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Voices of other publics: Online magazines, *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* as a representation of alternative media in democratic South Africa

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Journalism and Media Studies.

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the ways in which online magazines, *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard*, are representative of alternative media in democratic South Africa. It frames its arguments within the prevailing discursive democratic theory of the counterpublic sphere and examines how these publications' choice of content production, editorial contributors, target audiences and participatory norms characterise them as such a space. The study argues that as platforms of critical deliberation on issues based on the ideological beliefs, interests and lived experiences of their participants, these media can be regarded as counterpublics existing on the margins of conventional media. As a consequence of their exclusion from the consciousness of 'dominant publics', their publishing activities tend to counter or be of contestatory editorial positioning as a challenge to mainstream media. This study advances that their production of critical content, representation of (and as) marginalised voices and their contribution to public deliberation contribute to our understanding of the role of alternative media in democratic South Africa. To further understand the critical nature of their coverage, this thesis also interrogates *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard's* socio-political content, by analysing their reports of the *Rhodes Must Fall*[1] discourse which saw student uprisings around the issue of transformation in South Africa's institutions of higher learning; as well as the xenophobic attacks that put the country in the global spotlight in 2015.

[1] A movement started by a group of students from the University of Cape Town in 2015 calling for the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from their campus. The protests for transformation spread to other institutions of higher learning throughout South Africa and were highly self-published on social media under the #RhodesMustFall

Declaration

I declare that this is my own unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Nontobeko Zuma

January 2017

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1

Introduction

The end of apartheid rule in 1994, signaled a new era for South Africa's news media. When once the publishing and broadcasting of critical and oppositional content had been suppressed and banned under strict apartheid press laws passed by the National Party government, an independent press could finally become a reality. Democratic sentiment that had previously seen journalists incarcerated, exiled or killed in the struggle for liberation, could be expressed under the country's new democratic constitution. Indeed, the anti-government media's watchdog and activist role at the time, continues to be revered as having contributed significantly to the end of the apartheid regime, in particular, the courageous contributions of the alternative press, which challenged and defied the then government's racist and separatist rule.

Having come into existence as early as the late 1800s and elevated through the progressively unjust socio-political conditions of early 21st century South Africa, alternative media has remained entrenched in the country's resistance movements. The democratic transition towards the independence of the press came with transformation related to the inclusion of black ownership, certain changes to access by different audience demographics and indeed, content itself. For some media scholars such as Berger (1999), Duncan (2014), Harber (2014) and Maserow (2014), however, due to media concentration created by that the fact that most operations were and

continue to be run by the same companies, this era has also heralded an undesirable shift which has seen news media producers publishing more content but with little diversity. Meanwhile, others like Daniels (2014) also decry the lack of critical content appearing in the current South African media setting. These critiques suggest a certain inadequacy within the country's media in that it does not offer representation that is fairly reflective of South Africa's democracy. They were thus instrumental in stimulating my research question around the role the alternative media plays in post-apartheid South Africa.

Using the discursive democratic theory of the counterpublic sphere, the study explored South Africa's alternative media setting to interrogate how participation and critical content are being used to reflect the sentiments of some demographics of South Africa, generally not covered in mainstream media i.e. the voices of marginalised publics. It asked the questions, how existing role players challenge the mainstream media, the roles they see themselves as playing, who gets represented and on what terms. Online publications *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* were selected as case studies and helped to redefine the role of alternative media in South Africa today.

1.1. Research Questions

The following were the questions this study set out to answer about *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* as publications representative of post-apartheid alternative media.

- What is the role of alternative media in democratic South Africa?
- In what way do can these media give voice to the marginalised?
- How do they contribute to critical content?
- What kind of content is being published?
- What level of participation takes place and how?
- Who gets to contribute to ongoing dialogues and on what terms?
- In what ways does the editorial positioning of the publication reflect them as counterpublics?
- How do they cover socio-political issues, specifically Rhodes Must Fall protests and xenophobia?

1.2. Rationale

South Africa's media underwent some major changes when the country transitioned from apartheid to democracy in 1994 and, it continues on a transformation trajectory with the proliferation of social media and the "digital first" approach infiltrating newsrooms across the globe[2]. With regards to content, many of the publications that were instrumental to the fight against state oppression and had become entwined with the struggle against racial oppression, found themselves having to reevaluate their watchdog role in South Africa post-1994. Indeed, even those with leanings towards particular political parties, lost that cause within the democratic setting. As Guy Berger notes in his work, *Towards an Analysis of the South African Media and Transformation, 1994 - 1999* (1999), there is a view 'which suggests reverse discontinuity. It recognises (and indeed applauds) critical coverage under the old regime, but argues that this role became redundant once a new, democratically-elected, government took office' (ibid.).

It is in light of just such a view that this section discusses the level or lack thereof, of critical content appearing in the current media. An overview of the nature of today's alternative media thus becomes relevant to this inquiry. Issues of ownership and participation are a vital part of determining how much or how little of the content appearing in today's mainstream media is actually critical.

[2] A phenomenon by which media and other information-based companies traditionally publishing in the print format, begin to offer their products in digital formats in order to better serve their audiences in the Information Age.

Wits University's Journalism Department project, *The State of the Newsroom* (2014) edited by Glenda Daniels, is an important resource in this regard. Its research shows that there are still four main players in South Africa's print sector, namely; *Media24, Sekunjalo, Times Media Group* and *Caxton Group*, which dominates the community news space. It also offers an in-depth overview of the dominant players in the broadcast industry which comprise of the *SABC* (TV and radio), *e.TV* as well as *DStv - Multichoice*'s pay-TV service. The research notes that community newspapers are the strongest option for critical media especially as it pertains to coverage that is not purely focused on the interests of middle class South Africans.

> Community newspapers appear to be making a valuable contribution to diversity of news in terms of content and plurality of voices. Further, there was an inspiring idealism among editors and journalists – for most, their driving force was to serve their communities. (Daniels, 2014)

While *The State of the Newsroom 2014* provides valuable insights with regards to the kind of stories dominating mainstream news and discusses censorship of news media through the *Secrecy Bill* and the *National Keypoints Act* in addition to revealing statistics around transformation[3], critical content is not a subject of its study. There exists a view that content in South Africa's mainstream media is no longer critical[4]. This could be

[3] Transformation refers to the changes in South Africa's media landscape owing to, firstly; the transition to democracy where media ownership from white to black hands, and indeed from so-called legacy companies to independent ones has gone through fewer changes than expected. It also refers to the Digital First approach wherein print media has struggled with sustainability due to social media penetration.

[4] These include Guy Berger (1999) who in his critique about transformation in democratic South African media suggests that the media's watchdog role has become "redundant" under the new government.

attributed to the fact that only a few media groups – as per the study's findings – own and control the country's mainstream media, such that sources and angles are the same; but there is also the crucial matter of representation. With regards to a diversity of voices, a brief but critical perspective is offered by among others, Angela Quintal, former editor of the *Mail and Guardian* who expresses concern over the lack of truly critical content in South Africa's mainstream media, lamenting that 'the media often slips into formulaic reporting. It doesn't always go behind the story and dig as deep as it should' (Maserow 2014). It is also the view of some (ibid.) that the mainstream media is overly focused on commercial gains and has thus neglected its duties of reporting from a critical perspective in favour of profits. As *SECTION27*'s Mark Heywood articulates, "The media needs to look at issues that don't necessarily sell newspapers...it is so important for the victims of social injustice" (ibid.).

Representation of marginalised groups is an issue which South Africa's current mainstream media has also failed to address. According to a study by the *Media Monitoring Project*, the issue of women representation during elections, for example, is extremely problematic. Its study found that men were the primary target of news coverage and that the media seldom asked political parties to account for their policies on gender. It even revealed with respect to women leaders that "women politicians were regularly demonized and infantilized by the media. They are branded as "unfeminine" or "iron women"- ruthless, belligerent and doggedly determined." (Morna 2002)

Harber (2014), Maserow (2014) and Daniels (2014) also states a need for South Africa's democratic, independent media to be more critical.

A number of esteemed South African scholars and academics are of the view that transformation in the country's media landscape has been minimal. Core to contestations around what transformation means in this regard, are issues of diversity and plurality with regards to the kind of news content being published. Guy Berger (2009), Anton Harber (2014) and Jane Duncan (2015); have all shared some interesting views on the subject. It is the perspective of this study that publications that exist in the margins of mainstream media, should form part of the media diversity debate if practical answers are to be arrived at about the extent of diversity in today's media landscape. The role of South Africa's media – especially that which has been described as alternative – in the country's transition from apartheid to democracy has, after all, been a significant one. It is on these grounds that this research sets out to evaluate the nature of South Africa's publications, *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard*. The study hopes to answer some of the questions that would contribute to our understanding of critical media in the post-apartheid era.

This study frames its analysis using counterpublic sphere theory as a monocle through which it can determine the role and editorial positioning of the alternative media publications chosen as its case studies. The counterpublic sphere as a theoretical framework is important in informing our perceptions around the media's role in representing a diversity of voices to reflect different social groups within a democratic setting, especially those defined by Saunders (1990), as existing in highly "stratified societies" such as South Africa. As a principle that responds directly to the notions of 'democratisation' and 'equal citizenship' characterised in Habermas's public sphere

theory, the notion of counterpublics makes way for discussions on how groups within a society can create and participate in their own spaces through which their interests whether cultural, political, ideological or social etc., can be expressed. Below I broadly offer the reasons these particular publications have been selected as case studies for this research.

Africa is a Country claims to "challenge and destabilize" Western (and Western media's) perceptions of Africa and Africans in the diaspora. The words "challenge" and "destabilize" become important when observed from the point of view of alternative media which is itself often described as oppositional and offering resistance to conventional views and opinions. An analysis of *Africa is a Country* could then offer some understanding of its contribution to the diversity of voices South Africa's media today.

Vanguard immediately declares itself as a publication for the black woman. Its founder, Panashe Chigumadzi has previously described it in her website "as a black feminist platform for young black women coming of age in post-apartheid South Africa" (Chigumadzi, no date). On a fundamental basis, this brave declaration opens the publication up to some scrutiny and raises questions of exclusion on the basis of race and gender. However, the social theory of counterpublics – evolved from the notion of the public sphere – allows us to examine *Vanguard*'s contribution to the diversity of South Africa's media setting due to its classification as a space that offers marginalised

groups i.e. feminists, black women, and black female feminists or womanists, a space in the public consciousness through the debates they hold in various platforms.

1.3. Aims and Objectives

This research aimed to evaluate the nature of South Africa's alternative media content and the role players in this space see themselves as fulfilling, whose voices are represented and on what terms. It is a study stimulated by questions of the role of media in a democratic society. It sought to find out how marginalised voices of so-called counterpublics are reflected in the alternative media. It asked the questions around how two publications, *Vanguard* and *Africa is a Country* are considered alternative media.

To appropriate its argument, the study framed its argument within the prevailing discursive democratic theory of the *counterpublic sphere* and examines how these magazines' choice of content, production, editorial contributors and audience patterns characterise them as such a space. It was interested in issues around who gets to participate and on what terms as it sets to discover the representation of critical voices important to a democratic society such as South Africa. This research took into account the way in which the publications in its scope, have covered political content, in particular, the Rhodes Must Fall discourse which saw student uprising over the issue of transformation in higher institutions of learning and; the xenophobic attacks that once again put South Africa in the global spotlight in 2015. Determining how critical the case

studies are, was considered in important in answering the question around the diversity of media in democratic South Africa.

In her essay, *Pluralism with Little Diversity: the South African Experience of Media Transformation (2015)*, Jane Duncan brings awareness to the issue of lack of diversity within the South African media landscape. She argues that in as much as there has been a notable increase of 'independent' media, there is a sameness in the way in which mainstream media reports, which is itself driven by the sameness of their intended audience – the middle class. She is essentially concerned about a lack of alternative coverage, primarily that the "South African media landscape is characterised by moderate pluralism, but not necessarily diversity, as many media groups offer 'more of the same' rather than genuine alternatives to the dominant sources of information, news and entertainment" (ibid. p2).

Anton Harber (2014) concurs with this view. He further posits that measuring the kind of diversity taking place in South Africa's media setting, should not begin and end with considerations of race, gender and ownership as well as gauging the imbalances thereof, but that the content itself should be critical and questioning.

> It will certainly not be healthy if the space for independent, critical, accountability journalism continues to shrink. I am not so concerned about whether a publication supports or opposes the ANC[5]; I am more

[5] An abbreviation for the African National Congress - South Africa's first democratically elected political party, governing since 1994.

> concerned whether the culture of that newsroom is an open one that encourages a diversity of views and opinions. (Harber, 2014)

Both scholars strongly suggest that South African journalism, is in need of content that is “critical”, “alternative” and “diverse”. Having considered these views, this research sought to uncover whether these alternatives exist in a form of the publications that are central to its inquiry, *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard*. This study further aimed to explore the way in which important socio-political issues were covered in these publications as this could shed some light into the usefulness of a South African counterpublic sphere as a means of democratic advancement, through a representation of voices often unheard and thus not considered part of society’s discourse.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

Academic media research has generated terms such as 'radical', 'critical', 'grassroots', 'left wing', 'participatory', 'protest' or 'independent' , among others, when referring to what is commonly placed under the umbrella of alternative media. Yet while such terminology suggests a commonality in what this particular form of media deal with, in reality and in most socio-political contexts within which it occurs, scholars the likes of Atton (2004) argue that the genre of alternative media is often characterised as facing a certain dichotomy.

When it comes to print and digital formats, a variety of factors – from content to operational methods, production to consumption patterns – point to a number of complexities within alternative media, particularly as they relate to its pursuit to be instrumental in challenging hegemonic institutions such as the state, mainstream media and corporate establishments, in order to create accountability and begin to address the inequities that exist within stratified democracies like South Africa. This section identifies four such factors, namely; access, choice of medium, participation and independence (in relation to funding models). I note here that closely examined, these particular facets of alternative media or the application thereof can be perceived to be contradictory to its discourses, and while there appears to be some kind of consensus among those who study the genre that its production formats do not necessarily conform to any single meaning and that it rather relies on a combination of different traits to define it (discussed further in Chapter 2: Literature Review), it is concerning that alternative

media's organisational structures at times present as incongruous to their role. Such problematisation of alternative media suggests that the genre could benefit from empirical research. Having identified these, counterpublics theory is introduced as an appropriate framework in tackling the subject of this thesis due to its potentiality to address some of the challenges confronting alternative media.

The first of these is the incontrovertible characteristic of such media to lie beyond the access and accessibility of the majority of 'marginalised' masses on whose behalf and/or about whom it ultimately bases and develops its narratives. The problem of lack of access and accessibility is evidenced in at least three different aspects of print and digital alternative media operations i.e. language use, chosen mediums of production, and in a few cases; the cost of consumption of such media.

With regards to the first, language; an observation of the most notable alternative print and digital publications in South Africa, for example Chimurenga and Frank Talk has drawn definitions of their use of language as being highly intellectual, elite or academic (Podur 2005). Needless to say, in a country which – according a 2015 study by the Central Connecticut State University – rates 56th out of 61 countries in terms of education inputs and outputs, library, newspaper and computer accessibility; the complexity and intellectual nature of the language used in many alternative publications, immediately guarantees the exclusion of a large number of subordinated people from participating - prompting questions like: "Are we doing all we can to reach non-elite audiences?" (Alberts, 1997).

Directly linked to the complexity of language used on these platforms is the issue of who actually participates and deliberates as well as the conditions which enable them to do so. In South Africa, a significant number of those who converge on alternative media platforms such as those belonging to LGBTIQ, women's or land rights organisations or groups; are middle class, upper middle class or elite intellectuals. Even given their ability to use critical, counter-hegemonic content to construct new and oppositional perspectives which are essential in disrupting the power of dominant publics, and though they are regarded as having the authority to represent or echo the voices and plights of subordinated social classes against stately structures; it is also equally true that they are – as with the deliberants of the bourgeoisie Habermasian public sphere – an exclusive group or more accurately; exclusive as groups whose pure intellectualism prompts critics to "warn against being too optimistic about the actual democratic effects of notions such as civil media..." (Sandoval and Fuchs, 2009)

Such a statement further highlights the paradoxical attributes that emerge from the use of references such as civil media and active citizenry, hence fuel questions around the legitimacy of their voices, putting in doubt their ability to act as principals of social agency (Downing 2001). Given their positions in society and the fact that most of the intellectuals who contribute and drive narratives in alternative media belong to a different, comparatively less subdued social class than the majority of marginalised citizens, their dominance means that "the very agents of resistance (can) be alienated..." (Atton, 2001).

The choice to publish online, though a popular one for alternative media publishers, also presents similar challenges. The advantages of using the digital platform seem plenty. Among them, is the obvious capacity the online space has to minimise the cost of production. For a majority of small-scale alternative media publications, this means a predictable list of expenditures - with the minimum requirements being, the device used to create and publish, electricity, data, hosting and maintenance costs. Generally, the only other expenses involve human resources such as writers or contributors. For a limited number of publishers, this list may also include advertising and marketing costs, which is not common practice among alternative media publishers. Unlike with print media, digital publishing allows editors to publish directly onto their websites, which cuts out middle men such as distributors. The added benefit of this, of course, is that distribution is immediate or happens in real time; which allows for faster and more effective engagement between producers and consumers. However, the broadness of the online space and their conscientious choice to publish content that is oppositional to that of the mainstream space, when linked to their resistance towards online or social marketing (which affects their search engine rankings); means alternative media are often, ironically, left in the margins of larger societal discourses.

However, while it might be less costly to set up, host and run blogs and news websites, it is not necessarily as affordable for marginalised publics to consume. In a country like South Africa, the high cost of data becomes an added barrier to content consumption. Even with the frequency and wide availability of research in the area of Internet

penetration and its links to social networking, assumptions – even if based on pockets of statistical information – should be avoided in studies involving marginalised sectors of the population as they tend to ignore the many complexities arising from the socio-economic context of such communities.

This is apparent when one examines the comparative statistical information of access to hardware such as smart phone devices (which is relatively easy and affordable to access) and what would be considered the prerequisites of being able to access the primary functions of such devices i.e. access to cellphone signals/network, airtime/data costs, and even access to electricity needed to keep devices charged and operational (which is arguably less easy or and less affordable). Equally important, in particular with regards to our enquiry, is how marginalised people who do have access to the Internet, may or may not engage with it. As an example, a 2016 report about a study conducted by New York-based research company, *We Are Social*, seems to tick all the boxes when it comes to access to smart phones and even Internet use and yet closer examination of the kind of access may give a different impression. It found that almost half of South Africans (26.4 million people) fit within the perimeters of what are defined as 'active Internet users'. However, a great number of these (38 %) were people using the Internet for mobile messaging on platforms such as WhatsApp, others for mobile banking, location services, shopping etc. The study does not reflect the consumption of, nor the interactivity that people have with the news media, but its statistics putting social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter in the top rankings of the platforms active Internet users engage with, is important given a fair amount of studies by Fuchs

(2013), Poell (2014) and Ghel (2015) have come to define social media as a potential sphere for critical deliberation. In South Africa, this is arguably linked to such events as the Fees Must Fall movement, which indicate that social media is being used as an expansive space for protest and oppositional discourses. However, it is increasingly important that the expansion of the scope of what defines alternative media; continues to be firm on the inclusion of ordinary "citizens, not elites" (Atton, 2001) so that alternative media remains "the means for democratic communication to people who are normally excluded from media production." (ibid.).

The sentiment is validated by Mona as it applies to African contexts.

> Arguably, underground and oppositional communication in Africa is expanded and amplified online, but using only social media as a way to define alternative media and communication in Africa is limiting, as it does not sufficiently illustrate its role and position, or the processes, actors, forms, audiences, content and strategies involved. A fixation with social media carries the danger of overlooking other small-scale oriented communication and media used by the marginalised or have-nots. Such bottom-up alternative media forms are usually more independent of the state and the market, operating within spaces that are horizontal and counter-hegemonic – both important for self-representation. (Mano, 2015)

Finally, a common attribute among publishers of alternative media – independence - also presents as a challenge that needs further exploration. Although independence is regarded as a primary characteristic of alternative media publishers, it is also an aspect which some struggle to maintain in their efforts to keep their production processes sustainable. While most alternative publishers strictly and on principle, choose not to accept any kind of commercial advertising on their platforms, a number of them tend to have a noncommittal relationship with certain funding models. These may include state-aligned funding, with others even accepting funding from private corporations, especially in instances where such funding is content or project-based. As an example, one of our case studies, *Africa is a Country*, has in recent times obtained funding from the Shuttleworth Foundation, an alignment which is deemed justified because of the philanthropic benefits. Although there is no evidence to suggest that this has nor could in anyway jeopardize its independence, the relationship and others could easily be misconstrued as a threat to the publication's independence.

These observations lead to a realisation that, the use of 'intellectual' language, the circumstances which determine participation, chosen platforms of production and distribution, as well as issues of independence; all collectively dent alternative media's bearing as an emancipatory force which is meant to foster participatory access (to marginalised publics) with the goal of bridging the divide between producer and consumer as envisioned by Couldry (2003). To this point, it must also be emphasized that such a problematisation, is not intended to, nor can it completely dispute or mask those attributes of alternative media that do offer pragmatic solutions to socio-political

problems and foster social change in democracies, as they were able to during the rise of the resistance, protest and liberal press of apartheid South Africa. This refers to those of its characteristics that seem to be common in all of its different platforms such as their critical, contestatory relationship with mainstream media which avails them as platforms for the expression of oppositional worldviews, and; most importantly, their ability to challenge stately hegemony and the status quo, a role which is well-established as a key for media to fulfill towards the advancement of their democracies.

Although the acknowledgement of the aforementioned problems facing alternative media in the South African context, may be imperative not only to improving our understanding of the genre but also in identifying further issues that may contribute towards its advancement through empirical research; it is also my view that this study's chosen theory – the counterpublic sphere – begins to address a few of these problems by allowing for the constitution of a sphere of deliberation in which "members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of *their* identities, interests and needs." (Fraser, 1997)

Counterpublics or counterpublic sphere theory first emerges in Nancy Fraser's critiques which later evolve into modifications of Jürgen Habermas's public sphere theory. In her conception, Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy, Fraser (1997) describes the notion of counterpublics as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses" (ibid p. 81). Counterpublics theory is rooted in discursive

democratic theory and is interested in social discourses of different publics, especially those existing in the margins of general publics in so-called stratified societies.

According to Fraser, counterpublics theory allows for a “contestatory” relationship between the dominant publics and counterpublics. In it, subaltern counterpublics are able to deliberate on and collectively confront “exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behaviour and alternative norms of public speech” (ibid.). Counterpublics theory evolved in direct contestation to Habermas’s public sphere.

Habermas’s magnum opus, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere; An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962) is a powerful conception of the notion of the public sphere as normative, democratic social theory. In it, he describes this as a sphere in which private individuals may assemble to discuss or deliberate on issues of public concern. These private individuals or publics may, through their concern for the “common good” rationally and “freely” exchange opinions in debates involving the needs of the larger society. In this manner, they are understood to mediate on behalf of the public. This sphere tends to be distinct from the state and often holds the state accountable through counter-discourses. It is therefore a democratic space within which “all” citizens have equal access (Habermas 1991).

The notion of the public sphere as described by Habermas, is rooted in 17th and 18th century Europe during which time the frame of reference is based on the activities of the

bourgeoisie and their discussions about the interests of society. Besides the physical interaction occurring at non-state venues like taverns, salons and coffee houses; the public sphere further relies on the circulation of printed materials such as journals, newspapers and pamphlets to extend its debate and discussion (ibid.)

Critical of the "bourgeoisness" of the Habermasian public sphere which she deems adversely dominated by the participation of elite individuals within society and thus unaccommodating to the interests of underprivileged, subordinated or "ordinary" members of society such as the working class, women, black people or collectively, "alternative publics"; Fraser's counterpublic sphere expands on the public sphere's emancipatory potential by becoming a space where subordinated publics can "formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (ibid.). In parsing the public sphere, other scholars the likes of Lande (1998) and Michael Warner (2002), also see Harbermas's public sphere to be in contradiction with its assertions of having an emancipatory potential.

Their contestation problematizes Habermas's structure of public opinion and public participation; primarily on the basis that it seems flagrantly incognizant of the distinction between the "bourgeois public" and "other publics" where other publics mainly comprise individuals generally dominated by the former. Secondly, it is the view of these theorists that the public sphere cannot claim its representation without a consideration of socio-economic inequities that inhibit access and accessibility of some within society to contribute to the formation of public opinion.Thirdly, they posit that the Habermasian

public sphere does not adequately accommodate societal dynamics in as far gender balance – a thought expressed in detail by Lande (1998) – socio-economic status, cultural context and political preference.

As a result, both Fraser and Warner propose that the theory of counterpublics is better equipped to accommodate certain publics who want to speak for themselves in the 'private' spaces they create, allowing them to express their interests, needs and ideologies as collective 'publics'. In her argument, Fraser posits that inequities between the dominant and subordinate do not allow for the ideal of equal participation nor equal access (Fraser 1990, p125). The relationship between publicity and status is more complex than Habermas intimates, that declaring a deliberative arena to be a space where extant status distinctions are bracketed and neutralized is not sufficient to make it so…he fails to recognize other non-liberal, nonbourgeoisie public spheres (Fraser, 1990: p60 - 111).

To further her argument around the separation between dominated publics and bourgeois publics, Fraser then adds that there be accommodated based on varying social realities, a space in which exist "counter-publics". In essence, in Fraser's observation, the idea of an ideal public sphere only becomes relevant in as far as it can offer "open access, participatory parity, and social equality" (ibid.) In Public and Counterpublics (2002), Warner characterises the public sphere as a space not unlike Fraser's, defined by variant discourses inherent to a society within which there is a

diversity of cultures, values and ideologies – a “stratified” society. He regards the public sphere as bearing an ideological dichotomy in as far as it can speak to both individual and stranger simultaneously such that “the idea of a public political confidence is committed to a strange destination.” In the kind of public society that the idea of publics has enabled, the self-organization of discourse public has immense resonance from the point of view of individuals (ibid. p413).

For Warner, redefining Habermas’s analysis of public into “counterpublics” is of critical importance as in so doing, we are better able to understand the idea of a public as being “self-organised”. The question around which of the publics are being addressed, is only determined by the expanse of circulation, which in turn makes it an “ongoing (social) space of encounter for discourse” (ibid. p90). He asserts that no form of identity, whether it be race, gender, cultural orientation or social status; necessarily makes anyone in a society part of a public because as he adds “being part of the public requires at least minimal participation, even if it is patient or nominal, rather than a permanent state of being.” (ibid. p415). Warner principally maintains that there is obscurity in the concept of Habermas’s publics or civil society which make it self-determining and unrecognisable. He reveals it as being constituted of attention “with no active uptake”.

In other words; it may be of no consequence to the notion of equal access, participation or democratic discourse. In contrast, he offers the notion of counterpublics as allowing marginalised minorities or subordinated groups; and arguably even interest-based groups recognition through a “circulatory space” where they are not constantly in the fringes of the wider society but can actually become active participants in discourses that are of interest to them, with neither the need to fit in nor a subjugation to stigmatization by the general publics. This, for Warner is a more progressive form of giving audiences or users an identity that may compel them to participate, for “the subordinate status of a counterpublic does not simply reflect identities formed elsewhere; participation in such a public is one of the ways by which its members’ identities are formed and transformed. A hierarchy or stigma is the assumed background of practice” (ibid. p424).

1.5. Methodology

An overview

This study interrogates the critical nature and the role played by alternative online publications, *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* magazine in democratic South Africa's media landscape. It evaluates the ways in which both publications engage with significant socio-political issues, in particular, the uprising of South Africa's tertiary students against lack of institutional transformation as signified by the Rhodes Must Fall movement as well as the problem of xenophobic attacks; both issues that put the country's democracy in the global spotlight in first part of 2015. Using the literature review to set context and understanding around the study of alternative media, I applied the theoretical framework of counterpublics which proved useful because of its qualities as a space for democratic discourse (Fraser 1997).

1.5.1. Methods of collection

Two methods, namely; content analysis and interviews were used to ask the relevant questions. Content analysis is a useful method in analysing volumes of text. It involves an evaluation of words, sentences and phrases to determine the messages being conveyed to provide context and meaning that becomes critical to the discernment of communication (Yang, 2008). Content analysis is largely regarded and applied in social sciences research as a helpful method in "objectively and systematically identifying

specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1969). All three interviews were conducted and recorded online using a computer and Internet and via the Skype audio formats. Interviews are considered beneficial in research as a method by which the researcher and the participant can engage in a more direct manner. The advantage to this method is its ability to allow the researcher to 'draw on the best human qualities … trust, thoughtful questioning and perceptive probing, empathy and reflective listening' (Salmons, 2012). Both these approaches helped me to analyse issues of participation, to interrogate the concept of community, the critical nature in which the research topics were engaged as well as the significance of counterpublic voices in media within South Africa's democratic setting. Informed by a thorough review of content and the themes contained in *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* publications, I proceeded to conduct interviews with founding editors, Panashe Chigumadzi and co-editor Thato Magano as well as Sean Jacobs, respectively.

1.5.2. Content analysis

To begin, I conducted a content analysis of *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* magazine reports in the first two weeks of publication. In the case of *Africa is a Country*, this was content published between August 3 and August 16, 2009. For Vanguard, the period sampled was between 25 April and May 02, 2014. In both instances, these base evaluations helped me establish who the contributors/participants were and what topics were being tackled. A study of this first period ultimately allowed me to examine the publications' role as representative of counterpublic theory. I collected and studied all

articles and reports within this time frame before undertaking subsequent analysis of the two issues central to this research, the publications' coverage of the Rhodes Must Fall protests and xenophobic attacks.

The second time frame chosen for this research was 09 March (when the Cecil John Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town had excrement poured over it in protest for transformation) and 29 May, 2015 (three weeks after the Rhodes statue was removed). This period of content analysis, was selected as a way of critically analysing how these publications report on significant socio-political events in the country. It is important to note that the xenophobic attacks continued beyond this period, while the Rhodes Must Fall protests morphed and spread to other parts of the country under the larger Fees Must Fall[6] movement which continued into 2016.

1.5.3. Interviews

Following this process, I conducted interviews with the two founding editors of each publication as well as a co-editor of one. A Skype audio interview was conducted with editor and founder of *Vanguard* magazine, Panashe Chigumadzi, along with co-editor and marketing consultant, Thato Mogano on November 18, 2015. Due to logistical limitations, a Skype audio interview was first conducted with the founding editor of *Africa is a Country*, Sean Jacobs and later questions were sent to him via electronic mail and

[6] Nationwide student protests that took place in various South African tertiary institutions in 2015 and in which students demanded the lowering of fees citing the academic exclusion for those who came from poor backgrounds. Issues of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction and the insourcing of workers also formed part of this discourse.

he answers this second part of the interview in recorded answers on February 7, 2016. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for inclusion in the overall findings of this thesis.

Publication	Reasons for selection	Interviewees	Role/Position
1. Africa is a Country	Independent publisher, pan-Africanist perspective	Sean Jacobs	Founding Editor
	Audiences as contributors		
	Critical content i.e. makes assertions that it publishes content that challenges conventional media's perspectives of Africa and Africans. Described as left wing		
2. Vanguard Magazine	Independent publisher, pan-Africanist perspective	Panashe Chigumadzi	Founding Editor
	Audiences as contributors	Thato Mogano	Co-editor /contributor
	The publication is regarded as Counterpublic due to its assertions it is targeted specifically at young, black feminist		

Table 1: Provides a concise outline of those interviewed and attempts to provide an understanding for the process of selection.

1.5.4. Method of analysis

Using the data collected as a point of departure, a method of analysis best suited to provide an all-encompassing evaluation of all reports, mainly articles – relevant to the chosen subject matter within the study's chosen time frame – was employed. To do so, a direct internal search of africasacountry.com as well as vanguardmagazine.co.za was done using a combination of keywords and website tags or categories in line with the qualified method of content analysis. This method whose primary purpose is to seek meaning of relatively large amounts of texts for better interpretation 'by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages' (Holsti 1969), involved a search within each report for certain phrases, sentences and/or paragraphs containing

themes that would allow me to interpret and appropriate the results qualitatively. I then used the data from several of those reports to highlight the themes discussed (Deacon, et al.; 1999).

1.5.5. Limitations and changes to proposed research period

It is to be noted that the period initially proposed for this research was extended due to issues encountered in the process of collecting data. While I had initially offered to cover the first two weeks right after the launch of each case study publication, I had to change due to the fact that in the case of *Africa is a Country*, there was no original content published during this period. As founder and editor, Sean Jacobs, made me aware in an interview conducted on Skype on November 18, 2015, the publication had previously been hosted elsewhere and did not have much original content as he mostly shared links to content on the Internet that he found interesting, therefore the relevant data was not readily available for appropriate analysis. In essence, *Africa is a Country* did not exist in its current form during the dates proposed.

1.5.6. Selection process

The two publications used as case studies for this thesis were selected primarily because they are independent literally entities that present as critical of 'conventional' content. Secondly, both engage in literally activities that tend to embody the approaches of alternative media as described in this paper's literature review, in which audiences

are active participants and contributors to media, making their voices crucial to the advancement of democracy.

In particular*, Africa is a Country* was selected because of its claims to challenge conventional, or more specifically, Western views of Africa and Africans. Similarly, *Vanguard* magazine claims to speak to a black woman coming of age from the perspective of a feminist black woman. I regarded these assertions as warranting further analysis in order to gauge the ways in which they contribute to a more diverse South African media landscape. I probed how these case study publications are structurally and ideologically unorthodox in terms of media production, participatory norms and the manner in which they present as critical.

2

Literature Review

2.1. Alternative Media: Context and Contestation

Meaning floats.

It cannot be finally fixed. (Hall, 1997: 228)

This section will begin by outlining some of the dominant schools of thought that have contributed to current definitions of alternative media. In the attempt to better appropriate my analysis, I cite the works of both African and global scholars on the subject. Having evaluated the different positions, I apply Nancy Fraser's counterpublics as a theoretical framework in an attempt to answer the question posed by this paper: In what way are *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* magazines representative of South Africa's alternative media post-1994? It is to be noted that one of the magazines in question, *Africa is a Country,* while founded by South African academic, Sean Jacobs, is not exclusively South African in terms of content as it also features stories and artworks from around the continent and beyond.

A significant volume of current literature on alternative media comprises contestations of meaning. There seems a prevalent pattern among scholars who have contributed to alternative media theory to guardedly define and redefine it as a point of departure. Examples include, among others, Atton (1999; 2002; 2008), Hamilton (2000), Kranich (2000), Roger (2001), Downing (2001) and Fuchs (2010). While such laboured

elucidation in academic discourse may signify a certain paucity in the body of empirical research (Yanow; Schwartz-Shea, 2015) and while this may also be accurate in reference to the typology of alternative media; the opposite too could be considered - that the diversity of spheres encompassed by its magnitude adds to complexities of meaning.

The typology of alternative media has involved contestation around two core media theory frameworks, namely subjective and objective. Both are based on Anthony Giddens' viewpoints as expressed in *The Constitution of Society (1984).* For Giddens, the subjective approach focuses on social actors and their interests and opinions as they are regarded as sources or participants. These could be audiences as well as journalists. Objectivism, on the other hand, is interested in the organisation of media production structures and movements. As such, those advocating objective social theory concern themselves with the institutalisation of the media environment such as hierarchies, ideologies, values and, the economic interests of media production.

The first, more widely adopted *subjective approach* focuses on the participatory nature and thus 'democratisation' of media. It advances the argument that for media to become an effective tool of democracy representative of a diversity of social, political, economic and cultural viewpoints; audiences need to be part of the media production process.

It is the aim of the subjective approach to eliminate the distinction between producer and consumer, transmitter and receiver, writer and reader of messages so as to be able

to (a) encourage active citizenry as a contribution to democratic processes, (b) challenge the concentration of capitalist mass media and thus imperial power, (c) turn marginalised audiences into social actors by giving them a voice to construct debate around their own, often neglected, social realities and (d) make media an emancipatory space in which the editorial hierarchy is broken down. In the following passages, I bring attention to some of the proponents of the subjective approach and their arguments as related to the order in which they are mentioned above.

The debate around active citizenry is supported in Clemencia Rodriguez's essay contained in the book *Redeveloping Communication for Social Change* (Wilkins 2000). Rodriguez posits that the involvement of citizens in the processes of media production would help enable members of the generally misrepresented or ignored public to "reclaim" their visibility by using media as an instrument of social empowerment (ibid.).

Chris Atton, a widely-published scholar on the subjective approach, finds flawed the operational and structural approaches of the objective framework of alternative media. He believes that its focus on organisational structure becomes defeatist because "the very agents of resistance (the working class in this instance) can be alienated and isolated from those directing them" (Atton 2001: 103).

On the other hand, proponents of the *objective approach* posit that alternative media should envelope aspects of radical, politically oppositional and ideologically alternate content to that published in mainstream media without losing their organisational structure. O'Sullivan (1995), Meikle (2002) and Fuchs (2010) concur in their

consideration of alternative media as that which embodies counter-hegemonic discourse, thus *critical content* becomes key in defining the objective perspective.

Secondly, although with some distinct systematic variations to those posed in subjective theory, the objective argument is also of the view that alternative media can contribute positively to society's democratic aspirations and its causes for freedom. It states that through radical criticism of socio-political and economic views that challenge the status quo, such media might be considered as fulfilling a meaningful role in advancing democratic discourse which in conventional media is portrayed in a manner that is marginal to 'lower', less powerful and less influential classes of society (Fraser 2001).

In *Towards the Democratization of Public Communication: A Critique of the Current Criteria of News*, Michael Traber describes conventional news media of the late 80s in the African context as "by and large autocratic rather than democratic. They are primarily concerned with the interests of the elites rather than with the aspirations of what we call 'ordinary people', or 'the masses', who have no face, no will of their own." (Traber, 1987: 67). In his critique, Traber also offers that alternative media be "a reversal of news values of conventional journalism". While he addresses the importance of 'alternative social actors' such as manual labourers as vital to representation of the 'voiceless', instead of owned participation as favoured by the subjective perspective; he suggests that they (social actors) speak *through* alternative media and 'thus occupy a place in the public consciousness' (ibid., p76).

John Downing (2001) echoes Traber's democratic argument with an assertion that alternative media content need proactively challenge political hegemony and oppression

by being critical of dominant perspectives; and by reporting on topics not often covered in conventional media. However, he also warns against a tendency to oversimplify the term alternative media by failing to acknowledge that there always exists an alternative. He qualifies his assertion by pointing out that it is the radical nature of such media that affirms its distinction, thereby eliminating the amorphous, oxymoronic definition of being 'alternative'.

As a more steadfast challenge to the participatory argument offered in the subjective perspective, Downing adds that organised social movements are important aspects of 'radical media'. He explains that structure becomes important in advancing social activism against capitalist dominance and that "it is reasonable to acknowledge that some forms of organised leadership are essential to coordinate challenges to the ideological hegemony of capital and to put forward credible alternative programs and perspectives" (ibid.).

Christian Fuchs, author of *Alternative Media as Critical Media,* (2001) brings into the argument two crucial aspects to the social critical theory debate, public- and counter-public sphere. True to his signature political economy theory debate, Fuchs advances:

> The totality of alternative media constitutes an alternative public sphere, a sphere of protest and political discussion that has an oppositional role and hence enhances the vividness of democracy. If there is no opposition, there is no democracy. The counter-public spheres are at the same time critical and affirmative (the latter because the existence

> of protest allows dominant classes to argue that society is pluralistic and does not need to be changed). (Fuchs, 2001, p184)

It is Fuchs's argument then that helps me arrive at some perspective with regards to contesting theories even as further questions arise. In the digital age, contestations of meaning are likely to remain part of the subject of alternative media for some time. But a deduction could be made looking at the perspectives discussed above that – albeit with differing variations and, combinations – alternative media may at some point or other be defined as fitting within one or more of the following terms: in resistance to convention, oppositional, anti-government, anti-capitalist, socialist, Marxist, participatory, representative of the marginalised groups within society, report differently to mainstream media, left-wing, non-commercial and grassroots. The subjects of this paper, *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard*, may well be reflective of one or more of these definitions; but further enquiries as to their ideological perspectives and broader roles in democratic South Africa's media landscape are important. These questions are confronted using the notion of the counterpublic sphere as a theoretical framework.

2.2. A History of South Africa's alternative media

It was as the 19th century was lapsing that new voices began to emerge in the periphery of South Africa's whites-only media landscape. They were the unheard voices of black missionary converts who would henceforth be known (albeit with some contestation) as pioneers of the nation's almost 300-year-old history of alternative, resistance and protest media. Trailing its developments in his book, *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880s to 1960s,* Les Switzer documents its emergence as dating as far back as 1830, starting with the 'African Mission press' which he describes as "the earliest African protest literature" (Switzer, 1997).

His work claims to reflect the evolution of the alternative press through four significant periods with the first being the *African Mission press* which had its roots in "pioneer mission societies and their converts living primarily in mission station and outstation communities" for about five decades between the 1830s and 1880s (ibid.). The second is the *independent protest press* beginning at the end of 1880 until about 1930. It comprised a variety of literature largely generated by the indigenous black people who've come to be called the black "petty bourgeoisie". Thirdly, is what Switzer refers to as the *early resistance press* whose left wing activities and views were published in white-owned publications. This form of protest media endured for another 30 years until 1960 and was representative of both working and middle class interests. Switzer describes the proceeding ten years, the *later resistance press,* as being largely driven

by organisational movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement[7] and other social movements with political and student groups at their helm. Further accounts of the history of alternative media in South Africa is found in Guy Berger's 2000 contribution to the subject, *Publishing for the People: the Alternative Pres: 1980 – 1999.* As earlier mentioned, this research focuses on radical media as it existed in the 60s and 80s.

[7] An activist movement established in the 1960s to counter apartheid and oppression of non-white peoples by the governing National Party. Steve Biko was its most prominent leader.

2.2.1. The 1960s

The 1960s decade goes down in South African history as a quintessential reflection of some of the worst tragedies of the apartheid epoch. This was the period during which the press rose up against the heightening oppression and segregation of black citizens by the Nationalist government.

The radical, oppositional and “liberal” voices of the time — while informed by a broader repugnance of apartheid’s separatist actions — arguably gained momentum following the events of the year 1960. Protests to counter pass laws, which were designed to limit and control the movement of migrant labourers and the general black population of the country while enforcing the regime’s apartheid doctrines, had been announced by then African National Congress (ANC) leader, Robert Sobukwe at the end of 1959. One such protest was scheduled to occur on March 31 of the following year. However, the Pan African Congress (PAC), a breakaway party from the ANC, chose to launch its own campaign against pass laws on March 21. From the early hours of that morning, leaders of the PAC went on a mission to mobilise residents to support its march. A few hours later, a crowd of an estimated 5000 to 7000 black township residents marched to a police station in Sharpeville and demanded arrest, saying they would no longer comply with the pass laws. During the standoff with members of the South African Police force (SAP), a succession of gunfire ripped through scores of protesters. Police used live ammunition to shoot and kill 69 people, leaving over 100 more wounded. A related protest was underway in Cape Town’s Langa township on the same day. It too culminated in the deaths of three people (Hatchen 1984).

This tragic event, which today marks *Human Rights Day* came to be known as the *Sharpeville Massacre*. Nine days after March 21, a state of emergency was declared, the first ever in the history of the country. This not only steered the assault and detention of many political activists countrywide, it also set off brutal police raids, bans and an imposition of sanctions against publications speaking against nationalist government actions. The terms of the state of emergency were extreme for both the public and the press. Most of the South African public was either in the dark or misinformed about the events of this period as most of the copy relating to the *Sharpeville Massacre* could only be published in the international media.

> In many cases readers abroad were better informed about what was happening in South Africa than South Africans themselves. The emergency regulations included restrictions on reporting so far-reaching that if interpreted literally would mean a complete ban on publishing anything relating to the crisis... The result was that South African editors, unsure about what they could print, had to exercise a large measure of self-censorship. (ibid. p.58)

Laws such as *The Suppression of Communism Act No.44,* which had been passed in the previous decade, were strongly re-enforced at this time. With the ANC and PAC outlawed under both this and the *Unlawful Organisations Act of 1960*, publishing activities related to their political movements or leaders, was considered an act of defiance and could have devastating consequences for journalists, editors and the publications for which they worked (Lapping 1986, 168). Laws such as these granted

the state power to censor, suppress, ban, arrest, deport and/or prohibit the country's media. *The Suppression of Communism Act* gave the apartheid government the authority:

> To declare the Communist Party of South Africa to be an unlawful organization; to make provision for declaring other organizations promoting communistic activities to be unlawful and for prohibiting certain periodical or other publications; to prohibit certain communistic activities; and to make provision for other incidental matters. (Act No.44 of 1950)

Publications critical of government's actions were either banned, raided or had their members prosecuted, or forced into exile. In April 1960, publications *Torch* and *New Age*[8] were banned. Ronald South who edited *Africa South* went into exile, while editors of *Contact* and the *Evening Post* faced prosecution for printing critical content, providing names and details of police actions against activists and township residents, as well as refusing to disclose their sources. Some defiant publications continued to print while in hiding.

> Other actions taken that year included the suspension of certain publications (Torch and New Age) for the duration of the emergency

[8] Not to be confused with a later newspaper of the same name, launched in democratic South Africa in 2010.

> and the prosecution of editors and publishers of others (Contact, Evening Post and New Age) for publishing subversive statements. (Fullard 2010, p.344)

Meanwhile, state broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), aired propaganda messages insisting the country was not in crisis and that all was normal with its state of affairs even at the backdrop of intensifying police brutality and suppression of press freedom. Then Prime Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd accused the press of fabricating stories and portraying the government in a bad light to the international community. (Merrett 1994)

Journalists and editors from the *Rand Daily Mail, New African, World* and the *Guardian* were all legally chastised by the state for several "unlawful" publishing activities. In 1961, Michael Harmel from the *Guardian* and later, *African Communist*, was placed under house arrest and subsequently forced into exile. A year later, the *New Age* was banned under the *Suppression of Communism Act* and again under its new form as grassroots publication, *Spark* (ibid. p.65).

Privately-owned companies (some with government links) used alternate means to subdue the ever-increasing criticism of black-owned or black-staffed publications. This culminated in the failure of several revolutionary grassroots and commercial publishers. In 1963, the *Anglo American Corporation*-funded, *Argus Company,* took over radical black publications under the *Bantu Press*, a move that could silence the few, strong oppositional voices of black journalists in publications such as *Bantu World* and *Ilanga*. A year later, Afrikanse Pers also bought publications *Imvo* and *Zonk* from the *Bantu*

Press. These events are noted as having been purposed towards suppressing opposition as '…traditional protest publications were bought out, closed down or depoliticised and merged with a new captive black commercial press controlled by white entrepreneurs' (Switzer 2001).

Similarly, left-wing black journalists were censored. In 1965, significant literature and journalism activists the likes of Lewis Nkosi, Todd Matshikiza, Can Themba, Bloke Modisane and Es'kia Mphahlele were silenced under the *Suppression of Communism Act* (Merrett 1995, p.53). By the end of the decade, hundreds of journalists critical of the government had either been arrested, exiled or banned under one or another of the South African laws.

2.2.2 The 1980s

The resistance press that followed the period of a June 16, 1976 Soweto student uprising which was against Afrikaans being used as a medium of instruction at schools, was largely driven by grassroots organisational movements including worker unions, student organisations and those affiliated or representing political groups. Such media became the archetype for marginalised voices and was vigorously anti-apartheid in nature. It is described as having been "fully engaged in the struggle for South Africa" (Switzer 2001). In addition, there was a significant amount of 'liberal press' publications, fundamentally critical of the nationalist government and as such regarded as part of the country's alternative – in this case, alternative to nationalist publications and the state-

owned SABC. While at times critised by grassroots media as organs of private business primarily interested in commercial gains (Berger 2000), the content of these white-owned publications was a threat to government, mostly due to its inclusion of black consciousness and pro-reform content.

> Despite having conservative white owners and managers, the daily *World* and its *Sunday* edition, *Weekend World*, dripped with black consciousness, and played a major role in giving national prominence to the Soweto Students Representative Council and its leaders and the parents? Committee of Ten (ibid.)

The contribution of community or grassroots publications is a notable one. The community-based press experience of South Africa's alternative media was characterised not only by anti-apartheid reporting but also by its efforts to mobilise communities against oppressive state mechanisms. Grassroots media, which played the role of alternative media to what it viewed as a complacent, hypocritical independently-owned press, distributed messages of resistance through newsletters, T-shirts, posters and banners etc. Student and community activists were instrumental in spreading slogans and delivering news — including those of protest action and updates on prosecutions or arrest of political leaders and activists — to the local communities. Publications such as *Grassroots, The Eye, Umthonyama, Saamstaan* and *Speak* were some of the community newspapers determined to fulfil that role as Berger (ibid.) notes, in particular with *Grassroots*:

> The idea was to begin organising people on "first-level" issues - things like rents, bus fares, housing, street lights, legal rights, non-racial sport, i.e. basic community issues and problems. This was for reasons of security as much as strategy. Having achieved a certain success, these issues could then be taken up at a "second-level", meaning that they could be linked together into a single political thread which highlighted - and targeted - what was seen as the cause of oppression and exploitation: the apartheid state and big business (ibid. p.6)

With the magnitude of protest voices amassing beyond the scope of student-led, union-based and political party publications, the apartheid government too intensified its censorship campaign by introducing plenty more laws to restrict press freedom. The over 100 press laws combined with other tyrannical laws, would see many local and some international journalists and publications banned or prosecuted. These included, among others, the *Riotous Assemblies Act,* the *Police Act,* the *Criminal Procedure Act, the Armaments Development and Production Amendment Act 86 of 1980 and* the *Protection of Information Act 84 of 1982*. The defense ministry was also allowed to censor publications by having its minister read copy and having made his interpretations, approve or reject it prior to the time of going to press (Merrett 1994).

The banning of publications and journalists while certainly with more dire circumstances than just the inconvenience of owners having to start over again every time, ironically helped add depth to the struggle for liberation. Journalists who had been silenced were even more determined to expose the evils of the apartheid system. As an example, the

Weekly Mail, established by Anton Harber and Irwin Manoim in 1985, began its journey as a result of the closure of the vocally oppositional *Rand Daily Mail* in April of that year (ibid.). The *Weekly Mail* went to print two months later. According to Berger, this move paved the way for newspapers such as *New Nation, South* and *Vrye Weekblad* to follow suit. The financial constraints which plagued these independent publications was endured in favour of fervently publishing politically oppositional content which was done, as Berger describes, in a "dramatically panache" manner.

The mid-80s would in many ways become the genesis of the faint likelihood that the resistance struggle could be won and the media's contribution to the subsequent negotiations that eventually led to democracy, was a momentous one. ANC leaders, with the backing of other activists on the continent and some international entities, began contemplating the prospect of armed struggle. The party and other liberation movements such as the United Democratic Movement (UDM) and PAC among others, were able to convey protest messages to relevant communities through the resistance media. Publications like *The Star* and the *Weekly Mail* became crafty with their publishing activities, using loopholes within the law to evade arrest or closure.

As had become practice, the government responded with the introduction of *The Control of Access to Public Premises Act 53 of 1985.* This law put limitations on the press coverage of public gatherings where demonstrations were being- or could potentially be held (Merrett 1985). The struggle for justice had deepened and turned violent with assassinations by explosions, shootings and unexplained disappearances of black political leaders and activists in different parts of country, becoming a regular

occurrence. Journalists, as always, were in the line of fire. For an example, journalists from *The Star*, Rich Mkhondo (also hit by police teargas) and Mike Tissong were harassed by members of the police force while reporting from one of the three scenes of a hand grenade explosion that killed members of the ANC-allied Congress of South African Students (COSAS) in Duduza on the East Rand. While the state broadcaster attributed many such incidents to black political party rivalry, publications the likes of *Sowetan* and *Weekly Mail* grew convinced that the black-on-black violence that led to the death of some prominent political activists in key communities, was an element of a 'third force' or had been orchestrated by the state.

The publishing activities of some oppositional media received support from the international press. The empathetic sentiment of some international government, led to the rand being devalued. However, unrest increased when ANC members came under suspicion for the deaths of members of the police force. A state of emergency was declared again in 1986. The *Weekly Mail* was suspended for about a month in 1988, but determined to expose the injustices of apartheid, it took the courageous decision of publishing an unprecedented two-page spread on struggle stalwart, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, in December of the same year. To justify its illegal coverage, the newspaper claimed that since Mandela had been moved from "hospital to a warder's house in the grounds of Victor Verster prison, he was no longer a prisoner and thus publication of his picture was no longer illegal" (O'Malley 2007).

In 1989, the state of emergency was declared again and the clampdown on the press which found itself in the fight both against the broader apartheid laws as well as those

directed specifically at curbing its freedoms, continued. *Weekly Mail*'s Jo-Ann Bekker, Anton Harber and Franz Kruger were among a number of journalists charged under emergency regulations for the oppositional content published in their newspaper.

Attacks on activists and journalists continued beyond the 80s, until eventually, then Prime Minister F.W. de Klerk, under pressure from the international community, lifted the state of emergency and announced in February of 1990, that the apartheid government was going to introduce some reforms. The remainder of the 1980s, though signaling a possibility of change, saw the unrelenting resistance press continue to publish protest content through the period of negotiations after Nelson Mandela's release from his 27-year imprisonment on Robben Island in 1991 (ibid.).

2.2.3 A note on the role of apartheid-era alternatives

I note in conclusion the role played by alternative media during apartheid. Publications that challenged apartheid era injustices have been defined as left-wing, pro-reform, anti-government and vessels of radical activism media. The alternative media of the time mainly covered stories from liberal or socialist perspectives. Many were ideologically aligned to political parties, anti-apartheid activists and even international governments that supported the cause for democracy. They represented the disenfranchised communities in a manner that made alternative media an integral part of the resistance movement. Many a sacrifice was made by many a newspaper, contributors and editors in the struggle for liberation. At times, the sacrifice was freedom as many were jailed or exiled; at others it was loss of life itself.

Newspapers such as the *Weekly Mail*, *Vrye Weekblad* and *South*, are revered for the tactical manner in which they resisted unjust legislation even as they were constantly harassed by the state. South Africa's alternative media spanning two centuries, has been an instrument of significant political change. Yet, this does beg the question: what does the alternative media of today stand for and what is its role in a democratic South Africa society? This thesis attempts to answer these questions through an interrogation of alternative publications, *Africa is a Country (www.africaisacountry.com)* and *Vanguard (www.vanguardmagazine.co.za).*

3

Findings

As outlined in the *Literature Review* section of this study, one of the defining aspects of alternative media is its participatory nature, in particular, as it pertains to 'democratizing' media platforms in a manner that gives 'altern publics' a space for deliberation and engagement, often resulting in a community made up of audience members claiming a voice and becoming active contributors (Warner 2002).

This section provides both the necessary background to each publication and the findings made from conducting the content analysis. First I discuss their background as sampled in the first two weeks of their existence. Studying this brief background proved useful to the process of interpreting the results, not only with regards to the analysis of the content published and ways in which that content is a reflection of the genre of alternative media, but also the extent to which it is critical and oppositional. The background of the publications' activities further enabled me to definitively identify their approaches by answering questions of editorial positioning and engagement. I also, broadly, provide examples of topics covered and the angles explored in the first two weeks of each publication's existence, in an attempt to give the reader a fundamental understanding of both case studies' editorial positioning, styles and agendas.

3.1. Africa is a Country

Although an exact date proved hard to trace, *Africa is a Country* or the initial version thereof, started off as a personal blog in the year 2005 when founder, Sean Jacobs created a writing platform on *Google*'s blog-publishing service, *Blogger*. It was hosted on theleoafrinus.blogspot.com and populated rather infrequently with content reflective of Jacobs' own interests i.e. music, film, culture, political events, links to news reports and a few media reviews etc. In an audio-based Skype interview on November 18, 2015, Jacobs described the publication at that point as having been:

> A mix of kind of anecdote, criticism, irreverent reporting, embellishment [and that] was what it was and I think for a long time, that's all I wanted to do. 2005 till roughly about 2009, when it was just an obscure little blog, telling people about interesting things to read, links to stuff, a little bit of media criticism…in the style of that time. (Jacobs, 2015. Int)

The name of the blog, *Leo Africanus*, which would for similar reasons evolve to *Africa is a Country*, was inspired by the work of a 16th century author of the same name. The Spanish-born Moroccan, who had been born al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan or Hassan al-Wazzan for short, was most recognised for his book *Descrittione dell'Africa* which is Arabic for *'Description of Africa'*, in which he provided what he referred to as a geographic outline of the northern parts of the African continent (Haji, 2003).The book gained a notable readership, influencing what would for some time inform some Europeans' "understanding" of Africa. While Leo Africanus is revered by some in the

Muslim community as a significant historical figure exemplary of Moroccan and indeed African excellence, *Descrittione dell'Africa*, is deemed by some in the west to have been a reflection not of his own odyssey through North Africa but rather a compilation of information gathered throughout his encounters with numerous travelers (ibid.).

As a media scholar and an African immigrant in the United States, Jacobs describes his decision to name the blog *Leo Africanus* as symbolic of a counter-narrative, challenging western media's notions and lopsided portrayals of Africa, in particular; the predisposition of some to refer to it as though it were a country. *Africa is a Country*'s initial slogan was "The blog about Africa that's not about famine, Bono, or Barack Obama"… it recently changed to "Not the continent with 54 countries".

A personal project, originally driven by the young academic's keen sense of self-expression as well as a certain enthusiasm for self-publishing, *Leo Africanus* gradually grew to become a representation of certain ideological views.

> It was the Blogging Revolution … blogging had suddenly become accessible, self-publication had become an accessible thing so it was the right time to do it. And I think finally, it was a really a response to what I think an obsession with development speak. With America's interest in Africa or when it came to like, Britain's interest in Africa or France's interest in Africa and wanting to shape, well, I would say shape or shift that conversation, saying actually you know what,

> actually, there's a long history [that's interesting] of politics and things going on in the African continent. (Jacobs, 2015. Int.)

Hosted under the domain name, africascountry.com, it published its first post on August 3, 2009. The next two weeks of publication (until August 17), though shorter and less detailed than at a later stage, perfectly reflect the diversity of topics of interest that would set the tone of the publication until the present day. Some of these include; snippets and blurbs accompanying video inserts to musical performances and recordings by independent musical artists, not generally covered in mainstream media. Secondly, *Africa is a Country* shares detailed announcements of cultural and or art exhibitions, including films (mostly by travelling African producers or renowned so-called underground performers in the United States), antiestablishment musical festivals as well as seminars by African scholars. Thirdly, the publication publishes analysis and critiques of mainstream media reports on topical African issues. The fifth type of content published in the first two weeks of publication included images, links to slideshows and videos about conflict in some African countries. There were also articles on policy and human rights issues in Africa, most of which contained views oppositional to those of governments. Educational pieces about Africa's prominent leaders, especially those considered socialist, form part of the initial make up of Africa is a Country.

The artistic, cultural and socio-political content appearing in the publication in the first two weeks of inception, has remained firmly intact throughtout its existence. This refers to features such as *Music Break* – a song or live performance post which has since morphed into a musical compilation of indie artists – which first appeared in *Africa is a*

Country's pages a day after it launched on August 4, 2009 and twice more in the next two weeks.

Examples of notable socio-political topics covered during this period, all of which are regarded by this research as an important reflection of *Africa is a Country*'s style of reporting, could be found in posts such as *'The Church Elders and the Gays'*, published on August 6, a critical comment in which government legislation and religious policy issues are condemned for their role in "criminalising sexuality" in countries such as Malawi.

Issues around the politics of identity and heritage which enjoy frequent attention on the publication's accessible eight-year history, are addressed in this two-week period through such posts as the August 15, 2009 critique which discusses the Botswana government's failure to offer hunting permits to the hunter-gathering community of the San people, despite a High Court order ruling that relevant legislation be implemented. The two-minute read, titled *'Hey Botswana, Give the Bushmen a Break'*, condemns the government for continuing with arrests and describes its stance as profit-driven while highlighting a larger issue of prejudice against the San population in that country.

'Museveni Loves Himself a Free Press he can Control' is a brief and to-the-point critique of Uganda's long-time president Yoweri Museveni's remarks criticising his country's media. The three-paragraph piece which begins with the assertion, "Like all autocrats pretending to be democrats…" is the sole yet powerful criticism made by the author on

the issue of government hypocrisy, explicitly as it relates to press freedom. Without further ado, Jacobs cleverly only adds this quote by Museveni: “You rarely inform. You rarely educate. You entertain, yes. But you mostly lie and incite. I have so much evidence to prove all this … When you try to imitate the Western media, you will run into problems.” And with a brief mention of Museveni’s then 23-year long regime, Jacobs reminds the reader that the leader is running again in the next election. This post is a type of editorial that in time and with far more detail, continues to be reflected in the pages of *Africa is a Country* today. Since it first launched in its current form in 2009, a considerable amount of features and categories have been added since the addition of an editorial team as demonstrated in the table below.

Feature	**Topic of discussion**	**Year of inception**
Football is a Country	Discusses events and politics of the sport	2010
Academy Page	Educates readers about historical events and figures of significance in African history	2012
Latin America is a Country	Addresses issues of identity, the economy and political issues in the region	2013
Boimer Tucker	A podcast show of African or music themes around current topical issues in Africa and the diaspora. It is presented by Boima Tucker. It is hosted via the audio-streaming website, Mixcloud.	2014
Digital Archive	Reports on innovative digital projects, mostly from Africa and focuses primarily at those tackling issues of social justice. It is compiled by contributor Liz Timbs, a PHD candidate in History studies from the University of Michigan.	2014
Travelling While Black	Headed by Liberian academic, Robtel Neajai Pailey, the project contains “commentaries, articles, and artwork about the vicissitudes of carrying an African passport—inside and outside Africa”.	2016
It’s the Economy Stupid	Critique of weekly economic events curated by Zambian-born economist and post-doctoral fellow at Harvard University, Grieve Chelwa.	2016

Table 2: This table shows the main categories featured in Africa is a Country magazine, some contributors and the period during which they began being published.

To answer one of the main questions asked in the beginning of this paper around participation and engagement, I conducted an internal search of *Africa is a Country*. I

found that from August 2009 until January 2010, Sean Jacobs remained the sole author of the publication. While I could not trace any other active contributors on the site until January 30, 2010 – when Neelika Jayawardane (now Senior Culture Editor), started penning – the platform began receiving responses in its comments section just a few days after its launch. The comment system was therefore the first feature enabling discussions to take place, as Jacobs, however occasionally, engaged with readers.

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were also inherently launched. The publication's contributors and readers comprise mainly academics, intellectuals, journalists and mostly middle class Africans in the diaspora. The list of participants grew significantly as more and more people began to share the content and engage with each other as the growing community of contributors. Conversations around issues written about are still being discussed on the publication's different media platforms on a daily basis. This level of participation though taking place predominantly online via comments on the aforementioned platforms, is not the sole method of engagement. Having built a loyal following online through features such as the publication's traditional "call-to-action" in a form of announcements about workshops, lectures, performances and exhibitions of interest to the reader, Jacobs initially used offline interactions with his fellow peers as an opportunity to grow the publication, such that a number of contributors on the platform today either started off as readers or were invited to make contributions, as confirmed by one of the interviewees, Grieve Chelwa.

> The editors at AIAC (Africa is a Country) invited me to be a contributor. Having read the blog for many months, I'd always wanted to write for

> them. And I took up the opportunity when it presented itself. What I really like about the site is that there is usually a quick turn around from writing a blog post to publication. (Chelwa. Int. 2017)

According to Jacobs, this was one of first ways in which the publication received contributions as he relates through the interview conducted in November 18, 2016.

> The rest (of the content) … came from people who would send me stuff (because) after a while when the site had followers and people reading it, people would actually send me things that they would want me to talk about. (Jacobs, 2016a)

Africa is a Country lists 12 people as part of its editorship including Jacobs, founder and Chief Editor. Eight people in the team are specifically in charge of the publication's overall editorial management by category, while the other four are in charge of editing and compiling specific feature projects. As an example, Liberian academic, Robtel Neajai Pailey, recently launched the Travelling While Black feature on the platform and Pablo Medina Uribe, is one of two editors in charge of the Latin America is a Country project. The list in the table below outlining the roles of contributing editors is included in the publication's "About" page.

Name	**Position**	**Subject**
Sean Jacobs	Founder/Chief Editor	All
Boima Tucker	Managing Editor	Music
Elliot Ross	Managing Editor	Football is a Country
Neelika Jayawardane	Senior Culture Editor	Culture

Marissa Moorman	Editor	Current Affairs & History
Dan Magaziner	Editor	Current Affairs & History
Dylan Valley	Editor	Film
Caitlin Candler	Editor	Inequality
Zachary Rosen	Editor	Photography

Table 3: The names and roles of Africa is a Country's editorial team.

It is worth noting that while no exact data was gathered in terms of the amount of contributors who've written for *Africa is a Country*, this number is deemed to be relatively large based on the two factors; one, the website has been active since 2009 with the majority of content being original and long form; secondly, the publication is made up of over 625 pages (each page consisting of 7 articles, based on the website's current layout). This amounts to a total of 4375 posts, according to figures based on data gathered from August 3, 2009 to November 5, 2015. Participation on the platform happens in the following 5 ways: editors ask for contributions from peers or subject matter experts, mostly academics or students specialising in a certain field, people submit their contributions via email, editors repost certain content on their different platforms (generally via the website) with permission from the original writers and often with links back to the original source, by use of the comment section and; through engagement on social media.

Africa is a Country has over 72,000 followers on its main Twitter account. It has an additional 6,000 followers particularly following its @Futbolscountry account which tweets on the topic of soccer alongside one of its most popular features, *Football is a Country*. The publication has over 52,000 *Facebook* followers, 690 *YouTube* subscribers and over 600 followers on *Instagram*.

3.2. Vanguard

Founded by a Wits University accounting graduate and author, Panashe Chigumadzi, *Vanguard* is a niche magazine directed at young, black South African womanist audiences. The online platform came to life on April 25, 2014 with a traditional style editor's note signaling its launch. *Vanguard* was initially defined simply as "a black feminist platform for the young, black woman coming of age in post-apartheid South Africa" (Vanguard 2014). However, the website's 'About' section recently morphed to offer a more nuanced description which includes a minor but significant replacement of the word "feminist" with "womanist". It now describes *Vanguard* as "a womanist platform for young black women in South Africa speaking to the intersectionality of queer politics, Black Consciousness and pan-Africanism." (Vanguard, no date)

Vanguard has since its establishment been self-funded. According to its founding editor, Panashe Chigumadzi, although publishing on the web has meant significant exposure, starting a print magazine was her first preference, a vision that has not manifest due to the expense involved in print publishing. While Chigumadzi still has hopes she might at some point in the future receive sufficient funding to print *Vanguard*, she says she

relishes the independence of self-publishing, the benefits of online interactions with fellow peers and how those pave the way for instantaneous publishing of “hot” issues.

In keeping with that independence, *Vanguard* does not conform to any formalised structural organisation in terms of management. The site is currently run by two people, its founder and her publishing partner, Thato Magano. Both are responsible for loading the content contributed by participants and they are the sole decision-makers in terms of which content is important and which angles to focus on.

Vanguard’s publishing activities are interested in both the race and gender-based social and cultural (music, film, fashion, art etc.) aspects of South African life. These are discussed in this platform in a form of reviews, critiques and analyses; and conveyed through text, audio and video formats. *Vanguard* also publishes creative writing pieces ranging from fictional short stories to poetry.

> Our preoccupations are sort of pop culture critique and that’s where a lot of our focus is… It’s a lot more socio-cultural criticism and pop culture criticism that we might give. (Chigumadzi, 2015. Intv.)

Specific features on the platform include: ‘The code switch’, a debate around a variety of mainly social issues affecting women in South Africa today. It is in a form of an independent talk show that is published on video streaming platform, YouTube. Secondly, *Vanguard* publishes a number of cultural and socio-economic themed articles as well as podcasts. *Vanguard*’s entire list of features are displayed in the table below.

Feature	Topic of Discussion	Year of inception
The Code Switch	Online debate show featuring black feminist and womanist contributors on a number of social topics	2014
Podcasts	Audio clips from debates the editors have on provincial talk radio station, Power FM as well as other audio interviews on topics related to young black middle class South Africans	2015
Creative writing	A collection of anthologies, poems and short stories by different contributors	2015
#BestOfTheInternets	Republished video inserts from the World Wide Web comprising cultural content of interest.	2015

Table 4: The above table shows some of the main features of Vanguard magazine and the dates during which they began being published.

Vanguard like *Africa is a Country* (though smaller in comparison), attracts a considerably sized volume of contributors. Due to the magnitude of the site, this research did not achieve exact data as to how many people outside of Chigumadzi and Magano had contributed content but I was able to calculate at least 20 from the first date of publication (April 25, 2014) until November 25, 2015.

Participation on *Vanguard* happens across its various platforms and while the website, vanguardmagazine.co.za, is arguably the central space for content publishing, deliberations around topics of interest to its readers tend to occur primarily on social media. In fact, Chigumadzi, P. – through an interview conducted on November 18, 2015 - confirms that a number of conversations and subject matter that ends up being written

about in the magazine, are as a result of conversations that happen on social media, particularly on Twitter. This became evident when viewing the comment section of the magazine, specifically, during the sample period of this research. It must be noted although checked for the purposes of determining on-site deliberation, little reliable data could be gathered from *Vanguard*''s comment section. This can be attributed to the fact that in posts that initially appear to have some kind of interaction, most of the "comments" turn out to be spam. As an example, instead of substantive discussion, there is a flurry of generic 'thank you' sentences i.e. "Very useful", "I'm new to blogging and this really helped me", "You guys are doing a great job, bravo!" and "I like your blog. Will repost." etc.

Vanguard's Twitter account, under the handle @MxVanguard – which has the publication's largest following with over 2000 followers – is arguably where most of the interaction around *Vanguard* content occurs, streamlined and organised into relevant hashtags. Due to character constraints on that platform, however, in-depth discussions are not always reflected. Similarly, *Vanguard*'s Facebook page which has just over 1000 followers gets minimal interactivity. The bulk of content shared by *Vanguard* on Facebook, gets some likes and shares but with very little discussion taking place. It's worthwhile to also note that *Vanguard* continues its discussions offline through features such as *Vanguard Radio,* which besides publishing podcasts, allows editors to have interactions with audiences outside of its own platform. As an example, though not slotted as such on air, Chigumadzi and Magano are regularly invited as guests on discussions around blackness, white privilege, feminism and related topics on *Power*

FM, 98.7, one of two provincial talk radio stations in the Gauteng province. These discussions are then later added onto the site under a feature called *Vanguard Radio*. *Vanguard* also facilitates discussions on platforms such as *Feminist Stokvel,* a collective of women facilitating dialogue on socio-economic issues affecting young, black South African women, of which Chigumadzi is a member.

4

Discussion

This research set out to interrogate how publications, *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* could be regarded as alternative to – or as existing on the margins of – mainstream media in the context of a democratic South Africa. Critical to answering this question, was an analysis of their editorial positioning and practices which included, participation and the terms under which contributions occurred as well as the nature of the content they chose to focus on. In a nutshell, this evaluation required me to study their choices of content, organisational structure as well as the processes involved in determining participation on their platforms. I was able to arrive at the relevant answers using the content analysis and interviews as a method. Below are discussed the findings and interpretations thereof.

4.1. Editorial Positioning

4.1.1 Africa is a Country

Africa is a Country, is an independent, self-funded publication. It publishes unconventional content which according to its website seeks to "deliberately challenge and destabilize received wisdom about the African continent and its people in Western

media — that definition includes “old (nationally oriented) media,” new social media as well as “global news media” (Africa is a Country, no date).

Beyond assuming this role to contest western interpretations of Africa and Africans as would be exposed to audiences in north America and other western countries, in an interview recorded on February 7, 2016, founder and Chief Editor, Sean Jacobs explains that one of *Africa is a Country*’s concerns specifically when it comes to South Africa, has been to counter the mainstream narrative and its misconstrued ‘rainbow nation’ image.

> I mean that sort of, you know, drumbeat reconciliation talk…everything’s wonderful, apartheid’s over, they’ve reconciled, everything’s great. And going back and forth to South Africa and realising that’s not the case, I wanted to correct that … so I had seen, you know, real life being conquered, people were living real lives and not just sort of getting covered once in a while and then, that depicts them. So I wanted to counter that. (Jacobs, 2016. Int.)

This somewhat begins to offer a response to one of the sub-questions asked by this research regarding the significance of alternative media in a South Africa that has already transitioned into democracy. Jacobs argues that “what South Africa experiences – basically political freedom in terms of people’s access to political representation – is incomplete” (ibid.). *Africa is a Country*’s misgivings about South Africa’s democracy and its progressions are principally rooted in its ideologies as a left-wing publication as

Jacobs reiterates, “We definitely, in terms of ideological content…we are left wing…so a lot of the coverage is very, the perspective comes from the left” (ibid.).

As a result, *Africa is a Country* tends towards radically oppositional outlooks on democratic ideals such as that of “free markets” which it often considers to be “empty rhetoric” that does not fundamentally “gel with reality” (ibid.). In essence, the publication is resolutely avant-garde in its perspectives about political ideologies versus “marginalised” people’s realities, and is critical of the global “consensus” around world politics and socio-economics. In the following passage, Jacobs explains in detail what his publication considers to be “conventional views” and the reasons it challenges them.

> “The…sort of consensus around globalisation, the consensus around neo-liberalism, the consensus around democracy, the consensus around “there is no other way”...that is manifest in South Africa. It’s GEAR, it’s black empowerment, sort of, politics of rights in South Africa because the politics of rights and the idea of rights is very mainstream. You know, human rights, not the right to water, not the right to electricity, not the right to descent schools. So that’s what we’re challenging, challenging the sort of consensus around the empty rhetoric of pan-Africanism, the sort of whether we can see some of the dangers and not the dangers of African nationalism. We’re against forums of this kind of glib, Afropolitan stuff. The ‘*Africa rising’ literature* because none of these things actually gel with reality. (Jacobs, 2016. Int)

The above statement also alludes to the publication's overall bearing on, for instance, matters of transformation within the country's mainstream media entities. In its positioning as left-wing media, *Africa is a Country* contests the so-called independence of the press, as well as challenges its plurality. Jacobs argues that South African media's ability to fulfill its role as a space for deliberation that truly reflects the nation's diverse views for the advancement of democracy, could be considered illegitimate as most prominent media is owned and controlled by the same "legacy companies" with links to the nationalist government of the apartheid era. Similarly, the publication's position on independent publishing is meant to counter a certain reliance on advertisers and their influence on content. Jacobs explains that because mainstream operations are commercially-driven, their content inevitably favors advertisers and therefore are to the benefit of white capital. This, he advances, is to the detriment of the role South Africa's mainstream media plays as a sphere for equitable deliberation.

> I'm saying, if you say about public sphere in South Africa, the inherited media, the black media - if you want to use that – terminology about South Africa is always complicated – but these things are clear, there was a media created for black South Africans. That media existed on the margins and that media often to those companies, those legacy companies like *Naspers* owned like *City Press, Sowetan* was partly owned by *Independent* … and then you have *Daily Sun*. So, you have this inherited public sphere that has black media operating on its margins. You then have that media, again in quotes, transform itself where maybe half of those media now have black editors, they have

> mostly black journalists. But the trouble is they are commercial enterprises but like all commercial enterprises, they care about audiences for advertisers. You know, who's the best audiences for advertisers in South Africa? It's still predominantly white South Africa. (ibid.)

The study also found that the way in which *Africa is a Country* reports on issues of xenophobia and Rhodes Must Fall is contestatory to mainstream perspectives. Its contributions to the discourse around these matters shows a deliberate attempt to represent views that are not often incorporated in non-critical media platforms. Its xenophobia coverage, for instance, though written largely by its academic community of contributors, features what could be considered voices of dissent on the matter. As an example, Achille Mbembe's critique is inspired by his conversations with the non-South African community and their experiences of xenophobia. There are a number of other examples of an alternative representation of voices around the issue of xenophobia such as that written by artist Setumo-Thebe Mohlomi in an article called *'HIFA in a time of xenophobia'* where non-South Africans are again given a voice as the author, South African, recounts his experiences with the Zimbabwean community during the time of xenophobic attacks.

A prime example of this with regards to *Africa is a Country'*s Rhodes Must Fall coverage, is an article by Abigail McDougall in which she conducted an in-depth interview reflecting the perspectives of a UCT staff member and former cleaner about the Rhodes statue and the Rhodes Must Fall protests – all three demonstrate the

publication's stance on giving representation to voices that often go unfeatured in mainstream media outlets. Jacobs is fiercely critical of mainstream media's partiality to 'authoritative voices' in its coverage of these subjects. The publication's assessment on the mainstream coverage of Rhode Must Fall as an example, is that it has tended to cover perspectives from the more "privileged" universities and thus failed to record the marginalised students at the centre of the struggle. In an interview with Jacobs (ibid.), he refers to one of *Africa is a Country*'s most popular video productions to date entitled *'Shutting Down the Rainbow Nation: #FeesMustFall'* (2015), in which voices of so-called alternative voices were majorly represented.

> Suddenly when you look at that programme on race and gender, all the people speaking in that video were mostly women, black women at that, and they spoke from the motherland campuses, not UCT or Wits but they spoke to you from Grahamstown and the images came from UWC…so we try to…show more than the kind of images that we were getting in the mainstream media. (ibid.)

The 'deficit' of diverse content, according to Jacobs, has led to a relationship of mistrust between South Africa's mainstream media and its black audiences, principally those belonging to the middle class. The emergent void is of particular significance with regards to the reasons *Africa is Country* has positioned itself in the left in terms of its editorial content. As Jacobs articulates during the February 7, 2016 interview, "It's obvious that South African elites don't trust, or have any – particularly black people – confidence in that media" (ibid.). In response, *Africa is a Country* has erected itself as a counterpublic sphere.

> I would say I've created a space in which those people…who can't write or say what they think in the mainstream, they know that there is a space for them in Africa is a Country… a lot of people feel they own the site and if we write certain things sometimes, they disagree with it, they are not happy with it. I think my thing is I want them to keep thinking. I don't want them to get too comfortable. (ibid.)

In its form as a counterpublic sphere, *Africa is a Country* seeks to address issues often neglected by mainstream media that are of interest to its audiences. This is correspondingly exhibited in the publication's large volume of cultural content, most of which provides analysis of artists from various mediums and genres, but always from outside the scope of what is considered commercial or popular culture.

4.1.2 Vanguard

Vanguard publishes content related to the experiences of young black South Africans, primarily women and does so from, as mentioned in their bi-line, a womanist perspective. *Vanguard*, according to Chigumadzi, was a result of a certain discontent over the deficit of plurality within the South African media landscape which left her feeling she could not relate to aspects of black life as it appears in populist publications. More personally, she says she has felt that she existed in the margins of democratic South Africa, with no one in the mainstream media representing her as a young womanist. She explains a need for her as well as the community which holds similar

ideologies about African feminism, to find a space in which they could freely deliberate about matters that are of interest and significance to them.

> The inspiration was not seeing myself represented in media, on the covers, on the mastheads, and on the way stories were told. If they were stories about black women they were often anthropological in the way in which we talk about things, the full nuance was never there. And if you find a black women represented it was either Lupita, Beyoncé or Bonang, so for us it was really to say we want a space where we can celebrate black womanhood in all of its manifestations. So we wanted to have a space where we can have our joy, our tears, fears and our anger everything there in a way where we don't have to censor, italicise or explain ourselves. (Zibeda, 2015)

Chigumadzi says that while the publication was initially interested in conversations angled around the Black Consciousness philosophy as one she deemed appropriate in the beginning, to get young black people to be mentally "decolonized", *Vanguard's* voice has evolved to encompass other important dialogues around socio-economic issues affecting young, black women in democratic South Africa.

> I am no longer exclusively interested in Black Consciousness alone, I have come to learn about intersectional feminism and African feminisms and would articulate the ideas differently. Beyond that, I am no longer interested in 'identity issues', I am interested in how we can change the socio-economic order and that is reflected in [why I am

> interested in] who owns platforms and who gets to participate. (Lieman, 2015)

Consequently, *Vanguard* regards the mainstream media in a negative light for its perpetration of negative stereotypes about black people, its failure to be critical of the systems of patriarchy and racial privilege; and for its inadequacy in representing a diversity of views that reflect the dynamics of the South African society post-apartheid. Cawe (2017) perceives the country's conventional media as containing "too much sensation, echo and very little 'systemic' analysis", and shares in the sentiment that it is essential for consumers of alternative media to become producers.

> In this day and age, it is not enough to complain. We are no longer just 'recipients' or 'consumers' of media, but also 'creators' of it, and we all need to take that responsibility much more seriously and with more intent (ibid.).

Vanguard tends to report more cultural content than it does socio-political, its critiques are discernibly oppositional of societal perceptions and treatment of women, in particular, black women both in public and private spaces. *Vanguard'*s decision in 2015 to replace in its definition the word "feminist" becomes critical in our interpretation of its position as a counterpublic sphere, as by virtue of its removal and the inclusion instead of "womanist", a candid shift is immediately created. Womanist relays a different meaning which augments the politics of *Vanguard*, who it speaks to and on behalf of.

Used to describe the intersectionality between sexism, racism and classism, Alice Walker, the African-American author and poet who coined the term, on a fundamental

level uses womanist to refer to a black feminist. However, as has been demonstrated through academic debate and studies concerned with it since it first appeared in her book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), the term indisputably bears more nuanced connotations. In particular, womanism can be perceived as a study interested in what defines the black feminist - her experiences, desires and needs, in as much as it concerns itself with her enduring and courageous character which reflect her, as Walker pronounces, as one “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist” (ibid.). In interpreting the distinction between the two, Mojica (2011) qualifies the following:

> Black Feminism is still a derivative of Feminism, which is female-centered. Womanism, as defined earlier, is centered around the natural order of life, family and a complimentary relationship with men and women. It is all-inclusive and universal. Black Feminism tackles the social, political, and educational struggle of African-American women in the United States but it does not address all the global issues that women in the African Diaspora are dealing with. It should be noted that in no way is Black Feminism any more or less important than Womanism. In fact, there are many elements in Black Feminism that are considered womanist values, such as the recognition of African roots, the pattern of defining a Black woman’s standpoint and the struggle to rectify sexist attitudes. Rather, Womanism is the direction that Black Feminism should be evolving towards. (ibid.)

With regards to editorial positioning, *Vanguard* magazine could be interpreted as having an 'informal' approach to publishing activities. Notwithstanding its discernibly organised and fairly efficient operational methods, evidence suggests that the publication operates with a great deal of flexibility and adaptability, dissimilar to that of conventional media in that it does not depend on strategic processes in a similar manner. Such adaptability is reflected in the fact that there are no clearly defined editorial policies for neither contributors nor users/readers of the platform. As with *Africa is a Country*'s Sean Jacobs' assertion in an interview that 'everybody brings their own ideological idiosyncrasies to the project...' (Jacobs 2016) through the content they submit, *Vanguard* while offering contributor guidelines outlining its preferences in subject matter, writing style and the black identity of contributors, is also primarily interested in content that is favourable to its ideologies and social causes.

> We don't choose who gets to write or we've developed into a space where we don't get to choose who gets to write. It's ultimately whether you submitted something that works within the narrative of what we are trying to say as a publication in its entirety….the project that we are on is the project of legitimizing ordinary voices. (Mogano, 2015. Intv)

This is not to say that no guidelines are offered upon the submission of content but rather that said guidelines do not conform to the values central to mass media organisations. The research also uncovered that *Vanguard* does not concern itself with principles related to balance and impartiality in reporting but rather with contextualising

and offering thorough critiques about issues related to “the black condition”, especially of women in post-apartheid South Africa.

Vanguard takes most of its cues from social media interactions and discussions and because of its position as a counterpublic publication, it is the issues that are most significant to its immediate physical and online social sphere which set the precedent on the direction the content should take. As a result, a number of their readers and followers – such as Magano – may go on to become contributors.

> I’ve seen even us (Vanguard), when we’ve been problematic, how people have gone on to say…’you missed the mark here’ and when we’ve done really well they’ve also said…that was just something spectacular’…and I appreciate that because it’s just people who are very critical about what they consume. And if you’re speaking about creative new narratives or alternative media spaces and creating critical readers….I appreciate that. (ibid.)

Following an evaluation of both publications, it could be argued that because they do not generally compile news reports in traditional formats, most of their content, viewed through the monocle of traditional media, might be regarded as being more ‘opinion’ than news. While both publications – by virtue of their flexible editorial activities – clearly exercise freedom of expression and editorial independence, they are more directly intent on publishing their own politics and ideologies rather than adhering to a set of predefined, universal journalistic values or principles and thus reflecting the

characteristics of being counterpublics. These attributes are discussed further in the section on *Publications as Counterpublics.*

4.2. Xenophobia coverage

Overview

Since 2013, sporadic incidents of xenophobia were reported in a number of South Africa's townships, most notably, Johannesburg's Duduza, Orange Farm, Diepsloot and Alexandra. As with the xenophobic attacks of 2008 – the worst yet on South African soil – looting of shops belonging to non-South African vendors signaled the impending violence. In December, 2014, an attack on Somali nationals whose tuck shops were petrol-bombed in the KwaMashu township in Durban, sprung fears that a wave of xenophobia would resurface.

In January 2015, it did, when a Somali shop owner residing in Soweto fatally shot a 14-year-old boy, Simphiwe Mahori, and allegedly injured another 23-year-old man whom he accused of trying to rob his establishment. The incident triggered more assaults which were characterised by looting on his and other shops owned by non-South Africans in several Soweto townships, including those in informal settlements such as Snake Park, Slovoville and Emndeni. The shop owner was arrested.

In March 2015, residents from almost a dozen Limpopo villages looted a number of shops and threatened violence against their non-South Africans owners, but it was not until the end of that month that related violence escalated to other regions, starting in KwaZulu-Natal and circulating back to Gauteng. Durban's Inanda township, KwaMashu and uMlazi were regarded hotspots as the situation worsened in April, leading to the displacement of thousands of migrants from other countries on the continent. As some citizens gathered to march against the wave of xenophobic attacks in Durban, it was reported that some non-South Africans launched attacks of their own in an ensuing city centre standoff between the two groups. Police used water cannons and rubber bullets to disperse the crowds.

Coinciding with the April 14 national marches against xenophobia and ironically on the day the city centre standoff had occurred, was a late afternoon briefing by the country's security cluster, after which was launched Operation Fiela – a collaboration between the South African Police Services (SAPS), the army and the Department of Home Affairs – which led to raids being conducted in criminal hotspots across the country. Fiela led to the deportation of thousands of illegal immigrants and the confiscation illegal firearms as well as goods believed to be stolen from non-South African shop owners. The government denied that Fiela was targeted at non-South Africans. Still, angered by the displacement of its citizens and the loss of life, some Nigerian businesses threatened to shut down their branches in South Africa while Zimbabwe and Mozambique arranged for their citizens' safe return home.

The April 18 killing of Mozambican vendor Emmanuel Josias Sithole would come to signify the brutally of xenophobia in 2015. Sithole was beaten by a wrench and stabbed to death in broad daylight in Alexandra township after confronting his attackers for refusing to pay for cigarettes from his shop. The killing was documented by *Sunday Times* journalist, James Oatway. Four men were initially accused of his murder, but one was found to have not played a role in the actual killing, while another a 17-year-old, was only charged with theft. On February 01, his two killers were sentenced to 10 and 17 years in prison, respectively. Police refused to call Sithole's killing xenophobia, attributing it instead to pure criminality and calling it a robbery gone wrong.

KwaZulu-Natal's King Goodwill Zwelithini who had reportedly instigated the recent wave of violence during a speech in which he allegedly called for non-South Africans to return to their countries of birth, called an imbizo[9], asking for peace and cohesion on April 20. He denied having incited the violence, criticised South African media for apparently distorting his widely-publicised speech and called on journalists to reassess what he had said to his followers that day.

> Even today, I am asking those in the media to police my speech in Pongolo, the whole speech, and not pick and choose what they publish in order for people to know what I said, where my words come from…the war that I am waging is for us to protect every foreigner in

[9] A gathering or forum of discussion, mostly called by traditional leaders. The term is adapted from the Zulu word meaning 'a summoning' and was originally used to refer to meetings of the Zulu people in response to a king and traditional leader.

this country, regardless of which country they come from. (Zwelithini, 2015)

By the date of submission of this research, the Human Rights Commission, was still investigating charges laid against king Zwelithini for the violation of human rights through alleged hate speech and incitement of violence. Seven people, including South Africans, had been killed by the time the violence subsided.

The following sub-sections cover the main themes that emerged from *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard*'s coverage of the 2015 xenophobia outbreaks as a way of evaluating the publications' approaches in engaging politicized content.

Date published	Title	Author	Position	Publication
February 11, 2015	Vangi's voice: Call it what you want, it's xenophobia	Vangile Gantsho	Poet/Writer	Vanguard
April 6, 2015	A malignant 'nativism' threatens post-apartheid democracy in South Africa	Sean Jacobs	Chief Editor	Africa is a Country
April 15, 2015	Achille Mbembe writes about xenophobia in South Africa	Achille Mbembe	Academic/Philosopher	Africa is a Country
April 16, 2015	Photo of the Day: What value do we place on African lives?	Vanessa Doble	Legal consultant	Africa is a Country
April 20, 2015	If you come from another country, you can never be truly South African	Sean Jacobs	Chief Editor	Africa is a Country
April 21, 2015	Call Me Clever: Facing our middle class complicity in Afrophobia	Thato Magano	Vanguard co-editor, marketer	Vanguard
April 29, 2015	Xenophobia and border imperialism	Imara Ajani Rolston	Filmmaker/Doctoral student	Africa is a Country
May 6, 2015	The assassins of memory	Boubacar Boris Diop	Journalist/novelist/ screenwriter	Africa is a Country
May 21, 2015	Liberating ourselves from our liberators	Chielozona Eze	Poet/Philosopher	Africa is a Country

May 25, 2015	Thoughts on xenophobia from a South African in Mozambique	Justin Pearce	Academic	Africa is a Country
May 28, 2015	HIFA in a time of Xenophobia	Setumo Thebe	Documentary photographer	Africa is a Country

Table 5: List of articles on xenophobia, their authors and the publications in which they were published.

4.2.1. Othering, scapegoating and chauvinism

The first recurring theme covered by the case study publications around the issue of xenophobia in South Africa is the intersectionality that exists between othering, scapegoating and chauvinism as will be discussed in length in this subsection.

Before exploring this discussion, it is worth noting that *Vanguard* magazine's coverage of the 2015 xenophobic attacks in South Africa, was marginal during the dates chosen for this research sample. While the topic appears a few times in its online history, only one of the articles was written during this time frame. For the purposes of evaluating its coverage adequately, an article published a month before the sample period, has also been included.

The first article tackling the topic of xenophobia in *Vanguard* magazine was written by spoken word poet, Vangile Gantsho and entitled, *'Call it what you want, it's xenophobia'* (2015). In it, Gantsho speaks of the "othering" of fellow Africans by South African citizens, a tendency she attributes to a "brokenness" within poor black communities that she believes a consequence of the "irrationality of being born in the depression" that is "the ghetto".

> Much needs to be said about this 'cut off your nose to spite your face' mentality. The same mind-set that torches clinics and libraries to protest service delivery is what makes people believe that burning down someone else's shop, stealing from them and calling them makwerekwere will do anything to uplift your own situation. All this does is entrench the breaking. Children grow up thinking looting and violence is ok when it is targeted at the 'other' because they see their parents and law enforcement agencies doing it. A false sense of entitlement is created, where taking what you have not worked for becomes a legitimate option. And most tragically, we learn and pass on hate. (ibid.)

Although Gantsho's stance on the matter suggests a certain empathy for the poverty-stricken South African communities who are "forced to co-exist" in confined spaces with those displaced from other parts of the continent, making "othering and animosity seem inevitable", she also hastens to add that violent attacks by the black working class are unjustified because "South African people are not the first to experience poverty. Nor are we the first to survive dehumanization" (ibid.).

Achille Mbembe, a renowned academic and African intellectual, writes lengthily on the issue of othering. His 16 April article in *Africa is a Country*, is deliberately punctuated with references to "foreigners" and "makwerekwere"[10]. His use of these terms and the way in which they are guardedly hugged by inverted commas throughout his article,

[10] A derogatory term used by some black South Africans to refer to fellow black people from the continent, especially those with darker skin tones.

emphasizes his unbending belief that they are flawed and that their usage advances the scapegoating of other black Africans from across South Africa's borders. In the following passage, he points to the perils of using poverty as a rationale for the vicious attacks.

> We now have the semblance of a discourse aimed at justifying the atrocities, the creeping pogrom since this is what it actually is. An unfolding pogrom to be sure. The justificatory discourse starts with the usual stereotypes — they are darker than us; they steal our jobs; they do not respect us; they are used by whites who prefer to exploit them rather than employing us, therefore avoiding the requirements of affirmative action. (Mbembe, 2015)

Mbembe principally points to a symbiosis between othering and chauvinism, reasoning that the former is a result of the latter. South Africans, he argues, have been socialised into "national-chauvinism" with what he calls a "justificatory discourse [which] starts with the usual stereotypes — they are darker than us; they steal our jobs; they do not respect us; they are used by whites who prefer to exploit them rather than employing us …" (ibid.). This, he contends, is the manner in which South Africa, through xenophobic attacks, fulfils its "permanent need of scapegoats" instead of addressing issues of poverty, joblessness and other, similar, negative ramifications of the post-apartheid 'condition'.

Noting the numerous intricacies of the xenophobia problem, Senegalese author, Diop (2015), warns that this "hatred of the Other" may worsen given what Mbembe (2015)

calls “the emergence of the rudiments of an “ideology”” that non-national Africans are the reason a majority of South Africans find themselves living in poverty.

> One would have hoped that, once they regained their freedom, South Africans would have looked at dark-skinned foreigners differently. In fact, the hard economic realities have weighed in far more than the ethical scruples. As disillusionment and social tensions have become clearer, the makwerekwere have become convenient scapegoats. (ibid.)

Like Mbembe, Diop decries the failure of xenophobic South Africans to acknowledge the contributions of other Africans to their liberation from the grips of the apartheid regime. His article, *The Assassins of Memory,* once again brings our attention to the concept of chauvinism which he believes is not limited to the working class but is a general South African problem, through which “contentious” socialisations have led to problems such as the “makwerekwere stigma (which) has its corollary in a terribly isolationist mentality, the result of a very particular history that has spared no social class”. He further notes – relating to a dinner conversation with a middle-class citizen who referred to Africa as an ‘elsewhere’ – a “South African sense of being either outside the continent or being a grand exception to it” (ibid.).

Chielozona Eze, a Nigerian poet and philosopher writes in *‘Liberating ourselves from our Liberators’* (2015) about xenophobic scapegoating as a problem of moral decay and

suggests that Africans “rethink” their position on heritage. Eze does not propose the abandonment of identity or cultural consciousness among black Africans but rather calls for a realisation that “in our global age…autochthony, nativism, or heritage no longer define us exclusively” (ibid.). While the majority of his article is themed around xenophobia and its links to imperialism, he is also concerned that “those who start out attacking others, on the basis of difference, end up attacking their own people on the basis of … well, difference”. In this sense, while Eze is advocating for solidarity among Africans, he is cautioning against using identity in a fundamentalist fashion because, as he explains “solidarity based on phenotype or heritage is dangerous. He who loves you because of your skin color can hate you for the same reason” (ibid.).

Eze like the majority of the authors who wrote on the topic of xenophobia in *Africa is a Country* brings our attention to the malevolent relationship between chauvinism and othering whether it’s based on ‘nationalist’, ‘tribalist’ or ‘traditionalist’ fundamentalism.

> If we are incapable of responding to the pain of the other, regardless of who that other is, then the fault might be in our humanity, not in our economic deprivation. But that’s precisely the issue. We have instinctively promoted victimhood to sainthood, and we are morally the poorer for that. (Eze, 2015)

Drawing similarities between South Africa, other African states and even Europe, Sean Jacobs’ *If you come from another African country, you can never become fully South African* (2015), echoes the sentiments of scapegoating “those we deem foreigners”. Jacobs is of the view that “The ethno-nationalism that marked apartheid’s dying days,

has now morphed into a malignant “nativism” that threatens post-apartheid democracy”. This, Jacobs advances, is a result of such things as the perceived superiority of the Zulu king, King Zwelithini, who as a traditional leader was at the drawn of democracy, “co-opted” – along with others of his stature, as a leader of South Africa’s largest tribe, the Zulus. (ibid.)

He attributes the scapegoating to the country’s “unwillingness to expand the boundaries of their identity” and suggests this as an attitude brought on by promises made by apartheid liberators that the struggle would grant “its followers liberation from the poverty, racism, exclusion and inequality that they were experiencing.” He goes on to state that because “most black South Africans have experienced nothing of the sort since 1994…all that their political leaders can offer them now is chauvinism” (ibid). He reiterates this view in his April 25 piece, *A malignant ‘nativism’ threatens post-apartheid democracy (in South Africa).*

> For many poor blacks, the label “South African” and the accompanying right to be represented by a democratic government are the only reward they earned from long decades of struggle. During the negotiations to end apartheid rule, the idea that South Africa belonged only to “those who already lived in it” was one issue on which the white minority and the liberation movements already agreed. In their view, the struggle over apartheid was contested by South African nationals, and the nation belonged to those who had declared it for themselves during that struggle. (ibid.)

This, of course, also falls within another recurring theme that authors of these publications deem core - the view that xenophobia is a post-colonialist problem, which is discussed in detail in the next subsection.

4.2.2. A post-colonial problem

The psychological, socio-political and socio-economic effects of colonialism come up often in discussions about the xenophobic attacks that afflicted South Africa in 2015. This section records how Africa's colonial history is being linked to the problem of xenophobia, based on the discussions published in both *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* magazine.

On 14 April, 2015, carried under the headline *Call me Clever: Facing our Middle Class Complicity in Afrophobia*, was one in a number of articles written for *Vanguard* by Thato Magano as part of his Call Me Clever series (conversations from or about the black middle-class perspective of South Africa's so-called 'clever blacks')[11]. In it, Magano offers that the 'shameful and apologist' attitudes of the black middle class regarding xenophobia, are not only counter-revolutionary but also chauvinistic. He suggests that the usage of the term 'xenophobia', overlooks that it is black-African on black-African violence that characterises the attacks. Ignoring this, he suggests, makes South

[11] A term originating from black South African communities in post-apartheid South Africa, referring to those among them who are or who deem themselves to be intellectuals. It is also used to refer to educated black middle class people and can to some extent be regarded as having evolved from the terms "coconut" or "model c" which in apartheid times referred to people who were seen as high-brow, attended multi-racial school, or were regarded black on the outside while having the mannerisms of white people.

Africans dismissive of how “issues of class, income, colour and history have intersected to create the perfect storm” (ibid.) thus exacerbating the problem. He ties this with the issue of privilege and the manner in which it was used by apartheid to sow divisions between non-white peoples (through, for example, such concepts as the use of impimpi[12] by the apartheid police).

Magano states that privilege encourages South Africa’s middle class to stand in judgment of the perpetrators - the majority of which are the black working class. This, Magano is convinced is a hypocritical stance that is not only reminiscent of but also reinforces the discrimination introduced by colonialism and apartheid.

> In our non-performative outrage aided by our class privilege, we accuse the perpetrators of being uneducated and uncivilised and we forgot how our history as South Africans, particularly the painful colonial part of that history that continues to seep through the most basic of conversations about foreign nationals and thus continues to dictate how we relate to each other. We have forgotten how, within the borders of this country, WE WERE TAUGHT to hate each other and to further hate those that look like us on the rest of the continent. (ibid.)

In essence, Magano understands xenophobia to be a construct of South Africa’s apartheid history which now falls in the hands of the democratic government and the “six million … middle class bystanders” to address and resolve by acknowledging and

[12] A word derived from South Africa’s isiZulu and isiXhosa languages meaning police informant or spy. It is similar in meaning to the western term “uncle Tom”.

thereby, confronting its root causes. For Magano, the attacks are a manifestation of a place and time when the "history of institutionalised self-hatred, limited resources and class intersect" and his call is for the "blanketing of this phenomena as 'xeno-phobia' [needs] to stop because, as he argues, this makes it easier for the perpetrators of the violence to ignore the fact that they are "at war with [ourselves] themselves" (ibid.).

A similar sentiment is expressed by Eze, in *Liberating Ourselves from our Liberators* (2015). Eze problematises the issue of nativism and adds that Afrophobia is as much a chauvinistic product of moral decay as it is a by-product of colonialism. He speaks sturdily against the use of heritage in justifying harmful attitudes and behaviours, arguing for African solidarity that is more reflective of a globalised world.

> The truth of our global age is that autochthony, nativism, or heritage no longer define us exclusively. Whereas they may have helped us Africans to challenge European imperialism in the past, they are now injurious to our humanity. (ibid.)

Eze considers that through their insistence on nativism, Africans have "instinctively promoted victimhood to sainthood", because, as he suggests, they (Africans) may have learned "to hate the historical enemy (the colonialists) more than they knew how to love themselves". Eze offers that South Africans' hatred of other Africans from across the borders is not concomitant to economic competition.

> The issue then is not that the other black body stands in the way of your progress; rather, it is a case of an infernal hatred of this other body,

> performed in a macabre ritualistic glee. This is more than ordinary xenophobia can explain. Explanation has to be sought in the realm of psychology: how has the black man developed such an aversion for his fellow black man, for what looks like him? Perhaps we could look for explanation in the realm of ethics: did black people learn to hate the historical enemy (the colonialists) more than they knew how to love themselves. (ibid.)

Writing as a white South African living just outside its borders at the time of the 2015 xenophobic attacks, academic Justice Pearce's *Thoughts on Xenophobia from a South African in Mozambique* adds a different dynamic to the discussion. While it is the view of the majority of the authors of the case studies that clues can be found in colonial history for the xenophobic attitudes of some South Africans towards other black Africans from the continent, none have noted it from the white middle class perspective except for Pearce. According to him, white South Africans do, in fact, prefer to employ non-national Africans. He notes that in discussions and debates about xenophobia, there is little attention being paid to the role or lack thereof of white South Africans. He suggests that the media both here and in Mozambique has painted white and privileged South Africans who often march against xenophobia or stand in judgment of the xenophobic working class, in saintly roles, instead of noting their "hypocrisy" which he understands to be a consequence of an active preference on their part to not interact with or hire working class black South Africans.

Noting a juxtaposition between an anonymous article that brings the issue of said hypocrisy to light and a report by a Mozambican journalist who refers to them (privileged

white citizens) as “South Africans of good will”, Pearce explains that ‘the white South African deference towards Africans from across the border has a history’, one he believes explicates why white South Africa is more empathetic of non-South Africans when it comes to xenophobic incidents.

> In its critique of white people’s particular concern with the migrants’ plight, that anonymous article broaches a rather obvious topic that seldom gets discussed publicly: the way which the unease that typifies white attitudes towards black South Africans is absent where our interaction with non-South African Africans is concerned. (ibid.)

In the following passage, Pearce further relates his familiarity with this deference for non-national South Africans and its commonality within his particular community:

> This is a theme that I’ve heard over the years in conversations across the social and geographical range of white South Africa: from fruit farmers in the Limpopo Valley (migrants are good because they will work for less) all the way to Cape Town suburbanites (Malawians are so respectful, Zimbabweans are so well-spoken). (ibid.)

Pearce’s is an interesting perspective as it affords the reader a different understanding of the stance of some white South Africans, who are virtually invisible and are barely ever cited in dialogues about xenophobia.

Writing for *Africa is a Country*, Canadian national, Imara Ajani Rolston (2015), contributes to our understanding of the issue of border between African nations as an

imperialist problem. Eze takes this argument in a new direction by unearthing not only ethnic discrimination as a historic impetus to keep those who are different away, but by also pointing at political and "imperialist gain" as being central to problems with bordered countries and essentially, minds.

> By legislatively and politically maintaining and protecting borders as they stand in South Africa and beyond we come to embody what these borders represented and continue to represent today. Dehumanization in the name of imperial prosperity and accumulation lie at the foundation of the modern South African and Canadian border and so they will continue to lie at the root of our psyches. (ibid.)

Rolston compares the historical context of South Africa's borders to that of his own country, Canada, which he understands "were a source of inspiration for apartheid's architects". Rolston notes this as an ongoing colonialist problem of "settler dominance" which has seen his country "continue to suffer from the effects of revisionist history" where as a result of negative peace Canada's "First Peoples continue to be forcefully and coercively disenfranchised" (ibid.). Drawing some insights from Harsha Walia's work on border imperialism, Rolston reflects on the xenophobia problem using the following comparison:

> South Africa's imperial history of racialized land dispossession was a precursor for the construction of a modern capitalist state as it was in Canada. By Walia's account, borders etch this imperialism into the physical and psychological topography of a country. The Afrophobic

> attacks in South Africa rise out of bordered psychologies that pit economically displaced men and women constructed as “migrants” against historically dispossessed “nationals”. (ibid.)

4.2.3. Lack of leadership/government accountability

Lack of accountability and leadership on the part of the government of South Africa is a recurrent theme in most of the discussions about xenophobia. In the majority of articles published in both case study publications, the authors criticise government’s reactive, rather than proactive stance in dealing with xenophobic attacks. In the following passages, I tap into the discussions that took place in both *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* magazines around the theme of government accountability or lack thereof in an attempt to understand these publications’ level of criticism for how xenophobia is being handled by officials.

Writing for Vanguard, Gantsho highlights the issue of “government denialism” around the issue of xenophobia. She traces it back to Thabo Mbeki’s presidency and argues that officials have “resisted pressure from various human rights groups to call these attacks ‘xenophobic’, labelling them instead as acts of criminality”, with the inclusion of the following extract from the former South African president, in which he was sharing his views about the xenophobic attacks of 2008:

> What happened during those days was not inspired by possessed nationalism, or extreme chauvinism, resulting in our communities

> violently expressing the hitherto unknown sentiments of mass and mindless hatred of foreigners … none in our society has any right to encourage or incite xenophobia by trying to explain naked criminal activity by cloaking it in the garb of xenophobia. (Gantsho, 2015)

It is interesting to note that Mbeki actively denies any association to chauvinism or nationalism in his understanding of the attacks as this is in stark contrast to the findings of this study in which these emerge as the main themes underlying the xenophobia problem, according to the publications under evaluation. This denialism has, in Gantsho's view, resulted in a certain complacency on the part of government to approach or address the problem of xenophobia in an undeviating manner that would have permitted it to destroy its very foundations.

Achille Mbembe, meanwhile, highlights changes in South Africa's immigration legislation which he believes, are symbolic of government's own, perhaps, veiled need to keep other Africans beyond the borders and according to him, this includes even those who have long acquired permanent residence in the country. He states that "through its new anti-immigration measures, the government is busy turning previously legal migrants into illegal ones" and in this way, he perceives government's role in xenophobia as a "tacit" one but one which does not make it any less complicit in "the current hunt for "foreigners"". Mbembe's criticism brings our attention to the plight of the non-South African professional and student community whose visas have, he claims, without explanation have become ineligible.

> The South African government has recently taken a harsh stance on immigration. New, draconian measures have been passed into law. Their effects are devastating for people already established here legally…the government of South Africa is either unable or unwilling to protect those who are here legally from the ire of its people, to appeal to a higher authority. (Mbembe, 2015)

For Vanessa Doble, who writes for *Africa is a Country*, from "a place of shame", xenophobic atrocities are being downplayed if not completely side-lined by state officials. She laments the failure not just of government, but of structures belonging to the governing party, to find a solution to the xenophobia problem. In the following passage, she discusses issues she wishes she could raise while writing a letter to her unborn nephew whose father is Mozambican:

> I am sorry…I did not say to the ANC women's league 'for goodness sake where are you? What are you doing while thugs kill and steal from people and chase mothers carrying their babies? You were there for Reeva Steenkamp when her family needed you most but where are you now when your country and its daughters and her children need you even more?' (ibid.)

By mentioning its support for Reeva Steenkamp's family, Doble essentially highlights the failure of the governing ANC's Women's League to exhibit the same kind of empathy and solidarity with the victims of xenophobic attacks.

> I am sorry that I did nothing. That I did not toyi toyi outside parliament demanding that the President take action and that King Zwelithini publicly condemn those who were killing and stealing in his name. (Doble, 2015)

Doble's is as much a condemnation of fellow middle class South Africans' failure to rebel against the perpetrators of xenophobia as it is a plea for the country's leadership to act against these atrocities.

In an article co-authored with fellow *Africa is a Country* contributor, Dan Magaziner, and first published in *The New York Times*, Sean Jacobs having highlighted the problem with the Zulu king, Goodwill Zwelithini's chauvinism, blames the country's president for not condemning him for comments he made about non-nationals which were believed by many to have been the source of the xenophobic violence that began in April 2015 in his KwaZulu Natal province.

> Mr. Zuma has not done much to address the crisis. He issued a soft condemnation a week after the first attacks started and offered migrants safe passage back to their native countries. He has since sent the military into the most restive areas, while criticizing the media for over-hyping the story. (Jacobs, 2015)

Jacobs sees the president as an enabler of the king's nationalist agenda – an act he also blames the ANC for at the end of apartheid, the government put the king and other traditional leaders "on the state's payroll", thus giving "legitimacy to a form of ethno-nationalist politics that the ANC had officially opposed during the anti-apartheid

struggle" in an effort to allow a peaceful transition into democracy amid some ethnic and regional conflicts. Jacobs criticises Zuma's denialism which has often included blaming the media for reporting on the topic of xenophobia in an 'embellished manner'.

Senegalese author, Boubacar Boris Diop, adds to the call for political leadership to be more answerable while at the same time heaping praise on former leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Ahmed Kathrada for having been exemplary in their liberation and solidarity efforts. Diop is, however, critical of current leaders whom he reasons – like Mbembe before him – have 'turned a blind eye' and failed to protect the victims of xenophobia.

> "The ANC leaders who came into power in 1994 with thanks, in particular, to the help of Zimbabwe, Zambia and Mozambique, are well aware that the citizens of those neighboring countries – and more widely all black foreigners – are looked at very badly in the townships, where they are called Makwerekwere." (ibid.)

Diop further suggests complicity on the part of the "black ruling elite" whom he says are "glad to make others responsible for their own bankruptcy" (ibid.).

4.3. Rhodes Must Fall coverage

Overview

The Rhodes Must Fall protest action will likely go down as one of the most significant student movements in the history of democratic South Africa. It was the first in a series of student protest action where, for the first time, the country's so-called born-frees[13] mobilised and in masses, came out to fight against the protracted remnants of colonialism and apartheid within South Africa's tertiary institutions. Believed by many to be the lost generation born into a democratic country where most of the injustices of the past were just that, the born-frees for the first time tweeted, marched, sang struggle songs and fought in solidarity against the lack of transformation at South Africa's institutions of higher learning. Their struggle, this time, went beyond hashtag or virtual activism. Taking to the streets to address issues that have been subjects of debate since the governing ANC had taken over from the oppressors two decades prior, students demanded answers to issues of racial and lingual divisions, academic exclusion by high fees, and for the workers of those institutions; issues of outsourcing.

The protest began on March 9, 2015 when a student from the University of Cape Town (UCT) – regarded as Africa's best university – Chumani Maxwele, after a gathering of students, decided to climb on top of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes with a bucket full of excrement and poured it over the 19th century colonialist.

[13] A term used to refer to the generation born during or after the period in which a previously colonised country gains its independence. It is largely used in South Africa to describe those born post-1994, when the country transitioned from apartheid rule to democracy.

There had been in recent times, incidents of statues being defaced around the country but not necessarily by students. Some from certain quarters of the nation demanded that colonial symbols be removed from public spaces. Some were in support of this cause, while others condemned it. Racial tensions were on the rise as certain sectors of South African society regarded these acts as direct attacks on the white race and perceived it as an attempt to erase the history of their own people, while others begged for government to find ways to get rid of them as they were a constant reminder of the oppression suffered by black and non-white communities under the apartheid regime. Central to *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard'*s discussions were themes that were in alignment with the actual objectives of the Rhodes Must Fall protests, as outlined below.

- Exposing and fighting institutional racism in several of South Africa's tertiary institutions
- Fighting against the exploitation of black, working class employees at these institutions
- Challenging the existence of colonial symbols in democratic South Africa and thus the continued domination of the economy by the white race, a divide which has kept present-day South Africa the world's most unequal society
- Highlighting the role of white privilege in academic exclusion of black students in institutions of higher learning.

Many of the authors in *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* magazine, concurred on that the issue of colonial statues were important to democratic discourse. While some South Africans remain opposed to the literal removal of colonialist symbols in

public spaces, there is a definite consensus among the contributors of these alternative magazines that the statue of Rhodes needed to be removed. It was on April 9, exactly one month since the day the protest has begun and after the outcry through the hashtag #RhodesMustFall which reverberated in places as far as Oxford University in England prompting students there to march in solidarity with South African tertiary students for this cause and, a vote in favour of its removal by UCT's executive council. Due to the intersectionality of the themes discussed, this next section does not discuss them in isolation but rather highlights them within each article chosen for analysis.

Date published	Title	Author	Position	Publication
March 23, 2015	AIAC Video: South Africa's 'born frees' gag on the rainbow nation pill they've been fed for the past 21 years	Leila Dee Dougan	Journalist and academic	Africa is a Country
March 23, 2015	Rhodes must fall everywhere	Christopher Webb	PhD candidate	Africa is a Country
March 24, 2015	#RhodesMustFall: A UCT student's breakdown of the revolutionary events unfolding	Siphokuhle Mathe	UCT student	Vanguard
March 25, 2015	It's not just about Cecil John Rhodes	Greer Valley	Design entrepreneur	Africa is a Country
March 26, 2015	#RhodesMustFall: The View from Zimbabwe	Tawanda Moyo	Blogger	Africa is a Country
March 27, 2015	So What Happens #AfterRhodesFalls?	Duane Jethro	PhD candidate	Africa is a Country
March 31, 2015	The University of Cape Town is Paralyzed with Fear of the Past	Angelo C. Fick	Academic / Current Affairs analyst	Africa is a Country
March 31, 2015	#BestofTheInternets: #RhodesMustFall UCT Assembly	Vanguard reporter	Contributor	Vanguard
April 6, 2015	The Rise of a Post-colonial University	Ruchi Chaturvedi	Lecturer	Africa is a Country
April 6, 2015	UPDATE: We know some of you are googling "Jan van Riebeeck" now. Well this is for you	Zubeida Jaffer	Writer	Africa is a Country

April 14, 2015	#RhodesHasFallen: A lesson to the African National Congress	Siphokuhle Mathe	UCT student	Vanguard
April 15, 2015	This the sound of Cecil John Rhodes falling	Sophie Wooley	Writer/Journalist/Performer	Africa is a Country
April 28, 2015	The arrogance of apartheid-denialism at Stellenbosch University	Open Stellenbosch	Student activists	Africa is a Country
April 28, 2015	Guest Opinion: Student Uprising's in South Africa have exposed the cracks of our "freedom"	Simamkele Dlakavu	Social activist and television producer	Vanguard
May 3, 2015	The Life and Times of Mr Peter Buckton: Forty four years of walking past Cecil John Rhodes' Statue	Abigail McDougall	Freelance writer	Africa is a Country
May 11, 2015	To be young, privileged and black (in a world of white hegemony)	Lelo Macheke	Journalism student	Africa is a Country
May 15, 2015	The old is dying and the young ones have just been born	Sisonke Msimang	Writer	Africa is a Country

Table 6: List of articles on Rhodes Must Fall protests, their authors and the publications in which they were published. Note some of the articles appearing on this table did not form part of the following discussion. Those discussed were selected on the basis that they reflected the major themes that recurred throughout the publications' Rhodes Must Fall coverage.

Published in Vanguard magazine, *#RhodesMustFall: A UCT student's breakdown of the revolutionary events unfolding* by Siphokuhle Mathe, discusses – in a journalistic timeline – issues of institutional racism and white privilege at the University of Cape Town, which was the epicentre of the Rhodes Must Fall movement. In it, Mathe applauds the bravery of Chumani Maxwele, the student who elevated the issue of the lack of transformation at the university by throwing excrement at the statue of white colonialist, Cecil John Rhodes, as a form of protest.

> The white arrogance he spoke of is in line with the idea that the university is predominantly white and does not reflect the demographics of South Africa, except for the demographic which displays the gross socio-economic inequality among black and white people. The white

> arrogance…is also in line with the idea that the university has not undertaken its mandate to truly transform the university so as to move from the oppressive dynamics which have embedded themselves since the university's colonialist inception. (ibid.)

Mathe sees the 13 March assembly as a remarkable dissolution of the arrogant attitudes of protesters' white counterparts. At the same time, he expresses surprise at the containment of the dialogue itself despite "emotions spiraling". Mathe considers this aptitude of students and workers who have long been exposed to systematic racism, to hold peaceful protests, as a sign of "black intellectualism". This view is profoundly expressed as he concludes his piece for Vanguard magazine.

> Black intellectualism has now assembled and sat to discuss the discourse of its people in an operation #OccupyBremner which involved overnight stays at the building over the weekend. Healthy discussions have ensued, with sobering yet emotive singing of struggle songs. Students have taken their stationery and books to the building and they continued to study while undergoing a special kind of black therapy. This is the kind of revolution which black people have so wanted for a long time. The wait to be provided with space is no longer a wait because the space is now being rightfully assumed. (ibid.)

The context to Mathe's article is provided in a video link published on *Vanguard* on March 31 under the title, *#BestofTheInternets: #RhodesMustFall UCT Assembly which* shows us the same intellectualism through a video whose duration is over two hours. Posted on the university's YouTube channel, the video entitled *University Assembly:*

The Rhodes Statue and Transformation (2015) shows the March 13 deliberations held by students to the attentions of their vice chancellor and some of the institution's lecturers.

What is interesting about this particular post is that the Vanguard Reporter, named as author, brings our attention to just about all of the issues discussed. S/he only adds the quote shared by a student, in which she laments, "God Almighty, I'm tired of being told to move on. We built this country, slaves. The man holding the whip did not build. When could we scream for our loved ones lost and chances trampled" (Vanguard reporter 2015).

In the video, the first assembly of its kind is documented in full and as expected, the issue of UCT's racism is brought up over and over again by the majority of speakers – students and staff – as they assume the podium. This is when the core list of protesters' demands are raised, not least the obvious imbalances in racial diversity of lecturers at the institution, the prejudices against less-privileged students, the outsourcing of workers and the failure of some white students to recognise and acknowledge the pain of exclusion expressed by protesters.

University of Cape Town's vice chancellor, Max Price, expresses his solidarity with the cause for transformation, but is soon drowned out by struggle song, "Senzeni, na?", translated to *'what have we done?'*, as soon as he confesses to the fact that the issue of the Rhodes statue was not at the forefront of the minds of the university's executives.

Writing for *Africa's a Country*, visiting PhD candidate at UCT, Christopher Webb, understands the student protest as an important milestone towards reshaping the country, by "critiquing the raced, classed and gendered dimensions that shape access to education in South African society" (2015). He discusses this intersectionality in some detail and argues that the students' struggle is driven by the harsh realities and anguish of black bodies young and old as a direct consequence of the nation's as well as the continent's colonial past. The Rhodes Must Fall protests, he argues, is an immediate reflection of such consequences and speaks to how colonialist belief and practices continue to play themselves out through systematic racism at the university, as well as others across the country.

Although the bulk of the discussion in his article is about the situation developing at the time in South Africa, Webb's article is entitled *Rhodes Must Fall everywhere* because it also acknowledges the struggle of students in his native Canada, in particular, the University of Toronto, where students were in their third week of protests over austerity measures. He regards this as a sign that "student uprisings" are signaling transformation that puts human development ahead of "economic austerity and neoliberal rationalism".

Webb pays a lot of attention to the subject of the outsourcing of workers, which emerged from the start as one of the core and, most obvious issues of racial prejudice within the institution as that which Rhodes Must Fall activists were interested in rooting out. He notes its inclusion in the protest as not only a reaffirmation of students "as

catalysts of struggle", but also as a measure by which their protest has recognised "economic inequality" and has had "a greater recognition of the structural violence that black people continue to endure." (ibid.)

> Students holding placards that read 'Black Staff at UCT Matter' are also calling attention to the low wages of cleaners and maintenance staff on campus … By speaking directly to the enduring symbols of racial domination on campus they have not only exposed the epistemological whiteness of the curriculum but the ways in which the university exploits cheap and racialized labour. (ibid.)

Webb further describes how the outsourcing of workers and the academic exclusion of black history through universities' curricula is further reflected in the economic inequities of South African society.

> When we situate this particular struggle within the political economy of this deeply unequal nation it's quite clear that a struggle against symbols of colonialism is a struggle against the perpetuation of colonial forms of domination in the present. In the South African case this involves both material forms of racial inequality inscribed into the nature of the post-apartheid economy—ongoing urban divisions along racial lines is but one example as are contemporary forms of labour migrancy. The other is, of course, the ideological tenets of white supremacy... (ibid.)

It's not just about Cecil John Rhodes is an article by Greer Valley, former postgraduate student at Stellenbosch University. Offering a different take on the matter, Valley starts by discussing a letter received by UCT's alumni, requesting comment about the students' removal of the Rhodes statue from campus. Relating this to a similar experience at Stellenbosch University where recently a plaque dedicated to one apartheid architect, Henry Verwoerd statue, had been destroyed in a building fire, she warns that the university's management not focus on its removal as though it were a surface issue. Valley is of the view that Rhodes' statue's removal alone would create the perception that what it symbolizes has also been dealt with, while the root challenges facing the university around the issue of transformation remain.

> While I agree that material culture is both embedded with and transmits meaning as well as produces historic narratives, the university's efforts shouldn't simply be focused on the removal of the statue, as this may rob us of an important opportunity to track and expose the role of power in the making of history. (Valley, 2015)

Valley argues that the total removal of colonial symbols around the country, has the potential to obscure the real work that needs to be done to effect transformation i.e. by using such symbols to create awareness about subjects' roles in imperialism, colonialism and apartheid. Her suggestion is that rather than remove the Rhodes statue and other historic symbols that paint a canvas of South African history, the "intervention" should be to get artists "to disrupt the language and visual coding of the sculpture itself" so as to "permanently alter its meaning and the way in which it is read by present and future generations". Valley believes the presence of colonial statues as a constant

reminder of the travesties of past regimes would help keep institutions on their toes about the real work that needs to be done.

> The statue could become a reminder to the institution that there are pressing issues in terms of reform (beyond just removing it) that need to be addressed. My concern is that in 'wiping the slate clean' by removing the sculpture and placing it in the glass vitrine of a museum, far away from its context, an opportunity may be missed for continued dialogue about the lingering presence and effects of South Africa's colonial past. (ibid.)

Former academic and current affairs analyst, Angelo Fick, writes for *Africa is a Country* in detail about what he refers to as a paralysis born of fear by UCT management and indeed, other South African institutions of higher learning. Dotting through a historical timeline of both the institution's "old racist myths about colonialism and the nobility of the imperial mission" as well as several attempts by those affected by it to resist its capture (such as the occupation of the Bremner building in 1968 by some 600 students, 47 years before its occupation during the current Rhodes Must Fall protest), Fick reminds the reader that the discourse around the fall of Rhodes and colonial symbolism is an enduring one and so is the legacy of "white-washing" recent history. This, he contends, demonstrates institutional racism, result of a "dated grasp of the meanings of 'race', the dynamics of racism, and the work of anti-racism in post-apartheid South Africa" (ibid.).

Fick's *The University of Cape Town is Paralyzed with Fear of the Past*, goes to some lengths to highlight the "discomfort" protectors of colonial legacies and past atrocities have towards "erasing" history. He perceives UCT and similar institutions' failure to transform as "reactionary racism", a consequence of the "inaccurate misreading of the past". Fick argues that these repeated patterns of clinging to the University's so-called heritage serve "as evidence of a larger failure to decolonise apartheid higher education" in the country.

> What the whole Rhodes fracas has revealed, quite spectacularly, is how colonial worldviews have taken root in South Africa's higher education sector, and in the minds of its graduates. What can also be traced in both the tone and the lack of substance in much of the antagonism, is the wider insistence on misreading 'race' as a biological, phenotypical reality, a fundamental, scientific misunderstanding seemingly shared by some of the most educated South Africans. But worst, and most depressingly, this historical moment has unveiled the casual racism that lurks beneath the polite surfaces of everyday smiles in the tax-funded organisations dedicated to higher learning. (ibid.)

Fick's discussion on institutional racism also notes UCT's preference to revere Rhodes as a businessman and philanthropist whose legacy should be associated with "scholarships, gifts, bequests" rather than his role as a figure controversial even in his time for "his political and economic thuggery and skullduggery" as well as the "colonial violence and violation" of African people.

Fick concludes his argument with a pronouncement that the Rhodes statue be removed from the campus and take to a museum where those who wish to marvel over it may be allowed to access it. He criticises what he believes are “mediocre contributions in the ‘Rhodes debate’ for their suggestions that to remove “colonial symbols and statues would be to erase history”. He motions for resistance against “debased and fallacious terms of engagement” set by this line of dialogue, adding that the suggestion that “we run of repeating the past mistakes of others if we do not quietly accept the present and accommodate ourselves to its inequalities, inequities, and unfair distribution of resources” (ibid) amounts to bullying and signifies a certain disregard for the black, colonialised citizens of the country and continent.

> Firstly, some of us do not need statues to be reminded of colonial conquest and violation; the landscape bears the traces of that violence. Secondly, removing statues from public spaces does not require their destruction; museums are places where such statues can be kept in curated exhibitions which provide context for those who wish to see them. Thirdly, for twenty years many people have walked past statues like Rhodes, and not remembered the violent history commemorated; and those of us pained, viscerally upset by such constant glorification of genocidal megalomaniacs are told to stop overreacting, to develop thicker skins, and ‘get on with it’. (ibid.)

In summary, based on the above coverage of xenophobia and Rhodes Must Fall protests, I was able to make certain deductions about how *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* as alternative publications cover issues of socio-political significance in South

Africa. The themes they discuss point not only to their editorial stance as oppositional but this is also done in ways that seek to extensively interrogate the underlying context of these issues in a manner not generally done by mainstream media outlets. The majority of their coverage also demonstrates that their contributors have a shared, left-wing perspective of the issues that have led such conflicts, thus revealing their position as a counterpublic sphere. Themes such as the effects of colonialism, capitalism and imperialism emerging in their reportage of xenophobia and the student protests, are of certain significance. This paired with their candid criticism of the current South African government, also speaks to their misgivings about South Africa's democracy and point to their beliefs of it being "incomplete" as stated by Sean Jacobs in a February 7, 2016 interview.

5

Publications as counterpublics

The discursive democratic theory of counterpublics summarily defines counterpublics as individuals whom – through feeling disenfranchised in certain public discourses – may form their own 'tribes' based on similar interests, values, beliefs, social standings and ideologies, enabling them to hold useful deliberations and counter-discourses about their own lived realities. Nancy Fraser (1991) and Michael Warner (2002) have used the term "subordinated" publics to describe what they believe is a catalytic aspect of such

formations within stratified democratic societies - an explanation expanded upon in *Understanding Alternative Media* by Bailey; Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008).

> Subordinated groups exercise their power to contest hegemonic meanings through a discursive practice of resistance, that is, to produce non-conformist and sometimes counter-hegemonic representations of the views of those marginalized, misrepresented and under-represented in the public sphere. (Bailey, *et al.; 2008)*

Guided by the aforementioned scholars' definitions and assertions, and having conducted both a content analysis and interviews with the publishers, an interrogation of *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* revealed that they fall within the spectrum of alternative media communities regarded as counterpublics. This section discusses based on these findings the characteristics that define them as such i.e. the formation of their own space for deliberation in the margins of general publics, their chosen platform, the Internet, as an ideal space for deliberation and broader editorial positioning, the critical nature of their content, their "emancipatory" potential as well as how identity factors into what they see themselves as responding to.

Africa is a Country and *Vanguard* publish online both in website form as well as on social media platforms. Their use of these spaces for publishing bears great significance as their use of the Internet as a medium enables them to deliberate more conveniently as what Warner (2002) labels "self-organised", "sub-altern" publics. One of the key variances between Nancy Fraser's conception of the counterpublic sphere and the historical public sphere described by Jurgen Harbermas, is that the latter

predominantly depended on physical or 'real world' interactions to thrive. Even though print materials such as pamphlets and posters etc., were distributed to communicate meeting agendas and for coordination purposes, the traditional public sphere operated within certain technological (and socio-political) limitations. With the proliferation of the Internet, today's public sphere stretches across magazines, e-books and real-time mediums such as radio, television, as well as the Internet. A number of scholars like Asen; Brouwer (2001), Downing (2001) and Atton (2004) have written about the Internet as being permissive of emancipation among counterpublics, in particular with regards to the potential for alternative, protest or critical dialogue to take place through "direct" participation and in real time.

Their occupation of this space, has been instrumental to both *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard*'s publishing activities. In an interview conducted on November 18, 2015, *Vanguard* magazine editor Panashe Chigumadzi explains that online interactions not only become critical as a distribution channel for content already published on their website but that Vanguard essentially takes its cues from the conversations happening among fellow peers on social media, as a guide to what it publishes. Whereas the editors pronounce direct personal engagements in talks and panel discussions as having been expedient to raising awareness about their products in the beginning (see section 6.5.1, par. 13), they describe the process of selection as "…basically social media monitoring and conversation monitoring…so this is what is on people's minds, let's do any issue on that" (Chigumadzi 2015).

These assertions by the editors begin to reveal a clear divide between the ways in which they select their content and position themselves editorially when compared to conventional media platforms who generally use demographic marketing tools to make determinations about their audiences and thus their editorial direction. For the case study publishers, it is online interactions that are key and as such they claim to not rely on website metrics. Ayabonga Cawe, an economist, who's both reader and contributor to Vanguard magazine says the fact that the topics covered in the publication are also those being discussed in other social networks, on- and off-line is "what makes it relevant and socially grounded" (Cawe, 2017)

They further sustain that they are primarily concerned with issues that are inherently of interest to those whose ideologies are aligned with theirs, with most of these conversations taking place on social media platforms. Through Jacobs' asserts in a recorded interview conducted on February 7, 2016 when he made the following statement about Rhodes Must Fall protests, we begin to see that the editors' strong relationship with their readers on social media is as much a consequence of their collective discontentment with the inefficiencies of mainstream media to report angles often unexplored and of significance to them, as it is due to the capacity they receive via social media to participate frankly with fellow peers.

> If you follow the student protests, you will notice that probably the most reliable media in that area was social media. So self-publishing, towards people sharing long posts that they would just write without editing them, like stream of consciousness posts of what was

> happening to them around the campus or how people would work out ideological disputes at Wits, say between different factions on the SRC, the relationship between say Wits students and TUT students. None of that texture of that stuff has been captured in the mainstream press. Stellenbosch University and outsourcing, none of that stuff would be captured in the mainstream press in South Africa. Instead it was being covered on that I don't think was created for that, Twitter and Facebook. (Jacobs, 2016. Int.)

It is interesting to note that the gradual progression of each publication into a counterpublic was largely influenced by its contributors and participants, the altern publics. As its editors posit, not only is *Vanguard* a space created "for those people who were feeling marginalised by what they were seeing out in media, (and where) they realised that this is a space they can bring some of the more critical conversations to the platform (Magano 2015), but deliberations within their particular counterpublic sphere have also been central to their personal and ideological evolution. This is noted in Chigumadzi's case, who relates that when she launched *Vanguard* she was merely an adherent to the values of the Black Consciousness Movement and would write from that perspective, but that through her social interactions online, she later become a feminist and now regards herself as a womanist.

> I was not a feminist or a womanist when I started Vanguard and how I got introduced to issues of intersectionality and privilege and all those things was online, through social media, through following interesting conversations. (Chigumadzi, 2015. Intv.)

The ideological changes and growth that Chigumadzi has undergone over the two-year existence of *Vanguard*, are also reflected in the magazine itself. This influence is indicative of inherent characteristics of counterpublics theory, namely; the importance of the collective and secondly, identity and its role in counter-discourses. The first is touched upon in a chapter by Kidd and Rodriguez where they refer to alternative media as bearing attributes of 'collective design, decision making, creative interchange and governance, at all stages of the production and circulation of meaning' (2010). Social and ideological identity is seen as a critical factor in counterpublic theory as explained by Asen's critique in the next passage.

> Focusing not on exclusion per se but on the recognition of exclusion avoids essentialist understandings of difference and situates counter as a constructed relationship. This perspective calls to attention the collectives that emerge through recognition – collectives that in our multiple everyday identifications and affiliations through coalitions and assertions of identity acknowledge dilemmas of difference. (Asen, 2001)

Further contributing to our understanding of identity as a critical aspect of counterpublic discourse, are the publishers' recognition of their publications as spaces of convergence for under-represented black middle-class communities. This is echoed by a contributor of Vanguard magazine, Vangile Gantsho.

> I think the majority of people who subscribe to Vanguard share the kind of hopes I speak of... This is not to say they agree on everything, but

> they certainly feel seen by Vanguard. Feel acknowledged. And safer there. This includes people who consider themselves to be allies. Black, womx, LGBTQI, feminist… The #wecanbeboth generation. Beyonce lovers and haters alike! Because here, we exist! (Gantsho, 2017)

Jacobs describes *Africa is a Country* contributors, for example, as "black middle-class people … (who) can actually engage directly with the language of power, the terms of power, the lexicon of power" (ibid.). Similarly, *Vanguard* editors see themselves as responding and contributing to conversations happening among a specific kind of public who as suggested by Fraser (2001) converge as a direct result of struggle or some sort of shared oppression. In the proceeding quote, Mogano describes what he believes is the foremost conflict common to *Vanguard* participants.

> I think people were waiting and they were waiting for a platform that was saying, we recognise the struggle that you are having, we recognise the issues that you are contending with on the daily basis as a black person who is somewhat middle-class, who is somewhat social and upwardly mobile and [sic] but you still have to contend with the lived reality of being a black person in South Africa. So I think really that's what resonated the most and what continues to resonate with people today. (Mogano, 2015. Int.)

I was able to gather from interviews with the editors and contributing readers alike that the resonance that allows the case study publications and others similar to them such as *The Conmag, The Daily Vox and Abahlali Basemjondolo* to thrive also speaks to

deeper issues of developing and nurturing these social and ideological identities through the so-called “tribes” that they form and interact with. In *Counterpublic and the State,* Robert Asel and Daniel C. Brouwer (2001) support this interpretation with the observation that “counterpublic theory encourages scholars to reconsider the role played by identity. Counterpublics, as temporal, discursive, and even physical spaces, are not exclusively defined by identity but, instead, aid in the definition of identity” (ibid. p.165).

> One may locate the “counter” of counterpublics in the identity of the persons who articulate oppositional discourse. This approach offers a useful way of explication historical experiences of exclusion and oppression and incorporating recent developments such as new social movements (NSMs). Theorists of NSMs claim that a primary goal of these movements is the affirmation of identities suppressed or distorted by regimes of power and legitimation. In this sense, nascent counterpublics emerge when collectives assert, “we are Black,” “we are queer,” “we are wimmin.” *(ibid. p.8)*

The publisher of *Africa is a Country,* Sean Jacobs further offers, for instance, that one of the methods by which the publication’s contributors are gathered is their collective interest in left wing politics. He adds that ‘a lot of the proposed contributors are often people I spot or … other members of the editorial committee would recommend’ (ibid.). This further speaks to the tendency for counterpublics to almost gravitate towards each other based on the marginalisation of their ideologies and experience.

Gantsho's statement that as participants, they don't always "agree on everything" (2017), is noteworthy because it speaks strongly to our understanding of these platforms as critical to deliberation. However, as discussed in the theoretical framework, findings also point to differing viewpoints with regards to whether counterpublics theory does sufficiently or even accurately deal with some of the problems of alternative media. Two of the respondents strongly felt that the publications were not necessarily alternative nor counterpublic. For Gantsho, describing Vanguard as an alternative magazine, is not only vague but could also have undesirable implications to its consumers because even though "magazines such as Vanguard are credible sources of information. I also think platforms such as the Vanguard allow for those who have been invisible in mainstream media to be seen...referring to such platforms as “alternative” may perhaps also be referring to those whom it represents as “alternative” (ibid.).

Similarly, Vanguard contributor, Siyabonga Cawe, believes that counterpublics theory fails to account for the intersectionality that occurs in the online sphere which leads to his observation that describing Vanguard as part of a counterpublic sphere is not sufficient.

> I would think it quite reductionist to collapse Vanguard into part of a homogenous ‘counter-public’. I think with the strides in technology, the rise of social media and the information age we live in, that ‘counter-public’ is more heterogenous than my simple understanding of the ‘theory’ would suggest. I think readers and contributors to Vanguard

> inhabit online, broadcast and print 'publics' that intersect and interact daily. So you'll find a contributor or reader engage with the content of Vanguard not necessarily coming from a strict conservative/progressive lens or distinction, but from a range of influences, both online and offline. You see this in how different people, even on what is seen as 'Black Twitter' take different perspectives on what is presented as 'content', be it on Vanguard or any other platform. It makes for a refreshing change from the media 'echo chamber' we've become accustomed to. (Cawe 2017. Int.)

What these very valid contestations point to is a need for the development of research theories that can better support alternative media by way of addressing the loopholes and gaps that make it appear too broad. The editors and participants of these case study publications, certainly demonstrate a sense of awareness that their spaces of expression are in the fringes of the general public and it is in this space that they feel a sense of belonging and thus a certain level of emancipation due to the fact that they can be critical and oppositional, eccentric and unconventional as a collective.

5

Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer the question: How are online publications, *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* representative of alternative media in democratic South Africa? As noted in the introductory section of the study, in as much as these publications' publishing activities are concerned with contesting mainstream discourses – like the alternative media of the pre-democratic era in South Africa – the foundations of their critiques lay in their concerns about the inclusion of their particular viewpoints within the broader South African society's public consciousness and thus for the democratic representation of their lived experiences. Therein lies one of the distinguishing factors between current and past alternative media publications. Whereas pre-democratic alternatives were concerned with a common *political* cause – fighting the nationalist

regime for its oppression of black South Africans, arguably from the position of a *collective* public sphere – the publications researched here while also oppositional, respond to the marginalisation of their own, various causes by forming community-based social spaces in the fringes of populist media.

On the other hand, a comparative interpretation also reveals their determination to publish independently as being rooted in a place of conflict. And not unlike the publishers that existed pre-democracy referred to by as Switzer (1997) as the "resistance press", the conflict being addressed by the subjects of this study, may be attributed to a need to fill a void created by the underrepresentation of a community's core values, interests and codes. The chapter on literature review described alternative media's subjective versus objective approaches, and discussed existing contestations around oppositional media. The former advances that alternative media be used as a tool to break down the barriers between producers and consumers of media not only as a form of resistance to the power and domination of the mass media system but also to democratise the media space and empower subordinated groups in an effort to effect social change. The objective approach meanwhile, argues that participation and active citizenship are not as crucial to alternative media as critical, counter-hegemonic discourses which, through proper structural organisation and leadership, can focus on combating socio-economic and political domination. In analysing the editorial positioning and the forms of participation taking place in the case studies, this research found that neither publication could be considered to fall under one or other – subjective or objective approaches of the alternative media genre – instead evaluations point to each being characterised, invariably, by a combination of these attitudes.

With regards to the structural formation and institutional media production processes espoused in the objective approach, both *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard* could be interpreted as having somewhat 'informal' approaches. Notwithstanding their fairly efficient operational methods, evidence suggests they are broadly subjective. A further indication of subjectivity in these alternative media is their deliberate inattention to editorial policies and principles. However, their choice instead to deal with underlying, core issues behind topics of discussions in a radical fashion, reflects them in the objective light.

Because of its proliferation and their capacity to "freely" access the social media space and, based on their own understanding of their role as alternative media, both *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard,* value the active participation that transpires as a part of their publishing activities. In the same vein, being critical is considered imperative to constructive debates, as we are able to determine through *Africa is a Country'*s Sean Jacobs' (2016) assertion that he wants "collaborators" to "keep thinking" and "to keep questioning what their argument is", as well as Thato Mogano (2015) whose response to criticism directed at *Vanguard* content is: "I appreciate that because it's just people who are very critical about what they consume" (2015). Much of this flexibility is demonstrated adequately through the publishers' radical response to power as reflected in (a) their positioning as independent platforms, (b) their in-depth and critical coverage of political content such as xenophobia and the Rhodes Must Fall protests, (c) their sizeable focus on 'grassroots' creative, cultural content and (d) the way which they move to elevate predominantly unheard voices in both socio-cultural and socio-political discourses.

Feeling marginalised in public discourses that are the focus of mainstream media, is primarily what drives these publications. They take a directly oppositional stance through their editorial positioning so as to contest populist media's "exclusionary" environment, but also as an emancipatory tool towards expressing the outlook they deem critical to their lived experiences as a community of "subordinated" people.

While it is the view of this study that the very foundations of the case studies are in direct response to the lack of diversity in media content in South Africa, I note that instead of attempting to be the platforms in which plurality is reflected, they are actively concerned with publishing content that supports their interests and interrogates their place in democratic society. It is primarily through this approach of organising themselves and their content that this research concludes that they have claimed the place of South Africa's counterpublic sphere – they are creating and occupying a space that legitimises and advances their causes, one that allows them to be oppositional without having to account for, cloak or justify their agency. There is no doubt that *Africa is a Country* and *Vanguard are* at the helm of a new kind of alternative media in South Africa.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: *Interview transcript with Vanguard magazine*

(www.vanguardmagazine.co.za)

Interviewee 1: Founder and editor, Panashe Chigumadzi (PC)

Interviewee 2: Marketing manager and contributor, Thato Magano (TM)

Type of interview: One on one Skype audio interview

Date recorded: November 18, 2015

Q: What kind of work went into launching Vanguard?

PC: A: So, it was one of those…because the initial ideal was to start it as a print thing but of course, (you know), didn't have the resources and having (also) worked in corporate and thinking about how business plans get approved, I thought I would never get myself money. So to go and prove there's this thing I have a hypothesis for first and then you can go and get an investor…It was literally after saving a bit of money and then putting together a website, getting someone to do that. It was a very different space then it is now. I remember speaking to people, going to Maboneng and saying, do you wanna do a My Fashion Week for Vanguard and looking for people who were

potential columnist such as Thato…I invited him to write for Vanguard after we had been having a conversation and we used to have regular columns and…we'd probably do maybe 12 pieces a week …or do things like three months in advance whereas now we do it like the day before (laughs). It was very basic, let's start with the mail (sic) newsletter…so Thato came in and I asked if he could help us with this or help us with that and he just overdid it.

Q: What goes into marketing a magazine that is so niche, because right now, Vanguard is considerably well-known. Every now and then I hear you on Power FM. It's like people are looking to you guys to speak on certain issues. How did you get to that point?

TM: What was interesting for me about Vanguard even before Panashe and I had become partners was the fact that we were creating a space that was unapologetically going to speak about the black condition and the condition of being black in this country. The condition of being black yet not being black enough but not also being white enough, so just like the people who are caught in the middle. So when we went out or when I went out and I started, I didn't do anything extraordinary, what I did was I followed the traditional marketing principles…but was resonated was here was a space that was unapologetic about what it is and was going to speak about what it is…people were hungry for something like that and that's what in the beginning that's what made Vanguard work…. We also did not want to be too radical and we wanna sugarcoat it a bit so we introduce people into the conversations around consciousness. But I think people were waiting for a media platform that was saying "we recognise the struggle that you are facing, we recognise the issues that you are contending with on the daily

basis as a black person who is somewhat middle class, who is somewhat socially and upwardly mobile but you still have to contend with the lived reality of being a black person in South Africa…who we have now become is embracing the spectrum of blackness.

Q: So it was fertile ground and you just needed to cultivate. Although I do think you are being modest.

TM: (laughs)

PC: We went to a lot of events, yo! I think what really helped was one, people think of you as a blog and you'll find that a lot of blogs that everyone likes is uploaded intermittently so we've been able over the last two years to be consistent. You'd get you newsletter regularly, then the radio thing helped a lot. We'd also go to different platforms like The Frank Talk with the Steve Biko Foundation, Live magazine. It was just a way to get ourselves out there … so like if there was a panel discussion you'd put your hand up and people would recognise that we had something to say. Just from a functional perspective, those things helped a lot to get it to where it is now.

Q: Do you see yourself as challenging conventional views in terms of how they report on issues?

PC: This space is very different from when we started…We have even changed how we define Vanguard. Now what you're seeing is that before you even get to write the piece there've been 140-character take downs of an issue, it's been problematised and dissected a 100 times on Twitter (shares some examples of "dissected" topics). We find that we're not as far from our readers as we might have been in the past.

TM: I think we cultivated trust. I think we were the ones first in the firing line, taking what would have been the knocks. I mean we were the first ones to critique Our Perfect Wedding when it was not the most expected thing for black audiences to do…so I think for those people who were feeling marginalised by what they were seeing out in media, they perhaps realized that this is a space where they can bring more of the critical conversations to the platform. Now we don't even have to write an article about an issue because there will someone who will say…this is a different thought that I had to the conversation that people were having and that trust was established.

Q: I think at the back of the mind of alternative media is a particular line of questioning and the fact that you would publish content deliberating about shows such as Our Perfect Wedding is probably what sets you apart from the other publication such as Chimurenga?

PC: I think for me it's that we're speaking to a particular group….we're speaking in particular to the post-apartheid beneficiaries, we are the born-free whereas Chimurenga is a much older audience, a lot more established and this is a space where…I mean I was not a feminist or a womanist when I started Vanguard. I just it was for black women but that's not the same thing as saying you're a feminist…it's a very different thing. And for me, how I got introduced to issues of intersectionality, privilege and all those things, was online through social media, through following interesting conversations, which is very different to the way Chimurenga started, they were print first whereas we are digital and that's how we were first available so I think it's a generational difference because as well it speaks to what our preoccupations are. Our preoccupations are a lot more sort of pop culture critique, that's where a lot of our focus is. We will comment about politics

but you're unlikely to see something about Nkandla for example. But it's more the socio-cultural criticism and pop-cultural criticism….we've started to critique from a class perspective…what does it mean to be middle class and black in South Africa…but what we find that there is an politics of who has a voice and around whose voice is legitimate. (…gives example about how some contributors felt their perspective were not valid). We are seeing a lot of platforms that have started after Vanguard because they see that their perspectives are valid and if they want to see something that's not out there, they can even write about it.

Q: How do you decide who contributes?

PC: It's open for people to write. Send the piece.

TM: *We don't choose who gets to write or we've developed into a space where we don't get to choose who gets to write. It's ultimately whether you submitted something that works within the narrative of what we are trying to say as a publication in its entirety….the project that we are on is the project of legitimizing ordinary voices… (makes example of how people have enjoyed the most unlikely content). We've created a space where blackness can say I'm a different type of black etc.*

Q: Would you regard the Black Twitter sphere as your biggest fans?

TM: The official answer is we don't know

PC: Black Twitter's do diverse though…there's so many of them

TM: There are no heroes in Black Twitter. There's a particular group of people who direct the conversation such as Bonang who is not a god on Black Twitter because even though people respect her hustle etc., they also critique her without crushing the space that she holds within this conception of black success. I've seen even us when we're

being problematic, people will say, you've missed the mark here but when we've done well, they'll say that was something spectacular and I appreciate that because it's just people who are very critical about what they consume and if we're taking about new narratives, creating alternative spaces and creating critical readers, then people must be more critical.

Q: Do you use analytics and if so how? Do you respond to your audience engagement based on these?

PC: It's not an exact science…there's no advertising, there's no income that comes from Vanguard which is why we can have the attitude that we have because first of all it's a labour of love…Thatho check analytics from time to time..

TM: Initially, we used to check every week, we were very interested in the project of capitalizing the magazine and then our stubbornness of remaining true to what the magazine was, we consider it a non-committal sacrificial space. What we know inherently is that the market is there…people's surprisingly positive response to Vanguard tells us that if we are concerned about page views then we are limiting ourselves, we wouldn't be true to what we are doing.

PC: For me, in terms of picking what to write about is basically social media monitoring and conversation monitoring. We gauge what is on people's minds and we do an issue on that. The difficulty with Vanguard is that the kind of content makes people digest it first but people do not respond immediately. Some things are very slow burn…we try and the metrics that we use is we try and gauge social relevance i.e. do people engage and you're not gonna get that kind of thing from clicks…both virtual social places as physical. For example conversations I hear on campus play a role.

Q: How do you see yourselves as different to alternatives that came before you?

PC: There tends to be a distinctive style that we've cultivated….it's also young people who are using the word intersectionality, privilege in South Africa. There's a particular lexicon of young black people who are so-called 'woke' on Twitter. I think what we've cultivated is…Biko theories etc. are important so when we call for writers we don't want a thesis about what the black man needs to do…but what does it mean for you on a Monday morning (gives examples). We ask you to declare yourself because essayist need to be honest. From the style perspective we're very interested in the "I" but for the purposes of the collective.

Q: Would you define your audience as being marginalised or as "the other"?

TM: I would say that we are speaking to a particular group of people but who do fit in with the rest and I would say that Vanguard also is that way. In as much as it is niche, it is also mainstream (makes examples of pieces of content reflecting content of interest to different groups), there's something for someone, not just the highbrow.

Q: Let me play the devil's advocate here. You used the word "highbrow". One might perceive the way your style of writing as being very intellectual and in that sense you likely appeal to a certain, perhaps academic group of people. How do you respond to that?

TM: I agree with you but even this particular group of people, I don't want to limit to these specific conversations…we always try to be as balanced as possible around what is the hard-hitting kind of conversation that we want people to start or what is a conventional topic that we want to tackle in a particular Vanguardian sort of way.

PC: Let me come in here (to say) they are marginalised in the sense that the mainstream media does not speak to their perspectives, for example, you're black middle class but the point is that the kind of conversations they are having are generally not reflected in media. Even when we talk about how Fees Must Fall is covered, the media doesn't see them as human…

Q: Do you consider yourselves as activists?

PC: We're saying you've spoken about the black condition but what now what are you gonna do about it…we don't want it to be abstract so maybe it's a mild form of activism.

TM: There's always a "call to action". We've articulated the issue and the issue is what must happen who can do what? I suppose more personal advocacy. You're supposed to sit with the article and think, individually, what are you going to do with this information?

Q: What are your views on South Africa's democracy?

TM: The investment in the liberal understanding of democracy is what I find problematic about the way South Africa has constructed itself in the past twenty-one years. The constitution is one of the most problematic documents that we have in this country because it continues to insure that black people in this country remain marginalised and so I keep saying to people that I am not a beliver in the democracy project…especially now what's happening with Fees Must Fall protest and the state's response to it because protest is the way for people to demand attention from the centres of power, and so how the state responds to that is a result of the functioning of the democratic project and how its ability to react in that way is protected by the constitution. There's a

lot of things that we must dissect and question about the democratic project and who it seeks to affirm dignity for.

PC: The main thing for me is there's more concern over that than students being rubber-bulleted…a black body has been brutalized, that's not an issue and at the core of our democracy and our constitution is the protection of white property specifically. That's the crux of the negotiation settlement which is to say you can maintain your ill-gotten wealth and we'll just provide access to services to blacks and we're seeing that the protection of that property is more important that black life in South Africa. I think our democracy is very anti-black and anti-black woman.

Q: Are you saying the slave has learnt to emulate the master?

PC: They do embody that but they have just outsourced the security guard role to black people as we were able to see in Marikana. They are more the 'security guard' more than them being the new masters.

Q: Please share your views about South Africa's current media landscape?

TM: I self-elected out of TV about three years ago, I hardly read the newspapers, I mostly read online where I can curate for myself what I want to consume. The troubling thing about South African media, particularly, in as much as there has been access, it still works within the white supremacist framework of what blackness is or should be. Things like Our Perfect Wedding, deeply problematic…

PC: The word for it in the industry is "kaffir content", it's the stuff where they're gonna make us laugh etc. All this stuff that does not contextualize it in the socio-economic landscape to talk about oh! We don't have black fathers but we don't talk about migrant labourers.

TM: Idols is a perfect example of what happens when people have access but over the past four years has consistently moved being as South African as it can but ultimately the construction of an Idol is still determined by how well does the person who wins the competition fit within a Eurocentric notion of what an idol is so the person must be able to sing pop music, wear the coolest clothes, all these things that are determined by a very Eurocentric way of being in the world…you have to look at what works, just being borrowed overseas and sprinkled with a little bit of blackness.

PC: You just have to look at the issue of ownership, we don't own the majority of media. The person who owns black media is Basetsana Khumalo but she gives us "kaffir content" so for me it's a question of the decolonization of the media and no, that hasn't happened at all.

Q: Would you consider advertising on site?

PC: We have considered it about the focus has been the content so we have a lot of different things so the admin and logistics of it have not allowed.

Q: Do you have any final comments?

TM: I think one of the things that has been one of my greatest joys and pleasures in working on Vanguard and with Panashe has been our commitment towards not pathologising the experience of being black. There's always that consciousness that the experience of being black in kaffir media for example is something that is created by people on our behalf. We demand that we are contextualized into space and memory and that we are always conscious of those things and when people read critically, there are reasons why things happened. It's also about treating our audience with the same level of respect and saying we also understanding the experience.

PC: What I can for myself is that Vanguard has been very personally transformative for me. It's not the space it was when we first started, nor am I. I think it speaks to an evolution over time. We've always been clear that we're not here to provide the answers but for the exploration and Vanguard has pushed and stretched me in ways that I've never been pushed and stretched before so I will always appreciate my experience with Vanguard for that. We'll continue and see where it takes us.

---ENDS---

APPENDIX B: ***Interview transcript with Africa is a Country***

Interviewee: Founder and chief editor, Sean Jacobs

Type of interview: One on one Skype audio interview

Date recorded: November 18, 2015

Q: What are you views of South Africa's current media landscape especially with regards to content?

A: So South Africa's media landscape is again here. It's not exceptional. It's a typical liberal democratic landscape in which you favour or emphasise private media, *the* summary should be like the saviour of democracy kind of like the 4th estate and I think there's definitely well, the state I think undermines public media. And then I think, within the media, mainstream media in South Africa, the mainstream press there's a hostility to public media and so if you look for example in the way, I you know also, this is also about quality of that. So these things are linked to the quality of the SABC, undermined by the state but it also its also treated hostile in the public press which favours private media and I think that's for example in the way of for example South Africans relate to like eNCA as opposed to SABC when SABC is still the primary source for peoples news whether it's on the radio, in particular, or on television, but its I think its undermined, treated as hostile. The print media is very much, I think is linked to your next question with regard to transformation. The print media is, it has black editors, you know, well although more recently at a number of publications where black editors have left they've hired white editors again and somebody also pointed out curiously no woman, less black woman in particular, but the print media in South Africa is very much in line

with liberal democratic politics, it's very straight down the line and not very adventurous. And even the media that sold the former media that the English media that was tied to white English capital, I think to some extent they may deny that but that's very much still their politics the vantage point that they report. Afrikaans media plays a much more interesting game it's global, these are the Afrikaans firms like Naspers,Media24 ,they think of themselves as global media firms but at the same time they are still very much tied up in the project of Afrikaner nationalism although they've they've expanded that project now to include other people. The former alternative media in South Africa like the *Mail & Guardian* they moved I think now to centre right, I mean the *Mail & Guardian*, it reports about the DA I think it's obsessed with having the politics of the DA and I think what may come across as being critical might in some senses be more sort of strategic. It is trying to the DA like, "how it can do better" you know I think that's sort of … and it's obsessed with corruption within the state. So the standard I think is very low, writing; the journalism I think it's really bad. On my annual visits to South Africa and again, you know, my my I read it online but when you there I actually buy newspapers because that's what people do and you can actually see that the standard of reporting whether it's the Star or the Argus or the Natal Witness etcetera. The standard I think is quite low. There are exceptions I think, Business Day, it's like a paper of record again it's in a context, where there's a very low standard it's still a paper of record. It does contain ,you know, some voices out of left field like Steve Friedman but in general maximum of the reporting even from black thinkers whether it's like Justice Malala or or somebody else, it would be sort of BEE-rate stuff you'd read anywhere else and there's very little original thinking. There is actually outside of that mainstream media and this goes to

another question that you are asking right under that; are there media in South Africa that you consider alternative and critical and why? I think, in a sort of a very desert-like atmosphere for good media. I think in the main stream, so I mentioned the Business Day; I also think City Press for all the faults and the politics of its editor, it's actually not a bad newspaper in the way that it attempts to to cover South Africa in its totality or to capture like an energy of South Africa. So I mean it is caught up in for example that it belongs to Media24 and Naspers so there's a lot of cross hibernation like in which for example the same content is carried in Rapport in Afrikaans gets translated to City Press in English. So the same reporters mostly Afrikaner reporters you'd see their names in the Rapport and you see their name in City Press. The stories change slightly but much of the the much of it is the same work. So but nevertheless, I think City Press tries through some of the, you know, deeply opinions that it runs and some of the reporting it it does a little better but it's not great. I think that the sort of underfunded things that are online like *The Con* I think probably, so I should mention before I say that that I think also that the *Mail & Guardian* is a disappointment, but it has been for like a while *The Con* is very interesting and I think it is something to watch for, should be supported and given money. *Daily Vox*, to some extent it has its limitations. It came of age certainly during the student protests. Its opinion articles is hit and miss.
"The Con" is way better it has a really, and its actually these journalists ,right, that come out of the *Mail & Guardian*, Yenolusi Sebo, Percy Umoya, who came together and I think produce this really good almost kind of reportage and analytical journalism on what is going on in South Africa right now. So you find again you know, like all sites that are underfunded they help putting a lot of content where sometimes you would hope

they could've edited it better, but for me right now I would say something like "The Con" is really good for South Africa.

Q: In what way is your content alternative to the mainstream?

A: I think I have answered that already in the way that I said we try to be more analytical to try understand these things less as sort of these discrete events to link them together so in a way for example we thought and written about Julius Malema. I think the way we've written about nelson Mandela, about the South African economy, about, you know, pop music whether it's the phenomenon like Die Antwoord or the direction of hip hop in South Africa or film. I think everybody praised it and we find an actual media scholar like a scholar of Nigerian media who's based at the city, University of New York, Queens College and got him to do a piece that was that was not just about "the con" tent of the film but also have a film that represented something. Debates about like distribution and exhibitions' of African conflicts and stuff

Q: In what way is your publication dissimilar to the alternative media of the apartheid media era?

A: *These things are different,* of course. I mean we're not operating under conditions of censorship. State racism, dictatorship. I think secondly we are not subject…the advances in technology means that we can bypass censorship there's a way ,you know, we could bypass that kind of censorship that alternative media faced in South Africa. We are not just South African you know, like most things in South Africa. I think we tried to break out of that and to be more interested in South Africa's place in the world. In terms of our coverage of RhodesMustFall, I don't know you'd have to ask the people who read that coverage. I will say in October, I think it was, around October when the

Washington Post did on one of their blogs, the monkey cage blog, they did a big sort of piece on what and who to follow on RhodesMustFall and we were pretty high up that ladder and linked to that, a plug that the way that we particularly covered debates about the nature of the university, you know, the nature of a post-colonial university. Debates about black pain between *Achille Mbembe and Thando Ndluwani* or the essay, you know the film that we made, I think we broke a lot with this kind of episodic coverage, even these essay writer at beginning of FeesMustFall second phase, you know, after students returned back and made it about fees and not just about issues round representation and statues but actual kind of material conditions. I think we did really well in in helping people make sense of that and then linking those moments to things outside South Africa...I think that's something else we did.

Q: What defined your coverage of the xenophobic violence?

A: There I think we ran one or two things ummmmm but we ran them mostly…we've ran previously about xenophobic violence in South Africa. I mean I've written about it not just in Africa is a Country but in The Guardian. *Suren Pillay* wrote a really long piece for us on the nature of kind of xenophobic violence and then a fellow editor, Dan Magaziner and myself, we wrote a piece for the New York times in which we traced a lot of the violence to sort of to the deals of the political negotiations of the early 1990s, and the return of the traditional leadership and Jacob Zuma championing of certain native politics and to elevate figures like you know King Goodwill Zwelethini who was a compromised political figure in the homeland system. Very conservative and you know, I think what we did is to move away again I say again we interested in…we are not a newspaper, we are not…we are not doing like that first draft of history that kind of way

that journalism things would sell…we're more interested asking like okay what is going on here? I think that that's how the coverage of xenophobic violence was

Q: What's your publications contribution to democracy in South Africa?

A: Okay so I you can hear from earlier answers, I don't mind blowing my own horn but I think again with this question I think you should ask other people.

Q: How do you choose your contributors?

A: If you want organic. It's a collective but a lot of the proposed contributors are often people I spot or people other members of the editorial committee (there's 8 people in our editorial committee) would recommend. They have a say or they would recommend people but a lot of that decision like political leadership is still very much with me and helping to shape that.

Q: How do you deal with submissions that are not aligned to your vision for the publication?

A: Perhaps it's that if it happens like it did sometime in the past we create a debate around it but I think that the point about "Africa as a Country" is that it's left. It's a left wing publication so am not publishing. I am not gonna publish right wing stuff ,am not gonna publish centre stuff that can be published somewhere else. I am not publishing any of those things because they can be published somewhere else and this doesn't mean am censoring…it already exists somewhere else.

Q: what kind of politicized content is published in your paper or in your in your website?

A: It's inherently everything we publish is political, whether we write about music, whether we write about film whether we write about…the web, whether we write about politics we think its ummmmm critical

Q: How do you fund the publication?

A: Mostly, its free labour like myself and the editors they all do free labour. We only pay one of our people. We paying a stipend to a managing editor. He gets a monthly stipend and then we've ran in the past really small or sort of medium ranged sort of sponsored content. Well, that's not the right word, but we make an agreement with somebody, Al Jazeera, the group called Africa for Norway, where we work with them and edit. We have editorial control around finding like through a submission process contributors to write about a theme, so whether it will be the world cup in Brazil, here we work with Al Jazeera on a series called *32 fans 32 nations* or whether it was a series with Africa for Noise, the Scandanavian African students group where we found people to all write about kind of know developmental and advertising and images of Africa. We found the writers we published it and then they paid the writers but we're responsible more for the editorial. Then we have one sponsorship…a once off…..sponsorship….where the Shuttleworth foundation, which as a South African foundation, gave us a small grant to help us pay for some of the website, designs, buying like recording equipment and paying stipend for our managing editor.

Q: What kind of engagement do you get on social media?

A: I mean, actually I think that makes us unique from other sites that do the same kind of work we do. It's that we really value and cultivate our profile on Twitter. I mean we just go to town I would say more than when we publish something, we really use

Facebook. We have a Facebook page and I think about now more than fifty four thousand subscribers or likes. And then on Twitter, we have about almost seventy two thousand followers. and those are, you know, that's not something to to pretend is not there so we very aware of the power of those of social media pages and we kind of use it to good effect to…to promote the content we produce whether it be it would live tweeting an event or promoting the writing of our editors who contributed to outside of "Africa as a Country" or stuff that they…they published on "Africa as a Country".

Q: Do you use analytics as a guide?

A: No; we don't use analytics to tell us what to publish. We are aware of analytics, we do check it because we also try to, we are hoping to find people to advertise with us and for that you need it…we've gotten some money, small money, out of advertising it, by the way, is a part of the answer about funding the publication. So some really minimal income for advertising. But analytics doesn't drive like the kind of content we run because our project is a political project and is not guided by that kind of consideration.

Q: Do you think South Africans in general are interested in reading critical comment?

A: Yeah they are. I mean, whether it's someone that visits in South Africa or the…the emails we get or the fact that outside of the united states, South Africa is our second largest ,you know, following both for our …our what we write about.. Or what we put on social media. I think I've answered that question before why, it's because South African media is so poor. I mean whatever topic, when the way South African media covers race they call race if they call racial violence. What do they call it? They refer to it as a controversy or incident, you know, rather they calling it what it is, and I think, because

we call things what they are, people are more happy to listen and see what we have to say.

Q: Why have I chosen the online space to publish?

A: Because it costs money to produce ummmmm you know physical magazines and physical newspapers. We are getting into the… we are contemplating ,we actually discussing ,its now ,you know, its early 2016,but we are talking about partnering with a publishing house and an existing ummmmm people who've already ran a left wing magazine for us produce our own,but when we use the online space its free and its immediate.

Q: What are the stories that have received the most engagement?

A: If you know "Connie 2012" was on at a big moment,"FeesMustFall"…. let me look quickly, "Township of Tours" because it's a very popular thing in South Africa historical figures particularly our writings about *"Franz Fanon"* when we write about south African liberals; when we cover elections…when we…you know it depends on the moment. I think it's more driven by people talking about a particular thing at a particular time and for those reasons something gets traction.

Q: Do I see myself as the voice of the marginalised?

A: I know I have a big head *chuckle* but I would never do that. One of the things that I always say is that I don't claim to speak for anybody, I just claim to speak for myself and for the editorial committee and maybe if I wanted to be ambitious for a set of ideas, I do not want to speak with people but I speak of a for a set of ideas that is not represented or is marginalised in talks and writings and depictions in and about Africa.

Q: Finally, are you satisfied with the current reach your publication and would you improve it?

A: Simple straight forward answer…you know…am happy where we are. But I also think we can improve it by infusion of, you know, more young people more talent. I'm trying to bring in more Africans both people living here in the diaspora, people living on the continent, but myself am deeply favouring people who grew up or have experience living under an African government. So i am really pushing for that and when the publication has people from all kinds of background but I think I am getting more and more obsessed with by providing space for young Africans. I mean I am not a kid anymore. I am now entering middle age, I am over forty. So for me, you know, it is important that we try to think about generation that come after this. Now by the time they do this, you know, "Africa as a Country" may not exist and there might not be a need for it; but in helping them to figure it out, I think that would be my job. Yeah, I would like for more people to read more on what we are doing. We want to produce books. We are producing books. We want to produce a magazine, that's something, a print magazine because that brings for us some of our readers a kind of prestige. But I think at heart we really want to remain online. I've even noticed we've published…we don't publish as much on the website anymore as we did in the old days but we publish a lot on Twitter and on Facebook .

ENDS

APPENDIX C: ***Interview transcript with Africa is a Country***

Interviewee: Founder and chief editor, Sean Jacobs

Type of interview: One on one Skype audio interview / Recorded by interviewee

Date recorded: February 7, 2015

Sean Jacobs: This is a recording for Nontobeko Zuma. So, I'm just going to answer the questions. I may not answer all the questions but I'll try my best.

So the first question:

Q: What inspired the establishment of Africa is a Country?

A: In short, it's because I'm in training. I'm a political scientist and a media scholar, so it made sense. And this is the second factor. While I was a migrant, an African immigrant in the United States…to respond the kinds of images that were circulating about Africans, particularly South Africa in US media. And when I say South Africa, I mean that sort of drumbeat reconciliation talk…everything's wonderful, apartheid's over, they've reconciled, everything's great. And going back and forth to South Africa and realising that's not the case, I wanted to correct that. I also travelled to southern Africa and in west Africa, I had been to Senegal so I had seen real life being conquered, people were living real lives and not just sort of getting covered once in a while and then, that depicts them. So I wanted to counter that. And then also, there's a long history of African media production that I wanted to bring into the mix. So, I would say

being a media scholar, after 911, being an African in America. And then I think the most two other factors that I think….one is that; it was the Blogging Revolution so when I started Africa is a Country, I think it's 2005, although I was already blogging in 2004 on Google's Blogger was you know, blog, the blogging revolution, that blogging had suddenly become accessible, self-publication had become an accessible thing so it was the right time to do it. And I think finally, it was really a response to what I think an obsession with development speak. With America's interest in Africa or when it came to like, Britain's interest in Africa or France's interest in Africa and wanting to shape, well, I would say shape or shift that conversation, saying actually you know what, actually, there's a long history that's interesting of politics and things going on in the African continent.

Q: Why was it named Africa is a Country?

A: It started off really by having a different name. It was called Leo Africanus, it was a reference to an interesting figure from the 16th century who had written a book called 'The Description of Africa', [it] became interested in how Europeans understood Africa for a long while after that…but that was a mix of kind of anecdote, criticism, irreverent reporting, embellishment and that was what it was and I think for a long time, that's all I wanted to do, 2005 till roughly about 2009, when it was just an obscure little blog, telling people about interesting things to read, links to stuff, a little bit of media criticism, some sort of like, in the style of that time. A lot of like personal reminiscence like "Hey, I'm off to the Bronx Zoo and this is what the African village looks like. You know, something like that if I go with my kids. And I think Africa's a Country thing happened once I realized [sort of, you know] in 2008 that I had become what was, you know, I'm self-

indulgent now…that it was being taken seriously as a piece of media criticism. I thought I need a different name, something that's obscure. It just so happened that many of the writing, many of the utterances, many of the commentary of sort of famous people, celebrities, even ordinary people would talk about Africa in a film or in a documentary or in a newspaper article or somewhere online and treat it like it was – particularly groups of people who would go there to do volunteer work - one country. And [I kind of] it came out of that and I called it Africa is a Country. But I think the name stuck in my head and I think it worked for me. To be honest, I think it's because I knew it was something that could become viral and it fitted very well with the tone of the site which was sort of mocking not necessarily reverent but at the same time trying to be very serious.

Q: What kind of work went into launching the publication?

A: That's easy. My own unpaid work. It was just me. I didn't think of it as work, because reading in media….at that time there wasn't much media on Africa, enough to like cover an African country or make a general comment about Africa. Say once every week and a half, at a time. If it wasn't about war and terror, it wasn't about oil or if it wasn't about, you know, sort of confirming civil war or confirming violence or something like that, it would be this kind of very decontextaulised reporting and so it was manageable. I did my tour, I'd teach university and used some downtime. I probably should have written a book but I, I decided, later. But I spent it more just pouring through media, particularly media about music, culture, I love music, I love movies, particularly African films, African music so it was just a thing that I could, you know, I would see and kind of report on it like one hour every day…I would read something on the bus or the train and the rest …came from people who would send me stuff. (Because) after a while when the site

had followers and people reading it, people would actually send me things that they would want me to talk about. So now to the next question…

Q: What kind of content do you publish?

A: We publish like a mix of opinion and analysis. We also, I think that people should also not make distinctions between what is a blog and what we do on Facebook and what we do on Twitter so a lot of what we do, I think, consider it like, we do education, we do like hashtags, like 'know your history', like Black history month… we let's recall some great men or women, influential people, be it historical figures. We definitely, in terms of ideological content, I would say we are left wing. I mean I'm very much sort of South African left winger, I suppose. So a lot of the coverage is very, the perspective comes from the left. There's many people on the blog who are…not everybody's South African, some people are from family backgrounds like…Zambia, Malawi, Senegal, Algeria so everybody brings their own kind of experience and their own ideological idiosyncrasies to the project. But I think the main crux of it, the direction, comes from me. Then we also have other projects like "Latin America is a Country' which is a separate slightly, which is run most on Facebook and something called Football is a Country…Let me finish my other point about the distinction between the places where we publish. We do a lot of work on Twitter, you know, hashtag Twitter University, new books, we live tweet events like, you know, is there's a talk or something, we live tweet it. With Twitter University, for example, we send like where we tell people, here are some interesting academic literature if you don't know about, you should read so we produce a radio programme, we produce, videos. Probably our most successful video about FeesMustFall – 11 minutes, put together by a team based in South Africa, in

different places…Rhodes in Grahamstown, Pietermaritzburg and using lots of bureau, secondary material by other producers, journalists, freelancers to cut together a programme on how we felt or what we thought were the important issues that needed to come out of that struggle. You know, suddenly when you look at that programme on race and gender, all the people speaking in that video were mostly women, black women at that and they spoke from the motherland campuses, not UCT or Wits but they spoke to you from Grahamstown and the images came from UWC so we try to like, you know, show more than the kind of images that we were getting in the mainstream media. We cover debates. Whether those are debates about Israel and …to apartheid, whether it's about Nigerian democracy or trade unionism, you know, it gets a bunch of people together to debate a particular issue. Ahain, I think Fees Must Fall was a pivotal one, the burial and death of Nelson Mandela was also very interesting because we came with like, from, you know, came at it differently while other people did just like hagiographies of Mandela, we did something different.

Q: Who are you targeted at?

A: I'd say primarily, we're talking to elites. I mean, I make no bones about that we're not talking to like the mass. We're talking to elites, journalists, people who run opinion pages…African elites in particular and westerners, people from elsewhere. We're interested also in African issues, I think we want them to read us. Intellectuals, students and academics.

Q: Do you have preferences in so far as who reads or comments of your stories?

A: Nope, you know, we did for a while. We shut down our comments because we would get hate mail, offensive comments and conspiracy theorists and all kinds of other crazies but then we've opened up the comments again to allow people to comment on stories.

Q: You claim to challenge conventional views. What do you consider to be conventional views?

A: I mean, mainstream. You know the sort of consensus round globalization, the consensus around neo-liberalism, the consensus around democracy, the consensus around "there is no other way" which is sort of like the ….that is manifest in South Africa. It's GEAR, it's black empowerment, sort of, politics of rights in South Africa because the politics of rights and the idea of rights is very mainstream. You know human rights, not the right to water, not the right to electricity, not the right to descent schools. So that's what we're challenging, challenging the sort of consensus around the empty rhetoric of pan-Africanism, the sort of whether we can see some of the dangers and not the dangers of African nationalism. We're against forums of this kind of glib, Afropolitan stuff. The Africa Rising literature because none of these things actually gel with reality. We're always skeptical if somebody is celebrated in the west (laughs). It doesn't always happen but that happens in most instances.

Q: What are your views of South Africa's democracy?

A: I mean South African democracy is incomplete. It's in effect liberal democracy. What South Africa experiences basically political freedom in terms of people's access to political representation, it's incomplete. It's obvious that democracy didn't, doesn't come

with or democracy doesn't give you economic freedom but it provides a means for the forum…

Q: (Interviewee speaks on South Africa's public sphere)

A: It's not super theoretical because it tries to look at the protests, you know, the student protests. And how the media in South Africa covered it and did not cover it. And one of the sort of the implicit arguments of that piece is…before I answer your question, I'm saying we should also question so if we construct the idea of a public sphere in South Africa and then I suppose what we then mean by counterpublic. Although I've written a lot of academic stuff about the idea of the public sphere in South Africa, I would actually reject that there is a public sphere in South Africa. There is an inherited public sphere which was a public sphere that was very limited and that was created for white South Africans and then on the margins of that public sphere there existed publications, you know, these were mostly like print and the radio, which was dominated by the SABC which is the state broadcaster. But I think it has never been allowed to succeed and we can go into those reasons why. But the SABC has never been an actual public sphere. The SABC more than any other institution in South Africa of the inherited public sphere, I think they, for a very short time, tried to do the job of a proper public sphere. There are many reasons why they didn't. Some people might say it's because Thabo Mbeki, the ANC begins to I'm gonna put the word "interfere" (in quotes) or it might have nothing to do with the ANC but perhaps to do with the fate of all public broadcasters, that all around the world, governments invest less money in a public broadcaster. You see, for example, etv which, you know it's okay but they replace the SABC as sort of a primary space where people watch the news, rather than if you want to get more informed, then

watch the SABC is still very much the primary source of news in South Africa for most South Africans even if they have problems with it. So when I talk about print, I'm saying, if you say about public sphere in South Africa, the inherited media, the black media if you want to use that, terminology about South Africa is always complicated but these things are clear, there was a media created for black South Africans. That media existed on the margins and that media often to those companies, those legacy companies like Naspers owned like City Press, Sowetan was partly owned by Independent and then you have Daily Sun. So, you have this inherited public sphere that has black media operating on its margins. You then have that media, again in quotes, transform itself where maybe half of those media now have black editors, they have mostly black journalists. But the trouble is they are commercial enterprises but like all commercial enterprises, they care about audiences for advertisers. You know, who's the best audiences for advertisers in South Africa? It's still predominantly white South Africa. So what they think is news – and this is not just talking about high news – this is also talking about news…how they write about the past, how they write about laws, how they write about hopes for the future, I think it's still heavily inflected by the anxieties of white South Africa. You know for better or worse. Similarly, how they write about arts, how they write about sports – rugby, cricket, whatever. So when you say public sphere in South Africa, I think we have to first interrogate just at an empirical level what that means in a place like South Africa. I don't think a public sphere exists in South Africa. What has however happened I think is outside of that dominant media in South Africa, which is generally…I want to be careful to not say it's entirely liberal but it's a sort of centre right liberal politics…if you look historically when there's an election in South

Africa, and you see who the newspapers endorse during an election. 94, I think, it's less than one percent of all the publications…I think it's only the *Mail and Guardian* saying people should vote for the ANC and then the Sowetan said people should vote for black political parties. I think by 99, you replicate much of that same thing but then Business Day people decides people should vote for UDM or something like that. But in general, South African newspapers may not be overly DA but their views sort of line up with liberal politics, free markets, no state interference etc. So, if you're just using the vote, the public sphere in South Africa does not even line up with the views of the majority or even if you want to be more generous, or even the plurality, in other words the 50 plus 1 (percent) of the people in South Africa. So, just on the basis of voting on the racial representation on who owns them, how they transform, I don't think there is a public sphere in South Africa. What is there when you say there's a counterpublic, offline, I think what happened in South Africa is that people realized that the SABC is never going to, because it doesn't have the money like I said, it's subject to interference, it has become interested in getting more audiences for advertisers and that the South African press, in blunt terms you know, that's now Independent Newspapers, which had a weird relationship with the ANC but the printed press is not going to be transformed. But so, I think what's happened more recently in South Africa – like the student protests gave like some sense of it, is that more and more people are just gonna cast aside that press. They are going to reject that press. And I can't say that for the mass of South Africans but I can say that for elites. It's obvious that South African elites don't trust, or have any, particularly black people, have any confidence in that media. And I think the student protests in which people, and if you follow the student protests, you will notice that

probably the most reliable media in that area was social media. So self-publishing, towards people sharing long posts that they would just write without editing them, like stream of consciousness posts of what was happening to them around the campus or how people would work out ideological disputes at Wits, say between different factions on the SRC, the relationship between say Wits students and TUT students. None of that texture of that stuff has been captured in the mainstream press. Stellenbosch University and outsourcing, none of that stuff would be captured in the mainstream press in South Africa. Instead it was being covered on that I don't think was created for that, *Twitter* and *Facebook*. People would just like put videos up, write little articles etc. So, I think that's what happened there. I think more formally, the *Daily Vox*, I think you should, I don't know if you're looking at them. What they did was to emerge as a kind of, almost like a newspaper. Their opinion articles, and this is just my personal opinion, I don't think their opinion is as good as the ability to in real time, cover a protest that nobody else was covering or give a voice to the bidders of those protests the way that the mainstream media couldn't achieve. So I think like part of that story that you need to like, figure out. I also think for better or worse because it's problematic, the *Daily Maverick* and another website called *Politics Web*, I don't know if you know those two website (Responds: "I do"). *Politics Web*, I think is founded by this white guy who comes from the Democratic Alliance… he just published everything, regardless of the politics – the left or the right. And then there's a small website that I think comes out of the differences between the ANC and the EFF, I think it's called like *Politiki* and they just publish like statements, opinion editorials, sometimes things that are bordering on slander but they put all that stuff online. So I just wanted to make a shoutout to those

things before I talk about *Africa is a Country* because I think it's very important to recognise that if there is a counterpublic emerging in South Africa, the foremost statement is that it doesn't have a home yet. It's purely just sort of like people posting their stuff sometimes from Business Day or IOL but giving it their own spin by writing their little intro on their Facebook page or on Twitter, sort of like in real time just giving their opinion. Like a photograph, they chose a photograph and start debating or talking around the photograph, that's the first one. The second one, I think is to look at something like the Daily Vox. And then I think is to look at something more ambiguous or problematic like the Daily Maverick, which is still a kind of space for the sort of white opinion but it's not exactly that. It's still sort of ah, like the said, there's people there, there's also kind of a spectrum that's sort of left to right or new kind of thing. So what's what the point of? so that was the long run (laughs)…okay, okay.

So, how does Africa is a Country fit into all of that? So firstly, I'm South African so that is my role in my thinking about my own place in relationship to the public sphere. I know that your work is primarily about South Africa. I founded Africa is a Country mainly as a site for being an African immigrant living in New York city, sort of early 2000s when there was an explosion of the Internet, you know, blogs, personal blogs and initially, my idea was to engage with a North American audience and with decontextualized reporting, analysis and their failure to, you know they would render like Africans, flat or how they fit into certain narratives here in the North. Like what is an Afropolitan, is Africa rising and you know, that kind of crap. So I was responding at first to that sort of discourse that was going on around here and I think secondly, I was responding to how

the big media, the prominent media - New York Times is probably the most important here, the Wall Street Journal and television which operates on a more popular level, whether it be CNN, you know with pretensions of being a global media outlet or whether it is ah, kind of local television … specialty programmes like 60 Minutes or CBS or Fox. I was interested in how they cover Africa, what kind of exposure was circulating in the North. And because I was from South Africa, I was particularly obsesses with what people were saying in South Africa. Now, that meant, again, how people here were writing about South Africa. The Internet like everything else – because I started the another site in 2005 because Africa is a Country only started in 2009 and that moment also coincided with a change in kind of how we source news or also, to be frank, like the self-proliferation, I think in places like South Africa, a celebration of blogs also. Initially, mostly like blogs by white South Africans blogging about wine and rugby and when South African newspapers began to go online. Like they started putting everything that they had online. News 24, which I think for better or worse, is ahead of the curve when it comes to Internet in South Africa, like the way that they talke all the copy from the different publications from that company and put them on one website and then, they have these other where you pay a subscription fee and then you get some of their news. I think they were like ahead of everybody else on doing that. So that meant, and this is now getting to point of how I started getting more interested, coz for a while I think I was not interested in the colder detail coming from South Africa. But now everything coming out of South Africa was now more dispersed, I could read that in New York and complemented by the base of Twitter, complemented by Facebook, it meant that I couldn't just write about what people here were saying about South Africa,

but I also had to ask 'what are South Africans saying?' I can't just pretend that they are not saying anything because they're on the web too. And that's when we became more involved with trying to explain not just o our audiences here but it's also for what I felt – given that long kind of intro I gave you – were some of the problems with the South African public sphere. I would say, it started slowly by…but this then also coincides with me beginning to see, okay, there are people in South Africa that I can ask to write and explain things and these people ca write both for a local audience, they can also write for an audience here in the United States. You know people like Sisonke Msimang, I don't know if you know her (responds: "Yes, I do") or T.O. Molefe, he's a South African writer. So I can go to people like that and say 'Can you write about this thing but make it eligible?' I mean not that I was like still training them, they were writing, smart writers. You could go to them and you could assume that what they would write would gain traction within South Africa. So I think, it sort of generally started with the 2009 election, then the election in 2014, the changes within the ANC, the ANC making a full transition from being an operation to being now it's just a conventional political part. The fact that people that people realized that…that moment, that thing where we believed that the ANC would be sort of the repository that they would carry our hopes that they would carry our hopes, that's not gonna happen, that's over. I think that's where *Africa is a Country* would play a role and it's small, I'm not saying we're changing the world. I would say with the student protest, we also began to claim a space that okay, something is happening in South Africa. And it's also because I experienced it I real time. I was following the student protest, I realized that that I had not looked at a South

African newspaper. With Rhodes Must Fall, it felt like the mainstream had a relationship with

Q: ***Who are some of Africa is a Country's contributors?***

These are black middle-class people…they can actually engage directly with the language of power, the terms of power, the lexicon of power. They know how to access the technology. They are dispersed, they're outside and they are not outside. They're in South Africa.

Q: Do you feel your audiences are somewhat on the margins of society?

I would say I've created a space in which those people…who can't write or say what they think in the mainstream, they know that there is a space for them in *Africa is a Country*… a lot of people feel they own the site and if we write certain things sometimes, they disagree with it, they are not happy with it. I think my thing is I want them to keep thinking. I don't want them to get too comfortable. I want them to like keep questioning what their argument is…whether it's about the state, whether it's about language, whether it's about South Africa's place in Africa. All of that is sort of happening at the same time but I wanna say one other thing, we also do a lot of Twitter so it's not just about producing these opinion editorials or articles and giving people information about cultural politics, it's also doing a lot on social media.

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APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C: ***Interview transcript for Vanguard***

Interviewee: Reader / Contributor: Ayabonga Cawe

Type of interview: Email

Date Received: 9 January 2017

Q: Vanguard is regarded as an alternative media publication. In what way do you think this is true?

Well I don't know much about the distinctions between mainstream and alternative publications (I'm just a boring economist), but I do think what makes it 'alternative' is its distribution and content choice. You are not going to find the kind of edgy and 'conscientizing' content in the normal run of a print magazine you can pick from a retailer's shelf, nor will you find the content in some of the mainstream online news sites. It's also about how Vanguard understands that we don't live 'single issue' lives, and is able to bring 'culture' and 'street' into the 'political' and vice versa, without compartmentalizing our lives to meet the whims of advertisers or publishers. That's really refreshing

Q: How did you come to be a contributor to the publication? What inspired you to go from reader to contributor? What did/do you find appealing about it?

I knew Panashe from our University days at Wits. I actually remember inviting her to a Sankara screening we hosted as Blackwash (a Black Consciousness collective aligned to the September National Imbizo) , at John Moffat when she was still an Accounting

student. She always reminds me of that. So for me it was seeing Vanguard, as a platform that could allow us to think differently, even 'dangerously' at times. So I had some thoughts I'd put to paper, and Panashe was willing to give me the space, also because I think much of what I had to say was in the spirit and message that Vanguard wanted to convey.

Q: How easy or difficult was it to get your pieces published on this platform? What was the process?

I think some of this is answered above. The first article I wrote, was a retelling of a 1985 Massacre that happened in my hometown, in Mlungisi in Queenstown. It was part of the process of consolidating a history that has never been told to our generation and those in the FeesMustFall movement, building that archive not only for inspiration and the ability to locate our struggles in a long history of resistance, but also to reflect on tactics, security measures and strategy.

Q: Alternative media is generally revered for its capacity to be the voice of the marginalised. Do you find this to be accurate, if so, what are the exclusionary factors in conventional media that have contributed to you becoming a consumer of alternatives such as Vanguard?

I think that's over reaching a bit. I don't think it is the voice of the marginalized, I think it's a platform that offers something different to the marginalized from the Daily Sun and

other tabloid sensationalist stuff the media oligarchs push. Many of us who wrote and write for Vanguard aren't from marginalized backgrounds, but if we understand that oppression and systemic marginalization is fluid and generational, then there are many common and shared experiences that emerge in the writing, regardless of immediate class background. There are exclusionary factors, Vanguard is online (data is expensive?), the tone and register of the writing, whilst informative, is often academic, high end or avant-garde. So I wouldn't say it's the voice of the marginalized yet, that 'state' might be the end-point, but I don't think it's there yet. I see Vanguard playing a catalytic role towards that end

Q: **Historically, alternative media, particularly in South Africa, reflected the anti-racial discourse against the then apartheid state and it played a significant role in the "fall" thereof. What in your view is the role of alternative media in democratic South Africa?**

That struggle, of building robust anti-racial, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist discourse and movements is not over. As much as formal 'Apartheid' is gone, structural and systemic Apartheid remains alongside a polarized global capitalist order, and so the role of 'alternative media' may have changed slightly, but not greatly. It must remain the fresh, combative and critically incisive tool to build a new distinctly African society in an increasingly unwelcoming geopolitical reality.

Q: The media theory/concept of "counter publics" is explored in depth in this thesis and, quite vaguely, it suggests a formation of communities of likeminded people whom through the use of alternative media platforms/networks are able to freely share, interrogate and advance their struggles, ideologies and/or lived experiences outside the confines of societal norms and populist media. Do you feel as though the readers and contributors of Vanguard are part of a "counter public" or at least part of a community? Please explain how?

I don't know much about the theory, but I would think it quite reductionist to collapse Vanguard into part of a homogenous 'counter-public'. I think with the strides in technology, the rise of social media and the information age we live in, that 'counter-public' is more heterogenous than my simple understanding of the 'theory' would suggest. I think readers and contributors to Vanguard inhabit online, broadcast and print 'publics' that intersect and interact daily. So you'll find a contributor or reader engage with the content of Vanguard not neccesarily coming from a strict conservative/progressive lens or distinction, but from a range of influences, both online and offline. You see this in how different people, even on what is seen as 'Black Twitter' take different perspectives on what is presented as 'content', be it on Vanguard or any other platform. It makes for a refreshing change from the media 'echo chamber' we've become accustomed to.

Q: **Are the issues discussed in the publication, generally those you find yourself debating or deliberating on in other spaces with your fellow peers? Are these narratives you are also having on social media networks, other art spaces etc...?**

Certainly, that's what makes it relevant and socially grounded.

Q: What are your thoughts of the way in which Vanguard covered the Fees Must Fall protest/movement?

I think it was quite difficult and also exciting. Difficult in the sense that many in the management of Vanguard are part of the movement, making the 'balance' quite difficult (note that I use 'balance' and not neutrality, no narrative or discourse is value neutral). Exciting because the period gave Vanguard an opportunity to uncover new voices from within the movement, who not only wrote about the 'fees issue', but greater questions related to intersectional and anti-imperialist notions of decoloniality (race, gender, class, the nation state, the market, religion etc.) In this way, many activists were able to find their voices in the written work of struggle, much like Staffrider created a platform for cultural workers and writers in the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s.

Q: **Any thoughts on its coverage of the afrophobic/xenophobic attacks of 2015? (I know you wrote a great piece on this, which forms part of discussions in my thesis about this subject)**

I am not too sure about the piece you are referring to, but nonetheless, I think our analysis in South Africa of continental issues is rather weak. This is an outcome of a historical process that extricated South Africa from the continent. That's why even after independence, this country's name remains a 'direction'. Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, Gold Coast became Ghana, South West Africa became Namibia, South Africa of 1910, remained South Africa. In many ways sociologically seeing itself as an extension of Europe rather than a part of Africa. Unfortunately the African people of SA also at some point started believing this. So without a robust Africanist and anti-imperialist discourse of colonization, migration and displacement, African people from outside SA find themselves in the middle of the continuing culture of 'black-on-black' violence at the heart of institutionalized racism and capitalism based on race, cheap labour and family-breaking migration. So this weakness of a discourse on what the continent means for SA, plays itself out in many ways from the diplomatic spats, anti-African immigration policy, to afrophobic violence at a community level. All the while, this sentiment intersects with a 'white savior complex' and what Biko called an 'inferiority complex' among blacks; a black 'foreigner' is a kwerekwere, a white one, is an expat, investor or 'savior' (you choose).

Q: What are your views of South Africa's media landscape at the moment?

Too much sensation, echo and very little 'systemic' analysis. But in this day and age, it is not enough to complain. We are no longer just 'recipients' or 'consumers' of media,

but also ‘creators’ of it, and we all need to take that responsibility much more seriously and with more intent.

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APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D: ***Interview transcript for Africa is a Country***

Interviewee: Reader / Contributor: Vangile Gantsho

Type of interview: Email

Date Received: 10 January 2017

Q: Vanguard is regarded as an alternative media publication. In what way do you think this is true?

I mean, I think blogs, online magazines and opinion pieces are becoming the norm so I’m not sure how alternative it is. Yes, it’s not a newspaper article, but I think magazines such as Vanguard are credible sources of information. I also think platforms such as the Vanguard allow for those who have been invisible in mainstream media to be seen. So referring to such platforms as “alternative” may perhaps also be referring to those whom it represents as “alternative”. And that doesn’t sit too well with me.

Q: How did you come to be a contributor to the publication? What inspired you to go from reader to contributor? What did/do you find appealing about it?

Well I was approached by Panashe when it was still an idea. We had met at TEDex JHB: I was hosting and she was speaking, then got to talking about telling our own stories.

Q: How easy or difficult was it to get your pieces published on this platform? What was the process?

Well, because I was a regular contributor for some time, I was expected to write regularly. But I believe anyone (black womxn in particular) can send a piece to the editor and if it is in line with Vanguard's ideals, it may be published.

Q: Alternative media is generally revered for its capacity to be the voice of the marginalised. Do you find this to be accurate, if so, what are the exclusionary factors in conventional media that have contributed to you becoming a consumer of alternatives such as Vanguard?

Firstly, please see my answer to question 1 about the use of the word "alternative". Secondly, mainstream media tends to focus on issues that affect a privileged sector of society. How mainstream politics affect the economy, and how the economy affects the rand. How to maintain the status quo of the privileged minority. Through Vanguard, we

can talk about how everyday life through brown breasts is both beautiful and excruciating. We can be honest about the pressures of corporate, or the sexual expectation on our bodies, or how difficult it is to have it all (and want it all). We can be our own historians, so the narrative around black womxn becomes as varied as we are.

The thing about being black AND womxn (this includes all who identify as women) is that you are living in a racist and patriarchal society. So you're fighting two wars, everyday. And this system will have you believe that these wars are imaginary. Vanguard is a safe space where we realise that we are not crazy (not all of us anyway), and these wars are real. Our pain is real. And out joy is real. WE are REAL!

Q: Historically, alternative media, particularly in South Africa, reflected the anti-racial discourse against the then apartheid state and it played a significant role in the "fall" thereof. What in your view is the role of alternative media in democratic South Africa?

I think I answered most of this in Q4 but I'll elaborate. "Alternative" media shines a light on structural oppression and the damage we have been taught to accept as part of the package, if we want to live in nice houses and go to "good" schools. To be a part of economic South Africa. It is through these platforms that we were able to hear the in depth stories surrounding #feesmustfall and #referencelist and #pretoriagirlshigh and #endoutsourcing. Where the people affected had a chance to tell their side of the story, without mainstream policing. So I hope that some day, this kind of media will play a role

in making the world safer and easier for black womxn to just breathe. And hopefully dance.

Q: The media theory/concept of "counter publics" is explored in depth in this thesis and, quite vaguely, it suggests a formation of communities of likeminded people whom through the use of alternative media platforms/networks are able to freely share, interrogate and advance their struggles, ideologies and/or lived experiences outside the confines of societal norms and populist media. Do you feel as though the readers and contributors of Vanguard are part of a "counter public" or at least part of a community? Please explain how?

Absolutely. I think the majority of people who subscribe to Vanguard share the kind of hopes I speak of in Q5. This is not to say they agree on everything, but they certainly feel seen by Vanguard. Feel acknowledged. And safer there. This includes people who consider themselves to be allies. Black, womx, LGBTQI, feminist… The #wecanbeboth generation. Beyonce lovers and haters alike! Because here, we exist!

Q: Are the issues discussed in the publication, generally those you find yourself debating or deliberating on in other spaces with your fellow peers? Are these narratives you are also having on social media networks, other art spaces etc...?

I think my answers to the previous questions are indicative of this. Definitely. I am passionate about being a part or making sure that black womxn exist in literature. Be it

through opinion pieces or through poetry. And I am surrounded by people, from different professions, who believe the same thing. And we're conversing. And plotting world domination ;)

On a serious note, particularly in my poetry, I am writing more and more about the everyday silences of brown girls. It's of particular interest to me. The "wayward girls and wicked womxn". The virtuous daughters and mothers. Womxn as complex. And different. As happy and fighting and dancing and BEING! And because this is such a huge part of my poetry, it is a huge part of my conversations. My way of life and reading.

Q: What are your thoughts of the way in which Vanguard covered the Fees Must Fall protest/movement?

I think Vanguard has given voice to the students of the movement. Especially with Panashe and Thato being so heavily involved in the Wits protests. I also like that there have been shining moments where Vangaurd (either through opinion pieces or through social media) has given some voice to the less affluent, historically black institutions. By way of explaining the violence, or by way of assisting in fundraising. I wish the rhetoric had focused more on that, but I definitely think Vanguard was part of unpacking why FMF is important. The forgotten middle and the *rise of coconut* all being contributing factors.

Q: Any thoughts on its coverage of the afrophobic/xenophobic attacks of 2015? (I know you wrote a great piece on this, which forms part of discussions in my thesis about this subject)

Again, I think as contributors, we are definitely pan-Africanists, and were all hugely affected by the afrophobic attacks. We need to have honest conversations as black people about how we hurt each other. And I think Vanguard helped facilitate such discussion. We also need to be critical of how a violent system begets violence. And I think Vanguard was a platform on which we could interrogate and engage critically.

Q: What are your views of South Africa's media landscape at the moment?

I think we are seeing more inclusion of the black womxn voice. The Nontobekos and the Busisiwe's are really helping in challenging the either or narratives we've been having: pro-government propaganda of the SABC (and its allies), or the white liberalist DA propaganda of the ENews and Sunday Independent gang. People are telling stories that are important to them, and using whatever platform is available to them to do so. We're seeing online channels, virtual magazines… people are moving away from the papers and tv screens to their computers and phones. I love it!

----ENDS---

APPENDIX E

APPENDIX E: ***Interview transcript for Africa is a Country***

Interviewee: Reader / Contributing Editor: Grieve Chelwa

Type of interview: Email

Date Received: 11 January 2017

Q: Africa is a Country is regarded as an alternative media publication. In what way do you think this is true?

The content is alternative, and often a reaction, to what you will find out there in the mainstream outlets.

Q: How did you come to be a contributor to the publication? What inspired you to go from reader to contributor? What did/do you find appealing about it?

The editors at AIAC invited me to be a contributor. Having read the blog for many months, I'd always wanted to write for them. And I took up the opportunity when it presented itself. What I really like about the site is that there is usually a quick turn around from writing a blog post to publication.

Q: How easy or difficult was it to get your pieces published on this platform? What was the process?

Not very difficult. The site has the standard editorial review but this process is less tedious than other publications.

Q: Alternative media is generally revered for its capacity to be the voice of the marginalised. Do you find this to be accurate, if so, what are the exclusionary factors in conventional media that have contributed to you becoming a consumer of alternatives such as AIAC?

Yes, alternative media is indeed the voice of the marginalised. Conventional media's butchering of the African story made me a consumer of AIAC.

Q: Historically, alternative media, particularly in South Africa, reflected the anti-racial discourse against the then apartheid state and it played a significant role in the "fall" thereof. What in your view is the role of alternative media in democratic South Africa?

Confronting racism and articulating an imagining of a South Africa anchored on equality.

Q: The media theory/concept of "counter publics" is explored in depth in this thesis and, quite vaguely, it suggests a formation of communities of likeminded people whom through the use of alternative media platforms/networks are able to freely share, interrogate and advance their struggles, ideologies and/or lived experiences outside the confines of societal norms and populist media. Do you

feel as though the readers and contributors of AIAC are part of a "counter public" or at least part of a community? Please explain how?

Yes we are a "counter public". You can see this in the way there is a common thread running through all the publications on the site centered around such themes as social justice, panafricanism, etc...

Q: Are the issues discussed in the publication, generally those you find yourself debating or deliberating on in other spaces with your fellow peers? Are these narratives you are also having on social media networks, other art spaces etc...?

Q: What are your thoughts of the way in which AIAC covered the Fees Must Fall protest/movement?

I think AIAC covered the October 2015 protests very well --- ample voice was given to the students in the movement. The follow-up protests of 2016 weren't covered well. Often the pieces in the publication tended to throw a lot of scorn on the students, something that wasn't helped by a lack of a clear articulation on the part of the students regarding their demands.

Q: Any thoughts on its coverage of the afrophobic/xenophobic attacks of 2015?

The site covered these very well digging into the complexities of the attacks.

Q: What are your views of South Africa's media landscape at the moment?

No deep views here given I am not an SA citizen.