

# No news is bad news

 By [Janine Lazarus](#)

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Like most small business owners, I assume, a few quiet days before a hectic schedule are always welcome - but they generally present themselves with a good measure of guilt. Try as I might, I can't stop myself from keeping a beady eye on my Blackberry - lest I miss out on the next pitch or proposal.

So one of the things I do to assuage my guilt is to hop onto the internet to catch up on all the emails cramming my inbox. One of these missives recently was a petition calling for the review of the Secrecy Bill. I didn't need to read any further before adding my name - and a strong comment - to the spiraling number of citizens of this country who are entirely against a Bill that threatens fundamental rights like the freedom of speech.

## Criticism

I'm often criticized by clients in Media Skills Training workshops for what they view as the media's unwarranted invasion of privacy. I'm used to this. When you stand before people who have been on the rough edge of the wedge in newspaper stories or radio interviews, then being lambasted for your brethren riding roughshod over their lives becomes par for the course.

*But* - and that's an important *but* - I make no excuses for the critical mirror that I believe needs to be held in front of society in order for it to see itself in all its beauty and rank ugliness.

I don't buy into the ideology that the media is responsible for nation building. If we're tasked to tell things like they are, then in as much it cannot translate into catching the killers we write about, it also cannot be one that paints a picture that doesn't reflect what is actually going on.

Another inevitable criticism against the media from clients is that reporters don't tell 'the truth' and are not objective in their reportage. In fact, I shudder to think of how many delegates are at pains to tell me that they don't read newspapers because it depresses them. Again, I'm used to this.

## Objectivity, truth is pie in the sky

For the first ten years of my career as a bright-eyed and bushy-tailed hack, I wore my badge of editor-ordered objectivity like a medal of honour. But then I soon learned that objectivity was as pie in the sky a concept as the truth. We are all coloured by our life experience.

I'd reckon that the most you can ask of a wily reporter is for balance. To tell all sides of the story so that everyone involved is given the right of reply.

So, back then to the Protection of State Information Bill. I'll admit that the media in South Africa has got it wrong on some occasions, and inexcusably wrong on others. But to imply that they are wrong all of the time simply creates an unnecessary framework for an abuse of power.

## Secrecy Bill implications

Apart from impinging on journalists, the Bill will also have grave implications for people in the civil service who want to blow the whistle. Damning investigations into upgrades on presidential residences, the questionable use of a military key point as a launch pad for a private party, and other scoops from the past decade that exposed corruption and bribery, will all be neatly swept under the carpet.

A law that silences people at grassroots level talks to a government rhetoric that has grown more hostile towards the media over the years, and something that would be insanely out of touch with the way information flows in the 21st century.

No news can only equate to bad news.

## ABOUT JANINE LAZARUS

Janine Lazarus is a South African journalist and interviewer of top names in the news, public figures and celebrities. Follow @JanineLazarus on Twitter.

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