

## Follow the paper trail

Tyler Brûlé

The Fast Lane



Today's column is devoted to setting the record straight. It's not the first time I've had to correct misconceptions or sift fact from fiction. You might recall that on a couple of occasions I've had to remind readers that all of the miles clocked up on this page are paid by me or my companies and not by this newspaper. There have also been occasions where I've had to highlight that this columnist does not accept free hotel rooms, flights or fancy gifts, so that means all of my views on hotels and air carriers are fully my own and viewed through the lens of a paying customer rather than someone on a PR jolly.

For this latest record straightener, let's rewind a couple of days and make our way to the suburbs of one of the bigger cities in the Low Countries. We're in the European headquarters of a multinational and have been ushered into a large meeting room to discuss branding, content and all the other things that marketeers like to chat about.

One of the gentleman turns to me and asks: "Why do you like paper and magazines so much? What is it?" The question hasn't been delivered in the friendliest manner but I nevertheless take up the challenge.

"Oh, it's not just me who likes paper," I start. "I think hundreds of millions, even billions of people like paper. Even your customers."

"Yeah but what is it?" he asks. "Why not digital, or something else?"

I wonder if he's just testing my limits or if this gentleman is truly curious and has arrived at the table with his own set of biases. "Where would you like me to start?" I counter. "Because this tired

narrative needs to stop once and for all. Let's start in Toronto because I was there meeting a company that was selling Kindle-style devices but it decided to leave that business because it wasn't going so well. The CEO found that people reading novels off-screen didn't have quite the lift rate predicted, so decided it was time to focus on paper. Since then her CFO has had to re-forecast their digital sales on multiple occasions — downward, not up."

The gentleman across the polished expanse of beech isn't looking that impressed but I'm just warming up: "This is not an emerging market with

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low spending power. It's one of the biggest English-speaking countries and there's not the rush to depart the printed page like everyone predicted," I explain. "So it's not just me that likes books, clearly tens of millions of my countrymen feel the same."

To put things into context, I tell him it's not about one thing or the other but a variety of choices. I suggest that everyone feels that media owners, marketing teams and ad buyers all have to march in lock step and embrace one channel for reading and everything else that's not glowing on a sapphire crystal display is irrelevant.

"I was also with one of the world's biggest book publishers recently," I go

on, "and they're investing in more warehouse space because the logistics centres they thought would be empty by now are anything but — people want books not chunks of grey plastic."

Shortly after on the train to Frankfurt for the book fair, I was recapping our recent business wins with our managing director and we concluded that there's been a clear turn in the market. From meetings in Dubai with the magazine trade where the mood was much sunnier (not just because it was the UAE) to projects in a variety of sectors, there was a definite shift back to paper. "Funny, isn't it?" remarked my colleague. "It's amazing how much companies want something to hold on to because that's what their brands and consumers demand."

By the time we pulled up at the Hauptbahnhof and made our way through the crush of editors, agents and authors in the lobby of the Hessischer Hof, we'd concluded the people who keep pushing the unilateral digital narrative tend to be the ones who want to cut costs and mistakenly think doing digital is cheaper or are in search of measurements and validation for every move they make rather than taking bold decisions that perhaps can't be simply validated by clicks or traffic.

So for the record, you're not going to be the smartest person around the boardroom or dinner table by talking up digital media because paper is here, always has been, and in many corners of media is, in fact, growing.

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More columns at [ft.com/brule](http://ft.com/brule)



### SNAPSHOT

#### 'Tableaus Boys 2011' by Alinka Echeverría

Alinka Echeverría is a Mexican-born award-winning visual artist whose work inhabits the hinterland between anthropology and conceptual art. In 2011 she travelled to South Sudan to produce a series of portraits of the newly independent nation. Expecting euphoria, she instead encountered uncertainty.

Her images illustrate a country in transition, where former guerrilla soldiers assume the roles of prison guards and police officers, as in "Boys" (2011), and her role as photographer is called into

question: "As soon as you lift up the camera, you make the other person vulnerable."

The resulting project, "Becoming South Sudan", unravels the glorious myths of independence to document a country's first steps into a tense, uneasy future. The photographs will be on display at the Ravestijn Gallery in Amsterdam.

Laura Garmeson

*'Becoming South Sudan' from October 29-December 3; [theravestijngallery.com](http://theravestijngallery.com)*

### Weekend's most read on FT.com

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3. **At Home** Fundraiser Georgette Mosbacher on why Trump is a 'decent man'

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6. **Valery Gergiev interview** The Russian conductor on Putin, power and performance

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## Obama, Clinton and the power of female friendship

Nilanjana Roy

Crossing Over



One of the women I love most turned 88 recently. Her memories are my history: she remembers world wars, pre-independence India, the days when "nationalism" was an ideal rather than a threat, the rise and fall of dictators.

My friend and I were talking on the phone about the political uncertainties and stresses of this year. She told me that we forget how precarious other times in history felt, and that it's easy to forget what brought hope back then. Usually it's the small things — friendships among leaders, for instance. Collect the good moments when you see them, she advised, collect hope.

When she said this, something clicked. All week, I'd been feeling moved by Michelle Obama's stirring, powerful speech in New Hampshire, where she spoke about the "hurtful, hateful" language used to demean women, and reminded her listeners that, beyond politics, there was basic human decency.

Then she endorsed Hillary Clinton for her "character and commitment". "We know that when things get tough, Hillary doesn't complain," Obama said. "She doesn't blame others. She doesn't abandon ship for something easier." She went further, speaking of Clinton as a mother and a daughter. Shortly afterwards, Clinton posted a signed tweet in response: "@FLOTUS, I'm in awe. Thanks for putting into words what's in so many of our hearts. -H."

I felt a sense of sudden and unmistakable relief. From 2008, the narrative about Clinton and Obama conformed to a disappointing but stubbornly enduring stereotype — two powerful women who didn't get along. The word "catfights" hovers in the air at these times, sourly, playing into the hopelessly old-fashioned but still persistent belief that women are rivals more often than friends.

In reality, friendships and alliances of respect between powerful women are common and foundational. But the profound networks of support, the intellectual as well as emotional

companionship, between women who run the world are not as visible as they might be. The media tends to focus either on women-as-rivals or on the partners of famous women, especially when these partners are male.

The present solidarity between Clinton and Obama is an interesting example of how a certain kind of female friendship develops, transcending an initially strong suspicion, when the two are finally able to find common ground. This is of course a pragmatic relationship, forged towards the tail-end of an election. But it is also forged in the realisation that they have strong, shared values on

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feminism, equality, a vision for the next generation.

There's a gap between the feminism of Clinton's pioneering generation — to be a powerful woman, you had to learn never to display weakness — and this generation, where feminists such as Roxane Gay and Mona Eltahawy often draw their power from the sharing of all kinds of experiences, including moments of great vulnerability. Obama steps into that gap between generations, and bridges it.

It's probably unrealistic to expect that Obama and Clinton will be BFFs, but these moments of mutual respect and public accord should bury the old stereotypes, even if those tend to return, like zombies from the grave. I wish that the image that we reached for when we thought of powerful, influential women was stronger and more true to life — take the friendship between Oprah Winfrey and Maya Angelou, for example.

They met in the 1970s when Winfrey was a young journalist in Baltimore, there to interview the poet. She impressed Angelou by taking exactly the five minutes allotted to her. They

met next in 1984, and their friendship would last until Angelou's death in 2014. (One of my friends and mentors suggests that so long as both women have equally satisfying creative or business careers, the friendship that spans decades is far more the norm than not.) Angelou said she thought of Winfrey as her daughter; Winfrey called Angelou her mother, sister and friend. Winfrey's account of their friendship can sound like a long-running conversation, interrupted here and there but always resumed. It's the same when she writes about her friendship with fellow broadcaster Gayle King: "With the exception of a few times during vacations spent out of the country, Gayle and I talked every day since."

Two qualities that sustain this kind of friendship, between women who have often been pioneers or achieved a great deal in their respective fields, would be the abjuration of jealousy, and a loyalty that rests on directness, the ability to speak your mind fearlessly.

In 2014, Gloria Steinem visited Kolkata for a literary festival. She spoke with her usual eloquence, connecting the protest movements she'd been part of in the US with Indian feminism, and met with old friends that evening. Her table was packed, all of them women. Some had travelled with her, some had met her in India.

Their friendships had lasted five, six decades. Younger women flitted to their side like dazzled moths, fascinated by this strongly knit network of female friends. I felt I was being shown what to want; that we were all fascinated by something that we were learning to create for ourselves, too. When Clinton and Obama salaamed each other last week, they put the focus on what unites rather than divides them. There is tremendous power in watching that and, in the words of my wise friend, hope.

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