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text



*Women inmates of the Westville Correctional Centre deal with issues of patriarchal oppression through participatory theatre*



*The incarcerated women used the prison as theatre, as the Correctional Centre became the stage for 'guerrilla tactics' through the renegotiation of identity and its performance*

# Doing drama behind bars

ONE SUNDAY IN 1999 I was sitting in a cold London bed-sit with a cup of Twinings and *The Independent*. My now husband and I were one of the many over-qualified South Africans doing menial jobs in London to earn those precious pounds for travel, security, consumables and First World affirmation. I was a customer-service agent for a small telecommunications company and listening to irate customers fighting for a few pence or a free phone card was starting to wear me down. Surely there was something more meaningful I could be doing than negotiating phone bills?

There is nothing quite like a white South African with a social conscience... white guilt? Democracy was new. South Africa was 'alive with possibility' (as the slogan goes), and here I was sipping camomile, thousands of miles away. It was in this frame of mind that I opened up the paper and an article instantly caught my eye. It was a piece on a theatre company called 'Geese' who were using

**By Miranda Young-Jahangeer**

theatre to rehabilitate offenders. The excitement I felt when reading this article was overwhelming to the point that I would risk the raising of a sceptical eyebrow and say it felt like 'a calling'. I had no idea how I was going to work in prisons but I knew instantly it was a point of passion. I cut the newspaper article out and put it away safely. It travelled with me all the way back to South Africa

A year later I was sitting in Ruth Teer-Tomaselli's office at the Graduate Programme for Culture and Media Studies (CCMS) at the then University of Natal. Prof. Teer-Tomaselli was kind enough to offer me a job there after a carefully penned e-mail where I complained about a country obsessed with Tabloid news. Ruth and I were discussing some work-related matters when I walked Chris Hurst of the Drama and Performance Studies Programme. His effusive

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energy was intriguing. “We are running a first year course on Prison Theatre and I need someone to run the theatre projects in Westville Female Correctional Centre” he said to her – hardly noticing me at all. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I felt like everything in my life had been directed towards this moment. And I was about to blow it. I think I said something about how interesting that sounded. He left, I thought for good, but two days later he walked into my office and asked me to join the team and work with female offenders at what is now termed The Westville Female Correctional Facility.

The introduction of performance-based recreation into the South African Correctional Facilities, in 1996, offered new opportunities for partnerships between the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) and outside institutions such as Drama and Performance Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Popular participatory theatre was introduced in Westville Female Correctional Centre in 2000. The collaboration between DCS and UKZN served as the catalyst for my thesis that contributes to furthering the debate around female incarceration while responding to the real need to work against oppression from the inside out.

The period of transition in South Africa from apartheid to democracy presents a unique moment for broadening “the ongoing debate on the continuity of culture before and after decolonisation”. My thesis attempts to provide new gendered dimensions to this dialogue through the

analysis of popular culture generally and popular participatory theatre (PPT), specifically over a period of 5 years at Westville Female Correctional Centre. As such it is positioned within a Post-colonial Feminist imperative to create spaces for third world women to legitimise experience and explore possibilities for their own lives.

Incarcerated women globally are a small and specific community who experience

*‘Incarcerated women globally are a small and specific community who experience and have experienced the multi-dimensional operation of patriarchal oppression’*

and have experienced the multi-dimensional operation of patriarchal oppression. However, pertinent to the research I engaged in was the question – to what extent are democratic, liberatory processes possible within a Correctional Centre environment? While post-colonial approaches are considered, a Fiskean reading of the popular is useful here in its articulation of the ongoing negotiation between the power-bloc and the people. This analysis demanded an expansion of the scope from Prison Theatre to prison as theatre as the Correctional Centre became the stage for ‘guerrilla tactics’

through the renegotiation of identity and its performance.

The thesis essentially theorises the narrative of this research process which includes the narratives of five central women as they evolve over a period of five years, focusing specifically on issues of motherhood, femininity, sexuality, abuse and health (HIV/AIDS). It pivots on how the women at Westville appropriated and used the Prison Theatre in the negotiation of discursive power and patriarchy: as democratic communication, as propaganda and in the (re)negotiation of Zulu identity, all of which are motivated primarily by the political desire to self-actualise and generate self-esteem. The analysis complicates any attempt to position the women as either colluding with the status quo or resisting it.

In ending, in order to begin it is fitting to say that my way inside required that I first go outside. I had to remove myself from the familiarity of my South African (Durban) context in order to see clearly and from a distance what it was I felt strongly about which in turn set in motion the events which lead to the work and to my thesis. There has always been a political motivation. However, my initial politics were far less radical than they are now – the inmates of Westville Female have taught me well. Ultimately it is about (yes, I will risk the raised eyebrow again) love. For love, as Paulo Freire (1970) and bell hooks (1994) agree, is the ultimate “practice of freedom” – and where better to start than in a prison?

**This thesis was supervised by Keyan Tomaselli and Lynn Dalrymple**

## CCMS celebrates the achievements of its recent PhD graduates

### Abraham Kiprof Mulwo

An analysis of students’ responses to ABC and VCT messages focuses on the students’ interaction with communication campaigns regarding HIV/AIDS and HIV prevention. Abraham Mulwo applies a mixed-methods approach combining a questionnaire survey with a hermeneutic analysis of textual narratives. He examines students’ interpretations of Abstain, Be-faithful or Condomize and Voluntary Counselling and Testing texts and the social dynamics involved in meaning-production. Mulwo offers an insight into the structures and processes of meaning-formation within social systems, with regard to sex and HIV/AIDS, and how the meanings generated through these processes influence the interpretations and impact of HIV prevention texts.

### John-Eudes Kunda Lengwe

Listening and talking as HIV prevention captures the complexity of researching human sexuality as revealed by the HIV epidemic with its complex behavioural dynamics. Explored from a cultural studies perspective, John Kunda applies a novel public health approach by drawing on a cross-sectional survey triangulated via listening analysis, discourse analysis and focused ethnography. Kunda’s multidisciplinary approaches unveils the secret world of everyday human sexuality amongst university students. Policy challenges for HIV prevention within South African universities

are thus challenged by his findings. His work zeros in on how rational models of behaviour-change need to adapt to irrational sexual behaviours.

### Miranda Young-Jahangeer

Popular participatory performance elicits information around how incarcerated women understand and engage concepts of power and personal identity. The method enables social change and self-awareness. The thesis was noted as being ‘fascinating’, ‘perceptive’ and ‘intelligently conceived’ offering many ‘original and carefully thought-out insights into an important area of performance, ... which has not received much critical attention in Africa’.

### Nhamo Anthony Mhiripiri

Nhamo Mhiripiri’s thesis explores the self-exhibitions at cultural villages of two South African ethnic groups popular with tourists – the #Khomani of the Northern Cape and the Zulu. The thesis lays more emphasis on the contemporary artistic and visual cultural productions of the #Khomani, while Zulu cultural projects stand as relevant comparison. The thesis is written in an imaginative, at times, dialogic dramatic style to reflect the nuanced interactions between the writer-researcher and the subject communities. The iconic works of #Khomani artists Vetkat and Riekie Kruiper are critically and aesthetically appreciated, in much the same way as the self-performances of Siliikat van Wyk and other craftmakers and self-performers receive insightful attention.

# The Challenge: Self and Other

*Subjects of Writing - Writing the Subject: Literature and Anthropology, a joint workshop with CCMS and Bayreuth University's International Graduate School of African Studies provided some solutions*

THE 'SELF AND other' in academia and life is a challenge, that the individual has to tackle. Students of CCMS came to grips with this very challenge at the *Writing and self* workshops, in early May.

We as students are at a stage in our academic careers where we are at odds with how to write ourselves and others into academic texts. This is where the workshops came into play, and we realised that CCMS deals with this problem on a daily basis.

It was noted by Professor Keyan Tomaselli during the workshops that the research process in the Kalahari was quite daunting. This was in particular reference to the Centre's research in the Kalahari,

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*By Adam Meikle*

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where both lecturers and students dealt with auto-ethnographic and ethnographic elements of research. As researchers they frequently had to deal with how to write themselves, and their research participants effectively into their texts. Issues lay not with how the researchers presented themselves, however the presentation of the research participants was problematic.

Professor Tomaselli spoke about how the !Kung asked for their perspective to be written into the research. This leads to a dilemma where the researcher is caught between maintaining research that is

academic, and pleasing the subjects of the research. CCMS has attempted to probe this problem, and produce research that is of benefit to the world of academics and the ≠Khomani. The workshops helped to foster understanding about this very problem that all academics faced.

In the end, students and lecturers alike came out of the workshops changed and ready for the challenges ahead. The knowledge that lecturers and students face the same problems, in research, helps to enlighten students to the reality of research and the effort it takes.

In CCMS we are a community and we help each other out, to produce research with a purpose.

## Prof Donal McCracken joins CCMS

THERE WERE CRIES of "Out of the deanery and into the Centre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS)". This was the celebratory tone at the School of Literary Studies, Media and Creative Arts' formal welcome to Professor Donal McCracken to the School, and into the Centre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS).

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*By Lunga Memela*

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The former Dean for the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences was received by a jovial team of professors, lecturers, administrative staff and students alike at the School on March 11, 2010. The welcome by Professor Keyan Tomaselli heralded the redeployment of the former dean into the ever-expanding Centre for Communication, Media & Society following its relaunch in November, 2009.

"I've hardly seen him since his arrival at CCMS. It seems like Donal is regularly consulted by higher echelons on very important matters of College governance – Faculty selection committees, chairing centre boards, etc" – observed Professor Tomaselli. However, Professor McCracken will make an invaluable contribution to the smooth-running of the department, the social, and the research sectors of the Centre.

The School commended Professor McCracken's library of

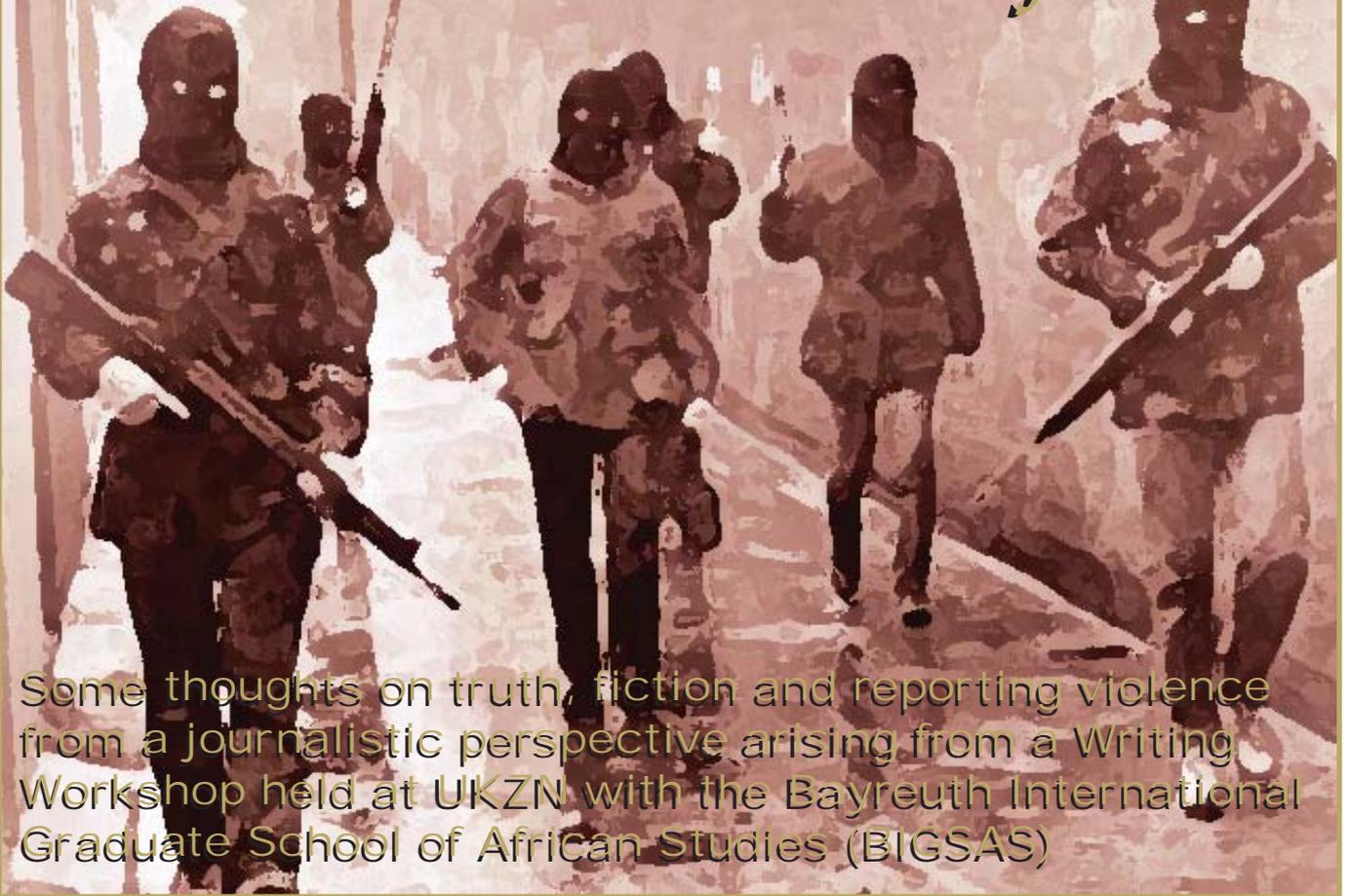


Photo: Lunga Memela

academic insight, but still more emphatically it commended his irrepressible humour and amazing ability to give entertaining impromptu speeches at the School's events. Professor McCracken joins the CCMS 'dream team'. He will run an Honours module with Dr Zoë Molver on war reporting. The Centre continues to build an enduring research base within the School, to develop a critical mass of top scholars and to actively address the slow throughput of Masters and Doctoral graduates. In addition CCMS is a base for senior researchers, research associates, professors' emeritus and other retirees to remain connected with the School.

Now ensconced in the school hosting CCMS, English Studies, Fine Art, and Drama and Performance Studies departments, Professor McCracken joins a diverse assemblage of academics, publicists, performers, writers, research assistants and students, passionate about their work.

# *Collateral damage: Don't cloud the issue with fact!*



Some thoughts on truth, fiction and reporting violence from a journalistic perspective arising from a Writing Workshop held at UKZN with the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS)

**T**HERE IS AN established axiom in commercial journalism that states: “If it bleeds, it leads”. This maxim acknowledges the fact that violence sells papers (and other forms of popular commercial media).

**By Mike Maxwell**

In reporting war and crime, events are frequently sensationalised, selective and geared towards remote audiences who are often disengaged and indifferent to the implications and realities.

As a result, the reportage is delivered as a form of spectacle, verging on entertainment. The purient public obsession with carnage manifests itself as a demand for graphic third party encounters that engender judgement or censure. This is the vicarious *Circus Maximus* of the news consumer. While it purports to be an account of events, it is necessarily embellished by the subjective reactions of the reporter, the mandate of the editor and the commercial imperatives of the publisher.

The notional remit of professional journalism that seeks to deliver a dispassionate account of events – so-called “objective reporting” – is often abandoned to create a better story. Indeed there are

*Psychologically news reporting of violence is received as drama, as literature. It is events that are distilled into words. Therefore, real violence becomes a catalyst for fiction*

elements within New Journalism that actively encourage the engagement of the reporter in the events, to the point where the news becomes autobiographical. The economic demands of the media organisations

necessitate a “saleable” product. The texts are thus constructed to meet market demands.

The reporter conjures images designed to generate reaction from readers – this relies more on the perceptions of the writer and their ability to articulate it than the base events themselves – and resulting in the story becoming ‘faction’, a mixture of fact and fiction. Whatever ‘truth’ there might be at the foundation is blurred and lost under the imposed superstructure of descriptive verbiage.

The story itself acquires fluid dynamics as the ontological levels within it intersect at certain points. At one level of existence are the events themselves, then there is the interpreted ‘reality’ by the reporter, interlinked with the deconstructed and received images of the reader or viewer. The events become imaginative constructs once they are embedded in words, literally evolving figments of vocabulary, designed and calculated to elicit an emotive response.

Thus violence mutates into entertainment, as facts merge with fiction

and perceptions are warped by embellishment. A transition from witness to raconteur takes place, a story is created for a specific audience.

Journalism, especially when reported from remote locations, is difficult, if not impossible, for most readers or viewers to verify. They are compelled to accept the interpretations of the reporter. Consequently the scenario is 'constructed' by the words of the reporter. The credibility of this testimony, of the witness, is dependent on the ability to generate images. It requires, even demands, a "sympathetic imagination" from the audience.

In this respect, reporting becomes fiction. It begins to enter the realm of literature as it seeks not to simply inform, but to evoke an emotional response. In fiction, the self and other occupy separate realms. The reader is made aware of the "created characters" and the scene-setting in the drama, and maintains a conscious distance from them. In effect the parameters

between the text and the reader are set and remain fixed throughout the encounter. In anthropology and the social sciences, self and other tend to occupy the same realm, but retain distinctions of identity that are subconsciously entrenched.

The evaluation dynamic is fluid and constantly tested by ongoing persistent inputs within the encounter which either reinforce or negate the precepts of the observer's belief system.

Psychologically news reporting of violence is received as drama, as literature. It is events that are distilled into words. Therefore, real violence becomes a catalyst for fiction. This is because fiction is more easily assimilated and allows readers to distance themselves while simultaneously becoming engaged with the subject. The reader is fascinated yet removed. This apparent contradiction is resolved through the merging of reportage and literature.

This is one of the main reasons that the military are now so acutely aware of the need

to control and manufacture "news from the front". The transition and development of war reporting from Vietnam to Iraq illustrates this dearly. Senseless and almost random acts of extreme violence are portrayed as having a higher purpose, part of an unfolding plan that will result in the greater good. The deployment of euphemisms masks the reality for the reader, as civilian casualties become "collateral damage", and the dead and wounded are blurred into a statistical spreadsheet.

Thus the story of violence is mediated through a form of fictitious literature - 'faction' - masquerading as objective war reporting. As everything is resolved into a numerical tally sheet the fiction becomes complete. There are no souls, only numbers; no blood, only ink. There is no reality, only representation. In the end it is nothing more than a story that lingers briefly in memory until the turn of the page, where it is eclipsed by the next tranche of compelling vocabulary.

*As a result, the reportage is delivered as a form of spectacle, verging on entertainment. The prurient public obsession with carnage manifests itself as a demand for graphic third party encounters that engender judgement or censure. This is the vicarious Circus Maximus of the news consumer*



Photo: Anne Maxwell

LECTURERS AT THE University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) may soon have to brush up on their teaching skills when, in the near future, compulsory teacher training courses envisaged by the Dean of Education and Deputy Vice-Chancellor are implemented.

*By Gail Robinson*

UKZN students are struggling to cope in an academic environment, and Professors Michael Samuel and Renuka Vithal both believe its time for lecturers to throw them a lifeline by way of hands-on teaching.

This article focuses largely on articles that appeared in the magazine *UKZNTOUCH*, issue 1, 2010 (Reported by Greg Dardagan and others) on the hotly debated role of academics, particularly in relation to addressing the student failure rate.

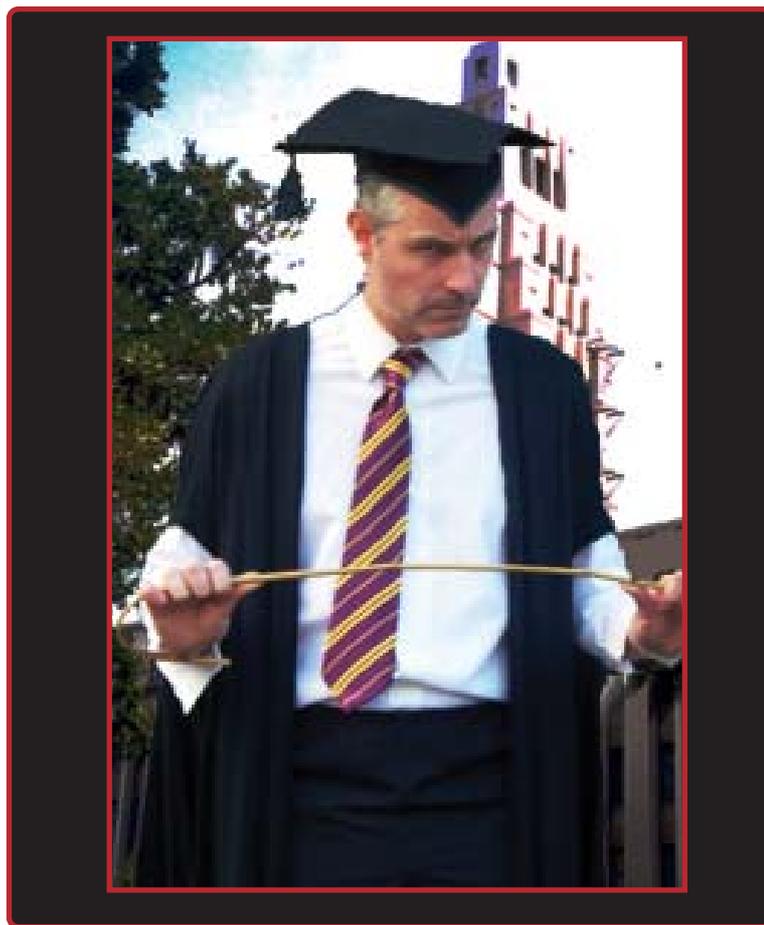
UKZN is reputedly one of South Africa's finest research institutions, but Samuel is concerned that the emphasis on research "tends to underplay the importance of the university academic as a teacher within the Higher Education system." He contends that the role of the academic as teacher needs to be reasserted.

Vithal agrees that there is a need to 'upskill' the pedagogical capabilities of not only lecturers, but professors too if on assessment their skills are found to be lacking. Their plans are to introduce future training for academics which would include the discipline of pedagogy. It is anticipated that this intervention will have a knock-on effect, providing struggling students with much needed assistance to develop their academic capacity, and so avoid a high student failure and dropout rate.

A closer look at poor achievement reveals that UKZN's diverse student body is often not primed to engage in academic learning. Samuel focuses on university access criteria and questions whether students are receiving adequate guidance regarding career-planning decisions. He makes the point that a university access pass (Senior Certificate) does not guarantee that students have the cultural capital – "the required academic literacy and academic preparedness in order to engage with what Higher Education actually entails" – necessary to succeed. Samuel suggests that where school learners are insufficiently 'activated' to develop readiness for Higher Education by their teachers, it becomes the responsibility of Higher Education 'teachers' to "bridge that gap". Samuel comments that

6 "increasingly the identity of the

# *Academics: Researchers or Teachers?*



university academic as a teacher is being foregrounded as pivotal to the success and throughput of students".

Seasoned academics, however, are not

*the university academic as a teacher is being foregrounded as pivotal to the success and throughput of students*

as enthusiastic about wearing the 'teacher' cap. Professor Keyan Tomaselli, head of The Centre for Communication, Media

and Society (CCMS), prefers to profile himself as an 'educator'. Other academics have indicated that they consider themselves 'facilitators'. What, you might ask, is the difference – is this not just fashionable terminology for what is basically the same thing – getting students to learn enough to pass? Well, yes and no. While the end goal (success in passing at the end of the study period) remains the same, the means to the end have changed fundamentally. The shift in title reflects the evolving perception of how learning occurs, what the ideal learning environment is, and how the learning process is best facilitated. The title of 'educator/facilitator' on one side of the learning equation is matched with 'learner' on the other. This implies mutual responsibility

for the learning process which relies on the active participation of both parties. Teaching is traditionally associated with the 'banking education system', which suggests how the transmission of pre-determined knowledge from an 'all-knowing' teacher to a passive 'unknowing' student occurs. This method was identified by Paulo Freire as being responsible for sustaining the superior/subordinate status quo evident in power relations between teachers and pupils, and also in broader society.

Working with oppressed peoples in Brazil, Freire recognised that social transformation was only possible after they had developed a sense of agency – an awareness of their potential to influence the direction of and outcomes in their own lives. This empowering realisation occurred once they became aware first, of how their passive role in the learning process contributed to sustaining an unequal power relation; and second, how this could be reversed once they adopted a proactive stance and engaged actively in the creation of knowledge through hands-on learning.

Samuel suggests we are living in an 'age of knowledge explosion'. He refers to the rapid expansion of knowledge, and implies that trying to contain it for teaching

purposes by defining its content would be impossible. This highlights the need for students to learn how to access new knowledge, and the need for lecturers to reposition themselves as facilitators in this

*in an age where we are overloaded with information, the winners are those who can sift it, harness it and communicate with it*

regard, rather than as custodians of a static body of knowledge that needs to be transmitted. However, being proactive in accessing knowledge is not enough.

Mike Maxwell, a lecturer in CCMS, explains that "in an age where we are overloaded with information, the winners are those who can sift it, harness it and

communicate with it. It is not simply enough to know it – today's student must also know what to do with it." This is daunting for many new students, and overwhelming for those who are ill-prepared for the quantum leap from school to university. It becomes clear that a generous dose of guidance and support for struggling students would not only be much appreciated – it is in fact a must if students are to succeed in their studies.

This swings the spotlight back on to the role of academics – researchers, or teachers? If the demands of research can be balanced with investing time and effort into student endeavours so that their capacity as future researchers is enhanced, there is no doubt that UKZN's students will become a valuable attribute to the institution.

Samuel suggests that academics "concentrate on what we hope to achieve for our learners here in the South African, African and globalised village of the international world..." It's perhaps not a bad idea for students, too, to concentrate on what they hope to achieve, take ownership of their learning, and realise that now is the time to become active participants in the creation of knowledge.

# Teaching and Research

THE POLARISATION OF the argument between 'teaching' on the one hand and 'research' on the other often forgets that the best researchers are also often the best teachers. This is because researchers are located at their respective disciplinary coalfaces: they educate from practices in the field, from direct experience, from the empirical front, so to speak.

*By Keyan Tomaselli*

They are not relying only on a textbook that someone else wrote, based in a different context, far removed from the daily experience of UKZN students. Researchers/educators critique the textbooks – a positively unsettling experience for students – rather than relying on them as pre-given templates. Theory and method comes alive in the actual practice of the discipline – made possible by research.

Researchers (and indeed activists/anyone who is socially involved), can engage students via various methods designed to break dependency, replace passivity and promote agency. Regrettably, the word "teaching", suggests that it is the lecturer who must do the work, while students respond like 'clients' – waiting for the 'service'.

As an alternative, respect students for what expertise they bring to the classroom, organise that space to leverage their different experiences and skill sets so that

all can benefit, and encourage them to take responsibility for their own collective learning. But anyone who has used the lecture theatres on Howard College knows that these intimidating, steeply tiered and inflexible spaces are designed to achieve the opposite: banking education at its best/worst, where hierarchy is reinforced by their neo-fascist design. SAPSE with its emphasis on throughput has exacerbated the situation.

These issues were intensively debated at Natal University at the *Design of Learning Spaces* conference. They remain valid today (see the proceedings edited by Costas Criticos and Michael Thurlow, published by the Media Resource Centre, 1987).

Students learn best when they are educating themselves. The 'teacher' is just the facilitator/educator. The educator should be asking questions, not delivering answers. This is the Socratic method. Teachers may need to be trained and held accountable to regulating bodies, but educators and researchers take responsibility for their own practice.

The former approach encourages instrumentalisation where students imagine that 'doing time' is the equivalent of learning. Learning is a dynamic negotiation in the thick of things. The former delivers numbers for the auditors, the latter provides education for the students. This is known as critical pedagogy *a la* Paulo Freire.

# Shoot the Media!?

The rhetoric of rage is a symptom of a deeper malaise within our developing democracy

By Jonathan Dockney

2010 HAS SEEN a number of events that have tested our ideals of the media. Despite that by the time that this article goes to print some of these issues will be no doubt dated (in a post-modern sense); they burn still.

Juju, E.T., the ANC, the AWB, JZ...all have left their own indelible impression on South Africa's collective consciousness and SA's media seem to have been caught up in the maelstrom. However, a comment that I have heard repeatedly is that the media have made these events bigger than they really are. More specifically, that the media have made Julius 'Juju' Malema.

Our own *enfant terrible*, Juju was made by the media – according to some. Obviously, Juju sells newspapers and this no doubt has media corporations' tongues wagging. For while I certainly agree that his meteoric rise can be attributed to the frequency of his appearance in the media, what also needs to be asked is, what about the others who have made Juju? What about the voters who put him where he is? What about the leadership of the ANC? There are other powers at work other than the media, elevating Malema to almost demagogue status. The power battles that are currently lashing the ANC from within – and despairingly courting the ANC



Julius Malema: "made by the media?"

useless leadership, apathetic voters and the entrenchment of the exploitation of the poor have meant that Juju has become the expressive symbol of largely (albeit in decline) black working class anger.

*The 'Malema dilemma' is a result of our own doing: corrupt and useless leadership, apathetic voters and the entrenchment of the exploitation of the poor have meant that Juju has become the expressive symbol of largely black working class anger*

Youth League's support – are key.

Malema is more than likely hitching a ride on the exploited for his own political ambitions (if I am wrong, then my apologies), but his mere existence as a mediated political figure warrants our attention. There is something worth listening to in Juju. It's not his logic though. Rather, what needs consideration is how is it that he is where he is today? This is not solely about a vociferous

brat who sends the media into a frenzy every time that he speaks. The 'Malema dilemma' is a result of our own doing: corrupt and

This is where our moral leaders need to step in. It never ceases to amaze me how to this day, no one with any social, political or moral clout has stood up and said, people, *of course* we're angry, *of course* we feel pain. But the path of anger and destruction – as seemingly espoused by populist ranters – leads nowhere but to our own ruin. What we need is constructive and honest dialogue, not the blame game.

So then, have the media become our recourse to excuse our own complicity? After all, South Africa is a democracy and *we* pick our own leaders; it's easier to blame the other than oneself. In this case the other is the spectacle of the media.

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