concepts, routines, or techniques into your day-to-day practice (for example, your 'story of hope' at news diary meetings)? Have you attempted to reorganise your news room in any way away from the traditional beat system? If so, how exactly? Also, what role does your revamped website play in your overarching editorial strategies and how is it related, if at all, to your civic journalism agenda?

p. Civic journalism and economic self interest

Your circulation and readership are slowly growing in the context of a global decline in newspaper readership and the global economic crisis. However, you did have to retrench some staff earlier in the year. (How many? Which posts?) In the US, public journalism as practiced by some news organisations has been criticised as primarily a strategy for economic survival in the face of shrinking circulation, online competition and declining advertising revenues. How important is economic self-interest as an impetus for civic journalism at the *Daily Dispatch*?

q. Personal and institutional change

Tell me how your views and actions may have changed since you started the *Community Dialogues*. What have you personally learned from the experience?

What impact have the *Community Dialogues* had on the organisation, the way you do business, and on the individuals in it? What do the other journalists at the *Daily Dispatch* think of the *Community Dialogues*?

After having these experiences, what advice would you give someone else in your position (i.e. other journalists in other news organisations) who may be contemplating doing something similar?

Where would you like to see the *Dispatch* in 3-5 years in relation to civic journalism strategies like the *Community Dialogues*?

Who has been most helpful to you in relation to the *Community Dialogues* and other civic journalism strategies in the organisation? How has he/ she been helpful?

r. Your turn

Are there any questions would you like to pose to me?

Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during the interview?

Are there any other events/ ideas that stand out in your mind? Could you describe it (each one)?