

INTERNATIONALIZING MEDIA STUDIES

The South/ern African Communication Association

Keyan G. Tomaselli and Ruth E. Teer-Tomaselli

Abstract / A discussion of the history of journalism and mass communication studies, in relation to its alter ego, media studies, provides the backdrop to an analysis of the role played by the South African Communication Association (SACOMM) during the 1980s and after apartheid, up to 2006. The central argument is that SACOMM was criss-crossed by a particular kind of internal family argument in which specific contradictions were being negotiated: (1) pro-apartheid vs anti-apartheid (during the 1980s); (2) realists vs idealists; and (3) communication science vs media studies. The way these antagonisms had been negotiated by 2006 provides some insight into the way that media studies assisted in internationalizing the association and in exposing communication science to other paradigms.

Keywords / apartheid / communication science / media studies / South African Communication Association

Journalism and mass communication (JMC) *teaching* began late in South Africa as a serious enterprise, notwithstanding the importance and politically legitimating role of print media for the dominant classes during apartheid. Television had been considered a potentially destructive influence on Afrikaner identity and cultural cohesion (Wilkins and Strydom, 1978). However, effects research conducted by US scholars reassured the government that television could be managed to service Afrikaner nationalist interests (Meyer, 1971; Tomaselli et al., 1989). Also, exponential global growth in the electronics industry at the time required cathode ray tube technology if South Africa was to retain its international manufacturing competitiveness.

The introduction of television in 1976, broadcasting nationally from one of the then most centralized and sophisticated production complexes in the world, presaged the need for tertiary media studies. Afrikaans-language universities had anticipated this need, responding positively to a 1967 appeal for more communication by the then Minister of National Education. However, three of the four English-language liberal universities failed to respond. Rhodes was the only exception. The initial reluctance of the English-language universities in developing media and communication modules was rooted in the following:

1. Their conservative disciplinary traditions (Tomaselli et al., 1983);
2. The utterly pessimistic assumption that the sites of media and culture had been so totally colonized by the apartheid state that to teach these disciplines even critically was to risk apartheid cooptation (see, for example, Tomaselli, 1987a).
3. Related to this was an overdetermining functionalist reading of Althusser (1971), which convinced scholars that resistance was near impossible, notwithstanding the signs of popular revolt exploding all around them (Muller and Tomaselli, 1990).
4. Anti-apartheid academics faced up to repression, engaging in a kind of resistance that put most emphasis on Leninist organizational vanguards. While much debate occurred on questions of popular 'accountability' (Walters, 1983), regrettably, little time could be found for the systematic examination of methodological issues.
5. Finally, the academic boycott had isolated critical South African scholars from global debates, trends and learning from struggles elsewhere.

The first journalism course was inaugurated at Potchefstroom University in 1960, followed by Rhodes University and the University of South Africa (UNISA), both in 1969 (Fourie, 1990a). Other courses were inaugurated regularly thereafter, including at the homeland institutions (Wigston, 1988).

A graduate journalism department based on the Columbia University model was set up at Stellenbosch in 1978. In 1981, Rhodes added media studies, while the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit at the University of Natal was inaugurated in 1985. This unit was modelled on the Birmingham Centre, and was explicitly mandated by the university to work with anti-apartheid social movements in the struggle for democracy (see NeSmith, 1988; Tomaselli, 1987b, 1988).

By the end of the 1990s, communication sciences¹ were competing with post-disciplinary literary appropriations of the field in the guise of media studies. These developments witnessed a growing incorporation of media and communication studies into modern language (usually English language and literature) and drama. Often describing their syllabuses as cultural studies-based, these rely heavily on literary-hermeneutic and PostLit Crit approaches (Cooper and Steyn, 1996; Murray, 1997; Nuttall and Michaels, 2000; Tomaselli, 2000). This trend arguably leads to a detachment of 'media' from its cognate practices of *journalism* and *communication*, and certainly from praxis. With the clear exception of Rhodes, which has matured in size, capacity and disciplinary independence, media studies (in comparison to communication science) are more usually held hostage to English to bolster their undergraduate student enrolments. More purist 'journalism' and communication science in Afrikaans universities remain narrower in their focus, with 'media studies' being played in a minor key, but with far greater independence from literary studies, as compared to their 'English' counterparts.

Associations, Education Meetings and Ideology

The year 1980 was a watershed for communication science on the one hand, and media studies on the other. During this year, three new journals appeared on the

scene, and the Southern African Communication Association (SACOMM), also established in 1980, is the most enduring of the associations servicing the field. Though its constitution incorporated multiracial membership from the start, anti-apartheid scholars tended to perceive SACOMM as supportive of state policy. The reasons were: (1) the association was mainly populated by scholars from the government-supporting Afrikaans-language universities; (2) 'Southern' politically signified the 'constellation' of apartheid states or Bantustans; and (3) there was the perceived political and paradigmatic conservatism of most SACOMM members, as reflected in the Association's official publications *Communicare* and *Ecquid Novi*.

Critical South African media studies scholars have never settled comfortably into any association. Media studies (as a self-appointed counterbalance to communication science) emerged at the 1979 Rhodes meeting 'Survival of the Press Conference' (Department of Journalism, 1979), and was inaugurated at the 1980 Association for Sociology in South Africa (ASSA) conference in Maseru, Lesotho (Switzer, 1980). As a broad-based, transdisciplinary, staunchly anti-apartheid grouping, ASSA provided a temporary base for media studies scholars/activists during the 1980s. ASSA was dissolved in the mid-1990s when it merged with its ideological other, in the process losing its vibrant interdisciplinarity. Most disciplines during the 1980s were represented by two associations, one being anti-apartheid or neutral, the other being pro-apartheid. SACOMM thus found itself buffeted by two internal and opposing ideological trajectories during the 1980s. This dualism was represented by a critical media studies on the one hand and a largely pro-apartheid or allegedly neutral communication science on the other. In response to national unification in 1994, 'Southern' was replaced with 'South' in 2002, SACOMM also jettisoned its parallel Afrikaans name, SAKOMM, and like all other institutions, SACOMM undertook fundamental restructuring in response to the advent of popular democracy, though rather later than its sister disciplinary associations (Tomaselli, 2005a). The first crack occurred when Lynette Steenveld (2000), who then held the Chair of Media Transformation at Rhodes University (Steenveld, 2002, 2004), was invited to talk at the 2000 conference about transformation. Steenveld exposed delegates to the way that paradigms different from those taken for granted by most SACOMM members incorporate issues of power and human rights. The cracking of prior scientific ideological baggage, facilitated by the political transition, opened the door to membership by cultural and media studies scholars after 2001. By the 2006 conference, it was clear that the membership had become much more eclectic, a process that indicated the diversifying membership drawn also from philosophy, hermeneutics, linguistics, literature and film studies.

There is more to this saga than mere struggles over naming or conceptual jurisdictions. Many left-leaning scholars occupying beleaguered positions during the late apartheid era tended to engage in increasingly abstracted mutual critique that often bordered on the querulous. Espousing a particular cause – whether 'work-erism', Gramscianism or Althusserianism – frequently became more important than engaging with enquiry into actual JMC issues (e.g. Tomaselli and Shepperson, 2000a). All too frequently, JMC was disposed of as 'structural-functionalist', 'positivist', 'idealist' or some other epithet. In contrast, media studies from the mid-1990s on

became something of a fad used by English-language universities to reattract students lost from literature to commerce courses. Despite the broadening of SACOMM's base, the association retained a conservative profile rooted in market-led administrative research, communication science and functionalism, though this shifted as more universities introduced media studies, even if they were spin-offs from English departments.

Mapping Paradigms: Journals

A short history might best be presented via the prism of South African journals serving the field. *Communications in Africa* (1971–4) aimed at coordinating knowledge between the media and the universities and offered survey-type research articles. *Communicatio*, inaugurated in 1974, offered interpretive approaches: hermeneutics, reception theory, phenomenology and existentialism. Administrative research derived from organizational sociology, as well as articles on intercultural communication, appeared frequently in the 1980s. The institutional focus on 'Intercultural Communication' underpinned the 'reformed apartheid' notion of finding ways to improve communication between supposedly racially incompatible groups. *Communicatio* occasionally during the 1980s also published articles on media studies and critical theory (Muller et al., 1985; Wigston, 1988). Like *Ecquid Novi*, *Communicatio's* relative openness to a variety of research traditions was to become very important in terms of a significant paradigm shift towards media studies at UNISA, especially in the late 1980s. Both journals used this pluralism to establish international profiles, particularly after 2000.

Communicare, officially published by SACOMM between 1980 and 1995, reflected the association's instrumentalist and extensive professional membership with a strong emphasis on business, marketing, organizational and intercultural communication. Brief descriptive introductions rather than editorials introduced each issue. A 'Last Word' section offered an invited polemic, but rarely elicited further debate. Disputes over the ownership of *Communicare*, and allegations on its being held hostage to a narrow communication science, resulted in SACOMM ceding it to its then publisher, Rand Afrikaans University (RAU). The journal was relaunched in 2006 by the University of Johannesburg, RAU's new name.

The SACOMM-linked *Ecquid Novi: Journal for Journalism in Southern Africa* actively encouraged submissions internationally from a range of paradigms, including Marxist (see, for example, James, 1987; Snyman, 1987). This strategy spurred discussion of paradigms other than positivism and/or the interpretive. This resulted from the editor's networking via AEJMC (Association for the Education of Journalism and Mass Communication). It is now the official journal of one of AEJMC's working groups (see De Beer, 2005).

The three journals were conceived by their editors as being 'liberal' (Afrikaans: *verlig* [reformist, enlightened]). With some exceptions most of their authors worked within the framework of political 'reformism'. Despite the failure of 'reform' as far as the black majority was concerned, they discussed the 'problem' in terms of a 'communication gap'. Dissent was argued to be caused by the failure of the state

to have adequately communicated the benefits of apartheid or reformed-apartheid to black people (De Wet, 1987; Overton and Slabbert, 1985; Vorster, 1986). These assumptions were fed from a communication 'effects' approach that monitored what 'groups' (as racially defined by the state) were thinking, wanting or experiencing. Similarly, intergroup communication was rearticulated from its pluralistic US roots into supporting apartheid social relations (Tomaselli, 1999).

Opposed to the aforementioned titles was *Critical Arts: A Journal for Media Studies*.² The epistemological and self-reflexive history of this transdisciplinary journal has been well documented elsewhere (Tomaselli and Shepperson, 2000b; Tomaselli et al., 1983). Suffice it to say here that extensive editorials are considered by the journal's editors to be crucial in shaping the field, in providing directions, polemics and points for debate. Its authors and editors were not initially aware of the Birmingham Centre until some British academics connected to the Witwatersrand History Workshop brought this to their attention in the early 1980s. Since both Birmingham and *Critical Arts* worked from historical materialist approaches, it is not surprising that early *Critical Arts* authors had developed along similar, if initially, parallel tracks. *Critical Arts*, the Rhodes University Department of Journalism and Media Studies, and the establishment of the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit at the University of Natal in 1985, fundamentally fractured the decades' dominance of UNISA-led interpretive communication studies.

The Rise of Cultural and Media Studies

Post-apartheid cultural and media studies are no longer confined to the 'left', or to 'Marxists', residual Althusserians or pessimistic Frankfurters. Where, for example, media studies in South Africa were once rooted at Rhodes and Natal, variants have invaded most humanities that were previously hostile, or at best, defensively apprehensive, of the field. Cultural and media studies (CMS) also mainlined through previously conceptually conservative communication and journalism departments (see, for example, Fourie, 1996: 157–221) that had once negotiated their students' world-views through interpretive, phenomenological and existential philosophies (Tomaselli and Louw, 1993: 291–3). These shifts, however, negotiated the early 'neo-Marxist' media studies moment in a rather fascinating if sometimes ahistorical way. This involved embedding media studies within an instrumentalist, administrative, conceptual framework. In other cases, the old anti-apartheid Left shifted from their previously research-based studies, into the kinds of neo-positivist textualism that Keith Windschuttle (1998: 113) excoriates for its 'mouth-full-of-marbles' jargon (e.g. Strelitz and Steenveld, 1998). However, although the 'old Left' prior to 1990 had occupied a common pragmatic base from which to develop their theoretical criticism of apartheid media, the period beyond apartheid saw different schools moving from this base and into different quarters of the conceptual map.

This post-1994 legitimacy conferred upon CMS occurred also because previously hostile theorists and practitioners were trying to find explanations through which they could make sense of the post-apartheid, post-Cold War, post-industrial environment into which South Africa had reconnected after the termination of sanctions

and boycotts in 1990. CMS were seen to be on the 'winning side', and were thus adopted by their previous detractors as a means towards negotiating their routes into unfamiliar political, social and cultural terrains. Media studies offer some pointers to ensure that neo-fascism does not recur, and also help to understand just where identity politics fit into this world of the 'post'. However, cultural studies are as co-optable as any others. Vigilance is required in terms of the apparently accommodating regressive and alienating discourses that typified aspects of post-apartheid sham science and policy claiming cultural studies allegiance (see Tomaselli, 2001).

Integrating Opposites

CMS's antagonistic relationship with communication science results from an insistence that scientific law always serves sectional interests. This underpins CMS's caution in accepting 'positivist' epistemology premised on the natural sciences, which largely underpins SACOMM journals' contents, management assumptions and refereeing procedures. SACOMM's disparate community, however, entered a few years after the millennium into open-ended interparadigmatic conversations (see SACOMM Panel Discussion, 2005). As was clear from the 2003 plenary on research chaired by Pieter Fourie, we may have reached the end of disciplinary histories. Some discussants had little idea of the respective philosophies and derivations of communication science, critical communication studies, or cultural and media studies, or how these engage with each other. The opportunistic rush to adopt media studies fractured appreciation of paradigmatic histories and sometimes resulted in synchronic, ahistorical and textual appropriations totally removed from any sense of the fields as they originally developed.

The reasons for this eclecticism are clear. SACOMM has become a loosely associated ensemble of different scholars from a variety of disciplines, some of which are able to talk to each other, and some less so. It historically tended to offer a forum for the presentation of finished products, and failed to function as a forum to spearhead research or promote debate. Conferences since 2003 planned plenary sessions to engage scholars epistemologically, to engage the market-led administrative approaches in relation to critical studies (e.g. Morgan, 2006; SACOMM Panel Discussion, 2005; Tomaselli, 2005b). The logical considerations of this situation concern the standard critical description of the methodological and epistemological stand-off as a function of different paradigms. The binaries can be schematically presented as shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

SACOMM'S Schizophrenia

SACOMM's Schizophrenia I: The Paradigms	
<p>The 'Realists': Communication Science</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CORPORATE, ORGANISATIONAL, MARKETING, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT, sender-centric (roughly speaking) 	<p>The 'Idealists': Media Studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AUDIENCE AND RECEPTION ANALYSIS – lived experience, interpretation, receiver-centric (roughly speaking)
SACOMM's Schizophrenia II: On Science	
<p>The 'Realists': Method is all!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FIND US THE NUMBERS. Feelings and qualities are subjective and are anti-science (roughly speaking). • 'Theory' is the testing of hypotheses that describe what would happen under the relevant circumstances. • Author interpretation of the numbers is considered 'subjective' and unscientific. • Author interpretation even of the numbers themselves may be viewed with suspicion. 	<p>The 'Idealists': Theory is all!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ONLY USE NUMBERS WHEN TOTALLY UNAVOIDABLE (roughly speaking: when publishing in certain journals). • Theory emerges from the critical examination of social experience in terms of power relations. • Individuals, feelings and experience are suppressed by quantitative approaches, which are accused of being structurally and symbolically violent, alienating and anti-humanist.
SACOMM's Schizophrenia III: On Meaning	
<p>The 'Realists': Reality is <i>not</i> a text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL RESEARCH IS MEASUREMENT. Feelings and qualities cannot be measured. Therefore such work is unscientific and capricious. • Subjects are treated as objects. • Data presentation is primary to interpretation. 	<p>The 'Idealists': Reality <i>is</i> a text!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL RESEARCH IS INTERPRETATION. Scholars are historically and culturally bound. • Subjects are assumed to be experiencing human beings, not only as objects or data.

SACOMM's Schizophrenia IV: On Models	
<p>The 'Realists': It's all in Shannon and Weaver (1949)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL COMMUNICATION IS THROUGH BLACK BOXES. Find the parameters of the box, and everything follows. 	<p>The 'Idealists': It's all in the Circuit of Culture! (Du Gay et al., 1997)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL COMMUNICATION IS NEGOTIATION BETWEEN SUBJECTIVITIES. There is only the circulation of meaning and its discrepant appropriation by group identities.

<p>Realists: acknowledge that Weaver is the main influence, and that Shannon is perfectly relevant if Communication Science doesn't treat quantification as purely cardinal. Reception can be very adequately analysed as an Ordinal phenomenon within collections.</p> <p>Idealists: acknowledge that there are quite valid recursive processes that are applicable in derivations of Shannon. Weaver, a mathematician, wrote a non-mathematical appreciation of Shannon's 1948 paper. This section of Shannon and Weaver is an entirely independent contribution, in which Weaver draws on poetic, political and sociological metaphors to elucidate Shannon's properties of communication, especially Entropy, Information, Redundancy and Noise. Weaver's (1949) contribution was to 'humanize' Shannon's mathematical telecommunications model, adapting it to incorporate symbolic communication.</p>

Source: Adapted from Tomaselli (2005b: 37).

True Confessions and Cross-Paradigm Allegations

CMS argue that knowledge/science is an epiphenomenon of power. Communication scientists during the Cold War split into two paradigms. On the one hand, progressives knew Kuhn (1962) was right because they had experienced the vicissitudes of extracting research funds for enquiry into projects that opposed apartheid. Conservative institutions, on the other hand, knew Kuhn was wrong because it was obvious that ideology did not affect the efficiency of atomic bombs. In a way, then, Cold War research needs for better bombs and louder communication remain at the heart of the differences in SACOMM, whatever the influence of ideological alliances during the apartheid era, or the pluralist shifts after 1994.

The better-bomb metaphor of science predominated at SACOMM until about 2004, while the newly arrived interpretive CMS scholars insist that critique of the metaphor and the interests it serves is its proper objective. Our point is that the 'paradigm' is a sociological description of how different approaches to science engage with each other, introducing new curricula in the process. This was clearly evident after 1994 when communication science departments introduced CMS to

their courses. It is this relation between science, research and teaching that offers a starting point in examining how media studies are internationalizing South African curricula. But what is not always understood is that CMS postulate a concept of truth as a matter of discursive negotiation. Hence CMS's sometimes acerbic interaction, the 'family argument' (Morgan, 2006) with communication science, still the leading paradigm in SACOMM, because CMS see off claims for scientific neutrality and objectivity as arising from a concept of non-negotiable, measurable truth.

Self-Reflection

While analyses have critically interrogated South African JMC and media studies, these are very few and emanate from the same five authors (see, for example, De Beer and Tomaselli, 2000; Fourie, 1990b; Tomaselli and Louw, 1993; Tomaselli and Shepperson, 2000c, 2003). The transition from apartheid to post-apartheid and from communication science to media studies simply and often resulted in an easy, unproblematic shift by most JMC academics. Some, however, thoroughly reconstituted themselves, their approaches and their theories, understanding that a new context required new practices and theories. Hence, a shift from JMC to various kinds of 'media studies' (postmodernist, political economy, descriptive, functionalist, instrumentalist, sloganistic) was an outcome for some. Most, however, assumed a political continuity, much like a change of government through 'normal' democratic procedures.

Where does this leave SACOMM with regard to internationalizing media studies? Basically, the question needs a two-fold inverting: (1) How are media studies attempting to internationalize SACOMM's assumptions about science? and (2) in what way have media studies played a role in internationalizing SACOMM? Media studies offer:

1. A means to post-apartheid global conceptual connectivity;
2. A way of explaining new media and the fracturing of audiences away from the 'mass' in a globalizing world;
3. A way of saving literature departments; and
4. A path towards better representing South African history.

Communicare is now published independently of SACOMM, defensively self-assured in its new found claims to interparadigmatic scientism (De Wet, 2006). *Communicatio* is beginning to test the global waters, and *Critical Arts*, the originator of media studies in South Africa, will with *Communicatio* from 2007 be published by a multinational company. *Ecquid Novi*, now the only journal affiliated to SACOMM, continues to publish papers from all paradigms. The issues and contradictions which remain are:

- Postmodern cultural studies can be fun but not necessarily useful. Students want to study subjects that will ensure them jobs. Corporate communication embedded within communication science remains the preferred choice in an economy where jobs are scarce.

- SACOMM has a long pedigree with the corporate communication research constituency, which remains largely dominant, partly because the association is dismissed by many new self-styled media studies researchers whose real disciplinary homes remain in literature. Many of these are conceptual squatters in a field with which they do not wish to engage. However, with the introduction of IAMCR-style working groups in 2006, it is hoped that SACOMM will become more relevant to the wider community.
- The endless restructuring of the tertiary sector, both in terms of management and mergers, has exhausted most academics, and SACOMM's institutional capacity and governance are constantly under stress and in need of sustained forms of viable governance (Tomaselli, 2005a).
- A disturbing parochialism among South African communication scholars isolates them from global media studies trajectories. An instrumentalist approach to university research and research funding tends to persuade authors to unadvisedly limit choice of journals in which to publish to specific low impact, mainly South African 'accredited' titles (see Byrne, 1996; Tomaselli, 2005a: 44–5).
- While SACOMM annual conferences are usually vibrant interparadigmatic events, the difficulty of sustaining continuity and activity between conferences is a problem. When we return to the chaos of our endlessly restructuring institutions sight is often lost of deeper epistemological issues.
- SACOMM affiliated to IAMCR and NCA in 2003, but participates much more actively in AEMJC structures, whose concerns are closer to the interests of most active SACOMM members. Systematic collaborations have proven difficult to integrate. The one joint conference organized in the early 1990s with the erstwhile World Communication Association (WCA) was an ideological and financial disaster for SACOMM. Not only did SACOMM pick up much of the tab for these US academic tourists on tax-deductible trips, but their insistence on going into the conflicted black townships like they would a game reserve under armed police protection and armoured vehicles left a real bad taste in the mouth. WCA was not represented at this roundtable of international associations at the September 2006 Internationalizing Media Studies conference hosted by the University of Westminster, where a much shorter version of this article was presented. This is just as well. WCA is like the World Baseball Series – US teams only.

The Way Ahead

The reorganization of the tertiary sector by the new government placed new responsibilities on disciplinary associations, including curriculum issues, regionalization (Jordaan, 2004), assessment criteria, outcomes and the rating of researchers by the National Research Foundation (see, for example, Hauptfleisch, 2005). SACOMM is engaged in all of these sites and is now also actively shaping the fields it represents in the ways in which its conferences are organized, and in conducting plenary sessions on methodological and epistemological issues. Previously, methodologies were taken for granted, and not debated or critiqued. The 'family argument', previously crudely framed as a partisan Marxist/Stalinist politics vs an objective communication science,

has been softened by the introduction of media studies, which have provided something of a conceptual middle ground. The opacity of theory has also been pierced by submissions as conference delegates and authors attempt to take on board a wider diversity of approaches. The growing internationalization of delegates, especially keynote speakers, at SACOMM conferences, also works to widen local horizons. In conclusion, then, media studies work to internationalize SACOMM rather than the association internationalizing media studies.

Notes

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1. In South Africa, the following derivations took root: *communication science* emerged from a Comptean approach linked to behavioural psychology. *Communication studies* drawing from rhetoric and speech communication are not a feature of South African curricula. A sociological emphasis is found in *media studies* based political economy of communication, Birmingham cultural studies and sociology. *Media (textual) analysis* is a literary derivative.
2. Its subtitle was changed in 1983 to *A Journal for Cultural Studies*, and in 2001 to *A South–North Journal for Cultural and Media Studies*.

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Keyan G. Tomaselli is immediate past president of the South African Communication Association (SACOMM) and is based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.

Address *School of Literary Studies, Media and Creative Arts, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, Durban 4041, South Africa. [email: tomasell@ukzn.ac.za]*

Ruth E. Teer-Tomaselli is current vice-president and president-elect of SACOMM. She is based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban where she holds the UNESCO Chair in Communications for Southern Africa.

Address *School of Literary Studies, Media and Creative Arts, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, Durban 4041, South Africa. [email: teertoma@ukzn.ac.za]*