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WHAT'S PUBLIC IS PROPAGANDA, WHAT'S SECRET IS SERIOUS: OFFICIAL SECRECY AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

by Christopher Merrett

We exist at the moment in a strange interregnum, between an old order where speech was regarded as a privilege, not a right and a new order under a bill of rights... whose ambit is presently a matter for speculation.

Background

If South Africa is ever to become a participative democracy it will require firstly, a large number of educated people; and secondly, information. Without background knowledge about issues, and the way government has tackled and intends to tackle them, the ability of the electorate to make informed and intelligent decisions, especially in an increasingly technologically based society, is limited. Knowledge does not equal power, as the cliché would have it, but it is true to say that power cannot be exercised without it. Information is essential to efficient and thereby effective democracy, which is why the concept of the right to know is recognized as fundamental in democratic societies. Information contributes to judgments and choices which make people into responsible citizens as well as legitimating the very concept of government.

South African society has traditionally been highly secretive, for a number of easily explained reasons. The most obvious is the fact that a government which defied all modern thought and whose survival depended on the repression of human rights would not act in an open way... Official secrecy (also known as statutory censorship) lies in legislation which controls vast areas of public life. The South African government is not unique: all governments try to hide details of the ways in which they work, particularly those which are unsavoury or unpopular. In South Africa, however, the national information system has become grossly distorted to the benefit of government propaganda in an attempt to preserve the power of a white elite and its allies. Furthermore, most South Africans have become conditioned to
assume that this is normal and natural, or even desirable. One of the biggest secrets in South Africa is the extent of government secrecy.

From the mid-1950s until the late 1980s, information on certain topics became hard, and even dangerous, to acquire. Real debate on vital issues was hampered by both a dearth of information and punitive action by the government against dissenting opinion. To varying degrees information about the following was circumscribed:

- Business information and foreign trade
- Capital punishment, especially racial bias in sentencing
- Conscientious objection
- Corruption and cases of fraud
- Detention without trial and the treatment of detainees
- Land consolidation
- Liberation movements and their activities and policies
- Mental health institutions
- Military incursions into Angola and repression in Namibia
- Nuclear power and the development of nuclear weapons
- Oil supplies and reserves
- Police involvement in repression in South Africa
- Prisons and treatment of prisoners
- Sanctions and South African trade
- Weapons procurement and development

These are all topics about which the voters and taxpayers have a right to be well informed. The current legislation preventing them can be classified, very crudely, as follows:

- Acts which control official information (eg. Protection of Information Act, Statistics Act)
- Acts which restrict information from all sources on specific topics (eg. Nuclear Energy Act, Petroleum Products Act)
- Acts which regulate administrative and legal functions (eg. Archives Act, Criminal Procedure Act, Disclosure of Foreign Funding Act, Inquests Act)
- Other Acts extending arbitrary government power (eg. Indemnity Act, Internal Security Act, Publications Act)

Did South Africa explode a nuclear device in the southern Indian Ocean on 22 September 1979; and who else was involved? Which countries have transferred technology to South Africa in the course of developing the arms industry? Who lost the country $30 million in 1979 by paying twice for a stolen cargo of oil from the tanker Salem? Why did Samora Machel's plane crash just inside South Africa in October 1986? What caused the South African Airways aircraft Helderberg to crash off Mauritius in 1987? Who was responsible for the assassinations of Matthew Goniwe and his comrades, the Ribeiros, David Webster, Stanza Bopape, Siphiwe Mtimkulu and Anton Lubowski? These are all legitimate questions of public interest to which citizens have a right to expect a comprehensive answer. In each case knowledge is deficient and official secrecy is trying to hide the truth.

Current Situation

The situation has improved slightly since 1990 without the legislation being altered drastically. The exceptionally high level of secrecy began to break down as government confidence waned and investigative journalism flourished, reinforced by lessons learned by the democratic movement during the State of Emergency. The Weekly Mail, Vrye Weekblad and New/Sunday Nation, for instance, have published exposes on certain aspects of prisons, psychiatric hospitals, the activities of hit squads and “special forces”, arms supplies to Iraq, Israel and Rwanda, oil supplies and the Inkathagate funding scandal. The most recent example concerned an expose of government duplicity about South Africa's nuclear capability which came to light through court records dating from 1987. The authorities have threatened legal action but seem less sure of themselves than they were a few years ago. From this we can draw the lesson that harsh repression in the sphere of information requires confidence on the part of the authorities. During 1992, laws about the police and prisons were relaxed; and Reg Rumney writing in the Weekly Mail about oil supplies a year earlier remarked that he was able to work, for the first time in years, without the fear of “the Special Branch paying visits to researchers who asked too many questions about the...industry.”

However, Max de Preez of Vrye Weekblad was convicted and fined under the Protection of Information Act in 1990 for pub-
lishing news that an institute attached to Stellen Bosch University acted as a conduit for information to the National Intelligence Service. The same Act was invoked in a fraud case which revealed the fact that the Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB) was involved in military interference in the affairs of another state. No further evidence would be revealed. In November 1990, the trial of a conscientious objector, Michael Graaf, was hurriedly adjourned when he revealed details about security force actions in Namibia as part of his evidence, thus infringing the Defence Act. As Mathew Blatchford remarked, "The armed forces operate in secret, a secrecy protected by a huge number of interlocking statutes.... Without this concealment the South African public might have been revolted by what the armed forces have done."

Secrecy seems to be an integral part of the "new" South Africa. Commentary on CODESA in 1992 and on the work of the Advisory Committee on Land Reform (ACLA) has been especially critical of the secrecy involved. A particularly worrying current concern is that about South Africa's nuclear weapons. In 1991 South Africa signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which opened up its stockpile to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA). The IAEA fears that, because the nuclear programme was secret and unmonitored for so long, weapons grade material is undocumented. United States government sources suggest that the South African authorities have shredded documents concerning the nuclear programme and may have fabricated records showing how much enriched uranium it produced. There is a major worry that material unaccounted for may fall into the wrong (that is to say, right wing) hands. Hidden from the public was the fact that South Africa had developed battlefield nuclear weapons which could be launched from Armscor's G5 and G6 guns, capable of projecting a 2 kiloton warhead 42 km. Russian and US experts suspect that South Africa had developed thermonuclear devices and the capability to deliver them as far as Nairobi and Lagos. The other fact that was carefully concealed was the amount of international assistance given to South Africa. The carefully nurtured image of a robust, defiant economy becoming self-sufficient in armaments was largely propaganda; assistance being provided by Germany, the United States, France, Canada and, in particular, Israel.

Another recent issue which has been clouded in secrecy has been that of South Africa's relations with Angola. Jonas Savimbi of UNITA visited South Africa unannounced on 17 September 1992, twelve days before the Angolan elections which he later repudiated. Apparently he was assured of South African support for his federal demands and promised clandestine aid in a continuing war via a massive air bridge from the upgraded military base at Pomfret in the northern Cape. There was heavy nighttime flying over Botswana in the second half of 1992 and ludicrous claims were made by the South African military authorities that private planes were flying through gaps in the radar coverage of the country's borders. The private, secretive conduct of foreign policy in this way would, of course, either bring down any democratically elected government, or have severe repercussions for it. There are good reasons why the South African government should be secretive about its relations with Angola: the parallels with Inkatha and Natal (especially at the time of writing in April 1994) are chillingly obvious.

The most blatant potential use of secrecy is found in the Further Indemnity Act of 1992, which provides for a National Indemnity Council to meet in secret to decide who should receive indemnity for political crimes. Evidence and documentation are strictly confidential (section 10 of the Act). Thus are war criminals to be exonerated. This measure was rejected even by an unrepresentative parliament and forced through via the appointed President's Council. It is a continuation of the policy of repression as state strategy and designed to protect servants of the apartheid state, some of them highly placed. It is part of what Brian Currin of Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) describes as the "forgiveness industry" so appealing to the conservatives and born-again democrats who want to wash their hands of the past, establish a "clean break" and "forgive and forget."

In the words of Kader Asmal, apartheid was a criminal conspiracy and a calculated crime against humanity. It was no unfortunate error, but a policy which glorified lawlessness, social disintegration and immorality; and treated anyone who dissented from its viewpoint, and did so effectively, as a criminal.

Enforced amnesia about the past is no beginning for a society requiring openness. Hilda Bernstein writes evocatively in a recent essay on South Africa's history as one of "torn and miss-
We need to complete some of those pages by finding out who did what to whom and why, a process also required of the ANC in light of its inertia after the Motsuengane Commission and hypocrisy about events in its Angolan and Ugandan camps. Reconciliation requires truth and justice, and Philip van Niekerk argues persuasively that "there are matters of honour of setting the record straight, of making sense of the sad history of our country that still require the truth." As George Orwell put it epigrammatically, "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past."

For several years there have been rumours that government officials were destroying documents: the first example which came to light concerned the police forensic laboratories in Pretoria at the time of Dirk Coetzees revelations about police death squads. In August 1993, the wholesale destruction of classified documents, especially those relating to the work of the National Security Management System (NSMS), was highlighted. The National Intelligence Service (NIS) contended that classified documents are exempt from the Archives Act (as of course are the South African Defence Force (SADF) documents) and the State Archives appeared to have no plans to take legal action. The destruction order was itself a classified document. It was recalled on 28 September 1993 as part of an out-of-court settlement, after an application made to the Supreme Court by LHR. Papers must now be treated in terms of the Archives Act, although complacency must be avoided in view of the South African tradition of shredding historically incriminating material: there is apparently no complete record of the Rivonia Trial in the Transvaal Supreme Court archives and inquest records are routinely destroyed. Inquests have of course, like commissions of enquiry, been notorious in South Africa for the details they obscured, rather than the truth they revealed, so the destruction of related documents is to be expected. Recently the Koevoet archive disappeared mysteriously en route from Windhoek to Pretoria.

In 1992 at the Library and Information Workers' Organization (LIWO) Conference held in Cape Town, Albie Sachs pointed out that the most comprehensive biographical dictionary in South Africa consisted of security police files, although one wonders about their long-term survival. Some would say that, knowing the low level of intelligence and morality of those who supplied the information, and something about the experience of revealing police files in East Germany, perhaps this is a good thing. It is interesting to note that certain well-connected individuals have been allowed access to the files: Emma Gilbey, biographer of Winnie Mandela, was allowed to see police material including copies of first year university essays and bank statements. There is also fear that documents seized from anti-apartheid organizations over the years are now being destroyed by the police using the excuse that since the 1990 unbannings they are no longer needed.

There are thus two main reasons why there is concern about freedom of information and its relation to a future democratic society. Firstly, we must reclaim our history. Any nation which has an incomplete understanding of its past rests on shaky foundations and there are parallels here with the German experience after the Second World War. Secondly, government must be made accountable in the light of the historical role of the South African state as a kleptocracy, an exploiter and repressor. In view of this, there is a need to develop freedom of information rights, law and practice which concentrate not so much on the relation between government and individual, as in other countries, but rather on redressing socio-economic inequities within society.

Principles

It is widely accepted that governments have a legitimate right on behalf of the citizenry as a whole to classify certain information. The parameters need not, however, be as wide as most governments would like us to believe. The best standpoint from which to proceed would be an assumption that all information should be available, with certain exemptions. Obviously data which might assist an external aggressor must be protected; and some personal information in which the State has a legitimate interest should be kept confidential. There is even a case for the strategic advice given to Ministers, but not the data upon which it is based, to be confidential. Australian law exempts certain (but not all) documents affecting national security and international relations, relations between the states, the Cabinet, internal gov-
ernment processes, law enforcement and public safety, govern­
ment financial or property interests, personal privacy, legal pro-
essional privilege, certain business affairs, certain research, the
national economy, matters divulged in confidence or involving
contempt of court or parliament, and elections. This is a long list
for a country known as one of the world's leading democracies
and it illustrates the difficulty of establishing a freedom of infor-
mation ethos.

What must be tackled in South Africa is the unchallenged abil-
ity of a government to confuse the legitimate security of the
state with the protection of party political and other sectional
interests, or the covering up of human rights abuses, corruption,
and maladministration. Such confusion is precisely what
has happened in the past, and continues to this day. Boundary
lines have to be drawn around that limited amount of informa-
tion to which the state can justifiably claim confidentiality.
Simple right of access to information is not, however, the full
extent of the issue at stake. Even South Africa's stringent sys-
tem of official secrecy was not sufficient to ensure complete
secrecy. For example, an outline of the Salem affair was known
almost immediately, even if the precise details of South
Africa's involvement remained obscure for some years. The
presence of South African troops deep in Angola in 1975 was
impossible to hide for long.

Both of these examples had international dimensions which
ensured that the authorities had no control over the broad
details. Their ability to control information about internal
affairs, for instance, prison brutality and the premeditated
assaults by police on the rights of citizens, was of course a good
deal stronger. However, even where information gradually came
to light, insufficient was known quickly enough to have made
an impact even if universal suffrage had been in place.

If governments are to be held accountable for their actions, the
public must have information quickly. Thus not only do the
laws governing official secrecy in South Africa need radical and
rapid revision to entrench a right to information, but the media
must be encouraged to expose issues which have a public inter-
est dimension. Even a post-liberation government will be tempt-
ed to cover up embarrassing details of the ways in which it

works and perpetuate its term in office by keeping people in
ignorance.

There is also good reason to apply freedom of information
regulations to private companies. They should be required to
publish in their annual reports all breaches of legislation on
environmental matters, occupational health and safety, discrimi-
nation, advertising and trades description and consumer
protection, and account for all accidents. This is the concept of
rudimentary social audit which becomes as important as govern-
ment accountability in an era in which those who continue to hold political power in South Africa
desperately privatize the common wealth ahead of black
political empowerment.

The law as it stands encourages corruption and suppresses
dissent. It has come as no surprise to those who opposed
apartheid for so long that the moral decay which it deified
encouraged financial and other corruption. This was
inevitable in a society dedicated to secrecy in which dissent
was equated with treason. The latter is a symptom of a sick
society: national health is dependent upon a good measure of
dissent and unfettered questioning. One of the speakers in
the debate in the British House of Commons in February
1993 described secrecy as a "corrosive disease." Philip van
Niekerk has made the telling point that the litmus test of any
political movement's commitment to society is its policy on
freedom of speech and information.31

Methods

Official secrecy will not be reduced to reasonable proportions
by legislative reform alone: for instance, by repealing statutory
censorship clauses in topical legislation, and loosening the
Protection of Information Act. The right to information must be
entrenched in a constitution or Bill of Rights guaranteed by the
independent judiciary. Furthermore, the civil service must be
trained to reflect its name, to see itself acting for the benefit of
society as a whole.

A climate of greater openness can only be assured in the long
term by changes in the attitude of individuals and groups and
radical alteration of the national ethos. Government claims
regarding the need for secrecy need to be treated with extreme suspicion. Tony Heard quite correctly argues that “deceit, secrecy and obfuscation have been the norms for four decades...” and points to the danger of “trip switch[ing] from one sterile era of conformity to another.” South Africans must become less deferential to those with political and economic power, more cynical about their motives and more ready to challenge them, if necessary in imaginative ways. This is embodied in calls for a strong and resilient civil society in which trade unions, the churches, the press, universities, the professions and librarians and information workers act as society’s watchdogs in such matters. This can also be seen as a rallying and unifying issue, appealing to intelligent conservatives (assuming that this is not a contradiction in terms) as it leads to more economical government, greater accountability and a higher quality of decision making. Certainly there can be no such freedom without a vigorous, pluralistic, free press with high standards of journalism, especially in the field of investigative reporting. Sadly, there is in South Africa a long history of press deference to politicians while the electronic media, as it does world-wide, tends to trivialize important and complex matters. Ironically at the point of political liberation, South Africa’s vibrant press is being decimated: New African (Durban) and Vrye Weekblad (Johannesburg) have recently closed down and other titles are under threat.

One way governments can avoid the issue is by reducing their commitment to collecting information, for instance, by privatizing and commercializing aspects of data collection formerly paid for from the public purse. There is a need to counter the right wing idea that there is no such thing as society, that human relationships can be reduced to a two dimensional structure based on authority (domination-subordination) and commerce (buyer-seller). All progressive thought in the past few centuries has accepted that we have responsibilities towards one another and that the health of society as a whole is vital. Such a collectivist vision depends upon the duty of government to act in the interests of the citizenry of such society, collect data about it and promote a free flow of information. At this stage of South Africa’s history there is a strong call for transparency, but the Kempton park negotiations (which led to the first non-racial elections in April 1994) and the operations of the Transitional Executive Council (TEC) have been notable for the amount of work completed behind closed doors.

ANC policy in this regard is not encouraging. It proposes that the press be guaranteed fair comment, but this does not mean it will be free. It all sounds rather reminiscent of the National Party’s demand that the press should be “responsible.” Nor is there a commitment to freedom of information, but rather “necessary” information for “effective” use. Van Niekerk speculates that this policy is designed to suppress internal dissent. After the recent Sisulu bodyguard shooting incident, it is thought that the ANC and the police agreed not to release any further information, ostensibly to avoid a “trial by the media.” There are laws to prevent this; all that transpired was that the public were deprived of information. Furthermore, recent discussion about the role of the press has raised again that oppressive spectre of the 1970s and 1980s “national consensus.”

The example of Zimbabwe is sufficient warning of the propensity of post-liberation governments to utilize the repressive legislation of their predecessors.

What of librarians and information workers: where do they fit in? Obviously their role in society is dependent upon the amount and relevance of information provided to users; or at the very least the amount of constructive advice imparted about where to locate it. At a Library Association symposium in London in 1990, entitled “In the national interest,” a member of the audience asked a panel whether its members could identify with the concept of “librarian as hero.” They were too taken aback to respond coherently, but I have often thought about that question subsequently, and come to the conclusion: yes, if librarians take part courageously, vociferously and eloquently in the promotion and defence of a civil right as fundamental as freedom of information. Of course, it will be necessary to shake off that tradition of professional cowardice shown by the establishment which dominates South African
Librarianship in relation to the problem of censorship. The sobering truth is that without the collaboration of librarians, state censorship could not have worked, at least not since June 1976, the point at which cracks began to appear in the monolith of apartheid. If librarians have the courage of their convictions and can break away from the timidity of the past, lining up with other civil libertarians, then the rewards can be great. Librarians need to be frontrunners in a vibrant and if necessary aggressive civil society which takes on the authorities in such matters, part of the reclamation of the people's history and a group seen to be essential to the flow of information which will underpin democracy.

For many years South Africans saw their national struggle, quite understandably, as distinctive and in some ways unique. The struggle for the "right to know" lines South Africans up in a global development in which they can learn from other societies. If they do not, there can be no political empowerment for the mass of people.

NOTES

1. This view of officialdom and information is attributed to Charles Bohlen (1905-1974), US Ambassador to Moscow and Paris in the 1950s and 1960s.
4. The Salem was a tanker which broke the oil embargo of South Africa in December 1979 by landing a stolen cargo of oil at Durban. She was scuttled in an insurance scam off the coast of West Africa soon afterwards.
5. Goniwe, the Ribeiros, etc. were all anti-apartheid activists assassinated by various arms of the South African security forces. Anton Lubowski was a member of SWAPO who worked for the independence of Namibia.
8. CODESA was the acronym for the multi-lateral talks which started the negotiation process leading to democratic elections but which broke down in mid-1992. ACLA was an early attempt to tackle land restitution.
9. An editorial in Farmer's Weekly complained that the members of ACLA were political appointments and that their recommendations were secret. It argued that the judicial process should be used to settle land claims in open courts so that justice could be seen to be done [Land briefs, AFRA News, February 1993, p.20].
10. Both the IAEA and the CIA claim that they failed to identify South Africa's nuclear bomb factory at Advena, 40 kilometres west of Pretoria, although this is a little hard to accept.
11. Armscor is the state agency for manufacturing, procuring and exporting military hardware.
14. Kader Asmal was a prominent human rights lawyer in exile with the ANC. He is now the Minister of Water Affairs in the Government of National Unity.
17. The Motsuenyane Commission was the third internal ANC investigation into alleged human rights abuses in its Angolan and East African camps.
20. Dirk Coetzee operated out of the police squad base at Vlakplaas near Pretoria for some years before fleeing the country and putting information at the disposal of the ANC.
22. The trial of 1963 which sent Nelson Mandela and much of the ANC leadership to jail for life.


25. People discovered that their spouses or children informed on them, information which they might have been better without. There is also the distinct possibility that false information supplied to the police out of malice or ignorance is now accepted as truth and that the reputations of honourable people will be sullied forever. The irony of freedom of information achieving the ends of a now disgraced and notionally disbanded security police would be complete.


28. In Australia, 28,247 freedom of information (FOI) requests were received in 1991-92, at a cost of $A 12.7 million. Full time equivalent staff employed on FOI matters were 203. Most of the requests (92%) concerned veteran’s affairs, social security, taxation, and immigration, local government and ethnic affairs. Other issues (about 6%) included education, housing, defence, police and foreign affairs. Only 4% of requests were refused entirely, and 19% in part. (Australia. Attorney-General’s Department. Freedom of Information Act, 1982. *Annual report, 1991-1992*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1992.)


34. The Transitional Executive Council was theoretically a power sharing body administering South Africa with the National Party government for the four months leading up to the April 1994 elections.

14 Articles
ORAL DOCUMENTATION:
THE OTHER "FAMINE" IN AFRICAN LIBRARIES
by Anaba Alemna

Introduction

A lot has been written about the "book famine" as the other famine in Africa, the major famine being the hunger for food. Unfortunately, very little has been heard about another "famine" in African libraries which is the lack of oral documentation in these libraries. What is often forgotten is that Africans basically have an oral culture. The book, reading, libraries and formal education were all imported from the colonial masters.

The introduction of libraries, reading and a bookish system of formal education into Africa marked the historic transition from an oral pedagogy to a literary education. Because of its emphasis on literacy, this new system required that librarians and others stress "alphabetized information" as opposed to "information per se." According to Amada, "the absence of true libraries in Africa as well as the poor quality of both services and clientele, is to be better understood in terms of the hasty attempt to transform Africa from an oral to a written culture."1

In more recent times there has been a tendency to view the people of Africa, particularly the majority who live in the rural areas, as ignorant, passive and stubbornly uncooperative recipients of "modern" information that has somehow been legitimized by the printed word. The actual situation, though, is that the people probably have more ideas than most, for within Africa's oral medium, there exists a treasure-trove of knowledge which could contribute to the solution of many of the continent's persistent problems.

In the view of Ruth Finnegan, "the concept of an oral literature is an unfamiliar one to most people brought up in cultures which, like those of contemporary Europe, lay stress on the idea of literacy and written tradition. In the popular view it seems to convey on the one hand the idea of mystery, on the other that of crude and artistically undeveloped formulations."2 She goes on to stress that none of these assumptions is generally valid. Her position is that, despite difficulties of exact delimitation and presentation, it is misleading as well as unfruitful to attempt to draw a strict line between the verbal art of literate and non-literate cultural traditions.

Thus, it is clear that the difference between oral and written literature is that of degree and not of kind. Throughout much of antiquity even written works were normally read aloud rather than silently, and one means of transmitting and, as it were, "publishing" a literary composition was to deliver it aloud to a group of friends. In such cases the relationship of the performance and transmission of literary works to the content is not totally dissimilar from that in African oral literature. Even in a society apparently dominated by the printed word the oral aspect is not entirely lost. Perhaps because of the common idea that written literature is somehow the highest form of the arts, the current significance of oral elements often tends to be played down, if not overlooked completely. African oral literature has often been regarded as primitive and not to be studied by civilized communities.

Oral Documentation in Libraries

A number of scholars have stressed the importance of oral documentation in libraries. However, there has been, and still is, a considerable amount of repetition and overlap in this literature. This is not to suggest that the literature is not worthwhile. On the contrary, there are a number of articles which are of outstanding quality.

Enright3 has observed that librarians and documentalists tend to be reactive rather than proactive in their response to providing information to the changing needs of the society. Their reluctance to perceive the significance of emerging trends in information gathering and to develop service in anticipation of the need of users, has efficiently diminished their own position, and the centrality of their role to their user communities.

Heintze4 has expressed concern about the average scholar's disregard for any responsibility toward posterity's use of the oral
tradition materials gathered during personal research and investigation. He reports unsuccessful attempts in developed countries to encourage scholars to deposit their working materials in recognized oral data collections.

The reluctance of traditionalist librarians to recognize the significance of new media and their rapidly increasing importance to information users has led to the diversion of resources to alternative centers. As a consequence of their inaction, new centers have been set up to meet the growing demands of a generation of information users who no longer had the traditional background of reliance almost exclusively on printed literature.

But it is not African librarians alone who should be blamed for their lack of interest in oral documentation. In the words of Anyidoho, until recently, under the able misdirection of colonial education programs, few African scholars would consider the oral traditions of their people worth the attention of scholarly research. Ironically, many of them were at the same time very loud in condemnation of almost every foreign work on African culture.

Until about two decades ago, few African scholars would even dream of going into anthropology or folklore. Today, however, good judgement has overcome sentiment, and an African can stand up in the midst of other academics and announce that he or she is an anthropologist or a folklorist without losing respect among colleagues.

There are growing signs of a fuller appreciation of the extent and nature of African oral literature. There have been attempts to establish oral literature as a systematic and serious field of study which could coordinate the efforts of all of those working in relative isolation. These include students of culture, sociology, ideology, art, religion, and history. As librarianship cuts across all these subject areas, it becomes even more relevant for librarians to have a knowledge of the nature of oral traditions, various mechanisms available for testing their validity, authenticity, and reliability, and the uses to which they may be put by researchers.

Oral documentation has been hailed as part of the new librarian’s ongoing policy of actively seeking information, rather than passively arranging it, and of dealing in a wide variety of media. In the scholarly analysis of Africa’s oral tradition, tape and disc recordings are now widely used. Linguistics, folklore, history, anthropology and other fields continue to gather their primary data through the use of tape recordings.

Disc recordings are also being made of African traditional music and drumming. Materials of these types have been exported to other countries, especially those interested in African studies programs. A third way in which African tradition is being preserved is through the use of film. This has become very popular of late, and several indigenous film-making businesses have recently been established in several African countries. Many of these films reflect traditional ethnic behaviour and help to preserve African culture.

It is in the area of oral documentation in libraries that African countries have lagged behind. Amadi laments that “the grief arising from the devastation of a library by fire or similar causes in the western world is only comparable in intensity to the loss, through death, of an old man in Africa. The latter, like the former, is the veritable embodiment of an archive or a proto-library — a library without shelves.”

The situation is even much more devastating than Amadi’s description. For whereas a published book has an independent existence and generates secondary materials like reviews, synopses, commentaries and so on, all of which could be replaced from multiple copies elsewhere, the destruction of an oral library through death occasions a total “vanishing into oblivion.”

As Ndiaye suggests, “the librarian’s job is to try to gain in-depth knowledge of orality in order to mark out the areas where there is conflict and those where orality and libraries are really compatible. The needs of both must be brought into harmony.” The effectiveness of libraries is at stake in all the regions where books are today being introduced, and where the population is actually aware of their value and necessity.

Apart from the fact that the library inspires more confidence in a reading public than other official agencies, it is the only institution which distributes literature free of charge. And when one
considers that in almost all African countries, one of the major constraints of book buying is a low income, then the importance of libraries as vehicles of communication cannot be overemphasized.

This is not to underplay the fact that documentation and preservation of oral tradition in African libraries have various limitations such as manpower, funding, technology, as well as some practical difficulties. There is no doubt that the resources available for the librarian in Africa to exploit this medium of information provision are minimal. What is of major concern is that even in countries where these limitations can be overcome, no attempt is made at oral documentation in libraries.

As long ago as 1973, in a contribution to a conference on publishing in Africa, Oyeoku suggested that "the initial emphasis of African libraries need not be on the printed word. It is quite feasible and more meaningful to start a library in a rural community with miles of tapes of people's folklore, music and culture." He proposed experimentation with a new institution in a rural village, which would collect oral materials from the villages into a community library of tapes. The institution would gradually transcribe the materials for use in connection with literacy teaching, so that new readers were dealing with familiar and well-loved materials. It is now two decades since this proposal was made, and libraries in Africa have done very little to accomplish this very important task.

Conclusion

As Africa continues to modernize, the barriers between the old and the new are being torn down. The isolated village, which preserves the traditional ways, is searching out new methods of communication such as the radio and the printed word. The city dweller, too, often isolated for several generations from the traditional ways of life, is searching out new ways to reforge his links with the past. It is the blending of the two ways of life which challenges the modern African who can recognize the values of both life styles. It is also in this situation that the library is expected to play a major role.

NOTES


Acknowledgement

The writer expresses his deep gratitude to Ms. Pat Strenstrom of the Library and Information Science Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for her encouragement and support.
SUPERHIGHWAYS, WORK, AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE INFORMATION AGE: A SYMPOSIUM

John Buschman, Barbara Garson, and Lance Rose


John Buschman

Higher education has seen both optimism and, simultaneously, dire warnings about the changes coming from new information technologies. On the optimistic side, Robert Jensen reports in a recent *Academe* (July/August 1993) “that education is in the midst of a monumental technological paradigm shift, one that will eventually change the way that all instructors teach and the way that all students learn.” As a result, “higher education will improve significantly for most students.” Of the warnings, it is routine for political and educational leaders to assert that enrollments will be linked to the availability of technological resources on campuses, that attempting to prepare students for a technologically dominated “information society” with 19th century teaching methods will lead to social obsolescence, and that technology is the answer to the burgeoning costs of delivering information.

Both rhetorical approaches assume the ascendency, and then the primacy, of the role of information technology in higher education. Thus the fiscal, curricular, and research decisions flowing from that underlying assumption have the appearance of necessary accommodation to the inevitable. Our choice *seems* simple: the exciting new (albeit sometimes reluctant) plugged-in professor versus the dangerously irrelevant chalk-and-talk type. However, a clear discussion of the professional and pedagogical concerns of faculty is missing. There are tradeoffs in adopting these technologies, and those are not being widely debated. While there are plenty of policy and theoretical problems to take issue with, I wish to concentrate on four basic and immediate ones which should concern the profession: privacy and academic freedom in the electronic environment, preservation of electronic records, instructional effectiveness of electronic teaching resources, and the costs. It is in these areas that the profession faces some choices and challenges right now. I will try and briefly outline some of the concerns in each.

Privacy and Academic Freedom Issues

The new networks in place - and those envisioned for the future - have some immediate problems for privacy, and consequently, the academic freedom of the profession. First, the software designed to run networks - including campus networks - allow network managers to read, copy, or delete files and messages stored on connected remote computers or in accounts. E-mail, as one example of a widespread application on campuses, occupies a legal gray area in workplace privacy law. Marc Rotenberg, Director of Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility has observed “that e-mail is more like a postcard than a sealed letter.” While wholesale invasions of faculty files are probably not happening on campuses right now because of long fought-over traditions of academic freedom, a recent survey by the computer magazine *Macworld* (July 1993) estimated that 20 million Americans are now subjected to electronic eavesdropping in their work.

Secondly, the immense economic and legal battle over electronic copyright has begun. The upshot may well be that copyrighted documents delivered over networks are paid for on a per-use basis. This means that the individual readings of scholars and students - the subjects, contents, patterns of inquiry of individuals contained in the articles, books, chapters, media, and newspapers electronically delivered to them - would be tracked by the system set up to monitor copyright payments. This was made crystal clear in a recent report noting that publishers plan “to enforce their copyrights and collect royalty fees by using reader-identification and metering devices that will keep track of what a user reads or prints” (*Chronicle of Higher Education* 11-24-93, A15).

This represents a radical departure from the past because, while much of this type of information (in variously less-organized forms) has been available, it was in the hands of libraries and
librarians. Both the institutions and the professional colleagues that run them are deeply committed to free – and private – inquiry. For example, library circulation records are protected by many state laws and in the professional ethics of librarians, and such records are not archived after materials are returned. The new data collectors will not be libraries, but rather private information vending corporations. They might be required to keep reading records confidential, but it is probable that they would be able to use them for marketing purposes. Such a system could construct an information-seeking profile to be sold to other marketers of information products. (This would merely replicate the pattern of the information collected by grocery chains on individual persons and their point-of-sale purchases.)

Another problem for the professional privacy of academics is that such databases can be broken into by hackers and confidential information about individuals can be gathered. This is exactly what happened to Robert Bork during his nomination process for the Supreme Court. His video rental records were gathered by a reporter who broke into the computerized checkout system of the video store Bork used (Economist 3-12-88, 31). Even well-run and well-intentioned information corporations will expose sensitive and private information about scholars and students to such dangers. Further, even if there were ways to insure the privacy of records contained in corporate databanks, communication over electronic networks is not at all private. The federal government is moving aggressively to limit the encryption of messages and texts to formulas to which the government has a deciphering key in the name of combating terrorist and organized crime users of the networks. With wiretap-style authorization, government agencies can “listen in” on on-line conversations and read any encrypted texts. Messages can be nearly impossible to unscramble (i.e. completely private), unless they are limited to the use of known encrypting formulas. Thus there is a movement to ensure that network communications – the documents and information sent – are not “too private.”

The relationship of each of these to the essential privacy and academic freedom the profession depends upon is clear. What we read and when, what we write and send out, all have the potential to become much more transparent and monitored by the many layers of administration and government in an electronic context. If the values of privacy and academic freedom are not built into the laws and into our own campus regulations, the effect could be an erosion of an essential value for which the professoriate has long fought. As a current example, the context of recent debates about hate speech and course content makes monitoring the electronic comments and communications of teachers a particularly sensitive issue (See The Chronicle of Higher Education 11-24-93, A16.)

**Preservation Issues**

The record of scholarly, historical, and literary electronic production is in danger. Consider the controversies surrounding the electronic records of the Bush Administration. It took a lawsuit to save the backup tapes of the message system of the National Security Council from being erased. While the Bush Administration argued that the tapes contained no consequential documents, scholars noted that vital information concerning the Iran-contra scandal and the investigation of Manuel Noriega were found in them. Another suit was filed over the National Archivist ceding control of White House computer tapes to President Bush. He did this before subsequently being offered the job of running the Bush Presidential Library at Texas A&M University where the tapes will be stored and mounted. Electronic records present a different challenge to literary scholars who worry that the editing and revision process of contemporary writers may be lost forever – either through the overwriting of documents in word processing or in the degradation of disk copies of manuscripts. Photographic records on videocassettes and in digital form are similarly in danger, and the collection, preservation, and organization of the information available on the Internet – before it disappears forever – has yet to be extensively undertaken.3

Eugene Provenzo has noted just how easy it is to change, edit, or delete electronic and digital texts and photographs. The resulting differences in documents are obviously more difficult to trace than those made in analog text or traditional photographs. The reason for the intensity of the fight over the Bush Administration’s records was the totality of control exercised by
erasing or editing the tapes and the lack of a “trail” to track down the original content or the existence of the document. Historians have long fought over veracity and availability when it comes to historical sources, but electronic records represent a new ability to control those sources. As one example, if our libraries convert extensively to document delivery systems from centralized, remote databases, the decision to “weed” certain documents from a virtual library’s holdings is complete – it no longer exists in a database anywhere for anyone. Unlike electronic formats, it has been noted that previously, “even the most severe kind of censorship [could] not track down every last copy of a book” (IFLA Journal 1987, 116). This is quite dramatically contrasted with our current, if imperfect system.

By way of further illustration of Provenzo’s concerns, a major library organization put forth a chilling proposal a number of years ago in response to our “Information Explosion”:

[The role of libraries for several thousand years, which emphasizes the preservation of the human record, has now become more complex, requiring hard decisions not only about what is to be preserved but also about what is to be discarded. Decisions...must be made to erase portions of the record deemed to be insignificant, irrelevant, and unrepresentative... (American Libraries, December 1977, 617)

It is clear that the profession needs to take an active interest in insuring the preservation, organization, and access to the range of scholarly resources and production in electronic formats.

Issues of Instructional Effectiveness

Perhaps the primary benefit claimed for information technologies is the projected quantum improvement in the teaching-learning process. I have already mentioned Jensen’s claim to this effect, and he goes on to note the role of faculty “authoring hypermedia materials that will be available at all hours on campus networks [and] helping students choose from a mind-boggling multimedia library of worldwide learning material...” However, the actual efficacy of instructional technologies is much more difficult to ascertain. Even enthusiasts concede that this is “not a researchable question” and that “evidence that [it] does have significant and sustained impact on learning is hard to produce” (Chronicle of Higher Education 5-5-93, A27-A29).

Political scientist Kenneth Janda has studied multimedia instruction as contrasted to alternate and traditional methods. His findings indicated that, while students liked the multimedia products better, this did not translate into better performance, more interest in the subject matter, or greater overall knowledge. After reviewing prior research, he concludes that the modelling capabilities of multimedia might be useful for mathematics and the sciences, but even research on teaching in those areas came to indefinite conclusions. If greater learning is taking place with information technology teaching tools, “then its advocates bear the burden of identifying and demonstrating these benefits – and whether the results are worth the considerable investment in time...and in the cost of the equipment needed for teaching with it.”

The ways in which teaching technologies shape content is an even bigger question than their effectiveness. This is a wide-ranging and somewhat unruly issue, but I will try and summarize it. Scholars in the fields of history and literature offer perhaps the clearest examples of the problems associated with media portrayals of academic content. The editing and abbreviation of film adaptations of works of literature is a well known and undesirable outcome of the shift from print to media. But even a product as laudable as an unabridged audioclip recording of a work of literature has inherent problems: you are left with at least “two readers...grappling for possession of the text.... The problem with taped narrative is that it all but cancels...the whole written-word-inner-voicing connections...” For historians, the well-regarded and critically acclaimed PBS series The Civil War generated heated debate about the place of media portrayals in the teaching of history. At best, such attempts to render history in the media still do not “embrace the dissonance of critical inquiry” at the heart of historical studies. Perhaps more succinctly, historians’ emphasis on evaluating sources does not match media emphasis on images and suspending disbelief.

Historical and literary studies are emblematic of what happens to content in all disciplines when it is transferred to media. As Neil Postman has noted,
Cost Issues

The relationship of investment in the technological infrastructure of campuses to the institutional support of faculties is obvious: both are competing for scarce dollars. Even Jensen admits that "the technology paradigm shift could not be happening at a worse time in academic budgets."

Costs are clearly high. In my own area, speedy electronic document delivery is considered the great savior of academic libraries - and a way to provide immediate access without the costs of subscribing to and housing journals. But recent price listings from the ISI "Genuine Article" Document Delivery Service and the British Library Document Supply Centre spelled out the expense of relying on such services: copies of current and backlist journal articles faxed within 24 hours (the closest approximation of a library owning a journal) ranged from $23.50 to a flat $38.26 per article. Further, the "virtual library" projects of the Library of Congress have caused a continual search for enhanced revenue sources in our most important scholarly center and these future (and as yet unfunded) electronic alternatives to building and housing print collections are considered seriously as reasons not to renovate, build, or enlarge libraries.

However, the issue for faculty goes much deeper. I have heard a Vice President for Information Technology state it quite bluntly: "Technology will be the primary means for delivering instruction." Information technologies are seen as a way to reduce dependence on faculty in instruction. EDUCOM is putting together a group to look at ways of making "instruction more effective and more efficient" through technology, which "can help students learn better at a lower cost per student" (Chronicle of Higher Education 7-14-93, A25). A rather low-tech example of this was provided by the provost of an eastern university who wished aloud in the pages of the New York Times (12-12-93, E4) that he could "substitute taped lectures for a particularly uninspired professor or reduce the classics department" with technological-

censor content and control access. If our past and present attempts to transfer history and literature into media are any indication, then these new teaching products will tend to reify in a particularly powerful way the perspective and content portrayed in them.

Every medium gives and takes away, although not in equal measure, for media change does not necessarily result in equilibrium. [W]e are obliged to ask...what is happening as typography moves to the periphery of our culture and electronic media take their place at the center. [For instance,] a claim, whether true or false, must be made in language. More precisely, it must take the form of a proposition, for that is the universe of discourse from which such words as true and false come.... I submit that such questions do not apply to the world of visual images. One can like or dislike [the image], but one can not refute it. [These new media] are winning the competition with typography for the time, attention, and cognitive predispositions of our youth. (Alternative Library Literature, 1986/87, 39-42)

There is a decided move toward conflating and combining media products - the multimedia technologies discussed here are indications of this trend. The upshot is that there will probably be less ability to isolate traditional scholarly and teaching approaches - located in print - because many print resources will become multimedia. Further, there will also be more pressure on teachers to incorporate those digital texts with sound and image components into their courses if for no other reason than to make content more stimulating and appealing to students - not to mention use of these new tools as an evaluative criteria for teaching "effectiveness." Teaching and scholarship could become an extension of the art of persuading with images - like advertising.

Faculty should also not ignore the effect of sources of funding on the content of these new teaching tools. At best, the corporate perspective in product development influences which subjects become available first in the new formats. More worrisome is that content may be skewed. A corporate sponsored high-tech program on historical progress in communications at Epcot Center was unsubtly intended to "assure us that the same pattern can be extrapolated into the future, with results so impressive that they can only be hinted at by shadowy evocations." At worst, corporations (and universities for that matter) have used their ownership and sponsorship of networks and databases to
ly distributed instruction. As these new technologies are developed, along with the means to deliver them over long distances on an individual student basis, it is not a leap of imagination to conclude that administrations will want to see a return on their investments by cutting instructional costs in other areas. These media carry potential to enhance informational support of teachers, but also to replace them as well.

In conclusion, I believe there are reasons for faculty to watch carefully the development and application of instructional technologies. Faculty must insist on substantive input into decisions of investment, instructional applications, distribution of and guidelines for the technological infrastructure of their campuses. This is necessary in order to insure in the future the kind of teaching support, privacy, and academic freedom that most of us enjoy today. These new technological tools do hold very positive potential to enhance and widen our ability to bring relevant information to bear on scholarship and teaching. But like any technological development, this does not take place in a vacuum. As Langdon Winner has written, what is missing from our push to develop technology as our “National Money Pump” are questions of what “Walter Lipmann called the public philosophy—a vision of the purposes that bring us together in society in the first place.... The discussion [of technological change] should focus not only on technical features and economic payoffs, but also on aspects of social organization and long-term consequences for the quality of public life” (Chronicle of Higher Education 8-4-93, B1-3). I believe this focus should characterize those discussions in higher education as well. As an antidote to the hype, faculty must play a critical role in decisions about technologies in higher education. Otherwise, the advertising blitz underway will carry the day.

Barbara Garson
(summary prepared by David Iverson)

Barbara Garson’s speech used anecdotes and dialogue from her books All the Liveling Day: The meaning and demeaning of routine work and The Electronic Sweatshop. She began by noting that electronic monitoring has been present since computers were first introduced into the workplace. For example, in 1980 the first time she touched a computer at a temporary job, she discovered that the number of keystrokes per hour was being counted by the company computer. Supervision was done by the machine rather than by a boss or department head roaming the room, raising the question of whether such data is private, public, or belongs to the company. Her employer took the position that the information on the employee was company data and not personal, so there was no violation of personal privacy in using electronic monitoring to count keystrokes per hour. Garson has a long history of opposing electronic monitoring, but admits that “we’ve had very little success in fighting electronic monitoring. Some physical health and safety things have been improved in the office. But they really want to control you and see what you are doing, and we’ve had very little success in [combating] that.”

She related one rare example of successfully combatting electronic monitoring in the workplace which she has written about in her books:

There was a young woman who early on loved computers. She had a B.A. in literature, and she saw an ad for a proofreader in an accounting firm. She applied and got the job and found herself reading long columns of figures, in the days before word processing. Eventually the word processors arrived (they were Wangs) and she was very excited. She learned to be a word processor and she loved it. She was typing and editing reports and figures, and staying late to do them. After a little while, the company brought in keystroke counting. Suddenly she finds her keystrokes are being counted. The machine now listed for each report generated, and each time the report was edited: 1) the name of the report; the date it was created; 2) the person who created it; 3) the number of keystrokes; 4) the number of pages; and 5) the amount of time worked. So, for example, a typical report might have listed the following: 20,000 keystrokes, 20 pages, 120 minutes. The young woman in this story abhorred this and felt that it was absolutely humiliating....

What did she do? The Wang machine had a function
called Supercopy. You could open another document. She would open another document, copy the 20,000 keystroke document into another, then delete the old document and print out the new one. That maneuver took a few keystrokes and could be done in 30 seconds. So now the report would say: 20,000 keystrokes, 20 pages, 30 seconds. She taught that to everybody in the place and everything came in in 30 seconds. They did that for one week, and in that place in that unit, keystroke counting was taken away.

Garson has found that “66% of employees were electronically monitored by 1985,” and added that electronic monitoring becomes a question of “Are you plugging in on your own, or are you being plugged in when you don’t want to be plugged in?” She went on to discuss work environments and networking:

In fact, personal computers came into the workplace largely through people bringing them into the office. VisiCalc, the original spreadsheet program, was designed for this sort of non-networked computer. They weren’t networked into anything and weren’t authorized. They were sometimes bought out of the money for typewriters. Immediately the personal computer [was pushed] in the other direction in the office through networks. While there is much to be gained by some networking, not everything has to be networked to everything else in a configuration where everybody can be monitored. So it really is a question of who’s using it and which way the data flows. You’ve got this super connection all over the world and like every other technology in the world, it really depends on who controls it…. Monitoring turns out to be the key variable predictor of physical illnesses at work.

Garson concluded her talk by mentioning that, as a member of the National Writers’ Union, she is involved with one of the first lawsuits on electronic copyright. They are seeking to answer the question, “Does the newspaper that buys my article automatically control all electronic publishing rights too? The publishers say yes and have been selling my work to Nexis without my permission and without paying me.”

Lance Rose
(summary prepared by David Iverson)

Lance Rose, of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, began his talk by asking, “Is a writer’s market dependent upon the number of [electronic] rights or the number of writers?” as a prelude to talking about competition with publishers through electronic and desktop publishing. Electronic services is a wide-open field, but is it fair to ask for more money because something is published electronically? He characterized the issue as freedom of speech, electronically speaking. Rose, who described himself as a computer lawyer, went on to talk about three pending court cases which pertain to this topic:

The Newsday case, taking place in the Southern District of New York, Manhattan Court, is a “virtual reality” case involving the alleged stealing of electronic material by Newsday.

Frank Music v. CompuServe involves preservation and copyright of electronic media, specifically the uploading/downloading of files, including items where there might be copyright infringement.

Playboy v. Tech Warehouse is another copyright infringement case involving digital images, copyright and the electronic transfer of information.

He discussed in brief a number of groups involved with electronic rights:

Electronic Frontier Foundation, founded by Mitch Kapor and John H. Barlow, is concerned with exploring civil rights in an electronic environment and forming a national information infrastructure involving protocol, rates to be charged, etc.

The Society for Electronic Access (for which he is the contact person), Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility, the Center for Media Education, and the Center for Civil Networking were mentioned.

The Taxpayer Asset Project (TAP) is a Ralph Nader project (with Jamie Love as the contact person). The idea behind this group is that public information — both paper and electronic — are assets of the taxpayer, and two examples of how TAP puts this idea into practice were given. The first involves the
EDGAR database. This is an SEC database of company filings by publicly-held companies which was controlled by Mead Data Central for a profit. TAP asked, "Why is Mead Data Central making all the money off of this?" Put another way, "why is a private company making a profit off of public information?" Because of TAP's inquiry into this, Mead Data Central's control of this database is on the way out. Similarly, the JURIS database, a database of legal materials used by the Justice Department, is controlled by WESTLAW. If the information in JURIS were public, it would compete with expensive databases like WESTLAW and LEXIS. The Justice Department decided that JURIS would be controlled by WESTLAW and that they would buy information on JURIS from WESTLAW just like everyone else. TAP is investigating this situation as well. The group is also looking at the antitrust aspects of mergers between large media/entertainment agencies, out of an anti-Big Brother fear of a few large companies controlling everything. One of TAP's more notable accomplishments was blowing the whistle on Information Industry Association and the National Archives Database.

Rose concluded his talk by highlighting a national discussion about encryption of electronic messages. The idea behind this is to keep the networks free without undo or unwanted monitoring by the government. The encryption of texts and messages always defeats an attempt to invade one's electronic privacy. However, the federal government wants to retain and expand their ability to monitor these transmissions by way of the "Clipper" chip. Essentially, Clipper would provide an algorithmic key to any encrypted message if the chip were installed in your computer. The government wants to mandate the manufacturing and installation of these chips and possibly make electronic access to government information available only through Clipper. This is also proposed for sales of computers overseas.

Rose mentioned the Cantwell Bill is an anti-Clipper measure sponsored by software publishers to relax National Security Agency (NSA) import restrictions on software to deflect potential market share loss posed by Clipper, which would not require NSA approval.

Reports on Garson's and Rose's presentations were prepared by David S. Iversen, Assistant Professor – Librarian, Rider University, from a tape made by Our Common Interest, R.R. 3, Box 319-A, Monroe, NY 10950.

Notes


5. Quotes are from the respective sources noted below. For very recent discussions of these points, see Rand Richards Cooper, Can We Really Read With Our Ears?, New York Times Book Review, 6-6-93, 15, 49; and Daniel J. Walkowitz, Telling the Story: The Media, the Public, and American History, Perspectives: The Newsletter of the American Historical Association, 10-93, 1, 6-9.


Dear Colleagues,

I would like to share with you excerpts from a few of the many messages I have received from South African colleagues whom I met during my trip to their country a year ago. What is remarkable about these messages is their common expression of a new sense of lightness. Perhaps that is one way one describes what it means to be free, free at last!

From Mrs. T. D. Shah, Architecture Branch Librarian, University of Natal, Durban

Greetings from OUR new country! Words cannot express my feelings and the feelings of this country in the past two weeks and more especially yesterday, the greatest day in South Africa.

It is literally true that all of us are walking with our heads held high and with a spring in our step. I wish you were here to experience this. It is wonderful to see that this freedom of ours is celebrated worldwide and the world was physically and spiritually with us yesterday. Our "prisoner President" has brought tears of joy and hope that are difficult to explain.

From Christine Stillwell, Senior Lecturer in Library Science, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg

We have all been quite euphoric and seeing the ANC's celebration party in Johannesburg on telly made us all want to groove. The experience of voting was very interesting – to see how whites had adjusted to change and the joy for the enfranchised. Many of us feel as if an enormous burden has been lifted off our backs. I have waited all my life for this liberation and it feels great. My brother and his family had voted in Australia and it was very interesting to share parts of the day with them. I think they were very homesick and found it unbelievable that liberation had come so swiftly. We are very excited about tomorrow and the liberation of the union building from years of dourness. One of the most enjoyable things about the new government is their "joie de vivre" – we have been such a bunch of Calvinists.

We aren't thrilled to have Inkatha in power in Natal but we must accept the result as possibly the one least likely to lead to further bloodshed in the region. They will be under pressure to deliver, especially, in my book, as regards implementing policy to enable women.

The whole mood here is changed. It is lighter, more joyous and people are enjoying the sense of being the same – one nation at last. Many people have wept with joy and emotion on and off for days! It means a lot that you are with us.

From Margaret Richards, African Studies Library, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch

We are filled with such joy and pride and relief that this day has finally dawned, it is a truly walking-on-air feeling, which seems to have swept the entire nation.

I, along with a good few of my colleagues, was on the Parade to greet our new President – elected on Monday, and to hear his address. As with the Inauguration yesterday, an emotional occasion. These last weeks have been an extraordinary time to live through. We seemed on the brink of civil war, when a last-minute breakthrough secured the election process. The election itself touched every person in a remarkable way. Like most of the country's people, I stood in a queue for five and a half hours to vote, and in that time, somehow, the feeling grew, in all of us, that we really were one people, for the first time.

Shared with you here at Berkeley in the spirit of helping to celebrate this remarkable period in South African history.

Phyllis Bischof
IFLA CUBA STATEMENT

Statement of Librarians from the United States and Puerto Rico on U.S. - Cuba Relations

We librarians from the United States and Puerto Rico have just completed our productive participation in the 60th conference of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in Havana, Cuba. We were hosted by hundreds of dedicated Cuban librarians from all types of libraries throughout the island. As a group, we feel compelled to give our colleagues and government representatives our observations. We urge a reevaluation of U.S. policy towards Cuba, leading towards normalization of relations.

We have seen first-hand the determination of our Cuban colleagues to advance their library services despite the hardships, shortages, and material limitations they are now experiencing. We have witnessed their determination to safeguard basic gains in education, including library services, in the context of developing aspects of a market economy. We have been deeply impressed by their commitment to common professional objectives and deeply moved by their generosity in hosting librarians from all over the world despite their problems.

It is clear that many of these problems could be alleviated by the end of the U.S. economic blockade against Cuba and the normalization of relations between our two countries. Diplomatic and economic ties between the U.S. and other nations [such as China and Vietnam] with which the U.S. has ideological differences, have been achieved. Why not do the same with Cuba? Normalization would allow the flow of food and medicine into Cuba through trade, reduce the hunger of Cuban people, and stem the tide of those Cubans who are trying to escape these economic hardships by taking to the sea in rafts.

But Cuba will not be the only beneficiary from such a course. U.S. businesses and the American people will benefit from trade, and the prestige of the U.S. in world affairs will be enhanced by its ability to abandon an outdated policy which is universally opposed in the international community.

We have been privileged among U.S. citizens to have the opportunity to visit, research and study library service in Cuba and to confer with colleagues from every continent gathered here. And although we have done this within the guidelines of the U.S. Treasury Department, we have been deeply embarrassed by the senseless restrictions placed on travel here for U.S. citizens. We librarians struggle daily for intellectual freedom and the right to know. These are fundamental principles of our profession and our democratic system. The continuation of a policy which limits the right of U.S. citizens to travel is unworthy of a great nation and contradicts our country's ideals of personal and intellectual freedom and human rights.

In conclusion, we urge our government to seek negotiations with the government of Cuba aimed at normalizing relations, ending the blockade, and reinstituting unfettered travel and exchanges between the people of our two countries.

Nancy D. Anderson (University of Illinois, Urbana)
Mary Ashe (San Francisco, California)
Herbert Biblo (Long Island Resource Council, Stony Brook, New York)
Mary Biblo (University of Chicago Laboratory School, Chicago, Illinois)
Stephen C. Bloom (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
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Monica Ertel (Portale Valley, California)
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John Buschman is head of collection development at Rider University in New Jersey, and editor of Critical Approaches to Information Technology in Librarianship, Greenwood Press, 1994.

Barbara Garson is the author of the play MacBird and the books Electronic Sweatshop: How Computers Are Transforming the Office of the Future into the Factory of the Past and All the Livelong Day: The Meaning and Demeaning of Routine Work, both available from Viking Penguin. She was also the Socialist Party’s Vice-Presidential candidate in 1992.

Charles Keller is an artist, teacher and activist living in New York City. From 1945 to 1948 he was art editor for New Masses, and from 1978 to 1988 was editorial cartoonist for the People’s Daily World. He has taught art at Vassar, Hofstra and Parsons School of Design.

Christopher Merrett is Deputy University Librarian at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, and a co-founder of Library and Information Workers Organization, an association of anti-apartheid librarians founded in 1990.

Lance Rose is a member of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and a lawyer specializing in copyright law.

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