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The Challenges and Possibilities of New Media in African Scholarship: The Case of *Safundi* and U.S.-South African Comparative Studies

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Abstract

With the publication of several seminal works in the 1980s and 1990s, George Fredrickson and others informally established the field of U.S. and South African comparative studies. The commercial and critical success of these works catapulted such comparative scholarship from the footnotes of research papers to a subject actively engaged in academic circles.

For the past five years, the journal *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies*—and its online community—has sought to develop the comparative field beyond the foundation provided by Fredrickson *et al* by harnessing the strengths of electronic publishing. The result has not only been a deepening of knowledge and broadening of disciplinary focus, but the website and its related resources have improved knowledge dissemination and community building amongst comparative scholars in and out of Africa.

Using the development of *Safundi* as a case study, Andrew Offenburger and Christopher Lee discuss the possibilities, challenges, and ultimate importance of electronic publishing to Africa-related scholarship. The authors trace the development of *Safundi* from its debut in 1999 to its five-year anniversary in June 2004, a period of time when *Safundi* expanded from an academic journal to an entire comparative community of two thousand members worldwide, with an editorial board of scholars from Africa and elsewhere, and with varied online resources: *The Safundi Member Research Newsletter*, the Online Member

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Database, the Comparative Bibliographic Database, and a compendium of comparative syllabi.

Issues of information access, online databases, electronic journal publishing, electronic resource sharing, and community building, among others, are addressed both qualitatively and quantitatively, as revealed by the *Safundi* example. The authors also set this case study within a historical context and suggest ways that the journal—and Africa-related electronic scholarship, more broadly—may further develop in the immediate future.

Résumé

Avec la publication de plusieurs œuvres précurseurs dans les années 1980 et 1990, George Fredrickson et d'autres ont officiellement développé le domaine des études comparatives entre les États-Unis et l'Afrique du Sud. Le succès commercial et critique de ces œuvres a catapulté cette étude comparative, partant des notes de bas de page des documents de recherche vers un sujet activement engagé dans les milieux universitaires.

Pour les cinq dernières années, la revue *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies* (Revue des études comparatives Sud-Africaines et Américaines)- et sa communauté en ligne- ont cherché à développer le domaine comparatif au-delà de la fondation fournie par Fredrickson *et al* en exploitant les points forts de l'édition électronique. Le résultat a non seulement été un approfondissement de la connaissance et l'élargissement de l'accent disciplinaire, mais aussi le site Web et ses ressources connexes ont permis d'améliorer la diffusion des connaissances et le développement de la conscience communautaire parmi les chercheurs en matière d'étude comparée à l'intérieur et en dehors de l'Afrique.

Utilisant le développement de *Safundi* comme une étude de cas, Andrew Offenburger et Christopher Lee discutent des possibilités, des défis et de l'ultime importance de l'édition électronique pour la recherche relative à l'Afrique. Les auteurs retracent l'évolution de *Safundi* depuis ses débuts en 1999 jusqu'à son cinquième anniversaire en juin 2004, une période où *Safundi* est passé d'une revue universitaire pour s'étendre vers une communauté comparative de deux mille membres dans le monde, avec un comité de rédaction composé de chercheurs d'Afrique et d'ailleurs, et avec diverses ressources en ligne: *The Safundi Member Research Newsletter* (Bulletin de recherche des membres de *Safundi*), le Online Member Database (Base de données des membres en ligne), the Comparative Bibliographic Database (Base de données bibliographiques comparatives), et un recueil des plans d'études comparatives.

Les questions liées à l'accès à l'information, aux bases de données en ligne, à l'édition de revues électroniques, au partage des ressources électroniques, et au développement de la prise de conscience communautaire, entre autres, sont abordées tant qualitativement que quantitativement, comme révélé par l'exemple de *Safundi*. Les auteurs ont également mis cette étude de cas dans un contexte historique et suggèrent des moyens que le journal—et les recherches électroniques

relatives à l'Afrique, plus largement—peuvent développer davantage dans l'avenir immédiat.

Introduction

Open the e-mail accounts of *Safundi* editors on most mornings, and you will find article submissions and ideas for future journal issues, messages from new journal members introducing the nature of their research, and the ubiquitous inheritance e-mail scams that promise fortunes from some late distant relative once in succession to the crown of an African country. Hardly a day goes by without receiving each of these three types of correspondence.

Seen through the eyes of conference participants today, the e-mails mentioned above can be arranged into three themes that are important to new media in African scholarship:

- Dissemination of information,
- Community building, and
- Effective and responsible use of new technologies.

These themes have been equally important—guiding principles, in fact—to the editors of *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies* and to the members of its online community since its founding in 1999.

Over the course of the past five years, what began as an online publication known as *USA-SA.com* has developed into an online community of scholars with access to two publications (*Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies* and the *Safundi Member Research Newsletter*), an online comparative bibliographic database, an online member directory, and a number of comparative syllabi. *Safundi*,¹ therefore, offers a significant case study for evaluating the role of online publishing and its relationship to African scholarship for two main reasons.

First, the development of *Safundi* has coincided with the expansion of Internet resources for the public and, more specifically, for scholars with research interests in Africa. Its beginning, though not quite as romantic as the mythic 'some kid in a garage with a computer and an idea,' was just as simple and financially endowed. As the Internet became more common globally, *Safundi* – and interest in its publication – grew. Today, as the editors of print and online publications contemplate the future of their journals (e.g., whether to go online, which financial model to follow, and how

to protect copyrighted materials), *Safundi*'s editorial board finds itself confronting the same issues.

The second reason for *Safundi*'s significance as a case study is its unusual history and status vis-à-vis publishers and the issue of academic affiliation: the publisher is neither housed at a university nor located in the electronic branch of a major publishing company. Rather, Andrew Offenburger has published the journal as an independent scholar with an interest in U.S.-South African comparative studies and with advanced experience in website design and programming. For this reason, many constraining financial factors did not and still do not apply to *Safundi*, although profitability issues do parallel those currently experienced in the industry. In general, the history and ongoing experience of *Safundi* suggest the multiple ways in which online publishing can be established and take hold – at times beyond formal academic and publisher settings – with the crucial element being *commitment*, intellectually and editorially.

With these thoughts in mind, this paper will consist of three main parts:

- i. A history of our electronic journal and community (placing it within a historical context of United States and South African comparative studies as well as the context of the post-Apartheid period and its historiographical trends);
- ii. An evaluation of *Safundi* today and issues related to online publishing; and
- iii. Speculation on its future development and, more generally, on the prospects of Africa-related electronic publishing.

Various themes pertaining to online publications and African studies shall be addressed within the aforementioned sections, with particular emphasis on – as mentioned at the beginning – content dissemination, community building, and effective and responsible use of new technologies.

A history of *Safundi* and U.S.-South African comparative studies

The idea to create an online publication to compare the United States and South Africa came to Offenburger in 1998 as then-President Nelson Mandela toured the United States and, more importantly, after reading George Fredrickson's two landmark comparative studies – *White Supremacy* and *Black Liberation* – earlier that year.² Fredrickson's books, published in 1981 and 1995 respectively, together with other monographs in the 1980s and 1990s by John Cell, Robert Massie, and Stanley Greenberg,

formed the 'first wave'³ of comparative U.S. and South African studies, although notable works on the two countries were published as early as 1915.⁴ By the mid-1990s, Fredrickson and others had unofficially established the field of U.S. and South African comparative studies. The commercial and critical success of their works catapulted comparative scholarship from the footnotes of research papers to a subject of active engagement in academic circles. A new field had taken hold.

At the same time, *Safundi* also came of age in the context of the early post-Apartheid period, a time for introspection and reassessment, politically, socially and, in many ways, intellectually. The politics of researching and writing South African history amidst this new period has yet to be fully defined, though several features have emerged. Influenced by trends in Great Britain and the United States, the generation of social historians who came of age during the 1970s – among them Shula Marks, Colin Bundy, William Beinart, and Charles van Onselen – set an early agenda of seeking to recover the histories of South Africa's black communities and their various corollaries: the histories of workers, peasants, women, and other social groups that had largely been overlooked by the South African academy. These central themes continue today, though new approaches have been added as well. Among them, the practice of public history – through museums, memorials, and other public displays – has developed as an important new area, bridging the divide between academic history and popular history through such sites as Robben Island and the new Apartheid Museum in Gauteng. Related to this trend is work that has attempted to complicate the practice of history itself: the social purpose of history, its relationship to politics, and its role in shaping perceptions of both the past and the present. Recent work by Carolyn Hamilton and Leslie Witz embraces this outlook with their respective examinations of the historical lives of Zulu leader Shaka and Jan van Riebeeck, the Dutch captain who established Cape Town in 1652.⁵ However, perhaps the most important trend that has yet to be fully manifested is one proposed in Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996): the need to integrate South Africa more completely into the historical trends of the continent.⁶

Mamdani's call is not new. In the introduction to the first edition of the *Oxford History of South Africa* (1969), Leonard Thompson underlined the need to connect the experience of black South Africans with those of other African communities elsewhere on the continent. Historical work from the 1970s followed this suggestion, though perhaps not always explicitly so: transcontinental comparisons did not become a norm. Mamdani's

insistence on the similarities and parallels, then, and the need for an 'African unit of analysis' has, therefore, been a welcome invitation.

Safundi agrees that the South African experience should be opened to comparison – perhaps the academic equivalent of 'ending sanctions' – though, as discussed previously, our points of reference are different. And if there is a need to assuage concern that such comparisons with the United States are purely academic, it is perhaps important to underscore here that U.S.-South African comparisons have been engaged previously on a number of occasions by intellectuals and activists on-the-ground, what has also been referred to as 'comparative history from below.' For example, in his study *Songs of Zion* (1995), James Campbell demonstrates how the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the first half of the twentieth century provided a 'looking glass' for black Americans and black South Africans, an institutional setting that enabled transnational comparisons of black experience to take place at a local level.⁷ Comparisons were also made by others who observed and travelled between both countries, from Ralph Bunche and Robert F. Kennedy to activists of the Black Power (U.S.) and Black Consciousness (S.A.) movements. Such comparisons were important, enabling activists and intellectuals to recast their perspectives and struggles within a broader frame of reference: their experiences were not isolated, but part of a common, global struggle for civil rights. *Safundi* embraces a similar approach with the goal of recasting how U.S. and South African history is understood at local, national, and international levels.⁸

Safundi has, therefore, come of age during a complex period of technological, political, and historiographical change. *Safundi's* original goal was not necessarily to publish an academic journal as much as it was to use new technologies to foster dialogue between scholars and citizens from the two countries, be it within academic, essay, journalistic, or creative writing. The first issue of *Safundi*⁹ reveals this inclusiveness, featuring one academic article, one essay reprint, transcripts of Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki's inaugural speeches, and a collection of newspaper feature articles. With no editorial board, no funding, few registered members, and a desire to develop the comparative field beyond the foundation provided by Fredrickson *et al*, *Safundi* indeed had a humble beginning. By August 2000, however, the website and its journal had turned a corner. The second journal issue had been posted online,¹⁰ *Safundi* became the official name of the journal and online community, and fifteen scholars were named to serve on the first editorial board.

Among the initial issues the board needed to address was where to 'draw the line,' geographically and theoretically, which became evident when one outside historian questioned the appropriateness of the journal's title:

Are we to assume, from its name and from its invitation to contributors, that the Journal of South [not Southern] African and American Comparative Studies is limited to the boundaries of the present republic misleadingly called 'South Africa' but extends on the other hand to something called 'America' which stretches from the Aleutian Islands to Tierra del Fuego?¹¹

This problem appeared easy to answer with some semantic adjustments, i.e., renaming the journal to the 'Journal of Southern African and United States Comparative Studies,' but the theoretical and practical questions ran much deeper. As the *Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies*, what would we define as 'South African' or 'American'? Would comparing the two countries be a prerequisite for publication? Would this theoretically locate our journal on boundaries and borders despite our wish to cross them? Finally, would such comparisons become highly determined, serving to necessitate both places and demonstrating what Mamdani has disparagingly called 'history by analogy'? These questions were further linked to and complicated by the electronic medium – or 'public history' format – used by *Safundi* for such explorations. How might the use of online publication methods reinforce or circumvent these problems?

After some discussion, and despite leaving many of these questions unanswered, *Safundi* retained its name as the *Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies*. We would need to identify borders, after all, in order to cross them. The editorial board came to the consensus that it would give priority to comparative articles and print research papers directly addressing one country so long as they would be of interest to the comparative scholar. In this statement, the board purposely left room for interpretation.

Related to these issues, another topic discussed at some length by the board was whether or not to complement the electronic journal with a print edition. *Safundi* distributed a survey in August 2001 asking this question, among others, and 69 per cent responded favourably to the prospect of a print edition of the journal.¹² On the one hand, print journals carry more prestige at present, although this belief is changing slowly. On the other, this temporary prestige comes at the cost of much higher production expenses and exponentially slower research dissemination, two of the board's greatest concerns, which were even more relevant concerning

the international nature of the journal. The argument for publishing exclusively online strengthened when the board took into account *Safundi*'s unique position in academia. Electronic publishing enabled *Safundi* to reach its global audience instantly, at no cost to the reader, and with no production fees.¹³ What disadvantage this brought in terms of prestige has been compensated with anniversary print issues.¹⁴

A final consideration in the creation of *Safundi* – left entirely to the publisher to decide – concerned the financial model the journal and community would follow. A journal with such a specific topic as *Safundi*'s – particularly a new journal – could not generate enough demand to warrant the adherence of a pay-per-issue financial model. Such a decision would effectively kill its readership. Equally unfeasible in the long term are free electronic journals. Valiant as the efforts might be, unless housed within an academic department, privately published open-access journals are ultimately doomed endeavours.

In the case of *Safundi*, the financial model has changed over time due to rising costs and the expansion of (i.e., more work required by) the journal and other resources. From its debut in 1999 to the publication of Issue 3 in October 2000, website visitors read all articles free of charge; registration as a member (providing contact information) was available to those who wished to join the e-mail list. Between October 2000 and December 2003, visitors to *Safundi* freely viewed the latest issue of the journal, and only those who registered as members (again, those who provided contact information yet paid nothing) could read past issues. Since December 2003 *Safundi* has continued to give free access to the most recent issue of the journal and newsletter while requiring member registration to download the penultimate journal issue and newsletter; premium website services – admittance to the journal and newsletter archives and access to the online member directory, comparative bibliographic database, and collection of comparative syllabi – have been restricted to 'Safundi Scholars,' or those members who pay an annual fee.¹⁵ With this system, *Safundi* has attempted to find a middle ground between maximising information access and covering expenses.

The changing of *Safundi*'s rates and open-availability exemplifies how the website and journal have adjusted to shifting trends in the market and expanded in conjunction with the rise of online publication and interest in U.S.-South African comparative studies. The major milestones discussed above – not to mention key additions to the website, such as the publication of the first *Safundi Member Research Newsletter* – propelled the community to become the diverse forum for scholastic exchange that it is

today. Having considered its history and place within the field of U.S.-South African scholarship thus far, we shall now discuss the current state of the community and related issues in African scholarship.

***Safundi*, electronic publication, and its role in academia**

As of July 2004 *Safundi* has published fifteen issues of its *Journal*, nine *Research Newsletters*, and three databases: the Online Member Database, the Comparative Bibliographic Database, and the Database of Comparative Syllabi. Our community is comprised of 2,139 members from 44 countries. *Safundi* Scholar subscriptions, both personal and institutional, are in their infancy, but recent sales are promising: Stanford University and the University of Cape Town have joined as institutional subscribers. These positive indicators – not without their corresponding challenges – and the progress and setbacks experienced by *Safundi* speak to the state of online African scholarship today, and are best explored by discussing individually the five components of our community.

Safundi and electronic journal publication

In an e-mail sent to the *Journal* in 2003, one potential author asked several questions ‘about *Safundi* as an electronic journal,’ and identified two reservations that many scholars share about publishing articles in a digital format. After introducing the nature of the proposed research, the scholar wrote: ‘If the journal evaporates into cyberspace then the ‘evidence’ of my professional productivity will be diminished. I am also concerned about dishonest readers who may misuse items published in *Safundi*.’

This e-mail touches upon three of the most important issues of online publishing:

- i. Permanence;
- ii. Protection against plagiarism; and
- iii. Acceptance/legitimacy within the academic community.

These issues are important to any journal, whether online or in print, though the electronic format of *Safundi*, as with other online publications, has made it particularly vulnerable to such concerns. Despite its tremendous advantages for displaying, disseminating, and storing information, the Internet continues to be an uncertain realm legally and in terms of longevity from the standpoint of individual websites. Both of these factors in turn have affected the sense of ‘legitimacy’ of writing published on the Internet. Is writing online ‘published’ in the same way as articles found in print

journals? Does the low cost and ‘instantaneous’ nature of online publishing work against it? In sum, can the Internet become a place of accepted scholarship equivalent to that found in print?

It *can* be. On one end of the spectrum, the Internet is a provider of unethical misuse inherent in e-mail frauds and plagiarism; on the other end, it has the greatest potential for research dissemination and community building available today. The issue of permanence and protection have been discussed previously – through the commitment of the publisher in website maintenance, the role of special print issues, and the function of membership and accessibility – though the general issue of legitimacy is more complex, in so far as it deals with inchoate qualities of public perception and opinion. The *Safundi* example has shown that one path to acceptance and academic rigor rests in maintaining certain *continuities* with print *journals*, in particular that of the *peer-review process*. Of the five requests from former *Journal* contributors to write letters on their behalf in support of tenure or other promotions, all five have emphasised the importance of mentioning our peer-review process, ‘so they know it’s not just a website,’ as one said. Attention to established editorial norms is, therefore, a crucial component for creating a sense of legitimacy and gaining acceptance. Such continuities serve to blur the boundaries between print and online media, for the benefit of the latter.

For now, however, websites still carry the burden of proof: whether commercial or non-profit, they are often worthless until proven valuable. In this sense, one of the Internet’s distinct advantages is the use of multimedia. Although seemingly obvious, this is still underestimated and consequently underutilised. At two points in the *Journal’s* history, scholars harnessed this distinct power. In Issue 2 (July 2000) Colette Gaiter, a graphic designer and assistant professor of journalism at the University of Minnesota, looked at race, culture, and gender in post-Apartheid South Africa and the United States in her multimedia exhibit, ‘The Natural Order of Things.’ Larry Shore of the Department of Film and Media Studies at Hunter College presented his multimedia website, ‘Ripple of Hope in the Land of Apartheid: Robert F. Kennedy in South Africa, June 4th-9th, 1966,’ in *Safundi* Issue 9 (May 2002). Each of these ‘articles’ – websites, really – use Macromedia Flash, pictures, and audio and video clips to investigate currents of U.S.-South African comparative currents. These two examples show that despite one’s outlook on prestige and acceptance of online scholarship vis-à-vis print publications, the Internet can be credited as fostering a new format for academic investigations.

However, with this new technology also come new sets of problems to be addressed: e-mail filters blocking subscribers' newsletters; dealing with several operating systems, platforms, programming languages, privacy, and security mechanisms; and the continual monitoring of a site's accessibility. Last year, only after several weeks of undelivered mail and hours of research did we learn that all e-mails to subscribers at the University of Cape Town were being returned because *Safundi*'s hosting provider had been erroneously listed as a possible spammer.¹⁶ In many ways, legitimate online publications pay the intangible debt that spammers and hackers accrue. Another component, at times a challenge, of online publication is linking from external resources, particularly from search engines. For the three-month time period relating to the publication of Issue 13/14 (April-June 2004), *Safundi* received 6,290 page hits, 870 (13.8 per cent) of which came from search engine links and 865 (13.7 per cent) from another external site. Of these visitors, 541 (8.6 per cent) bookmarked the website. Being vigilant about ensuring availability to new readers and researchers – viewing the journal from 'the outside in,' as it were – is therefore an important aspect of maintenance.

Taken together, the aforementioned benefits and challenges of publishing *Safundi* in electronic format underscore the importance of online publication and the ethical and effective use of new technologies. With reasonable trepidation, the scholarly community inches towards pervasive digitisation and increased information access. For a discussion on the latter, we now turn to another *Safundi* example: the *Member Research Newsletter*.

The safundi member research newsletter and information access

Introduced to the *Safundi* community in June 2003, the *Research Newsletter* aimed to better connect scholars on both sides of the Atlantic by 'printing' in PDF format a feature article, member responses, calls for papers, new research notices, and conference announcements of interest to the U.S.-South African comparative scholar. Through this shorter publication, *Safundi* sought to create a more participatory international community enabled by the novelties of the Internet. At this point the two authors of this paper began to collaborate, as Contributing Editor Christopher Lee crafted articles on timely topics that offered the grounds for comparison between the United States and South Africa, as well as exploring larger thematic currents such as colonialism ('The Social Life of Images: Power, Spectacle, and the Role of the Visual in Colonialism'), imperialism ('Imperialism Then and Now: Reflections on the U.S. Occupation of Iraq'),

and education ('Brown v. Board of Education at Fifty: Education, Equality, and the Unfinished Nature of Democracy').

Like the journal, the *Newsletter* has enabled the *Safundi* community to have access to the latest comparative research at no cost. Together, the two have sparked further interest in the field and intensified the importance for accessible information: on average, every week around the release of a new *Newsletter*, traffic to the *Safundi* site increases three-fold. Such information access has played a formative role in editorial board decisions and philosophical discussions on the role and future of *Safundi*, and its most important function has been to help bridge an 'African digital divide.'

Though coined elsewhere, 'digital divide' is used here in a specific sense:

- Creating publications and online forums to better link the two countries; and
- Facilitating increased South African Internet connectivity and use.

Not many U.S.-based print journals are available in South Africa, and even fewer are available vice versa. As of yet, this distance has not been bridged through online connections, demonstrating the first aspect of the divide. The second part can be seen in the following statistic: of the 2,139 *Safundi* members, 1,248 (58.3 per cent) reside in the United States and 536 (25.1 per cent) in South Africa; yet, of the total count of website visitors, 52 per cent come from the former and only 10 per cent from the latter. Ever since *Safundi's* creation, the proportion of South African-based visitors to U.S.-based hits has been climbing. Much digital distance has been reduced. With the *Safundi Member Research Newsletter* and other electronic resources, notably H-Net and African Journals OnLine, the future is promising.

In light of the importance of wider information availability, a larger theoretical question persists: will computer technologies bring more voices to the discussion and study of Africa or, viewed through notions of the 'digital divide,' will it stratify the field into different sets of users, print and internet? Therefore, in crossing some boundaries, are we indirectly reinforcing other ones? When considered in the context of the U.S.-South African comparative field, one can assertively show that drawing parallels, making connections, or marking differences – in a word, comparing – the two countries does usefully cross borders and productively opens the field to new approaches and discussions. Our concern here, then, is with the unintended consequences of online publishing, of creating 'communi-

ties' that may be more exclusionary in practice than initially wanted or anticipated, which brings us to the next section.

The online member database and community building

As suggested previously, a distinct benefit of extensive digital networks is online community building. The *Safundi* Online Member Database was created specifically to create a strong network of researchers interested in comparing the United States and South Africa. Those members who have *Safundi* Scholar access may search the database of registered members by name, university/organisation, and research interest. Each person's profile can be browsed, complete with contact information, research interests, and personal biography, if available. In short, members interested in connecting with academic counterparts in other countries have a way to find each other. This differs only slightly from other available resources such as the database of African scholars available online through the Columbia University library in that it can connect those people who might not see themselves as Africanists but who wish to speak with a related expert in the other country.

The appeal to 'join our community of comparative scholars' appears in most *Safundi* promotional materials and e-mail invitations sent to scholars. Over the life of *Safundi*, 4,876 such invitations have been personally sent,¹⁷ and the typical response rate fluctuates between ten and 12 percent.

Invitations are a key element to growth. The development of the *Safundi* community – particularly within academic circles¹⁸ – can be attributed in part to these invitations. Membership has grown an average of 50 per cent every six months. Put another way, it took 28 months to register the first 500 members, and thence only 7, 11, and another 11 months for each of the next 500. This accounts for removing duplicate entries and persistently invalid e-mail addresses. It is also useful to mention that 38.3 per cent of *Safundi* members have a PhD., with another 37 per cent to earn their PhD. during the next two years. These figures not only point out the intellectual calibre of the community but also its relative youth. We see bringing in younger scholars who are just beginning their careers – and who often have more media awareness – as a key strategy in ensuring the long-term development of *Safundi*.

At the same time, one part of community building where *Safundi* has fallen short is in the recruitment—or perhaps interest—of members from other African countries (28 of the 2139 registered members [1.3 per cent]). This situation is a tangible reflection of the digital divide mentioned previously. It is our hope and intention that participation in today's conference

begins the process of increasing the awareness of *Safundi* throughout the continent at large.

Comparative Bibliographic Database and Online Databases in General

The next logical step in developing an online research-focused community is to share the members' research with one another. In December 2003, *Safundi* unveiled the Comparative Bibliographic Database, an archive of bibliographic references on U.S.-South African articles of interest to the comparative scholar.¹⁹

References to other comparative works have been especially useful for teachers and professors looking for lesser-known articles, and underscore the importance of providing additional resources for members wishing to dig deeper than the *Journal* and *Newsletter*. *Safundi* has further extended the utility of existing data by uniting the Comparative Bibliographic Database with the Online Member Directory. That is, if a citation exists in the bibliography that has been written by a scholar who is a member of the *Safundi* community, the system displays a graphic and that author's profile becomes visible with a single click.

Online databases and bibliographies available outside of *Safundi* have been of importance to its development, as well, though on a smaller scale.²⁰ The *Journal's* indexing in Africabib.org, an online bibliographic database, draws new members to the website every month. Moreover, other indexing services and bibliographies – such as Historical Abstracts – can particularly help online publications by lending more credibility to the new media in the eyes of sceptics. Article placement within such databases is, therefore, a crucial need for publicising the work published in *Safundi*, with an outcome being further recognition of *Safundi* as a journal equivalent to those in print.

Database of comparative syllabi and electronic resource sharing

The final component of *Safundi's* online offerings highlights both the potential value and threat of electronic resource sharing. The Database of Comparative Syllabi – a resource still under development with some fifteen syllabi at present – allows academics to share their course materials in a secure environment. Some professors more than others see their syllabi as creative works or academic exercises and are less likely to share their syllabi without a control mechanism in place. For this reason, the Database is available exclusively to paying *Safundi* members.

Like the potential contributing author above who was ‘concerned about dishonest readers who may misuse items published in *Safundi*,’ many scholars are rightfully concerned about the ease of plagiarism and general misuse of new technologies. The very issue of such importance to the Editorial Board²¹ – information access and research dissemination – can at times provide the greatest cause for concern. With a watchful eye and appropriate security measures in place, the risk of abuse of electronic resources can be lessened and the benefits of online networks enhanced. Again, editorial commitment is the important element here.

Summary

To summarise, the five resources published by *Safundi* discussed above essentially serve as five different ways to bridge the Atlantic Ocean: by academic examination in the *Journal*, current trends and discussions in the *Newsletter*, personal connections in the member database, research dissemination in the bibliographic database, and pedagogical links in member syllabi. These ‘bridges’ have strengthened over the last five years with rising interest in electronic publication, in addition to new approaches to the study of Africa (e.g., the expansion of studies on the Diaspora) that have also encouraged transnational and transcontinental work. These developments have displayed both rewards and challenges unique to online publications and to African research generally. Viewed through the lens of the *Safundi* experience, then, the immediate future of new media in African scholarship begins to come into focus.

The future of *Safundi* and new media in african scholarship

In the immediate future, *Safundi* will not ‘evaporate into cyberspace’; nor will online publishing fall by the wayside. If the *Safundi* experience serves as an accurate barometer, the partnership of electronic media and African scholarship will continue to create novel insights and enhance current scholarship. The new medium offers distinct advantages to print – we hesitate to use the word ‘traditional’ – publication, namely:

- Cheaper production expenses;
- Faster research dissemination;
- Less expense for the reader; and
- The potential of an instant global audience.

Though perhaps transparent at this point, it is important to emphasise that electronic publishing is still at an early stage and, consequently, further

experimentation –both success *and* failure – is necessary: there is no single, fail-proof method. However, in line with the strengths listed above and the points outlined previously, there are four summary observations that can be offered as guiding principles for the future of online publishing. These relate to:

- a. Academic legitimacy;
- b. Community building and publications development;
- c. Editorial commitment; and
- d. Permanence.

The most important and least tangible aspect of electronic publishing that will shape *Safundi*'s future and that of Internet-based African scholarship is the academic legitimacy ascribed to online journals. To this end, finding a balance between open availability and copyright protection is critical. Continuing the peer-review process and other established traditions of quality control will help, too. Crucial to the success – and this will likely happen naturally – is the collaboration between well-established scholars and their younger, more tech-savvy counterparts to further increase scholarly acceptance of the new medium.

Second, growing electronic social networks through community building and ongoing development of the related publications promises to be an integral factor of electronic publishing, as well. Since its founding days, *Safundi* has aggressively recruited researchers and members of the public to visit and evaluate its website. This has significantly increased the rate of new memberships, a rejuvenating force that has sparked the development of existing and new resources. The importance of this resource diversification – specifically for privately funded online communities – cannot be understated. Neither of *Safundi*'s individual components would bring in enough revenue to be worth the added expense of payment systems, but the five resources together are enough to pay recurrent expenses and provide a very modest profit (which is ultimately used to purchase software or other business-related services).

Publication diversification can also speak to editorial boards of the future, who should seek ways to take advantage of the online medium and expand editorial focus when appropriate. For example, *Safundi* will publish a special pedagogy issue in October – guest edited by Larry Shore – with articles on teaching South African studies in the United States and vice versa. The special issue will give scholars from different disciplines

Table I: Key Events in the Development of Safundi

1999	<i>June</i>	<i>USA-SA.com</i> Issue 1 (1 article, 2 reprints, 1 transcript)
	<i>July</i>	<i>USA-SA.com</i> Issue 2 (2 articles, 1 multimedia presentation)
2000	<i>August</i>	First Editorial Board named (15 editors)
		<i>USA-SA.com</i> becomes <i>Safundi</i>
	<i>October</i>	Site Design II Issue 3 (3 articles)
	<i>January</i>	Issue 4 (3 articles, 1 translation, 1 review)
2001	<i>April</i>	Issue 5 (8 articles, 1 review, 1 poem)
	<i>July</i>	Issue 6 (6 articles, 1 reprint)
	<i>August</i>	Editors-in-Chief named Survey results returned
	<i>September</i>	Site Design III
	<i>October</i>	500th member
	<i>November</i>	Issue 7 (4 articles, 2 reviews)
2002	<i>February</i>	Issue 8 (4 articles, 6 reprints, 1 review, 1 obituary)
	<i>May</i>	1,000 th member Issue 9 (3 articles, 1 multimedia presentation, 1 review)
2003		<i>Safundi</i> book published.
	<i>January</i>	1,500th member
	<i>April</i>	Issue 10 (2 articles, 5 reprints) Editorial Board renewed (37 editors)
	<i>May</i>	Site Design IV <i>Safundi Member Research Newsletter (SMRN)</i> introduced
	<i>July</i>	<i>SMRN</i> Issue 2 Issue 11 (2 articles, 1 reprint, 1 review)
	<i>September</i>	<i>SMRN</i> Issue 3
	<i>October</i>	<i>SMRN</i> Issue 4 Issue 12 (2 articles, 2 reviews)
	<i>November</i>	<i>SMRN</i> Issue 5
	<i>December</i>	' <i>Safundi Scholar</i> ' subscriptions available Institutional subscriptions available
	<i>January</i>	<i>SMRN</i> Issue 6
2004	<i>March</i>	2,000th member <i>SMRN</i> Issue 7
	<i>April</i>	Issue 13/14 (6 articles, 1 interview, 1 reprint, 1 review)
	<i>May</i>	<i>SMRN</i> Issue 8
	<i>July</i>	<i>SMRN</i> Issue 9 Issue 15 (3 articles, 2 reprints, 1 review, 1 translation)
	<i>August</i>	Semester subscriptions available

Table II: Safundi Survey, August 2001

1. What is your primary field of interest?		8. I find the articles in Safundi interesting, enlightening, and well-researched. 100% represents STRONGLY AGREE, 0% represents STRONGLY DISAGREE.	
History	18%	Rating	79%
Literature	13%	9. Please rate the overall quality of Safundi. 100% represents EXCELLENT, 0% represents POOR.	
Other	13%	Rating	81%
Politics	10%	10. We are considering publishing a weekly email report summarising news and current events related to South African and/or American studies. Would this be something that you would like to receive?	
Media/Comm.	7%	Yes	92%
Anthropology	9%	No	8%
Economics	6%	11. Would you like Safundi to publish a print edition?	
Business	5%	Yes	69%
Current Events	4%	No	31%
NGO	4%	12. If Safundi did publish a print edition, would you likely subscribe to it, provided the price was reasonable?	
Sociology	4%	Yes	66%
Art	1%	No	34%
Biology	1%	13. If Safundi offered premium services on the web site to help you with your research, would you likely subscribe to these services, provided the price was reasonable?	
Geography	1%	Yes	61%
Music	1%	No	39%
Public Health	1%	14. Would you object to advertisements in Safundi, provided they do not interfere with its content?	
Social Services	1%	Yes	17%
		No	83%
2. Would you like Safundi to publish an online directory of its members?		15. If Safundi held a conference, should it be held in South Africa or the United States?	
Yes	85%	South Africa	63%
No	15%	United States	37%
3. What is the highest degree that you have received?		16. If Safundi held a conference on South African and American comparative studies, would you want to attend?	
Doctorate	45%	Yes	93%
Masters	44%	No	7%
Bachelors	11%		
4. If you have not received a Ph.D., do you plan to receive it within the next two years?			
Yes	75%		
No	25%		
5. Has Safundi enhanced your current research and understanding of South African and/or American studies?			
Yes	85%		
No	15%		
6. Would you like Safundi to publish fiction and poetry as well as scholarly articles, so long as all published works relate to South African and/or American studies?			
Yes	63%		
No	37%		
7. Of the following choices, which kind of published work would you like to see more of in Safundi?			
Scholarly	54%		
Reviews	13%		
Interviews	18%		
Essay	9%		
Fiction/Poetry	6%		

Table III: The Safundi Editorial Board

— Founding Editor & Publisher —	
Andrew Offenburger Independent Scholar	
— Editors-in-Chief —	
Scott Rosenberg Wittenberg University	Christopher Saunders University of Cape Town
— Patron of the Board —	
George Fredrickson Stanford University	
— Editorial Board —	
Susan Andrade University of Pittsburgh	Alex Lichtenstein Rice University
Lynn Berat New York University	Peter Limb Michigan State University
Surendra Bhana University of Kansas	Sabine Marschall University of KwaZulu-Natal
Norman Etherington University of Western Australia	Roy du Pré Vaal Triangle Technikon
Rick Halpern University of Toronto	Peter Rachleff Macalester College
Peter Hilsenrath University of North Texas	Grant Saff Hofstra University
Michael Leslie University of Florida	James Statman Witswatersrand University
Moeketsi Letseka Human Sciences Research Council	Johann Tempelhoff Potschefstroom University
Keyan Tomaselli University of KwaZulu-Natal	
— Contributing Editor —	
Christopher Lee Harvard University	
— associate Editors —	
Mohamed Adhikari University of Cape Town	Jamie Gates Point Loma Nazarene University
Geri Augusto Independent Scholar	Brian Halley Beacon Press
Azeem Badroodien Human Sciences Research Council	Peter Midgley University of Alberta
David Carter University of Nebraska-Omaha	David Chioni Moore Macalester College
Derek Catsam Minnesota State University	Carol Patitu Texas A&M University
Eric Cédiey Institute of Political Studies	Marie Denise Prevost University of Maastricht
James Cobbe Florida State University	Eric Singer Goucher College
Allan Farman University of Louisville	Sylvia Washington Northwestern University

the chance to explore commonalities in teaching U.S. and South African comparative studies. At the risk of stating the obvious, we also consider it important to draw attention to a need that involves both growing social networks and publication development: that for-profit publishers maintain (or establish) different price structures for Africa-based subscribers.

Third, on the scale of the individual, the importance of editorial commitment to academic rigour, of open minds to the creative possibilities of the Internet, and of dedication to the success of the new online medium for research dissemination extends to all parties involved in these exciting times for African scholarship.

Fourth, as a natural extension of the previous three observations, *Safundi* and Africa-related online publications must establish a good record of permanence. Static and simpler links to content – and ensuring that materials are indexed in third-party databases and search engines – offer a practical way of forming a foundation for permanence.²² This can be enhanced by publishing materials and communicating with members regularly, i.e., on time, an area where scholarly print publications often fall short. With regularity comes the perception of durability. Finally, the publication of solid, fresh scholarship propels any publication, print or online, to a promising future.

Adhering to these four guiding principles does not, of course, ensure an online journal's success, but their significance to the *Safundi* example suggests they will be critical to the future of online publishing and new media in African scholarship. And it is an important future. Electronic publications—more than just computerised adaptations of printed materials—have the potential to bring people and research closer together more quickly than before, be it by crossing borders, as in *Safundi*, or by other means discussed here.

Notes

1. For purposes of clarification, the italicised '*Safundi*' refers to *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies* (the academic journal), while '*Safundi*' – no italics – represents the entire online community at <http://www.safundi.com>. Both of these terms cover the period of time when the journal and the online community were known as *USA-SA.com* (June 1999 to August 2000). '*Safundi*' is an invented word composed of the following parts: 'S' represents 'South Africa,' 'a' stands for 'America,' and 'fundu' originates from the Xhosa word *umfundu*, which translates as 'scholar.'
2. Fredrickson, George, 1981, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press and Fredrickson, George, 1996, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black*

- Ideologies in the United States and South Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
3. Bergh, Jonah, 2003, 'White Supremacy Twenty-One Years On: Opportunities for Comparative Historical Research', *Historia* 48, No. 1 (May), pp. 355-372.
 4. For example, see Maurice Evans, *Black and White in the Southern States: A Study of the Race Problem in the United States from a South African Point of View* (University of South Carolina Press, 2001 [Originally published in 1915]).
 5. Hamilton, Carolyn, 1998, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Witz, Leslie, 2003, *Apartheid's Festival: Contesting South Africa's National Pasts*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
 6. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
 7. Campbell, James, 1995, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa*, New York: Oxford University Press.
 8. For additional overviews, see Fredrickson, George M., 1997, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements*, Berkeley: University of California; Cooper, Frederick, 1996, 'Review Essay: Race, Ideology, and the Perils of Comparative History', *The American Historical Review* 101. 4 (October), pp. 1122-1138; Alexander, Peter and Halpern, Rick, 2004, 'Introduction: Comparing Race and Labour in South Africa and the United States,' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30. 1, pp. 5-18.
 9. Issue 1 was published under the name of *USA-SA.com*.
 10. Issue 2 ran thirteen months after the premiere issue due principally to a prior outstanding commitment held by the publisher.
 11. Parsons, Neil, 2000, 'SAFUNDI – Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies-reply', in H-SAfrica 30 October (<http://h-net.msu.edu/~safrica/archives/october>).
 12. Of the 408 *Safundi* members at the time, 85 (20.8 per cent) participated in the survey. For complete results, see Table II.
 13. 'No cost to the reader,' of course, does not include the costs of obtaining computer and Internet access. While this may seem rather miniscule to the American reader, it is much more relevant to the Africa-based researcher. This digital divide is addressed later in the paper. 'No production cost' does not account for basic website hosting charges and time invested by the editors and publisher.
 14. See the first print monograph published by *Safundi*: Offenburger, Andrew, Rosenberg, Scott and Saunders, Christopher, 2003, *A South African and American Comparative Reader: The Best of Safundi and Other Selected Articles*, Nashville: *Safundi*.

15. An annual membership costs \$49.95 for individuals and \$250 for institutions (which gives access to all affiliated faculty, students, and staff). For institutions within Africa, a 40 per cent discount is offered, and this same discount will be applied soon to personal subscriptions within Africa.
16. *Safundi* has always been hosted on a shared server. It is likely that the former hosting provider was listed as a spammer because of a previous client's misuse of e-mail protocols.
17. 'Personally sent' is defined as an individual e-mail from the publisher to the invitee. In the first three years of the website's existence, invitations systematically went out to Africanists who might be interested in the journal. These individuals were either recommended to *Safundi* or their online website spoke of an interest in African studies or comparative issues. Such promotion would be more than likely taboo today in light of the public's intolerance of 'unsolicited' e-mail.
18. According to the 2001 *Safundi* survey (Table II), more than eighty per cent of *Safundi*'s members are affiliated with an institution of higher education.
19. The database includes research that directly compares the two countries as well as that which compares related regions. Select sources that are not comparative but of interest to members are included, e.g., monographs on foreign policy involving the two nations.
20. Indexing of *Safundi* in third-party databases is in its infancy. This is primarily due to time constraints in publishing the *Journal* and other website resources.
21. See Table III for a listing of all Editorial Board members.
22. As an example of this, with the fourth redesign of the *Safundi* site in 2003, links to journal content changed from containing an argument (e.g., <http://www.safundi.com/papers.asp?lop=shore>) to following an identifiable pattern (e.g., <http://www.safundi.com/issues/09/shore.asp>).