

**WOMEN VOICES IN THE MEDIA OF THE AFRIKAANS LANGUAGE
COMMUNITY - AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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ABSTRACT

How were the voices of women journalists in the Afrikaans speaking community in South Africa heard over the past century? Who were these women, and who pioneered the way before them? This article investigates the origin and development of Afrikaans women journalists against the background of the socio-political climate as manifested after the Anglo-Boer War. Discrimination against women was widespread, as in other cultures. However, after the Anglo-Boer War, it seems women relinquished their rights in favour of the Afrikaner Nationalist movement. This impacted even more on the rights of women as citizens who could contribute as equals on all levels of society. Individuals who pleaded for equality were silenced. Afrikaans women were not allowed - it was deemed as "the will of God" - to play a public role. In the Afrikaans journalism world, this manifested itself in the fact that women had to be content to play a secondary role for many decades. Those individuals who can be regarded as the pioneers in Afrikaans journalism are highlighted in this article. The need for more research in media historiography - not only with the focus on women, but also on those voices that were not heard because of class or race - is also articulated.

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INTRODUCTION

South African media today portrays the same characteristics as do media in other countries, both in the so-called First World and Third World: women portrayed in the media are by far in the minority; they are in many cases stereotyped, and lastly, they have limited roles as media producers (Goga 2000; Spears, Seudegart & Gallagher 2000; Lowe Morna 2001; GMBS 2003).

According to the latest data around women's views and women's voices in the media, the Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS) (2003) for 12 Southern African countries, women constituted 17 % of news sources in the media monitored for this study in 2002 – close to the global 18 % in the Global Media Monitoring Project 2000 (GMMP 2000). Women however constitute 52 % of populations in these countries (GMBS 2003:10).

Women who are deemed to have more power – those in parliament – are also not portrayed relative to their representation in parliament. Women constitute an average of 18 % of parliamentarians in the region, yet they constitute only 8 % of sources in the category for politicians (GMBS *ibid.*). If one compares South Africa's women representation of 31 % in parliament (before the 2004 elections), and reflects that they are only 8 % of news sources, it is clear that women "are not news" (GMBS 2003). Incidentally, the slogan for the GMBS is "Women and men make the news".

How does representation of women both as media subjects and as media producers in the Afrikaans language community compare with these results, and what is the pre-history and development of women journalists in this particular language community?

Afrikaans media today has a significant slice of the "media cake" in South Africa. Specifically in the magazine sector, an Afrikaans weekly family magazine, *Huisgenoot*, has the highest circulation, and is, comparatively with other world media markets, one of the world's success stories in terms of market penetration. In the glossy women's magazine segment, it is also an Afrikaans women's magazine, *Sarie*, which has the highest circulation (SA Media Facts 2004:18&19).

How did this Afrikaans market develop? How did Afrikaans women journalists develop? What chances did they get – and what opportunities did they create for themselves? Under which socio-political circumstances did they manage to develop? This study will endeavour to give an overview of specifically the origin and development of women journalists in the Afrikaans language community.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study is the socio-scientific, qualitative method of historical research. The quotations were, for the purposes of this article, in the majority of cases translated from the original Afrikaans.

BACKGROUND

Looking at specifically Afrikaans media, and Afrikaans women journalists, it could be postulated that the events of the past century had a significant influence on the development of the media and its women journalists in this language community.

Starting with the Anglo Boer war at the turn of the twentieth century, through the nationalist era in the first half of the century, followed by the apartheid/nationalist era from the middle of the century, up to the democratisation of South Africa in the last decade of the previous century, Afrikaans media, and thus Afrikaans women journalists, reflect the various contexts in which they developed.

One can postulate that the Anglo Boer war (1899 – 1902) had a measurable influence on the development of Afrikaans women in general, and women in specific sectors, such as the media, in particular.

The absence of women's voices in many sectors runs parallel to a strange phenomenon. The Dutch/Afrikaans women possibly had the most liberty during the 18th and 19th century, and, were "backed by a legal position that was stronger than anywhere else in the European colonies" (Giliomee 2003a:23).

Yet, from a sector of society that held "the strongest position of all women in the Western world" their position declined "to one where they were subjected to pervasive discrimination and had become politically much less assertive than African women in their own country" (Giliomee 2003a:24).

Giliomee also calls this the "political eclipse" of Afrikaner women. The explanation for this phenomenon, according to Giliomee (ibid.), can be found in the fact that they "acquiesced in the twentieth century because they subordinated the cause of female liberation to the dictates of the Afrikaner nationalist movement"

Landman quotes Afrikaans women as suffering from "identities of failure" (2003:66):

How did this happen? What is the origin of this low self-image? Or should we rather ask, why can't we get our identities in order? Everyone in this country is able to elevate and empower themselves – but Afrikaans women it seems still have difficulties.

As in the literary gender discourse, one can refer to the absence of the Afrikaans woman's voice in the media in the early years as the "silences between words and texts" (Van Niekerk 1994:1).

The silence of black and coloured women was even more resounding. Of these last two groups, some of them would also be Afrikaans, as the home language of the majority of coloured people is Afrikaans.

In a previously racially divided country such as South Africa, it is necessary to reflect for a moment on the history of the language of Afrikaans and the definition of Afrikaans.

Afrikaans is described as one of the few new languages that has developed in recent times, developing from 17th century Dutch (the language of the Dutch settlers in the 17th century to the southern most point of Africa), with, as is commonly accepted, influences from Malay and Portuguese, as well as indigenous Southern African languages from the Khoi, Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana and Sotho ethnic groups. Afrikaans got official status as a national language in the then Union of South Africa in 1925.

In terms of “Afrikaner/Afrikaans”, depending on one’s own point of departure, one could distinguish between Afrikaner women journalists, and Afrikaans women journalists.

“Afrikaner women journalists” would refer to specifically white women belonging to the Afrikaner ethnic group, in the majority of cases descendants of the first European settlers to the Cape of Dutch, German and French Huguenot origin, and who would relate to the ethnic grouping “Afrikaner”. The language Afrikaans became the predominant language amongst these descendants, as also the predominant language amongst the so-called “coloured” people of the Cape, descendants of Malay slaves, indigenous Khoi, San and white settlers.

For the purposes of this article the reference will be to Afrikaans women journalists, which would include *white Afrikaner women*, *white Afrikaans speaking women* as well as *coloured Afrikaans speaking women*.

How did Afrikaans women journalists establish themselves over the years? Where does the “herstory” of women in South African media, but particularly in Afrikaans media, begin?

In his 2001 speech commemorating the tenth World Press Freedom day, President Thabo Mbeki said press freedom must be enjoyed by all and not just a few:

No-one can be satisfied when press freedom is mainly enjoyed by a select group...

It is the core right of all people to have access to media that expresses their opinions and which adequately reflects their life experiences and aspirations (For the 10th 2001).

The status of women and other minority groups in the media, as indicated in the Introduction, suggests we are clearly far from this ideal. This also applies to the creators of media.

If women are not represented in the media, could one conclude that they are also not media decision makers and creators? And how did Afrikaans women participate as media decision makers and creators in an era in which South Africa was dictated to by Afrikaner male decision makers and thus media creators?

Although there are no specific statistics available for Afrikaans women in media, one could conclude that the figure of women journalists currently in Southern African print media – 22 % (GMBS 2003:11) – could be representative of a substantial percentage of Afrikaans women. Also, one should take into account, in 2004, due to the dynamics in a liberated South Africa, an “Afrikaans” name in media does not imply that the person would be Afrikaans, an Afrikaner, or work at Afrikaans media. The “divisions” in the South African population was much more evident in previous decades characterised by the results of segregation, and indeed, going back to 18th and 19th century South Africa, as is postulated in the seminal work *The Afrikaners. Biography of a people* (Giliomee 2003b).

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Journalism has been described as the first rough draft of history, which, for centuries, has primarily been written by male historians. No wonder gender academics insist a *herstory* instead of *history*, should be written.

Where do women stand in the media's existing historiography?

In Europe, mass communication has only been studied academically for the past seven decades, and since the late fifties, and more specifically the late seventies, in South Africa (De Beer 1998:5). In the United States, journalism schools exist since the turn of the previous century.

The historiography of the media is a field of study in several countries, with a couple of centres for media history at tertiary institutions. Women's contributions to journalism have only been significantly studied in the last two to three decades. Foci in South African media studies do not yet include research on media history topics in a significant way, nor specifically the development or contribution of women journalists, although a couple of studies focussing on Afrikaans women's development were completed in the mid 1980s.

How did this "herstory" develop for women in the Dutch/Afrikaans language community? Who were the first Afrikaans women journalists?

Considering that the first Europeans settled at the Cape in 1652, the media took some time to develop. It was almost 150 years before the first "independent" newspaper was published at the Cape (Diederichs & De Beer 1978:87). During this development, as is reflected in the existing historiography of the media, women's names are almost invisible.

Compared to the contribution women made in media in other countries, as can be seen in the next brief overview, the question needs to be asked: did Dutch/Afrikaans women not make a contribution, or were those who contributed, ignored by historians?

Women were so scarce in the world of the "newspaper man" in the early Dutch/Afrikaans and English journalism, that most historians ignored them completely or mention one or two at most (Van der Vyver 1987:16).

The Netherlands and Britain, both forerunners in newspaper publication and also colonial rulers of South Africa, deprived their colony of a free press. The media developed slowly. This could be the reason why women entered journalism much later (Van der Vyver 1987:6). Yet, they evidently did participate, in small numbers, and as far as currently could be established, only after 1850.

The development of the press and the country contributed to give limited opportunities for the participation of women. Those who could participate, still need to be drawn out of the shadows into the discourse of current media historiography.

Landman argues that to exclude women from historical texts, is not "innocent": "It has an important influence on women's identity formation, their self-worth." (2003:66) This argument can also be applied to women in media history.

In her criticism of Giliomee's portrayal of women in his work *The Afrikaners*, she contends that women could only be found in the "stereotypical places" (2003:66).

It seems that historians are still unavoidably influenced by personal background and social experiences, and because historiography is mainly in the hands of men, it can still be described as the “fragile expressions of the limited perspectives of white, male historians” (Van der Vyver 1987:35).

The UK and the USA

It is accepted that the first weekly newspaper in the Western world was published in Germany in 1609 (Diederichs & De Beer 1998:87). The first daily was published in 1660, in the same country. The first British newspaper was published in 1665, and in America the first newspaper appeared in 1690. The first magazine was published in 1704 in Britain (Claassen 1998:120). In America the first magazine was published in 1740.

Women were the exception in Britain’s 18th century media industry (Van der Vyver 1987:5). In America, women names before 1800 were just as scarce, although research indicates they played a larger role than in Britain. At least fourteen women were publishers and printers of newspapers. They were the widows of publishers who continued the business after their spouse’s death (Van der Vyver 1987:10).

In America in 1849, a nationwide debate erupted after the editor of a women’s magazine defended long trousers as women’s apparel (Van der Vyver 1987:28). The South African Afrikaans woman’s title, *Sarie* magazine, started the debate for Afrikaans women exactly a century later, in the 1950s (Rabe 1985:158).

Early female journalists were thus also feminist activists, and contributed to the vote obtained in the following century (Van der Vyver 1987:32).

In the 20th century one breakthrough for American women journalists came through the intervention of Eleanor Roosevelt, American first lady. She only allowed female reporters to her press conferences. This policy drastically altered attitudes towards women reporters (Mills 1990:36): “She brought women into government and brought their ideas to bear on government.”

Newspapers and news agencies were compelled to appoint at least one woman, or to retain women’s posts during the Depression.

Only one American woman journalist was accredited in World War 1. In World War 2, more than 20 were accredited. The war proved that women could fulfil any conceivable male position. More importantly, it swayed public opinion in favour of the working-woman (Van der Vyver 1987:106).

The stigma of the working-woman, which lasted until well into the 20th century, made part-time journalism attractive to women. The Second World War saw the acceptance of the working, married woman as an indispensable, first class citizen. She would not relinquish her new economic independence after the war (Van der Vyver 1987: 125). Although the public ideal of womanhood tended again towards kitchen, church and children, the working-woman was never condemned in the same way.

Since the 1960s, women had more choices. More graduated, they married later and, thanks to the contraceptive the Pill, had more control over family planning. Women also

continued working when they had a family (Mills 1990:84). However, the complex roles women chose for themselves, thanks to this "liberation", were only just beginning.

The first women in Afrikaans journalism

Only two women names appear in a study by Boshoff on the Dutch/Afrikaans journalism, published in 1930. One is that of a widow who managed her husband's newspaper after his death. She was the widow of GW Silberbauer, and the publication appeared from 1844 until 1860. (This author is still trying to establish the widow's name instead of perpetuating discriminatory practices of identifying a woman by her husband's name.) The other name is that of the daughter of a Stellenbosch minister who, after his death, became editor of his newspaper, established in 1859. She was "miss" Ella Neethling (Boshoff as cited in Van der Vyver 1987:19).

It seemed the presence of a male family member was, as in America, a prerequisite for women in early South African journalism. Other women in the early development of the Dutch-Afrikaans press used pseudonyms, probably to escape the stigma of a "working" woman (Van der Vyver 1987:19).

As in Britain, a noblewoman was one of the first "recognised" women journalists in South African media. Anna, countess of Bremont, was South Africa's first "recognised" woman reporter. After singing at the 1889 founding of *The Star* in Johannesburg, it was announced that she would be joining the editorial staff (Van der Vyver 1987:38). While she described the "charming dresses" and "enchanted hats" of Johannesburgers, an American woman journalist had already spent six months in Mexico investigating corruption.

There is an obvious explanation for the slow development of the Afrikaans press: the language had to develop with the press. Unlike other countries where the press emerged from a language spoken and written for centuries, the Afrikaans press helped form the Afrikaans language. It has been said that the first actual Afrikaans ever written was political journalism – Meurant's dialogue between Klaas Waarzegger and Jan Twijfelaar (Pienaar 1979: 126).

With the effect of the Anglo-Boer war on the development of the Afrikaner, it is apparent why the Afrikaans woman had an even more difficult entry into the media. One of the consequences of the war was the patriarchal manipulation of Afrikaans women. Until recently, these repercussions were still felt. Feminism was questioned and deemed suspicious – even, and especially, by Afrikaans women (Du Toit & Krog 1994:22).

Seeing that an Afrikaner woman already petitioned for the vote in the first half of the nineteenth century, one would have expected South Africa to be at the forefront of women's rights (Du Toit & Krog 1994:24), and therefore also women participating as active journalists.

In a speech before the British commissioner in 1843, Susanna Smit, wife of the Voortrekker minister Erasmus Smit, demanded the vote. (The now famous phrase: "Rather barefoot over the Drakensberg" stemmed from this speech). However, the reaction from the British commissioner was that Smit and her generation had

“disgraced” their husbands by requesting a freedom “not recognised in any civilised community” (Du Toit & Krog 1994:26).

Half a century later, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the *Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners* (Association for True Afrikaners) discriminated against the descendants of these feisty women. Women were not allowed as “friends” of the association – and initially they could not publish in its newspaper, *Di Patriot* (Van Niekerk 1994:10). This first Afrikaans newspaper, established in 1876, and first Afrikaans magazine, *Ons Klyntji*, founded in 1896, both followed active policies of discrimination against women. The National Party also initially excluded women as members, leading to the founding of the *Vroue Nasionale Party* (Women’s National Party) (Steyn 2004:178).

The aftermath of the Anglo-Boer war, however, was the nail in the coffin for Afrikaner women and how they participated – or were allowed to participate – in public affairs. The “emergent feminism” was handicapped by the newly created term, “Mother of the Nation”. It was said “Women were supposed to concentrate on the noble task of nurturing the nation, rather than concerning themselves with filthy things like politics” (Du Toit & Krog 1994:24).

One can postulate that the Afrikaner woman emerged from the Anglo-Boer war as the classical victim – and was treated as such in an especially domineering patriarchal society for a long time.

One can state that she was, together with her black sisters and brothers, officially liberated from this patriarchal, nationalist ideology with the onset of democracy at the beginning of the 1990s. However, whereas her black sisters, thanks to their struggle history, have embraced this freedom, the Afrikaner woman still has to come to terms with her public role in a new society.

Why was the Afrikaner woman predominantly portrayed as the victim, the sufferer, and the one with no control over her life or her own destiny since the aftermath of the Anglo Boer War and for the major part of the 20th century? What caused this “eclipse” of the Afrikaner woman?

The image of women as the courageous cornerstone of her nation was anything but liberating. Instead, it bound her to an ideal of mother of the nation, synonymous with idealised “femininity” (Van Niekerk 1994:10). Feminism, human rights and equality, it seemed, was not part of the general vocabulary of turn of the century emerging Afrikaans.

Literary, cultural and governmental power in the Afrikaner community was patriarchal (Van Niekerk *ibid.*). After the Anglo-Boer war, a correlation between Afrikaner nationalism and “Motherhood of the Nation” was created in literature to contribute to the domination of women.

Politicians and cultural leaders went out of their way to set the “zusters” on the right path to the noble task of mothering the nation. This “f-word”, indeed, was unpronounceable. It was impressed upon the Afrikaner women that their war

contribution and sacrifice was greater than that of anyone else. They therefore deserved “special” treatment after the war (Du Toit & Krog 1994: 24).

The exact details of this suffering were never highlighted, which means there still is no closure for this episode in South African historiography in general, nor South African historiography focussing on women. More than 26 000 women and children died in concentration camps under the most horrific conditions. Those that survived carried with them the scars of war, including being raped by their victors. If this wartime phenomenon was not perpetrated as much by British soldiers, the British instigated indigenous loyalists to do so on their behalf (Van Bart & Scholtz 2003:38,39,44,45).

These war crimes were never investigated, and even a hundred years later, the questions of why are still not even formulated, let alone answered.

One reason that could be offered in hindsight can be that patriarchy decided on behalf of the women, and that a deep-seated pietism, together with the stigma and shame of rape resulted in nothing being done to bring this war crime out into the open. This question, though, should still be haunting a nation – at least its women – one hundred years later. The answers will not be known unless historiography also decides to offer answers to those questions, as the “Spiral of Silence” should not be tolerated.

Also, in hindsight, and with the subject of this article at hand, one cannot but postulate another question: if there were women journalists at the time, would these war crimes go un-investigated?

The 20th century

Pioneering journalist MER (ME Rothmann, 1875 – 1975) never shied away from feminism. Her writing exhibited an “attitude against social oppression that was well ahead of her time”. In one of her books, she criticised the perception that women were worth less than men or that she should project herself as the “subservient Martha” (Van Niekerk 1994:13).

MER – one of the first four full-time female students at the South African College – exhibited a feminist consciousness from early on and regarded her mother as the first Afrikaans feminist (MER 1972:73). In 1922 she was appointed as “women’s editor” at *Die Burger*. In her writings she advocated women’s rights, and in the context of her time, it must be recognised as pioneering (and brave) work. However, a statement such as the following only underlines the ideological, cultural and patriarchal atmosphere in which she worked: strongly arguing for women’s right to vote, she asks of Afrikaner men to “... help us to educate ourselves to assist you in a more efficient way” (Steyn 2004:204).

Besides these relative feminist pleas early in the 20th century, the first Afrikaans feminist book appeared in 1921: *Vrou en feminis – of iets oor die vrouevraagstuk* (*Woman and feminist – or something about the women’s issue*), by Marie du Toit, sister of the Afrikaans theologian and poet Totius. Her book was a direct response to her brother’s church politics. Gender discrimination, she wrote, is comparable with race and class prejudices (Van Niekerk 1994:2).

Why was the Afrikaans woman so oppressed – with her permission?

Her sisters in the Netherlands got the vote in 1918. While Dutch women rejoiced, their husbands apparently did not. Many South African clergymen studied in the Netherlands, where they encountered a theologian who wrote a book titled *De erepositie van de vrouw* (*The honourable position of women*) in 1914. It used God's will as justification for keeping women out of the public eye (Landman 1998:105).

Totius was among the ministers that returned under this influence. In 1920, he led the commission investigating female suffrage. As God "disapproved", he recommended that women abstain from voting in church and broader politics.

Du Toit had hoped to mobilise Afrikaner women by exposing them to a new female image. However, she, as well as her book, was soon forgotten (Du Toit & Krog 1994:27).

With the procurement of the female vote in 1930, its campaigners were treated contemptuously by politicians and the media and subjected to extreme forms of sexism (Du Toit & Krog 1994:25).

As the "flagship publication" of Nasionale Pers (initially De Nasionale Pers, now officially Naspers), *Die Burger* (initially *De Burger*) is an almost-perfect case study for the development of the Afrikaans female journalist. This article will further focus on some aspects of Afrikaans women journalists' development in print media as reflected in this company.

It is a well-known fact that this newspaper was the direct result of Afrikaner nationalism, established in 1915 in the town of Stellenbosch with the sole purpose of advancing Afrikaner nationalism (see also Muller 1990).

Women played a "cosmetic" role when it was launched. "Mrs Christiaan Marais", identified with her husband's name, was formally photographed where she stood with the first proof at *De Burger's* presses (Van der Vyver 1987:37).

The first (part-time) woman on the editorial team was Maria Cillié, or Mrs Dr G.G. Cillié as readers knew her – not only by her husband's name, but also his title. She was the wife of a previous rector of the University of Stellenbosch, the town in which the newspaper was established and with which, through many decades, existed a close relationship. (The Cilliés' involvement was to be continued by son Piet, first as reporter, later editor and finally as chairman of Naspers, and also founder of the Department of Journalism at Stellenbosch University.)

Although a shortage of men saw female editorial staff being used for general news work, it was "unthinkable" that they could be appointed to the general editorial team. The reason: a woman could not be sent on any assignment, not to the court or on "less pleasant" stories (Van der Vyver 1987:115).

The first Afrikaans magazine, *De Boerevrou*, was established in 1919. This was MER's journalism training school. The founder of *Die Boerevrou*, as it was later spelled, Mabel Malherbe, was the first female mayor of Pretoria and the second woman to be elected to parliament (Rabe 1985:21). She was the niece of well-known Afrikaans

poet and newspaper editor, Eugène Marais. Although a highly empowered woman and individualist, this magazine stood in the atmosphere of Afrikaner Nationalism, and also embraced the “mother of the nation” concept as postulated by reigning Afrikaner patriarchy (Kruger 1991).

MER strongly influenced the next generation of female journalists. If the men at *Die Burger* sometimes thought she laid feminism “on a bit thick”, the *Burger*-journalist and later renowned linguist, Louis Hiemstra, said they “actually could not challenge her reasoned exposition” (1975:66).

MER wrote in 1950, at the age of 75, that women no longer, as some men thought, sought windmills to storm:

While men pay thousands of women less than men for the same work, how can we be convinced that we are dealing with a windmill? (MER 1950:23).

Later, she referred to a 1922 article: “Many people tend to characterise the whole female movement as sinful. But, it is not. It is just as sinful as the flooding of an overfull dam” (MER 1972: 211).

MER did not hesitate to criticise “big” Afrikaner names, like the Afrikaans lawyer, poet and author as well as colleague at *Die Burger*, Langenhoven, who wrote, amongst others, that women should not be allowed into the legal profession (Van der Vyver 1987:85).

She was a mentor for several Afrikaans journalists. Alba Boucher, first female deputy editor in the Naspers stable, and Audrey Blignault, who for years wrote a column for the same magazine (Rabe 1985:110), was known as her “Kaapse kinders” (Cape children) (Steyn 2004:419).

In terms of the professional practice of journalism, she shared her knowledge generously, as could be concluded from various sources (Blignault 1975:14; Botha 1975:26; Boucher 1975: 29). Today, she is not just merited for the groundbreaking work she did for women, but also because she was “according to every criteria, a remarkable reporter” (Van der Vyver 1987:93).

The obstacles for women are evident if one reads what Markus Viljoen wrote about the position of women as reporters (the *Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns* or Academy of Science and Arts medal for outstanding journalism is named after him; Viljoen was also the first South African journalist with formal journalism training – that of the Columbia School of Journalism):

Her position is completely subordinate. ...in the ordinary journalism she is mostly saddled with the specifically female matters, like tea parties, marriages and the like (Viljoen 1953:25).

The Afrikaans press – as others – “banned” women journalists to the women’s pages as it was the praxis of the time. This was echoed in the English press, although it is commonly accepted that women in this sector managed to break away from the women’s pages sooner.

Until after 1945, women at *Die Burger* were only appointed to the women's editorial team – but not as members of the full-time staff. Official policy also forced them to resign if they married (Van der Vyver 1987:95). Even if a woman decided not to marry, a career as professional journalist was not guaranteed, as she would not be appointed full-time.

To be regarded as a professional journalist, one had to have certain experience, one of which was to work in the night newsroom – the “engine” room of a morning paper. Women at *Die Burger* were not “permitted” to work in the night newsroom, although, like another pioneering Afrikaans journalist, Rykie van Reenen, they were prepared to work there.

After MER, Van Reenen was the second women's name in the development of Afrikaans journalism. It is fitting that the Naspers fellowship in the Stellenbosch Journalism department is named the Rykie van Reenen-Fellowship in honour of her.

She was a pioneering career professional who became the first female journalist appointed to the highest executive position in the Afrikaans and South African journalism – as acting editor of one of the mainstream newspapers, a milestone for her time. Van Reenen was also the only woman journalist to receive the Academy's Markus Viljoen medal for journalism and to be granted an honorary doctorate. [Audrey Blignault also received an honorary doctorate, but this recognised her literary contribution as essayist, not journalist, as did Antjie Krog, also for her literary contribution, although the commendation referred to her journalistic contribution in terms of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's hearings (Graduation 2004:19).]

Another “pioneer for women” was, according to one study, one of paper and ink rather than flesh and blood: the Afrikaans women's magazine *Sarie* (Van der Vyver 1987:135).

Unlike Naspers' other magazines motivated by “serving” the nation, the business ethic behind *Sarie*, launched in 1949, was clear: “no service without profit” (Spies 1992:378). It seems that even the company's women's magazine had to contend with discrimination.

The magazine soon proved to be a success in her target market – and fulfilled the objectives of management. She brought with her other important milestones for women. Naspers now had to appoint female journalists. In 1951, married women could now stay on as “temporary staff” – and they were temporarily appointed every six months (Van der Vyver 1987:149). *Sarie* also empowered her reader with relevant information – such as articles on women and their legal position (Rabe 1985:158).

Discrimination against women journalists however was still widespread – and accepted. Until the 1970s, the woman's page editor of *Die Burger* never attended the daily news conference with the editors of other sections (Van der Vyver 1987:175).

Some milestones for women at Naspers/*Die Burger* included:

The first female sub-editor to be appointed, in 1978, in the night newsroom was Marie-Louise van Heerden (Van der Vyver 1987:195). Mercy Morkel was the first coloured woman at *Die Burger* in the late 1970s. The author of this article was the first woman

to “man” one of *Die Burger*’s four satellite offices in 1980 (yet, after her return, she discovered that women staffers getting married still had to re-apply for their jobs as “a formality” (personal experience)). Latiefa Mobarra was the first coloured woman in the night newsroom in the early 1980s (Van der Vyver 1987:194). The first woman chief sub-editor at *Die Burger*, Irna van Zyl, was appointed in 1985, and Igna Schneider was promoted as the first woman news editor in 1999.

However, a handbook for journalists, written primarily by male Naspers journalists and published in 1982, still consistently referred to male practitioners, with the “men of the press” setting the tone in the introduction (Cillié 1982:n.p.). The mythical “newspaperman” and references without exception to the male pronoun, is the accepted form in this work, ironically called *Joernalistiek vandag (Journalism today)*.

To his credit, the chairperson of Naspers, Ton Vosloo, said in 2003 in an obituary on another pioneering woman journalist, Rieta Burgers (2003:4):

She has been passed over, like so many other capable women journalists, for far, far too long for editorship for magazines mainly for women. This has been rectified, but Naspers, with the wisdom of hindsight, has lost too much because of its male chauvinism, which now belongs for good to the history.

CONCLUSION

This article, by highlighting the development of Afrikaans women journalists in print media, set out to draw attention to the fact that the contribution of women journalists in our media history as subject to be researched is still a neglected field of study.

Suppressed in terms of economical and political power for almost a century, it is still difficult for Afrikaans women in general to re-capture that political independence they had in the 18th and 19th century.

Since the early 1990s it has been indicated time and again that the South African society was as sexist as it was racist, and that historians should have a priority to highlight the first (Landman 2003:67).

Furthermore, Landman argues, historians are needed that can do two things: they must indicate how Afrikaans women are still captives in a subculture in which they cannot express themselves politically in public, and secondly, that the alternative histories of Afrikaans women should be told that do not appear in mainstream history such as Giliomee’s book (2003:66).

The same can be applied to media history. Those texts that do exist, do not acknowledge the contribution, against all odds, of women.

It is hoped that this article will generate interest culminating in future detailed studies, not only in the history of Afrikaans women journalists, but also that of all women, and also the role of journalists of colour – women and men – who had to overcome even bigger stumbling blocks to pursue their chosen profession.

In the current South African context labour legislation makes gender discrimination illegal. While women are more prevalent in editorial teams and decision-making

processes, they have an historical handicap in terms of senior managerial positions.

By studying the past, and drawing inspiration from those pioneers who opened up new possibilities in a time when women were regarded as inferior to men, it is hoped that a new generation's research will transpose this history in its contexts and complexities, to serve as inspiration for what still needs to be done in order to build a society in which all are treated equal, with equal opportunities, and accordingly, can contribute equally.

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