

## SECTION: HISTORY

**FOCUS AREA:** Journalism as a history chronicle, journalists as chroniclers of their times.

**TITLE:** Women's magazines in a 21<sup>st</sup> century democratic South Africa: Merely parrot-talk or truly shape-shifters?

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### ABSTRACT

The magazine as a “social barometer” of a particular society is widely acknowledged. Furthermore, it is argued that women's magazines provide essential information about society and cultures, thus helping readers think about themselves as contributors in self-governing societies. Since Nelson Mandela was sworn in as South Africa's first democratically elected black president on 10 May 1994, the country's socio-political sphere changed significantly. As such, this paper analyses the editor's letter in *True Love* – an archetypal South African women's magazine aimed at black readers – during 2004, 2009 and 2014 when the first general elections of the 21<sup>st</sup> century took place. The aim of this paper is to understand what the messages in the editor's letter are about society and culture, realising that magazines mirror society and society mirrors magazines. It explores whether the editorials in this selected sample of *True Love* magazines can be described as merely “parrot-talk” or truly “shape shifters”?

### KEYWORDS

Democracy, editor's letter, message, social barometer, society, South Africa, *True Love*, women's magazines

### INTRODUCTION

It is exactly twenty years since South Africa's historic transition from an authoritarian state under a white minority rule to a widely celebrated democracy. Although the scale and the scope of the transformation South Africa embarked on after the first democratic elections in 1994 is without precedence, it is not without a magnitude of challenges. It is argued that in South Africa's search for a new future the country's social problems of poverty, unemployment and inequality intensified, and that the challenges of South Africa's change to a democracy include political, economic and social transformation at each and every level of the post-1994 society (Ramphela, 2008; Venter & Landsberg, 2011; Dikeni, 2012; Terreblanche, 2012; Du Preez, 2013).

Media content as a means of monitoring the “cultural temperature” of society has first been acknowledged by the sociologist Max Weber in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (MacNamara, 2005). More specifically, the magazine as “social barometer” of a particular society is justly documented (Johnson & Prijatelj, 2007:88-130). Furthermore, it is argued that women's magazines present fundamental information about society and cultures, thus “helping us think about ourselves as participants in a democratic society” (Campbell, 2000:270-306; also see Greenfield & Reid, 1998; McKay, 2000; Gough-Yates, 2003). In addition, the editor's letter or the editorial – an opinion piece written by the editor that appears within the first few pages of the magazine – is regarded as a powerful instrument for “persuading, inspiring, illuminating, informing and connecting with readers” (Johnson & Prijatelj, 2007:246). As such, this paper analyses the editor's letter in *True Love*<sup>2</sup> – an

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on Elna Rossouw's doctoral study titled “A qualitative content analysis of the editor's letter in three archetypal South African women's magazines during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” – registered in January 2014 at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. The focus of the broader study includes *Sarie*, *Fair Lady* and *True Love* as examples of archetypal South African women's magazines. Elna ([erossouw@uj.ac.za](mailto:erossouw@uj.ac.za)) is a lecturer in the Department of Journalism, Film and Television at the University of Johannesburg. Prof Lizette Rabe ([lrabe@sun.ac.za](mailto:lrabe@sun.ac.za)), supervisor of this study, is coordinator of the MA and PhD programmes of the Department of Journalism at Stellenbosch University.

<sup>2</sup>*True Love* was originally established by Drum Publications in 1972 and sold to Nasionale Pers (Naspers) in 1984. As such, *True Love* is generally accepted as the longest running women's magazine in local magazine publishing history serving the black market in South Africa. Therefore, *True Love* is described as an archetypal or “alpha” magazine in her respective market. The latest ABC circulation figure for the monthly publication is 61 223 (Jan-Mar 2014) and the total

archetypal South African women's magazine aimed at black readers – at a specific time in the history of South Africa's democratic dispensation. Although this research – which resembles a pilot study – focuses specifically on the editor's letter published in the year of the first three general elections in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, i.e. in 2004, 2009 and 2014, it must be seen in context to South Africa's first general democratic election in 1994 when Nelson Mandela became president, and the election in 1999 when Thabo Mbeki became South Africa's second democratically elected leader. As the timeframe of the broader study focuses on the editor's letter since the immediate start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (1 January 2001) up to 31 December 2014 – the year in which the fifth election took place – this study will only analyse the editor's letter in *True Love* during 2004, 2009 and 2014 (up to June). The aim is to understand what the messages in the editor's letter are about society and culture, within the theoretical framework of contemporary political theory, realising that magazines “are lively engaging societal resources, affecting the world around them and, in turn, being affected themselves by that world” (Johnson & Prijatel, 2007:89). In other words: what influence do magazines have, in this particular case, the editor's letter, over a specific period in *True Love* magazine, in terms of “parrot-talk” of mirroring society or whether they can be “shape-shifters” in terms of their influence?

To contextualise this study, the researcher considered the South African government's programme of action, as implied in the annual State of the Nation Address (SONA) to identify pertinent political, economic and societal matters during the specified election years (Mbeki, 2004; Zuma, 2009 & 2014). Therefore, this paper investigates whether socio-political and economic issues during the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a democratic South Africa are reflected in the editors' letter of *True Love* as an archetypal South African women's magazine.

## THE MAGAZINE AS SOCIAL BAROMETER

The interaction between magazines and society, and the magazine as “social barometer” of that specific society, has long been recognised (Johnson & Prijatel, 2007:89-90). Moreover, Johnson and Prijatel have argued that magazines are acknowledged as “active members of a complex society, leading the discussion in many cases, but allowing others in society to take action in society that will cause change”. Jane Raphaely (2012a:26), doyenne of South African women's magazines, described magazines as “the shape-shifters of the media world”. Furthermore, Raphaely (2012b:9) highlights the important socio-cultural function of magazines when she reflects on the banning of women's magazines in South-Africa pre-democracy: “But the best thing they had done was to give women in South Africa a significant soapbox with a huge sound system that allowed even the softest voice to reverberate as a very loud shout.”

While recognising women's magazines' cultural importance, Greenfield and Reid (1998:161) suggest that “this must be appreciated alongside their presentation of commercial messages”. Modern-day magazines' – in the category of “consumer magazines”<sup>3</sup> – growing dependence on advertising means content reflecting the public sphere sometimes has difficulty finding its way into print as more magazines identify their readers as consumers first and as citizens second (Campbell, 2000:304-305). Moreover, Rabe (2008:31) opines that as custodian of the brand you have to put the interest of the title first, even if it implies “that you have to downplay your own (for example feminist) take on life, and present instead a softer ‘women's rights’ face, so as not to intimidate a specific market”. More specifically, it is generally accepted that the editor of a women's magazine as the chief editorial figure is not only responsible for producing a magazine that will appeal to its specific audience, but also has to “relay the real sales message” to the advertisers (Gough-Yates, 2003:118; also see McKay, 2000; Rabe, 2005; Johnson & Prijatel, 2007).

Currently, magazines all over the world are transforming in response to changing demographic preferences, rising costs and the impact of the Internet (Guidone, 2000:14-33; also see Johnson & Prijatel, 2007; Zarwan, 2007; Naspers, 2011; Leslie, 2013). In addition, the effects of globalisation at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – from a political, economic and technological perspective – created an almost endless profusion of hybridised cultures (Lindlof, 2009:61; also see Sánchez-Tabernero, 2006). Rossouw (2005:ii, also see Abrahamson, 1996; McKay, 2000;

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readership is 2 494 000 for the period 2013BA (Jan-Dec) as measured by AMPS (<http://m24m.co.za/m24markets/true-love/>).

<sup>3</sup> “consumer magazines”: Magazines produced for popular use. “They are sold on the newsstand or by subscriptions and are marketed like any other consumer product. They usually contain advertising [as] readers are important to advertisers because of their potential as consumers” (Johnson & Prijatel, 2007:15; Gough-Yates, 2003).

Bignell, 2002; Gough-Yates, 2003; Van Kranenburg & Hogenbirk, 2006; Johnson & Prijatel, 2007, Holmes & Nice, 2012) argues that South African women's magazines – especially the home-grown magazines and the three titles selected for the broader study – have changed drastically since South Africa became a democracy in 1994. The established domestic women's magazine market had to take cognisance of, e.g., the worldwide trend of fragmentation. Therefore, this study investigates the message of the women's magazine editor as *brand custodian* or *content curator* (researcher's emphasises, also see McKay, 2000; Johnson & Prijatel, 2007:195-204; Rabe, 2008) in specifically *True Love* during 2004, 2009 and the first six months of 2014.<sup>4</sup>

## APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF MAGAZINES

Scholarly research on women's magazines offers different perspectives of how they should be studied. Gough-Yates (2003:6) contends the three main research streams are textual analysis, audience-studies and the most recent, the production-based approach, which reflects on how practitioners "understand, represent and relate to their product". She elucidates "production-based" research as the way the management and organisation of the magazine industry influence the relationships between women's magazines, advertisers and marketers and how they ultimately shape the character of a magazine. Furthermore, Gough-Yates (2003) asserts that women's magazine publishing is not only a commercially led, market-orientated industry, but one that depends heavily on social and cultural processes for its effective operation.

This study follows the third approach, namely the production-based approach, in an effort to find answers to how the relevant practitioners have understood, represented and related to their product as reflected in the editor's letter, how the management and organisation of a magazine could influence the relationship between the magazine and its commercial and editorial consumers (advertisers and readers), and, eventually, how this shapes the character of a magazine.

Importantly, a literature review within the third stream points to the work of Ferguson in 1983 as the first in-depth analysis of women's magazine production-based research. Moreover, the studies of Johnson (1993), Van Zoonen (1994), the research of Reed, McRobbie and Oats (all in 1996), Ozturkmen (1999), Kirca (2001), Stephenson, and Oh and Frith (both in 2007), Frith and Feng in 2009 and the recent study by Feng and Karan in 2011 are regarded as significant contributions to the field. However, Gough-Yates' (2003) research needs to be highlighted as most relevant in terms of its specific context, and therefore specific background to this study. The authors are in agreement with Shufeldt (2004:181) that Gough-Yates' study is a reverberating call for "research that is mindful of the mutually constitutive nature of economic imperatives and the production of cultural texts".

With regard to South African studies (National Research Foundation, 2012) this study is a unique enquiry. Still, some South African studies give context and background to this study as they have *True Love* as focus. It was only at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when Donnelly (2001), adopting a poststructuralist view on the gendered self as socially constructed in *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love*, that *True Love* was studied on a scholarly level. A year later, Ndzamela's (2002) research focused on the social construction and cultural representation of women in *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love*, while Sanger (2009) studied the construction of femininity and race in among others, *True Love*. Furthermore, Laden (2001; 2003, also see Narunsky-Laden, 2007; 2011) has been exploring the cultural economy of particularly consumer magazines for black South Africans, focusing, inter alia, on *True Love* during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Drawing on the above research on women's magazines from within the production-based approach, this paper now proceeds to provide an analysis of the editor's letter in *True Love* as a "social barometer" at a specific time in the history of South Africa's young democratic dispensation.

## TRUE LOVE: A CHRONICLER OF HER TIME

The diversity of South Africa's population has led to the establishment of various magazines targeted at specific population groups since the middle of the 20th century. Claassen (1998:127) observes that magazines directed at the black market became important after 1945 when several successful publications were launched. A prime example was *Drum*, first published in 1951 by Jim Bailey. Various authors highlight the significant socio-cultural-political role of *Drum* during the early

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<sup>4</sup> South Africa's 5<sup>th</sup> general election took place on 7 May, 2014. Due to the IAMCR conference date of 15-19 July, 2014, this paper only include an analysis of the editor's letters as published from January to June 2014.

years of the Verwoerdian-apartheid era when *Drum* became an important mouthpiece for the township masses, expressing their social and political grievances. Therefore, this researcher opines that *Drum* – as the forerunner of South African magazines aimed at the South African black consumers – illustrates the concept of the magazine as “social barometer” and is an unambiguous example of the interaction between magazines and society.

Interestingly, *True Love* (1972) was launched by Bailey as *Drum*'s sister magazine, but targeted at migrant workers on the gold mines in Johannesburg. The magazine was first positioned as a women's publication in 1984, when Bailey sold the title to Naspers, the oldest publishing group in South Africa. National Magazines (the magazine publishing section of Naspers at the time), subsequently repositioned *True Love* as a women's magazine aimed at South Africa's black female readership (Laden 2001; 2003). In the same year, Pearl Mashabela became the first black female magazine editor in South Africa. In 1988, Bessie Tugwana and Dorah Sithole were appointed as co-editors and shared the editorial responsibility till mid-1995.

However, the repositioning of *True Love* as a women's magazine was not without challenges in a South Africa pre-democracy. Tugwana (in Narunsky-Laden, 2011:179) noted that “one of the challenges during our time was that many black people had no interest in reading. We made it more pictorial and pitched the magazine at a large market – which was a huge mistake. Sales fluctuated.” Tugwana's perception of increased pictorial and a mass-market orientation at the time as erroneous is significant. Narunsky-Laden (2011) speculates whether this had to do with “market conditions at the time, or with *True Love*'s more upmarket image”, or

“[P]erhaps political changes occurring in South Africa during the early 1990s (Mandela's release from prison, the referendum and first democratic elections) encouraged the publishers, Naspers, to invest in *True Love*, in the hope of reaping the fruits of the anticipated expansion of a newly viable black middle-class.”

Just over a year after South Africa's first democratic elections, *True Love* was again repositioned and Khanyi Dhlomo-Mkhize, daughter of the political figure Oscar Dhlomo, was appointed editor. Targeting younger black South African women “determined to make every aspect of their lives a success” (Dhlomo-Mkhize, 1996), the modernised version of *True Love* finally removed the *& Family* appendix to its title, and was given the still current slogan: “All a woman needs”. During her time as editor, Dhlomo-Mkhize tripled not only the circulation of the magazine, but also established *True Love* as the monthly title with the most advertisements in the country (Retief, 2002:17; also see Brand, 2003). Dhlomo-Mkhize acknowledged that she used *True Love* to make a positive impact on the lives of South African women:

“I want to help to better people's lives... [A]partheid and our history made that we as black people have not yet started to get to know ourselves as individuals. My readers are in an exciting time in their lives. They now define their own lifestyle and role in the community – this is not defined anymore by legislation or the society” (translated from Afrikaans).

Furthermore, Dhlomo-Mkhize firmly believes that the media has a social responsibility: “As a society we are making progress, but there are still many problems the government cannot solve. *True Love* empowered 2 million women, it grew from more or less 500 000 in 1995” (translated from Afrikaans).

The editors during the years of investigation were Busisiwe Mahlaba (2004)<sup>5</sup>, Dorah Sithole (2009) and Lerato Tshabalala (2014)<sup>6</sup>.

In her first editor's letter in April 2004 – published at the time of the country's third general election and the commemoration of the first decade of democracy – Busisiwe Mahlaba (Ferguson, 2004:12) states that she is “proud being a woman in South Africa” and emphasises that she wants to keep empowerment of women on *True Love*'s agenda. Furthermore, Mahlaba alludes to the fact that there are still ingrained cultural and social perceptions working to women's disadvantage,

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<sup>5</sup> Although Busisiwe Mahlaba's took over as *True Love*'s editor on 1 February 2004, her first editor's letter – due to the magazine's production schedule – was published in the April issue. From January to March 2004, the editor's letter was written by the acting-editor, Glynis O'Hara.

<sup>6</sup> The editor's letter in June 2014, was written by the *True Love* team, as the letter in May 2014 was the last contribution by Lerato Tshabalala as editor of *True Love*.

particularly regarding HIV/Aids and the practice of safe sex – views that should be changed. She believes the way to success is to ensure that *True Love* continues to give her readers information that is “relevant, inspiring and entertaining, without being condescending”. Two years later, Mahlaba (2006) notes that it is important for *True Love* to keep pace with the readers’ reality as black female demographics and psychographics have changed significantly since 1994. “[O]ur reader has moved assertively into the workplace and is in a much stronger position financially with higher expectations and far more choices as a consumer.” Mahlaba defines *True Love* as the “only magazine that appreciates the fusion of traditional and modern lifestyles and delivers that unique understanding of ‘Louis Vuitton-meets-lobola’ lifestyle”. A year later, in August 2007, the *True Love* team describes the magazine’s “journey” on their website as follows:

“... Over the past 31 years, it’s reflected all the roads the TRUE LOVE woman has travelled. From the political fired-up girls of the late 1970s, who fought on the streets and took the struggle home, to the State of emergency women of the 1980s, who were activists, businesswomen, caregivers and home-makers, to the liberated, newly-empowered women of the 1990s, to the women of 2003, who encompass all these qualities and more, while celebrating their strength, their uniqueness and their options. Today we have more opportunities than ever before to find health, wealth, wisdom and happiness.”

However, after 2004 and a period of *True Love* being one of the fastest growing magazines and the biggest-selling English glossy women’s magazine in South Africa, the readership figures declined drastically after Dhlomo-Mkhize’s resignation in 2004 to pursue new interests. Sithole (2008) argues that soon after Dhlomo-Mkhize left, it appeared that the publication lost direction. She ascribes this to the magazine’s change in identity and two changes of editors in five years. According to her the only thing that remained consistent through the changes was the target audience of black women; even the targeted age group became unclear. In addition, Nandipha (2008:25) points out that in 2005 the magazine was selling about 140 000 copies, with more than a million readers. In 2008 circulation has dropped by nearly 40 000. Sithole, who co-edited *True Love* previously, was appointed to redirect the magazine that has been slated for “depicting a farfetched and one-dimensional image of black women”, especially on her covers (Nandipha, 2008:25). Under Sithole’s editorship the magazine tried “to catch up by exploring mature and alternative women on its covers faces to counter the soapie queens”. Sithole realised that readers evolve, and so does the magazine, and that the editorial staff had to keep up with the readers. “The trick is to know and understand the reader and give her what she wants.”

In 2012 *True Love* magazine celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday with yet a revitalised look as well as content mix, responding to the issues affecting South Africa’s black women. Lerato Tshabalala (Abrahams, 2012), appointed as editor in December 2012, explained:

“I have immense respect for the product because I grew up with it. I have a deep understanding of who the *True Love* woman is, so when I worked with my team to decide on its future direction, I did it with all my heart and soul. All the changes that we made come from a place of immense love and respect for the magazine, and for the role it has played in the history of so many South African women.”

*True Love*’s latest vision statement (*True Love* website, June 2014) highlights her legendary status in the history of South African women’s magazines:

“TRUE LOVE is the iconic South African fashion, beauty and lifestyle magazine for black women. It is the recommended handbook and style guide...an indispensable accessory that inspires, comments, entertains and advises modern African women. It challenges its readers with in-depth editorial, focusing on subjects that stimulate debate and discussion. Investigative special reports and thought-leading columns combine with stylish and sexy fashion and beauty pages that define South African style. TRUE LOVE aims to push readers to where they want to be, challenging and helping them to take the next big steps to get there, changing lives from ordinary to extraordinary.”

## A NEW SOCIAL SPHERE

The characteristics of South Africa's socio-political dispensation post-1994 are documented by various authors. Ramphela (2008:13-27), for example, describes some of the significant transformational issues as the socio-economic change; sheer magnitude of conversion taking place within the political, economic and social systems; the building of a non-racial, non-sexist and egalitarian society, and the improvement of human, intellectual and social capital. Venter and Landsberg (2011:v, also see Dikeni, 2012; Terreblanche 2012; Du Preez, 2013) are in agreement with the above and further argue that the challenges of the new millennium are especially socio-economic in nature. In addition, Joubert (2012:581) equates the period from 2004 to 2011 – partly the focus of this paper – to “democratic puberty” and describes it as that of a teenager in his “rebellious tenth to sixteenth year”. Moreover, Joubert (2012: 582-601) suggests that during this “democratic puberty” South Africa's politics will be dominated by the tension in government, as well as between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Democratic Alliance (DA) as the two major role players on the electoral front; the positive (e.g., a well-regulated banking sector and strong gold price) and negative (e.g., the high unemployment figures and corruption) aspects of the South African economy; the premise that Mandela's dictum of human rights should prevail as the moral compass for foreign policy, as well as social issues such as health care – and specifically HIV/Aids – crime-prevention, xenophobia and nation-building will need to be addressed in this development stage of the young democracy.

Drawing from this, the researcher identified the historical transformation and change to democracy in South Africa; the social relations, as well as the social values and moral principles within the newly formed democratic society; and the relationship between the magazine and the advertiser as significant indicators of, in this case, the editor's letter in *True Love* as “social barometer”, and which will form the framework for the relevant applicable methodology, namely content analysis.

Against this background, the theoretical departure point for this study is contemporary political economy. Political economy can be explained as one of several theories used in media studies to examine how “economic and political relationships, interests and affiliations determine the nature and functioning of social institutions, and the impact or lack of impact of these relationships on social transformation and development” (Fourie, 2007:121-122). Used as an umbrella term, political economy generally investigates “processes of consolidation, diversification, commercialization, the working of the profit motive in the hunt for audiences and/or for advertising and its consequences for media practices and media content” (Boyd-Barrett, 2010:186; also see Graham, 2006:494). Furthermore, Graham (2006:494) argues that political economy of communication is undertaken within a critical research framework and is therefore value-laden. However, Graham suggests a *contemporary* framework to understand the political economies of communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and contends that political economies have changed to such an extent that an almost total reassessment is required to comprehend the changes. Thus, the researcher acknowledges the historical development of political economy as a theoretical framework, but move with scholars such as Graham (2006, also see Garnham, 2006) to the contemporary political economy as framework.

Importantly, the researcher acknowledges that the chosen theoretical framework of political economy from a critical perspective may, at first glance, seem irreconcilable with the study's production-based approach within the field of journalism studies. However, the researcher contends, and fully agrees with Fourie (2007:145), that it is difficult to distinguish lucidly between the critical or the positivistic theoretical traditions as the “two grand theories from which all mass communication research depart”. As these theoretical approaches borrow from each other and are shaped on each other, the researcher refers to a synthesis of paradigms. This is in accordance with Fourie's (2007:145) claim that “little positivistic research is done today without critical interpretation” and that “little critical research does not test its assumptions empirically”.

Thus, keeping in mind the focus and emphasis of the study and the fusion of positivistic and critical approaches in the research, the central research question is phrased as: What are the messages of the editor of *True Love* within the theoretical framework of contemporary political economy, specifically during the specified election years of 2004, 2009 and 2014? The central research question answers, and gives clarity, to the following sub-questions:

- a) What does the editor's letter in *True Love* say about the historical transformation and change to democracy in South Africa in the three selected election years?
- b) What does the editor's letter in *True Love* say about the social relations within the newly formed democratic society?
- c) What does the editor's letter in *True Love* say about the social values and moral principles within the newly formed democratic society?
- d) What does the editor's letter in *True Love* say about the relationship between the magazine and the advertiser?

### EXAMINING THE EDITOR'S LETTER AS SOCIAL ARTEFACTS

This study follows the socio-scientific tradition of inductive and interpretive research and applies qualitative content analysis (QCA) to examine the editor's letter as social artefacts (Babbie, 2002:311).

As content analysis (CA) is defined as a set of methods for systematically coding and analysing qualitative data (Bernard & Ryan, 2010:287, Adler & Clark, 2011; Treadwell, 2011), it is argued that the fundamental focus of CA is to provide a descriptive account of what a media text contains. In examining media output, CA can "go beyond simple description" (Gunter, 2000:60) and the researcher is of the opinion that as such, QCA achieves the research aim as it is "able to provide insights into the intentions or objectives of media content producers". As such, analysing the content of the editor's letter will involve what Bernard and Ryan (2010:54) call five imperative steps: (1) discovering themes and subthemes; (2) describing the core and peripheral elements of themes; (3) building hierarchies of themes; (4) applying themes; and (5) linking themes into theoretical models.

The researcher makes her sampling decision based on professional judgement (Treadwell, 2011:108-110 & 117) and as the choice of a nonprobability sampling method is theoretically informed, purposive sampling is used. This is based on the supposition that the specific media content, i.e., the editor's letter, meets the exact criteria of the researcher (Adler & Clark, 2011:123-124). Furthermore, Priest (2010:110-111) argues that statistical sampling is not essentially a significant factor for qualitative media content studies, "... rather, the intent is to gain a 'window' on a particular worldview...represented by a limited set of media messages selected purposively by the researcher". Consequently, the generalisability of such a study "lies in the observations of patterns and relationships that appear to be relevant beyond the case or example under study".

The unit of analysis is nine editors' letters published from January to December in 2004 (the issues of February, October and December were not available for the current study); for 2009, ten editors' letters were analysed (the August issue and December issue were not available); while the unit of analysis for 2014 – January to June – is six issues. The total sample of the editor's letter in *True Love* magazine is twenty-five<sup>7</sup>.

For the broader study, the researcher intends to use the data analysis tool ATLAS.ti, a software qualitative data analysis and knowledge management tool to "manage, extract, compare, explore, and reassemble meaningful pieces from large amounts of data in a creative, flexible, yet systematic way" (Muhr & Friese, 2004:2, also see Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Saldaña, 2009; Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Smit, 2012). However, the researcher realises that a special purpose database management programme like ATLAS.ti is only a tool for "handling and asking questions of text" (Bernard & Ryan, 2010:109); the analysis is still done by the researcher. For this study, the researcher chose to conduct the analysis by hand as the amount of data is not substantial. Lindlof and Taylor (2011:261) draw attention to the fact that LeCompte and Schensul (1999) argued that it is "not worthwhile to use a computer to code fewer than 100 pages of text data because of the time required to do it". Thus, applying the manual method as a tool for data analysis, this study starts with a systematic analysis of the qualitative data that comes with the creation of categories and a coding scheme (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011:246). The coding and categorisation of the message in the editor's letter of *True Love* is guided by the four sub-questions of the study: What does the editor's letter in *True Love* say about the historical transformation and change to democracy in South Africa; the social relations *and* (researcher's emphasis) the social values and moral principles

<sup>7</sup> With regard to the issues of *True Love* magazine that were not available for the current study, the researcher is in agreement with Bernard & Ryan (2010:360) that there is increasing proof that a sample size of between 20 to 60 is enough "to uncover and understand the core categories in any well-defined cultural domain or study of lived experience".

within the newly formed democratic society; and the relationship between the magazine and the advertiser?

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### The editor's view on transformation and democracy

On the first sub-question, on the issues of transformation and democracy, the researcher found the following:

In her first editor's letter – published as an interview in *True Love* – Busisiwe Mahlaba (Ferguson, 2004:12) states that she is honoured by being a woman in South Africa and underscores the advancement of equality of women during the first ten years of democracy as notable: "It's good to see women seizing the day and putting themselves in the forefront in so many arenas." However, she emphasises that there should be more encouragement for women to empower themselves:

"It is important, though, that empowerment stretches countywide to cover all aspects and walks of life, so that women can benefit from it whether they're in big cities or the rural areas. I'd love to see more of them being given opportunities to excel as entrepreneurs – no hand-outs, just less red tape!"

Mahlaba (Ferguson, 2004:12) refers to the fact that there are, nevertheless, many cultural and social acuties hampering the advancement of women, particularly regarding HIV/Aids and sexual traditions. She believes this should change, and undertakes to ensure that *True Love* continues to provide readers with appropriate information that is motivating and enjoyable without being patronising.

The empowerment of women remains on *True Love's* agenda, especially during the month of August when Women's Day is celebrated internationally. In July 2004, the editor's letter (Mahlaba, August 2004:14) claims that the magazine "is starting early with features that will empower you as a woman and help you make choices that are good for you first – others later". In an array of features, the magazine introduces; "three beautiful and multi-talented *sistahs* of *Yizo Yizo* – a controversial TV series that touched on taboo matters and brought them into the open for us to question and accept as realities"; sporting stars as "our African sisters who're seeking success in the 2004 Olympics and not letting anything stand in their way" and six remarkable women who have successfully followed their dreams.

The recognition of women in South Africa's young democracy is further explored in Mahlaba's letter of August (2004:12) where readers are compelled "to take time-out to acknowledge the contribution they have made to family and society alike and relish the fact that God made you a woman". To illustrate "how important we women are to the smooth running of this planet ...the issue is packed with stories celebrating awesome women from diverse backgrounds who are trail-blazers in their fields – and doing it with African style and grace".

Moreover, Mahlaba (August 2004:12) encourages the readers "in knowing you can make it in life – even without a tertiary education". She refers to the feature, *Making It With Matric* which gives examples of careers that do not require a degree, and urges readers to "sit back, relax and enjoy this issue that's once again crammed with empowering, entertaining information". In a later editor's letter (Mahlaba, November 2004:18) pays homage to health workers – in this case a nurse – and chronicles the tales of "extraordinary women who heal the hurt and keep our country hospitals going, even in the most desperately inadequate circumstances".

"Absolutely bursting with pride to be South African", Mahlaba (September 2004:18) continues with a constructive message and points once again to the advancement of women's rights post-democracy:

"This is the month when we celebrate [Heritage Day and] our wonderful country and we at TRUE LOVE believe 'SA is da bomb'. Accordingly we bring you an issue overflowing with soul, music and the spirit of *Ubuntu*... we salute three women who made it against all odds, at a time when this country didn't take kindly to black sisters rising up and becoming



independent. These women refused to let South Africa's vicious apartheid laws stand in the way of their success – *amaqhawekazi*<sup>8</sup> indeed!"

The "Proudly South African" theme and the celebration of Heritage Day continues in Sithole's (September 2009:12) writing and celebrates South African talent, "old and new". Her message is to read more about leading fashion designers influenced by South Africa's rich heritage; discover South African comedians' passion for local products and prepare some soul food for Heritage Day, and "fall in love all over again with our beautiful country and its people".

Furthermore, Sithole (January 2009:7) urges the readers to face the year with determination, approach each day with a resolve to rise to new challenges, and to push their perceived limitations to new realms. She (February 2009:9) also appeals to readers to seriously consider living in an eco-conscious way and be part of the green revolution. She warns that "we watch with laidback interest as activists speak up and imitate campaigns to conscientise us on the seriousness and repercussions of destructive human activities". By quoting Wangari Maathai, the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner, she warns:

"Unless we change our course, the coming generations will inherit an impoverished environment that will mean a hungrier, less fertile, and a more unstable world. More conflicts will erupt. Protecting the environment is not just a pleasure but also a duty."

In addition, Sithole (March 2009:7) argues for an awareness of respect for culture and fellow human beings:

"The youth of today have been blessed by being raised in a free South Africa. ...A strong and sound foundation has been laid for you; you are standing on the shoulders of giants. As your parents, who grew up in a repressed South Africa, all we wanted was to be free. Our success in life and in business, we were convinced, depended on our political freedom... We didn't even realise that through the struggle our spirits had become resilient. That determination to succeed is exactly why you see so many successful black executives and entrepreneurs; not enough I know, but definitely a force."

In the 2009 April issue – the month when the fourth general election took place – Sithole (:12) reminds readers to cast their ballot and writes that "if you are in doubt...read Lebo Mashile's insightful column on the issue".

Sithole (June 2009:16) insists that young South Africans must embrace their families and communities to remain successful and to achieve even more and mentions that although the youth is still faced with major challenges, *True Love* will strive to empower with thought-provoking articles. Chronicling the history of apartheid and the accompanying violence, she explains that her generation had to contend with parents treating girls differently to boys:

"...boys were allowed to hang out with friends at street corners or local shops until late at night, they had fewer house chores and were made to feel like kings. The fact that most fathers also spent a lot of time hanging out with their friends at local beer halls and shebeens did not help either."

Furthermore, she depicts South Africa's past:

"The 1976 uprisings, for instance, were not just about Afrikaans being thrust upon the black youth of the day, but it was also about the dismal existence of black people that were enforced by the apartheid government. The beer halls that were built next to the train stations resulted in many fathers being absent from homes and that's why those beer halls were the first to go up in flames. It is obvious that the youth were expressing a deep resentment of not having their fathers at home..."

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<sup>8</sup> "amaqhawekazi" (translated from Zulu) refers to the strength or the power of women.

However, Sithole (June 2009:16) writes that “in spite of what we’ve battled through as a nation, it is refreshing to see how most men have risen to the occasion by spending more time at home with their families”.

The editor’s letter – written by Lerato Tshabalala in 2014 – follows a completely different approach to the editor’s letter signed by Mahlaba and Sithole. These letters each have a title, e.g., “Invite abundance into your life” (January 2014:4) and “Hold onto your dreams” (March 2014:6), and do not discuss or debate any specific theme or link to any of the articles featured in the specific issue. The researcher, at this stage, speculates that these letters can be described as a reflection of the editor’s personal foci, except for “Love starts from within” (February 2014:4) when the funeral of Nelson Mandela is described:

“During the memorial service it rained constantly... I felt as though the universe were crying with us. When a great tree falls, the ripples are enormous. Losing a loved one is something we all have to face at some point or another in our lives... And yet, our deepest and most profound lessons come when we realise that someone we love is gone: we learn about the things we need to improve or change in our lives.”

Tshabalala contextualises the role of Mandela in South Africa’s liberation struggle by writing that Madiba – “when asked why he pardoned his oppressors – said: ‘They’ve already had me for 27 years... I had to let it go’. He wasn’t going to give them another day of his life”. She concludes that Mandela “knew that the divine force that brought him here needed him to acknowledge his purpose and fulfil it, and when he was done, it welcomed him back into its arms. For his presence in our lives in South Africa, I feel blessed”.

### **The editor’s view on interface within society**

On the second sub-question, on the aspects of social relation within the newly formed democratic society, the researcher found the following:

Some of South Africa’s socio-economic problems are revealed by *True Love*’s special investigative reports and the editor’s letter, specifically, points to the severity of certain socio-economic problems. For example, O’Hara (March 2004, 22) praises the cover girl for her investing her time and energy to the cause of abused women, as well as having the courage and humanity to reach out to prisoners, realising that “prisoners are often in prison because they have committed heinous crimes”.

Moreover, when sensitive family structures are explored in an article titled “When Auntie Steps In”, the editor’s letter (O’Hara, March 2004:22) draws attention to the importance of an extended family structure when both parents are working and asks “where would we be without all the aunts who help look after their sisters’ children, when needed?” She mentions that South African children often have a far closer relationship with their aunts than children in the UK or the US, and with interviewing “three such aunts *True Love* found the thin line between mommy and auntie can be a delicate one to negotiate”.

Furthermore, Mahlaba (November 2004:18) suggests that the pain of women and girls who have been abused has been “kept private too long” and that “the shocking account of a courageous young schoolgirl who’s walked this path” can help to address gender violence and change attitudes.

Another issue that comes to the fore in the editor’s letter (Sithole, October 2009:10) is that society is too preoccupied with physical appearance. Referring to a special report on Body Dysmorphic Disorder (a psychological disorder in which a person becomes obsessed with the imaginary defects in their appearance) the message is that “not only should we be on the lookout for social pressures that may distort our children’s self-image, but we must also help them to maintain healthy bodies”. Moreover, Sithole notes that research by the Medical Research Council has shown that more than 17 percent of South African children between the ages of one and nine, who are living in urban areas, are overweight. *True Love* published an in-depth look at this issue and presented ways to stop obesity in children. On the matter of breast cancer awareness, the 2009 October editor’s letter (:10) focused on “remarkable people working with non-governmental organisation in helping communities deal and cope with the disease”.

South Africa’s financial affairs also comes under *True Love*’s scrutiny (Sithole, July 2009:14) and, once again, a special report should help the readers to make sense of the world’s state of economic affairs: “It is worth your while to read this feature, especially if you want to understand this

financial crisis that seems to be crippling the world, including South Africa.” Furthermore, Sithole implores the readers “to develop a culture of saving so when the unforeseen occurrences happen we are not destitute”.

In addition, two special reports are highlighted in the editor’s letter of January 2009 (:7); the convergence of technology and the ecological movement. Sithole writes that being a parent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not for “the faint-hearted because our children are inundated with technology and fast-paced thinking, while living without the traditional safety of consistency”. Therefore, referring to a parenting feature, she also believes that parents must lay a firm foundation for children by making sure they are ready to start school.

### **The editor’s view on social values and moral principles**

Sub-question 3 addressed the social values and moral principles within the newly formed democratic society:

The researcher asserts that the selected sample of the editor’s letter in *True Love* heeds a clear message about social values and moral principles. O’Hara (February 2004:12) contends that attitudes must be changed: “How do we develop a culture in which boys understand that forcing a girl to have sex, or emotionally blackmailing her into it, is really abuse – and completely unacceptable?” And “that far too many teens below 15 are sexually active – leading to both emotional and physical damage”.

Furthermore, Mahlaba (August 2004:12) concedes that “with all this affluence [in a newly formed economic society] come many temptations” and that “hard drugs have taken a lethal grip on our communities”. Sithole (May 2009:14) also draws attention to the fact that the country’s present social and economic structure has produced isolation from some parents as well as from extended families and that the traditional roles of parenting are challenged, both at home and in the business world:

“From a child’s birth, fathers are expected to play a more active role, which means dedication and involvement by both parents. The good thing, though, is that involved parenting will naturally convey such deep love to children that they will feel happy and secure. A child who feels ‘right’ is more likely to act right and as parents, we want to see our children growing up to be decent human beings.”

Celebrating Mother’s Day, Sithole (May 2009:14) refers to mothers “as women often taken for granted; yet they’re the unshakeable beacons on whom we depend – not only in childhood, but right through our lives”. Touching on unconditional love and a mother’s painful experience, *True Love* readers learn about a woman whose love for her son has been tested in a terrible way and triumphed. In the same vein, fathers are hailed as “a lasting blueprint against which we measure all other males and, ideally give us a special experience of security, strength, protection and warmth” (Mahlaba, June 2004:14)

### **The rapport between *True Love* and her advertisers**

On the fourth sub-question, on the relationship between *True Love* magazine and her advertisers, the researcher found the following:

As *True Love* has been positioned as a consumer magazine aimed at South Africa’s black female readers for more than forty years, it can be expected that the editor’s letter will also reflect this consumer culture, and thus promote the interests of advertisers. In the sample of the editor’s letter that was analysed, products in the fashion, beauty and food sections were mostly highlighted. Three examples read:

“Summer’s here at last, and we celebrate with 108 pages of stunning fashion and beauty trends and tips to help you sizzle your way into the season!” (Mahlaba, November 2004:18);

“With Mother’s Day around the corner, I know mothers out there may expect their children to shower them with praises and gifts... you can do this with the help of *True Love*. We

have great suggestions, ranging from... exquisite tarts to gift ideas for techno-savvy moms” (Sithole, May 2009:14);

and

“In keeping with... Father’s Day celebration, Ayanda Bikitsha’s pick of fabulous men’s grooming products... will help you with gifting ideas. Grooming for men has reached a new level where facials, pedicures and manicures (for men) have also become a necessity” (Sithole, June 2009:14).

In the selected sample of editors’ letters that were analysed, the names of two beauty advertisers are mentioned and can be linked to sponsored competitions within the magazine. First, readers are enticed to enter “our fabulous Lux cover girl competition, so that you too could be one of the radiant women gracing our glossy face” (Mahlaba, September 2004:28). The second mention is a chance to win tickets to the Face Of REVLON REALISTIC Gala Dinner, plus REVLON REALISTIC hampers through a SMS competition (Sithole, October 2009:10). Additionally, Lerato Moloi, an international model and businesswoman, are congratulated on being named the first black woman to represent the cosmetic brand Elizabeth Arden (Sithole, April 2009:12).

In what can be labelled self-promotion, Sithole’ (July, 2009:14) markets her cookbook, *Cooking from Cape to Cairo*, in her editor’s letter. This is repeated in an offer to order the book at a discount and entertain “like an African queen” (October 2009:10).

Besides the normal advertising that is usually associated with a woman’s magazine, *True Love* publishes “a fun irreverent piece – titled ‘Gels, Bells and Whistles’ about the merits (or otherwise) of relying on elixirs for sexual satisfaction”. *True Love* “gets up close and personal with new sex-enhancing products and test them to see whether they really deliver the ecstasy they promise” (Mahlaba, June 2004:14). Moreover, Mahlaba (June 2004:14) argues that “in a society where the fast-food consumer mind-set is overtaking the ability to savour and build up enduring relationships, the lure of the orgasm on demand – just add hot water and stir! – is strong”.

In the same editor’s letter, Mahlaba notes that in an age of consumerism the huge increase of debt among South African women is cause for concern and underscores financial empowerment as highlighted in the article “I Nearly Drowned in Debt”. Furthermore, she appeals to her readers to study the issue’s comprehensive guidelines when buying a home and to use this information to avoid pitfalls

Finally, a proud moment in the history of the magazine is celebrated with the announcement that the *Sunday Times*’ Generation Next supplement awarded *True Love* the Coolest Female Magazine accolade (Sithole, September 2009:12). This coincides with the magazine celebrating “Proudly South Africa” month and Heritage Day in September:

“Home is truly where the heart is in our *Consumer* feature ...reminding us of all the wonderful things that make our country such a great place to live in. I could add to that list your favourite magazine, TRUE LOVE. Even at 38 years of age TRUE LOVE has not lost her touch, which is why *Sunday Times* Generation Next awarded *True Love* the Coolest Female Magazine accolade.

“Thank you South Africa!”

## CONCLUSION

To answer the central research question posed in this paper, namely “What are the messages of the editor of *True Love* within the theoretical framework of contemporary political economy, specifically during the specified election years of 2004, 2009 and 2014”, the following – focused on by the four sub-questions – may be surmised:

South Africa’s celebrated historical transformation and change to democracy is high on *True Love*’s agenda. The editor’s letter alludes to various socio-political and economic changes post-apartheid. The building of a non-racial and equal society is an issue and the improvement of human and intellectual capital is applauded. The empowerment of black women features in many of the editors’ letters and are illustrated with concrete examples. However, the message in the editor’s

letter is that South Africa – as a young democracy – still faces countless challenges in many social spheres that need to be addressed urgently.

Moreover, the analysis of the editor's letter to determine the message about the social relations within the newly formed democracy, points to a deep understanding of societal difficulties within the black community. It discusses the role South Africa's history played in mapping a new society, but also challenges transformation issues in a new democratic society. Furthermore, the message is that to be a successful democracy social values and moral principles need to be upheld and that the spirit of *ubuntu* and the protection of human rights should at all times prevail. Moreover, as *True Love* is positioned as a consumer magazine for black South African women, the premise that an editor of a women's magazine should act as a brand custodian or content curator is supported by this study. As Gough-Yates (2003) asserts, women's magazine publishing is not only a commercially led, market-orientated industry, but one that depends heavily on social and cultural processes for its effective operation.

Finally, as the editor's letter in a women's magazine is regarded as a powerful instrument for "persuading, inspiring, illuminating, informing and connecting with readers" (Johnson & Prijatel, 2007:246), the researcher argues that the study has shown that the editor's letter in the selected sample of *True Love* magazine, does indeed fulfil the above criteria. Therefore, it can be asserted that *True Love*, and specifically her editor's letter, drives essential information about society and cultures, thus "helping us think about ourselves as participants in a democratic society" (Campbell, 2000:270-306). The study illustrates the important socio-cultural function of women's magazines and concludes that not only does *True Love* – as an example of an archetypal women's magazine at a certain stage in South Africa's democratic development – act as a social barometer of a 21<sup>st</sup> century society, but can indeed be described as a "shape-shifter" in terms of her influence.

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