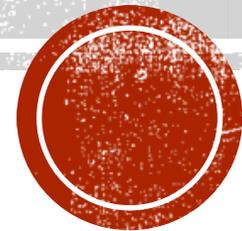


TAKING THE FLAK

Exposing the Ku Klux Klan for Print & Broadcast

By Ken Pratt



THANKS TO JENNY KEAN & ABBEY MACLURE

- For your useful online videos on how journalists can protect themselves from online abuse and threats.
- Interesting that when reporting Black Lives Matter there is reference to racist abuse as this is partly what my presentation today will deal with.
- Jenny & Abbey's videos are useful in providing online tips and are a strong foundation upon which to build this debate.
- For my part I'm hoping today to explore the creation of a wider cultural/societal approach - I'll be looking at the idea of creating 'Protective Pillars' to help empower journalists to 'feel' that they have the power of democratic institutions on their side to go about our business and to explain how protective pillars can help us to create a safe and healthier 'cultural atmosphere' within which to operate.



THE SUNDAY POST

- The presentation really starts with an investigation I carried out for The Scotsman newspaper many years ago – one that was followed up by Mark Daly of the BBC who went on to win The Royal Television Society Awards for the Panorama documentary The Secret Policeman.
- My infiltration of the Ku Klux Klan in the UK began with an innocuous glance at a magazine a Rangers fan/contact of mine brought into the pub one night. He'd picked it up outside Ibrox before the game. In the BNP Spearhead magazine there was a PO Box number, an add for Ku Klux Klan regalia. I wrote to it and so began my correspondence with The Grand Wizard in the USA, who, over a period of months began to introduce me to the Scottish branch of the Ku Klux Klan in Edinburgh and the English branch in Bournemouth.
- I was working as a staff reporter at The Sunday Post in Glasgow at the time and the paper initially supported my investigation then inexplicably dropped it.



THE SCOTSMAN

- I considered the investigation to be in the public interest so I disobeyed my Editor and continued to investigate it independently – eventually publishing the story on the front page of The Scotsman.
- During the investigation I lived at the homes of Ku Klux Klan members in Bournemouth. They knew I was a journalist but The Grand Wizard in the USA had instructed them that The Sunday Post was a white Anglo-Saxon protestant publication ‘untainted by that devilish Jew Robert Maxwell’, and that I was to be trusted and given full access – he reminded them that the Ku Klux Klan was founded by Scots and that if the organization was to be developed in the UK it would have to reach out to ‘friendly sources’ such as The Scottish Sunday Post.
- The headline of the story ‘Opening Up The Bigot’s Secret Society’ was the trigger for the threats and abuse I was later to receive.



MOONLIGHTING IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

- The photograph you are about to see is one I took of UK Klansmen in my hotel room in Bournemouth - and the by-line Robert Sandilands is the nom de plume I used at the time for freelance material that I considered to be in the public interest but which my editors at The Sunday Post didn't see fit to publish.
- I actually wrote about the source of my interest in racism and the extreme right in a piece for the AJE a few years back
- <https://journalism-education.org/2015/01/the-night-big-tom-died-teaching-students-to-use-personal-experiences-by-ken-pratt-university-of-west-of-scotland/>
- The term 'public interest' is core. If student journalists are to properly apply the public interest then they must be empowered with the moral authority to ask hard questions. It is my contention today that the online abuse that Jenny and Abbey discuss in their videos eats away at the motivation and 'cultural confidence' required by young journalists to successfully operate in today's environment.



'WE'RE COMING TO GET YOU'



'YOU BROKE OUR TRUST. YOU ARE A DEAD MAN.'

- 'Bad White Man' – KKK UK term for left-wingers and Communists.'
- Before leaving my hotel room, they carefully dusted off their fingerprints from everything they had touched. 'Just a precaution' smiled one. 'In case you decide to have a chat with the Special Branch.'
- For several months I corresponded with the Great Titan, known to his friends as Richard.

KKK WOMEN AND POLICE INVOLVEMENT

- During my time with the KKK one of the women members told me that the group had links to the police, that her friend's husband, a policeman was a member, and that there were others.
- I included this claim in my original copy for The Scotsman.
- Mark Daly from the BBC then approached me during early research for his award winning documentary The Secret Policeman (2003), winner of The Royal Television Society Awards.
- Mark was interested in developing the police angle. He then joined the Greater Manchester force as part of an undercover investigation to expose racism. In one scene a trainee is filmed wearing a Ku Klux Klan mask and threatening to beat up an Asian colleague.



RACISM IN THE POLICE

- "He'll regret the day he was ever born a Paki," he says, before adding that his aim is "to eradicate the whole fucking country of people like him". Daly also recorded racist remarks made by other trainee officers. One recruit said murdered black teenager Stephen Lawrence "deserved to die", that his killing was "a good memory" and that white racists "should be given diplomatic immunity".
- Mark's investigation was ground-breaking. And in July 2021 Greater Manchester Police was described as institutionally racist by the chairwoman of a panel scrutinising the force's record.
- Elizabeth Cameron suggested disproportionate use of police powers went "beyond unconscious bias and into the realms of racism".
- A report into race equality issues at GMP found officers were four times more likely to use force on black people.



THE SECRET POLICEMAN BBC PANORAMA



ARRESTED

- As Mark was walking to his flat in Stockport he was surrounded by a group of officers from internal affairs. They had received ‘an anonymous tip-off’ about the documentary.
- “They put me in the cells for the night,” recalls Mark. “It was bizarre. I’d been working as a probationary police constable sorting out domestics, arresting people and putting them in cells. Suddenly I was on the other side.”
- Mark was arrested on suspicion of committing three offences: obtaining a pecuniary advantage by deception (his police wages), presenting false documents (he didn't let on that he had worked as an undercover reporter on his police trainee application form), and damaging police property (he made a hole in his bulletproof vest to hold a pinhole camera and battery pack).
- So ended Daly's seven-month undercover operation for the BBC.



AWARDS AND PH (D)

- The threats and intimidation this paper will deal with isn't social media harassment and bullying - it deals with deep-rooted covert institutionalised threats to Press freedom.
- Coincidentally both Mark and myself come from the same town, Clydebank in The West of Scotland. We'd previously never met other than bumping into one another in a local pub and meeting on a job when I worked at The Daily Record and Mark at The Scotsman.
- Six police officers resigned after Marks documentary and I went on to complete my Ph (D) at Glasgow University that partly interrogates aspects of invisible embedded fascism in aspects of Scottish culture specifically the heightened impact of Caledonian antiszygy associated with Scots dialect when merged with Standard English) – the KKK itself of course was founded by Scots cavalry officers during the American Civil War.



FEELING SHY ABOUT TELLING THE TRUTH? -FEAR & SELF-CENSORSHIP

- According to a [May 2020 report](#) by Peter Noorlander on the implementation of the 2016 Council of Europe recommendation, attacks against journalists remain insufficiently investigated, and a very high percentage of incidents go unpunished. “Journalists have little confidence that attacks or threats against them will be investigated, and often do not report them,” the report said. “This has a grave effect on them, and many no longer report attacks but instead self-censor and shy away from potentially controversial issues ... [CoE] Member States have committed to creating an enabling environment for freedom of expression, yet, what journalists experience on the ground is increased violence, threats, denigration, arbitrary arrests and detention.”
- ‘Most people self-censor to avoid occupational or personal harm. Researchers have found that social media helps grow a phenomenon known as the [‘spiral of silence’](#) — when individuals suppress their own views if they think they differ from those of family, friends or colleagues. People are also becoming more afraid to share their views because of a deliberate effort by far-right movements and connected media to stoke division and polarization (Day 2021).



BOURDIEU

- According to Bourdieu (1986), self-censorship among journalists comes from their fear of being left behind and is a function of their *habitus*, or an internalised sense for the rules within the field in which they work, and for strategies of how one can accumulate capital, that is, resources in the form of money, prestige, influence. In other words, self-censorship is a form of structural censorship, which comes from the way in which social life and access to resources are organised.
- I mention Bourdieu because it is a similar form of psychological or social/cultural ‘imprisonment’ that we have to empower our journalism students to break free from if they are to provide themselves with the necessary flak jackets to protect themselves from the type of abuse they are increasingly likely to encounter in the course of their work.
- Noorlander (2020) describes this type of violence against journalists as ‘a terminal threat to democracy’ that ‘defies international standards on freedom of expression.’



PROTECTION PILLARS

- This doesn't necessarily take the form of physical threats but is a form of cultural violence where institutions and societal structures coerce young journalists into the application of a debased form of their trade.
- As Noorlander explains 'this has a grave effect on them and many no longer report attacks but instead self-censor and shy away from potentially controversial issues- corruption, the link between organized crime, business and politics, or even 'regular' critical political reporting - do so in fear for their and their family's safety.'
- In his background paper on the Implementation of the Safety of Journalists for the Conference of Ministers Responsible For Media and Information society (Nicosia, Cyprus, May, 2020) Noorlander suggests the creation of what he refers to as 'protection pillars' for journalists.



WHAT IS A PROTECTION PILLAR?

- They come in 4 forms:
- A. The Prevention Pillar
- B. The Protection Pillar
- C. The Prosecution Pillar
- D. The Promotion Pillar
- The Prevention Pillar is most clearly seen in new developments in Iceland which has engaged on what Noorlander refers to as 'a wholesale review of a range of laws that effect freedom of expression.' The UK has to now review whether the legislation it has in place is robust and effective in practice. If not laws must be reformed and implementation ensured.



THE PROTECTION PILLAR

- Under The Protection Pillar early warning and rapid-response mechanisms such as hotlines should be set-up and there must be genuine and effective partnership with civic society.
- We can look to areas of Solutions Journalism to engage more constructively with a range of our civic institutions. That may mean teams being organized including teams of journalism educators like ourselves to step in to public (and private) institutions to educate around the areas of human rights and freedom of expression – simple steps to tackle the spiral of silence that Bourdieu refers to. In HE institutions it could mean for example getting more directly involved in the debates around freedom of expression on campus.
- An organization like the AJE for example is well placed to organize a working group from around our Journalism HE institutions to begin planning this.



THE PROSECUTION PILLAR

- The Prosecution Pillar requires an ending of impunity: all crimes against journalists must be properly and effectively investigated and perpetrators brought to justice. Noorlander suggests ‘the establishment of special prosecutors units’, with specialised protocols that provide guidance on the investigation and prosecution of crimes committed against journalists and other media actors and that recognize the links between such violence and their work. Online attacks must be prosecuted as thoroughly as those that occur in the physical, ‘offline’ world. Effective training of law enforcement, judicial and other public officials is key.
- The Promotion Pillar recommends that Member states engage in information, education and awareness campaigns on the importance of the issue of safety of journalists and that they develop civil society partnerships to promote the safety of journalists



TIME FOR ACTION

- The UK can learn from national plans and protective mechanisms that are being implemented in Sweden and the Netherlands and Italy's protection program for individuals under threat from organized crime. Action should be coordinated with plans on ending violence against women and for the protection of human rights defenders.
- The 'promotion' pillar recommends that Member States engage in information, education and awareness raising campaigns on the importance of the issue of safety of journalists, and that civil society partnerships are created to promote the safety of journalists.
- The urgency of the situation needs to be matched by an urgency of engagement at the political level.



SOME PRACTICAL STEPS

- This means actively challenging built-in cultural assumptions that freedom of expression is a given and is safely embedded in our institutions.
- As Noorlander says ‘it is essential, first of all, that political leaders and public officials explicitly recognize that violence against journalists constitutes a threat to democracy. They must unequivocally condemn violent attacks and stop denigrating the media. A positive message needs to come from the top that freedom of expression is vital to democracy.’
- To be effective, national plans of action should be grounded in an informed and well-researched analysis of the situation in the country, including a clear gender analysis. There must be strong political and operational leadership, as well as inter-agency coordination, and genuine civil society partnership from the planning stages onwards. Each plan must set a comprehensive and effective programme of activity that builds practice and evidence over time, and sufficient budget must be allocated.



SOME GOOD NEWS

- I spoke with Mark before and just after Christmas – it was initially planned that we would both present at this conference. Unfortunately he is busy on another BBC investigative assignment today.
- But he said one thing to me that I want to bring to conference. And that is that since The Secret Policeman investigation he doesn't feel oppressed or cowed (sorry Bourdieu) but empowered to continue his investigative work – a signal perhaps that support mechanisms at the BBC are still in a good place to allow investigative journalism to flourish.
- As for me, as an occasional freelance, I still produce occasional investigative material
- <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/scots-clinical-director-jason-leitchs-indian-charity-accused-of-dastardly-acts->
- <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/nuclear-deal-may-fund-scottish-army-p2hhkp8m0>
- But without the backing of a powerful media institution I'm grateful to revert more fully to the insights of cultural theorists like Bourdieu, a sign of the hackademic that I have become.

