



The dilemmas of ethical publishing in post-apartheid South Africa: the politics of dignity v freedom of expression raised by the case of *The Spear*

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Introduction

Journalists and editors are frequently faced with questions about what they should do in particular circumstances. This, “in a nutshell” is the basics of ethics, writes Ward. He clarifies the basis of such ethical decision-making: that it should be a “reasoned, principled, position”. In his view, “Some ethical questions will require reflection on our basic values and the purpose of human society” (<http://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu/resources/ethics-in-a-nutshell>; Ronning 2002: 5). But the basis of such “reasoned and principled” positions is often not clear-cut. And in societies, such as post-1994 South Africa, riven with class, gender, racial and ethnic divides, these decisions often beg questions about ‘whose values’ are the reference point, and what are we trying to achieve in our ‘new society’. In the course of their daily routines journalists and editors are thus faced with huge intellectual challenges in which there is often not a lot of time for ‘deep reflection’. Arguably, what passes for such reflection, is simply a reflection on what has been ‘proven practice’ and what constitutes their ‘experience’ and ‘knowledge’ of the society in which they are operating—as well as, of course, the business constraints under which they operate. However, this knowledge is necessarily contingent and circumscribed.

In this paper I probe some of the theoretical issues that underpin the discourses which provoked the *City Press* editor’s decisions about publishing, and then withdrawing, the photograph of the painting which has become popularly known as *The Spear*. In particular I focus on debates about identity which speak to key questions within media ethics about universalism v particularism; the individual v the collective (Ronning 2002; Ward & Wasserman 2010). In so doing, I hope to show the fine distinctions that academics working in these fields of knowledge make in attempts to clarify what is at stake, not only theoretically, but also politically. By examining the Editor’s rationale behind her decision-making I show the remove between the discourses of academics and those of media practitioners. My observation is how much harder it is for journalists and editors to make such judgment calls when they probably do not have access to the theoretical debates involved, nor the luxury of time to consider them in detail, and are also accountable to the publishing institutions of which they are a part². This necessarily begs questions about the ethics and politics of such decision-making.

Background

On 11 May 2012, *City Press*, a local ‘black’ newspaper published a review of an art exhibition by local ‘white artist’, Brett Murray, titled ‘Hail to the Thief II’

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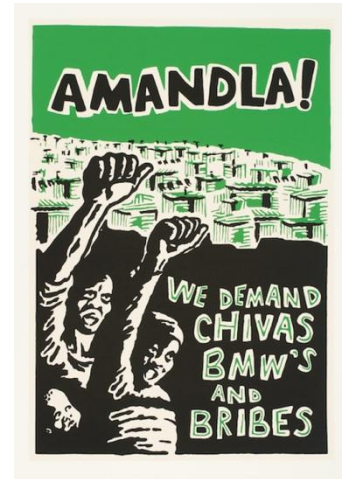
² In this case, for example, there are questions about whether the Editor of *City Press* was put under pressure by the owners of the publication to take the offending photograph off the website (see Bruce 2012,



(<http://www.citypress.co.co.za/lifestyle/white-noise-20120511/>). The article was accompanied by photographs of various exhibits which were satirical works critical of aspects of the ANC government's politics: their misuse of public funds; the lack of public accountability; what has become known as their political culture of 'tenderpreneurialism' in which ANC/government cadres win economic contracts/tenders; and the development of a culture of elite governance, unaccountability and untouchability.



Johnnie Walker... 'Forward Comrades'



Amandla. We demand Chivas, BMWs and Bribes



ANC...get out of jail free card.



ANC logo with 'for sale' and 'sold'





Another painting, “The Spear – a portrait of Jacob Zuma” was a parody of the president based on the iconic image of Lenin (see right-hand image)—with his penis exposed. The publication of the photograph provoked a furore, with the President launching a High Court application to have the painting removed from the gallery as it impugned his dignity. South African Minister of Education of Higher Education, Minister Blade Nzimande, and ANC secretary general Gwede Mantashe called for a boycott of *City Press* (Etheridge 2012). Tweeters called on the public to support *City Press*. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) organised a march on the art gallery. The South African Communist Party (SACP) called the painting ‘sadistic’, noting that “Freedom of expression has never meant freedom to insult and harm the dignity of another person” (*Mail & Guardian* 21 May 2012). The Publications Board rated the painting N16—which means not to be viewed by children under the age of 16. The Black Management Forum viewed the painting as “...an attack on the culture of the majority, the black people of South Africa. It cannot go unchallenged.” They also saw the painting as a “‘crude attempt’ to reinforce the ‘hostility harboured by a small number of South Africans towards our democratic dispensation and towards members of the national leadership’” (*City Press* 21 May 2012). An art critic saw it as a typical racist colonialist representation of the Black male colonial subject (Schutte 2012). The Nazareth Baptist church called for the stoning of the painter. Numerous articles and blogs were written either in defence of the painting and its photographic publication in *City Press* on the grounds of freedom of expression, or against the painting and its public reproduction on the grounds that they impugned the dignity of South Africa’s ‘first citizen’. Through all this, the Editor-in-Chief, Ferial Haffajee, maintained the paper’s right to publish the photograph. In a column in *City Press* (18 May 2012) headlined “The spear of the nation stays up”, she explained her position:

A group wanted the image of an “exposed” president to lead our arts section...but too many people in our office objected on grounds that ranged from us being a family paper, to concerns about dignity and cultural values. We put the image inside and ran a funny version on page 1, its indignity covered by a price tag...In the past week—and in the one to come—we will hear (sic) again this clash of free expression and dignity. Inevitably, race will be drawn into it: only a black president would be depicted like this, the race brigade will drone. Inevitably, sexuality will be drawn into it: it is the stereotype of the black man and the uncontrollable appetite, they will wail. We have been here before when Zapiro did his series on Justice being raped by the president and his gang³...

To ask us now, as the ANC has done, to take down an image from our website is to ask us to participate in an act of censorship. As journalists worth our salt, we can’t. (Haffajee 2012a)

The Editor pretty much summed up the public objections to the painting which the publication of its photograph provoked: race and culture (sexuality). And in support of the publication: freedom of expression—both of the media, and artistic, as guaranteed by Section 16 (1) of the Constitution (<http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/a108-96pdf>, page 19). But ten days later, following increased social and political objections to the publication of the photograph on the newspaper’s website, she ‘caved in’. “The spear is down—out

³ The ANC, ANC Youth League and the SACP accused the *Sunday Times* editor, Mondli Makhanya of abusing press freedom (Daniels 2012:105).



of care and fear” was the *City Press* (28 May 2012) headline to the column in which she explained her new position (Haffajee 2012 b). Her decision to take the photograph off the newspaper’s website provoked further online responses either praising her ‘sensitivity’ or accusing her of buckling to threats. Journalists were divided on the issue (<http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/editors-mull-haffajee-decision-on-spear-1-1307049>). And months later, presenting the University of Cape Town annual TB Davie lecture on academic and human freedoms, Haffajee admitted: “I would not take down that image today, knowing what I do now” (Etheridge 2012).

‘The Spear’ debacle again raises the tension between freedom of expression, and the right to dignity. In South Africa neither right is Constitutionally privileged. As a result, similar debates provoked the 1999/2000 South African Human Rights Commission’s Inquiry into Racism in the Media (Steenveld 2007, 2009), and more recently, the *Sunday Times* (7 September 2008) publication of Zapiro’s cartoon of the ‘Rape of Lady Justice’ showing President Zuma (with the iconic shower above his head) unbuckling his trousers while his alliance partners held down ‘Lady Justice’, egging him on: “Go for it, Boss!” (Hammett 2010: 88, 90). The President sued the cartoonist for R7 million: “R5 million for damage to his reputation and R2 million for injury to his dignity” (<http://www.pepperexpress.co.za/2009/10/06/zapiro-my-life-as-a-political-cartoonist>). The main iconographic elements of this cartoon all reference recent political events: the shower head to the President’s claim that he took a shower after his alleged rape of an HIV-positive woman; the image of rape, to the charge of rape against him; and Lady Justice as the victim, to the ‘rape’ of the judicial system—especially in relation to Zuma’s prosecution for corruption in relation to the arms deal (Hammett 2010). There is a similarity between Zapiro’s cartoons and the artist Brett Murray’s painting in that they are both satirical forms of expression which are explicitly critical commentaries on contemporary South African politics— Murray’s recent artwork being seen as a revisiting of 1980s ‘protest art’ (<http://www.citypress.co.co.za/lifestyle/white-noise-20120511/>; see also Koelble and Robins_2007).

What is also significant is the timing of these ‘debacles’⁴. Many have now argued that the timing was politically ‘motivated’: first⁵ to ensure Zuma’s election as President of the ANC at the ANC’s national conference at Polekwane in 2007, thereby unseating his rival, the then unpopular Thabo Mbeki; then his election as President of South Africa in 2008; now his re-election as president of the ANC at its national conference in Mangaung (2012); thereby ensuring his election as President of the country for a second term in the 2014 general elections (Bruce 2012, De Waal 2012, Lekota 2012, Munusamy 20013). By taking ‘*The Spear*’ to the streets, and once-again presenting the President as a ‘victim’ of the abuse of freedom of expression and his right to dignity, it is claimed his supporters attempted to stem his fading support by mobilising people around particularistic ethnic claims harking back to the ‘100% Zulu boy’⁶ which framed the discourse during his rape trial (Lekota 2012, Munusamy 20013). Another view is that *The Spear* gave the ANC an opportunity to attack *City*

⁴ My thanks to colleague Harry Dugmore for making this point explicit in a discussion.

⁵ First was cartoonist Zapiro’s response to Zuma’s 2007 rape trial in which his defenders described him as a “100% Zulu boy”, and represented him as a victim of state power under then-president Thabo Mbeki as a means of garnering support for him at the ANC’s national conference in Polekwane later that year at which he was elected as President of the ANC, thus ensuring his election as President of the country in 2008 (Lekota 2012, Munusamy 20013).

⁶ See Benedict Carton’s exploration of the significance of Zulu cultural identity which supports Calhoun’s position re the basis of solidarity.



Press for spearheading the investigations into what has become known as Mduligate (De Waal 2012).

Aim of the paper

In this paper I consider some theoretical approaches to the concerns underlying the difficulties faced by the editor in her decision-making. Key amongst these were the tension between freedom of expression and the media, and the right to dignity, and second, the tension between 'the public interest' and 'the national interest': typical expressions of the contestation between the media and the state (Steenveld 2009) in their bid 'to represent the people'. In South Africa these questions of representation are underpinned by questions of identity, and justice. It is from this perspective that I probe the ethics of the Editor's decision-making. The paper is divided into 4 main sections. I begin by considering Michael Billig's (1991) concept of 'dilemmatic thinking' as an over-arching framework for considering the difficulties in making sense of, and responding to, particular texts. In the second section I examine two approaches to 'the Law' which could inform some aspects of the dilemma posed by the publication of the photograph of *'The Spear'*. First, I note Powell's (1995) post-modern (critical race theory) position which challenges the positivism of hegemonic approaches to legal theory, which often inform assumptions about 'the Law' as being 'non-ideological' and hence a good arbiter of 'justice'. I then consider Mamdani's (2001) argument about how colonial legal frameworks impact on contemporary understandings of political and cultural identity. His perspective thus historicises contemporary post-colonial legal frameworks, enabling them also to be seen as contingent and ideological. In the third section I turn to frameworks which speak to issues of identity, belonging and cosmopolitanism which inform approaches to 'dignity' and 'inclusion' in contemporary democracies. In the fourth (final) section I consider perspectives on journalism practice and ethics to consider the Editor's dilemma about publishing in the public interest or national interest which encapsulate the relationship between identity and justice claims. In each section I draw on published textual responses to the publication of the photograph as a means of showing the kinds of discourses that were drawn on, and which were arguably the basis for the dilemma facing the Editor-in-chief regarding the publication of the photograph.

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Dilemmatic thinking

Michael Billig's concept of 'dilemmatic thinking' is a useful starting point for approaching the ethical dilemmas faced by the *City Press* editor. He argues that people use various strands of meanings gained from a range of ideologies or frameworks to make sense of issues that contradict or puzzle them about particular texts, or particular genres of texts, at particular moments. Readers thus possess contrary and sometimes even contradictory interpretative frameworks of meaning-making for talking about and making sense of the world. Because of this, readers may face 'dilemmas' in their reading of texts, making them engage in a dynamic way with such texts. Thus reading a newspaper, or viewing an art exhibition, or deciding whether an image is publishable or not, is often a negotiation with the text because of the contending frameworks that could be used for making sense of it. Thus, what people say, think, and argue will vary across time; the recourse to one repertoire rather than another, may depend upon the functions of the discourse, and the context, in which it occurs (Billig 1990: 18, qtd. Ferguson 1998: 55).

Billig thus emphasises the profoundly social context of meaning-making, and thus the complex ways in which people interact with media content. He also stresses the twin-



nature of ideology (as a 'system of meanings') as working both unconsciously and consciously through language:

In stressing the dilemmatic aspects of ideology, we hope to oppose the implications of both cognitive and ideological theory, which ignore the social nature of thinking. In contrast to cognitive psychologists, we stress the *ideological* nature of thought; in contrast to theorists of ideology, we stress the *thoughtful* nature of ideology. (Billig et al 1988: 2) [qtd. Ferguson 1998: 54]

Writing about the representation of race and racism in the media, Ferguson suggests that they present dilemmas in both the construction of texts, and the decoding of them by readers. The task of researchers is to identify these dilemmas, and to provide a range of readings and analysis that explore their operations (1998: 54). This "involves the media researcher in dealing with perceptions in relation to 'race' as part of the lived experience of media audiences, *and* the ways in which issues related to 'race' are represented across a range of media and genre" (1998: 53). It is in this regard that I explore the dilemmas facing the editor as she had to consider the potential readings of the published photograph and the range of discourses which a diverse public was likely to draw on.

The Law

The Law as an ideological construct

American scholar John A Powell describes the tension between freedom of expression/freedom of the press as "two narratives that describe different worlds" (1995: 333). The free speech tradition, Powell writes, tells the story of "people asserting their autonomy through participation, free thought, and self-expression in the polity...wary of government constraint...such constraint [being] an evil to be avoided in society" (1995: 333). The equality tradition, on the other hand, tells a different story:

[of] people whom communities and government conspired to exclude from any meaningful participation in the polity or public institution. It tells the story of a government that until very recently actively engaged in efforts to exclude, and now passively stands by while private actors and powerful social forces continue to shut the door to persons seeking full membership in society. This tradition also tells of a long struggle for status, not just as members of the polity, but as complete and respected human beings. Indeed the great evil to be avoided, as seen from this framework, is discrimination that undermines or destroys someone's humanity. (Powell 1995: 333)

In short, the free speech constituency could be seen as representing those who already have access to an existing system that is organised in a way that they are familiar with, and that suits them. The equality constituency represents those who are newcomers, and who do not only want to participate, but also want to have a say in the rules and conventions governing participation. Powell (1995) argues that it is not helpful to ask which of the two narratives is more valid, as this assumes that there is some other formulation that we can use to judge this. The fact is, depending on which world we live in, we will choose *that* story as being more relevant to our interests.



A recognition of the validity of the second narrative begs questions about belonging, citizenship, and ‘cosmopolitan democracy’, all of which raise ethical issues for journalists, despite a Constitution which may guarantee freedom of expression and the media. As noted above, Haffajee’s rationale for publishing the photograph indicates her awareness of the complexities of belonging in South Africa. She writes:

Ours is a sexually aware, satirically sussed and progressive country. At the same time, we are a traditional society with a president who is most well- known for his many marriages. Our identity is not as simple as the cultural chauvinists and dignity dogmatists like to make out. Ours is, by design, a live and let live world. I’m tired of the people who desire to kill ideas of which they do not approve. Besides, our morality and good practice is selective. (Haffajee 2012a)

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To locate these tensions within ‘the law’ in post-colonial societies, I turn to Mahmood Mamdani’s (2001) perspective on the legal construction of ‘settler and native’ (or ‘citizen’ and ‘subject’) as a political legacy of colonialism which animates the various debates about belonging, culture and citizenship which are at the heart of tension between the rights to dignity, and freedom of expression.

Colonialism, the law, and identity in post-colonial states

One of Mamdani’s primary concerns is how “Europe ruled Africa” (2001: 651), by which he means, the ways in which European colonial *political structures or institutions* constituted the formation of the newly independent African states. The significance of these structures is that this process of state formation produced *political* identities which Mamdani argues are to be differentiated from cultural ones (2001: 652). A critical institution was ‘the law’ through which the state enforced the practices of institutions which created and reproduced citizen participation in it. Key amongst these was the legal distinction between ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ (Mamdani 2001: 654):

Ethnicities were governed through customary laws. While civil law spoke the language of rights, customary law spoke the language of tradition, of authenticity. These were different languages with different effects, even opposite effects. The language of rights bounded law. It claimed to set limits to power. For civic power was to be exercised within the rule of law, and had to observe the sanctity of the domain of rights. The language of custom, in contrast, did not circumscribe power, for custom was *enforced*. The language of custom enabled power instead of checking it by drawing boundaries around it. In such an arrangement, no rule of law was possible. (2001: 654).

In short, writes Mamdani,

Colonial law made a fundamental distinction between two types of persons: those indigenous and those not indigenous; in a word, between natives and non-natives...rights belonged to non-natives, not to natives. Natives had to live according to custom. Nationalism was a struggle of natives to be recognized as a transethnic identity, as a race, as ‘Africans’, and thus—as a race—to gain admission to the world of rights, to civil society, which was a short form for *civilized* society. (2001: 654)



In short, the non-indigenous became citizens, governed by rights; whereas the indigenous remained subjects, governed by customary law. Mamdani here speaks to the fundamental clash between the underpinning discourses framing the right to freedom of expression, and the rights to dignity and equality. Freedom of expression speaks to civic rights—rights to civic participation associated with liberal democracies; in contrast, the rights to dignity and equality speak to an acknowledgement of ‘ethnicity’, ‘culture’, and the world of ‘customary’ practice which seeks legitimacy through a new legal framework. While Powell speaks of these from a post-modern perspective of ‘two-worlds’ which are equally valid, Mamdani emphasises the *structural frameworks*—the legacies of colonial law, in particular—and power relations which constituted these ‘two worlds’. He thus points to the ways in which these frameworks have shaped contemporary politics and identity formation in post-colonial states—as a single, contested world. It is on the structuring legacies of identity formation that Calhoun (2003) and Brubaker (2003) differ—a discussion I return to later.

Mamdani argues that there were three main consequences of this colonial legal framework:

the first...[a] tendency for indigeneity to become the litmus test for rights under the postcolonial state, as under the colonial state...second...that we have built upon this foundation and turned indigeneity into a test for justice, and thus entitlement under the postcolonial state...third...to identify a colonially constructed regime of customary law with Africa’s authentic tradition. (2001: 657)

Of most significance, is the importance of *the law* in the construction of political identities:

If the law recognises you as a member of an ethnicity, and state institutions treat you as a member of that particular ethnicity, then you become an ethnic being legally. By contrast if the law recognizes you as a member of a racial group, then your legal identity is racial. You understand your relationship to the state and your relationship to other legally defined groups through the mediation of the law and of the state as a consequence of your legally inscribed identity. (2001: 663)

It is arguably how this legal discourse reifies ethnicity and race that worries Brubaker (2003: 554)—again, a point I turn to later. Critical to our discussion now is Mamdani’s conceptual separation of cultural identity from political identity. While he acknowledges that they overlap, his argument is that they are constructed in law. In a democratic state the construction of citizenship is a political identity associated with political rights and should not be considered in relation to indigeneity or ‘cultural’ identity (2001: 664). The South African Constitution (and Bill of Rights) is the legal framework which constructs the identity of citizenship: as non-racial and non-ethnic, based on *human* rights in which “human dignity” is guaranteed under Section 10. And yet, Chapter 12 of the Constitution makes provision for a system of Customary Law, customs of communities observing Customary Law, and Traditional Leaders, thereby entrenching, as Mamdani argues, a discourse and practice of ethnic specificity which is handled outside of the Bill of Rights (Chapter 2 of the Constitution). So while Freedom of Expression (Section 16 of Bill of Rights) may be unequivocally guaranteed by the Constitution, the recognition of Customary Law opens the door for the right to ‘Human dignity’ (Section 10 of Bill of Rights) to be



interpreted on cultural/ethnic grounds—what Brubaker refers to as a “*practice of politicized ethnicity*” (2003: 554)—despite the caveat that the dictates of the Bill of Rights limits customary rights (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 302). ‘Personhood’, to which the concept dignity applies, is thus not an abstract quality, but ‘practically’ understood in relation to gender, race, ethnicity, culture, etc. For Calhoun, this is critical: “no one lives outside particularistic solidarities” (2003; 546). Although their positions are similar, it would seem there is a degree of difference in the understanding of the ideological (conscious and unconscious) force of ethnicity in ‘civic’ identity. In her rationale for keeping the photograph of *The Spear* on the *City Press* website, Haffajee (the Editor-in-Chief) recognises the power of ethnic identifications: “we are a traditional society with a president who is most well-known for his many marriages... Our identity is not as simple as the cultural chauvinists and dignity dogmatists like to make out” (Haffajee 2012a). But she is equally aware of the ‘practice of politicized ethnicity’: “Besides, our morality and good practice is selective”. She notes:

the march away from progressive politics to patriarchal conservatism is everywhere.

It is there in the Traditional Courts Bill, which seeks to return rural women to servitude; it is there in a governing party MP, who seeks to strip gay people of their right to love; it is there in the draft Protection of State Information Act, which seeks to pull a securocrat’s dragnet over the free flow of news and information.

It is there in the march of polygamy; there in the push-back on quotas for women politicians and there in the people who want art pulled down because they do not like its message. (Haffajee 2012a)

The Preamble to the Constitution “Recognise[s] the injustices of the past” and sees the adoption of the Constitution as a means to “[H]eal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights”. Thus while McKaiser (2012) may be correct in suggesting that President Zuma’s case would have been better mounted in terms of defamation or under the Equality Act (see also de Vos 2012), Haffajee’s eventual taking down of the photograph seems to honour the spirit of the Constitution (2012b):

City Press is not and has never been an object of division; neither am I. I prefer to understand *City Press* as a bridge across divides, a forum for debate... We are robust and independent, yes, but divisive and deaf, no...

Dignity: identity, recognition and belonging

In this section I consider the right to dignity in relation to a range of discourses with which it is associated, most notably, identity, recognition, belonging, cosmopolitanism, and ultimately social justice—all of which surfaced in some form in the debates about whether the photograph of *The Spear* should have been published or not. To do this, I draw on the 2003 debate between Craig Calhoun and Rogers Brubaker in which they probe the meanings and politics of ‘belonging’ central to contemporary discourses which frame ‘cosmopolitanism’ as liberal and an identity we moderns ought to have, in contrast to ‘illiberal local’ attachments to particular groups, or cultures (Calhoun 2003: 532). This discourse is evident, for example, in Haffajee’s reference to “the march from progressive politics to patriarchal conservatism” (2012a), and in McKaiser’s (2012) ‘Open Letter’ to her challenging her decision to take down the photograph of *The Spear*. McKaiser (2012) suggests her



position is reminiscent of the “anthropology of low expectations” of apartheid politics:

The modern version of “Don’t teach them maths because they won’t get it” seems to be “Don’t demand of them what you would demand of a cosmopolitan, progressive, educated white person—tolerance of artistic freedom—because ‘they’ won’t get it!”

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Here we see the ‘chain of signification’ of ‘cosmopolitan’ associated with education, ‘whiteness’, tolerance of artistic freedom, in contrast to ‘blackness’ with their opposites.

Calhoun makes three arguments that are pertinent to this essay. The first is that ‘belonging’ to a social group is a fundamental human trait—making us essentially *social* beings: “...it is impossible not to belong to social groups, relations, or culture” (2003: 536). But he also argues that “groups should not be presumed to be sharply bounded or internally homogenous; they should be seen as variably solidary, salient and stable” (2003: 562; 203:547). From this perspective he views culture as non-essentialist, and open to variability and change. It is constitutive of identity or a sense of belonging to a group. But although Calhoun argues that ethnic identity could be considered “a commonality of understanding, access to the world, and mode of action that facilitates the construction of social relationships and provides common rhetoric even to competition and quarrels” (2003: 560), he also suggests that it may be more helpful to think that “people *participate* to varying degrees in ethnicity, rather than that they simply are or are not members of ethnic groups” (2003: 560). He argues that, ironically, “challenges to the reproduction of cultural patterns engender efforts to defend them that may contribute to making them sharper identities” (2003: 561-2). This was evident in some public responses to what was deemed an insult not only to the president, but to the culture some citizens/subjects identified with.

Poet and writer Mongane Wally Serote said the painting was “no different to labelling black people kaffirs”. “Blacks feel humiliated and spat on by their white counterparts in situations like this”...
“In Zulu culture you respect adults,” said Professor Nhlanhla Mathonsi, head of the school of Zulu Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
“It is not earned – it is predetermined. (Bauer 2012)

The culture under attack was seen as both ‘ethnic’ and ‘racial’, which is not surprising given the slippages in South African usage of the terms. The Editor was mindful of this position, hence her comment about what “the race brigade will drone” (Haffajee 2012a).

The second argument Calhoun makes is that seeing cosmopolitanism and local identifications as polar opposites is an effect of not seeing them as mutually constituted by the global capitalist economic system. This failure, he argues “encourages a substitution of ethics for politics, accounts of what is good or bad in individual action for how collective struggles might change social structure or institutions” (2003: 532). He suggests that “The idea of individuals abstract enough to be able to choose all their ‘identifications’ is deeply misleading” (2003: 536). He thus argues against a premise of individualism evident in many understandings of cosmopolitanism which suggest that one can eschew local attachments (to culture, ethnicity or nation), for a ‘global’ or ‘cosmopolitan’ identity (2003: 532, 535). Instead, he maintains:



cosmopolitan liberals often fail to recognize the social conditions of their own discourse, presenting it as a freedom from social belonging rather than a special sort of belonging, a view from nowhere or everywhere rather than from particular social spaces. The view of cosmopolitan elites expresses privilege; they are not neutral apprehensions of the whole. (2003: 532).

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In short, he proposes that cosmopolitan theories “fail to make sense of the world as it is and the next steps people might take to make both it and their lives better” (2003: 532). Instead, they “offer an abstract normative structure which, however much occasioned by real-world social change, can only have the standing of ‘abstract ought’, with all the potential tyranny over immanent projects of social improvement that implies” (2003: 532).

And finally, he argues that it is precisely because groups are socially marginalised that they engage in a politics of belonging and solidarity in order to mount a political challenge to the structures and institutions which marginalise them (2003: 532, 545, 560; also Hall 2000:149). The potency of discourses of ethnicity and culture were evident in how easy it was for leaders of the tripartite alliance (ANC, Communist Party, and Cosatu) to rally their members in defence of ‘their president’ (as in Zuma’s rape trial). The posters carried by supporters at various rallies are indicative of their sense of ‘group identification’ or ‘allegiance’: “Zuma was not voted into power by newspaper picture or articles. He was voted in by the majority of South Africans” (image 7)⁷; “Hands off our president, we are hurt (image 4)⁸; “Naked or not, Zuma for second term” (image 6)⁹.

⁷ Zuma artwork: Testing the Constitution [Mail&Guardian 21 May 2012]

<http://mg.co.za/2012-05-20-jury-divided-dignity-vs-freedom-of-expression> ay 2012 0:29 - Nikolaus Bauer



⁸ Judge questions racial element in Zuma Spear case [New Age online 24 May 2012]
www.thenewage.co.za/Detail.aspx?mid=53&news_id=51664&cat_id=1007



While Brubaker is largely in agreement with Calhoun, his main concern is that groups, such as ethnic ones, are often conceived as ‘real, substantial things-in-the-world’ (2003: 554), rather than as a “contextually fluctuating conceptual variable” (2003: 555). This reification, he argues, makes possible “the *practice* of politicized ethnicity” (2003: 554). This view of ethnicity is evident in many of the responses to *The Spear*—hence the ‘ease’, noted above, with which members of the ANC leadership could draw on such discourses to rally support for Zuma. In discussing the challenges in considering the political claims made in the name of ‘diversity’, Brubaker writes:



Julia Molutsi ANC member demonstrating outside South Gauteng High Court. Picture: Elvis Ka Nyelenzi

⁹ Gallery to remove portrait from its website [Eyewitness News 29 May 2012]
<http://ewn.co.za/2012/05/29/gallery-to-remove-The-Spear>



Pro-Jacob Zuma protesters gather at Zoo Lake to march against 'The Spear'. Picture: Taurai Maduna/EWN



In any particular context, some ways of representing diversity and framing claims are going to be more legitimate than others. This creates incentives to talk about diversity in particular ways. So in the last century and a half, for example, where nationhood has carried with it a presumption of self-government, there have been strong incentives for political entrepreneurs seeking independence or autonomy to represent the diverse populations of large polyglot and multi-confessional states in specifically national terms, as multi-national. There are similar incentives today to use the language of indigeneity. And in liberal democratic polities today, where religious rights and liberties are strongly protected, there are strong incentives to represent diversity in religious terms. The general point is that how diverse populations are characterized depends on what claims are recognized as legitimate and effective in particular discursive and policy environments – and these change over time and vary across contexts.

<http://www.mmg.mpg.de/special-output/interviews/interview-with-rogers-brubaker-university-of-california-los-angeles>

Calhoun shares this view, arguing that solidarities should not be seen as “pre-political” (2003: 547). He also acknowledges that various solidarities, ethnicity, identity or groupness are “socially produced, shaped by material factors, culturally organized and yet also open to human action” (2003: 549). It is thus “not the ‘bad other’ to individual choice” (2003: 549).

He is thus not unmindful of the dangers of ‘groupism’, but he is concerned that Brubaker underestimates the significance of *culture* (as a system of ideas and practices) in the constitution of ethnic identities which provide “a commonality of understanding, access to the world, and a mode of action that facilitates the construction of social relationships and provides a common rhetoric even to competition and quarrels” (2003: 560). He argues:

The privileged feel free as individuals precisely because their habituses are well attuned to the dominant socio-cultural organization. But the less privileged experience a mismatch between their embodied capacities to generate action and some of the fields in which they are forced to act—notably those of economy and state. (2003: 560).

This perspective echoes the ‘two worlds’ discussed by Powell above. It also speaks to the habituses of middle class people like academics and journalists, and indeed journalism as ‘universal’, ‘cosmopolitan’, modernist practice. Perhaps mindful of this perspective, the Editor noted the following in her decision to take down the photograph:

The other lesson in all of this is that our common national dignity is still paper-thin; that our mutual understanding across cultures and races is still a work in progress and that pain is still deep. We have not yet defined a Mzansi way of maintaining a leader’s dignity while exercising a robust free speech or reached an understanding that a leader embodies the nation, no matter what we may think of him or her. (Haffajee 2012b)

In sum, Calhoun (2003) points to the critical importance of ethnicity in constituting a sense of belonging, and the variable ways in which it can be deployed to defend perceived injustices. However, Mamdani’s argument that the very colonial legal structures which constitute people as particular ethnic or racial subjects seems to



militate against them having such a flexible understanding of ethnic or racial understanding, hence his argument that we should “challenge the idea that we must define political identity, political rights, and political justice first and foremost in relation to indigeneity”. The differences between Calhoun’s and Brubaker’s positions are fine. But both point to the need for contextual analysis: for Calhoun, we need “sociological analysis of why people seek and reproduce social solidarity” (2003: 550); for Brubaker, we need to be cognisant that how groups are characterized “depends on what claims are recognized as legitimate and effective in particular discursive and policy environments” (<http://www.mmg.mpg.de/special-output/interviews/interview-with-rogers-brubaker-university-of-california-los-angeles>). The difficulty for most journalists is that they do not have the luxury of the time to conduct such sociological or political analysis. The appropriateness of their decision-making thus depends on the extent of the kind of sociological and political knowledge they have already developed. Given the complexity of the sociology and politics of the invocation of solidarities in particular political situations, it is thus not surprising that journalists and editors face ‘ethical’ dilemmas regarding what to publish, when.

Recognition without ethics

The importance of social solidarity that culture and ethnicity facilitate, Calhoun argues, is that it enables the marginalised to ‘take the next step’ in organising to fight for the redress of their social and economic circumstances (2003: 532). In other words, he explicitly links “the politics of difference” to “the politics of equality” (Fraser 2001: 21). Fraser shares this view: “Justice today requires both redistribution and recognition: neither is sufficient” (2001: 22). Proponents of redistribution see it as a moral right—the basis of fairness and equal treatment for all; whereas proponents of recognition see ethics as promoting qualitative conditions that constitute ‘the good life’. But, she notes:

It is now standard practice in moral philosophy to distinguish questions of justice from questions of the good life. Construing the first as a matter of ‘the right’, and the second as a matter of ‘the good’, most philosophers align distributive justice with Kantian *Moralitat* (morality) and recognition with Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* (ethics). (2001: 22)

The demands for justice are seen as universally binding, whereas the claims for the recognition of difference are seen as referring to particular cultures and practices. The former position is taken by deontologists, the latter by Communitarians. But as she believes that progressive politics today requires both justice and recognition, she attempts to find a philosophical way of combining both: namely seeing recognition of difference not as ethical claims vis-à-vis ‘the good’, but as a justice claim. She thus argues against ‘the identity model of recognition’ for a number of reasons: it views identity as individualised and psychological rather than social and dynamic; it posits *group* identity as the object of recognition, which often has an essentialist basis to which all members of the group have to conform; it reifies culture. In short, it “lends itself all too easily to repressive forms of communitarianism” (2001: 24)—as noted above by both Calhoun and Brubaker. Instead, she proposes a “status model of recognition” in which what is recognised is not the group, “but rather the status of group members as full partners in social interaction” (2001: 24). In other words, she locates the approach within a framework of democratic citizenship. She argues that to view recognition in this way “is to examine institutionalized patterns of cultural value for their effects on the relative standing of social actors” (2001: 24). From this



perspective, recognition is not a matter of self-realization, but of justice, because “it’s unjust that some individuals and groups are denied the status of full partners in social interaction simply because of institutionalised patterns of cultural value in whose construction they have not equally participated and which disparage their distinctive characteristics...” (2001:). The criterion for judging whether claims for recognition are valid or not thus depends on the claimant showing that “current arrangements prevent them from participating on a par with others in social life” (2001: 32). In short, the recognition sought should enable “participatory parity”. This is arguably her way of obviating the danger of “politicized ethnicity” noted by Brubaker (2003) and other critics of communitarianism (Calhoun 2003, Fourie 2010, Tomaselli 2009). On this basis it is arguable that recurring media representations of black people helps constitute institutional racism, which continues to inhibit the parity of participation of black people in many spheres of social and economic life. And that calls for changes to their reporting practice is a justice claim, rather than an ethical one. On the other hand, she also argues that by “aligning recognition with justice instead of the good life, one avoids the view that everyone has an equal right to social esteem” (2001: 28). And here she points to the distinction between esteem and respect which is owed to all on the basis of a common humanity, whereas esteem is based on our valuation of particular traits (2001: 39). In relation to *The Spear*, calls for Zuma to be “esteemed” are arguably not valid on the basis of allegations of rape against him and his involvement in corruption (See McKaiser 2012).

One could thus see Fraser’s argument as a way to reframe journalism ethics—not as based *either* on liberal, deontological ethics *or* communitarian ethics—but a combination of the concerns of each, rooted in a consideration of what is ‘just’ for each participant in a plural democracy. From this perspective the debates about the publication of the photograph should not centre on ‘African’ culture and practices, but questions of how media representations facilitate or hinder social equality and the “parity of participation” in social life. In Tomaselli’s words, “ethics without justice is blind, and justice without equity is empty” (2009: 7)

Journalism practice and ethics

The above discussion has attempted to highlight the significance of questions about culture, identity, groupness, and solidarity to the dilemmas underpinning the ethics of media representation and publication. This has necessarily touched on paradigmatic questions about individualism versus collectivism, and universalism versus particularism which underpin debates about journalism practice.

The hegemonic view of journalism as a social practice is that it is ‘universal’ (Hanitzsch 2007). Despite the acknowledgement that there are different kinds of journalism, there is still a view of it as a ‘normative’ practice. This practice is based on its normative role in liberal democracies (Ronning 2002, see also Christians et al 2009). In this regard, freedom of speech, expression, and the media are seen as a *sine quo non* of democratic practice (Lichtenberg 1990, van der Westhuizen 1994: 267, Murdock 1992) in which the media are seen as operating ‘in the public interest’, rather than the ‘national interest’—a point discussed below.

The underlying tension between these rights, and the right to dignity, which is usually¹⁰ constituted by the discourses around identity and belonging, is that the

¹⁰ See discussion of Ward’s (2010) grounding of dignity within a set of universal protonorms



former are often regarded as 'universal', whereas the latter are associated with a politics or ethics of recognition which is associated with 'particularity'. In this regard, questions of press freedom and the right of freedom of expression are treated within the ambit of normative (liberal) ethics, whereas issues relating to 'difference' in journalism ethics are often addressed via 'communitarian ethics' (see Christians 2004). However, within the discourse of communitarianism, 'the group' or 'the community' are often treated as homogenous, and there is no recognition of power relations or that 'the community' is socially constructed (see Kasoma 1994). The problems of communitarianism and its form of *Ubuntu* in African philosophy are well documented (Banda 2009, Fourie 2007, Fourie 2010, Tomaselli 2009), and echo the concerns of Fraser (2001), Mamdani (2001), Calhoun (2003) and Brubaker (2003) discussed above.

As noted earlier, another aspect critical to this normative conception of journalism is that it serves democracy in 'the public interest' rather than 'the national interest'—another discourse that surfaced in the debates about the publication of the photograph of *The Spear* (McKaiser 2012, ramalainetalkpoliticalanalysis 2012). This debate has a long history in South Africa in which the 'national interest' is associated with the Government's idea of what 'the state' needs, whereas 'the public interest' is usually associated with civil society's needs (see Wasserman and de Beer 2005). In relation to debates about journalism practice, the former is associated with forms of 'development journalism' and communitarian ethics which is eschewed by liberal practitioners, whereas the latter is associated with liberal democratic practice and ethics. Haffajee's original argument for publishing the photograph was firmly rooted in the liberal right to free speech, and thus in 'the public interest' (2012a). But her reason for taking down the photograph was "out of care and fear" (2012b), arguably expressed in terms of 'the national interest'. Fellow editor, Peter Bruce of *Business Day* agreed with her that the photograph should come down "in the national interest" (2012). Others disagreed, seeing it as a blow for free speech and the independence of the media, while the *New Age*, *Citizen* and *Sowetan* were equivocal (SAPA 2012; McKaiser 2012).

The acknowledgement of capitalism and colonialism as global systems which have shaped global media relations and practices has provoked at least two noteworthy contributions to theorising the tensions and debates noted above. One is Clifford Christians' (2010) notion of an "Ethics of Universal Being" in which he grounds questions of dignity as universally associated with the ontology of being human. On this basis he notes the sanctity of human life as a 'protonorm' from which he derives the fundamental ethical principles of human dignity, truth, and non-violence (2010). The other suggests using post-colonial theory as an approach to media ethics as it too questions the politics of modernist universalism and liberal individualism which obscures structural power relations, framing quests for universal justice in ways which negate the significance of solidarity based on culture and ethnicity to these struggles (Rao and Wasserman 2007, Rao 2010, Wasserman 2010). By foregrounding particular concepts drawn from Powell (1995), Mamdani (2001), Calhoun (2003), Brubaker (2003) and Fraser (2001) whose work appears not to be part of the corpus of work on media ethics, I hope to have added their insights to the field.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper is to offer theoretical insights into the *City Press* editor's published dilemmas about her decision to publish, and then retract, the photographic image of *The Spear* from the newspaper's website. In particular, I



focused on debates about culture, identity, belonging and solidarity, as these were prominent in her decision-making which was a response to the public discourses aired in various online and offline media sites. While the theoretical perspectives may be useful in informing the political debates that take place, and in contributing to the on-going theoretical discussions about media ethics, they do not provide a 'blue-print' for action. As can be seen from the discussions above, theorists make *fine* distinctions in their arguments with each other. In contrast, journalists and the general public seem to draw on more generalised discursive repertoires which are hegemonic to their discursive communities. There appears to be a significant gap between the discourses of academics, media professionals, and the public. Editors routinely weigh up contingent factors and make judgement calls in particular contexts which are often politically loaded. The breach in the different discourses could be sutured by public engagement between editors and academics about the basis of their positions. This would arguably help both the public and the journalistic community in refining their understandings of the kinds of perspectives that need to be taken into account in making publishing decisions.

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