The Amateur Computerist

Table of Contents

Editorial: "Will This Kill That?"

"The archdeacon contemplated the gigantic cathedral for a time in 'silence, then he sighed and stretched out his right hand toward the 'printed book lying open on his table and his left hand toward Notre-Dame, and he looked sadly from the book to the church: 'Alas,' he said, 'this will kill that'...the book of stone, so solid and durable, would give way to the book of 'paper, which was more solid and durable still."

The French novelist, Victor Hugo, in his *Notre Dame de Paris* was commenting on the emergence over 500 years ago of the printed book and its challenge to the

cathedral and the church as the conveyor of authoritative ideas.

Today a similar scenario is being envisioned, debated and tested in practice. "Will," as Michael Hauben put it, "the new online forms of discourse dethrone the professional news media?"
(http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x13)

We offer this issue of the *Amateur Computerist* to share some of this emerging debate and story with our readers. Throughout the main-stream news media industry, the impact of the internet is being taken seriously. Every major and most minor newspapers, and every major radio and TV news program has a website and many are considering or experimenting with how to introduce increased reader input and citizen reporting. These efforts are commercially driven. The readership of main-stream media is declining and the web is increasingly becoming the main source of advertising revenue for newspaper companies.

But also there is a challenge to the authority and centrality of main-stream media. That challenge is coming from efforts at non-commercial or at least non-profit 'and other forms of citizen journalism where staff and citizen reporters contribute as part of their roles as citizens of their societies or citizens of the net, netizens, 'Here lies the controversy.'

Samuel Freedman, a *New York Times* journalist and professor at the Columbia University School of Journalism sees citizen journalism as "one of the trendiest terms of the moment…part of a larger attempt to degrade, even disenfranchise journalism as practiced by trained professionals." Who would he asks "treat an amateur as equally credible as a professional?."
(http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2006/03/30/publiceye/entry1458655.shtml. See also "Citizen Journalists and the New 'News,'" p. 6 in this issue)

His fellow Columbia Journalism School professor Nicholas Lemann voices his agreement in the *New Yorker* ("Amateur Hour: Journalism without Journalists," Aug 8, 2006). Lemann argues that, "the content of most citizen journalism will be familiar to anyone who has ever read a church or community newsletter."
(http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/060807fa_fact1 . 'See also "Cit-J and Its Place in Journalism," p. 8 in this issue)

Defenders of participatory or citizen journalism do not agree that citizen reporters or journalists are amateurs, only reporting community or personal news. They point out that online newspapers like *OhmyNews* in South Korea attract serious citizen reporting and try to serve as society's democratic watchdog, a role which main stream media has more and more abandoned.

Oh Yeon-ho founded *OhmyNews* in Feb 2000 to encourage "every citizen to be a reporter" and to make available in Korea a spectrum of news and views not contained in the conservative main-stream media. From the very beginning *OhmyNews* Korean language edition mixed staff journalist and citizen reports and gave all articles professional editing. According to Oh, "only those citizen reporters who are passionately committed to social change and reporting make our project possible." (See, "Welcome to Korea and *OhmyNews*," the bottom of the next column.)

Similarly, Erik Larson who started the citizen website flix.dk in Denmark in 2003 sees journalism fulfilling a higher purpose needed by society than main stream media is currently serving. He writes that, "without critical high quality commercially independent journalism, society loses its headlights and moves into the future like passengers on a bus riding at night at high speed with its lights turned off." (See, "Media War in Denmark," p. 3 in this issue)

Larson writes he has deep respect for journalism as a profession, but he agrees with John McManus who wrote the book, *Market-Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware.* Larson writes, "'market driven' journalism slowly but steadily undermines the work conditions for journalists who seriously want to pursue the task of being 'democracy's watchdogs.'" Larson has adopted Oh's combination of professional editing and citizen reporting giving every citizen a chance to get her or his voice heard and a chance to influence the daily news agenda.

There is a sense that a new journalism is needed because the main stream media has failed. Ronda Hauben, a featured writer in *OhmyNews* and researcher of the social impact of the internet, sees *OhmyNews* as part of a vision of a 21st century press that broadens what is considered news and who is encouraged to produce it.

"Interesting times we live in," writes Larson, "a media revolution is unfolding right before our eyes." Twenty-first century media will be different. but who is going to hold the power in the end? Which will be dominant, market driven journalism or citizen journalism?

[Editor's Note: Mr. Oh Yeon-ho founded the online Korean-language newspaper *OhmyNews* in February 2000. Today, *OhmyNews* is a major player in the South Korean news media industry, ranking among the top 10 most influential newspapers there. *OhmyNews* pioneered centering a newspaper on articles submitted by what it calls citizen reporters mixed with some articles by staff journalists. In 2004, *OhmyNews* launched an English-language edition called *OhmyNews International* (OMNI) (http://english. OhmyNews.com/) which has attracted more than 1200 registered citizen journalist from at least 91 countries. Articles in OMNI often show up in online searches made with engines like Google news. From July 14 to 17, 2006 OMNI held its second annual Citizen Reporters Forum. The following are Mr. Oh's remarks opening that Forum.]

Welcome to Korea and *OhmyNews*
OhmyNews founder and CEO
Oh Yeon-ho welcomes participants of the 2nd Int'l Citizen Reporters' Forum

by Oh Yeon-ho

Two of the most prominent buzzwords in recent years have been Web 2.0 and

UCC (user-created content). Underlying both concepts is the belief that collective participation will lead to an optimum solution or conclusion. In other words, decisions will best be made when there is truly mass participation through the Internet.

While giant corporations rush to find a way of commercializing these concepts, citizen journalism, I believe, represents the most developed model for Web 2.0 and UCC. It depends not only on the participation of the masses but on the participation of those who think critically and creatively.

Writing a news story requires a good deal of time and consideration. It is much more difficult, for example, than leaving a comment or posting a blog entry. Though we are an open platform accessible to everyone, not everyone can write a news story. Only those citizen reporters who are passionately committed to social change and reporting make our project possible. The main reason that citizen journalism has not grown and spread more rapidly is the difficult task of finding and organizing these passionate citizen reporters in waiting.

Once citizen journalism takes root in society, however, it cannot be easily uprooted. For it exists at that point not only on a physical plane but as a definitive concept in the minds of the people. I hope *OhmyNews* stands as living proof and example of how solid citizen journalism can be.

The speakers for our second International Citizen Reporters' Forum are admired around the globe for working to make citizens the primary content-creators, agenda-builders and, ultimately, decision-makers in the world. We are honored and privileged to invite them.

Citizen reporters from over 20 countries are attending this forum. Some of them will spend 35 hours in flight just to come here. They represent those who are realizing the possibility of global citizen journalism. Their presentations will provide a rare chance to understand the state of journalism in general and of the budding citizen journalism in their respective countries in particular.

Since the first forum held last year *OhmyNews* International has more than doubled the number of registered citizen reporters. The number of countries that our citizen reporters represent has increased from 50 to 91, an indication that the global spread of citizen journalism is not in some remote future but is taking place right now.

Throughout this forum, we will focus humbly on the limits and problems of citizen journalism as well as best practices. Our agenda and sessions are designed to introduce and provoke substantive discussion. I know of no other international forum that is dedicated entirely to the unique topic of citizen journalism. I hope this forum will be evaluated in the future as a springboard for citizen journalism to advance to the next stage.

I'd like to remind our readers that you will be able to join the forum by accessing our site, english.ohmynews.com. We are planning to web-cast the forum live for the full length of the event.

Information and values still flow today from top to bottom, from West to East, from North to South. It is time now to push back and re-channel the great flow back and forth, to and fro, from citizen to global citizen.

Thank you.
© 2006 *OhmyNews*

[Editor's Note: In 2003, Erik Larsen and two fellow Danish journalists started a citizen journalism website. For no special reason they called it Flix (www.flix.dk). Three years later Flix has gained a reputation in Denmark as a substantial alternative source of news and opinion. Larsen is its main editor. The following is his description of a contest in Denmark today over the future of Danish media and journalism.]

Media War in Denmark: Which Way Forward?

by Erik Larsen
erik@flix.dk

In late August 2006, I was a speaker at a one day conference called 'The Day of Journalism' at the Danish School of Journalism in Copenhagen. This year's focuses were on the invasion of free newspapers into the Danish media market, the increased amount of political 'spin' planted in news stories and finally User Generated Content (UGC) and Citizen Journalism (CR).

Citizen Journalism is set to move into the main media-sphere in Denmark this autumn as two printed newspapers (the big daily 'Politiken' and the new yet-to-debut free national paper 'Nyhedsavisen' – which translated into English literally means 'The Newspaper') have announced that they will introduce Citizen Journalism on their web-editions. Both corporations – the Danish behind Politiken and the Icelandic behind Nyhedsavisen – have hired highly qualified and talented people to run the Citizen Journalism sections on their respective websites. And they are allocating huge sums and more and more staff to their web-editions since the naked fact is that the web is increasingly becoming the main source of advertising revenue for newspapers.

My speech was divided into three parts: First I tried to give some definitions of what Citizen Reporting (as opposed to Public Journalism and User Generated Content) is and how we have been trying to implant the *OhmyNews* concepts into Danish culture with the online news web site Flix (http://www.flix.dk).

Secondly I gave some concrete examples of fields where I believe Citizen Journalism is superior to traditional journalism, and finally I drew my conclusion about whether or not the explosion of citizen journalism we are apparently about to see in Denmark will benefit society at large or generally improve the standards of objective, critical journalism. The latter is what I was asked to elaborate on before the conference.

In Denmark all the big media corporations are preparing for what is generally called 'the Newspaper war.' All the three major Danish papers have launched free give-

away papers within the last weeks, they have spent enormous amounts of money on this and the purpose has been to eat up the market for free newspapers before the Icelandic media venture 'Nyhedsavisen' enters the market. 'Nyhedsavisen' has bought up most of the journalistic muscle in Denmark, they have simply bought out all the best journalists from the 'old' papers, they have employed one of the most talented and visionary editors in Denmark to head the battle and they aim to become the biggest and most important newspaper – and web-based news outlet – in Denmark within one year.

The Icelandic company has managed to completely overtake the newspaper market in Iceland in a very short time with its free paper. No wonder the old papers are scared.

This 'media war' is about one thing and ONLY one thing: Engulfing as much of the advertising market as possible. In short it is a splendid example of what John McManus wrote about in his book *Market Driven Journalism*.

McManus uses a simple but precise metaphor for the importance of journalism in a democracy or indeed any society where journalism is the 'headlight of society.'

Without critical, high quality, commercially independent journalism, society loses its headlights and moves into the future like passengers on a bus riding on a highway at night at high speed with the lights turned off. We will be blind to all dangers to the democratic institutions, which are after all very fragile and – historically seen – sparse phenomena.

We will be oblivious to potential environmental disasters, government corruption, all sorts of illegal transactions made by multinational companies and a whole range of other issues of vital importance to our common good.

I have a deep respect for journalism as a profession – with regards though only to the journalists who understand that they are serving democracy and/or the public in general (and those are rare) and I believe it takes hard work and special skills and talent to uncover, e.g., government scandals. Although I am of course all for Citizen Reporting, I do NOT want to see the tradition of quality journalism disappear in Denmark. After all, with our long tradition of having a free and critical press in Denmark, there are numerous examples of journalists who uncovered scandals or illegal activities in Danish governments and in many cases even forced officials to resign.

What John McManus documents so brilliantly in his book is how 'market driven journalism' slowly but steadily undermines the work conditions for journalists who seriously want to pursue the task of being 'democracy's watchdogs.' He uses the term 'Cognitive dissonance' for the psychological phenomenon of journalists gradually twisting or adjusting their moral codex. The pressure from editors above them forces them into dropping important stories or adapting their writing so it fits the demands of the those who in effect take over the editorial control of any commercial media: The advertisers.

When I hear newspaper people in Denmark discuss the coming 'Media war' on, e.g., public service radio (Denmark's Radio) they talk about newspapers and media as a business like any other and the only purpose of running a newspaper today is to make

revenue for the stockholders or owners by focusing on engulfing as much as possible of the billion kroner (DKK, Danish Crowns, our local currency unit) advertising market. This way of thinking, 'media as purely business,' has become accepted in Denmark though fortunately there are many critical voices in the public debate from media researchers, teachers in the School of Journalism, etc. All of these though are people who typically are not working inside the media.

Now, the editor-in-chief of the much awaited new free paper in Denmark, Nyhedsavisen, has proclaimed that he will assure that the highest quality of journalism will be safeguarded and featured in his paper. It will be delivered to every single household in Denmark for free and is expected/feared to be the biggest newspaper in Denmark very soon. He has said that huge resources have been set aside for investigative journalism and I believe he seriously believes in and strives for setting a new and high standard for free newspapers. He has also proclaimed that the new paper's web-edition will be the best and most read web-media in Denmark, and it is to this end he intends to implement Citizen Reporting plus totally uncensored blogging by the newspapers reporters on the website.

If he can really pull that off I say Hallelujah. If he manages to implement Citizen Reporting and take it to a level that Flix.dk never managed to due primarily due to lack of funding I will gladly shut down the Flix server and spend my time on something else, like writing more articles myself or go back to literature.

But – and this was the final conclusion in my speech at the School of Journalism – we have yet to see what Politiken and Nyhedsavisen mean and end up with when they give Citizen Reporting the green light. I believe there is a real danger that the standards of Citizen Reporting might be ruled by the lowest denominator due to the pull of the market forces; editors might be inclined to sieve out all the intellectual stuff or any really important informative articles and instead highlight a kind of smalltalkish 'Reality News.' We have already seen this happening with another free Danish newspaper, Urban, which offers blogging space to all its readers. It occasionally features blog entries from its readers in the printed edition, but always and only dumb although entertaining lifestyle oriented examples of 'Citizen Reporting,' articles with themes like 'Why I hate smokers?' or 'How do I find Mr. Right?' and such stuff.

Will Politiken and Nyhedsavisen with all their pretty ideals and promises be able to stand up against the demands of their respective owners who see media as a money making machine and nothing else? Will they be able to make Citizen Reporting a respected and powerful factor in the overall media picture? Time will tell, and I can't wait to see how they implement it on their websites. If they are smart they will make something like 'Readers Edition' on Netzeiting.de which I've studied more and which seems to be a brilliant way of introducing Citizen Reporting to western users/citizens.

What I liked about Mr. Oh Yeon Ho's concept behind *OhmyNews* when I first read about it back in 2003 was that he acknowledges the potential virtues and skills of professional journalists while at the same time stating that 'every citizen is a reporter' and should have at least a chance to get her or his voice heard or influence the daily news agenda – which of course in South Korea in 2000 must have been an especially

strongly felt need in parts of the population due to the rigid and conservative main stream media at the time.

Although it has never actually been unfolded in practice, my vision for Flix.dk has been and still is to combine the best traditions from 'old' media with the immense possibilities of knowledge sharing, personal storytelling and of course 'Citizen Reporting' in order to help cultivate the internet – well the Danish section of it anyway – into the supreme and unprecedented media for democracy and free speech which it holds the potential to be. But the *OhmyNews* model cannot be directly transferred to Danish citizens' needs and culture. Some heavy experimentation was/is needed with the purpose of setting some basic rules, ethics and formats for what could make Citizen Reporting a truly powerful democracy tool in Denmark.

So – to answer the question I've asked myself a few times after I learned about the coming boom in Citizen Reporting in Denmark – will Flix.dk be obsolete after the 'big players' take over the management of Citizen Reporting in Denmark? No, I don't think so. Flix may lose some of our best writers to the big media-sites but many others will discover Flix for the first time. My job as the Flix-editor will be to run any important stories which the others won't touch and make a special effort with regards to writing or running stories which enhances the general awareness of the effects and dangers to democracy which will spin off of the huge churn and turn in Danish media habits that we are about to experience.

Besides, you could imagine that Citizen Reporters and their readers in a fully 'Citizen Reporter driven' media arena would not stick to or be loyal to a single website but rather do their work and information-gathering across a broad range of sites, blogs and what have you. This is already the case. No internet-user sticks to a single media but jumps via hyperlinks from site to site. There are certainly going to be plenty of challenges to both journalists and Citizen Reporters in the future in regards to distributing the important news and information out to the right people amidst the bombardment of useless information, spam and advertising-driven clutter which we try our best to ignore when we sit in front of our screens but which is still there and perpetually gets more and more noisy and distracting.

The Danish newspapers have finally accepted that the internet is NOT going to disappear overnight as they must have been secretly wishing. Every single Danish paper is moving staff from the written edition to the web edition.

Interesting times we live in – a Media Revolution is unfolding right before our eyes and I guess maybe one could ask the same question as was asked before the French Revolution in 1789: Who is going to hold the power at the end: The people or the King? (The king in our current scenario meaning the more or less corrupted and purely market driven main stream media).

Citizen Journalists and the New 'News'
A response to Samuel Freedman's column on CBS TV's 'Public Eye'

by Ronda Hauben
ronda.netizen@gmail.com

"Each week we invite someone from outside...to weigh in with their thoughts about CBS News and the media at large," explains the introduction on the CBS TV Web site feature "Public Eye." The March 29, 2006 article featured on "Public Eye" was on the subject of citizen journalism. It was written by Samuel Freedman, a professor at the Columbia University School of Journalism and a *New York Times* columnist.[1] In his article, Freedman presents not only a superficial view of citizen journalism, but also a rosy colored view of the main-stream professional press in the U.S.

The thrust of Freedman's argument is that citizen journalism is "part of a larger attempt to degrade, even to disenfranchise journalism as practiced by trained professionals." Citizen journalism, according to Freedman, is in essence the presentation of "raw material generated by amateurs," unlike the journalism of the "trained, skilled journalist (who) should know how to weigh, analyze, describe and explain."

Considering that Freedman is a professional journalist and also a professor who is responsible for the training of professional journalists, one might expect that he would do some investigation about the origins and thrust of the phenomena of citizen journalism before writing an article which not only mischaracterizes the phenomena, but similarly mischaracterizes the practice of most of the professional journalists in the U.S.

Citizen journalism is a growing phenomenon. For many who care about producing or reading the news, it is a welcome phenomenon. The South Korean newspaper *OhmyNews* has done much to introduce and pioneer this form of journalism.[2] The impetus for broadening not only the nature of what is considered as news, but also who is encouraged to produce the news, is part of the vision for a 21st century press that guided the creation and development of *OhmyNews.*

Oh Yeon-ho, the founder and CEO of *OhmyNews* started the young newspaper officially in February, 2000. Oh was reacting to the "closed and elitist journalistic culture" which marginalized those journalists in South Korea who dared to challenge the imbalance of power in the media environment in South Korea at that time.[3]

Oh's goal was to contribute to a media culture in South Korea in which the "quality" determined what news would merit public attention, not the "power and prestige of the media organization that printed the article."

OhmyNews has worked hard to pioneer the concept that "every citizen in a reporter." Explaining this concept, Oh describes how citizen reporters for *OhmyNews* "raise high the flag of guerrilla warfare" against "the massive media power" that he saw functioning in South Korea as "the final gutter of Korean capitalist society."

Oh believed that citizen reporters would function to provide a more accurate and all sided journalism as an alternative to the conservative South Korean press that was dominating South Korean media. "Citizen reporters can be called guerrillas," he writes, "because they are not professional and regulars and they post news from perspectives uniquely their own, not those of the conservative establishment."[4]

In the U.S., there is a similar problem with media power which is used to increase the wealth and power of a small sector of the society, while ignoring the needs and desires of the broader strata of the population. Take for example, the mainstream U.S. media coverage of the current conflict between General Motors and its parts operations offshoot Delphi, and the union workforce. The CBS TV program "60 Minutes" carried a segment about the dire economic condition of GM and Delphi on Sunday evening, April 4.[5]

Similar to much of the other main-stream corporate media coverage of the current controversy, the producers of "60 Minutes" presented one side as the whole story. From their presentation a viewer would have no idea that there are workers who are challenging the story that GM/Delphi and the corporate main-stream U.S. media are presenting to the world of GM/Delphi's dire financial condition. The main-stream media is reporting that the source of the problem is the wages and benefits of the union workforce.[6] There is no coverage in the U.S. press of the corporate transfer of funds out of North America or corporate mismanagement or deceptive bookkeeping.

On March 31, the Delphi Corporation asked Judge Robert D. Drain, of the Southern District of New York for permission to void the UAW contracts as part of its bankruptcy process and to sell or close 21 plants in the U.S., including those that have been profitable like the Cooperstown Delphi facility.[7]

Auto workers who are challenging what is happening, refer to Delphi's actions as "union busting and corporate restructuring" not as bankruptcy. The role of the media in helping to promote the corporate claims of economic impoverishment without any independent media investigation or consideration of alternative models of what is happening, shows how there is a serious void in the role played by the mainstream U.S. media in such a situation.

There is an important alternative perspective that auto workers have been presenting as a way to view the GM/Delphi restructuring attack on their right to union membership and activity. Their articles and discussion are available on web sites and mailing list maintained by union workers who advocate the need to fight the cutbacks in wages and benefits and union rights that the GM and Delphi actions represent.[8] These workers warn that as GM and Delphi act to void the UAW union contracts, other major employers are watching and considering what they can learn from the process.

A similar one sided media presentation dominated the public discussion during the New York City Transit Workers Strike in December 2005.[9]

There is a need for citizen journalists who will fill the gap by telling the otherwise untold part of the GM/Delphi saga. The main-stream press in the U.S. will in general tell the "news" from the press releases or interviews with advocates for corporations like GM or Delphi. Whether there are economic or political reasons for this bias, be it

the need to maintain advertising contracts, or the need to stay on good terms with the corporate spokespersons, or some other reason, is secondary.

The main issue is that there is a need to present the union workers' side in the public debate over the GM/Delphi restructuring, in order for the public to have a chance to understand what is at stake. Some of the workers advocating waging a struggle against the GM/Delphi restructuring plan, say that they spend considerable time speaking with reporters, only to see little or nothing of what they have said in the article when it appears.

The Korean edition of *OhmyNews*, with the articles by thousands of citizen journalists has been part of a force to effectively counter the dominance of the conservative press in South Korea. *OhmyNews* has recently announced that it has entered into an agreement with Softbank and which will make it possible to create a Japanese version of *OhmyNews*, will provide the funds for efforts to improve the Korean *OhmyNews*, and will make it possible to support the further development of the International edition of *OhmyNews*.[10]

Journalism educators like Xiguang Li, the executive dean of the School of Journalism and Communication of Tsinghua University, have expressed interest in the *OhmyNews* model and in finding a way to work toward having a version in their countries.

In the U.S., there is a need for a diversity of viewpoints and an alternative to the pro-corporate journalism that dominates the media landscape. *OhmyNews* presents a working model based on citizen journalists as a form of newspaper that can help open up the U.S. media beyond its current one-sidedness. It would be encouraging to see the Columbia Journalism School and its professors welcome such efforts and perhaps even provide support to create a U.S. form of *OhmyNews* and help train U.S. journalists about the innovations in 21st century journalism that online newspapers like the Korean edition of *OhmyNews* have pioneered.

The current crisis in the mainstream media in the U.S. demonstrates that there is a need for a serious examination of the deficiencies of the corporate dominated media. By studying models like the Korean *OhmyNews* and trying to learn from its ability to welcome netizens to be part of a more participatory process for gathering and presenting the "news," a means may be found to create the needed alternative forms of "news" for a 21st century press in the U.S.[11]

Notes:

1. "Outside Voices: Samuel Freedman on the Difference between the Amateur and the Pro," Public Eye, March 31, 2006.
(http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2006/03/30/publiceye/entry1458655.shtml)
2. I am writing this article in the international edition of *OhmyNews* which appears in English at http://english.ohmynews.com/ The Korean edition, however, pioneered the concept of citizen reporter or citizen journalist).
3. " *OhmyNews* and 21st Century Journalism"
(http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?menu=c10400&no=246787&rel

no=1)
4. The term "guerrillas" refers to "small non-regular armed forces who disrupt the rear positions of the enemy."
5. CBS TV "60 Minutes" (http://www.cbsnews.com/sections/60minutes/main3415.shtml)
6. "Automakers and the Voice of the UAW" (http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?menu=c10400&no=277878&rel_no=1)
7. "Coopersville Delphi Workers Surprised by Plant Closing" (http://www.wzzm13.com/news/news_article.aspx?storyid=52324)
8. See for example, "The Psychology And Brainwash" by John Goschka, "Miller's Deadline The Same Day As FBI/SEC Deadline" by Gregg Shotwell, "Good Day Honorable Robert D. Drain" by David Huff, and "A Buy-Off That Looks Like Rosemary's Baby" by Gregg Shotwell. '(http://futureoftheunion.com/?cat=15)
9. "First NYC Transit Strike in 25 Years" (http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?menu=c10400&no=264876&rel_no=1)
10. " *OhmyNews* Bags Softbank Millions" (http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?article_class=8&no=282147&rel_no=1)
11. "The Emergence of the Netizens" (http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?menu=c10400&no=234337&rel_no=1)

Cit-J and Its Place in Journalism
A reply to Nicholas Lemann's *New Yorker* article

by Ronda Hauben
ronda.netizen@gmail.com

In his recent article, "Amateur Hour: Journalism Without Journalists," published in *The New Yorker* on Aug 7, Nicholas Lemann challenges the promise and practice of citizen journalism.[1]

Lemann is on the staff of *The New Yorker*, a magazine that publishes important investigative journalism. He is also the Dean of the Columbia University Journalism School, one of the most prominent schools of journalism in the United States. Given these credentials one might expect that an article by Lemann in the *The New Yorker* would offer a serious examination of the new phenomenon of citizen journal-

ism, and a consideration of the role it can play in the media.

Unfortunately Lemann does not set out to do either of these two pieces of much needed work. Instead he offers an argument against citizen journalism very similar to the one advanced by Samuel Freedman, also at the Columbia University Journalism School, in an article published on CBS's "Public Eye" in March.[2]

At the root of Lemann's article is the argument that citizen journalism makes grandiose promises but only delivers trivial fare.

"Professional journalists," (or those who earn their income doing journalism) according to Lemann, are intimidated by the supporters of citizen journalism and so do not adequately defend the achievements of their profession.

It is these "professionals," however, he writes, who carry out the duties required of journalists.

Hence according to Lemann's portrayal of the world, all that is needed is an adequate defense of the deeds of journalists who are paid for their work, rather than trying to substitute "amateurs" who earn their living elsewhere.

What Lemann writes is a defense of salaried journalists. His case against citizen journalists is that the articles they write are of the variety that belong in a "church or a community newsletter," and therefore not an innovation.

The problem with Lemann's presentation of journalism in 21st century America, is that he is substituting the protection of the profession of journalism, for the social purpose that is at the roots of why journalism is so important for a society.

This point was sharply enunciated in a program held in April 2006 at Columbia University.[3] One of the panelists, the journalist Charles Glass, described the difficulties he has faced trying to do journalism in the U.S. His complaint was that American journalism has become hostage to a "business culture." He argued that for journalists in the U.S., "Our moral obligation to tell the truth is too often over-ridden by the commercial concerns to do what the employer wants."

Describing the destruction of journalism in the U.S. by the business culture it is embedded in, Glass said his experience had taught him that the business culture couldn't be adapted to promote the truth. The

business model is the wrong model for journalism, he explained. This is because the goal of journalism isn't to reach consumers or customers. The goal of the journalist is to speak to citizens.

Other panelists in the program at Columbia were Seymour Hersh, John Pilger and Robert Fisk. This set of prominent journalists explained that the problem they observed in the U.S. political environment was that there has been a breakdown of many institutions and of the journalistic oversight of these institutions.

Instead of the U.S. press providing oversight and questions to the powerful in the U.S., too often the press acts as official spokesperson or as the disseminator of the government's positions on issues.

Lemann's defense of journalism is actually the defense of what Glass referred to as the "business culture" which is destroying the ability of journalism to serve a public purpose. The polity in the U.S. is sick. The mechanism for rooting out the sickness is to dig out and expose the problems of the society that are hidden from public view. But such exposures are rarely made, and when they are submitted to editors, they may not be published. Glass cited a number of stories he wrote that were never printed or aired on television.

Similarly, Fisk described how the words used by U.S. journalists mask the abuse of power. He also demonstrated how very often news articles in the U.S. press rely on government information as their sources and hence end up presenting as news the official version of the events, instead of uncovering what is going on beneath the surface, what is actually at stake, and for whom.

In the article I wrote in response to Freedman's article about citizen journalism, I described how auto workers who are interviewed by the press about the cutbacks and layoffs by the auto parts company Delphi, do not see any reference to what they told the reporters when the articles appear.[4] This is only one of a number of examples where the point of the view of the powerful is presented to the public as the only point of view in mainstream journalism in the United States.

In the current media environment, there is little investigative journalism being carried out by mainstream media organizations, and few resources are available for those journalists who work for the mainstream press to delve beneath the surface of current events to dig

out the truth.

For example, there are various government investigations ongoing into the bookkeeping practices of Delphi and its former parent company General Motors. Yet instead of investigating what is actually going on with these corporate entities and their management practices, many of the reporters covering stories related to GM or Delphi just echo corporate claims that the problem the companies are facing is that their workforce is too highly paid, or that its pensions and health care insurance are too heavy a burden for the U.S. auto industry.

There are any number of other events in the U.S. that cry out for journalists to delve beneath the surface. The outing of Valerie Plame's identity as an undercover CIA agent in July, 2003, in retaliation for her husband's activities in exposing false claims made by the Bush administration, is but another glaring example of a story that has not received the attention it deserves from the U.S. press.

The crimes of the Nixon White House were unmasked because there were investigative journalists who were able to devote time and resources to digging out what was being hidden.[5] No such newspaper investigation has been conducted in the cases involving the Bush White House.

Lemann recognizes that *OhmyNews* is "perhaps the biggest citizen-journalism site" and that it is based in Seoul, Korea. He gives no indication, however, of familiarity with the important achievements of *OhmyNews*. "What has citizen journalism actually brought us?," he asks disparagingly, ignoring the fact that *OhmyNews* and citizen reporters publishing in *OhmyNews* helped to elect an unknown politician to the presidency of South Korea.

Nor does he seem to know that a citizen reporter posting on *OhmyNews* to honor two middle school girls killed by an armored tank driven by two U.S. soldiers, helped to ignite large candlelight demonstrations against the problem of the unequal U.S.-Korean relationship.

There are other significant examples of achievements by citizen reporters which Lemann could learn about if he were interested. Then he would be in a position to make an informed assessment of the potential and achievements of citizen journalism.

Instead, his case against citizen journalism rests on three arbitrary

examples of articles taken from three different sites on a particular day in June. The selection mechanism used to choose the sample articles appears to be his effort to claim that citizen journalism is equivalent to what would in other times have appeared in a "church or community newsletter."

Lemann doesn't provide the reader of his article in *The New Yorker* with any means to understand the origins of citizen journalism, as in the context of the creation of the Korean edition of *OhmyNews*, or the media reform movement called the Anti-Chosun [Daily] Movement that it was part of.

He does offer the reader a foray into the vibrant publishing environment in Great Britain in the late 17th century. The actual book he refers to, Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain by Mark Knights, provides a lively discussion of how representative politics was built on extensive public participation.

While the book offers an interesting exploration of the interconnection between political participation and political representation, Lemann's interest in it seems more connected to the description it provides of a period when partisan politics became dominant. This seems related to Lemann's prediction that such an outcome is likely to be the result among those writing on the Internet as well.

While Lemann's article provides little perspective or insight into the citizen journalism phenomena, it does provide an example of why citizen journalism is needed. The Internet has brought changes in our society, and institutions. Whether the new forms and content available for journalism, some of which are being explored under the rubric of "citizen journalism," will bring improvements to journalism is yet to be determined. It is, at the least, premature, for Lemann to pronounce the failure of "citizen journalism," especially when he has made so little effort to learn about its nature and origin. But more profoundly, his article, published in the *The New Yorker*, and by someone of the stature of Dean Lemann, demonstrates that there are serious deficiencies in how change is considered and investigated.

Fortunately, the Internet and the advent of citizen journalism means that other viewpoints and examinations of the phenomena of citizen journalism will be produced and discussed.[6]

Notes:

1. Nicholas Lemann, "Journalism without journalists," The *New Yorker*, Aug 7, 2006 (http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/060807fa_fact1)

2. "Outside Voices: Samuel Freedman On The Difference Between The Amateur And The Pro," CBS Public Eye, March 31, 2006 (http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2006/03/30/publiceye/entry1458655.shtml)

3. Ronda Hauben, "Business Wrong Model for Journalism, Goal of journalism should be to speak to citizens," *OhmyNews*, April 17, 2006: (http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?menu=c10400&no=286231&rel_no=1)

4. Ronda Hauben, "Citizen Journalists and the New 'News', A response to Samuel Freedman's column on CBS TV's 'Public Eye'," *OhmyNews*, April 4, 2006 (http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?menu=c10400&no=283357&rel_no=1)

5. Ronda Hauben, "Citizen Journalism and Lessons from Watergate: The role of investigative reporting in unraveling scandal," *Ohmynews*, June 20, 2006 (http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?menu=c10400&no=299884&rel_no=1)

6. "Newspapers And Reporters And Citizen Journalists? Oh My!" – "Public Eye" (http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2006/06/01/publiceye/entry1675510.shtml)

Reporting From Nepal

[Citizen reporters in their own words] Rupesh Silwal discusses the importance of citizen journalism

by Rupesh Silwal

Dear colleagues, *OhmyNews* team, international citizen reporters, ladies and gentlemen, Greetings from South Asia – Nepal. Together we experienced some wonderful moments at last year's *OhmyNews* forum. This year, too, participatory journalism has brought us together. I'd like to express my thanks to *OhmyNews* for all the splendid work, but today I would like to speak about its influence in Nepal.

The Internet is playing a larger role in the daily lives of many and racing toward being an integral part of households the world over. Its

impact is rising in developing nations like Nepal. Accordingly, traditional journalism here is adapting to take changing landscapes into account.

Citizen journalism has been practiced in Nepal since mid 2005 – three months after the King sacked the government and seized complete power. Some 3,000 politicians, student leaders, journalists and rights activists were arrested and press freedoms were suspended to prevent any political mobilization against the monarchy. Activists remained in detention and were prohibited from traveling either domestically or internationally, and the King ruled directly without an elected government or parliament.

In this context when the government curbed all forms of media, *OhmyNews* became an excellent platform for freedom of expression in Nepal.

After attending the First International Citizen Reporters' Forum in Seoul last year, I felt that I understood more about emerging forms of 21st century media and citizen journalism. I shared my experiences with a few enthusiastic friends and they are now active citizen reporters for *OhmyNews*.

After the royal coup, *OhmyNews* brought realistic versions of Nepalese society to an international arena. At the time this was extremely important because most traditional media outlets seemed to be biased. The citizen reporters writing for *OhmyNews* helped the world understand why there was a movement against monarchism.

Stories on *OhmyNews* have a heart because they prioritize human feelings. This is simply the way that citizens write the news.

I wrote, my friends wrote and the whole world knew what citizens were thinking about when other media were just passing on rumor.

In this way, *OhmyNews* played a role in the establishment of democracy in Nepal. Now, there are more than a dozen citizen reporters from Nepal. Their participation has changed their behavior and made them think about the world in different ways.

Rosha, a citizen reporter from Nepal, now takes a camera with her wherever she goes because she doesn't want to miss the chance to grab some news for *OhmyNews*.

Pawan Acharya is a key person in Nepalese news broadcasting and

he has introduced some of his friends to citizen journalism.

Some enthusiastic citizen reporters have even started Nepal's first citizen journalism site and the government is working to regulate online journalism as an important aspect of the internationalization of cultural and social issues.

I appreciate *OhmyNews* because it carried a series of articles on the caste-based discrimination that prevails in this region. We have to face it everyday and the whole world should know that. It's a subject that is hardly ever covered in traditional or international media.

Thanks to *OhmyNews* I have regained contact with old school friends and I now have more options in life. Reporting for international media might have once been a mere dream for emerging journalists but with *OhmyNews* it is just few minutes' registration process away, and accessible to anyone. This has broadened the horizon of journalism.

However, there are still some issues to be faced.

In the case of Nepal, most interesting news stories are based on country areas where access to the Internet is almost impossible. Who writes about them? An urban reporter. I wish things could be different, and one day I'm sure they will be.

There is also the question of literacy and knowledge of citizen journalism among people in Nepal's remotest regions. However, once everyone in every region learns about participatory journalism, I promise that websites like *OhmyNews* will be seen as the best source for news. Readers will trust news stories written by the people they know!

During visits in the different regions of Nepal, I have found brilliant citizens who are keen on writing the news and are also seeking jobs.

At present the traditional media excludes them in favor of hired or paid reporters who may or may not write about the issues that most concern citizens.

The South Asian economy is emerging as a global force. Historically, culturally and geographically diverse, it is a region with thousands of untold realities.

Politically and socially, the region is unique. You can see communism declining throughout the world but it is emerging here.

All the countries in South Asia are developing nations, which means that the region is in a transitional situation. This might be the reason why

corruption has major impact on day to day life here.

The fact that the region is in the process of development means that there are also a lot of opportunities here. I am sure citizen journalism will be flourishing in South Asia within the next few years. Everyone expects that *OhmyNews* will come up with a regional site for South Asia.

I will conclude by saying that people power is citizen power, and that obviously, citizen power is guided by citizen journalism.

Here's to the success of the Second *OhmyNews International* Citizen Reporters' Forum!

© 2006 OhmyNews

Citizen Journalism Brought to Germany
Reader's Edition: New web site modeled on *OhmyNews*

by Ronda Hauben

Reader's Edition, created in the spring of 2006, is an example of a developing citizen journalism platform that is currently part of the German language online newspaper *Netzeitung*. The content of *Netzeitung* and *Reader's Edition*, are different though they have links readers can follow from one to the other. While a regular staff creates *Netzeitung*, the readers of *Reader's Edition* as volunteers determine the subject matter and content by the articles they submit. Thus the content of *Reader's Edition* reflects the readers' interests and the issues they deem important to cover.

Peter Schink, who was the *Netzeitung* project manager in charge of the creation of *Reader's Edition*, started the project in March 2006. He explains that he built the model for his project following the idea of *OhmyNews*. Since the German media landscape is different from that in South Korea, however, Schink adapted the model so it would be "a little bit different." Also, since there was little money for the project, he had

to rely on modifications of the free software program "WordPress" to do the technical development.

Schink explains that, working along with one programmer and one designer, he created the German language citizen journalism site after only 2-1/2 months of work. His goal was "to design a platform which looks a bit like a printed newspaper." It was important, he emphasizes, that "every participant get the idea that it is not a forum or weblog but 'a newspaper'."

While *Reader's Edition* was in development, Schink traveled around Germany giving lectures at universities and at the "web-Mondays" being held in various cities in Germany. Web-Mondays are informal gatherings to bring together those interested in developing web 2.0 applications.

In his travels, Schink says that he met many "open-minded students, who really supported the idea of citizen journalism." From the interested people he met, he found 10 volunteers who were willing to serve as editors for the new online newspaper. Called moderators, these volunteers are the interface between the articles submitted by readers and the process by which these articles are chosen, prepared, and placed on the *Reader's Edition* web page.

Before the official opening of the *Reader's Edition* site, Schink collected e-mail addresses of interested people whom he encouraged to explore the site. "Some of them were bloggers," Schink writes, "and as you can imagine, they really liked to play around with the site."

Though the majority of the editorial work and articles are contributed by volunteers to *Reader's Edition*, the parent newspaper, *Netzeitung*, has been providing technical and other forms of support. Recently, however, the editor-in-chief of *Netzeitung*, Michael Maier, has informed those participating in *Reader's Edition* that they will have to become self-supporting. Maier has hired a business consultant, Hugo Martin, to take *Reader's Edition* into what is being called Phase 2. Martin is proposing that *Reader's Edition* become a community platform for NGO's and others who want to have access to publishing tools and are willing to pay a fee for this access.

There have been concerns raised in the *Reader's Edition* online forum about the changes being proposed and that such changes are being

carried out just a few months after the online introduction of the citizen journalism project. One reader proposed that a two or three year period of time is needed to see how such a project will develop, rather than making substantial changes after only six months in operation.

Netzeitung, the parent newspaper, however, is undergoing changes in its ownership structure. Started in 2000 by a Norwegian online newspaper company, Nettsvision.com, *Netzeitung* has already seen a number of changes in its ownership structure. Recently, the current owner, Orkla Media, sold the rest of its media empire to a British media corporation, the Mecom Group, headed by British media figure David Montgomery. Only *Netzeitung* and *Reader's Edition* remain with Orkla Media. Hence *Netzeitung* staff members expect that changes in the ownership and financing structure of *Netzeitung* are likely to follow. Despite the upcoming changes, however, *Reader's Edition* has already proven to its readers the promising potential of citizen journalism.

One early participant, Rolf Ehlers, describes the varied and interesting content contributed to *Reader's Edition* by its readers. He writes, "Reader's Edition is opening a new world of citizen participation in all political and societal questions. The readers seem to have a clever ability to maintain order, and they will need it because in the end there is no domain they won't be confronted with. When they started they found an interesting mix of contemporary issues and those that are more long term."

Ehlers concludes, "Reader's Edition is doing what I dreamed of with my web site a few years ago but which I could not then realize technically. Reader's Edition is more than a competitor to the known print media. It will bring new forms of news and views which you didn't even know existed."

© 2006 *OhmyNews*

Citizen Reporting in Brazil
The information highway belongs
in the hands of the people

by Guilherme Lopes Neves

Audience participation in the creation of news content is not simply an online phenomenon, at least not in Brazil. Radio stations like Jovem Pam used to put the public on the air reporting the traffic, for example, and I'm sure that all over the world other companies have done the same.

But the Internet obviously gives the public much more chance to be heard, seen and read. The Net is a great leveler, equalizing the production of journalists and their audience.

Years after *OhmyNews* started citizen reporting at a level unimagined by many people, the big corporations have started to do the same.

Steve Outing pinpointed this "move" by the mainstream media in an article on Poynter Online, in which he writes: "To varying degrees, news organizations are giving their audience greater opportunities to participate."

Outing names the BBC as an example, and we can add to it CNN, AOL, and many others big media organizations.

In Brazil, there are three user-generated content projects. They are from the sites iG, Terra, and Globo Online; all of them accept texts, photographs, video and audio from the public.

Everything started with the Reader-Reporter section on iG. Anyone could write and send stories to them. After checking the information, the text was published. This was in about the year 2000.

Globo Online, is part of a huge communication company, Globo Organizations, which has newspapers, radio stations and television stations. The site was inaugurated in 1996. And in this year it started the Eu-Reporter (I-Reporter) section, with texts, videos and photos sent by the audience.

We also have the Vc-Reporter (something like U-Reporter, with "U" meaning you) section on the Terra Web site. Belonging to the Spanish communications corporation Telefonica, Terra does the same

as Globo, receiving the material from the public by mail.

In the year 2006, iG set up the My News site, accepting users' collaboration, and allowing readers to comment on the articles.

All these Brazilian sites are focused on news and facts. But, at least two of them, Globo and iG, accept opinion texts, published with identification, at iG, and in a different section at Globo.

The texts are published in their integrity, with small changes.

None of these organizations pays for the collaborations; not even a symbolic amount. All sites make very clear that once the text is submitted, they can do whatever they want to it. Those are the rules.

The major difference between these sites and *OhmyNews* is the fact that participating at OMNI makes you part of a community of citizen reporters, engaged in journalism free from the main-stream.

Since I've started writing for OMNI this year I've been feeling that I'm part of something greater and truly democratic, not simply contributing to a big news medium. I could finally, after seven years studying and five working as journalist, feel like a reporter.

All because first, you decide the subject, the approach and your sources; second, you have space enough to examine the subject deeply; and third, you sign the article, read the comments and know how many people have read your story. Everything a "usual" journalist has, we have here.

An alternative to the big news

In Brazil, the media is highly concentrated, which is a shame for democracy. It happens that when the owners of media companies don't want the population to know something, people just won't know. It is like being responsible for a public highway and only allowing people you want to ride along it.

The information highway needs to be in the citizens' hands and participatory journalism can do that.

Contributing to a big content site is a good start. It will be even better if citizen reporters keep their own blogs, for example, to discuss subjects of communitarian interest, and not go to the main-stream to get attention.

At the big corporations there is every chance that the audience contributions get lost under the content generated by the staff journalists,

who don't communicate with the citizens.

I don't think those initiatives are a bad idea; they are a good start.

Citizen journalism could be an alternative to big media speech. But right now it is just becoming a part of it.

There are initiatives in Brazil that are more democratic and where all the content is collaborative, but compared to spaces like OMNI, there is lot more that can be done in Brazil.

© 2006 *OhmyNews*

Netizens in Japan Take a New Step Forward

by Ronda Hauben

I want to welcome *OhmyNews* Japan which has just been launched in Japan. This is an important step in the effort to spread the Korean *OhmyNews* model to other countries, both by learning how to build on the lessons from the Korean model and how to change the model to respond to different local conditions.

While the Korean *OhmyNews* emphasized "'open-minded progress' in order to change the distorted environment in the conservative-dominated media" in South Korea, *OhmyNews* Japan will instead have a policy of "'political and ideological neutrality' in order to fit the socio-political environment in Japan," announced Oh Yeon-ho, the founder and CEO of *OhmyNews*. He also explained that citizen reporters in Japan will use their real names in their articles, just as citizen reporters in Korea are required to do; however, pen names will be "allowed for some exceptional circumstances."

An article describing the launch of *OhmyNews* Japan reported that "bloggers and netizens in Japan are actively discussing directions and approaches *OhmyNews* should take."[1]

It is good to see that bloggers and netizens in Japan have the opportunity to contribute to *OhmyNews* Japan and to help it to develop and spread.

This is a welcome sign, as it is a reminder of how Japanese researchers and Japanese society welcomed the concept of "netizen" in the mid 1990s and helped it to spread in Japan.

In 1995, Professor Shumpei Kumon, the director of the GLOCOM Institute (Global Communications Institution) in Japan, learned of research by a young researcher and invited the researcher, Michael Hauben, to Japan to share his research.

In 1996, Hauben wrote a description of the role played by Professor Kumon in helping to spread the concept of netizen in Japan, Hauben writes:

"A little under one year ago, I received a letter sent through the Internet, via electronic mail. The letter was sent by a professor from Japan, and concerned studies we were both interested in.... The specific concern was about the emergence of Netizens, or people who use computer networks who consider themselves to be part of a global identity. The Netizen is part of a developing global cooperative community."

Hauben shared the email from Professor Kumon he had received a year before in 1995 which said in part: "I am a social scientist in Japan writing on information revolution and information-oriented civilization. Since I came across the term 'netizen' about a year ago. I have been fascinated by this idea. It seems that the age of not only technological-industrial but also political-social revolution is coming, comparable to the 'citizen's revolution' in the past. I would very much like to do a book on that theme." (E-mail from Professor Kumon)[2]

Professor Kumon appreciated Hauben's role in developing and spreading the concept of netizen as a new form of online citizenship, a new form of social identity and consciousness.[3] Professor Kumon invited Hauben to Japan to be one of the guest speakers at the Hypernetwork '95 Beppu Bay Conference on the "Netizen Revolution."

A little while later, Professor Kumon published a book in Japanese titled, "The Age of Netizens." It included a chapter by Hauben "The Birth of the Netizens."[4]

Also when Hauben's book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* was published in a print edition in the U.S., a Japanese translation soon followed.[5]

One of the netizens that Hauben met when he was in Japan was Hiroyuki Takahashi, at the time a college student. Takahashi suggested that there be a netizen association formed to help to spread the Internet and to encourage people to learn how to become part of the online world.

Though the netizen association wasn't able to form at the time, the beginning of *OhmyNews* Japan to develop citizen journalism in Japan and the *OhmyNews* model is a hopeful sign. It is a means to continue efforts to spread the Internet and to encourage people to use the Net in ways that will be helpful for their lives and for society.

Notes:
1. "OhmyNews Japan Debuts"
(http://english.ohmynews.com/ArticleView/article_view.asp?menu=A11100&no=313808&rel_no=1&back_url=)
2. http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/text/netizen-a-call.html
3. http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.xpr
4. http://groups.google.com/group/fj.misc/msg/65a9f2d1109d64b6?dmode=source
5. The Japanese edition was published in 1997 by Chuokoron-Sha, Inc. The url for the online English edition is: http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/netbook/
© 2006 *OhmyNews*

Exporting Citizen Journalism
Sites in Denmark and Israel Demonstrate That
OhmyNews Model Is Spreading

by Ronda Hauben
ronda@ais.org

The *OhmyNews* International Citizen Reporters' Forum 2006 session describing how citizen journalism has spread to Denmark and Israel was an important contribution to the forum. Erik Larsen who founded and is CEO of Flix.dk in Denmark and Michael Weiss who founded Scoop.co.il in Israel presented fascinating descriptions of the

online news sites they have begun in their respective countries.

Flix.dk began in 2003 before there was an English version of *OhmyNews*. Larsen described how he read an article about *OhmyNews* in 2003 and had to go to someone who could translate the Korean so he could learn as much as possible about *OhmyNews* in its Korean edition. Flix.dk was launched in November 2003 from a small computer in Larsen's apartment using open-source software. At first he worked with two colleagues to provide the management and friends, family, and colleagues contributed the articles. For the first year, in addition to stories from others, the three editors would write "a column a day," Larson explained, "focusing on some unconventional news story or taking a deeper look at news and media culture in general."

The goal for Larsen and his colleagues was to create a site for citizen reporting that would be based on sound journalistic practices and user-created content and the sharing of knowledge. Their hope was that this would lead to having better information available to people and that the articles and discussion would help people to change their view of the world to have a more accurate view and ultimately more democracy.

Flix.dk thus far has been a non-profit model. Larsen realizes that he needs additional funding as it grows but that there is a need to be careful about what the sources of funds are, as certain sources of funding can be very detrimental to the ability to have a democratic media. He refers to examples of how certain forms of funding ended up destroying the newspapers they were supposed to support, as described in the book Market Driven Journalism by John McManus.

Larsen described how certain articles in Flix.dk provided break-throughs in spreading knowledge of and gaining contributors for the online newspaper. One such case was the "Keld Bach-case" in Spring 2004 where a Danish blogger was threatened by some lawyers and told he had to remove some links on his blog or he would be liable for a large amount of money. The lawyers, in threatening the blogger, were violating his rights, and the coverage of the story on Flix.dk led to live radio show coverage, so that the lawyers had to publicly apologize to the blogger.

Larsen told of the difficulty of finding funds to help Flix.dk grow, but that the site is appreciated by the Danish public and contributors.

Given the crisis he outlined in the Danish media environment, there is a serious need for Flix.dk.

Scoop.co.il came into operation after the last *OhmyNews* Forum. Weiss began his talk with the statement that "it is tempting to think that money runs the world." Instead, however, he explained that the real fuel is vision. He hopes that Scoop will be a tool for making change.

In his talk, Weiss described how he recruited citizen reporters by sending invitations to those bloggers and others online whom he felt would make a valuable contribution to Scoop.co.il. Also he described how there are rewards for doing a certain number of stories but that citizen reporters receive no payment for their articles.

The funding for Scoop.co.il initially came from an Israeli venture capitalist. Citizen reporters who want to sign up to write are put through a screening process, and have an initial phone conversation with an editor.

Weiss also hopes to start soon an English language section of Scoop.co.il. There are many contributors from diverse sections of Israeli society for stories for Scoop.co.il.

These two presentations were a highlight of the 2006 forum. They are concrete embodiments showing that the model provided by *OhmyNews* Korea can lead to different variations and can be established in other countries and in other languages. These examples of other working citizen journalism sites raise the hope that by next year's *OhmyNews* forum, there will not only be many more citizen reporters but also several more examples of online sites inspired by the model that *OhmyNews* Korea is pioneering.

© 2006 *OhmyNews*

Netizens Are Critical to
Citizen Journalism
[Citizen Reporters in Their Own Words]
Ronda Hauben from the U.S.

by Ronda Hauben
ronda@ais.org

It is with a smile that I prepare today to go to Korea and the 2006 *OhmyNews* International Citizen Reporters' Forum.

When leaving the forum last year I remember having a conversation with one of the citizen reporters. She said she had been thinking and felt that perhaps one of the most important aspects of citizen journalism was that there are netizens, people online who have found that the Internet is helpful in their efforts and desire to make the world a better place.

She felt that it was from the netizens that the significant aspects of citizen journalism will develop. She told me she wanted to be sure to share this with me before she left the forum.

I first came to learn about *OhmyNews* in 2003 when I saw an article in the Financial Times that said the "netizens" in South Korea had made it possible to elect the president of the country. This made me curious and I wanted to learn what I could about what had happened.

From Korean friends online and off I came to know about *OhmyNews*. A Korean friend showed me the Korean edition, which was all there was in 2003, and she translated some of the many comments there were on different articles.

She encouraged me to write to founder Oh Yeon-ho with my questions about *OhmyNews*.

I probably did try to write an e-mail and sent it, but don't remember exactly and didn't at the time get an answer. Instead Mr. Oh, it seems, was preparing to do an English edition so that the many people who were interested in *OhmyNews* but who couldn't read Korean would still get an idea of the idea of citizen journalism.

A little while later, a netizen I met online said she would submit an article I had written about the Howard Dean campaign in the U.S. to

OhmyNews. In it I compared Dean's election campaign to the campaign for the presidency of South Korea. She translated it into Korean, and it appeared in both English and Korean in an issue of the Korean *OhmyNews* in March of 2004.

This all raises an important question for me that I hope will be considered at the 2006 forum: How is the spread of *OhmyNews* and *OhmyNews International* connected to the fight for democracy? The fact that the birth of the Korean edition of OMN was connected to the continuing fight for democracy in South Korea seems an important aspect of any effort to spread the lessons from the Korean *OhmyNews* to other publications and to other countries.

The netizens of South Korea who contributed their articles as citizen reporters when OMN began and who continued to contribute the articles as it grew, are a factor that is to be considered and understood. Also, it seems there was a staff for the newspaper which not only encouraged the submissions, but who also helped to cover the developments in the fight for more democracy in Korea for the young newspaper.

I have found that learning about and understanding the developments in the Korean fight for more democracy is an encouragement to continue working with *OhmyNews*. I often wish that *OhmyNews* would have more of the articles from the Korean version of the newspaper translated into English to be part of the English edition. That way there would be more knowledge of what is happening in Korea among those who read and write for the International edition of the newspaper.

Next year is the 20th anniversary of the victory of the 1987 revolution in South Korea. Perhaps in honor of this event *OhmyNews* can find a way to share more of the events of the Korean democratization efforts with those who can only read the English edition.

I often wonder if there is any way there could be an American version of *OhmyNews* which would be a champion in the fight against the conservative press and politics that dominate U.S. society. It seems so difficult to consider this possibility here in the U.S. as the conservative forces are so strong and pervasive.

It seems that they would find a way to impose the need to make money on whatever was created, rather than recognizing the need to have a social purpose as the critical thrust. This is why I feel it is so

important to have some knowledge of how *OhmyNews* grew out of the progressive movement in South Korea. It is important to remember that an early goal of Mr. Oh was to create a media culture in which "the quality of news determined whether it won or lost," not the power and prestige of the media organization that printed the article.

Last year's forum was a very memorable experience. There are many special events I recall, but the most special was after I gave the brief talk I had been invited to give. Several citizen reporters for the Korean edition of *OhmyNews* came to embrace me and thank me for the talk. The talk I gave was about the online research of Michael Hauben in 1992-1993 which discovered that the Net was encouraging people to be able to participate as citizens in a way previously impossible.

This research – observing what was developing on the Net – esulted in the concept of "netizen." The continuing spread of the Net and the netizens are symbolized by "netizens" I met during last year's OMNI forum. They, in turn, are a tribute to and an encouragement for the spread of OMNI's great experiment.

© 2006 *OhmyNews*

Citizen Journalism Not About 'Amateurs' or 'Pros'
Interview with *OhmyNews* Citizen Reporter Ronda Hauben

[Editor's Note: This is an interview with *OhmyNews International* featured writer Ronda Hauben for the Korean online publication *ABC Paper* by Heewon Kim, a researcher who received her M.A. a year ago from Yonsei University in Cultural Studies. The interview appears in the Aug. 31, 2006 issue of *ABC Paper* in Korean. The interview here is a slightly edited version of the Korean original.]

ABC: Can you write a short self-introduction for the readers about your main interests and your research? Or just say hello to the *ABC Paper* subscribers.

RH: As a bit of background, I recently returned from a wonderful visit

to Korea. I was invited to attend the *OhmyNews* International Citizen Reporters Forum in July. After that was over, I stayed in Seoul for several days.

I have a great deal of respect for what netizens have achieved in Korea. (Here I am using 'netizen' in the sense of one who acts as a citizen of the net, rather than the use of the term as any user.)

I am co-author of the book "Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet." The book was put online in January 1994.

During this visit to Korea I met with Yun Young-min, who is a sociology professor at Hanyang University. He showed me his book in Korean about the Internet.

The book is "A Theory of Electronic Information Space: A Sociological Exploration of the Computer Network" (Seoul: Jeonyewon, 1996). It included a number of references to "Netizens." He had written to me an email message explaining that the book "Netizens" encouraged him to push forward his plan to write a book about cyberspace in Korean. It was quite wonderful to see an actual early reference to the book "Netizens" in a Korean book about the Internet.

I am especially interested in the impact of the Internet and of netizens on the continuing struggle to extend democracy, in theory and practice. South Korea is in the forefronts of the world with regard to the spread of broadband access, and has a strong tradition of a democratic movement. Perhaps that accounts for why South Korea is in the forefronts of exploring how the Internet can be a "laboratory for democracy."

I am doing research about the experience of netizens in Korea and have tried to help spread knowledge about these important developments.

I would welcome collaboration with Korean netizens and other researchers.

ABC: We know you have researched Internet journalism and netizen participation in Korea for a long time. What was the first motivation to you? Is there any particular event or opportunity which led you to Korea?

RH: I first learned about the important developments in South Korea when I saw in 2003 a reference on the front page of the Financial Times

newspaper that the president of South Korea was elected by netizens.

It was fascinating to see both that netizens in South Korea were mentioned on the front page of the Financial Times and that they were credited with bringing about the election of a head of state. This was a significant achievement. I knew it was important to learn about what was happening in South Korea.

ABC: In Korea, the concept of 'netizen' seems to be usually misunderstood. Can you explain the exact meaning of it to Korean people?

RH: My co-author of "Netizens," Michael Hauben, did research online in 1992-1993 to determine what impact computer networking was having on the lives of those who had access to the Net. What he observed was that many of the people who responded to some questions he posted online, were excited about what the Net made possible for them. Also, though, surprisingly many of those who wrote explained that the Net was an important development and they wanted it to grow and flourish and to be available to anyone who wanted access.

Just as the French term "citoyen" or citizen, was used during the time of the French Revolution to signify a social identity of an individual who contributes to his or her society, both on a national and international basis, so the term 'netizen' reflects a new non-geographical socially based membership.

The term 'netizen,' as it was originally created, was used to describe people who cared about the Net and the larger world it is part of and work toward building the cooperative and collective nature which benefits the larger world. In this case the word represents positive activity and no adjective need be used.

Another use of the term 'netizen' developed, one which refers to anyone who uses the Net for any purpose. Then the term is prefixed with adjectives, like good or bad.

I reserve the term 'netizen' for those who devote time and effort to make the Net, and the world it is part of, a better place. (Michael described this distinction in the Preface to "Netizens." This is online at: http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/)

ABC: In addition, do you think netizen participation will be more activated in the near future? Or do you think we have many new obstacles against the netizen movement?

RH: During my recent visit to Seoul, a number of the people I spoke with were concerned about what the prospects were in the near future for the netizen movement.

I think that having a longer term perspective which takes into account the important achievements of netizens in Korea thus far, and also tries to understand how the difficulties in the past have been overcome, would be helpful.

For example, in reviewing what happened with regard to the Hwang Woo-suk affair (i.e. the Korean stem-cell scientist), it is important to keep in mind the achievements of young netizen scientists and other netizens who posted online what was wrong with Hwang's papers and spread the exposure on the Internet.

Some felt this would reflect poorly on Korea and Korean science. To the contrary, the ability to uncover fraudulent scientific activity reflects very highly on Korean scientists and on Korea. The ability to counter all the efforts to cover up the scientific fraud was an important achievement of netizens in Korea.

I realize that there were those online who supported Hwang. I am, however, reserving the word 'netizen' for those who were active in the fight for honesty in science.

ABC: You did various case studies on grassroots journalism. Especially you are very interested in *OhmyNews*, and also contributing as a citizen reporter. What do you think of the social effects of *OhmyNews*?

RH: Part of the concept of 'citizen journalism' is a return to the idea of journalism having a public purpose and responsibility. The Internet has made it possible to reinvent the concept of news so that the real-life conditions of more people and their news and views become part of what is recognized as journalism.

This isn't an "amateur" journalism replacing a "professional" journalism. Rather it is an extension of who is to be able to contribute to what is considered as "news."

In the U.S. there is a great effort to defend "corporate journalism," i.e. a journalism which reflects the news and views of the powerful and the wealthy in U.S. society.

The Internet, however, expands those whose 'voice' can be heard.

The development of citizen journalism where it is not only that

readers can discuss what "journalists" write, but where readers contribute as "journalists" is an important contribution to the effort to define a 21st century journalism.

ABC: Now *OhmyNews* became quite influential, so it is regarded as a very successful model. Do you think this kind of model can be successful in other countries? Or do you think there are unique features/background in Korea?

RH: It is not accidental that *OhmyNews* could be developed in South Korea. It is in South Korea that there has been the confluence of both widespread access to broadband, and the democratic achievements of the 1987 revolution. There is also a continuing commitment to carry on the struggle for democracy by a significant sector of Korean society.

But while South Korea is a special place with regard to these elements, I don't believe it is unique. Instead, I feel that as lessons are learned from the experience of the Korean edition of *OhmyNews*, these lessons can make it possible to develop other versions of *OhmyNews* elsewhere.

ABC: What is your expectation of *OhmyNews* Japan?

RH: I wish those who are beginning *OhmyNews* Japan well.

It is an important effort they are undertaking. I feel that most important will be what goal is set for *OhmyNews* Japan. When I told a Japanese friend about the effort to begin *OhmyNews* Japan, he wondered whether it would be able to become a major opinion leader in Japan.

Can *OhmyNews* Japan champion the voice of the powerless so it will be heard? Can it support those who are concerned with the broader social needs of society and support their efforts for reform?

A while ago, I was told that some in Japan are afraid to speak out using their own names as they are concerned that they will be penalized. If this is a current problem, it would seem important that *OhmyNews* Japan take this problem into account and communicate with netizens in Japan raising the question about what to do with regard to such problems.

Will *OhmyNews* Japan welcome contributions from netizens in Japan? Will netizens find a way to support and help *OhmyNews* Japan to develop? These are some of the challenges that I believe lie ahead for *OhmyNews* Japan.

ABC: In the U.S., there are many people who express their political opinion. (e.g. bloggers) It seems to be easy that everyone can make his/her own channel to spread their opinions and arguments. Maybe is this a reason for the failure of Bayosphere? What do you think of the main reasons of the closure of Bayosphere?

RH: I don't know the reason for the failure of Bayosphere, other than the short statement that was posted by Dan Gillmor when he announced he was ending it. In his statement he mentioned that he had depended on startup funding and on trying to find further funding.

Someone posted in response that it would be interesting if a researcher compared the creation of *OhmyNews* with Gillmor's efforts to create Bayosphere.

I felt this was a helpful focus. When the Korean *OhmyNews* began, it devoted resources to support the blacklist movement which had as its purpose to document which policians were unfit for public office. Also it welcomed netizens and their contributions and even paid them a little for their work. The Korean *OhmyNews* began as part of an effort to provide an effective counter to the conservative press.

These socially oriented efforts of the Korean *OhmyNews* provide a basis for support by netizens. I don't know if there were similar socially oriented efforts of Bayosphere when it began.

Even more important, however, is the fact that *OhmyNews* has welcomed progressive people to contribute their news and views.

This didn't seem to be the case, in my experience, with Bayosphere. Instead it seemed to be focused on a more narrow technical community.

ABC: People are starting to enjoy multimedia, not only text, so that many websites like youtube.com have become very popular. We can see similar phenomena in Korea. Do you think this can change the power/relationships of existing mainstream broadcasting media? (As blogs and *OhmyNews* vs. existing newspapers.)

RH: Sure. Already online videos are providing a challenge to the mainstream media.

Netizen journalism in all forms of media, however, would benefit from having a consciousness of what kind of media is needed as the alternative to the mainstream media.

It is helpful to look at what is being developed and to also have an

ongoing collective conversation about what is desired.

My view of a netizen media is a media which makes it possible for the common people to have more power over their lives and over the decisions that affect them. This could be part of the needed vision for the development of a netizen media.

ABC: Finally, do you have a next plan to visit Seoul again? In addition, what will be your next research?

RH: Yes I would like to visit Seoul again soon. It was wonderful to have been invited to conferences in Korea last year and this year and to have had the opportunity to have discussions with Korean researchers and activists interested in democracy.

Actually I would like to be able to spend six months in Korea so I could do more serious research about the role of netizens in Korean democratization. Spending some time in Korea would help me to become more familiar with the Korean language, which would also help my research. Unfortunately I don't speak Korean so I hope to find a collaborator who can help me know more about the content of Korean language posts on the Internet.

Currently, I am working on a proposal for an updated edition, a second edition of "Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet."

I would like to have a section of the book about the role of netizens in extending democracy. The achievements of netizens in Korea would be an important part of the section.

I have been working on some draft papers about netizens and democracy in Korea.

The papers are online and I welcome comments and discussion of them.

The papers are:

1. The Rise of Netizen Democracy A case study of netizens' impact on democracy in South Korea.
(http://www.ais.org/~ronda/new.papers/netizensskorea.txt)

2. The New Dynamics of Democratization in South Korea The Internet and the Emergence of the Netizen.
(http://www.ais.org/~ronda/new.papers/paperkorea.txt)

3. Carother's Critique of the Transition Paradigm and the 2002 Presiden-

tial Election Campaign in South Korea 'The Netizens and the Conservative Print Media.

(http://www.ais.org/~ronda/new.papers/korea-carothers.doc)

I also have an outline for a paper about the history and impact on democratic developments of the internet in Korea: What is the Impact of Netizens on South Korean Democratization?

A version of the book "Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet" is online.

I would appreciate comments and discussion toward doing a 2nd edition of the book. Perhaps there could even be a Korean translation of a 2nd edition.

I would like to see a version of *OhmyNews* like the original Korean *OhmyNews* for the U.S. I would want to be part of the staff that helps to provide the editorial direction for such an undertaking. It would be wonderful to have a netizen online newspaper in the U.S., which would collaborate with other netizen media around the world.

Both parties welcome comments and discussion of the issues raised in this interview. Heewon Kim maintains a blog at hypercortex.net.

Where Do You Head,
Citizen Journalism?

Impressions from *OhmyNews*
International Citizen Reporters' Forum

by Alexander Krabbe

[Citizen Journalism and Beyond/OhmyTV] 2006

Two years after the launch of *OhmyNews* International, different forms of citizen journalism have appeared on the Internet. At *OhmyNews*' second International Citizen Reporters' Forum, key representatives presented the special characteristics of their forms of citizen-participatory journalism.

What can be learned from them? Will there be a common perspec-

tive, a common dream that can bind the different projects together in order to form an effective counterweight to traditional media?

Diversity

Presentations by Tim Lord, managing editor of Slashdot.org and Ethan Zuckerman, co-founder of Globalvoicesonline.org, revealed their approaches to their audience, and gave the forum's attendees a better idea of the diverse ways citizens could participate in online media.

Slashdot.org and Globalvoicesonline.org differ very much from the *OhmyNews* project, which may be considered an attempt to integrate bloggers into a semi-professional editing process. At *OhmyNews*, editors help citizen reporters create articles of a certain standard of quality.

Slashdot.org in the words of Lord, rather forms a contribution factory in which comments on news are promoted. Citizens contributing to the Web site will remain anonymous, increasing the chance of keeping discussion on various topics alive and dynamic.

"Contentious," "interested" and "helpful to each other" is how Lord describes the people who contribute to Slashdot.org. However, moderators decide where a comment will be placed and thus how much attention it may gather, which has displeased some contributors.

Consequentially, anti-Slashdot.org Web sites have already popped up, which in a way confirms the original's popularity among Internet users. The most popular Web site critical of Lord and his colleagues is named, as one can guess, Anti-slash.org.

Lacking in Cooperation

When asked how he regarded future cooperation between different citizen journalism projects, Lord remained reserved: "It is difficult, for example, to place permanent links connecting various citizen media projects to each other. One cannot be sure whether the readers will accept that. Besides, many Web sites are already over-linked."

Zuckerman seemed more open-minded toward establishing a vital cooperation between the numerous citizen media projects. "We already face a lot of cooperation with other forms of citizen participation Web sites," he said. Close contact would be held with Reporters Without

Borders.

Globalvoicesonline.org, which gets 900,000 hits per month, gives bloggers a chance to present their personal stories to a global audience in a professional environment. Zuckerman calls it an "amplification of blogs, rather citizen media than citizen journalism," as emphasized by its aim of pointing out divergence in media focusing that leaves large regions uncovered by the conventional press.

Africa suffers from a lack of internet access, which makes reporting from countries such as Nigeria difficult. Zuckerman pointed out the asymmetry of media attention by comparing Nigeria and Japan – two countries with almost the same number of inhabitants, but with very different proportions in media representation.

OhmyNews founder and CEO Oh Yeon-ho looks at future cooperation in the citizen media sphere on a greater time scale: "We find citizen journalism today in an early stage. Various forms are developing in this environment. There may be cooperation between grown projects in the future."

Thus, citizen journalism today consists of many islands. Globalvoicesonline.org and Slashdot.org are but two examples. At the forum, Lord and Zuckerman only presented their islands, neglecting the chance to develop concrete plans for inter-project cooperation. Not a single suggestion in this direction was to be heard.

American technology writer and former columnist Dan Gillmor, now engaged in his own citizen journalism project, expressed his view on the issue this way: "I think cooperation between the different grass roots journalism projects will be hard." Gillmor, however, on Ourmedia.org offers basic information to those intending to run participatory media projects. A learning center that shows how to create video blogs, podcasts, screencasts, digital stories, and other emerging media forms can be found easily on that Web site.

Outlook

This author's impression from the Citizen Reporters' Forum is stamped by the lack of connection between different participatory media Web sites. Maybe the reason for this is that the old elite of the early Internet age still dominate.[*] They grew up with ideological fights over

operating systems and source codes and consequentially coined the term "flame war." As with the beginning of many progressive movements, the power of citizen journalism appears to be split.

Nevertheless, the citizen reporters attending the forum represent a new generation that stands at the gates of the participatory era. Unlike the ego-focused hacker generation, these engaged people – from different countries, from all social classes, and from every age – seem to form a united movement. One day their spirit may give citizen journalism a new dynamic, bringing the media into the people's hands. © 2006 *OhmyNews*

*Note: The editors see the early history as a time of great sharing and equality. The early hackers were respected constructive members of the community.

OhmyNews Changed My Perspective
[Citizen Reporters in Their Own Words]

by Amit Pyakurel

My name is Amit Pyakurel, a college student from Nepal, and I have been a citizen reporter for *OhmyNews* for a while now. My first encounter with *OhmyNews* was an exciting experience and left me overjoyed that my first article about the conflict in my country got published on the front page of the site. This also led me tsee that even a person like me, who hasn't yet made a firm commitment to a journalism career, could tell the story to a global audience.

Though I am like a toddler in the field of journalism, my work with *OhmyNews* International has changed my perspective on the society I live in and on the world at large. Political and social issues are my fields of interest, and I do often become concerned with various issues, good and bad, from other parts of the world having to do with my livelihood. And since becoming a citizen reporter for *OhmyNews* I feel that my concerns have acquired a new direction, which I can express through my writings, letting a wide range of people worldwide attend to and respond

to my stories.

Working with *OhmyNews* has further helped me to see that writing, especially on sensitive social or political matters, is not a cakewalk. You needn't just know what has happened, but why and how. Getting a deeper sense of an issue means hard work and practice, thinking, and patience. Though I can't expect such skills to develop in an amateur like myself all at once, I do appreciate the job of the brainy staffers associated with *OhmyNews* who remark on my work and make suggestions, point out my mistakes, and encourage me to do better. This helps me develop motivation with responsibility.

Today's world is no longer confined to a particular social milieu or within the territory of any national boundary. The social conflicts, poverty, and other forms of human suffering are no longer a concern just of the people directly or indirectly affected by them but now have also become the concern of people living remotely from the actual happenings. Thanks to the advancements in information technology that have narrowed the world in this manner, making it like a single village, and *OhmyNews*' idea of citizen journalism, a new dimension is added to this concept of a "global village."

I admire *OhmyNews*' concept, "Every Citizen a Reporter," aiming as it does to bring together the voices of global, everyday citizens and their concerns with events around them. People from different walks of life and with different perspectives should come together by means of this common platform and generate a wider range of ideas about issues, something that, I believe, could get us closer to their resolution on the basis of an understanding created through this global debate.

OhmyNews is certainly establishing a unique trend in the field of journalism, in which anyone can participate, and it already consists of intelligent and hardworking staffers, who, I believe, have a glorious vision to grow this news industry amid a vibrant global media market. As its goal is to provide information not generally covered by the traditional media, I think mere reportage is not what *OhmyNews* should be about. A new perspective or commentary on some common issues and on those making the headlines could satisfy a modern audience seeking something other than traditional news stories. I think *OhmyNews* could also lend special interest to the in-depth reporting and assessment

of individual issues not usually contained in the professional media.

When the civil conflict spearheaded by the decade-old bloody Maoist insurgency was already making global headlines, not only the Nepalese but the international community abruptly became more concerned when King Gyanendra staged a coup in February 2005, overriding civil liberties and restricting press freedom. It was in the latter days of the coup's legacy, when demonstrations against the monarchy began to disrupt the national economy, that I joined *OhmyNews* as a citizen reporter.

During the latest 19-day protests, the people's burning resentment against the royal regime and its oppression rose to a new height. Not an officially accredited journalist with an ID tag, I was rarely out on the streets to collect first-hand information on the crisis. I did refer to the local media and online news sites in combination with my own experience to cover the news stories. The turmoil in my country did arouse my feelings, and I felt that, at least, "I am having my say about these events for a global audience" as I began to write for *OhmyNews*.

The Internet has brought about an information revolution, but in Nepal, its use hasn't yet been all that convenient for the ordinary citizen. I have a dial-up connection, which has been helpful for me in working for *OhmyNews*, but it's slow, expensive, and unreliable. Because of these considerations and technical unavailability in most places, broadband and cable Internet have yet to make their debut in Nepal.

It seems just a short time ago that journalism itself began to take root here. The nonpartisan Panchayat rule from 1960 to 1990 was a black era for the media, as the press was systematically and brutally suppressed in that period. The press escaped suffocation after the multiparty democracy was established in 1990, and the ensuing constitution ruled out press restrictions, with some exceptions, like the prohibition of any kind of criticism of the monarchy.

The press in Nepal experienced another oppressive episode during King Gyanendra's 15-months of dictatorial rule. Regarding Nepal's recent political transformation, its parliament, arising from the massive people's movement in April, has attempted to do away with the speech restrictions, especially on criticism of the king and the royal family.

Another media form that has revolutionized information flow in

Nepal for some time now is the FM radio stations. Initially, having only one state-owned AM radio station named Radio Nepal, we are witness now to a number of private FM stations, which are gaining in popularity. Though some FM stations that thrived initially focused only on entertainment, avoiding politics and news-oriented material, some newly emerging private FM stations have brought Nepal into a new information age, making rural residents, the majority of the population, aware of political and social issues.

There has been a remarkable upsurge in the media market in Nepal since the establishment of democracy in 1990. Along with many local newspapers, some private dailies, like *Kantipur*, have gained a lot of popularity, as at first there was only the state-owned *Gorkhapatra* daily, which monopolized newspaper publishing. Initially there was only the state-owned Nepal Television, today there are four other private TV channels whose dissemination of the news has been able to attract wider public attention. People have yearned for fairness in the news since the state-owned media during the dictatorship dispersed artificial and misleading information to subdue the democratic process.

Thanks to the emerging media market in our country, we no longer have to depend upon a media monopoly, and such multilateral media could help to make information more fairly available to the public. As the media situation has significantly improved in Nepal, although aiming to be better in the future, the practice of citizen journalism here does not seem such a far-fetched expectation. But *OhmyNews*' model of "paid citizen journalism" could still be a distant goal in as economically fragile a developing country as Nepal. It would be a different thing if some popular media industry could follow up on this trend based on economic success, but this could include only a comparatively small number of urban people, not the majority living in the countryside, where poverty and illiteracy are rampant.

© 2006 *OhmyNews*

Researching the 'My' in *OhmyNews*
An Exploratory Paper into the Workings of Citizen Journalists in Korea

by Shaun W. Sutton

As both a communications researcher at the University of Leeds and a fanatic of anything Korean, I have been struck by the various activities of *OhmyNews* citizen journalists.

Indeed, since *OhmyNews'* founding in early 2000, Korean news guerrillas have been attracting the attention of world leaders, media organizations, and interested academics and citizens alike.

In response, over the past six months I have been conducting a detailed academic investigation into the popularity behind the success of *OhmyNews*.

This investigation gives a unique insight into the Korean version of *OhmyNews*, and readers of *OhmyNews* International will no doubt find interest in the results when comparing the Korean case study to their respective countries.

The investigation's purpose has been to find out exactly why citizen journalists write articles for *OhmyNews*. With the support from the News Guerrilla Team in Seoul, an empirical survey was administered to a sample of *OhmyNews* contributors, with these results forming an important part of the research paper.

The completed paper, in PDF format, can be examined at the link below. Comments on this research are welcome.
(http://image.ohmynews.com/down/etc/1/_316425_1%5B1%5D.pdf)

Citizen Journalism:
Holding Power to Account
How Life in a Palestinian Refugee Camp Led Ramzy Baroud to Dedicate Himself to the Truth

by Ramzy Baroud

I still vividly remember the anger in my father's voice as our family of seven gathered to warm ourselves around a tin pan filled with burning coal in our house, in a refugee camp, in the Gaza Strip. That was nearly 20-years-ago, and the camp was under a cruel Israeli military curfew.

Outside, Israeli army vehicles roamed the streets of the dreadfully crowded and impoverished camp. "Those who violate the army's order and leave their homes will be killed," blasted a voice from the loud-speakers positioned atop one of the Israeli vehicles. The soldier spoke in broken Arabic; his threats sounded ominously genuine.

Inside our humble dwelling, a refugee home that first started as a mud hut, we huddled with indescribable fear. Many people had died this way. Some of our neighbors were shot for looking out their windows. Others were killed inside their homes. Our house was riddled with bullets. We had no reason to doubt the Israeli army's threats. My Dad instructed us not to breath heavily, not to sneeze, and not to move for any reason. Even this could drive a herd of soldiers into our house.

A few hours later when things quieted down, my Dad, comforted by the fact that the jeeps seemed to have moved on to another part of the camp, turned on the radio. He never missed the BBC Arabic hourly news broadcast, even now.

Palestinians have always had a love-hate relationship with the media. Knowing that the name of our refugee camp was uttered on some radio station thousands of miles away, was in some way a recognition that our plight mattered, even if only a little. Hate, because this was hardly the case, and even if some references were made, they barely deviated from the usual mantras that saw the Israeli occupiers as the ultimate source of information, the primary authority on what had indeed happened.

This remains the case today. What the Israeli army acknowledges becomes fact, its narrative is the trusted narrative; what it dismisses, has simply never happened; at best, it's a murky Palestinian allegation.

The BBC radio mentioned nothing of the Israeli curfew imposed on half of the Gaza Strip that day, nothing of the wanton killings of several people. One boy who died that day was a classmate of mine, shot as we protested against the armed Jewish settlers' attack on our high school.

The still silence was now coupled with anger. "No one gives a damn whether we live or die, slaughtered like sheep and not even a mention on the news," my father began his own commentary, which often followed disappointing news broadcasts.

Out of this sense of helplessness my insistence on "getting the word out" was born. It had little to do with the 1988 U.S. presidential elections, an event that some argue led to the introduction of the concept of Citizen Journalism. It also had little to do with the advent of the Internet, although the latter has provided a platform for many people of conscience to disseminate their ideas.

"Getting the word out" or "just telling them the truth," as Malcolm X often preached is not inborn in me, or anyone else for that matter, but it is necessitated by circumstances: where a narrative is conveyed by one party, and the other party is completely excluded. While such an assertion sounds academic and perhaps a bit redundant, this kind of neglect is injurious to most of the forgotten multitudes all around the globe, those whose "side of the story" is either deemed irrelevant, unimportant or inconsistent with the mainstream narrative which has its own intricate checks and balances.

It comes as no surprise that my studies, career and activism have always remained closely tied to that notion: I studied, taught and wrote about journalism for many years. While I began my writing career at a very young age, as a correspondent for a few local newspapers in Palestine, my direct involvement in Citizen Journalism didn't begin until much later, in the year 2000.

A year earlier, I had embarked on what then looked more like a personal website, where I would post my weekly commentaries and the work of a few others. But the advent of the Palestinian Uprising in September 2000 turned that venture into one of the most stable and

widely read Palestinian online newspapers in the English language. It is called *The Palestine Chronicle.*

In record time, *The Palestine Chronicle* attracted a large number of writers from across the globe who sought not financial rewards, but a much needed platform to express their well-stated yet neglected points of view. Into its seventh year, *The Palestine Chronicle* has grown in scope and import, covering the Iraq war as well as the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Though no match for the traditional pro-Israeli media and with no financial backbone whatsoever, *The Palestine Chronicle* has made a dent in what had seemed to be an unwinnable battle for honest reporting.

The year 2002 witnessed the Israeli reinvasion of major West Bank population centers, prompting thousands of peace activists from across the world, notwithstanding Israel itself, to travel to the West Bank. Most of these activists hoped to convey the story beyond the headlines and the forgotten news segments filed by detached reporters based in five-star hotels in Tel Aviv. Through *The Palestine Chronicle* and other online venues, these activists were provided with a platform.

For example, Brian Wood – a U.S. based activist who visited the West Bank during the Israeli invasion of Jenin in April 2002 – used to sneak into the Palestinian refugee camp where hundreds of people were reportedly killed or wounded, call a friend in Colorado and convey a report regarding what he saw there over a cell phone. The report would in turn be sent to me in Seattle; I would edit and post it, and also send it to a mailing list of thousands, and eventually to hundreds of thousands.

Using the same style, and following the U.N. failure to investigate the Israeli killings in Jenin, I managed to use citizen reporters to put together what later became an Amazon.com best seller, *Searching Jenin: Eyewitness Accounts of the Israeli Invasion*. The book was the fruit of nearly 30 individuals; only two were professional journalists. It was the first, and still the most authoritative response to all the allegations made regarding the two-week long battle in Jenin. The book was used as a source for Middle East studies programs in various U.S. universities.

Citizen Journalism is not stamp collecting. It's true, at times it can be a fun and financially rewarding hobby to those willing to hide behind the backyard bushes of Hollywood celebrities, ready to snap the

million-dollar photo and sell it to some tabloid. But in my experience it can be a very useful tool in confronting authority, revealing atrocities and holding those in power to account for their deeds.

If Citizen Journalism, using the Internet and other media, succeeds in penetrating the monopoly of the corporate media on news (thus narratives and discourses), participatory democracy, which has been long circumvented by media deception and official propaganda, might finally recover some of its losses.

To achieve that, Citizen Journalism has to thoroughly analyze what is going wrong in today's mainstream media and remain focused on what the priorities are, what counts and what truly matters.

Ramzy Baroud teaches journalism at Australia's Curtin University of Technology, Malaysia Campus. He is the author of "Writings on the Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle" (Pluto Press, London), and editor-in-chief of The Palestine Chronicle.
© 2006 *OhmyNews*

Time to Think
Reflections on the Uses and Abuses of the Media
by Fiza Fatima Asar

The role of the media has long been under discussion, usually from two perspectives, one emphasizing how it might serve to improve society and the other discussing the ways the media have been manipulated by governments and elites in their own interests. It is unfortunate that the socially positive role of the media is often superseded by the larger interests of a national elite, the manipulative role emerging as the more dominant.

Hitlerian Germany was a prime historical example of how governments can employ the media to influence the mindset of citizens. During the Cold War, exemplified by "Voice of America," the media were once again used to promote the opposing sides' ideas. In some cases, as with Nazi Germany, the media may be used directly to market certain ideals,

and in other cases, it is a subtler process, in which the viewer/listener is influenced less directly.

In this context it is interesting to note the growing attention world governments are paying to the Arabic language and their willingness to reach Arabic-speaking audiences. There is a new wave of Arabic channels being introduced by major powers around the world.

Russia is in the process of starting an Arabic channel by the name of "Russia al-Awam," which will be aired in all Arabic-speaking countries. In recent times, Russia has increasingly oriented itself toward the Middle East. With its softer attitude than the West's toward Iran and the Hamas-run Palestinian government and its observer status in the Organization of Islamic Countries, Russia can be seen as playing a strategic game against the West. It's a two-way contest, however.

The West is trying to win the hearts and minds of the Arabic-speaking public as well. As the BBC World Service extends its Arabic broadcasts, CNN is monitoring its Arabic website. France, too, is aiming to broadcast its Arabic channel by 2007, the year Russia al-Awam will broadcast. Germany's channel, Deutsche Welle, is also interested in broadcasting in Arabic. Denmark and Spain are not far behind.

It is especially interesting to note this development, keeping in mind that these are the very countries that have seldom had warm relations with Arab-speaking peoples. There is enough evidence of this discrepancy in the treatment of the working class in France, which, not surprisingly, numbers many immigrants, a large fraction of whom are Arabic-speaking. This population lives under poor conditions and suffers increasingly tougher labor laws.

Denmark is home to the cartoons considered insulting to Muslims around the world. The negative reaction of Muslims to the cartoons only encouraged other European newspapers to continue their war on the susceptibilities of Arabs and Muslims in general. Enough has been said about the "war on terrorism" initiated by the United States and fostered by its Western allies. To fight "terrorism" these countries are committing acts of state terrorism, rounding up and imprisoning Arabs and Muslims without solid evidence, denying them legal access, sending them to jails like Guantanamo, and to other forms of maltreatment, as

was evident in the Al-Ghraib torture scandal.

When a contradictory picture like this emerges, it is difficult not to question how the motives behind it relate to the media. Is it purely a desire to reach out to wider audiences, or is it a long-term strategy to win over the Middle East by changing truth to propaganda?

If one were to begin believing in the idea that perhaps Western media in the Arabic-speaking world would be a positive step toward introducing the idea of democracy, it only takes a little while to look at the examples of Algeria, Turkey, Pakistan, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Hamas-run Palestine, and, in fact, every other country in the world to see how and when the West chooses to ignore the democratic ideal and in fact works against it where democratically elected groups are not to the West's liking.

These are the very media that showed footage of Palestinian children rejoicing after the 9/11 attacks without clearly showing whether the footage was from a prior recording, or whether the children were not tempted, by candies, perhaps, to act the part. Western media, attempting to break into the Arab world, are just a continuing chain of foreign enterprises, franchises, and companies that exercise a monopoly against the locals in all parts of the world. The problem is when we continue to indulge ourselves in the supposed "benefits" of these institutions, choosing to ignore the way they add to the contradictions around us, and the way they maneuver us away from reality.

Perhaps now is the time we must really question ourselves – is it permissible then for us to ignore the question of media manipulation and elite interests? Do we not have a responsibility in this toward ourselves and others? We may be in a better world today, when it comes to the opportunities we have to filter incoming information and make judgments based on our wisdom. In the age of information and technology, the twin factors of media and knowledge have been transformed into newer and better shapes, so that the role of governmental manipulation can be, and has been, greatly reduced.

No longer should we, as a global community, be content to blame our local television, radio, and print media for the misconceptions and ignorance we labor under. We have a great responsibility to ourselves and others to comprehend and promote the truth. Agreed, technology has

reached far and wide, and the Internet is more widely used than ever before. Yet, there are still many to whom access to technology is still a privilege. It is we who can employ our resources, use our good senses, break the ignorance we live in, make wise decisions, and then spread this light among others through our voice and commitment.

© 2006 *OhmyNews*

Great Expectations: A Writer's Dilemma

When Confronted by an Emotional Topic, How Does One Remain Objective?

by Bhumika Ghimire

While doing research on Afghan women for an *OhmyNews* article titled Afghan Women: Forgotten and Betrayed, I had big hopes.

I am the "new kid on the block," who hopes for big results for her work, no matter how small the work is. I had hoped that my article would spark a debate and make people see the failure of international intervention in Afghanistan, but nothing happened.

The article was published and after five or six days everyone forgot about the long suffering women of Afghanistan. The lack of outrage among readers made me question my motive. Was I writing about the women to get results or to just fulfill my duty? Should I expect results?

I got my answer a month after the article was published. During a meeting with a local peace group, someone said that if we just remain spectators we will turn out to be terribly angry people seeing all the injustice in the world. We have to do something to make our voices heard, be it in writing or by public speaking. This is the only way we can do justice to ourselves and the people around us.

The moment I heard this, I had an epiphany. I realized that my writing about the lives of Afghan women was my duty – something I had to do – whatever the outcome may be. I understood the futility of

my great expectations.

Even though I know what I am supposed to be doing, I can't help but hope for results. I don't know how seasoned journalists like Ahmed Rashid, who has been writing on Afghanistan for nearly 25 years, keeps his priorities straight. He has seen death, destruction, injustice year after year for last quarter of a century. How can one be objective in such a situation? If I put myself in his shoes, I can see that I would have turned into a frustrated lunatic unable to handle all the pressures.

I don't think my expecting results is because of my being a woman – making me somewhat emotional. When I used to write about Nepal and the way the Maoists have escaped justice, I knew that my writing would do nothing to improve the situation. I continued to write because I could not stop myself.

I think this is because since I grew up in Nepal, I know how things work there, so my "Nepali" gene told me not to dream big. But in the case of Afghanistan, I don't have that advantage. I don't have the "Afghan" gene in me, so I don't know how the people of Afghanistan think. I guess that is why my inner, inexperienced self took over and made me hope and dream.

I am ranting about my dilemma because today I got a message from the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), which talks about a report from United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) which says that 65% of the widows in Kabul see suicide as their only option to escape life's miseries.

To be a good journalist you have to be objective. But when you read about situations like the seven-year-old child being victim of domestic violence or a little girl being given away in marriage to a man twice her age, how does one remain objective? How to shut down your emotions and just write the news?

I cannot turn myself into a stone and just write the news. I am outraged by the situation of women in Afghanistan and yes, I do expect my readers to feel the same. I know I should not expect dramatic results, but this is the only way I can keep on writing.

© 2006 *OhmyNews*

On Being a Citizen Journalist
The Greatest Beauty of Citizen Journalism Is That its Power Is in Every Citizen's Hand

by Masimba Biriwasha

Being a citizen journalist has taught me to be responsible with the power that I have over information. I have a powerful understanding of the importance of information in shaping people's decisions and destinies.

I have a special responsibility to make sure that the information that I collect is accurate and truthful before sharing it with other citizens.

It is not the simple desire to see myself in print that drives me. Rather, it is to see citizens empowered to make independent and wise decisions about their lives and livelihoods.

I strive to be fair and complete in the stories that I tell. My aim is always to tell an accurate and authentic story, one that reflects reality as much as possible.

I strive to remain independent from the people and issues that I cover. Obviously, I am deeply concerned about the issues that I write about. But my primary motivation is to provide a complete picture, even if it is not entirely positive. I try to tell the truth as it is, without embellishments.

As a citizen journalist, I am not a mere conveyer of information. I am more that just a cog in the wheel of information. I am a citizen first, with a sincere desire to see freedom, fairness and justice prevail. I have a firm belief that freedom of expression is fundamental to citizens' progress, peace, and prosperity.

I therefore always do original reporting, applying a keen sense of judgment to information. My primary allegiance is to the public. I am aware of my own opinions and biases, and strive to interrogate them when I do my reporting.

I make it a point to represent all significant views in a way that is non-partisan and provides wholesome information to citizens.

I am curious and persistent. I have an in-built desire to keep going over the edge in search of the truth. I ask questions – many questions –

and never take no for an answer.

I am not intimidated by the big and powerful in society. However, I maintain an immense humility and passion to see the voices of the downtrodden speaking forcefully about issues that affect their lives.

My principal obligation is loyalty to citizens and the truth. I am highly disciplined at verifying the authenticity of information. And I maintain a rigorous independence from the characters behind the stories that I seek to tell.

I believe citizen journalism is an avenue to challenge dominant views in society. Usually, these dominant views marginalize the voiceless through economic and political power as well as access to the big media.

Every day, I face challenges to compromise these values but I always fight to keep them at the front of every story that I tell.

Citizen journalism is in essence supplying citizens with information that they can use to make a difference in their lives. It is more than just juggling words to paint a picture. Overall, it is a painstaking process that involves collecting and checking facts. And, above all, having the courage to share a story without fear or favor. The greatest beauty of citizen journalism is that the center of its power is in every citizen's hands.

A key question for me when I compile stories is always: how will a story help a citizen to be part of the change that makes our society better and freer?

© 2006 *OhmyNews*

OhmyNews Inspires
Citizen Journalism in Indonesia
OMNI Citizen Reporter Launches Panyingkul!

by Lily Yulianti

When I raised the idea of a local citizen journalism Web site in my home town, Makassar, Indonesia, I received some skeptical responses.

People said that the Internet is still a luxury thing in Indonesia, there are not many people that have adequate writing skills, and how would I find citizens to actively and continuously send their report and articles.

It was in April last year. I was sitting in front of my computer in Tokyo, imagining a local Web site run by ordinary citizens, in a city, around 6,000 kilometers away from me. Well, this is the fact: the number of Internet users in Indonesia is less than 10% of the total population. Makassar, my home town, is located in South Sulawesi Province, Eastern Indonesia, where the infrastructures lag behind the major cities in the western part of the country.

"Let's test the water. We'll never find out the feasibility unless we have a go," I said to some close friends last year.

Why did the idea of a local Web site with a citizen journalism model look so appealing to me? The fact was, after spending several months writing for *OhmyNews* and reading some articles about reader participation in creating news, I found that this model channels citizens' voices and promotes people's involvement in the public arena – in an independent media from the public, for the public.

It was nearly one year ago, when some friends of mine in Makassar agreed to join a discussion on citizen journalism and an online workshop to investigate any possibilities of introducing the new journalism model to the city. Later we decided to write several stories about the city square, Karebosi. Seven citizens came up with various ideas, inspired by the history, myths, and people of the square, and we presented the stories on a citizen journalism Web site called Panyingkul! on July 1, 2006. In addition, we also wrote book reviews about Makassar, small bookshops and book-rental or private libraries run by local people.

The word "panyingkul" originates from local languages, and means junction, intersection. We decided to use the word as we believe that it is ear-catching, easy to remember, distinctive, and presents the spirit of an alternative media. With two editors, one Web designer and Web developer working on a volunteer basis, we launched a project called "Journalism of Ordinary People." Our first main stories were the six feature-style articles about the city square. They were written by seven writers and on the launching day we declared that this project would be a monthly Web-magazine.

Just a few weeks after the launch, we received positive responses and also some expectations that the Web site should be routinely updated. The decision to provide a monthly magazine was finally changed. We determined to update the site on a daily basis, with one article per day. There were 10 citizen reporters who confirmed their commitment to write for us.

Now, 10 months have passed since we launched the project. Panyingkul! has published 174 articles mostly written by local citizens in Makassar and several writers in other cities, and also Indonesian people living overseas. They are university students, fiction writers, professional workers, and housewives, with ages ranged from 20 to 60 years old.

The stories vary from social issues such as street children, urban poor, traffic jams, education, public facilities, tourism, marine research, waste management, environmental issues, economic and social gaps among districts, women's empowerment, culture, arts, literature, and so on. Some stories have a distinctive point of view, such as criticism of poor public facilities and city development policies.

In some cases, the citizens' solidarity is easily channeled throughout Panyingkul! For example there was a collection of donations for a 60-year-old rickshaw driver who was stabbed by his friend. A citizen reporter wrote the profile of the rickshaw driver for Panyingkul!, explaining that he has to work as a cleaner at a university in the morning and also work as a rickshaw driver in the afternoon, in order to meet his family's daily needs.

When the citizen reporter wrote about the accident, other citizen reporters collected donations and also gave away their payments. (Note: Panyingkul! pays a small fee, around US$10 per article.)

When torrential rains and a storm destroyed a home-schooling program for poor children in Makassar early in January, again the citizen reporters collected donations for repairing the building, after a citizen reporter wrote about the incident.

Today I would like to share my story on behalf of around 40 citizen reporters in Panyingkul! who have shown their commitment to the spirit of participatory journalism introduced by *OhmyNews*: every citizen is a reporter. I do believe that there are a lot of unexpected possibilities in

engaging with this citizen journalism project. Not only have we now started an initiative to channel citizens' voices, but we have also started to re-write stories and histories of the city, based on ordinary people's perspectives, and we are maintaining our solidarity, concern, and passion to share our stories.

Of course hurdles still remain, along with the debate among the opponents and supporters of this new model of journalism. In Makassar, most citizen reporters have to go to Internet cafes to get connected. They have to pay 3.000 - 6.000 rupiahs (around 75 cents) per hour for the Internet connection. Sometimes they have to anticipate blackouts, when the electricity is sometimes temporarily cut off.

But no matter what, now we believe that ordinary people have their own power to spread the information, and to share their stories and views. As a citizen reporter, Luna Vidya says: "I have been questioning my identity as a citizen, as well as many things that I have seen and witnessed in the city and other places. Now I believe that I can share my views through my writings."

© 2007 *OhmyNews*