

The Journalism Dialogues

4 March 2008, Atlas Studios, Johannesburg

The role of the media in sustaining South Africa's young democracy is continually in the spotlight and 2008 is shaping up to be a tough year for journalists and editors. The frayintermedia + Mail&Guardian Journalism Dialogues are a series of 10 monthly public debates in which members of the public are able to engage with leading thinkers on the hot topics of the day. This is the transcription from the first Dialogue, which focused on how the media covers race.

JOE THLOLOE (Press Ombudsman and facilitator of The Journalism Dialogues):

Hello everyone, I hope that whatever I say this afternoon will not be held against me when one or two of you, have to appear in front of the ombudsman. When Michael Schmidt from frayintermedia, I still call them Paula Fray and Associates, called and asked me if I would be willing to chair these dialogues, I readily agreed for the very simple reason that I think there isn't enough conversation amongst journalists. We are all chasing after our tails – too many deadlines – and we never get the chance to reflect on our craft. I thought the idea of these dialogues was brilliant.

And the first one comes at a very interesting time. A few journalists get together and they decide they want to invite the president of the ANC to come and brief them confidentially and of course you get everybody shouting racism, not quite everybody, but you get a number of people shouting racism racism racism. You turn around; you look at the University of the Free State. You look at a couple of videos and people are shouting racism racism. You turn to Skielik and you find the same story – racism racism, but honestly the last time that we as journalists really looked at ourselves and what we are doing

about racism was when the HRC had its hearings on racism in the media and I'm delighted that today we are not being forced to look at ourselves. We do, however, have to look at ourselves as journalists, ourselves as society,



Joe Thloloe

and ourselves as a country. I won't be talking much again because I'm scared that what I say might be held against me.

But let me introduce the panel. Very interesting panel. Ben Said from eTV, I worked for years with him and I know he's a very thoughtful person. He will give us his ideas about how the media covers racism. And next to him what would in fact be the enemy, is Jesse Duarte from the ANC.

JESSE DUARTE (ANC):

Viva the ANC [laughs]

THLOLOE:

{laughs} you can't be part of us and be the enemy. Somewhere we need to define our relationship. And of course next to Jesse is Tseliso Thipanyane, who is the CEO of the Human Rights Commission, always the mediator. And finally Janet Smith, the executive editor of The Star. So it's a very interesting panel and they will each be looking at this question from their perspective. We'll give them about 30 minutes to talk but after that we get into the crux of this thing. What we do as society, what do us as journalists think is happening with racism and with racism in the media and the way the media are covering racism.

We wanted it to be a very interactive session, that's why I'm wearing a lapel microphone. I'll be walking around, fortunately, and I hope that you will participate as actively as possible. The idea is to move towards some solutions, some indication of where the media should be going. We can't prescribe for the media, but at least we can point them in particular directions.

Ben? It feels like the old days where I order you around. [laughs] It's your turn.

BEN SAID (eTV):

Thanks for all turning up today. I hope that we're going to have a great discussion and we'll come to some conclusions at the end of it. I'm going to probably stick more to the Forum for Black Journalists (FBJ) debate. That's something that I was fairly intimately involved in unfortunately and where as I haven't reported on Skielik, I haven't reported on what's been going on at the University of the Free State either, but I'm sure I will give some thoughts on those later. Just getting back to the FBJ

- just to give an indication of why we actually went in the first place.

First of all, it is my job at work. One of my beats is to cover Jacob Zuma. So, that was primarily the reason that we went. But also to cover the fact that white journalists were not being allowed into the meeting. We actually had a long discussion in our morning meeting that morning about whether this was really just an issue that journalists would be interested in or whether the public would have some interest in this and we sort of decided that it was enough of a talking point that it would be worth covering from that point of view as well. The other reasons why I went was that we felt that we... sorry one of the reasons why I went also was that I felt that possibly after the controversy that had been going on that whole morning, that perhaps white journalists would be allowed in, that the organiser would in a sense come to their senses or that Jacob Zuma would ask that white journalists would be allowed in and of course that didn't happen.

I must say that in terms of how we were handled, there was absolutely no nastiness. There was only politeness from the organisers themselves. From Abbey Makoe especially. We certainly weren't handled in a rough manner or in a rude manner. Some of the delegates there were rather different when we were inside. At one point a couple of the delegates there were talking about coconuts, and were talking about how when 702 made their stand. One person, Yusuf Abramjee, stood up and said that he wanted to walk out because he felt this

was wrong, people were talking behind me saying – forgive my language – this is typical of how a Western Cape coloured would behave. But from the organisers themselves, we had only politeness and I just want to state that upfront.

Just to give you an idea, we were allowed in initially. Jacob Zuma's security people were running the show that day and I don't think they had got the brief quite correctly, so a couple of us white journalists were allowed in and I was actually inside for about 20 minutes before I was politely asked to leave. I think there might have been some debates about my surname and whether I didn't perhaps have some mixed race blood in me, which in my mind just showed how utterly ridiculous the whole things was.

I think there are two issues here. We need to debate whether there is a need for a Forum of Black Journalists in South Africa in 2008 and I think that's a completely separate issue from whether Jacob Zuma was right to address them and whether white journalists should have been ejected from what was really a public meeting. It was the relaunch of the Forum for Black Journalists, but there were a lot of people who weren't journalists, there. So I think that white journalists certainly should have been

allowed in for that meeting. Whether there's a need for a Forum for Black Journalists that is something that we can perhaps get onto a little later today.

Now one of the arguments that the FBJ used, one of the main arguments, was that the Constitution guarantees freedom of association. It guarantees the rights of black people to only associate with only black people if that's what they wish, but I would have thought that that freedom of association clause in the constitution is in a response to a lack of freedom of association under Apartheid. And I don't think it can be used and should be used in this day and age to exclude people in the democratic South Africa. I can see the reason why it's in there in the Constitution, and that for me is very much a response to what happened under Apartheid where people didn't have the freedom to associate and I don't think it was ever meant to be exclusionary in a democratic South Africa. Some of my concerns that

I've had over the last couple of weeks, since this issue's been raised, I think one of them is why black journalists feel in 2008 that there is a need for an exclusively black journalists body. Are we in newsrooms as

integrated as we'd like to think we are? Do we, as white journalists, really have an understanding of the concerns that black people have and the difficulties that they perhaps face in their daily lives and certainly in terms of reporting in this country at the moment. But I still feel that engagement between

“...why black journalists feel in 2008 that there is a need for an exclusively black journalists body.”

“The last time that we as journalists really looked at ourselves and what we are doing about racism, was when the HRC (Human Rights Commission) had its hearings on racism in the media.”



Journalists and editors at the Journalism Dialogues.

racism would be a far better way of creating that understanding.

Also, what also concerns me a little bit is how polarised this debate has become. I mean I was on our morning TV show, you know and because of my stand point on this, a lot of this, a lot of black people were phoning in and making out that I was some sort of right wing ideologue and I think that's also very unfortunate in this day and age and I made the point on that morning show that it would be completely wrong for me to feel that I've somehow felt the hard hand of oppression on my shoulder and that I could in anyway have any sense of what it was like to be a black person under Apartheid. I'm not suggesting that for one single second and I hope that's not going to come up as an issue later, because that's not what I'm suggesting at all. All I'm asking is that we need to have a debate about whether there is a need for exclusively racial, racially exclusive bodies in South Africa in 2008 and what that actually achieves. And if we say that it's OK, what sort of message are we sending out to broader society. I mean, is it not then OK for white people to have their own, private exclusive golf clubs because they decide that they only want to associate with white people and I think we need to be very careful in how we manage this issue and what sort of signal we're sending out. Thank you.

THOLOLOE:

Thanks Ben, I'm sure there's going to be very heated arguments on that one. One of the questions that cropped up in my head is 'Is it wrong for the victims of Apartheid to withdraw into a caucus and say are we in fact moving away from Apartheid? What progress have we made as the victims of Apartheid, so that we can then emerge and say, we still have serious problems that the wounds of the past are not getting healed? But I suppose that's an issue that will come in later. Jesse?

DUARTE:

Thank you very much. Charmeela and Joe, thank you for inviting the ANC to participate in this debate. Let me just start by saying that race,



Adv. Tseliso Thipanyane

class and gender have a very peculiar relationship to one another and one of the very first things we did today was to illustrate that. Joe calls me the enemy and my very good friend over here says she'll punch you. Gender bias is a very serious matter. An assertive woman is always an aggressive woman and you know, little do you know that assertive women are amongst the gentle, kindest people in the world except when you step on our gender biased toes, then we will have to answer you fairly assertively.

The thing that I would like to deal with is not so much the thing that happened with the Forum for Black Journalists, but just in general, a couple of issues that we seem to be unable to grapple with as a country, as a nation.

How do you recognise racism in 2008? And what is a racist in 2008 and who is a racist in 2008 when we have mastered all the language of actually defining race in terms of a justification for a particular action that comes from somewhere else. For instance, affirmative action is sometimes described by people as blatant racism because it tries to address a problem that came from the Apartheid past and sometimes it is said that people can't find jobs because they are not African, because they are coloured or Indian or white, you can't get a job in South Africa now because you are not an African.

Now is that being described as blatant racism or is it understood as a mechanism that is forced on our society, from where we come

from. And if we try to deny that old reality are we simply asking that the status quo should remain the same forever or are we ready to knock this thing on its head? Are we ready to discuss the element of race that came with Apartheid and was never actually properly discussed by any of us? I don't think this is a debate for journalists only. I think this is a debate for all of us, wherever we may be seated. Whatever we may be doing.

I also think that one other matter that we seem to have kind of a difficulty with is this notion of building a nation. That many of us, before describing ourselves as South African, we are a Sotho, a Zulu, a coloured, an Indian, a Portuguese person, a Greek, an Italian, but you've lived here for three or four or five generations. And surely it's time to say I'm a South African and let me move on from that particular perspective and then recognise that being a South African also has with it a lot of interesting and difficult issues that you must cope with.

By the way my father worked here many years ago. It was called Atlas Bakery and he was a very lowly paid packer of bread in the 1960's in this building. I remember it very well. I think that if one looks at what happened... let me first go to Skielik and who's responsibility it is to develop and grow a generation of children and people whose mindsets can change and where does that begin?

I think what happened in Skielik was atrocious. I do think a young white man would probably not walk into a predominantly white area and shoot people. I also think it is unreasonable to suggest that four white young men at the University of the Free State would do to four or five white women, what they did to four black women.

And I think that's the issue we must confront head on. Where does that begin and how do you undermine



Ido Lekota

that mindset? Where? Is it in our education system that there's a problem? Is it the fact that the university administration does not say to students as they enter that

university this is a public institution and therefore all our facilities are for

every member of the South African public irrespective of where they come from? Or is it that we're still trying to nurse particular sensitivities somewhere in our country and hide that and say that that itself is not racism.

Depiction of race in the media, I read Madam and Eve very often. I think it's hilarious. But is Eve forever going to be a domestic worker for the rest of her life. Poor woman. And are we then not teaching our children that race and gender and class have a particular relationship. And we're not ready to confront that because the last time an ANC spokesman used cartoons to illustrate a point in the media he was unjustly used in a cartoon and I don't know what's going to be coming to me tomorrow. Probably I'll have a long nose and a big mouth and heavy ears and be cartooned in no uncertain terms. But the reality is we are what we read also and you are what you write. And you write who we are. That's exactly who you are as journalists. You have no other reality to learn from. You speak what you see every single day. You try to do it in a manner that some of you, fairly, some of you not so fairly, and my question that I put, Joe, is... I would not ask if it's right for black journalist who was victims of Apartheid today to speak to themselves about the issues they have, I would ask this question about really, the transformation of the media in our country.

Have we done enough work to talk to ourselves about how we characterise people? There are subtle racial stereotyping in the media (that's) the most destructive in our view, because it sneaks past the reader or listener. Critical. It goes unnoticed sometimes. There are many ways in which this can take place and we also need to ask you whose voices still are heard in today's media?

Whose voice are you speaking for all the time, everyday, when you speak? Whose important agenda is it that you need to put out there? Do we not live in a country with very distinct realities that are different? Do we not have an overwhelming amount of people who are extremely rich and whose opinions count? Today I read, and I won't mention the name, wrote in a particular editorial that the rich are leaving. They're just fed up.

Now, I'm going to call him later and ask him who are these rich and where are they leaving to? Unanswered

questions. It does suggest a kind of who the rich might be and if one looks at who is leaving the country, that's another reality that we can discuss.

Earlier last year, there was an article in The Star about four young men in Waterkloof who murdered a homeless



Jesse Duarte

man. The article described in detail the bewilderment and distress with which these young men and their families greeted their long sentences. There wasn't a single word about the victim of the attack or even what the crime was.

The victim was a black homeless person. There was nothing about this person. This person did not exist but there was this bewilderment. There was another article that appeared in the same paper about a week before about a couple who had murdered their five year old child.

The article provided a detailed account of the brutal crime providing no space for sympathy for the killers. And this is the question we must put to you. How then do you deal with this? When you write an article about four young men in the Free State and four young men in Waterkloof, this element of sympathy and understanding why they are as disturbed as they are comes into play. We need to understand that they can pee in food and abuse four black women and we must be sympathetic because they were not raised in a particular context.

So the question I put is who has to do this raising and where does it have to

come? As far as we're concerned, all of these people were cold blooded killers but the four young men who were white were treated sympathetically. The couple who were black were not. The couple who murdered their child - were not. Yet unless you put the two articles together, there's no reason to believe that the media treatment of the two cases had anything to do with race or of the defendant's.

So I think that... I applaud this particular debate. I think it's courageous. It's important that we as South Africans begin to say what is it that we're trying to portray here? When a black person robs... stands on a corner and the following day robs a store, he's just a thief. What would you say if a white youth did the same thing? Would you go into the detail of how poor they were and how the family hadn't had food for many days et cetera, et cetera. And those are perhaps the issues for me that the media perhaps need to confront. The cartooning of black people in a very particular way.

Long ago, about 25 years ago, the Canadian government started a program they called anti-racism. And they started by looking at how black people or people who were not white in Canada were depicted in their media and Canada did not have Apartheid, ever, in their lives.

They didn't have what we had here, but they had this element of when a cartoon is drawn about a black person, thick lips, hanging cheeks, big buttocks if it's a woman, et cetera, et cetera.

It's this peculiarity that we don't seem to want to confront. It's how we see each other.

Lastly, let me just say this; we decided that the president of the ANC would go to the Forum of Black Journalists. We discussed it and we decided that he would go because there should never be a day in South Africa that when people say to the ANC we'd like to put to you, that we say we're not ready to listen. Because that would be a difficult day for the ANC.

And the fact of the matter is, like it, don't like it, even though 48 percent of today's media at managerial level and elsewhere are black, has the

“Is the media sufficiently transformed and historically empowered to rise to the occasion to influence and interpret the challenges South Africa faces?”

newsroom... has the transformation of the mentality of the South African media occurred?

Have you... has the media come with us into 2008 with everything that comes with it. Is there an acceptance that in fact, South Africa is governed by a black majority government and is there an acceptance in fact, that many of the people in government do not have two PhD's but they do govern? They do govern. And is there reality in fact, on your part that having a black majority government means that there will be a slanted view towards the needs of the poorest people of our country who still remain black people?

Is there a fact in your mind on this issue and so my question would be, and I am going to grapple with that and we will too in the ANC, how then do you recognise racism and how do you speak about it openly without sounding politically incorrect or being afraid to speak about it because you're going to be politically wrong?

I applaud the journalists who spoke after the meeting of the Forum of Black Journalists. I listened to the radio interview that Ben (Said) had. I thought he was unfairly treated. I thought it was also quite strange that a lady who called from the Business Day was not understood as they could not understand her voice quite clearly. When they thought she was white, she wasn't welcome Joe. But when they found out that she was in fact black, they said you can now come.

Those are dangerous signs in our times and those are signs that as far as I'm concerned, we should be talking about and we should be asking questions about and we should be moving towards the understanding that in the end this is our country and we're all South Africans and the only people who are going to solve these problems are ourselves.

Thank you.

THLOLOE:

Thanks Jesse, you raise very difficult questions. It's very easy for us to be very polite and very politically correct and yet we live with racism – the texture of our society – and we don't find it easy to ask the difficult questions that you're asking. How do

we confront racism?

Tsheliso, I'm sure you've got the answers.

ADVOCATE TSHELISO THIPANYANE (Human Rights Commission):

Thanks to everybody who's here and as well the organisers of this event, I think it's very important. I will not say much about the Forum for Black Journalists. There is a complaint with the Human Rights Commission and we will be making a finding as to whether the event was constitutional

or unconstitutional. And I won't be going beyond that. Tomorrow we'll actually be having a discussion involving this matter, to hear the

different views before we decide which side we take.

I want to start by saying well; transformation has not failed to root out racists in South Africa. There has been lots of progress made; however, there are numerous challenges. Fourteen years into our democracy, it's not sufficient to address the impacts of racism which has been around for decades and decades or centuries depending on where you want to start from - Jan van Riebeeck or 1948, however, I think we could have actually done better to deal with the scourge of racism. But there are two issues which have basically retarded the progress

we could have made. One of them is the guilt or let me call it the "white" guilt. You know... you know, because of the guilt that we feel, because of what has happened or what was

done in our name or in our skin colour; we don't want to really engage with these issues of racism as a country. That's the first point. The second one is that nowadays, until recently, it's no longer popular to talk about racism. You are labelled as someone who's being obsessed with racism and also

some people think that there are even those who are trying to fight racism are actually using it to cover up for many many things including new governments and so on.

Now we as a Commission, when we became involved with the enquiry into racism, we were actually thrashed by the media. It was actually quite bad and people did not actually appreciate the impact of that because I think, after the report was done, we sort of left the report all together and disappeared from the report. I haven't even read the report myself since many, many years ago.

And last year we were accused by some prominent person in government that the Human Rights Commission is obsessed with racism and is doing nothing else. Now that was also a very worrying challenge and attack coming from the ruling party. We actually went to Parliament to try and defend ourselves to show Parliament how much we have been doing around issues of poverty and not just racism. And of course that has an impact on how you do your work as a human being, even though of course, you know you're supposed to do your work without fear or favour.

The second point I want to make is also that the media in this country is part of South African society and is therefore not immune to challenges of race... racism facing our nation. And I think this is also another problem. Sometimes we tend to think that the journalist or the media, the guys at the top there who know everything, and

therefore are not affected by issues of racism. I think developments around the FBJ do indicate that there are problems and I think that we would be deluding ourselves that the media and journalists are

excluded from the challenges of our country.

And therefore just going back to the point I was raising, that I mean, the failure for us to really engage with the issues of racism... even I as a black person, as a victim of racism in many ways, do I honestly discuss issues of



Mutloatse Mothobi



Janet Smith, Adv. Tseliso Thipanyane, Jesse Duarte and Ben Said

racism? When I am confronted with racial incident, what do I do? Most of the time we just keep quiet and move on unless we have no other option.

That is a fact for many of us. I hear stories from my friends, you know, who live in suburbs, when they get into the pool, the white people move out. They don't make an issue about it. When you drive to Pretoria, try and change a lane, nobody will give a way. You get a nasty look. You look at how issues of crime are reported and many other things.

Now, having said so what then is the role, and should be the role of the media as far as this issue is concerned? My view really is over the years... I have not studied this in detail but just as a birds eye view, and also in view of what I have said already... the media, while it has actually covered incidents of racism, has not really done it in a proper manner and therefore while... the media is actually characterised by very weak analysis of issues of racism.

And secondly the media tends to be very reactive. And why I'm saying this is I mean, we are sitting with a major problem which we sometimes want to run away from. That the biggest challenges facing this country include racism and poverty. Now if those are some of the biggest threats facing our nation, how then do we react to that challenge? How do the media react to issues of racism?

But now because of our guilt and other issues we try, you know, not to deal with that adequately.

Now, what I'm saying is because if we look at the promotion of equality and prevention of unfair discrimination act – we call it the Equality Act – the act actually speaks to the challenges facing our country as far as racism is concerned and speaks to the role all of

us should be playing as government as well as private citizens.

For example, the preamble in brief, in part, simply says the following for example: "The act endeavours to facilitate the transition to a democratic society in it's diversity, marked by Human relations that are caring and compassionate and guided by the principals of equality, fairness, equity, social progress, justice, Human dignity and freedom." That's the first point.

Secondly, section 24 of this Act, says: All persons have a duty and a responsibility to promote equality. All persons, including the media. So the issue is how have we as South Africans carried out this responsibility and duty imposed on us by ourselves to actually promote equality in our country. To fight racism as individuals and as a collective and the jury is out there.

Secondly section 27 of the Act says: "All persons, non-government organisations, community based organisations and traditional institutions must promote equality in their relationships with other bodies and in their public activities." Now if this is what the Act says about the challenges which we need to be dealing with and what we should be doing as South Africans to combat this very

serious problem – because you... after the Northwest issue, I was saying to colleagues, what if black people decide to be so angry and

retaliate. Where will we be in this country? It happened in Rwanda, it can happen anywhere and therefore we should not delude ourselves that we are now out of the woods thirteen years later. Anything could happen. If tomorrow somebody goes to Noord taxi rank then shoots over 50 taxi drivers, what do you think is going to happen in this country?

"...what then is the role, and should be the role as far as this issue is concerned?"

So those are some of the challenges which we really need to deal with. Now for the chairperson, I'm a little saddened and I'm hoping that Jesse Duarte will also use her position... the sections I've read to you from the Equality Act are not yet fully in operation, since it was passed in 2000. Now what does it say then about our seriousness as government, as people to combat racism? We passed a very good Act but we don't bring it into operation, eight years down the line. Are we suffering from guilt or what?

I'll leave it like that. And what has been the role of the journalists themselves. Does it mean that the journalists are not even aware of this Act and what it means? Don't ask about the Human Rights Commission, I will defend it myself in Parliament. [laughs]. Thank you.

THLOLOE:

Thank you Tseliso, you throw a very interesting problem to journalists that we should always remember that we are not only just writing about our society but we are part of society and that has got its own implications. Thank you again, for pointing that out. Janet, how are you guys at The Star dealing with race and racism?

JANET SMITH (The Star):

I think it's very interesting when you're out in the field as a white journalist, depending on the stories that you are writing. I was thinking a lot when Jesse was speaking, about the denial of ones own racism and that there are very forms of transfer that we engage in and thinking particular of race in the way in which some journalists and... I guess approach it from different sides of the spectrum.

To me racism is an internalised frame of reference. But what we do by doing that is we try and shift the blame on something else. We try to

deal with the issue in a totally different way and in the same way I think it's quiet interesting how the discussion about the FBJ played out in newsrooms where there were people who said that Abbey Mokoena was perhaps trying to... in his role as political editor at the SABC... trying to deal with the rift that had happened between the SABC and Jacob Zuma. So by inviting Jacob Zuma to participate in the re arrival of this organisation, they would somehow heal the differences with him. So I think there are interesting ways that we look at things and we are not always necessarily telling the truth or getting to the point. The fact that there have been three studies into racism in the media – two by the Media Monitoring Project together with yourselves and even the South African national editors forum had one I think in 2005, means that we are persistently dealing with major, major issues and looking at ourselves all the time.

And just to return to the issue of being a white journalist writing about issues around racism, a lot of white readers do call and inherent in their call is the hope that you will sympathise or empathise with them.

So we are still polarised on that front as well.

When I covered

Skielik going on three weeks ago, in an analysis piece, I had several white readers' phone and say they had either been victims of violent crime or members of their family had died in a brutal way and that the media no longer covers those kinds of deaths.

They are only interested in covering the deaths of black people and in the case of Skielik, this person couldn't understand how come that could be a news story.

I mean, it would be impossible that that wouldn't be a news story on an international scale, but it is difficult. You do find that many white readers, even readers of The Star who you would assume would be a little more liberated than readers of some other newspapers, they really are looking for empathy and we need to work quite hard at both compassion and neutrality

or objectivity.

And just the final point is on the issues of ... Tseliso brought up how do we look at broader issues, for example, land? We're just not covering land issues very well. We're just not covering land very well and those are certainly issues where race and racism could come into play quite dramatically.

So we need to broaden our own coverage of the greater issues that are affecting our country.

THLOLOE:

Thanks Jane. Now you've heard it from this side of the table, but as I said this forum is your forum. What we are trying to do is trying to say, what should we in the media be doing? And of course we expect other members of society to be assisting us in that introspection.

The South African Press Code just lays down the bare minimum. It says: The press should avoid discriminatory or derogatory references to people race, colour, ethnicity, religion,

gender, sexual orientation or preference, physical or mental disability, illness or age... I think when they spoke about age; they were talking about me...

"The press should

not refer to a persons' race, colour, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or preference, physical or mental illness, or in a prejudicial or pejorative context, except where it is strictly relevant to the matter reported or adds significantly to the readers understanding of that matter."

That's the bare minimum, but to do the right thing we need much more than that. we need more flesh and I am hoping that you will be able to guide us as we look for this flesh.

Do we have mics? Oh, we do.

IDO LEKOTA (Sowetan, Audience Member):

Hi, my name is Ido, I work for the Sowetan.

THLOLOE:

Hi Ido.

LEKOTA:

Hi bra-Joe. Mr Said, how do I pronounce your surname? Said? Ok. When you made your input you indicated that when you went to the FBJ thing, firstly you went there because it was a public meeting, but my understanding was that that was an off-the-record meeting. They made it clear that was an off the record briefing, so I don't know what makes it public in that case.

And then there was also... I understand that you cover Jacob Zuma, but I mean this raises the question if there is anything wrong for victims of apartheid even 14 years after that, given that we still say Yeah, even the president of country that there is still racism, there are two nations and whatever... is it wrong for them to caucus and then after that say what do we do? You know? And one of the things that we do is engage anybody else, including our white colleagues. Is there anything wrong with that?

The other issue is that the FBJ made it very clear about a day ago, before that white journalists are not invited. They made it clear. And that it is a closed session. People who went there as journalists, they went there having tape recorders and so on. We hardly do those things when we go to off the cuff, off the brief...

THLOLOE:

I'm going to cut you short. Can you point us in some direction rather than putting Ben Said in the dock?

LEKOTA:

Bra Joe, Bra Joe.. Maybe then I don't know what the agenda of thing, but its fine.

I can then suggest something that can be done. Essentially I think that in South Africa we bury our heads when it comes to issues of racism, we don't engage them. I think what the South African Human Rights Commission should be doing is to embark on more programmes, workshops on issues of race. It has been done in other countries. If you go to... you know I mean just somewhere in Scotland, kids even at pre-school and whatever, they get to do anti-racism programmes. There are colleges in the US, although they are based mostly on religion and whatever, but they also have programs, anti-racism programmes where people of different race and culture interact and deal with some of those issues.



The discussion was well attended.

THLOLOE:

So how do we bring this into our newsrooms?

LEKOTA:

Oh, is this only about the media? Well even in the newsrooms, it should be happening.

The problem is bra- Joe, the problem is as journalists, we don't want to face the fact that, you know, as black people we have certain experiences and as white people we have certain experiences and then when we talk, we... Mr... I just have to refer to that, I mean he says (Ben Said) you I mean, they came back to their sense. So he moves form a position where actually, it doesn't make sense for him for black people to react that way.

So it becomes a problem. So we need to engage at the level where he should maybe be able to understand why black people would react in that way in that given situation.

THLOLOE:

Thanks Ido. I just want to get a few more people commenting before I get a response from the panel.

TOM NKOSI (Audience Member):

Thank you.

My name is Tom Nkosi. I'm based in Mpumalanga province at a community newspaper.

I think there were some very interesting issues that were raised. I want to address myself on whether there was a need in 2008 to revive a structure such as FBJ.

My own input will be that the establishment of such structures which are seen to be exclusively black is just a reflection of historical injustices that remain unresolved.

I think HRC... actually asked a very critical question as to whose voice is being heard currently in the media and the same point was further elaborated I think by advocate Thipanyane when he said that when they did the hearings into racism in the media, they were actually... I think he said "trashed" or "thrashed". But he basically boils down as to who's voice is being heard.

So now, the question of is there a need for the resuscitation of such structures or should be just ignore what's happened in the past and focus on integrated structures.

I think my own submission would be that we acknowledge the existence of



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such structures such as FBJ, but focus on democratising or making them non-racial.

That is going to be my input in that and then my last input would be around the issue of analysis when dealing with racism.

Is it possible for people to be non-partisan when dealing with... when analysing racism?

And probably I'm not going to try to answer that. I'll leave it to the house. But I think it's an issue that needs to be looked into, Thank you.

THLOLOE:

Ok, thank you. I think Mothobi was next there.

MOTHOBI MUTLOATSE (Audience Member):

Mr Chair. I am an independent publisher, not mainstream.

But I think it's a general question.

Is the media sufficiently transformed and historically empowered to rise to the occasion, to influence and interpret the challenges South Africa faces?

THLOLOE:

Just lead us... you asked me a question. What type of answer are you....

MUTLOATSE:

Well it's a rhetorical question.

THLOLOE:

Because we are expecting a contribution

MUTLOATSE:

Well, may I lay my claim and lay my cards on the table. I think the media is part of the problem, not a solution. The media assumes a holier than thou attitude. It has the answers, but it has not raised the questions. I am saying quiet categorically [name unclear] is actually raising an issue of almost collective amnesia on the part of the media. The media has never admitted that it's part of the problem. For instance reference has been made to that... even some media groups refuse even to make representation to the Human Rights Commission. The Afrikaans press, Nasionale Pers in particular.

And then we have also the issue, I think it's a false concept, that having a black editor means you have solved the problem. For instance, you may have a black editor that heads a publication that is still part of the problem in terms of race relations, in terms of transformation. No one is prepared, even Sanef is not prepared to answer to the question of diversity of ownership.

The press is largely white owned. It may have black managers. So I am not being nice. I can afford to, because I'm independent, to lay the cards on the table and I'm also glad that Jesse's here, because the ruling party is supposed to even help transform the media, not just react to it.

Because if you look at it, the founding fathers of the ANC were

themselves journalists. Sol Plaatjie was a journalist. So there is nothing wrong in raising the historical perspective of where we are today. Why do

we still have white ownership of this important image maker - the media industry?

THLOLOE:

Thanks Mothobi. Can I start with Ben and move this way?

SAID:

I'm just going to respond to what the first gentleman raised. Perhaps the use of my words "public meeting"

was incorrect and I apologise for that however, although it was open to all black journalists, there were many people who weren't journalists who were there, but they were allowed in because they were black. So I thought that that was not necessarily correct. It was restricted, to journalists only and perhaps that's what I meant about it being perhaps a more open meeting.

On the second question: Is it not wrong for black journalists to caucus 14 years after apartheid to discuss issues of mutual concern? The problem is who defines what issues are of concern to black journalists only and you know there may be concerns that white journalists and black journalists face. I think Jesse Duarte brought this up. Should we not be encouraging nation building and should we not be encouraging integration? Now the question is whether a closed body of black journalists encourages nation building or integration or not? I'm personally not sure that it does.

Now would it not be more helpful to have a non-racial journalists' body where black and white journalists can meet to discuss race in South Africa, the betrayal of race in South Africa, like we're doing today, and raise the issue in the media and in our newsrooms.

I would have thought it better to engage rather than to have an exclusive body discussing that. You might even find that white journalists, white managers in newsrooms have perhaps a little

more concern for the problems that black journalists face. It they can have a proper understanding of what those problems are and hear it from black journalists themselves it could

be helpful. But black journalists having a closed body were they discuss these issues amongst themselves doesn't seem to be, to my mind, terribly helpful.

DUARTE:

I think just to close, I'd like to say you know it doesn't help for us to patronise the issues at all. If we're going to patronise racism, we're not dealing with it. And I think what we as a nation have to do, is to recognise

that as you said... when do we begin to recognise that element within all of us which is racist? We all have that, and we all have to recognise that it exists and move forward from that point on. But in terms of the South African media, I do think that a great deal of work needs to be done. Just in terms of understanding who the South African people are and what they represent and how they represent it.

A few weeks ago, the president wrote an article in ANC Today and he was castigated for a week after that because he suggested that perhaps the South African media don't understand, fundamentally, what all South Africans are trying to achieve. And all they did was to minimise it to his victory at Polokwane and it went way beyond that point.

I think the minimisation of issues is a problem in the South African media, making it too... bringing it down to too fine a point that nobody can understand after a while and doesn't do enough analysis or even enough research into the background to issues and I think with a great deal of respect to Ben, I'm not sure that when you are yourself feeling so threatened as a black person working in an environment where there isn't enough or sufficient attention

“I think the minimisation of issues is a problem in the South African media, making it too... bringing it down to too fine a point that nobody can understand...”

being paid to the issues you raise. And if you raise them over and over again you're simply a complainer. That it's going to make any difference unless you come as a body of people and you say now,

we've organised ourselves sufficiently well as a collective to say X Y and Z.

My understanding of the forum of black journalists is that was the intention was supposed to be. There are many issues that were raised with the president of the ANC which he cannot really do much about except black journalists themselves have to go back and do a lot of the work.

To Mthobo Mquatsi, yes I do think that he ANC does have a role to play in terms of transforming all parts of

our society, and we've been trying to do so and will continue to do so, that is our legacy and that is what we'd like to do... to have a South Africa that doesn't

think of itself in terms of race but in terms of a nation and a nation that is going to look at what is more important to all it's people not a small minority of people.

I just wanted to say to you,

that while we might have that as a responsibility to carry, I think that equally, people who have stopped writing about the issues, have a bigger responsibility than we do. And I don't believe that complaining about the problem is going to make it go away. I think we have to confront it. We have to find spaces in the newspaper to do so and so on. I do want to make one last point and I hope that you'll give space, chair.

When we met with the South African Editor's forum, Sanef, it was an extremely good meeting in my view. It was a meeting that did allow for a good deal of open discussion on many issues, but I think the question of ownership of the media remains an unresolved matter.

You have a Tony O' Reily who after a meeting of the council of investors in this country, makes a very interesting point about the future of South Africa if it was not in the same hands that it is in now. And forgets all about democracy. You know so democracy... to hell with democracy as long as we can have things as they always are and we can remain in our comfort zones we have. So the ownership of the media and changing the hands of the ownership of the media is an important issue.

The media did not like the fact that people from the ANC wanted to buy the Sunday Times and really went to town on that issue. But if a group of people, Naspers now for example, for countries for a long time was owned by people that all the media worked for, for a very, very long time didn't say too much about. And instead of saying something about the question of transformation and ownership, dealt with the fact that those four people who wanted... that Billy Modisa wanted to buy the Sunday Times because he wanted the ANC to own a newspaper.

Now, I don't know... Then we must put the question back to you. Who owns you right now? And who's agenda are you following and can we have that analysis openly and not scurry around it and be scared of it and be afraid to say that sometimes you are not as free in your editorial comment as you think you are and tell us that you are and we can have that debate.

We're open, anytime, to meet with the media, to have a discussion with you. Our intention is very clear. We want to make... we want to forge relationships, but we won't forego the principals we believe in to forge those relationships and we should not be expected to do so.

[applause]

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Ntata Joe, for me... for a country which was inspired by Martin Luther King's Dream speech you know, "I have a dream towards a non-racial society where black kids and whites kids can play together". For a country that's inspired by the freedom charter "South Africa belongs to all" for a country that has it's core values we believe we are fighting for non-racialism.

For a liberation movement, which in the 50s, actually opened it's doors to have white people and where a number of white people fought with as against apartheid, it become a bit difficult for me to understand why in 208 (verbatim) we 'll have an event like what happened over the FBJ. Purely from a realistic position and therefore what does it mean as a way forward.

Is this then how we should be addressing issues of racism in our countries, in that manner? Or is there a better, more effective way which actually does not promote division, but promote unity?

That's the question, of course tomorrow as I was saying there'll be a very robust debate where you'll actually hear us coming out much more openly about our views... and everybody else. Today I don't want to say that.

But then the issue for me, chairperson, what then has gone wrong in the media groups to actually lead to the establishment of FBJ and the way they went. Does it mean the journalists themselves have actually failed to address issues of racism and therefore they have to resort to a structure like that and actually keep other white

comrade journalists who are also sharing the same objectives? Because once we say no white Journalists, it means all white journalists. Those who are progressive and not progressive are included and it means all black journalists, those who are progressive and not progressive are regarded as progress – which is nonsense to start with.



Ben Said

So those are issues which we really need to address. Own what has gone on 13 years down the line. What has happened to that activism of journalists that we saw before 1994 where we were inspired by many brave journalists like the comrade here and many others? SO what has happened? Does it mean therefore that black journalists now do not have the power and the means to address their own issues when there are bodies like the Human Rights Commission, there's government and so forth? And those are issues that have to be addressed at some point in time and not come with very simplistic solutions to a problem.

And as we can see already, that incident have already caused so much controversy in this country and I think it will be with us for quiet a long time. So you can imagine if tomorrow the human rights Commission finds the FBJ guilty of racism and then we send them to court, that will be another story and then we'll be accused of being the white puppets in the... when we were doing the hearing we were told that we were puppets of Thabo Mbeki. When we act against the minister of the IFP,

we were told we were the puppet of the IFP. Last year we were puppets of Thabo Mbeki ... so I mean some of the issues we need to address are these.

Now my last point, chair, is this. Now on the transformation of the media, the pen will remain mightier than the sword and if the role of the media is so pushed out to our transformation, why are we failing to transform the media properly. And maybe the ANC and government needs to explain to us with all the powers they have - we have of Charters, we hear of BEE and blah blah blah, how come there is no media charter that says 25 percent of media should be owned by black people to facilitate that transformation.

Secondly what does it mean then about black people who own the media, who have stakes in the media like Tokoyo Sexwale, what are they doing? Thirdly what is the role of these black editors that we see in these big publications Sunday Times, Mail and Guardian, SABC?

What is going on? To actually call some journalists, not even the editors... because you see Sanef as an editor's forum, is not in favour of what has happened there... well to a large extent, so what should we assume? That it's the journalists on the ground that feels aggrieved and therefore need to find another forum. Does it mean that Sanef has failed to address the issues? Thank you.

THLOLOE:

Difficult questions... Jane?

SMITH:

I think that the thing that we're probably not all that willing to speak about is that viewership and circulation are still everything and the activism of journalists has in some publications been curtailed.

So as journalists we certainly do need to take a position and we do need to reassert that role that we should be playing in society.

I think we can be quite sure that in most newspapers over the next few months we'll see a shift towards Zuma as opposed to away from him, depending on what sort of suits the agenda of some owners.

So I think it is difficult... I think it a very difficult time for journalists to fight against the greater commercial machine, but we must continue to do that.

THLOLOE:

Jesse, it's very interesting. I'm looking at the code here. The South African press code and it repeats what's in the constitution: "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom of the press and other media". I don't see anything in brackets that says "except people with power inside the ANC"... I don't see it here, but that's how people read it essentially.

It's been a very interesting debate about that one. Shall we move to the other side of the room?

DIMITRI MARTINEZ (Audience Member):

Thanks. My name is Dimitri Martinez from MC Digital Media.

I wanted to pass a question of the SABC and the role of the SABC because we tend to sometimes include it as part of the media and other times as the national public broadcaster, or the state broadcaster. Call it whatever and possibly just to have a look at whether there is in fact a different role. There's been discussion about the SABC pushing development journalism and I really think that that's something that has not really been discussed.

The second issue I'd like to touch on was the issue the advocate raised from the Human Rights Commission.

Perhaps there is an answer. Why was that report trashed?

If we look back for example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission did their investigation into the roll of the media and gross human rights violations, they came

to the conclusion that there was in fact none.

Now I found that quite astounding, you said the pen is mightier than the sword... a nursery school child will tell you about sticks and stones not breaking their bones. Now I'm sure that it may well be that the reason is that we don't understand well enough precisely what that role is and how stereotypes are perpetuated, caricatures are perpetuated without us understanding. Thanks

THLOLOE:

Anybody else this side? Oh sorry.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Hi, I'm a member of the public. Just an ordinary reading member of the public and I'd like to just give you guys some observations as journalists, because at the end of the day you're not just talking to yourselves, but hopefully you're talking to us. I believe very strongly that yes, there is a need for greater introspection within the greater media community. What I find interesting is that in the past, the press was the liberal press and journalists are known as kind of liberal people. So frankly you guys got away with it and post liberation the move from being a liberal entity or assuming that everybody agrees that you're still liberal... so you jump into the traditional or the other role of the fourth estate which is to dive in and to criticise and to look deep into issues, et cetera, et cetera. Now looking and sitting on the other side that means you've missed out on a huge opportunity to actually look at what constitutes racism. Forget



Tom Nkosi

transformation, for all those other nice little words, but actually what racism is.

Look at what those kids in the Free State said - a little clip from Carte Blanche. They said its kind of Leon Schuster gone wrong.

So how do we get them to understand that fundamentally what they did was racist and my challenge to you as the media is to actually go back and look at yourself and say where the shortcuts are? Why are we

suddenly only wanting to operate as a fourth estate and not actually look at ourselves? Thank you.

THLOLOE:

Anybody else this side? Somebody at the back there.

JUDITH MTSEWU (Audience Member):

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Judith Mtsewu and I'm from the Media Monitoring Project. The reason I'm standing up is to take up the challenge that's been set. I mean, Mr Thloloe said we need to assist organisations in civil society, we need to assist the media do the introspection and we need to confront the issue of racism. Part of what the media monitor does is exactly that. We monitor the media and in monitoring the media we don't only look at the things that are shown. We also look at the absences and the silences and most of the time we suggest new angles in telling stories. And the thing with silences and with absence especially when it comes to races - and it came up in our staff meeting yesterday - is that it tends

to deligitimise the experience. Because in cases where the story of racism is not told, someone you know, who was a victim in that particular case, their story is being delegitimised and they're not being allowed to tell their story.

But it also serves to reinforce what a lot of black people are told in so

many ways. That you're being overly sensitive about race so, I mean. I think it requires us to engage and Media Monitoring Project for example, we are now involved in two projects and there is a third one and I'm going to mention the names. The first one is with the Department of Justice and all of these projects came about even before the Skielik incident and the FBJ instances and so there are people within South Africa and in government sectors who are interested in these issues. The first

one who is the DoJ, the national forum against racism and there we're focusing specifically on racism and xenophobia and the role the media plays in that particular arena. Another project we have is with the MDDA. The specific focus in that is community media and the third one, my director told me this morning is with one that has been commission by Sanef.



Jesse Duarte

So you know having done it a few years ago, clearly the incidents of the past few weeks suggest a need for another look at how the media presents the issue and I think as a final point from my side, part of what is strong about our practise at the Media Monitoring Project is that we provide evidence of these cases.

I think it's very easy, if you're working for a particular newspaper to say but our newspaper is not guilty of this. You can show me one story but I can show five stories which are not racist. Part of our strength is that we look at different media and everyday across print and TV, so we're about to give organisations a holistic and expansive view of what is out there in terms of racism.

THLOLOE:

Thank you. [applause] Do you have... Oh.

CHARMEELA BHAGOWAT, (Audience Member):

May I ask a question? Of ourselves, as journalists but also of the panel, but also of you, Joe. We've been talking about race and I think that in our interaction with members of the public, there's a general perception that the media is racist. I want to make one point and then ask a question

When we work with women in civil society, we often get asked this question: Why is it that media coverage is so sexist when we look at the bylines in the paper, the majority of them are female. In the same way, when we work with civil society organisations and we work with journalists, we keep getting this accusation of racism and many people say, yet the bylines, the names of the people who are writing, are black.

I think that is something interesting to think about. If we're talking about moving on, here's my question: What role do journalists play?

Do journalists have an obligation to promote positive values, good values in the society that they operate in and if we say yes, how do we go about doing that in our newsrooms as journalists?

Is it being proactive? Is it not just covering race when Skielik happens? And when the FBJ gets created?

How do we do that? That is my question.

THLOLOE:

The sad thing about these dialogues is that we are always being pushed by time. But can I ask the panel to do its final round. This time I'll start with Janet, this side and end with Ben on the other end.

SMITH:

I think it's just that few words illicit more of a defensive response than being accused of racism.

So, as we... I think what Charmeela says is true, we wouldn't wait for a trigger like raids or Skielik and it does come back to the grand tradition of activism and I think partly this should be the FBJ's role and partly it should be the role of another professional organisation of some kind that we need to unite in some way to really look at our society properly and carefully and without being so defensive.

THIPANYANE:

Two things, while we are thrashed, I think the Commission was way ahead of its time.

We it had this enquiry then because the media basically said: who the hell are you to question us?

And of course we had to subpoena a number of editors who then threatened to go to court and then later we reached a compromise where we threw the subpoenas where they would come but they would not be cross examined. And that actually created major division within the commission and actually what happened is this, some commissioners actually boycotted the hearing of the commission because they felt that other people have sold out by going for

a softer approach and then of course after the report was done, I think the media itself played an important role in killing the report, it's buried. That is the first thing. Then of course we're being accused of being anti human rights, we're being cartooned, you know, tackling the media, we're called all sorts of names internationally. Everybody saying these guys has gone crazy and of course the most sickening thing is that we are doing this thing at the instigation of Taboo Mbeki. For me that was really really awful. Now on the issue of the role of the media. For me, you know, the role of the media is so crucial to democracy we see it as the life blood, we see it as the oxygen of democracy. And one way of ensuring that we have proper democracy is for the people of the country to be informed about the good and the bad of what's happening in the country and therefore be able to make meaningful decision.

Now if the media does not play that role properly, we actually undermine our democracy. Now I've this before to other colleagues also that the media has to be very careful, because the Media itself could actually be a threat to freedom of expression and democracy.

THLOLOE:

Thanks Tseliso. Jesse?

DUARTE:

Thank you very much. I think firstly addressing this problem is not going to begin with litigation against it. It's actually going to begin with an honest review of what it is that this problem is and asking this question: when are we racist? What is racism? How do we in fact combat racism in 2008 and beyond in a non racial, united and democratic

South Africa. And I think there is a responsibility on the media and the institution of the media to in fact address their own role in perpetuating stereotypes in a very particular way, whether it's the way they write or how they are influenced by what they... on how they write and how they project people in a particular manner.

I think that is not something that any charter by anybody is going to cure except the practitioners themselves. We believe that South Africa does need a robust media. We do need that, but we also recognise that journalists have their own origins and opinions that are sometimes not necessarily reflective of broad society. It's their own views that they're putting across and so they have the right to do that.

That's why we fought for a democracy. We didn't fight to have a semi democracy or a democracy that's got brackets for some people.

A democracy must be even handed for all of us including the people you write about. Including how you depict the people you write about.

They have rights to and I think sometimes that is ignored.

That the other side of your story has got writes and that must be respected in one or another way.

So we're looking forward to more of this debate. I don't think it should end here and we would certainly wish to be part of this debate in our own way and I can just say this to you that you don't struggle for a non racial democracy, Joe, and then eight years, thirteen years down the line, you look back and say that went wrong. You continue with the struggle so that you implement and find ways of deepening what you struggled for. Because to pretend that it's all going to happen in a matter of two minutes is a bit naive with due respect. Thank you.

SAID:

I agree with Jesse that it is naive to overcome 350 years of racial oppression in just 14 or so years, but I

also think that the media is very diverse that's what makes it so difficult to say whether the media as a whole is racist or not. Just something directed again at Jesse, something I don't agree with.

I don't agree that the media wants the ANC government to fail and I think the ANC often comes back at us, giving the impression perhaps that white journalists and white editors somehow want

the ANC government to fail. I don't believe in the main that that is the case. The ANC government says that they will have a slanted view of the poorest of the poor and the media don't accept that. When we report on the public health system that's crumbling in many parts of the country, are we not having a slanted view towards the poor? When we report on an education system that isn't delivering the skills that we need and is failing many children in many parts of the country do we not have a slanted view towards the poor? When we see evidence, we report on evidence that in some respects, some ANC people are going easy on the aspect of corruption when it isn't being taken as seriously as perhaps we think. Is that not a slant on the poorest of the poor?

The ANC is the only people in the main who can deliver to the poorest of the poor and I'm afraid when that

doesn't happen, that criticism is going to continue and it's going to hurt on many occasions but there is no one else who can deliver in the main to the poorest of the poor. Second of all, on TV earlier in the week, a colleague said that the debate we should be having is not just about race, but is actually about tolerance.

It's about the University of the Free State - tolerance there. It's about Skielik... Khayelitsha where a mixed race man has been given a house in Khayelitsha after being on the waiting list for many years and he has been chased away and persecuted by black people living in that area saying that he can't live there because coloured people will bring tik to the area.

We also need to have a debate on tolerance where black people in Pretoria are attacking illegal immigrants who say they are stealing jobs and women. So I think the debate needs to happen on a much deeper level than just a white black debate.

It's about tolerance in society as a whole. Tolerance among racial groups, of foreigner, tolerance of men towards women. It needs to be a lot broader than we're doing at the moment.

THLOLOE:

Thank you everyone. We have run out of time. Thank you to our panel and everyone who came. It has been interesting and much needed discussion.

“So I think the debate needs to happen on a much deeper level than just a white-black debate.”



The audience listens intently to the discussion.