

CHAPTER SIX

Gender, images and globalisation

Key issues

- Globalisation of the media enforces “globalised norms” of gender.
- Globalised norms are produced and chosen by processes controlled in the so-called “first world” (ownership and decision-making structures).
- These images are distributed by new media technology throughout the world, including, increasingly, throughout Africa.
- Globalised images of gender are almost always commodity-based: “sex sells” on an international scale.



Demonstrations against globalisation during the World Conference on Sustainable Development, August 2002.

Introduction

Globalisation has brought an influx of images from the “global village” – the truly overwhelming number of images produced through high-technology media, and spread all over the world.

Increasingly, visual imagery in the press adopts and promotes “globalised” norms and standards. Practically, this means that the press prints visuals generated by international and “first world” based news, picture, entertainment and advertising agencies. Many of these messages come through entertainment agencies. Others are promoted as advertising imagery, through international corporations. Increasingly, we find photojournalism – visual images produced to record the news – filtered through conglomerates such as CNN and Reuters. These carry images of gender and gender roles generated, chosen, or moderated by staff based in the “first world.”

The result of this “globalisation” of imagery is that we are bombarded with pictures from the first-world of what is “masculine” and “feminine”, and all the areas that make up the relations between them (from the nuclear family, love and marriage, to concepts of war, of HIV/AIDS, and so on). Although we see vast numbers of these images, covering the vast range of subjects and promoting a wide list of products, this imagery reflects quite a narrow perspective on gender.

Exercise: Who is the sexiest woman in the world?

Kick off the discussion on globalisation with the article in **Handout twenty** entitled “Who is the sexiest woman in the world?” Discuss the following questions:

- What attitudes towards gender are presented?
- Is there a African woman in the pictures? Why?
- Where were the images taken, and by whom? How were they distributed to the Southern African print media?



Training tip: There is not a single African woman in the line up. Even on issues of beauty, Africa is marginalized. Everything about these pictures accentuates the physical attributes of women – as one participant put it: “it is like a flesh market”.

Exercise: Now give out the article on globalisation in **Handout twenty-one** by South African photojournalist Cedric Nunn and use it to lead a discussion on the pros and cons of globalisation.



Training tip: Although globalisation threatens to marginalize women, and African women even further, the new technologies offer possibilities for creating alternative images and distributing them at much lower cost than before. If we cannot halt globalisation, perhaps we need to see how best to “harness” the advantages it has to offer.

Globalised distribution

Many editors will print global images in preference to local ones – even where the local images are more relevant. The local production is expected to “maintain international standards”. These standards might not be met by a home-made image. The technical back-up, the equipment, and the skills to get the same degree of “glamour” may not be available.

An international, on-line photo, advertising, or news agency can come up with technically excellent illustrations for practically any subject, using the latest equipment and styles, all with the added gloss of international glamour. Where the local publication is partly or wholly linked to an international source taking pictures from the parent organisation is cheaper.

Recently, the new editor of a Southern African edition of an international fashion magazine said that she would try to make sure that up to a third of the images in her magazine would be locally produced. She considered this a giant step forward for localisation. Even South Africa’s state-owned broadcast media only requires that 15 percent of its music be locally produced.

THE SPICE PAGE

Here are some of the current hopefuls ... rounded off by the reigning champ



Nicole Fox



Lee-Anne Liebenberg



Gina Athans



Kerry and Tracy McGregor



Anna Kournikova...sexiest woman, for now

Hunt is on for sexiest women in the world

STAFF REPORTER

So who, exactly, is the Sexiest Women in the World? *FHM* magazine says that, currently, the title is held by tennis star Anna Kournikova who pushed the previous year's winner Jennifer Lopez down to fourth place in the rankings.

Now *FHM* has opened the voting again for this year's 100 Sexiest Women in the World poll. The poll, "the biggest magazine promotion of its kind" according to publisher Louis Eksteen, is conducted simultaneously in 16 territories around the world. Men best of the public nominate the women they find the most delectable and results are announced

at the end of May. "In as much as the poll-topper is inevitably an international superstar because of the global scope of the voting, it's always interesting to see who South Africa's sexiest celebrities are, and how they stack up against the international girls," says *FHM* South Africa editor Brendan Cooper. Do guys prefer blondes? According to the poll's vital statistics - yes.

Six of the top 10 women placed in 2002 are blonde, including the top three, Kournikova, McGregor and Britney Spears. *FHM*'s Sexiest Women in South Africa 2002 was lingerie model Kerry McGregor. She came second overall in the local *FHM* poll, narrowly beaten to the top spot by Kournikova. Other local lovelies who made impressive placings were

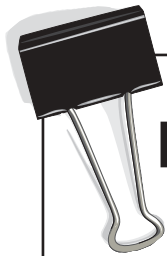
Charizé Theisen (10), current *FHM* covergirl Hilkebrand (12), and 5FM DJ's Nicole Fox (13) and Zuzanna Jurdina (15). Rounding out the top 20 of the poll was Cape Town model Christina Storm (17). And who do South African women rate? In the past poll where voter's gender details were recorded, a full 23% of votes were recorded from women.

"There are clear differences between who South African men and women consider 'sexy,'" says Eksteen. "Geri Halliwell appeared in the men's top 100 but received absolutely no votes from women. Likewise Denise van Outen, Jaime Pressly and Bianca Amato. Women voted for stars like Naomi Campbell, Natasha Sutherland, Janet Jackson and Hunter Tylo, none of whom

made the men's 100 Sexiest list." Votes can be cast online at www.fhm100sexiest.co.za or via SMS. Vodacom subscribers can send a text message naming their sexiest woman to 082-003-0123 whilst MTN subscribers can text to 083-920-8071. People who vote can SMS as many votes as they like, but only one name can be sent per SMS. Voting closes on Friday May 9.



handout twenty
Hunt is on for the sexiest woman in the world



handout twenty-one

Costs and benefits of globalisation

By Cedric Nunn*

Globalisation has brought us the networking of the world. Imaging benefits from this networking. Mostly, economic powerhouses have entrenched themselves in these networks. Big capital takes the major gains. But other groupings of people can use the same technology effectively. The digital revolution empowers us to “talk back”.

Other people have imaged Africa, most often in blood, revolution and coups. Photojournalism’s face of Africa has been of poverty, famine, rebels and exploitation. The problem is that the media focuses only on those – and this creates an unhealthy situation. In Scandinavia people talk about “good things that happen” – but that does not happen here in Africa. In Johannesburg we only see urban decay. When we do have really good news, it will get a paragraph one inch long in the local newspaper and no space at all in publications overseas.

I get despondent; it is a mission impossible, with very powerful forces at play. Our media houses in South Africa have come into black hands, and you can’t even tell it from reading the papers.

The narrative of race links to gender. When we look at gender, these prejudices become even more extreme. Publications demonstrate their bias: men predominate, they are in control of publications, they decide on what is culture.

We live in male-dominated newsrooms and culture. Men go to a bar with other men, where they drink and talk. They say women managers won’t make it: they will get irrational and can’t cope.

As media we are often producing for the outside audience – not for ourselves. Modern media tools are not accessible to our masses, to our communities. We have to think about the money issues. Often, a photographer needs to feed into Reuters to ensure he or she is paid. It is

hard for local journalists to get into rural areas, even in their own countries. But overseas correspondents get sent there and send out their stories.

We absorb from the international media the paradigms of what we are producing, and who we are producing for. When we do produce for MTV for Channel O, we are not producing about ourselves. The outside world doesn’t want to hear us. Africans in Africa create less than one per cent of international news. Intra-Africa exchange is still very poor.

African women have the least access to defining their own identities and telling us who they are and who they want to be.

But there is ground for optimism. In the Biennale in Bamako, images produced by African photographers about Africa showed a very different photography. That shows we can produce to a high standard, and we can reflect a true reality.

Is the new technology helping us to advance? The Internet is a powerful tool. As impoverished as we are, we need to be able to use these technologies to our benefit.

Many rural areas do have Internet access. Women in particular do not have access. But, in 1998, there was one Internet café in Bamako. There are 200 now. An Internet café can bring information to a group.

We need to deconstruct the international images and, in turn, we need to create Africa-based images of gender. It is possible in most newsrooms to find digital cameras. Women do have access to these. There is a possibility of impact there, which we need to exploit consciously.

**Cedric Nunn is a South African photojournalist*

Joining in, and being left out, of the global markets

It is not easy for local photographers to either compete with globalised sources, or to input into them. Access to global image banks requires technological links as well as contacts. This often comes down to where you went to college, or did your internship in media studies. First world journalists tend to know, and work with, other first world journalists. Globalised media makes technical demands that the local journalist may not have the equipment or technology to meet. Major global news organisations will automatically send a camera or television crew to a third-world disaster site, rather than contact a local photographer to cover the event.

Further, even where a local photojournalist is employed, she or he is expected to feed international presumptions and appetites for information. “Local” photojournalists may face an uphill task when they attempt to publish images on gender that counter “global norms”. One result is that where locally-based journalists do supply the international media, they quickly learn to tailor their products to that “international market”.

Exercise: Tailor made?

Do the pictures and stories in **Handout twenty-two** reflect the process of “tailoring” concepts of beauty to the international market? If they do, how is this done in the words and images?

Cultural hegemony: what is beauty anyway?

International media, the entertainment and fashion industries promote globalised “gender norms”. Historically, these “global norms” have also included explicit racial and cultural biases around what constitutes “beauty” or a “good-looking” appearance. Also, these “norms” are constructed by industry: fashionable colours for clothes and expensive make-up may deliberately display light skins. There has been a long, sad and damaging history of products aimed at lightening skins that naturally are no light. Although some effort has gone into identifying the most damaging of these products and rejecting racially biased stereotypes used to promote these products, many of the underlying “likes” and “dislikes” around race continue.

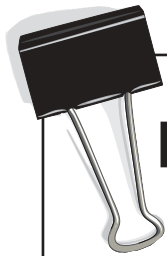
Spokespeople for global media often promote images that they call “multi-cultural” or “cross-cultural”. In practice, this means that international agencies and companies increasingly use models of colour, and designs incorporating non-western traditional clothing. The problem is that the producers (located in the first world) filter these images with an explicit intention of making the image acceptable in many places in the world – of which the first rule is, that it has to play in New York.

Exercise: Is beauty in the eye of the beholder?

Discuss the letters about model Alec Wek in **Handout twenty-three**. What concepts of beauty are being promoted or rejected by the writers? In your community, are there other standards of what is beautiful than those showed in the globalised press? What are these? Have a look also at the article entitled: “Search for face of Zambia begins.”



Training tip: Many communities define “a beautiful woman” as very different from the western concept of light skin, long smooth hair, and ultra-thin body. For instance, a West African mask uses light skin to indicate death, while slit eyes (rather than large round ones) and showing teeth in a smile denote beauty. Traditionally, in Africa, being large is a sign of beauty and wholesomeness while being thin is frowned upon. Globalisation is changing many of these notions of beauty and promoting homogenous norms that have a strong western bias towards the blonde, blue eyed, slim woman. This explains why in the earlier exercise – the search for the most beautiful woman in the world – not a single African woman featured. The second article in the handout makes the point that beauty has many faces. Is this now to be swallowed up in one notion of what is beautiful? How can Africa maintain its own identity and define its own realities within the multi-billion dollar, technology and multinational driven image industry?



handout twenty-two

Whose standards?

14

Sharp suiter hits the target

LOOKING at the 1994 snap, who would have thought that Nkosama Dlamini-Zuma ANC MP and minister, would end up a snappy dresser? Her wardrobe and career received a much needed boost when she became the foreign affairs minister. As health minister Dlamini-Zuma sported “ugly aunty” traditional garb but since moving up the ladder she has been transformed into a snazzy dresser in stylish power suits and fancy handbags.



Saturday Star, 24 May 2003.



handout twenty-three (a)

Does beauty have a single definition?

Now whites tell us what is beautiful

Just as we all can make a distinction between right and wrong, so we can form judgments on beauty and ugliness. Why not I feel surprised at the assertion that white people see Alek Wek as beautiful?

Traditionally, whites have wanted to improve their values on beauty and now they think they have a monopoly on aesthetics.

Originally they wanted us to believe small, sharp noses or thin lips were indicators of beauty. Now they express a different view and expect us to accept this imposition of judgment.

No, people may disdain imposition of beauty. Contrary to what the writer believes, Africanism is not about the blind glorification of ourselves. Therefore, Wek is ugly in the eyes of some blacks not because she is "too black", but because her face is not perceived in a manner that, in their eyes, constitutes attractiveness.

Sharp noses

It is also interesting to note that many people use the adjective "striking" to describe her beauty should not shock people, as the writer thinks. It transcends race, tribe and pigmentation.

Slain bodies, for starters, do not make beautiful faces as our Western insurers think. Although one may complement the other, it does not necessarily follow that when you have a bigger body you are ugly, or the other way round. Also small sharp noses or thin lips are not a measure of beauty.

I am also rather baffled by the implications of this paragraph. "Surprisingly" in South Africa, where there is a growing sense of Africanism and pride in black culture, Wek continues to be black people, too? What a jaundiced view of Africa! It also is interesting to our eyes, we have a right without consulting our Western experts on beauty - in any way.

Although Africanism is about re-claiming our rights, it also recognizes the distinction between bad and good, as it appreciates that some people are more beautiful than others.

All roads lead to Johannesburg.

True African allure is epitomised by women like Alek, not Barbie Dolls

people of East Africa by saying Alek "looks more like a girl from rural Kenya-Nairobi than a model".

There are more beautiful girls in that part of the country than all the pretty models we see on TV and in magazines. Girls from Kenya-Nairobi are not exposed, but the talent is there, and the beauty is there.

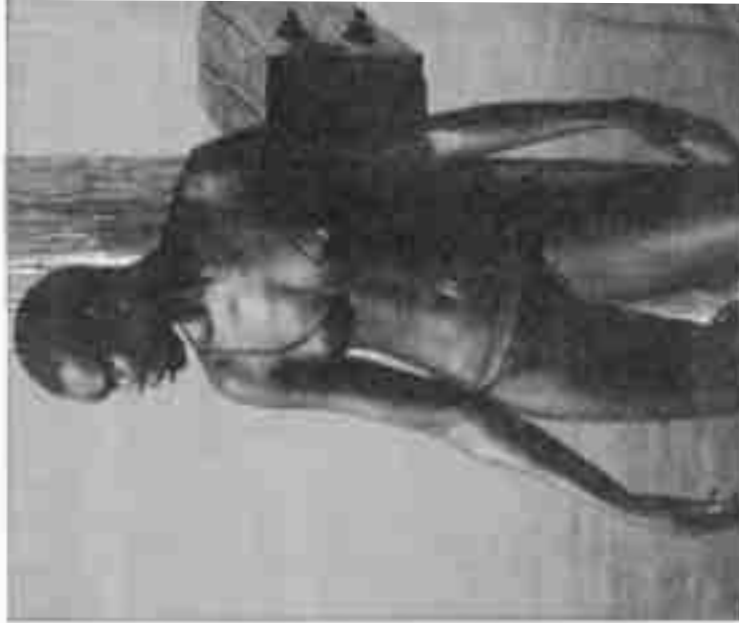
It is not about the beauty of African girls in Kenya-Nairobi. I am married to a girl from the Sakoniko family, deep in the rural Kenyan-Malindi area. I met my last girlfriend, that is, my girlfriend, wife, fiancée, or whatever, will never match her.

Thank you Thelma! It is not a girl who is not a girl, but a girl who is not a girl. Alek Wek does not represent a true African woman. Most of the models we see on TV and in magazines are not African women.

A black woman does not have to look like a Barbie Doll for her to be beautiful. Alek Wek is 100% African, whether her name is Alek Wek or not.

It is not about the beauty of African girls in Kenya-Nairobi. I am married to a girl from the Sakoniko family, deep in the rural Kenyan-Malindi area. I met my last girlfriend, that is, my girlfriend, wife, fiancée, or whatever, will never match her.

I Marlowe Eshale



BODY BLOWS: Scathing remarks have been made about Alek Wek's figure and face, but readers have sprung to her defence

Search for Face of Zambia begins

By **KELVIN KACHINGWE**

12 contestants to slug it out ...

THE search for Face of Zambia begins tonight in Lusaka at Le reference with 12 contestant all jostling to be among the four to represent the province in the finals slated for December.

Organisers Soul-Jam Production co-ordinator Dennis M ulenga said they would select four beauties from each province starting with Lusaka next weekend before going to Chingola the following week.

This will mean there will be 36 contestants from across the country at the finals in December.

He said the finals will be held at Hotel Inter-Continental at which funds raised will be donated to the Kenneth Kaunda Children of Africa Foundation (KKCAF).

However, at next weeks semi-finals in Lusaka, the contestants will be Mujane M abobbbolo, Kalwa Tembo, Sibeso M anuando,



•WHO among these beauties will represent Lusaka Province in the Face of Zambia contest?

Anne Mutale, N chin unya Gwanu, Julie Gwanu and Zitha Ngulube.

Others are Diana M ontiah, Getrude M uleya, Victoria M uutufela, Pamela M panza

and Melamie M abwe. M ulenga said the 12 will battle it out in four categories

- Introduction, Cocktail, Traditional and Casual. He also said unlike in the

past contestants, the contestants will be expected to wag their catwalk in Zambian music.



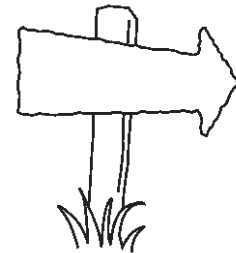
handout twenty-three (b)

Gender in the African “disaster”

Many people in Africa feel that the globalised media today promotes an overwhelming negative picture of Africa – the Great African Disaster. Endless pictures of war, starvation, drought and AIDS, compacted by criminal violence and corruption, leave the world believing the continent can only be a basket case. And globalised photojournalism has consistently reinforced this over-riding image.

African photographers point out that often this portrayal of Africa is imposed by the outside world. Very few of these images are of people living and working in Africa as they see themselves, and as they portray themselves to others. As Cedric Nunn notes in the earlier handout, “African” in Africa make less than one percent of globalised media images on Africa.

This global image of the African disaster is fundamentally a gendered image. Earlier we looked at how gender bias and stereotypes build upon racial and colonial pre-conceptions, leading to today’s global stereotypes of Africa.



Chapter Four: Gender and images: a brief history

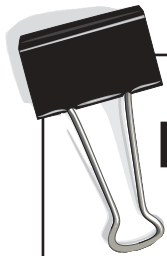
Women are shown with starving babies, helpless, immobilised, unable to give them even basic food. Their breasts are shrunken with poverty. Their homes are destroyed with war, and they are left defenceless against marauding men with weapons. They are incapable of coaxing a crop from the land. Note the key, repeated stereotype linked to being a woman: she is hopeless and helpless. Again, these images are not necessarily untrue: but are they telling the whole story?

Men are shown as equally failing. They are skeletal from AIDS. They engage in mindlessly vicious and destructive violence (where men are supposed to be protective and productive). Men at war in Africa are portrayed not as conquering heroes, but as a range of monsters engaging in anything from rape to cannibalism; they have no families, not caring for others, and certainly no ideals or beliefs that would explain their violence.

Exercise: Discuss the two images taken in conflict situations in Africa in **Handout twenty-four**. Who do participants think were the photographers? What were the differences in their approach to the images? What different messages are conveyed?



Training tip: The first picture is from a photo agency, while Mozambican photojournalist Joel Chiziane took the second photo in a refugee camp in Mozambique at the peak of the drought and war in that country. While the first image is one of despair, Chiziane’s photo is a classic example of how a local photographer may see things differently. His picture is a tribute to the triumph of the human spirit.



handout twenty-four

“Disaster” through different lenses



Mail and Guardian, May 2003.



Photo: Joel Chiziane

Discuss:

Who do you think were the photographers?

What were the differences in their approach to the images?

What different messages are conveyed?