

**'JOURNALISM IN A NEW DEMOCRACY: THE ETHICS OF LISTENING'**

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**INAUGURAL LECTURE**

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Thank you very much for this opportunity to share my academic interests with you. I am truly happy to be standing here - Rhodes University is a very special place and I consider myself fortunate to be a part of this community.

Before I continue, please allow me some personal words of thanks. I am only too aware of the fact that I would not be here tonight if it weren't for the many people who have shaped me as a person and who have engaged with my thought processes over the years. I view the academic project as a conversation, with my own ideas evolving as a result of ongoing discussions with many academic friends and colleagues, in this country and others, over the years. Among these I count several of my current colleagues in the School of Journalism and Media Studies here at Rhodes. I am not going to single them out lest I accidentally forget someone. I am very fortunate to be able to work alongside colleagues of their calibre. I would, however, like to acknowledge two collaborators who I have worked with for the last decade, namely Arnold de Beer and Sean Jacobs. Our intellectual sparring has greatly enriched my own work.

I would also like to thank members of my extended family who are here tonight to share this evening with me. My parents-in-law have travelled from Pretoria for the dubious privilege of being lectured to! I appreciate that very much.

And then, my own parents are also here tonight, as they have always been at the important moments of my life. I am deeply grateful to you for instilling in me a curiosity about life, a sense of wonderment for the world, as well as for teaching me that knowledge is its own reward.

I would like to offer special thanks to my wife, Helena. She has suffered my academic obsessions for 14 years now. And while she has allowed me to drag her halfway around the world in pursuit of my academic interests, she all too often has to stay at home to do solo-parenting while I travel. My achievements would not have been possible without her sacrifices and support.

And in their absence I must also thank my three wonderful children Lukas, Daniel and Sophie for showing me that Real Life only starts when your working day ends.

Tonight I would like to share my main research interests, explain where these interests come from and how they inter-relate.

The title of my talk is 'Journalism in a New Democracy: The Ethics of Listening'. It probes the key questions that have

been the focal point of my work for the past decade: what are the roles and responsibilities of journalism in post-apartheid South Africa? What values and principles should the media be guided by?

This question has several roots, and tonight I will explore three of these roots.

- Firstly the question emanates from my own experiences of growing up in South Africa, and later from my experiences as a working journalist. A brief sketch of some of these experiences will provide an initial backdrop. Please note that although I use the terms 'media' and 'journalism' interchangeably, I am in the first instance interested in the news media. I also concentrate on the mainstream commercial media which dominate the public sphere, although some of what I say will also apply to the public and community media.

- Secondly: the question is linked to the broader comparative understanding of South Africa as a new democracy. There is an emerging literature around the role of media in new democracies, and I will locate the question

about the roles and responsibilities of South African journalism within this developing terrain called 'transitology'.

- Thirdly: the question about roles and responsibilities, norms and values, demands that we consider journalism ethics. The area of journalism ethics I am specifically interested in is normative theory. Normative theory is more concerned with questions of what we think the norms and values of journalists *should* be than they are with the sociological question of what these values *are* – although the moral, sociological and cultural domains are linked. This has been an area of research for me, and I still teach it. When I tell people that I lecture in media ethics, I usually brace myself for predictable responses like “Oh, that must be a very short course, then!” or “Journalism Ethics is an oxymoron, just like Military Intelligence”.

Although journalists often see discussions of ethics as more appropriate for the ivory towers of academia than the cut and thrust of the newsroom, ethical decisions can have very real implications for how we view the world.

A recent example may illustrate this. Consider the choices that journalists had to make in covering perhaps the most shocking and shameful incident since the arrival of democracy in the country - the recent massacre of miners at Marikana.

The footage that the world first saw of the shooting of the miners was filmed literally from behind the backs of firing policemen. This alignment of journalists with positions of authority when covering conflict is not unusual, but it has implications. Subsequent to the shooting, sociologist Peter Alexander and his colleagues at the University of Johannesburg carried out some field research. Their findings suggested that the footage might have obscured the fact that most of the shots fired at protesters came from *behind* the group who were pictured running towards the cameras. If this is true, the strikers were shot in the *back* by another group of policemen who were out of sight of the cameras. Initially, these revelations were either scoffed at on social media or ignored by journalists.

But then the veteran photojournalist, Greg Marinovich, writing for the web publication *Daily Maverick*, basically confirmed the findings of Alexander and his UJ colleagues. If you have not yet read Marinovich's exceptional reports from the killing fields, I urge you to do so.

My main thrust here is that the initial response from journalists covering the incident looked a lot like what my colleague Jane Duncan has dubbed the local version of 'embedded journalism'.

'Embedded journalism' refers to the controversial practice of American journalists attaching themselves to military units during the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. This practice literally gives journalists a view on events from behind the barrel of a gun. Let us look again at the Lonmin events in the Northwest province. The bulk of journalists were hesitant to take a position in the immediate aftermath of this massacre, calling the issue 'complex', citing the falling of Lonmin's share price, relishing in the ensuing Malema-Zuma catfight but (with one or two exceptions, Marinovich among them)

neglecting to speak to miners themselves or do some field research of their own

This alignment of journalists with authority is nevertheless often defended through an appeal to the professional journalistic tenets of 'objectivity', 'detachment' and 'balance'. Because when journalism sides with power, be it military, political or economic, that position is often hidden or presented as neutral. That is because the alignment of journalism with power mostly takes place unintentionally as a result of established journalistic routines and practices, rather than through conscious choice. Journalists may write news, but are themselves also 'written by' the discourses and practices of journalism.

The debate about 'objectivity' has a long history in journalism studies. There have been attempts at revising this problematic concept, for instance by the BBC with their notion of 'due impartiality'. But there are many cases in South African history where the British journalist Martin Bell's 'journalism of attachment' and compassion would be easier to justify morally than the concept of professional



‘objectivity’. The events at Marikana could be one such case. In essence, the choice between different normative frameworks to guide journalistic practice in a new democracy, is the question about where to stand, and when to make a stand.

I would now like to provide some perspectives from my own work on journalism ethics to unpack this question.

First, some background on how I became interested in these questions.

A common sense understanding of media are that they a central pillar of democracy. They are trusted to provide the information that citizens need to make informed electoral choices; provide a space for public debate and keep those in power accountable. For these reasons, journalism is frequently perceived not only as central to democracy, but as ‘synonymous with democracy’ or even, according to media theorist James Carey, as ‘another name for democracy’.

But for someone like myself who has grown up in 1980s Afrikaans suburbia, this link between journalism and democracy has never been quite as self-evident. The

journalism I grew up with was technically sophisticated and professional in style and approach, but it nevertheless failed to provide me with information about what was really happening in the country at the time. It was just like the line from that well-known song by George and Ira Gershwin: “The more I read the papers/The less I comprehend”.

It is not only the Afrikaans press under apartheid that failed in these democratic duties, even if their loyalty to the apartheid regime was the most blatant. Critics like the American scholar Robert Horwitz, who has written one of the most comprehensive accounts of changes at the SABC, remind us that the mainstream commercial English press, tied to mining capital, only provided a limited critique of apartheid rather than a full-blown, open support for the liberation movements. Of course this is not to discount the brave work of many journalists in the face of oppression, especially those in the alternative press. But it calls for a critical interrogation of the distance between democratic ideals and practices; and for an appreciation of history and context. And when the press in contemporary, democratic South Africa attempt to fend off new threats to freedom of

expression, some modest introspection about its past might serve its own cause better than an unqualified self-aggrandisement.

The journalism I grew up with offered a very narrow view of reality. I therefore relied on literature to understand the experiences of other South Africans that had been hidden from my view. The dissident Afrikaans writers that Jack Cope called 'The Adversary Within' – people like André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, John Miles, Etienne van Heerden, Adam Small – succeeded in mediating voices that were largely inaudible in the journalism I was exposed to. I eventually did most of my post-graduate study in this area. Although my focus has subsequently shifted from literature to media, I am still interested in the ethical questions raised by the telling of stories, literary or journalistic. Equally compelling questions to ask of both literature and journalism include:

- How is truth related to power?
- How can the experiences of the Other be mediated in an ethical manner?

- How do the conditions of social and material inequality impact on whose stories get told and how they get told?

These questions are even more important in the context of a new democracy where social relations are being reconfigured. Telling stories in such a context raises ethical questions, and requires particular strategies of *listening*.

These questions and approaches are central to my research interests, which also stemmed from my own experience as a journalist.

I entered journalism practice in 1995 when democracy was something that journalists were only just getting used to. I started work at *Die Burger* newspaper as part of scholarship obligations and found myself in a community of practice that was redefining its own role in a new society. This was a newspaper that had been loyal to the apartheid regime and now rapidly had to transform and cast off the baggage of history. Consequently the newsroom was home to different generations of journalists who had different expectations of their roles. My first experience as a journalist was therefore that news is a contested discursive space. Different

journalisms co-existed, often in tension with one another, each claiming to be the most appropriate one for the time and context. Us incoming generation of journalists were often in direct opposition to the older editors. This experience stimulated in me an interest in how journalism defines its role within society and within democratic culture. It became clear to me that the relation between journalism and democracy is not at all as self-evident as journalistic rhetoric often makes it out to be.

There is the saying that journalism is 'history in a hurry'. Journalism is often in a hurry to speak but slower to listen. The role of journalism and media studies scholarship should therefore be to encourage a certain slowness and self-reflection. When we engage in this slow reflection on journalism in post-apartheid South Africa, we start asking questions like the following:

- What responsibilities does journalism have towards society?
- How can journalism contribute to the 'good life'?
- How can journalism deepen democracy?

- In short - how can journalism ensure that, to paraphrase playwright Henry Miller's well-known formulation, a nation remains in conversation with itself?

I have now briefly sketched the background of my interest in these normative questions. Normative theories are contested, as we can see from the often heated debates in South Africa about what the media should or shouldn't do. These contestations result from visions of the different journalisms that are appropriate for our democracy. The debate about 'indigenous values' and African ethical frameworks like *Ubuntu* is an example of such contestation, but I shall not go into that debate here. Other examples of normative debates are the 'national interest' vs 'public interest' debate led by Joel Netshitenze a few years ago, or the suggestion by SABC Board member Thami Mazwai that the broadcaster should be a 'guide dog' rather than a 'watchdog'

This brings me to the second of the three aspects I want to explore: the context of South Africa as a "new democracy",

and what that means for our understanding of the roles and responsibilities of journalism.

### **Journalism in a new democracy**

As has been the case in other ‘new democracies’ such as those emerging in Europe after the end of the Cold War, the South African media after apartheid found itself in a new environment in which it had to redefine its roles and responsibilities. The opening up of a democratic public sphere, the intensified impact of globalisation with the end of the country’s isolation and the redefinition of civil society in relation to a now legitimate state had profound implications for the South African media.

The study of South African media in comparative contexts – as a new democracy and lately as part of the BRICS formation of emerginc states – is a recent addition to my research interests.

One of the key debates in the literature of ‘transitology’, which is how some scholars refer to the study of political transition, is to what extent democratisation brought about complete transformation of these formerly authoritarian

states, or merely resulted in a continuation or strategic repositioning of partnerships between elites. The media often claim to 'serve the public interest'. But in a society undergoing rapid change, we can ask - who exactly is that public, and what are their interests?

Critics like the leftist economist Patrick Bond have argued that we saw in South Africa an 'elite transition'. He says a compromise was reached that transformed the political system while retaining capitalist economic policies. There is an overlap, in other words, between the two groups that the sociologist Roger Southall refers to as 'the incoming political elites and the established economic elites'. These arguments raise the question about where the mainstream media is positioned in relation to the political and corporate power elites in post-apartheid South Africa.

In his work in transitional countries in Eastern Europe, Colin Sparks has observed that the media have often been implicated in similar processes of what he calls 'elite continuity'. In his analysis of South Africa, Sparks uses the term 'elite renewal'. This is to acknowledge that the South



African media have seen racial transformation in terms of ownership and editorial management, but that the commercial media are still governed by the market logic that results in the stratification of audiences according to income and social position. The public and community media sector are meant to provide a counterbalance to the commercial media, but remain under-developed and beset by various challenges.

Sparks' observations are echoed by local commentators such as political scientist and astute commentator Steven Friedman. Friedman observes that most of the mainstream media continue to provide a very narrow view of South African reality – what he calls a 'view from the suburbs'. Friedman's comments were made in the context of the current heated debates about press freedom following on the proposed Media Appeals Tribunal and Protection of State Information Bill. He questions the claims by the media that they act in the 'public interest', when that public is fragmented and unequal, and their interests are as a result widely divergent.

When we move beyond commonsense notions of journalism as a 'pillar of democracy', a 'defender of the public interest' or the 'fourth estate of government', to ask more substantive questions about what we expect of journalism in the context of a democratic but unequal country, we are in the terrain of normative theory - a branch of media ethics. This is the third of the three points of focus that I want to touch upon in an attempt to answer the central question I posed at the beginning:

### **Journalism ethics**

The current, heated debates around whether the media should be self-regulated, co-regulated or submit to statutory oversight, are in the first instance *procedural questions*. They relate to the *processes* that should be followed to ensure an ethical and accountable media. Since the beginning of the democratisation process, much effort has been put into constructing a formalist ethical system for the South African media. The oppressive laws governing journalism under apartheid made way for a system of self-regulation, with at its centre a Press Council that adjudicates public complaints

according to ethical codes befitting the new democratic era. These ethical procedures have recently been subjected to scrutiny at public hearings by the Press Council and the Press Freedom Commission. These are laudable attempts to reflect on the current codes and mechanisms. Yet, as my colleague from Fort Hare Marc Caldwell points out in a recent book chapter, the mere following of certain rational procedures is not enough of a guarantee that the content of our moral choices will indeed contribute to the 'good life for purposes of human flourishing' in the post-apartheid media sphere. An ethics of the media, Caldwell notes, can focus so much on the rules, mechanisms and codes for professional journalism to ensure that they are 'doing no harm' that it never really comes around to considering how it may also 'do some good'.

The Indian economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen makes a similar distinction in his discussion of justice. Sen contrasts a procedural form of justice in early Indian jurisprudence, *niti*, with the substantive form, *nyaya*. Whereas the first concept is concerned with the rules and processes that make justice possible, the latter form considers how the rules of

justice affect people's everyday lives. For Sen, *niti* is located in the 'transcendental institutions' that deliver justice through rules and regulations, whereas *nyaya* refers to the kind of world, the type of society that we want to see emerge from these institutions and their rules. Justice, for Sen, needs therefore to be measured in terms of the accomplishments of institutions to improve "human lives, experiences and realizations".

If we apply Sen's distinction between *niti* and *nyaya* to journalism ethics, we must ask not only how well the institutions and processes of journalism - the press codes, the Press Council, self-regulation - function, but how journalism impacts on the everyday lives of people and enables them to realise their capacities. Sociologist Patrick Heller draws a similar distinction in his analysis of citizen participation in South African democracy. Heller warns us not to confuse the '*status*' of citizenship with the '*practice*' of citizenship. Although the arrival of formal democracy in 1994 bestowed the legal *status* of citizenship on all South Africans and guaranteed a vote at the ballot box, the *practice* of citizenship is not guaranteed. For the new democracy to

strengthen, citizens must be able to *practice* their citizenship, by having a say in how they are governed on a day-to-day basis, and by participating in democratic processes in such a way that their participation has real consequences. Heller whos how social inequalities and an absent, irresponsible or weak state militate against this practice of citizenship. But the practice of citizenship also requires a journalism that sees the facilitation of this practice as its ethical responsibility.

What ethical norms would such a journalism be guided by?

Let's first look at the current normative framework within which the South African media operates, and then at a possible alternative.

The ethical frameworks used by South African mainstream journalism have been adopted and adapted from those of established democracies where the emphasis falls on freedom of speech with certain safeguards. The dominant consensus among mainstream journalists in post-apartheid South Africa seems to be that the journalism should play a 'watchdog' role that is defined primarily in relation to the government – and not, for instance, to the same extent in

relation to big business. The excesses of press freedom are however held in check by a commitment to 'social responsibility', which, in our case, includes an emphasis on historically sensitive issues like 'racial stereotyping'.

The current emphasis on watchdog journalism in South Africa, most often taking an adversarial stance towards government, can lead to its own abuses. The watchdog stance can be exaggerated to the extent that the media resist any self-criticism and positions itself as an unofficial political opposition that opposes in knee-jerk fashion everything the government does. This stance is usually based on a liberal individualism that views the public as an aggregate of individuals, and as such does not have a moral imperative to seek out alternative views, empower marginal communities or amplify lesser-heard voices. It often comes in the guise of an elitist professionalism.

One of the clearest examples of how these elitist professional norms were articulated in South African journalism was when tabloid newspapers arrived on the scene in the early 2000s. These papers were aimed at the poor black majority that

were largely being ignored by the mainstream press in the country. The research for my book *Tabloid Journalism in South Africa* showed how these papers were dismissed by the journalistic establishment as ‘trash journalism’ because they flouted the professional norms of ‘objectivity’ and ‘rational debate’. But instead of using the popularity of the brash, sensationalist and low-brow tabloids as an occasion to critically reflect on their own relationship towards the majority of South African society, the mainstream press used tabloids as an opportunity to engage in ‘paradigm repair’.

Although tabloids are by no means ethically beyond reproach, the mainstream response towards the emergence of the South African mass-market was often based more on taste and preference than on a real engagement with the way these papers were telling of stories of everyday life in all their goriness and garishness. The rush to condemn tabloids was a good example of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s argument about how divisions between social classes are manifested in distinctions of taste. It also illustrates Sparks’ point about elite continuity and renewal in dominant media discourses.

These tabloids posed a challenge to the mainstream media: Although they seemed to transgress the formalist, procedural ethics of fact-checking, balance and detachment, in some ways the tabloids contributed more effectively to substantive values such as participation and inclusion of hitherto excluded and marginalised citizens than the mainstream media did. One could of course argue that this inclusion is exploited for commercial gain. But the point is that while popular media (in this case the tabloids) may stray outside the formalistic tenets of the press codes, this very transgression also highlights the limitations and weaknesses of the 'professional' values underpinning the dominant journalistic paradigm.

The self-identification of journalists as a professional class may seem innocuous enough when it comes to the rejection of tabloid newspapers, which went on to become the most widely read print publication in the country anyway. But at other times, the alignment of journalists with elites in society can skew the very reality of life in our new democracy.

Journalists' siding with professionals routinely results in a one-sided coverage of labour protests, for instance. When



strikes are viewed from office windows instead of from street level, so to speak, the emphasis is more likely to fall on how much a strike has 'cost the economy', rather than the type of storytelling that would give middle-class news consumers a taste of the daily desperation of workers having to make do on meagre wages. My earlier example about the perspective from which the Marikana massacre was initially filmed, is a case in point. Editors of commercial newspapers will argue that they present stories to appeal to their readers, because they have to sell newspapers. This may be a self-interested commercial justification, but it cannot be an ethical one. Not if we want to rely on media to deepen democracy by enabling speaking and listening across divides. Not doing harm is not enough – we need to demand of journalism also to do good.

If the normative framework of 'social responsibility', linked to a stance of 'professionalism' is inadequate to facilitate social change in a highly unequal, new democracy, where should we go to look for alternative norms? My research into media ethics, also at conversations with colleagues in a series of

global media ethics roundtables, has revolved around this question.

Cliff Christians and Kaarle Nordenstreng, two members of these roundtables, found in their research that the ‘primal sacredness of human life’ is a universal ‘protonorm’ found across the world, regardless of its different articulations across countries and contexts. This protonorm entails three substantive ethical principles: human dignity, truth-telling, and non-maleficence. Of these principles, the notion of human dignity poses a particular challenge for journalism in the South African context.

The notion of dignity as an ethical concept for journalism can be problematic. The protection of a politician’s dignity can become a spurious defence against the media’s unearthing of corruption and wrongdoing, as in the case of the ‘insult laws’ in place in many African countries. As we have seen from debates around Brett Murray’s artwork *The Spear of the Nation*, the Constitutional right to dignity sometimes sits uncomfortably next to the right to freedom of expression.

But the value of human dignity is enshrined in the South African Constitution because of our history of systemic racism that fundamentally denied the right to dignity for the majority of the country's citizens. If we bear in mind that history, it is also important to liberate the notion of 'human dignity' from its abuse by politicians. If we think seriously about the moral demands on a media claiming to work in the 'public interest' among conditions of dire poverty, social marginalisation and hopelessness, we cannot avoid thinking about human dignity in a more substantive sense.

It is against the background of human dignity as a protonorm for journalism, that I would like to explore the notion of an 'ethics of listening'. I propose that 'listening' as an ethical value is appropriate for a new democracy where social polarisations continue to impact on media narratives and agendas, and in a society where continued economic inequalities provide certain parts of the citizenry with disproportionate power to make themselves heard in the public sphere.

To treat people with dignity primarily means taking their stories seriously. To view people as dignified human beings, regardless of their social standing, means thinking about them not only as statistics with which to keep government accountable, or as voters that may sway the horse-race of party-politics. People should therefore not be viewed as means to the end of adversarial, watchdog-type journalism, but as end in themselves. Listen to them as they talk about their everyday life, about their struggles but also their victories, their pain but also their pleasures. To view human life as sacred means to look for the ways that we are connected, interrelated and interdependent. This approach is in line with the principle of *Ubuntu* - 'I am because you are'. Applying Ubuntu as a normative principle is however not without its problems, as it may lead to a romantic essentialism that could again exclude certain voices.

The feminist scholar Carol Gilligan's 'ethics of care' is rooted in this understanding of human dignity as based not on 'abstract speculations' but in *relationships* that are '*grounded in listening*'. 'The most basic questions about human living – how to live and what to do', Gilligan says, 'are fundamentally

questions about human relations, because people's lives are deeply connected, psychologically, economically, and politically'. 'To have a voice', she says, 'is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act'. This ethics of caring is one of commitment, of compassion, of immersion – values that are frowned upon in the liberal-individualist journalistic mantra of professionalism and detachment. This ethics would be less interested in correct procedures to minimise harm, and more in the substantive outcome of restoring the dignity of the marginalised, discovering interconnections between people and enabling a real engagement across the segmentations of race and market. This would require a *pro-active intervention* by journalists into society, to try and change it to what it might become, rather than just mirroring it as it already is.

This is not quite the same as 'giving voice to the voiceless', a claim that media like to make but that can easily become a patronising one that neglects to reflect about the journalist's own implication in the networks of power that have led to the silencing of certain voices in the first place. Listening

ethically would also mean thinking about your own location and vantage point.

‘Giving voice’ may paradoxically lead to silencing people even more, because they are only allowed to speak on the terms prescribed to them – as the poor, as the youth, as the striking miner. Instead an ethics of listening would require keeping quiet to hear how those voices are already speaking for themselves, and claiming agency, in spaces that journalists might not be too familiar with. Journalists would therefore have to learn to listen ‘across difference’, as the political theorist Tanja Dreher has put it. This would mean that middle class journalists will have to get up from their desks, walk the streets, and ‘unlearn their privilege’, as the postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak puts it.

But this is not the listening of ‘polite conversation’ that papers over cracks and differences in an attempt to reach easy but superficial consensus. In fact, Dreher refers to ‘difficult listening’ – a way of enabling an inclusive politics that does not shy away from conflict and differences. Nor would an ethics of listening amount to the bleeding heart

sympathy for poverty that so often results in what Lilie Chouliriaki, a media scholar at the LSE, called the ‘spectatorship of suffering’ - a voyeuristic perspective on others that deprives them of their own agency in order to forge the togetherness of privileged audiences. Roger Silverstone, in his book *Media and Morality*, speaks of the ‘proper distance’ that journalists have to learn to keep in order to exercise their duty of care. Collapsing the distance between journalist and subject completely, as in embedded journalism, is a relationship that is too close for journalists to remain vigilant. On the other hand, portraying subjects as a distant other that we cannot understand and can only pity, is too far.

The listening that I am advocating is not a cosy position devoid of politics. Nor is it one that sees no role for journalists other than providing a platform for citizens to speak to each other in a kind of mediated chatroom. On the contrary – journalists can connect horizontal discussions between citizens to the vertical axis of political power. Media can provide the amplification of voices needed to take

local struggles to the national, or the global arena. Journalists that listen can facilitate a politics from the ground up.

The difference is that the agenda for these questions will not be set only by journalists themselves, but by citizens – and not only in the fashionable ‘citizen journalism’ of ‘user-generated content’ on newspaper websites that does little to shift the dominant journalistic paradigm.

No - central to this approach is what Dreher calls the transformation of the media’s ‘desire for mastery into an ethical receptivity’. Journalists will have to learn to let go, to relinquish control. They will have to be prepared to have their own assumptions challenged, accepting that the picture of reality that emerges in the process of listening might be more complex and incomprehensible than they had thought, and that they themselves may be complicit in the very problems they seek to understand.

To quote another famous philosopher: ‘You may say I’m a dreamer, but I’m not the only one’. This kind of participatory journalism is already taught in the School of Journalism and Media Studies here at Rhodes, for instance in the



collaboration between Alette Schoon's television journalism students and teenagers from Shireen Badat's Upstart clubs in township schools to make films about their experiences.

Schoon cites Belgian academic Nico Carpentier's notion of journalists as 'gate-openers' rather than the traditional 'gate-keepers'. My colleague Rod Amner did something similar in partnering his journalism students with learners from the Mary Waters school, to interview each other. These projects are not without their ethical difficulties, and Rod and I are trying to grapple with them in a forthcoming paper.

But these projects illustrate media ethicist Cliff Christians's point, that moral principles do not have to be restricted to formal logic and rational procedures. They can be found in the narratives that shape our lives. To tell stories, and to listen to them, you need imagination. And imagination, Martha Nussbaum says in her work on the humanities, is vital for democracy:

'(T)he ability to imagine the experience of another – a capacity almost all human beings possess in some form – needs to be greatly enhanced and refined if we are to have

any hope of sustaining decent institutions across the many divisions that any modern society contains,” Nussbaum says.

Instilling and developing this moral imagination is a challenge for journalism education and scholarship.

To sum up:

I started this lecture by recalling how, as a youngster, it was stories that helped me to understand the country I was growing up in, and helped me imagine the lives of others that I did not read about in the media of that time.

For journalism in a new democracy such as South Africa to serve more than an elite, for it to enable citizens to actively practice their citizenship through media, for it to treat all South Africans with dignity, it would have to learn to listen across the different lines that continue to keep South Africans apart – journalists would have to learn to listen to the stories of those on the other side of the railway line, the breadline, the picket line, the barbed wire fence.

What would this listening mean for journalists in practice?

Let me end by returning to the coverage of the Marikana massacre.

In a recent interview with Greg Marinovich, the journalist that did the investigation that cast doubt on the official accounts of the events, he was asked if what was needed for better journalism was more investment of resources. 'Do we need a team (or teams) of journalists to get to the bottom of this?' he was asked. Marinovich responded as follows:

"I wouldn't say that. I think other journalists have been spending more time there than I have (...)

It's about opening your eyes and looking at what people are telling you, looking at their stories."

Thank you.