

## **Tackles and sidesteps: normative maintenance and paradigm repair in mainstream reactions to South African tabloid journalism**

### *ABSTRACT*

Since the introduction of the first tabloid to the South African market in 2001, and seemingly increasing with each subsequent entrant into this burgeoning market, debates about their role, the reasons for their success, their potential, and their ethics (or the lack thereof) have been raging in the popular press. This debate seems to suggest, among other things, that the questions raised by the introduction of tabloids are of primary concern to producers and consumers of the media itself – in other words, that tabloids need to be dealt with within the domain of the popular press itself. In this paper I argue that while these debates are seemingly set on evaluating the tabloid media, they also reveal – and perhaps even more so – the dominant normative assumptions and professional ideologies in the mainstream media. In debating and rejecting the journalistic excesses of the tabloids, these debates served as a form of paradigm repair to restore the image of an occupation in trouble. The question to be investigated by looking at these debates is whether the widespread criticism of tabloids should be seen as part of journalistic ritual, namely the routine application of ethical guidelines and the performance of professional standards, or whether these debates went deeper to provide a structural critique of the South African media.

*A previous version of this paper was presented to the annual conference of the South African Communication Association (Sacomm), Pretoria, 19-21 September 2005. I am indebted to Larry Strelitz for a discussion that set in motion much of my thinking in this paper. I am also grateful to Sean Jacobs, Arnold de Beer and the anonymous reviewers for valuable comments. The responsibility for misconceptions or mistakes of course remains solely mine.*

*Herman Wasserman is associate professor in Journalism at the University of Stellenbosch.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of the first tabloid to the South African market in 2001, and seemingly increasing with each subsequent entrant into this burgeoning market, debates about their role, the reasons for their success, their potential, and their ethics (or the lack thereof) have been raging in the popular press (see for instance Berger, 2004a; *Die Burger*, 2005; *Financial Mail*, 2002; *Finansies & Tegniek*, 2003a & 2003b; Froneman, 2004 & 2005; Harber, 2003; Manson, 2005; Rabe, 2005; *The Media Online*, 2004; Thlolo, 2005). This debate has thus far been conducted mostly in the popular press (more so than in scholarly journals or at conferences), even if, paradoxically, academics seem to have been the most vocal participants in those debates. The fact that so many academics have participated in this debate might point towards the challenge that tabloids pose to journalism schools, which might have to consider changing the way in which they teach news selection and writing, editing and design – perhaps even their very definition of journalism. Another explanation why the popular press has been chosen to debate the tabloids in the initial years since their emergence might be that tabloids are viewed as posing a danger to the image of journalism in the eyes of the public, and therefore have to be dealt with within the domain of the popular press itself<sup>1</sup>. A key issue in these debates was the responsibility of the tabloids – and of the media at large – towards a democratic society. Consider the questions posed by Manson (2005):

We all accept that tabloids will continue to launch and grow in this country. But instead of copying and pasting from the sick British model, why aren't local tabloid owners brave enough to embrace the spirit of our democracy? Why not accept that you can publish a tabloid without sacrificing your sense of social responsibility or the humanity of those you report on, and dare I suggest that of your writers and editors?

My aim in this paper is not to evaluate tabloids as such, in order to assess the quality of their journalism or the responses by their readers. This paper is therefore not a content analysis of tabloids. Rather, what I want to argue is that the debates around tabloids tell us something about the normative framework in which the rest of the print media, to which I will refer as *mainstream* print media, operate. In other words, the criticism levelled against tabloids is telling, not only because the critics evaluate the tabloid media, but also because they tell us what the dominant normative frameworks and professional ideologies in the *mainstream* media are. Even more importantly, the debates about tabloids show up important shortcomings and limitations in the mainstream media, which these debates serve to rectify or from which they divert attention away. In the debates about tabloids, the norms and assumptions of the mainstream media are manifested in a process of *paradigm repair*. In debating and rejecting the journalistic excesses of the tabloids, a discourse is developed that serves to repair the image of an occupation (or “industry” or “profession” or “interpretive

---

<sup>1</sup> An example of how mainstream media has attempted to walk the tightrope while incorporating tabloid elements to satisfy readers' curiosity and simultaneously setting themselves up as distinct from tabloids is the weekly column 'Tabloid Week' in the *Sunday Times*. In this regular feature, selected articles and reports from the week's tabloids are discussed and often ridiculed.

community”, depending on your perspective) in trouble. The tabloid debate gave mainstream print media the opportunity to redefine their own practices, values and responsibilities. Whether they used this opportunity to provide a structural critique of the media sector or whether they settled for the easier and more superficial one, that of the routine application of ethical guidelines and the performance of professional standards, is the question this article wants to pose.

## 1. BACKGROUND<sup>2</sup>

The print media landscape in post-1994 South Africa has been an increasingly commercialized one, with stiff competition between market players locally and globally. While editorial staff have become more racially representative, the commercial logic of especially the print media has caused them to remain aimed at lucrative audiences, with voices of the poor largely absent (cf. Jacobs, 2004). Because of the correlation between class and race created by apartheid, this also meant that, by the time the tabloids arrived, print media audiences had been predominantly white. A significant shift in the print media sector occurred with the appearance, in 2001, of the first of what later became a range of tabloids aimed at a mass black audience (including the section of the black population called “coloured” in apartheid nomenclature). The first tabloid, *Sunday Sun*, owned by the Naspers conglomerate (after a pitch by the publisher Deon du Plessis was turned down by Independent), went on sale at the cheap cover price of R1, thereby undercutting its closest rival, the established paper *Sowetan* and its sister publication *Sunday World*, aimed at the black middle class. This led to an accusation by Saki Macozoma, the chairman of the black empowerment consortium Nail, who then controlled New Africa Publications, owners of *Sowetan*<sup>3</sup>, that Naspers had engaged in “uncompetitive behaviour” (Beckett, 2003). The phenomenal commercial success of this tabloid was partly blamed for the huge circulation losses at *Sowetan* and seen as a reason for the appointment of a new editor, Thabo Leshilo, to take over from John Dlodlu, with the task of restructuring *Sowetan* and *Sunday World* and reversing their circulation losses (*The Media Online*, 2004). The following year, the tabloid (entitled *Daily Sun*) went daily, again growing at an unprecedented pace and increasing its circulation by 228% within the following year (Bloom, 2003). Naspers sought to replicate this commercial success story by launching an Afrikaans-language weekly tabloid in the Western Cape province in 2003, entitled *Kaapse Son*. Aimed at a “coloured” and white Afrikaans working class (Koopman, 2005a), its popularity soon became evident and it changed from a weekly to a daily (entitled simply *Son*) in 2005. Naspers’s rival company, Independent, replied by launching an English-language tabloid in the same region in 2005, *The Daily Voice*. Providing the same fare (its tagline is “Sex, Scandal, Skinner [gossip], Sport”), it aims to challenge the *Son* head-on, by using inter alia colloquial language (Penstone, 2005).

---

<sup>2</sup> This section draws on a book chapter co-authored with Marie-Louise du Bois, forthcoming in Olorunnisola, A. (ed.) *Media in South Africa Ten Years since Apartheid*, Edwin Mellen.

<sup>3</sup> A controlling stake in New Africa Publications was obtained by another black empowerment company, Johncom, in 2004 (see *The Media Online*, 2004).

As far as content is concerned, the three tabloids have much in common. They focus on gossip, scandal (in the case of the *Daily Sun* this often takes the form of incidents relating to witchcraft, superstition and the like), sports and entertainment (e.g. horse-racing news and entertainment guide) and sex (the semi-nude “page three girls” have raised the ire of feminists, as will be discussed below). The latter feature is especially central to the *Son*’s approach and identity – its website offers more pictures on a pay-per-view basis, and its marketing campaign at an annual Afrikaner cultural festival consisted of a peepshow. The tabloids’ commercial success does not mean that they were unanimously welcomed: on the contrary.

## **2. CRITICISM, PARADIGM REPAIR AND NORMATIVE MAINTENANCE**

Since their inception, South African tabloids have been subjected to constant – and often bitter – criticism from media commentators in the mainstream media<sup>4</sup>. In turn, publishers (Deon du Plessis, *Sun*) and editors (Ingo Capraro, *Son*; Raymond Joseph, *Daily Voice*) have used public platforms (e.g. Du Plessis, 2005) and newspaper columns (e.g. Capraro, 2005; Joseph, 2005) to defend their publications and articulate their vision. The Naspers media house has also used the publication channels at its disposal to promote the tabloids, for instance, through the publication of their astronomical circulation figures.

At times, the exchanges between academics and tabloid publishers and editors took the form of virulent attacks. One such exchange took place when Guy Berger in his speech as convenor judge at the Mondi Shanduka Newspaper Journalism awards in 2005 referred to tabloids as “junk journalism” and advised that the awards should steer clear of these (Berger, 2005). In his response, one-time news editor of the *Daily Voice*, Raymond Joseph, dismissed Berger’s speech as a “hissy fit” by a “learned prof” (Joseph, 2005).

The bulk of the criticism can be grouped into two main categories, namely the perceived low quality of journalism practised by these publications, and concerns about the lack of ethical standards guiding the actions of tabloid journalists. Let us very briefly consider some illustrations of these types of criticism.

### **2.1 Quality of journalism**

Berger (2004) has accused tabloid writing of falling short of “at least some of the basics of journalism”. “The problem”, he says, “is that some tabloidism gives a bad name to this genre of journalism as a whole”, citing “crass archetypal narratives” that are “the stuff of cheap fiction” and concluding that “they’re a country away from credible journalism” (Berger, 2004a). But Berger suggests that when tabloids (his example is the *Sowetan*) using a popular approach remain “at

---

<sup>4</sup> The examples given here from debates around tabloids are not presumed to be representative; rather they are chosen in a similar way as did Berkowitz (2000:132) in his study of paradigm repair, namely through the method of conceptual sampling – texts are chosen “for theoretically relevant reasons rather than through probability samples”.

root (...) factual" (Berger, 2004a), they can pass for good journalism. These comments are clearly aimed at upholding certain agreed-upon quality standards of journalism, and seem to posit existing journalistic practices as the standard against which tabloid journalism should be measured if it has a chance of being defined as journalism.

In his (2005) discussion of tabloids, Froneman pays considerable attention to the issue of definition. "We have to understand what tabloid journalism is; who the tabloids are; where it comes from; how it influences us all; and how we can respond to it" (*Daarom moet ons verstaan wat tabloid- of ponie-joernalistiek is; wie die poniepers of tabloids is; waar dit vandaan kom; hoe dit ons almal beïnvloed; en hoe ons daarop kan reageer*). He defines the characteristics of tabloid journalism in terms of content and presentation, but also criticizes tabloids' neglect of serious news in favour of the sensational and foresees the superficialization of public discourse. Significant, in the context of self-reflexivity as a characteristic of paradigm repair (to which I will refer below) is his appeal to readers as well as journalists to "reflect urgently" (*dringend nadink*) on these issues (Froneman, 2005). For Froneman, therefore, mainstream journalism is largely defined in terms of its gravity and depth. While he acknowledges that elements of tabloid journalism can also be found in mainstream Sunday newspapers or magazines like *Huisgenoot/You* and *People*, he dichotomizes between journalism that wants to entertain rather than inform.

While Rabe (2005) concentrates on ethical issues, she couples ethical standards (see below) with journalistic quality without defining the measures of that quality ("Responsible journalism is good journalism. Good journalism is responsible journalism") and concludes that "tabloids - and the (...) tabloidisation of the media - are the antithesis of good journalism". In this criticism, ethical norms are used as tools to define the occupation of journalism<sup>5</sup> – the implication is that adherence to a set of professional criteria for ethical behaviour also serves as a definition of what (good) journalism is.

Other similar criticism includes the neglect of the journalistic routines of striving for "balance" (Rabe, 2005) and the verification of sources (Harber, 2005). These are seen as detracting from the quality of journalism in general. Harber (2005) quips: "I need another source to verify the snake-rape story,' is not something one hears in a good tabloid newsroom".

## **2.2 Ethics**

The strongest criticism levelled against tabloids in popular debates is that of unethical behaviour. Most recently, *Son's* unscrupulous publication of harmful allegations against a gay minister in the conservative Dutch Reformed church made by his ex-partner, and the latter's subsequent suicide, led to heated debate in especially the Afrikaans media. Rabe (2005) commented in a column on the news website *News24*:

---

<sup>5</sup> Singer (2006), in a different context (the challenges posed to traditional journalism by the emergence of blogging), makes a similar point, albeit more extensively – namely that normative values will come to define professional journalism and distinguish them from other information providers.

(E)ven tabloids should subscribe to certain "tabloid" codes of conduct, although this may sound like an oxymoron. Otherwise, they might just carry on with a license to kill.

In his reaction to the same series of articles, Berger criticized tabloids for too easily equating what the public is interested in with what is in "the public interest", saying that tabloids are "in the entertainment market and not in the information market" (*Die Burger*, 2005-04-12:9, my translation). While he is critical of tabloids' failure to adhere to the ethical code of the print media industry set by the Press Ombudsman, he does not support Rabe's call for a separate code for tabloids. He invokes the traditional libertarian and social responsibility view of the media as a "watchdog", and acknowledges that in terms of this role "it may be wrong to write off a paper like the *Daily Sun* in its entirety" (Berger, 2004a).

This latest debate follows similar criticisms made earlier by Harber on ethical grounds. Anton Harber, while pointing at the positive potential of tabloids, lamented (Harber, 2005):

At the same time, one can't help feeling queasy when one looks at these papers, with their gory crime pictures, their fascination with superstition and bestiality ('I was raped by a snake') and their capacity to sail as close to the wind as possible on the worst populist sentiments, like xenophobia and homophobia. Recently, the *Daily Sun* spread across its front page — for all the world, including children, to see — the most sickening and degrading photograph of a pile of bodies after a Soweto family murder.

Froneman's criticisms of tabloids (2004; 2005) centred on ethical concerns. He bemoans the banality (*platvloersheid*) and triviality of tabloid content, calling it "low-level shock journalism" (*laevlakse skokjoernalistiek*) that affects readers' rights on a fundamental level.

### 3. PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

In the above reactions to tabloid journalism, dichotomies can be seen to be drawn up between ethical and non-ethical journalism, information and entertainment, and high level and low level journalism, with tabloids consistently being placed at the negative end of the binary. Little attention is paid to the extent to which mainstream journalism also peddles entertainment, sensational event-based journalism, superficial analysis or biased news coverage<sup>6</sup>. Instead, the status quo of mainstream journalism is to a large degree taken as the defining standard of journalism. The above concerns regarding the upholding of standards and ethical guidelines are typical of the professionalization of journalism. While often trumpeted as a check and balance against the abuse of media power, it is also widely viewed in critical terms. Allen (2005) refers to the process of professionalization as "corporate rationalization" that "establishes an elite, technocratic press that

---

<sup>6</sup> One has to look no further than the front page articles across the range of daily broadsheets on the rape trial of former deputy president Jacob Zuma in March 2006 to see how broadsheet journalism is often indistinguishable from the tabloids.

is more concerned with social control than promoting discursive forms of democracy". Garman (2005) indicates the "hallmarks of professionalism" as follows:

There are very particular ways in which journalists assert their control over information in the public domain as information specialists in reaching broad-based popular audiences. This sense of professionalism includes: knowing what is and isn't "news"; crafting this "news" into a "story" – a peculiarly, medium-specific, constrained format which demands not only training but lots of practice to master; and a tone of address which aims the information at the audience a particular media channel imagines itself to be speaking to/writing for. There is also a moral claim to be disinterested and dispassionate and to be working on behalf of the public, a claim known as "objectivity" which gives the operation of journalism a moral imperative that can be wielded to weed out particular types of knowledge the journalist or editor considers too high-brow, unfamiliar, arcane or partisan or even irrational/dangerous for their readers/audiences. As a result news journalists operate not simply as conduits who disseminate information but as specialists who decide what information is public-worthy and who then shape it into particular forms for dissemination. (...) This means that journalists can police a set of boundaries around their domain and protect their autonomy as specialists in particular knowledge areas and practices.

Much of the debates around tabloids in the past few years have functioned in the above manner. They were aimed at policing the boundaries of the profession by reiterating accepted definitions of what it is to be a journalist. The heading of Berger's column on tabloids (Berger, 2004a) says it succinctly: "Headline-grabbing tabloids: are they journalism?". The emphasis on objectivity (or "factual" reporting), ethical guidelines, a shared "basic" knowledge of what good journalism is and the definition of journalism in terms of the public interest are all characteristic of the professionalism approach to journalism. When these boundaries are overstepped, this paradigm is threatened. In order to re-establish the hegemony of the dominant professional value system, the culprits are identified, castigated or ostracized from the community<sup>7</sup> and the wrongdoing is explained (Berkowitz, 2000:127). This creates a ritual of self-reflexivity that allows for a limited critique, but is usually aimed at the individual wrongdoers rather than the profession itself and the paradigm upon which it builds its reputation (Berkowitz, 2000:128; Garman, 2005). This process is known as "paradigm repair" (Berkowitz, 2000:128):

In all, paradigm repair becomes a way for the media institution to justify its existence within its current system of practice (...) (N)ews paradigms tend toward the hegemonic within a profession; a member of the profession must follow the routines of the paradigm in order to be seen as a member in good standing.

---

<sup>7</sup> Examples to which Garman (2005) refers are the recent spate of plagiarism cases in the South African media, e.g. Darryl Bristow-Bovey and Cynthia Vongai and the criticism levelled against the author, Pamela Jooste, after allegations that she had plagiarized from a journalistic report in her latest novel.

In this context, it is important to note the reaction that the professional body of editors, the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef), also flexed its muscles in an attempt to police professional boundaries in the face of the emergence of tabloids. At its annual general meeting in Cape Town in July 2005, a special debate<sup>8</sup> was held on whether tabloid editors should also be welcomed into the fold of this professional body. The meeting was divided, but ultimately decided to welcome tabloids as a new form of journalism, while reaffirming its commitment to ethical principles<sup>9</sup>. While critics of tabloids like Guy Berger and Joe Thloloe repeated criticism that tabloids do not fulfil their informational role adequately or that they contravene professional ethics, several editors of mainstream publications spoke in support of tabloids, mostly on the grounds that tabloid journalism provides popular entertainment that should not be rejected on racist or classist grounds (Paddi Clay of *Johncom*) or that tabloids have rekindled a relationship with communities that mainstream media have lost (e.g. Mondli Makhanya, the editor of *Mail & Guardian* and Mathatha Tsedu, the editor of *City Press*). While this discussion indicated that the rejection of tabloids is not unanimous throughout the professional community of South African journalists, it serves to support the notion that the emergence of tabloids has served as an opportunity for debates about professionalism. It also emphasizes that the policing of professional boundaries takes place at different levels, and does not imply unanimity of responses.

The discussion of tabloids by Sanef is an example of how the South African mainstream media has engaged in the professional ritual of self-reflexivity. What has been conspicuously absent in most of these debates, however, is a critical look at mainstream newspapers themselves. Instead, the finger has been pointed at tabloids for threatening the dominant paradigm – instead of reconsidering the validity (and indeed the applicability to the state of current mainstream journalism) of that paradigm.

Inasmuch as the criticism of the tabloids centred on the boundaries and self-definitions of the journalistic profession in South Africa, these reactions may be read as a form of paradigm repair. While this process has international precedents<sup>10</sup>, the policing of professional boundaries in the South African context should be seen against the background of a general shift towards professional self-regulation. After apartheid, the media moved from an era in which they were subjected to strict legal control to one in which they operated on the basis of professional ethics and constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech.

---

<sup>8</sup> Notes from this meeting available from the author.

<sup>9</sup> The latter point was pointed out by Pedro Diederichs in his paper on tabloids at the Sacomm 2005 conference.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Berkowitz (2000) on the mainstream press's demonstration of superiority (what he calls "paradigm boosterism") to the tabloid media after Princess Diana's death. Örnebring & Jönsson (2004:283) in their historical perspective on tabloid journalism, also mention the fact that tabloids are "obvious targets when journalists themselves engage in self-reflection and media criticism": "Tabloid journalism becomes a kind of journalistic other, used as a warning example and symbol for all that is wrong with modern journalism (...)" (2004:284). Frank (2003) has shown how self-reflexivity among media professionals also goes beyond paradigm repair to a distinction drawn between individual reporters and members of a pack.

This shift entailed that media institutions had to develop media ethical codes that would fit in with the new order, whereas before they defined their conduct in terms of the prevailing laws (cf. Froneman, 1994). A number of problems were encountered as part of this new normative environment, among them inadequate knowledge of, and training in, media ethics (as revealed in a skills audit commissioned by Sanef, see De Beer & Steyn, 2002) and a range of ethical scandals<sup>11</sup>, culminating in 2003, which has subsequently been termed the '*annus horribilis*' of post-apartheid journalism (Haffajee, 2004). These scandals led to a campaign of getting "back to basics" by Sanef in an attempt to repair the image of the profession.

While professional self-regulation is obviously preferable to the previous system of governmental clampdown, this system does not seem to be working very well. The poor record of media professionals in keeping to the ethical codes decided upon in this self-regulatory framework was a manifestation on the surface of a much deeper malaise. Conflicts between the media and the government about the media's role in post-apartheid society (see Wasserman & De Beer, 2005) and recent debates between members of Sanef about the dangers posed by the increased commercial imperative in news media (Berger, 2004b; Harber, 2004) indicated deep-seated differences of opinion about the media's role in post-apartheid South Africa. It has become clear that issues such as press freedom and the public's right to know were interpreted through different value systems (Shepperson & Tomaselli, 2002:283).

Coupled with these conflicts about normative frameworks for the media is an apparent decline in public trust in the mainstream media (Fourie, 2005). Fourie (2005) points to an anomaly that may help to explain the rampant popularity of a medium like the tabloids, even in the face of severe criticism from commentators:

(D)espite the enormous growth of the media as an industry, the majority of people (under normal circumstances), tend to see, experience, and enjoy the media as a disposable but non-essential product. They see it mainly as entertainment and diversion. Yet, the media itself, journalists, social critics, moralists, intellectuals and journalism and media academics, take themselves and the media very serious. They see and defend it as a pillar of democracy, as indispensable for information, development and education, be it through news, campaigns or entertainment.

If this preference for the media as primarily an entertainment product is widespread, South African audiences and media commentators (proclaiming the centrality of the media for democratic participation) seem seriously out of sync. From the point of view that the media could contribute to social change, entertainment would not be taken as a general norm for the media. The criticism

---

<sup>11</sup> In 2003 a series of media ethical scandals received considerable attention. Primary among them were a prominent case of plagiarism by a well-known columnist, and perhaps more seriously, an allegation of espionage for the apartheid government made against the head of public prosecutions, Bulelani Ngcuka. The latter saga – involving conflicts of interest, the leaking of off-the-record information and unverified reports – resulted in a public judicial inquiry, the Hefer Commission.

that the media's penchant for sensation, conflict and entertainment serves to limit democratic deliberation rather than strengthen it has been part of media debates since the advent of the Frankfurt School. Even so, the disproportionate popularity of tabloids vis-à-vis "serious" news publications in South Africa cannot be patronisingly dismissed in the yet inconclusive normative debate. The fact that tabloids provide entertainment does not necessarily mean that entertainment is the *only* gratification sought by the readers turning to them in droves. The popularity of tabloids might at least in part be attributed to a more general alienation experienced in relation to other media forms. This alienation or sense of exclusion that readers experience in mainstream media should form the primary focus of debates around tabloids, rather than the transgression of rules of conduct formulated for the purpose of mainstream media.

The question that needs to be asked is whether the communities that are now flocking to tabloids had been adequately borne in mind when the now hegemonic normative frameworks were decided on. This does not mean that tabloids should not be criticized for their often ruthless conduct. However, a distinction should be drawn between the values that are fundamental to the 'good' in *broader* society and questions of style, genre or professional rituals. If tabloids provide an impetus for journalists to go 'back to basics', this return involves more than the performance of entrenched journalistic rituals. If basics are at stake, they are the basic values of the development of a deliberative democracy, the transformation of society and the redress of inequalities.

#### 4. WARNING LIGHTS

Significant in the tabloid discussion by Sanef referred to above was the acknowledgement by certain members that the popularity of tabloids may partly be seen as a result of a shortcoming on the part of the mainstream media. If one accepts that the unprecedented appeal of tabloids might also be the result of certain failures on the part of the mainstream media, what characteristics of tabloids may serve as warning lights pointing to these problems? What are the points on which tabloids may compel a rethink of the dominant normative frames? Some preliminary observations can be made (see also Wasserman, 2006):

- The liberal democratic view of independence and neutrality currently underpins South African media ethical frameworks<sup>12</sup>. This perspective hampers the media's role when judged by the extent to which it promotes and develops citizenship in its political, civil and social aspects (Steenveld, 2004:95) since it sets the ideal role for the media as being neutral conduits for information and precludes an active involvement in social change. Moreover, independence is viewed predominantly in terms of the media's relation to the government, while its position within networks of economic power is left largely unexamined<sup>13</sup>. Audience reaction to this

---

<sup>12</sup> See Retief (2002) for the commonality of tenets such as "objectivity", "impartiality" and "independence" in South African ethical codes, both professional and institutional. While issues of race and gender are also common denominators in media ethical codes, these are limited to issues of representation ("stereotyping") rather than their intersection with class.

<sup>13</sup> Or limited to immediate issues such as conflicts of interest or payment for articles unless in the "public interest" (Press Ombudsman, 2004).

limited (or even hypocritical and dishonest) understanding of independence might have been underestimated. Perhaps the tabloids' highly personalized, overtly subjective approach to news, can – as Larry Strelitz (2005) has pointed out – be seen as an “oppositional reading” (in Hall's terms) against the mainstream rhetorical strategies of objectivism<sup>14</sup>. Ward (2004:3) shows how the concept of objectivity has developed historically (more so in the US than in Europe and elsewhere, [Schudson, 2005:32]) as a rhetorical appeal to “establish, maintain or enhance their own credibility and that of their publications”, i.e. to maintain or repair the journalistic paradigm. The traditional notion of objectivity he asserts, however (2004:4), is in trouble and needs to be reformulated, because “the traditional notion of journalistic objectivity, articulated about a century ago, is indefensible philosophically, weakened by criticism inside and outside of journalism” and embraced by “fewer and fewer journalists”. In the South African context, Strelitz' (2005) use of Bakhtin's notion of the carnival as a means of resistance against authority to offer a way in which tabloids may be read is a very useful one. This view links up well with the one proposed by Örnebring and Jönsson (2004:284) that tabloids can be seen as an alternative public sphere outside the mainstream. Bloom (2005:20) avers that this is what is happening with South African tabloids:

What it's also clearly about is turning South Africa's traditional newspaper model on its head, getting buy-in from a reader who instinctively rejects the voice of authority found in conventional titles. Western or old school media values count for squat in this new world.

- Since the dominant normative framework guiding the media's self-regulation is that of government surveillance according to a liberal pluralist model, appeals to the media for more active involvement in transformation or development are framed in terms of governmental interference and interpreted as pressure to tone down criticism – untenable positions according to liberal ethics. Approaches such as public journalism, aimed at effecting social change, are usually frowned upon as this would entail journalists or media outlets 'becoming part of the story' (see Frank 2003, for an international comparison). Part of the success of tabloids might be related to their community orientation and developmental approach. The *Daily Sun* for instance has a regular feature “SunDefender” in which a legal expert, Lebogang Padi, provides free legal advice, an advice page “Sun Solutions”, features on education and a regular page with news from the rest of the continent: “Looking at Africa”. It is this type of self-help information that led Addison (2003) to view tabloids as empowering, especially for black communities. However, in a study of the coverage of HIV/Aids issues by Sunday newspapers, Swanepoel (2005) found that copy related to this topic was mostly sourced elsewhere, and the coverage was superficial and approached the issue from the sensationalistic angle of risk and transfer (e.g. promiscuity, rape, etc.), thereby increasing stigma. The potentially empowering role that the tabloids could

---

<sup>14</sup> A perhaps interesting parallel could be found in the phenomenon of blogging in the US. Although the lack of (and disparities regarding) Internet access in South Africa prevents this phenomenon from having the same impact as in the US, Gitlin (2005) has shown that blogs may be a response to public preference for point-of-view journalism. He sees this demand as underlying the demand for blogs that are “personal, argumentative, kinetic, forceful, with some relation to fact”.

have played on this important developmental issue has therefore been squandered in the search for sensation. This reiterates the point made by Harber (2003) that although these tabloids claim to conform to some notion of social responsibility, and although they portray themselves as representing community issues, they display a “total absence of politics and most serious public issues like HIV/AIDS”. The publisher of the *Daily Sun*, Deon du Plessis, has indicated that the lack of community involvement by the mainstream media provided him with a marketing niche (made possible by democratization) that was not recognized by the Independent group to whom he first pitched his idea (Bloom, 2005:17):

‘I don’t think they saw as clearly as we did that the country had changed,’ says Du Plessis of a decision the Irish group could be ruing to this day. ‘They were foreign.’

Although Du Plessis claims to be committed to “the man in the blue overall” and reporting about “people nobody ever heard of” (Bloom, 2005:19), i.e. the working class (also remarked upon positively by Harber [2005]), this stance does not necessarily reflect political or societal commitment outside commercial interests. This is suggested by comments in which Du Plessis describes the democratization of the country in terms of just another business opportunity and the “black market” as a marketing niche, seemingly without cognizance of the structural imbalances underlying the racially segmented media market in the country (Du Plessis, 2005):

One of the many happy spinoffs of 1994 – the beginning of SA’s Great Chance to re-invent itself, was that the so-called black market evaporated. There is no such thing. The fact is there are MANY markets in the so-called black market. It WAS there, this black market thing, while apartheid was there. Resistance to apartheid united most black people...its destruction was a great goal, a unifier of purpose. But with apartheid out of the way the market behaved as markets should...it split into pieces...pieces resting on new rules...like income, for instance.

This ahistorical view of townships (that bore the brunt of apartheid policing and state violence) is described as follows (Du Plessis, 2005):

For instance, what used to be the impenetrable, often sullen, often violent townships 10 years ago have become the most vibrant market in the country today.

Against this backdrop, it does not surprise one to find Du Plessis describing news as “a commodity” (Du Plessis, 2005). To its credit, however, it does seem more concerned with the plight of people in poor communities than does *Son* and *Daily Voice*, for instance, where the emphasis seems to fall more on “sex, skinner and sport” (sex, gossip and sport), to quote the

latter's tagline. Referring to the controversial pictures of semi-nude women in *Son*, Bloom (2005) points out this difference:

Where *Son* and *Daily Sun* do differ is on page three. Du Plessis opens his paper and points to a head-and-shoulders shot of a township mother mourning the loss of her children. 'There's our page three girl,' he says.

The Afrikaans tabloid *Son* focuses on communities, partly due to the fact that it publishes four regional issues. It also has correspondents in rural towns and assesses readers' opinions through focus groups (Koopman, 2005a & 2005b). The editor of the daily *Son* describes its content as "educational" by focusing on and exposing "drugs, prostitution, corruption" (Koopman, 2005a). National editor of the *Son* Ingo Capraro has gone so far as to describe his tabloid as a "sort of community newspaper" (Penstone, 2003). Invoking the resistance to apartheid by alternative media, Capraro (2005) has stated that *Son* would have fared even better under apartheid "had the successive totalitarian National Party governments allowed it to be published".

Comparing *Son* to newspapers that were censored under apartheid is rather rich, regarding the fact that Naspers, publishers of the *Son*, was directly linked to the ruling party during apartheid (see Beukes, 1992: 487-488). Now, however, Capraro celebrates the seemingly diverse readership of the tabloid (Capraro, 2005):

*Son* tells the story as it happens. Not in the language of the *taalstryders*, *dominees* and those longing for the days of political and cultural Afrikaner domination, but the way our readers speak. Our lingo is a "seamless" Afrikaans — the language of any race and colour. The Cape editions speak a mixture of Capey and northern suburbs Afrikaans. In the other editions, we also use the local Sefrikan vernacular. Yuppies make up an important part of our northern readership.

However, its potential to involve a larger readership in political debates concerning them is lost through its avoidance of politics, except when it has a salacious angle<sup>15</sup>. Harber (2005) is optimistic that this will change:

Some would argue that the main function of the tabloids is to distract ordinary people from the bigger political and social issues — and that is why they contain almost no government or party-political reporting. But this, I suspect, will change in time, as with the British tabloids. These papers — with their influence on millions of voters — will become politically more important.

---

<sup>15</sup> A presentation [Koopman, 2005a] outlining *Son's* areas of interest proclaims: "Drugs. Prostitution. Corruption – we don't do politics – but we do politicians."

Until now, however, when political issues have been covered, it has often been from a conservative or right-wing perspective, as Jacobs (2004:148-149) has shown with regard to xenophobic content. An interesting, seemingly community-orient spinoff of *Son* is a publication venture called “Son-boeke”<sup>16</sup> – booklets with e.g. health tips (e.g. *Dokter jouself gesond* [Treat yourself]). The latter is however an anomaly – where the tabloid is at pains (often seemingly forced) to use colloquialisms, slang and a mix of Afrikaans and English, the booklet employs formal medical terms and a rigid style. These types of contradictions are common and make a final judgment difficult. While the *Daily Voice* warns readers with a ‘parental advisory’ box on the front page that photographs of prison violence inside are ‘explicit’ (June 17, 2005), nevertheless it neither shrinks from graphic content, nor from promoting community conflict by proclaiming loudly in reactionary fashion on its posters ‘Bring back Pagad’ (referring to the vigilante movement on the Cape Flats, 5 July, 2005).

Judging tabloids in terms of community interest often yields paradoxical results. Nevertheless, the tabloids highlight the importance of revisiting dominant normative concepts such as ‘impartiality’ and the need for inscribing community involvement and a commitment to societal transformation into normative frameworks for the media. This is recognized by Andrew Gill, the publisher of *Sowetan* and *Sunday World*. The circulation of both papers has been severely impacted on by *Daily Sun*’s success (Bloom, 2005:20):

People told us we were no longer covering relevant issues in a relevant way. (...) We had a strong voice in the community, and we’ve gone back to that as a basic principle.

- Another shortcoming of current dominant normative frameworks is that while the concept of the “public interest” is often invoked as a guiding principle for the media, it remains vague and has not been defined adequately in terms of the inequalities regarding access to the media. It is often used in a rhetorical fashion by the media in exceptionalist terms, e.g. to justify otherwise questionable behaviour such as the invasion of a public figure’s privacy. While some of these claims may hold water from a free press point of view the concept is very seldom problematized. For instance, the impact of (mostly racially defined) market segmentation and how this is linked to material inequalities and societal polarizations inherited from apartheid are not considered when the “public” is described in vague or homogenous terms. This results in contesting claims made by the media and the democratically elected government about the stewardship of citizens’ interests. Without examining the power exerted by market forces in delimiting the opportunities for democratic participation, the concept of “public interest” is in danger of becoming a façade for sectoral interests. If claims (e.g. Joseph, 2005; Koopman, 2005a) are correct that tabloids have provided media access to sections of the community that have for various reasons been excluded before (as opposed to luring them away from

---

<sup>16</sup> In a recent *Daily Sun* venture (in collaboration with *Business & Arts South Africa*), writers were invited to contribute serialized stories, in an attempt to “encourage people to read stories (local stories) and develop a culture of reading, leading over time to better English literacy” (Litnet, 2005).

other publications), the tabloids might contribute to a broadening of what passes for “the public” in South African media. This could perhaps be likened to what Nyamnjoh (2005:23) calls “radio trottoir”, with reference to the rumour, political derision and humour that plays a significant role in other African countries where the media is dominated by elite interests. Although South African tabloids claim to define the market in terms of class rather than race (Capraro, 2005; Du Plessis, 2005), these categories still largely overlap. While these reasons are related to content, they are also economic in nature. The allure of the cheap cover price of tabloids (since they are supported by big conglomerates engaging in a price war — see the allegations of uncompetitive behaviour mentioned above) should not be discounted<sup>17</sup>. This alerts one to the fact that when reference is made to the “public interest” in normative frameworks, this concept should be viewed critically in terms of the broadening of the public sphere to include those sections of the population who have thus far been absent from mainstream media debates. However, unless this also means that these large numbers of readers are truly represented in tabloid content, that their perspectives are being privileged and that they are given an opportunity to participate in the creation of content, the large numbers of new readers cannot automatically be seen as a broadening of a participative public sphere, but may remain consumers of, rather than actors in, tabloid content.

- The dominant interpretation of the constitutional guarantees pertaining to the media seem to be rooted in an individualistic understanding of human rights, where media freedom is linked to the rights and duties of individuals (cf. Johnson & Jacobs, 2004). As a result of being informed by liberal ethics and the assumptions of individualism and universality, the dominant normative framework does not incorporate a specific focus on African cultural values and as a result sets up media ethical discourses for a confrontation with emerging (and often state-sponsored) discourses on African identity. Tabloids ostensibly take an African cultural perspective – but on closer inspection it becomes clear that the extent of this perspective remains mostly limited to stories on witchcraft, superstition or miracle cures. This essentialist and even racist view of what constitutes African culture led Joe Thloloe, the chairperson of the South African National Editors’ Forum (Sanef), to brand tabloids as a “throwback to the [newspaper] Bantu World of the 1950s”, which speaks of contempt for black readers (Thloloe, 2005; also cited in Berger, 2004a). While tabloids’ attempt to introduce African cultural meanings into a Western-dominated media discourse, these attempts also seem to have fallen largely foul of the reductionism and essentialism that Tomaselli (2003) pointed out in other contexts. This points to the work that still has to be done to reposition received media ethics scholarship in a South African context (e.g. Rønning & Kasoma, 2002) or finding similarities between African ethical concepts such as *ubuntu* and the Western ethical tradition of communitarianism (Christians, 2004).

---

<sup>17</sup> Harber (2003) also touches on the political-economic aspect of ownership, highlighting the fact that the two most successful tabloids (*Son* and *Daily Sun*) may be seen as manifestations of an unhealthy conglomeration of the print media in South Africa. Both are owned by the same company, Media 24 (a wholly-owned subsidiary of Naspers), that is “rapidly becoming the 94-pound of our newspaper industry”.

## **CONCLUSION**

For normative media ethics to be about more than the routine enforcement of existing guidelines, rituals and professional standards, critiques should go beyond the surface manifestations of media phenomena. If debates about media ethics in South Africa are to assist the transformation of journalism and the media industry, they should also address larger, structural issues. For the debate about tabloids to contribute to a thorough re-examination of the South African media environment, the following points should be taken into account:

- The debate about tabloids should move beyond the professional ritual of paradigm repair. The emergence and unprecedented success of tabloids provide an opportunity to investigate not only transgressions of the current hegemonic standards of professionalism, but rather to interrogate those standards themselves. It provides an occasion to examine the dominant normative frameworks of the media critically in an attempt to find out why they are not broadly accepted and how they may be revised.
- There is a need for proper audience ethnography of tabloids to establish what the uses and gratifications are that these audiences derive from tabloids, and what they do not find in mainstream newspapers. Such a study should serve as a wake-up call for mainstream newspapers to reflect on which sections of the public they neglect in their coverage and why.
- Simplistic binaries between mainstream and tabloid media should be avoided. This implies that tabloids should not be homogenized, but that the differences in style, content and emphasis between them should be acknowledged. The danger inherent in creating dichotomies (such as 'professional: unprofessional'; 'information: entertainment'; 'quality: popular') between mainstream media and tabloid media is that it relegates tabloid media to a position of the other. Caught up in such a binary, it becomes difficult if not impossible to recognize the positive and negative aspects of tabloids, because they remain the deficient and inferior other of the mainstream self. This also puts mainstream media in such a position of power that criticism is directed outwards only, instead of inwards as well.
- Taking tabloids seriously does not mean that everything they do should be condoned. There have been some horrific examples in the past few years of tabloids engaging in despicable journalism. Nor does it mean that market success should be taken as a normative standard of what journalism in a transitional democracy should be about. Here again there are examples of how South African tabloids have attained popularity through popular content such as stereotyping, xenophobia and entertainment instead of political engagement. One should therefore be careful in assessing which aspects of tabloid journalism should be taken as serious challenges to current normative frameworks and which should be rejected. The paper aimed to do this by indicating problems with current normative frameworks from a social change perspective and illustrating them with reference to alternative approaches offered by tabloids.
- Alternative approaches have to be found of viewing tabloids other than from existing, entrenched professional standards perspectives – especially when these professional standards are upheld

by a patronizing, knee-jerk morality. Nor should tabloids be granted a place in the sun from the assumption of superiority that exists only because tabloids are viewed as a type of “kiddies menu” from which readers will grow up to start appreciating mainstream fare. There should be an acknowledgment of the difference in genre that does not necessarily imply a hierarchy. Rather, the debate should be concerned with the effects that tabloids could have on the pre-existing, extremely commercialized media environment. Could tabloids contribute to a broader public sphere, or are they following the example of the mainstream media (albeit more overtly and spectacularly) in limiting public participation by turning readers into spectators rather than participants?

- The debate about tabloids and mainstream media should also contain a critical political economic focus. South African tabloids are all part of commercial conglomerates and it could be expected that their profitability would be higher on their agenda than increased public deliberation. The support of conglomerates for tabloids is also important when drawing conclusions on the basis of the high popularity of tabloids. The fact that tabloids can sell (especially initially, when breaking into the market) at a cheap price because they are cross-subsidized by other products in the same media group, should also be factored in when trying to account for tabloids' popularity. Readers may buy tabloids partly because they are cheap, and not only because they provide desired content. Too easy inferences between content and audience preference should therefore be avoided.

The emergence of tabloids has created an important opportunity for the South African mainstream media to engage critically in introspection and self-criticism. This should however be done in a rigorous and uncompromising fashion, and not only performed as a ritual of professional self-reflexivity.

There is much to find fault with in the South African tabloids. But if the only response to these tabloids would be to ensure the maintenance or repair of currently dominant professional frameworks, an important opportunity for critique would be lost. If nothing else, tabloids should remind the mainstream South African media that large sections of the South African public are feeling left out. In this regard, the remarks made by Emery & Emery about the Penny Press in nineteenth century United States are uncannily appropriate (albeit in a somewhat patronizing manner) for the South African context today (cited in Örnebring & Jönsson, 2004:288):

Whenever a mass of people has been neglected too long by the established organs of communication, agencies eventually have been devised to supply that want. Invariably the sophisticated reader greets this press of the masses with scorn because the content of such a press is likely to be elemental and emotional. Such scorn is not always deserved.

## REFERENCES

ADDISON, G. 2003. The Road to Populism. *The Media*. June. 19-24.

ALLEN, D. 2005. Professionalization and Globalization: Ethics and the Corporate Rationalization of Journalism. (Paper presented to the annual conference of the International Communication Association, New York City, May.)

BECKETT, D. 2003. Saki's Side. *The Media*, April. 12-17.

BERKOWITZ, D. 2000. Doing double duty: paradigm repair and the Princess Diana what-a-story. *Journalism* 1(2):125-143.

BERGER, G. 2003. Tsedu: Casualty of editorial confusion. *Mail & Guardian*. 2003-11-14:35.

BERGER, G. 2004a. Headline-grabbing tabloids: Are they journalism? *Mail & Guardian Online*. 8 December. [Web] Available: [http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=193128&area=/insight/insight\\_converse/](http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=193128&area=/insight/insight_converse/) [Date of Access: 4 July 2005]

BERGER, G. 2004b. Fourth Estate needs a Fourth Bottom Line. *Mail & Guardian Online*. [web] Available: [www.mg.co.za](http://www.mg.co.za). [Date of Access: 18 Aug 2004]

BERGER, G. 2005. Remarks at Mondi Shanduka Newspaper Journalism Awards. 20 April. [Web] Available: <http://journ.ru.ac.za/staff/guy/fulltext/mondi05.doc> [Date of Access: 13 March 2006]

BEUKES, W.D (Ed.).1992. Oor grense heen: Op pad na 'n nasionale pers, 1948-1990. Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel.

BLOOM, K. 2005. War Talk. *The Media*. July. 17-21

BLOOM, K. 2003. Daily Sun outshines all. *The Media Online*. 3 March. [Web] Available: [http://www.themediaco.za/article.aspx?articleid=43862&area=/media\\_weekly/](http://www.themediaco.za/article.aspx?articleid=43862&area=/media_weekly/) [Date of Access: 7 June 2005]

CAPRARO, I. 2005. Son's shining success. *Mail & Guardian Online* 3 June. [Web] Available: [http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=242311&area=/insight/insight\\_comment\\_and\\_an\\_alyis/](http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=242311&area=/insight/insight_comment_and_an_alyis/) [Date of Access: 7 June 2005]

*Wasserman: Tackles and sidesteps: normative maintenance and paradigm repair in mainstream reactions to South African tabloid journalism*

DE BEER, A.S. & STEYN, E. 2002. Sanef's 2002 South African National Journalism Skills Audit: an introduction and the Sanef report regarding the media industry. *Ecquid Novi* 23(2):11-86.

CHRISTIANS, C. 2004. Ubuntu and communitarianism in media ethics. *Ecquid Novi*, 25(1): 235-56.

DIE BURGER. 2005. Poniepers: waar is die grense? 2005-04-12:9.

DU PLESSIS, D. 2005. It's the niche, stupid. Speech delivered at meeting to announce Audited Bureau of Circulation Figures. [Web] Available: . Date of Access: 13 May 2005]

FINANCIAL MAIL. 2002. Here comes The Sun. 2002-07-26.

FINANSIES EN TEGNIEK. 2003a. Poniekoerant galop. 2003-03-07:54.

FINANSIES EN TEGNIEK, 2003b. Nuwe pret op grou Kaapse dae. 2003-05-16.

FOURIE, P.J. 2005. Thinking about journalists' thinking (and the criticism against journalism and its education). (Paper presented to Colloquium on Journalism Education, Rhodes University, June.)

FRANK, R. 2003. 'These crowded circumstances': when pack journalists bash pack journalism. *Journalism* 4(4): 441-458.

FRONEMAN, J. 1994. Redes vir die gebrek aan 'n intelligte, lewendige debat oor media-etiek. (Reasons for the lack of an intelligent, lively debate about media ethics). *Ecquid Novi* 15(1): 123-128.

FRONEMAN, J. 2004. Son sak oor moraliteit en gehalte. *Die Kerkbode*. 10 September. 13

FRONEMAN, J. 2005. Die geel gevaar. *Beeld*. 21 April.

GARMAN, A. 2005. Teaching to produce 'interpretive communities' rather than just 'professionals'. (Paper presented to Colloquium on Journalism Education, Rhodes University, June.)

GITLIN, T. 2005. Blogs and the Media Emperors' New Clothes. (Panel contribution at annual conference of the International Communication Association, New York City, May.)

HAFFAJEE, F. 2004. Public lecture at the South African National Editors' Forum Media Seminar Series. A review of the media in the first decade of democracy, Cape Town, 2004-07-02.

HARBER, A. 2003. Tabloids, pinball and affirmative action. [Web] Available: <http://www.journalism.co.za/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=939> [Date of Access: 7 June 2005-]

HARBER, A. 2004. State warns of bottom-line threat. *Business Day*. 17 August.

HARBER, A. 2005. Rich diet at bottom of trough. *Business Day*. 12 April. [Web] Available: <http://www.businessday.co.za/articles/opinion.aspx?ID=BD4A35364> [Date of Access: 12 April 2005]

JACOBS, S. 2004. Public Sphere, Power and Democratic Politics: Media and Policy Debates in Post-Apartheid South Africa. (PhD thesis, University of London, Birkbeck College.)

JOHNSON, K. & JACOBS, S. 2004. Democratization and the Rhetoric of Rights: Contradictions and Debate in Post-Apartheid South Africa. In Nyamnjoh, F. & Englund, H. (eds.) *Rights and Politics of Recognition in Africa*. London: Zed Books.

JOSEPH, R. 2005. Stranger than Fiction. *The Media*. July. 22-23.

KOOPMAN, A. 2005a. Email interview (editor: *daily Sun*), 2005-04-27.

KOOPMAN, A. 2005b. Email interview (editor: *daily Sun*), 2005-06-13.

LITNET. 2005. Business and Art South Africa in collaboration with *Daily Sun*. [Web] Available: <http://www.litnet.co.za/indaba/basa.asp> [Date of Access: 6 July 2005]

MANSON, H. 2005. No responsibility please, we're journalists. *Media toolbox* 7(13). 11 April. [Web] Available: <http://www.mediatoolbox.co.za/pebbles.asp?reid=3325> [Date of Access: 4 July 2005]

NYAMNJOH, FRANCIS B. 2005. *Africa's Media – Democracy & the Politics of Belonging*. Pretoria: Unisa Press/London & New York: Zed Books.

ÖRNEBRING, H. & JÖNSSON, A.M. 2004. Tabloid Journalism and the Public Sphere: a historical perspective on tabloid journalism. *Journalism Studies* 5(3): 283-295.

PENSTONE, K. 2003. Another tabloid hits town. *The Citizen*. 2003-11-08:13.

*Wasserman: Tackles and sidesteps: normative maintenance and paradigm repair in mainstream reactions to South African tabloid journalism*

PENSTONE, K. 2005. Sex sells, says Independent Newspapers. Marketing Web, 17 March. [Web] Available: <http://www.marketingweb.co.za/media/425731.htm>.

PRESS OMBUDSMAN. 2004. Press Code of Professional Practice. [Web] Available: [www.sanef.org.za](http://www.sanef.org.za). [Date of Access: 24 May 2004]

RABE, L. 2005. License to kill? News24. [Web] Available: [http://www.news24.com/News24/Columnists/Lizette\\_Rabe/0,,2-1630-1714\\_1685951,00.html](http://www.news24.com/News24/Columnists/Lizette_Rabe/0,,2-1630-1714_1685951,00.html) [Date of Access 4 July 2005]

RØNNING, H. & KASOMA, F.P. 2002. Media Ethics. Juta and Nordic SADC Journalism Centre.

SCHUDSON, M. 2005. The emergence of the objectivity norm in American Journalism. In: HØYER, S. & PÖTTKER, H. (eds.) Diffusion of the News Paradigm 1850-2000. Göteborg: Nordicom. 19-35.

SINGER, J. 2006. The Socially Responsible Existentialist. A normative emphasis for journalists in a new media environment. *Journalism Studies*, 7(1): 1-18.

STEENVELD, L. 2004. Transforming the Media: A Cultural Approach. *Critical Arts* 18 (1): 92-115.

STRELITZ, L. 2005. Discussant comments and personal communication, Colloquium on Journalism Education, Rhodes University, Grahamstown. June.

SWANEPOEL, T. 2005. MIV/Vigsberiggewing in die *Sunday Times*, *Rapport* en *Sunday Sun*: 'n etiese beoordeling. (Unpublished MA dissertation, North-West University.)

THE MEDIA ONLINE. 2004. Johncom restructures *Sowetan*, *Sunday World*. 19 August. [Web] Available: <http://www.themedia.co.za/article.aspx?articleid=135276&area=/medianews/> [Date of Access: 7 June 2005]

THLOLOE, J. 2005. Address at annual Press Freedom Day celebration, Department of Journalism, University of Stellenbosch. Available online at [www.sun.ac.za/journalism](http://www.sun.ac.za/journalism).

TOMASELLI, K.G. 2003. 'Our Culture' vs 'Foreign Culture'. An Essay on Ontological and Professional Issues in African Journalism. *Gazette*. 65(6): 427-441.

WARD, S.J.A. 2004. The Invention of Media Ethics: The Path to Objectivity and Beyond. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

WASSERMAN, H. 2006. Globalised values and postcolonial responses: South African perspectives on normative media ethics. Forthcoming in *Gazette* 68(1).

WASSERMAN, H. & DE BEER, A.S. 2005. A fragile affair: an overview of the relationship between the media and state in post-apartheid South Africa. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 20:2/3 (forthcoming).