

[MUSIC PLAYING]

RICHARD Good afternoon, everyone.

SAMUELS:

EMMANUEL K. Good afternoon.

AKYEAMPONG:

EVAN Thank you.

LIEBERMAN:

RICHARD
SAMUELS: Welcome to today's MIT Starr Forum, Speaking Truth to New Power-- Perspectives on a Free Press and Democracy in South Africa. I'm Richard Samuels. I direct the Center for International Studies at MIT, and I'm very pleased to welcome you. This is the first session of the new semester, and this is one of the only few in-person or hybrid events that we've hosted since the pandemic. So we're very glad to see real people in real seats at the same time in the same field of vision, and we also have a webcast audience that I'd like to acknowledge and thank for attending today's event as well. Our co-sponsors are the CIS, the Center for International Studies at MIT, Harvard University Center for African Studies, the MIT Africa program, and Porter Square Books.

Our topic today, the free press and democracy in South Africa, is of great importance, and you want to frame it in its ideal type. And its ideal type is beyond South Africa. That is, the independent transmission of news has been viewed as the moral cornerstone of free and fair and democratic governance because it would provide citizens with the information they need for self-rule. We think of it as a watchdog, as a Four Estate that would provide oversight of avaricious and corrupt politicians, business elites, other self-interested individuals who might threaten to undermine the norms of fairness and transparency in a democratic society. Now, obviously, this is not irrelevant to thinking about the press in the United States, but today, we're going to listen closely to how this, as an ideal type, is faring in South Africa specifically.

Now, before we get started, what I'd like to do is share that two of our speakers, Evan Lieberman from MIT and Eve Fairbank from Harvard, have both recently authored books that address aspects of this topic. The books are for sale in the lobby, and there'll be a book signing here on stage at the end of the event. And in addition, as is our custom, we'll conclude the event with Q&A, so please line up behind the mic. This microphone will go back to the stairs, and there's one over there. Please line up behind the microphone to ask your one question. For those watching from afar and for those who are virtually with us, please submit your questions online. And I want to emphasize that "one" and "question" are of equivalent importance-- one, and it should not be a speech.

But we also have one housekeeping announcement, which is to ask you to save the date for the next Starr Forum, which is on Friday, October 7. It'll be a Zoom webinar, and it's part of our Focus on Russia series, which is co-chaired by MIT Russia experts Dr. Carol Saivetz and Professor Elizabeth Wood. These talks have focused on, not surprising, the war in Ukraine, and the details will be available on our website as well as on the MIT Event Calendar. And if you've signed up for our newsletter, you'll receive the event notice.

Look, without further ado, let me get out of Emmanuel's way and introduce you to our moderator who will take over from here. Professor Emmanuel Akyeampong is the Ellen Gurney Professor of History and Professor of African and African American Studies at Harvard, and he's the Oppenheimer Faculty Director of the Harvard University Center for African Studies. He's also a faculty associate at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs and a board member at the Du Bois Institute.

As a former chair of the Committee on African Studies, he's been instrumental in creating the Department of African and African American Studies, and we're honored, very honored to welcome him here to MIT and for me to welcome him now to introduce our speakers and this important conversation. The last thing I'll say is that Emmanuel will also moderate the Q&A and enforce rigidly the one-question rule. Thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]

EMMANUEL K. AKYEAMPONG: Thank you, Dick, and good evening to our esteemed guests and distinguished panelists. I am delighted to be moderating tonight's Starr Forum on Speaking Truth to a New Power-- Perspectives on the Free Press and Democracy in South Africa. My name is Emmanuel Akyeampong, as Dick pointed out, and I'm at Harvard University.

When my dear friend and colleague Evan Lieberman approached me over the summer about collaborating on this event, I was immediately enthused about the opportunity. For many years, we have sought to deepen the linkages between our neighboring institutions, inviting our students and affiliated faculty to make the trip up or down Mass Avenue to share the wealth of resources that our two universities offer in the field of African Studies. That tonight's event would bring us together in conversation around South Africa was opportune. Evan has just published a book on post-apartheid South Africa, which we will, of course, hear more about in the course of the evening, and the Center for African Studies at Harvard opened its first multidisciplinary research office in sub-Saharan Africa in South Africa in 2017. We also host the Harvard South Africa Fellows Program, so we have a strong South Africa interest.

Through Evan, I've had the pleasure to be introduced to the work of Eve Fairbanks, who we'll also hear from tonight. Though Eve approaches her work as a journalist, her work brings together history, ethnography, and eloquent storytelling through life stories to paint a picture of not just a nation in transition but the ways in which political change has forced sociocultural change in South Africa as experienced through the lives of individuals, Black and white.

We are also joined by Branko Brkic and Styli Charalambous-- so Branko, you cannot laugh. You know I've been practicing-- of the *Daily Maverick*, South Africa's leading investigative newspaper. The *Daily Maverick* has been at the forefront of covering developing news stories in South Africa from the 2012 massacre at the Marikana mines to the exposure of state capture by South Africa's elite and political classes. Indeed, I have received their daily news digest for two years now, and they are my key source to news coming out of South Africa.

After we hear from our panelists individually this evening, I will invite them to join me on stage in conversation. My hope is that together we can explore not just the present state of South Africa and its democracy but how South Africa can learn from the world and the world from South Africa at a time when democracy may be on the backslide globally. Before I introduce our panelists to come to the stage, I do want to acknowledge that there's the absence of a South African person of color on this evening's panel. While the work of each of our four presenters is informed by those voices, it is not our intention to suggest that we are representative of or speaking on their behalf. I would also encourage my South Africans with us in the audience tonight and those online to join us in the Q&A portion.

As I invite each panelist to the stage to share their initial remarks, I will ask them to reflect on a guiding question, and this is the question. We are all, from our various vantage points, engaged with the South African experiment, the vision of a multiracial, socially just, and economically inclusive democratic society. This vision excited South Africans, particularly those formerly disadvantaged by apartheid, and the world at large. How have we fared with this vision?

So let me invite Branko-- and the idea is that I'll say the full name the first time, and then I could go to first names afterwards. So let me introduce Branko briefly, and Branko will step up. So Branko is editor in chief of *Daily Maverick*, a leading South Africa source of news, opinion, and investigations.

Branko started his career by publishing science fiction books in 1984 in what was then Yugoslavia. In the following seven years, he went from a project-based book publisher to starting what became Yugoslavia's biggest privately owned publishing house. He arrived in South Africa in 1991, where he started off in the reproduction business before working his way back to publishing, this time in magazines. In 2009, he launched the *Daily Maverick*. Please join me in welcoming Branko.

[APPLAUSE]

BRANKO BRKIC: Can you guys hear me? OK, so just a couple of credits, for Styli and I actually created this. So it wasn't only me who founded *Daily Maverick*. Styli co-founder is here.

And you mentioned 2012 massacre in Marikana. We have a guy who actually broke the story. Greg Marinovich is with us. He is the guy who was absolutely pivotal to *Daily Maverick's* success, and it was the biggest story of the post-democratic South Africa in 2012. I don't know if you guys know that 34 miners were killed, most of them in full view of TV cameras, and 78 people were injured, most of them quite badly.

Greg Marinovich was the only guy who actually searched for the truth when the rest of the media was going to the press conferences. And he was the only one who actually-- two weeks later, we published this massive expose in which we exposed the police and, it turns out, 17 murders. How many people were [INAUDIBLE]?

AUDIENCE: Just under 200 were arrested.

BRANKO BRKIC: No, but 17 guys were killed [INAUDIBLE].

AUDIENCE: 17 and 17 [INAUDIBLE].

BRANKO BRKIC: Yeah, 17 people were actually murdered in cold blood by the police, by the police that were supposed to service some people. And to me, personally, that was a break, and it was my personal epiphany. And my life, personally, afterwards was never the same, and my understanding of my role and the *Daily Maverick's* role-- and thankfully, Styli agreed with me-- changed massively after the Marikana.

So Greg Marinovich-- and for you who don't know, there was a Hollywood movie about him, and Ryan Phillippe actually played him. He's actually famous.

[LAUGHTER]

And Greg, when he was that age, he was actually better looking than Ryan Phillippe, I just want to say. All right, so anyway, so the *Daily Maverick* today is-- we have around 120 people, and the readership is around 8 million people every month. And we have around 250,000 newsletter subscribers, and so that's just the top picture.

We are in an incredibly dangerous moment for South Africa and Africa right now. And we built a democracy in South Africa over the last 28 years, and it's a strong democracy. But once it breaks, it's going to break for a long, long time and possibly never, never to be rebuilt. And one could argue that we are very close to breaking down.

We've been watching the degradation of the state from within, and it is true. We have some of the best-run elections in the world. We get the results immediately. The amount of intimidation is minimal. The campaigning is mostly completely civil.

What we do not have, we do not have accountability, and we do not have a way to hold the elected officials accountable because of the peculiarity of South African scene. It's essentially one-party system. The ANC was running this country for 28 years. Our party was essentially one-party system as well.

So we did not develop the methods of accountability. We do not hold people in power accountable for all the mistakes, and the previous record their skills pretty much matter not when they're getting powerful jobs and when they get big budgets to work with. What matters is their internal positions within the party.

28 years later, we are at the point where our infrastructure is near breaking point. Quite often, I mean, Styli and I had a discussion today. Are we a failed state or not? My argument is we are not yet a failed state, but when you put some bullet points in the Word document, it does look pretty shaky right now.

So unfortunately, everything in South Africa in the last 28 years basically was decided within the ANC's smoke-filled backrooms and became a situation where we have an ANC electoral conference at the end of this year. And that electoral conference will largely decide in which direction South Africa is going. Even if ANC loses power, it will decide in which direction-- was absolute power, so it will decide in which direction will the restructuring of South Africa's policy go. And it is easily going to go into the autocratic and nondemocratic direction.

In the worst-case scenario, a bunch of people that lost in 2017-- and they lost in good service because of our work in the Gupta Leaks when we exposed the state capture, and then President Zuma lost his job because of it. These people actually have a chance of coming back.

And I don't if you guys have a similar thing here after 6th of January if you thought nobody will come back, and now it looks quite possible. It's actually quite possible in South Africa that President Zuma's people, although he is now old, President Zuma's people will take over power again. That is the worst-case scenario, in which case we are likely to slide into failed state literally overnight.

Some of the arguments now are that they should take over because they will expose how rotten they are all, and they will lose at the elections of 2024, general elections that we have in 2024. My response to them is, are we going to have elections in 2024? Just to give you a idea of how dangerous the group is, they are essentially following the Trumpian Bolsonaro type of ideology, and literally, if they come into power, you can forget about freedom of expression immediately.

And by the way, South African media-- and that's the second part I'm going to talk about. South African media has been quite considerably weakened, and there's today probably two newsrooms of consequence. So it wouldn't be difficult for them to actually clip the wing and the freedom of expression completely in South Africa.

So unfortunately, if that happens, again, globally, what happens then globally, the international policies might actually speed up. They are moving more and more away from the EU and the US and closer to Russia and China. And we are having-- on a local level, we see a lot of evidence of those moves, and it's just not going to actually end up well.

Anyway, so in this situation, we are still very lucky that there's-- go to the media element of this. We are very lucky that we still can agree on what reality is, what the facts are in South Africa, at least overwhelming majority of us. We don't have a problem, which I think is becoming quite obvious, as in America where people can't agree on facts. We still can agree on facts, and that's where we see our role strategically.

So it's a race against time, and we at *Daily Maverick* literally rushing to create this center of trust and truth where people can actually come and trust that whatever we publish is the actual reflection of reality because, quite honestly, the guys who would be-- I don't know-- Fox News or Newsmax or OAN or Breitbart of South Africa thankfully are not very good at it yet, genuinely. They're more interested in actually making money rather than actually creating this loss leader that would help dominate the country. But especially now as the Russians are moving much closer, most skilled people can come, and that will change.

So that's personally our role in this thing, is to actually create this center of trust, and that will be removable. And literally, I think the future of South Africa depends on people of goodwill, and to be honest-- again, I tell these people. People cannot believe this.

First two states in South Africa failed, so executive and parliament [INAUDIBLE] failed. Judiciary is starting to fail, although they held absolutely heroically throughout the worst years of state capture, and the media failed 90%. We are literally holding for the fingernails right now. And civil society, also, there are a couple of really good organizations that are fighting.

So it is not a good situation. I'm not going to lie to you, and I'm sure that others perhaps will see it better, in a more positive view. But I'm really worried about where we're going.

So yeah, and without what we're doing, without agreeing on what's true and what is not true and what is right what is not right for South Africa, we don't have a democracy, and that is the fundamental fight that we are fighting right now. Thanks. Good. Thanks.

EMMANUEL K. Thank you.

AKYEAMPONG:

[APPLAUSE]

BRANKO BRKIC: Thank you.

EMMANUEL K. Thank you, Branko. Next, I call Styli, who's the publisher and CEO of *Daily Maverick*. After having qualified as a chartered accountant, Styli had a brief stint in the London banking industry before following his passions to the media business. He has subsequently helped establish and develop various media startups and projects, including *Daily Maverick* and The Gathering, the country's premier media and politics conference. So please join me in welcoming Styli.

[APPLAUSE]

STYLI Thank you. I am deeply honored to be here tonight amongst such esteemed company and a great institution like this one. I'm going to go out on a flyer here and guess that the majority of people who attend a conference like this don't need convincing that independent media is good for democracy. Instead, I'm going to continue with a little bit of the gloominess where my partner left off because it's not enough. The capacity for gloomy talk in a media conference on the democratic project around South Africa has plenty of space to be filled.

So the question I'd like to pose to you and the thought experiment I'd like you to walk with me on is, what happens if the South African democratic project fails? Because it is dangerously close to being more than just a thought experiment. As my partner alluded to, we can argue around the definition of a failed state in a country that struggles to deliver the most basic services like education, health, energy, and security to the majority of its population, but I can assure you that we still have much further to go in terms of rock bottom and what happens afterwards.

Two examples come to mind in terms of what could happen if this does materialize. The first one is obviously the one that we are intimately familiar with now, is the war in Ukraine and the impact of that on pretty much some key components of life like food, food insecurity, energy, and the displacement of people and how this interconnectedness of the world's economy and the fiber that connects us has a knock-on effect in even places like the United States. The other example is the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis and what the effect was of a million displaced refugees as they moved across borders and into Europe. That fueled the rise of far-right politics in Europe, and a case in point is the recent elections in Sweden and how the right and the far right now dominates the political scene there.

So what happens if a country like South Africa, when it's teetering on the edge-- and the other big economy in Africa, Nigeria, who is also struggling with its own democratic project-- what happens when these two powerhouses collapse and 1.5 billion people-- population that is also set to explode in the next 20 years. What happens to those people and the impact of that as those people look for refuge in the global North?

The thing that is driving the problems and the deterioration of these democratic projects is the cancer of corruption. Corruption allows people to infiltrate and erode the institutions that democracies need to survive and to function, and the biggest lever that we can pull from the outside to prevent that erosion of those institutions is independent, public-interest journalism. And yet private funds are almost nonexistent for the startup and support and the development of these institutions. Global development aid for media sits at a paltry 0.3% of total funding of which only 17% of that actually ends up in journalism itself.

So while there is a land grab for the resources and the control of many of our commodity-rich regions plays out between Russia and China, let us be vigilant about the impact of what happens if these projects do fail, because they will not be contained to regional problems and impacts. We are not insulated in this country and in Europe from what will happen, so the best thing that we can do is increase the level of support that we can provide to start up new media organizations, new independent media organizations, and to speed up the development and support of those that already exist to be bigger, better, and stronger. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

EMMANUEL K. AKYEAMPONG: Thank you, Steve. I will next ask Eve to come up. Let me introduce Eve Fairbanks first. So Eve is a journalist whose writing has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Republic*, *Foreign Policy*, and other outlets. She graduated from Yale with a degree in political philosophy and received a Fulbright scholarship to South Africa.

She's the author of the recently released *The Inheritors*, a *New York Times* Editor's Choice. It follows three South Africans over five tumultuous decades to explore what really happens when a country resolves to end white supremacy. Her book is available for purchase at tonight's event in the lobby. So Eve, please come up.

[APPLAUSE]

EVE FAIRBANKS: Hi, guys. I'm Eve. I have just written a book about South Africa. I've lived there for 13 years and also in Kenya.

I'm going to offer a tiny bit of a different perspective. I sometimes feel I'm involved in a lot of discussions related to how to bulk up the press, how to make sure we have an independent press even here. I used to work for a magazine in Washington, and we had internal discussions, some of which were more fruitful than others, about how we covered things, the investigative work that we did. And there was kind of like a question that hung behind some of the conversations that we had, which was we felt that we were working really hard.

And I would say in South Africa, it has a very free press. We could talk about that, very muscular, very dedicated, really terrific, terrific writers. And I'm going to sort of leave the *Daily Maverick* out of what I'm about to say because it's more prior to 2009, but you still have a scenario where we're talking about a country that a lot of people feel is in decline and becoming more corrupt.

The way that people vote is for the single party that dominates the politics. It's changing. That's dislodging, but it's not dislodged completely. And so you have a question of, how effective is the press that we have there? So if it's free and it's muscular, what is being accomplished?

I just want to give you a taste of a little bit of the book that I've written. I'm not going to go long, but I ended up spending a lot of time with a representative of the government, a person who many people would describe as rapacious or avaricious or corrupt or kind of an enemy to the press in a certain sense. And I'll just make a comment right after that, after I just give you a little bit of a flavor of that, of the reason why I did that as a journalist.

So there's a portion of the book. It's quite a kind of wide-ranging look at South Africa and different people's experiences of it over the last 25 years, but I focused in part on land reform. Who here has read anything about land-- maybe raise your hand if you know a little bit about land reform in South Africa. OK, everybody.

Yeah, so you had a situation obviously in urban areas and then in rural where there had been this extreme demarcation, which you can actually still see from a plane. If you take even a flight out of Joburg or certainly a small plane, you can see the difference in the land use. You can see the borders between what had been white and Black South Africa.

And so a giant priority for the ANC when it took power was to return a lot of land to Black South Africans, and I want to talk about a guy that they appointed to do that. His name is Michael Buys. He's a person who identifies as a colored South African, which is an apartheid category of mixed race, but he still talks about himself that way.

So he was tapped around 2010 to lead land reform in a particular province in South Africa's North. And I sat down with him many times and many conversations with him, and he told me that he had such a feeling of thrill when he saw the ad for this job, which he actually first saw in a newspaper. And he said that he loved the idea of giving land back, even of taking it back.

So his department-- and this was nationwide, but his department really focused on initially returning land to people that they termed "beneficiaries." And these were the descendants of people who had been pushed off land to make way for some of the biggest mechanized farms, in theory, because it was the most direct reparation. In practice, this quickly created two huge problems. The first was that generations later, there were many more offspring than there had ever been original victims of the land seizures, and so you had groups that had never really been in contact with each other numbering in the hundreds that resettled on plots that had once been owned by a single family.

The second problem that he noticed was that the descendants of people deprived of rural land were also the least likely to have received the kind of education necessary to run a high-tech farm. Many of them hadn't had the opportunity to finish high school. They hadn't been properly educated in a variety of languages. It was just a terrible education system that had existed under apartheid. And so I remember he told me that for them to receive a mechanized farm that immediately demanded the implementation of a computerized marketing plan for exporting produce to Europe was, for beneficiaries of liberation, a little like receiving a welcome-to-freedom basket containing a screaming newborn baby.

He also told me that he became resentful of these beneficiaries, and he began to feel that they were fantasists. It was hard to feel like he was working for them. He said their business plans were way out there. They would come to him saying we want to immediately own fleets of tractors and have big incomes. What we've seen-- and we would explain to them, he said, that even the white farmers didn't get to that level overnight. And he said he became very frustrated that the applicants didn't accept this.

And he remembered them saying to him, this is our time. You are a Black government. You are our people. You should help us get these things, so we can be like the ones for whom we were working.

He also then told me that he knew this resentment was a projection of his own shame. Of course, these applicants were going to be underskilled. That was exactly what apartheid intended.

And he'd said, I was also really embarrassed for myself as I worked further and further in government because I knew these fantasies were due to the promises we had been making, so things that his department would say but also the promises that the ANC had made right around '94, which were quite general, which were quite inspiring, that appropriate housing will be provided to all, that there'll be proper schools everywhere, beautiful roads. I think one of the first economic policies that they unveiled promised 500,000 new jobs every year, 6% growth. And he said, even those of us who are educated overseas and have PhDs, we really didn't question how all of these things were going to be possible.

There is another issue that he had a really hard time confronting, which was that, in fact, the job that he specifically was tasked with was impossible, totally, totally impossible. And this is kind of gone into more and more in the book, but the kind of farming that white South Africans had done, which you can see around you, could see around you-- you still can see to some extent-- looked very beautiful. You see these circles of alfalfa and these amazing kind of pivots, and that whole system was created by resting on the features of a segregationist regime in ways that go very deep.

So you had mid-sized and smaller farms that succeeded under apartheid only because they could take advantage of workers who couldn't argue for themselves, who didn't have rights, and also because economic sanctions insulated them. And when markets opened up after apartheid ended, farms that had been economically viable suddenly weren't, and you actually have a situation in South Africa, which I find uncovered, which is the huge failure of many white farmers. Most of the attrition from farming and the consolidation of farms is white farmers leaving that business.

And I'll just say the last thing. I mean, I find a kind of a narrative remains in the press in South Africa in the way we think about it and talk about it that if you just think about agriculture in particular that this was quite possibly an unjust system, an immoral system, but kind of operationally, it was a jewel, very beautiful, very efficient, very bureaucratically kind of efficient, very productive that South Africans now and the government now is in the process of destroying. I remember reading in 2010 the chief of staff to the land reform minister wondered whether it just wasn't true that Black people can't farm. This was a Black South African official.

And you get this narrative operating in a lot of other realms. If you take the government itself, you have a strong focus in the media right now on Eskom. I don't know if anyone's read about load shedding, electricity blackouts, the problem with the electric infrastructure. These problems are really real. But there's a kind of memory behind these stories that in the past, the lights were always on, that you had an infrastructure that really worked, and often, I think what this narrative kind of neglects to mention is that in the early '90s, only half of South African households had access to electricity at all.

And today, 9 out of 10 theoretically have access, sometimes have access, often do. They often do. They often do. There's been a huge-- Evan will talk about this, but a huge extension of benefits to South Africans.

And in one of my last interactions with this official, this land reform official, he said to me that he felt very ashamed, but he had what felt like a secret that he felt now that under apartheid, he who had been an activist, a very kind of serious protester and ANC fighter against apartheid, that he had always been looking at the white areas. He said to me, it looked like materially, they had everything. There was a sense among us that the country that will be bequeathed to us was the white country, but it was the whole country and all of its kind of burdens and systemic problems.

He was often the guy who had to drop these beneficiaries off of their farms. It's like, hey, you've applied for a farm. Now you get this great farm, and he would drop them off at the gate, these families with sometimes a single suitcase.

And he told me that driving home, he would find himself gripping his steering wheel and blinking back tears. "As I was driving away," he said, "I would be very sad because I already know it's not going to work for them. I can feel it. It's not going to work."

I don't think if I worked for a number of South African outlets, I would have ever been able to spend as much time with this official as I did, and he said a lot more about the ways that his own sense of failure, of shame, of resentment, et cetera, et cetera. He wanted to move up in the department so that he would be less close to people whom he felt he was failing. At least then, he would be a kind of a paper guy up higher in the land reform department. He wouldn't have to face his own people.

I don't know. I think it would be interesting to talk about, but I feel that there can be, even in societies-- and I think a lot about the US-- but an attitude where we conflate an independent press with an adversarial one, a strong press with one that is going against the state, against these figures very, very strongly. And I guess one thing I wondered over the course of writing this book was whether there are types of truth and deep causes, causes for corruption, reasons why people abandon their values, the ones that they really had held when they were liberation fighters, that are tough to surface with that type of relationship.

So I guess that's a question that I would leave. A free press, a muscular press-- we all believe in it. Nobody needs to be persuaded of that, but I do think we need to think as journalists about what methods we're using, the ways that we approach and interact with the type of officials that we dislike that we consider our adversaries and whether that ultimately surfaces some of the very deep causes behind these types of trends that we've talked about.

EMMANUEL K. Thank you.

AKYEAMPONG:

[APPLAUSE]

OK, Evan, let me introduce you. Evan is the Total Professor of Political Science and Contemporary Africa at MIT. He conducts research in the field of comparative politics with a focus on development and ethnic conflict in sub-Saharan Africa and is the recipient of several book awards. He's the author of the recently released *Until We Have Won Our Liberty-- South Africa After Apartheid*, which examines South Africa a quarter century after it became a multiracial democracy. His book is also available for purchase in the lobby.

EVAN Thanks, Emmanuel.

LIEBERMAN:

EMMANUEL K. Evan.

AKYEAMPONG:

[APPLAUSE]

EVAN Thanks so much, Emmanuel, and thanks so much to Dick and Michelle and CIS for all the logistics and all of our
LIEBERMAN: co-sponsors over at Harvard and for all of you for coming today. And I'll put my glass out here because you can decide whether it's half empty or a half-full glass, but the amount of water, we might not disagree in terms of a cubic centimeters.

So we're living in a time when the value of democracy itself is being challenged all around the world on a daily basis, and in South Africa, where citizens face daily blackouts, crime, high unemployment, so many hardships, it's really easy to understand why citizens might be skeptical of the democratic project. Yet in my book, which may be surprising after you've heard what you've heard today, I argue that democracy has served South Africa pretty well since its first multiracial election in 1994, and for some, that's a pretty controversial argument. And to give you a little flavor of it this afternoon, I want to draw a brief analogy with COVID.

It's more than two and a half years now since we all rushed home, and yet people are still getting sick. They're still dying. We're still wearing masks. Certainly, some people here are for good reason, and worrying. So from one perspective, it's a total disaster.

On the other hand, overall, we're so much better off because of the vaccines and the medicines that have been developed. One piece of evidence is the fact that we're all here today in person. And I don't want to minimize the COVID-related pain and suffering that persists around the globe, medical, economic, and otherwise. I recognize that vaccine access is still a big issue, but I'm also really grateful for the vaccines and public health campaigns that have positively affected millions of people. And I imagine most of you are, too.

And in many ways, I think the same is true with respect to the introduction of multiracial democracy in South Africa. And it's important to not-- I can't overstate how truly sick South Africa was three decades ago. After more than three centuries of institutionalized white supremacy, a Black majority was politically and economically excluded, beset with poverty, lack of education, few opportunities, and literally quite poor health.

Now, I focus much of the research for my book around Krugersdorp. It's an old mining town about an hour west of Johannesburg, founded in honor of one of the 19th century's most aggressive white nationalists, but even after Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990, their town council was still holding on to the most petty forms of segregation. Whites still didn't want to go to the movies with Black people or to share libraries with them. The town was filled with violence, and racially defined communities lived in conditions that were literally worlds apart, despite being less than a few miles from each other. Now, nationally, whites did vote in favor of a referendum to end apartheid, but the legacies of this system penetrated extraordinarily deep into almost every aspect of life.

So in turn, the aftermath of apartheid could have been a violent revolution. Many whites certainly in Krugersdorp who I met with said they expected revenge. They expected violent revenge. It could have been Rwanda or Yugoslavia. A populist demagogue could have ruled the land with an iron fist, but the South Africans got a negotiated settlement and a set of liberal democratic institutions.

Now, when you study just one sick patient and you give that patient a whole bunch of medicines, it's hard to know if any of them really work because lots of things are going on, and that patient might be exposed to all sorts of new viruses. But looking at a great deal of historical evidence, I try to show that this medicine of democracy, including a vibrant and free press, has had some very positive effects. It's not the same as saying it cured that illness, but it had some really positive effects.

So for example, the country's fourth president since 1994, Jacob Zuma, I think, fact-- he was a terrible leader. Fact-- he orchestrated extraordinary corruption schemes, took state money for upgrades into his own home, and engaged in rampant nepotism. And yet we know about that because journalists, especially those from the *Daily Maverick*, did the hard work to find out what was going on. They followed the money, and they shared this with the world.

And in turn, I actually think Zuma was held in check in various ways, notably by the government itself through some due process. He was forced to repay some of the money. I haven't seen that happen in the United States, I will tell you, and he was ousted from the presidency by his own party.

When he removed a highly competent finance minister and replaced him with an unqualified crony, the markets tanked. The press attacked. He was left very embarrassed, and under pressure, in a matter of days, he switched that guy out for a more acceptable choice. So time and again, the light of investigative journalism has caused embarrassment, pushback, and many important changes in policy, and these patterns embody the essence of democratic practice.

Now, there's no denying that South Africa is still rife with problems, and new ones keep popping up, really quite extraordinary problems. But to compare how things were under apartheid before 1994 to how things have evolved since then, there is unmistakable progress, not just in material outcomes like access to electricity, water, sewers, housing, and schooling. Again, we can talk about the quality and deterioration of some ends, but in terms of access, quite a bit of expansion, but also in terms of everyday social relations.

So in February 2019, I sat down with three pastors at a coffee shop near the center of Krugersdorp, and they describe significant change. I said, what's life been like in your townships? I'm interested to know if things have gotten better in terms of houses, service delivery. Service delivery is a really big issue in South Africa. And they describe significant change, positive change in terms of the services available in their townships, but they urged me to broaden my focus beyond the material.

One of the pastors asked me to look outside to see a line of people waiting, and there was a white guy at the end of a line of mostly Black folks. They were all waiting their turn at a cash machine to get their monthly government grant. Millions of South Africans now get cash grants. They're very small, but they're important to people's lives.

And in the old days, these pastors said there's no way that guy would have stood at the back of this line, let alone in the same line, let alone for the same entitlement. Now, on that day, the white guy was still getting the grant. He was perfectly safe, and everyone was being treated with dignity and, as they described it, the spirit of ubuntu.

So from my perspective, a range of democratic institutions have really breathed life into the idea of human rights, and the courts and the free press have fought back in the open when those have been violated. But those efforts often fail, and in fact, democratic practice has many adverse side effects. And maybe to a certain extent, Eve was beginning to touch on those. Daily unrelenting challenges in the media can contribute, I think, to a collective consciousness in which it's become impossible to appreciate that almost anything works at all, and more than 60% of South Africans say that their democracy is broken.

I don't think that the reality is all doom and gloom. I've seen it, but the news tends to be. And I asked the reporters at the *Krugersdorp News* about why no one had covered the development of what I saw as a very successful public housing project, which I visited myself. And a few replied, look, it's just a drop in the bucket. It's not something to pat the government on the back about.

Now, behind us in the center of the newsroom, a screen displayed how stories were trending on social media, and unfortunately, good-news stories almost never go viral. Now, in fact, humans suffer from a documented cognitive negativity bias. You could see-- I watch social media, and I see when there's good news. And there's no likes on it. When there's bad news, boy, people want to spread that around.

Now, in turn, I hear too many South Africans saying they wish that their country was more like China. Wouldn't it be nice to have a benevolent dictator? And for a country that fought so hard and long for political freedom, honestly, I bristle when I hear it.

But I understand. I understand it for those without jobs and who read about corrupt politicians-- and there are lots and lots of corrupt politicians-- it's no consolation to hear that things could have been better-- excuse me, that things could have been worse. And I have to concede, and here, I really agree. Civil war, state, and economic collapse are real possibilities, just as they were, however, three decades ago, but it's way too early, I think, to give up on this experiment.

Democratic practice can still contribute to dignified development. It's not a perfect solution or perfect medicine or a complete solution for our collective well-being, but democracy does remain better than the alternatives. And that applies clearly not just to South Africa but to all of us here in the United States, where, at the moment, democracy is also pretty fragile. So thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

EMMANUEL K. AKYEAMPONG: Thank you, Evan. Michelle, who was our guide, had instructed everybody to speak for seven minutes. I knew it wasn't going to happen, so I didn't attempt to keep time. So instead of making any sort of lengthy remarks, I will pose three questions, but I don't ask you to answer them. And then I'll go straight to our mics, and then we'll take in comments.

But the questions are sort of based on what I'm hearing and also because I've read your two books. So I start with Evan. On independence in Africa, many countries, many governments became developmental states with the explicit objective of fast economic development to acquire the material resources to provide welfare for very expectant citizens.

South Africa really didn't-- some of the countries, we nationalized expatriate businesses. South Africa didn't go specifically in the direction of the developmental state. Neither did it attempt major redistribution of wealth. Rather, it chose a third path, which you call dignified development, and so if you have an opportunity, maybe you can speak a little bit to what dignified development was. And how is the government supposed to fund it if it didn't take money from the wealthy or did the kinds of things it wanted to do?

And then I go to Eve. One of my favorite authors, Hage, talks about how governments are supposed to have the capacity to distribute hope. And this is not just substantive in terms of what the government can do, but people must perceive the government as having an effective capacity to distribute hope. Has the South African state in the eyes of its majority citizens lost the capacity to be a distributor of hope?

Then to Branko and Styli, let me quote from Eve and quote from Evan, and then you know I really read the book. So Eve, *Inheritors*, page 341-- quote, "Black and white people are angry or feel grief for entirely different reasons, and if the country succeeds by one marker, it will have to fail by another." You wouldn't get everybody happy. Evan, in your book, page 143, on the post-apartheid period, you say-- I quote you-- "In fact, rare has been the day when any major news outlet has not reported on the status of some government corruption allegation or another."

And we've had Styli, and we've had Branko. So my question to the *Daily Maverick* folks-- newspapers in independent Africa have long been at the center of imagining what the new nation could look like. You've seen excellent works doing this.

Yes, it's good to point to corruption, to point this, to point to that, but I wanted to ask the two of you, what vision of the desired nation does the *Daily Maverick* point to, apart from pointing to what is not correct? And what are the sources of its inspiration? So I'm not going to ask you to answer. I just want to put it there, but if you have an opportunity.

So we have two mics, one to the right, one to the left. So if you line up-- and then I'll check online, but while you're coming, please don't be bashful. If you want to briefly answer the questions I put up, you can do that. But I would rather we hear from the audience because I'm going to go to dinner with you anyway, so I can hear my answers.

So there's a mic to the right. There's a mic to the left. If you have a question, please. Yes, so please go to the mic because it's being recorded, and if you can maybe state your name, so at least we know who--

AUDIENCE: My name is Margaret Witham. I'm a retired educator. I would love for the *Daily Maverick* people to answer your question. It's a good one.

BRANKO BRKIC: [INAUDIBLE] OK, so just to respond to Eve. I think the moment where white people and Black people in South Africa are angry about the same thing is the moment where you actually succeed in creating a society which is not a society of divided races and divided people.

AUDIENCE: Branko.

BRANKO BRKIC: I'm sorry.

AUDIENCE: Can you speak louder?

EMMANUEL K. Can you speak louder?

AKYEAMPONG:

BRANKO BRKIC: All right, sorry. I think it's important that white and Black people are angry at different things for a long, long time, and the moment they are angry at the same thing together, it's actually a very good moment because they are angry at the things that matter in life. And they're not divided by race or politics or color.

And then also, it's Evan's question. It's your question as well. I'll tell you more about *Daily Maverick*.

We do 50 to 60 features a day, and we actually do lots about offering a better vision. We do hold people accountable, but we also have a massive section of *Daily Maverick*. One of them is called Maverick Citizen. The other one is called Our Burning Planet, which deals with the climate crisis. We offer a lot of solutions and a lot of ideas what we believe is a better society.

So on one side-- and we also have a weekly newspaper, which actively does that as well. We also offer a lot of the best opinion makers in South Africa that actually deal with it. So it's kind of difficult to respond to a question without you actually reading it every day and all that's on the page, and we publish, again, admittedly lots of material. And it's also necessary to understand that the greatest limelight is caught by investigations by default because those egregious and horrible things people can't look away from, actually, to read it.

But again, *Daily Maverick* is not only about investigations. We are full media platform that provides all sorts of different content and different stories, and some of them are actually thought leaders. We do publish quite a few op-eds from public intellectuals of South Africa as well, so in that case, we actually do go out of our way to offer the visions for the better South Africa, which we don't only attack. We attack when it needs to be attacked.

EMMANUEL K. OK, thank you. Styli, do you want to add something? Or I can go to the next.

AKYEAMPONG:

STYLI Yeah, I mean, it would be great if our lead story was man bites dog one day. I think that would be--

CHARALAMBOUS:

BRANKO BRKIC: Oh yeah, I'd love that.

STYLI That would be a great vision where that's the lead story on a day. I mean, but we have to-- right now, there are
CHARALAMBOUS: some big issues that need to be tended to, and that starts with awareness. But we've also done some interesting sentiment analysis on the work that we do, and this comes back, I think, to the cognitive biases that we have as humans where one of our basic needs is for safety.

And the fear that drives that also influences what we click on and what we read, and so our sentiment analysis, you probably will be surprised to know, showed that we do almost a third positive sentiment turned work, third neutral, and a third negative, which surprised quite a few people. But we also benchmarked that against some American outlets, which was not the case. So the work is being done to provide hope and to provide solutions and to provide a vision of a better way. Unfortunately, how our DNA is put together, we end up in the situation where the bad news is not only what sells but what people click on, and that's available.

BRANKO BRKIC: I think it's the important thing to add to what Styli is saying that we made a conscious decision not to worry about social networks. We do not chase Twitter. Our strategies are not about how is our story going to play on social media. We don't care. Quite honestly, we don't care, so it's very important to understand that that liberates us from actually publishing what is popular, what is clickable to what is important.

And we don't have clickbait. We don't have listicles. We don't have these things.

EMMANUEL K. Thank you. Question.

AKYEAMPONG:

AUDIENCE: Hi. My name is Derek Brown. I'm a co-director of an organization founded by some South African peacemakers many years ago. First of all, thanks to the panelists. I really appreciate all your comments, but especially thank you to the *Daily Maverick*, which, like our moderator here, I get on a daily basis, and you keep me informed.

But what I did want to ask was to pick up on one of your earlier comments and say, could you describe for me what you think are the business/economic and political threats to yourselves in particular but journalism and the free press in particular? And I would like to say, we're putting too much on the free press. I think we have to talk about civil society more generally, too, if we're talking about the future of South Africa.

BRANKO BRKIC: Styli, are you-- or me? Yeah.

STYLI Yeah. We can start-- the first, as I mentioned, the access to capital is a big challenge. There's very little private
CHARALAMBOUS: capital available, very little public funding that's available, and so the business model sustainability has been a big issue, in fact. We should not exist. 13 years-- we should not exist is--

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

STYLI Yeah, with difficulty. I think we were just lucky that I think we were born with levels of stubbornness that far
CHARALAMBOUS: exceed the norm, average. There are regulatory risks. So we see legislation changing to make it harder for us to operate. There's already moves when new legislation has been passed, old legislation that was tabled but never passed, things like the secrecy bill. We see litigation, so strategic litigation against the work that we do. We get a summons every other week that needs to be defended.

And then there's the threat of physical and online violence. We've had people whose homes have been broken into by state security. We know that a few of our people are being tracked, and our female journalists especially also are the subject of many threats online. And so it really is coming from every corner, and it makes it very difficult to kind of operate with hope. But we try, and we do our best. Did I leave anything out?

BRANKO BRKIC: I think what's important to understand is that we never had the luxury of thinking about having more than two- or three-month salaries. So we managed for 13 years. We managed to, again, stubbornly push against it and actually continue that path of growth because it's not only a business imperative. It's imperative of providing critical coverage where it's actually starting to either be inadequate or lack altogether.

Big problem in South Africa right now is the big media desert where there's literally no information, no credible information. And so what do we do? We are officially a hybrid business, which means we have nonprofit and for-profit units, but we are nonprofit and hopefully one day profit, which is-- that's not going to happen.

And you ask about civil society. Yes, civil society is a massive component of holding the country together, but when every aspect of society is weakening, civil society is weakening, too. And to be honest, right now, the Ukraine war did manage to suck a lot, a lot of energy and resources from global organizations funding democracy, and countries like South Africa or entire continent Africa do suffer for that.

EMMANUEL K. AKYEAMPONG: Evan, your work also speaks to the civil society. Do you want to say something before we move on?

EVAN LIEBERMAN: Sure. Just a couple of years after the end of apartheid, my wife and I lived in Cape Town, and I was based at this fantastic organization called Idasa, which had done a lot of work around the transition and was trying to be this aggregator of civil society organizations. And people thought one of the things that was so terrific about the resistance to apartheid were all the incredible organizations that were created in that week.

And a lot of those were funded by the United States and the UK and a lot of wealthy countries, and one of the realities is that as South Africa got its footing, people said, maybe we don't need to give that much more money. There's other problems in the world. And then one day, I got an email that Idasa had closed its doors, and lots of other civil societies had shut down.

And that's a real problem. It's actually very hard for civil society in South Africa to raise money, and I don't know if this will be on the agenda later this week when the South African president meets with Joe Biden. I'm guessing it's not.

But when we think about how to-- lots of people ask, how do we strengthen South African democracy? And I think that a lot of these small organizations-- again, not just the media. The media is really important, but people who help specific groups do.

But there is still a rich civil society life there. I work with an organization called the Legal Resources Centre, which has long supported human rights in the country, that goes after really important cases. There have been cases for mining workers who have silicosis. They won a multimillion-dollar settlement against the state, and people got the money. There were cases that they won for schools where there were completely unacceptable conditions for girls for learning, and they've won a lot of those cases. And so there are-- it can be ridiculous the extent to which one could be glass half empty, glass half full about South Africa, and I don't disagree with anything that they have said.

BRANKO BRKIC: Neither do we.

EVAN Right, but the question is, for me, when we're talking about the world, we say, well, compared to what?

LIEBERMAN: Compared to what? At the moment, the world is a bit of a mess, and if one starts and, as Emmanuel and I do, look at the rest of Africa and we're interested in questions about political freedom and development, there are so many challenges. And if Nigeria is going down and Emmanuel, who's from Ghana, talks about-- democracy has been pretty vibrant in Ghana, but there's a lot of frustration there.

So civil society-- these institutions are all very important, and we think about where South Africa is at. It is troubling but also stands in many ways as a leader, including for the free press and civil society, ironically.

EMMANUEL K. AKYEAMPONG: Thank you. We'll take one question, and then I'll add two from online. And then I'll let you respond as you see fit, so please.

AUDIENCE: Thank you. Good evening. My name is Lauren Siegel. I'm a doctoral candidate at Cornell University in Africana Studies. Thank you for all of your wonderful generative commentary.

I suppose my question is geared towards Eve Fairbanks but welcome to everyone's feedback. You touched on something very fascinating, and that is the affective nature of nation building or of the democratic project or experiment. And I was hoping you could say more about these affective qualities of shame, resentment, and regret as it came to bear for your subjects in your recent book project and how that may limit or expand notions of hope, to use Professor Akyeampong's term, in the case of democracy in South Africa.

EMMANUEL K. AKYEAMPONG: Let me add these couple of questions, and then you can take them. Online, the first question is, what can the US and EU do to help South Africa avoid the collapse of democracy and prevent a failed state? So that is one, I guess, is asking about what the international community can do.

The second one, we will see how we make meaning out of it. It says, being from Turkmenistan, my question is, why is the developed world raising attention to the problems of, I guess, other places in times of crisis but not in the times when these problems exist in other parts of the world but not in the developed world? I'm not sure whether you can make sense of that. I figured we will wrestle together with it.

EVE FAIRBANKS: I think I can sort of make sense of that. I mean, to attempt to comment on that and also on your question, I grew up in the US, and I initially started writing in DC. I grew up outside Washington in the '90s, which was a very, itself, kind of euphoric, weird decade in the US of just after the Cold War ended and so on. And I often thought about South Africa and the US. They had some resonances, and one was sort of thinking of themselves as exceptional.

I remember in the '90s, my father worked for Reagan. He had a very exceptionalist view of the US. It was very idealistic and very passionate but very city on a hill, and even before I really studied politics or was an adult, I had a sense of that both resulting in political mistakes and bad outcomes and adventures into other places that turned out badly and so on but also that it was actually a burden for the people who held that view. It was burdensome. It was anxiety producing. You feel you have nowhere to go but down.

And South Africa has something of that. It can either be an exciting miracle, or it can be a kind of betrayal of its promise. Sometimes, it feels as though it doesn't have a lot of room to kind of muddle through being a normal country, whatever that is. And so it's a place, I think, where the perception that people have and the emotions that they have around politics, around what they see, around the failures of their country are incredibly, incredibly kind of heavy and really important, and they themselves drive politics.

I have a situation on my street in Johannesburg where there's a house where the ownership of this house is debated. And people come and go every day in cars, and they say, we own the house. We own the house. And it's very problematic. Sometimes, these people are not as pleasant about saying they own the house.

And it's becoming a real thing where people on my street of various kind of backgrounds are saying that we really need to hire gangsters to live in this house, worse gangsters than are currently showing up. We need to somehow find exceptional gangsters to live in this house. And I'm like, there's laws around-- the ownership of this house can be determined legally. There is a legal system, and some the owner died intestate, and anyway.

But even my neighbors, they say, oh, this country is no longer a country of law and order. The legal system doesn't work, and we have to get these gangsters. And that may or may not be true in this specific circumstance, but the level of hope that they had and anticipation that they had and the deep disappointment that they feel and the cynicism ends up driving real events in a way that I find-- I don't know. It's something that I really tried to explore in the book. I think it's very, very potent and sometimes is a little missing from how we talk about policy.

EMMANUEL K. And the EU and the US have helped South Africa not become a failed state. Sometimes, I think it's the opposite.

AKYEAMPONG: We may come over and help them over here. Can you speak to that?

EVAN I was hoping Eve was going to answer that question.

LIEBERMAN:

EVE FAIRBANKS: No, South Africans should come here and teach us. I'm really serious about that.

EVAN There's so much self pity among South Africans during the days of Jacob Zuma's presidency, and yet midway
LIEBERMAN: through the presidency of Donald Trump, they would smirk at us and say, maybe, just maybe, we have the better president than you guys do.

[LAUGHTER]

And-- to bring together some of the questions I think that-- for me in my book, the question of dignity has been really important because apartheid and institutionalized white supremacy, which went on for hundreds of years, really deprived people of a sense of being seen and of being respected. And we look at the world today and the changing nature of political relations and the way the work the way the US is viewed in the world, and I think, throughout Africa, there is no longer a sense that people-- people are not looking to America for help.

And so if I were to answer that question in the affirmative-- let me tell you how the US could help South Africa-- I think it would be rejected outright understandably, and I think, for lots of really good reasons, we have no basis for posturing ourselves that way. However, I do worry. Back to some of the remarks earlier that South Africa, which is a member of the BRICS, which is Brazil, Russia, India, and China, along with South Africa, that if you look at the countries that were neutral in response to-- so-called neutral in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, well, along with Russia and China, which wasn't so surprising, it was also South Africa, India, and Brazil, which are the kind of three big regional democracies.

And that's worrying. To me, that's worrying that the orbit of influence is China and Russia and not the United States and the EU, that we should have more shared values around tolerance, around openness, around human rights, around concern for people who are at the most vulnerable sections of society. So I hope we can have a richer relationship. And frankly, lack of jobs lack of economic growth are at the heart of a lot of the frustration in South Africa today, and I'm hopeful that the US can be more economically engaged. But that's almost a platitude, but I would say that we need to be much more in the sphere of influence of South Africa to develop these shared values.

EMMANUEL K. Thank you.

AKYEAMPONG:

BRANKO BRKIC: To just add to it, the US did drop the ball on Africa over the last many years, and many of the priorities became priorities in the anti-terror fight, war on terror, rather than self-power. For a while, State Department really, really did a remarkable job in that. So I'll give you an idea. So when you have Uganda's Museveni and Rwanda's Kagame and Tanzania's autocrats being good big friends of the United States of America, it leaves a lot of bitter taste in the mouth of many, many in Africa.

EMMANUEL K. I was hoping-- this mic to my right has been suffering from neglect, and so if someone wants to step up to it--

AKYEAMPONG: I'm coming to you. I've seen you, but can we rescue the mic to my right? Daniel, please rescue the mic.

AUDIENCE: So my name's Daniel. I'm an assistant professor at Harvard University. Corruption has emerged multiple times, and I wondered if you could speak to the level of corruption within the press itself, so asking the press, because when corruption emerges, it seems like an othered entity, something outside. But I wondered about the level of corruption within the press itself.

EMMANUEL K. And if you can add to your question, we'll make those--

AKYEAMPONG:

BRANKO BRKIC: Ladies and gentlemen, Ryan Phillippe is there.

EMMANUEL K. Yes. So you can answer the question. You can ask your question, or you can answer his question to you.

AKYEAMPONG:

AUDIENCE: No, no, no, that's all the panelists.

EMMANUEL K. So please ask your question.

AKYEAMPONG:

AUDIENCE: Thank you. I'm sorry to extend the questioning. And I know you said no comments, but the question is a partial comment, if I'm allowed a little bit of a comment. Is that allowed?

EMMANUEL K. AKYEAMPONG: Dick?

RICHARD SAMUELS: Sure.

AUDIENCE: OK, thank you. So something that bothered me a little-- and Eve, if I may, it had bothered me when I first read your article when you published it-- was that there was this kind of not mentioning of any possibility of mala fides of people who don't appear on screen. And my colleagues there, we've known each other a long time, but I don't hear it. And I haven't read the book, so maybe it comes through in the books.

But we don't mention players who are not seen who might want these democratic projects to fail, and they are there. And they have mala fides, and they are malevolent. And this mention of BRICS can really speak for itself. These are powerful players, but even within South Africa, there are people who really determinedly want the new democracy to fail, people who look like me, essentially. And this is underplayed dramatically.

And Zuma's people are not just incompetent. They are partnered with people who just want to suck the blood out of these countries because they find it easy, easier to subvert them. I'd love you to speak to those impressions that you have of this, and these are things that are difficult to pin down. And I know we had these inquiries that had them, and the answer could go on for three hours. But I just didn't want that to escape.

EMMANUEL K. AKYEAMPONG: Thank you.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

AUDIENCE: Oh, bad intentions.

EMMANUEL K. AKYEAMPONG: Bad faith.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

[LAUGHTER]

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

EMMANUEL K. AKYEAMPONG: OK, so you can comment on the comment, and there's also a question. But he hasn't yet read the two books, so maybe the two of you can comment and say there are things in the book. And then my two folks from *Daily Maverick* can respond to the question about whether there's corruption in the press. OK.

EVE FAIRBANKS: Yeah, there's quite a bit of that in the book itself, but to kind of join your question with, I think, one that you asked, Emmanuel, I'm struck that I was in South Africa for the very tail end, very tiny tail end of Thabo Mbeki's presidency and then Zuma and now Ramaphosa. And Zuma was, especially right when he began, the one who seemed to give the most hope to people, which is kind of a rough memory, I think, because he turned out to be so completely corrupt and a bad-faith actor and demagogue and parasite and whatever.

And now Ramaphosa-- his speeches are mainly-- they're known for some bloopers. He seems a little more hapless as a kind of hope purveyor, but I think South Africa is in an interesting position where maybe it's becoming less reliant on needing hope delivered from the state and from state actors. And there's very specific things about the country, sort of structural things that mean that if you sound like a real purveyor of huge hopes, kind of huge dreams, there's going to be something suspicious about that because it's all set up in a way that makes it very, very hard to deliver. And you may be a real demagogue and actually a person whose intentions are poor and who's got these people behind the scenes. You're talking about there have been actors-- McKinsey, Bain-- but then actors from other countries that have really seen South Africa as a ripe-- like a mosquito would see a person.

So I actually think there's something hopeful in the less hopeful way that people are thinking about politics in South Africa and a little bit more distant, a little bit less hungry for some big vision, but thinking about maybe their city, their neighborhoods with a little bit of an ironic, at times, distance or critical distance, maybe to try to just join those questions.

EMMANUEL K. Thank you.

AKYEAMPONG:

EVAN LIEBERMAN: I'll just respond briefly because I know we're almost at time here, but for sure, South Africa has long been filled with a group of folks who wanted this project to die. The place that I studied was the hometown of the man who helped orchestrate the murder of Chris Hani, who was a liberation leader, and he was very popular in this town. And those people are still around, and they're both white people and people of all races who, I think, are very malevolently antidemocratic.

To a certain extent, I think antidemocrats are distributed around the world in democracies, and the question is how and why the institutions and popular sentiment are able to overcome them. So you won't find in the book lots of great stories about them, and maybe I don't focus on them enough. But I think that it's up to those who believe in democracy to be able to make the case for it, and at the moment, it's a hard case to make.

EMMANUEL K. Branko and Styli, if you will respond to Daniel's question, and then we will wrap up.

AKYEAMPONG:

BRANKO BRKIC: OK, so when I mentioned that media failed 90%, a large percentage of that was actually corruption part as well. So media failed for different reasons. One of the reasons was there were four big players in the South African media, and they never really adapted to the new world of internet and new world of modern South Africa as well, although some of them were doing some fabulously good business and making lots of money.

Then the corruption comes from different kind of angles there. Perhaps the most egregious examples of corruption were when the Gupta brothers, the Gupta Empire-- they started their own media outlets, *The New Age* and the TV station called the ANN7. And that lasted for a couple of years, but with the Guptas' demise, they closed down.

Another one, which is probably much more egregious-- and Eve actually tweeted about it the other day-- it's about takeover of the independent newspapers by Iqbal Survé, who is the really-- let's use the word fabulously corrupt character who stole more than a billion dollars from South Africa and who we stopped literally with hours to spare from stealing another \$700 million. And that man controls what used to be South Africa's biggest newspaper group, an English newspaper group, and he's really genuinely dangerous for the South Africa's democracy and accountability.

Another angle of corruption is the either corrupt journalists or state security agents that mask as a journalist. I'll give you an idea. Part of the Zuma's attack on South African Revenue Service-- SARS-- was actually the biggest part and the main highway that was driven through and by the *Sunday Times*, which is the main newspaper, Sunday newspaper in the country.

And they published, I think, 31 stories that they had to retract afterwards. Most of them were complete fiction about so-called rogue unit within SARS. And those stories were driven by three or four journalists, and we believe that some of them were just corrupt. But we believe that at least one of them was state security agents. So there's different ways of going into your question. A lot of corruption, and it did damage to South African media quite significantly. I don't know, Styli, if you want to add.

STYLI No, I would only add that if the inverse was true and the good side invested into media as much as the bad side **CHARALAMBOUS:** invested into media, we'd be at a much better place.

BRANKO BRKIC: Absolutely.

EMMANUEL K. Well, on that note, please join me in thanking our distinguished panelists.

AKYEAMPONG:

[APPLAUSE]

And a big thank you to you, our audience, and those online for engaging in today's conversation with us. We invite you to join us at cis.mit.edu and at africa.harvard.edu to learn more about our work and to join us for future events. Books by Eve and Evan are available for purchase in the lobby, so you can go and buy a copy and bring it right back here for it to be autographed. So thank you, and have a wonderful evening.

[APPLAUSE]

[MUSIC PLAYING]