



Think Piece

Digital activism and violence against women: Changing landscapes of feminist activism in southern Africa

Desiree Lewis and Crystal Orderson

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Think Pieces are paper contributions by prominent scholars and practitioners studying the intersections between the micro-context of community information ecologies and macro socio-political developments.

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Executive summary

Gender Based Violence (GBV) is systemically connected to patriarchal, postcolonial and nationalist struggles in present-day Africa. Focusing on the role of local and national forms of activism in which 'new media' play a pivotal role, this think piece confronts Violence Against Women (VAW) as a growing site of feminist activism and human rights struggles in the region. The paper begins by explaining the regional increase of violence and the challenges this poses around effective communication. The consideration of effective communication focuses critically on mainstream media, as a site of influential ostensibly public conversations about violence, women's experiences and how to challenge injustice.

The bulk of the paper, Section 3, deals with the evolution of feminist activism as articulated and realised through electronic communications systems and hybridised forms incorporating both traditional and new media.

The study moves in-between the local, national and regional levels with the aim of teasing out the national and regional implications of local events and struggles. General discussion is based on literature surveys and empirical observation. Local studies will be based on ethnographic work, including interviews, participant observation, analysis of media and other coverage of events, discourse analysis of texts in media, performance and other genres.

The paper draws mainly on a qualitative approach, although analysis of media includes quantitative study to ascertain how much gender-based violence is covered and how it is presented relative to coverage of other topics.

Section 1: Introduction

Confronting the reasons for escalating VAW – the rationalising myths behind violence, and the challenges that these pose to feminist activists, women in communities and marginalised women in particular – this section unravels the importance of the local, national and regional feminist struggles against VAW in the postcolonial African contexts.

Section 2: Speech freedoms? Limits of mainstream communication networks and GBV in Africa

This section turns to South Africa as a paradigmatic case study for appraising the limits of the mainstream (mainly print) media as an outlet and platform for progressive, human-rights and feminist

conversations on GBV in Africa. We focus on print media reporting on sexuality issues and gender violence in South Africa during 2007-2008, a period which could be seen to 'test' the efficacy and integrity of the mainstream print media around covering sexual violence in South Africa. In the wake of the rape trial implicating South African President Jacob Zuma, this period saw a dramatic upsurge of violence, alongside the introduction of new legislation (the Sexual Offences Bill/Act), policy design and related issues in 2008. Analysis shows that mainstream media coverage has not only been limited in terms of its content and form, but it has also, ultimately, played a conservative role. This survey of mainstream print media coverage therefore provides a foundation for demonstrating the innovativeness of local and national responses that enlist aspects of contemporary information systems, including the use of DVDs, social networks, cell-phones and Facebook.

Section 3: New media and feminist activism in southern Africa

This section, the main substance of the paper, deals with how alternative information production and dissemination addresses ongoing needs for proactive communication. We emphasise its impact among the most marginalised and seemingly powerless, also showing how new systems generate new knowledges, pro-actively disseminate information, and reach women in marginalised communities informing them of their rights and possibilities for action. We deal with two case studies that illustrate the adventurous use of new media, (including cell phones, websites, list serves and Facebook). In this way we trace the (often) spontaneous, 'organic' and 'bottom-up' knowledge creation efforts of a variety of civil society organisations – feminist and others and find that such efforts create feminist solidarities that are:

- Attentive to intersections of race, class, region and gender
- Empower women survivors
- And raise consciousness about substantive activist, legislative and policy-relevant interventions in the present.

3.1: Case study 1: Changing contexts of performance

The plays *Re-claiming the P-Word* and *Khululekani Emakhaya*, were launched as projects among black women students and staff at the University of the Western Cape. Responding to the well-known Northern-based *Vagina Monologues*, the plays confront distinctive ways in which black women's bodies in the Western Cape of South Africa have become 'battle-grounds' in the present. The plays are also concerned with raising awareness, mainly among black women, about their strength, power and capacity to resist gender injustice.

The performance of the plays have also involved localised, national and even international debate and discussion through, for example, group viewings of DVDs, through Facebook, cell-phones and Twitter. The case study, therefore, explores ways in which the play, as a 'traditional' genre, has been connected to 'new' forms of communication that enhance and even transform its revolutionary impact. It is therefore a 'local' example that is shown to have national implications for activism, lobbying and mobilising using a diversity of digital technologies.

3.2: Case study 2: GBV and ICT resistances

VAW constitutes a continuum. It is legitimised by various beliefs, institutions and structures at the domestic, communal and regional level. Focusing on diverse events and responses in the Western Cape, a province with the highest recorded incidence of rape, femicide, 'curative rape', child abuse and wife-battering in South Africa, this case study deals with both small-scale and larger forms of activism facilitated by digital technologies. The case study focuses on the inventiveness, eclecticism and hybridity of these, arguing that it is through the ingenuity of local women, whose gendered experiences are affected by race and class, that we can discover extremely complex yet effective forms of resistance that draw on new media.

Section 1: GBV as an index of patriarchy and central site for feminist activism in Africa

1. Scope of the problem in Africa

In a comprehensive study that establishes the interconnectedness of different forms of GBV and women's health, Lisa Vetten and Kailash Bhana (2001) draw attention to the grotesquely anomalous status of GBV in the South African justice system. They note that on one hand – “Police statistics on the incidence of domestic violence are not available because presently there is no crime called 'domestic violence’”. On the other hand, they recount horrific testimonies of GBV throughout the provinces:

"A community-based prevalence study conducted in three provinces found that 26.8% of women in the Eastern Cape, 28.4% of women in Mpumalanga and 19.1% of women in the Northern Province had been physically abused in their lifetimes by a current or ex-partner [...] Thirty-nine percent of young women in South Africa between the ages of 12 - 17 state they have been forced to have sex (2001)."

These horrific statistics do not, in fact, reflect the extent of the spiralling forms of VAW in South Africa, or in the region as a whole; they are merely the statistic gathered on the basis of known, documented and reported violence. In the southern African region as a whole, statistics gathered in recent years have been overwhelming – with rape, child abuse, femicide, domestic violence, harmful traditional practices, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and hate crimes and violence against gays and lesbians – escalating in recent years. In South Africa, what has become known as 'curative rape' has been as insidious as the state-sanctioned hate crimes and legislative actions against lesbians (and gays), while the battle around introducing effective legislation for sexual offences in various African countries indicate the ongoing challenge of dealing with this violation of women's rights.

The view that southern Africa, especially South Africa has one of the highest rape statistics in the world is well-known. Ticking seconds alongside the phrase 'seconds until the next rape' on the homepage of the Rape Crisis website¹ graphically convey the enormity of the situation. In the first year of South Africa's democracy, 19,308 cases of rape were reported to the South African Police Service (SAPS). By 1996, the figure had reached 50,481. National statistics from the SAPS show that approximately 1% of the rapes reported during 1996 and 1997 were perpetrated by husbands on wives (cited in Kottler, 1998). In 2000, 52,550 cases of rape and attempted rape were reported to the police, with 21,438 being cases of minors under the age of 18 (see Christofides *et al.*, 2003: 1).

1 See : www.rapecrisis.org.za, 31 August 2011.

Central reasons for the escalation of rape relate to a long-established culture shaped by colonialism and apartheid as well as resistance to this naturalised aggressive male sexuality as a symbol of the collective pride of particular groups. In Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, incidences of rape and violence perpetrated against women freedom fighters in the national anti-colonial parties, South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), the African National Congress (ANC), and the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) reveal how both colonialism and the nationalist struggles against it established VAW as a norm and route towards masculine ideas about ‘national freedom’.

Particular domestic, psychological, social and political circumstances lead particular men to feel disempowered. By raping those who are subordinate, they violently respond to a belief that their manhood has been denied, is under threat or needs to be proved. Particular historical legacies of racism, exploitation and injustice in southern Africa and, indeed, throughout Africa, have shaped extreme and complex syndromes of disempowerment among different groups of men.

In addition to the structural causes mentioned, rape has been exacerbated by the regional and global myths circulated about it. These vary from the claim that women invite rape, for example, by dressing in certain ways, to the view that men cannot control their sexual urges. What often propels these myths is media reporting, which has rightly become the subject of mounting critical attention by activists and gender researchers (see Vetten, 1998).

Critical work on media representations of rape raises the ambiguous effects of extensive reporting (see Boswell and Omarjee, 1999). While the media can play a necessary role in raising public awareness, it can also bolster stereotypes. It is the currency of these stereotypes – which demonise women, fixate on their duplicity, or perpetuate beliefs about their inevitable victimhood – that marginalises the seriousness of the problem and that often present major challenges for effective activism, mobilising and resistance.

Such stereotypes can only undermine official responses to reports of rape: Even when cases are reported, those employed within the police services fail, because of assumptions circulated in the media, to address urgent issues properly. In fact, rape crisis statistics on the trajectories of rape cases indicate the huge difficulties that women often face in courts and with police services. Invariably, the onus is on women to 'prove' rape. And those who lay charges are often browbeaten and pressurised by the police and in court.

Violent acts such as beatings and emotional abuse are systemically connected to rape. They are part of a continuum of violence where children are defined entirely as 'right-less' beings who must be relentlessly subdued, disciplined, and taught to obey. Historically, the high incidence of corporal punishment in settings ranging from the anti-colonial organisations, political parties, the military and schools in many African contexts needs to be acknowledged as part of a national ethos of naturalised authoritarian violence. The fact that such forms of physical discipline have often had a sexual face (often being linked to sexual harassment) also indicates how sexuality has been an instrument of power.

This ethos has often been internalised by, for example, activists, soldiers, schoolchildren and university students in forms such as brutal initiation practices. This demonstrates how deeply rooted it can become. Authoritarian codes in public and private life normalise violence against – women, subordinate men and children – as brutal forms of educating, punishing and disciplining.

If statistics on rape have been erratic and under-reported in many African contexts, those on domestic violence are even more difficult to verify. Two important reasons for this are:

- Domestic violence takes place in the family or household, which is generally viewed as a sacrosanct private sphere with laws that are not applicable in the public sphere
- Domestic violence takes on different forms, many of these – hidden and non-physical.

The family and heterosexual relationships become the means of ideologically controlling women. In many African countries, this ideological control is underpinned by masculinities that were integral to authoritarian rule and struggles by groups who resisted colonial and white racist domination. Where communities perceived themselves to be under threat, ascendant manhood often came to signify the reclaimed pride of the entire community. Consequently, many men and women have been complicit in venerating men's pre-eminence in the household.

Internalised stereotypes often lead people to play socially expected roles, with many men asserting their prescribed control over women, and many women acquiescing with the belief that their primary duty is to preserve their marriage and fidelity to their husbands. The gender ideology that supports this situation is often associated with compelling calls to defend beleaguered families as microcosms of threatened communities. Mystifying gender ideologies have therefore had a strong coercive function: the belief that heterosexuality, marriage and the family are sacred often obscures the deep violence within them. It also prevents those within situations of domestic violence from recognising abuse.

Domestic violence is consequently shrouded in concealment, complicity and silence. Throughout Africa, an important challenge remains that of raising public awareness of the unacceptability of spiralling domestic abuse mystified by the ideology of the heterosexist family and its bonds of intimacy. Another, and possibly even more important, challenge is the need for women affected by violence, particularly those marginalised through race and class, to empower themselves, to mobilise independently, and to use whatever resources they have at their disposal to resist specific and broader forms of violence. In many African countries, as is the case elsewhere, the resilience of gender ideology makes it extremely difficult for women to lay charges or take legal action. For example, many battered women are seen as blameworthy: violence directed at women is justified by the view that their partners' rage was ultimately caused by their wrongdoing. These assumptions inform the responses of many members of the police services and the courts. Moreover, certain women also firmly hold this view. In cases where battered women turn to women relatives or friends for advice and support, they may simply be urged to avoid action that could 'jeopardise' their relationships or 'destroy' their families.

Thus, spousal abuse or femicide raise complex issues in considering solutions, effective ways for women to empower themselves, for communities to be made sensitive to the injustice of domestic violence, for mainstreaming GBV into social justice and human rights agendas within communities, NGOs and CSOs. Here it should be noted that, alongside the growth of legislation and relations that seem to confirm gender transformation in various African countries, there has been an accompanying backlash against women's rights, with domestic violence in heterosexual relationships, rapidly increasing. For example, in South Africa, a startling MRC policy brief published in 2004 drew attention to the high rate of femicide and concluded that "every six hours a woman is killed by her intimate partner". As the murder of a woman by her intimate partner, intimate femicide, has often been linked to escalating patterns of domestic violence. The likelihood and prevalence of femicide increases with separation or threatened separation in abusive relationships.

The statistics gathered in South Africa reveal that gun prevalence and alcohol intake often feature in acts of intimate femicide. This reveals long-established cultural patterns where masculinity, violence, weapons such as guns as well as alcohol abuse are regularly linked in the gendered rituals of everyday life. The growth of commodity culture, alongside a legacy of militarism throughout Africa, coupled with resources used by many men to affirm assertive and aggressive masculinity, has therefore intensified domestic violence and its extreme in the form of femicide. Alcohol intake and high risk, excessive consumption of alcohol has also reinforced this.

It is noteworthy that the South Africa MRC study raised the prevalence of femicide mainly in the 20-29

and 30-39 age groups. This reveals the growth – despite legislation and a human rights culture – of extreme forms of GBV among Africans after several decades of decolonisation, rights-based cultures, and often elaborate national and international instruments for protecting women's rights.

2. Myths legitimising violence in African contexts

African feminists like Amina Mama (2000) and Pat McFadden (2001) have shown that so-called 'traditional' practices become an issue in situations where particular men manipulate or invent discourses of 'tradition' seeking to increase their power within families or communities. Very often, the weapon of tradition is used to attack women who seek to enter formerly male preserves.

The current flux in many African countries' politics has made discourses of tradition an increasingly important weapon in efforts to preserve the sense of entitlement and control of dominant groups who believe that their powers will be eroded by liberalism and globalisation. In the context of structural adjustment and neo-liberalism throughout Africa, factors that are likely to lead to an increase in practices of controlling women's bodies include: unemployment and frustration among the majority of the population; the erosion of traditional patterns of authority; the growth of a public culture that is increasingly shaped by progressive legislation; growing formal opportunities for women and girls in education and employment. It is noteworthy that in South Africa, the virginity testing movement commenced in the mid-1990s, shortly after the introduction of formally democratic practices in government, the economy, the educational system. (See Leclerc-Madlala, 2001). Similar patterns can be observed with female genital mutilation (FGM): practices which were fairly isolated became, in certain African countries or societies, widespread at times of social flux. At these times, certain men and women, who benefit from feudalistic and pre-feminist social orders, may actively work to reinstate FGM as a means of controlling the bodies of young women, and therefore also entrenching their fragile authority.

Democratisation throughout Africa led to the side-lining of feudalistic ethnic institutions that were reinforced by apartheid. It also threatened many of the privileges of leaders in rural areas. An array of practices for policing women's bodies and curtailing their freedom may grow as marginalised men seek to regain their former statuses or sense of entitlement. In July 2004, King Zwelithini, the leader of the only surviving African monarchy (Swaziland), was reported to have abducted a 17 year-old girl to be his future wife. The abduction was rationalised in terms of codes deemed traditional, and the feudal assumption that the king has total rights to all women's bodies.

Moreover, men who already have positions of authority may often use ideological tools to preserve it. Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala writes that, in South Africa key proponents of virginity testing include "a highly vocal chorus of mostly well-educated, male 'African Renaissance' advocates, including national and provincial government ministers, officials in the departments of education and health, non-governmental organisations dedicated to the rediscovery of African traditions and indigenous knowledge systems, and directors of Aids awareness projects" (2001: 4).

The complicity of women in harmful traditional practice cannot be ignored. Large numbers of rural women support and actively participate in practices such as FGM and virginity testing. The trend shows how socialisation leads to internalised beliefs that women do not have the right to own and control their bodies, that their bodies legitimately belong to others. Moreover, for many older women, what CEDAW terms 'harmful traditional practice' can also be a lever for social control. Here GBV can preserve hierarchies and control strategies based on age differences.

Leclerc-Madlala (2001: 4) provides a complex example of this by showing how certain older women have sought to guarantee their security in the context of AIDS in South Africa:

"Now, with the reality of AIDS and the prospect of caring for a growing number of children whose parents are either sick, dying or already dead, the expectations of the extended family/grandmother support system are seriously undermined. Moreover, the young children themselves often require more care as an ever-increasing number contract the virus...Thus, this older generation of women have a strong interest in guarding their daughters against pregnancy."

The rapid rise of the virginity testing movement and other initiation practices which require young women's subordination has been accompanied by a growing emphasis on the prestige status of those women who comply with 'tradition' and the ostensible 'revival' of a precolonial past. In the face of escalating HIV infection, violence and poverty, the sense of 'comfort' offered by these beliefs is considerable. This sense of 'security' helps to explain why numbers of girls and young women often willingly participate in, for example virginity testing, FGM and their attendant social rituals: very often, these rituals involve elaborate public exhibitions and approvals and public displays and censoring of women's 'disobedience' or 'immorality'. This raises starkly the limited options among girls and young women for developing more independent self-images and concepts. With public culture disseminating myths about cultural belonging, freedom and self-worth in patriarchal nationalist terms, many young girls and women are provided with few other alternatives to define their self-worth and value. Few studies seem to have dealt with this, with many focusing on the need for legislation, punitive action or NGO intervention. While these are important, what may be even more so are

messages that circulate in the public sphere that allow young women, older women and also men to acquire ways of defining and valuing women that lie beyond oppressive nationalist and patriarchal myths about citizenship and belonging.

As Leclerc-Madlala notes (2003), an emphasis on respecting the 'cultural appropriateness' of certain traditional practices that harm African women totally neglects the fact that it ultimately infringes on human rights and perpetuates gender oppression. FGM, virginity testing or the abduction of girls as wives may appear, from the point of view of the dominant patriarchal society, to preserve age-old customs and to ensure social control. But many of the root causes of problems such as child abuse, widespread HIV infection are rooted in male dominance and aggressive heterosexist sexual practices, and are wholly ignored by a 'culturally relativist' perspective.

In a suggestive discussion of the 'political economy of violence against women', Sheila Meintjies, Anu Pillay and Meredith Turshen (2001: 11-13) draw attention to the links between the policing of women's sexuality; violence; and circumstances of social and economic flux in Africa and other contexts in the global South. Referring to different contexts, they show how customary flows of wealth, resources and status are regulated through censoring certain women's digressions and rewarding other women's chastity. Women who accept traditional roles and behaviour gain access to resources and social acceptance, while those who digress are ostracised and denied resources. The rationalising of all this through idealising 'tradition' is ideologically forceful. Ultimately, however, tradition is the ideology that mystifies efforts to preserve power relations. Given the rapid social and economic flux in many African societies, the use of 'tradition' to police women's bodies is likely to become an increasingly powerful dynamic.

Myths in African contexts about tradition have been directly connected to an upsurge in acts of violence directed specifically at gays and lesbians. While GBV directly affects women most severely in patriarchal societies, it is also a heterosexist and homophobic expression of injustice and oppression, one which targets both women and men who are believed to deviate from 'normative' masculinities and femininities.

In South Africa, despite the fact that the Constitution explicitly identifies sexual orientation as the basis of unfair discrimination, homophobia and the verbal and physical violence associated with it, remain deeply entrenched in society. In Uganda, with a track record of positive human rights transformation, democratisation and gender-just policies and practices, homophobia has spiralled horrifically in recent years. The tabling of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill galvanised horrific waves of violence against gay

men and lesbians. And even though the Bill was never transformed into an act, the mood of intolerance that it generated towards gays, and the broader homophobic and patriarchal ethos (associated with violating subordinates, policing Ugandans on the basis of gender and sexual orientation) continues in the present day.

Hate crimes and violence against gays, lesbians and bisexuals are expressions of intolerance that speak volumes about injustices in patriarchal and heterosexist societies. As forms of GBV, these acts stem from the need – among certain men and women – to hurt and humiliate gay and lesbian people. The need to attack gays and lesbians not only reveals how homosexuality has been pathologised, but also how heterosexuality has been defined as totally inviolable. Homophobia and hate crimes are forms of GBV because they are driven by a belief that heterosexuality and its grounding in gender hierarchies must be defended at all costs, and that those who choose same-sex partners and so reject the gendered status quo must be punished or reformed.

Hate crimes and the range of abuses directed at gay people have not been mainstreamed into the lobbying, activism or civil society movements that generally confront GBV. Even though homophobia reinforces deep-seated injustices and human rights abuses, it is often assumed that homophobia is a concern only for gay and lesbian activists, rather than for all those who struggle for justice in society.

Critically examining this situation in an article titled 'The women's movement and lesbian and gay struggles in South Africa', Mary Hames (2003) writes:

“Despite South Africa's progressive constitution, deep prejudices against lesbians and gays persist in certain political parties [...] We see a marked silence about lesbian and gay rights even in the very latest repositioning of the "women's movement". For instance, the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) has committed itself to rebuilding a mass-based women's movement and systematically addressing emerging forms of gender-based oppression. It has, however, remained consistently silent about the structural, social and economic discrimination confronted by lesbians. Animosity towards lesbians and gays is often countenanced within organisations and institutions (including those widely considered to be "progressive") that play an important part in shaping public opinion and popular consciousness. The result is a spiralling pattern of prejudice – often expressed as systematic and culturally "sanctioned" physical violence.”

As has been the case in South Africa, Uganda has revealed an extraordinary upsurge of hate crimes rooted in homophobia and GBV. Also like South Africa, LGBT activists have shouldered the burden of resistance, with many feminists explicitly and implicitly denying that homophobia is a feminist issue. The feminist academic and activist, Sylvia Tamale, has spoken out strongly against the feminist betrayal of issues related to sex rights and freedoms in Africa.

Both Tamale in Uganda and Hames in South Africa point to the need for concerted action against homophobia as a form of GBV in settings ranging from polices in the workplace, to NGOs and women's organisations. At present in Africa, action against homophobia is undertaken almost exclusively by gay and lesbian activists; the Lesbian, Gay Transgender, Transsexual and Bisexual Community struggles to assert the rights of gays and lesbians largely without the support of the broader left, including the women's movement and gender activists. Moreover, services that address survivors of domestic violence tend to be heterosexist. For example, South African shelters sometimes actively discriminate against lesbians. Consequently, the need to mainstream homophobia into the feminist work of NGO's, gender researchers, gender activists and women's organisations remains an important challenge after several decades of robust women's movement activism throughout Africa.

3. Challenging gender-based violence in Africa

The laws against violence in Africa have been piecemeal and far less visible than laws that, for example, promote gender equality in the workplace or education. In fact, in some African countries (Namibia, Swaziland, and Malawi, for example) the 'rights to culture' enshrined in constitutions mean that governments refuse to take responsibility for forms of domestic and familial violence, seeing these private and shaped by age-old and 'sacrosanct' traditions threatened by imperialism and neo-colonialism. South Africa appears to be an exception. Here, the Domestic Violence Act was passed in 1998 and replaced the Prevention of Family Violence Act.

The range of policies in South Africa is considerable. But the idea that policy-making and legislation must be central to social transformation presents many difficulties. One difficulty is confronted by Dzodzi Tsikata (1997) dealing with Ghana. She argues that policy activism around gender equity in many African countries problematically takes the place of civil society activism. Very often, governments are urged to implement reform by donor countries, or else tactically accede to certain demands from civil society. The result is a plethora of piecemeal and *ad hoc* progressive legislation, without the broader social, cultural and economic changes that can lead to their successful implementation, or to sustainable changes.

By showing that GBV must be addressed through an 'intersectional' approach, many activists argue that this fragmented strategy is hugely inadequate. In terms of the intersectional approach, linkages are made between different social problems. So, for example, poverty is connected to violence both in determining the causes of violence and assessing how to assist with prevention and support for survivors. The intersectional approach also assumes that different sectors need to collaborate in dealing

with general and specific instances of GBV: health care services are encouraged to work closely with crime protection services or with educators in preventing violence and adequately responding to its occurrence.

But the surge of policies and legislation, alongside the growth of GBV on many different levels also casts serious doubt on the efficacy of top-down approaches to violence as an endemic phenomenon. When a culture of violence so deeply pervades society, it is clear that its roots lie largely in learned modes of behaviour, in mindsets and in cultural values. Moreover, GBV surfaces in relation to very particular political and economic processes, and varies throughout the different provinces and population groups.

This indicates that localised strategies and responses, rooted in the particular needs of different communities, must play a pivotal role. From this perspective, the role of civil society organisations and NGOs reveals far more proactive and context-sensitive approaches than the over-arching measures taken by the government and in legislation. These context-specific solutions have been proposed and reviewed in much of the research and writing. Fruitful collaboration between intellectual activism and civil society activism suggests increasingly radical forms of action in response to GBV. It is to these two sites that the final section turns in examining ICT responses in the context of feminist cultural and political activism.

There has been a massive mobilising of resources and energies around GBV for over a decade in Africa. But many of these respond to specific issues or to symptoms of systemic violence. This orientation is especially evident in legislation and policy-making. For example, it cannot be assumed that harsher sentencing for those found guilty of rape and attempted rape will automatically act as a deterrent. This does not necessarily address the way rape is part of the repertoire of masculine behaviour among certain youths, for whom the risk of being caught can in fact become an added 'incentive'. Similarly, the Domestic Violence Act in South Africa, despite its sophistication, does not fully address the complex ways in which poor women, because of their limited economic and social options, may choose *not* to take legal action against their abusers.

The disadvantages of law and state structures also revolve on their inaccessibility. Smythe and Parenzee (2004: 154) explain this in the following way:

"While activists for social justice [...] have chosen to focus on law as a tool for building a new and more just society, many communities who bore the brunt of oppressive apartheid laws have responded differently. Rather than turning to the state for protection, these communities have a history of mobilising

their own resources, and have developed informal structures of varying degrees of sophistication for resolving conflict.”

The trend towards holistic and 'intersectional' approaches has become increasingly important in the programmes of certain community organisations. It is also advocated in recent research based on careful empirical analysis of successes and ongoing challenges. For example, in 'When Rights Are Wronged', Bernadette Muthien and Helene Combrinck argue that meaningful interventions into GBV will not depend on the proliferation of regional and international human rights instruments, and that: "while recourse to legal interventions could be a critical part of any form of social change activism, it should be considered as only one component of multi-faceted local and international activisms to end gender-based violence" (2003).

Although it is always tactical and practical to focus on particular and concrete issues, the scope for meaningful and sustainable transformation points to programmes and recommendations where sectors co-operate and use a broad perspective that prioritises issues of justice. While rights are often defined with reference to the state and to formal and legal concerns, the concept of justice is much broader than the juridical term. In terms of justice, GBV occurs in a broad landscape involving social, economic, cultural and other factors.

The limitations of rights-based models can be assessed at two levels. At the international level, Muthien and Combrinck draw attention to the largely symbolic meaning of international rights instruments with respect to GBV. They show that frequently there are few actual mechanisms through which states can be held accountable to an international community. Consequently, monitoring of whether states actually uphold the principles to which they formally agree, cannot be guaranteed. CEDAW's Optional Protocol is an effort to remedy this. Secondly, international requirements for resource allocation and service provision are often unrealistic in African contexts: governments may invoke the problem of limited resources in relation to a wide range of socio-economic imperatives, with gender violence featuring as one of numerous pressing concerns.

At a national level, policies and instruments often address concerns at a formal and abstract level. But in practice, the objectives of legislation and policies may be much harder to reach. As indicated, one reason for this has to do with the extent to which GBV meshes with a range of racial, political and economic factors. Treating GBV as a sectoral problem will not address the extent to which it is exacerbated, caused or connected to injustices like poverty, the militarisation of society or unemployment. Another reason concerns the extent to which GBV is reproduced through ideology and

consciousness. While rights may address injustices at a formal level, it remains very difficult to legislate around how people think and feel about themselves as men and women believed to have certain 'natural' roles and identities.

The force of gender ideology can play a formidable role when it comes to the police services, for example. Here police complacency and dereliction of duty are a serious obstacle to preventing violence or punishing perpetrators. In a 2003 workshop on civilian oversight and the monitoring of police in South Africa, participants noted that the attitudes of the police often play a major role in obstructing the fight against GBV².

Evidence of such deeply-rooted obstacles and prejudices highlights the need for dramatic and radical transformation. Anu Pillay points towards this radical transformation when she urgently asks: "What do we need to do to move beyond the rights-based approach, which focuses on legal reforms, towards the needs-based approach, which highlights the social conditions that give rise to violence against women?" (2001: 17). Capturing this 'needs-based' approach in the outlook of the Masimanyane Women's Support Project in South Africa, Foster writes:

"In order to develop and sustain a democratic society, there has to be deep, rapid and fundamental change on a number of levels. In line with this has to be the recognition that we cannot legislate for change. Social justice and social change requires more than laws and policies. Women's organisations in South Africa believe it is imperative that we begin to address the problem by placing it both within a historical and political perspective [...] We need to acknowledge the pain of the past and the influence this has on the entire nation."

The task that this presents for organisations and progressive policy-making and legislation is considerable since "All aspects of society have to be examined and reviewed in order to establish the extent and depth of the problem. [...] Greater co-operation between government departments and NGO's is necessary, with Government taking responsibility for encouraging coalition building between NGO's, Community Based organisation's (CBO's) and government structures at the local, provincial and national level". There is a need, therefore, to identify the many circumstances that intersect with GBV on different levels, and to ensure that different levels are comprehensively addressed in activism, laws and policies.

It is clear that discourses of 'tradition' in Africa are especially important in rationalising, fuelling and perpetuating VAW. Cultural relativist arguments do not take feminism very far, since these tend to see 'tradition' as a sacred practice which Africans need to preserve in the face of modernisation and

2 See: OSJI, OSFSA (2003), *Civilian oversight and monitoring of the police in South Africa*.

globalisation. Many African feminists, scholars and NGOs, however, have recognised the extremely harmful impact of 'tradition' in relation to feminist transformation. And they have also acknowledged how difficult such discourses are to dislodge. Beliefs about community, the family and the nation are very firmly implanted in peoples minds - guiding and determining their sense of who they are in relation to others. Both men and women can therefore become deeply complicit in defending discourses that are ultimately extremely harmful. While formal safeguards against violence might address some of the challenges, how men and women, especially women think about themselves, their rights to justice can remain an ongoing challenge. This raises the importance of considering conscientising, awareness-raising, at the individual, familial, communal and national levels in sustainable and long-term strategic feminist activist intervention against violence. Such strategies may in fact prove to be not merely supportive of legislation and policy-making, but even more effective.

Section 2: Speech freedoms? Limits of mainstream communication networks and GBV in Africa: A South African case study

1. The South African media, gender based violence and sex and sexuality issues

Both implicitly and explicitly, Section 1 raises the importance of sources, sites and forms of effective communication about and around GBV in Africa. It has been shown that a culture of silence, and a culture of legitimation have normalised violence ensuring that large numbers of women remain trapped in syndromes of disempowerment, silence and complicity. Public talk, about violence as well as forms of communication that can best serve the interests of women who seek assistance, who need networks of solidarity, who require information and who would benefit from practical support, would obviously play a pivotal role as an intervention.

It might appear that some of them, elaborate media networks in Africa, address this in some way or the other with the increase of local traditional and non-traditional forms of communication. And South Africa, with its flourishing media and communications network, seems to exemplify this. Significantly, South Africa is often elevated as an exemplar of healthy public debate around sex, sexuality issues and GBV.

The South African media has been seen as reflecting this democratic flow of information and knowledge. Yet the information about gender violence, sex and sexuality issues in the mainstream media leaves much to be desired. By selecting South Africa as a case study, this section draws attention to the deeply conservative forms and effects of mainstream reporting on GBV, showing that even in the case of the 'enlightened' South African press – the stories, perspectives and needs of women remain marginalised and often censored.

South Africa presently exhibits animated public dialogues about sexuality, sexual rights and sexual health. These are connected to nascent and explicit debates and struggles around political freedoms. Expressions of these struggles are pronounced in the South African media, and include issues of sexual violence, same-sex relationships, legislation and policy-making around sexual rights and wide-ranging responses to HIV/AIDS.

In contrast to the Apartheid period, when subjects relating to sexuality were strictly censored, discourses of sex, sexual health and sexual rights dramatically erupted into public life from the mid-1990s. There has therefore been a notable quantitative increase of topics related to sexuality in the

wake of the introduction of South Africa's new Constitution, scope for press freedom, and official recognition of the rights to bodily integrity, sexual health and sexual freedoms of marginalised groups, including women, HIV-positive people and gays and lesbians.

Yet the media coverage of sexuality issues reveals a complex situation. As this section shows, a qualitative analysis uncovers complexities that lie beyond the mere *visibility* of coverage of sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights issues. This complexity makes it clear that women's perspectives and voices, especially the perspectives and voices of rural and poor women in society, remain marginalised, excluded or distorted in mainstream public communication.

What follows is a brief analysis of media coverage of sexuality issues in South Africa between July and December of 2005. This period is chosen because it marks a vital moment in the crisis of violence against women, with both this crisis and the media response to it indicating the range of possibilities and trends in other African contexts.

The two print media publications have been selected on the basis of popularity and readership rates as well as the diversity of viewpoints that they represent. Since the dramatic explosion of sex talk in South Africa has been mirrored in media coverage, the report selects significant patterns and focuses on the following four themes: GBV; protest and advocacy for sexual health rights and choices; policy and legislation related to sexual rights and health; miscellaneous sex and sexuality topics sanctioned by current provisions for press freedom.

The selected newspapers target significantly different audiences in terms of education, class, race and political orientation, which appears to indicate how receptive they are to 'the public'. This section deals with: the fairly recently established sensationalist daily publication, the *Daily Voice* and; *Sunday Times*, South Africa's biggest national newspaper.

Through tracking stories over a six-month period, the survey includes discussion of: the relative prominence given to these stories in terms of length, positioning, and images; an evaluation of the stories in terms of sources used and the selective use of information; and an analysis of headlines. In the case of the daily newspaper, the *Voice*, 12 editions are selected for the period from July to December 2005. In the case of the weekly publication, the *Sunday Times*, 6 editions are selected.

Questions raised include:

- How have dominant forms of 'public' communication in the form of newspaper coverage

responded to some of the most pressing challenges that face women's well-being and freedoms in South Africa?

- Has the media responded to the *range* of opinions and vantage points currently articulated around violence against women, sexual health and sex rights struggles, especially those of marginalised women?
- Implicitly, what are the possibilities for other forms of knowledge dissemination through ICTs and the democratising of knowledge, information and networking strategies?

2. Freedoms of speech, sexual rights and sexual health struggles

The South African Constitution has not only provided a foundation for activism, lobbying and legislation around sex rights and sexual health; it has also fostered an environment in which South Africans regularly encounter explicit images and talk about sex and sexuality in the public domain. In sharp contrast to draconian apartheid censorship, the post-apartheid climate sanctions irreverent depictions and discussions of sexuality – in cultural expression, through media such as radio, magazines, television, and of course, in certain newspapers.

At one level, uncensored talk about sex in the public sphere is a healthy index of freedom of expression and a thriving democracy. As Posel's comments suggest, however, irreverent talk or images of sex and sexuality can perpetuate stereotypes or biases. It can militate against, for example, gender justice, bodily integrity for women, or respect for individuals' or groups' rights to privacy and self-determination. It is therefore important to examine implicit ideological biases and commercial agendas in the particularly candid or iconoclastic examples of sex talk in certain newspapers. Attention to these sheds light on how liberal pronouncements about press freedom effectively function in situations where dominant ideologies and market imperatives work to drown out socially marginalised views, and erode substantive freedoms of expression and social justice.

In South Africa, civil society action, public debate, legislative responses and the affirmation of previously denied liberties suggest dramatically changing social attitudes. These processes seem to be shaping an environment in which the media has enormous license, and increasingly articulates political and personal freedoms for South Africa's citizens. Yet much of the prominent sex talk also sets severe limits on what kinds of freedoms are possible, and who articulates these freedoms.

One pivotal reason for these limitations is that the South African media industry since 1994 has

remained emphatically patriarchal. While GBV is obviously linked to patriarchal privilege and power, all biases around reporting on sex rights and sexuality issues clearly do not stem from gender inequalities. But patriarchal and authoritarian structures, relationships and mindsets are clearly linked to taboos around sex and sexuality, to heterosexism, and to rigidly regulating sexual identities and behaviour.

It is noteworthy, for example, that many of the South African organisations and figures linked to this country's traditional leadership structures and Moral Regeneration Movement are led by men, and implicitly or directly advocate paternal supremacy. Patriarchal authority in these organisations coexists with the belief that individuals should *not* have complete freedoms and self-determination about their bodies, reproductive potential and sexuality. Such authority also reflects firm views about airing sexuality discourses in public.

Calls for moral transformation in post-apartheid South Africa have also stressed the value of heteronormative institutions and relationships, which rigidly fix sexual roles and behaviour for men as well as women.

At an obvious level, such discrimination and bias in the media is evident in gender-blind or explicitly male-centred patterns of reporting. The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) Report for South Africa in 2005 showed that newspapers, as opposed to television or radio, are a medium where the profile across gender has rapidly become less unequal. Despite this, the report argued, entrenched male dominance in reporting has been perpetuated through, for example, situations in which the coverage of stories with female content is 70% as compared to the 30% of female reporters.

Identifying the categories of crime and violence; social and legal; celebrity, arts and sport; politics and government; science and health; and the economy, the South African GMMP report also showed that women subjects featured most often in reporting on crime and violence, and were least represented in traditionally male spheres, especially the economy, politics and government. In other words, a stark gender hierarchy continues to prevail in media representations of gender roles and identities: women are still portrayed as victims and objects in largely voyeuristic stories about crime and violence; men are generally represented as agents and leaders in stories that directly reinforce traditional notions of masculinity.

The ongoing marginalisation of women reporters and gender-related subjects in the media were commented on by Ferial Haffajee, then the black woman editor of the *Mail & Guardian*:

“With a loud women-in-media movement in South Africa, we do best in the region, but often the coverage that is lauded is occasion-specific: an acknowledgement of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign; tough coverage of the loutish behaviour of the members of the Friends of Jacob Zuma Trust outside the court, as well as interviews with female Cabinet ministers (usually as they are appointed) and with the Deputy President Phumizile Mlambo-Ngcuka, on her appointment last year.”

Even when blatant stereotyping and inequality appear to be transcended, discourse analysis of coverage reveals deeply entrenched patriarchal, hetero-normative and essentialist biases, as well as perspectives rooted in dominant or official ideologies.

Dealing with trends in 2003, Barbara Boswell has focused on sample coverage from two Cape Town newspapers' reporting on rape, and concludes as follows.

“The *Cape Times* and the *Cape Argus* largely continue to either trivialise the issue of gender-based violence by downplaying or ignoring it in reporting, or perpetuates negative stereotypes of women and gender-based violence through their reporting. Out of 28 reports on gender-based violence gathered within a five-day period, only one was sensitively written, without trivialising the issue or perpetuating negative myths about women and gender-based violence. The compassion and sensitivity shown by this single reporter is sadly lacking in most other reports.”

Such observations indicate that the media's transformation cannot rest on individuals, or on token and random changes. South African media reporting on sex, sexual health and sexual rights issues occurs in the context of entrenched power relations, ideological frameworks and national and internal agendas and market forces. Consequently, information-gathering and lobbying for substantive media transformation requires vigilance, careful analysis and political insight.

3. Sample survey and discourse analysis

A. The Sunday Times

Between July and October of 2005, the subjects of the *Sunday Times* front page news included investigations into the murder of mining magnate, Brett Kebble; the kidnap of a young boy, the transformation of Intelligence Services by the Minister; and the sacking of Jacob Zuma as Deputy President because of his implication in the trial of a businessmen jailed for corruption. Out of the 6 newspapers selected, one contained a front-page story relating to sexuality and sex rights issues, namely the November 13 edition covering the charge of rape laid against former deputy President, Jacob Zuma.

(i) Gender violence

Of the two gender and violence stories in the selected newspaper, one, in the October 30 edition, dealt with a woman's rape in prison. The story appeared on page 7 and comprised 3 columns of news, with one image depicting the affected woman with the child fathered by her rapist. The report illustrates reasonably balanced fact-gathering. Quoted sources are the rape survivor and a police spokesperson, and the reporter gives a detailed account of the circumstances of the rape, and the lenient responses to the three policemen accused of raping her. The woman's testimony is emphasised in the account, even though her actual words are quoted briefly.

Accessed voices in the Zuma rape accusation story are very different. The November 13 coverage of the charge of rape against Zuma, a breaking news story, totally marginalises the voice of the complainant. As the first newspaper to cover the rape allegation, the *Sunday Times* sensationalises the incident as a shocking story about a prominent public figure. The story highlights central narrative episodes without much follow-up of the sources quoted or incidents mentioned. While the complainant is quoted, her testimony is invoked only to stress a sensational incident, the charge of rape. The story also goes on to connect the rape accusation to a broader story, run throughout the year by several South African newspapers, of Zuma's sacking as deputy minister and the explosive responses of his supporters.

Significantly, in the first edition after the November 13 breaking news story of alleged rape by Zuma (20 November), the newspaper's editorial presented a powerful call to perceive rape from the viewpoint of the survivor. Headlined 'Rape is about the Survivor', the editorial is in part a defense of the newspaper's coverage of the rape allegation, coverage which many condemned. Questioning the way that "many have raged at this newspaper for reporting the fact of the allegation", it insists that the story should ultimately be about "a woman so hurt and angry that she mustered the courage to lay a charge of rape against the man she trusted as a father and loved as a friend". It concludes with the statement "Rape is about the survivor, and not the perpetrator".

This is an important reflection of the newspaper's perception of its need to provide principled and balanced reporting. Yet the breaking news story for 13 November certainly did not prioritise these principles. Overall, then, the newspaper seems to follow both market imperatives for sensationalism, as well as principled and socially accountable reporting. This tension is also manifested in the way the *Sunday Times* routinely publishes a picture of a 'pin-up girl' on its back page. Sensitive coverage in certain stories therefore needs to be considered alongside a broader editorial policy which prioritises 'popular appeal' through the standard media objectification of women's bodies.

The erratically principled attention to GBV is clearly manifested in the 9 September edition of the newspaper. Coverage here was prompted by the South African Police Service's (SAPS) annual crime statistic released in the week. The editorial, titled 'Stopping rape is everyone's duty' outlined the SAPS improved strategies for dealing with crime generally, but against the backdrop of rising statistics of rape. On page 5, the newspaper also covered the topic of rape in a long article written by four staff reporters. Headlined 'SA brutalises women, girls', the article quotes sources including the police, and spokespersons from the organisation, Rape Crisis and women's shelters. It is accompanied by a map indicating the prevalence of rape – among other crimes – in particular regions. This edition of the newspaper also provided a story of rape in the small town of Marico, made famous by a well-known South African writer. According to statistics released by the South African Police, this town had the highest reports for rape in South Africa. Overall, therefore, this edition quite boldly takes up two media challenges. One is the raising of public awareness about a silenced human rights violation, an insistence that gender-based violence is a major societal problem that must be exposed. The other is a call to readers to take some form of attitudinal or political responsibility in acknowledging mounting violence against women.

Coverage of issues relating to sex rights and legislation were more pronounced in the *Sunday Times* than those covering GBV. A long article in the October 23 edition, accompanied by an image, focused on attitudes towards gays in mosques and the church in South Africa. The article appeared in the 'Insight and Opinion' section of the *Sunday Times* towards the back of the paper. It provides a detailed and balanced account, focusing on the views of gay members of certain faiths and gay religious leaders as those whose views are generally drowned out in public spaces. It also recounts the opposition to homosexuality of two religious leaders, and provides commentary on gay struggles by the journalist. Letters in a subsequent newspaper respond to this article and indicate its role in sparking off public debate.

The December 4 issue also deals with homosexuality by devoting a full page (page 7) to the Constitutional Court's ruling on 1 December that Parliament should enact legislation for legalising gay marriage, and publishing 3 articles on the topic. Although the full page of three articles is important, the subject was clearly deemed less important than the front page news of the predictable 'important' topic of 'government', in this case, rumours of Kgalema Motlanthe, the ANC boss, being probed for subversion.

In the most prominent article on this page, the seriousness of the coverage of the court's ruling is watered down by the headline, 'Same-sex marriage: who pays lobola'. This headline picks up on a joke

made by a lesbian couple interviewed for the story about who would pay for whom. The purpose may be to add human interest, but it has the effect of trivialising a legal triumph for which many gay and lesbian couples and activists have long fought. Even though the article proceeds to give information about the ruling's implications for gay rights, and quotes two sources from gay organisations, as well as the Minister of Home Affairs, the prominent headline creates a flippant frame. The two other articles on same-sex marriage provide contrasting frames. One, written by the *Sunday Times* legal editor, critically appraises the caution of the ruling. The writer argues that the ruling is not attentive enough to constitutional provisions for groups discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation. The other, a short column of 4 paragraphs, quotes three religious leaders and the chairperson of the Human Rights Commission, whose views range from opposition to the ruling, to a call for the need to respect it.

The September 18 edition of the *Sunday Times* contains no text coverage of sexuality, sexual health and sex rights. But the front page carried a large colour photograph of a protest, led by traditionalists, against the Children's Bill, eventually enacted at the end of 2005. The image captures a large group of women and girls, clothed in 'traditional' attire (the young girls are bare-breasted and wear loin cloths, and the women wear t-shirts and beaded skirts) outside an official building. The picture appears beneath the large caption, 'The Bottom Line'. The phrase presumably refers to the general prominence of naked buttocks in the photograph. It also refers to two prominent figures in the foreground, with a woman's hand placed, in a gesture that might be castigating or protective, on the buttocks of one of the young girls. This coverage of legislation glaringly trivialises the topic of children's rights, and in particular, the violation of children's bodily rights under customary law, which countenances virginity testing. Opposition, co-ordinated by leaders with large followings of women and children in many communities, to law reform is turned into a puerile joke about protesters' exposed bodies. It is noteworthy that the display of women's nakedness is often the subject of humour or ridicule in the media. This coverage of a sexuality issue has not only trivialised a political issue around sexual rights; it has reinforced the predictable media objectification of women's bodies.

(ii) Dominant Trends in the *Sunday Times*

Although it sporadically takes on the responsibility of raising public awareness around sexual rights and health, the *Sunday Times* tends to sensationalise or trivialise stories of violence against women and sexual rights in its main sections. Reflective and provocative stories often appear in the 'Opinions and Insight' section, and are written by writers other than newspaper staff. Stories are therefore conceptualised outside of the 'core business' of the paper, where coverage of sex and sexuality issues often steers clear of provocative commentary, or extensive critical investigation. Commentary by commissioned writers in the 'Opinions and Insight' section indicates that the *Sunday Times* has

responded to a perceived public demand. This demand stems from views expressed in the public domain, and from civil society action, and it has put pressure on a leading national newspaper to provide socially responsive reporting on sexual health and sex rights struggles.

The same pressure led to the 'Everyone Knows Someone Campaign' from 2006. The *Sunday Times* editorial policy on coverage of sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights struggles has therefore not pro-actively shaped public opinion around sexuality, sexual health and sex rights issues. Rather, coverage is receptive to an existing demand for a variety of information and public debate on long sidelined issues. This is an important measure of the newspaper's accountability to the public. As a newspaper targeting readers across racial, class and regional boundaries, the *Sunday Times* does create a space for different groups to access diverging views around sex rights and sexual health. At the same time, this flexible forum is shaped by reporting conventions which often sensationalise or marginalise issues. The social and political implications of sexuality issues are constrained by an avoidance of political tendentiousness, the prioritising of moderate views about sex and sex rights, and a perception that the target audience does not require or want too much 'provocation'.

B. The Daily Voice

Conforming to the format and tone of the well-known British tabloid, the *Sun*, the *Daily Voice* is self-defined as a newspaper devoted to “sex, scandal, skinner [gossip] and sport”. Like other tabloids and magazines in this genre, it inundates the reader with images and text conveying violence, intrigue, and sex. It is also emphatically defined as a 'public' newspaper, being bought and read by many poor, working-class men and women.

The language used in the newspaper is therefore also distinctive. Although the *Voice* is technically an English-language newspaper, it frequently uses code-switching, with headlines and sections of stories incorporating the mixture of English and Afrikaans spoken by many lower-income members of the Western Cape population. Front-page news between July and December of 2005 was therefore wholly not in sync with front page news for other newspapers. Between July and December of 2005, *Daily Voice* headlines concerned such subjects as local pop stars, the assault of a young woman by her boyfriend, drug abuse in Cape Town's lower-income areas, a Cape Town policeman's assault on his girlfriend, a Satanist accused of murdering a church caretaker and a man's defence of his family from attack.

These stories are emphatically personal and localised. They immerse the reader in the immediacy of the present with very little follow-up, investigation or contextual discussion. The main aim is to shock and

titillate. It is clear that immediacy and detail in reporting can have the effect of alerting readers to everyday justice issues. Coverage of social injustices in *City Press* exemplifies this. But the *Voice* dwells on details without any suggestion of their implications. Consequently, it often presents 'trivia' as news. In fact, the conventions that the newspaper enlists are often those of fiction-writing.

The escapist emphasis characteristic of fiction is strongly evident in the second page of each edition of the newspaper. This page features pictures of bare-breasted women, accompanied with brief biographical write-ups. Echoing the content of soft-porn magazines, the newspaper clearly defines its target audience in terms of a 'male gaze'. The reader is defined as an indiscriminating consumer of dominant media images and messages.

(i) Gender based violence in the *Voice*

On average, the *Daily Voice* covers rape and sexual assault at least once for each edition. The tone of this coverage varies according to which angle the reporter finds best suited to entertaining readers. For example, The November 3 edition focuses on the plight of a school principal accused of rape. Headlined 'Sex Charge Crushed Me', the story briefly outlines the history of the charge of sexual assault, the principal's appeal against this, and his eventual reinstatement following an eight-month investigation. The dominant emphasis, however, is the testimony of the principal. His photograph appears at the top of the article, and subtitles such as 'distraught' and 'cleared' help to focus the reader's attention on his frequently quoted distress about the accusation.

In contrast is another prominent story, appearing on page 4 and spread across two pages with a number of photographs. Headlined 'Bruiser in Blue', the story focuses on a senior police officer accused of repeatedly assaulting his girlfriend. The story is reported from the complainant's point of view, and captures her perspective through subtitles like 'Stupid' (referring to the way she has seen herself for tolerating abuse"), and 'Slapped'. The story quotes her extensively, and provides detailed accounts of particular incidents of assault. Among the four photographs accompanying this story is a very large one of the complainant displaying bruises on her arms.

Another story, covered on 1 December, is headlined 'Hunting a Killer' and is spread across two full pages. At face value it seems to be more typical of the news covered in mainstream newspapers. Rather than dealing with trivia or a particular incident, it focuses on a spate of murders and rapes, and shows evidence of some investigation and follow-up. But the story focuses on the mystery surrounding the case. It deals with the fact that the victims all have biblical names, and dwells on minutiae about murder weapons and the killer's strategy. This emphasis on the bizarre is explicit in subtitles such as

'gruesome', 'crazed' and 'task team'. Focusing on ingredients typical of a fictional murder story, (the enormity of the crime, the elusiveness of the perpetrator and the challenges for detection), the story is clearly geared towards thrilling the reader.

A story headlined 'The Pick Axe Wives' in the December 15 edition is very similar. Accompanied by five graphic pictures of battered women, the story deals with two women abused by their partners. Although the story refers to the way the court freed their partners, and obliquely promises evidence of balanced investigation, the story is ultimately a sensation story. There is no follow-up of sources, and no indication that the reporter actually attended any court cases. The story's content is provided mainly by the testimony of the two battered women. These, like the three photographs on the cover page, and the four in the main story on pages 4 and 5, appeal mainly to a voyeuristic curiosity about others' suffering.

A story in the December 9 edition provides yet another angle on coverage of VAW. Headlined 'Smashed in Gympie', the story, spread across pages 12 and 13, deals with gangsters who daily attack at least five women. As is the case with other stories of sexual assault, the story is accompanied with numerous pictures. These capture the name of the street where the gangsters usually attack, windows smashed by the gangsters, and a (presumably) posed picture of a man about to fling a brick. Like the *Voice's* other stories on sexual violence, this coverage is primarily concerned with graphic images and narrative details with the force to shock and thrill readers.

The conflation of stories of sexual assault and VAW with entertainment is evident in the way that these stories are cast under the broad sensationalist rubric of 'crime'. Uncovering what is violent, frightening and threatening is the main purpose of these stories. And it is this purpose that leads to the shifts in perspective – ranging from the prioritising of victims to the exonerating of culprits.

The prioritising of entertainment can have ambiguous effects. In the pursuit of entertainment and sensation, newspapers such as the *Voice* cover topics which mainstream papers ignore. Such coverage might be prompted only by the newspaper's commercial goal of shocking and entertaining readers. At the same time, the effect is to bring issues to public attention which might otherwise remain unpublicised. It is therefore clear that tabloids such as the *Daily Voice* have the potential to function as important moulders of opinion and forums for exposing injustice. But factors such as market imperatives; the politics and knowledge of individual journalists; and the leeway and ability of editors to define accountable roles for their newspapers will always shape this potential.

(ii) Dominant Trends in *The Voice*

The *Voice* regularly sensationalises the subjects of VAW and sexual rights struggles, echoing a globalised mass media sensationalising of sex and violence. Never using investigation or balanced reporting, the paper is concerned merely with breaking stories of scandal and sensation, and assumes that it has a guaranteed audience for such coverage. Using the conventions of sensationalism established in soft-sell tabloid publications in Britain and the United States, the newspaper demonstrates the power of globalised norms in governing 'popular' mass media consumption and content. The paper uses graphic and lurid images and headlines to shock, titillate or entertain readers whose tastes are shaped by hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality.

Stories related to sex rights or GBV are therefore abstracted from a political or moral context. The stories are explicitly 'escapist' in discouraging readers' critical reflection on politics, ethics or justice, even though they minutely probe subjects' real lives. They are situated in a value system where the curiosity about sexual behaviour and practices, the objectification of women, or the centralising of male sexual fantasy, are part of a dominant repertoire of hegemonic messages about gender and sexuality. The newspaper therefore echoes messages in popular South magazines such as *You*, or *American* and *English* magazines marketed in South Africa. The prominence of images reinforces this trend. Images and short, vivid stories are stressed at the expense of reflection and insight, and the newspaper makes it clear that its main concern is with the surface sensationalism of its messages.

The popularity of this newspaper indicates a huge public demand for sensation, scandal and violence. Of importance too is the rate of growth of soft-sell tabloids. The introduction of the genre in South Africa began with an Afrikaans-language newspaper explicitly based on Britain's *Sun* (*Die Son*). *The Voice* followed soon after, and the recent English equivalent of *Die Son* is currently posed to challenge the sway of the English-language *Voice*. As more and more newspapers exploit an environment of freedom of speech, the competition to outdo each other in sensationalising is likely to increase. Ethical and political standards in such newspapers are therefore likely to be compromised more and more. The over-riding sway of commercial agendas, which exploit and reinforce dominant images and mindsets around sexuality and gender, can therefore easily undermine a broader environment in which freedom of speech has been aimed to guarantee all groups' rights and freedoms.

It is important to critique the commercial and male-centred character of soft-sell publications which are rapidly becoming a global media phenomenon.

4. Re-assessing South Africa's speech freedoms: Factors influencing media coverage of violence against women in South Africa

Writing in 1998, Lisa Vetten describes the 'schizophrenic' response of the South African mainstream media to rape. She argues that the focus, albeit often laudable, on uncovering VAW often co-exists uneasily with a tendency to underplay its political implications. This general contradiction frequently characterises media reporting on sex, sexual rights and sexual health more generally. The 'schizophrenic' response is symptomatic of political processes, where women's experiences and organisations are placing tremendous pressure on the media and communication networks to transform, and to respond to long-suppressed ideas and identities.

This pressure has culminated in organisations committed to alternative information production and dissemination. One such organisation, based in South Africa but operating in the entire African region, is Gender Links, which will also be dealt with in the case study in Section 3. Established in 2001, this NGO defines itself as being “committed to a region in which women and men are able to participate equally in all aspects of public and private life in accordance with the provisions of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development.”

Gender Links seeks to strengthen democracy by ensuring the participation of all citizens, especially women. Gender Links has consistently focused on the media through conducting research; training; creating and sharing content that demonstrates how gender can be integrated into media outputs; taking advantage of the opportunities presented by information technology and strengthening the communication skills of gender activists as well as women in decision-making.

But there have been many contradictions, shortcoming and complexities associated with this explosion of 'alternative' and 'new media'. What follows examines the key forces within which mainstream media, and even many alternative media sites such as Gender Links operate.

A. The state and the law

It seems anomalous to identify the state as an impediment to press freedom on sex and sexuality in South Africa. The South African media is not overtly 'restricted' by state laws in determining, for example, whether a gay rights activist can, without compromising a newspaper, write a newspaper article condemning homophobia.

At the same time, many state mechanisms actively regulate what the media reports and how the media reports on sex and sexuality. In fact, the main mechanism of state control over the media on an

everyday basis is the law. As 'private' matters, sexual violence, sex and sexuality are subjects whose treatment easily lays the media open to charges of libel. Laws for respecting individuals' personal rights cannot be flouted without newspapers facing serious consequences. This is especially true of high-profile figures whose prominence rests on their public reputation, and who can easily deploy economic, legal and political resources to defend their individual rights.

The media's constraints in relation to such figures was clearly demonstrated at the time that a rape charge was first laid against Jacob Zuma. The *Sunday Times*, which broke the story, was strongly attacked for unfounded reporting. A *Business Day* editorial reflected on the fact that the article contravened the Criminal Procedure Act by publishing the names of the complainant and accused before trial. And it is revealing that many newspapers covering the story between November and December of 2005, rather than following the *Sunday Times'* unearthing of unpublicised evidence, adopted a very cautious response. The *Mail & Guardian* report reflects this well. It alluded exclusively to coverage of the story in other newspapers for evidence, rather than referring to other sources.

There is, in fact, a significant albeit uncodified body of 'laws' that directly and indirectly regulates what the media may say with respect to sex, sexuality and sex rights. In South Africa, these laws are often defined in terms of abstract moral and ethical codes regulated by state-independent bodies. However there are important connections between these, state apparatuses, business interests and legislation. In South Africa, the news media is regulated by the Press Ombudsman, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission.

Like the state, the media in democracies like South Africa is often superficially 'free'. Newspapers have to carry the mantle of objectivity because their credibility rests on their not identifying with any sectional interest. As is the case with the state, the media is meant to serve the 'public' interest. The difficulty arises when we consider that the public is not comprised of a group of equal individuals, with equivalent power and freedom to speak and be heard in the public sphere. It is comprised of groups with long histories of privilege and power defined and regulated with respect to gender, sexuality, sexual identity and sexuality discourses. In catering for 'the public' interest, therefore, the media is not in a position to challenge ingrained hetero-normativity, for example, in cartoons, columns etc., since hetero-normativity is a dominant 'public' norm. In short, a consideration of dominant 'popular' discourses and how they are (often covertly) encoded in the media is often an important reflection of the laws that directly regulate the media.

At present, self-regulating media monitoring in South Africa seems to ensure considerable degrees of

freedom. But there are no guarantees for the sanctity of these freedoms. A clause in the Film and Publications Act of 1996 exempts the news media from all regulation and censorship. Recently, however, the Ministry of Home Affairs has proposed that the media no longer be exempt. If this proposal is approved and the Amendment Bill is enacted, newspaper coverage of gender violence, sex and sexual rights will be seriously affected. It is therefore noteworthy that the laws and processes guaranteeing press freedom, while impressive in the immediate post-apartheid period, are still open to contestation. If enacted, the recent Film and Publication Amendment Bill will dramatically alter the way newspapers respond to and enable sexuality and sex rights and health related debates and struggles.

B. Commercial interests

Newspapers survive by being sold. Newspapers operate in a commercial context, and in terms of their daily operations, they reflect the norms of commercial life. Newspapers rarely straightforwardly reflect the beliefs or values of owners or editors, whose ideals and goals often need to take second place to the imperative of financial survival. The imperative of selling newspapers can militate against the coverage of areas concerning groups perceived as having little buying or political power. Thus, limited coverage of South Africa's numerous rape and domestic violence cases involving poor and working-class women may be tacitly rationalised on the grounds that these are socially invisible figures about whom there is little readership interest.

Overall, therefore, commercial interests, both nationally and internationally, place considerable constraints on coverage of socially contentious and marginalised topics, irrespective of the ideals of editors. When we consider that sex and sexuality related issues are generally feminised, these are the topics that end up being subordinated for the sake of guaranteeing financial viability. GBV affects mainly women, and sex rights, and sexual health issues are often feminised as soft issues, as opposed to areas such as commerce and the economy, government and politics, which are coded as masculine. Financial viability is powerfully linked to masculinised topics and fields, and is associated with public performance, business ventures, party politics and governance.

The pre-eminence of commercial interest can take a more blatant form. Soft-sell tabloids clearly compromise all pretence to accountable, balanced reporting in the drive to commoditise sex, violence and women's bodies. *The Voice* clearly reveals how the sensationalising of sex, sexuality and violence against women can become mere commercialised items: their newsworthiness rests not on investigating processes that underlie or surround them, but on their fetishised dramatisation in a world where they

are subjects of mass consumption. The appeal of sensationalised stories about gender violence in tabloids in South Africa is an indication that ostensibly 'public' forms of communication are in fact overtly misogynistic and hostile to women's interests.

C. Globalisation, neo-liberalism and developmentalism

The growing prominence of soft-sell publications in an environment like South Africa clearly reveals the impact of hegemonic standards. The commercialising of sex and sexuality is a logical expression of the preoccupation, and has led increasingly to the mainstreaming of pornography in the media.

This mainstreaming of pornography often centralises male sexual fantasies in very stark ways. In *The Voice* for example, stories of VAW are mediated by perspectives bordering on fascination. In this case, there is often very little to distinguish the content and effects of the *news* media from the *entertainment* media (for example, magazines, videos and films). The main purpose of both is to ensure profits by pandering to a cultivated public taste for sex as violent, scandalous and usually misogynistic spectacle.

But the globalisation of standards can take other forms. A regulating media paradigm that deserves consideration, especially because of its ingrained impact on 'alternative media' in South Africa and other parts of the African continent, is the neo-liberal developmentalist paradigm. It has been shown that 'alternative' communication networks such as Gender Links provide an important alternative to the patriarchal orientation of the print media in southern Africa. Gender Links, funded by sponsors including Oxfam GB and DFID, has produced considerable work on challenges that face women in Africa, and especially on matters related to violence. It has, moreover, appeared to take up the challenge of enlisting new media, including the Internet, websites and podcasts in its dissemination of knowledge for empowering women. Work that has been produced, however, remains emphatically developmentalist, tending to speak down to marginalised women and to propose feminist solutions associated with struggles and expertise developed in the global South.

Of particular importance too is its restrictive impact, despite its effort to use communication forms adventurously. Online publications and training opportunities assume the prerequisites that the vast majority of South African women do not have: literacy, computer access and extensive time for intellectual and political work.

5. Beyond restrictive forms and genres: Making the case for new media content and forms

The mainstream print media has been, considering the wide availability of digital technologies in South

Africa, remarkably unadventurous. Newspapers and television have not capitalised on the wide-ranging ways of using, for example, Skype, podcasts and cell phone text messaging. All this would most certainly facilitate far more democratic processes around who speaks, from what perspective and about what when it comes to GBV.

Even when we turn to alternative communication sites, most notably the highly visible organisation, Gender Links, it becomes clear that the mere use of new media does not automatically guarantee the inclusion of marginalised women's voices and opportunities for their agencies. Organisations such as these reveal the extent to which ostensibly feminist projects can implicitly reinforce developmentalist agendas that suppress the agencies and voices of many South African women.

Regarding form, an NGO such as Gender Links also reveals how the experimental forms can reinforce elitist patterns of access, control and participation, with middle-class, professional and often non-African women remaining the producers of knowledge and solutions, and rural, per-urban and working-class women remaining the passive subjects of knowledge or the recipients of information.

Section 3: Case studies

This section takes up the two main sets of questions posed by the survey in sections 1 and 2:

How can alternative feminist lobbying through civil society and cultural expression, take up the challenge of systematic, radical and effective challenges to VAW in African contexts? And if we concede that legal interventions and international instruments can and have done very little to change the patriarchal and heterosexist status quo, intersecting as it does with class and region, how can localised, popular and community-driven initiatives achieve more effective lobbying, consciousness-raising and activism?

The second set of questions concern the form of this activism: How can ICTs, in comparison with the top-down apparatuses of the print media and legal and policy mechanisms, facilitate forms of intervention, lobbying and activism that are radical, subversive and democratic? It is a starting premise of this section that activism involving new media is most effective at the local level. The case studies, especially the study of the two plays, deals with small scale trends with the power to transform.

Drawing together responses to these two sets of questions, this section deals with performance and traditional forms of communication as these intersect with ICTs – the use of Facebook, Twitter, cellphones the informal circulation of DVDs. Much has been made in conventional discussions of ICTs of the digital divide, the extent to which the majority of women in Africa remain cut off from the resources and instruments for modern communications. This finding has driving solutions in the form of popular education in ICTs, making facilities and computers available to marginalised women. What, however, can be said about how women use resources at their disposal, and especially about how these resources are often combined with more traditional forms of expression, communication and networking?

Both case studies show that ICT use among women in South Africa is often combined with more traditional forms of networking. Rather than this demonstrating the lack of resources and opportunities, it often demonstrates the determination and resourcefulness of women who resolutely use the range of resources at their disposal.

1. Feminist activism, theatre and new media from the University of the Western Cape

A. Background to the plays

The two plays, *Reclaiming the P Word* and *Khululekani Emakhaya* are dramas incorporating personal testimonies and life histories about violence and women's resistance. They are highly localised and small scale. Conceptualised by Mary Hames, the Director of the Gender Equity Unit at UWC, the first play was conceived as an alternative to the *Vagina Monologues*. Hames maintains a deep antagonism towards research, activism and lobbying about VAW that reproduces stereotypes of women, especially black women as victims. She has written and spoken out publicly against the tendency in the gender research and activism industry to see black women's bodies only as sites of trauma, pain and suffering, the silent templates for others' intervention.

At the same time, she works closely and intimately with academic, support and administrative staff and students dealing with multiple forms of injustice and discrimination. These include hunger – many students cannot afford food, and the cultural 'shame' attached to poverty often leads them to remain silent. She has started a food project to address this. Another concerns racism, with staff and students approaching her about discrimination on a campus that remains deeply divided to intervene or to seek advice and support her in terms of ethnicities. Two other issues are homophobia and disability: she and her staff co-ordinate programmes, often driven by student volunteers, that raise awareness around sexual rights and justice, publish a gay and lesbian newsletter and coordinate a programme for mainstreaming disability activism into human rights awareness at UWC. The final issue, one which was prioritised with the origin of UWC's GEU, concerns gender injustices, ranging from sexual harassment to gender-sensitive policies on campus. This wide range of issues indicates that Hames is aware of and has struggled to address intersections in her work – of class, race, sexual orientation and disability – as these impact on gender.

I have chosen to write my case study as an insider/outsider, relying on first-hand observation and knowledge about the plays, and on my contact with Hames as a colleague and with students whom I teach and with whom, 4 years ago, I worked in the first production of the play.

B. Reclaiming the P Word: Publicity, activism and lobbying

The success of the play, *Reclaiming the P Word*, rested on its powerful and positive images. As an alternative to *The Vagina Monologues*, the play raised the importance of race and class in women's embodied experiences. With each version of the play, therefore, the various monologues focus on women's experiences of being black and gendered in the context of violence. Each monologue,

moreover, is conceptualised as a process of healing and transformation, with the pieces collectively tracing women's experiences of shame, trauma and violence, and leading on to their ability to see their bodies and themselves in new radical ways. When the play was first staged in 2006, word about it was circulated mainly through conventional routes – flyers and posters. The effectiveness of circulating information about dates, the play's content via email and cell phone, however, was quickly registered by the producer and cast.

By the time it was taken to the national theatre festival in Grahamstown, its publicising was mainly through twitter, text messages and emails. Angelo, a student at the GEU, says: “We really worked to get the play known long before we went to Grahamstown. In fact we kept in regular contact with our fans while we were travelling. They knew each and every detail of what happened on the bus.”

Supporting this, Hames has claimed that she knew very little about ICTs when the play was first produced, and that it was largely because of the students' expertise with ICTs that the play could be made known and, most importantly, discussed. Their enthusiasm led her to grow increasingly excited about the lobbying and advocacy possibilities of discussing this performance via new media.

The most important initiative here was The P Word Facebook page (see appendix). Ntombi, a cast member for 3 years, and the author of a new piece dealing with women's bodies, violence and HIV/AIDS, has said that “the idea of having Facebook was to get people to talk. A lot of people came to see the play. We had some limited time to discuss afterwards, but this was too short. Young women who came especially wanted to talk and have extended conversations. Sometimes they were shy to talk after the play. Sometimes they had very personal experiences and wanted a but more privacy.” Ntombi has therefore been the administrator of the Facebook page. While there have been many periods of inactivity, the page launches into action with performances.

C. Ownership and democratisation of knowledge and communication with the plays

Much has been made by optimistic liberal commentators about the opportunities for free and democratic communication through digital technologies. The crudest of these see the Internet, for example, as an open space that allows anybody, anywhere to contribute to the free flow of global knowledge. This naive view ignores a range of power relations, including:

- The fact that access to software and digital technologies requires financial resources and power;
- The fact that dominant views and perspectives dominate the world wide web. For example,

North American perspectives dominate discussions of terror and violence, and patriarchal and heterosexist views dominate decision of women and men.

Consequently, access, even once it is achieved by marginal groups and activists, does not guarantee an equivalence with hegemonic views. Marginal perspectives, especially those of women in the global South, constantly have to struggle to be heard in a global communication environment.

The circulation of the plays, and ways of generating discussion about the issues they raised, are part of this struggle. After the first few performances of the *P Word*, the play was filmed and DVDs were made. These DVDs have played a central role in popularising the play as a teaching tool – both for NGOs and for formal teaching. Organisations that have used the DVD include the Saartjie Baartman Centre for Abused Women, Women on Farms and SWEAT, an organisation for sex workers. All these organisations arranged for group performances of the play, and later went on to use DVDs to follow up discussions and explorations of women’s experiences of their bodies in the context of racism, violence and marginalisation.

Fatima Ismail, a counsellor at the Saartjie Baartman Centre who attended a performance with clients, has spoken very positively about these follow-up session: “The clients were really inspired by the production. They’re used to the usual kinds of documentaries and stuff on violence. But this was totally different. They especially liked the fact that all of women in the play were black. They also liked the way that the play gave personal solutions – noone was a victim. We used the DVD afterwards to discuss these sorts of issues, like what does empowerment really mean. Is it more than just getting a job and leaving your abusive partner.”

The Director of Women on Farms made similar comments: “A lot of the women in our organisation have actually never even seen a play. They were amazed to go to the university campus and see a play featuring women who had lives like theirs, who struggled with the issues they have. In some sessions we had after we saw the play we went back to the stories [individual monologues] to unpack a lot of issues about poverty and racism. How does all this impact on violence. I think one of the biggest things was how we ended up talking about what is violence. A lot of the information available doesn’t really show everything that actually forms violence for many women in our organisation.”

Moreover, the DVDs have also allowed performers, supporters and staff at UWC to circulate the play’s message within their local, regional and national networks. A South African academic working in the United States, Gabeba Baderoon, for example, has recently published an article on the play, and has

been using it since 2008 in her Women's Studies Classes. She has found it an extremely effective way to teach students about the need to explore the agencies of marginalised women in the global South.

Also important is that the recording and circulation of the play via DVD has been an alternative to the recording of the play as a static written text. The play is constantly being transformed, with new cast members and directors being given opportunities to convey unique messages and include new monologues. While documentation exists, it exists on the hard drives and memory sticks of the director, cast members and the director. The text is therefore not cast in stone, but remains flexible, available for constant modification, transformation and dissemination.

The new play, *Khululekani Emakhaya*, grew directly out of digital communication. In 2010, the producer committed herself to a new play when invited by the Grahamsown festival organisers to bring a play to the 2011 festival. In the course of email conversation with the organisers, she was under pressure to formulate a description hastily, and settled on the idea of a play dealing with the meanings of home. The idea had grown out of her work during 2009 and 2010 with women students' wide-ranging feelings about home, their feelings of alienation, discomfort and often domestic violence. The new play incorporates many stories of women experiencing violence within or despite the 'sanctuary' of a 'home'.

Like the previous play the new one was publicised and discussed through Twitter, cellphones, Facebook and email.

D. Branding, commodity items and feminist activism

The progressive possibilities of using ICTs and new media in feminist activism needs to be weighed up against the enmeshing of ICTs with neo-liberalism and commodity capitalism. These relentlessly co-opt resources and messages in the interests of a global capitalist system. For example, the marketing and sale of cell phones, laptops or software in many parts of South Africa, including the most impoverished rural areas, is a stark reminder that these tools are, for many, simply commodities whose sale will increase profits for privileged groups. Even in the most marginalised areas of South Africa, inhabited by those with basic resources in rural and peri-urban areas, for example, cellphone and cellphone service provider ads abound, indicating how poor people, women especially, are targeted as consumers of services and goods such as cellphones. How have the plays produced by UWC navigated the difficult territory of commodity capitalism?

Like so many popularised small-scale activities, the play has given rise to brand items – t-shirts and

hoodies bearing the slogan 'Reclaiming the P Word'. As is the case with the digital media enlisted around the plays, however, these commodity items have been used in ways that defy their origins in consumer capitalism and class hierarchies. They have been worn as statements of defiance and independence, allowing the performers to name themselves in opposition to dominant social messages about what women's bodies should be like.

2. The case study of Gender Links

This section begins with a review of the organisation, Gender Links. Dealt with in the preceding section, this NGO seems, on face value, to have responded pro-actively to the problems with effective communication around GBV. The review that follows, however, indicates how even ostensibly progressive organisations face many challenges with outreach, conveying women's vantage points effectively and democratising knowledge about violence and advocacy in meaningful ways. The study goes on to explore more encouraging processes in the work of other NGOs and initiatives in South Africa.

A. Analysis of Gender Links' perspective

An organisation that has been at the forefront of this is the 10 year-old Johannesburg gender and media organisation Gender Links (GL). The organisation has a dedicated news service for gender and media related issues. It therefore means that there is a constant stream of articles on gender related issues.

The months of July and August 2011 are used for analysis. These two months were chosen, as August is normally referred to as 'Women's month' and one usually expects a peak of coverage on a range of topics during those months. For the purposes of this analysis, I will look at:

- The range of opinions and vantage points currently articulated around sexual health.
- Which vantage points tend to be excluded and sidelined in most media reporting to what extent are dominant views reflected in coverage.

(i) Context: Gender Links

The organisation says that, "[...] gender and media remains a key niche for Gender Links. GL remains the powerhouse of research, training tools and links behind the gender and media movement." This analysis will look at whether they are indeed the 'powerhouse' of the gender and media movement and whether this analysis of their coverage can give us an indication of this. It is also important to note that, according to its vision, "it is committed to a region in which women and media are able to participate

equally in all aspects of public and private life in accordance with the provisions of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) protocol on gender and development”.

One could therefore assume that whilst the organisation is committed to ensure coverage of gender issues, it is in accordance with essentially a political organ of state. SADC is a member-based organisation of the 12 countries in the region.

According to the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development that Gender Links subscribes to, it:

- Encompasses commitments made in all regional, global and continental instruments for achieving gender equality.
- Enhances these instruments by addressing gaps and setting specific measurable targets where these do not already exist.
- Advances gender equality by ensuring accountability by all SADC member states, as well as providing a forum for the sharing of best practices, peer support and review.

It is therefore clear that the organisation subscribes to a set of measurable deliverables and one can assume it would do whatever necessary to ensure that their specific targets are met. One could further argue that given the political challenge that exists in the region, the often deeply patriarchal views uttered and the lack of commitment in some countries towards gender equality, this commitment might not always be possible. However, as the GL mission states that the organisation “achieves its vision by coordinating the work of the SADC protocol and together with all key African global commitments for achieving gender equality”. Given the immense power and access the GL has, are they therefore able to give the millions of SADC citizen’s accurate and different opinions on sexual health?

(ii) GL July coverage

For the purpose of the analysis, we will look at the following:

- Headline and length of story
- Sources
- Textual analyses

There were four articles written and produced by the GL team. The stories ranged from a focus on women’s month activities, the issue of HIV among the diaspora, soap operas and how it reinforces negative gender stereotypes and lastly, how there is a role of SADC in Africa’s newest country, South

Sudan. They first reported an overview of the women's activities in the coming month. The headline:

“SA: commemorates Women's Month is giving audiences a clear historical overview of Women's day activities. It was clearly written for an audience that is outside of South Africa and very informative. The report illustrates balanced fact gathering. But it also reads like a press release written by a government department with most of the sources being the department for women, children and people with disabilities. There are no analyses on the significance of GBV or how the country has failed to address the high rates of gender based violence or the issue of 'corrective rape'.”

The second story, 'International: HIV rates amongst African women living in the diaspora'. It is a very informative and a well-written opinion piece. The article raises the very sensitive issue of HIV amongst the diaspora living in London. A range of different sources and voices are included in the article. The article quotes different sources including that of a woman living with HIV, the article also gives the audience a detailed account of her fears and the reality of stigma still attached to HIV. The author also highlights the horrific statistics of Africans living in Canada and London, and how this group has the highest HIV infection rate in those countries. However, one of the sources, a doctor, once again reinforces stereotypes, “many people still believe that HIV is a form of punishment or witchcraft, and many Africans in the UK carry their culture with them”. This is a very worrying quote, as it reinforces deep-seated cultural stereotypes about 'them', 'witchcraft' and 'carrying culture'. There is no questioning of these views and the reader is simply left to accept it, as it comes from a doctor.

The third story, 'South Africa: Soap operas don't have to reinforce negative stereotypes', relates to the issue of representation of gay men on one of SA's most popular soap operas. There are no sources and the article was written as an analysis/reflective piece. However, very important questions are raised about the power of soap operas in SA and how the author felt that the makers of the television series have a responsibility to represent a 'fair, non-discriminatory version of SA'.

The writer must be applauded for taking on the producers of the show regarding their negative portrayal of gay men. It challenges dominant patriarchal views on the issue and also challenges the audience to interrogate images and language around this issue. The author challenges writers of the soap operas to “write storylines that can help the country overcome violence, hate and discord”. It further states that it is “only when we confront harmful stereotypes that our leaders actually stop perpetuating them”. The last article of the month, 'Africa: There is a role for SADC women in South Sudan' looks at the issue of the organ's role in rebuilding the country. The article has a range of sources, mostly UN and SADC documents. It raises all the right issues that need to be tackled in the country like the training of health professional and providing basic services. And whilst the article is very informative it lacks the voice of ordinary people and how the issue impacts their lives.

(iii) GL August coverage

Almost double the amount of articles were published in August. This could be ascribed to the fact that it was women's month and it was expected that a much more focused approach to the issue be taken. The articles ranged from unsafe abortion, a humorous perspective on women's rights, overcoming a different apartheid and the perpetuation of blatant stereotypes in the media. 'Better education will help fight unsafe abortions' raises deep-seated stereotypes and stigma attached to abortion in certain parts of the region. It has a range of sources and articulates the views and policies according to the SADC protocol. 'SA: a humorous perspective on the serious issue of women's rights' looks at a new radio docu-drama produced to highlight the often patriarchal views around gender equality. It highlights that whilst the country has "solid legal protections for women, at least on paper" the real commitment seems to be missing. The radio drama series looks at gender role reversals. Produced in different African vernacular languages, they are designed to encourage listeners to push for the effective implementation of the AU protocol with respect to women's rights. A wide range of sources are used in the article, but interesting to note, the majority of them are the funders of the docu-drama. 'Overcoming a different apartheid' published on Women's Day looks at how some women in Africa face a different type of apartheid because of their sex and how in South Africa the grim statistics of VAW continues to plague women. The article points out to this grim reality of their lives. However, it reminds us that yet another UN organisation must be welcomed. It states that despite the doom and gloom, the formation of UN Women should be 'welcomed'. It once again raises the issue that there needs to be some mention of a political organ, it is as if they are implying 'do not bite the hand that feeds you'. This is highly problematic as some of the articles highlight the good work that these agencies are doing without questioning the role they play and the Western notions that exists in these spaces.

'My huge bum' is a critical analyses of an article published in a local tabloid newspaper. The article centers on a young women's dilemma about having a 'huge bum'. The analysis point out that it is highly 'insensitive and crude' in its reporting on this issue. It also states that the article feeds into "a patriarchal and colonial discourse about African women". Once again, the article raises the critical issues and stereotypes that perpetuates negative reporting and although it speaks the right language and raises the pertinent issues, the article is highly sexist. The editor of this paper justifies the choice of picture and article, arguing its varied audience needed to 'understand what fat women go through'!

(iv) Dominant trends/Conclusion

GL, according to its annual report, has a budget of up to \$5 million. A budget that most non-governmental organisations can simply only dream of. With its huge personnel and technical resources,

GL is able to produce content easily. It deals with a range of very informative issues. It is not scared of raising uncomfortable issues and asks the important questions in the articles. However, it also reveals the difficulty in accommodating all the different views on the issues. Whilst it raises GBV and other sexual health issues, it also does not challenge some of the well-established views on the issue. GL has responded to this argument by saying that there has been a lack of coverage of these issues in the mainstream media. It has entered this fray by producing articles quick and fast and ready to be published. However on closer interrogation, as shown in the analysis, some of the articles fail to raise the deeply held views on certain issues like HIV in Africa.

It relies on a range of opinion makers and freelance writers based across the region. This enables the GL service to ensure that it has a wide range of voices on the issues and this should be applauded. It is not easy to always get timely content from the SADC region. Its content, which is free of charge, can be edited accordingly to the end user, in this case – the newspapers in the SADC region. One could question this approach and wonder if a sexist editor, someone who holds strong views on gays and lesbians or HIV could then edit the news accordingly. This can be worrying, as the message that GL wants to proclaim, could be misconstrued. There is certainly the right quantity of stories, it makes the right noises on issues but is it only for the sake of having to produce articles, due to the nature of a wire/news service. In some ways, this is a superficial response to the issues of the day.

One is also not sure of the specific space that is/was allocated for the different articles and how the final story is edited before printing in the paper. This places a burden on the specific editors (we do not know who they are given the nature of the different users of the articles) to ensure a necessary flow of copy on a range of issues. Whether it reaches its intended audience is not certain. Whilst we applaud the coverage on the range of issues, the different opinions and subject range of issues, one wonders how the ultimate user, whether rich or poor, woman or man in a rural village in Malawi or South Africa receives the news.

Another worry in the range of articles was also the lack of coverage on 'corrective rape' and the violence that lesbians are facing in South Africa. The issue dominated media during Women's month, and the organisation, Free Gender, raised some important issues. Due to the lack of coverage on the issue in the mainstream media, one can only conclude that perhaps the issue of gay and lesbian within the region is still regarded as very sensitive and is still taboo, and must be dealt with within that space, given that the articles are distributed across the region and such deeply held views are still prevalent. By focusing on its vision and mission and clearly ensuring that it stays true to it, with the SADC focus, hampers a more critical analysis of issues. Although some of the articles' analysis raises the right

noises, I would argue it is done within this parameter. This could be seen as a major constraint by an over-riding emphasis on protocols and conventions. There is, therefore, a set of liberal assumptions attached to this, and this is problematic, as it assumes we all buy into this liberal consensus.

Media scholar, Jane Duncan is insightful on this, and says “assumptions are built on the liberal feminist tradition, which emphasises the attainment of equal rights while remaining blind to the structural reasons why such rights are allocated unequally” (Duncan, 2006: 22). This is important, as it prioritises protocols and conventions that might not be important to gender activists challenging these views.

However, as Duncan points out, “[...] a women’s media movement would need to ensure that poor women’s voices are heard, even when women’s’ voices are heard in opposition to the anti-poor and anti-female aspects of government policy” (Duncan, 2006: 23). This is of particular concern as GL states very clearly that its vision and mission are according to SADC protocols. Some SADC countries like Zimbabwe and Malawi have been accused of neglecting its poor. In the case of the latter, they have systematically arrested and beaten up its poor following food riots. Can one therefore safely assume that the voices of the poor will always be heard?

3. Gender based violence activism: The use of ICTs in mobilising communities and activism in South Africa

A. Introduction

This section aims to provide some insight into how a number of organisations working in the GBV sectors have created different ICT platforms to spread the message to various users across the globe. The organisations have had to employ a number of creative ways of communicating with their core constituency and make use of the new media tools on offer. As the different case studies will show, the lack of financial resources has not stopped the organisations from employing creative strategies in its communication strategy. South Africa has a myriad of organisations working in the field of GBV. It ranges from lobbying to different grassroots organisations. The long history of the women’s movement has left its mark on activism in the country. In post-apartheid South Africa organisations have had to either – close shop or scramble to pull resources together to fight the scourge of GBV. With South Africa’s huge unemployment rate, Internet is still not accessible to many. Organisations are certainly making use of ICT but the usage and access of it varies. They have had to employ creative measures, taking into account the specific socio-economic conditions it finds itself in, in communicating with its local members and also the global community of activists.

According to Womensnet, an organisation dedicated to assist organisations developing ICT in their work, “the digital divide is bridging but with this comes new challenges and it seems the issue of violence against women is not reflected on our online spaces and technology is used as enablers”.

B. Free Gender and instant messaging

South Africa was one of the first countries in the world to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation, and the first in Africa to legalise same-sex marriage. However, a dark cloud looms over these many ‘firsts’ and that is the emergence and scourge of the so-called ‘corrective rape’ phenomenon. According to rights activists and organisations working in the area, the country has the highest reported rape cases in the world even though it is estimated that only one in nine is actually reported. ‘Corrective rape’ has now been added to these grim statistics. It is difficult to pen an exact definition of atrocious crime but rights activists have been at pains to define it, so as to highlight this violent conduct.

This phenomenon has been on the increase the past few years and according to organisations that have been monitoring the issue, 31 lesbians have been killed because of their sexuality in the past decade. According to activists, ‘corrective rape’ occurs where men rape lesbians as punishment for being lesbians, to ‘cure’ them and turn them into women. As Toyana argues, “lesbians are seen deviants who challenge norms, lesbians are subject to humiliation, discrimination and violence” (2011: 35).

One of the first homophobic cases reported in the media was in 2006 with the murder of the 19 year old Zoliswa Nkonyana. She was stoned and beaten to death by a mob of men in Khayelitsha on the outskirts of Cape Town. This brutal murder led to renewed activism in the community and saw the emergence of the organisation called Free Gender. According to its founding member, Funeka Soldaat, “Free Gender is the only black lesbian organisation operating in Khayelitsha and was formed especially to focus on homophobia and hate crimes directed to lesbians in the township”.

Free Gender works amongst the lesbian community in Khayelitsha, one of the poorest and most densely populated areas in Cape Town that has one of the highest unemployment rates in Cape Town. According to the 2001 census results, it was estimated that close to 3,50,000 people live in the area. One could safely assume eleven years later this number has doubled. According to the 2010/2011 crime statistics released by the SAPS, everyday nearly 75 people in the Western Cape become the victims of murder or of assault; more than 20 percent of all murders in the Western Cape were reported in Khayelitsha.

The organisation does not have many resources and does not have a website either. However, this has not deterred Soldaat and other foot soldiers of Free Gender to mobilise hundreds of lesbians in the area and across Cape Town to join them at the court cases where perpetrators of ‘corrective rape’ have appeared. FG had a huge turnout of its own mass rally in August 2011. “We focus on the local and have our own way of doing this; we know our core audience does not like to read very much, well that is what they tell us”, says Soldaat. Access to Internet is also luxury so the use of Facebook or Twitter or email cannot guarantee that their messages are read and will be read by their target audience. This meant that the organisation scanned the landscape and looked at the most common denominator in the township – the mobile phone.

According to the International Telecommunications Union, ITU (2009), the country has “almost full mobile coverage of all inhabited areas (92%)” and “growth rates, which although they have slowed down since the initial surge in mobile communications, are still faster than developed countries”. (Malila, 2011: 5). Malila argues that whilst this makes South Africa ‘a leader in mobile communications infrastructure, service and access in the developing world’, the manner in which phones are used by the majority of the population is unique, its usage of ‘call me backs’ and mobile instant messaging has impacted the numbers of people with handsets especially in the huge pre-paid market. She says – “the mobile market is dominated by ‘pay as you go’ customers -who indicated that mobile phone users do not have high incomes and in fact come from low income households (ibid). Given the high penetration of mobile phones from the low-income base, there has been the emergence of cheaper platforms to communicate with a mass based audiences”.

Members shared that “People do not want to read, they do not have money but they do want to know what Free Gender is up to so we use *MXIT* to communicate with people”. Through *MXIT* Free Gender was able to organise several public demonstrations at Khayelitsha court. They were therefore able to draw huge local and international media coverage and get the attention of the Ministers of Police, Justice and Social Development.

C. MXIT

The instant mobile messaging system (MIM) is a quick, fast and inexpensive communication platform to spread a message. According to Sarrazin, MIXIT is a South African based “free instant messaging application for mobile phones created in 2003” and “the service has turned into Africa’s largest social network claiming to have reached 27 million subscribers in the country” (Sarrazin, 2011: 26).

He argues that the platform is particularly appealing as “it is Java based and therefore works on range

of mobile phones regardless of the phone brand and requires only a basic phone and it also connects to other chat applications like Facebook and Google Talk”. Traditional one on one messages are free. It is this platform that has enabled Free Gender to communicate instantly with black lesbians in the townships and organise hundreds of members to their events or marches. “Internet is still expensive and our members do not have money for this, but they do have mobile phones and *MXIT* is free, so we can constantly communicate with people”, Soldaat states. She shares that while new technology is ‘awesome’ community based organisations like Free Gender do not have the money and have to use creative ways of using ICT to advocate for change and highlight the ‘corrective rape’ issue.

“It is amazing how quick we are able to mobilise people and spread the message of Free Gender; we do not have resources, but we know how to organise locally”, she said. However, given the global interest in Free Gender, Soldaat has penned her own blog, www.freegender.wordpress.com. Soldaat says this has been a great space to spread the message to the global community and raise awareness of what the organisation is doing.

D. Western Cape Network on Violence Against Women and packaged information

Established in 1989, the Western Cape Network on Violence Against Women is a network of organisations and individuals committed to fight VAW. The network has hundreds of members and provides different services in the field. They meet every month to:

- Share information
- Learn from one another
- Identify training needs
- Produce joint publications
- Lobby against violence towards women.

According to Claire Mathonsi, Deputy Director of the network, communication is key in the network and they have had to employ different methods and usage of ICT in the communication of their message to partners and members. “We have a diversity of members in urban and rural settings, they speak different languages, with different needs and they come from varied socio-economic backgrounds”, she says. The Network therefore took its time in developing the appropriate tool to communicate. With the sharing of information being key in the work of the Network, Mathonsi says it took awhile before it was comfortable with the appropriate tool of communication. ‘Of course we have Facebook and Twitter, but remember these platforms can also be abused by those using it and you must

have some resources as well”, adds Mathonsi.

E. Mobi-site

The Network has a dedicated website on the Internet but decided to take it one step further by developing special mobi-site accessible via a mobile phone. This mobi-site has content developed by the network on a varied of issues but is easily accessible via the mobile phone. Members can register via the mobi-site and access information on the network for their own usage and the site also offers a free ‘call me back’ service. As earlier pointed out, mobile phones remains a main source of information for millions of South Africans from poor socio-economic backgrounds.

“If a member sends us a call me back, we are able to immediately call them back and assist them with information they need to even offer initial counselling services, our members do not have money, so how are they supposed to communicate.” Web designers argue that web content for mobile phones have long been neglected but many sites have now been developed and are becoming more accessible to users of the very small screens and limited bandwidth, which characterises mobile phones (Kreutzin in Malila, 2011: 7). The network wants to ensure that it is quick and efficient in communicating with its members and the size of the mobi-site ensures the network is able to do this and take into account affordability and also manage its content. Whilst it took the organisation some time to develop the site, it was able to build a technology platform that works and communicate its message.

“If a member is 300 kilometres away, we want to ensure she has information on issues like the Domestic Violence Act, her rights at a local Court, or if the police are not doing their job properly, we want to know about it, she therefore has a way of communicating directly to us”. In this way, Mathonsi says, they are able to communicate important health messages to the network as well.

According to Benjamin, South Africa “is one of the most active mobiHealth sector and mHealth have exploded in recent years” (2011:49). With mHealth, patients have been able to receive SMS alerts from hospitals on when to collect medicines, and this has been used with HIV patients and in some outlying rural areas. Organisations like the network have therefore taken the different ICT platforms and tailored into what works for them.

F. Managing Facebook

The network has its own Facebook page but Mathonsi acknowledges that it has been very difficult to maintain and manage. The network also looked at their target audience and was faced with the question of how FB really fit into their members’ lives on a daily basis. “We workshopped this question

extensively and members raised that there was too much of a ‘free for all’ happening on FB and in one case in KwaZulu-Natal, someone used the site to plan dates and abuse the site for their own personal agendas”. According to Womensnet, there has been an increase in situations where personal information has been stolen from FB and Twitter accounts, and is being used to stalk and harass women and girls.

It is this experience that additionally prompted the network to design its own mobile platform. In this way it felt it could control the information and platform, especially given the literacy challenges. Mathonsi said that they wanted to create a safe space for their members and wanted different technology to speak to people.

On being asked – How do you control FB? Is it a safe space? What about privacy issues? How do you actually get your message out?. Mathonsi responded by saying, “We had to ask ourselves, can technology be that safe space? We wanted to ensure that technology is a safe space for our members and speak to them and take their specific context into account”. According to Womensnet, the Internet is populated with content that perpetuates VAW and now ICTs are used as a ‘tactic to control and track, thus leading to an increase in cases of domestic violence’. “Yes, we use technology and it has its place, but depending on your services, you must make technology work for you, the medium must match your vision and mission, not the other way around”, adds Mathonsi.

G. SWEAT: Giving voice to the marginalised

The Sex Workers Education & Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) work is focused on providing “safe sex educational work with adult sex workers”. Established in the late 1990’s it focussed on outreach work to sex workers working on the streets and within agencies. Its services include crisis counselling, legal advice and skills training for sex workers.

In 2000, SWEAT began actively advocating the decriminalisation of adult sex work and it now reaches sex workers nationally and engages in issues related to health and legal reform. Given the organisations core members, it needed to ensure that ICT works for them and it creates its own public space on this issue. As we have pointed out in earlier sections, in South Africa, despite the country’s liberal constitution, society still holds fairly conservative views when it comes to sex and sexuality, Sweat therefore operates within this terrain and faces an uphill battle with conservative members of civil society. “Sexworkers are silent and voiceless, we have had to take up public space to get our message out’, says Sweat Director, Sally Shackleton.

In order to do this the organisation established a core group of people who were dedicated in developing its own alternative media platform. Sweat wanted to ensure that its members were able to access information via Internet, Facebook, Twitter, mobile phones and podcasts. However, in order to do this, Sweat also had to ensure that it developed appropriate policies for the information and that it was also integrated into the work of the organisation. “Our messages whether on the site of FB had to be in line with the positions of Sweat and messages had to be consistent with our aim and vision”, mentioned Sally. “We had to ensure some sort of technology template and how to go about using Twitter and Facebook, we wanted to ensure that sexworkers start talking about themselves in a safe space and raise the pertinent challenges they face in their daily lives.” Sweat faced the same challenge as the Network, as it had to manage content but, more importantly, ensure that it was able to generate original content accessible to sex workers. Sweat also wanted to ensure that ICTs were part of the work of the organisation and that they were integrated in all its different formats. On their website they use video and sound to communicate to their core audience. “We wanted women to express themselves in their mother tongue but also hear their voices, in this way, at our events we record women and able to then put it on the website as a podcast”, Sally mentioned. However Sweat also does extensive lobbying work especially around the decriminalisation of sex work. Another tool the organisation wants to employ in its work is the Freedom Fone.

H. Freedom Fone

According to Womensnet, Freedom Fone is “telephony software, which takes the mobile phone and marries it with audio voice menus and short messaging system”. With its free and open source software the telephonic based application provides a new far-reaching communication medium for organisations and activists. It delivers information on demand to communities who need it most.

Conclusion

From the case studies, it is clear that GBV organisations are using ICTs in their work but are tailoring it to their specific needs according to the audiences they are talking to. However, financial resources remain a challenge and like in Free Gender's case, are impeding their work. This is not stopping them from employing what is out there and making it work for them. Although it would be difficult to quantify results, it is clear that the organisations have challenged the traditional methods of communication and are expanding knowledge of their work in different ways.

It is also clear from the examples that without financial backing organisations are still able to communicate and provide informative platforms. The organisations are challenging the mainstream media outlets and producing their own content for their users. They are using conventional methods of communication and using different ICTs platforms to educate the end user. The organisations have packaged their information accordingly. The development of the mobi-sites and usage of MXIT by the Network and Free Gender are also challenging how they mobilise and package information. They have also learnt that although Twitter and FB are free platforms, in order to actually use it users will have to have access to the Internet and access is, to some extent, still fairly limited.

As Sarrazin points out, "Internet access is significantly more restricted than access to mobile telephony, Africa therefore lags behind the rest of the world when it comes to Internet penetration rates. With an estimated population of 1.01 billion, Africa accounts for just over 110 million of the world's 1.97 billion Internet users" (Africa and Middle East Telecoms Week, 2011 in Sarrazin). It is not surprising that the high cost is one of the principal factors influencing African Internet penetration. It is estimated that an Internet connection speed of 100 Kbit/second costs around USD 110 per month, whereas a similar connection will be USD 20 per month in Europe (Sarrazin, 2011: 17). However, mobile phones and the lowering of mobile costs, have ensured end users like Free Gender activists are using cheap technology to communicate creatively and effectively.

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