

## **Julie O'Donoghue, graduate student, global scholar program, Medill School of Journalism,**

### **Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism**

Welcome to It's All Journalism. My name is Michael O'Connell. I'm here today with Anna Miars, our co-producer. And today, we've got a returning guest, a visitor. Julia O'Donoghue sat in on a couple of interviews we had. I think it was in January. And she was on her way to South Africa on an assignment. Julie's a graduate of Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism. She went to Johannesburg to work for [Business Day](#). Is that correct?

### **Julia O'Donoghue, graduate student in Medill School of Journalism's global scholar program**

Yes.

### **Michael O'Connell**

That's good. So, I thought we'd bring her in because working at a publication in another country, I thought she might have an interesting perspective on what journalism is like in other countries and, thanks to social media and email, we were able to sort of stay in contact while she was in Africa. And I asked her if she could interview some journalists there to get their perspective of what's going on in South Africa as far as journalism goes. We'll be playing a little bit of those interviews after we talk for a little bit. But, tell us about South Africa, your experience working there. What did you learn? What impressed you the most about being there.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Sure. I guess I'll start with what impressed me. South Africa's only been a democracy for 19 years. It's really only had a free press since 1990. Before that, it was heavily censored. The Apartheid government didn't let the press report on a lot of things. So, I was pretty impressed with how professional and how much like the American media that was.

I didn't really notice that much of a difference between newsrooms I've worked here and the newsroom there in terms of how they covered the government and how they went about covering business as usual.

### **Michael O'Connell**

So, it was Business Day? I assume it was like an industry focused paper or —

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

It's modeled after the *Financial Times*. And so, I would say the closest comparison would be *The Wall Street Journal* here. It's a national newspaper, but they do cover Johannesburg because they're based there and they do a lot of financial news.

**Michael O'Connell**

So, what were the big stories going on while you were there?

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Well, Oscar Pistorius was definitely the biggest story going on when I was there.

**Michael O'Connell**

Oh yeah.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Pretoria, where Oscar Pistorius lives and where the incident took place, is like an hour north of where I am, Joburg. The other big stories, the country's budget came out. Unlike here, where states have like their own budget and kind of a lot of control, in South Africa, the country's budget covers everything, like all education spending for elementary school, kindergarten stuff. That was a big story while I was there. The president spent 200 million rand, which is about \$20 million, to upgrade his personal residence and to make it more secure. He has four wives and about 24 children that people know of, so his situation and how much money was being spent on his security and his family was a huge story there. Twenty million dollars in South Africa is an enormous amount of money.

**Michael O'Connell**

It's a ransom.

**Anna Miars, producer, It's All Journalism**

Was that part of the country's budget? Or was that a separate item?

**Julia O'Donoghue**

It's interesting. In the Constitution in South Africa, it's stated that the president's family is going to be protected and taken care of by the South African government. I don't know why that is. I don't think that's in our Constitution to my knowledge. So there is this issue of he has four wives and polygamy is legal in South Africa, although neither Nelson Mandela or the previous presidents, there have only been three, had multiple wives, so this is like a new thing for them. And they are obligated to take care of them and their children. But some people thought that this was extreme, I guess would be the word. I think he built a personal hospital on his compound.

**Michael O'Connell**

No Obamacare there.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

No. And the security measures were kind of taken to the extreme. Honestly, that story had broken right before I got there, but it was sort of an ongoing issue. A lot of people

were really appalled I mean, like everyone from taxi drivers to CEOs of companies commented on this when you talked to them about how the country is going through a really bad time financially and the president was spending all this money on himself. And I should say there are three official residences, like the White House. He has three homes. It would be like Obama spent \$20 million on his home in Chicago upgrading it.

**Michael O'Connell**

Yeah, that wouldn't fly, somehow I don't think.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Correct.

**Michael O'Connell**

So, I know I'm going to mispronounce the name, Pistorius?

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Pistorius, yeah.

**Michael O'Connell**

Pistorius. You're on social media and you saw how it was playing here, what are your observations on how it played here as opposed to how it played there? Was it much different?

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah, actually, I thought it was very interesting how different it was. First of all, Oscar Pistorius to South Africa is a huge deal.

**Michael O'Connell**

Is he maybe like the Michael Jordan?

**Anna Miars**

Like Tiger Woods.

**Michael O'Connell**

Tiger Woods?

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah, he's definitely like the Tiger Woods. He's in every Nike ad you see. I think the fact that he is a disabled athlete, also rings or sort of resonates with South Africans a lot because South Africa feels like they were hobbled for a long time with Apartheid and so, the fact that this person is able to overcome all these things and they're South African

**Anna Miars**

It's symbolic.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

It's symbolic. It's also symbolic I would say to the white South African community too because they don't feel they have a lot positive role models out there in the world that people are turning to and saying, "Oh, we admire that person for what they have done."

The thing I noticed about the States and its coverage, I think that this makes sense, is that because it happened so close to Newtown and while the gun debate was going on here, there was a lot of focus on why Oscar had a gun, that South Africans have so many guns. Why, personal security issues and kind of relating it to the States' debate. I think in South Africa, South Africa has a lot of problems with violence and, if you will, random violence. A lot of people, like in Johannesburg, you don't walk down the street, you drive down the street to your local drug store. You probably live in a house that has a 17- or 18-foot wall around it, with barbed wire, if you can afford that and middle class people live that way, it's not just really wealthy people.

And so, I think it was more of a given in South Africa that he would have a gun. Once it came out how many guns he had, people started to think, "Hmmm, this is kind of gun nut." But like before that, I don't think it was considered that shocking that he would live in sort of a fortress. Like people in the U.S. kept saying, "He lives in a fortress." But almost anyone of means and even people who are middle class or I would say on the higher end of working class live in their own personal fortress in South Africa. Just crime is a really big problem and fear of home invasion is a big problem. A lot of people I know had been either the victims of violent crimes themselves or someone in their family had been and that includes rape, being beaten up or having someone killed in your family. It's kind of shocking how people live there.

### **Michael O'Connell**

It's odd, sort of the way that you were talking about Newtown shootings and everything, trying to relate, again, America's, I don't know if it's "jingoistic journalism" where we view events that going on around the world from our perspective of what we're dealing with day-to-day in America, where the situation may be very or is probably very different in another country and will be played and look very different there.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah, South Africa, I would say, has a big issue with violence against women. So that came into play a lot more with the discussion about Oscar and whether he killed his girlfriend because they were in a domestic dispute or whether he did it by accident, as he's claiming. That brought up a lot of discussion, like even on things like drive-time radio. They were saying things like, "How do relate to each other better as men and women?" There were pretty serious discussions around that front, which was interesting because, I think, sometimes that situation with violence against women in South Africa doesn't necessarily get talked about if it's the whole community. Sometimes it's relegated to a issue in the black community.

**Michael O'Connell**

Or a socio-economic thing, that it's, "Oh, this group has that, but that's not a problem across."

**Julia O'Donoghue**

For sure, but this seemed to open up a big discussion about that. Now, I don't know if that was going on before, but it certainly talked about like from male deejays and commercial radio journalists, like, "How can we treat our women better?" To, "How should you treat women?"

**Michael O'Connell**

Right.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

And that previously had I think mostly been discussed in and about the black community. The president and his four wives, that's certainly come up with him before. But there was definitely a lot more talk about that. Whereas, I don't think in the U.S. that wasn't brought up as much, the "Oh, South Africa has a problem with violence against women."

**Michael O'Connell**

Let's go back to your job, you're day-to-day, what was it your were doing there at *Business Day*?

**Julia O'Donoghue**

I was working in the video department, so I was doing video for the Web in the multimedia department. *Business Day* is the first newspaper in South Africa to have a video department. They are, I would say, light years ahead of other newspapers in South Africa in terms of trying to do new media. Their website is much better than any other paper I saw there. And some of that is because their demographics are such, just like *The Wall Street Journal*.

**Michael O'Connell**

Business people.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

It's business people. It's people who are affluent, who are plugged in, who definitely have a smartphone, if not an iPad. And so, that was interesting. You know, they're still trying to get their feet under them in terms of video. It's a financial publication, so some things don't lend themselves to visual storytelling that much. But I really applaud them for putting it out there and doing it.

I should explain that broadband in South Africa is really expensive. People pay the gigabyte, if not the megabyte. Everyone does. So like, even if you're a very wealthy per-

son, if you're looking at your smartphone, it's a decision to watch a video, because you're going to be using 50 megabytes that you could use on something else to watch that video. The fact that they even have a video department is pretty impressive. It shows that they're kind of looking towards the future.

**Michael O'Connell**

Forward thinking.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah, because right now, people in South Africa do not watch funny cat videos on their phone.

**Michael O'Connell**

It's too expensive.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Right. They're paying for that. Yeah, my friends, my peers, who are in their late 20s, early 30s, told me next to their rent, their data plan for their phone or for their computer was their most expensive item in their budget, more than food. So, whether that's true or not, I don't know, but it shows you like ...

**Michael O'Connell**

And that's what we have to deal with in America, the relative cheapness of broadband, we're balancing the fact that we're able to do all this stuff, but then we're wasting our time more with cat videos and stuff like that.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Right, yeah.

**Michael O'Connell**

We're not making smart decisions about spending that time.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah.

**Anna Miars**

Can you talk just briefly about your background?

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah, sure. Well, Before I went to Medill at Northwestern, I worked for a community newspaper in northwest D.C., called the *Northwest Current*, which was a lovely experience, but was totally print based. I mean, they did not even have a website for a while while I was there. And then I went and worked with Mike at The Connection out in

Northern Virginia and I covered the county government in Fairfax [County] primarily, so both the Board of Supervisors out there and the School Board.

**Michael O'Connell**

And you covered elections and stuff like that.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah.

**Michael O'Connell**

And some meaty stories as well.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah, some statewide stuff. It was a good time to be there because, you know, Obama made a play for Virginia fairly early, about a year after I got there, two years.

**Michael O'Connell**

Yeah, a year after you got there, you interviewed Obama. You covered Sarah Palin and John McCain and you saw everybody.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah.

**Michael O'Connell**

That was a fun time.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

And I'm sort of still connected to Virginia news in that there's a non-profit in Virginia called the [Virginia Public Access Project](#). I put together their email news blast in the mornings, so like articles from the *Virginia Pilot* and the *Richmond Times Dispatch* and other papers around Virginia. They kind of compile them and send them out to people who might be interested in what's going on around the state.

**Michael O'Connell**

And that's a real interesting organization. They're the ones who also do the election finance data.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah, they do campaign finance and they do a lot of like, when new lobbyists register, that all goes up on their website so you can see who's hiring what lobbyist, how many lobbyists does Dominion Power have at this point or Altria, which is the old Philip Morris.

**Michael O'Connell**

That's a great resource for journalists and also just for people who want to stay informed about what their candidate's, who's giving them money? If you're running for any office in Virginia, pretty much, from the mayor up to the governor, they have all the information about who they ... all the stuff that those the candidates have to file with the election board, their finance. Again, that's hugely important and interesting. I'd love to see that proliferate.

### **Anna Miars**

So, just to wrap up that question, what took you digital? What made you decide to go that direction?

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

I decided to go to grad school because I wanted to learn how to work better across platforms. Mike was already in grad school.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Yeah.

### **Anna Miars**

I was there with him.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

And far ahead of me on that front. But I wanted to learn how to work across platforms and I think I don't necessarily want to turn this into a plug for Northwestern, but I think they did a pretty good job. I mean, I knew nothing about HTML and CSS. Mike can confirm.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Yeah, I remember you complaining about it.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah.

### **Michael O'Connell**

I was like, "You just wait, because once you get on the other end of it, you'll be so happy."

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah. I learned how to edit audio. I certainly took a few classes in video and I went to South Africa through Northwestern and I told them I wanted to do video when I was abroad, because I felt like I wanted to get an idea of how that worked. And I felt like I needed more practice and it was definitely good for me.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Well, let's pause this and listen to the interviews you did. Now who are the people you spoke to?

### Julia O'Donoghue

His name's Anton Harber. He's the head of the journalism school at the University of — I'm going to try to pronounce this correctly — Witwatersrand. Everyone calls it Wits. It is one of the very top universities in South Africa. He, I think, started the journalism program there, and he was the editor and founder of a newspaper that's now called *The Mail & Guardian* that actually, probably resembles more like a *Newsweek* or a *Time* here. It's a weekly newspaper. The articles are a little bit longer, but it's highly regarded. It was my favorite newspaper in South Africa, with all due respect to *Business Day*. And it was an anti-Apartheid newspaper under Apartheid. It got shut down a couple of times. It was sort of — he called it "alternative press." It's not quite like our alternative press, but it was operating in a way that was angering the powers that be.

### Michael O'Connell

Right. It was confrontational to whatever the powers that be.

### Julia O'Donoghue

Correct.

### Michael O'Connell

OK. So, let's take a listen to this.

*This interview took place between Julia O'Donoghue and Anton Harbor in Johannesburg, South Africa on March 27, 2013. O'Donoghue was working at Business Day, a South African newspaper, as part of the global scholar program at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.*

### Anton Harbor, Caxton professor of Journalism, University of the Witwatersrand

So, my name is Anton Harbor. I'm currently something called the Caxton Professor of Journalism at University of the Witwatersrand, which is the leading university in Johannesburg, where I run the journalism school – the journalism department.

I'm a former newspaper editor. I was the founding editor of a newspaper called, now called the *Mail & Guardian*, used to be called *The Weekly Mail*. What else can I tell you that's relevant? I'm the chairman of an organization called the Freedom of Expression Institute. So, I'm a freedom of expression activist.

I'm the author of a book called *Diepsloot*. I'm a columnist for various papers, including returning quite soon to *Business Day*.

### Julia O'Donoghue

I was wondering if you could talk about, in general, what you think the state of freedom of expression is in South Africa? How it's changed?

### **Anton Harbor**

In fact, we have a remarkable degree of freedom of expression, a very high level of it, and we've had it since Mandela left prison in 1990. We've really be very free to do as much as we want to do without fear of closure or arrest or prosecution.

The reason there has been a growing controversy around it is because there has been a threat to freedom of expression, which has taken two forms. The one has been the government has been calling for a statutory media tribunal to end the system of self regulation we have in the printed media in particular because they've been very critical of some of the print media's attitudes and reporting.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

So that would be like, they would be able to prosecute journalists for?

### **Anton Harbor**

Well it's not clear what they mean by it, but we've had a British-style self regulatory system in this country for many decades, and they're suggesting that there be an appeals board that is statutorily recognized. I supposed some like where Britain is moving to, but there's a very strong resistance here to statutory regulation of that sort.

The other threat has been that they've tabled and put down a number of versions of what we can a secrecy bill, a protection of state information bill that deals with whistle blowers and leaks from the state and security information. That's a bad law. I mean it was two years ago when they first tabled it. It was a terrible law. There's been a lot of resistance to it, to the point where it hasn't been approved by parliament yet, but even the version that they are looking at now is much improved. It's still a bad law, but it still hasn't been passed.

So there is a threat from the government to start to limit the freedom of expression we've had. But on the other hand, there has been very strong resistance to it, and that's been a very healthy sign.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

You said that freedom of expression came into sort of being, you know, I'm assuming in the early-to-mid-90s.

### **Anton Harbor**

Well in 1990 and then, of course, it was entrenched in the new constitution in 1994.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

OK, can you talk about what restrictions existed before 1990?

**Anton Harbor**

We had very heavy censorship in the days of Apartheid before 1990. Broadcasting was very tightly state controlled, and there were a number of laws limiting what we could say and who we could quote, particularly of banned political organizations like the ANC [African National Congress] and people like Nelson Mandela.

In particular, during the 1980s, there was a series of state of emergencies because the uprising that was happening at the time, which brought in a lot of quite severe media restrictions.

So for example, the paper I worked on, *The Weekly Mail*, was closed down for a period. Our paper was closed down. Some of our journalists and some other journalists and editors were detained for a very long periods of time. We were prosecuted many times for writing stuff they didn't want us to write. So, it was very – it was tightly controlled.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

So could you give me an example of something that you all wrote that caused you to be shut down or someone would be put in...

**Anton Harbor**

Well, the reasons we were shut down is they said that we were promoting the aims of banned organizations and that we were undermining the security forces during the state of emergency. So we were reporting on what they were doing, and obviously they didn't want that.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Right.

**Anton Harbor**

But basically *The Weekly Mail* then was a very strong anti-Apartheid newspaper, very outspoken and quite cheeky in doing it. So it butt heads with the authorities repeatedly during that period.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

So how did that transition work, I mean, from a journalism perspective?

**Anton Harbor**

Well what was all those restrictions in 1990 effectively fell away, although many of them were still on the statute books. They were just not being implemented so that period from 1990 to 1994 was one of complete freedom because really there was no authority over what went in the media.

And we were like deer caught in the headlights. Suddenly, we had all the incredible freedom and, you know, we learned and developed ways – sometimes I think quite imaginative ways and creative ways – to deal with censorship, to cope and fight censorship, to undermine censorship. Suddenly, we found ourselves in approaching a normal situation, where we had to relearn to be normal journalists and use our freedom effectively.

So we went through a very difficult transition and a very complicated transition in which most papers like *The Weekly Mail*, because *The Weekly Mail* was one of a number of what we called alternative publications, anti-Apartheid publications, non-mainstream publications at the time. All of them except *The Weekly Mail* closed down in the transition because they couldn't really cope or find an audience or find financial backing in the transitional period.

Then came the constitution in '94 and that, sort of, obviously, it gave huge protection to freedom of expression, but it also, you know, started to create a balance between freedom of expression and people's right to privacy and the normal constitutional issues in a constitutional democracy. We've been grappling with those since then, really, to try and establish I suppose a new set of rules and norms.

The ANC government has certainly felt that the media has been very critical, and they would argue, as a whole, has been hostile to the transition project and hostile to the ANC government. I think that's contestable, but it's one of the reasons they've pushed for change and transformation and action on the media front.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

I just want to figure out what you mean about, like, being imaginative or what type of adjustments or difficulties you would have in the transition period.

### **Anton Harbor**

Well the strange thing about censorship here is that it fell within a legal framework, by and large, so they would pass a law saying you can't quote such and such a person because they're a banned person so you would use approaches like quoting that person's spouse or quoting them without naming them and giving hints as to who they were.

So we saw our mission in that era as finding creative ways to get around censorship, to keep people informed as best we could by looking for the gray areas of the law. The way censors worked and usually work is that they don't create hard and fast rules. They create areas of uncertainty to try and intimidate you into self-censorship, and you can sometimes use those to push back the law.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Sure. So is that why when you go to, like, the Apartheid Museum and stuff you see a lot of footage of someone like Winnie Mandela or was she banned? I don't know.

**Anton Harbor**

She was banned for periods of time, but there were periods when she was one of the sole people who could speak out, in a sense, for her husband and for the ANC. And periods where she could be quoted and periods where she couldn't and these things changed all the time.

You know, one of the best-known things we did, for example, was at the height of the state of emergency, when they really were very severely restrictive in our reporting on security force action in particular. We decided we would produce a newspaper as if there were no restrictions, and then we got our lawyer to tell what to come out and we simply put black lines so you got a whole newspaper with black lines and pictures blacked out dotted throughout the paper, except, I think, I don't think there was any of the sports page. I think we managed to keep those clean.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

So can I ask you, in terms of the transition, I mean it sounds like obviously you were in one camp of media, but for a publication that was more mainstream, certainly something like the SABC, which I am going to explain to the audience is the public —

**Anton Harbor**

The public broadcaster. It was then a state broadcaster. It didn't serve the public. It served the state and the ruling party.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Do you have a sense of what their transition was like?

**Anton Harbor**

Their's was maybe the biggest transition of all because they were a state broadcaster serving the ruling party and very tightly controlled, and they moved quickly to become a public broadcaster run at arm's length from the state and with a new public broadcasting mandate to serve the public. They had a very difficult transition because also — and it was true of most of our newsrooms — were overwhelmingly white. Most of them, not all of them, some of them were partly mixed. And some black newspapers had black newsrooms, but the SABC newsroom was largely white and that had to go through a very quick and very radical transition to a more representative demographic.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

I know now that they broadcast in multiple languages.

**Anton Harbor**

They always did.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

So they always did?

**Anton Harbor**

They always did, but then it was used as an instrument of separation. They were very strict about different languages on different stations and no crossover. Whereas now, they broadcast in all languages, but they are much more relaxed about moving between languages on stations. There is no longer, kind of, that pure attempt to divide people by language or by ethnicity.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Outside of SABC, in terms of private media companies, was there concerns about who owned the media?

**Anton Harbor**

Very definitely because ownership was very tightly held. So we had, in the printed media, we had Afrikaans press, which was also very close to the ruling party, and it had to go through a huge transition as that ruling party lost power. In the English press, the mining houses really controlled the English language press, that mainstream press that it is, and it was a quite a conservative liberal – it was a conservative liberal press. It was an anti-Apartheid press, but strictly within the limits of white politics. They had to go through their own less radical transition, but a transition as well.

Outside of broadcasting, there's issues about language because we have 11 official languages, but we really only produce major newspapers in two of those 11 or three of those 11 languages. The press has always been predominantly in English and Afrikaans, and we've had growth in recent years in isiZulu, the Zulu language. But the other languages are really quite dramatically underrepresented in the printed media.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

SABC has, I mean, I think its biggest radio station is a Zulu radio station.

**Anton Harbor**

By a long way, the biggest station is the Zulu station, yes.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Can you kind of explain – people speak Afrikaans across ... I think some Americans might think that Afrikaans is only spoken by white South Africans. That's not true.

**Anton Harbor**

No, it's pretty widely understood. It's spoken, it's certainly the leading language in the colored population, in the mixed-race and Malaysian decent population that we called the colored population. And it's widely understood by a lot of South Africans.

English – the most common languages are English, Afrikaans and Zulu – the most widely understood languages. But most South Africans speak three, four, five languages.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Right. I wanted to get back to what you were saying about integrating newsrooms because I think that is something we struggle with in the U.S. And in the U.S., I would think newspapers, in particular, are still having struggles in having a diverse staff. There's a little bit more pressure on certainly television. I'm from Washington, D.C. Our market has a large black population so there are — you see prominent black faces on our nightly news, and, if you didn't, I'd question what was going on there. I wanted to talk a little bit about what happened in South Africa because I feel like at *Business Day*, I mean things aren't perfect, but I work in a department with all black journalists and I feel like there is some representation. I mean I know that the demographics here are vastly different.

### **Anton Harbor**

It's changed dramatically and most newsrooms now are much more representative than they were 15 years ago. Fifteen years ago, it ranged from newsroom to newsroom. Some were completely white. Some were integrated. Some were completely black, and those were the newspapers really aimed a purely black audience. But certainly, overwhelmingly, the management and editing positions – the senior positions – were overwhelmingly white and clearly that had to change quite quickly.

There was huge pressure for that change because I think people, quite rightly, saw the media, not just ... You know, it was true of almost every South African workplace had to go through a huge transition, particularly in management. But the media was seen as particularly important because, in a way, it was seen as a social leader. It has a very particular role in a society in transition, so it was seen as a priority to bring transformation. Transformation is defined in many ways, but clearly the first priority was clearly a more representative demography in the newsrooms and in newspaper management and control.

It was a difficult transition. A lot of skills and experience were lost as, I suppose, either left journalism or were retired early or left the country. A lot of new, young people came in, and because it was a rapid transition, it affected the quality of our media naturally to go through a change like that. A loss of experiences and skills – it's going to affect things. But I think we've come out the other end. We are suffering from many of the same issues and ailments that journalism is suffering from around the world. So there is a very mixed state of journalism in this country, but certainly that level of transition in terms of the demography of newsrooms, we've come a long way down the line.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

So now that we have covered that. I guess I want to get back to, I guess, what's sounds like a little bit of a backlash going on right now in terms of wanting to, I guess, scale

back expression of freedom, or at least in some corners. Can you talk about where, specifically, that's coming from? Is that coming from President Zuma? Is that coming from...

### **Anton Harbor**

It's coming from strong elements within the ANC who feel ... You know, it comes from two strains. There is a feeling that in exercising freedom that the media has sometimes trampled on people's rights to dignity and privacy. Dignity being a particularly sensitive issue in a country coming from Apartheid you know. But also a sense that the media has been very critical of the ANC, and it's true, the media has been very critical of the ANC. I think that's quite a healthy thing. But clearly, I suppose you have to understand that we had a liberation movement that became a government in a swift transition, a very difficult transition and often felt the difficult scrutiny of a very critical media.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

We should probably explain that the ANC is the ruling party by a fairly sizable majority.

### **Anton Harbor**

Well I think that's clearly a factor because the ANC, you know, it's commanded two-thirds support since it came to power and with a fairly weak opposition. At least elements of the press have seen a need to step into that gap and be particularly strong on them. If there is a strength in the media in this country, it's that certain papers have been very strong watchdogs.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Which papers?

### **Anton Harbor**

I would say the *Mail & Guardian*, what was *The Weekly Mail*. I would say the *Sunday Times*, in particular periods, not consistently, but certainly in recent years.

What has been strong in this country, very noticeably, I think, is investigative journalism. I know around the world investigative journalism has been in decline in many places because of the costs and the financial situation. But in this country, there are three or four very strong, top quality by any international standard, investigative teams that have been powerful watchdogs at the *Mail & Guardian*, *Sunday Times*, a television program like *Carte Blanche* on M-Net has done some very good stuff, *City Press* most recently.

You know, I've been a judge in international competitions for investigative journalism and for local, and our good investigative journalism can compete with anything in the world.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

It's hard for me to tell how the digital revolution has hit South Africa or not hit South Africa. Do you think it's hitting the media – I mean it does seem like you all are a little bit, in terms of the impact on the industry, behind where the U.S. is.

**Anton Harbor**

Oh yes. Bandwidth here has been slow and expensive.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Yes. It's very expensive to use bandwidth. I mean most of my friends pay for data plans, they tell me it's their biggest expense next to their rent. Whereas, in the U.S., we pay a flat fee and...

**Anton Harbor**

So that delayed the impact on the traditional media, and certainly newspaper between the years 2002 and 2009 or '10, there was growth in our newspapers.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

There was growth?

**Anton Harbor**

There was growth.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Why?

**Anton Harbor**

Largely because we had a new generation of tabloids emerge, which found new readers and the reading market expanded, and because the internet was only a factor in a small percentage, maybe 10 percent of the population.

That pattern has shifted in the last couple of years. Newspapers have gone into quite serious decline, and I think the clearest explanation for that is mobile access to the Internet has taken off. It's still expensive, but it's gotten a little bit cheaper, and the big change has been the arrival of smartphones. And the fact that a lot of young people are accessing the Internet with limited usage, because of the cost, but accessing it online.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

OK. So, like for example, most people that would be reading a newspaper probably also have a smartphone or a mobile device that they would looking at stuff on.

**Anton Harbor**

I mean mobile, smartphones are ubiquitous in this country and increasingly it's smartphones, which has enabled an access that many people didn't have because they didn't

have a PC and they didn't have telephone or particularly a high bandwidth telephone line, a broadband line. And so many more people can access it now, but usage is still limited by the cost.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Has the broadcast media been hit hard by the digital transition?

### **Anton Harbor**

Look, our biggest media, our most popular media, is still radio. So, you know, 92 percent of the population listen to radio and that remains, you know, and television is somewhere about 60 to 65 percent. So print has been hard hit and the others less so.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

But it doesn't seem like you are at the point where you watching like AFCON on your phone right?

### **Anton Harbor**

No. No, because of the bandwidth cost.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Given that you are kind of looking ahead, do you see things going the way they are going in the States or the U.K. in terms of, like, where the industry is going to be in a few years? Do you think you are moving that direction too?

### **Anton Harbor**

You know predicting what happens with our media in a fool's game. If we have learned anything in the media transitions of the last 20 years, it's avoid predictions.

I think there are differences in this country because, in a sense, we are going to leap-frog to mobile access, and not go through the stages of desktop access quite as much. Most of our access is workplace-based much more so than home-based, which means different usage patterns. The biggest usage is at lunchtime in offices rather than in evening as it is in the U.S. for example I understand. There clearly are differences that we are still grappling to understand what the differences are.

But newspapers here have never had huge penetration. You have to understand that the newspaper base here was always small.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Is that a literacy thing?

### **Anton Harbor**

It's a literacy thing. It's a financial thing. It's been an educational factor and it's the history of the fact that the newspaper largely catered to the elite. Until the last 10 years, we never really had a popular—we never had much of a popular printed media.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

OK, so you guys didn't have, like, tabloid culture?

### **Anton Harbor**

Well we had some, but not in the same way. Whereas in 2002, they launched here a paper called the *Daily Sun*, which was a real tabloid in every sense of the word, what the British would call a red top. And that became very quickly our biggest newspaper by a long way. It remains our biggest newspaper by a long way.

And certainly our biggest gap in our media is the kind of small town, rural community press or community radio stations. That's where there is a great weakness, I suppose, the bottom end of regular community coverage. There's huge gaps there.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Has there been a different impact, or a more sizable impact, on the Afrikaans press verses the English press? I guess that you were saying that those are two ...

### **Anton Harbor**

Good question. Look the Afrikaans press really was a subservient, government-supporting press that had cabinet ministers on its boards and really was close to the ruling party, and it's become stridently independent and critical. So the Afrikaans press has been through a radical transformation yes, but, you know, there were two Afrikaans newspaper companies. There's now one, and, in fact, it has become a global, developing world phenomenon.

One of the most extraordinary things is that Naspers, which was this very conservative Afrikaans ruling party-supporting, pro...not pro-Apartheid but close to the Apartheid government newspaper group, is now a major player in China and Brazil, across Africa...

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

What? How did that happen?

### **Anton Harbor**

They went on a huge expansionist drive based on revenue they got from paid television. They struck in big in paid television, and very aggressive in new media. They are the biggest shareholder for example in Tencent in China, which is a huge asset. So in the developing world, they are the leading group.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

That's interesting. Here as in the States, a lot of working journalists feel a little bit downtrodden. I feel like there are a lot of people who are kind of not optimistic about where, actually here, where South Africa is headed and where South Africa and journalism is headed. I, kind of, wanted to get your opinion about either of those things.

### **Anton Harbor**

Look, we have been going and we are continuing to go through a very radical and very difficult transition, and, you know, clearly there are huge positives to that and huge negatives. The society is, and our transition is more fragile than we thought it was. This is country plagued by a deep inheritance of inequality, violence and conflict, which remains bubbling away beneath the surface, and sometimes bursting out into, above the surface.

Our media has been through a complicated transition as well. You put that transition together with what's happened globally in terms of shrinking newsrooms and financial pressures, uncertainty about the future, digitalization and its complexities, that has led to a great deal of uncertainty, and in some ways, in some areas, a decline of our media.

Am I optimistic about it? I guess I am something of an optimist. I think we have to be, you know, I'm a realist about the transition and complexities of it and the fact that we are going to have many ups and downs. We've had many ups and downs, and we'll continue to have many ups and downs. People here love to say: are you optimistic or are you pessimistic? It's a ridiculous question because we are on a roller coaster ride. We have been for a long time, and we'll continue to be.

### **Michael O'Connell**

OK. We're back. We'll keep this short, but we do want to talk about what we just heard. Tell us sort of what he was wrapping up with there.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Well, he's largely positive, kind of has an optimistic or positive outlook about how South Africa in general and South African journalism. You know, they have weathered relatively well, I tend to agree with him, a lot of transition. If we just think about in the the U.S. what transition we've gone through with the digital revolution, add on top of that you're a new democracy.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Right.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

You have to integrate your newsroom. You have to deal with the fact that you're no longer living under this sort of overbearing censorship. They have weathered a lot of things very well, I think. Things are tough. Things are tough in South Africa, in general. Their unemployment's high. They're still the largest economy in Africa, but Nigeria looks

like it will overtake them in four years. And that's kind of a big psychological blow to South Africans who have always thought as themselves —

**Michael O'Connell**

With a degree of pride.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Yes, and that goes, in my experience, all groups of South Africans think of themselves as being kind of leaders in Africa, more developed, more sophisticated in some ways. So, South Africa's having some economic troubles. Their government, a lot of people are not satisfied with their government. The president's going to be in office for seven more years. Many people are not very happy with him. Unlike the U.S., anyone who knows anything about how the U.K. system works, that's more how they work.

**Michael O'Connell**

OK.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

You vote for a party. And in this case, President Zuma's party is the ANC, which is the party of Nelson Mandela and the party of liberation. They have a two-thirds majority. They win overwhelmingly, for obvious reasons. But people don't necessarily like him. So, it's like, a lot of people are voting for the ANC and he is the leader in the ANC, but they don't like the fact that he's the leader. They would prefer it to be someone else.

**Michael O'Connell**

That's like in America where you end up with two candidates that you don't particularly like, but you're going to vote for one because he or she is the the candidate of your party.

**Anna Miars**

The better of the two.

**Julia O'Donoghue**

Right.

**Michael O'Connell**

Yeah, the lesser of two evils. And I do mean evil.

There's a couple of interesting things that I took away from this. One, the obvious thing is that, not that we have a perfect world with all of the freedoms that we have with our press, but we certainly have a lot of freedoms and a lot of lessons and experiences we've had from 200 years of a free press. This is a relatively new country that is dealing with building it's own free press. I thought that was really fascinating. It's day one, what does it mean to have a free press? And trying to define that from both the government's

point of view, "What are we going to let the press do" and also the press itself, understanding what their role is and our they're going to fulfill that role. It think that was fascinating.

And then also, I mean, broadband, the technology. Just to see how much that affects the development and spread of digital media. Just the cost of that. Just how much, in our country, the cheaper broadband has helped to push digital much faster than other countries.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

In South Africa, 80 percent of the population is black and of that 80 percent, about 30 percent, only 30 percent have a telephone in their home. So already you're looking at smaller numbers. Because if you don't have a telephone, you probably don't have an Internet connection. You may have mobile phone. You're already looking at a much smaller segment of the population and then it's just really expensive even for people who can like "afford it." Also, it's sort of like where we were, I would say, I guess it's hard to gauge, but like 10 years ago. It's not like everywhere you go there's WiFi.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Right.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

So, I used to go to lunch every day from my building, we were next to a big pedestrian mall. There's like one place in that mall that has WiFi. Everywhere else does not have WiFi. That's a mall that's sort of in the equivalent of like a Tysons Corner [high-end retail mall in Fairfax County, Va.] situation. Like, there's lots of like very wealthy, sort of business-oriented people.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Sort of upscale.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah. So, it's just really different and frustrating.

### **Anna Miars**

Is there hope to change the price of broadband? I know that's maybe not under the journalism purview, but just in general, to make that more accessible to people.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

That's a good question. I don't know. I'll tell you this. This isn't exactly an answer, but I, because I was working for a financial publication. I went to a lot of meetings with a lot of business people. You know, people who are heading up Johnson & Johnson in South Africa or all of Africa. And I was always surprised how that didn't seem to be coming up in the "How can we grow the business world of South Africa" discussion.

Because to me, it was just a huge barrier. They would talk a lot about skilled labor and work compensation laws, a lot of those types of things. There's concerns that South Africa may be going in a more socialist direction in terms of certain things. Having said that, I was always like, "What about broadband? Because I don't know why anyone who's a high-tech person would want to open a company up here." And I had heard from other people who had traveled around Africa that places like Rwanda, probably with outside assistance I would imagine, have great broadband and Internet access. And that Nigeria has better broadband access in some ways. So, I was sort of wondering like, "Isn't this something you need to get on top of?" Because, if I want to have my global office in Africa, right now the reason a lot of global companies have their offices in Joburg is because it's more built up, things work well, they have don't have power outages as much as other parts of Africa, but at a certain point, the fact that your broadband is so expensive, I think, will be an issue.

### **Michael O'Connell**

So maybe that's something an entrepreneur needs to do is to go in there and say, "Look, we're going to make this a priority." But, the other side of it is that they may have other, from their perspective, they may see other problems or issues that, from a business perspective, might have a bigger bang for their buck. Maybe that's just not on their radar or it's not as much of a priority in general.

I think that this has been a really interesting conversation and I'm really glad that you came in and brought in this audio. Is there something that you wanted to add?

### **Anna Miars**

I have one last question.

### **Michael O'Connell**

OK.

### **Anna Miars**

You guys talked a little bit about journalism education in terms of where he works. I'm curious, what is journalism education like? I don't know if you can answer this question. Is it comparable to what we're learning in the U.S., especially in terms of the digital push?

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Yeah. That's interesting. I tried to get a little bit of a hold on that with my coworkers.

So, as I mentioned before, the university that he teaches at is like the second best university in the country, probably the best in certain fields. South Africa is a little bit different in that you tend to go to university, again, at least I know a lot like Ireland, kind of close to home.

Journalists, not all of them go to university, much like it used to be here. Some of them go to sort of, it's hard for me to tell, it's kind of halfway between university and high school, something called a technicon, which is essentially like a technical training school. And some of the reporters at *Business Day* went to a technicon. Incidentally, some of the best reporters, I would say, of the reporters under 25, the very best reporter went to a technicon. So, I don't know how that breaks down.

This isn't quite answering your question, but I think their higher education system is also in flux. I don't know. I don't think that they're training them to do digital journalism. I don't think you see a lot of sort of Web development stuff going on. That is the impression I get.

### **Michael O'Connell**

Thank you very much for coming in. It was good talking to you. This is sort of an interesting perspective. It's nice to get a look of what's going on in journalism elsewhere in the world. I know you're on Twitter. If people want to contact you on Twitter, how can they do that?

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Sure. I'm @jsodonoghue. My last name's kind of hard to spell.

### **Michael O'Connell**

All right. Thanks very much.

### **Julia O'Donoghue**

Thanks.