



UNDERCOVER GUIDE

Anas Aremeyaw Anas



UNDERCOVER GUIDE FOR INVESTIGATIVE REPORTERS

Anas Aremeyaw Anas

Undercover Reporter / lawyer

FOREWORD

If I was asked to name Africa's best ball-juggler or ball dribbler of the 21st century, it's obvious I would name former Super Eagle's midfielder, Austin Jay Jay Okocha. But, if I was asked to name Africa's top undercover journalist of our time, I would name Ghanaian Journalist, Anas Aremeyaw.

There's no doubt that Anas has been the champion of undercover investigative journalism across this continent—whereby he has unearthed the biggest scandals in Ghana and outside his country. Though some have questioned his methods of investigative journalism—citing ethical issues—the most important thing is that at the end he has served the public interests at a great deal.

I have personally worked with Anas in Tanzania in one of the most dangerous assignments involving the trail of the real buyers of the albino's body parts in 2011, and I can definitely say that 'he has the technical-know-how on undercover investigative journalism'. A lot of people may think that you can just grab a secret recording devices, bug yourself and lie to your sources in order to get the story. That's not the case with Anas.

That's why when he decided to share his magic or guidance on undercover investigative journalism, he did the best work by documenting how those aspiring to join this 'adventure' can follow his path. Anas has shown us that he is not greedy when it comes to sharing knowledge on undercover investigative journalism. He has done so in local, regional and international conferences—winning applause as well as criticism.

This time around, he has decided to put this knowledge in writing, so that even the next generations would one day benefit from this courageous son of Africa, who has used undercover reporting to defend public interests. I do hope that those who will read this manual or guidance on undercover journalism would fully benefit. I have read it, and I can strongly say it's a good job from one of our own.

Thanks,

Richard Mgamba
FAIR Commissioning Editor

15 April 2014, Dares Salaam (Tanzania)

BIOGRAPHY

My name is Anas Aremeyaw Anas. I am an Undercover Journalist.

I have gone undercover in various institutions in numerous countries- ranging from the inner circles of government to brothels and mad houses. My aim in doing undercover journalism is to name, shame and jail. In our part of the world, sometimes simply gathering information is not enough, you need to back it up with hard core evidence and this is what I do. I remain eternally grateful to my fans all over the world for the many words of encouragement that I receive every day. Your encouragement and acknowledgement of my work makes it easier for me to wake up every day and continue with this crusade.

About me and what I do.

I am a Ghanaian undercover investigative journalist. Due to my work, I am anonymous and my anonymity is in fact an important tool in my investigations. My undercover investigations focus primarily on issues of human rights abuse (especially child abuses) and corruption. I have carried out undercover investigations in many countries and in different continents.

My primary focus remains in Sub Saharan Africa. My human right investigations deals with creating a better life and providing equal opportunities for children and adults being abused to grow whilst my corruption investigations focus on Government employees and executives who instead of working for the people rather loot the national kitty and thus deprive citizens of essential amenities that would create a better standard of living for them.

My works have received critical acclaim over the years and have led to changes in legislation, institutions and departments. President Barack Obama, in his first visit to Africa in 2009 after being elected President of the United States, singled my work out in a speech to Ghana's Parliament:

“An independent press. A vibrant private sector. A civil society. Those are the things that give life to democracy. We see that spirit in courageous journalists like Anas Aremeyaw Anas, who risked his life to report the truth.”

WHAT IS UNDERCOVER JOURNALISM?

Undercover journalism encompasses a lot of things, principles and methods that it is difficult to give it one specific definition. Any attempt to define it would most likely lead to a combination of words that would more than confuse rather than educate and clarify. To put it simply, undercover journalism is not conventional journalism. Thus the journalist does not go up to an individual, corporation or personality and introduce themselves and either request for an interview or a report or any such thing in order to obtain and verify information. The undercover journalist goes about looking for or collecting information or reports and verifying it either with or without the knowledge of the subject.

To illustrate, if I want to find out about recent issues that have cropped up in the media about a state institution, specifically in the arena of corruption. I can decide to interview the General Manager and go undercover to verify or dispute the information that I have received or I may go undercover and find out what exactly is going on and then interview the General Manager afterwards. Undercover in a few words is obtaining information as a journalist through unconventional means. It usually requires the journalist to embed him or herself within the 'community' of the subject matter. That being said, there are various means of 'embedding' and we would discuss a few in this guide.

WHAT IS ENTRAPMENT?

Due to the thin line that lies between undercover journalism and entrapment, there have been several debates as to whether undercover journalism is a form of entrapment. Entrapment is the inducement of a person to commit a crime. Entrapment in journalism occurs where the journalist induces a person who would not otherwise have committed a certain act to commit it.

The journalist may induce either by threatening the subject, making promises, unduly persuading, coercing, taking advantage of the relationship that he/she may have with the subject and inducing sympathy, harassing the subject, taking undue advantage of any trust that the subject may have, taking advantage of any financial problems that the subject may have etc. in order to get the subject to do a positive act that he would not otherwise be disposed to do.

To illustrate here, I go to a bank as an undercover to gain information about how the secretaries are corrupt and may fake documents if necessary for a customer who has bribed them. I offer a secretary who earns the equivalent of USD\$ 200 a month USD\$ 50,000 if she can fake some documents for me. This is entrapment as I have used her low financial position to induce her decision to be corrupt by offering her money that I know she would more than likely be unable to resist. By offering her such a huge amount, I have implanted in her mind the disposition to do an act that she would not otherwise have done or thought of doing and by actually paying her I would have induced her to commit the act and thus entrapped her.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN UNDERCOVER JOURNALISM AND ENTRAPMENT

With undercover journalism, the journalist has some reliable information that the subject is involved in some activity that the journalist is certain cannot come to light if he employs conventional journalism methods. According to BBC's Ofcom rules, there must be some prima facie evidence of the activity.

The journalist thus either assumes a character or uses other means to try and gather the information and obtain evidence of the subject in the act. The journalist assumes a character that the subject would be comfortable dealing with or uses cameras or other methods to "catch" the subject in the act in order to obtain authentic information.

'SpiritChild'

(<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2013/01/201319121124284358.html>), is an undercover work that I did last year for Aljazeera's **People and Power** to reveal a practice in certain parts of Northern Ghana and Burkina Faso where children are murdered once it is 'confirmed' by a soothsayer that the children are or have evil spirits. Now, before I went undercover, there had been several rumours in the community about this practice but no one would give any credible information as to how it happens, who are involved and where the killing is done. The information that was available was that it was an age old practice and it was done to protect the family of the evil child.

Using the conventional method of journalism was not going to work and so I had to go undercover. I assumed the role of a father whose business was not going well. When I consulted a soothsayer with this, he informed me that my "son" was an evil spirit who had come into the world to destroy my wealth.

I had to play along and agree to the procedures that would help me rid myself of this child. I was led to another soothsayer or diviner who indeed confirmed that my son was evil and that I needed to kill him, I was then given a list of things to buy, and a date was set for my son to be killed. On the agreed day the perpetrators indeed came to my house to kill the child.

As a journalist, I had reliable information that the practice was going on, that the subject that I initially contacted was engaged in the practice (he had done it in the past and was still in the process of doing it) and I had to assume the role of a local person i.e someone that he would be comfortable dealing with.

Had I gone in as a journalist who wanted an interview and wanted an insight into what he and his cohorts did, I would not have had the information that I had. Thus by using undercover, I was able to obtain reliable information and evidence that brought the practice out into the open and gave the public the truth about the practice called '**Spirit Child**'.

I would have been in the arena of entrapment though if when I met the initial or first contact, he had proved that he had no knowledge or interest in the subject I was talking about and could not in any way help me with the recent misfortunes that were befalling me after the birth of my son and I had gone ahead and threatened him with death or promised him an obscene amount of money or had coerced him with the promise of gifts to tell me that my son was an evil spirit.

I am not by this implying that an initial resistance means a subject is not interested. Depending on the culture of the society that you are in, sometimes an initial resistance is just a way of weeding out persons who are resilient from those who are merely phishing. But if you obtain the information by some form of inducement that is not what the subject is ordinarily used to, then you are in the arena of entrapment.

WHY IS IT TO BE USED?

According to Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, there are nine ethos of journalism and these are: Journalism's first obligation is to tell the truth, its first loyalty is to the citizens, its essence is discipline of verification, its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover and it must serve as an independent monitor of power.

Again it must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise, strive to make the news significant, interesting, and relevant, keep the news comprehensive and proportional and also practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.

Out of these, undercover journalism most subscribes to the first, second, third, fifth and sixth ethos. There are certain news stories that are very relevant to society and yet telling the story holistically and truthfully is impossible to do unless the journalist goes undercover.

In '*Spell of the Albino*'

(<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/africaninvestigates/2011/11/2011111185428766652.html>), an African Investigative piece for Aljazeera, it was widely known in Tanzania that the limbs and certain body parts of albinos were being used by local medicine men for ritual purposes. A person who wanted to gain wealth without necessarily working for it or who wanted progress in business or any aspect of his life was sure to achieve his aim if he could procure a body part of an albino and send it to a medicine man for spiritual fortification.

The newspapers in Tanzania and the international media were extensively covering this phenomenon and there were several albinos who had had their limbs cut off. The problem was that, there was no direct evidence to link these forced amputations to any medicine man or any person who wanted to become rich overnight.

My journalism in this instance had an obligation to the citizens and the world to tell the full story in a holistic manner in such a manner that it would provide a forum for public criticism and compromise and also provide the law makers and enforcers with evidence that may lead to laws that better protect the albinos.

With this in mind, we needed to look at the story from two angles; from the angle of albinos and from that of the persons who believed and engaged in the practice. We needed to speak with the albinos who had had their limbs hacked off and those who had not. Those who had undergone the tragedy lived in pain, sorrow and bitterness and those who had not lived in perpetual fear of their lives.

Telling the story from this angle did not require undercover journalism as the subjects were willing and able to speak to us and practically walk us through their experience in order for us to report it to the general public in a truthful and verifiable manner. They had no qualms about

interviews and welcomed the use of cameras to capture their stories and reveal the 'world' that they now lived in by virtue of these barbarous acts.

It was not going to be the same experience with those who believed and engaged in the practice. They were not willing to admit to the practice even through unrecorded conversations. Attempts by journalist to introduce themselves and ask for an interview were met with stiff silence and sometimes aggressive opposition.

It was next to impossible to use conventional means of journalism to report the truth about those who believed and engaged in the practice of using body parts of albinos for spiritual reasons. My best option was to use undercover journalism.

I went undercover and posed as a person who wanted spiritual fortification for wealth. By so doing, I came into contact with persons who confessed to having benefited from the use of albino limbs for spiritual fortification, persons who were willing to go and hack off the limbs of albinos for sale to me, persons who knew albinos and were willing to lure them into a place where their limbs could be hacked off and then medicine men who demanded albino limbs in order to "help me" and those who already had some of the limbs and had used them in preparing some concoctions ready for sale.

With the use of cameras, I managed to capture these persons speaking about the various roles that they played in fostering the practice. The final story that was presented to the general public was a story of those who engaged in and those who were affected by this practice.

'***Spell of the albino***' was a story that reported on crimes committed against albinos and the social injustices that albinos had to suffer and live in simply because of their skin colour and pigmentation. All because they were born or live in Tanzania. The impact the story had on society necessitated the use of this form of journalism.

Civil society's uproar, the prosecution of those engaged in the act relying on the evidence that was obtained undercover, the change in Government's attitude and the decision to do more to protect albino's, the change in society's attitude towards albinos and the collective need to make their safety a societal and not individual concern and most of all the relief and joy that albinos in Tanzania felt and the fact that they now feel able to move past their pain and not live in fear was due to the fact that by employing undercover means of journalism, a comprehensive story was told to Tanzanians and the world at large.

In sum, undercover journalism is used because there are certain stories of social injustice, crime, abuse of power, social good etc. that need to be brought to the focus of citizens and society in general in order to provoke civil society into healthy debates, criticisms, compromises and changes. Where these types of stories cannot be told by conventional journalistic means, then the relevance of the story dictates that the journalist should go undercover in order to get the story in its entirety. This is the 'why' of undercover journalism.

WHEN IS IT TO BE USED?

Undercover journalism shall be used only when the conventional or traditional methods of journalism have failed or where there is concrete evidence that the traditional means would not yield the required result. One only goes to undercover as a last resort.

Before deciding on whether to go undercover, the journalist must first look at the evidence that he has already gathered about the activity he wants to investigate. By looking at the evidence, I mean he must study it carefully to be certain that the activity exists or happens and is ongoing. As is said in law, there must be some prima facie evidence about the act.

This evidence must be verifiable and should have proven to be true. There is nothing as frustrating and disappointing as going undercover only to find out that the subject or subject matter does not exist or the information that you relied on was not true. Apart from the disappointment, the journalist also wastes funds and loses the trust of his superiors. In order to forestall this, check, check, check and re check your information and evidence and make sure that it is unshakeable and truthful.

The source of your information must be free from any prejudice, financial considerations, revenge, jealousy, envy, lies etc. if your source has some personal interest in the story you need to be extra careful about the information that is provided to you.

Two years ago, a gentleman came to me with a story of how children were being buried alive in a certain region of Ghana. According to him, this was done by a certain high priest who demanded about three children every month from the townsfolk as sacrifice to the gods. He claimed that these children were buried in a special place and certain rites were carried out in order to prevent their dead bodies from being discovered when the ground was dug up.

He claimed he could no longer sleep on the matter as it had been worrying him especially after his nephew was sacrificed some months ago. He and his elder brother had thus decided to come to me and report the matter. He could take me to the town but I would not find the body unless some rites were performed and this required money. He also produced a sheet of paper on which his brother had written a list of how much money they would require for telling me the story; taking me there; and how much they expected after the story broke. Of course it is common knowledge that as journalists we do not and cannot pay our sources.

I asked him to go away if it was money they required. They could make money if they told the President, maybe he would even throw in a national award. He came back again and agreed not to take any money. He sounded credible and seemed to have an earnest urge to bring this issue to light. Before I pitched the story to my team, I decided to find out from my sources in that region if anyone had heard of this practice. No one had.

That put me on a red alert. I asked one to go to the particular community and see if he could glean a hint of any such practice. He came out with nothing. I then decided to call some of my friends who were editors of other papers if they had heard any such story. No one had. A senior lawyer colleague of mine who is interested in child human rights rang me and as we were talking, I gave him a similar but not exact story and the reservations I had. He informed me that a certain gentleman had been to him with an almost exact story and had managed to collect some money from him under the guise of using it to convince witnesses to talk to him. Apparently, the gentleman and his alleged brother had done this to one other lawyer.

The story was cooked up in order to extort money from known child rights activists. I knew instantly that it was the same guy who had come to me. I complained to the police and it was decided that the next time the gentleman contacted me, I should notify the police. Contact me he did in a few days and the police arrested him.

Upon interrogation, he confessed that there was no story and there was no brother. The story was just a means for him to make money from journalists and child rights activists and he modified it depending on who he was extorting money from.

As you have realized, the story was one which seemed true and the source at a glance looked credible. But as it turned out, there was no story at all. Had I not taken the necessary caution before pitching this story to my team, we would have committed a lot of resources to investigating the story only to realize that we had been scammed. Check, cross check, check, and triple check the information from your source.

Again, the journalist must decide whether the story merits the use of undercover techniques. This is very important as it is very easy and tempting to use undercover instead of the conventional methods of journalism.

As I have already said, you must only resort to undercover when all else fails. You must thus systematically look at your subject and information and then go through the various traditional means of journalism and be certain that none of them would be able to gather the truth and verify it in order to come out with your story.

You must together with the team or your superiors justify the reason why you have to use undercover to investigate and come out with your story. You do not go undercover just because there must at all times be a justification. Undercover is risky and in some instances have led to the loss of lives of persons involved. The decision to go undercover must thus not be taken lightly.

As part of the process of deciding to go undercover, we must analyze the effect that such a decision would have; on the general public and on journalism as a whole. Sometimes, even though the story might be good, it may be overshadowed by the fact that you went undercover to get the story.

The public might not be so receptive to your method and so you end up losing the impact of the story as the focus is on you and your method rather than the story. Look at your society and be certain that it would accept the method you use in getting your story. After all, the essence of a story is that it gets the attention of society and leads to debates and criticisms that would ensure positive change.

You must look to the confidentiality of your sources. At all times, you must protect the identity of your source unless the sources do not have any problem with their identity being made known. If going undercover would in any way expose the identity of your source or sources, it may be prudent not to do so.

How might a journalist determine whether a story warrants deception, or whether undercover methods are likely to be more detrimental to the craft than valuable?

The Canadian Association of Journalists provides some guidelines for determining this; "We will be transparent in our actions, especially where our stories are controversial, have far-reaching impact, or require special techniques. Special investigative methods will be used only if:

- The information is important for the public
- There is no other way to obtain the information
- Any harm to individuals or organizations is out-weighed by the benefits of making the information public
- We are able to plan the investigation carefully."

Bob Steele is a well known writer who has written extensively on undercover journalism. He has over the years emphasized that journalists should not under any condition engage in undercover journalism for any of the following reasons:

- Winning a prize
- The subject of the story is unethical
- Using undercover because others have used it
- Undercover would get the story faster and cost less
- Undercover would beat the competition i.e other journalists

To these I would add, do not use undercover because you want to be a famous journalist.

HOW IS IT TO BE USED?

After deciding that the best means of getting your story would be to go undercover, you must meet with your team and or editors and decide on the best means of undercover.

In this, you must conduct extensive research into your subject matter. What is the subject matter really doing? How are the actions affecting the social fabric of society? Looked at from all angles, how would the subject matter's action measure up to societal standards? Does the subject matter have any justifications? What are the comparative actions of similar subject matters?

In doing '*Orphans Home of Hell*', (www.ansaremeyawanas.org) I had to look at not only the situation in Ghana's premier orphanage home; Osu Children's Home, but I also looked at other orphanage homes in the country and compared it to Osu. I also went outside the shores of Ghana and looked at the practice in about four other countries. If the story is to have a good impact, then it must have depth and be void of sensationalism.

After the extensive research, you must meet with your editor and legal adviser and consider the legal angles of a story. Seek legal advice on the method you intend to use. Are there any civil liabilities that you would incur as a result of going undercover? Are there any constitutional provisions on the right to privacy and would your story breach it? In gathering your story, would you be interfering with privileged and confidential relationships? What damages would be done to a subject's reputation by virtue of the story and what are your possible defences if you are sued?

As a rule, I always run a story and the method I intend to use by my legal team first and gain their approval. If they disapprove, they would give reasons and provide alternatives. The process goes back and forth till we are able to decide on the best method to use that would reduce our liabilities if at all.

You must keep in mind that every country has its rules. Make sure that your undercover journalism does not fall foul of the law. If you seek legal advice, most often than not, there would be some grey areas you can capitalize on.

After this, you must consider whether you can do the story alone or if you need a team. In gathering a team if need be, you must first and foremost look for credible persons whose confidentiality can be ensured. Some rules to ensure confidentiality and safety of a project:

- a) Do not use the same team for every project
- b) Let team members know as much as is necessary
- c) Team members do not necessarily have to know about each other.
- d) Always have a back up team

You must keep in mind the fact that some members of your team would try to sabotage the investigation either by informing the subject matter of the investigation in exchange for cash or other favours, blackmailing the subject matter, joining in on whatever crime or malfeasance is going on instead of investigating or may simply go to sleep and not do what they have been assigned to do. These things happen in every investigation but in order to minimize its effect, always have a back up team.

The reason why team members need to be on a need to know basis is that in some instances, some may be arrested by security forces who are not in on the investigation. Even though the team is trained not to panic when arrested, there are instances when some may panic and talk before you are able to get them out. The less they know, the better for the whole operation.

Usually the security forces are willing to let a person go once the media house explains that they are on an investigation. Because such things happen, your media house needs to know that you are on an investigation so that they can bail you out when and if it becomes necessary.

Sometimes, it is best to inform some persons who are relevant in the society about your investigation. If your investigation is in a village for instance, you may do yourself a lot of good if you introduce yourself to the chief and inform him in general rather than specific terms of your reason for coming to the community. He would in turn inform the community and they would not see you as a threat. This would ensure your safety and protection if anyone in the society wants to harm you whilst you are doing the story.

I learnt this the hard way. I was almost lynched six years ago by members of a community whilst on an investigation because I had not introduced myself to the town head or any person. I was seen as an outsider and my every action was watched (without my knowledge). When the community thought I was being too nosy and secretive, they decided that I was a bad person who was there for some evil purpose and so they decided to arrest and lynch me one fine afternoon.

Always inform someone who can offer you protection and not betray your confidence when you are on an investigation. That person would be your life saver when it becomes necessary. Sometimes, your personal contacts become very useful during an investigation.

Whilst doing '**Chocolate, the bitter truth**' (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00rqm4nan>) an investigation for BBC **Panorama** in a remote village in Ghana, I was arrested by the Ghana Police. My phones were off and I could not contact anyone and so I stayed in cells for two days.

When one officer charged my phones for me, I had to make a snap decision, whether to call the BBC in London or to contact some personal friends in Ghana who could get me out without any detailed explanation from me as to why I was arrested. I called one of my Ghanaian contacts and within twenty minutes, I was out of the cells. Your media house, relevant and confidential members of society and your personal contacts would save you from danger during an investigation.

You must also train your team. Training is very important and is the cornerstone for the success of every investigation. Train them on what to look out for, how to conduct themselves, how to obtain information, how to store and secure the information and successfully transmit it to the appropriate person or system. All information collected or obtained must be backed up. The team also needs to be trained to use whatever method of investigation you have decided on. There is no need sending out a person who knows next to nothing about operating hidden cameras to obtain information using a hidden camera. He may do what is required of him but would come back with no evidence as to what happened.

The methods of undercover investigation are many and have their advantages and disadvantages. You may decide to embed yourself in the community or society of your subject matter. Thus you may decide to get a job within the company and observe by participation or you may decide to visit the company as an investor. You can do both.

In doing '**Eurofood**' I applied for and was employed as a factory hand. I went to work normally and with the aid of hidden cameras, recorded what was going on. The production was being carried out under very unhygienic conditions, the flour that was used was not wholesome as some had maggots in it, the staffs were being treated unfairly and were dismissed indiscriminately etc.

I worked alone on this story and so in order to capture all the relevant evidence, I had to take steps to get my supervisors to transfer me from one department to another. After gathering evidence, I came back after my shift was over and downloaded the videos and also backed it up. I also wrote down my findings. I did this for about three months till I had gathered all the evidence I needed.

You may also decide to fix a hidden camera at vantage points to cover the actions of your subject matter. This is quite tricky as the cameras need to be positioned at the right angles and places to avoid detection and also capture the evidence that is required. Sometimes, you may need an insider's help to do this. You may also pose as a work hand in order to gain access.

In investigating the 'abortion doctor' in '**Wild Ghana**' (www.anasaremeyawanas.org), I needed access to the theatre where he conducted the abortion. It was in the theatre that he raped the girls before carrying out the abortion. He was the only person apart from the girls (patients) who entered this room.

There was no assistant and a cleaner only came in after a procedure in order to clean up. I had to disguise myself as a lowly skilled person who wanted to be a cleaner. After persistent calls on the administrator to give me a job, I was finally made a cleaner. I was not a cleaner for the theatre but a general cleaner in the hospital.

I befriended the cleaner for the theatre and convinced her to let me help her clean on some occasions. One day, I convinced her to allow me to clean the theatre one early morning. Within five minutes, I had to install all my cameras. I had determined my vantage points during the days I had come in with her and I immediately set out to work and finished installation on time.

I could only do this because I knew my cameras and had received extensive training and practice on how to install them. I also knew how to retrieve the tapes in the cameras and replace them. How I did the retrievals is a matter for another day. Training is key to the success of every investigation. That point cannot be over emphasized.

In some cases, you have to be a part of an institution and go through everything in order to obtain your evidence. In doing '**Madhouse**' (www.anasaremeyawanas.org), I checked into the Accra psychiatric hospital as a mental patient, received the same medications as other patients, ate the same food, slept in the same ward, got the same injections, etc. I had to smoke marijuana etc. as these were the normal practices going on. In order not to be detected I had to be as normal as possible in the psychiatric hospital environment. When I finally checked out after some months, I had some health problems and had to receive medical treatment, but I got my story.

There are several methods of undercover investigation. Always, remember though, that no story is worth your life. If the method is too dangerous and may endanger your life, find another way. Read about the various methods and find out which is most suitable to your investigation and use it. Suitability also depends on public receptiveness to the method.

About two years ago, when some newspapers in the UK, decided to tap telephone lines of some members of the Royal family and other members of society, they not only broke laws but also received the scorn and disgust of the general public. This year, some journalists in the same country posed as rich Arabs and offered to bribe some Members of Parliament in order for them to push through a law. When the story broke, the people of UK welcomed it and the Members of Parliament had to resign due to the reaction of society.

Always ask and answer this question; when the public knows of my methods, would they be receptive to it or would I receive the ire of society? Sometimes, you may receive the ire of society, but posterity would judge you more favourably. Be ready for the criticisms.

When you commence the investigation, your mantra should be “get in, get what you want and get out.” In order to do this effectively, you must know exactly what evidence you require and any other incidentals or tangential evidence that may come in necessary to your investigation. When you get the evidence, get out.

Undercover investigations are risky and sometimes the journalist gets carried away when he is unearthing other interesting things. The risk to your life becomes more increased the more you stay and the more you veer away from your initial plan. It is understandable that as journalists our thirst for information is never satisfied and sometimes, we may need to change plans a bit. If that becomes necessary, come back to the drawing table and plan it out but as much as possible, do not linger.

Get out and come back another day. Having a good story and making mention of other things would raise public awareness and get the right persons to go in and cleanse the system up. That is better on any day than losing the whole story and possibly your life because you wanted more.

My investigations over the years have focused on corruption, crimes and human rights abuses especially concerning children. I have had to involve the police on more than one occasion. The question is at what stage do you involve them?.Is it before you embark on an investigation, during the investigation or after the investigation? My answer to this is that it depends. My practice has been to involve them when I have gathered enough evidence with which they can do their job of arresting the subject matter if need be.

In '**Fools Gold**'

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/africaninvestigates/2011/10/2011103183056245296.html>, an African Investigative piece for Aljazeera, I involved the police after my initial contact with the scammers had yielded fruitful results and we were on the verge of paying them the money in exchange for the gold. The police went to the scene of the payment and mounted surveillance and were ready to arrest as soon as the fake gold bars were handed over to us. Of course they went more than eight hours before the scheduled meeting. When the scammers changed venues, the police quickly re organized and changed their plans in order to effect the arrest.

Involving the security forces is a dicey issue which would depend on the country you are in, the laws that govern undercover journalism operations and the investigation you are doing. Just remember that irrespective of where you are in the world, once you have evidence of a crime, the police would have to act on it. The question would be whether or not your evidence would be admissible in court. That is for the lawyers!

After obtaining the information, you must speak to the subject matter and hear his side of the story. As journalists this is important. Even if they say something contrary to what you have on tape, you must still hear their side. Sometimes you must confront them with the evidence. This is quite dangerous and must only be done after all precautions have been taken.

In '**How to Rob Africa**'

(<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2012/11/201211714649852604.html>), an investigation for Aljazeera's **Witness**, I confronted the subject after we had gathered evidence that he was willing to launder corrupt money for us. We had the evidence and could have decided not to reveal ourselves as journalists but once I had the all clear from my team, I confronted him with the evidence. This is called "**stepping**". On this occasion, it turned out well but in other situations, it may not. Be careful.

After you have gathered the information, you must bring it all together and present it to your editors and the general public. If it is for print, I am sure your technique of writing may have to change to accommodate the findings. If it is a documentary, then you would have to edit, direct etc. you are the best person to decide how to go about presenting your story. Whatever you do, you must maintain your ethics as a journalist.

Sometimes a story may lead to the prosecution of your subject matter. As you gathered the evidence, you would be the key witness of the prosecution. In order for you to successfully do this, you must keep all the evidence that you have obtained. Your notepad is very relevant. Never discard any evidence that you obtain once the story is done. Keep copies and have a back up as always. Remember the key details even though you have moved on to other stories.

Be certain that the evidence you obtained is available and safe. You would undergo rigorous cross examination so make sure your evidence is water tight. Issues of your protection and safety would be decided on by the prosecutors and your editors.

I went undercover for the story '**Timber**'

(<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/africaninvestigates/2011/11/20111123134340348960.html> (an African Investigates piece for Aljazeera), in Sierra Leone in 2011. An aspect of the story was corruption in the Vice President's Office. After a huge public debate and a decision by the US Congress to review some of the issues due to its links with the Country, the Anti Corruption Commission decided to prosecute two persons.

I was called to give evidence in 2013 for the prosecution. As at the time of my evidence, I had done more than ten other stories and so the details of '**Timber**' were no longer fresh in my mind. I knew the key facts and I had to go back to my evidence to refresh my memory and get my facts right.

In conclusion, journalism is a great profession. It is exciting and rewarding and performs a great role in society. Undercover is one of the means of doing our jobs as journalists but it is a slippery and dangerous road which must only be followed after all due precautions have been taken. This guide should spur you on to read and learn more.

15 HOT TIPS FOR UNDERCOVER

1. To put it simply, undercover journalism is not conventional journalism. With undercover journalism, the journalist has some reliable information that the subject is involved in some activity that the journalist is certain cannot come to light if he employs conventional journalism methods.
2. Entrapment is the inducement of a person to commit a crime. Entrapment in journalism occurs where the journalist induces a person who would not otherwise have committed a certain act to commit it.
3. Undercover journalism is used because there are certain stories of social injustice, crime, abuse of power, social good etc. that need to be brought to the focus of citizens and society in general in order to provoke civil society into healthy debates, criticisms, compromises and changes. Where such stories cannot be told by conventional journalistic means, then the relevance of the story dictates that the journalist should go undercover in order to get the story in its entirety.
4. Undercover journalism shall be used only when the conventional or traditional methods of journalism have failed or where there is concrete evidence that the traditional means would not yield the required result.
5. You must together with the team or your superiors justify the reason why you have to use undercover to investigate and come out with your story. You do not go undercover just because- there must at all times be a justification and you must have prima facie evidence
6. The journalist must decide whether the story merits the use of undercover techniques. This is very important as it is very easy and tempting to use undercover instead of the conventional methods of journalism. Systematically look at your subject and information and then go through the various traditional means of journalism and be certain that none of them would be able to gather the truth and verify it in order to come out with your story.
7. As part of the process of deciding to go undercover, you have to analyze the effect that such a decision would have; on the general public and on journalism as a whole. The public might not be so receptive to your method and so you end up losing the impact of the story as the focus is on you and your method rather than the story.
8. After deciding that the best means of getting your story would be to go undercover, you must conduct extensive research into the various forms of undercover that may work with your subject matter and then meet with your team and or editors and decide on the best method of undercover to use.

9. You must keep in mind that every country has its rules. Make sure that your undercover journalism does not fall foul of the law. Seek legal advice before you commence your investigation.
10. Decide whether you can do the story alone or if you need a team. In gathering team if need be, first and foremost look for credible persons whose confidentiality can be ensured. Have a back up team and always keep team members on a need to know basis.
11. Training is very important and is the cornerstone for the success of every investigation. Train your team on what to look out for, how to conduct themselves, how to obtain information, how to store and secure the information and successfully transmit it to the appropriate person or system. More importantly, get some training yourself. When you commence the investigation, your mantra should be "get in, get what you want and get out."
12. Involve the police when necessary. Involving the security forces is a dicey issue which would depend on the country you are in, the laws that govern undercover journalism operations and the investigation you are doing. Just remember that irrespective of where you are in the world, once you have evidence of a crime, the police would have to act on it.
13. After obtaining the information, you must speak to the subject matter and hear his or her side of the story.
14. After you have gathered the information, you must bring it all together and present it to your editors and the general public. If it is for print, I am sure your technique of writing may have to change to accommodate the findings. If it is a documentary, then you would have to edit, direct etc. you are the best person to decide how to go about presenting your story. Whatever you do, you must maintain your ethics as a journalist.
15. Sometimes a story may lead to the prosecution of your subject matter. As you gathered the evidence, you would be the key witness of the prosecution. In order for you to successfully do this, you must keep all the evidence that you have obtained.

Anas Aremeyaw Anas

Undercover Reporter / lawyer

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