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**Visa Applications: A Harrowing Tale**

# Visas: An Unwelcome and Time-consuming Interlude to Academic Publishing

Julie Grant\*

As a foreign academic in South Africa, applying for visas to remain and work in the country is frustrating. Ever changing goalposts, coupled with government and/or agency staff often ill-equipped for the job and unappreciative of how stressful the situation is for the applicant, makes the process exasperating and unpleasant. The process is a minefield which you need to navigate while attending to your daily academic commitments including publishing.

I arrived to live full-time in South Africa in 2012 and have held a number of different visas, dictated by the particular job I have held. As such, I have many experiences to share from my visits to the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) and the agency that superseded them, which I have had to apply through since 2018. Government brought this third party on board to integrate the visa process to make it seamless and efficient<sup>1</sup>.

My recent excursion to make my visa application, however, confirmed that I am not the only applicant who has experienced a less



Dr Julie Grant: Visa trauma for foreign academics

***“My recent excursion to make my visa application, however, confirmed that I am not the only applicant who has experienced a less than seamless or efficient service”***

1 See <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-09-01-residency-in-limbo-living-in-hope-of-the-stamp-of-approval-from-south-africas-home-affairs/> (accessed 23/02/2022).

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## Visa Applications: A Harrowing Tale

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than seamless or efficient service. A variety of stories were exchanged while we waited to be seen at the agency offices – none of them complimentary.

Despite poor service, the contract between the third party agency and government was officially extended in 2020<sup>2</sup>. My recent experience was perhaps extreme due to the agency being impacted by Covid-19, however, they certainly did not cope with the situation efficiently.

**L**et me recount this experience for you: I made my appointment to submit my visa application online. The appointment was for the beginning of December 2021. I opted for a “later in the day” appointment as previous experience had taught me that processes move faster towards the end of the work day - staff can only leave for home once all applicants have been attended to. This also meant that I could spend the first half of the day working at the university. I arrived on the day with documents that I had amassed in support of my application. Although this was to be my fourth critical skills visa, given that the rules and regulations are ever-changing, I was apprehensive of the outcome (as I always am). Following a discussion about my application between three staff members (which I could not follow being that it was in a language that I am not versed in), the one staff member who was actually serving me informed me that my application was not being accepted; I did not have two pieces of documentation which staff thought was necessary. In previous years this documentation was waived as the additional documents I provided render them unnecessary.

Alas this was not to be in 2021! I was sent away and told to return the next morning at 8am. I was advised to arrive early as then I would be seen early.

I had already lost a half a day’s work for the appointment, in addition to the time

spent accruing all my documents (including medical certificates and radiological reports, getting them certified etc). I was somewhat stressed to inform my line manager that I again needed time off to return to the agency as we were busy to edit book chapters that we wished to return to authors before the summer break.

Furthermore I was busy to organise a field trip to collect research data needed to complete additional chapters for the said book. The fieldwork required the submission of paperwork for approval at a time of year when staff were hard to locate because Covid-19 required them to work from home and/or because they were winding down for the break. The last thing I needed was to be collecting further documentation and returning to the agency!

I did *need* to return to the agency, however; without the visa renewal I could not stay in South Africa! The next day I arrived at the agency at 9am and was surprisingly directed to stand in a car park and wait for instruction. Twenty minutes later I was placed in one of four queues. As I was only there to submit paperwork, which had for the most part been approved the previous day, I hoped to be finished within a few hours so that I could return to university and the duties that I hoped to complete before my field trip (should I ever manage to get my paperwork completed). It was not to be!

**I**waited in the queue from which no one was accepted into the office until 5.30pm. Some people had been there from 6am. There were no seats available and little in the way of social distancing despite it being the middle of the fourth wave of Covid-19. I was concerned that, as the office normally accepts its last applicants at 3pm, I would be turned away to return the next day. That would have required me to miss yet another day



*Interminable, repetitive and frequently fruitless queues are a hallmark of most peoples’ visa application experiences*

***“I waited in the queue from which no one was accepted into the office until 5.30pm. Some people had been there from 6am. There were no seats available and little in the way of social distancing despite it being the middle of the fourth wave of Covid-19.”***

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2020-06-02-home-affairs-seeks-extension-of-vfs-global-visa-contract/> (accessed 23/02/2022).

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## Visa Applications: A Harrowing Tale

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of work and by now I was remembering that the deadline for article subsidy submissions was looming! I needed to make these submissions to generate research funds without which I would not be able to conduct research to inform my publications.

Luckily, my line was ushered into the agency offices at 5.30pm where we again queued. This time there were seats and social distancing was enforced. By 9pm I was finally at the counter and my application was accepted for transfer to the DHA who would decide if my visa application was to be successful – I was relieved.

At that point two ladies re-entered the office amid some commotion. After having waited all day in the queue and having finally been able to collect their visas just before 9pm, they had exited the agency offices only to be robbed of their valuables, including their passports with their new visas. This was despite the presence of a number of security guards employed by the agency. I was feeling rather vulnerable at this point so upon my exit from the office I requested that security walk me to my car and they kindly obliged.

**J**ump now to the end of December 2021 when I received notification that a decision has been made regarding my visa application. Never before have I experienced such a quick turn-around period! I was only able to secure an appointment to collect the visa a month later, however, at the end of January. Upon collection, the good news was that I had been successful! I then had to rush the visa to the university to enable them to reappoint me.

Overall, within academic and non-academic circles, the feeling is that South Africa visa processes are difficult (as they are elsewhere), with agency and DHA staff often being ill-equipped to deal with applications, and even being hostile towards applicants. The cost and time involved in applying for a visa is considerable, so the decision to do so is a significant one. Agency visa appointments cost R1350 and with a further R1500 for



the critical skills application fee- non-refundable for unsuccessful applications. Fortunately, I have an understanding manager who is sympathetic to my plight and grants me time to collect the necessary documents, provides the required written assurances, and allows me time away to attend the appointments. My university department is also supportive and supplies the necessary letters, while I have a number of friends willing to write appropriate letters of recommendation. Note that many employers shy away from employing foreign nationals due to the time consuming processes involved in securing visas.

**A**s academics we are under immense pressure to publish; even more so for foreign academics, such as myself, who rely on short-term contracts that require publications to ensure contract renewal. While visas are a necessary evil, a more user friendly agency, with staff sympathetic to the (often difficult) situation of the applicants, would foster more amicable interactions.

Given the considerable cost associated with the visa process I expect a professional, efficient, informed and timely service that allows me to attend my appointment and return to work that same day to fulfil my publishing requirement. This would better enable me to remain in my job and in the future apply (and pay) for visas thereby contributing to the economic wheel turning of the visa industry while helping to keep people in jobs. Submitting a visa application should not be a one and a half day sojourn!

*“While visas are a necessary evil, a more user friendly agency, with staff sympathetic to the (often difficult) situation of the applicants, would foster more amicable interactions”*

## The Slow Pace of Data Collection

# Please Do My Research Survey! Anyone? No...

Aimee Viljoen-Stroebel\*

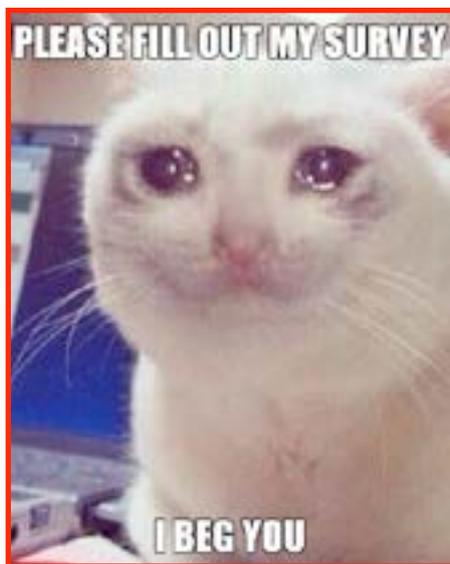
If you are busy with an audience study, or any type of survey based research, you will know that the act of getting people to fill in your research survey, is a whole other type of **beast**. But what I didn't expect, going into the data collection phase of my PhD study, was how emotionally draining it would be to collect surveys.

For my methodological approach, I chose snowball sampling and an online survey, due to the size of the population group I am trying to study (millennials in Gauteng between 25-40 years of age). In previous research, for my honours research project and masters dissertation (2017 & 2019), my focus had been on younger audiences and did not specifically focus on South Africans. The surveys for those projects poured in, basically overnight, and I expected the same speedy response when I set off on the same journey in January of 2022.

Alas, here I am two months into the data collection process, with surveys trickling in so slowly it makes me want to pull my hair out. I have asked over 500 people to *please* fill in this "really quick, really short" survey, but the responses still move at a snail pace, if they move at all. I lay in bed at night thinking *why won't they just help me?* And the same question haunts me each morning when I check the updated total of surveys collected. I said "it is a short survey" and "it will only take a few minutes of your time", but still the survey count remains static.

Then, I had a small revelation (probably a very obvious one, but I'll share it none the less). Honestly, this revelation is still forming itself in my mind, and it is probably more of a musing than a full blown revelation, but here goes:

Your family will fill in your survey, but don't expect their friends or friends of their friends to pay *any* attention to your request.



***"I need to accept that data collection isn't a race horse, it's the pony little kids have rides on at amusement parks. Slow and a little repetitive. It will take time for me to collect all the surveys I need."***

People need a *reason* to want to help you.

The *portal* through which you ask for help, affects what response you will get.

Make it *personal*.

Here is what I've done, which seems to work. Albeit, this does not work perfectly, but it is working better than anything I have tried so far.

Instead of using *social* networks like Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, where people are constantly bombarded with advertisements and spam, I started contacting people using LinkedIn. It is a professional, business and employment service, which means people expect a level of *business* interaction on it. This includes asking for assistance with work, and in this case, research.

The second thing I changed was the way in which I approached potential participants. Instead of pleading for help with *my* research that is so important to *me*, I made it personal to my connections by relating the importance of my research to their work (the job/profession listed on their profile). That way, my research carries significance for them as well.

And finally, I messaged *everyone*. Invite, message, repeat.

I need to accept that data collection isn't a race horse, it's the pony little kids have rides on at amusement parks. Slow and a little repetitive. It will take time for me to collect all the surveys I need. I just need to keep pushing, and asking, and messaging and hoping!

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Research and Publishing Across Disciplines

# The Straddled Academic

Addamms Mututa\*

On my academic journey, I have met and benefited from many excellent souls; individuals who went out of their way and showed me kindness in innumerable ways. They all lit my candle with theirs, illuminating my mind, and shaping my academic path to this moment. This path has led me across many geographical territories, and led me to fields of inquiry I had not imagined before. In the process, I shed many disciplinary rigidities and became more accommodative of experimental thought across disciplines. This is where I am today – bestriding disciplines, seeking tentacles, any, that may hold together the possibility for cross-disciplinary thinking and theories.

A few days ago, I came to know about ANFASA, an excellent academic forum, through Professor Keyan Tomaselli. I have since read its great contributions on academic publishing and research. What I am enthused about, and what I will write about here, is my academic itinerary, something that I think may motivate other researchers either within the same predicament as mine, or those who will follow in the future.

My undergraduate training is in Creative Arts. I took courses from theatre, literature, anthropology, business management, philosophy, music, film, and French. Then I went back for an MPhil in Literature, then an MA researching on film and gender microaggressions. It was, however, in PhD where my initial interdisciplinary research interest really flourished. Here, I

worked across cinema and urban studies. This combination enabled me to undertake a Postdoctoral Fellowship in an engineering department at UCT, researching on cities and cinema.

It is the challenges of researching and publishing within such a framework that I want to share.

**Research**

Research today has become more integrated and pragmatic. In Arts and Humanities in general, the academia is moving from reiterative description of ‘the state of affairs’ or a thematic critique of arts, to an ‘enquiry.’ What is the meaning of arts, not only in an exclusive disciplinary domain where they are produced and ‘fit’, but also in the temporal context in which we can think of them as parts of discourse? Is meaning of artworks static and complete or is it flexible, complex, and dynamic?

Working with African cinema and African cities, it has become apparent that the connection between art and public discourse – on any perspective imaginable

continues on page 6:



*“What is the meaning of arts, not only in an exclusive disciplinary domain where they are produced and ‘fit’, but also in the temporal context in which we can think of them as parts of discourse?”*

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## Research and Publishing Across Disciplines

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– is not coincidental, but vital. Art is not merely expressive, it is also interpretive of how we humans make sense of ourselves and our world.

I pursue this connection from observing patterns of the ‘art discourse’ and developing questions about the meaning of what we see in artworks as something that calls for cross synthesis between the work and the observer. ‘What am I seeing when I look at a film?’ is contingent upon ‘What is the film communicating through its elements.’ The urgent task is to recruit a cohort of cross-disciplinary researchers who are sufficiently fascinated with ‘the rhetoric of art’ to transpose the artwork critique with urgent questions of everyday life.

### Publishing<sup>1</sup>

A big goal of academic writing is sharing information with others. It is this process of networking knowledge production across minds and disciplines which

is the backbone of academic enquiry. What I have observed to be a remarkable challenge is to identify, from the writing stage, a conceptual approach that will work well with an academic publisher, while also contributing significantly to the broader concerns of the disciplines you are working with. In my case, working with cinema and cities, I have found it useful to conceptualize my work as a synthesis of film critique and urban theory.

This has worked well so far, and, minus the challenge that one may have to be comfortable with ‘forcing’ your way into new alliances between disciplines, the field is very exciting. The future of research and publishing in the humanities and social sciences is heading this way.

There is growing interest in cross-disciplinary conversations, incubation of ideas that straddle knowledge territories, and an urgent need to theorize our world issues from multiple nodes. Disciplinary convergence – that’s the direction that I am heading in.

### <sup>1</sup> Publications

*Johannesburg in Transition: Representing Street Encounters as Racial Registers in Clint Eastwood’s Invictus*

*Critical Arts - South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, Vol. 33, Issue 2, pp. 1-13

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2019.1631363>

*The casebre on the sand: Reflections on Luanda’s excepted citizenship through the cinematography of Maria João Ganga’s Na Cidade Vazia (2004)*

*Journal of African Cinemas*, Vol 11, No. 3, pp. 277-293

[https://doi.org/10.1386/jac\\_00021\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jac_00021_1)

*Battered Bodies: Characterizing Johannesburg’s Apartheid Past and Present in Gavin Hood’s Tsotsi*

*Journal of African Cinemas*, Vol. 12, Numbers 2-3, pp. 213-228

[https://doi.org/10.1386/jac\\_00037\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jac_00037_1)

*Crisis Urbanism and Postcolonial African Cities in Postmillennial Cinema*

Routledge. New York, and London.

<https://www.routledge.com/Crisis-Urbanism-and-Postcolonial-African-Cities-in-Postmillennial-Cinema/Mututa/p/book/9780367640835#>

**“There is growing interest in cross-disciplinary conversations, incubation of ideas that straddle knowledge territories, and an urgent need to theorize our world issues from multiple nodes. Disciplinary convergence – that’s my direction”**

**Developing an Academic Mindset of Quality Over Quantity**

# Powering Through Publishing Pressure



**Duduzile Zwane\***

If you have been in academia for any length of time, you will have heard the ominous “publish or perish” catchphrase. The connotation therein, is that your credibility as a prolific thinker is dependent on your publishing output. I venture to say that this phrase is used to terrorise academics into feverishly publishing articles or risk ejection from the university system.

Seven years ago, I was recruited into the employment pool at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal (UKZN). When I first heard the dreaded mantra, I dismissed it because I believed I had time aplenty to churn out quality articles. Gradually, the cacophony of voices which were not-so-subtly coercing me to publish, grew louder. The stark fear which marred my colleagues’ faces further conveyed how direly my livelihood depended on my publishing prowess. Thereafter, I resolved to publish an article from my Master’s thesis before the end of that year. We were already four months into it.

As I sat in front of my computer, I realised that I didn’t have the vaguest idea where to begin. While my thesis was my proudest accomplishment at that time, I wasn’t sure how to mine it for the gems which could be imported into a journal article. I considered asking my senior colleagues for guidance, but noticed that they were barely functioning under the colossal weight of their workloads. They looked like their bodies were on autopilot. They had to prepare for lectures, supervise scores of demanding students (who were termed “primary clients” by the university to convey that their needs superseded all others) and devote time to their own research pursuits. So they wouldn’t have been enthused at the prospect of helping me *pro bono*. Academia is renowned for siphoning the benevolence out of the most generous Samaritans.

I then contemplated approaching my younger colleagues, but decided against it. You see, academia is exceptionally competitive. Intellectual astuteness must be feigned at all times to avoid appearing weak. So seeking help from my peers would have been construed as an admission of cerebral inferiority and incompatibility with my dream profession. Essentially, I was adrift on an island of overwhelming uncertainty and anguish.

I eventually combed through the internet for publications by professors whose career paths I hoped to emulate. Tonally and structurally their works became the blueprint for my first successful article publication.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after, a senior colleague deflated my bubble of elation by pointing out that it had been

printed by a South African journal. He was intimating that I had wasted my data because local journals were substandard and my article would be regarded as such by the broader academic community. This dismayed me at the time, but I now know it was baseless condescension of the highest order. This emotionally gruelling experience taught me the following:

Firstly, academics – particularly the novices – have to prioritise mental healthcare. The majority of their time is spent on processing information. So severe burnout is inevitable. The university environment can be somewhat condemnatory towards admitting to psychological exhaustion (although this is changing). So seek support privately. Don’t wait until you’re in acute distress. A psychologist can alleviate feelings of crippling self-doubt and equip you with the skills you need to avoid being your own harshest critic.

Secondly, realise that the “publish or perish” motto is a myth. It is less about the quantity of your publications and more about their quality. A prospective employer won’t be too impressed by utter drivel which somehow makes it to print. However, they will appreciate sophisticated analysis and originality.

Importantly, don’t compare yourself to your colleagues. Comparison exacerbates performance anxiety and diminishes creativity. Remember, we all have a unique comprehension of ideas and events. Even if we are exposed to them at the same time, we don’t interpret them in precisely the same way. So always trust in your distinct analytical aptitude. Resist comparing yourself even when it comes to the writing process. There will be days where you will grind out thousands of words in a single sitting. On others, you’ll barely eke out a paragraph after several hours. Both experiences are par for the course.

**\* Duduzile Zwane holds a PhD from University of Johannesburg and an MA from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. She is a regular contributor to The ANFASA Magazine.**

<sup>1</sup> “Uncovering barriers to bilharzia prevention communication”, by Lauren Dyll and Dudu Zwane, *Communicare*, 34(1), 2015. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC178694> He MA thesis, “Assessing perceptions – Addressing (mis)conceptions: An exploration of interventions to address the health needs of female teenagers affected by Bilharzia” is here: [https://ccms.ukzn.ac.za/Files/articles/MA\\_theses/duduzile%20zwane%20-%20thesis%20final.pdf](https://ccms.ukzn.ac.za/Files/articles/MA_theses/duduzile%20zwane%20-%20thesis%20final.pdf)

**Embracing The Value of Critique in Academia**

# Writing and the Academic Environment

**Johannes Pretorius\***

These are my thoughts as someone who came from a world outside academia and then, all of a sudden, inhabiting the weird and wonderful world of the academic habitus.

The first thing that struck me was that you are entering a mysterious new world; one that precedes you, a world to be discovered that has a supposed essence and character you cannot yet distinguish, where everything seems part of a consistent, cogent, larger academic universe and where terms like peer review, articles, journals, critical paradigms etc. leaves one wondering. In short, it's a fascinating new world.

As time passes and one becomes a little more acclimatised (by reading, observing and delving a little deeper into the everyday) the small defining characteristics that lends character to your specific academic setting becomes a little more discrete. You realise that your environment has its traditions and customs, prevalent paradigms and associated practices and an epistemological an ontological engagement that is, to some degree, specific to it. In short it has a 'culture' that has taken form over time, which makes it just a little different from any other similar academic spaces. Being in one space or set up is not the same as being in another. For the new entrant (me) this made this new 'space' all the more fascinating.

Even more fascinating was that this

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environment is inhabited by strange creatures – your academic peers. They are the ones that give life to the environment, who maintain old traditions (and build new ones), which engages with paradigms, new thoughts and tendencies, and which keep the institution alive. They are the academic staff, your fellow students, the broader associates of your institution, the honorary fellows and other non-academic associates.

As I became a little more familiar with the environment, another thing became clear. The academic environment is one that shapes. Your academic peers give shape to the environment through their activity (engaging with ideas, peddling critique, maintaining traditions etc ) and the environment, in turn, shapes those that are part of it, who keeps it alive. As you become more and more embedded you too become shaped.

**You**

In this way, as you become embedded in your new environment, you also become one of the peers (the strange creatures) who, in a small way, sustain and constitute the environment by their activity. To be specific, you start contributing by producing an academic text in the form of an MA, PHD or perhaps an article. As a new entrant, however, one is also still in need of being shaped. When you arrive in a situation, you take from it more than you give.

What this means for the aspiring researcher is that you cannot simply waltz in and dance to your own tune. You find yourself in an environment that is specific, that subscribes to some form of



*“Art is not merely expressive, it is also interpretive of how we humans make sense of ourselves and our world.”*

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## Embracing The Value of Critique in Academia

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academic rigour and which furthermore, has its own ‘culture’, so to say. If you value this particular environment i.e. you want to become embedded in it, you have to allow yourself to be shaped by it. That is, ironically, to find your own voice you have to allow yourself to be shaped by your environment and the peers that constitute it. The alternative is being a voice out of nowhere. As ‘they’ say, in a slightly different vein but with the same implications, there is nothing outside discourse.

### **Critique**

This leads one to that thing that makes many tremble. One way you and your work take form (become shaped) by the academic environment and those that inhabit it is through critique. And this is where it becomes personal.

Critique, I slowly came to realise, is one of the shaping forces in the academic environment and more than anything gives form through the activity of and engagement with your peers in the production of an academic text. If one thinks of it as a shaping force, an etymological trajectory appears; The word critique, stems from the Ancient Greek word *Kritikos*, meaning the art of judging that which is ‘valuable’. A critic is someone who can discern – who can ‘see’ that which is of value in a particular form of art. Critique, however, as something that looks for value, can also be taken in its active sense; the art of shaping into something valuable. Thus, in its contemporary academic usage the word still echoes its origins in its active sense: to form or shape into something of value. Academically speaking, if critique is a force that shapes it aims to shape into something that is of value to the academic environment. Sharing critique is thus a collective activity, that should seek to contribute something of value to the character and vitality of the academic environment. Good and interesting academic work.

In this way, critique from your peers, ideally speaking, is one of those elements that give shape to your work so that it can be of value to the environment you

become embedded in. You and your work are shaped and sharpened by critique from your peers so that it can eventually contribute, be valuable academic output, and be valuable to the department as a whole. Adding value means you now actively partake and add in the construction and constitution of your environment.

On a personal note, I found that I wanted to be valuable to the environment in which I found myself. It was an environment that had an institutional culture and

***“But it is this development of a thick skin that helps one ride the wave of critique more adeptly, and which makes seminars and colloquia so valuable as a space where critique can flow freely and where the individual too can grow”***

‘spirit’ going that spoke of rigour yet had an ‘openness’ about it that was attractive. This came with one significant challenge in the writing journey, however. It is not always comfortable being formed. The shaping force of critique is a powerful one, and if one is not mindful as a student one can quickly allow it to overwhelm.

For me this became a danger in a couple of ways; one was being precious about your work. You want to contribute to an academic environment, but you also sometimes feel uncomfortable in taking input from others. For me this stemmed from the fear that critique will present something that you cannot easily integrate into your own constellation of

ideas. Basically, that you will be asked to account for something that unsettles the trajectory of how you imagine your ideas will form and progress towards the finish line. This posed the danger of becoming isolated and I had to learn how to be open to engagement, to taking form. Before trying to add my own voice. In this instance, taking form didn’t mean that you had to become a cog in a system, taking form meant being open to engagement and learning how to ‘peddle’ critique to the benefit of your environment and your peers.

Critically one also has to develop a thick skin, because not all critique hits the mark. One receives critique from all directions and in some cases the critique might be ‘correct’ but not necessarily the right critique for you to make the mistakes, finish the study and learn from it.

But it is this development of a thick skin that helps one ride the wave of critique more adeptly, and which makes seminars and colloquia so valuable as a space where critique can flow freely and where the individual too can grow. I found that it was at these spaces, as intimating as they may seem at first, where a lot of the shaping takes place.

Incidentally, this, for me was the value of a good supervisor (Prof Ruth Teer-Tomaselli). Someone who could ‘let go’ at certain points but who could also make sure that you keep in line with academic standards, don’t bite off more than you can chew or work in the realm of loose speculation.

### **Conclusion**

Embeddedness implies being shaped into something valuable to a specific environment. As a individual that can give and take critique and who can produce quality work. But embeddedness also means you can draw power from your surroundings, you can draw on your environment to shape you and your work into something stronger and more resilient. This also makes it a commitment – you want to be valuable to the spirit or character of a place. In this way you let yourself be shaped so that you can draw power from your surroundings, not be isolated, and that you can eventually, perhaps, shape in turn.

Developing a Post-PhD Research Career

# Ultimately the PhD was simply not enough

**Tigere Muringa\***

**M**y journey in academia and authorship began soon after I completed my undergraduate degree. When I was approaching the end of my undergraduate studies, I was given a minor research assignment and faced a real challenge figuring out the course I should take. I was very passionate about media and cultural studies in the field of media, but I couldn't decide what the essay should focus on. Nevertheless, by somewhat divine chance, I came across a published master's thesis that looked at the media coverage of political candidates during 2013 Zimbabwean elections. It was contextualised to the 2013 Zimbabwean presidential elections.

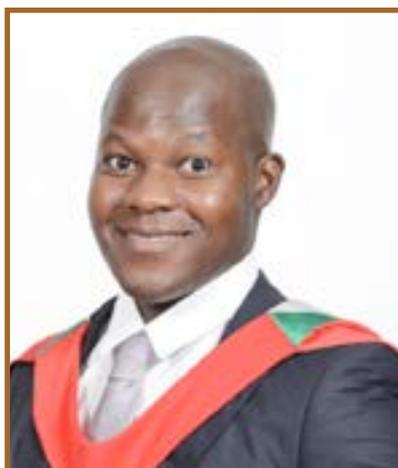
And that was the beginning of my journey as an author/researcher interested in the media and elections. The procedure of planning and writing the essay was so engaging that I felt I just had to continue doing this kind of exercise. I was determined to do a master's degree and later a PhD, and I even had an idea of the type of research I would like to do at that stage.

Following the fulfilling experience I had on that undergraduate research essay and completing my honours degree, I was so fortunate to have the opportunity to work on my graduate master's degrees and later my PhD thesis. During this process, I gained many valuable skills crucial to young academics: preparing and amending research proposals and ethics applications, organising and conducting fieldwork across different platforms.

**Navigating the hurdles**

Yet the next four years (from master to completion of PhD) held many difficulties, most of which were not anticipated. The challenges began almost instantaneously in the form of data collection issues. I wanted to focus on news practitioners' interviews and therefore access audio data from the journalist's interviews to complete the secondary data. Unfortunately, getting hold of the journalist to participate in the interviews proved near impossible, even with the help of some very supportive contacts. Effectively, it meant significantly remodelling my research on the go.

I also experienced challenges in the form of recurring health-related issues, and these were both physically and mentally taxing. Sometimes this entailed frustrating experiences navigating university bureaucracy. These events and issues all created potential hindrances that challenged the way I



approached my work. This however, helped me reflect on what had made the PhD a successful and positive experience, despite all the challenges.

**Life beyond the PhD**

The post-PhD stage requires that a person engages in research, attends conferences, writes and publishes. Understanding and dealing rationally with the realities of a life in academia is as essential as being clever. Once a person graduates the clock is always ticking. As a young professional, a person who completes their PhD needs to select appropriate research problems that they may complete in time. In addition, they ought to be attending conferences and publishing essential papers.

A common mistake I made when getting into academia was that I wasn't fully aware of what was required for the academic career to stay relevant. From Masters to PhD I can safely say that I was going after an achievement. I wanted a doctorate. Because of such a limited approach, many research careers never happen. To say the least, like most graduates, I wasn't prepared for what would happen to me after completing my PhD studies. Most people emerge from graduate school with a PhD and excellent technical skills but little understanding of surviving the research career. In this, I was not alone. The post-PhD survival skills are seldom part of the doctoral curriculum. The statement "good students find their way on their own while the remainder cannot be helped" made my plight even worse, since at the time of completing my PhD, I wasn't aware of the path to establishing myself in research. I completed my PhD without a journal article, book chapter or a book. After becoming a PhD graduate, I didn't know that it would be like starting again from the ground to establish myself in the research career. At this point, I almost become like those graduates who get an excellent opportunity of passing from a graduate study to scientific retirement without engaging in a career.

However, because of my passion for research, after such an experience, rather than being naïve, I rose to the challenge. I gave myself training and did tutorials online to learn about the public and prepare peer-reviewed journal articles. From my PhD thesis, I began to write journal articles that I targeted at several journals in South Africa. I began to look out for calls for papers and book chapters on the internet to submit my work to. This process did not pay immediate dividends given the amount of waiting required in the process of journal publications. However, slowly, things began to take shape when I started getting reviews and corrections for my submitted journal articles. I am confident that I am now better positioned and set to establish myself as a researcher in media and elections.

\* Dr Tigere Muringa is Director of Research, M&G Research Consultants

**Life Lessons From The Newsroom**

# “If it bleeds, it leads”: Pointers from a Journalist

**Silusapho Nyandai\***

In July 2012 the first, of countless by-lines with my name on it was published in the Durban based *Daily News* newspaper. The story was a hard news article about a young boy who had died in a fire which had gutted a flat while he was locked in at home alone, on Mahatma Gandhi Road in the South Beach area of Durban.

I have learned much about being a journalist since then, but allow me to take you back there for a moment. On that warm July morning in 2012, I learned what it means when they say: “if it bleeds it leads”.

My time at the *Daily News* was part of my Work Integrated Learning (WIL) experience programme which was a requirement for passing my National Diploma in Journalism at the Durban University of Technology (DUT).

On the day in question I had heard the commotion from my residence. I lived on the same street as the deceased boy. On investigation I found out about the fire and I immediately called my Deputy News Editor at the time, whose response was to ask: “has someone died?”. He further told me to find out, because the story would only work if there was a dead person involved.

I remember trying to get the fire fighters on scene to grant me an on-the-record interview, but they refused despite my adrenaline infused enthusiasm. I

**\* Silusapho Nyanda currently works for a government newspaper called *Vuku’uzenzele* and he is Assistant Director: *Vuk’uzenzel* Government Communication and Information System.**

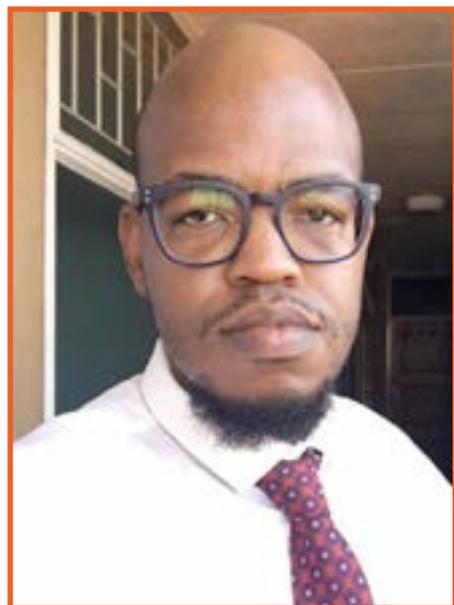
eventually managed to get some unofficial information from the fire fighters and eyewitnesses on scene. Despite asking numerous times, the family would not speak to me at the time, a feeling that I would only understand with time.

When I went to the office, (because this was pre-COVID19 and working from home), I had a discussion with my then Deputy News Editor who told me that I could not use the information from the fire fighters on scene. The hustle started again as I now had to get an official statement from the municipality spokesperson. In my naivety I thought that this would be the easy part. On that day I lost half my hairline.

At first all I got was a standard “we will release a statement” response. Eventually I wrote the story and now sat frustrated for hours as I waited for the municipality’s response. At the end of it was all the information I already had. With experience I learned that I could have written that article based on eyewitness accounts and added the municipality’s “official statement” as a by the way the municipality did confirm.

The article itself was an above the fold page two story. To be frank with you, I don’t remember what I wrote in the article but I am certain there was red ink all over it. On that day, I learned two valuable lessons in journalism: How and when you approach people who have lost a child is crucial in getting the interviews. Your desire for a scoop should always tread on the side of being a human being first.

The second lesson I learned on that day, is that something which seems like big news to me, might not make it into the paper. Always check all your angles and what is missing before even pitching the idea to your publisher, editor or research supervisor.



***“On that day, I learned two valuable lessons in journalism: How and when you approach people who have lost a child is crucial in getting the interviews. Your desire for a scoop should always tread on the side of being a human being first.”***

**The Contentious Copyright Amendment Bill is Evolving Slowly**

# A Personal Reflection on the Saga of the Copyright Amendment Bill

**Monica Seeber\***

Last week, the 2022 schedule for the parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Trade and Industry indicated that the Committee will be meeting on 8, 9 and 11 March. They will be considering the most recent round of submissions by stakeholders on the Copyright Amendment Bill of 2013.

Having been involved since that beginning, I can hardly believe that, nine years after the draft Bill was first published for comment, we are still arguing about it. The story has truly been a saga. You may well ask what the problems are and why the Bill has not yet been enacted into law as a revision of the 1978 Copyright Act as amended, and I can only answer that it is a portmanteau, multipurpose, multiple industry Bill with diverse elements and contradictions that sets out to do too much; that it is poorly drafted; that it fails to balance the rights of creators with the needs of society; that it has given way to undue influence and is biased as a result...that it has lost its way and become a nightmare for its supporters and critics alike.

If I were to recount the saga in all its gory details you would still be reading seven hours later – if you had not fallen asleep or thrown a brick at your computer screen in fury. So I shall confine this update to where the Bill is right now (as far as it concerns authors and publishers) and what is likely to come next.

Late last year the minister of trade and industry admitted that the Bill was flawed in some respects and that the DTIC would try to fix some contentious clauses. We were invited to submit comments on those specific clauses to the Portfolio Committee, which would, taking all the (conflicting) comments into account, decide whether the Bill was ready to go back to the National Assembly to be passed, and thence to the National Council of Provinces (don't expect a happy ending any time soon).

At the core of ANFASA's 12-page submission, something like the eleventh or twelfth over the years, was the three-step test of the Berne Convention, to which South Africa is a signatory:

- (1) *Authors of literary and artistic works protected by this Convention shall have the exclusive right of authorising the reproduction of these works, in any manner or form.*
- (2) *It shall be a matter for legislation in the countries of the Union to permit the reproduction of such works in*



***“... hoping the saga ... will come to an end with victory for creativity, authors, and the book”***

*certain special cases, provided that such reproduction does not conflict with a normal exploitation of the work and does not unreasonably prejudice the legitimate interests of the author.*

The DTIC had asked whether the three-step test should be included in clauses which set out the copyright exceptions for educational purposes. ANFASA argued that it should, and we gave detailed reasons.

We then went on to say that trying to fix the Bill by attending to a few of its most contentious clauses was simply not enough; that there was too much wrong with the Bill and it needed to be re-written by experts. Quite honestly, I feel sorry for the members of the Portfolio Committee because they are not expert in complex and technical copyright issues.

So, that is it. Nine years later, the light is still too far down the tunnel to be more than a pinprick.

For nine years ANFASA has been arguing and lobbying for authors' rights to receive

some payment when large chunks of their books (in print and online) are copied in schools and universities when they are denied the right to authorise and to receive payment. Instead of concern for the continued creativity of authors we have been subjected to cries of 'the Bill will open the doors of learning to the previously marginalised' which can only be interpreted to mean that the law will allow schools to make copies of books when education departments fail to deliver them. Or that the inexpensive licensing of extracts in universities will now give way to free copying. Some advocates of free copying have even said that copyright is 'unconstitutional' because it denies the right to an education. Go figure.

Nine years later, I sometimes wonder if all the effort is worth it. Does it really matter if there is a decline in writing and publishing? Does it matter if South Africa's output of knowledge production, of quality books, is set back? If potential authors decide to do something more lucrative for a living? Maybe knowledge ought to be free. Really free, that is, so that all those who impart it – teachers, lecturers, librarians – also, like authors, do it for free.

I sometimes wonder whether I should be doing something more lucrative – selling boerewors rolls, for instance. There seems to have been a lot of effort over the years, for very little result.

But I don't want to end on a pessimistic note. Where there is life there is hope, and so I'm hoping that the saga of the Copyright Amendment Bill will come to an end with victory for creativity, for authors, and for the book.

**\* Monica Seeber is the team leader of the ANFASA Copyright Team**

# The Tribulations of an Emerging Scholar

## The Toil of Academic Authorship

**Joseph S. Kiva\***



**B**ecoming an author is neither a walk in the park nor a bed of roses. The hardships which come with it are particularly pronounced in academia. Producing a scholarly article with your name on it requires immense conviction and persistence. The main challenge faced by prospective academic authors is a lack of motivation. Other hindrances include shortage of data collection funds and finding talented mentors who voluntarily share their expertise about the art of writing for publication.

I am an emerging scholar who is passionate about the craft of writing and getting my work published. Presently, I engage in these activities for the joy they bring me and not necessarily because my livelihood demands it. In the long term, my goal is to become a renowned academic who publishes extensively in my field of communication and related social science disciplines.

**\* Joseph S. Kiva is a lecturer at the Uganda Christian University (UCU)**

It takes hard work, tenacity, and laser focus to become someone who not only endures the ups and downs but moves forward no matter what. My academic publishing experience involved a collaboration with other authors. This endeavor produced three peer reviewed articles, which appeared in reputable journals. Our goal was for all three to be published around the same time.

Ultimately, it took a year for our joint articles to be accepted. We decided at the outset that we wouldn't restrict our article submissions to a sole journal because of the protracted waiting period. Finding the appropriate journals to submit our work to for consideration, was labour intensive. Furthermore, the reviewers from these various journals always suggested changes to our articles. This reviewer commentary can be draining, particularly if you are a novice author, who is uncertain about how to approach the corrections to your manuscript. It must be borne in mind that producing a totally

impeccable journal article is difficult if not impossible. So one needs to be patient, and open to constructive criticism lest all one's wonderful work be lost.

The blatant rejections from publishers require stoicism. They don't mean that you will never get published. Most journal reviewers usually provide constructive feedback, which can be used to improve your writing and then resubmit elsewhere. Furthermore, they offer concrete reasons for rejecting your work in the first place. By all means, take the time to evaluate the relevance of their critique for yourself before attempting to address it. In sum, seeing a published article with my name alongside those of fellow authors was more than pleasing, it was indescribable. I now know that becoming an accomplished author is time consuming and not for the faint-hearted. Therefore, I salute academics who are well published and aspire to emulate them in future. For now, the struggle continues.

***“My academic publishing experience involved a collaboration with other authors. This endeavor produced three peer reviewed articles, which appeared in reputable journals”***

**Sources**

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## The Importance of Structure, Format and Presentation in Academic Writing



# A Matter Of Style

**Alex Taremwa\***

**A**t post-grad, the only compliment my supervisor paid me was that he loved my academic writing. This compliment carried a lot of weight because most journalists struggle to differentiate between journalistic and academic writing. I had read widely; the

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defence panel agreed that the literature review was tight, and the plagiarism check had passed me with flying colours.

A few months after my graduation, a colleague in Norway approached me with an offer I couldn't refuse; contribute my study as a chapter in her forthcoming book. The only catch was to condense my 50,000-word thesis into 8,000 words.

Even more, there would be a double-blind peer review of my submission. I quickly Googled what a double-blind peer review is and concluded it was manageable, so I got to work. After three sleepless nights, I submitted the first draft.

After a few weeks of agonizing patience, the document returned to me in the company of two attachments from the peer reviewers. After reading the first three comments, my brain and body agreed that

***"I quickly Googled what a double-blind peer review is and concluded it was manageable, so I got to work"***

continues on page 15:

## The Importance of Structure, Format and Presentation in Academic Writing

continued from page 14:

I could benefit from a few hours of sleep. That is when it hit me that I should have never taken my supervisor’s compliments to heart.

But while I was demoralized, the fire to have my thesis published in a peer-reviewed journal kept me going. I quickly looked up the publisher’s style guide and studied it cover-to-cover.

I had noticed that while I had a lot of red in my documents, the reviewers had not questioned the substance of my work but rather the structure, the format of citations, quotes, tables, references, and appendices. I quickly installed the EndNote citation software, integrated it into Microsoft Word and set it to American Psychological Association (APA) 7th Edition.

This software helps the author to ensure that all cited all listed references are cited, and all cited references are listed. It also helps with citations with more than three authors, the order of the names, the publisher, the publisher’s geographical location, and other relevant details that the writer would otherwise have to capture manually.

It is important to note that different publishers have different styles of writing. Scholars who are desirous of publishing their work ought to read the style guide of the publishers before submitting their work for consideration.

Additionally, I shared my document with two professors whose academic rigour and attention to detail I trusted to catch any redundancies and grammatical errors that could have escaped. Their comments and criticisms helped enrich my submission and significantly improved its publishing prospects.

Upon the second submission, the



comments from the peer reviewers were warm and encouraging. They said the document was intellectually stimulating, the findings were thorough, the presentation did justice to the data, and the ethical considerations – specifically the respondents’ confidentiality – were addressed well.

Surprisingly, writing the short articles gave me a bloody nose. It took me more than two days to put together a 250-word abstract and a bio of 100 words. I almost depleted all my coffee on these two and maybe this article too.

The good news is the book titled ‘Covid-19 and the Media in Sub-Saharan Africa: Media Viability, Framing and Health Communication’ will be published in out in the Summer of 2022 with a chapter on the viability of digital subscriptions in Uganda authored by yours truly – a testimony to resilience and caffeine.

***“I had noticed that while I had a lot of red in my documents, the reviewers had not questioned the substance of my work but rather the structure, the format of citations, quotes, tables, references, and appendices”***

### Publication

- 1 Taremwa, A. (2022). Viability of paid subscription in Uganda: An analysis of Chimp Reports’ Paywall, In: Dralega, C.A. and Napakol, A. (eds), Covid-19 and the Media in Sub-Saharan Africa: Media Viability, Framing and Health Communication. Emerald Publishers, London.

# The Impatience of Being Earnest

Keyan G Tomaselli

**T**he *Importance of Being Earnest, A Trivial Comedy for Serious People* is a play by satirist Oscar Wilde. First performed on 14 February 1895 at the St James's Theatre in London, it is a farcical comedy in which the protagonists maintain fictitious personae to escape burdensome social obligations. Working within the social conventions of late Victorian London, the play's major themes are the triviality with which it treats institutions as serious as marriage, and the resulting satire of Victorian ways. Its high farce and witty dialogue have helped make *The Importance of Being Earnest* Wilde's most enduringly popular play<sup>1</sup>.

Back in the day – when I was a student (1966-1983) scholarly publication was a big deal. Typesetting and printing were expensive and complicated affairs during this slower mechanical, analogue age. An article could stack for five years once accepted before seeing the light of day, and copies were held largely by a few hundred libraries only. Only the top scholars got published. The rest just taught. Or consulted. Or did committee work. Or, took early retirement.

Published articles often drew vigorous peer critique and the objective was to impact the discipline, to develop theory and offer explanation. Careers were made by solid work, clearly evidencing slow scholarship, but squandered when published studies were found scientifically wanting. In those days, readers read, they dissected, and they commented on and debated the publications under scrutiny.

Nowadays, some scholars cite, insist on being cited, and engage in cartel behaviour to push up their metrics. Tick the performance box; engage in fast and dirty scholarship to meet institutional auditing requirements and financial bottom lines. DHET (Department of Higher Education and Training) is God, as it provides the variable state-derived income via which universities can pay their bills.

Scholarly publishing has become a treadmill. Everyone is expected to do it: professors, lecturers, even graduate students. Well and good, except that much publishing is just codswallop – a niche so beguilingly exploited by the predatory open access online publishers. Journals now are expected by many authors simply to offer the equivalent of product displays, and no-one has the time, inclination or is rewarded for engaging in debate, for writing book reviews or commentaries any more, there being no institutional rewards for this kind of work.

Guest editors sometimes demand that their skimpy editorials be accorded full research status. Write a short commentary,

continues on page 17:



***“Scholarly publishing has become a treadmill. Everyone is expected to do it: professors, lecturers, even graduate students. Well and good, except that much publishing is just codswallop – a niche so beguilingly exploited by the predatory open access online publishers”***

1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Importance\\_of\\_Being\\_Earnest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Importance_of_Being_Earnest)

**Editor's Corner**

continued from page 16:

place it as a full research paper, tick the box for the performance management template, massage your dean's Excel spreadsheet and bank the proceeds of the DHET publication incentive subsidy, if that's what your institution allows you to do. Move on to the next article lest you forfeit your annual notch increase.

We need a Zondo Commission for academics perhaps.

When writing to editors, ask whether the journal is 'accredited', but not what its impact is, who its readers are, or where it has been cited. Inquire on submission if your article can appear in the next number, and feign astonishment when told that the review process can take up to six months plus, and publication online another 10 months as the article needs to get into the production queue. Complain that the editor is impeding your career, and then refuse to review articles for this any or any other journal. After all, you are not getting paid to waste your time being collegiate or being a peer. That's mug's work. Somebody else must do the work – like unpaid editors and voluntary editorial board members who slave away after hours delivering a collective project meant to save the planet from overproduction, overconsumption and overexploitation.

Universities have become factories and academics are complicit in the publication conveyer belt, contributing to the issuing of unnecessary carbon emissions. Write faster and faster and faster. Universities are ranked; researchers are rated and roughed up by managerialism. We are turned into cogs who must meet pre-set targets, and be counselled by line managers who may have themselves failed to meet their own targets, and who may be lower ranked, with less publications and fewer degrees.

Just think, physicists like Newton, Einstein and Higgs would have failed in the current academic environment. They just did not publish enough. The first two were not even employed at universities when they made their breakthroughs. Higgs – of the God particle - observed that he had become an embarrassment to his university. Why do academics not get to measure the performance of their auditors, administrators, deans and managers? This of course would be a monumental waste of time, but at least we'd feel that we were getting even.

Had these physicists not done their thing, we'd still be in the dark ages, thinking that the sun revolves around the earth. Nevertheless, many politicians scarcely believe the climate change scientists. Republicans in the USA and truck drivers

in Canada reject immunological science, and in South Africa many claimed that Homo Naledi was just another racist plot. "Back to Past" is the movie that needs to be reprised under these circumstances.

Academics are supposed to think, break with dominant discourses or rewrite the taken-for-granted. Earnestness takes time and care.

So, my advice, which simply mirrors every article published in the ANFASA Magazine authored by an emergent academic, is to take yourself seriously, which is a virtue. But, impatience in getting published because you have performance boxes to tick, can only backfire. Someone, somewhere, sometime, will find that substandard article that earned your university a welcome DHET incentive, but your own integrity might thereby be impugned.

Playing Trivia is fun, being trivial is good for relaxation, but trivializing scholarship by being impatient is to be resisted. There is indeed importance in being earnest.

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This article is a cheeky summary of my longer essay on the topic, Tomaselli, K.G., 2018. A self-reflexive analysis of Communicare: Inter-paradigmatic repositioning. *Communicare: Journal for Communication*

*Sciences in Southern Africa*, 37(2), 17-30. <https://journals.co.za/content/journal/10520/EJC-127f11d1d>

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