

Cardoso, courageous embodiment of patriotic journalism honoured

 By [Anton Harber](#)

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At the University of the Witwatersrand this week, we honoured a patriotic journalist who was killed because of his investigative work. Carlos Cardoso was born in Mozambique but was schooled in Witbank and at Wits. As a supporter of Mozambican independence and Frelimo, and a passionate opponent of colonialism, he was arrested and deported in 1975.

Back in Mozambique, he became a journalist and, within a few years, was the head of the government news agency, AIM. Mozambique had little media freedom and Cardoso bridled against this. He was jailed for six days when he wrote about the Renamo rebellion in a way that deviated from the official line. But then-president Samora Machel came to respect and trust Cardoso and he became part of an inner circle of journalists, though not a party member.

Sound familiar?

Devastated by Machel's death in 1986, he was sharply critical of Frelimo's new leadership, attacking those he said were serving only their own interests. He was concerned about the rise of corruption and started to push for a more independent and robust media. In 1989, depressed and frustrated, he left journalism.

Mozambique opened up its media in 1992 and Cardoso was part of a group of journalists who launched the country's first independent publication, MediaFax. It was only four pages, faxed out nightly to subscribers, but it was an instant success. According to biographer Paul Fauvet: "It was a voice located on the left wing of Frelimo, but quite prepared to denounce government blunders or abuses. And it was sharply written."

Cardoso also became involved in the "Together for the City Movement" in Maputo, winning a seat on the council as an independent. There was no simplistic separation of activism and journalism for him, but instead the spirit of public service that is at the heart of good journalism. His last editorial was an attack on the city council for failing to provide adequate basic services. He was also investigating a 1996 corruption scandal involving the state-controlled Commercial Bank of Mozambique.

Respected - even by those he criticised

On 22 November 2000, Cardoso was gunned down in Maputo. It emerged in the trial of his killers that they had been hired by the family involved in the huge bank fraud. Fauvet writes: "Cardoso came to embody all that was best in Mozambican journalism, all that was honest, questioning, combative. He was admired, respected, loved - even among those subjected to withering criticism in his paper." At his funeral, then-president Joaquim Chissano said: "We were used to arguing with Cardoso. We argued with him because he raised pertinent questions that demand the attention of all of us. He forced us all to think.... Today, when he is no longer with us ... who else will raise the questions with the force that he raised them?"

He forced all of us to think. That's high praise for a journalist.

The Carlos Cardoso Memorial Lecture was delivered by Namibian Gwen Lister, another journalist who has won international accolades for exposing wrongs before and after independence. Lister faced prosecution, threats, firebombs, and advertising boycotts when her newspaper, the Namibian, fought for an end to South African rule. And after independence, pushing relentlessly for accountability and transparency, she has faced threats, firebombs and advertising boycotts. It is a familiar pattern. According to the Committee for the Protection of Journalists, 14 reporters were killed in Africa last year, 44 were in prison at the end of the year, and hundreds were forced into exile. As Mzilikazi wa Afrika, chair of the Forum of African Investigative Reporters and himself a formidable muckraker, put it: "To be in an investigative journalist in Africa, you need a thick skull, the heart of a lion and deaf ears."

Take note of the adjectives used to praise these journalists: critical, independent, questioning, honest, outspoken, combative, fearless, determined to hold power to account, committed to serving a public not a party.... I am sorry to say, President Jacob Zuma, that the patriot's duty is to give you a hard time. It's that simple.

ABOUT ANTON HARBER

Anton Harber, Wits University Caxton Professor of Journalism and chair of the Freedom of Expression Institute, was a Weekly Mail (now Mail & Guardian) founding editor and a Kagiso Media executive director. He wrote *Diepsloot* (Jonathan Ball, 2011), *Recht Malan* Prize winner, and co-edited the first two editions of *The A-Z of South African Politics* (Penguin, 1994/5), *What is Left Unsaid: Reporting the South African HIV Epidemic* (Jacana, 2010) and *Troublemakers: The best of SA's investigative journalism* (Jacana, 2010).

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