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AN EMBRACE THAT STABS IN THE BACK:  
THE VISUAL RHETORIC OF THE *DAILY VOICE*

1. FIRST WORDS: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE *DAILY VOICE*

At first glance, the *Daily Voice* presents itself as a loud, colourful and feisty tabloid publication, very much in the British tradition. Headlines are provocative, visuals are often chosen for their ‘shock value’, and the general tone is one of relative informality – as opposed to traditional broadsheets. However, even when examining the *Daily Voice* over a short, ten-day period (27 September to 6 October 2006), it is apparent that there is perhaps more to this newspaper than meets the eye. While locating itself firmly within the daily experience of its target market, the *Daily Voice* may also serve to separate that same community from a broader South African ‘reality’. But before we explore the concomitant issues suggested by this statement, it is worth presenting a background ‘biography’ of the publication.

The *Daily Voice* (or the *Voice* as it is generally referred to) is a relatively recent addition to the South African press portfolio. Launched in March 2005, it forms part of a stable of publications owned by the Independent News and Media (South Africa) group (INMSA) that, in turn, is wholly owned by the United Kingdom-based Independent News and Media plc (Harrison, 2005). The latter is headed by ‘media baron’ Sir Anthony O’ Reilly, with additional interests in India and Australia. The South African division of the company is responsible for some 67% of the English language newspaper market in the country, and includes such established titles as the century old *Cape Argus* in Cape Town and *The Star* (established in 1887) in Johannesburg (Harrison, 2005). The *Daily Voice* occupies a growing niche for INMSA, and is very much a geographically focused newspaper, targeting the Cape Town metropole (the major city in the province of the

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Western Cape). Its market, according to both the editorial staff and other commentators, is what is known as the Cape Flats – an area previously designated for the occupation of ‘working class’ coloured people (Brophy in Louis, 2006 and Van der Walt, 2005). Under the apartheid formula, coloureds were a distinct (albeit ‘mixed’) race, entitled to different (although limited) franchise as opposed to whites, and Indians and blacks. It should be noted that coloureds claim a unique and very specific history in the Cape, with the issue of ‘identity’ still a contentious one. The term itself has been derided as pejorative by some members of the group (the phrase ‘so-called coloured’ was used extensively until the mid-1990s, although its popularity has since waned), while others elevated it as a legitimate political and cultural tag (Jung, 2000: 168). Indeed, political power in the Western Cape province is ultimately settled by the ‘coloured vote’ – and is actively courted by the major parties. Demographically, then, the coloured group makes up just over 50% of the Western Cape’s population, with the balance more or less evenly split between whites and blacks.

The reported readership and circulation figures for the *Daily Voice* vary. Glenn and Knaggs (2006) put the print run at 60 000, while the editor, Karl Brophy (in Harrison, 2005), suggests that this is closer to 100 000 with a projected target of 200 000 within three years. Multiple readership of individual issues is assumed. The target market is defined according to the Lifestyle Measurement index (LSM), which traditionally has a range of between 1 and 8, with 8 as the most affluent class. More recently, two ‘super groups’ 9 and 10 have been added, with the latter representing a household income of R15 000+. Just over 60% of the *Voice*’s readership thus falls within the LSM 4 – 7 spectrum, which – although broad – can be read as ‘middle class’. Household income also varies substantially, but can be averaged out to approximately R5000. The remaining roughly 35% of the readership is categorised as LSM 8 – 10 (Glenn and Knaggs, 2006). Perhaps because of its less affluent readership, the *Daily Voice* does not have its own website. However, nor can it be found amidst the pages of those of its South African parent company ([www.iol.co.za](http://www.iol.co.za)), or on the official site of the UK holding company, ([www.inmplc.com](http://www.inmplc.com)), both of which mention (and link to) many of the other titles in the group. This may suggest a reticence to overtly divulge a corporate agenda or philosophy

– at least until the publication ‘finds its feet’. However, the analogous absence of an editorial leader in the *Voice* points to potential avoidance, or, indeed, what Burgoon (2005: 5) might bluntly label ‘deception’ by omission.

The Editor is Irish-born Karl Brophy, who worked for the *Daily Mirror* in the United Kingdom before being seconded to start the *Daily Voice* in Cape Town. His previous experience was also within the Independent group, writing for the *Irish Examiner* and the *Irish Independent*. He has also worked in the public sector, described by at least one commentator as a ‘spin doctor for the Irish government’ (Glenn, 2006). Brophy claims not to get his news ‘from the wires’ (Glenn and Knaggs, 2006), but instead employs local reporters to cover the city. Local (i.e. Cape Town) content is thus dominant, although overseas entertainment news appears to be drawn from the resources of the INMSA. Certainly, at least, the classified bookings desk is run via a central number and group e-mail address, capeclass@iol.co.za.

As mentioned, with its exuberant reporting style and Page Three Girls, the format of the *Voice* broadly fits into the mould of the British daily tabloid. It is published from Monday to Friday, although the Friday edition is claimed as a ‘Friday to Saturday’ newspaper, and includes a larger entertainment section (the *Daily Voice* is therefore, in truth, not a ‘daily voice’). The publication’s configuration is A3 in size, and usually 24 pages in length. This rises to 32 pages for the Monday edition (with a separate, increased sports section) and 40 pages on a Friday. The retail price remains a uniform R1,50. Excluding advertising (which accounts for more or less four pages out of 24), and on average, about a third of the tabloid is made up of the sports pages, with the rest devoted to news and entertainment.

It must be said that the *Voice* created something of ‘stir’ in Cape Town during its launch and continues to elicit mixed reactions from the city’s citizenry. When it first hit the streets over a year ago, its self-declared aim was to focus on the ‘nitty, gritty and titty’. As a result, and perhaps unsurprisingly, it was soon declared the *Daily Vice* by the His People’s Christian Church spokesman, Errol Naidoo (in Van der Walt, 2005). And when

I enquired as to the publication's availability at the upmarket Exclusive Books outlet at the V&A Waterfront, I was informed by the (white, female) assistant: 'We don't stock that horrible newspaper'.

## 2. *JYMOET REG PRAAT*: LANGUAGE AND OTHER READERSHIP ISSUES

Officially, the National Party (NP) of old defined a coloured person as someone who 'is not a White or a Black person' (Jung, 2000: 168). Implicit is a dialectic that has marked the coloured identity for centuries. Under the tortured apartheid categories (Indians were separated out as Asian, whereas Japanese South Africans were 'honorary whites'), coloureds encompassed a distinct (and yet hazy) grouping, with its tangled roots in Muslim Indonesia, Malaysia, Holland, the indigenous Khoisan and Bantu tribes, as well as the intermingling slave trade (Adjikari, 1991: 106). As Jung (2000: 169) points out, this cast the coloured in an inherently oppositional role in terms of the apartheid government's quest for neat categories of racial 'purity'. Certainly, 'opposition' and 'conflict' are words that regularly pockmark coloured history. Historically, they aligned themselves with the British, against the Afrikaner (Jung, 2000: 175), despite sharing a language with the latter. With the rise of the NP, however, coloureds did not automatically adopt a sense of camaraderie with their fellow 'non-whites'. Their struggle history is one of cleavages, between 'realists' (who sought to engage with the apartheid government), and 'rebels' (who actively sought to overthrow it). They were thus stigmatised (by apartheid) and 'self-stigmatised' (by their internal inconsistencies) (Stone, in Mesthrie, 2002: 384). Their leaders never fully embraced Biko's idea of Black Consciousness, for example, and yet more than fifty coloured Capetonians died protesting in solidarity with the 1976 Soweto uprising. The inherent contradictions of the hybridised coloured identity are perfectly illustrated here: the protests were against the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, and yet more than 85% of coloureds consider it a mother tongue (Jung, 2000: 194). Even this fact is fraught with ambiguity, as there is an increasing trend for parents to speak English to their children (in order to give them a 'head start'), and to consume English-language media, as in the *Voice*

(McCormick, in Mesthrie, 2002: 225). In truth, as will be discussed shortly, the everyday Cape Flats dialect is a unique blend of both English and Afrikaans.

In the 1994 elections, the Western Cape was the most hotly contested province, with the coloured community having to choose between ‘the party that established apartheid (the NP) against the pre-eminent party of liberation (the ANC) [pitted against each other] for the votes of South Africans who had been neither the clear beneficiaries nor the main targets either of apartheid or liberation’ (Eldridge and Seekings, 1996: 519). In the final result, most coloureds living in the Western Cape voted for their former oppressors (Jung, 2000: 200), giving rise to accusations of racism and anti-African sentiment. While Eldridge and Seekings (1996: 519) suggest that this is too simplistic an interpretation, it is evident that coloureds are a more distinct and separate grouping now than before liberation. By 1993, for example, more than 75% were reported to be happy to drop the ‘so-called’ prefix – proclaiming themselves as coloured, once again in ‘opposition’ to ‘blacks’ and ‘whites’.

This quest for a distinct identity is nowhere more apparent than in the language of the Cape Flats, a dialect that the *Voice* continuously echoes. Described as *kombuistaal* (kitchen language), it is an amalgamation of English and Afrikaans with relatively ‘low prestige’ (McCormick in Mesthrie, 2002: 223). Characterised by code-switching (a conscious or unconscious shift and alternation between the two languages), *kombuistaal* is rich with ‘metaphoric creativity [and a] connotative wealth of wit’ (Stone in Mesthrie, 2002: 385). While speakers freely agree with McCormick’s interpretation of the language as low prestige, it is clear that it has a certain obvious cachet within the community. Those speaking ‘pure’ English, or its equivalent in Afrikaans – *suiwer* – would be immediately harangued for ‘keeping [themselves] high and mighty’. Reports McCormick (in Mesthrie, 2002: 223), interlocutors insist that they would admonish those enjoined in such linguistic ‘social distancing’ with a sharp: ‘*Jong, jy moet reg praat!*’ (Hey, you must talk properly!) Stone (in Mesthrie, 2002: 386) further suggests that *kombuistaal* is made up of further sub-dialects, which include: ‘respectable’ (spoken by the majority), ‘disreputable’ (used by, mostly, rebellious young men wishing to appear

tough), ‘delinquent’ (a slang associated with those flirting with gangs and drugs) and ‘outcast’ (employed by prisoners and hardened gangsters). Each level demonstrates a further ‘corruption’ of the English-Afrikaans blend. For example, delinquents would interpret the phrase ‘what’s going on here?’ as ‘*Maak my vol accor’ing die beweging?*’ (Make me full according to this movement?), while outcasts might say ‘*Hoe sal ek gcwala die djaar?*’ (How shall I comprehend this year?). In the case of the latter, a ‘year’ is prison-slang for a ‘day’. If Stone (in Mesthrie, 2002: 390) is correct, then the dialect of the *Voice* is one of ‘respectability’ with occasional lapses into delinquency, as in the following headlines:

- ‘*Tik kop diewe*’ (Dopehead thieves; ‘tik’ is the current drug of choice) – 5 October 2006
- ‘*In my gat geskiet*’ (Shot in my ‘hole’; a derogatory expression for buttocks) – 4 October 2006
- ‘*Kakkerlakke in my koek*’ (Cockroaches in my cake; although ‘koek’ is also slang for vagina) – 27 September 2006

By embracing *kombuistaal* in banner headlines, then, the *Voice* is citing itself firmly within the mainstream coloured community. In many respects, this illustrates one of the tenets of what Ong (in Medhurst, 1997: 35) has dubbed the ‘Second Age of Orality’. The theory suggests that visuals are increasingly displacing texts, and we are thus effectively ‘losing’ our literacy and ‘regaining’ some of the patterns of a previous oral tradition. Instead of pictures becoming more important than arguments, as Rubin (1977: 165) complains, they *are* the arguments. This ‘conversational’ aspect of visuality creates a virtual sense of intimacy – the *feel* of face-to-face contact. In using a familiar language (admittedly, in a contrived environment), the argument is clear: the publication shares the *ethos* – values – of its readers. Furthermore, the term ‘delinquency’ is slightly misleading – the sub-dialect is associated with indulged cheekiness, rather than serious wrongdoing. Indeed, there is a communal appreciation for young men who are able to think on their feet and ‘*steel met die oor*’ (steal with the ear), and use the language creatively, albeit sometimes abrasively (Stone, in Mesthrie, 2002: 383). Indeed, to *reg praat*, it is necessary to twist, reinvent, and sporadically swear. In this sense, speakers are cast in the role of *bricoleur* (Lévi-Strauss, in Stone, in Mesthrie, 2002: 391): one who ‘builds up structured sets, not directly with other structured sets, but by using the remains and debris

of events... or odds and ends...'. The result is *bricolage* (something new created, here, from the available linguistic resources) – a fluid badge of identity, at once embracing and yet provocatively pushing back. Indeed, although ostensibly an English-language publication, it is apparent that the *Voice* is capable of speaking fluent *kombuistaal*.

### 3. VISUALITY IN THE VOICE: FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Visually, the *Voice* follows (or perhaps leads) its linguistic counterpart – a kind of *kombuisoog* (kitchen eye?). It is a full-colour publication, with comparatively little use of black and white, even in the text of articles. There is no consistent column grid, typographic style, or choice of font (other than sans-serif). Headlines are sometimes underlined, occasionally display a drop-shadow, often reversed out of a colour, or even made up of multiple hues. The layout is densely packed, with visuals dominating each spread: stock-shots (photographs sourced from third parties) are juxtaposed against pictures taken in the community, and even computer-generated drawings (cartoon cockroaches on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 2006) are added to the mix. Stark images of criminality mingle with photographs of stark-naked women. The result is a vibrant pictorial patchwork. In fact, the editorial presentation sometimes overwhelms the advertisements that surround it through its sheer visual force. At the very least, due to their similarities in terms of colour and font selection, the two entities often leach into one another. If the 5<sup>th</sup> of October edition is read left to right, for example, an ad for 'Ashley's Wheels' made up of a matrix of car photographs, blends into an offering from 'Ranch Meat Centres', with a similar presentation of cuts of meat. The two then segue into an article entitled 'All Shook Up', a report on a social event featuring an Elvis impersonator – its melange of small photographs depicting partygoers is little different to the shots of Fiat Unos and Karoo *wors* (sausage). The point is, there is very little that is visually 'high and mighty' about the *Voice*. Advertising is not subordinate to the editorial, fonts are not chosen for their elegance, and colour is key.

It is therefore tempting to read the voice as presenting a visual parallel to the 'ordinary' coloured experience: a fractured, jostling, loud, *bricolage* – full of linguistic wit. (In fact,

if there is one visual consistency in the *Voice*, it is the front-masthead. The font is always pale yellow, and always reversed out of blue, or a dark colour. This is a consistent voice, then, interwoven into the societal disorder of the Cape Flats, but positioning itself as a reliable, trustworthy presence.) In this equation, the publication is relatively passive – reflective – with the reader credited with significant agency (Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz. 2001: 254). Hariman and Lucaites (2002: 366) describe this as ‘civic identity aroused by visibility’ – with the *Voice* providing ‘resources’ for communication and debate. However, if we employ just one of the tools of rhetorical scrutiny suggested by Foss (1982: 60) – Burke’s ideas around form – then it is clear that there is an inherent incongruity in the *Voice*. Burke (in Foss, 1982: 60) posits repetitive form as ‘the consistent maintenance of a principle under new guises, or a restatement of the same thing in different ways’, which continually arouses and fulfils expectations. The visual construction is thus a potential comfort. But Burke assumes that all communication contains ‘some aspect of division’ – an inequality between participants. Via a technique he calls agon analysis, the conflicts in the form can be exposed – something achieved by simply asking ‘what versus what?’ (Foss, 1982: 61).

In reading the *Voice*, for example, there is an obvious and immediate separation of the sports pages versus the rest, of sporting headlines versus those for news/entertainment headlines, and of sporting heroes versus movie and television stars. It seems that the rule-based order of the sporting arena – a substitute for warfare and violence – is being offered as a potential plasma against the Cape Flats experience of random crime and persistent grime.

#### 4. THE SPORTS PAGES: CHEERING COMMUNITY VALUES?

The sport section is visually separated from news/entertainment in at least three ways. Firstly, the Monday edition carries a separate sports insert, dubbed; ‘*Mania: Alles Wat Bal Is*’ (Mania: everything that has to do with a ball). *Mania* is twelve pages long – with the October 2<sup>nd</sup> insert focused almost exclusively on soccer – but, notably, contains no

advertising whatsoever. Secondly, during the rest of the week, the relatively copy-rich and colour-free Classified and Horse Racing Guide double page spreads (usually consecutive) act as a textual barrier between the sports reports and the main body. And, thirdly, the use of *kombuistaal* is less evident here. Not only is it resolutely respectable, it is also bordering on the *suiwer*, as these representative lead headlines illustrate:

- ‘Western Province will come to Greeff’ (a story about the shuffling of the Western Province rugby side, which includes moving Werner Greeff to flyhalf) – 5 October 2006
- ‘Now or never’ (a report on a last chance game for the Western Province rugby side) – 29 September 2006
- ‘Dream on’ (an article on footballer Steven Gerrard’s future ambitions) – 27 September 2006

Photographs are almost always of traditional heroes in action, and are seldom provocative or playful (one exception features Michael Schumacher covering his groin with his cap under the caption: ‘*On Target*’). The majority of the articles cover rugby and soccer, with relatively little copy devoted to the more gentle pursuit of cricket. Potentially, this may have to do with its relative femininity. The ‘*moffie*’ culture – defined as constituting homosexual or effeminate men – has long been a small but significant part of coloured history, with its own distinctive argot (Stone, in Mesthrie, 2002: 384). Even if this is stretching the point, it is evident that, visually, sport is represented in a more traditional, more aspirant, somewhat sacrosanct manner. The elevation of the sporting spectacle, then, can be read as a desire for ‘fair play’ and time-honoured rules, given the relative anarchy that often pervades the Cape Flats. The ‘violence and competition’ that occurs on the field is thus a plasma for a world beyond the very real violence and competition that is a daily reality for much of the coloured community. Which begs the questions, why does this desire for ‘fairness’ exist in the first place? And does the *Voice* argue for or against it?

##### 5. <COMMUNITY UNDER SIEGE>

Cloud's notion of 'ideographs' may help uncover some answers. In her analysis of the <clash of civilisations> ideograph (note the use of the < > brackets to indicate the concept), Cloud (2004: 286) expands the latter definition beyond shifting although 'recurring iconic images'. Visuals can, she avers, also 'index' verbal slogans – effectively concretising an ideology. In the case of the *Voice*, a potential verbal slogan exists, which I have dubbed <community under siege>. It is certainly a historically complex phrase, with its roots in the 'siege mentality' of a white Afrikaner past. This was, after all, the group who initiated the Great Trek north in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in an effort to escape the perceived subjugation of British rule in colonial South Africa. Because the threat of attack was a constant reality, the trekkers would form their ox-wagons into a circle, or *laager*, at night. With a fire lit in the centre of this safer space, some protection – if not comfort – was afforded. By 1948, of course, Afrikaner determination under the banner of the NP, had led the Afrikaner to retreat into a different kind of *laager* – in the form of the apartheid strategy. As part of the state's propaganda effort, in 1952 the 300-year anniversary of Dutchman Jan van Riebeck's arrival at the Cape was celebrated, with the event rewritten into the history books as the defining moment in the country's history. The momentous nature of the Great Trek was similarly embedded into the national psyche, and was also literally and very visually carved into frescoes of the imposing *Voortrekker* monument in Pretoria. Scenes of Afrikaner triumph are depicted, and the ox-wagon is elevated to the status of state symbol (Tobey, 2002). Over time, 'siege mentality' and the Afrikaans inspired equivalent '*laager* mentality' became synonyms, used when describing the extreme right wing *verkramptes*, or unenlightened section, of the NP. It was this attitude that resisted democratic majority rule until 1989, when the transition began under President F.W. de Klerk.

Post the 1994 elections, 'community' has developed as a positive, catch-all phrase associated with a burgeoning democracy. If the generality may be extended, 'communities' encompass all 'stakeholders' (a term used to describe actors such as government, civil society, etc.), with the aim of providing what is best for 'our people'. But, it can be argued, 'community' can also be thought of as an exclusive as well as inclusive term. Not everyone can belong to every community (unless we summon up the

vague banality of concepts like the community of the Rainbow Nation). ‘A binary construction’ (Cloud, 2004: 286) of the self and ‘the Other’ persists. And so there must also be ‘non-stakeholders’, or people whose goals and values do not correspond with our own. (Similarly, ‘our people’ are not ‘your people’.) It seems that, for the *Voice* reader, non-stakeholders are almost everyone else. Whites are abused by at least one columnist (Nigel Pearce the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2006 writes: ‘Take your stats and fcuk off: crime is a white lie’), while the police (an organ of the ‘black’ state) are frequently criticised. There is a sense of retreat and withdrawal from the broader South African reality, but this is not necessarily a retreat into safety. *Skollies* (ruffians) and gangsters occupy the ‘home turf’.

Conflating these two terms, then – ‘siege’ and ‘community’ – is particularly apposite given the ambivalent coloured past. While Pearce may consider Caucasians worthy of scorn, historically, coloureds were effectively ‘second on the list’ in apartheid’s ranking system and could ‘try for white’. That is to say, be legally racially reclassified and enter the *laager*. Although less overt, this tendency is currently reflected in the consistent coloured support for (white-led) Democratic Alliance (DA), but it must be said that coloureds claim less affinity to political parties than any other group (Jung, 2000: 226). This may be explained by the fact that coloured have been pragmatically ‘dropped’ by whites more than once. ‘Realists’ who had been coopted into an unequal parliamentary system in 1984, found themselves ‘out in the cold’ less than ten years later as the NP began negotiations with the ANC. Those who continued to vote for the NP were ‘betrayed’ a second time in 2004, when the party merged with the ANC and was effectively dissolved. The coloured community now once again finds itself ‘second on the list’. Affirmative action policies effectively favour the most previously disadvantaged – i.e. black applicants – first. The wry coloured mantra ‘then we weren’t white enough, now we’re not black enough’ has more than just a ring of truth in it (Jung, 2000: 198).

Coloureds are perhaps justified, then, in feeling somewhat isolated under the new dispensation. Their ‘siege’ is effectively one of neglect and suspicion. Abandoned by one elite (with whom they at least shared a language) and ignored by a new (with whom they constantly butt heads, not least at local government level), coloureds may have turned

inwards as *'soort soek soort'* (like finds like). This attitude is certainly exacerbated by the levels of crime on the Cape Flats. <Community under siege> is therefore an amalgam of past and present: a suitably uncomfortable mix. It suggests a united people, but united only in their collective angst about the future. In the *Voice*, this scenario is reinforced in two ways. Firstly, by the continued and repeated inclusion of violent imagery in the lead stories: dead bodies, brutalised local residents, raped women. These are accompanied by headlines that include complementary phrases like 'Papa Evil', 'Daddy Killer' and 'Sin City'. The community is literally 'under attack'. A second visual theme is the use of 'non-coloureds' (the Other) in the more licentious sections of the newspapers. In this way Page Three Girls are uniformly white, with an article on 'Killer Blowjob' (evidently oral sex causes tonsil cancer) in the October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006 edition accompanied by a Caucasian woman eating a banana. Similarly, the lurid Dina Rodriguez trial (where a white woman is accused of hiring four men to kill her lover's child with a previous girlfriend) is covered in double page spreads (also on October 3<sup>rd</sup>). The argument is apparent: these are not 'our people'. Even if we are titillated by them, we do not share their relative immorality – theirs is another world.

The *Voice* repeatedly reflects the siege 'reality' – forensically, epideictically, but seldom deliberately: it does not offer solutions. Thus, while the newspaper ostensibly upholds community values - Salazar's (2002: 99) 'persuasive simulacrum' – it simultaneously and dialectically undermines those same values. There is surely little utility in separating the coloured community from the rest of the Western Cape and, indeed, from the rest of South Africa. If the Afrikaners were eventually forced to open the *laager*, would their 'kindred race' not be better off learning from that lesson? In the *Voice*, however, the plasma is rendered pseudos: there is surely more to the South African reality than sex, violence and victimhood (putting aside the fact that sport is potentially offered as a neutral *kosmos*). Nowhere is this sense of 'blamism' more apparent than in the first double page spread of each issue of the *Voice* (pages 2 and 3), which epideictically juxtaposes the lead story on page 2 (overt blame) with the topless girl on page 3 (covert praise). Thus, for example, we are confronted with:

- ‘*Dive into disaster*’ (visual of a drowned, dead child, on the right) vs. ‘*Sexy Lexx is so easy to please*’ (visual of a pouting blonde, topless, on the left) – 28 September 2006
- ‘*Shot in the face*’ (visual of a man, with bullet holes superimposed onto the graphics) vs. ‘*Ann loves to rock her sexy body*’ (visual of a pouting blonde, topless) – 2 October 2006
- ‘*I raped tiny Usanda*’ (visual of a man who confessed to raping and killing his girlfriend’s ten-year old daughter, also pictured) vs. ‘*Sensuous silk is her weakness*’ (visual of pouting brunette, topless) – 6 October 2006

And yet even as the message is repeated, an inherent ‘dissonance’ is apparent. Talking mostly about advertising messages, Martin (in Shields, 2001: 212) suggests that dissonance occurs ‘when an advertisement that follows or precedes an article is so at odds with the content of the article that it renders the advertisement either offensive or absurd...’. It can be argued, however, that dissonance can be thought of in broader terms. There is dissonance, for example, between the Norman Rockwell’s earlier depictions of an idealised America, and his later civil rights work (Gallagher and Zagacki, 2005: 176). Likewise, there is dissonance on Sky News, as the anchor reports on, say, Hurricane Katrina while the ‘ticker’ at the bottom of the screen updates us on the gold price. In the case of the *Voice*, however, it is the article on page 2 that renders the article on page 3 absurd (or, indeed, vice-versa). Clearly, there is an inherent tension in the argument that the *Voice* presents its readers every week day. On the one hand, there is a community – jointly decrying the violence on the Cape Flats and the authorities’ inability (or unwillingness) to do something about it. And on the other hand, there is fleshy escapism (and an idealised sporting world). Even as the latter trivialises the former, however, it offers succour apart from it. The *Voice*’s pseudos is thus complete: a paranoid reality has been created, with a false sense of salvation to boot. Inside the *laager* is not the warm protection of a fire, but the eventually cold realisation that the *Voice*’s version of soccer and sex is almost certainly another betrayal.

In attempting to locate the ‘public sphere’ – moments of ‘discursive engagement’ within society – Finnegan and Kang (2004: 387) draw on DeLuca and Peeples’ conception of a ‘public screen’. The case is being put forward is one in favour of visual rhetoric – that discussions can also occur via ‘screens’: televisions, computer monitors and the front

pages of newspapers. Rejecting the criticism that the spectacle of images displaces social critique, the authors argue that screens allow for social critique ‘through spectacle’ (Finnegan and Kang, 2004: 391). There is, however, also a Habermasian interpretation to this ‘mirror’, and one that posits it as an ultimately distorting force. ‘Enticement’ and ‘entertainment’ serve to obscure the fact that an ideology is being imparted; one that is ultimately disempowering, insidiously reinforcing as it does existing social inequalities. Burgoon (2005: 6) empirically supports the hegemonic power of the media to deceive, defining the latter as the intentional transmission of information designed to ‘foster false beliefs or conclusions’. Although writing mostly about the internet, she notes that our general ‘deception detection accuracy is poor’ with misdirection and ambiguity blurring the line between the real and the unreal (Burgoon, 2005: 9). The ‘screen’ is therefore a screen in all senses of the word – certainly, in the case of the *Voice*, it reveals *and* it hides (Finnegan and Kang, 2004: 387).

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Brophy (in Glenn and Knaggs, 2006) is quoted as saying that the *Voice* is simply ‘reflecting what [our readers] want’. As an example of the publication’s popularity, he continues with:

I’ve been... at the Galaxy [a local, predominantly coloured night club] there a couple of months ago with all our journalists, and they are treated like heroes coming home. The DJ got up into the box and announced that the *Daily Voice* was in the house and the place went crazy. And it’s madness, it’s crazy; I have never seen a reaction like that to a publication before.

There is no doubt that Brophy has a point. The *Voice* is eminently successful at what it does: persuading the community that it is *their* voice. As has been demonstrated here, this is, however, a somewhat problematic assertion. To begin with, Brophy is an Irish representative of a company based in the United Kingdom – he is implicitly not of ‘the community’ he claims to reflect. The absence of an explicit proclamation of the aims and values of the *Voice* – on a website, or editorial column – is also worthy of interrogation, as it allows for a relatively free hand: the paper is not beholden to an obvious ethos.

Instead, we ‘hear’ about the *Voice*, almost insidiously, from sister publications – as is the case with the articles by Harrison and Van der Walt.

To a certain extent, the coloured community *has* been ‘heroically’ reflected – or screened – particularly in the use of *kombuistaal*, and the photographing of local people. But, at the same time, these representations act as a pseudos, creating an unreality that continues the historical separation of the coloureds from ‘the rest’. The *Voice* is therefore not one from the future, it resounds with the echoes of the past. It decries the ‘siege’ even as it encourages it. It whispers sex and trumpets sport, but does not suggest ways of engaging more constructively with the current South African reality. And with its dissonant imagery, it continuously strikes a false note. The trouble is, as the often tortured history of the coloured community suggests, ‘dissonance’ over a long enough period, may eventually evolve into ‘resonance’. When exclusion is the ‘crazy’ reality, the comforting *laager* calls. For the coloured ‘community’, then, the *Daily Voice* may well be a siren song.

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