

## Tabloids in Southern Africa

By Themba Mahleka

Much debate in the media world currently focuses on tabloids and tabloidisation in the news media. It would seem that tabloids are indeed a thriving part of our Southern African media landscape. Regardless of how we define such a tabloid, they are likely here to stay, in all their forms. Surveying nine countries in Southern Africa, there are 23 papers considered “tabloid” and 134 considered “mainstream.”

Another notable trend is that the majority of tabloids found in the region are in English. Out of the 23 tabloid newspapers found in the region only 5 of them were not in English. These were; *Kaapse Son* (Afrikaans) of South Africa, *Spoti Starehe* and *Sani Newspaper* (both in Swahili) of Tanzania, *Kwayedza* (Shona) and *Umthunywa* (Ndebele) of Zimbabwe.

One potential problem with these figures is that defining tabloids is an illusive endeavour. Conducting a survey of tabloids that exist in the Southern Africa region seems like an easy task – maybe an afternoon of work, a few phone calls and a brief report write-up. Not as simple as it sounds.

In undertaking just such a task, I encountered various obstacles. Initially, it was locating people from the various countries who could assist with information. The next, reaching a meeting of minds insofar as what a tabloid actually is.

Traditionally, a tabloid is a newspaper with a particular format and/or size. Today the term is used more and more to refer to a newspaper

which mainly focuses on, or focuses to great extent on, bizarre stories, celebrity stories, gossip columns, agony aunts, has lots of pictures (some controversial), etc. At this stage, I had to stress the point of content as opposed to format.

A fresh hurdle presented itself – some individuals I liaised with stated that there were no newspapers with content solely of that nature. I then had to stress the point that, most tabloids like *The Sun* (in South Africa) for instance will report on current affairs or “serious news” (a term which was used a lot during my correspondence) but will focus more on the less “serious news.”

Another problem was that it is a lot easier to obtain information on what newspapers may be present in a certain country, but more challenging to a certain which of those newspapers is a tabloid newspaper. It is largely at the discretion of the person you are liaising with, to decide which paper is a tabloid and which paper is not. The obvious danger of this is that one may have distorted information, one would have to call four or five people (including representative of the particular tabloid) to make sure that the tabloid is in fact a tabloid.

After scaling all the obstacles (taking what information I could in certain situations), my initial analysis was that, countries with smaller populations, like Lesotho (1 900 000) and Swaziland (1 146 050) for example, reported that they did not have a single tabloid. Another

interesting fact is that there are 7 newspapers in Lesotho and 5 in Swaziland – this is significantly fewer newspapers than other countries.

Countries with greater populations, South Africa (46 900 000) and Tanzania (32 000 000) for example, not only had tabloids but also had a fair number (comparatively) of different tabloids. South Africa has 7 tabloid newspapers, and Tanzania has 5 tabloid newspapers.

Botswana, with fairly smaller population (1 690 000), however, does not fall into this seemingly emergent pattern of, the smaller the population the less tabloid newspapers available (if any). Botswana did report having 3 tabloid newspapers, the difference being that Botswana also had more newspapers in general (9 other newspapers). It seems, at least at a

preliminary level, that the greater the variety of media (or newspapers) available, the greater the chances of there being tabloids.

COUNTRY	“MAINSTREAM” NEWSPAPER	TABLOIDS
Botswana	9	3
Lesotho	7	0
Malawi	7	2
Namibia	13	1
South Africa	31	7
Swaziland	5	0
Tanzania	24	5
Zambia	14	3
Zimbabwe	24	2
TOTAL	134	23

# TRUTH

The *Daily Voice* is a success because it speaks to the people, writes **Fiona Forde**

**SENSATIONAL, over the top tabloid trash was how some of my Johannesburg colleagues described our Western Cape sister paper, the Daily Voice. Man eats man. Dog eats baby. 7-year-old rapes 8-year-old to death, then lives in my toilet. I saw plus my child. Boy raped. Girl missing. Child dead. All this in the heart of the Mother City. Eish! You don't make it up if you read, they want to say it. Only that were true. Throughout last week I rode with the reporters as they produced another edition of life in the Cape Flats. Each morning I were out there, pounding the ground, talking to contacts about what was doing down in the township, only to come back and see for front page to showcase their gory tales. And sadly, I can vouch for just about every word printed. The week got off to a particularly bad start when mutilated baby's body was splashed across the full page. The month-old infant was found in the backyard of a Capetown home with its two tiny legs sticking from a cloth nappie. The baby's head and its had been neatly hacked off. It was found with eye-bow nibbling at its death. Tuesday brought the story of the 10-year-old who'd been stabbed to death when he refused to hand in his bike to a 16-year-old thug. It was also the day the gay nanny did a runner in a bee's skirt and high heels, leaving her two ang diarrhoea all alone, prompting the witty headline: 'Homo and away'. Wednesday brought little sepiwava, with a cartooning. The man had been found at sea for three months but had been seen in the...**

**BARBARIC**  
 DO YOU HAVE A STORY? SMS 32832

**CANNIBAL IN THE CAPE**  
 DO YOU HAVE A STORY? SMS 32832

**HOMO AND AWAY**  
 DO YOU HAVE A STORY? SMS 32832

**NAJWA ISN'T MAD**  
 DO YOU HAVE A STORY? SMS 32832

Patrick Chashe, the National Assembly's home affairs committee chairperson.  
 "It's the pornography, the morality, the moral lack of the Daily Voice that bothers me."  
 "It's not just about what they say, but the way they say it."

"It's the kind of language these people relate to. If they didn't, tabloids like the Voice wouldn't be enjoying the success they are."  
 "Essentially, it's those who don't read the tabloids who have most issue with them. Heated debates

Cape Flats tabloid in South Africa growing in popularity