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Women Climbing the Ladder

Experiences of Affirmative Action in South African Media

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine what effect an extensive affirmative action programme has had on a group of black women in the South African media, and how they perceive how existing power structures affect their everyday experiences within their respective media companies. The empirical base is an interview study with eight black women who hold or held top editorial positions in South Africa. Drawing on Bourdieu's field theory, the results suggest that there is an escape from journalism as other forms of symbolic capital have not managed to outweigh the negative capital of being a black woman in South African journalism.

Keywords: *South Africa, gender, journalism, Bourdieu*

I. Introduction

Research has shown that there is still gender inequality in newsrooms around the world (de Bruin & Ross, 2004; Djerf-Pierre, 2005; Löfgren-Nilsson, 2010; North, 2009; Ross & Carter, 2011). However, feminist media researchers have been calling for more stories from the South, with a particular need for qualitative and comparative analyses of the production of news from a gender perspective (Bosch, 2011; Djerf-Pierre, 2011).

The national focus of this paper is South Africa which has one of the world's most gender-equal parliaments and gender-progressive constitutions, but where conflicts between tradition, culture and customary law impact women's rights at a variety of levels (Gouws, 2008). The harsh realities facing South African women have also been made visible in several public incidents, including the rape trial of President Jacob

Zuma (Motsei, 2007), and the impact of tradition and culture has been described in studies focusing on the difficulties black[1] women experience in the newsrooms in the region (Zuiderveld, 2011; Roxberg, 2010; Gender Links et al., 2010). However, in recent years, several black women have entered the highest ranks of the South African media elite. In 2004, Ferial Haffajee (currently editor of *City Press*) became the first female editor of a large South African daily newspaper, when she took the job to head the prestigious *Mail and Guardian* – famous for its investigative reporting. In 2007, Zingisa Mkhuma was appointed the first black female editor of the *Pretoria News* (Anon A, 2007), and in 2013 Phylicia Oppelt became the first black female editor of *the Sunday Times* (Anon B, 2013), the country's largest weekly. This paper, therefore, took as a point of departure that the glass ceiling had (at least in part) been broken and that new opportunities existed for black women in South African media. The aim of this article, therefore, is twofold. Firstly, to provide a more detailed, nuanced understanding of the effect an affirmative action programme has had for a group of black women in the media and, secondly, how these women perceive how existing power structures affect their everyday experiences within their respective media companies.

II. Women in South African Journalism

A recent study from Wits University on the State of the Newsroom (Daniels, 2013) found that in the nine newsrooms included in the study – *CNBC Africa*, *EWN*, *City Press*, *M & G*, *Sunday Times*, *Beeld*, *SABC*, *The Witness*, and *Sowetan* – there was almost total gender balance in all, with 49 percent women making up the total staff. However, in an earlier study, Gender Links (2009) found that when it came to

1. The definition of black in this context follows the definition made in the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (Government Gazette, 2004, p. 4). It is a generic term which includes coloureds, blacks and Indians. Further, in line with the definition made by the Print and Digital Media Transformation Task Team, these are "citizens of South Africa by birth or descent, or by naturalisation" (PDMTTT, 2013, p. 4).

decision-making, women remained underrepresented. The top management consists of only 25 percent women, while in senior management the figure is 35 percent (Gender Links, 2009). Unfortunately, neither the statistics of female representation from the State of the Newsroom, nor that from Gender Links specified race/ethnicity. However, there are some quantitative data indicating the level of black female representation in editorial management in the submissions to the Print and Digital Media Transformation Task Team (PDMTTT) (2013). Of 17 titles in *Independent Newspapers*, three had black female editors, while of the 12 publications in *Times Media Group*, three had black female editors. In *Media24,* white women dominated as editors in both the local newspapers and in the magazines' titles. Therefore, there is a "discrepancy between the newsroom and the 'corner office'" (PDMTTT, 2013, p. 36).

Fourie (2013) describes how South African journalism, content, ownership, regulation and staffing are all influenced by the specific characteristics of the country: "extreme diversities, dichotomies and paradoxes: rich versus poor, literate versus illiterate, urbanized versus rural, First World versus Third World conditions, developed versus under-developed, etc." (p. 223). In this context, printed media has been criticized by the ANC for lack of transformation in the newsroom (ANC, 2010), with the ANC calling for a media charter which would include measures for regulating race diversity among the media staff (ANC, 2013). However, several media houses in South Africa are currently under economic pressure. Due to increasing circulation and advertising revenues, *Independent Newspapers* and *Media 24* have been reducing their staff (Anon C, 2013; Daniels, 2013). These companies have expressed difficulties with addressing employment equality while cutting costs. However, there are also attempts by the industry to effect structural changes. *The Times Media Group* has a sub-editor programme for black females and a talent

management programme to plan for the succession of editors (PDMTT, 2013).

In order to fully understand the position of black women in South African media houses one has to go back to the early years after independence in the mid 1990's. The emerging political vision was of a nation based on equality for all, abolishing previous discriminatory practices. The present South African state has a well-developed institutional system, in which gender equality has been a political goal (Mvimbi, 2009). Women's interest groups were active in the early process of the transformation, ensuring that gender issues were incorporated in the process of policymaking (Hassim, 2003). The model developed by these South African feminist scholars and activists consisted of three corner-stones: "a large number of women in senior-decision-making positions, a supportive constitutional and legal framework is in place; and the country has established integrated national gender machinery" (Mvimbi, 2009, pp. 13-14). However, there are mixed opinions among feminist scholars in South Africa as to how successful the work towards achieving gender equality has been (Goetz & Hassim, 2003; Gouws, 2004; Hassim, 2003; Hassim, 2006; Meintjes, 2005).

In 1998, the South African government introduced the Employment Equity Act. The aim was to ensure gender and ethnic equality within companies with more than 50 employees (Goga, 2001). In 2000, paired with a massive shift in media ownership, nine of the large dailies in South Africa had replaced white editors and deputy editors with black (Berger, 2001). In 1994, there was not one single black woman in a high managerial position in any of the South African media companies. In 1999, black women held six percent of the managerial posts in the media (Goga, 2001). However, in 2005, most first-line managers were still English-speaking (younger) men, with good educational credentials (Steyn, De Beer & Steyn, 2005, p. 102).

III. Theory

Earlier research in various fields such as sociology, education and health has used field theory, formulated by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, when discussing concepts of ethnicity, class and gender (Anderson, 2000; Meyers, 2004). In recent years, researchers within journalism have also adopted Bourdieu's theories, as they have proved effective for analyzing relations of power within the media, as well as the forces struggling for control from the outside (Benson, 2006; Benson & Neveu, 2005; Hovden, 2008; Hackett, 2006; Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Schultz, 2007). Djerf-Pierre (2005, 2006) and Melin (2008) have further developed the adaption of Bourdieu's theory on capital, habitus and field within the media when analyzing the concept of gender and power within Swedish and British journalism. However, their main key when examining results is gender. Class is less evident and ethnicity not present at all. Thus, the bulk of media research using Bourdieu is based in a western-setting. In this study, I will, therefore, 'de-westernize' Bourdieu (Curran & Park, 2000), showing how his arguments can be used when analyzing the role of gender in journalism in a non-western setting by applying both class and ethnicity as analytical tools.

In this text, I am referring to Bourdieu's (1999, 2001, 2005) and Bourdieu & Passeron's (1990) own words on capital, field, doxa and habitus, but also to interpreters of his work such as Broady (1988), Moi (1999), Benson (2006) and Djerf-Pierre (2005). The *field* is a defined social stratum distinguished by the competition for power over that field, with the actors in the field having certain dispositions and common goals (Bourdieu, 1999) The media itself can be defined as such a field where different players strive for maximum influence over journalistic content (Djerf-Pierre, 2005). There may be national variations within journalistic fields depending on

"internal and external forces shaping the news" (Benson, 2005, p. 197), and this is, in part, what I hope to capture.

While studying the female "media elite" in South Africa, I will mainly use Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic capital,* and in particular *professional* and *cultural capital*, as an analytical framework. "Symbolic capital" is probably the most essential term within Bourdieu's theory. It can be described as certain values regarded as important in a specific social field. An easier definition might simply be: the rules that exist for how to perform in every-day life in order to be respected. The routines of every-day life in a specific field must be deeply incorporated in order for the game to be played successfully and to understand how the rules of this informal economy work (Broady, 1988). Bourdieu also writes of *habitus*, and Djerf-Pierre (2005) translates the theory of *habitus* into the media field as follows:

> The individual habitus of a senior manager is formed in the process of life, and is shaped by different experiences of the general social field (through upbringing, schooling, etc.) and also of more specific fields, professional and others (social and professional life, such as working in the media). Some is gained by inheritance (through class and family background) and some is acquired through the individual's own educational and professional choices and efforts. Although not all agents in the media field share exactly the same habitus, they must know and recognize the rules of the game and they must know what forms of capital are recognized in the specific field in question. (pp. 269-270)

Bourdieu stated that there may be many forms of symbolic capital and that they may vary between fields. One such form is *cultural capital*. This was not just any culture, but fine culture: intellectualism, cultivation and carriage (Bourdieu &

Passeron, 1990; Broady, 1988). Educational systems divide cultural capital, and through attaining this capital the individual's habitus is formed. However, cultural capital can be monopolized by different classes and social groups (Broady, 1988). Cultural capital then is developed mainly through education, but also through personal development, "which makes class background and gender very important in this respect" (Djerf-Pierre, 2005, p. 270).

Other forms of symbolic capital important for Bourdieu were *social capital* and *professional capital* which, in media terms, could be described as "the amount of professional experience a person has in the media field, the person's career pattern and previously held positions" (Djerf-Pierre, 2005, p. 270). According to Bourdieu (2001), gender is a specific form of symbolic capital, with different values in different fields. In most cases, manhood carries a positive, symbolic capital and femininity a negative, symbolic capital (Moi, 1999). Bourdieu acknowledges a complex situation, where symbolic violence can continue although social conditions have changed (Moi, 1999). Moi (1999) describes how the people with most capital of the form valued in certain field are given legitimacy to be spokespersons for the *doxa*. Once attaining this position, they strive to keep their power over the *doxa*. Contestants, challenging their position, are discouraged by featuring them as *heterodox*: lacking capital. Thus, those in possession of symbolic capital use symbolic violence to retain their positions (Moi, 1999).

As Curran and Park (2000) have argued, theories that explain realities in the global north might not be applicable in other venues. There is a need to break free from Anglo-American theories and instead identify the limitations of traditional media theories in order to 'de-westernize' them. When applying Bourdieu to gender and power structures in the South African newsroom, a key issue arises: the interplay

between gender, ethnicity and class. Which form of negative symbolic capital is heaviest for black female journalists to bear: being a woman or being black? Bourdieu himself has noted this difference:

> Despite the specific experiences which bring them together […] women remain *separated from each other* by economic and cultural differences which affect, among other things, their objective and subjective ways of undergoing and suffering masculine domination – without, however, canceling out all that is linked to the diminution of symbolic capital entailed by being a woman. (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 93)

Few researchers have tackled feminist issues in journalism in Africa. This was acknowledged already in 2001 by Opoku-Mensah in the very first issue of the journal *Feminist Media Studies*, and ten years later Bosch (2011) claimed this is still the case, with most feminist media research undertaken in South Africa addressing gender representation in the media content (31).[2] Although this research is important, there is a clear lack of qualitative, in-depth analysis of South African media structures or, as Bosch puts it: "what is now needed is a broader range of voices from the global South" (p. 28). While Fourie (2010) notes how racial issues have become "a standard component" (pp. 150-151) of South African journalism research, questions of gender and the everyday experience of newsroom structures have been covered to a lesser extent. One exception, however, is a study by Botma (2012) that discusses the legacy of apartheid within journalism education in South Africa, and how black South African journalism students are lacking in cultural capital as their level of knowledge and skills is lower than their Afrikaaner counterparts. The reasons for this can be traced back to injustices during the apartheid era. As a result of this legacy, black

2. See for example Buitens research on gendered discourses in three South African newspapers (2009), and the work undertaken by the non-governmental organization Gender Links (2009, 2010).

journalists are "unable to compete successfully for a dominant, recognized position (symbolic and social capital) and financial gain (economic capital) in the 'field' of cultural production" (Botma, 2012, p. 31).

While the empirical stance in Botma's study was journalism education, the conclusions raise important questions about how these differences in cultural capital play out when black journalists leave universities and take on a career in the media. While Bourdieu's theories have been applied on a wide range of matters within media studies, the part that is lacking is an understanding of how the differences in symbolic capital are manifested in the every-day life of the newsroom. This inadequacy is rooted partly in geography, as qualitative research into the particular daily routines of South African newsrooms is lacking. However, there are also unanswered questions as to the forms of interplay between symbolic capital, gender and ethnicity.

IV. Method

This article is based on interviews with eight black women who hold (or have held) top editorial positions in South African media companies. They are or have been members of the boards of directors as chief-editors, top management as managing editors of different newsrooms within media houses, and senior management as editors of different sections[3] (The study also includes an interview with a representative of the group Gender Links).

The women all worked in mainstream South African media companies, except for two participants who had left journalism and were working in media consulting and journalism research. The participants in this study were between 30 and 49 years old, and had between 7 and 24 years of experience of working as journalists. All of the

3. These definitions of the different levels of media management in South Africa follow Gender Links (2009, p. 8) definitions in their glass-ceiling studies. They have in their turn based their definitions on the Employment Equity Act of South Africa (1998) and the Paterson scales (Jordan et. al, 1992).

participants started out as interns after having studied at university. Two of the respondents indicated that they had been headhunted for their top jobs in media management. Given the very limited number of black female senior editors at mainstream South African newspapers, the respondents in this study represent most members of this very select group.

All interviews were conducted in 2013. Seven interviews were conducted over the phone, with an average length of 34 minutes. One interview was made via e-mail as this particular participant refused to be interviewed on the phone. Naturally, it would have been preferable to do the interviews face-to-face, but I did not sense that the richness of the interviews was affected by interviewing via phone. The fact that I have had previous experience of living in Southern Africa, and of conducting research in South Africa may of course have contributed to that.

The structure of the interviews was inspired by a large survey study on women in the Swedish "media elite" (Djerf-Pierre, 2005, 2006) and involved open-ended questions on age, level of education, career patterns, social background, mother's and father's education, how to manage the balance between work and family life, mentors and networks. It also involved questions about (1) their opinions of affirmative action; (2) how they would describe the current situation for black women in the South African media companies; (3) what events they found important for the advancement of black women in the media; (4) what obstacles there still are and what their own plans for the future were. Even though I have followed a standardized interview guide where each participant was asked the same questions, not all questions were asked in the same way. The interviews were more like conversations where thoughts and experiences were not only delivered but also shared (Crafoord, 1994). The participants were regarded as more than a passive source of information, and this

stance is important within feminist research (Oakley, 1999). I ensured that every aspect in my interview guide was also addressed in every interview, and this enabled me to do an analysis inspired by Reichertz and Soffner's hermeneutic model (as cited in Flick, 2006). The transcribed interviews were analyzed by identifying and dividing them into their central themes. These themes were later combined to new, descriptive testimonies in which seven new main themes emerged: (1) Lack of qualifications, (2) work-life balance, (3) tradition and femininity, (4) the stigma of black women, (5) the definition of Affirmative Action, and (6) escaping journalism.

V. The Results

All of the participants gave witness to a process of transformation for black women working in the media in South Africa, with many of them taking on leading positions in journalism. As several of the participants in this study were educated or started working as journalists, in the midst of the struggle against apartheid, they provide a dynamic picture of development for black female journalists. During the 1980s, media companies basically consisted of white men, and the very few women who were in journalism were white. Oddly enough, however, the period before 1994 was described by several of the participants in this study as a time of opportunities for black women. There was a large share of independent, alternative media houses, employing black women. One of these was the anti-apartheid *South Newspaper* where two of the participants in this study took their first journalistic steps. The democratic atmosphere, and values of this newspaper and its newsroom, was an important testing-ground preparing them for later challenges:

> H: We weren't part of the mainstream newspapers; it was a completely different experience. *South Newspaper* was an anti-apartheid newspaper, so by virtue of that they were very integrated. They had a different way of dealing

> with individuals if that makes any sense. So there wasn't a colour issue, there wasn't a thing of us and them, which I think might have been different at the mainstream media companies.

After 1994, the new democratic South Africa emphasized equality, and that there should be no imbalances because of ethnicity, class or gender. This was put into practise through an affirmative action program. Several of the participants in the study mentioned the importance of how female leaders in journalism served as an inspiration for them. However, this period also saw a new market emerging consisting of wealthy black readers looking for journalism that reflected their situation. The black, female journalists could, therefore, put themselves in that space and tell the companies that they could deliver what this new group of consumers was looking for. This and a combination of hard work and love of journalism opened doors, enabling them to climb the editorial ladder:

> G: There was no stopping of what I would do or how hard I would work or what the hours were. When I was in that space I wanted to move forward and fast.

However, despite these early opportunities, the experience of the participants in this study was that the development for black women in the media has been slow. They do reach the level of editor, but then they do not reach any further:

> D: There is a black/white war that has been fought in the media, but not a male/female war.
>
> E: There could be a lot more, not enough black women going to middle management level, still very few going at senior management level. Most of the women at senior management level are at the black newspapers .

F: There is a progressive improvement, but certainly it is not a revolutionary improvement.

A. Lack of Qualifications

The first explanatory factor to why black women have not yet managed to break the glass-ceiling in South African media companies is a lack of qualifications. The most important aspect of this matter is the language barrier. A majority of women in this study described not having a perfect command of English, as did their colleagues. This may be linked both to ethnicity and to class background, which are related in South Africa.[4]

Thus, while attaining a career in the media, several of the women also started out on a long class journey. Five of the eight participants came from a low-income stratum, growing up in townships or in rural areas. Their parents were teachers, nurses, truck drivers, carpenters, clothing workers or clerks. Only one participant had parents who were academics. One participant described how, when she was growing up, the choice of professions for young women in her village was limited to becoming a nurse or being a teacher. In these communities, media and journalism were something unfamiliar. No one had a mother or an aunt who was a journalist. They shared books in school and collected money together so they could go and buy a magazine to read.[5]

In spite of coming from low-income stratum, they all managed to go to university, and a majority of them obtained a degree in journalism. Their education was in some

[4] The history of the construction of racial categories in South Africa is very well described by Posel (2001). In 1950, South Africa formed the Population Registration Act, a foundation of the apartheid system, aiming at ensuring the purity of races. Every citizen was defined as white, coloured or native. The classification of a person's race would then have implications for all other aspects of life (ibid).

[5] The Population Registration Act enabled the apartheid regime to continue with the Group Areas Act in 1950 which formed a judicial framework for the displacement of non-white communities (Adhikari, 2005). In the new communities in which many blacks now found themselves, every part of life was segregated, including housing and education. "The races were to be kept apart at all public events, and black attendance prohibited at any functions held in 'white' areas" (Welsh, 2000, p. 449).

cases financed through scholarships or donations. While some managed to attain an education at a private school, five expressed the difficulties in not having the same level of education as their white colleagues. This had a noted impact upon their English skills, which they felt had made them inferior in the newsroom. They felt that they spoke English with a particular accent, different from the English accent taught in private schools and used by white South Africans:

> G: I was really angry with the fact that I wasn't promoted. I saw everybody else being promoted and all the others ever being promoted were white men. And they were younger than me. But they had another level of education, they did their degrees in English. They were different. They didn't come from where I came from so it took me longer to be at the level that the people at [company name] expected me to be at. So that caused anger for me, but like I said, looking back, I was quite upset, I was like why is [name of white, male colleague] getting the job and I'm not getting the job. It's not fair. But he wrote way better headlines than I did.

In the early years of affirmative action, a lack of formal qualifications was compensated for by the training of black journalists. This support no longer exists. Four of the participants mentioned that they had not received any specific support at all, and they had learnt on the job or were trained by managers. In addition, five felt that they had not received, or were currently not receiving, any support from superior managers. One of the informants felt that, had it not been for her personal contacts with valuable sources from the journalistic field, she could easily have become invisible and useless in the newsroom. Another editor described how she and a colleague had for several years covered for their superior manager, who did not do his job – for example by going to finance meetings though having little experience of this

kind of work. All of this had resulted in a sense that the young journalists were in with very little professional support.

However, the level of support for media mangers seemed to vary between media companies. Two of the participants described how their companies were in favour of training. One of the participants described how when she first stepped into media management she was sent on courses in basic managerial skills. Through her employer, she had also taken part in a series of newspaper management courses and even obtained an MBA. In the absence of training – or even in addition – another important form of support for the participants was mentorship. All of the editors in this study have had mentors during their careers: usually other editors working within the same company. Interestingly, for four of the participants, the mentors were males, and in one case, also white.

What the participants in this study lacked was a social network with other, top-level media representatives. Only two were part of a professional network such as the South African National Editors Forum, and only one said that she socializes with other top-level media representatives at an informal level.

B. Work-Life Balance

According to several of the participants, the media industry in South Africa is not ready for professional women with families, making it harder for women wanting to attain a career in the media. Seven of the participants had children, and five had children under the age of five. Five were married/living in a relationship, while two were single parents. The majority worked long hours: more than ten hours per day. There was no flextime, nor any opportunity to work from home (except for one editor who was working in an online newsroom). The result of this work-life imbalance could result in enormous pressures. One informant noted that while she wanted to be

with her children and help with things like homework, she also felt that she had been given a unique opportunity that few other black women had been given, and that she did not want to fail co-workers who saw her as a role-model.

> C: That's the unfortunate part of being a journalist. You can't do both perfectly. I try my very best. What do you do when a source tells you at eight O'clock, "Where are you? I need to give you some documents."

For those who were married or living in a relationship, the choice of partner seems to have been important in order to make a career in the media. Although their husbands or partners worked full-time, one called her husband "progressive" as he did all the washing and grocery shopping. However, all of them had some form of household or/and child-care support. One of them described this as essential in order to attain a career in the media.

C. Tradition and Femininity

All the journalists in this study spoke of the support that they had received from their families when pursuing a career in the media. They all especially mentioned their mothers as important role-models and supporters, encouraging their daughters to grasp an opportunity that had not been available to them. However, a patriarchal power structure within and outside the media was noted by all but two of the participants. The perception held by most of the participants was relatively uniform: men, and particularly white men, ruled South African media and held the highest paid and most senior positions. As was commented upon, dominant male structures within the media sector were simply a reflection of broader social paradigms:

> G: Our president is well-known for saying things like women should have babies, that's what they're made for. So, it's our leadership, it's sexist. There's a sexist line riding through sort of everything that has been done. […] What is

said by people that are in positions of power also informs how people think. Recently, the ANC Women's League said that the ANC is not ready for a woman president. It's that kind of that stuff that just shapes the conversation.

Two participants, however, did not recognize these male structures, at least not within the media companies. The opportunities for women and men are exactly the same, they noted, with women of all ages taking up senior positions in the media. It is interesting to note that these views were expressed by the youngest and the oldest participants in this study. Four of the women had positive experiences of working as managers with the newsroom staff, who had been seen as generally supportive. The four other journalists did not have the same experiences, with three describing how there had been multiple tensions and conflicts in the newsrooms centered around their leading role as black women, being passionate and pushing for excellence.

G: It's an issue that is sort of ongoing with every newsroom I've been in.

It sounds like such a cliché - it's not always easy being a black woman in a position of power. It just isn't.

D. The Stigma of Black Women

Apart from cultural traditions, there were also historical traditions that seemed to affect the daily life in the newsroom for black female journalists. Six of them perceived that being a black woman in the workplace was in fact stigmatizing. They described how black women have historically been on the bottom rung of the social ladder in South Africa, and that this view of black women being inferior still lingers. Three of them said that their experience was that other employees did not think that they could do their job properly: a fact often connected to their level of education and their English skills. One editor felt that her work was monitored more closely than

that of other colleagues, while another felt that any indication of competence on her part tended to surprise the newsroom and senior staff.

> D: Oh my goodness. She is actually smart; she is articulate; she can count; she can read and she can write.

The perception of being inferior as a black woman in journalism also extended beyond the newsroom: one editor described the puzzlement sometimes aroused amongst non-journalists when she walked into a room and presented herself as the business editor.

> A: There is obviously that stigma of being black, being young and being women.

E. The Definition of Affirmative Action

Five of the eight journalists considered themselves beneficiaries of the affirmative action program. While it was not pointed out to them that they were employed to fill affirmative action requirements, looking back they did realize that this was the case. One of them described how she was hired to her first job as journalist in 1999, five years after independence. She was recruited to a historically white newspaper that, at the time, had only two African reporters. Although she got the second best scores compared to her male counterpart, she got the job. In 2007, she was recruited to another newspaper looking for an experienced black female journalist who also spoke *IsiXhosa*. Although this was an English-language national newspaper, labour laws in South Africa forced it to employ a journalist with this specific background. When another participant was looking back upon how her career had progressed, she said she has realized that she did not really have the skills that her first job as a sub-editor in a mainstream media company required. At that time, in 1999, she became one of two coloured people in that newsroom. The rest of her colleagues were white.

The three journalists who *did not* consider themselves as a product of affirmative action said that it was their work ethic, know-how and their experience that gave them their position. This was pointed out as well by those who *did* consider themselves as beneficiaries of affirmative action: for these respondents, affirmative action only gave them an opportunity they would otherwise not have had to show what they were capable of. The rest of the success in their careers was due to hard work, commitment, ability and contributions to the newsroom. However, while a majority of the participants did perceive themselves as beneficiaries of affirmative action, only two said that they were actually in favor of its use, reasoning that media companies would not hire people out of good will and that there needed to be legislation to ensure diversity.

> F: I am very proud to say that policy worked for me and therefore I am not part of the crew who believes that it is unfair […]. I am a supporter and a believer in it because I think it is the only way to bring about true equality.

F. Escaping Journalism

Summing up the experiences of the black women journalists in this study, we may draw at least one large conclusion. At the time of the interviews, journalism was not where these women would like to be in the future. Six out of the eight participants did not see that they would continue working in the media in the long term. Two of the journalists said that they would like to end up in academia in some way, or to be teachers. One of the journalists had already left the media when I interviewed her. Another said she would consider going into a corporate environment, working at a PR department. Another journalist said that she would like to attain a scholarship and enhance her education with an international degree. One journalist said that she is still

discovering what else is out there, that there are a lot of things to be done, but for journalists being an editor is no longer the final call.

Not all of the informants specifically mentioned the reasons for wanting to leave journalism, but those who did expressed a sense of being stuck in their careers, and that their choices within the media sector were limited.

> E: I don't want to go back into newspapers. And online is very young [referring to the media form and the online newsrooms] and I think I kind of had enough of that. So I think your choices, they are quite limited.

One of them also expressed that she wanted a job with less pressure, more flexibility and higher salary. The two journalists who wanted to stay in journalism said they wanted to develop their profile as media workers, drawing on their understanding of the African continent and to continue having an influence in the critical debate on South African media.

VI. Analysis

One of the chief obstacles for the female leaders in this study in climbing the editorial ladder was that the power in the media companies was still male, and mainly white. Some women managed to move beyond this but this is not true for all women.

> E: I think there are a few brilliant women who can walk around like John Wayne, with balls between their legs. I think it's good for them. And they are not going to move. But I think a lot of women are pretty much stuck because the money is with a handful of people.

Given that only two out of eight of the participants wanted to continue working in journalism, the perceived limitations of the media field had resulted in the conclusion that journalism was not a long-term solution for them. I will now continue to discuss this in terms of Bourdieu's work on *doxa, field, habitus,* but mainly *capital*.

The way into the specific social stratum that Bourdieu calls the journalistic *field* (Bourdieu, 1999) has for most of the participants in this study been affirmative action. Once in, they have quickly learnt the *habitus* of the journalistic field and found the paths to power and influence. Evidence of this is their rapid career advancement and the number of positions they have held. In this process, they have managed to attain a high level of *professional capital* (Djerf-Pierre, 2005). Their previous experience of media management has (at least partly) acted as a counter-balance to their gender. However, incorporating into the *habitus* has not been enough. The experience of this group of women is that the rules of the game in the media *field* in South Africa are weighted so that white men maintain their power. There is an almost unanimous view of the *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1999) of the journalistic field: it is male, and it is mostly white. Not all black women have managed to move beyond this *doxa*. As one of the participants stated, while there is not necessarily a specific vendetta against black women within the media field of South Africa, the rules of the field have been decided by those who wield maximum power, and strive to keep it. Further, the journalistic field depends upon external forces (Bourdieu, 1999), which is evidenced through the effects the economic downturn has had for the advancement of black women within South African media companies. When times are bad, people are reluctant to leave their positions, and there is no room for new recruitments.

The case of black women in South African media strengthens Bourdieu's argument that women "remain separated from each other by economic and cultural differences" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 93). According to Bourdieu, *the symbolic capital* – or the knowledge of how to perform yourself in a specific social field – is deeply engraved on both the body and mind (Broady, 1988) and can be attained through upbringing, schooling, inheritance, and so on (Djerf-Pierre, 2005). Djerf-Pierre (2005)

points out that even though the *habitus* of the workers in the media field cannot be identical, "they must know and recognize the rules of the game" (p. 270), and they must know what kind of *capital* is valued in each specific media field. My understanding is that the participants in this study are painfully aware of what forms of *cultural capital* are generally recognized in the journalistic field in South Africa because it would be nearly impossible for them to reach the level of capital required.

The individual *habitus* of the participants in this study has been formed by very different experiences compared to that of their white, female colleagues. All but one of the participants in this study have participated in a significant class journey. They come from social environments in which their parents and their neighbors dwelled in the lower levels of the economy. An important part of the *cultural capital* is incorporated into and attained through an educational system (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Broady, 1988) that most of them have not had access to. The educational system of the apartheid era in South Africa created a significant gap in the media field, one which will take generations to bridge. Speaking and writing English in an "acceptable" way within the journalistic field is an important form of media-related *cultural capital*. This *cultural capital* has been monopolized by white journalists, and by learning to master this form of capital they attain power within the field. This currency of languages contributes to what Botma (2012) calls "maintaining apartheid hegemony" (p. 32). The contestants, in this case black female journalists, challenge their position and are rejected by being featured as *heterodox*: they lack the correct capital. Thus, as Moi (1999) pointed out, the possessors of symbolic capital continue to use *symbolic violence* to retain their position(s).

However, there is a certain form of *cultural capital* that the participants in this study did have and their white colleagues lack. They have attained this through their

up-bringing, namely the experience of being part of the struggle against apartheid, of learning not to keep quiet and to stand up for rights such as freedom of expression. This form of capital, which they have attained by circumstance, is a basic principle within the *doxa* of liberal journalism. As they have incorporated these ideals in their everyday life, this *doxa* is natural, and may in part explain their advancement within journalism.

I will now turn to *social capital* and, as Djerf-Pierre (2005, 2006) in the study of the Swedish female "media elite," analyze it on four levels. Starting with the number of mentors, the women in this study seem to have had many mentors, both white and black, men and women. The role of the mentors seems to have been very important for them in attaining and pursuing their careers. In this regard, they seem to have managed to attain a high level of social capital. However, in other regards, their level of social capital is low. The women in this study have reduced participation in informal and formal professional networks. There is also a low level of professional contacts outside the office (such as with other top-level media representatives). Therefore, as a whole, there is a low level of support between the female leaders in journalism in South Africa. At the same time, the perception amongst the respondents is that there is a vivid male network. This creates an asymmetry within the media field where male leaders have higher levels of social capital than women. However, there is another form of *social capital* that the women in this study have a high level of, and which seems to have been very valuable for them when deciding to enter the media field, namely the support of family and friends in taking up a career in the media. This particular form of *social capital* seems to have formed their individual *habitus* as senior media managers. Their mothers have served as role-models, pushing them and supporting them in striving for a career they themselves never had.

VII. Conclusions

This study is a first step in understanding how gender, ethnicity and class interplays with the organizational structures of the journalistic field of South Africa via interviews with several key members of the small group of black women that work (or have worked) in senior media management in South Africa. The majority of the participants in this study do not see a future for themselves within the media industry. What does this say about South African journalism?

Bourdieu's notions on symbolic capital bear a strong relationship to the women interviewed in this study. However, one of the main conclusions of this paper is that western theories on gender and journalism fall short when applied to the South African context: some parts are applicable, whereas others are not. What is the significance of patriarchy, feminism and equality in the media? How are these concepts defined? The answers to these questions will not be the same in every setting. The way to gain knowledge about the implications of gender, ethnicity and class in the organizational structures of the South African media companies is to speak to those who are witnessing these social systems in their everyday life. However, as African media scholars (Bosch, 2011; Opoku-Mensah, 2001) have pointed out, there is an apparent lack of theoretical reflection regarding these matters in journalism research from/on Africa. Therefore, researchers often have little choice but to try to apply western theories in a geographically, historically and culturally alternate setting.

In this study, Djerf-Pierre's (2005, 2006) research on women in the Swedish media-elite was used as a frame for investigating the economy of *symbolic capital* for

black women in the South African media elite – in part to see how transferable Djerf-Pierre's arguments were. However, Djerf-Pierre's study is strongly context-based. Some of her arguments did respond very well to the South African context, while others did not. For example, the importance of choosing the right partner was equally important as was the strong role-models in their mothers. However, the economy of the *symbolic capital* was different. While Djerf-Pierre does not in any way imply that her arguments are transferable to other settings, it is still interesting to see what happens when her appropriation of Bourdieu on gender and journalism is applied in another societal context.

The most interesting result in my study is that six out of the eight journalists planned to escape journalism. In Djerf-Pierre's study, her most important theoretical argument was that other forms of *symbolic capital* could manage to outweigh the negative capital of being a woman in the Swedish "media elite." However, the proposed "escape from journalism" in my study on the part of the informants implies that this economy of *symbolic capital* cannot be applied in the same way to South African journalism. There are certain circumstances that must be given consideration, and by doing this, Bourdieu's field theory (and Djerf-Pierre's appropriation of the same in regard to gender and journalism) can be developed. The amount of professional, social and cultural capital has not proved enough to give black women access to the highest ranks of the media-elite. The question that remains, then, is what other options these women might have besides leaving journalism? One explanation for the difference in the economy of *symbolic capital* is that the majority of the women in my study perceive themselves as products of a double form of affirmative action. They gained entry to the field of journalism not only because they were women, but also because they were black. By entering the field in this way they

carried with them two forms of negative capital: femininity and the *cultural capital* of being black (given the historical trajectories of South Africa). While women in the Swedish "media elite" had a strong *cultural capital* as their origins was upper middle-class, the background of the participants from South Africa was completely different, as most of them came from the lower economic strata. Further, their *social capital* was dissimilar to the female Swedish "media elite" in the sense that there was little socialization between black female media managers. However, there was another form of *cultural capital* that was emphasized by several of the participants, one that has not previously been recognized by Bourdieu, and certainly not in the research on the economy of *symbolic capital* in journalism. This particular *cultural capital* was inherited and formed by the apartheid struggle: the courage to fight injustices and the value of freedom of expression.

Thus, the observations of Djerf-Pierre are applicable in a particular context, where the currency of a certain capital has a defined value. However, it is obvious that moving away from a western context, the theory is weakened. The conclusion is that feminist researchers must be careful when applying western theories on gender and journalism in South Africa, and this study is a contribution to the de-westernization (Curran & Park, 2000) of these theories.

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