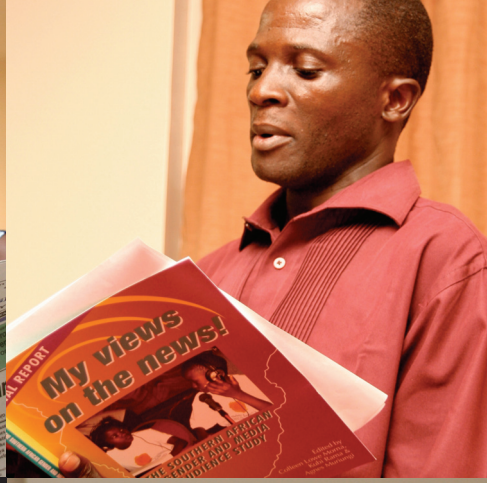
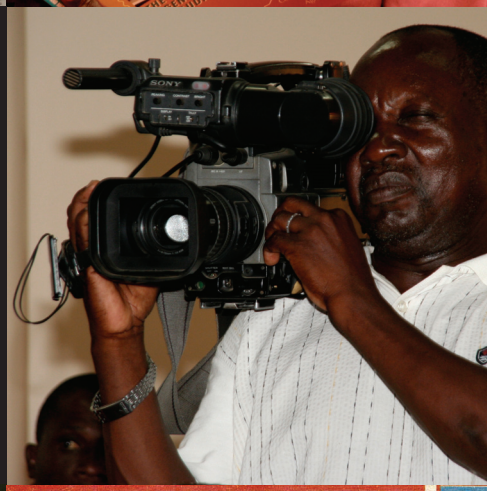








GENDER AND MEDIA DIVERSITY JOURNAL









THE TABLOID EXPLOSION

Gender and Media Diversity Centre (GMDC)

The Gender and Media Diversity Journal is an output of the Gender and Media Diversity Centre (GMDC). The GMDC is a physical and virtual resource centre based in Southern Africa, with linkages in Africa and across the globe. The centre envisages media that are diverse, representative, responsive, and professional, and a citizenry, women and men, who are empowered to engage critically with their media. It facilitates the collection, connection and dissemination of information and resources relating to gender, media and diversity. The centre also collaborates on research, education and training.

The GMDC is a consortium of media NGOs and tertiary institutions committed to the vision and mission of the GMDC. Working with an advisory group, Gender Links and the Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network manage the centre. The advisory group includes:

- Highway Africa, Pan African (Chris Kabwato)
- Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ), South Africa (Shehnaaz Bulbulia)
- Inter Press Service, Pan African (Farai Samhungu)
- Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), SADC (Jennifer Mufune)
- Media Monitoring Project (MMP), South Africa (William Bird)
- NSJ, SADC (Donna Mpengula Tomas),
- Polytechnic of Namibia, Namibia (Emily Brown)
- Rhodes University, South Africa (Jude Mathurine)
- SAFAIDS, SADC (Tariro Chikumbirike)
- Sangonet, South Africa (Fazila Farouk)
- University of Liverpool, United Kingdom (Professor Karen Ross)
- University of Stellenbosch, South Africa (Professor Lizette Rabe)
- Independent representatives:

- United Kingdom, Peter DaCosta
- United Kingdom, Margaret Gallagher
- India, Ammu Joseph
- Zimbabwe, Emmie Wade

The objectives of the GMDC are:

- Promote more analytical, responsive and contextual journalism.
- Develop and share a body of knowledge on gender and media diversity.
- Publicise the work of media scholars, students and practitioners.
- Provide resources that makes the links between media theory and practice.



- Create a space for participatory discussion and debate on gender and media diversity.
- Develop global and local partnerships with strategic organisations.
- Become a centre of excellence on new approaches and fresh thinking.

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EDITORIAL



Tabloids and media diversity

By Deborah Walter

This third issue of the Gender and Media Diversity Journal continues in the tradition of the first two by offering diverse perspectives on the media landscape in Southern Africa, enriched by views from the rest of Africa and other regions of the world. As a project now of the Gender and Media Diversity Centre (GMDC) launched by Gender Links and GEMSA in 2007, the journal aims to stimulate debate on media diversity broadly, and the gender dimensions of this specifically.

Against this background, it is fitting that this issue should focus on tabloids and tabloidisation, a subject with great relevance to media diversity, as well as gender and the media. We are pleased at the wide variety of responses to the call for articles. The range of opinions is as varied as its contributors.

For a start, there is debate on what constitutes a tabloid. Is it form (technically, yes) or content: sensationalism, and greater focus on personal, visual stories? For example, is the *Mail and Guardian* a tabloid? In form it certainly is, but in content it is not what we would commonly think of as a tabloid. For this journal, tabloids are defined by their content, rather than by form.

Yet, as Rene Smith, an independent researcher from South Africa explains in her overview, there are increasingly blurred lines between tabloids and "mainstream" newspapers that are taking some of their cues from tabloids in a bid to increase circulation. This phenomenon is referred to as "tabloidisation." While much of the focus in the journal is on print media, it is important to remember that tabloids and tabloidisation are also reflected in the electronic media; reality television for example. An article by Carolyn Byerly of Howard University in the USA adds fascinating insights into the electronic expressions of tabloidisation.

In their contribution Lynette Steenveld and Larry Strelitz from Rhodes University, South Africa, write that while many mainstream journalists question whether headline-grabbing tabloids is real journalism, others argue that the "campaign journalism" often found in tabloids plays a "helper" role in communities, pointing out inadequacies of local systems and mobilising action.

Beate Kasale, editor of the *Voice* in Botswana concurs. She argues that while the paper is often criticised, it "provides an opportunity for the voices of the voiceless to be heard."

Critics argue that tabloids "dumb down" good journalism, and threaten the very role that the fourth estate plays in a healthy democracy. In her contribution, Lizette Rabe from Stellenbosch University in South Africa argues that tabloids are a mix of "the good, the bad and the ugly". She contends that the challenge is for media to make the most of the opportunities that tabloids present for diversity and adding value to the media environment.

It comes as no surprise that those who are closest to the tabloids, the editors and the readers, think that tabloids are more in tune with the public. Based on a series of interviews conducted for research initiated by Gender Links, editors in South Africa, Mauritius and Tanzania all point to their readers' desire for people-centered, human-interest stories as key to their popularity.

But the preliminary findings of GL's "*Mirror on the Media*" research into the gender dimensions of tabloids in these three countries suggest that tabloids are not quite as "people-centred" as they are made out to be, if we take as our starting point that people in any society comprise both women and men.

Comparing the findings of the monitoring against the Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS) conducted by Gender Links and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) in 2003, the study finds that women are as under-represented as sources and images in tabloids as they are in the mainstream media. The study also finds that although

tabloids do carry more local and human interest news than the mainstream media (including on "ordinary" women and on topics of interest to such women) these publications promote some of the worst gender stereotypes.

As Kylie Thomas points out, media analysis is not just about what is in papers, but also about what is not. She questions why, if tabloids are truly the "people's papers," there is very little reference to HIV and AIDS, one of the most pressing issues facing the region, in the pages of South Africa's *Daily Sun*.

The competing viewpoints do not end with the tabloids. In the second section of the journal, the topic turns away from tabloids, towards a broader look at the media landscape.

Ammu Joseph argues from India that media coverage in times of disasters misses important stories through gender blind reporting. She takes issue with media professionals who take the narrow view that because both men and women both died in the 2004 Tsunami, there are no gender dimensions to disasters.

In her contribution, Nathalie Sanger from South Africa argues that while magazine editors see themselves as neutral, their representation of gender certainly is not. She proposes that the presentation of such people as women and homosexuals in these magazines as "other" erases any claim of objectivity and neutrality.

Many contributors suggest that there is need for new research and strategies on media diversity. Byerly suggests since increased concentration of media ownership by a few large media companies is one explanation for the "dumbing-down" of serious news in American TV news, expanding ownership among a wider range of owners, including women and racial minorities, could be a solution. A less explored avenue may also be focusing greater attention on the workers who ultimately create and produce news content. Rosemary Okello-Orlale from Kenya adds that freedom of expression should be balanced against standards for content.

In the final two articles, we are reminded that media is not just about news. Maude Dikobe from Botswana discusses how misogynistic lyrics in calypso music in Trinidad contribute to gender based violence. Reflecting on GL's recent *Mirror on the Media* study on *Gender and Advertising in Southern Africa*, GL Executive Director Colleen Lowe Morna points to the need for much greater focus by gender an media networks on the stereotypes that are perpetuated by advertising.

This issue of the GMDJ is being launched at Highway Africa 2007, which this year aims to tackle some of the practical challenges that face journalists and media institutions in the production of media, publishing and the dissemination/distribution of media products. The challenges in the production of media and its distribution impinge on the quality of journalism and the professionalism of journalists.

To truly empower people to engage critically with media, dialogue and debate must not be limited to academics, journalists, and those few individuals that are usually found at the forefront of these discussions. Rather, it must engage media analysts, editors, audiences, content producers, journalists, newsmakers, advertisers, etc.

Like it or not, we are all part of the media landscape, affected by the printed and broadcast word, the posters confronting us at intersections, and the magazines displayed on the rack at our local grocery store. Media shapes the world around us, so everyone has the right, and maybe even the responsibility, to have a voice in what shape this is taking.

This underscores the importance of initiatives such as the media literacy classes that have taken place at GL this year, as well as the face-to-face GMDC debates on topical media issues.

For its part, the journal aims to build a bridge between media policy and practice, providing a space for analysis, comment, debate and dialogue. We invite comment and feedback on this issue, as well as contributors for future issues. For information about upcoming themes and contributors guidelines, please contact the editor on: editor@genderlinks.org.za. Happy reading!

Deborah Walter

NEWSBRIEFS

Highway Africa 2007 – Quality and professionalism in journalism and the media: the case for new media.

Highway Africa is a partnership between Rhodes University (School of Journalism and Media Studies) and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), with the support of several partners, development agencies and sponsors. For ten years, the Highway Africa conference has been at the centre of Africa's debates on journalism and new media, and has become the largest annual gathering of African journalists in the world (531 in 2006). In the last four years Highway Africa has evolved into a multi-pronged programme including research, education and training, a news agency offering a weekly news digest on information and communication technology (ICT) developments in Africa, and the annual conference.

Having in the past four years tracked the role of the media in relation to the concept of the Information Society, Highway Africa 2007 turns its attention to tackle some of the practical challenges that face journalists and media institutions in the production of media, publishing, and the dissemination/distribution of media products. The challenges in the production of media and its distribution impinge on the quality of journalism and the professionalism of journalists. The 2007 conference seeks to address a number of questions related to quality and professionalism in their interface with the deployment and use of technology in the newsroom.

Press Council of Botswana sets the tone on gender

The Press Council of Botswana (PCB) set the tone for other media regulatory authorities in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) when they drafted a gender code of ethics for their membership after a one-and-a-half day workshop in Gaborone, Botswana. Speaking after producing the draft, a buoyant PCB chairperson, Pamela Dube said, "I am happy with the process and the principles behind it. What remains is to take this draft to the PCB board for their consideration." The code seeks to mainstream gender into universally accepted codes of ethics for the media as a way of ensuring that the media, which is a powerful instrument for social transformation, empowers all people, both male and female in Botswana. The code is unique in that it also seeks to promote an environment in the work-place that ensures the empowerment of female employees through mentoring, career pathing, affirmative action and a general atmosphere of equal access to opportunities in the newsrooms.

This move was in part a response to the Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS) conducted by Gender Links and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) in 2003 that showed that women constituted 17 percent of news sources in the region and that they are portrayed in a limited range of roles; most often as sex workers and victims of violence. The remaining challenge is the effective implementation of this code, once the PCB board adopts it. The drafting process was facilitated by Gender Links as part of its vision to "promote gender equality in and through the media" in the SADC region. This initiative is targeted at media regulatory authorities in the SADC region and is closely related to the Media Action Plan (MAP) on HIV and AIDS and Gender that seeks to roll out HIV and AIDS, and gender policies in 218 media houses in the SADC region by 2008.

South African Press Council re-launched

Former SABC TV news, e.tv news editor-in-chief, and Sowetan deputy editor Joe Thloloe was elected South Africa's new press ombudsman, as the new Press Council of South Africa launched officially on 3 August 2007 in Johannesburg. Thloloe, veteran journalist who also worked for The World (fore-runner of today's Sowetan), Rand Daily Mail, Golden City Post and Drum magazine, will be at the helm of the Press Council of South Africa, a newly formed institution that replaces the Press Founding

Bodies Committee. A total of 24 members – 12 from the office of the Ombudsman and 12 from the Appeal Panel – form part of the council, which is set up by the newspaper and magazine industry to administer the Office of the Press Ombudsman and Appeal Panel. Out of the 12 Appeal Panel members, six are public representatives – something that represents a unique feature in the history of South Africa media's administrative affairs.

Source: All Africa.com

Media Council of Zimbabwe launched

Representatives from media organisations in Zimbabwe elected an eleven-member board to oversee the self-preservation of professionalism in the media by their own representatives from the media and members of the public. According to the MISA, the board is in contrast to the Media and Information Commission imposed on journalists by the infamous Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). A code of conduct, as well as the constitution governing the functions of the council and the responsibilities of affiliate journalists was adopted at the meeting.

Source: www.misa.org

Soweto Community Television

Soweto TV, launched 3 July 2007, is South Africa's first community television station. Granted a yearlong license, the station is a volunteer community initiative – "made by Sowetans for Sowetans," which aims to evolve into a fully commercial enterprise in its first year. The station will provide a training platform for volunteer producers, directors, technical and production staff who would like to help keep this station on air. Soweto Community TV is an interactive "talk radio on television" concept, where both presenters and producers of shows engage with Soweto viewers about issues relevant to the community. For more information visit
http://www.sowetotv.org.za/

Source: http://www.tvsa.co.za/

Gay and lesbian radio returns

After nearly two years off-air, the Tuesday Night Show returned to the airwaves on 3 July. Launched in 2004

Honour Roll

CNN honours Ugandan journalist

CNN awarded Richard M. Kavuma, from Uganda the top prize in this year's CNN MultiChoice African journalism awards. Kavuma, who works for The Weekly Observer in Uganda, won for his series of articles on his country's performance on Millennium Development Goals. Judges chose his work from 1670 entries coming from 40 nations across the African continent.

Source: Journalism.co.za

SA media women recognised

The Media Magazine and Vodacom host the Women in Media Awards every August (Women's month) in South Africa. Patricia Scholtemeyer, CEO of Media24 Magazines, was named overall winner of the 2007 awards, and Colleen Lowe Morna, executive director of Gender Links, announced as runner-up. Siki Mgabadeli received the Vodacom Rising Star – honouring a woman under 30 who is already making an impact in the media, and veteran journalist Joyce Sikhakhane the Lifetime Achievement Award. "These awards are now in their fifth year," says Sandra Gordon, founder of the award and publisher of The Media, "and each year our editorial board is pleasantly surprised by the number and caliber of nominees and is often is hard pressed to reach a short list."

Source: Marketingweb.co.za

HIV and AIDS communication award

The Zimbabwe-based Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Information Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS) won the inaugural AfriComnet Award for Excellence in HIV and AIDS Strategic Communication in the journalism category for the best series or article on an HIV-related topic. Other winners at the event included Nigeria's Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS), Straight Talk Uganda, Zambia's Health Communication Partnership (HCP) and SABC TV. Using the Media Resource Desk (MRD) as its strategy, SAfAIDS encourages more effective HIV communication in Southern Africa. The MRD is a collaboration between the Southern Africa Editor's Forum (SAEF), the Media Action Plan (MAP), UNAIDS and SAfAIDS, and produces a range of materials for a database of over 500 media houses, media organisations, freelancers and institutions of learning throughout the southern Africa region. These materials, packaged in the form of fact sheets, newsletters and newsflashes, seek to capacitate media professionals to report accurately, excitingly, and ethically on HIV and AIDS-related issues.

Source: af-aids listserv

on SABC's Radio 2000, Tuesday Night was South Africa's first nationally broadcast radio programme dedicated to the gay and lesbian community. Now broadcast on 1485am, this weekly radio show provides a platform of expression for gay men and women, as well as their straight friends and families, to ask questions and air their views. Editorial content aims to address the needs of gay community and the needs of the society, which at times, "finds itself at a loss when dealing with homosexuality." The show discusses everyday issues like equality, empowerment, mental fitness, HIV and AIDS, spirituality and entrepreneurship. "With the support of the 1485 Radio Today Board, Chair – Dr John Kani and the station's Patron, the South African High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, the H.E. Ms. Lindiwe Mabuza, Tuesday Night is focused on reaching communities throughout the province and beyond. We're excited to resume broadcasts and will continue to address the needs of the entire community," said Tuesday Night executive producer Maciek Mazur. Tune in live every Tuesday night from 8pm on 1485am in the greater Johannesburg area and on DStv Audio Channel 70 nationally and to the 8 English-speaking Southern African countries.

Source: http://www.tuesdaynight.co.za/



Tuesday night crew - from left: Troy Thiel and Perdita Bokeer, Presenters; Thomas Manamela, 1485 Radio Today Sound Engineer; Maciek Mazur, Executive Producer *Credit: Tuesday Night*

African Union Protocol Media

The African Union (AU) Protocol, the Protocol to the charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, is a ground-breaking continental human rights instrument that seeks top protect the rights of women in Africa. Produced in Africa by Africans with the participation of both government and civil society, the document emanates from the experiences of African women themselves. Given the Protocol's relatively short life, many women and men, both in rural and urban areas, are not aware of its existence or its importance as a tool for women's empowerment on the continent. In order for more countries to ratify and domesticate the Protocol, and for women to take advantage of its provisions, broader community awareness and support is necessary.

FAHAMU (Networks for Social Justice) and the African Women's Development and Communication's Network (FEMNET) have established the Media for Women's Rights (MEWOR) Project on behalf of Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR), a regional coalition consisting of more than 20 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working towards the promotion and protection of women's human rights in Africa. The MEWOR Project proposes to support the SOAWR campaign in its bid to get countries to ratify and domesticate the protocol and as a result catalyse changing attitudes towards women's human rights in Africa. The project includes a radio drama, being produced in collaboration with CMFD (Community Media for Development) Productions, a current affairs programme and a cartoon series aimed at creating widespread awareness about the protocol. The cartoon strips will target younger audiences, while the radio programmes are deigned for local communities, policy makers and opinion leaders. They will be available for download from the Internet and broadcast on radio stations. Radio is seen as critical tool for popularising the provisions of the Protocol, as it is only by building a popular base will it be possible for citizens to ensure that the provisions of the Protocol are implemented in practice in the courts and in legislation. For more information contact Roselynn Musa advocacy@femnet.or.ke

Women talk peace – Asia, Pacific and Africa

This series of radio productions aim to raise awareness about the varied aspects of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which addresses the impact of war on women, and

women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. The series is part of the International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC)'s efforts to develop a core group of broadcasters, print journalists, and other media practitioners who are informed about UNSCR 1325, to ensure a sustained flow of information about the resolution and other legal mechanisms, as well as how they can be used to protect and promote women's rights. The radio productions use varied formats including features, dramas, and short plugs.

Media literacy

Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens in a democracy. A literate citizenry that can engage media leads to a powerful citizenry. Media literacy tries to dispel the notion that audiences are passive consumers of media products. This seeks to highlight the fact that audiences can take control of their situation and be able to engage with media and state what exactly they expect from it. Gender Links offers a Media Literacy course as part of ongoing efforts to create a culture of critical media consumption among citizens. For the first time, Gender Links piloted this course for learners from across the province 25-29 June, over school vacation. For more information, visit http://www.genderlinks.org.za



Media literacy first step to media diversity: Learners examine media during Gender Links course *Credit: Trevor Davies*

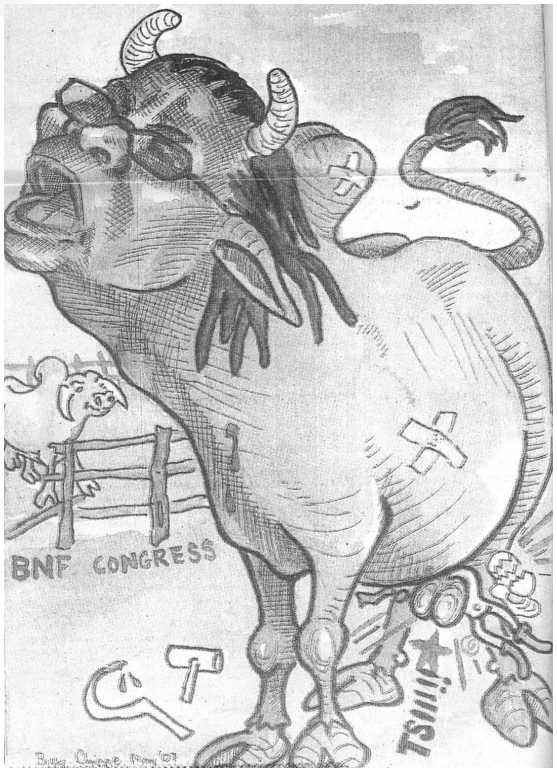
Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Alerts and Complaints Project

During 2007, GEMSA chapters will be collecting alerts and complaints on gender insensitive media coverage, to be circulated via list serves and on the GEMSA website. Meetings will be held with media entities to talk through the alerts and possible action to avoid similar gender insensitive practices. Quarterly media briefings will share progress of the project. Complaints will be lodged with regulatory authorities in each country. The purpose is to test existing gender provisions or to get regulatory to develop gender criteria for complaints. This process parallels a Gender Links project working with regulatory authorities to develop gender policies.

Example – Botswana cartoon demeans women aspiring for leadership positions

Kathleen Letshabo stood as president of the Botswana National Front. Letshabo lost the election. The Gender and Media in Southern Africa (GEMSA) Botswana Chapter and the Botswana Media Women Association (BOMWA) noted with alarm the Cartoon that appeared in the *Monitor* Newspaper of 28 May 2007. The cartoon, titled *BNF Congress,* supposedly depicted the Botswana National Front aspirant for Party Presidency, Kathleen Letshabo, at its Congress being castrated and bleeding. The message implied by the cartoon has the effect of degrading and ridiculing women who aspire for leadership positions in the political arena. The depiction of the cartoon defeats the purpose of democracy that in every election, there are winners and losers, and Letshabo is not immune to a defeat of this nature. In Botswana, male candidates have lost in similar circumstances, but they have not been shown as *"bleeding bulls being castrated."* The cartoon not only insulted Letshabo but also showed little regard for all women that have ambitions to aspire for leadership positions in both the political realm and any sector of the economy. Botswana Media Women's Association-GEMSA sent a complaint to the Botswana Press Council (BPC). The BPC judgment is that the cartoon is not gender insensitive.

Read more about the Alerts project on www.gemsa.org.za. Any alerts you want to raise? Contact GEMSA admin@gemsa.org.za or call +27 11 622 6597



No time to NAP

At watershed conference held in May 2006, convened by Gender Links, National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and UNICEF, representatives of government and civil society drafted a National Action Plan (NAP) to End Gender Violence for South Africa using the SADC Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Gender Violence as a framework. Concrete targets and timeframes were set. Delegates signed what is now known as the Kopanong Declaration as a sign on commitment to the multi sector approach to end gender violence. Efforts are underway to localise the plan through pilot projects in the Gauteng and North West provinces for effective implementation of the plan.

The process has been replicated in the region where similar workshops have been held in five other countries: Mauritius, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. While Zambia and Zimbabwe had draft action plans which were being reviewed, outputs from the workshops will be used to enrich existing draft plans. In Tanzania a communication strategy will be developed around the country's NAP to end gender violence and Botswana will be using the workshop to revisit their action plan. A further four countries will be targeted in the next phase.

Linked to all of this is the need for media to play a role in popularising the action plans and communicating key issues arising. Media can play a vital role by ensuring that it covers gender violence issues in a fair, balanced and gender responsive manner instead of sensationalising these experiences lived by real people. There is a need for coverage of gender based violence incidents to reflect all voices in their diversity, including those of survivors of gender violence. For more information about NAP and the role media can play, write justice@genderlinks.org.za

Overview: The tabloid phenomenon



News Vendor *Credit: Trevor Davies*



Making sense out of tabloids and tabloidisation – an introduction[1]

René Smith

Abstract

There is a growing trend towards tabloidisation of the media in Southern Africa, and around the world. Though generally associated with sensationalism and a lower quality of journalism, the increasing popularity of tabloids is leading more mainstream broadsheets to consider what elements can be incorporated to build sales and readership, blurring the lines between the two. Very little research exists on the phenomena of tabloids and tabloidisation in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. Some argue that tabloids are creating a larger reading public. Others question what the impact is, if this reading public is confronted by sensationsalism and "lower standard" reporting.

Key words

tabloid, tabloidisation, journalism, media

What is a tabloid?

The word "tabloid" itself is a derivation from "tablette," an old French word for "small slab... with or for inscription" (Langer 1998). The word "tabloid" began as a trademark of the pharmaceutical company Burroughs, Welcome & Co. of London, and was registered officially in 1884 as a "fancy word" for a compressed pharmaceutical. The connotation of compressed tablet was soon applied to other small items and to the "compressed" journalism that condensed stories into a simplified, easily-absorbed format. The label of "tabloid journalism" (1901) preceded the smaller sheet newspapers that contained it (1918).

An early pioneer of tabloid journalism was Alfred Harmsworth (1865-1922), who amassed a large publishing empire of halfpenny papers by rescuing failing stolid papers and transforming them to reflect the popular taste, which yielded him enormous profits. Harmsworth used his tabloids to influence public opinion, for example, by bringing down the wartime government of Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith in the Shell Crisis of 1915.

US tabloid-sized newspapers

This style of journalism and newspaper publishing was exported to various other countries, including the United

Notes

[1]This article is excerpted from research done by Gender Links exploring tabloids and tabloidisation in Southern Africa.

States (U.S). The daily tabloids in the U.S., which date back to the founding of the *New York Daily News* in 1919, are generally much less overheated and less oriented towards scandal and sensationalism than their British counterparts. With the exception of the supermarket tabloids, which have little mainstream credibility, the word "tabloid" in the U.S. can refer more to format than to content. A number of respected and indeed prize-winning American papers use the tabloid format.

However, since its initial purchase by Rupert Murdoch in 1976, the *New York Post* has become the exemplar of the brash British-style tabloid in the U.S., and its competition with the *Daily News* has become newspaper legend. (Wikpedia)

There are a number of serious newspapers with serious, hard-news content, of high journalistic standards in tabloid form (i.e. *Mail and Guardian* in South African and the *Daily Mail* of London). Prominent U.S. tabloids include the *Philadelphia Daily News*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver, the *Boston Herald*, *Newsday* on New York's Long Island and *The Examiner*, which is a free newspaper published in San Francisco, Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. (*Newsday* co-founder Alicia Patterson was the daughter of Joseph Patterson, founder of the New York Daily News.)

However, the modern day understanding of tabloids is most closely aligned to the British tabloids, renowned for their emphasis on scandal, particularly as it relates to politicians, and other personalities (sports or entertainment), a recipe of "news" evidently popular with the "masses/ the working class majority." The distinctions are felt in terms of readership where the mainstream press is seen as more *highbrow* and its readers distinguished from *low brow*, (popular culture that is).

As S Elizabeth Bird (1998) argues, unlike the trend in the United Kingdom (UK), tabloids in the United States – "supermarket tabloids" – focus exclusively on the lives and loves of celebrities with no *"news about politics, the economy, or any subject we might think of as traditional hard news"* and limited distinction between the classes of readers of tabloids.

The African media landscape has seen a proliferation of tabloid journalism over the past few years. According to an article on Tanzanian media by Lawrence Kilimwiko, not a day goes by in Tanzania without sensational headlines about death splashed across the front page of its tabloid newspapers[2]. Kilimkwiko suggests that colour photographs of grisly accidents or violent crimes feature prominently.

In South Africa, newspaper readership trends show a steady growth in favour of tabloids (AMPS 2005). The *Daily Sun* is the most popular daily newspaper with sales of 301 800 and an estimated readership of 2.29million, followed by *Sowetan* with daily sales of 118 261 and a readership of 1.54million.

The *Daily Sun* commands 11.2% of the 30.6 million readers (SAARF 2005). The paper has managed to capture the largest chunk of the newspaper reader market, (followed by the *Sunday Times*, 10.4% of total readership). The *Daily Sun's* exponential growth has occurred amidst the demise of other publications in South Africa (i.e. *This Day, Nova*[3]).



Credit: Brendan Kennedy

Notes

[2] http://www.misa.org/sothisisdemocracy/tanzania/tanzania.html
[3] It is accepted the demise of these publications was a collective consequence of branding and marketing, of regulation as well as of issues of structure and ownership and of technological innovation (i.e news on demand via the Internet).

Together the *Daily Sun*, *Sunday Sun*, *Sowetan*, *Son* and *Sunday World* command the biggest share of total readership (that's 11.2%; 6.3%; 5.3%; 4.5% and 3.4% respectively).

In other African countries, commentators have argued the proliferation of the tabloids are a result of the "shrinkage of mainstream press" because of political pressure (i.e. Mabweazara (2005) on the scenario in Zimbabwe) or of a discontent with incessant stories on politics. On the other hand, simply a general need for diversion from the usual lived experiences of poverty and politics (i.e. Opolot (2005) on Uganda).

Tabloidisation of the media

The above creates the impression that clear differences exist between tabloid and mainstream media. However, the distinctions are not always clear. This is primarily due to the characteristics of tabloids becoming increasingly evident in the mainstream media. Sex, scandal and sport are favoured while analysis and balanced coverage remains the preserve of "finer," quality/*highbrow* publications as opposed to reflecting a normative approach to journalism.

Tabloidisation of media is a phrase generally used to explain the growing trend of mainstream media reflecting the character of tabloid-style journalism. This has resulted in the terms "tabloid" and "tabloidisation" being (erroneously) conflated, although they are distinct categories.

Design features of tabloids

Research in three countries examining tabloid and mainstream newspaper content shows that tabloids have less advertising space but more pictures on their pages.

Country/paper	Advertising		Pictures		Editorial	
	Tabloid	Mainstream	Tabloid	Mainstream	Tabloid	Mainstream
	%	%	%	%	%	%
S Africa						
Daily Voice/Star	30.3	53.5	28.9	13.2	40.8	33.4
Daily Sun/The Citizen	39.0	51.9	19.6	13.6	41.4	34.6
Sunday World/Sowetan	50.5	73.5	14.1	7.3	35.4	19.1
Mauritius						
5 - Plus / Week End	46.8	43.9	17.7	13.2	35.5	42.9
Le Dimanche/ Le Mauricien	42.7	34.5	15.5	16.2	41.8	49.3
L'Hebdo/Le Express	18.0	72.0	30.1	12.8	51.9	15.2
Tanzania						
Uwazi/ The Express	21.1	17.4	12.8	12.3	66.1	70.3
Amani/ Business Times	10.2	38.3	39.7	18.6	50.1	43.1
Alasiri/ The Guardian	6.1	19.5	23.7	29.0	70.2	51.5

The tabloidisation of the media has often been understood to represent the shifts in mainstream media from critical reportage to a more "dumbed-down" version of media products. Tabloidisation reflects the way in which reporting and programming on television in particular begins to reflect more the audiences need for scandal and trivia where television's entertainment value is seen to supersede its other functions of informing and educating its audiences. It is the news genre and television news in particular where this blurring of boundaries is most evident. Here, hard news and

critical analysis "merges into the countless talk shows and syndicated reality programming" (Bird 1998, 34).

The tabloidisation of the mainstream media in South Africa for example, is evident in the blurring of boundaries between the more established daily, the *Sowetan* and the newer *Daily Sun*. The former is a traditional main-stream paper in tabloid format and the latter a tabloid (in content and form). The shift, it is argued, is partially due to "the bottom line," where the uptake of the *Daily Sun* encroached on the Sowetan's market thus necessitating a review of strategy in securing readers.

European tabloid-sized newspapers

The biggest tabloid (and newspaper in general) in Europe, by circulation, is Germany's *Bild-Zeitung*, with around 4 million copies (down from above 5 million in the 1980s). Although its paper size is bigger, its style was copied from the British tabloids.

In the UK, three previously broadsheet daily newspapers – *The Independent*, *The Times*, and *The Scotsman* – have switched to tabloid size in recent years, although they call it "compact" to avoid the down-market connotation of that word. Similarly, when referring to the down-market tabloid newspapers the alternative term "red-top" (referring to their traditionally red-coloured mastheads) distinguishes them from the up-market compact newspapers.

In the Netherlands, several newspapers have started publishing tabloid versions of their newspapers, including the major "quality" newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, with *NRC Next* in 2006. Two free tabloid newspapers were also introduced in the early 2000s, *Metro and Spits*, mostly for distribution in public transportation. In 2007 a third and fourth, higher quality 'train tabloid" appeared, *De Pers* and *Dag*.

In France, the *Nice Matin*, a popular Southern France newspaper, changed from broadsheet to tabloid on 8 April 2006. They changed the printing format in one day after test results showed that 74% liked the tabloid format compared to broadsheet.

Tabloid-sized newspapers in other countries

In the People's Republic of China, Chinese tabloids have exploded in popularity since the mid-1990s and have tested the limits of press censorship by taking editorial positions critical of the government and by engaging in critical investigative reporting.

In Oman, *TheWeek* is a free, 48-page, all-colour, independent weekly published from Muscat in the Sultanate of Oman. Oman's first free newspaper was launched in March 2003 and has now gone on to gather what is believed to be the largest readership for any publication in Oman. *TheWeek* is audited by BPA Worldwide, which has certified its circulation as being a weekly average of 50,300.

In Georgia, weekly *The Financial* switched to compact format in 2005 and doubled number of pages. English language newspaper is published on high quality paper and distributed free of charge among bankers, top decision-makers. Other newspapers publishing in Georgian language tested compact format early in 1990s.

Making media accessible or destroying journalism?

Very little research exists on the phenomenon of tabloids and tabloidisation in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. In South Africa, ongoing debate has occurred in media-related publications, specifically *Equid Novi, The Media* magazine, the *Rhodes Journalism Review* (Wasserman (2005); Strelitz & Steenveld (2005); Joseph (2005a & 2005b); Berger (2005)). Arguments have focused primarily on tabloids in relation to journalistic standards, media ethics, and the related tabloid-

isation of the media.

Tabloids are viewed in relation to highbrow, quality press. "Quality" in this instance refers to a press, which adheres to editorial codes in pursuit or newsworthy stories. These debates have essentially focused on whether or not tabloids are "good journalism" or good for journalism. This is situated within the ambit of ongoing dialogue about journalistic standards and standards of journalism in South Africa[4].

Unlike tabloids, mainstream media – it is argued – present objective facts, and are meant to reflect and interrogate the political and socio-economic realities of societies. Moreover, as Lynette Steenveld (2006, 20) argues, the address of mainstream press is more authoritative than tabloids (which are conversational)

> "[t]heirs is serious, official, and impersonal, aimed at producing understanding and belief" [...] "they address their readers from the position of one who know, and is providing information for those who don't".

Arguments in support of tabloids often focus on their role as a form of journalism which talks to the needs of "ordinary" people, and profiles the realities of working class people in particular. It is argued that tabloids focus more on people than the state. As a South African commentator quipped, tabloids "are talking to ordinary people about their lives and their issues, about things that affect them, often with humour, in a language they understand and can relate to" (Joseph 2005).

As Bird (1998) argues, the growth of the tabloids and the tabloidisation of the media points to the audience preference for "human interest stories, celebrity gossip and life-style advice." This observation concurs with findings of the Gender and Media Audience Study (2005) conducted across 12 countries, which found that women and men would like more local and human-interest news (Lowe Morna, Rama and Muriungi 2006, 19).

Tabloids, it is argued, contribute to public dialogue and debate, which in a democratic South Africa reflects a move away from the historical marginalisaton of the country's majority and the preserve of the *public sphere* for the ruling minority and elites. Traditionally conceptualised as the gathering together of individuals–mainly men and members of the bourgeoisie – in their private capacities, to form a public, Jurgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere has relevance to the role of tabloids in South Africa. As Douglas Kellner argues, Habermas's *focus on "democratization" was associated with "political participation as the core of a democratic society and as an essential element in individual self-development."*

Although critiqued as elitist[5], Harbermas's concept of the public sphere reflects an assessment of a particular historical moment in German society. The notion of the



Newspaper sizes in August 2005. Le Monde is in the Berliner format. The Guardian was (until September 2005) in the British broadsheet format, whereas the Daily Mail is a tabloid, and The Times a "compact". Berliner Zeitung and Neues Deutschland are of sizes between broadsheet and Berliner. A piece of white A4 paper is placed in front for scale
Source: Wikpedia

Notes

[4]See: SANEF Skills Audit (2002)
[5]Critical in this regard is the absence of women and populist/ grassroots as well as other groups and social movements Harbermas' conceptualisation of the public sphere (REF Mary Ryan, 1992???).

"public sphere" remains relevant to discussions about tabloids and the use of this space for dialogue, discussion and debate. A critical analysis of this requires an evaluation of the structure of this dialogue and the extent to which it functions in the public interest or "for the public good." This requires an evaluation of the social and political relevance of tabloids – that is, how the public sphere is utilized to discuss issues of social and political concern.

According to Jochen Gaugele (a Political Editor of a German tabloid who participated in public dialogue on *"The Tabloid Challenge"*[6]), "[g]ood journalism provides access to information to all groups in a society, not just the elite. A good newspaper should fascinate people who would otherwise not read at all" (IAJ 2006,9). Gaugele (IAJ 2006) argues that his tabloid can be defined as good journalism because it not only offers readers what the public wants (as opposed to what editors think their readers should have), but that it conforms to what he has referred to as the "seven tenets of good journalism":

1. Presents difficult subjects in a comprehensible way
2. Offers the readers actually what they want, not what they should want
3. Takes the readers seriously and views the world from the reader's perspective
4. Looks behind the scenes of power and sometimes even into the private life of the individual.
5. Reveals and sets the agenda and political debate.
6. Provides orientation and counselling
7. Is independent from party politics.

Arguments against tabloids highlight the ways in which tabloids often violate the basic ethics of journalism including objectivity, investigation, facts and the "pursuit of the truth." Critical discourse has focused on how the production of "irrelevant news" eventually engulfs "consequential" news. The concern here is the effect of this tabloid style of journalism across the press in general, at the expense of investigation, facts and elucidation.

As the Media Monitoring Project (MMP) in South Africa has highlighted, "Tabloids have introduced newspapers to millions of new readers, and some provide informative content on the inner pages. However, reporting in some of these tabloids is not only sensationalist in nature, lacking context and leading with shocking visuals and inflammatory headlines, but they are also blatantly sexist and frequently xenophobic. As a result journalistic practices of ethical conduct are sometimes sidelined by such tabloids. This leads to lower-quality news and less regard for human rights." (MMP 2007)

A gendered analysis

Limited research exists on gender portrayal in tabloids. Preliminary findings by the Media Monitoring Project (MMP) point to a general stereotyped portrayal of "foreigners" and women and to limitations to social



Shocking visuals are a common feature of tabloids (Uwazi, Tanzania)

Notes

[6]Public discussion forum hosted by the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) in South Africa, in July 2006. See IAJ (2006)

responsibility – both of which are key criteria in ethical journalism[7]. As Franz Kruger observes, while the participatory nature of tabloids is laudable, "[t]he question is whether that connectedness means a paper should uncritically buy into even the worst prejudices and superstitions of its audience" (2006, 31).

Recent audience research into the gendered nature of media reports revealed that women are more likely to be presented in stereotypical terms and images that emphasise their sexuality (GMBS 2003). Media have not done much in terms of challenging these stereotypes. It is however clear that the majority of audiences were not happy with this representation of women (GMAS 2005). The study on tabloids will also analyse the extent to which tabloids follow this general trend vis-à-vis the portrayal of men and women in the media.

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Notes

[7]See Retief's (2002) propositions regarding a code of ethics

Tabloids in Southern Africa

By Themba Mahleka

Much debate in the media world currently focuses on tabloids and tabloidisation in the news media. It would seem that tabloids are indeed a thriving part of our Southern African media landscape. Regardless of how we define such a tabloid, they are likely here to stay, in all their forms. Surveying nine countries in Southern Africa, there are 23 papers considered "tabloid" and 134 considered "mainstream."

Another notable trend is that the majority of tabloids found in the region are in English. Out of the 23 tabloid newspapers found in the region only 5 of them were not in English. These were; *Kaapse Son* (Afrikaans) of South Africa, *Spoti Starehe* and *Sani Newspaper* (both in Swahili) of Tanzania, *Kwayedza* (Shona) and *Umthunywa* (Ndebele) of Zimbabwe.

On potential problem with these figures is that defining tabloids is an illusive endeavour. Conducting a survey of tabloids that exist in the Southern Africa region seems like an easy task – maybe an afternoon of work, a few phone calls and a brief report write-up. Not as simple as it sounds.

In undertaking just such a task, I encountered various obstacles. Initially, it was locating people from the various countries who could assist with information. The next, reaching a meeting of minds insofar as what a tabloid actually is.

Traditionally, a tabloid is a newspaper with a particular format and/or size. Today the term is used more and more to refer to a newspaper which mainly focuses on, or focuses to great extent on, bizarre stories, celebrity stories, gossip columns, agony aunts, has lots of pictures (some controversial), etc. At this stage, I had to stress the point of content as opposed to format.

A fresh hurdle presented itself – some individuals I liaised with stated that there were no newspapers with content solely of that nature. I then had to stress the point that, most tabloids like *The Sun* (in South Africa) for instance will report on current affairs or "serious news" (a term which was used a lot during my correspondence) but will focus more on the less "serious news."

Another problem was that it is a lot easier to obtain information on what newspapers may be present in a certain country, but more challenging to a certain which of those newspapers is a tabloid newspaper. It is largely at the discretion of the person you are liaising with, to decide which paper is a tabloid and which paper is not. The obvious danger of this is that one may have distorted information, one would have to call four or five people (including representative of the particular tabloid) to make sure that the tabloid is in fact a tabloid.

After scaling all the obstacles (taking what information I could in certain situations), my initial analysis was that, countries with smaller populations, like Lesotho (1 900 000) and Swaziland (1 146 050) for example, reported that they did not have a single tabloid. Another

interesting fact is that there are 7 newspapers in Lesotho and 5 in Swaziland – this is significantly fewer newspapers than other countries.

Countries with greater populations, South Africa (46 900 000) and Tanzania (32 000 000) for example, not only had tabloids but also had a fair number (comparatively) of different tabloids. South Africa has 7 tabloid newspapers, and Tanzania has 5 tabloid newspapers.

Botswana, with fairly smaller population (1 690 000), however, does not fall into this seemingly emergent pattern of, the smaller the population the less tabloid newspapers available (if any). Botswana did report having 3 tabloid newspapers, the difference being that Botswana also had more newspapers in general (9 other newspapers). It seems, at least at a preliminary level, that the greater the variety of media (or newspapers) available, the greater the chances of there being tabloids.

COUNTRY	"MAINSTREAM" NEWSPAPER	TABLOIDS
Botswana	9	3
Lesotho	7	0
Malawi	7	2
Namibia	13	1
South Africa	31	7
Swaziland	5	0
Tanzania	24	5
Zambia	14	3
Zimbabwe	24	2
TOTAL	134	23


TRUTH

The *Daily Voice* is a success because it speaks to the people, writes **Fiona Forde**

Sensational, over-the-top tabloid trash was how some of my Johannesburg colleagues described our Western Cape sister paper, the *Daily Voice*. Man eats man. Dog eats baby. 7-year-old axes 8-year-old to death. Jesus lives in my toilet. I saw pigs my child. Boy raped. Girl missing. Child dead. If all this in the heart of the Mother City. Eish! You didn't make it up if you tried. They used to say If only that were true. Throughout last week I mon with the reporters as they produced another editions of life in the Cape Flats. Each morning y were out there, pounding the ground, talking to ir contacts about what was doing down in the mmunity, only to come back and vie for front-page ce to showcase their gory tales.
And sadly, I can vouch for just about every word y printed.
The week got off to a particularly bad start when mutilated baby's body was splashed across the st page. The month-old infant was found in the kyard of a Gugulethu home with its two tiny legs ngling from a cloth nappy. The baby's head and ns had been neatly hacked off. It was found with og busy nibbling at its flesh.
Tuesday brought the story of the 10-year-old who been stabbed to death when he refused to hand r his bike to a 16-year-old thug.
It was also the day the gay nanny did a runner in f boss's skirt and high heels, leaving her two ng charges all alone, prompting the witty head- e: "Homo and away".
Wednesday brought little reprieve, with a carni- resurfacing. The man had been lost at sea for three

Patrick Chauke, the National Assembly's home affairs committee chairperson.
"It's the pornography, the nudity, the moral lacking of the *Daily Voice* that bothers me."
It's not just about what they say, but the way they

"It's the kind of language these people relate to. If they didn't, tabloids like the Voice wouldn't be enjoying the success they are."
Ironically, it's those who don't read the tabloids who have most issue with them. Heated debates

Cape Flats tabloid in South Africa growing in popularity

Tabloids and Tabloidisation – the debate



Loga Virahswamy, President of Media Watch Organisation, Mauritius (left) debates tabloids with a local editor



Making sense of tabloid newspapers: some key considerations

By Lynette Steenveld and Larry Strelitz



Abstract

Many journalists and media critics question whether tabloid journalism is real journalism. While some propose that tabloids do not contribute to social and political development, others argue that they deal with social issues that impact on people's daily lives, and in so doing, contribute to a broader understanding of what is regarded as "political." One aspect of this is campaign journalism, where the tabloid acts as a "helper" in the community. The growing popularity of tabloids points to a need for research to understand their role and function in society.

Key words

tabloids, journalism, politics

Many mainstream journalists question whether headline-grabbing tabloids can be considered real journalism. For critics, one of the key definers of what constitutes journalism is that it provides information about the social world that its readers can use to make informed social and political decisions.

In contrast, tabloids privilege melodramatic tales of everyday personal experience. In so doing, arguably, they draw attention away from the wider political and economic processes that shape readers' lives. From this perspective, tabloids contribute little to the social processes that help build democratic societies – the defining rationale of journalism – and for this reason many dismiss them as worthless.

This particular critique foregrounds one aspect of the normative view of journalism: its provision of information that is useful for citizens in their political participation in democratic processes. Two points are noteworthy in this regard. First, the "crisis in journalism" that concerns both media producers and commentators is the declining interest in mainstream journalism (evidenced by declining audiences), and its impact on the political culture in societies that describe themselves as democracies. Second, the liberal view of journalism is wider than its information-providing role.

Ronning, for example, identifies three key purposes of journalism. First, it provides information that citizen's need "to know and exercise their civil rights." Second, it provides information that enables people to participate in the political sphere of their lives. Finally, it offers citizens representations of themselves that they can identify with

– and (ideally) propose a wide range of identities that people can inhabit (1994,15; see also Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001, 17-18).



Women take a critical look at media *Credit: Trevor Davies*

While the mainstream press are at their strongest in serving the first two functions, they are perhaps less successful in their execution of the third. It is this last aspect of journalism – its identity-constituting capacity – that may account for the decline in ordinary people's interest in the mainstream media, and the popularity of tabloids.

The two features that distinguish tabloids from the mainstream media are their mode of address, and focus on the politics of everyday issues and problems confronting their readership. This difference begs questions about how these aspects of journalism relate to the conventional understanding of its political role expressed in the first two functions of journalism identified above, and challenges us to think about tabloids as a particular form of journalism and how they address the issue of being both popular and politically engaging.

"Defining" tabloids

The current explosion of tabloids in South Africa and across Africa can be seen as part of a global and historical process that has been referred to as the "tabloidisation" of the news media (Eide 1997). This has resulted in a media form with three defining textual characteristics: *range, form*, and *style* (Uribe and Gunter 2004, 390).

The term *range* refers to a decreasing proportion of page space allocated to information compared to entertainment; to foreign as compared to local news; and to "hard" compared to "soft" news (sport, crime, celebrities, entertainment). *Form* refers to the privileging of visual representations (colourful photographs, headlines, graphics) as opposed to traditional dense text. Finally, *style* refers to the increased personalised angle of coverage – both in the highlighting of stories of ordinary people as well as the focus on the private lives of public figures (Uribe and Gunter 2004, 390). Another aspect of this style is their conversational tone, which often mirrors the colloquial language of readers. In this way, they set up a more "egalitarian" relationship between themselves and their audience, rather than pontificating from on high (Fiske 1992). This feature, together with more local stories and a personalised approach , creates a more intimate relationship between the paper and its readers.

Some aspects of these formal qualities of tabloids – their "sensationalism", personalisation, and focus on private concerns – have been described by Jostein Gripsrud (1992) as akin to the main components of melodrama which emerged in Europe in the 18th century. The French revolution marked a change in consciousness from a belief in the sacred to the secular ordering of the world. This meant that the social conflicts and upheavals people experienced could no longer be attributed to spiritual forces, but rather the battle between the primal forces of good and evil embodied in individuals.

In this new context, he argues, we can understand the melodramatic as "an expressionist aesthetic, striving to *externalise* what is underneath the chaotic and uncertain surface of modern existence" (1992, 87). Melodrama's use of the spectacular and the sensational aimed, according to Gripsrud, "to demonstrate the *strength* of the forces at play, their pervasiveness, the impossibility of getting around them" (1992, 87). In drama, these elements would have the effect of moving the audience, thus increasing the plays' pedagogical effect. As Gripsrud (1992, 87) notes, melodrama meant to teach the audience a lesson and in that, it had a didactic function. He notes:

> Today's popular press also teaches the audience a lesson, every day. It says that what the world (the news) is really about, is emotions, fundamental and strong: love, hate, grief, joy, lust and disgust. Such emotions are shared by all human beings, regardless of social positions, and so is "general morality" crime does not pay, betrayal is betrayal, doing to others… etc. Sex and death are the two aspects of life that create the most intense emotions, so naturally they are the most heavily focused themes. (1992, 87-88)

This privileging of the emotional and the moral – as opposed to "the rational" that the mainstream media are premised on – may also go some way to explaining their popularity.

Another feature of tabloids is stories that deal with phenomena and situations that rupture our empirically based understandings of the world: alien abductions, impregnations by ghosts and so on. Cultural theorist John Fiske addresses this feature of tabloids arguing that they produce subjectivities that are different from those produced by the mainstream press (1992, 46). The latter present information as objective facts selected from an empiricist reality. Good "objective" investigation produces the truth. Their tone is serious, official, and impersonal, aimed at producing a rational understanding of social life. They address their readers from the position of one who knows, providing information for those who do not.

In contrast, the stories of the extraordinary in tabloids are appealing because they play with this common-sense understanding of the real. Fiske writes, "One of its most characteristic tones of voice is that of a sceptical laughter which offers the pleasures of disbelief, the pleasures of not being taken in" (1992, 48). He argues that ordinary people get pleasure from this kind of story because their tongue-in-cheek appreciation of it is a way of signaling approval for versions of reality that are scorned by the powers that be. This response, he asserts, is "the historical result of centuries of subordination which the people have not allowed to develop into subjection" (1992, 48).
In some countries, stories of witchcraft may fall into this category, but they could also express a different set of cultural myths for explaining certain kinds of social situations or events. For example, in a study of the Zimbabwean tabloid, *uMthunywa*, Mabweazara (2006) found that most readers believed that the paranormal occurrences reported in the paper were factual descriptions of real experiences in people's lives.

Similarly, Deon Du Plessis, publisher and part-owner of the *Daily Sun,* defends his paper carrying stories about magic and ancestral spirits:

> I'm not going to slag off these beliefs. We once carried a picture of a bed on the roof in the township of Mangaung. The owner insisted that he woke up there. His neighbour told our reporter that there was a white horse hanging around, and that the horse and the removal of the bed were connected by magic. Are we supposed to go to Mangaung and tell people they're talking shit? I'm not going to do any such thing. We'll report it as it was told to us. (*Noseweek*, February 2006, 27)

Du Plessis's comments accord with those of journalists working on the American supermarket tabloid, the *National Enquirer.* According to Bird (1990, 378), a standard constantly invoked by these journalists is the mainstream journalistic tenet of objectivity and that they deem a story "accurate" if it faithfully reports what sources said or wrote. As Bird concludes, "by this standard, much of what is written in tabloids can be claimed to be exceptionally accurate" (1990, 378).[8]

The popularity of tabloids

While remaining sensitive to the specificity of national socio-political contexts, it is possible to discern generic reasons for the popularity of tabloid journalism. In explaining the popularity of these media amongst the British working classes, Sparks (1988, 216-217) postulates that political and economic power in a stable democracy is so far removed from the real lives of the mass of the population that they have no interest

Notes

[8]As Roschco, points out, "Giving sources the responsibility for supplying content [has] freed reporters from the need for extensive knowledge about subject matter" (1975: 42).

in monitoring its disposal. In other words, he argues, in a stable democracy the popularity of the tabloids says more about the relationship of ordinary working people to the social and political processes that govern their lives, than about the press.

It is significant that during the 1980s, when popular political activity was at its height in South Africa, we witnessed the emergence of the "alternative" press. This media had an explicitly political purpose, expressed in their aim to "popularise, educate, and organise," and thus focused on social and political issues – traditionally defined in relation to the anti-apartheid struggle. It is noteworthy that the current tabloid explosion in South Africa occurred just 10 years after the first democratic elections.

While our democracy is still in its infancy, it is worth considering whether the growth of the tabloid press in this country is a sign of the alienation felt amongst the working classes from the formal political processes, or whether it is a sign of "struggle fatigue." As Gripsrud notes with regard to the popular press in Norway, "[I]t still remains a pervasive fact that most people prefer pleasure to politics, and this may be understood as a choice made on the basis of some sort of recognition of their social conditions" (1992, 92).

The ten years of democracy may be significant in another way. The rise of the mass circulation popular press in both America and Europe coincided with the growth of a new reading public, a result of the introduction of mass education and the resulting growth in literacy. In similar vein, perhaps in Africa we are witnessing the growth of new reading publics with their own "specific socio-cultural traits and contingencies" (Dahlgren 1991, 16). If this is so, we need a sociological understanding of how such publics are constituted, and of the role of journalism and other media in this process.

As Ornebring and Jonsson (2004, 285) observe, while there is arguably a mainstream mediated public sphere dominated by elite sources, the structural elitism (who is quoted, what kinds of stories are covered) of this sphere in turn creates a need for one, or several, *alternative* public spheres. Tabloid journalism has, according to these authors, the ability to broaden the public, giving news-access to groups not previously targeted by the prestige press. Similarly, Sparks (1991, 63) notes that the British press consists of different kinds of print media produced for different social classes and that they have to be understood as part of the differing cultural lives of those classes.

The place and content of a newspaper in working-class culture is quite different from that in middle-class or ruling-class culture. The press, he argues, is not, and never has been, a single self-evident and undifferentiated category. What we need to investigate, then, is the role played by tabloids in the social, cultural, and political life of different classes in the particular countries in which they have emerged.

Service or campaign journalism: A different kind of popular journalism

Eide argues that tabloid journalism does not have a unitary identity, but is a differentiated form. On the one hand there are tabloids solely preoccupied with moral disorder and threats to everyday life, and on the other there are those which incorporate what he calls "service and campaign journalism" (1997, 180). This kind of journalism addresses readers as consumers rather than citizens, and its purpose is "to provide the readers with guidance" (Eide 1997, 177) in their quest for obtaining goods and services that improve their daily lives. It is a "manual for everyday life" (1997, 177), "providing guidance in conducting a good life" (1997, 180). Eide writes:

> They [journalists] address a *lifeworld* where information *does* matter for the reader, not a *system* world where readers' possibilities for action are limited. This is "news-you-can-use" – the newspaper becomes a "use-paper" (1997, 177).

In service journalism, according to Eide (1997), the role of the journalist is as advocate and campaigner on behalf of consumers. The journalist is an advisor, "the hero or good-helper" (1997, 178) and in the process, the newspaper builds an alliance or makes a contract

with the reader. While the journalist is the hero, the civil servant, the government bureaucrat or local councillor plays the role of the antagonist.

This description of a form of popular journalism exemplifies aspects of some of South Africa's tabloid press. Deon Du Plessis, in commenting on the *Daily Sun*, notes:

> We don't do traditional politics. We do real politics. Real politics is shit flowing past your front door because the municipality won't fix the sewerage. It's workmen leaving open holes for kids to fall into. It's police ignoring calls for help. Last year [2005], we did a thing called the Hall of Shame. Every day, we invited people to send us details of government failing them, then published the names and addresses of those responsible. I think that campaign contributed more to the emphasis Mbeki's government is now placing on local government delivery. That's where the rubber hits the proverbial road. Don't say we're not political. (*Noseweek*, February 2006, 26)

Other editors concur with this service role of tabloid journalism. For example, Ingo Capraro, editor of *Die Son*, has noted: "We have a weekly 'campaign' of sorts going, aimed at the empowerment of women to help combat AIDS" (*Mail & Guardian online* 8 December 2004). *City Press* editor, Mthatha Tsedu, pointed out that "many people with social problems call the *Daily Sun* before they call the police". (*Mail & Guardian online,* 2 July 2005)

Critique of tabloid journalism: political journalism?

Understanding the reasons behind the popularity of the tabloids should not be confused with the commercial agenda that drives the publishing companies. While their rhetoric may be of "serving the people," and "giving them what they want," this happily coincides with their drive for profits – gained precisely from those very people who formerly were not regarded as significant enough to constitute a viable "market segment." In South Africa, it is significant that the main producer of the tabloid press is Media24, a subsidiary of Naspers, former supporter of the Apartheid state.

In this context, Wasserman (2006, 180-181) points out that Deon Du Plessis's description of their tabloids' black readership in purely economic terms – as a "niche market" – obscures its political and economic construction during the apartheid era. Furthermore, he reminds us that the South African explosion of tabloids coincided with the heightened drive for profits within the industry – achieved by "the reduction of staff, privileging commercial imperatives, the erosion of specialised reporting and the juniorisation of the newsroom" (2006, 179). As part of this commercial imperative, tabloids need to connect with the "structure of feeling" of their readers. This may, in part, explain the xenophobia of South African tabloids identified by critics such as Sean Jacobs (2004, 148-149, cited in Wasserman 2006, 181).

One of the most challenging critiques of tabloids is that their focus on personal experience and local stories offers an inadequate or simplistic understanding of social and political processes. Sparks argues that this approach "offer[s] the experiences of the individual as the direct and unmediated key to the understanding the social totality" (1992, 41). This leads to a popular misconception that personal experience is a means of "grounding" or validating what is regarded as "real". Instead, as Sparks argues, we need to understand the ways in which structural forces such as the economy, politics, and prevailing ideologies shape the kinds of experiences we have as individuals. As he writes, "The simple reality is that the nature of the social totality is neither constituted through immediate individual experience nor entirely comprehensible in its terms. Between the individual and the social totality are the complex mediations of institutional structures, economic relations and so on" (1992, 41). This matrix of mediations is ostensibly what the mainstream media are supposed to inform its citizens of.

It is by providing this kind of information that they function as one of the institutional supports to creating or sustaining a democracy. By intervening in this terrain, mainstream journalism performs its critical role and potentially contributes to social change. In Sparks' words, "Any attempt to transform

that totality must necessarily understand these mediations in order to reshape them. Critical thought must, therefore, necessarily involve the processes of abstraction even if the critical impulse itself is ultimately grounded in immediate experience" (Sparks 1992, 41).

In sum, the critique of tabloid media is that by focussing on the experiential and the emotive, they do not offer their readers the opportunity to reflect critically on the social world that shapes their own experiences. Such critical reflection involves the ability to move from the concrete to the abstract, and from the experience of the particular to the general.

Conclusion

Tabloids are a complex phenomenon, which need to be understood economically, politically, and socially. There is a need for qualitative research to deepen understanding of the relationship between the textual strategies of the tabloids and their reader popularity. However, the ethnographic emphasis on meaning making at the point of consumption can often result in the downplaying of the ways in which experience is structured by objective conditions. In addition to this, political economists remind us that the production and distribution of culture (such as tabloids) take place within a specific economic system and this places constraints on the range of textual meanings made available by the producing institutions. Therefore, such an investigation does not imply an uncritical celebration of popular preferences, but rather points to the need to understand how they have come about, and what dimension of the social structure they either challenge or help hold in place.

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An Analogy Between Tabloids and the Wild, Wild West: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly?

By Lizette Rabe

Abstract

Although old news in many media-environments, tabloids are still new news in South Africa. The introduction of this media phenomenon created many opportunities. The question is whether they will be fulfilled or whether they will be missed opportunities. For the moment, it seems it is still frontier country, almost the Wild, Wild West, where everything goes. This article analyses this phenomenon by drawing on the title of the well-known Western, The Good, the Bad and the Ugly. It tries to answer what is good about this new genre in print media, what can be described as bad, and what aspects can only be described as ugly.

Key words

community, democracy, freedom of speech, human rights, print media, society, South Africa, tabloids, ubuntu-journalism

South Africa is one of the few countries in the world where print media statistics are on the rise, both in terms of titles and circulation (Balding 2007). This is good news, because it means more people are reading. Whole communities that were not newspaper consumers before are changing. In a country such as South Africa, this is a reason for celebration.

However, if you analyse what is being consumed, one wonders about its impact on a society still trying to establish basic human rights. A media baron reportedly once said it does not matter how low his opposition goes, he will just go lower.

It seems this is what is happening in terms of tabloid content in at least one tabloid war raging on the streets of the Western Cape. If one looks at posters mounted by the two local tabloids on lampposts, you have to feel sorry for the accidental visitor. On which planet are these weird, but not wonderful things happening?

Which probes the next question: What do they add to our society and the issues we are grappling with at this stage in development of a young democracy? Especially one still struggling to overcome the legacy of 350 years of colonial and apartheid rule, and trying to live up to a constitution that (in words)

encapsulates freedom and equality to each citizen in the country?

For journalists – also those working on these new titles – it is important to discuss from within the industry ways of improving industry and institution. Debates, discussions and articles on the topic should therefore be welcomed; also their criticisms.

It is interesting that some tabloids inevitably call upon freedom of expression to publish what they try to justify as being in the public's interest (although one can conclude it is really about what interests the public). Yet, they are not so tolerant of voices that criticise. It has always been an interesting phenomenon that journalists are quick to be critical of others, yet do not tolerate criticism against themselves. This remains one of our media's weak points, to our detriment. However, that is another issue.

The publication of tabloids is a division in our print media industry that is still in its Wild, Wild West phase, and therefore it might be appropriate to present a critique of them in terms of one well-known western film, *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.*

When it comes to tabloids, many questions arise. Can we take a tabloid model aimed at the working class in a developed, industrialised country (the typical British model) and transplant it to a country struggling with many inequalities – such as gender and economic inequality?

Background

Without delving too deeply into a media-historio-graphical perspective, it should suffice to say that tabloids are new to the South African media landscape.

Of course, one can say that sensationalist journalism has always been with us. Cicero criticised the "first" Western journalist Chrestus for "sensationalising" news (Diederichs; De Beer 1998, 86). Another source shows a graphic sketch of a "horrible monster" in a broadsheet of 1531, portraying a freak of nature (a conjoined pig) (Conboy 2002, 24).



Daily Sun Billboard towers in the Johannesburg CBD
Credit: Brendan Kennedy

That which is out of the ordinary intrigues human beings. After all, that is what constitutes news.

The Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Affairs at Harvard University, characterises tabloids as "a downgrading of hard news and upgrading of sex, scandal and infotainment" (Watson; Hill 2003, 285). Tabloids as sensationalist journalism began in the United States with competition between media tycoons Pulitzer and Hearst, who "compacted" news; wrote shorter reports; splashed bigger headings; and made bolder approaches (Encarta, 1999, 1898). Tabloid as a proprietary name for tablets of condensed medicine, registered for a brand of tablet in 1884, was adapted to fit the underlying notion of compression used to describe the condensed way of writing.

Should it then be a matter of having your tabloid and swallowing it?

As in other matters, the occurrence of tabloids in print media is a case of horses for courses. The media horse performing in the tabloid race typically has to cater to common denominators in the lower end of the market. However, does it need to be common?

In terms of media produces targeted at certain markets, tabloids target the lower end of the Living Standards Measurements (LSMs), which range from 1 to 10. You are either part of the tabloid market, or you are not. And you can choose to expose yourself to such a product or not.

Or ?

Not, according to media scholar Froneman who feels there is a definite tabloid intrusion on the public sphere. He argues that he has no choice of being confronted with what tabloids offer their markets. In fact, he contends that the obscene posters mounted right in front of you at a traffic light, mean that neither you nor your family have a choice about this intrusion. "You are exposed against your will – drawn in – and down. And this is a fundamental attack on human rights." Therefore, tabloids not only have a potential influence on their target markets, but all of society.

Development of tabloids

In the South African context, the tabloid genre is new in the sense that the opportunity to service the bottom end of the media market was not exploitable before. Our market saw its first real tabloid in 2002, with the introduction of the *Daily Sun* published by Media24 – the biggest selling daily in South Africa for some time, and now also the biggest selling newspaper title in South Africa (Sampson 2007).

The *Kaapse Son*, also published by Media24 arrived in March 2003. The *Daily Voice* arrived in April 2005, when the *Son* went from a weekly to a daily frequency. The *Sunday Sun* (Media24) is also part of the tabloid family, with a weekly newcomer, *Sondag* (Media24), in 2007. *Son* has various regional publications: *Son Noord* (Gauteng), *Sentraal* (Free State) and *Oos* (Eastern Cape).

Meanwhile, other newspapers have also changed course in terms of content becoming more tabloidy – like the *Sowetan* (published by Johncom) and *Beeld* and *Die Burger* (published by Media24).

Esser argues that on a micro level, tabloidisation "can be seen as a media phenomenon involving the revision of traditional newspaper and other media formats driven by reader preferences and commercial requirements. On the macro level, it "can be seen as a social phenomenon both instigating and symbolising major changes to the constitution of society" (as cited in Watson & Hill 2002, 285).

It is accepted that "the term is used more often as a concept than in physical reference to the more compact size of a tabloid newspaper" (Franklin et all 2005, 259).

Therefore, there must be distinction between tabloid *format* and tabloid *content*. The *Mail & Guardian* is tabloid format, but in terms of content, a so-called *qualoid*, or compact. So is *Die Burger's* Saturday supplement *By*, a qualoid, with all the potential of becoming a stand-alone weekly compact newspaper of quality.

It seems the newspaper market worldwide is moving to a more consumer-friendly format, with famous brands such as *The Times* of London now publishing a compact as well as a broadsheet version. According to media managers here and abroad (personal communication), it seems it is only advertisers who, at this stage, want the broadsheets to remain, because of their literal broadsheet advertisements. The British *Guardian* is a compact, between the size of a tabloid and broadsheet. The Dutch *NRC Handelsblad* has launched a new generation product in format and contents, *NRC. Next,* aimed at a younger market, although without a tabloid content (Donker 2007).

In other words, tabloid does not refer to the format so much as it does to the style; the *typography*, the *treatment* and the *presentation* of news. Unfortunately, in too many cases in South Africa one has to add the unprofessional culture within which this journalism is practised where news is treated as a one-sided, unverified, unbalanced commodity (various examples exist, but the Laurie Gaum character assassination in the *Kaapse Son* in 2005 is one such example).

Journalism/tabloidism

If, for traditional journalism the essentials for every story must be the basic principles of accuracy, balance and independence while answering the five W's and the one H – who, what, where, when, why and how – for sensationalist journalism it would be the six S's: sex, scandal, "skinner"[9], skin, sensation, sport.

Of the many desperately needed studies, one would be an audience study of the credibility these publications have among consumers. From observations, it seems that readers read solely for entertainment purposes, and do not generally believe what they read, as true.

Some titles, maybe some editions, pass some of the above journalistic criteria. If one takes the definition of tabloidism to mean sensationalist journalism one can clearly see that there are tabloids and then there are tabloids – many different levels of quality exist. It is even rumoured that one tabloid within a geographical area where a tabloid war is fought, wants to position itself above another because one has become too sleazy, even to the standards of the fellow-tabloid-editor.

Without going into a theoretical unpacking of tabloids, one could say that the phenomenon of tabloids is a development within the capitalist political economy of the media theory. This would allow one to critique it accordingly. However, academic theory and tabloids are worlds apart.

The phenomenon might therefore be more at home in terms of the "Wild Wild West" analogy. *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* is applicable. The many positive things about tabloids constitute the good. Then there are those not so good – maybe they can constitute the bad, and then you get the plain ugly stuff.

The ugly

In one phrase – irresponsible journalism. This would include the mostly brainless (as it seems those in charge of tabloids barely use cerebral matter to contemplate these matters) perpetuation of stereotypes, especially in terms of gender, but also a number of other issues, such as xenophobia.

One can justly ask, have these guys (the editors/managers are without exception male) ever heard of human rights?

What about trying to adhere to our Constitution? Racism is not to be tolerated; in fact, newspapers will hound out an individual if there is the slightest allegation of racism. Yet, sadly, sexism is not only accepted, but also perpetrated and capitalised on.

One experienced, top journalist (personal communication) said regarding a tabloid that in one afternoon they managed to destroy what non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other activists built up in ten years in terms of responsible sexual behaviour. This journalist referred to how a story on HIV/AIDS managed to get it all wrong in terms of representation, terminology, etc.

This is just one such an example.

Without having to conduct an extensive survey, it is clear that in terms of the representation of gender, class, age, race, ethnicity, beliefs, etc., we need to do some serious soul searching.

Or is it acceptable to ignore not only our Constitution, but universally accepted gender/human rights by portraying women in a demeaning way in a publication that is not only accessible to all age groups, but of which the contents are also brandished on lamp posts? Indeed, feed the interests of the public in the name of circulation and therefore income; and forget about the public interest?

Then, we prefer not to confront ourselves with why South Africa has the highest rape statistics in the world, and that domestic violence is on the increase. Of course, one cannot state that there is a direct

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[9]A colloquial Afrikaans word (correct Standard Afrikaans spelling is 'skinder'), pronounced 'skunna', meaning gossip.

correlation between tabloids and crimes against women and children without scientific research.



Image of a 29 year old grandmother sensationalises teenage pregnancy
L'Hebdo, Mauritius

But what are the tabloids doing about these social ills?

Tabloids continue to portray women as naïve creatures, who think *tokoloshes*[10] rape them, and who display their bodies as objects. An object cannot think, therefore cannot feel pain. Objectification has been described as the violence of the male gaze. Every publication of a stereotypical image of a woman as a sex object perpetuates this violence. Stereotypes are the "standardised mental images" that represent an oversimplified or uncritical judgment (Lazier and Gagnard Kendrick 1993, 201).

The "subtlest and most pervasive of influences… are those which create and maintain the repertory of stereotypes. We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And these preoccupations, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception," wrote another feminist media scholar (Gist 1993, 104). This is emphasised by Van Zoonen's observation, "The portrayal of women as objects to be viewed by the (male) audience is a key element of western patriarchal culture… The inclusion of females' bodies as decorative components… is common" (1994, 87).

This commodification and stereotyping of women is not only found in images, but also in the text and style seen in tabloids and therefore one can safely say that the media is not unguilty of why women are treated so violently in some communities.

Example: A *Daily Voice* front page featured a photograph of a dead woman run over by a truck. The heading read "Mother Trucker." This of course intended that the reader to recall the phrase "Mother Fucker." The day's poster repeated the same.

One can safely assume that nothing this woman did in life justified such a label in death. And nothing gave the tabloid the right to demolish an individual's human rights in such a way – and, in the process, disrespect every woman in society. In fact, every member of society.

The portrayal of women is but one aspect that can be categorised under the notion ugly. What about the journalism practised in these newsrooms? A basic code of ethics for professional journalism contains at least these elements: accuracy, balance, fairness, a justified story and independence of the writer – with the tagline maximum truth, minimum harm.

The question then arises: How is it possible that journalists, editors and publishers cannot distance themselves from the so-called commercial successes and not reflect on the impact this type of pulp journalism has on society?

If sensation becomes the standard (and there certainly are enough signs of this meandering to so-called mainstream media as well), how is it going to erode the status and credibility of the media?

Notes

[10]A mythical figure in Southern African folklore

Journalists working at one of the most successful tabloids admitted to an editor in their group that they themselves do not believe between 40 to 60% of the stories in their own paper (Tsedu 2005). How can people who should know better defend this?

In our young democracy, the media still has to redefine its role. It would be a sad day if journalism that has no credibility defined that role – a contradiction in terms. It will readily play into the hands of those who would like to see the media undermined. The fact that the media – both as an industry and as an institution – are doing it to ourselves, makes it even worse.

Now, the bad

One is tempted to ask – Is tabloidism, journalism? How does tabloidism answer to journalism's principles? In other words, how is an actual event that answers to certain news values, reported upon in a tabloid way?

Another question: What are the news values within the tabloid genre? Do they differ, and should they differ from other news values? If news is, put simply, an event that is of significance to a certain audience because of certain reasons, how is it treated in a tabloid environment?

Or is it in some cases a made-up story? Not really fabricated (hopefully not), but close to it.

How can a rumour be taken as a story? How can it not be verified; not presented in an accurate, balanced, fair and independent manner? Resulting in those stories of which one can only say it is another example of letting the facts stand in the way of a good story.

The next point also lies between ugly, good and something vaguely bad. Reporting on – or manufacturing – the bizarre, the absurd and the banal. Is it news?

What are we feeding our markets? Is it about being in the gutter, staying in the gutter, and not aspiring to something better? How much is tabloidism contributing to dumbing down a market that, having been on the receiving end of colonialism and apartheid, is contending with an education system that failed them? One tabloid honcho, of a tabloid that prides itself on developmental news (personal communication), said of another, "Do they really want to show their readers they are shit and they will remain shit?"

The fact that the tabloids use a bastardised language – please note – not creolised – can also be seen as racist. South African poor whites in the 1930s were elevated from their socio-economic situation by aspirational reading offered by Naspers (which owns Media24), a company which at that time published mainly for white Afrikaners. The question needs to be, why then give poor coloured people sleaze to read – in a language worse than they themselves are speaking?

Some tabloid editors fool themselves and those wishing to believe them that tabloids stand up for the underdog, for the powerless, that they are doing developmental news.

But how long before more people (and not only the critics) realise that the king is, indeed, without clothes? Tabloids themselves are supposed to tell their readers exactly that, in a consistent way and in a manner that respects their audiences. Sadly, it seems that they do not realise their own value to be an agent of constructive change in our communities.

Instead, it is boasted that members of the public start to threaten one another that they will smear their names in the tabloids – in other words: tabloids will publish their one-sided, unbalanced, unverified information.

Another bad consequence of tabloids is the erosion of what is acceptable journalism in the rest of our media, be it on television, on radio or in print. Language becomes more and more daring and reaches a level of vulgarity, which some tabloids take to be standard language. Visuals are also more daring – one sees more flesh, more horror, and more violence.

Even the community newspapers are following suit. (personal observation). One wonders whether it is in the chase for circulation that they forget their mission?

And then, of course, there is the purely sensationalist handling of stories as the point of departure, both in presentation and text. How acceptable is it if newspapers that pride themselves on being "papers of record" start saying they have to take their example from the tabloids (personal communication)?

And what about the good?

There are many things to be said in favour of tabloids. One just hopes that the good will be victorious over the bad – and especially the ugly. Otherwise this new, exciting, invigorating medium is going to let an opportunity slip which will be just, well, too tragic to contemplate.

What is good about tabloids?

Certainly, it can be the voice of the voiceless, the paper of the people and the media of the masses. The more media voices in a democracy, the better.

If alternative media did its share to work towards democratisation in the '80s, then tabloids are the new alternative media. In the '80s, lack of support from South Africa's mainstream media to support social movements led to the formation of the alternative media, well-documented by Switzer and Adhikari (2000). As Biagi writes, "[C]auses need a voice, and if those voices are not represented in the mainstream press, publications emerge to support alternative views" (2005, 59).

Tabloids have the potential to be the voice for causes in the market it serves. The question is whether the commercial imperative will allow the social imperative to be the driver, instead of the other way round. The potentially powerful position of tabloids should rest on a business model that will allow these media to flourish. After all, just because it is a "tabloid" it should not reduce the voiceless masses to naïve, base, common, pathetic individuals.

In terms of the business of newspapering, it is an exciting new development and contribution to the South African newspaper landscape. It represents a growth in the newspaper market that few other countries can show.

It is, in a word, a phenomenon and many media houses look with envy at the South African market and its growing opportunities to expand profit margins, adding value to the share price.

The question is how this should be managed? Because this might also be its biggest threat.

Tabloids created work opportunities, from journalism jobs, to printing to distribution. There are inspiring tales of newspaper vendors who started out selling a couple of newspapers a day, who are now vendor tycoons, with sub-vendors. In a sense one can say it is a revolution in newspapering (without sounding too sensationalist).

In terms of content, it also encompasses a new way of telling stories and of representing these stories, which, in the best cases is something to be commended, explored and studied.

Also in terms of typography, there is new development: The bold layout and big visuals that are characteristic of tabloids (leading to their nickname in Britain as the red tops).

In other words, it adds value to the current media mix. It provides more choices. It adds to our media richness in a developing market. It has new characteristics.

Most importantly, it has made non-readers read. These newcomers did not take circulation away from existing markets. The question, of course, remains, but *what* are they reading? One hopes this will be the foundation for moving on to other reading material.

It also added a new definition to developmental news, or how-to-information for a developing market. One can also describe it as empowerment news. In terms of this developmental news model, one

needs to be specific. Some tabloids do it, some say they do it, and some think they do it.

Done well, developmental journalism must be the most important contribution tabloids can make, because this lays the foundation for a new lower middle class to develop from a raw working class.

That is why it is so important that tabloidism fulfils its potential and uses the opportunity to establish a truly *ubuntu*-journalism in South Africa.

This emerging market can serve all kinds of existing and new media products. Not only for business opportunities, but for empowerment that goes hand in hand with such a development.

Lastly, it is a fun new medium.

The media and journalists are far too serious, and as journalists we take ourselves far too serious. The weight of representing the Fourth Estate – which is not a new property on the Atlantic Seaboard's Golden Mile marketed by Pam Golding (as someone, really, said) – weighs far too heavily on our shoulders, for far too long.

Tabloids have put the much-needed fun back into journalism. But this may be the point to reflect on. Fun cannot mean publish and be damned; publish without responsibility. That is not fun, that is criminal.

Conclusion

Tabloids can be a great new, innovative product. The question should be: Why not allow it to flourish as a vibrant journalistic product in a vibrant young democracy? Why allow it to be crippled by a dated model that is yet another manifestation of how a certain part of our population are still colonised by white men and their idea of what a tabloid should be?

A starting point to establishing tabloids will add value to communities, is that tabloids also need to adhere to an ethical code. Some already have such codes, but they clearly do not apply them. Some are apparently working on them – but if they do not intend to adhere to it, they should spare themselves the energy and effort. Fact is, if they base their work on a professional ethical code, there will be an immediate improvement in what is dished out to an unsuspecting and gullible market.

Basic principles within a developmental journalism model need to be applied. Otherwise it might be a success story in terms of the short term – maybe. What about the long term? How will it impact the integrity and credibility of the media as an institution? Tabloids need to adhere to the following basic principles:

- In terms of accuracy – how many sources were used to check the story?
- How was it verified?
- Is it fair?
- Was there any invasion of privacy?
- Is it independent?
- What are the reasons for the story? (Someone with a hidden agenda trying to avenge himself?)
- Might the editor perhaps have an axe to grind with someone?
- Was it in the public's interest – or purely something that interested the public?
- Is it a justifiable story, or simply malicious *skinner*?

These are just a couple of the most basic checklist-questions for stories.



Journalist, Erin Pottie, reviews the *Daily Sun*

If the voice of the voiceless, the paper of the people, the media of the masses, do not adhere to this, it will be a missed opportunity to be innovative in a new market, in a new democracy.

In conclusion, many questions remain. What will this do to the credibility of the Fourth Estate? And why is the opportunity not used to establish a new paradigm of journalism? One that is popular with intrinsic *ubuntu*-"people care"-characteristics?

To return to the analogy of this article, how long will we remain in a state of living in the Wild, Wild West, where it seems every tabloid can shoot from hip – and get away with it?

This author is convinced good tabloidism is possible. It does not have to be pulp journalism. The challenge should be how to do sensationalist journalism within the paradigms of journalistic principles.

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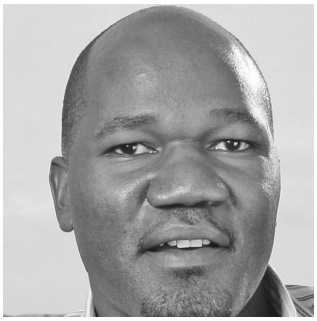
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Boon or bane? The rise of tabloidisation and implications for the quality press in South Africa

By Dumisani Moyo and Nkosinathi Selekane

Abstract

There is growing concern the world over that serious and analytical or "quality" newspapers are becoming less and less serious in their treatment of day-to-day issues and taking on features that resemble the tabloids in a development that is known as "tabloidisation." Some argue that the success of tabloid papers, which thrive on sensationalism, scandal, sport and infotainment, has forced the quality press to water down their content in order to suit commercial demands at the expense of serving the public interest. By first exploring the meanings and origins of the concepts of "quality press", "tabloids" and "tabloidisation", this paper seeks to address the question of whether tabloids can make a positive contribution to society.

Key words

social responsibility, public interest, public sphere, democracy, quality press, tabloids, tabloidisation

There is growing concern that commercialisation of the press throughout the world has led to the decline of "quality" information that is supplied by the news media. Terms such as "dumbing down" and "soaping" have gained currency in reference to this decline. The struggle for survival in an increasingly competitive environment has forced the "quality" press to turn to the borrowing of content forms and presentation formats from the "tabloid" press – with the result that these media become more sensational and tabloid–like in outlook, derogatively known as "tabloidisation." The hybridisation of both content and form is linked to the phenomenal success of tabloid newspapers in terms of both readership figures and attraction of advertisers, which tends to suggest that readers increasingly prefer entertainment–oriented content to informative content.

These anxieties about the erosion of quality newspapers relate to a set of assumptions about the role of the media in a democracy. It has been argued, for example, that tabloidisation compromises the civic and democratic function of the media (Franklin 1998, 4). McManus (1994, 147) states that market journalism is contradictory to the normative role of the press. Normative theories of the media emphasise the importance of

"quality" information over entertainment content. This emphasises that "quality" information can facilitate democratic discourse, leading to discussions and debates that revive the ideal role of news media as platforms for public debate.

This ideal role includes the fact that the media are also important tools for educating people, interpreting events and offering analysis to the public. More importantly, in the case of fledgling democracies such as South Africa, the media needs to play a critical role in both nation building and the nurturing of democracy. The need to fulfil such a critical role therefore raises the question whether newly emerging nations such as South Africa can afford the luxury of a media that merely seeks to entertain.

In Africa, the chief enemy to press freedom is usually considered to be the state, with privatisation and opening up of markets seen as the answer. However, this ignores the problematic role of the market (Rønning 1994). While market liberals suggest that leaving journalism to the free market guarantees the freedom of the press from the apparatus of the state, that does not in return guarantee press freedom from the market (Curran 2002). Market forces hamper private media in fulfilling its ideal role.

The quality press: what quality?

It is imperative that we start by defining what we mean by the quality press. Colin Sparks (cited in Malovic and Vilovic 2004), for example, defines the quality press thus:

> Quality newspapers are large format newspapers that report news in depth, often with serious tone and higher–level language. News is dominated by national and international events, politics, business, with less emphasis on celebrities and gossip.

The quality press seems to engage in stating facts of stories, so readers interpret the stories for themselves. Stories usually maintain objectivity and are not full of opinions. The quality press does not employ unconventional language to address its readers but uses formal language (Malovic and Vilovic 2004, 2). Focus is more on providing informative content and less entertainment content (Park 1960). These newspapers focus on using texts more than visuals. Quality newspapers have long stories with "in-depth reportage," and are known for being able to sustain investigative journalism, which has become a costly affair in the 21st century. Investigative journalism is one of the most important features of the quality press. Malovic and Vilovic (2004, 1) state, "the quality press has never sought to attract buyers and readers by using huge photographs and sensational bold headlines." The quality press is the closest in playing the normative role of the press, as it dwells on discussions of political events and democratic issues that are pivotal to democratic states.

The tabloids

The Oxford Dictionary defines tabloid as "a newspaper having pages half the size of a broadsheet, written in a popular style," and explains its origin as "first referring to a tablet of medicine: the current sense reflects the idea of information being presented in a form that is easily digested." The tabloid press tends to be easier to read and includes opinions in articles (Joseph 2005, 30). Early usage of the term associated it with the physical dimension of newspapers and their easy portability, which enabled people to carry and read in confined spaces such as commuter transport (Langer 2003). More recently, the term tabloid has come to be associated with the debasement or vulgarisation of journalism.

Critics generally accuse tabloid newspapers of being obsessed with celebrities, gossip, and giving more space on scandal and sport at the expense of serious reporting (Merrill 2006, 1). Sensationalising, over-dramatisation, and personalisation are some of the recurrent accusations levelled against tabloids. Typically, tabloids are more entertaining than informative. They generously use pictures, they use casual and chatty style of writing, and they carry screaming, eye-catching headlines. Kurtz (1993), Franklin (1998) and Turner (1999) agree on the point that tabloid content is composed of sensational language and street talk (slang) which is associated with entertainment content as a way of attracting readers.

The aim of tabloids is to attract as many readers as

possible to sell large numbers of copies, in order to draw advertising revenue. The increasing competition among the leading South African tabloids for the same market can be seen as worsening the quality of newspapers as they struggle to "out-tabloid" one another.[1]

The fundamental question that arises with the emergence of tabloids everywhere is whether, by making newspapers more accessible to the ordinary person through lowering the threshold of entry into public debate, these newspapers are contributing to the empowerment of citizenship or rather to the debasement of democracy.

Tabloids' low copy price and use of graphics and simple language can be seen as elements that make them accessible to ordinary people, as compared to other newspapers. The South African tabloid, *The Daily Sun*, has the largest circulation figures at 504 850 copies a day (www.media24.co.za). *The Daily Sun* concentrates on celebrities as well as ordinary people who experience what one might call the "bizarre." The newspaper produces short news stories and uses sensational headlines and large pictures as part of its reporting strategy.

Stories on *tokoloshes,* witchcraft and others from the world of make-belief are part of the diet from *The Daily Sun*, and ironically have a wide appeal among ordinary people. Some argue that by playing on people's fantasies the tabloids promote a form of escapism that leads to political apathy in society. This could mean a missed opportunity to contribute to the noble ideals of democracy, particularly in countries such as South Africa where the nation-building project is still in its infancy.

The concern is that the tabloid press seems to disengage issues that interrogate state governance and the operations of business. As the presidential succession debate heats up, tabloids such as *The Daily Sun* often shy away from offering long analytical pieces. Veteran editor Joe Thloloe (cited in Kruger 2006) commented that *The Daily Sun* was a newspaper that embraced the old tendencies of the Bantu World of the fifties. He further mentioned that the ruling whites employed such press to keep the black oppressed quiet as they discussed trivial issues of sex, sport and superstition at the expense of more serious political issues. While Deon du Plessis, the publisher of *The Daily Sun* argues that the newspaper is for working class men, others note that the newspaper is failing to raise issues that might empower workers (Berger 2005a, 3).

Given the record success of *The Sun* in recent years, it is difficult to imagine the owners (Media 24) sacrificing profits for "quality" if this means changing the presentation format and providing more serious and analytical content. Strelitz and Steenveld (2005, 267) point out that although publishers of tabloids claim to offer people what they want, these publishers are also largely driven by profits.

Arguments in defence of the tabloids

In a fast-moving world characterised by split-second television images and sound-bytes, tabloid-style news is becoming more and more fashionable with readers. Market studies are also suggesting that readers, especially younger and female ones – prefer "a quick, manageable read."[2] As such, several scholars argue that tabloids and the consequent tabloidisation of the quality press are not wholly bad phenomena. For example, by making ordinary people the main subjects of their stories, tabloids tend to subvert the norm of having elite people as the natural newsmakers. In this vein, tabloids are "a more accessible, less elitist approach to communication" (Barnett 1998, 75). They have the capacity of "making difficult concepts or stories 'come alive' for people who lack either the ability or inclination to read long-winded articles on complex subjects" (Ibid, 77-78).

The tabloid strategy of "introducing stories through personal histories, real-life dramas or humour" (ibid) has also been successful in drawing sustained reader attention and interests. As such, entertainment formats that entice

Notes

[1]See for example, *Financial Mail*, 19 November 2004, 'First shots in tabloid war', [2]Time, 10 May 2004, "It's a tabloid world."

readers may be an effective strategy where people are generally becoming apathetic. Contrary to claims that tabloid newspapers, despite their success in copy sales, have not been successful in providing information that empowers the citizens, Raymond Joseph (among other scholars) argues that tabloids have resulted in more people reading newspapers (Joseph 2005, 30). Joseph (2005, 31) points out that the tabloids are talking to ordinary people about the issues that affect them on a daily basis. According to Joseph (2005, 30) tabloids use simple devices to depict stories such the use of pictures and sidebars to break complicated stories and make them much easier to read.

Lumby (1999, 62) has also argued that "any criticisms towards tabloids are hugely aimed at protecting traditional definitions of what matters in 'public affairs' such as business, parliamentary politics, economics, the law and so on."

There is an argument that the tabloid trend has put "private issues" outside, from domestic violence and child abuse to relationship, addiction, eating disorders, parenting problems and sexuality (Turner 1999, 62). A further point is the contention that many of the concerns expressed about the influence of tabloids reflect a conventional and long – standing hostility towards popular culture. Some academic commentators have found sympathy with the tabloids, interpreting the tabloidisation of news as a cultural expression of democratic development and that they have reflected the interests (populist and trivial though they may be) of the contemporary mass public (McNair 1998, 116).

It is not easy to define what is important for society, but a great concern should be whether citizens understand their position in society. If one is to consider Marxism and look at the fact that tabloids are produced by the ruling elites for the working class, then one must probe whether tabloids are a way of marginalising the working class even further (Berger 2005a, 3).

There are claims that tabloids in South Africa have become a place where people come when they have been let down by the country's authorities (Joseph 2005, 30). The *South African Police Services (SAPS*) once opened a temporary bureau at the *Daily Sun*'s offices to deal with problems brought by the readers to the newspaper (Berger 2005a, 4). By so doing, the *Sun* has built a relationship of trust with its readers, which translates into growing reader interests. Estimates are that more than one person reads a copy of the *Daily Sun*, an indication that the paper has wider reach in society.

On the other hand, the simplicity of tabloids makes the newspapers more readable yet at the same time being less informative. Perhaps tabloids cultivate a culture of laziness among readers as they become less accustomed to reading long analytical pieces. The question is whether it is possible "to integrate the 'progressive' with the 'popular' elements of the quality and tabloid press" as Guy Berger (2005b) suggests.

Tabloidisation – the contamination of the quality press?

The Media Monitoring Project (MMP) recently reported that tabloidisation of news is on the increase in South Africa. The MMP noted with concern that while tabloids had introduced newspapers to millions of new readers, with some providing quality content in their inside pages, the general trend is that of sensationalism, characterised by "lack of context and leading with shocking visuals and inflammatory headlines," as well as "blatantly sexists and frequently xenophobic" content.[3] However, the MMP report does not go into details to explain what it means by tabloidisation, nor does it explain the full extent of the tabloidisation on the South African media landscape. Turner (1999, 59) explains tabloidisation as, … a shift from politics and towards crime, away from the daily news agenda and editorially generated items promoted days in advance, away from information-based treatments of social issues and towards entertaining stories, lifestyles of celebrities, and an overwhelming investment in the power of the visual and the news becoming an entertainment spectacle.

Notes

[3]See: MMP, Addressing the State of the Media: http://www.mediamonitoring.org.za/Resources/MMPNewsletters/tabid/101/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/127/Addressing-the-state-of-the-media.aspx

This trend is synonymous with the "soaping of politics" whereby there is an attempt to write political stories in a softer or exciting manner. Esser (1999, 292) suggests that tabloidisation appeared one hundred years ago when newspapers started adding sections emphasising sports and entertainment, illustrations and sensations that appealed to wider audiences. Supplements, according to Esser (1999) are another form of tabloidisation as newspapers feel pressured to carry them to cater for different audience tastes and preferences. The issue of attracting advertising revenue also appears as advertisers promote most supplements.

Respected South African quality newspapers such as the tabloid-sized *Mail & Guardian* and *The Star*, for example, have followed this trend of offering supplements that range from motoring, lifestyle, to general entertainment. While these newspapers still maintain their quality offering, ranging from well-written opinion/analysis pieces to investigative content, what needs to be established is whether this increase in entertainment-oriented content has displaced the serious informative content. What is clear, though, is that both newspapers increasingly borrow tabloid-style headlines and eye-catching front-page layouts that are typical of the tabloid tradition.

In particular, *The Mail & Guardian* has often provided attention-grabbing headlines that sometimes border on the sensational.[4] The newspaper has used titles of movies and various language techniques to attract readership. A good example of this is the headline "Mission Possible" used by the *Mail & Guardian* (May 12–18 2006) for a Jacob Zuma story just before he went to court to receive judgment on his alleged rape case. This was around the time cinemas released the movie *Mission Impossible 3* nationwide. This is a technique used by the *Mail & Guardian* to show that it is aware of what is popular with the readers out there.

The Star newspaper (November 13 2006) also pulled a catchy headline when Tony Yengeni allegedly went home for a weekend while he was still in prison. The headline was **"**Yengeni's Prison Break." The Fox series *Prison Break* was running at this same time on *M-net*. Generally, there seems to be growing pressure on the part of newspapers to appeal to the popular in order to attract readers. The mode of presentation in this case is populist although the stories need not be of inferior quality (Malovic and Vilovic 2004, 2). Tabloidisation is therefore a consequence of commercialised media, most often promoted by the pressures of advertisers to reach large audiences (Esser 1999, 291).

Tabliodisation has also been defined as "as a spillover of tabloid news values from the popular to the quality press" and it implies a "contamination of the so-called serious media by adopting the tabloid agenda" (Esser 1999, 293). This hybridisation aims to appeal to readers of all shades by providing a "total" newspaper that addresses those looking for gossip, sport and serious topics alike. Quality newspapers such as the *Star* increasingly use various language techniques for their headlines – from sensationalism, street talk (slang), alliterations to puns, which have always been a common feature of tabloids (Kurtz 1993; Franklin 1998; Turner 1999). The use of large pictures on the front pages of quality newspapers such as the *Mail & Guardian* and *The Star* reflect tabloidisation, a strategy to lure readers with visuals.

With regard to the *Mail and Guardian*, the paper follows a growing international trend where quality newspapers are assuming tabloid size both for economic and convenience purposes. In the United Kingdom, *The Times* and the *Independent* witnessed dramatic gains in circulation after introducing compact tabloid editions in 2003. Newspapers are business enterprises, and they naturally tend to imitate successful innovations. When the *Independent* (UK) introduced the compact edition and saw sales shoot up 18% in a period of six months, this inspired many other European newspapers to go "compact."[5] The successful transformation of the *Sowetan Sunday World* from a quality broadsheet that was struggling to get past a

Notes

[4]The *Mail and Guardian* has once been accused of using tabloid tactics. See, for example, Sarah Henkeman's letter to the Editor, Weekly Mail and Guardian, 19 January 2006: "Stop these tabloid tactics"
[5]Time Magazine, 10 May 2004, "It's a tabloid world."
[6]Saturday Star, 10 May 2003, "'Cheeky' tabloid is driving hard."

circulation of 30,000 into a popular tabloid in 2000 is an interesting case. Within a year, sales soared past 100,000.[6]

What distinguishes the *Mail & Guardian* from the trend described above is that the newspaper does not put stories on its front page. The front page is more like a contents menu. The *Mail & Guardian's* front page is thus similar to that of most tabloids in that it is used as a banner to announce the lead story of the issue. While the use of tabloid-style front-pages and magazine-like supplements may raise concern that the paper is being "tabloidised", it is notable that *The Mail & Guardian*, to its credit, has maintained its seriousness and analytical approach to issues. It has played both an investigative and watchdog role in exposing government corruption from the Oil-gate Scandal to the Travel-gate Scandal, which are the hallmarks of the quality press.

Concluding reflections

The arguments raised point to the need for focused empirical studies to investigate the claims of growing tabloidisation, namely that there is a progressive displacement of serious, challenging and informative content such as news and analysis by sub-standard content which focuses on entertainment, scandal, and showbusiness in the South African media landscape. Such research is necessary to validate the accusations of debasement levelled against the press. In recent years, most newspapers have expanded in size, as well as diversifying in terms of the supplements and "magazine" inserts. What needs to be verified is whether the increased number of pages has compromised existing content formats, and whether we are getting less of serious analytical content as a result**.**

Steven Barnett (1998) suggests three approaches to ascertaining the presence and impact of tabloidisation. The first approach would be concerned with determining whether the "bad" is progressively chasing the "good", and whether the volume of serious and challenging material is on the declined. The second approach would seek to ascertain whether packaging and presentational formats that make content more populist debases serious and challenging material. The final approach would be to explore the extent to which front pages give less prominence to serious stories in favour of entertainment and more "human interest" stories. The argument here is that serious stories may still be covered but relegated to the inside pages of the newspapers, with "important political debates, foreign stories or new policy initiatives" taking back seat while "quality" newspapers lead with "allegations of sleaze, …or a major crime or tragedy story" – all of which belong to the tabloid tradition. Such research will enable us to tell the scale and impact of tabloidisation in the South African press.

The challenge we face today is that tabloids are here to stay, and we cannot afford to ignore them. In a world where respect for freedom of expression and choice have become key yardsticks in measuring democratic performance and tolerance of diversity of opinion, it is imperative that tabloids be considered an integral part of our expanding media landscape. It is therefore the duty of the citizens to demand quality and ethical journalism from all media, tabloids included. From the foregoing discussion, the conclusion is that the rise in any country of tabloids and the consequent tabloidisation of the quality press can be both a boon and a bane. There are different shades of tabloids, and that journalistic values of objectivity, fairness and balance can be upheld through the enforcement of professional ethical codes that bind the entire press sector – tabloids and broadsheets included.

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Tabloid television: America's shift to the sensational

Carolyn M. Byerly

Abstract

The essay examines the nature of news and public affairs programming, particularly on commercial television in the United States today. That programming, which began to shift toward sensationalism in the 1980s in a neoliberal political climate, assumes the trappings of tabloid journalism in today's society. In place of in-depth responsible reporting on war, economics and social issues, news programmes often blur the lines between information and entertainment, opt for lurid crime coverage without adequate analysis, and fail to meet the news needs of women and racial minorities. In a larger climate of deregulation and corporatisation of the public sphere, the increased concentration of media ownership by a few large media companies is one explanation for the dumbing-down of serious news in American TV news. The author suggests that expanding ownership among a wider range of owners, including women and racial minorities, is an obvious route to improving the situation. A less explored avenue may also be focusing greater attention on the workers who ultimately create and produce news content.

Key words

television, tabloids, tabloidisastion, news, gender

It's after 10 pm and I sit down to enjoy a little television. With the mental wheels still turning from the day, I look for something to feed the little grey cells – some serious ideas. Grabbing the remote control, I look for news, or maybe a good talk show. What I find instead on this typical weeknight in America is:

- *Dateline NBC* (broadcast on its cable partner MSNBC) featuring an investigative piece with child-like young adults working undercover as adolescents to catch child sex perps who used the Internet to set up what they believed are sexual encounters. The men, of varied ages and ethnicities, are caught on camera and in true ambush-journalism style, made to account for themselves to millions of viewers.
- CNN's intrepid reporter Anderson Cooper (of Hurricane Katrina fame) anchoring a feature on

Japanese women and children soaking in a ramen (noodle) bath.

- Fox News's Bill O'Reilly (of the *O'Reilly Factor*) interviewing Jane Velez-Mitchell on Paris Hilton. The author of the book "Secrets can be Murder" believes Americans criminalise people for what they think. What *she* thinks is that "we are all at fault" for people like Paris Hilton's problems.

The last example is a particularly interesting case in point regarding what has happened to news and public affairs programming in the United States (U.S.). O'Reilly's interview added to the already extensive news coverage of Hilton's early release from jail in Los Angeles for drinking while intoxicated, and on a suspended driver's license. In the months of June and July 2007, no U.S. news station, or even the U.S. version of BBC news, failed to provide extensive coverage of Hilton's arrest, jailing, temporary release, and re-jailing by Los Angeles authorities.

The coverage prompted *Washington Post* columnist Eugene Robinson to question why she deserved any attention at all, noting that Hilton, heiress to the Hilton hotel fortune, had no particular achievements, attributes or talents to her credit, nothing to make her particularly newsworthy. She does not sing, dance, act in films, or undertake civic work, he said. She is only rich.

Masquerading as news

Together, these represent just a sample of the larger tabloid menu masquerading as television news and public affairs in America today. Media scholars trace the trend back to the 1980s, the years of Reagan's presidency. An emerging climate of neoliberalism, a brand of conservatism that championed deregulation and the privatisation of government functions, also gave rise to a particular form of sensationalism in the nation's airwaves. In these years, flamboyant right-wing talk radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh were starting their diatribes against progressive reforms of the '60s and '70s. At the same time, evangelist Christian leaders like the late Reverend Jerry Falwell, of the Moral Majority; Reverend Pat Robertson, of the Christian Coalition; and Reverend James Bakker, of Praise the Lord (PTL) had established regular television programmes to air their own political views.

These and other conservative voices – nearly always white, male and middle-aged – have virtually drowned out moderate, progressive and leftist voices in the intervening years, with the Congress's and the courts' blessings.[1]

Meanwhile, magazines like *A Current Affair* and *Hard Copy* took their place alongside tabloid TV news. Together these offered prolonged, detailed lurid coverage of cases like the alleged rape of New York teenager Tawana Brawley, the gang rape and near-death beating of a woman jogging in Central Park (NY), and the Rob Lowe sex tape scandal.[2]

In the mid 1990s, the O.J. Simpson murder trial dominated traditional news stations, as well as tabloid TV magazines and public affairs programs. Leading the pack was CNN, the all-news TV channel that had gained prominence for its responsible reporting of the first Gulf War in 1991. With the Simpson trial, CNN made an about-face to tabloidism, dedicating the majority of its air time to Simpson's case – first the gruesome murder and botched police investigation, then he circus-like trial – all of which would dominate nearly a two-year period. More recently, CNN has turned its second station, *CNN-Headline News*, into a nightly sensation-ridden exposé

Notes

[1]In 1987, the US Supreme Court ruled that the Fairness Doctrine, something the FCC had adopted in the 1960s as a way of requiring broadcast stations to air varied perspectives on issues of public controversy, had never been authorised by Congress and therefore the FCC did not have to apply it. The FCC subsequently abolished the doctrine. In years since, efforts by Congress to legislate the doctrine have failed, and while such efforts continue, there remains no established regulatory mechanism to assure a marketplace of ideas in American broadcast. [2]In 1987, Tawana Brawley, a 15-year-old African American, accused six white men, some of them police officers, of abducting and raping her and scrawling racial epithets on her body with charcoal. A grand jury investigation returned no indictments, and the case was dismissed as a fabrication. In 1988, Rob Lowe, an actor, filmed himself having sex with two young women, one of whom was later learned to be only 16. The tape, made public, brought him a range of legal problems, and he later entered drug and alcohol rehabilitation. In 1989, a young white woman was viciously beaten and raped by a group of young men, all of them non-white, while she jogged in Central Park. All five of the men's convictions were overturned years later for weak or falsified evidence. In 1994, former pro football player O.J. Simpson was tried in Los Angeles for brutally killing his ex-wife Nicole and her friend Ron Goldman. Though acquitted by the jury in a criminal trial, Simpson was later found responsible for the killings in a civil case brought by Goldman's parents. Significantly, race, gender, and/or social class figured centrally in all of these cases, and in the media's coverage of them.

of missing and murdered women and children in *Headline Prime* a tabloid hosted by flamboyant former prosecutor Nancy Grace. Grace's aggressive style brought her a large viewing audience but also some problems. In a September 2006 interview with a missing boy's mother, Grace allegedly intimated that the woman had murdered her child. The woman committed suicide after the interview, and her family sued Grace and CNN in a wrongful death suit, which is still in the courts.

A longer tradition

Some might observe that today's tabloid television follows a longer standing tradition of the media using gossip, fabrication, and sexually titillating stories to attract and entertain the audience and, in the process, to increase their revenues from advertising and direct sales (the latter in the case of newspapers and magazines). The classic example of this dates to the late 1800s. Media barons Joseph Pulitzer and his rival William Randolph Hurst used their respective newspapers to incite and then to fan public sentiments supporting the Spanish-American war. Devoting extensive, sensational daily coverage to the war, they greatly increased circulation and advertising revenues.

Cultural studies theorists like Stuart Hall have observed that popular culture has always appealed to the common pleasures, memories and experiences of ordinary people comprising the audience. Thus, Hall believes, educated elites have been both critical and suspicious of pop culture. Following this thinking, cultural studies scholars like Sonia Livingstone and David Morley have made a case for the "active audience" whose members they say interact with texts (i.e. television programmes) in such ways as to construct their own meanings from the stories they see and hear in light of their personal values and experiences. In this way, they believe, the discursive nature of all programming means that such texts (i.e., contents) are open to multiple interpretations by audiences whose members are diverse and unpredictable.

This way of thinking should be challenged – after all, the audience has little real power to decide what is aired or what perspectives will be included. However, it is also useful to consider some of the ways that audiences understand content itself.

Hi-brow or low-brow?

Media scholars recognise the traditional split between elite and popular culture, the former allegedly created for the educated, "tasteful" audience, latter for the teeming masses of less education and "less taste." While television is typically identified as a medium of popular culture, scholars recognise there is wide variation in its content. Thus, the designations of high-brow, mid-brow, and low-brow are sometimes used to differentiate a hierarchy of quality. For example, elite news and public affairs shows do exist on American television, but mostly on the less-watched non-commercial TV networks. Everything supposedly sifts out into mid- and low-brow programming.

The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) is the largest of what is considered the source of elite programming, a network that has historically drawn educated professionals for its viewership. The weekday hour-long *News Hour* with Jim Lehrer is perhaps the best known and longest lived of its news programmes. For several years, a version of BBC produced for US audiences also runs on many PBS channels in the evenings, bringing mostly international news. Weekly public affairs programmes, like Bill Moyers' *Journal* and David Brancaccio's *Now* both air Friday evenings on PBS, while programmes like *Frontline* and *Point of View* provide documentary-style analyses of major current issues. In addition, the cable industry's non-commercial C-SPAN I and II air unedited footage of congressional floor action of the day, as well as public lectures, panels and conferences on its 24/7 stations.

Eclipsing these, however, is the fare of the common person's mid- and low-brow commercial television fare, the latter of which the discussion has shown to be increasingly tabloidised in its news. The vast majority of the U.S. public – 93% of those who use television as the main source of news in one recent poll conducted by Corporation for Public Broadcasting – said they depend on commercial (i.e., advertising supported) television news on a daily basis. The irony

is that current market research by the Radio Television News Directors' Association (RTNDA) shows that viewers are most interested in national and international news, as well as news about politics, education, health care and the environment. These serious news pursuits are quite different from the celebrity and other features that fill so many newscasts.

These same studies show that American news audiences prefer local news channels. However, these stations, too, have drifted into softer news, some of it overlaying fact and fiction. Consider, for example, one recent Thursday night in Washington DC when the local female CBS anchor led with the comment that "Tonight we begin with a story about a real missing child," referring to the storyline in the popular CBS program *Missing: Without a Trace* which immediately precedes her newscast. Such segues clearly link news and entertainment programming, raising questions about how such practices serves public interest.

Race and gender questions

Instead of fiction, crime and hype, my own recent research among primarily African-American urban audiences shows that this significant news audience wants more in-depth coverage of their neighborhoods by reporters who are familiar with the Black experience.

Tabloidisation of news and public affairs similarly fails the female audience. The 2005 Global Media Monitoring Project revealed that women are still grossly underrepresented in the news, both in the US and elsewhere, with women constituting around a fourth of the subjects in hard news, most often as celebrities or victims. That figure is slightly higher in economics and business (about 28%), and in science and health (38%) coverage, but all of these numbers show the news is still far from gender parity in a nation where a vibrant feminist movement has operated for four decades.

Feminist perspectives are particularly missing in popular primetime crime programmes like the A&E cable station's *American Justice* and *Cold Case Files* both narrated by award-winning journalist Bill Kurtis, and CBS's *48-Hour Mystery*. These programmes lean toward a tabloid format, investigating real homicide cases that usually involve the rape and murder of women and children by family members or acquaintances. The programmes raise their realism quotient when they feature short dramatic reconstructions of the crimes.

They are also appealing because of their authenticity, intrigue, and focus on forensic science used to solve the cases and achieve convictions. They grab attention by occasionally focusing on high profile heinous criminals like Ted Bundy, Kenneth Bianchi (the "Hillside Strangler"), and Gary Ridgeway (the "Green River Killer"). But the gender politics inherent in most of these crimes of women's victimisation, typically the most obvious and unifying thread running through these programmes, rarely find their way into the stories' information. This, despite the fact that, feminists have worked for decades to advance new analyses of violence against women in the general society, to establish victim advocacy in the legal system, and to support victims through their healing process.

The problem of profits

Such production techniques – i.e., segues from fictional programmes into real-news, reconstructions of real-life events for the sake of drama, and overemphasis on lurid details – challenge audiences and scholars alike to ask what is the value of such programming and who benefits?

Unlike some other nations whose broadcast industries developed along the lines of non-commercial models or some balance between commercial and non-commercial, the American radio and television industry followed the commercial model from its beginnings in the 1920s. Today, the telecommunications industry is second only to the pharmaceutical industry in relation to profits, according to media economists Compaine and Gomery. In the era of media deregulation since the 1980s, mergers and acquisitions within the industry have resulted in a handful of five or six mega-companies, most of those headquartered in the United States, dominating all

forms of media world-wide. Significantly, the ownership of these companies is the exclusive preserve of wealthy white men, particularly in the case of broadcast, where women and minorities own less than 7% of radio and television stations nationwide, according to the media advocacy group Free Press and other independent research.

Not surprisingly in this era of tabloid journalism, the trump card of heavily a corporatised society and the media industries that reflect it, the commercial news media have almost completely ignored media mergers and their social and political implications. The media's news and public affairs programming genres, therefore, significantly stifle critical public debate in the general public, as well as the generation of public policy to correct media ownership and content patterns that serve the private corporate, but not the public's interest.

A meaningful exception to this trend exists in PBS (a non-commercial station) journalists Bill Moyers and David Brancaccio, both of whom have regularly followed media conglomeration and the broad-based media reform movement that burst forth to challenge it since 2004[3]. Led by media advocacy groups like Free Press, and public interest attorneys at Media Alliance, Media Access Project, Institute for Public Representation, and Minority Media Telecommunications Council, the movement has mobilised citizen pressure on the Federal Communication Commission (which regulates ownership, licensing, and other things), and Congress (which passes laws).

Critical theorist Colin Sparks has observed that in abnormal times, such this deeply corporatised period of our present history represents, when the ruling class is challenged, their control over the communication industries may be called into question from below, just like factories and other industries. Though he writes perhaps with British workers' history more in mind than American workers, he offers a little considered avenue for concerned scholars and citizens to address content anomalies like tabloidisation of news and public affairs programming. Rather invisible in discussions of dumbed-down content are the decision makers, artists, and other production staff involved in setting agendas and carrying them out.

One challenge ahead, then, may be to consider the communication workers, the faceless many who actually manufacture the programming we would like to placed more soundly in the public's service. How can we better understand the role and consciousness of these human layers of the communication process, the varied ways they understand their tasks, and the inevitable systems of punishments and rewards that motivate them to do what they do within the belly of the corporate beast. This is not to say that they should be held responsible necessarily, but rather that gaining a clearer view of their labor and potential power to act might invigorate both critical scholars and the popular political movement that seeks to replace tabloid journalism with something more responsible.

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Notes

[3]The U.S. media reform movement dates from the *Prometheus Radio vs. the FCC* legal case, in which a federal judge ruled that the FCC could not implement a new set of policies aimed at further deregulation of media industries because such would harm small local stations. That same decision required the FCC to revisit ownership policies related to women and minorities, whose ownership had declined in years since passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, a law that essentially authorised vertical integration of telecommunications industries (and the concentration of ownerships that came about because of that integration).



The tabloidisation of the media markets and society in Africa – the case of electronic media

By Rosemary Okello-Orlale

Abstract

As elsewhere in the world, the African media is at a crossroads. Democratisation processes and growing access to technologies has resulted in tremendous growth potential. Yet at the same time, the outcome of increased competition is the tendency for media to try as much as possible to capture their audience and get them hooked. The tabloidisation of news means that media may ignore social problems and focus on scandal and tabloid entertainment rather than issues of serious public concern. Some policy frameworks need to be put in place, but these mechanisms should encourage pluralism and diversity in media, and not be used to hinder freedom of expression.

Key words

media, technology, tabloidisation

There is no doubt that media is powerful. Marshall McLuhan has argued that available media actually shape human activity. In his famous phrase "The medium is the message," MacLuhan predicts the upheaval of local cultures especially in this era of globalised values. He said:

> Any technology tends to create a new human environment... Technological environments are not merely passive containers of people but are active processes that reshape people and other technologies alike. (McLuhan 1962)[4]

Many have supported McLuhan by arguing that high technology in itself has both basic and pervasive effects on the culture of the people who create and use it. We are now living in the information age with new telecommunication networks and multimedia networks that have sufficient bandwidth or capacity to carry voice, data, image text, and video messages as easily as a phone call. In the information age, media have gained more powers to perform almost limitless things and by engaging technology, it is becoming increasingly easier for the

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[4]Cited from *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* by Marshall McLuhan

media to manipulate their audiences hence making them extremely vulnerable.

Because of stiff competition between different media outlets, most have to either re-invent themselves or employ other strategies to survive. In the process of all this, the situation has become rather messy with some turning into the so-called "tabloids."

Tabloids tend to place more emphasis on sensational stories and on many occasions, they are prone to carelessness in their news, taking advantage that it is increasingly becoming more and more difficult to sue for libel. Some argue that much of the content in tabloids can easily be categorised as "junk food news," It is becoming increasingly hard to distinguish between information and entertainment in this age – commonly referred to as "infotainment."

Tabloidisation or this style of journalism mostly has its origins in Europe and in particular Britain but has now been exported to other parts of the world like US, Australia, China and now becoming increasingly common in Africa.

Tabloidisation of media markets and society in Africa

As elsewhere in the world, the media in Africa are at crossroads, challenged to comply with the highest management standards while portraying the essence of a changing society.

The media in Africa have had tremendous growth especially in the post-colonial period. The democratisation process in Africa greatly influenced the development of the mass media. Of all institutions, the mass media reacted to the processes of democratisation in the fastest and most flexible way.

Generally, Africa as a continent has undergone a lot of changes; from single party dictatorships to multiparty democracies, from long-serving presidents-for-life to two or single term presidents. The media has been in the thick of these changes, for instance, the principals and style of creating emerging new journalism was ad hoc. The events forced journalists and media organisations to learn and master their new mission by groping blindly around and at the price of professional risks.



Making gender aware television at Tanzania Business Unusual Workshop

Within a short time, multipartyism and the resultant shift to the libertarian paradigm and without gate keeping control, the style and patterns of journalism departed very much from the former patterns. For example, it is now common to find 80% of persons employed in a media house in Africa to have no background at all in the field of communications or journalism. Most presenters in FM stations in Africa are musicians, disc jockeys, models or some other kind of celebrities; and these are news analysts and commentators!

The print media that were traditionally better behaved have also fallen for that trap. They have created spaces or pull outs that target certain groups, particularly the younger generation. The content of these pullouts generally consist of lot of material that traditionally media would never be allowed to pass as journalism.

In order to understand the genesis of tabloidisation in Africa, it is better first to understand the dynamics of society and media from a historical and sociological perspective.

The "demassified" and "globalised" reality

Dennis McQuail (1981) refers to "the decline of the mass society" or what Alvin Toefler refers to as "demassification." Demassification refers to a situation whereby the traditional mass audience splintres into all sorts of sub-groups; some interested in this, some that! This situation is a consequence of new communication technologies like the Internet and satellite technology.

Toefler argues in his book *The Third Wave* that society appears to be moving in a certain direction. He describes three waves of change that have occurred in the human society – from agrarian society (first wave) to industrial society (second wave) and now information society (which he refers to as the third wave). In the third wave or the information age, what we see coming down the line are third wave methods of communication, which have taken the mass audience and splintered it into sub-groups (or different audience groups).

In the demassified reality, audiences have wider choices from which to choose from, whether its cable TV, Internet FM broadcasts or the numerous FM stations. This is not just limited to channels of communication but also goes down to programming with audiences having a variety of programmes to choose from.

We now have a situation whereby different media organisations are no longer targeting a mass audience but dealing with niche audiences. For instance, audiences are now being categorised by age group or social class by different media houses. While this phenomenon started in the Western countries, it is now the norm in many African countries, made possible by new technologies. Market and media research firms led by AC Nielsen have laid ground in Africa!

In many African countries, the pattern was for the government to own and operate the media particularly in broadcasting. For privately owned media, they were heavily controlled. This kind of monopoly has been broken down in most African countries with the advent of multiparty democracy that saw liberalisation of the airwaves and largely because of new communication technologies.

The demassified reality poses certain challenges especially in the libertarian paradigm of media ownership and control. It has led to increased competition among media houses competing for the increasingly "splintered audiences" with many of them fighting for survival. This is almost good news for the audiences as they are exposed to increase and diverse choices! However, before you applause, think about it!

An interesting phenomenon revealing itself in this demassified reality is globalisation of mass media (the globalised reality). This is where the mass media is not just operating at the national or local level but the audiences are now being "sold" to the global arena. Toefler has used the term "global gladiators" (Power Shift) to refer to forces operating globally that are no longer just nation states. Here, we are referring to a few big multinational or transnational corporations that are major players on the global scene.

Just as we have Transparency International, Vatican, Coca Cola, Pepsi, Unilever, so do we also have *CNN*, *BBC*, *and Sky* that set the global agenda. We also have the civil society, which are no longer just localised or national, but are now global in reach, and makes very active use of the Internet and the new communications media.

The media have therefore reacted to the demassified reality by converging to beat off competition leading to a situation whereby only a few players remain in the field. We now have more and more cases of cross-media ownership, which is becoming increasingly difficult to address.

A big challenge confronting the media in Africa especially in the demassified or globalised reality is

who is to finance them as they develop? In many cases, majority are private owned media, which are all commercial entities, depending on mass sales and advertisement revenue to keep them alive. For instance, with liberalisation of the airwaves, the press has been facing increased competition as most of their audiences have shifted to the numerous TV and FM stations as their primary source of news or entertainment.

For example, in Kenya, due to increasing costs particularly of newsprint, which is in short supply in spite of developments in composition and production, radio and TV now outstrip the press as the reporter of current news. Even among the various electronic media outlets, the competition is so intense that they are getting a little bit more creative to make ends meet! However, what is the cost of creativity?

The information age has witnessed breaking up of society in cultural groups (demassification). The media has responded to information age by concentrating, that is monopolising in order to manage competition. The barrel of the gun no longer wields power, but rather power is in the hands of those who control information. The media have realised the potential of new technology especially the Internet. For example, most media organisations now have on-line editions and with on-line edition, you get global and with that, you can tap the global market making the advertisers happier.

Sondhi (1981) argues that modern technology "backed by the ruthless power of marketing and media, has all but broken the moral backbone of journalism." He says that most media houses in developing countries have succumbed to the jungle of advertising and the tinsel of modern consumerism and according to him, communication technology has played a disturbing role.

An area, which has suffered no less, is that of Development Communication. Despite decades of effort in this field in Africa, it cannot be said that a body of knowledge and practice has emerged which is rewarding and reassuring. On the contrary, there is almost a total collapse of the Development Communication paradigm.

During the past two decades, we have been working based on a theoretical framework developed essentially in the West. However, experience has shown us that at this point of time we do not have a conceptual framework on which to base our future work in Development Communication.

The first thing that strikes one in developing countries is the rapture between communication and life. Communication systems, as these ruthless hardware combines have come to be known, have lost touch with nourishment of culture on the one hand and ecological well-being on the other (Sondhi 1981).

The accelerating technological explosion in the field of communications, with revolutions in satellite communication and micro processing techniques representing the most dramatic illustrations, have both universalised and personalised world communication. (Dordick, 1984)[5]

Some characterise the convergence of six somewhat separately developed technologies (i.e. print, broadcasting, point-to-point telecommunications, computer, satellites and microprocessors) into a single technological revolution, as a second revolution. The new communication technologies thus exhibit both centralising (global village) as well as fragmenting (demassification) effect.

Desktop publishing systems, production and dissemination of news by news agencies, digitalisation of the communication processes, wide range of radio broadcasting and TV programmes, as well as variety of teleservices (fax, cellular phones, database, teletext, videotext, Internet etc) have highly influenced the media production, the economic and creative processes. However, globalisation of communication

Notes

[5]Herbert S. Dordick has the written the article "New Communications Technology and Media Power" in the book *The News Media in National and International Conflict*.

may cause some significant problems for Africa, such as disparagement of national identity, creation of cultural inequality and establishment of an informational dependence on the technologically highly developed countries.

The Reaction

The big question now is how have the media reacted to these challenges?

The tendency for the media right now is to try as much as possible to capture their audience and get them hooked. Most media houses have seen the essence of market researching their audiences in order to tailor their programmes to meet the audience needs – all in the name of ratings!

The general trend to spice news with some sort of entertainment (infotainment) is now on the increase. Take for instance, a typical FM broadcast in Africa is the model of *Readers Digest* typified by all that is "fragmentary, the topical, and diverting (period of propaganda and publicity). A typical broadcasting day comprises a little each of light music, current affairs, three minutes news, commentary, discussion, a talk on reproductive health or child care, women issues, panel discussion, an appearance by a politician or two and more music and then the broadcast day is through!"(Sondhi 1981,127-29)

The argument currently is that modern technology backed by ruthless power of marketing and media has all but broken the moral backbone of journalism. Most media houses in Africa have succumbed to the jungle of advertising and the tinsel of consumerism with "journalism" on one end and "infotainment" on the other end, throwing professionalism out of the window. For example, instances of media houses employing personalities with no background in journalism to create some sort of celebrity appeal are on the rise.

It is one thing for them to play the role of entertainers and another thing for them to play the role of news analysts! It is typical for media houses to employ an individual with a western accent that can talk fast and condense news into a three-minute bulletin. While everybody is allowed to give their opinions and views on issues, when you have the capacity to shape people"s opinion especially in developing countries like African countries, it is better when this is left in the hands of responsible and qualified people! In Africa, due to the low literacy levels, most people lack the ability to decipher information that come from the media and a majority take what comes from there as the gospel truth.

It is no secret that majority of media outlets are commercial entities and what counts is actually the bottom-line! This is the reason why most are poised towards the trivial and sensational.

Liberalisation of the airwaves has seen many newcomers, among them broadcasting stations and a proliferation of newssheets and magazines, which provide an alternative source of news to the main-stream media. The establishment of mass media market has stimulated the development of new formats and styles of expression thus fostering higher selectivity among audiences.

Just like in the West, the intensifying globalisation has led to new market models of mass media in Africa. We have a situation whereby different media are in fewer hands (cross-media ownership) resulting in a shrinking number of giant media corporations controlling a wide range of media ranging from broad-cast to print and other forms of popular entertainment as well as the most accessed Internet sites. The new model of media management has provided an impetus to the replacement of news with entertainment (infotainment) or what is now also commonly referred to as "tabloidisation of news" in pursuit of profits rather than public enlightment.

According to Habermas (1989), the function of the media have been transformed from that of facilitating useful and rational discussions within the public into shaping, constructing, and limiting public discourse to those themes validated and approved by media corporations. He argues that the people become mere spectators of media presentations and discourse that mold public

opinion, hence reducing them to mere objects of news and information.

The tabloidisation of news and intense competition between various media meant that the corporate media ignored social problems and focused on scandal and tabloid entertainment rather than issues of serious public concern.

Take for instance the recent publications by Cameroon media about gay members of parliament and ministers. Many have argued that this was not a matter in public interest at all but a way of sensationalising issues to increase sales. The newspaper editors said that they intended to expose "people who engage in deviant behaviour." The papers are reported to have had enormous sales with one paper quoted to have said that they had two extra print runs with some vendors resorting to selling photocopies to satisfy demand.

Conclusion and way forward

In order for the African media to be able to cope with the 21st century challenges, they need to clearly understand the industry well to enable them analyse the trends that have typified the developments in communication industry.

Mutere and Abuoga have suggested the need for clear planning in the development of information itself, particularly in policies to do with regulating information and the media environment. (Abuoga & Mutere 1988)

In most African countries, there is no mechanism, independent of the Government which has developed for licensing (not granting a concession to) the private radio and TV stations. For example, in Kenya, there is yet to be established a comprehensive media policy. As Lawrence Mute observes, "obstacles still exist and this country's media policy is not out of the woods yet. The work of the Task Force on Press Laws is still to come to fruition and media-related constitutional reforms are elusive." (Mute 2000, 142)

While there is need for some form of regulation, it is important that the laws to regulate the media not be used in a manner not intended to advance social welfare (Mute 2000, 145). For instance, in Kenya's case he says that there is need for the Government to begin working on effective and inclusive policies. Mute continues to say that such policies should encourage and sustain pluralism in society; they should sustain diversity of opinion and tolerance of objectionable or detestable views; and they should not invoke censorship or other unfettered powers.

There is need for a policy framework to ensure a system of "checks and balances" in determining the acceptability of program material. This is in the wake of chaos that has resulted especially with the shift to libertarian philosophy of the media. It's in the interest of the media as a vital medium to encourage programs that are innovative, reflect a high degree of creative skill, deal with significant moral and social issues and present challenging concepts and other subject matter that relate to the world in which the viewer or listener lives.

Peter da Costa[6], while commenting on the role of media in Africa had this to says:

> Communication has always been the key to dissolving borders. The oral storytelling tradition was the way in which us Africans shared our news, preserved our history, ensured social cohesion and stability, and charted our future. We should see the media in Africa today as a continuation of our traditions. The African media is critical to fostering regional integration because it can enable the sharing of knowledge to people in different countries who are linked by common problems and common goals. New technologies like digital satellite radio can turn local content into regional programming.

Notes

[6]Peter da Costa is a Media Specialist; sourced from http://www.uneca.org/adfiii/riefforts/forward.htm

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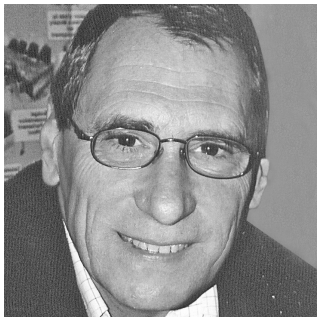
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Tabloids and visual trends

By Trevor Davies

Abstract

The increasing "tabloidisation," of both print and electronic media brings with it a shift to the more visual aspects of journalism. While photojournalism offers significant capacity for presenting news and current affairs, the current shift rather focuses on the more sensational aspects of the visual image, displacing content. There is a need for research on the topic, to better understand the attraction and role of visuality in journalism.

Key words

tabloids, photojournalism, television

The South African consumer walks, works, drives or relaxes 24/7 in an inescapable landscape of visual imagery: television, video, film, billboards, newspapers and magazines. This semiotic landscape found in both the public sphere and the private world of television viewing, tabloid reading, cinema going, street gossip, and rumour, constructs an illusory image of South Africa. It may be the picture of a local "soap star" or fashion model on the front cover of a magazine sold by a vendor on the street, or the billboard representation of available "foreign babes" in a local sex-bar in Rivonia or Cape Town. Nevertheless, visuality in contemporary South Africa sups from a cup of transnational, cross-cultural politics of visual representation, and fashions, and re-fashions, images of itself and the "other" on a map of globally gendered cultural geography.

It has been suggested that one of the striking features of globalising and localising media is a shift in the relative salience of semiotic modalities from verbal to visual semiosis. Others propose it might it just be because younger people are indeed the visual generation – more easily confounded by the apparent truth of the visual image, which is seen as somehow transparent, obvious, unmediated?



Billboards are everywhere *Credit: Trevor Davies*

Perhaps the "realness" of a set of phenomena is more tied up with the impact of it's image, rather than its correlation to any outside reality? Worrying if true, as we go deeper into a post-modern era where digital technology makes image manipulation easier and more sophisticated, and where manufactured images and documentary images become more seamlessly intertwined when presented through the convergence of advertising and editorial content confusion and mix in a disturbing relativism.

The term "tabloidisation" sums up a series of perceived negative processes that stand accused of transforming supposedly rationalist discourses into sensationalist or "fabulous" discourses. Tabloids combine the following two principles: attractive and large format photographs and appealing text graphics, as well as sensationalist word choice and a concentrated discourse. Features of its approach and style also merge with the increasing number of "talk", "soap opera" and "reality" shows on African TV these days.

Even so called "serious" investigative journalism such as *Carte Blanche*, watched by people who would cringe at the suggestion they are consuming tabloid journalism, show markedly similar approaches in tabloidisation to their comparative American and European counterpart programmes within their genre. From their roots, tabloid television shows have never been constrained by what actual video or sound footage might exist. Instead, they developed the art of the re-enactment, or dramatisation, in which actors recreate actual events for the cameras. In the following decade, the technique became a stock feature of reality shows and syndicated news magazines, and is widely cited as one of the key elements in tabloidisation.

For a while, it seemed that re-enactment was one of the few features separating tabloid news from serious news. However, dramatisations have started to creep into investigative magazines such as *Carte Blanche*, as well as in local investigative news stories, particularly in crime re-enactments. Gradually the dramatisation is beginning to become as just another way to enhance the story, to bring it to life.

There is also an accompanying trend in the "image economy" that is transforming the media landscape whereby, for example, photographers are leaving established broadsheet newspapers like *The Star* in droves for the more lucrative "local celebrity" beats offered by *The Sun* and others. This is causing major problems for the broadsheets.

There is, of course, quantitatively also a greater use of pictorial material by broadsheet newspapers, and consequently fewer words. Second, we see the increasing predominance of the visual image over analysis and rational description, a trend remarked upon by countless cultural and media critics, and certainly not confined to the genre of news (see, for example, Ewen 1988[1]; Jhally 1987[2]). Related to both points is the growing use of dramatic techniques, such as photo enhancement and re-enactments.

However, the increasing shift to the visual in newspapers is not necessarily a good thing from the perspectives of the creators of photographic meaning – the photojournalists and photo editors themselves. They argue for important perspectives in visual content analysis of the "tabloidisation" process and its impact upon photojournalistic discourses from two competing perspectives: the polarisation perspective attributes to tabloidisation a sharpening differentiation and polarisation between tabloid and broadsheet newspapers uses of celebrity and "ordinary people" photography with little context or meaning to a socially conditioned narrative and storyline in tabloids. In contrasts, in the broadsheets there is still a place for "serious photojournalism."

However, according to the homogenising view, sensational photojournalism, which once seemed to be confined to the lowbrow media, now spreads

Notes

[1]Ewen, Stuart. 1988. All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture. New York: Basic Books.
[2]Jhally, Sut . 1987. The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society. New York: St. Martin's Press.

to all media and photojournalists feel a disappearing space editorially for well thought out and provocative photo-essays. As one photojournalist put it, "the money fills your pockets but the photography empties out your soul."[3]

The debate over exactly what images are appropriate continues. Proceeding from the assumption that misogynistic pornographic elements confirm the ideological values and gender identities of the authoritarian patriarchate, a study by Ivana Kronja on East European tabloids shows that two forms of representation – tabloid journalism and pornography – emerge in a common misogynistic, patriarchal, hyper-masculine and politically radical tone. In the contemporary world, pornography is above all represented through "mass-marketed heterosexual pornography."[4]

One often-cited symptom of tabloidisation is the way the image has crowded out rational analysis while increasing gendered stereotyping. Examples of misogyny on tabloid cover pages in the previous sampling of newspapers and TV output in the SADC region by organisations such as Gender Links are numerous.

Whilst wary of drawing conclusions without much more research on our southern African context it is fair to say that visual analysis through semiotic and other tools such as feminist visual ethnographic studies has been lacking in the panoply of analysis techniques on media and advertising. Funding remains an issue for this and a willingness to place it on "serious" academic research programming is needed. Perhaps this can start to happen now that we are appreciating the tabloids are not a nuisance that will disappear with media maturity but a serious and long standing audience desire for this type of storytelling will continue to be satisfied by the media houses.

Writer Bio
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Notes

[3]Author interview with Tsvangirayi Mukwhazi, (CNN African Photographer of the Year Winner, 2004) carried out in June, 2007.
[4]Jensen, Robert "Introduction: Pornographic Dodges and Distortions", in: Gail Dines et. al. Pornography: The Production and Consumption of Inequality, Routledge, New York and London, 1998, p.7.

Tabloid Content – a human rights perspective





Whose news, whose views?
Tabloids do little to bridge the gender gap

By Colleen Lowe Morna

Abstract

Those who argue in favour of tabloids say that they are close to the people, reflecting more accurately their views, voices and concerns. Tabloid editors maintain that if one looks past the blatant gender stereotypes often found in front page headlines, the inside pages are full of stories about ordinary women that would not be found in the mainstream press. The first phase of a Gender Links (GL) study on gender and tabloids in Southern Africa shows that while tabloids have more human interest stories than their mainstream counterparts and are clearly more accessible, women's views and voices are just as under-represented in this medium as in the mainstream press. Blatant and more subtle gender stereotypes abound in tabloids. These often breach basic journalistic ethics of fairness, accuracy, and respect for human dignity. The monitoring did, however, yield examples of gender aware reporting in tabloids. These suggest that tabloids, with their more popular and accessible approach, could potentially play an important role in promoting gender equality. The next phase of the research will focus on audience responses. This will be used to amplify the content analysis before final conclusions are drawn.

Key words

Gender, media, sources, tabloids, blatant stereotypes, subtle stereotypes, gender blind reporting; gender aware reporting.

The scene is the quarterly meeting of the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) in Cape Town in early 2007. The event is a panel of tabloid editors arguing their case before their rather dubious mainstream counterparts. One of the tabloid editors brags that if circulation is anything to go by, there is nothing to debate. Tabloids sell. So they must be doing something right!

A media studies professor takes the tabloid editors on. There's more to journalism, he says, than making money. Citing a rape case in which the man's penis is referred to in a tabloid as the "spear of the nation" he asks where tabloids get off the hook when it comes to upholding the most basic human rights values of our Constitution.

This, retorts the tabloid editor, is how people talk in the townships. Women readers, he claims, love it and love tabloids. He ventures that there are far more women sources and stories about women in tabloids than in the mainstream press. Tabloid help lines, he adds, are flooded with calls from women because they are far more effective at fighting crime and finding lost children than the local police station. Rather than just lambaste tabloids, the editor argued, gender and media analysts need to take note of the social contribution that they make.

Background to the research

Over the past four years, the GL *Mirror on the Media* project has undertaken periodic monitoring of different aspects of gender and media coverage in between major regional monitoring projects. Following the challenge posed at the SANEF meeting, GL decided to focus its research in 2007 on gender and tabloids.

Earlier research on the mainstream media (excluding tabloids) showed that women are grossly underrepresented in media as sources and are portrayed in a narrow range of roles: most often as homemakers; sex objects and victims of violence (GMBS, 2003). The 2006 "Who Talks on Radio Talk Shows" research revealed that women only make up 25% of callers to radio talk shows. The Gender and Media Audience Study(GMAS, 2006) showed that women and men would like to see women portrayed in a far more diverse range of roles than is presently the case. It also showed that audiences would like more local and human interest news.

Most of the debates on tabloids to date have focused on journalistic standards, media ethics, and the related tabloidisation of the media (IAJ (2006) Strelitz & Steenveld (2005); Joseph (2005*a* & 2005*b);* Berger (2005)). Limited research exists on gender portrayal in tabloids. It is thus appropriate to evaluate not only the reasons behind the popularity of this medium but also how women (in particular) are able to access tabloids, how women and men are portrayed, and how they respond to this form of media.

The research being undertaken is in two parts. The first part, now complete, involved monitoring three newspapers (see Table one) in South Africa, Tanzania and Mauritius (the three countries in the region with the highest density of tabloids) during the month of June (five issues of each paper in the case of dailies and four issues of each paper in the case of weeklies). While it is recognised that there are electronic formats to tabloids, this initial monitoring exercise focused only on newspapers.

Table one: Newspapers monitored

COUNTRY	NEWSPAPER
Mauritius	L'Hebdo (weekly); 5 Plus (weekly) Le Dimanche (weekly)
South Africa	Daily Sun (Media 24); The Daily Voice (Independent) and the Sunday World (weekly)
Tanzania	Alasiri (evening daily); Amani- weekly; Uwazi (weekly)

The monitoring has provided quantitative data on topics; sources; images; functions of sources; who speaks on what; roles; ages and gender perspectives (whether or not stories are gender blind; display blatant stereotypes; subtle stereotypes or may be regarded as gender aware.) Each country team leader submitted one example of each of the latter classifications from all three publications monitored in each country (twelve case studies per country, or 36 case studies altogether).

The second phase of the research from September to December 2007 will draw on the findings of the content analysis to conduct research into how audiences, women and men, respond to tabloids. The final report will involve triangulating results of the first and second phase. The findings shared here are thus an interim assessment based on the quantitative monitoring and the examples in the case studies.

Where possible, the average figures for the three countries are compared with the regional averages in the Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS) of 2003 and the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) of 2005. Such comparisons are possible where similar parameters were used. In turn, the

tabloid monitoring has provided ideas for new parameters for the GMBS that is to be repeated in 2008/2009.

For convenience, the non-tabloid press is referred to in this article as the "mainstream media". Given the penetration of tabloids in some markets (South Africa, for example), this may be something of a misnomer. But the alternative term often used – "the quality press" – is also problematic because of its value judgements. The term "mainstream" is therefore preferable, if not entirely accurate.

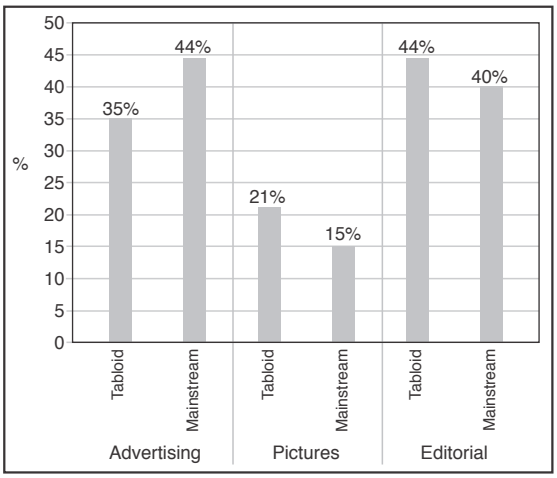
The distinguishing features of a tabloid in Southern Africa

To place tabloids in context, some aspects of the monitoring sought to establish the distinguishing features of this medium. These included design features; origins of stories (whether local or foreign); genres and topics.

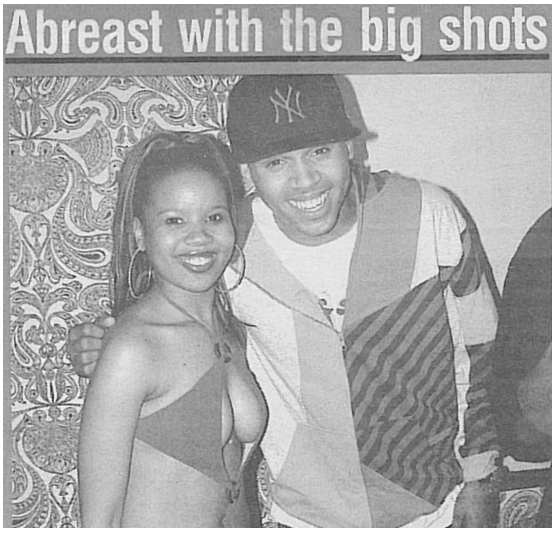
Design features

By measuring the amount of space devoted to editorial, advertising and visuals in samples of tabloids and mainstream media in each country, monitors came up with useful comparative statistics on the make up of the two types of newspaper. As illustrated in Figure one, there is approximately equal space given to editorial content in the tabloids and mainstream press in the three countries (44 percent and 40 percent respectively). The main difference concerns the proportion of content taken up by advertising and pictures. At 44 percent, the mainstream press devotes considerably more space to advertising than tabloids (35 percent) that clearly rely more heavily on their higher circulation for survival. Tabloids fill this extra space with more images (21 percent visuals in tabloids compared to 15 percent in the mainstream press).

Figure one: Design features of tabloids versus mainstream media



Indeed, stories in tabloids are often told in photo essays with much punning and playing on headlines. An example is the story in the *Sunday World* (24 June 2007) entitled "Abreast with the big shots". It shows Chomee, a prominent South African musician and dancer, standing with Chris Brown, an American R and B and pop singer, who is on a visit to South Africa. Below the photo is the caption "YUMMY CHUMMY: Our very own Chomee gets Chummy with… Chris Brown…" Chomee is clad in revealing clothing and Chris Brown has his hand wrapped around her back.



Abreast with the big shots

The editorial mix

Figure two shows that in contrast to the mainstream press in which news dominates, about half of tabloid content is of a non-news nature. This includes a relatively high proportion of features, human interest stories, portraits and profiles.

A typical example of this is a story from the monitoring (the *Daily Sun*, 10 June 2007) of the "ten job juggler" profiling a man who is a taxi driver on weekends, a petrol attendant at night, a public phone technician across three networks, a member of the Community Police Forum, an events organiser and a comedian. He has just started a recording company. The story is both a profile and human interest story.

Local content

The relatively high level on local content is underscored by the fact that only 13 percent of stories come from a foreign news agency (see Figure three). Unfortunately comparative figures do not exist for the mainstream media in Southern Africa but will be included in the next GMBS. Other interesting observations from the tabloid monitoring are that contrary to expectation, none of the stories trace their origin to hearsay. Reporters of the different publications originated 66 percent of the stories, with only three percent coming from local agencies. However, a fairly high proportion of tabloid stories in the three countries (17 percent) are based on secondary sources such as reports.

Figure two: Genres in tabloids

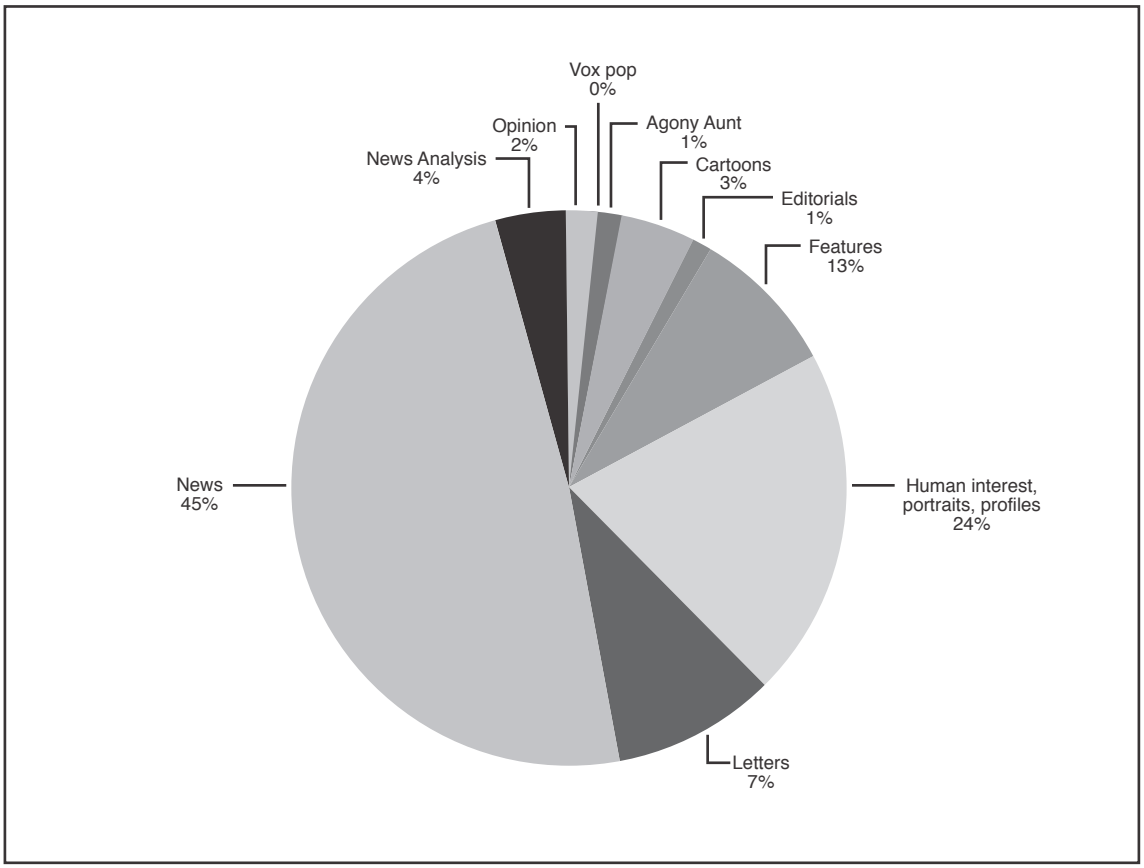
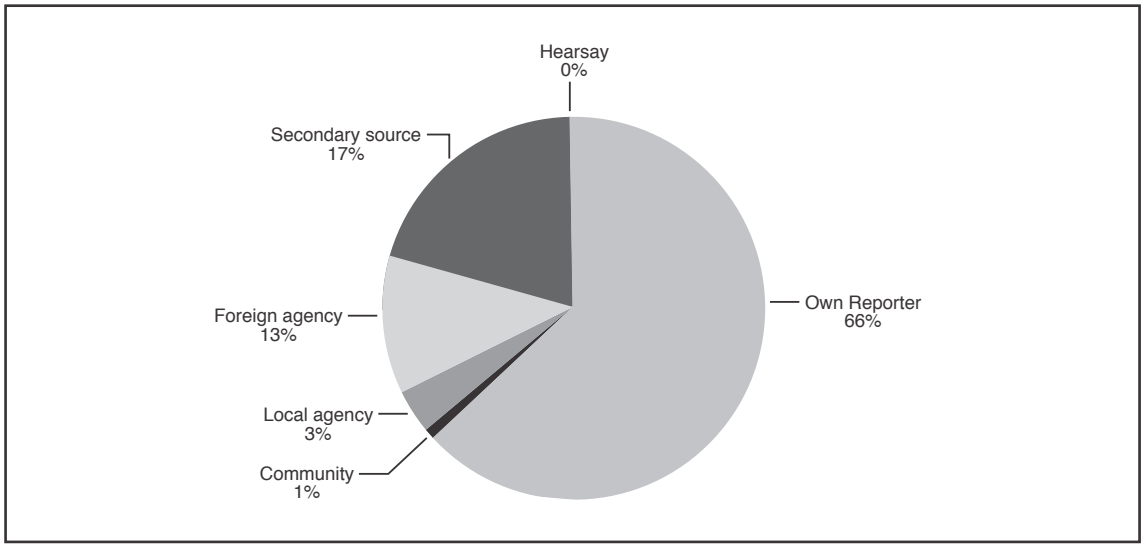


Figure three: Origin of stories in tabloids – regional

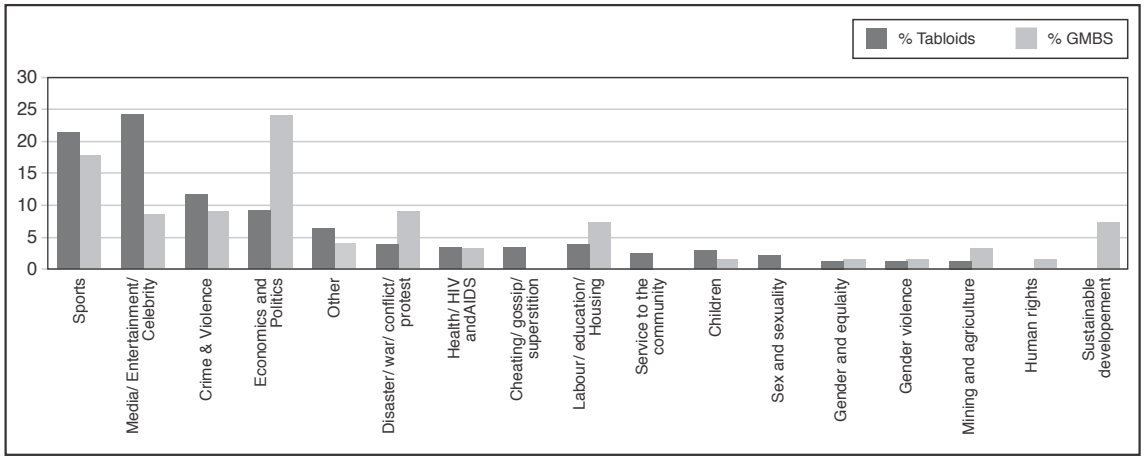


Topics

Figure four provides comparative figures on the different topics covered by tabloids in comparison to the mainstream media, as measured in the GMBS. A few topic codes are exclusive to the tabloid monitoring (cheating; gossip; superstition; service to community; sex and sexuality) while others (human rights and sustainable development) are exclusive to the GMBS monitoring. These, however, constitute a small proportion of the total. What is clear from the comparative analysis of the main topic codes is that both tabloids and mainstream media share a love of sports (21 percent and 17 percent respectively).

On the other hand, mainstream media has a much higher proportion of economic and political news (25 percent compared to 10 percent in the case of tabloids). Tabloids in turn have a much higher proportion of media, entertainment and celebrity news (24 percent compared to 8 percent). At about one percent each, gender violence and gender equality are equally marginal topics in both tabloids and the mainstream press.

Figure four: Topics – tabloids versus GMBS



Sensation plays a big role in tabloids, and is prominently displayed. Typical headlines in tabloids are like the one in *Uwazi* (24 June 2007): "*Aibu Tupu! Wanaume wachapana makonde, mwanamke aingia uvunguni Kujiokoa, suala laripotiwa polisi* – Shame! Two men fight over a woman while she hides underneath the bed!"


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Global Publishers & General Enterprises Ltd
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Jumanne Juni 12-19, 2007
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Aibu tupu!
Wanaume wachapana makonde, mwanamke aingia uvunguni kujiokoa, suala laripotiwa polisi
Na Makongoro Oging'
VIFO VYA WANAFUNZI HAWA VINASIKITISHA
Mmoja ashangaza wengi, ajining'iniza darini, mwingine afa kwa moshi, ilikuwaje? UK. 2

Though a relatively small part of the overall topic mix, superstition is another distinguishing feature. An example is the article in *Le Dimanche* (24 June 2007) about how several inhabitants on a street called Diego Garcia saw a woman with long hair walking at night. One woman coming from the hospital with her son said she saw a woman walking very fast but without any legs. When she turned around to have a good look the woman has disappeared**.**

Gender perspectives

As sex is the most basic demographic of any society, virtually every story has a gender dimension of some kind, whether it be the failure to seek out the views of both women and men, or the perpetuating or challenging of gender stereotypes in the way the story is told. Over several years of monitoring, GL has developed a Gender and Media (GEM) system for classifying stories as either gender blind (ignoring gender dimensions where they clearly exist); perpetuating stereotypes (subtly or blatantly) as well as a category for stories that may be regarded as gender aware. The criteria for each category are set out in Table two.

While this framework was used for the qualitative monitoring in the GMBS, monitors did not quantify what proportion of all stories monitored fell into which category. But the *Mirror on the Media* advertising monitoring in 2006 did quantify the GEM classification findings, prompting GL to adopt a similar approach in the tabloid monitoring. In results strikingly similar to the advertising monitoring, the GEM Classification of the tabloid stories monitored showed that about two thirds demonstrated gender biases of one kind or the other, with only one third classified as "gender aware"(see Figure five).

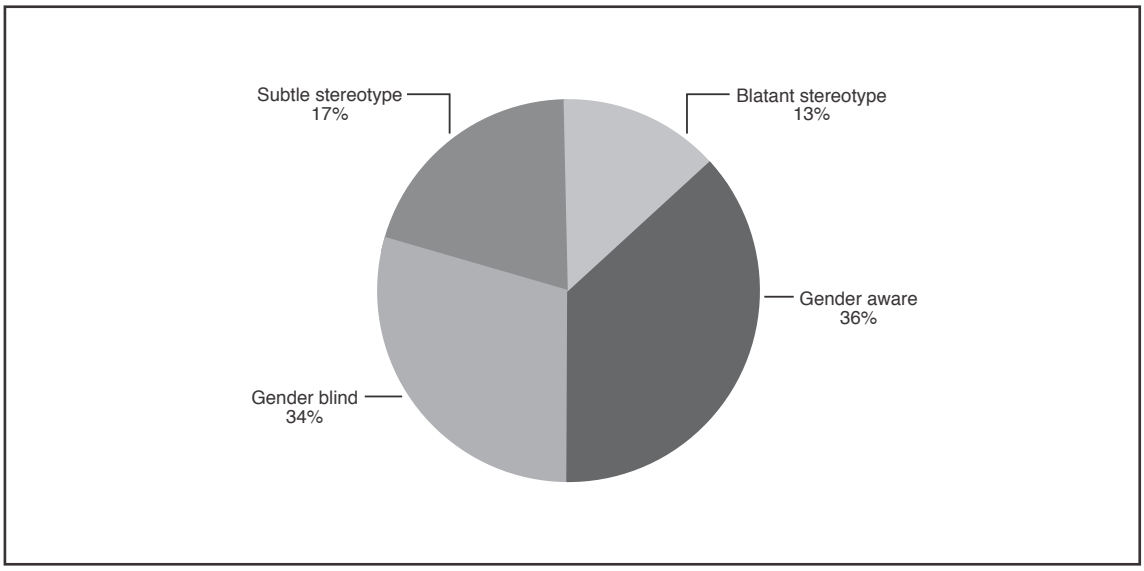

XIVe année – HEBDOMADAIRE DU DIMANCHE – 24 JUIN 2007 – No 2530 –
Le Dimanche
Cet hebdo fut dirigé par Raymond Nauvel de 1961 à 1983
• Fantôme à Plaine-Verte ?
Une femme sans jambes aurait été aperçue à la rue Diego Garcia
• L'hystérie collective prend une dimension de psychose
Depuis quelque temps, on constate un engouement pour les choses qui ont trait au surnaturel et qui échappent du domaine du rationnel. Dans le concret des choses, les Mauriciens sont friands de nouvelles qui font frissonner. Le surnaturel a toujours été un mystère et beaucoup de questions sont posées sur tout ce qui concerne le diable, le fantôme et la sorcellerie.

TABLOID CONTENT – A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

Table two: Gender and Media Classification

Blatant stereotype (BS)	**Subtle stereotype (SS)**
Women are presented in stereotypical roles such as victims or sex objects.	Articles or images that reinforce notions of women's domestic and men's more public roles in ways that make this seem normal, e.g. a mother's agony, rather than parents agony over a child.
Men are presented in stereotypical roles such as strong businessmen or leaders.	Articles or images in which women are referred to according to personal relationships that have no relevance to the story; e.g. a woman minister is referred to as the wife of someone.
Gender-blind (GB)	**Gender aware (GA)**
Lack of gender balance in sources.	Gender balance of sources.
Gender biased language	Gender neutral language
Lack of awareness of gender dynamics	Awareness of differential impact
Biased coverage of issue • Double standards • Moralising e.g. being judgmental • Open prejudice e.g. women are less intelligent than men etc • Ridicule e.g. women in certain situations • Placing blame e.g. on rape survivors for their dress etc	Fairness in approach to issue • No double standards • No moralising • No open prejudice • No ridicule • No placing of blame
Perpetuates stereotypes	Challenges stereotypes
Use of jargon and stereotypical gender biased language	Simple accessible gender sensitive language
Aggregated data	Gender disaggregated data
Gives a one-sided view.	Prompts debate on complex issues

Figure five: Gender perspectives in tabloids



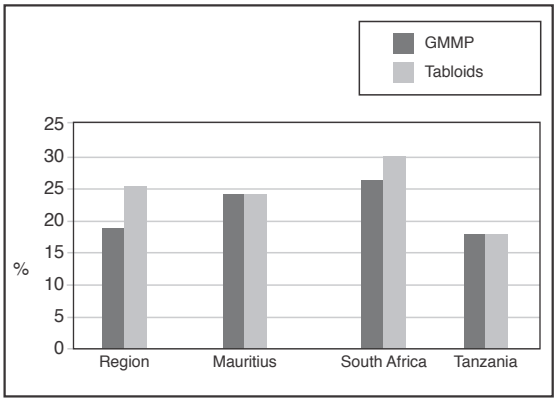
Gender blindness in tabloids

Gender gaps in the editorial content of the media concern both what is and what is not. The sins of omission or "gender blindness" are reflected in the multiple ways in which women's views are ignored. Despite the protestations of tabloid editors to the contrary, monitoring results show that there is little difference between tabloids and the mainstream media on this front as reflected in results on sources (further disaggregated by race in South Africa); who speaks on what topics and the many examples of missed opportunities in the qualitative monitoring.

Sources

Overall, as illustrated in Figure six, women constitute 25 percent of news sources in tabloids in the three countries monitored compared to the Southern African regional average of 19 percent in the GMMP, the latest study for which such figures are available for the mainstream media. In Mauritius and Tanzania the figures are exactly the same for tabloids and the GMMP (24 percent and 18 percent respectively). At 30 percent, women sources in tabloids in South Africa were the highest of the three counties and slightly higher than in South Africa's GMMP figure of 26 percent.

Figure five: Women sources in tabloids versus GMMP



Examples of how women's views are ignored in tabloids abound. For example, an article in the *Daily Sun* (20 June) previews the setting up of a new youth scouting initiative called Football Dreams. The aim of the project is to identify 50 young players for a weekly training session with top European coaches. Football Dreams is supported by the United Nations Office of Sport for Development and Peace. All those interviewed are men. There is no mention, nor discussion, as to whether young women are to be included in the training.

Because of the more visual nature of tabloids, GL gathered gender disaggregated data on images in this monitoring (information not collected in the GMBS). With women constituting 35 percent of those depicted in the tabloid monitoring, the finding is that women are more likely appear as pictures than as sources in tabloids, but even then not in equal proportion to their strength in the population. This finding is strikingly similar to that made in the gender and advertising research which concluded that women are "more likely to be seen than heard" in advertisements.

Gender and race

As in the case of the GMBS, monitors in South Africa disaggregated data on sources both according to sex and race. The comparative results, summarised in Table three, are particularly interesting.

Table three: Gender and race, Tabloids versus the mainstream media

	MEN			WOMEN		
	Popu-lation	Sources GMBS**	Sources tabloids***	Popu-lation	Sources GMBS	Sources tabloids
Black*	41%	27%	61%	45%	7%	18%
White	6%	32%	8%	7%	7%	4%

(*includes Coloured and Indians; **17% of sources were unknown or classified as other in the GMBS; ***9% of sources were unknown or classified as other in the tabloid monitoring)

Reflecting the black target markets of many tabloids, these display a much higher proportion of black sources than the mainstream media. But the gender gap is still glaring. Whereas in the GMBS black men were under-represented and white men over represented as news sources, in the case of tabloids black men (at 61 percent of sources and 41 percent of the population) are the dominant voices. At 18 percent, black women are better represented in tabloids than in the mainstream media (7 percent) but are still grossly under-represented relative to their strength in the population (45 percent).

How does this come about? An article in the *Sunday World* entitled "*I don't want a Brenda Fassie for a wife*" dated 10 June 2007 is a case in point. It concerns an older man complaining about his young wife, a musician. The story is all about why she should stay at home and take care of their baby rather than be on the road promoting her album. But the story is told entirely from the perspective of the man. At no point is the young woman or anyone close to her interviewed.



'I don't want a Brenda Fassie for a wife'

GATVOL Mandla Mthembu expropriated the luxury toy from Khanyisile Mbau because "he doesn't want a Brenda Fassie for a wife".

Mthembu made this remark to *Sunday World* yesterday.

"Khanyi signed a record deal with EMI behind my back.

"Malcom X, who has been pretending to be the mediator between Khanyi and I, is now her manager.

"This means she will spend months on the road promoting her album.

"Who will take care of our baby when she is out promoting her album?

"I want Khanyi, not a nanny, to take care of our baby."

Mthembu also says Khanyi was overheard saying she met someone at *The Lion King* premiere in Fourways and has a crush on him.

"I confronted her about these issues at the filling station but she denied everything.

"Knowing Khanyi, I think there is a modicum of truth in the claim."

Mthembu also says Khanyi always comes back home in the wee hours of the morning.

"When I ask her to stop what she is doing, she refuses and says she still needed her freedom.

"Then why did she get married?" asks a fuming multi-millionaire.

BETTER DAYS: Mandla Mthembu hugs his young wife Khanyisile Mbau. *Picture by Elvis Ntombela*

What kind of women and men speak?

One of the innovations of the GMMP in 2005 was to gauge the function of sources: are they the main subject of the story; a spokesperson or expert? Alternatively, are they speaking from personal experience, were they an eye witness or are they part of a snap public opinion survey (or vox pop)? And is there any difference between the function of women and men sources? Figure seven shows the proportional break down of the functions of women and men sources in all stories monitored in tabloids in the three countries while Figure eight shows comparative Southern African results for

the GMMP that measured the same parameters in the mainstream media.

Figure seven: Function of sources in tabloids

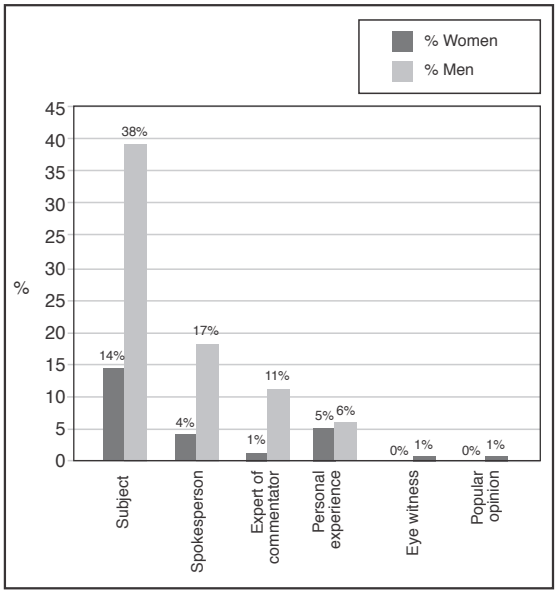
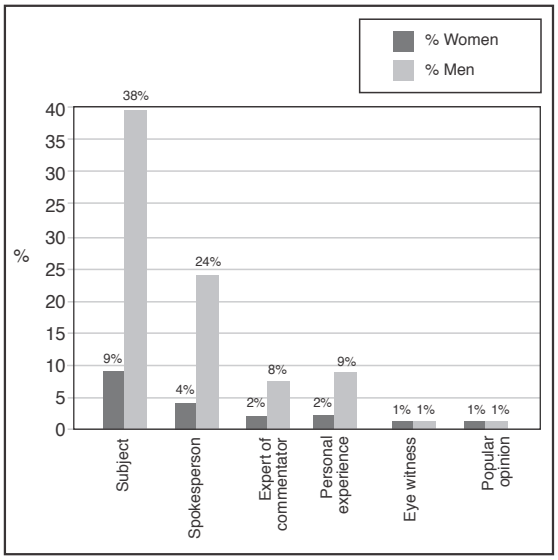


Figure eight: Function of sources (GMMP Southern Africa)



The two graphs are strikingly similar. They show that both in tabloids and the mainstream media the majority of sources are either the main subject of the story or spokespersons and that in both instances men are the dominant voices. At 12 percent in the case of tabloids and 11 percent in the case of mainstream media experts and commentators (those who provide context and analysis to stories) are relatively low on the list and again men predominate.

Women's views are more likely to feature in equal measure to men in the three "ordinary person" categories of personal experience, eye witness and popular opinion, especially in tabloids. Yet, despite the claim by tabloids to being "people's newspapers" these three categories (constituting 13 percent of all sources)

The conclusion from these findings is that both tabloids and mainstream media in the region suffer from a hierarchical approach to news, often dominated by the single source voice of authority, who is invariably a man. Until the media fulfils its purported function as "the voice of the voiceless" seeking out the views of not just those who make policies but those who are affected by them, there is little hope of the gender imbalances in the news being corrected.

Who speaks on what

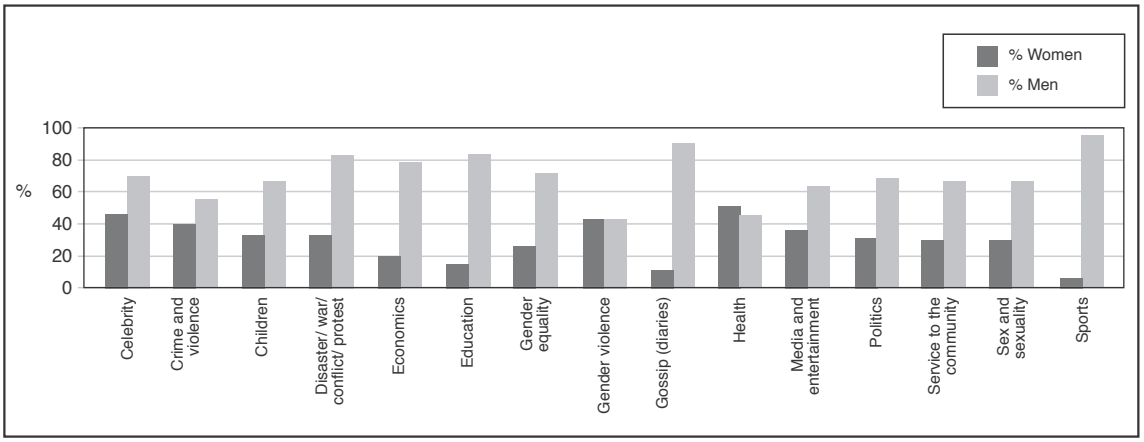
Figure nine disaggregates topics in tabloids by gender. Again despite the claims by tabloid editors to giving women more voice than in the mainstream media, the results show that there is little difference between the two. As in the case of the findings in both the GMBS and GMMP, women's views are under-represented in all topic categories in tabloids: especially in sports, politics and economics. Unlike the mainstream media, in which women had more to say than men in only the gender equality topic category, in tabloids men's views predominate even in this topic category. The only topic category in which women's view predominated in tabloids was health, with celebrity news a close second.

As in the case of the mainstream media, gender blindness in tabloids translates into missed opportunities for being more reflective of, and

TABLOID CONTENT – A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

responsive to audiences. An example from *Five Plus* in Mauritius (17 June) is an economic story on the increase in the price of milk in which the only two people interviewed are the male spokesperson for a consumer organisation and the director of a supermarket, with no views from women consumers who are most likely to have the strongest views on the issue.

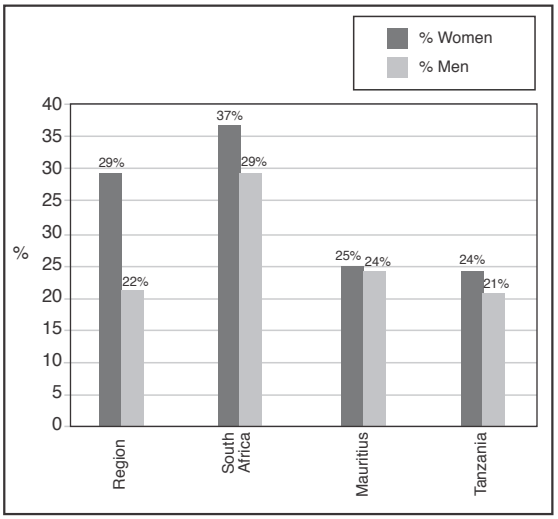
Figure nine: Who speaks on what in the tabloids?



Who tells the story?

As in the case of the mainstream media, tabloid newsrooms also appear to be dominated by men. The monitoring showed (see Figure ten) that women journalists constituted 29 percent of those who wrote stories, compared to 22 percent print journalists in the GMBS. This varies across countries, from 37 percent women writers in South African tabloids to 21 percent in Tanzania. The tabloid monitoring did not measure to what extent women journalists are more likely to consult female opinion in their stories. However, the GL Southern Africa analysis of GMMP results has shown that on average, women are more likely to consult female sources. Gender gaps in newsrooms are therefore another way in which gender biases reflect in the tabloid press.

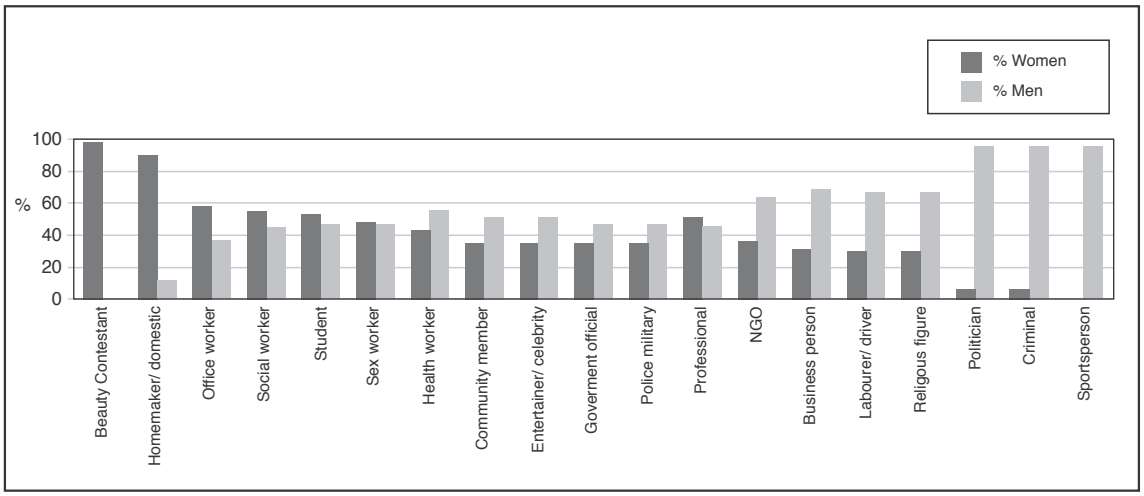
Figure ten: Gender gaps in newsrooms, tabloids versus mainstream media



Stereotypes

As in the case of the mainstream media, gender stereotypes are perpetuated in a number of ways in tabloids. In findings that mirror those of both the GMBS and GMMP, Figure eleven shows that the only occupational category in which women predominate in tabloids is as beauty contestants; home makers and domestic workers; office workers; social workers and students. Men on the other hand predominate in a range of roles, from professional, to NGO, to business person, labourers and drivers, religious figures and politicians.

Figure eleven: Roles of women and men in tabloids



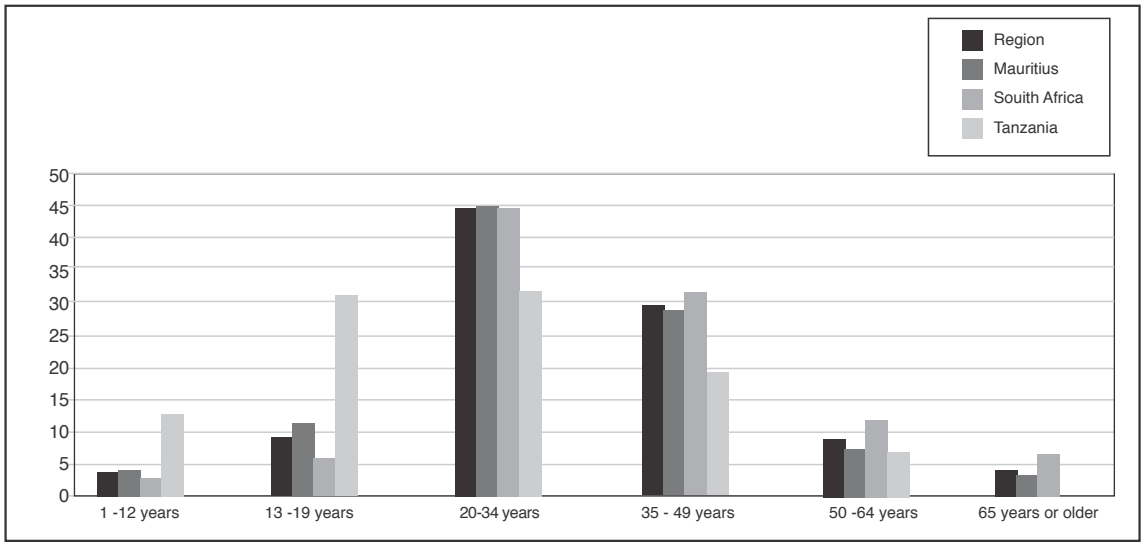
A question often asked is whether this is not just the way society is. It is true that the gender division of labour is still heavily pronounced in all societies. However, even where women *are* present, they are often not reflected. For example, while women now constitute about 20 percent of all politicians in Southern Africa,they constituted only 8 percent of the politicians who spoke in the GMBS and five percent in the tabloid monitoring (see Figure eleven). The graph also shows that there are virtually no sportswomen portrayed in tabloids. This again is not the reality on the ground.

Subtle stereotypes

Stereotypes are expressed in both subtle and blatant ways. Subtle forms include the numerous stories that emphasise the domestic and traditional roles of women in a way that makes this seem normal.

Another way that subtle stereotypes are reinforced in tabloids (as in the mainstream media) is the tendency for older women to be virtually non-existent in coverage. Figure twelve shows that across all countries in which the monitoring took place, women predominate in the 20-34 year old category and become virtually non-existent in the age categories over fifty.

Figure twelve: Women in tabloids by age



As in the findings of the GMBS, another way in which subtle stereotypes are reinforced is the tendency to refer to women according to a personal relationship, as a mother, wife, or daughter, while men are identified in their own right. In the tabloid monitoring, only 2 percent of all men were identified according to a relationship (compared to three percent in the case of the GMBS). In contrast 18 percent of women sources were identified according to a personal relationship in tabloids (compared to 11 percent in the case of the GMBS).

Blatant stereotypes

The more blatant stereotypes found in tabloids are of macho men on the one hand and women on the other who are little more than objects or victims.

An example is the article in the *Daily Voice* (20 June 2007) on Hlomla Dandala, a prominent South African actor (voted among the top 100 South African hunks) who has fathered four children with different women in the past three years despite describing the condom as "his favourite piece of clothing." He attributes his wayward behaviour to the fact that he spends a lot of time away from his wife. None of the views of the women are expressed. The story is accompanied by a face shot of him on one side and a curious image of a woman's legs slightly parted on the other.



Serial dad smaaks condoms

GENERATIONS:
SABC1, 8PM

SOAP star Hlomla Dandala's favourite piece of clothing is a condom.

This may come as a shock to some, especially considering the rumours about him cheating and fathering children across the country.

But, according to the former *Generations* star, he loves nothing more than wearing a condom.

Hlomla made this claim after being voted as one of South Africa's Hot 100 hunks.

This seems strange in light of the fact that he has fathered four children with four different women in the past three years.

Decisions

Hlomla says being away from his wife, *Lotto* presenter Candy Litchfield, led to his making bad decisions.

"I was incredibly self-destructive away from her," he says.

"It takes a fair amount of irresponsibility to have children with four different women."

However, the soap star says he is ready to move on from his mistakes and wants to heal his relationship with his wife and all his children.

FATHER: Hlomla

Women in tabloids are often portrayed in extremes of either the virtuous virgin or devil incarnate. An article in *Le Dimanche* (10 June, 2007) speculates on whether Princess Diana was a virgin on the day of her wedding. The article is based on a book by a former friend claiming that she slept with the Prince in the Royal Train before getting married. The article takes it for granted that Prince Charles should not have been expected to be a virgin on the night of his wedding.

Reporting on the sentencing of Dina Rodrigues, the woman who shocked South Africa by murdering a child fathered by her former boyfriend, the *Daily Voice* (29-30 June) adds to the words of the judge: "heartless, cowardly and ruthless" its own interpretation: "Pure Evil."

There is a headshot of Rodrigues with her image manipulated to give her bloodshot eyes. The main story is carried on pages six to eight of the main paper. The main story on page six carries the headline, "Dina is evil personified."

While it is true that Dina Rodrigues committed a ruthless crime, the story is not a court report but a highly personalised attack driven by the stereotype of the "devil woman." Little mention is made in the story of the men who actually carried out the murder.



TABLOID CONTENT – A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

Independent women in tabloids are few and far between. The idea of a man having to rely on a woman is taboo. An article in *Alasari* (21 June) concerns a man who lodged a complaint with the court over an alleged insult by a woman who said that he was "not a man because he is being supported by his wife". The article is entitled: "*Jose, hata kama unalishwa na mkeo, usione soo, yote maisha* (Jose, even if you rely on your wife for basic necessities, don't feel ashamed of it, it is all life)". But there is little in the story to persuade the reader that this is indeed not the ultimate shame and that the man has strong cause to feel aggrieved.

Gender awareness

The monitoring did, however, yield some interesting examples of more gender aware reporting. These included:

Men and parenting: An article in the *Sunday World* (24 June 2007) concerns a man, Musa Sokulu, who is seeking to understand what happened to the foetus of his unborn baby when his wife was involved in car crash. The wife who was seven months pregnant at the time of the accident was buried without the unborn baby when Musa, who was also in the accident, was still recovering in hospital.

Challenging gender and racial stereotypes: An article in *Five Plus* (3 June) is a love story about how two dancers, Eva Dalais from Reunion who met Thabo Legrand from Botswana on the island of Mauritius. They share a life and a baby. As they prepare for their show "Utopia", their responsibility as parents and their choreography intertwine with ease. During the interview the two literally glow. Theirs is a strange and unusual tale in this racially polarised region.

A gay ending: The same issue of *Five Plus* (3 June) carries the story of a Mauritian who emigrated to the United States as he could no longer hide his sexual orientation. Vincent de Gersigny, formerly employed at the Commercial Bank in Rose Hill, is gay and could not talk about his sexual orientation as this was taboo in Mauritius. He was supported by one of his friends at the bank who gave him the address of his partner-to-be, Jonathan Gordon, 54 years old. They corresponded and finally he left everything behind to meet his partner in New Jersey, the third state in the United States to recognise gay marriage. De Gersigny got his visa through the green card lottery. From New Jersey he wrote to his parents to inform them that he is gay. His parents were not shocked and accepted him as he is. He finally got married to his partner. What is most important for him is that gay couples have the same rights as heterosexual couples.



Assertive women: A story in the June 28-1 July issue of *Amani* in Tanzania concerns popular performer Asha Baraka taking on the police after they asked her to stop her show because it was too noisy. Upon arrival, she opposed the order for the music to be switched off explaining that if they complied there would be chaos

from the fans. In the ensuing argument Baraka got her way.

Listen to the children! An unusual story in *Uwazi* (June 19-25) concerned boys and girls petitioning the government to look into issues that concern their welfare such as drug abuse, transportation and diets in schools as well as the needs of orphaned children during the Celebration of the Day of the African Child. They presented their petition to a woman minister, Magreth Sitta in the presence of parents, guardians and children's rights activists.

Conclusions

The first phase of the gender and tabloid research suggests that despite being closer to the people and possibly even having larger woman audiences than the mainstream press, tabloids display similar gender gaps and biases. These are especially pronounced in the blatant stereotypes often found in the headlines of tabloids. However, because of their reach and popularity, tabloids also have the potential to be an agent of change. Do audiences, especially women, accept what they get in tabloids because that is what they want or because that is all they can get? What do tabloids know about their audiences and how closely do they listen to them? Would this make a difference? These are some of the questions we will seek to answer in the next phase of the research. Watch this space!

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Writers Bio

Colleen Lowe Morna is Executive Director of Gender Links and Chair of the Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network. She is editor of several books and research reports on gender, media and governance in Southern Africa)

HIV and AIDS and Tabloids in South Africa – what is left unsaid

By Kylie Thomas

Abstract

This article explores how the South African tabloid the *Daily Sun* represents HIV and AIDS. It argues that while overt coverage of the epidemic is minimal, issues relating to HIV and AIDS appear on almost every page of the newspaper. This suggests a need for sustained and critical engagement with issues about HIV and AIDS in the media. The article provides a critique of some the modes of representation that characterise the articles in the *Daily Sun*, focusing on the portrayal of rape in particular.

Key words

HIV/ AIDS, South Africa, gender, representation, tabloids, rape.

Although I had been amused and disturbed by tabloid headlines, and, on several occasions, curious about the content of the tabloids, I had never allowed myself the perverse pleasure of reading them. Having been given the task of reading the tabloids for professional reasons, over the last few weeks I joined the growing ranks of the largest group of newspaper readers in South Africa. Launched in 2001, tabloid newspaper the *Daily Sun* now has over 3 million readers. By 2003 the number of readers of the paper exceeded those of the mainstream daily *The Star* by over 70 000 (Bloom 2003).

I began my research by scanning copies of the paper for articles that referred to HIV and AIDS. In some editions, HIV and AIDS was not mentioned at all, in others the epidemic featured in a single line in a single article. Over the period of a month, I did not spot a single headline containing the words HIV or AIDS, nor did I find any articles that focused explicitly on HIV and AIDS.

That the media can play an important role in creating awareness, in keeping the public informed about the epidemic, and in reducing stigma and discrimination directed towards people living with HIV and AIDS has been established (Stein 2001; Kruger 2005). The fact that the tabloid media has the widest circulation of any publication in South Africa and has elected not to cover HIV and AIDS issues in any systematic way is unfortunate indeed. While media critics might argue that the absence of HIV-related content in the tabloid press is less damaging than reporting that sensationalises the epidemic and stigmatises people living with HIV and AIDS, the lack of overt engagement with these issues is in no way harmless.



More real life stories of people living positively with HIV are needed
Credit: Gender Links

The absence of content overtly referring to the epidemic in the pages of the *Daily Sun* is disturbing for a number of reasons. Not least of which is that HIV and AIDS is clearly a matter of concern for the *Daily Sun's* readers. As I read through the paper day after day I realised that much of the content *was* in fact related to the epidemic, even if the words HIV and AIDS themselves were not mentioned. This includes articles about sexual violence and rape, multiple partners and adulterous relationships, the poor state of public clinics and hospitals. Even the classifieds section (made up largely of notices for herbalists and healers), and advertising, much of which relates to funeral plans and life insurance policies, promotes nutritional supplements reputed to boost the immune system and promises to improve your sex-life, mainly through "miracle" penis enlargement.

Given that the tabloids do cover all kinds of human-interest stories, the absence of HIV and AIDS content is remarkable. The absence of articles that focus on science and even on the political aspects of the epidemic is easier to understand – these issues only make sensational copy once a year or so. But personal stories about living with HIV, about how HIV positive patients are treated in clinics and at hospitals and about the difficulties people encounter when trying to access treatment in the public health care sector seem the ideal candidates for inclusion in the so-called "people's papers."

In this article, I look at how issues related to HIV and AIDS are present on virtually every page of the *Daily Sun* but are hardly ever addressed overtly. Such an analysis reveals the extent to which the epidemic is affecting everyday life in South Africa and points to the need for an overt, ongoing and critical engagement with issues about HIV and AIDS. I also provide a critique of some the modes of representation that characterise the articles in the *Daily Sun*.

No need for ethics! Tabloids are good!

> *There are more than three million people now reading tabloids who never read newspapers before. This is good for society and good for advertisers. The reason for this success is the fundamental difference between broadsheets and tabloids: broadsheets preach to readers what they should think rather than reflecting what people are thinking.*
> Karl Brophy, executive editor of the *Daily Voice*, a South African tabloid
> (Brophy, as cited in van der Walt, 2005,12)

That tabloids provide a space for their readers' voices to be heard is true – the tabloid press includes stories about individuals and their experiences that would not often be included in the mainstream press. But the idea that tabloids simply represent the views of their readers is a dangerous one indeed. Such a view makes tolerating and in some instances, encouraging, violence, xenophobia, misogyny and hetero-sexism appear normative. This is what Jane Bennett, in her incisive discussion of gender-based violence and practices of normalisation in South Africa, terms "erasing the blood with notions of the ordinary" (2005, 33). Bennett argues that rape and other forms of gender-based violence are normalised in South Africa and in this way, the *production* of a culture within which sanctions such forms of violence is made invisible. Sipho Kekana's article "He proposed, then raped her!" is a case in point.

A 24-year-old man was in love with a 39-year-old woman. So he proposed to the older woman, but the woman showed no interest. The young man then decided to show the woman that he was old enough to suit her age. He forced a kiss on her and started to rape her several times – in front of other people, who

were observing closely. (*Daily Sun*, 4 July 2007, 12)

Kekana's claim, that the man raped the woman because the man "decided to show the woman that he was old enough to suit her age" reveals a way of thinking about gender, violence and sexuality that is assumed normative. Some of these assumed norms are that men can prove their manhood through sexual intercourse and rape; that rape is a kind of pedagogical practice that can be used to "show" women how to behave. In this thinking, the only reason that women refuse the sexual advances of men is because they have not realised that the men who approach them are suitable partners.

Kekana goes on to note that several other people were witness to the rape. He does not ask why none of the people "who were observing closely" did not attempt to prevent the rape from occurring. In failing to comment on the inaction of the crowd who looked on as the rape occurred, Kekana's article sanctions and validates the voyeuristic impulses of the readers. It also creates the impression that rape in public on a Sunday morning on a busy street is an interesting but otherwise unremarkable event.



12 DAILY SUN Wednesday 4 July 2007

He proposed, then raped her!

By SIPHO KEKANA

A 24-YEAR-OLD man was in love with a 39-year-old woman.

So he proposed to the older woman, but the woman showed no interest.

The young man then decided to show the woman that he was old enough to suit her age.

He forced a kiss on her and started to rape her several times – in front of other people, who were observing closely.

According to the police, the incident occured on Sunday morning at about 7am in Dilopye at Hammanskraal, north of Tshwane.

Captain Modise Phalane of Temba police said the woman was on her way home in the morning when she was approached by the young man, who declared his feelings for her and proposed marriage.

Phalane said that the suspect told the victim that she was so beautiful and that he wanted to marry her.

"The victim replied by saying that the suspect was too young to be involved in a relationship with her, but the young man kept on pushing her.

"When he realised that things were not going smoothly for him, the suspect decided to rape the woman in front of people crossing the busy street in Dilopye Village," said Phalane.

The cop said the suspect then raped the poor woman for several minutes, and thereafter told her how sweet she was.

"While the suspect was still busy on top of the woman, the suspect told her she was perfect in bed and he hoped they could continue with their new relationship," Phalane said.

He said the woman was saved by a taxi operator who was passing by. "The taxi driver chased the suspect and caught him. He then handed him to the police," Phalane explained.

He as due to appear in the Temba Magistrates Court yesterday on charges of rape.

"He proposed, then raped her!" effectively reduces the act of rape and the trauma that accompanies it to an amusing incident. Kekana's interview with Captain Modise Phalane of the Temba police reveals how the justice system focuses on the rapist at the expense of the raped woman. In the statements made by the police officer that Kekana chose to cite, rape is trivialised.

> The cop said the suspect then raped the poor woman for several minutes, and thereafter told her how sweet she was. "While the suspect was still busy on top of the woman, the suspect told her she was perfect in bed and he hoped they could continue with their new relationship," Phalane said. (*Daily Sun*, 4 July 2007, 12)

In this account, the voice of the rapist emerges clearly. No mention is made of the physical or psychological state of the woman after the rape or of how she reacted, whether or not she called for help, but the crowd of spectators ignored her. In addition, the article does not mention if she was unable to speak after the assault, whether she chose not to do so or whether the journalist was unable to locate her to ask her questions. Kekana's article is not neutral. If we are to address the crises that we are facing as a society, it is critical that we understand the performative force of representation.

Many of the articles in the *Daily Sun* include value judgments about the subjects represented that reflect the view of the journalist and that of the newspaper but do not necessarily reflect the opinions of those who read the article. For instance, Daniel Thobakgale's "Body of Baby in Sewerage Pit" relates how the body of a baby was found in an open sewer in Tembisa, an informal settlement outside of Johannesburg. "Nobody knows who the evil mother could be" Thobakgale writes, asserting, without evidence, that the mother of the baby is the person responsible for the child's death (*Daily Sun*, 18 June 2007, 14).

12 DAILY SUN Monday 11 June 2007

I can't feed my dead sisters' kids!

By KAMOGELO SEBOLA

FOR THE PAST two years a family have been surviving on handouts.

This is because Home Affairs says their bread-winner is dead.

Maria Pekwa (37) of Tshepisong in West Rand is HIV-positive and a foster mother to five orphaned children. She cannot apply for grants for this kids because Home Affairs says she is dead . . .

Maria told *Daily Sun* her problems started when her sister took her birth certificate to apply for an ID because she could not find hers.

"I did not know about this but when I found out I tried to fix it when my sister was still alive," she said.

She says that Home Affairs kept on saying that she should re-apply and the problem will be solved.

In 2004 Maria eventually got her ID. But when she wanted to register for child support grant for her son, she was told that she was dead. Life has never been the same since.

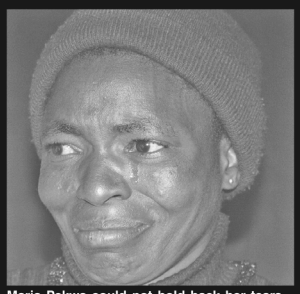
"These children's mums, who were also my sisters, died of Aids. I do not want to die and leave these children to fend for themselves at this young age," she says.

"I took care of my sisters when they were sick, but now I think this department has cursed me for saying I am dead when I am alive. I am getting sick now," she added.

The orphans are aged between 16 and five.

She gets her medication monthly at Leratong Hospital.

"I walk to the hospital which is about eight kilometres from my place. I do not want to feel sorry for myself, all I want is to get this grant so I can get myself immune-boosters and support my sisters' kids," she said.



Maria Pekwa could not hold back her tears when she told her story to *Daily Sun*.
Photo by Happy Baloyi

Spokesman for Home Affairs, Mantshele Tau, says that Maria's case is a special one and needs to be handled as such.

"I will advise her to visit one of our offices and ask to speak to the manager," said Tau.

Spokesman for the Department of Social services, Fred Mokoka, said they will look into the matter and see how they can help.

Home Affairs HORRORS

My dreams are slowly being crushed!

By KAMOGELO SEBOLA

SHE HAD big dreams for her future . . .

But until this young woman gets an ID, her dreams will never become a reality!

Phumelela Mkhabela (21), of Mamelodi, Tshwane, applied for her ID nine months ago.

She thought it would only take a couple of weeks to arrive, but she is still waiting.

When she first went to the Home Affairs offices in Harrison Street, Joburg, to go and fetch her ID, she was told that it was never issued.

She was told to re-apply, but Matabela does not trust the system.

"I'm worried about having to re-apply; what became of my first application?

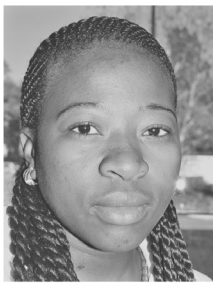
"I do not want to find myself married to a stranger," she said.

Mthabela, who wanted to enroll at Joburg University at the beginning of the year, was turned away.

She was told she could not register without an ID.

"My dream of becoming a chartered accountant is slowly fading away," she said.

Until Home Affairs starts doing its job, many more young people will be forced to give up their dreams.



Phumelela Mkhabela cannot study because she does not have an ID.
Photo by Morapedi Mashashe

Thobakgale's is one of many articles about the murder of children and babies that appear in the Daily Sun (see for instance "Baby Bagged," *Daily Sun*, 13 July 2007, 8). Women reportedly commit many of these acts of murder, often the mother of a newborn child. In spite of the frequent appearance of such articles, not a single piece engages with the complex reasons as to why a woman might put her own child to death. Instead, the newspaper stigmatises these women and condemns them as "evil."

The notion that tabloids reflect "what people are thinking" without telling them what to think also effaces the fact that the failure of the tabloids to engage with the crisis of HIV/AIDS is an editorial decision and is not a reflection of the desire of the readers. Let us take it as true, as newspaper editors in South Africa have argued, that headlines that include the words HIV and AIDS lead to a dramatic decline in the numbers of people who buy the paper. Even if this is the case, this does not justify the failure to address the epidemic in the middle and back pages of the paper. HIV and AIDS do not need to feature in the headlines to keep the epidemic on the agenda.

The content of the *Daily Sun* does address social problems such as homelessness, gender-based violence and problems related to the provision of essential services like water and electricity. The *Daily Sun* often contains a section entitled "Home Affairs Horrors." This consists of one or two articles that focus on the effects of poor service delivery at the Department of Home Affairs. Articles like "My dreams are slowly being crushed!," the story of a young woman who cannot register to study at university because her application for an identity document has been lost in the system, and "Home Affairs says I am dead!" highlight the stories of individuals and provide a powerful critique of the Department's incompetence.

It is in this section of the paper that "I can't feed my

dead sisters' kids!" appeared (*Daily Sun*, 11 June 2007, 12). This piece relates the story of Maria Pekwa, a 37-year-old, HIV positive woman who cares for the five children of her sisters, both of whom died of AIDS-related diseases. The story finds a place in the Daily Sun because Pekwa has been declared dead by the Department of Home Affairs. As a result, she cannot obtain the identity document she requires in order to access child-support grants.

Alongside the article is a photograph of Maria Pekwa, the only image of a person living with HIV/AIDS I found in the *Daily Sun* in the issues I read in June and July 2007. The image is a close-up portrait of Pekwa, tears streaming down her face. While on the one hand the photograph can be read as portraying Pekwa as a victim, its appearance is important. Pekwa is living openly with HIV. In the context of denial and stigma, both in the pages of the *Daily Sun* and in society more broadly, her photograph and narrative asserts the presence of people living with HIV and AIDS.

The epidemic is a central feature in the *Daily Sun*, the words HIV and AIDS are just not overtly stated. In spite of years of the government's "Break the Silence" campaign and Lovelife's prevention campaign slogan "talk about it," and in spite of sex making up around half the content of papers like the *Daily Sun*, HIV and AIDS clearly remains difficult to say. Yet a cursory analysis of the *Daily Sun's* letters page reveals that while the paper may be afraid to say the words, readers are not. Given the power of the media in shaping perceptions, it is important to advocate for more and better-quality journalism about HIV and AIDS. The *Sunday Times* campaign, launched to encourage South Africans to test for HIV and to reduce stigma and discrimination is a good initiative and a simple one.

It is something that other papers, like the *Daily Sun* could easily replicate. Each week the paper includes a brief personal account of a person living with HIV and AIDS and includes a photograph of the person if they have submitted one. A column, like this, which the *Sunday Times* has called "Everyone Knows Someone," and a campaign to encourage testing for HIV along the lines of their "Each One Reach Five" would work well in the tabloid press. The *Sowetan's* long-running "In Memoriam" pages, a section that includes photographs of the deceased and ordinarily takes up a double-page spread, could also be included in the tabloids. In this way, the newspaper becomes a public mourning space in which people's lives are honoured and remembered. The government should also be encouraged to place public service notices in the tabloid press.

There is great potential for content to be included in the tabloid papers that works to support people living with HIV and AIDS and their affected friends, families and communities. Given the poor quality of journalism in the *Daily Sun* it seems that the best way to achieve this would be through inviting readers to submit their own testimonies, photographs and stories about community heroes, home based care workers, HIV counsellors, peer-educators, people living openly with HIV and campaigning for access to treatment and messages about those they have lost. An initiative like this requires the support of the editors of the paper, which, in the case of the *Daily Sun* seems quite unlikely. Alternatively, how about a campaign to infiltrate the tabloid press through the classifieds? Instead of moaning about the poor quality of journalism in tabloids, we should start using them. Write letters to the editor and submit them for publication, write articles and, if these are never printed, take out an ad in the classifieds section. Even if you only do it once, your efforts will reach approximately 3 million South Africans.

Women Take Over Daily Sun!

"You strike a woman, you strike a rock!" the crowd of women chanted as they stormed the offices of the Daily Sun and seized control of the country's leading tabloid newspaper.

"Who will buy your paper?" Deon du Plessis and Themba Khumalo, deposed publisher and editor of the tabloid were heard to squeal as they fled their offices, clutching their Sports Illustrated calendars to their chests. There are over 20 million women living in South Africa and as of yet there is no

newspaper that does not portray women in dehumanising ways. The new daily Womandla! will begin by challenging these stereotypes and promises to capture the attention of women and open-minded men everywhere.

This fictional scenario raises an important issue for consideration. With such a large representation of the population, and readership, why do the pages of print media continue to present women in ways that perpetuate stereotypes, and re-enforce gender inequalities?

In her article reflecting on the lack of engagement with issues about women and the media at the Beijing + 10 conference in 2005, Jac sm Kee asks, "How is it possible for something as fundamental as women's right to use and shape the powers of media and communications to slip off the agenda." She writes:

> Placed next to matters like rape, human trafficking, women in situations of armed conflict, abortion, severe poverty and so on, it is easy to imagine media and communications merely as tools to face these challenges. They hover around the "real" women's issue at hand and become secondary in importance, appended as a form of analysis or strategy. With that, the power dynamics and geopolitical milieu that affect media and communications as an arena fade into the relatively depoliticised language of "access" and "capacity building." Although these perspectives are important, they effectively augment the understanding of media and communications as neutral instruments instead of an influential domain that shapes, and is shaped by discourses of social reality and gender relations.
>
> *(Lee 2005, 48)*

Lee's perspective is a critical reminder that the media not only makes a culture visible to itself but also plays a central part in shaping culture. Recognising the field of representation as a field of transformation and ideological contest opens the possibility for an engagement with media within which the political and cultural can be reconfigured. What we need is a revolutionary strategy – a South African feminist media collective that can perform acts of culture-jamming and can find ways to respond to inadequate and harmful representations. The covert HIV and AIDS-related content that is a feature of many of the *Daily Sun*'s articles testifies to the need for well-written, informed journalism about the epidemic. The absence of any clear editorial policy or guidelines for HIV/AIDS reporting (or for reporting on any other subject for that matter) permits the expression of xenophobic, racist and hetero-sexist views. This constitutes not only a failure to address the epidemic but also fuels the spread of ignorance, which in turn, fuels the spread of HIV.

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Popular or populist? Mediations on the Jacob Zuma rape trial in the Sowetan

Jeanne Prinsloo and Alison Stent

Abstract

The trial of Jacob Zuma on allegations of rape served as a catalyst for public opinion to be voiced both for and against Zuma, and his actions, particlalr in the media. This article focuses not on editorial content, but rather on public expressions found in The Sowetan, both in letters from members of the public, and in photographs that reflect two sides of the debate.

Key words

media, journalism, gender violence, justice system,

The trial of Jacob Zuma took place in the Johannesburg High Court from 6 March to 9 May 2006, where he stood accused of the rape of a thirty-one year old woman while she was a guest in his Johannesburg home. This occasion served as a catalyst for a range of different responses to Zuma, to his supporters, and to many other issues, some of them seemingly unrelated to the court case. They were articulated, enacted, contested and then given form in the news media. Major actors played their parts, events were duly staged, pronouncements made and there was even a song and dance routine to accompany some of the performance, much of which then made news copy at the time.

The general news coverage and editorial comment, as argued elsewhere (Prinsloo 2006), tended to be framed within a human rights discourse in line with a public sphere construct of the liberal press (see, for example, Curran 1991). There was a strong tendency to foreground Zuma and his supporters, whose modes of conduct were generally constructed as un-civilised, illegal, immoral and excessive[1]. In particular, Zuma's construction of Zulu culture received strong reactions. Informed by their sense of professional practice, the press took on the mantle of the fourth estate and their criticism of Zuma as an influential public figure is framed as concern for the *polis* or public good (Curran 1991).

This discussion focuses on the *Sowetan* newspaper, which, although frequently described as a "tabloid" arguably in this instance plays a very similar journalistic role to other mainstream press. It not concerned with the news reports and editorials,

Notes

[1]For example, Sowetan reporter Moreosole describes them as 'Screeching women in tribal dress [who] burnt pictures of the alleged victim', and as 'vulgar profanity-screaming crowds that have turned [Zuma's] trial into a mockery of justice' (Sowetan 10 Mar 2006,19).

except when these include the expressions of "ordinary" people, but rather the voice of the population, found in letters and photographs.

The *Sowetan* currently has *a* relatively large average daily readership of 1.54 million, targeting English-literate black readers. It began in 1981 as a free delivery, responding to the marginalisation of black readers. Under the editorship of academic and anti-apartheid activist Aggrey Klaaste from 1988 to 2002, it gained respect in progressive and academic circles. By the time media conglomerate Johnnic Communications acquired a controlling share in 2004, it was in direct competition with the national daily tabloid *The Sun,* and shares many of the layout features that traditionally set tabloids apart from broadsheets. However, its target market is middleclass as opposed to *The Sun's* working class one, and the *Sowetan* has retained a fairly strong human rights framework.

In its pages then, the people's voices existed in the instance of the Zuma trial in two forms, namely in the form of letters to the editor on one hand, and as expressed on placards, t-shirts and in performance but captured photographically on the other. It is interesting that the two modes do very different work, although both essentially express the voices of the same two oppositional camps, that is, a pro-Zuma and an anti-Zuma stance.

The discussion below takes place within an analytical framework based on Laclau's (2005) theorisation of populism as a discourse, in which populism functions to call in widely diverse groupings, which the political and social dispensation have each marginalised in some way. Thus, it is central to the theory that populism is inherently anti-institutional in nature, or to phrase it differently, a "populist rupture" differentiates itself from a top-down, repressive political structure that frustrates or ignores its legitimate demands. Turning to the problem of how a populist front can represent itself as a totality when it comprises a set of particularistic demands that are entirely different from each other, Laclau notes that it can only do so by reducing to a minimum its particularistic content. "At the limit, this process reaches a point where the homogenizing function is carried out by a pure name: the name of the leader" (2005, 7).

In his earlier work, Laclau uses the concept of "nodal point" as an organising principle, or point of crystallisation around which other signs arrange themselves and acquire meaning (Laclau & Mouffe1985). In these terms, Zuma serves as the "nodal point" around which the two contesting positions arrange their points of argument and identification, investing Zuma's identity with oppositional meanings, as we shall see below.

Letters

The focus of the letters to the editor published in the *Sowetan* seems to echo or at least respond to the different stages and events of the trial. Of forty-nine letters written between January and May 2006, a mere four appeared in January when the selection of the judge took place. During the preliminary hearings in February, the letters increased to ten and tended to foreground the behaviour of Zuma and his supporters outside the court. While the March letters, fifteen in all, continued to pronounce on Zuma's conduct they also responded to the evidence of the complainant led from 6 to 17 March. Then Zuma's evidence heard between 3 and 7 April provided his detailed version of the sexual encounter and his subsequent now notorious shower. Curiously, relatively few letters were printed (only five) in April and they tend to respond to his sexual conduct while Zuma's extraordinary testimony elicited world-wide press coverage. The case was adjourned on 18 April and then in May a flurry of letters (fifteen) were published and this correlates with the judgment on 8 May.

If the news coverage tended to espouse a rights position that was critical of Zuma and his supporters' behaviour, there is a noticeably similar tendency in the letters. Categorising the letters as broadly speaking pro or anti Zuma confirms this. Allowing for three more ambiguous letters to be included as anti-Zuma (as the writers might express certain deference to Zuma but write to record their strong criticism for his or the supporters' behaviours), thirty four express positions that are critical while fifteen are supportive of him. Thus, roughly two-thirds (68%) express anti-Zuma to one-third (32%) articulating pro-Zuma sentiments. Responses to the Zuma trial from

both camps describe and variously proscribe the behaviour of the different actors. The paper identifies three overlapping themes that structure the discussion that follows, namely the events staged outside the court, gender and presidential succession. Zuma provides the central locus around which the dividing lines are drawn and also provides the catalyst to discuss and critique a range of social issues not essentially linked to Zuma.

Among the anti-Zuma letters, twenty nine express criticism of Zuma, his supporters or both, twenty seven dismay at gendered behaviour as enacted inside and outside the courtroom and on the night of the alleged rape, and seven political opposition to Zuma as president.

Pro Zuma letters

While less vociferous, the pro-Zuma camp condemns the supporters of the complainant; they express their dissatisfaction with challenges to patriarchal power relations, but are hesitant in explicitly discussing the issue of presidential succession. Below, letters expressing anti-Zuma sentiments are compared against those from the pro-Zuma camp.

Outside court – Supporters Behaviour	
The criticism leveled against Zuma's supporters, abundant in February constructs them as bullies "hurling insults and throwing stones" (17 Feb 2006) who "insult[...] all rape victims and their families" (17 Feb 2006) and act outside the bounds of decency. The support by Cosatu and the ANCYL for Zuma is constructed as "misleading and dangerous" and they are cautioned against being "used as political pawns" (17 Feb 2006).	Though Zuma's supporters wrote fewer letters to the Sowetan, they are proportionately just as vocal in condemning the anti-rape activists that support the complainant outside the court. Ironically, they propose that the complainant and supporters are undemocratic, and hostile to men. "What does Powa's presence say about the rights of a person who is innocent until proven guilty?" (15 Mar 2006). "Organisations that supported Zuma's accuser should feel ashamed of themselves. It seems they only make a lot of noise and don't educate women about abuse" (11.05). "Are South African women's organisations callous?... The latest victim of their bitter war against males... (05.01). Thus women's organisations and their members are made other and responsible for a war against men.
Outside court – Zuma's behaviour	
Zuma is called to account for his personal conduct as well as that of his supporters, reprimanded for "dancing and enjoying himself while the alleged victim has to cover her head to protect her identity" (17 Feb 2006). Then he is sharply criticised for his "seeming lack of control" over his supporters when they destroy Mbeki T-shirts, "sing insulting songs about the judiciary" and "intimidate the complainant" (20 Feb 2006). One woman asks, "What message will his supporters' ugly intimidation send to the nation? Are they saying that any woman who dares to speak out against abuse will be intimidated? ... I have yet to hear or see Zuma or his lawyers condemn his supporters' actions." (10 Mar 2006).	Zuma's (and their own) behaviour is defended in the letters under the right to freedom of expression: "Zuma's critics are hypocritical... Let our people express their feelings... this is a democracy and people must not be intimidated by contempt of court claims' (22 Feb 2006) and "Blaming the ANCYL for supporting Zuma instead of his accuser, by virtue of her being in an age group of the constituency it represents equals blackmail" (23 Mar 2006).

Gender relations

It did not come as a surprise considering the nature of the accusation that much of the criticism levelled against Zuma in the letters relates to the inequality of gendered relations both during the actual trial and outside. There was anger around what rape activists identify as social myths that naturalise violence against women, such as that what a woman wears and her previous sexual history has relevance for subsequent sexual violence.

Concerning gender relations, a set of responses recur that are deeply conservative of traditional patriarchy.

The manner of conduct of the trial and the chances of legal justice for women became a matter of critical concern for some writers: "I would not be surprised if the rate at which rape victims report their violations drops dramatically. Who wants her past sexual activities to be publicized and scrutinized?... wearing a miniskirt will now be used against a woman who is raped" (22 Mar 2006). Further, "He [Zuma] failed to show support for female emancipation when he allowed his lawyers to try to discredit the alleged victim's previous abuse" (31 Mar 2006). Outrage at the struggle song, which became Zuma's signature tune during the trial is a recurrent theme, "His insensitivity in singing *Awuleth'umshini wam* at a rape trial, with all its phallic symbolism for me as a black woman is mind blowing" (17 Feb 2006).

The attacks incorporate those in the ANC who have been supportive of shifting gender inequalities and the present leadership is thus "othered." In a particularly bitter letter one man attacks Thabo Mbeki's reign, "He has given women and children more choice than men… there are many divorces because of equality… During apartheid the black man was not free. Under Mbeki's regime the black man is in a worse position" (05.01). In another, gender activists are attacked for "try[ing] to convince us that the complainant was raped" and the media are called "irresponsible" to give them space to do it.

On the issue of the night of the alleged rape Zuma's conduct is identified as hypocritical and a bad example. The sexual encounter is not framed as rape but the gendered dimensions are foregrounded, "A man of Jacob Zuma's stature… especially when the complainant happens to be the daughter of a friend of his, an AIDS activist and half the man's age. Not so long ago Zuma led our moral regeneration campaign, so quite apart from whether or not it was rape, what was the man thinking?" (15 Mar 2006). As a "public figure… adultery sets a bad example to the youth" (13 Mar 2006). "He should not have slept with that woman without using a condom… he gave a speech in 2004 about how we should all be responsible about HIV-AIDS" (14 Mar 2006) and "At his age, in his position, his behaviour is disgusting"(10 Apr 2006).

The same letter defends Zuma's behaviour on the night of the alleged rape, "Why is the abuse of Zuma's dignity being ignored? The claim by the woman has also revealed his sexual escapades, which are a private matter… Having sex without a condom is not a crime"(31 Mar 2006). This concern with a man's right to privacy is somewhat ironic in that Zuma's sexual history was never probed.

After the judgment, several letters are unconcerned with gender justice but are outraged about the challenge to traditional patriarchy. "It is sad to see that many African women do not understand what rape and abuse is… do human rights only refer to women? What about poor men who are emotionally abused every day? Everything that a man does nowadays is wrong" (11.05) and even worse, "I can imagine thousands of men who are serving sentences for rape and abuse, which they did not commit. What would happen when

	they come out of jail? They will be angry… women who falsely accuse men should be jailed for perjury… Zuma's win was not only for him, but for all men" (12.05). Thus, the Zuma saga also provides a virtual meeting point where dissatisfaction with challenges to conservative and traditional patriarchy are articulated.
Succession	
Towards the end of the trial, several members of the public considered the possibility of Zuma as a presidential candidate. Many do not flatter him: "Zuma would be a fool not to see that he has been given his 10-count knockout" (31 Mar 2006) "If there were a conspiracy… then his alleged detractors seem to know him well… once the right environment was set up he would do the rest himself" (05 Apr 2006) He "passed from the political elite to being an ordinary, shameful individual… this marks his end in political power" (06 Apr 2006) "Zuma's ambition of becoming president in 2009 is a pipe dream… the outcome of his two trials is immaterial… Msholozi has dug his own grave and we must wait by it to make sure he sleeps in it" (17 Mar 2006)	Interestingly, while the posters and T-shirts of Zuma's supporters focus strongly on his presidential candidacy, the only letters concerning it choose not to discuss it by deferring to party structures: "Fortunately the ANC is blessed with tried and tested procedures and structures. It will… deliver the correct candidates to lead the organisation and the country" (06 Apr 2006) and "The ANC has its own policies and the machinery of succession is in place" (23 Mar 2006).

To draw together some of the threads then, it is noticeable that the majority of the opinions expressed in the letters by members of the public concur with those described in relation to the news coverage and discussed at the beginning of this paper. It is important to recall that letter writers are more middleclass and therefore literate, and that possibly the editors exercised a degree of gate keeping, either unconsciously or consciously, in their selection of letters, assigning them headlines and page positions, and also seeking to maintain some balance of view-points. While the liberal rights position is largely validated, what it omits is picked up too.

One particular letter usefully makes the point about the divisions and sees this position as ignoring "the bigger picture." The letter, published on 15 March, stands out as highly critical of those espousing a rights position, particularly gender activists. The writer (a man) points bluntly to a gulf between classes that leaves women "haves" and "have nots" with no common ground. He constructs gender activists as "sophisticated" people in "plush offices" with "easier access to the media" (presumably due to higher literacy levels) but as out of touch with the "bigger picture". This is available only to "ordinary" women and can be gained from the "street columns" outside the court. The media thus becomes part of this "other" that is not "ordinary"; part of a privileged elite speaking to a "different audience". The letter mentions the argument of the gender activists, that for women to support Zuma is something that undermines fighting abuse, but does not deal with it. In this way gender justice – part of the universal and individualised human rights discourse concomitant with neoliberal western capitalism – is trivialised in the face of the "bigger picture" hinted at, rendered not worth thinking about, unreasonable and inappropriate. This critique notices those who are absent or at least whose position has been flagged as deviant.

Pictures

The ordinary people this writer refers to might not write letters, but photographs explicitly visually represent the viewpoints of widely diverse groupings. Their "voice" is scrawled on posters and performed in dress, ritual and action. The supporters are also highly aware of the camera as they enact scenarios further spreading their message. Thus, a number of disparate groupings are depicted, again using the nodal point or catalyst of Zuma to make evident their position and their sense of marginalisation.

Outside court

Zuma, and his supporters and the gender activists all feature in the photos outside the court. The images of Zuma himself tend to be of two kinds – one records his popularity, the darling of the people, and the other surrounded by burly, head-shaven bodyguards in dark glasses that give a sinister sense of despots an conspiracies. There is a recurrent image of Zuma smiling widely, fist raised, phallic microphone in hand, presumably doing his *mshini wam* dance for adoring supporters.

Most of the pictures taken outside the courtroom show Zuma's supporters in huge numbers, waving hand-scrawled, mis-spelt placards or engaging vigorously with riot police. There are relatively few pictures of the anti-rape activists, always in much smaller groups, posters neatly and professionally printed, usually in orderly, static photographs. Thus the *Sowetan's* overall representation of the contesting groups creates the impression of order versus disorder: the anti-rape activists are already well-behaved and orderly, in fact personifying the middle-class, literate target market of the *Sowetan*, the ordered citizenry, while Zuma's supporters are disorderly and the police, often foregrounded in the pictures, have to enforce order on them. Another noteworthy pattern in these pictures is



ACCUSER NOW THE ACCUSED

State derides Zuma's conspiracy theory

The woman who said Jacob Zuma raped her was accused of being a liar in the Johannesburg high court yesterday.

"The complainant is in certain respects a liar," Kemp J Kemp, the former deputy president's lawyer, told the court.

In a bid to have his client discharged by Judge Willem van der Merwe, Kemp said the state had not proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the complainant had been raped.

The HIV-positive woman alleged Zuma raped her at his home in Johannesburg last November last year. But Zuma said they had consensual sex.

Kemp said the complainant had lied to the court about her matriculating and that she had lied to Zuma by reneging on a promise made after the alleged rape that she would meet him.

She had told newspapers that Zuma had not raped her, Kemp said, and she had not told the police that, shortly before the alleged rape, she had visited Zuma in his study dressed only in a kanga [wrap].

Kemp said it was highly improbable that the complainant could not remember the name of the boarding-school teacher who she claimed had raped her and had made her pregnant.

Earlier this month the complainant testified that she believed she had lost consciousness when the teacher raped her. She said she had an abortion – which would have been illegal at the time – after the rape.

"It seems to be one of the situations where sexual intercourse was being labelled rape because it suited her," Kemp said.

Kemp said the complainant had told the court that Yusuf Dockrat, a lawyer, had urged her to drop the rape charge against Zuma, but Dockrat denied this.

DISBELIEVING: Kemp J Kemp, Jacob Zuma's lawyer

HIGH SPIRITS: Jacob Zuma supporters show their support for the former deputy president outside the Johannesburg high court where he is appearing on a rape charge.

Clipping from 30 March 2007



OVERHEATED: A Jacob Zuma supporter is restrained by police after clashing with sympathisers of the rape complainant.

The doctor who examined the complainant after the alleged rape said she told him that she had washed, douched and bathed, Kemp told the court.

But the complainant had testified that she had taken a shower.

The complainant said she had told the doctor of "a stinging pain" in her vagina but the doctor said she had made no mention of this.

Kemp asked why the complainant did not say in her statement to the police that Zuma had held her hands down during the alleged rape, as she had testified in court.

"One would think it would be very important to put this in the statement to support the rape allegation," Kemp said.

The complainant told the police that she went to sleep after the alleged rape. But she had testified that she had sent several SMSes after the alleged rape, he said.

Kemp questioned why the complainant had not left Zuma's house after the alleged rape or locked the door to her room. Kemp said she must have felt she was in no danger.

He said Zuma would have run a greater risk of contracting HIV during a rape than while having consensual sex.

HIV infection is more likely to be contracted during violent sex.

ON DUTY: Bodyguards are on the alert as Zuma's car leaves the Johannesburg high court.

PLACARD PROTEST: Members of women's rights groups have attended every day of the trial. PHOTOS: AP

Herman Broodryk, for the state, said that if the rape allegation against Jacob Zuma were part of a political conspiracy that conspiracy was poorly planned.

"One would have expected her [the complainant] to storm out of the house and lay this complaint with blood flowing all over her face and several bruises and a terrible story to tell.

"She did not even have a real injury," Broodryk told the court.

Zuma's legal team had not introduced political conspiracy as a fact but had merely raised the subject and then "kept their options open", Broodryk said.

Zuma was dismissed as deputy president last year when corruption charges were brought against him.

The rape charge followed.

Zuma and his supporters have claimed that the fraud and rape charges against him are part of a political conspiracy to stop him becoming president of South Africa.

Broodryk was opposing a defence application for Zuma's discharge under section 174 of the Criminal Procedure Act.

The trial continues today. – Sapa

Clipping from 30 March 2007

the overwhelming number of women playing active, vigorous roles while men are largely passive and in the background. Third, customary dress and performance are foregrounded in the pictures of Zuma's supporters.

This opposition of order and disorder is most clearly seen in a double-page spread (29 Mar 2006, 6-7) with the massive, bold, reverse upper case headline "Accuser now the accused" on the left forming the focal point. On the facing page, two pictures are next to each other. On the right, a neat line of gender activists, all women, stand stock-still about three deep behind a restraining tape, holding posters against their chests or over their heads. The posters are all the same size, and all professionally printed in the same upper-case font. They read: "Defending women rights"; "Innocent until found otherwise"; "Don't distort our rights"; and "Stop abusing our rights". Their orderliness is further emphasised by their reflection in a puddle in the foreground, so still that the reversed lettering of the posters is undisturbed.

To its left, in stark contrast, a woman in tribal clothes, beads and facepaint, her right arm thrusting vigorously towards the camera so that her pointing finger looms into the top left corner, is being physically restrained by a policeman wearing a public-order bib, profiled face impassive, eyes shaded by his cap. Both are looking away from the camera. A high-energy jumble of public order police officers and posters are in the background. The tagline is "Overheated" and the caption tells us, "A Jacob Zuma supporter is restrained by police after clashing with sympathisers of the rape complainant".

In this way while the gender activists are firmly associated with a world of civilization, sophistication and self-control while a more pagan, tribalistic and uncontrollable element is frequently associated with Zuma's supporters. In another picture, a woman in customary regalia is burning a pair of panties with a rapturous expression on her traditionally painted face (04.04, 4). In a third image a woman in a Friends of JZ T-shirt – but again with tribal beads – kneels chanting before some smoking *impephu* (incense) with a young man at her side whose head is bowed and hands are clasped as though in prayer (16 Mar 2006, 6). In this way, the customary subject is represented.

However, Zuma's supporters hail from divergent spaces. Community organisations also seize on him as a node of identification and express their grievances with the political order through support for him. Zuma's supporters often appropriate a human rights discourse to rationalise their position as we saw in the letters. In one picture (14 Feb 2006,5) Golden Miles Bhudu, self-appointed life president of the Prisoners' Organisation for Human Rights (SAPOHR), stands in orange prison garb, chains wrapped around his body, holding a badly hand-scrawled poster that reads: "Jacob Zuma was raped", thus echoing the letter quoted earlier expressing outrage at Zuma's public humiliation.

Gender relations and succession

It is not possible to separate gender and succession as discrete themes in a discussion of the pictures as we did with the letters, as so many of the pictures speak to both. Again, it is concerning gender relations that deeply conservative traditional positions are expressed. If the pro-Zuma letters expressed reluctance to deal with the succession issue, the rough, handwritten and often mis-spelt messages on posters held by Zuma's supporters outside court were explicit about it.

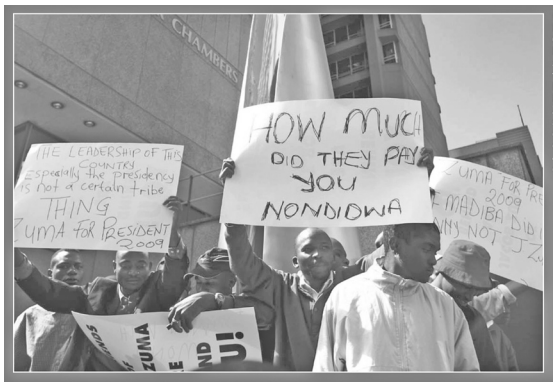
In one picture (10 Mar 2006,19), three hand-scrawled posters are fore grounded while the youths holding them are obscured by hats, shadows or the posters themselves. The central one, the focal point of the image, asks, "How much did they pay you *nondidwa*. There is no question

mark at the end, turning the question into a statement of fact, an accusation that *Nondidwa*' (isiXhosa for slut/whore) was paid, the existence of a "they" taken as certainty. Thus is the rape complainant constructed as a tramp, a liar and a tool of conspirators who would pay a woman to invent a rape. Thus, the belief in Zuma's innocence declared.

The poster to the right of this reads, "Zuma for president 2009 if Madiba did it why not JZ." With these words Zuma is elevated to Nelson Mandela's iconic status of both hero and martyr in the struggle for liberation and the present government is equated with the brutal, oppressive apartheid regime, and Zuma's rape trial is thus made concomitant with the way that regime subverted the legal system to silence those who worked for social justice. This functions to highlight Zuma's "street cred" through his liberation struggle background, to discredit the current legal system and to once again proclaim Zuma's innocence no matter what the trial's outcome.

To the left, the third poster reads, "The leadership of this country especially the presidency is not a certain tribe thing. Zuma for president 2009." This poster alludes to an ethnic contestation between Zulu and Xhosa people, introducing an element of ethnic tension present in Zuma's supporters' conspiracy theory and their construction of a Xhosa cabal intent on keeping a Zulu from becoming president. In this way, Zuma calls in this disenchanted grouping too.

The picture's tagline is "Chanting hate", and the caption, unusually, is overt commentary from the *Sowetan*:



"Claiming to know for sure what the court has yet to learn, Jacob Zuma's supporters demonstrate outside the Joburg high court." Thus, the *Sowetan* has directed the reader to feel critical of Zuma's faceless supporters for chanting hate speech and for pre-empting a judge's decision although they can hardly write.

Other political tensions are in this mix too. Another picture (07.04:6) shows a woman in ethnic regalia and face paint holding up and pointing to a battered piece of packing box cardboard covered with close, hand printed script, so badly written as to be barely legible. Her eyes are closed and the paint renders her face, mask-like, impenetrable. The poster reads: "1. Where is Chris Hani? Assassinated before he succeeded Mandela. 2. Where is Ramaphosa? Forced to jet out of xx to consider business. 3. Where is Matthews Phosa? Stepped out of the race to follow business. 4. Where is Tokyo? Pushed to follow business. Next to poor comrade Zuma – they regard as illiteracy and pushed to courts because you wouldn't accommodate business but president – they decided to take you to court for nothing. Viva JZ viva!" This reasonably sophisticated political analysis (incongruous with its crude form) succinctly summarises the conspiracy theory that contextualized the rape trial and constructed the rape complainant as a political pawn. Those who espouse the theory are also hailed as members of this disparate grouping.

Another poster stands out when considering the tangled threads of gender and succession: unusually for Zuma's supporters it is professionally printed and equally unusually it is held by a man. It reads: Cosatu says Phumzile won't be president (22.05: 13)[2]. The poster is a direct response to Thabo Mbeki's announcement[3] that he thought South Africa was ready for a woman president. The patriarchal tone is clear. What the pictures in effect reiterate is the division that the letter about class proposed.

Conclusion

We have seen how Zuma serves as the "nodal point" around which the two discourses arrange their chains of equivalence, investing his identity with oppositional meanings.

TABLOID CONTENT – A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

The anti-Zuma chain arguably functions within a neoliberal rights-based frame that constructs him as a perpetrator of gender crime, morally suspect, foolish, sexually irresponsible, hypocritical, a bad example and unfit to succeed Mbeki to the presidency, while his supporters' discourse constructs him as a liberation hero, martyr, champion of the poor and a victim of conspiracy.

We also said populism as a discourse functions to call in widely diverse groupings that are marginalised by the current dispensation, often embracing a range of diverse and even contradictory political beliefs, linked only by their inimical stance towards a particular administrative or political power. In relation to this study, these include the ANC's leftist alliance partners' desire for less centrism and a more socialist economic policy; the bruised ethnic pride of the Zulu people; the construction of a conspiracy to prevent Zuma's ascendancy to presidency and the genuinely desperate poverty and unemployment among the majority of South Africans, many of whom lack housing, employment, health care, access to schools or even clean water.

If a populist front has formed around Zuma, then it may be wise to recall the words of Mamdani:

> Part of the lesson of the Uganda Asian experience is that the denial of justice bred a wave of popular discontent, a wave a demagogue rode to power. The story of Idi Amin Dada has been racialized and told over and again, as that of an anthropological oddity. To be meaningful, it needs to be retold as the story of an unaddressed social grievance that could be harvested by a demagogue. (2005: 8)

Idi Amin, in other words, capitalised on the existing conditions, which according to Laclau are necessary for a "populist rupture" – a history of long-frustrated social demands. Arguably then, despite its popular origins the Sowetan and its identity as a tabloid, has chosen sides in the class divide, in certain ways marginalising the underclass and foregrounding its wealthier middle class market through its liberal stance. In the words of the letter referred to earlier: "The two sides speak to different audiences and past each other" (15.3.06).

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Writer's Bio

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Notes

[2]This statement refers to Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, who not only replaced Zuma as the country's deputy president when he was fired by Mbeki after the rape accusation, but is married to former Scorpion head Bulelani Ngcuka, who led the fraud investigation into Zuma and his financial adviser Shabir Shaik.

[3]It was reported in the Sowetan under the headline 'Mbeki's timing raises gender issue for Cosatu' (08 May 2006, 4).

What the editors say





Editor's experience of creating a voice for the voiceless, tabloid-style.

By Beata Kasale, Publisher

Botswana's *The Voice* newspaper, which celebrated its 14th birthday in February 2007, prints over 32 000 copies weekly and boasts by far the highest circulation in Botswana. The paper has become almost as controversial as the news it carries. Yet, it also carries stories that people want to hear about, and effectively engages its readers.

The Voice's founding aim was to offer an alternative newspaper focusing on local-interest stories and entertainment, crime stories, gossip columns, lives of celebrities and people of prominence, as well as sports stars.

However, in the absence of celebrities in a country with a population of 1.7 million people and a low-key response to sports stars in Botswana, *The Voice* realigned its content to reflect Botswana society today, as well as to give the "voiceless a voice." However, most of all, to bring issues otherwise regarded as mundane to the public interest.

The Voice gives extensive coverage to a wide range of social, cultural and political issues which are deemed to impact the "man on the street" and it is predominantly identified by its lively, brief news content, with an abundance of pictures and big headlines while reporting wonderful, amazing, and even shocking stories.

Despite comments that the beautiful 'Voice-babes' published on page 3 and the gossip column sells the paper, we have established that it is the headline, which sells the newspapers.

People are interested to read about national issues and the hypocrisy displayed by prominent members of our society. They are tired of politicians who stand there and wag their fingers and preach but do not practice. We believe that a good and responsible reporter's job is to get the story. If the story happens to be about sex, we cannot get away from it.

Our country, as with other African states, struggles with the HIV and AIDS issue, but this does not stop infidelity. The sex scandals articles name and shame those in the public eye, who indulge in extra-marital affairs. How can we effectively curb HIV/AIDS when our courts are full of cases of infidelity and some of these cases involve the 'cream' and the 'role models' of our society?

Perhaps one of the most controversial stories, still talked about today, was the 1997 headline, Have you had Sex with this Lady?, which featured the tragic story of brave Sally Modise who had died from an HIV/AIDS related illness.

Modise gave an exclusive interview to the paper a year before her death. She was deeply concerned and disturbed that the HIV/AIDS issue did not seem to have any impact on the society who continued to be in denial and treated HIV/AIDS with stigma and discrimination. She asked that her death be dramatised to reach out to the public.

The story sparked much heated debate. Some felt *The Voice* violated Sally's human rights. Ten years later, we still stand by that headline as we have heard testimony of how that headline has changed many a life. At a Gender Links organised workshop in Gaborone, Botswana journalists discussed the "Have you had Sex with this Lady?" headline and one journalist said that the story encouraged him to practice safe sex.

The newspaper has become a "voice of voice-less" by becoming actively involved in running various campaigns for the marginalised and the poverty stricken. *The Voice* has worked with people living with HIV/AIDS and given them a platform to talk about the issue through columns in the paper.


April 19, 2002

The Voice

www.thevoice.co.bw

SPEAKS FOR ITSELF P1.50 V244

SCARRED FOR LIFE

Victim of violence campaigns for help

FACE OF THE FACELESS: Juleka is the face of abused women

THIS IS the picture of a woman scarred for life by h

Juleka's story inspired action and public apology.


THE VOICE

ABUSIVE MAN SPEAKS

THE MAN who poured petrol and set alight a woman whose scarred face appeared on the front page of The Voice recently said he was sorry he did it.

Violence

R LIFE: Juleka Africa

DIRECTORATE

REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

Stories have also encouraged readers to come forward to lend a helping hand. The story of a woman, badly scarred when her former boyfriend torched her face and body, touched a kind reader who raised money for her to reconstruct her face through plastic surgery. The story also resulted in a response for the former boyfriend, public acknowledgement that he was sorry for what he did.

A child who was born without an anus got assistance from The Voice reader, Robert Masitara who, through his charity organisation, raised money for an operation in South Africa, which relieved the baby from this disability.

The paper has also inspired community action. The Free Baeta campaign, launched in 1997 for a woman jailed for 10 years for stealing P50.00 from her friend, ultimately resulted in her release from prison following the massive campaign started by The Voice. In February 2007, a Tati Siding man had a tragic accident when his donkey drawn cart collided with the train. He lost a grand-daughter and all his donkeys were killed. Through an appeal from the newspaper, readers raised money to buy the family a cart and donkeys.

The Voice shows that though editorial content may include tabloid style brief stories, big visuals (including beautiful girls), controversy, and the most ordinary, amazing, and even shocking stories, it can also be a sensitive and compelling source of news and current affairs that affect the average person. The Voice moved from tabloid to a popular but more sensitive publication, ensuring that there is above all 'a voice for the voiceless.'

Writers Bio
Beata Kasale is publisher and co-owner of *The Voice* newspaper in Botswana.

Tabloid editors: what makes a tabloid tick?

Based on interviews by Loga Virahswamy, Sikhonzile Ndlovu and Willy Kitima

As part of the *Mirror on the Media – Tabloids* research that Gender Links is conducting in Mauritius, South Africa and Tanzania, researchers spoke with tabloid editors in each of the three countries about their publications, what makes them popular, and their understanding of their role in the media landscape. Among other interviews, Sikhonzile Ndlovu interviewed Charles Mogale, editor of *Sunday World* in South Africa; Loga Virahswamy interviewed Jean-Claude Dedans, a senior journalist with *L'Hebdo* and Ariane de l'Estrac, managing editor of *La Sentinelle*, including tabloid *5-Plus*, in Mauritius; Willy Kitima interviewed Joyce Bazira, managing editor for *Alasiri* in Tanzania.



Loga Virahswamy with Jean-Claude Matombe, Seychelles
Credit: Colleen Lowe Morna

About the publications

The editors interviewed represent just a sample of the growing number of tabloid newspapers found in the region. Each of the publications enjoys significant readerships. According to Charles Mogale, the latest *Sunday World* sale at the time of the interview (4 August 2007) was 203 000-plus and they had been selling over 200 000 copies for three weeks in succession. Based on an estimated readership of seven people per copy, the readership should be upward of 1.5 million. *L'Hebdo* sells about 10 000 copies per week, while 5-Plus sells 80,000, the second largest readership in Mauritius of the ten weeklies. *Alsiri* normally prints up to 26,000 copies daily, though the number may vary depending on various factors.

For the most part, the tabloids target readerships are the young and women, largely with lower or middle income. Sunday World's readership is mostly 18-35 year-old, affluent, ambitious blacks with some disposable income, living in both townships and suburbs, more than 70% in Gauteng province. Both *L'Hebdo' s* and *5 Plus's* readers are mostly women and middle class people, though *L'Hebdo* is principally found in towns and suburbs and 5 Plus sold in both urban and rural regions. *Alasiri* targets Tanzanians with low income who cannot afford the price of big papers, especially women.

Why makes tabloids popular and successful?

Though there are many differences the tabloid landscape, especially between Mauritius and the other countries, all editors indicated that the popularity of tabloids relied on the fact that the content was relatively "light" and entertaining, prioritises

people, and reflects the average persons own experiences.

"They are different, fresh and unlike mainstream, traditional newspapers, they are not angry. They are funny and entertaining, and people want entertainment sometimes, especially on Sundays… [people] love being taken into the personal lives of their role models and other celebrities."
– Charles Mogale, *Sunday World*

"It's easy to read, small and the front page is attractive. You have to run a full story on the six columns and this will act as a teaser."
– Jean-Claude Dedans, *L'Hebdo*

"The popularity of 5-Plus is due to its politics of being close to the people and each event has a human dimension and takes the angle of the human being." – Ariane de l'Estrac, *5 Plus.*

"What we mostly consider in our stories is their timelines, relevance and ethic. The language, humor and our style of presentation of facts make our paper different from others. They like our style of telling hard facts using jesting style as well as our way we break news on time. They get annoyed when we write stories which were published in morning papers." – Joyce Bazira, *Alsiri*

The response from Mauritius, and from Mogale of Sunday World, reflect that editors do not view all tabloids as being the same.

"In other countries tabloids are popular because of their taste for sensationalism and scandals, but in Mauritius this is different. The format, the approach, the angle, and the variety of information that covers the whole week, the choice of the day it is put on the market (Sunday) and the richness in content are all gathered together to make tabloids so popular. 5 Plus is therefore a magazine of news that puts in perspective the events of the week with a human approach. Tabloids in Mauritius cannot be qualified of being "dumbed-down" as opposed to the broadsheets. A newspaper which targets a middle class public is a tabloid, L'Express Dimanche." – de l'Estrac

"We pioneered tabloid journalism in the country. We believe we are a credible, thinking person's tabloid. We are celebrity driven, and many of the celebs we feature are role models to our readers. Most importantly, we are not the kind of tabloid that will publish a story that says 'Tokoloshe gave me Aids.'" – Mogale

Each of the editors indicated that they felt that they had a responsibility to the public, and that they adhered to common journalistic principles, but with a unique role to play in the media landscape.

"L'Hebdo has a reputation to be harsh on its news. Never bias nor are we consensual. We have always a good human story and some big scandals. On political matters, no one can point at us a finger to say that we are for X, Y or Z."
– Dedans

"Mainstream newspapers serve a different need in the market. Some are papers of record, some pursue political agendas, some take up social issues (on behalf of their constituencies). We are different and serve a different market. We can't all be angry political watchdogs. Some must entertain, and we do… We believe those who want to be educated must read textbooks. Our market knows politics, business, world affairs etc are all important, but they prefer something else on Sunday. They want a bit of a light-hearted, uplifting, often amusing read. That's what we supply… The Mail and Guardian is one of the best newspapers in the world, and it's a fact. But we are not trying to be like them. Imagine if every newspaper tried to solve the problems of the world… boring, boring, boring!!!"
– Mogale

"Our news values are honesty, fairness and double-checking. We do not have a locomotive alone and no wagons behind like the mainstream newspapers. We make it sure that we have wagons

full of astonishing things." – Dedans

"Media Practitioners of La Sentinelle Ltd work according to a Code of Ethics, which insist on accuracy, balance, and precise information in articles, ethics, freedom and independence. 5 Plus distinguishes itself by its commitment to give voices to the voiceless and by its creative angles... apart from informing, education and entertaining, the media must build a link between people." – de l'Estrac

"We are here to denunciate, to be the public's voice... Journalism is a way for each journalist to play his or her role to bring truth to his/her readers. We are of an extreme fairness in our way we treat news. Fairness is all about our job." – Dedans

Gender issues and complaints

Although tabloids are often criticised for their representation for women and gender stereotypes, all four editors interviewed felt this did not apply to their publication.

"The angles – family, intimacy of personalities that makes the news, gender equality. There is always a woman behind a man and vice versa." – de l'Estrac

"We sometimes have complaints, it's most about the harshness of some news. You never can please to everybody in that job. But they are never of a gender nature... normally, all scandals deal with men, unfortunately. So, women have a better share and a quite positive view." – Dedans

"We find that if we do not have a woman on the cover, the sales tend to dip. We try and 'lighten' up Page 1, 2 and 3 with a nice image of a lady – preferably a well-known personality… those who do not read us accuse us of being trashy. We are not – it is the fault of those publications who give tabloids a bad name. One of them recently brazenly referred to the president's private parts. We do not do that. We believe smut is not smart. We are sexy without being gross and sleazy." – Mogale

Overall, each of the editors indicated that their role in the media landscape was unique, and that tabloids enjoy a growing popularity among the reading public. Perhaps Mogale's indication of what research showed prior to *Sunday World's* redesign from broadsheet to a tabloid is most telling:

"…the most important piece of research was prior to redesign from broadsheet to tabloid. The message was change to tabloid, or close shop." – Mogale



Promoting tabloid journalism

Matebello Motloung

Tabloid journalists often complain that journalism awards discriminate against their genre. But perhaps the industry is justified in doing so, asks ***Matebello Motloung.***

The biggest achievement of tabloid newspapers in this country is said to be their penetration of a market that previously either did not read newspapers or was not adequately represented in the mainstream media.

While I can't say I'm a fan, I have to say, my recent experience with the Daily Sun has forced to me acknowledge that this tabloid gives its readers a sense of ownership over the paper, and is rightly referred to as "the people's paper."

The daily recently republished an article I wrote for *The Media*'s sister website, Marketingweb, and before 10am that very same day, I had received four emails from Daily Sun readers. You can imagine my surprise at this almost instantaneous response given that it is said most readers are semi-literate and often blue-collar workers. Needless to say, I continued to receive many more that week and had also become an overnight "celebrity" in my neighbourhood. Neither my neighbours nor the young boys who wash my car at weekends let me forget that they saw me in the newspaper.

Discussing efforts to encourage tabloids to enter the Vodacom Journalist of the Year Awards this year, my colleagues and I wondered how best the playing field could be levelled. After all, there are stark differences between tabloids and mainstream publications especially when it comes to the quality of the content and their writing styles. For example, how does one judge a piece published in *Cape Argus* or *Beeld* with one by the *Daily Voice* or *Son* when their writing and language usage are worlds apart. Yes, the articles may not be that incomprehensible but part of the judging includes checking proper language usage with as few colloquialisms and slang as possible.

I had a debate about this with an editor of one of the tabloid newspapers asking him why is it they run stories that are unbelievable to some of us such as people being raped by snakes or being victims of some form of witchcraft or the other.

"But who are we to question what the people say? If someone tells you that his house is haunted and that at night this and that happens, who are we to say that the person is lying just because they believe in something we don't? You know very well that among black people, if something happens and they can't explain it, there are those who will say it must be witchcraft."

That said, is it then justified for a newspaper to publish a recipe of how to make a dangerous drug in the name of educating readers on how easy it is to make the substance?

Please don't get me wrong, I'm not saying tabloids should not be allowed to enter journalism awards because that would be discrimination. After all, there are positive contributions they've made to their communities such as leading successful campaigns against crimes like rape and drug usage. All I'm saying is it would be nice to see more of them use their influence more responsibly because, yes, tabloids have succeeded in getting people to read but does that count when all they are fed is information that doesn't improve their lives?

Matebello Motloung is the deputy editor of The Media magazine.

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What the readers say



Arlete Moises scans the *Daily Sun* *Credit: Brendan Kennedy*



The tabloid advantage: readers want local coverage

By Teboho Senthebane

Abstract

Critics of tabloids take the journalism profession itself to task for what they consider the poor journalistic quality of tabloid journalism. However, what do the readers think? In particular, why have young people become less interested in news and less critical of the techniques typical of tabloid style? These critics often seem to overlook the impetus coming not from journalists but from the audience. While critics agree that the audience has a role in determining the direction in which journalism is going, limited empirical work has been done on how audiences actually view news, how they define it and what they do with it. The article discusses the characteristics of tabloids, debates on tabloidisation of the media and implications of their booming market in the region. The article includes the viewpoints of two readers of tabloids, and two people who do not read tabloids. Why do some read, and some not read.

Key words

HIV/AIDS, South Africa, gender, representation, tabloids, rape.

A move towards tabloidisation

There is widespread debate about what some consider to be the process of "tabloidisation" of the media. This process involves a shift to new and more entertainment-oriented kinds of content, and a shift from verbal to visual priorities. At their most extreme, critics of tabloidisation see it as one major element provoking a crisis of public life that is eroding the basis of democracy. On the other hand, there are those who argue that there is little or no evidence for growing tabloidisation, and that the traditional functions of the mass media continue to be discharged at least as well as they have been in the past. Others welcome the spread of tabloidisation, which they see as broadening and democratising the content of the mass media. The old ways of the media were the preserve of an elite minority and they served to exclude the voices and concerns of the majority of the population, particularly the poor and women.

So, what has changed? Kaushal (2007) posits, "the very dynamics of tabloidisation rests on

media development and the massive competition which sets the whole process of circulation and advertising in a perspective with the strategies which are employed to be the "best" in the business. The broadcast boom and the internet explosion have had serious implications on the way tabloidisation as a phenomenon developed.

The boom in tabloids aimed at the township market reflects a wider trend. Newspaper companies long wrote off black consumers as too poor to buy their products, but have recently woken up to the massive buying power the market holds. Media executives say higher incomes and improved literacy among the black majority, as well as the end of apartheid-era censorship prompted them to launch more populist newspapers.

Some other African countries already boast tabloids. Uganda's raunchy *Red Pepper* features plenty of female flesh and Zimbabwe media firms publish two tabloids, albeit slightly more high-brow than some of their South African counterparts.

Experts are now questioning what these tabloids have that other newspapers lack? The answer: local coverage. Tabloids are focusing more on the news that is not found anywhere else. Internet news can easily replace national news, but local stories keep reader's attention.

Giving readers what they want

"It has all the news about what's happening in the townships, and it's cheap," said security guard Jacob Jaleni of top-selling tabloid *Daily Sun*. "Some people don't like it but I think it tells the story like it is." Local news is attractive to young people since it involves the community in which they live, it is about people or situations they know and schemes of reference do not have to be complex in order to achieve a ready understanding.

Anton Haber (2007) insists, "they have given us one of the healthiest and most vigorous newspaper markets in the world, and drawn in hundreds of thousands of new daily readers, or that they are filled with the faces and voices of South Africans often absent from mainstream media."



A probable question is: What constitutes serious journalism today? For many editors, it begins with a newspaper in the broadsheet format. Readers, fortunately, decide by content and presentation, not on the size of the sheet on which it is printed. Newspapers are the only product whose size and form are determined by those who produce it, and not by those who consume it.

With millions of readers, this genre of news papering has proved economically successful if dubious in content. The number of loyal readers of tabloids signifies that readers' insatiable appetite for gossip was not just a 19th century phenomenon but is an inherent characteristic of human nature.

As a regular tabloid reader, Mthuthuzeli Mhletswa is conscious that some of tabloids harshest critics seldom read them, "I have observed that people who buy them rarely, if ever criticise them. I personally applaud tabloids; they help us in our aspirations: from raising money to highlighting the failure of local amenities, so let us not be too quick to condemn everything the tabloids do."

Another dedicated reader, Thandi Sojane quickly points out "I like tabloids because they speak to me in a language that I speak and understand, I particularly find them interesting to read, they write short paragraphs in simple language, flashy headlines and

illustrations or photographs designed to astonish readers and that's what I want in a newspaper."

Other people stand to differ, Xolani Khuzwayo never reads tabloids at all and dislikes them, saying, "they use elementary language and can be very sensational and they are only concerned with grabbing attention, not accuracy." Sharon Lenin observes that most editors and writers conform to journalistic standards and work hard to maintain an overall sense of "objectivity," but "tabloids don't seem to follow any of these rules. Tabloids are insensitive to people's feelings and pretend to be living in a world of their own."

The question then is; so where do they get their stories?

Some tabloid reporters generally claim, "so we must be doing something right, rather than write long and windy pieces to win awards, we write short and sensational stories to win readers." Mzimkhulu Sithetho, an old hand Lesotho journalist and editor of *Watchdog* posits, "I have written for a tabloid newspaper that had an upper hand in the up market with high sales. I have since come to grips with the reality that tabloids provide readers with information they need. They therefore perform the information role perfectly. They are spontaneous in reporting and put their material into context, at least to suit the reader."

He adds that tabloids both inform and entertain readers. "This is done by careful choice of words that are coined in a way that pulls the attention of the reader." Nevertheless, he argues, "like an intravenous needle that injects a patient and sends him or her panicking, tabloids create panic by publishing material that rocks the reader and creates a sense of going mad. When they pick on an issue that could be treated nominally, tabloids send readers mad with the Bang! Bang! Approach, raising readers' eyebrows."

Tabloidisation and quality journalism

Tabloidisation of the media today connotes a shift from the reporting of important information to entertaining the audiences with celebrity gossip, sex and crime. The word tabloid has become associated with a distinctly negative connotation, one of sleazy content and immoral reporting techniques. Many consider tabloids to be a villain in the media world, as well as a source of extreme embarrassment for the society's journalistic and literary elite.

Despite the characterisation of tabloid as trash by the media elite, implementation of some of the tools of the tabloid has affected mainstream media's bottom line in a very positive way – better circulations, bigger audiences and of course larger profits. The skyrocketing sales of tabloids and their focus on entertainment rather than hard news caused the mainstream media to adopt some tabloid tactics to increase readership. Newspapers are increasingly pursuing a quest for smallness and convenience in an effort to retain an increasingly scarce commodity: readers.

Many editors and publishers still relate tabloid to lower quality journalism. Despite the recent success of quality newspapers, such as *The Times of London*, converting to tabloid, the "myth" of tabloids as less than quality prevails in the minds of many inside newsrooms. The myth is difficult to debunk, despite what research shows about readers preferring the smaller formats (a majority of readers, especially younger ones, do), as well as the circulation success of those newspapers making the transition.

It is this myth of the tabloid or, better yet, the irrational fear of some editors and publishers of the word "tabloid" itself that keeps many from contemplating the idea of testing their newspaper in a smaller format. Using stereotypes, and even worse, formats, to determine what constitutes serious versus sensational journalism is not going to lead to better products. Size matters. It can be argued that the myth that somehow big represented best has now been blown away. For some time now, publishers, advertisers and even readers have been looking to smaller formats. More and more people are turning to the tabloid at the expense of competitors. Our industry has been hijacked by the notion that

tabloids somehow suggest tacky. Such a migration is not without challenges, in particular in advertising.

Stephen Lacy, a journalism professor at Michigan State University argues, "people these days expect choice. Those who provide content have to give people choice, or they're going to lose consumers." (Deggens 2006)

News organisations have responded to the new media environment in several ways. Many are going tabloid. Instead of beating their entertainment and propaganda competitors, many journalists are joining them. The increased competition spawned by the new technologies has led some traditional news purveyors to "go tabloid" – increasing coverage of celebrity gossip, bizarre crime, and sex scandals to try to retain their mass audience and as a result have loosened their standards and definitions of what makes news.

The challenge for the journalist is not the medium but the message. As consumers start experimenting in cyberspace, journalists need to address more urgently not the delivery format but the quality of their core product: reliable and useful information on which citizens can act.

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Writer Bio
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Word on the street, what consumers say

Surveying customers purchasing newspapers at a Johannesburg newsstand, here is what readers had to say about what tabloids they read, and why.

Compiled by Brendan Kennedy and Dikeledi Sibanda
Photos: Brendan Kennedy



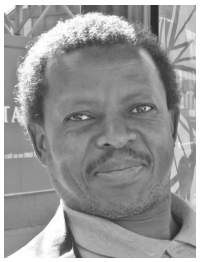
Name: Patricia Hillman
Age: 45
From: Mayfair
What newspaper: The Daily Sun
"It tells you what's going on around you. Other papers tell you what's going on in other countries. I like to know what's going on around me."



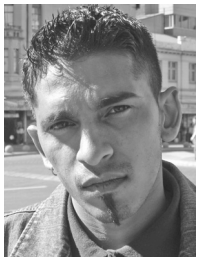
Name: Lemmy Ngxabazi
Age:
From: Eastern Cape
What newspaper: The Sowetan and The Daily Sun
"It updates me in everything: news, sports, entertainment; so I can know what's happening around me."



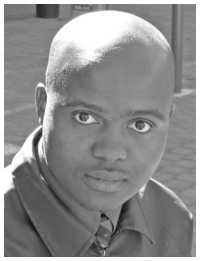
Name: Lesego Motshegwa
Age: 19
From: Kew
What paper: The Sowetan
"I read it for the information, and because it's true unlike the Daily Sun."



Name: Marks Tshabalala
Age: 50
From: Hillbrow
What paper: Daily Sun
"The Daily Sun is up to date with the news and it's better than other papers."



Name: Donovan Govendar
Age: 27
From: Telfontein
What paper: Daily Sun
"It's cheaper and also more interesting."



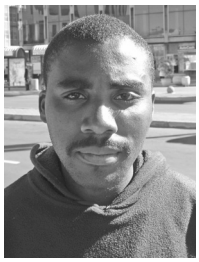
Name: Ndabezinhle Nqayi
Age: 20
From: Orange Farm
What paper: Daily Sun and The Star
"The Daily Sun is direct and forward. The Star keeps us posted on what's happening around us and for employment."



Name: Jennifer Gerhardi
Age: 25
From: Ridgeway Ext. in Mondeor
What paper: The Citizen
"It has a lot more detail and it's more interesting."



Name: Olivia Featherson
Age: 23
From: Weltevreden Park
What paper: The Star and The Citizen
"I want to be informed on different issues."



Name: Sibusiso Njokwe
Age: 22
From: Midrand
What paper: The Daily Sun, The Star, The Sowetan, The Thembisan (as a security guard, he's able to read them all). Favourites - The Star and The Sowetan.
"I read The Star for the employment pages on Wednesday and Friday, and I read the Daily Sun because I like to know what's happening around me."



Name: Jocob Maphoto
Age: 25
From: Braamfisher
What paper: Daily Sun and The Star
"It's affordable and has lots of information on what's going on around us."

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Media Watch





Magazine editors, objectivity and neutrality. "We cannot at any stage be seen to be political, as we are not here to engender change, but to inspire"

By Nadia Sanger

Abstract

This paper explores notions of objectivity, neutrality and the "political" in the views of South African magazine editors and how these views relate to their representations of gender and sexuality. It argues, from a feminist poststructuralist position, that the insistence on the objectivity and neutrality of their publications is in sharp contrast to the ways in which a political position is taken in presenting gender and sexuality in binaristic and unequal terms within the pages of the magazines. The presentation of women and homosexuals in these magazines as "other" and exotic erases any claim of objectivity and neutrality.

Key words

Magazines, editors, objectivity, gender

Editors' roles

The article is based on interviews with five editors of South African magazines – *For Him* Magazine (FHM), *Men's Health*, Blink, *True Love* and *Fair Lady*. The editors of *FHM* and *Men's Health* are white males, the editor of *Fair Lady* is a white female, *True Love* has a black female editor, and *Blink* had a black male editor before the magazine ceased to exist, as discussed later in this article. Except for *Blink* magazine, which no longer exists, interviewees will be anonymous and not linked to the magazine brand which she/he represents, though the article will disclose the "race" and sex of the interviewee.

Most editors linked the success of their magazines-making as the priority," noting that "a successful magazine taps into the heads of its reader-ship – their needs, desires and lifestyles' (white male editor of a men's magazine). Another white male editor of a men's magazine noted that

> magazines are much more concerned with the bottom line than with playing an important role as change agents. Magazines are very commercially orientated and people who work there see their jobs as growing circulation/readers. The business prerogative in magazine publishing is far more dominant than the social one.

Similarly, the editor of a woman's magazine relates that "consumers only respond to something that has personal appeal for them, which means that

they are already predisposed to the subject matter." Both these editors appear to agree that magazines merely *reflect* the realities of its readership – they do not produce realities.

This is different to the views of ex-editor of *Blink* magazine, Siphiwe Mpye, on his role in building *Blink* magazine. Mpye (2006) notes for example that *Blink* set out to

> To show the rest of the country that the affluent black male has not only emerged, but will, given time, increasingly be the backbone of [the South African] economy… we had also realised and wanted to show this man to be about much more than soccer, BMWs and bling. We wanted to show that he was also passionate, compassionate, intelligent, worldly, sensitive, politically aware, discerning (Mpye in Viljoen 2007, in press).

Discussions around notions of what constitutes the "political", objectivity and neutrality constantly highlighted differences in what these editors saw as their role.

Magazines as creators of meaning

As agents of socialisation, the media could play an important role in social responsibility by raising awareness about such issues as HIV/AIDS, male violence against women and children, racism and poverty, amongst other social problems in South Africa. Others who see the media as having a critical responsibility in transforming South African society have argued this. Boswell (2002) for instance has argued that the media has both the power and responsibility in shaping society's views about the world. She points out that the media could be either a tool for maintaining the status quo or a tool for transformation. Similarly, Tomaselli and Tomaselli (2001), talk about the role of the media – including magazines – as both sites and instruments of transformation. As instruments of transformation, the authors relate how the media provides important platforms for information, debate and education "around issues shaping the kind of society we are, and the kind of society we wish to become" (2001, 124).



Most media miss out showing the caring, sensitive side of men
Credit: Trevor Davies

In terms of gender and sexuality, many feminist theorists have commented on the ways in which media presents women. Boswell (2002) for instance has argued that the media plays a critical role in shaping constructions of femininities by reinforcing "acceptable" gender roles. Speaking particularly about masculinities, Kimmel (1992) has suggested that the media functions as one of the key elements in presenting "acceptable" ways of being men. Allen (2003) argues that the normative presentations of masculinities and femininities in the media are those that privilege heterosexuality, and the active male/passive female binary. Similarly, Durham and Kellner (2001) relate how media products provide materials from which we forge our notions of what it means to be heterosexual, homosexual, women or men. In terms of how hetero-femininities are presented in the media, I take MacDonald's (1995) position who claims that definitions of femininity:

> have historically been much more integral to the formation of identity for women than for men. If women had defined for themselves the ideals of their bodily shape or decoration, this would not be problematic. It is the denial of this right in the history of Western cultural representation, in medical practice, and in the multi-billion dollar pornography, fashion and cosmetic industries, that has

granted women only squatters' rights to their own bodies (1995, 193).

However, as I will discuss below, most editors did not see their magazines as obligated to playing any role in transformation. Instead, most understood social responsibility as a "political" issue, and magazines were located as both objective and neutral in their contents. The prevailing views expressed in the interviews with editors therefore centered on notions of objectivity and neutrality, which I discuss below.

Magazines as neutral and objective

The dominant view in interviews was that magazines were not "political" but subscribed to particular notions of objectivity and neutrality:

> It's not the job of the media to fight racism, sexism, homophobia, HIV/AIDS, poverty, TB or whatever. The media plays an important social role but it does not play judge and jury to whatever happens in society. We do have a responsibility to highlight and discuss social phenomena, but ultimately we afford the reader the respect to make her own judgments and opinions. The role that the media occupies – that fourth estate position we occupy – is one that is free from bias and judgment.

This view, articulated by a white female editor of a woman's magazine, was common in interviews with editors. However, it is also a view that has been long been problematised. Unlike the view of the editor above that the media might "highlight and discuss social phenomena", Stuart Hall (1992) has argued that the media defines, not merely produces, "reality". Hall explains how the active work of selecting, presenting, structuring and shaping material in media content does not merely reflect "an already-existing meaning" but instead is the practice of "*making things mean*" (cited in Braude, 1999, 18, emphasis in original). Nevertheless, this was not the view of the editors I interviewed and they overwhelmingly took the position that their magazines reflected neutrality and objectivity. As a white male editor of a men's magazine related:

> I'm uncomfortable with magazines supposed role in nation-building. Magazines are products, like chocolate bars. Magazines are profit-making products; they are not there for nation-building. Magazines do not have to be there for the betterment of society. But they also cannot be guided by commercial gain. Too much emphasis on products playing a role in nation-building when magazines have a massive responsibility to shareholders.

Instead, editors understood magazines to be a mode of entertainment, as one white female editor put it:

> They are there to amuse, inform and entertain people no matter what the subject. A magazine's role is to discuss issues and explain/break-down arguments that help readers make an informed decision on their own. People's perceptions may not be changed by what they read in magazines, but at least they have more info at their disposal to inform/challenge those perceptions, whatever they may be.

In other words, magazines provide information that readers can choose to discard or utilise. Again, editors understand this information to be neutral and objective, even though, as the same interviewee argues later, "social, political and economic changes all play a distinctive role in moving the magazine and its readership in particular directions." But another black female editor believed that magazines should steer away from "politics" entirely, stating that "as a glossy women's magazine, we cannot at any stage be seen to be political, as we are not here to engender change, but to inspire." Again, the overriding discourse in editors' opinions was that their magazines always aimed to be neutral and objective, in terms of the types of material included on racism, homophobia, HIV/AIDS, sexism or poverty for instance, or in the decisions to exclude material of this type altogether.

There was also the view that it was hard to be socially responsible in South Africa when the global market plays a huge role in determining what goes into editorialised versions local magazines. The global context of magazine production shaped and framed the choices around which South African stories could be published and which stories would be most "marketable".

A white male deputy editor of a men's magazine highlighted this:

> Our aim is teaching and learning from the American. Our stories are of such a global brand. We have to give it a South African spin – it's never around being socially responsible. It's about trying to solve a guy's problem. We're about day-to-day things, rather than building the nation's conscience. It's not about the broader goals of social justice. We are also tightly controlled as a brand internationally. It always comes back to how useful the info is to the reader; how will it help him in his life. We very rarely approach things to do with society. We'd never run an HIV/AIDS story and we are a health magazine. We are working on it now. We also ran a big rape feature, all with very personal stories, but the drive was this: how can you as a man respond in an environment where rape and sexual violence is so prevalent?

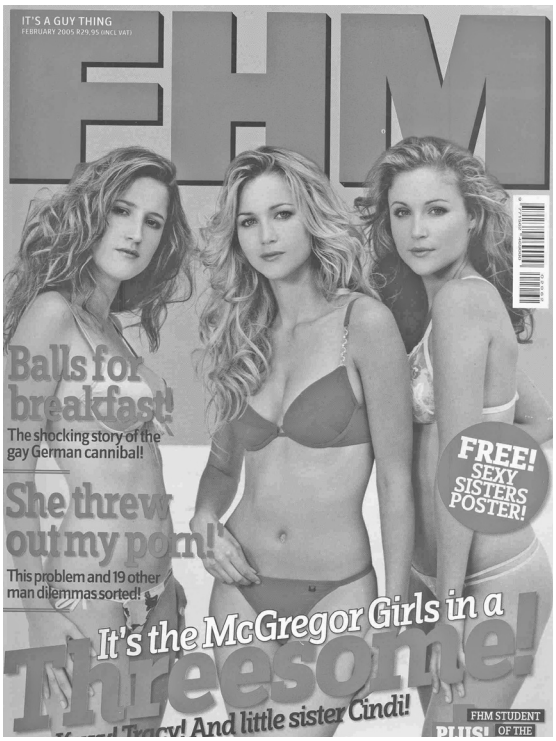
This view illustrates the supposedly "apolitical" framework preferred by the magazine. Men's problems are not understood to be social problems, and hence men must individually work them out. In other words, this magazine, targeted at male readers, clearly does not represent questions around for example, gender violence, fatherhood or HIV/AIDS as political questions requiring political solutions. Instead, such questions are presented as individual problems requiring individual solutions. The focus is on individual men's "day-to-day problems", which is understood as unrelated to more overtly political questions around "building the nation's conscience" and feeding into social change.

In terms of social transformation in which women and other marginalised groups, such as gay and lesbian South Africans, are able to experience a more meaningful "democracy", questions of sexualities are key. The following discussion reflects why neutrality isn't possible.

Gender and Sexuality

In my interviews with editors, a central element of the version of (hetero)masculinity privileged in the magazines is the construction of femininity. One white male editor of a men's magazine related that while women are often professional sources,

The male gaze is very present. Men will buy our magazine partly because there are beautiful women in it. We give readers what they find attractive (not fat women). There is international control over what you publish. The most enlightened man will enjoy looking at beautiful women – a skinny, slight creature. She may not be Kate Moss, but it's ok if it's J-Lo. Women are featured as objects of desire in men's magazines.



"Skinny slight creatures"

This comment suggests that there is a particular version of femininity privileged in the world of South African men's magazines and these often mirror Western beauty ideals. It is assumed that all "enlightened" males are heterosexual, and that all of them find a particular type of woman attractive – "skinny, slight creature(s)". A woman who is not skinny and slight, who does not fit into this limited construction of femininity, is understood as unattractive to heterosexual men and therefore is a risk to feature as a model in men's magazines. "Fat" women, in the

words of the interviewee above, are not attractive, despite the evidence that many societies around the world (including African) have long histories in which plumper women have been constructed as desirable. This preference for particular types of feminine representations again articulates a political position, one that sees Western presentations of beauty as superior within a global market.

Other male editors appeared to agree with this view. Here *Blink*'s editor seemed to agree with the dominant view that women are mostly presented for the male gaze:

> There are many reasons for women being represented through men's eyes. Our editorial staff is mostly female. The creative input comes from women. I am conscious of these things – models are comfortable with the shoots.

Yet another white male editor presented the view that men's magazines present women through the male gaze and that this was not something to be questioned or challenged:

> Women are represented from the perspective of the male gaze. It is a mistake to believe that women and sexuality do not preoccupy men most of the time. This is what men spend most of their time thinking about.

While male editors – across racial divisions – appeared to be aware of some of the ways in which men's magazines often present women as sexual objects in, the two female editors in my interviews rejected this notion of women as sexual objects in women's magazines. This reflects that there was at least some awareness of – and discomfort around – the "politics" of representing women as sexual objects. One black female editor argued:

> Women's magazines, especially within Media24, have always reflected women through women's eyes. There is never any doubt about that and I think more and more women's magazines on the shelf are all about women and reflect us absolutely through own eyes.

A white female editor responded to my question on the ways in which women are presented in women's magazines by stating "women wouldn't buy them. Women are not stupid" to buy magazines in which they are presented from the perspective of the male gaze.



Women's magazines more likely to represent women their own eyes.

Underlining the point by Durham and Kellner (2001) that media products provide the scripts from which people forge their sexualities for instance, were the white male editors of two of the most popular men's magazines in the country explaining that their magazines targeted heterosexual customers:

> We are not a homophobic publication *but* we make fun, joking reference to this. There seems to be a male homophobic trend, male humour. We are in line with being seen to encourage tolerance in South Africa but our readers are mostly heterosexual (my emphasis in italics).

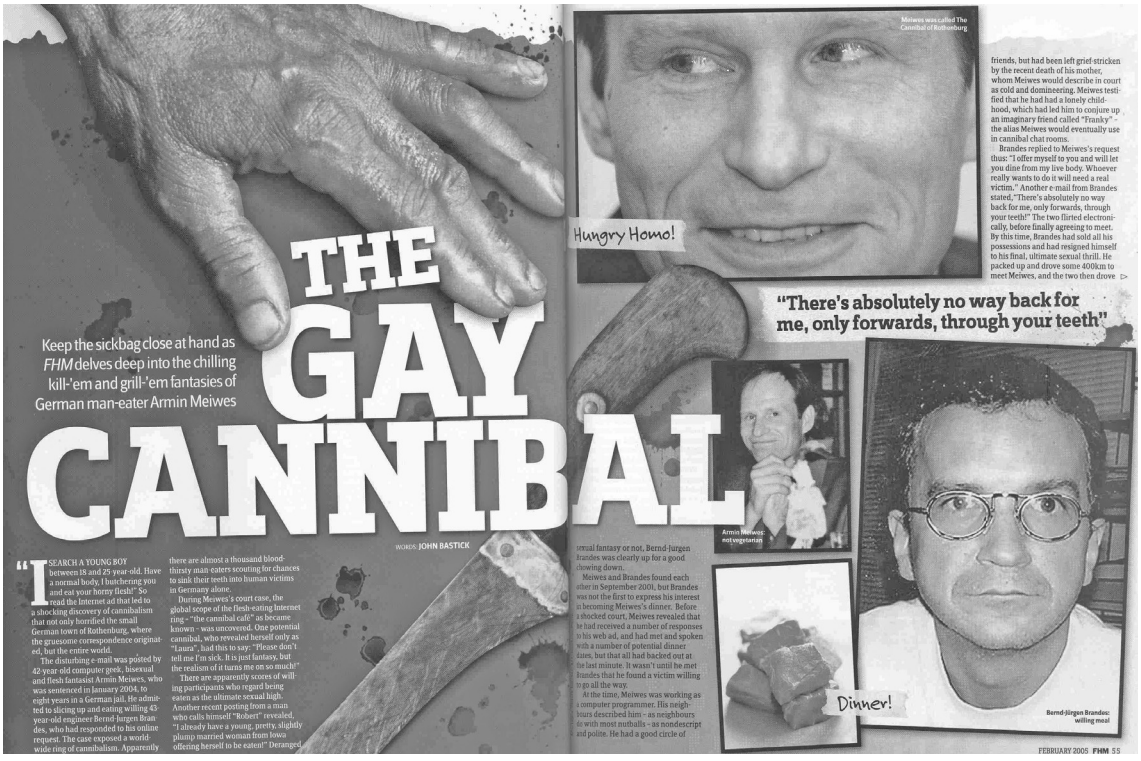
In addition, if not discussed in a joking manner, the topic of homosexuality is almost completely ignored, again reinforcing heterosexuality and pointing to the impossibility of ever producing a neutral publication. Another white male deputy editor of a men's magazine narrated for example that his

magazine "does not feel it has an obligation to cover homosexuality" in its contents:

> *Our magazine* has a high gay readership but regardless of the story being run, it always has a heterosexual dent. I don't think *our magazine* would ever run a how-to sex story on homosexual sex. But that's not to say the magazine only ever covers things conventionally associated with straight men. For instance we have a big grooming, fashion, nutrition and weightloss focus. These would conventionally have been regarded as more the domain of the gay readership. But they are issues now which all men look for advice on. The fact that *our magazine* has a gay readership means the content mix is working for that readership, but the magazine has never actively sought out that market or addressed it directly (my emphasis).

Again, the above view reflects a political stance where editors, based on their readerships' assumed heterosexualities, deliberately take the position to not address their homosexual readers. This is not a neutral stance. Similarly, a black female editor reverted to notions of neutrality and objectivity in her view that women's magazines present a range of sexualities on equal terms. Again, heteronormative discourses – believed to be neutral and objective – are employed, invisibilising rampant homophobia in our society:

> *Our readers* don't ever have to be "educated" when it comes to these matters – they know their minds. It's therefore not for us to ever be prescriptive. We simply report on all aspects of sexuality, as this is part of normal everyday life in South Africa and in the rest of the world (my emphasis).



Men's magazines tend to at best make a joke of homosexuality, and worse, perpetuate negative perceptions. (FHM, Feb 2005)

There were challenges to the consensus that magazines had no business messing with the "political" and these mostly came from the black male editor of *Blink* magazine. I discuss these below.

Challenges to the dominant view

One white male editor noted that "magazines do have a huge role to play in nation building. They simply have not been creative enough in trying to find ways to explore that and write about it." Ex-editor of *Blink*, Siphiwe Mpye, however, connected constructions of (black) masculinities to gender violence and highlighted the ways in which men's magazines can act responsibly by playing a role in raising these connections for their readers. He argues that

> Nation-building relates to relationships between women and men. *Consider* the baggage black men have had -abuse, alienation. We have a responsibility to reflect a different kind of man who is not intimidated by women, not an absent father, protects his family – this will go a long way towards nation-building. We have lots of female readers who encourage us. They say that we give insight into their problems with men. We present a general idea of what women go through. We get debates and topics out there and lots of insight will happen outside of the magazine. We also deal with hard issues, such as AIDS, abuse and other harder issues (my emphasis).

He also linked the notion of magazines' social responsibility to racism:

> Race issues are a huge preoccupation because too often people strive to pretend that race issues do not exist. There is a sense that we should move on – this is dangerous. We need to find ways of dealing with racism. The subtle things need to be dealt with. *Magazines* in our own way, need to conscientise readers and society in general. Then we would be doing our part (my emphasis).

In terms of homosexuality, Mpye challenged the dominant assumption that readerships were heterosexual and that the magazines only include content relevant to these readers. Men's magazines, according to Mpye, have a responsibility to educate readers about homosexuality:

> We most definitely have an obligation to educate readers about homosexuality. A lot of gay men can identify although the tone of the magazine is heterosexual. *It has* a lot to do with male identities – men are grappling with who they are. It's an exciting time for masculinity – before there was a focus on women and women's issues. Rightfully so. Masculinity is now largely a reaction to women's emancipation. Men were always the hunters. Men have to adapt. Conversely, all these different types of men have emerged. *Blink has* a political conscience. We represent this kind of spirit (my emphasis).

A white male editor, however, highlighted the difficulties in talking about issues such as racism, sexuality and HIV/AIDS in magazines targeting white readers:

In terms of HIV/AIDS and racism, it's hard to separate oneself from the magazine. *Our magazine* has never considered it – never felt any responsibility to run any story. I think it is changing. Magazines have had to find fresh ways to approach things like HIV. It is no longer about big shocking stories, but about how it is an ordinary everyday part of our lives.

While the most challenging points of view on presentations of masculinities and media social responsibility came from the black male editor of *Blink* magazine, it is unfortunate that this magazine stopped publishing in late 2006. My interview with Siphiwe Mpye, ex-editor of *Blink* magazine, suggests that his provocative vision did not produce positive, sustainable results in the world of magazines, which operate on maximising profits. It seems that challenging readers to think more critically about the social context in which they find themselves does not sell magazines. As one white male editor pointed out:

> Magazines that have tried to put more into their editorial mix often get labelled 'too worthy" or just "boring", like *Marie Claire* and *Fair Lady*. *You-Drum*, *Huisgenoot* has done a huge amount with their readership in terms of social awareness in the last year. But magazines tread a fine line between being slick and serious, glam and heartfelt, tittilating and earnest, self-involved and community minded. The

rampant consumer in our readerships and advertising base generally wins the battle.

The collapse of *Blink* magazine demonstrates that the inclusion of features aiming to subvert traditional ideas of (black) masculinities as unemotional, absent fathers, highlighting the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and male violence against women and children – content usually only found in women's magazines – did not interest black male readers enough to continue buying the magazine. A more thorough analysis of the ways in which *Blink* magazine presents gender, sexuality and race to their readers I have discussed elsewhere.



Loving abused women

Nhlanhla Hlongwane revisits some of the women he has loved, and confronts the thorns among the roses of his walk down tainted lovers' paradise.

As a student, I remember most vividly Nation of Islam's Minister Louis Farrakhan saying in one of his speeches, that if you rape a woman, you basically kill and murder something inside her, and that she won't heal unless God Himself intervenes.

During that time, it seemed as if just about every woman I met had been violated at some point in her life. Through these women, I became aware of man as a sexual predator and a molester, an aspect of man I had not known before.

Over the years, music has helped bring me some perspective and healing, as one affected. For me U2's *Achtung Baby* allowed me to begin understanding life on the edge.

Their twisted tongue-in-cheek lyrics, became the soundtrack of many of my meditations and rage at what other men had done to the women I came to love.

As hard as I tried, I never could take away all of their deep sadness. And so lyrics from songs like "So cruel", "Ultraviolet", "Acrobat" and "Love is blindness" spoke to my anger and helped colour my own morbid mood!

"Don't believe what you hear, don't believe what you see.
You just close your eyes, you can feel the enemy.
When I first met you girl you had fire in your soul.
What happened, your face all melted in snow?"
"Acrobat"

In whispers and long empty stares, girlfriends and lovers told me about girls who had their childhoods stolen from them. They unveiled a dark world of pain, depravity and torture.

I was confused and angry to learn that so many of the women who I had come to know, and love, had been raped as children, and as young women. I became introduced to the world of incest, abuse and sexual offences. I felt guilty for being male, I felt responsible. I wished I could have been there for all of them to prevent it all from happening. I took it all on, I felt hopeless. I felt ashamed.

I couldn't understand how they could speak, how they could be, how they could carry on with the weight of their burden. I was a student in America at the time and as any idealistic student who dreamt of changing the world, I spoke to my mom about my devastation. She had just come back from visiting home and began to tell me that while she was there, South African children we protesting in the streets against child abuse!

She was repeatedly raped at knife-point by her step-brother. Intervention didn't happen until her brothers happened on them. She had been choked unconscious at the time.

My world spun from under my feet. I was cold and numb. My innocence was lost. I hadn't imagined child abuse to be an American thing only, but I didn't think that the madness was universal, and that groups of children, in my own country, were taking to the streets in protest against it! That moment defined me.

"Oh sugar don't you cry,
Oh child wipe the tears from your eyes.
You know I need you to be strong,
The day is as dark as the night is long".
"Ultraviolet"

There is Ntombenhle, a shy young engineering student in her early 20s. I met her while living in Yeoville. She was generally withdrawn but put up a brave face for her little sister whom she was looking after and sending to school. If you took the time to see, Ntombenhle was shell-shocked from her rite of passage into womanhood. She's a multiple rape survivor. She was raped by someone who later became an SABC presenter. After her physical rape, she was further tortured emotionally by the thought that she might see him in her living room, or possibly hear his voice from the kitchen, every time she turned on her TV.

"I would get so mad seeing him smiling on TV as though he did nothing, like he didn't leave a trail of destruction behind him!" She never pointed him out to me for fear of what I might do, and rightly so! Her wound remained open, constantly, festering and unable to heal.

She tells me he died a few years ago. Even after learning that, I had this yearning to dig him up, just to kill him again.

"After the rape I became aggressive, and I found I couldn't relate to my parents anymore. I became overly protective of my little sister because I never wanted what happened to me to happen to her". When it nearly did, at the hands of her older sister's boyfriend, she was able to respond; "I am glad that I knew the signs and I got her to talk to me and that's when she started to live with me."

"Sometimes I feel like, I don't know.
Sometimes I feel like checking out.
I want to get it right,
I can't always be strong
And loving won't be long."
"Ultraviolet"

I met Nomvula at a film conference I dropped in on in Cape Town. She was (wo)manning one of the stands there and our eyes met as I was making my rounds among the buyers and sellers. We later shared a spliff at the end of the day's session. I quickly discovered that she was a passionate and spirited artist. It wasn't until she moved to Yeoville some years later that I got the chance to know her whole story. She was repeatedly raped at knife-point by her step-brother.

Intervention didn't happen until her brother and other step-brother happened on them. She had been choked unconscious at the time.

Even though she has always been "a rebel and a tomboy", after her rape, she also became aggressive. "I became buck wild. I started drinking, smoking weed and got in with the wrong crowd because I felt safer with them."

She felt betrayed by her brother and step-brother who forced her to disclose to her mother and step-father.

Blink, which stopped publishing in late 2006, offered men a different perspective than most men's magazines (Blink August 2005, 40-41)

In conclusion, an overriding theme in my interviews with the editors of *Men's Health*, *FHM*, *Fair Lady* and *True Love*, was the notion that their magazines are both neutral and objective. Editors appeared to believe that it is not the role of magazines to contribute towards social change – they aim to produce magazines that fit comfortably into and reflect existing societal norms rather than challenge social norms. Social responsibility and nation-building were believed to be "political" endeavours understood to be completely separate from the magazines' primary objective to accumulate profits. However, there were challenges to this understanding. The editor of *Blink* magazine saw his magazine as taking a stance position on issues related to gender-based violence, racism, HIV/AIDS, masculinities and so on. He thought that magazines could play an important role in transformation. And while the other editors generally felt that their magazines maintained neutrality and objectivity by not overtly challenging the status quo, this stance in itself was not understood to be a political one which helps to maintain and reinforce

Notes

[1] (SAARF, 2003-2005 South African Advertising and ResearchFoundation. (2003). Email communication with Tshifhiwa Mulaudzi, Technical Support Executive at SAARF

inequalities around gender, sexuality, HIV/AIDS and so on in South Africa.

There were signs of a slightly deeper understanding of the political in discussions around representations of women – presumably linked to almost 50 years of feminist activism and theorising about representations of women. But except for FHM, the declining readerships (SAARF, 2003-2005[1]) for *Men's Health*, *True Love*, *Femina* and *Fair Lady* reflect that editors are not connecting with their readers as comfortably as they suggest in their interviews. It isn't clear whether an inclusion of articles which challenge the status quo might work better in the existing magazines, if these were offered to readers. But there are real risks involved in producing articles that challenge the status quo as the demise of *Blink* seems to illustrate. Given *Blink*'s experience, alongside the fact that the South African market for magazines is just a microcosm of the global capitalist economic system, it seems unlikely that local editors are likely to change their existing strategies to follow *Blink*'s lead. In addition, the sudden inclusion of features about socio-political challenges could result in a further decline of readerships and ultimately a loss in profits. At the same time, declining readerships do suggest that editors need to consider a change in strategy.

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Writers Bio

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Media Action Plan (MAP): Setting the agenda on HIV and AIDS and gender

By Dumisani Gandhi

Abstract

A progressive policy – whatever policy – is only as progressive as it is effectively implemented. As the Media Action Plan on HIV and AIDS and Gender, whose main objective is to roll out policies in 80% of 218 targeted newsrooms in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, gets half-way into its second year of implementation, this is one of the challenges that is emerging and has serious implications on the sustainability of the programme. This is apart, of course, from the daunting task of working with the many media houses to ensure that such policies are in place. This paper seeks to give the background and update on the progress of MAP, point out highlights of the process, identify the challenges and suggest the way forward on the process.

MAP is a collaborative effort coordinated by the Southern African Editors Forum (SAEF) to improve practice and coverage of HIV and AIDS and gender in Southern African newsrooms. MAP is clustered into five operational areas that are led by different organisations as follows;

Policy: Gender Links, Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and Gender and Media Southern Africa Network (GEMSA)
Training: Led by PANOS
Ethics: Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA)
Information: Southern Africa AIDS Information and Dissemination Services (SAFAIDS) and UNAIDS
Monitoring and Research: Media Monitoring Project (MMP)

Among other things, MAP aims to:

- Ensure better coordination and participation of media managers in activities targeting the media on HIV and AIDS in Southern Africa.
- Ensure that 80% media houses in the SADC region have HIV and AIDS and Gender policies and programmes by the end of 2008.
- Improve coverage of HIV and AIDS and Gender.
- Promote diversity.
- Equitable and fair treatment of all within media workplaces.
- Mitigate the effects of HIV and AIDS on the media industry.
- Identify and recognise progressive newsroom leadership; the development and implementation

of HIV and AIDS and gender policies which are making a difference in the work place and in the coverage of these issues bymedia houses.



Media can play a role to increase discussion about HIV and AIDS
Credit: Gender Links

MAP process

The major output area for the Media Action Plan is the adoption of policies that are expected to function as some form of workplace and social contract committing the media to deal with HIV and AIDS as a workplace, social and economic issue that they must play a part in mitigating its impact. The policy drafting process is done through five stages but varies with each media house.

First Stage: MAP country facilitators seek and get buy-in from the owners and management of the media house on whether or not to go ahead with the process.

*Second Stage***:** The facilitators do a situation analysis, which is an assessment of whether or not the media house in question has existing systems or policies in place or as often happens, no policies to deal with HIV and AIDS and its gender dimensions and whether there is a champion within the organisation and the workplace culture in general etc.

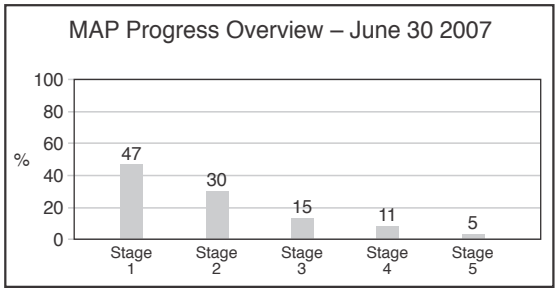
Third Stage: This when an in house workshop is held on how to go about drafting the policy; what the key areas for emphasis are and to set up a task team to do the actual drafting of the policies.

Fourth Stage: At this stage, the media house produces a draft policy, which is sent to Gender Links for review and quality control.

Stage Five: At this stage the draft is finalised and ready for adoption by the publishers and owners of the media houses.

Progress to date:

The graph below shows the progress that has been made to from programme inception to end of June 2007.



In its first year (2006-2007) 57 or about 26% of the 218 media houses targeted went through stage one and agreed to develop HIV and AIDS and gender policies. As at June 2007 this figure has almost doubled to 103 (47%) media houses. Out of the 103, 66 (30%) have gone further to the second stage of the process which is the situation analysis while 33 (15%) have gone through the drafting stage of the policies. Of the 33, 24 (11%) have actually submitted drafts and 11 (5%) of which have gone further to adopt these policies.

Sample of media houses with draft policies

2006-2007	2007-2008
Kaya FM (South Africa)	The Voice (Botswana
Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation	Mining Mirror (Zambia)
Chronicle Newspaper (Malawi)	Voice of the Church (Swaziland)
Capital Radio (Malawi)	The Swaziland Times
Power 101 FM	Joy Radio (Malawi)
Radio Terra Verde (Mozambique)	La Vie Catholique
TSN (Tanzania)	
The Swazi Observer	
Botswana Guardian and Midweek Sun	

Highlights

Many of the media houses that have drafted policies have not waited for the adoption of such policies in order to start implementing them. One such example is *The Swazi Observer* of Swaziland and *The Times* of Zambia. *The Swazi Observer* has done well on the editorial side while *The Times* of Zambia has been doing very with its workplace policy.



Since launching in 2005, the MAP programme has seen considerable progress

For example, on a visit to Swaziland, the chief editor of *The Swazi Observer* informed MAP that every Thursday the paper reserves a page for the Swaziland National AIDS Association (NERCHA) in which the paper carries stories with positive coverage of the pandemic as well as pictures that do not reinforce stigma and discrimination.

The paper is also working with UNICEF on HIV and AIDS with particular focus on children and this is catered for on Mondays and Fridays.
"We hope to go around schools and get children's stories on what they know about the pandemic and how it has impacted on them and we will publish these letters unedited and in the children's handwriting", said Musa Ndlangamandla.

The implementation process has not been the same at every media house. In some media policies have been drafted but it has been difficult to implement them for various reasons. For example, while the radio station has done well in producing programmes on HIV and AIDS, Capital Radio (Malawi) managing director, Alaudin S Osman had this to say about the workplace: "I do not know how to explain this. But there is apathy around the issue of HIV and AIDS at the workplace. The policy is there but none of the workers has come forward."

Thus, one of the major challenges to the sustainability of the MAP programme is to ensure the systematic and consistent implementation of these policies. There is a need to link the policy with action plans to implement the policies and achieve the desired effect in a measurable and verifiable manner.

For example, on a visit to Malawi in June, FM 101 Radio is doing a good job with its HIV and AIDS programme but did not recognise they were doing what they pledged to do in their policy. There was therefore no clear link between the policy and the station's response to HIV and AIDS. The disadvantage of implementing policy in an unstructured way is that without clear targets and a planned way of achieving such targets, it is difficult to measure or reach the full potential of what he policy can achieve.

Sustainability



Rose Haji (MISA Tanzania) and Jennifer Mufune (MISA Regional)
Credit: Colleen Lowe Morna

MAP recognises that it is not enough to come up with a policy but if that policy is not implemented then it is just about the same as having no policy at all. It is

in recognition of this potential pitfall that MAP has, in conjunction with the Sol Plaatjie Institute (SPI), introduced the SPI-MAP HIV and AIDS and Gender Media Awards.

The objectives of the awards are:

- To recognise progressive newsroom leadership and institutional practice in the response to the challenge of HIV and AIDS and its gender dimensions.
- To encourage progressive diversity policies and practice in media houses.
- To identify and recognise the development and implementation of HIV and AIDS and gender policies which are making a difference in the work place.

Apart from the prize money, the prestigious part of the awards is that the winning entries will receive a week's training from a reputable regional training institution and with an expert trainer conducting such training. It is hoped that media houses can receive recognition for progressive practices on HIV and AIDS and gender as well as play their part in mitigating the impact of HIV and AIDS.

Gender Links, which is the lead agency for the policy arm of MAP, continues to collaborate with other partners like SAFAIDS on information and PANOS on training to ensure that once the policies have been put in place, journalists have sufficient and accurate information on developments on HIV and AIDS. Hence, from 25 June to 29 June SAFAIDS and Gender Links were on a road show to Malawi and Zambia to market the media resource desk that is housed at SAFAIDS.

Challenges

The goals of MAP are challenging in themselves not least because of the number of media houses and the countries that are participating in the process.

Other challenges include:

- The slow process of getting buy-in and reaching the drafting stage
- Change of staff or management tends to take the process back as new management and staff has to be briefed all over again.
- The gap between policy adoption and implementation in media houses needs to be bridged
- The need for effective coordination and collaboration by all partners.

Way forward

It is acknowledged that the policy roll out process will be slow and in some countries painstakingly slow. However, it is work that needs to be done because without a cure or vaccine, there is no other way than put in place good practices for mitigating, if not halting the spread of HIV. The MAP partners need more collaboration in moving the process forward. And when this is all said and done, it is everybody's responsibility to play their part.

Writers Bio
Dumisani Gandhi started his career as a subeditor with the Zimbabwe Independent and then moved on to become Research Officer and Advocacy Officer with the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ). He joined Gender Links as Manager of the Gender, HIV and AIDS and Media programme in April 2007.



Historical Culture of Gender and Hetero/Sexual Violence in Calypso in Trinidad: Treat 'Em Rough

By Maude Dikobe

Abstract

Gender based violence is pervasive staple of Trinidad's calypso music, presented and encouraged in some male calypsonians' lyrics for a long time. A new breed of female caplyso singers are now turning the tide, using the lyrics to speak out against gender violence in the country. This paper explores a female point of view on gender-related violence such as rape, incest, sexual harassment, and shaming. Calypso lyrics sung by men will be read against calypsos sung by women (particularly Singing Sonia and Singing Sandra), many of which are eloquent responses to the verbal and physical abuses to which women are subjected in Trinidad.

Key words

gender, violence, music, calypso

This song is dedicated to all the children who are victims of incest.
-- "Jenny's Dilemma"... Singing Sonia

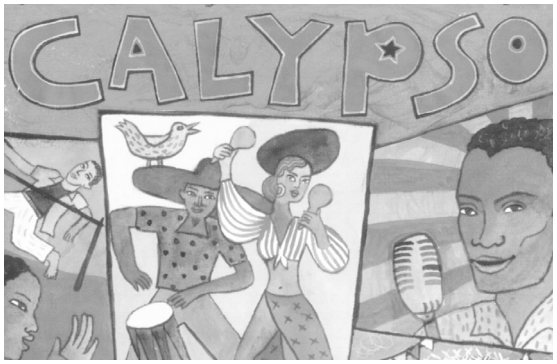
You got to love me or leave me
Or live with Miss Dorothy
This time is too hard
For me to mind a man that is bad
--"Love Me or Leave Me," Lady Iere

Calypso and gender

Calypso is an icon of Trinidadian identity and culture. Yet, this often ignores how it simultaneously obscures and perpetuates the acceptance of sexual violence. According to Caribbean Feminist Research Agenda (CAFRA), one of the leading feminist think tanks in the Caribbean, sexual violence affects all women in Trinidad her extensive work on sexual violence in the Caribbean, perceives violence as "the ultimate and most fundamental form of control over a person, the mechanism which is used to keep women from 'getting outta hand' in Trinidad" (Mohammed 1991, 33).

Other Caribbean feminists share her view that the root

cause of sexual violence lies in issues of control and power (Mohammed 1991, Hodge 1974, Boyce-Davies 1990). Mohammed and novelist-activist Merle Hodge are among the most influential Caribbean voices on domestic and sexual violence in Trinidad. Hodge was correct in noting that in Trinidad the denigration of women has become part of the national ethos (Coombs 1974).



Calypso's overwhelming endorsement of violence against women cannot be overstated. Stereotypical representation in calypso of women as sexually forward, cheats, unhygienic, and so on, helps to control them. One has only to recall "Dorothy" a sexual archetype about whom countless calypsos have been written:[2] Dorothy personifies many of the worst stereotypes about women in Trinidad: She is "a stuck-up slut whose only positive aspect is her seductive availability." Given her immodesty and deceitfulness, she deserves to be "controlled." The lyrics below, from Roaring Lion's *My Darling Dorothy* (c. 1944) are emblematic of countless examples that can serve to summarise the character of women as portrayed in male lyrics:

Good Lord since I marry Dorothy she had me going crazy (x2)
When is good I can't stand the pressure
She want me to commit murder
She has a sailor man
She has a Chinee man
Then she left a Chinee man
To come with a police man
Then she left the yankee man
And go pick up the steel band man….
-- "My Darling Dorothy," Roaring Lion

While various forces in society mediate calypso lyrics, it is important to understand how lyrics contribute to sexual violence. Calypsos often reflect social reality; the attitudes towards women they express serve as evidence of dominant gender ideology at different historical points. The violent nature of so many calypso lyrics helps one to understand scenarios where the imagined violence in calypso lyrics would be translated into real physical torment of women – an experience that (as Caribbean feminist Patricia Mohammed notes) is often trivialised in phrases such as "massaging their bodies with 'lil licks" (Mohammed 1991, 38).

The question of whether violent art causes or reflects real violence in society is still being widely debated. Many Trinidadian women believe that misogynistic calypso lyrics do nurture certain attitudes, especially widespread violence against them: "We believe that the many ills, such as wife battering, rape and assault, incest and other effects in our society today, can be attributed to the lack of respect to our women."[3]

As calypsonian Bianca Hull quipped, "The situation with women in this country is disturbing me. I lost a friend to murder. I want men to calm down."[6] She went on to immortalise her friend's experience in her calypso "Woman Is" (1998). It is no coincidence that violence against women was the theme addressed by most female calypsonians for the 1998 Carnival season.

A perfect example of how traditional calypso lyrics can obscure the painful nature of sexual abuse is Sparrow's song "Mabel." Here Sparrow presents a situation in which the singer himself abuses a minor – 13-year-old Mabel[7] – but he narrates it without the slightest irony or self-awareness. In his calypso, Mabel is a seductive teenager who will not listen to

Notes

[2]Calypsos on Dorothy include "Don't Hide Behind the Door, Dorothy" (Growler), "Don't Tickle Me, Dorothy" (Beginner), "Dorothy Went to Bathe" (Lion), "Leave Me Alone, Dorothy" (Destroyer), "My Troubles With Dorothy" (Executer), and perhaps the most cleverly political "Dorothy" song, "Wait, Dorothy, Wait" (Black Stalin).
[3] See article by Veronica Landreth-Smith, Trinidad Express February 11, 1998:35) "Calypsonians Under Fire: Women Knock Dirty Lyrics" in which a South Trinidadian women's group strongly criticised calypsonians for lyrics that denigrated women.
[6] Trinidad Express February 7, 1998:2. At the time Claudia Johnson was based at the Karavan tent in Arouca.
[7]Keith Smith (Editor-At Large) "For Dirty Men Only" Trinidad Express March 25, 1998:9. The lyrics quoted are taken from his article.

her grandmother and entices the older male calypsonian – the exact opposite of what is really taking place. When virginal Mabel gets pregnant, it is her fault, not Sparrow's:

Thirteen-year-old Mabel
She looking for trouble
Every night she going out for a walk
And she poor grandmother can't talk
And if yuh tell she no
She start to frown
Ready to cuss yuh upside down…

Don't worry your head over me
Study for yourself and not for me
Because ah young and strong
I ain't 'fraid a man in town
Don't worry yuh head over me

Granny was furious
But Sparrow was curious
While grandmother talking
This time Sparrow attacking
At length and at last ah bust the tape
Good Lord she could not escape
Shortly after she got a sign
She say the child is mine
--"Mabel," Mighty Sparrow

Between 1930 and 1950, mainly men were writing, performing, recording, and reporting *about* calypso. A quick glance at lyrics sung by male calypsonians during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s reveals real world verbal and physical abuses.

Atilla the Hun's "Treat 'Em Rough" (circa 1935) is a particularly distressing example of misogynistic lyrics:

Every now and then knock them down
They'll love you long and they'll love you strong
Black up dey eye, bruise up de knee
And then they love you eternally...
You must be robust, you must be tough
I mean, don't pull no punches but treat 'em rough.
--"Treat 'Em Rough," Atilla the Hun

"Treat 'Em Rough" is a horrible example often cited in works on domestic violence. From a didactic point of view, "playful" calypsos like this are nothing short of a manual for torture: "Treat 'em rough, cuff them down, black dey eye," and so on[6]. Bearing in mind that calypso is iconic of the nation state, For criticism of the nation state see Benedict Anderson's Imagined Community. For feminist critiques of the nation state, see Biddy Martin, "What's Home Got To Do with It" in Alexander and Mohanty (1997) among others. Calypsos written and performed by men provide a prime example of the social construction of gender and other subtle mechanisms of power used to control women. Further, they shed some light on the fragility of the female subject identity within the nation state.[7]



Actors from theatrical production *Khuluma Afrika!* portray domestic violence scene, such violence is a reality for far too many women around the world. *Credit: Tonya Graham*

The old model of violent patriarchal ideology also calls for shaming women who elect partners of the same sex – for instance, Roaring Lion's "Cheek to Cheek" (1947):

There's a romantic game that the girls playing
Socially known as cheek to cheek dancing (2x)
They date up each other for martini
Challenging that men are secondary
The way they hug up in broad daylight
Gives you an incentive what goes on at night
--"Cheek to Cheek," Roaring Lion

Notes

[6]Most cultures have their own version of "Treat 'Em Rough." Whether it is a folk song from Botswana or a rap hit in the U.S., lyrics repeat that unless a man exerts his power by treating his woman rough he risks being viewed as effeminate.
[7] For criticism of the nation state see Benedict Anderson's Imagined Community. For feminist critiques of the nation state, see Biddy Martin, "What's Home Got To Do with It" in Alexander and Mohanty (1997) among others.

These lyrics are still pertinent today. Faced with women's social and economic independence, men still feel compelled to control them.

Hulsie Bhaggan: Verbal and Psychological Abuse

In 1994, a young, unmarried, female, Indo-Trinidadian United National Congress (UNC) Party politician named Hulsie Bhaggan made newspaper headlines, and found herself featured in a number of nasty calypsos – as well as a few admiring ones. Bhaggan's story is profoundly important, since it shows not only women's mistreatment in Trinidad – and how calypso inflicts that mistreatment – but it also shows that women calypsonians are starting to change that unfortunate historical tradition.

The "Hulsie song cycle," shows examples of virtually every mechanism used to subordinate and control Trini women. These include accusation of lesbianism, fear of incest, women portrayed as helpless prizes, Indian men and African men using women's bodies to get back at each other, Indian fear of African sexual prowess, and, most important, the sexual punishment meted out to women who step out of their place.

The Bhaggan story includes at least four or five great calypsos, some by men, some by women. The vehement reaction against her mirrors a number of tense issues for Trinidadians. Taken as a single narrative, these songs capture the complex nature of the sexual struggle in Trinidad and Tobago far more accurately than classic calypsos like Radio's "Man Smart" or Atilla's "Treat 'Em Rough."

In 1994, Hulsie Bhaggan made several controversial remarks about black men coming to her home district of Caroni (with a primarily Indian population)[8] , and raping young Indian women. Shortly thereafter, she protested the lack of flood relief funds for her constituents by sitting down in the middle of the Butler Highway, the major north-south highway in Trinidad. She blocked traffic for several hours, and refused to move until police took her forcibly to jail.[9]

Naturally, Bhaggan was the subject of quite a few calypsos that year and the next. In and of itself, that is not surprising; any politician being sent to jail would inspire scores of calypsos. What *is* interesting is that almost all of the calypsos written on Bhaggan were violent attacks on her gender, sexuality, and the sexually transgressive nature of her actions. Most of the male calypsonians declared that the "real" reason she was acting in contradiction to traditional female roles was that she was sexually frustrated (i.e., she needed a man, she needed to get married, and she needed to have babies).

One calypso even suggested rape in jail as appropriate punishment for her behavior. Here we see violence against women and gender at its clearest. Her real sin was that neither the East Indian males in her party, nor the Afro-Trinidadian males who attacked her publicly in their lyrics, could control her.

The first "Hulsie calypso," which satirised her initial accusations about African men raping Indian women, was MacGruff's "Bacchanal In Central" (1994), also known as "Hold Your Dhoti [10] and Run." It took a clever, humorous view of the situation:

Since Hulsie start this controversy
Ah 'fraid to check my girlfriend in Caroni
So I tell my partner come go with me
So we shake up and put on dhoti
But we bounce up with group of vigilantes
To prove your identity they say
Drop your dhoti so that we see
Whether you is African or Indian
I tell my partner now is the time to run
Run partner now
If you want to live longer
Hold your dhoti and run!
--"Bacchanal in Central," McGruff

When McGruff and his partner seek shelter in a nearby home, they discover a number of Indian men,

Notes

[8]A common joke among Afro-Trinidadians is to refer to Caroni as "Fort Apache," after John Ford's famous western movie in which the heroes are surrounded by "all those f------ Indians."

[9]See Rohlehr's article in Trinidad Literary Review (1999). To comprehend the seriousness of Hulsie's protest, one must understand that the Butler Highway is the only highway that connects different parts of the island

[10] Dhoti is a pair of baggy Indian pants..

including prominent conservative politician "Sat Maharaj in a mini dhoti."[11] In the song, McGruff contends that Indian men committed the rapes and alleged that black men did it.

The underlying issue here is not just the supposed rape of the young Indian virgins, but that the supposed rape by Afro-Trinidadians! This scenario reflects long-standing racial stereotypes that each group still harbours about the other: Access to Indian women by African men threatens racial purity.

Ironically, most male Afro-Trinidadian calypsonians threatened Bhaggan by what Merle Hodge described as "brandishing their penises" at her[12]. In fact, the male response (at least from Brother Marvin and Cro Cro, both of whom sang about her) was practically a black penis symphony. The use of the penis as a disciplinary tool is clearly present in both examples.

Cro Cro's "Respect the Law" (1994) is a typically vicious (and typically clever) song that ultimately declares that Hulsie deserves rape in jail:

Ah tell you careful with Hulsie Bhaggan
The things she go do for recognition
You can't go and block the public highway
Just cause you want to have things your way
I pay my license and you can't tell me ah can't pass
If I was coming I would surely have licked down your...
[Cro Cro leaves off the rhyming word, "ass."]
--"Respect the Law," Cro Cro

Cro Cro's chorus responds to his questions as if they are a *vox populi*, which is rather misleading as they are really reading scripted replies:

Cro Cro: Do you think this woman should run the country?
Chorus: No! No! No!
Cro Cro: Do you think she set a good example for we?
Chorus: No! No! No!
--"Respect the Law," Cro Cro

Cro Cro continues

If we really want a woman leader for true
Definitely Hulsie it would not be you.
The police should have gi' you a good cut-tail Whipping.
And get the rest from a big, strong fella in jail
--"Respect the Law," Cro Cro

In his "Miss ," Brother Marvin, blames Bhaggan's misbehavior on sexual deprivation and her secret desire for an African lover. He tells Hulsie that she needs discipline, maybe flogging, and recommends that she take a vacation, go to Africa [to] ease her tension (presumably sexually). He also says she should get married and stop giving so much trouble; he even offers to marry her himself. His recourse to the "big black dick" as solution to her problems is firmly rooted in the calypsonian's reverence for his sexual potency both real and imaginary:

You should get married and stop giving so much trouble
If you can't find somebody to care for you
I am sure Morgan Job[14] *available...*
I'm a handsome Trinbagonia
Ah love Indian woman!
Imagine me and Hulsie, we shack up in Caroni
All she want is two dougla[15] *to keep she cool as cucumber*
With two dougla pullin' she dress still
She wouldn't spend she body in jail
Come on Miss Bhaggan, leh we add more dougla in this island
--"Miss Bhaggan," Brother Marvin

Both Cro Cro and Brother Marvin's lyrics include verbal and psychological abuse associated with shaming of women. They blame Bhaggan's bad behavior on needing a man, or lacking one who satisfies her sexually. Women who are too assertive and/or aggressive are often said to need a man to tame their energy. The phallus becomes an instrument of disciplinary power, to tame the rebel force within independent women.

The Personal Is Political: Woman To Woman

Female opinions of Hulsie Bhaggan differed markedly from those seen in the lyrics of male calypsonians. Women's responses, like that of Merle Hodge in a letter to the editor, begged that Hulsie be left alone. "When male politicians are criticised by calypsonians," wrote Hodge, "they are attacked as politicians. Ms. Bhaggan is being attacked as a

Notes

[11]For a full discussion of calypso and ethnicity see Yelvington (1993).
[12]Trinidad Express Feb 2, 1994:9
[14]A conservative (and controversial) black radio personality who infuriated a lot of calypsonians, and appeared as a butt of many calypso jokes. Pairing him with Hulsie would have been insultingto her. *available...*

woman, in particular a single woman. How dare she! Some of our most creative calypsonians seem to turn into little boys brandishing their penises at Hulsie.[16]" Hodge noted that during the cycle of Hulsie-bashing calypsos, Chalkdust was the only male calypsonian who continued in the picong style with good-natured humor in his criticism of Bhaggan, and did not threaten her with his phallus.

One Hindu women's organisation replied in Phagwa song to Cro Cro:

Hulsie serving this land harder than a man
Hulsie stand up for all ah we
Stand up for Cro Cro
Doh mind Cro Cro singing racial calypso

Interestingly enough, the debate was divided along strictly ethnic lines. Even feminists of other-ethnicity remained silent. Some commentators felt that the reason Afro-Trinidadian feminists failed to join forces to criticise Cro Cro and his fellow Afro-Trinidadian calypsonians was because Hulsie was an East Indian woman. However, in another Hulsie song, "Woman to Woman" (1994), sung by Afro-Trinidadian calypsonian Bianca Hull, the singer addresses Bhaggan respectfully as a sister feminist and insists that she should represent all women not just Indian women.

As woman talking to woman
Ah sad you defended some, and not all woman...
You could be young or old, plain or pretty
Black or white, the thief don't show mercy
So you could only make a fuss
About woman in Chaguanas
Hulsie, who standing up for us?
Women getting kick and cuss from
From Toco to Icacus
So you see, that's why I feel you should fight for we.

Whether African, Chinese or Caucasian
Indian, Syrian, alla we is same woman
In Arima women fighting just like in Point and in Chaguanas
Maharaj, Ghani and Parashram, and Panday[17] don't understand
But Hulsie, the women say "Fight for we."
--"Woman to Woman," Bianca Hull

These lyrics call for a sisterhood that transcends racial and class lines, one that hopefully brings women from Caroni (predominantly Indian) together with women from working class neighborhoods in Port of Spain such as Basdie. Hull feels that women from all the major ethnic groups should bridge racial divides, unite, and fight for the rights of all women.

Themes and Variations: Homegrown Violence

Recently, increasing numbers of male calypsonians have been striving to salvage the image of women in calypso and satirise (or even criticise) misogynistic lyrics. For instance, in his brilliant "Homegrown Violence" (1998), Brother Resistance's voice-over commentary on Atilla's "Treat 'Em Rough" (referred to earlier in this chapter) critiques Atilla's misogynist lyric in a progressive manner.

Atilla:
I have discovered a new philosophy
How to live with women happily
Every now and then turn them down
They'll love you long and they'll love you strong
You must be robust, you must be tough
Don't throw no punches but treat them rough

Resistance:
Violence against women is a tragedy
Approved by the norms of society
-- "Homegrown Violence," Brother Resistance

Resistance's voice-over calypso highlights society's complicity in these home-grown crimes. Resistance adds police car sirens to the sound mix, along with the police officer's comment (after he has presumably arrived at the scene of the crime) that he cannot interfere in domestic matters.

Even before Resistance composed his post-modern commentary, a handful of other male calypsonians such as Mighty Duke have presented women and women's issues in a positive manner.

Notes

[15]A mixed-race Afro-Indian.
[16]Trinidad Express, February 2, 1994:9
[17]Four male politicians in Hulsie's UNC party

For instance, in "Rocket In Yuh Pocket" Duke insists that if the woman says no, the man should leave her alone and contain his horniness:

Women shouldn't fear to walk any street
Any time they choose
Without you appear like a bull in heat
When yuh drink yuh booze
Let she dress how she feel to dress
I confess you may get a thrill
But doh put she under duress
And force she against she will
Women should be protected
And not subjected to abuse
To be so molested or disrespected
There is no excuse
Let her be who she wants to be
That's a woman's prerogative
You can't force yourself down on she
Let her give what she choose to give
Ah say Mr. Crockett:

--"Rocket In Yuh Pocket," Mighty Duke

Throughout the calypso, Duke begs Mr. Crockett to keep his "rocket" in his pocket and stop disrespecting women.

However, a few positive calypsos do not mean that we no longer come across calypsos that present women as promiscuous or deserving victims of rape because they wore the wrong clothes. Even progressive calypsonians like Stalin are not above recycling the sexist stereotype of Dorothy, Trinidad's archetypal loose woman, when he needs to use her in a song like "Wait, Dorothy, Wait" (1985). Calypso after calypso continues to objectify women.

Love Me or Leave Me: Feminine Accents In Calypso

It would be wrong to treat the misogynistic lyrics sung by male calypsonians as if they were unmediated. The overtly feminist lyrics of two calypsonians, Singing Sonia and Singing Sandra, building on lyrics of earlier female calypsonians, such as Lady Iere's "Love Me or Leave Me," and Singing Francine's "Run Away" thwart conventional representations of women in calypso as they focus on women's interests and concerns – woman as subjects, not objects.

If she bring she friends to visit the house
You insulting she you calling them louse
If she talk to Greg you say she with he
Like she is a slot puppy
Morning noonand night you blowing she mind
You binging she old, old before she time
Seven years you living in misery
Woman runaway, woman, runaway, woman run away from he

--"Runaway," Singing Francine

The existence of such articulate feminist commentaries forces the audience to reexamine some stereotypes traditionally associated with women in calypso, as they finally hear the story from the woman's point of view. Where do these songs stand in relation to traditional calypsos? They stand firmly grounded in women's lived experiences, and force the listeners to scrutinise everyday events in feminist terms.

For instance, when Singing Francine wrote a calypso about women in abusive relationships, her simple, authoritative advice was far different from Atilla's male-bonding urge toward violence. Francine told her listeners to resist such violence by any means necessary, and take defensive action. Her song title says it all: "Run Away" (1979).

Loud debates in parliament on the need to end sexual violence often complement female calypsonians' social commentaries.[18] The small but deter-mined feminist movement in Trinidad should have increased awareness of the need to address these social problems; this, in turn, led to more feminist themes in calypso (Mohammed, 1991, Reddock, 1998, Massiah, 1988).



The increasing presence of women on the calypso music scene, the impact of the kinds of topics they cover, and the unique ways in which they cover them, all force us to acknowledge the fact that the personal concerns they bring to the table are profoundly political. This is ironic, considering that traditionally the only way a woman's calypso might be credited as political would be if it had a patriotic thrust, i.e., if it were a "nation building" calypso.

Equalising Acts: Death to Raperman

Among contemporary female calypsonians, no one has been more consistent in her focus on sexual violence than Singing Sandra (Sandra Des Vignes). Her ongoing interest is visible in the titles of her songs: "Raperman" (1984), "Sexy Employers" (or "Die With My Dignity") (1987), and "Equaliser" (1994). In "Equaliser" (written by Christopher Grant) Sandra makes no attempt to hide her anger at, and hatred for, the brutal purveyors of sexual violence. On the contrary, she describes herself as the "Equaliser," the only one capable of punishing the perpetrators. Impatient with rhetoric, she demands a real commitment on the part of the legal system in Trinidad to ensure equal rights for both women and men:

We tired beg, we tired plead
Still man wouldn't hear.
Everyday they making we bleed,
Stick break in de ear.
And the authorities; is nothing dey doing,
The law needs reviewing.
Is time to get tough,
I know exactly what to do
Send them to me,
Enough is enough.
--"Equaliser," Singing Sandra

Sandra had sung on rape before, notably in her 1984 calypso "Raperman" – but this time she appeared on stage with a pair of rusty garden shears, ready to punish sex offenders by chopping off their testicles. Delivered with powerful conviction and an almost-terrifying fury, her merciless song some male calypsonians strongly criticised her as being unnecessarily graphic and violent. However, woman's columnist Donna Pierre described it as "[T]he voice of abused and battered women everywhere, sending a strong message to both the men who inflict such pain, and the powers that be who cannot yet decide upon a penalty appropriate for such crimes."[19] Like "Die With My Dignity" (1987), this calypso hascome to be considered one of Sandra's trademark songs.

Feminist singers like these give advice to women on how to *deal with* sexual violence: Whether it is Francine telling battered women to run away, Singing Sonia drawing our attention to shameful sexual abuses in the home, or Singing Sandra threatening to castrate rapists, these songs spoke directly woman to woman. Although most female calypsonians resist the "feminist" label, that doesn't stop them from addressing female issues in their calypso.

In "Die With My Dignity" (also known as "Sexy Employers") Singing Sandra might be talking about every woman applying for a job when she observes:

You looking out to find something to do
You meet a boss man who promise to help you
But when the man lay down the condition
Is nothing else but humiliation
They want to see your whole anatomy
They want to see whey yuh doctor never see
They want you to do whey yuh husband never do…
To get a job these days as a woman!
Brother they go keep their money
I go keep my honey
And die with my dignity
--"Die With My Dignity," Singing Sandra

Moreover, in a calypso entitled "Professional Advice" (1992) Singing Sonia (and her songwriter, Shadow) capture the situation in which female calypsonians struggle to gain recognition and respect in the highly competitive and manipulative world of calypso:

Notes

[18]By 1975 "The National Commission on the Status of Women was formed ."(Mohammed 1991) Reddock (1985)

[19]Trinidad Guardian January 25, 1998:24

They are some sharks looking for bait
They want to bite then kill you still
Don't let them use you like a tool
Or you will become a fool
Stand up for all your rights
And fight them with all your might.
--"Professional Advice," Singing Sonia

Overall, many female calypsonians' lyrics urge their listeners to recognise the sexism still operating in Trinidad society, and its attendant sexual violence. By persistently foregrounding female experience, both Sonia, Sandra, and their sisters usher in gender dissent that is not even on the radar for most male calypsonians. They counsel women to express themselves with dignity, and foster awareness of their rights. Female calypsonians continue to "do their thing" as per Calypso Rose's song title – joined by women from all walks of life as they demand that their voices not only be heard, but be respected.

While there is no single response to the challenges presented by gender violence (not even Sandra's "Equaliser") broadening our understanding of sexual violence can help foster a culture that has zero tolerance for such barbaric acts.

Thanks to the female calyponians, women in Trinidad are being heard at last – through calypso lyrics, parliamentary speeches, focus groups, rallies, television commentary, talk-show call-ins, the presence of female programme hosts and steel-band critics on the radio, and much more. The fact that some of the songs about sexual violence performed by these women are, in fact, collaborations between the singers and the men who write for them, demonstrates that sexual violence is not only a woman's problem, but a national problem as well. To borrow the words of two African diasporic sisters, Singing Sandra and Aretha Franklin, as women fight gender discrimination they demand R.E.S.P.E.C.T

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Media coverage of disasters through a gender lens

By Ammu Joseph

Abstract

It is possible to look at most events, issues, and happening in the world through a gender lens, and disasters, whether human or natural, are no different. Though of course disasters affect everyone – women, men, children – they do not usually affect everyone equally. Though women are often the most impacted during disasters, their unique needs are rarely considered, and their possible roles relief and reconstruction efforts ignored. A gender lens by media in times of disaster may help to highlights some of these issues. Unless gender is acknowledged as one of several factors that affect people's experience of almost everything, and accepted as one of the "angles" to be explored while covering anything, the media will continue to tell only part of the story.

Key words

disaster, emergency, tsunami, media, journalism, gender

Looking at a disaster

At an international conference on the media's role in the post-tsunami scenario in April 2005, a journalist who questioned the scant coverage of women's concerns in the aftermath of the December disaster was told off by a male resource person for being "too gender sensitive." A female participant advised her to shed her "women's ghetto mentality," and that "this sort of thinking isn't going to get you anywhere." The participant added, "people died, not just women." Why should the media concentrate on the women? (Kandaswam 2005)

Anticipating just such a reaction to my presentation on some of the missing links in media coverage of the tsunami at a workshop on 8 January 2005, I flagged the doubt myself. The presentation questioned, whether, though a natural disaster such as this one, obviously affected those who happened to be in the path of the massive waves, could there possibly be a gender angle to the tsunami story? Is it at all reasonable to call for a gender perspective while covering the post-tsunami situation? (Joseph 2005)

It is abundantly clear that gender was indeed a critical factor in the tragedy, as well as in the relief, recovery and rehabilitation process that followed. (Oxfam 2005; Sridharan 2005). For example, there is substantial evidence that more women than men died when the killer waves engulfed the shores. Most of the reasons cited for the apparently higher female death toll have

everything to do with gender as manifested in many of the affected countries, such as women's restrictive clothes, their customary inability to swim or climb trees, and their conventional roles as mothers and caregivers. There were also early reports of molestation and rape at some relief camps, of trafficking in women and girls, and of adolescent girls forced to marry older men who had lost their wives in the calamity.

At another level, relief efforts often forgot the special needs and concerns of women and girls – such as inner wear and sanitary napkins, accessible toilets with adequate water, reproductive and maternal health care, female health workers, safety and privacy. Many women also found themselves left out in the distribution of relief money and material, thanks to traditional notions about heads of families and/or breadwinners. Single women – including female heads of households – were particularly vulnerable, especially if they did not have adult sons.

In the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase, too, women were disadvantaged, especially with regard to the restoration of means of livelihood. With the plight of fishermen, and their losses in terms of assets like boats and nets, occupying centre-stage, little attention was paid to other economic activities in coastal areas, including those involving women.

In addition, the "property owner centric" approach that generally characterised rehabilitation packages came under criticism for ignoring the needs of people from the fishing and farming communities who do not own boats, nets, land or shops but do contribute their labour and skills to the coastal economy. Under the circumstances women, who traditionally form a major section of the informal or unorganised sector of labour and who rarely own property, were rendered doubly invisible, with their economic activities, losses, and needs by and large unaccounted for.

The consequent neglect of women's livelihood needs was obviously catastrophic for a large number of families, especially among the poor, because women are often their sole earners and/or sources of support. In any case, women's earnings tend to go directly towards meeting the basic needs of their families, while a significant portion of men frequently spend earnings on personal habits such as drinking, smoking, and gambling. There are reports of men wasting relief money in this way, and this then serving as triggers for domestic violence.

To make matters worse, women and local women's collectives – including self-help or savings and credit groups – were often ignored by the government, other agencies, as well as gram panchayats (rural institutions of local self-governance), in the process of post-tsunami planning and decision-making.

At the same time, tsunami-affected women were not merely victims. In fact, many played active roles in rescue, relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. What is more, as "first responders," they often took on the challenging task of restoring a semblance of normalcy to life after the disaster. This included cooking, cleaning, taking care of the sick and the injured, the young and the old, sending children to school, salvaging belongings, helping to repair homes, and trying to make ends meet and regain livelihoods under extremely difficult circumstances.

Many women survivors also grew in strength and confidence in the wake of their experience of devastation and tragedy. They approached both government officials and non-governmental organisations for assistance in rebuilding their lives and livelihoods. Recognising the multiple benefits of collective action, they formed, joined or reactivated self-help groups, some learning from the experiences of earthquake-affected rural women from Gujarat and Maharashtra in India who had turned disaster into opportunity by working together to re-establish themselves and their communities. (Joseph 2003a, 2003b; 2003c). In the process, they managed to overcome prior restraints on their mobility, become more assertive and ambitious in claiming their rights, and compel families and communities to recognise their personhood and capabilities.

So, yes, people died – not just women. People suffered, succumbed, survived, recovered, and rebuilt –

not just women. Nobody would be stupid enough to suggest that the media focus exclusively on women. However, surely it is fair to propose that the media, in their vital role as the Fourth Estate, the watchdog of society, defenders of the public interest, must attempt to reflect the experiences, concerns and opinions of diverse sections of the population, including the female half of the human race. Yet, despite the well-documented gender differences in the impact of disasters, and despite the fact that women and children constitute the majority of victims seen in the media's representation of disasters, natural and otherwise, media coverage of recurring disasters across the world continues to be, by and large, gender-blind.

As Oxfam's March 2005 Briefing Note on The Tsunami's Impact on Women put it, "there is no scarcity of reflections and commentary on the impact of the disaster that shook the coasts of several Asian countries on 26 December 2004. The media have… looked into almost every conceivable angle: the impact on tourism, the impact on the environment, revealed underwater villages, even the impact on animals. One area that has received less attention is the gender impact of the tsunami, and its impact on women in particular (Oxfam 2006)."

Months later, media coverage of Hurricane Katrina, which devastated New Orleans and neighbouring areas in the United States of America, was little better. As Joni Seager pointed out, the mainstream media "started asking tough, targeted questions about why this disaster fell so hard on one side of the race line.' However, they were not so quick to notice and highlight the fact that the disaster 'fell hard on one side of the gender line, too.' (Seager, 2005) According to her, the 'not-noticing' of the gendered dimensions of this disaster by the American media and by the panoply of experts who interpreted the disaster to the public through the media is alarming and warrants attention in itself."

Gender blindness also characterised much of the reporting on the massive earthquake that struck parts of Pakistan and India, particularly Kashmir, in October 2005. Yet there are many indications that gender played a crucial role in the disproportionate number of female casualties, as well as in women's access to aid and healthcare, and that it will continue to determine the lives of many survivors. For example, an early Reuters report quoted Pakistani officials who acknowledged that the majority of the victims were women and children but that the men of the affected communities often intercepted and distributed much of the aid, including relief material. (Reuters 2005) According to Aditi Kapoor, "most aid workers arriving in the affected areas are usually greeted first by groups of men. Women from the affected communities usually stand some distance away." As one woman told her, "It is easier for men to voice their concerns. But whom can we go to for (our) issues?" (Kapoor, 2005)

United Nations estimates suggest that there were 40,000 pregnant women among the four million people affected by the deadly quake. Health officials warned that the tremors could have triggered miscarriage and premature labour, which would entail more risk than normal in view of the destruction of many of the clinics and hospitals that constituted the limited healthcare facilities available in the worst affected areas at the best of times. Even on the Indian side of Kashmir, which was relatively less devastated, over 300 cases of miscarriage were registered in the weeks after the disaster, emergency obstetric care was inaccessible, and trauma counselling negligible (Gupta 2005).

One of the most widely reported post-earthquake "gender" stories, versions of which appeared in some mainstream international news outlets, was the Melody Cinema story about the conversion of an abandoned movie theatre in Islamabad into a women's hospital catering to the needs of the large number of women who sustained spinal injuries in the disaster. A doctor attending to the severely injured in the makeshift medical centre said that 90 per cent of the patients he had seen were girls and women. Most were paraplegics. The fact that most of the patients with spinal injuries were women is

attributed primarily to gender-related roles and restrictions.

In all likelihood, gender will also determine the future of these women. Unable to walk and, in many cases, to control their bladders or bowels, they may require constant care for the rest of their lives. Under the circumstances, the married ones lived in fear of abandonment by their husbands and the single ones knew their chances of marriage were virtually non-existent. The attending doctor was obviously concerned about what would happen to his patients after they left the hospital. "This society is cruel," he said. "They will be out on the streets unless they can get a skill and become independent. A young woman who does not walk, who has no control over her bladder, has no real chance in this society." (Winter 2005)

Paraplegics were not the only ones facing a bleak future. There were reports of women survivors, especially widows without adult sons, losing property to male relatives after moving out of their broken homes in shattered mountain villages in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. (Parsons 2006) Most of them had no papers to prove their owner-ship and reportedly, according to customary law, a dead man's property reverts to his brothers rather than his wife. Although daughters do have a right to a share in the property, this is apparently often denied to them. As a result, a large number of quake-affected women and girls could be left with no home to call their own.

Still, several women have also been able to turn the disaster into an opportunity to restructure their lives for the better. With so many families having lost homes, assets and means of livelihood in the rubble, these women faced less opposition to their efforts to find work outside the confines of their houses. Some set up petty shops, others found employment in non-governmental organisations. In addition, encouraged by humanitarian organisations, some set up women's committees to assess their communities' rehabilitation and reconstruction needs (Koster 2006).

To sum up, one unfortunate constant across the many disasters that took place in several parts of the world through 2005 was the huge toll they took on women. After a trip to tsunami-ravaged Sri Lanka in November 2005, Ritu Sharma noted, "I am (now) more cognisant than ever of how natural disasters impact women severely and in specific ways that are often not recognised, especially during reconstruction phases after the crises have faded from the news." (Sharma 2006)

Clearly, then, gender is an angle that needs to be explored in media coverage of disasters and their aftermath. As the Oxfam Briefing Note put it, "Disasters, however natural, are profoundly discriminatory. Wherever they hit, pre-existing structures and social conditions determine that some members of the community will be less affected while others will pay a higher price. Among the differences that determine how people are affected by such disasters is that of gender."

The media must recognise more fully that even "hard news" coverage, including the reporting of disasters, can actually benefit from gender consciousness. By focusing attention on the inevitable social consequences of "natural" calamities, the media can alert both communities and the authorities to the impact of the event on different sections of the affected population, including various categories of women, and



Muzaffarabad, Pakistan - An elderly woman sits among the rubble, she received donated blankets and a jacket. She still has no place to go, her home completely destroyed

Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

highlight the importance of taking their experiences, opinions, needs and resources into account in the relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction process.

The bonus is that the special stories resulting from gender awareness not only serve a valuable purpose in the aftermath of such events, but they are also likely to stand out as more memorable than many others in the customary media blitz that generally follows. So looking through the world through a gender lens has nothing to do with being "too gender sensitive" or being burdened with a "women's ghetto mentality." Disasters have everything to do with gender, as do other high profile, high prestige areas of media coverage such as war, social conflict, politics and economics. The stories are out there. If few of them make it to the mainstream media, it is because gender awareness is still missing in many newsrooms.

There is, today, no dearth of sources and resources to figure out whether or not an event or process has any special implications for women, including different categories of women, as well as other vulnerable sections of society whose voices are not commonly heard in the media. It is just a question of looking for them. Even that is not difficult, especially in the present era of the Internet.

The bottom line is that unless gender is acknowledged as one of several factors that affect people's experience of almost everything, and accepted as one of the "angles" to be explored while covering anything, the media will continue to tell only part of the story – whatever that story may be.

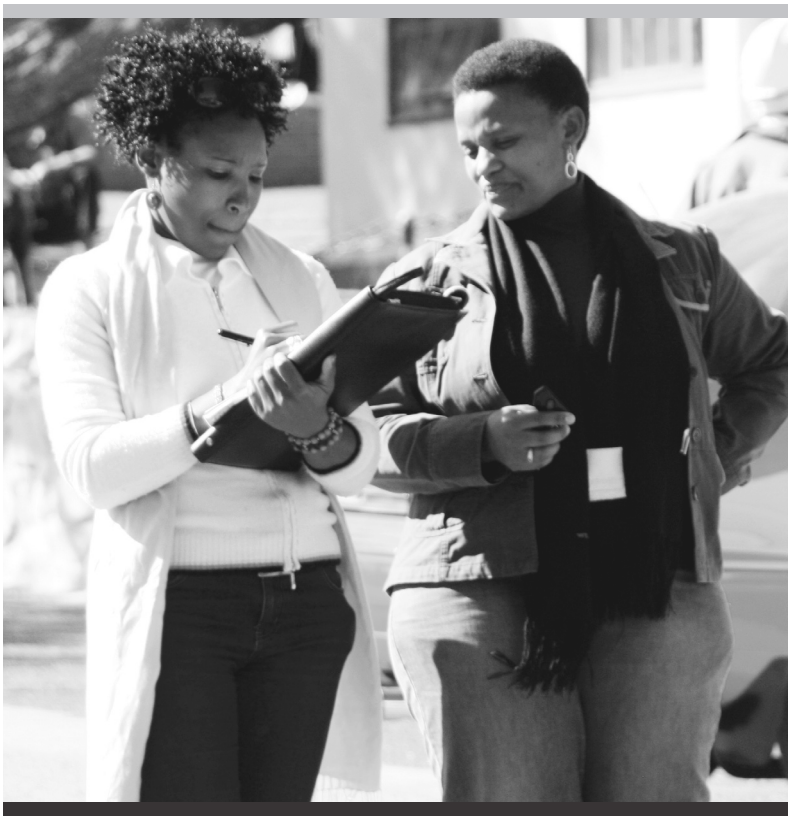
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Notes
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Opinion





Reporting refugees: The case of World Refugee Day 2007

By Sandra Roberts

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), South Africa was the main destination, worldwide, for new asylum-seekers in 2006. It is surprising then, that the South African media paid so little attention to 20 June, World Refugee Day, and its associated gender issues. On the other hand, perhaps it is not so surprising, given the media's tendency to either at best ignore refugees and migrant communities, or at worst, perpetuate negative stereotypes.

Amnesty International notes that, "violence against women during conflict has reached epidemic proportions. Mass rape is frequently used systematically, as a weapon of war." It is not surprising, then that 80% of refugees worldwide are women and children (UNHCR 2001). Trafficking of women also bolsters the number of asylum seekers. Female asylum seekers are undoubtedly more vulnerable than males in a foreign country, at risk of sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and rights abuses.

One could then expect on World Refugee Day, that media would generally highlight refugees, in such a way as to reflect the experiences of both men and women. The Media Monitoring Project did quick scan of Johannesburg English dailies to see how it was covered and found that the *Sowetan* and *The Star* are the only newspapers to provide good coverage on this global event.

The commitment of *Sowetan* in covering refugees is clear in the editorial, and in the prominent coverage on World Refugee Day as well as the day after. The editorial entitled "Today is fear enough," (Sowetan, 18) recognises the desperation that refugees experience to leave their homes. Opposite is an article about a family settling in the United States, "New life for refugees." (Sowetan, 19).

The *Sowetan* also covered the issue the next day (21 June), with the whole page (25) dedicated to the issue of refugees. The various articles describe how South Africans often discriminate against refugees and how the latter are often looked upon as a vulnerable group. Yet, many refugees are highly qualified and could provide much-needed skills to the country. An earlier article on the 19 June featured a family who has been waiting for six years in South Africa for formalisation of their refuge status.

The Star quoted the UNHCR research in an original article titled "SA biggest recipient of asylum-seekers" (The Star, 21/06/2007, 6). An article alongside it was about the Lindela repatriation centre contract under review. None of the three articles in page 6 discussed the experiences and the difficulties faced by refugees and as such, omit the background as to why refugees flee their countries and end up in South Africa or somewhere else. Although the coverage is not xenophobic in nature, it does not raise awareness on the issue nor discuss the human rights of the refugees involved.

The *Daily Sun* welcomed World Refugee Day with a front page "You're Busted! Cop with a BIG GUN wakes up aliens selling illegal IDs." The article typically blurs the line between legal and illegal foreign nationals, calling



Woman in Kenembwa refugee camp in Tanzania searches for missing child *Credit: Trevor Davies*

them all "aliens." The *Daily Sun* had previously (13/06/2007, 2) covered another crime story allegedly involving foreign nationals entitled "Aliens bust for murder!"

Research conducted by the Media Monitoring Project entitled *Revealing Race: An analysis of the coverage of race and xenophobia in the South African print media* reveals the results of monitoring of a sample of Gauteng-based print media from January to May 2006 on the repre-sentation of issues of race, ethnicity and xenophobia in selected media.

Most of the reports on crime (16% of all stories monitored) were about crimes committed by non-nationals which made headline news particularly in the Daily Sun. All of the publications monitored, however, tended to mention the nationality of the people committing incidents of crime particularly if they were not South African citizens, without explaining the relevance of this information to the story. This form of reporting tended to perpetuate the stereotype that non-nationals were more predisposed to commit crime than nationals.

The monitoring found a degree of diversity in topics covered. It is, however, evident that a handful of subjects provided the majority of stories in this regard. Items on crime, politics, economy, justice/legal system, and conflict together comprised 60% of the coverage where issues of race and xenophobia were discussed. Articles of a human interest nature, which may help to engender understanding, were notably absent.

Periodic coverage of this nature would lead readers to believe that foreign nationals and even South Africans born elsewhere are likely to be criminals. Ironically, in the same edition, the *Daily Sun* mentions how South Africa will gain from foreign teachers' skills yet the title refers to the Zimbabwean teachers as "aliens."

The othering of immigrants, by calling them "aliens," makes an already alienated group further vulnerable. This is particularly true of the more vulnerable refugees, women and children. Othering by the media in Rwanda, led to a genocide and the rape of 20% of Rwandan women.[1] It would seem fair to guess that systematically calling foreign nationals "aliens" and perpetuating stereotypes about this group is a dangerous activity for refugee women and girls.

Other newspapers were silent on that day, except for a brief piece in the *Business Day* mentioning that 78% of Zimbabweans in Johannesburg are illegal (20/06/2007, pg. 3) and a piece about the Lindela Repatriation Centre. No mention is made however, of World Refugee Day (21/06/2007, pg. 3).

Considering the hardships that refugees go through before arriving in their host country, it seems that the media could have done a better job of challenging xenophobia and highlighting the plight of refugees on World Refugee Day. The *Sowetan*, however, proved that newspapers can do a good job of raising the public's awareness on the rights of refugees.[2]

Sandra Roberts is a project coordinator with the Media Monitoring Project.

Notes

[1]http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGACT770342004.

[2]http://web.amnesty.org/pages/refugees-background-eng



Missing the mark? Gender and advertising in Southern Africa

By Colleen Lowe Morna

What on earth does the size of a woman's bra have to do with smoking cigarettes? The question, posed by a woman in one of the focus group discussions in the recently released Gender Links study on gender and advertising in four Southern African countries is one that could well be asked of many of the advertisements that flash around us each day.

Covering 1650 radio, television, print and billboard advertisements in Mauritius, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the study aimed to establish how women and men are represented and portrayed in advertising. Monitoring took place over a two week period in December 2006, followed by separate male and female focus group discussions on selected case studies.

Unlike news content that must be impartial, considered and fair, advertisers have the licence to play with our minds by accentuating the bizarre; taking us on feel good trips; or lifting us out of our normal space: whatever it takes to catch our attention.

Precisely because of this power over the mind, advertising is a critical area of concern for transforming gender relations. The good news is that women are far more likely to be reflected in advertising than in news content. The bad news is that this is often for all the wrong reasons.

Overall, women constituted 41 percent of all subjects (those featuring in the adverts as voices and or images) in the advertising monitoring, compared to the Southern African average of 19 percent news sources in the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) of 2005 that provides latest data on women and men in the news.

The higher proportion of women in advertisements than as news sources is, however, not a measure of greater gender sensitivity in this area of media practice, but a reflection of the fact that advertising still relies heavily on women's physical attributes as a marketing ploy. A case in point is the woman wearing a Cup D bra in a cigarette advertisement in Zimbabwe where there is no relationship at all between the woman and the product being advertised.

If advertisements that are regarded as gender neutral are excluded (for example a cell phone with no person in the advertisement) 62 percent of the items monitored were classified as either gender blind (regarding women as non-existent) or displaying blatant or subtle stereotypes, with only 38 percent of advertisements classified as "gender aware".

Gender blindness is apparent in such areas as sports advertising which has a heavy male bias even though women often constitute a high proportion of the spectators at such events. Advertisers during the soccer World Cup found that they had sold themselves short when most of the advertising during this event watched by billions across the globe targeted men, despite the fact that women in fact constituted 40 percent of those watching the spectacle!

One of the ways in which gender stereotypes are reinforced in advertising is the fact that women are far

more likely to feature as images than as voices in advertisements. In the study, women comprised 54 percent of subjects in billboard followed by 51 percent of the subjects in print advertisements. In contrast, they comprised 42 percent of TV and 35 percent of radio advertisement subjects.

Billboards displayed the highest proportion of blatant stereotypes, often using women as mere objects to attract attention, with no relationship to the actual product (like a woman in a scanty top advertising air time or standing next to a car). The messages in billboards are often at best insensitive, at worst dangerous. A case in point is the billboard advert for women's underwear in South Africa, a country with one of the highest levels of gender violence in the world, with the caption, "undress for success."

While women dominated in still images, they constituted a mere 29 percent of all voice-overs. The clear message that emerges from this is that women in advertising are meant to be seen and not heard. This has the undertones of an old Victorian saying in reference to children. It should raise serious concerns as to how the agency of women continues to be denied into the 21st century.

Another way in which stereotypes are reinforced is in the different roles that women and men are portrayed in advertising. For example women constituted 82 percent of those classified as model/beauty contestant/sex object and 60 percent of home-makers. Men on the other hand dominated in business, sport, politics and other "serious" pursuits.

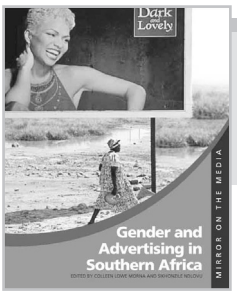
Household goods, food and cleaning materials are almost always associated with women, while financial services are typically associated with men. In all countries, and in a pattern similar to the news, women above the age of 36 are virtually non-existent in advertising. Almost all the older people in adverts are men.

Despite these biases, the study identified an interesting array of advertisements classified as "gender aware". An interesting sector – and one of the fastest growing areas of advertising in all countries – is telecommunications. The sector seems to be cottoning onto the fact that to increase market share, you need to broaden your horizons. In Africa, where land lines in the rural areas are few and far between, it makes as much sense to appeal to "gogo" (granny) in the rural areas as to the trendy young man in town if you are going to grow your cell phone network. And it certainly makes sense to consciously appeal to women and men!

In the focus groups, a surprising number of men, young and old, said they would like to see men in more diverse roles, such as cooking and caring for the family. Women and men warmed to the increasing examples of "gender benders" in advertising. Could it be that by harping on tired old stereotypes, advertisers are losing out on potential new markets? Come on advertisers, how about really surprising us!

Colleen Lowe Morna is Executive Director of Gender Links and Chair of the Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network

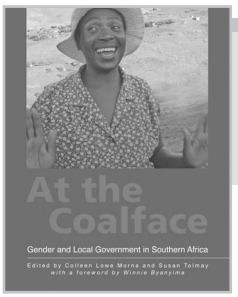




Mirror on the Media Gender and Advertising in Southern Africa Edited by Colleen Lowe Morna and Sikhonzile Ndlovu

A ground breaking study on gender and advertising in Southern Africa, conducted by Gender Links, has revealed that while women are more likely to feature in advertising than in news content, they are more likely to be seen than head. They predominate in billboards and still images and hardly feature in voice-overs; and it is in these still images that we see blatant stereotypes at their worst.

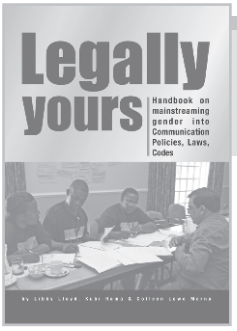
Covering 1650 radio, television, print and billboard advertisements in Mauritius, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the study aimed to establish how women and men are represented iand portrayed in advertising. Despite women constituting half of all consumers, they are often either ignored, or portrayed in ways that perpetuate blatant and more subtle forms of stereotypes.



At the Coalface – Gender and Local Government in Southern Africa Edited by Colleen Lowe Morna and Susan Tolmay

With a growing number of Southern African countries from different political and electoral backgrounds showing that gender parity can be achieved in local government, there is no longer any excuse for any country in the region not to achieve this goal. However, if women are to make a difference in this sphere of decision-making – the "coalface" of service delivery – far more needs to be done to strengthen local government and to integrate gender considerations into its work.

These are the key findings of a ground breaking new study on gender and local government in Southern Africa by Gender Links, a Southern African NGO that specialises in gender, governance and the media. Over a year in the making, the study included interviews with 478 local councillors, 438 civil society representatives and 30 experts and officials in four Southern African countries, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa.



Legally yours: Handbook on mainstreaming gender into communication policies, laws and codes

How do you ensure that there is gender balance in the media? How do you make sure that the media portrays women and men, girls and boys fairly? One of the first steps is to ensure that laws and policies are gender sensitive. *Legally yours: Handbook on mainstreaming gender into communication policies laws and codes* provides useful tools and methods to systematically mainstream gender in media and communication laws, regulations and policies and in regulatory bodies.

Regulators are standard setting bodies and should lead by example. This requires regulators to mainstream gender in the regulatory authorities themselves. Some of the critical steps would include developing gender policies, having effective sexual harassment policies and including gender into every aspect of the institution's work. Gender Links is working in partnership Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) and the Botswana Press Council (BPC) to mainstream gender in their work. Workshops have been held with the BPC in July and TCRA in August towards developing gender policies.



New version of AP stylebook available

The latest stylebook from the world's largest newsgathering organisation includes new writing guidelines on topics such as the African Union, Islamic holy days, and the spelling of Katmandu. Besides the 2007 print edition of the Associated Press Stylebook, any journalist can subscribe to the online edition. Subscribers can use the site to do text searches, receive e-mails on the book's constant updates, or even compile their own modified stylebook. While the stylebook is based on American English, it remains a useful tool for writers and editors worldwide. It also includes a detailed section on media laws. New entries in the book include airstrike, BlackBerry, Chennai, hip-hop and intefadah, among many others. Entries that have been updated include Baha'i, European Union, Fatah and Mexico. The online subscription costs US$25 per year. Newsrooms and other organisations can purchase site licenses that allow multiple subscriptions, starting at US$200 for 10. Copies of the spiral-bound book costs US$17.95 or $11.75 for AP members.

CONCEPT AND EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

The Gender and Media Diversity Journal (GMDJ)
Concept and Editorial guidelines

What?

The Gender and Media Diversity Journal is the biennial journal of the Gender and Media Diversity Centre (GMDC). The journal is intellectual but not academic. It provides up-to-date and cutting edge information on media diversity in Southern Africa and the space for the dissemination of research findings and projects; case studies; campaigns, policy developments; and opinion and debate on media practice in the region.

Each journal focuses on a different thematic areas identified in consultation with the GMDC advisory group. Inaugural issues (before the establishment of the GMDC) focused on the Global Gender Media Monitoring Project and the second on the Gender and Media Summit held in September 2006 under the banner "Media Diversity: Good For Business, Good for Democracy." Future issues will tackle themes such as quality and professionalism in the media: the case for new media; non-journalistic media; children's media; and the outcomes of the Media Action Plan on HIV AIDS and Gender involving editor's forums and media development NGOs across the region.

Why?

Despite its mission of "giving voice to the voiceless", the media worldwide is heavily biased towards covering the views of those in power, an elite group often defined according to race, ethnicity, class and gender. In Southern Africa, where democracy is a relatively new and fragile phenomenon, the media are still largely state dominated. The concept of a public media is weak. Albeit to different degrees, private and community media face political, organisational and financial challenges. Overall, whether in the public or private sphere, media ownership is concentrated in a few hands. The voices of those most affected by policies and unequal power relations in society are seldom heard even though they constitute the majority of news consumer population. Failure to understand and respond to audiences in all their diversity is also bad for business.

The journal aims to:

- Develop and share a body of knowledge on media diversity in Southern Africa.
- Promote more probing, analytical and contextual journalism.
- Share best practices on how to achieve greater diversity in media content, ownership and market share.
- Contribute to greater media literacy and responsiveness among ordinary citizens- women and men – in Southern Africa.

Each journal will contain:

- Introduction – editorial and news briefs
- Thematic focus
- The issue – should go before those below
- Media watch
- Reviews and reports of programmes, projects, research, policy and development related to gender and diversity in the media.
- Opinion and letters.

The Southern Africa Media Diversity Journal targets media workers and owners, policy-makers, researchers, lecturers, student journalists, activists and those individuals and organisations working towards media diversity in the region.

Contributions are invited and solicited from groups and individuals such as these and commissioned by the editor.

When?

The journal comes out twice a year in September and March.

How to contribute

For further information and to request full contributors guidelines please contact

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Tel: + 27 11 622 2877

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